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## Theorizing platformization from the perspective of the connection between mobile journalism and political participation

**Abstract**

Digital media platforms are used to make social contacts, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Journalism also adopts mobile and social platforms into news production and distribution. The usage of digital media platforms in journalistic practices has shown some interlinkage with political participation. Against these backdrops, there is a need for a theoretical framework to analyze the interlinkage and the relevant influence on social activities. This article uses a conceptual approach and theorizes platformization to explicate the rationale behind the interaction between digital platforms, mobile journalism, and political participation. Platformization in this study inspects media as mediated and dynamic platform that values interactivity and data. We also argue that the thesis of platformization derives from mediatization theory, and consists of platform logic and platform architecture. Platform logic is represented by platform functionality, platform automation, mobile mediality, and platform-based sociality. Platformization is structured by the platform architecture in the communication activities. Platform architecture has two senses. Firstly, it has the sense of internal structure, i.e., the engineering structure of software and hardware. Secondly, it contains the sense of external structure, i.e., the platform's structural position in the platform ecosystem.

**Keywords**

**Platformization, mobile journalism, political participation, platform logic, platform architecture, digital platform.**

### 1. Introduction

Gillespie (2010) takes the angles of etymology and semantics to reveal the elementary meaning of platform as “a ‘raised level surface’ designed to facilitate some activity that will subsequently take place” from four semantic territories: computation, architecture, figuration, and politics. Baldwin *et al.* (2008) emphasize that platform is formed by the architecture system and the embedded interfaces, and identify three main settings among the uses of platforms, namely product development, technology strategy, and industrial economics. Platforms are generally accepted as cores and bases to make components and communication, but they are multidimensionally demonstrated in different settings.

Habermas (1989) discusses the public sphere as a platform for advertising. The platform in his context is a special realm where commercial circulation and public communication are balanced, whilst the demarcation between the public sphere and private sphere are blurred. In respect of legal term clarified in Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, a platform is an “interactive computer service” that “means any information service, system, or access software provider that provides or enables computer access by multiple users to a computer server, including specifically a service or system that provides access to the Internet and such systems operated or services offered by libraries or educational institutions” (Legal Information Institute). In the economic aspect, Langley and Leyshon (2016) remark on the digital economic circulation and platform capitalism by thinking of the platform “as a discrete and dynamic arrangement defined by a particular combination of socio-technical and capitalist business practices,” and foreground the “infrastructural and intermediary qualities of the platform.” Srnicek (2017a; 2017b) considers that Facebook, Amazon, Google and Uber exemplify a nebulous series of entities called platforms. The platform is regarded by him as a “newly predominant type of business model premised upon bringing different groups together” which is conducive to platform economy and platform capitalism.

The digital platform is a genre of platforms, which is confined to the digital field whilst exerting influence on many aspects of social practices. What fundamentally identifies the digital platform from other platforms is the digital technology it applies. A digital platform denotes the digital and technological system which provides technical and corporeal resources, interfaces, and connections to fulfill certain aims and functions. A typical digital platform consists of software, firmware or hardware architectures, a software stack, programming languages, related software components, and a graphical user interface (Jansen, 2013).

Platforms are not only utilities or conduits that channel circulations (Langley & Leyshon, 2016). Accompanied by autonomous content production and distribution, the digital platform is inclined to some extent to bypass the political participant resulting from the application of artificial intelligence. Relying upon the algorithm, the character of the digital platform is perplexed between the pathway to political participation and acting as the subjective participant. This confusion also comes with the overlapped role of the audience, since the audience act as both senders and receivers of political information via digital platforms to “participate in the creation, sharing and interpretation of news, information, and opinions” (Picone *et al.*, 2015)

Thus, this study attempts to examine (1) how the platform’s role evolves from affordance provider and information mediator to a kind of information automaton; (2) how platform-mediated political participation takes shape through the utilization of mobile phones in journalism practices; and (3) how to model platformization for better reflecting platform’s evolution and its influence on communication.

## **2. From platform functionality to platform automation**

It is a vital commonality for various platforms to provide functions. The evolution of the platform stems from affording functionality. For instance, in the 1990s, the concept of an in-house platform emerged as the “foundation or base of common components around which a company might build a series of related products” (Cusumano, 2010). Since the advent of Web 2.0, the Internet has been regarded as a fundamental digital platform (or meta-platform) (Tsekeris & Katerelos, 2012; Helmond, 2015). Web 2.0 offers the openness for users’ participation and provides the social interaction that overcomes the limits of time and space (Papsdorf, 2015), and gives the means of “prosumption” (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010). Platform companies are also demanded to facilitate functional complementors (Cusumano, 2010) to add platform functionality and “sticky” content (e.g., Cormode & Krishnamurthy, 2008).

The present-time concept of the platform first appeared in the context of Web 2.0 and was shaped in the automated communication field (Papsdorf, 2015). Comprised of background-support automation and content-provider automation, platform automation tends to be more accentuated than platform functionality in this progress. As a consequence, personal interaction is prone to be mediated and supplanted by platform interaction.

We suppose that platform functionality and platform automation exert institutional influence on journalism, culture, business, politics, and other domains. (Nieborg & Poell, 2018; Helmond, 2015; Karatzogianni & Matthews, 2020; Nieborg & Helmond, 2019). To explain the influence, some scholars coin the notion of platformization.

Based on the exposition of HTML, XML, social media API, and programmability, Helmond (2015) contends that platformization refers to “the rise of the platform as the dominant infrastructural and economic model of the social web and the consequences of the expansion of social media platforms into other spaces online.” Platformization is defined by Nieborg and Poell (2018) from cultural production perspective as “the penetration of economic, governmental, and infrastructural extensions of digital platforms into the web and app ecosystems, fundamentally affecting the operations of the cultural industries.”

Whereas, platformization is not deemed to be constrained to simply comprehend social media and apps, but also functioning in the sphere of media evolution and perception of the social and political construction, occurring under the circumstances of the changing journalism profession (e.g., Burum, 2016; Lenzner, 2014) and the diversified prototypes of communication (Jensen & Helles, 2017).

The trajectory from platform functionality to platform automation is an inner method of platformization, which concurs with the transformation from social interaction that is “characterized by subjectivity to one that is dominated by objectified criteria” (Papsdorf, 2015). Platformization is also the realization of the platform ecosystem where the appetite for data and network effects play crucial parts, characterized by “the interdependence and interoperability of platforms” (van Dijck, 2013). The network effects in this study indicate the logic that (a) more users means more value; (b) the participation on one side of the companies’ market relies on the participation of the other side of the market; (c) the winner takes all or the majority (Srnicsek, 2017b; Cusumano, 2010&2011; Hoelck & Ballon, 2015).

Predicated upon Jansen’s (2013) analysis of an ecosystem-based software platform, we contend that a platform ecosystem is a collection of software and hardware artifacts that form a coherent whole on which applications can be built endogenously and exogenously. A platform ecosystem is distinguished from an industry-wide platform by the effectuation of network effects, and it is constituted by intermediaries, functional complementors, workers, users, regulatory authorities, judiciary, and entrepreneurs when network effects encourage more users and complementors to adopt platforms (Jansen, 2013).

### **3. The connection between mobile journalism and political participation**

Mobile journalism is defined by Burum and Quinn (2016) as “an innovative form of reporting where people use only a smartphone to create and file stories.” With the technological development of portable intelligent devices, mobile journalism is a category of reporting where professionals and citizens primarily use mobile platforms (including smartphones, tablets, etc.) to create, file, and disseminate stories in the formats of video, audio, photo, and text.

Owing to the convenience of creating and proliferating compelling stories and politicized content, mobile journalism “heralds a revolution in the way citizens can operate in the public sphere” (Burum & Quinn, 2016). The presumption of news that is “being gathered and disseminated on platforms” (Johnston, 2016) becomes a genre of practices for social connection (Picone *et al.*, 2016) and a kind of behavior for information acquisition and consumption (Picone *et al.*, 2015; Lee, 2015).

According to the previous studies, social media platform use and political participation are related, either positively or negatively. For instance, the preference for digital news platforms has strong positive effects on both online and offline political participation (Bachmann & Zúñiga, 2013). The content made by mobile journalists mediates political participation via digital platforms, and this mediating process promotes the political engagement of politicians, citizens, and organizations (Enli & Skogerbo, 2013; McKelvey & Piebiak, 2016).

Predicated upon the motivation of political participation elicited by social media usage (Wells & Thorson, 2017; Lilleker & Koc-Michalska, 2017) and the reciprocal rapport between online political expression and offline political protesting (Visser & Stolle, 2014), mobile journalism is citizen-oriented and fuels political engagement. There seems to be a positive link between mobile journalism and online political participation among young people, at least in some advanced democracies (Xenos *et al.*, 2014). Nevertheless, social media use does not necessarily lead to political engagement (Park, 2013). The dissemination of mobile journalism content via social media is inclined to weaken the effect of political engagement under some circumstances (Schroeder, 2016), compared to that of the content made and spread by traditional media.

We assume that the relation between mobile journalism and political participation tends to be strengthened by the engagement momentum. Mobile journalism is counted as participatory engagement in two inquiries: first, mobile platform users' presence and recognition in news production and distribution; second, the power distribution and rights equalization due to the news production and distribution (Borum, 2016). From political and journalistic orientations, the focus on mobile practices helps to avoid the overemphasis on the constructive and organizing role of institutions, and fills the gap between engagement, news consumption, and everyday life (Ahva, 2016; Burum & Quinn, 2016).

Moreover, mobile journalism extends the connotation of online political expression to online politically expressive production of news. Mobile journalism shapes the overlapped roles of citizens, news producers, and news users as citizen-prosumers whose news preferences entail predispositions, sociality, and information seeking (Weaver *et al.*, 2019; Zúñiga *et al.*, 2014; Lee, 2015).

Broadening the horizon to the platform society (van Dijck *et al.*, 2018), people have the propensity to be constantly connected (e.g., Beacon platform) through extant identifiability and biometric recognition, and the living environment tends to evolve into a virtual platform (e.g., the supermarket with face recognition and no checkout operator or self-service tills).

Empirically, the online survey (Vorderer *et al.*, 2016) conducted with 178 university students in Germany finds that being permanently online (PO) and permanently connected (PC) occur frequently (e.g., cyberloafing, in waiting for situations and being alone in public transportation), and are most likely a psychological readiness and alertness; and that "being connected to others (PC) seems to be more relevant to the participants than browsing the web (PO)."

Therefore, the momentum to keep engaging takes place in the mobile-digital situation, where personal context (Pérez Tornero & Varis, 2010) infused with highly idiosyncratic and diverse media repertoires (Molyneux, 2017) concurs with both latent and manifest forms of political participation (Ekman & Amna, 2012).

#### **4. Mobile mediality**

Sheller (2016) proposes the term "mobile mediality" to emphasize the communicative flexibility that mobile communication technology brings into the relations between people, communities, and places. The connotation of mobile mediality is specified by Humphreys (2012) as mobile interactions with social networks in an environment that is online and offline

interrelated and mutually constituted. Mobile mediality is vibrant where the local and mobile spaces are overlapped, and when the public sphere and the private sphere are intersected.

The overlap of the local and mobile spaces is well captured by the theory of the mobile-digital situation (Seiler & Kidwell, 2016). As mobile social platforms are widespread (Pew, 2017), self-existence and self-perception are correlated with others' co-presence, not only physically but also virtually (Humphreys, 2012). This traversing of spatial and temporal limitations results in perpetual telepresence and constructs a kind of the mobile-digital situation where information receivers and emitters are mobile to access, analyze, evaluate and create transversal media content (Pérez Tornero & Varis, 2010).

Mobile phones and other mobile platforms are the tools for news production and consumption in mobile journalism. The prominent features of integrating mobile platforms into journalism are mobility, connectivity (Aljazeera Media Training & Development Centre, 2017), and interactivity in news routines. Since mobile digital platform users' physical locations are flexible, the inherence of mobility is mediated and the mobile aspect of media is reflected in mobile journalism.

Mobile journalism blurs the boundary between vocational life and private life (Mabweazara, 2011) while granting the private sphere civic quality (Papacharissi, 2010) and the public sphere personal attribute (Enli & Skogerbo, 2013). Online digital platforms, possessing civically reflexive architectures, fill in the gap between the public sphere and the private sphere (Papacharissi, 2010; Tenenboim & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2020). Using social media, political candidates, for instance, show the tendency to combine private identity and public persona for their political courses and think highly of personal visibility in the public sphere (Enli & Skogerbo, 2013). The intersection of the public and the private can be comprehended as the personal media bubble (Pérez Tornero & Varis, 2010) that is embodied as an atomized organization for transmitting public information and experiences through a networked private sphere (Papacharissi, 2010).

Giving credit to photographing and filming as the manifestation of paying witnesses (Papadopoulos, 2014) in the practices of mobile journalism, the engagement with the public sphere is enabled more directly (Blaagaard, 2013). Further, public discussions through the private social network account give a presentation that political and public issues revolve around sensory experiences, lifestyle preferences, personal publics, and communities (Papadopoulos, 2014; Nekmat *et al.*, 2015; Schmidt, 2014). Digital social platforms are at the core of articulated communicative space where the code-enabled connections construct the process of expression, sharing, and socializing (Schmidt, 2014).

## **5. Platform-based sociality**

In the platform ecosystem, many parties co-evolve and play out their functionality either proactively or unwillingly, paving the way to the platformed sociality (van Dijck, 2013). Apart from structuring the social interaction, digital platforms conflate the identities (e.g., Lenzner, 2014) of mobile journalists and news consumers, and also shape the connection of information terminals by transmitting audiovisual content online (the "likes" and other forms of online expression can also be viewed as a kind of content). The transmissions of audiovisual content are the repeated occurrence of mobile journalism practices (e.g., Burum & Quinn, 2016), and are encouraged by algorithms and automation of digital platforms. Relying on such situations, news tends to become more social (Johnston, 2016), at the very least morphing into the duality of not only the content but also the carrier for daily contact, particularly in the spread of viral stories (Picone *et al.*, 2016).

Routinized social contacts on digital platforms (Halupka, 2016) can come across the content about political and public issues, while digital media platforms allow casual communication among individuals and organizations (Vaccari, 2017; Maireder *et al.*, 2017), in both personal and civil contexts (Pérez Tornero & Varis, 2010). Political and public contact via

digital platforms has shown an effect on political participation. For example, when using Twitter to consume news, political participants are likely to initially enable political discourse among activists, and meanwhile tend to sustain the political movements taking place elsewhere (Theocharis *et al.*, 2015).

Platformed sociality by van Dijck (2013) is the conflation of human connectedness and automated connectivity. As a result of the desire for data in the process of platformization, human connectedness is not playing the significant part as it should, compared to automated connectivity. This may lead to the lack of “tangible sociality” and the “missing social” on digital social platforms (Couldry, 2015) and bolster the simplification of human sociality to the sheer number of “likes,” and “friends” and “matches,” etc. In some cases, the popularity principle that “[t]he more contacts you have and make, the more valuable you become” (van Dijck, 2013), along with network effects, underplays the genuine social interactions and deep dialogues with reasonability and humanity.

There is evidence indicating that automated connectivity is not as decisive as normally imagined in social contacts. Heatherly *et al.* (2016) find that the degree of involvement in political discussions on digital social platforms is not entirely restricted by technical affordance, but also individual motivations and characteristics. Additionally, mobile journalism is considered a more autonomous subfield of journalism by Burum (2016), and represents a style of neo-journalism that shifts “the focus away from a technological determinist view to one that posits the importance of digital storytelling skills and reflectivity.”

Thus, we coin the sociality in platform society (van Dijck *et al.*, 2018) as the platform-based sociality to reiterate digital platform literacy and new humanism (Pérez Tornero & Varis, 2010), based on the notion of platformed sociality proposed by van Dijck (2013). Firstly, relational identity and connectivity (Seiler & Kidwell, 2016) are underscored in this type of sociality. Secondly, a constellation of audiovisual information online (e.g., memes) labels this sociality with informational visualization (Humphreys, 2012).

As aforementioned, digital platforms play as intermediaries and active participants in political courses hinging on functional visibility, and they boost the process from platform functionality to platform automation while stressing the network effects and popularity principle. Platformization is so closely knitted with political participation that the practices of platform-based sociality embody the culture of participating, collaborating, and co-developing (Couldry, 2015; van Dijck, 2013).

In light of platform-based sociality, we contemplate a type of political participation, i.e., platform-mediated political participation, to unfold the dynamics of digital platforms, mobile journalism, and political participation. What is undergoing in the terrain of platformization sheds light on the comprehension of new traits of political participation. Citizens in the wave of platformization can exchange views and attitudes with people of political divergence (Heatherly *et al.*, 2016). They have more inclination to mobilize and be mobilized informally and individually (Vaccari, 2017). They need skillfully armed with media and information literacy for tracing information, information forensic examination, and disseminating UGC (Johnston, 2016). They face participatory uncertainties about activism and slacktivism (clicktivism), democratic construction and destruction (Ahva, 2016; Halupka, 2016).

Rather than being restrained and customized in either the political sphere or media space (e.g., Couldry, 2015), in the era of platformization, participation may break through the barrier between political engagement and media involvement. The confluence of platform-mediated political participation and mobile journalism emerges due partly to the widespread acceptance of digital platforms within many sectors and the intermediary effect of digital platforms across political and media sectors.

Mobile journalism does not regard participation as a merely journalistic artifact. Instead, it orients toward citizenship and political life through mobile media and journalism (Ahva,



2016) by accommodating a flow of ambient and live updates on the ongoing situation (Sheller, 2015). In this sense, news production, consumption, and distribution are the avatars of platform-mediated participation, especially during breaking news reports and emergent circumstances.

## **6. A new communication paradigm?**

### *6.1. Deriving from mediatization theory*

Paradigmatic examination and explanation of communication models are adopted as a way to schematize the communication field. For instance, media effect theory is the frontline of identifying the paradigm crisis (Kuhn, 2012) of the media sociology paradigm (Gitlin, 1978; Lang, 2013; Chen, 2018). To model the media effect, theories develop from classical mass communication effects (e.g., hypodermic injection, two-step flow of communications) to the limited effects model (Lang, 2013). This is a transition from taking the mass media social constructive ability as granted to the attention of personal influence (Gitlin, 1978). This is also a tendency to the paradigm “transferred into a person’s memory and is made available to the person when they are undertaking an action” (Lang, 2013).

According to Kuhn (2012), a paradigm is legitimate as the possibility of puzzling-solving, and ought to be used in two different senses: (1) the constellation of beliefs, values, and techniques which are shared by a given community structure; (2) the specific models or examples that can replace explicit rules for puzzle-solution. Combining both media effects theories, mediatization theory is emblematic of a new paradigm (Lunt & Livingstone, 2016). The mediatization paradigm is emerging since the organizational and institutional power of media is increasingly exerted in and beyond media companies, organizations, and institutions. Media logic is also apparently effective in many other sectors, such as politics and culture, and even the society as a whole (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Hjarvard, 2013; Stromback & Esser, 2014). Besides, in academic practice, the research communities and schools are active and form a certain community structure.

Hence, it seems that mediatization is a valid paradigm in the communication field to explain the puzzles: (1) the spread of media influencing on and intertwining with other fields or social institutions (Hjarvard, 2013); (2) the media-related dynamics of change play along with mechanisms that are socially and culturally contextualized and interactional (Driessens *et al.*, 2017); (3) the evolution of the derivative concept –media logic or media logics (Thimm *et al.*, 2018); (4) the deep mediatization dependent on digitalization, and personal and institutional automated data processing (Hepp, 2019).

While following the enterprise of mediatization to solve these puzzles, it is argued that mediatization is characterized by a crucial feature: the media logic’s detachment from society either historically (Livingstone & Lunt, 2014) or intersectionally (e.g., interactions and dynamics across sectors). The duality and opposite of media and society may link the interaction between media and society by the dimension of time. But is it plausible or too general to explain a specific phenomenon? Or is it a kind of circularity? This is manifested in the paradox of mediatization as a new paradigm of comprehending communication while incapable of discerning itself from the old paradigm of media sociology which assumes media (especially mass media) are external to society (Lang, 2013).

Moreover, the mediatization paradigm does not seem outright convincing in terms of argumentation about the impetus of media influence and the specific attribute of the influencing approach, when media is increasingly automated. For instance, the legitimacy of the mediatization paradigm lies in the inherent and diachronic development of theories (Livingstone & Lunt, 2014; Lunt & Livingstone, 2016). This explanation of the paradigm legitimacy is less convincing because it is subjective to circular logic to encompass the

impetus of media influence, unless with recourse to alien impact factors such as capital, political culture, etc.

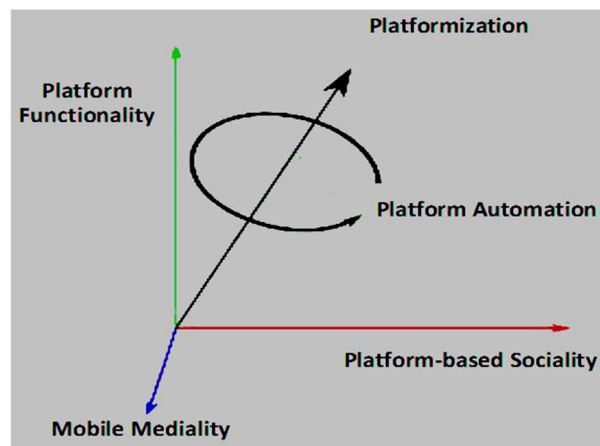
The theoretical constructs of the culture of connectivity (van Dijck, 2013), mediated construction of reality (Couldry & Hepp, 2017), and platform society (van Dijck *et al.*, 2018) attempt to answer the paradox via integrating theories such as political economy, actor-network theory, communicative (re)figuration (Hepp *et al.*, 2018; Hepp, 2019) and social construction tradition (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). But mixed theories are not explicitly described as the emerging paradigm that focuses more on individuals and/or a cohort of persons in terms of the psychological and physical interactions with digital platform media.

There is a need for (1) an emerging paradigm that elevates the mediated platforms to the level of being able to have organizationally coalesced into both sociological institutionalization and personal formation; (2) an incipient paradigm that recognizes power-transmission structure and affective information, through symbolic generalization (Blumer, 1969) of texts, pretexts, and subtexts. Thus, we attentively propose that the main theoretical components of platformization are platform logic and the platform architecture, from the perspective of the relation between mobile journalism and political participation.

## 6.2. Platform logic

The platformization model is fashioned generally in line with platform logic which is imprinted in the practices and cultural modeling from mediated message to the mediated platform (when the platform reflects media attributes) that possesses mediated ability of processing information. Based on the arguments made thus far, platform functionality, platform automation, mobile mediality, and platform-based sociality amount to the quaternions of platform logic (see Figure 1). As discussed above, platform functionality closely involves platform users' participation in making content, consuming platforms' affordances, forwarding the content, commentation, discussion, etc.

**Figure 1.** Quaternions of platform logic.



Source: Own elaboration.

If platformization can be regarded as an axis, process, or vector, platform automation indicates the rotation angle that signifies the degree of automation and determines the inherent dynamic of platformization in the quaternions. Although we assume that platform automation is simply data-driven, it also has overtones of social capital, industrial and financial capital, revenues, and politics. The transect of platformization in a specific context would be the entanglement of platform functionality, mobile mediality, and platform-based sociality, sharing proximity of media repertoire, media ensemble, and media environment (Hepp, 2019) in spacial, psychological, and cultural dimensions.



This entanglement marks the difference in perception of media between deep mediatization theory (Hepp, 2019) and platformization theory, although both theories examine automation by taking account of media influence. Because of viewing media as a process (Hepp, 2019), deep mediatization theory not only confounds the denotations of media and mediatization but also tends to alienate automaton from core theoretical and social constructions.

In comparison, platformization inspects media as mediated and dynamic platform that values interactivity and data (or information). Both interactivity and data turn out to be resources that boost the vector of platformization, particularly when network effects come about. During this process, resource production and management make profits (e.g., Srnicek, 2017b) and add values through automating the strands of platform cooperativism (Karatzogianni & Matthews, 2020) and sharing economy, etc. During the same process, platformization is primed for actions and at least provides avenues and possibilities for the permeation between collective and connective actions (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013).

Platform logic aims to offer a new analytic tool for the dyad of politics and platforms, on account of its embodiment of the integrative approach of three meta-discourses (information conduits, social interaction, social construction) of modeling communication (Bergman *et al.*, 2019). To achieve this, we try to identify the intertwined routes of realizing platform logic, i.e., personalization and convergence, given that both truss up the quaternions.

The route of personalization is generally an identification from other persons in the environment of multifarious platforms, contents, and platform users. Specifically, it is how platforms and contents are tailored to users' demographics, political and cultural standpoints, consuming patterns and conventions, physical and virtual environments, psychological movements, device attributes, etc. As regards the convergence route, it has four meanings, i.e. (1) technological combination (VR/AR+4K/8K+5G/6G+AI), (2) organizational/institutional integration (capital, personnel, policy, working routines), (3) information assimilation (Professional Generated Content+UGC/UGP+Artificial Intelligence Generated Content), (4) omnipresent participation (various participatory methods).

The platform logic we proposed inspects the technical, personal, institutional, and societal respects, and attempts to expose the rationale and procedures that platforms follow to intervene in both private and public spheres. This model of platform logic differs from the one proposed by Schwarz (2017) which examines platform logic as the way and dominance of platforms and platform corporations influence across micro, meso, and macro levels. We contend that the model of platform logic should not only reflect platformization's scheme of transcending layered structures of society and commercial strata, but also penetrate (Nieborg & Poell, 2018) micro, meso, and macro levels to mitigate the strain of the ternary structure.

### **6.3. Platform architecture**

The platform is an architectonic composition in the territories of computation and algorithm, buildings and space, politics and discourses (Gillespie, 2010; Papakyriakopoulos *et al.*, 2020). The algorithms of platforms in this study are not limited to mathematics and software programming. They also incorporate the steps of information processing, a set of mental codes, and the layout of the steps that people use and follow to make sense of media messages consciously and unconsciously (Potter, 2012). As for digital platforms, their functionalities are usually endogenously represented through specific software, firmware, or hardware architectures. Exogenously, their ecosystem is dynamic due to the data supply and network effects.

To some extent, platform architecture fashions the form of platformization, constitutes the structurality and vitality of certain communication activities, and organizes and/or institutes the platform entities (corporates, media, administration, NGOs, etc.). Put differently, platform architecture has two senses. Firstly, it has the sense of internal structure,

i.e., the engineering structure of software and/or hardware. Secondly, it contains the sense of external/network structure, i.e., the platform's structural position in the platform ecosystem in terms of infrastructures and institutions.

Since information transmission is understood in the manifestation of platform-created space (e.g., Twitter-sphere), and meanwhile is perceived as a kind of time recording (Eichhorn, 2019) through communications on platforms, both structures are the appropriation of resources, the concatenation of coded sociality in a specific cultural, economic and political context, and the exhibition and exertion of the power that moves beyond the discursive range "toward a more heterogeneous ensemble which includes the non-discursive" (Coté, 2014).

Within the scope of the coding theory (Neubauer *et al.*, 2007) for information transmission, platform architecture should support the reliable transmission of information over noise channels. Communication in this sense can be comprehended as the transmission over specific real and virtual space, e.g., radio channels and optical wavelength, and also perceived as the transmission in the dimension of time by filing information on appropriate platforms for data storage.

Jensen and Helles (2017) hold the dissevered, fixed, and static topology of communication that treats technologies and services as the scale of time and social structuration. They realize that this exceeded certainty may lead to the unaccountability of the automation of communication to a certain degree, and they propose the many-to-one communication as the rationalization and reclamation. However, it is not sufficient to only inspect the operational analysis of the interface (Rubin & Rubin, 1985) between different prototypes of communication, and it is not adequate to figure out the prefiguring of certain kinds of platform users' information.

Under the circumstance that the platform ecosystem is usually dynamic and a coherent whole, the external structure ideally can be amorphous in terms of communication prototypes, and then it can accommodate itself to different contexts. Morphologically, it seems to bear a resemblance to contagious communication (Törnberg, 2018). The external structure can also be represented by the interaction of both contents and forms, by the interaction that transcends the duality between distributors and receivers. For instance, the one-to-one-to-many communication format is another reason for apprehending the architecture from the systematic perspective of the platform ecosystem that tends to be gaining omnipresence in communication architectures, e.g., ubiquitous mass (Li, 2020).

Nevertheless, the external structure does not deny the legitimacy of certain architectures including network topology, apparatuses, and institutions (Heinrich, 2012), and it is generally based upon the mediated construction of society (Couldry & Hepp, 2017) and it specifically depends on the gratification of platform participants and users (Rubin & Rubin, 1985).

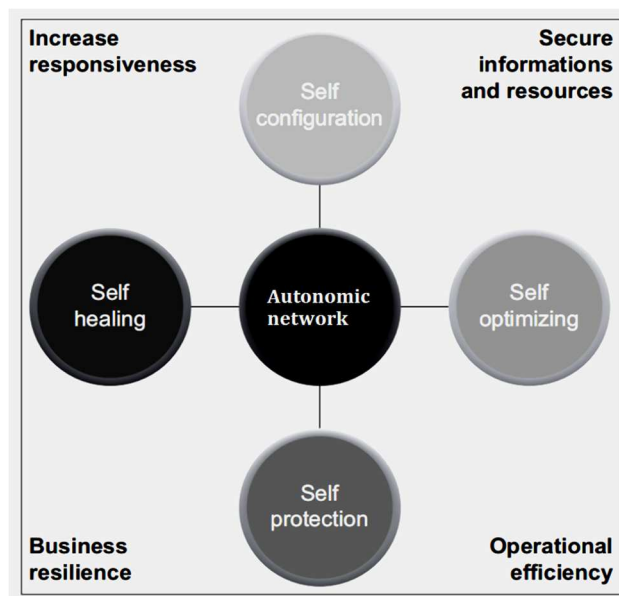
The structural dynamic of platform architecture yields structural virality that generates dynamics, the direction of information distribution, and even independently generates information (Eichhorn, 2019), with high granularity and sensitivity of time intervals in a comprehensive media environment. The media environment has a high level of virality online and nurtures the platform influencers with Multi-Channel Network (MCN) and Intellectual Property (IP) products and services, on account of

- (1) the hyperactive users (Papakyriakopoulos *et al.*, 2020);
- (2) the technology-supported communication infrastructure of three levels: geo-ethnic media, community organization and residents (An & Mendiola-Smith, 2018), and services of Bots, 5G, IoT, Cloud, Deep Learning, etc.;
- (3) the network typology that frames communities at least discursively (Wenzel *et al.*, 2020) under ideal conditions, boosts user participation and clears the technological, institutional, and political barriers to communication expediency and the culture of political discourse (Hepp *et al.*, 2016).

Normally in a narrow sense of external structure, network typology has a dendrite structure, linear/circular structure (Martin & Dwyer, 2019), lattice structure, and small-world structure (Ch'ng, 2015). In the practical sense, the regular network typology tends to oversimplify the structure, while taking perspectives of transmission conduits (Chen *et al.*, 2019) and multi-layer of information processing (Politis *et al.*, 2018).

Further, has the network structure assumed automating ability and flexibility to a certain degree? It is possible as there are social media automation tools in the market, and more importantly autonomic design of network (see Figure 2). News stories are propagated via networks by users or the public, through users' pursuit of entertainment and self-interest, malice and dissatisfaction, in the form of platform-based sociality such as link sharing, endorsing, or commenting (Chorley & Mottershead, 2016; Martin & Dwyer, 2019). From this point of view, the automation of network structure is reasonable since it aims to gratify users' needs (Rosengren, 1974; Potter, 2012), materialize social practices (Couldry & Hepp, 2017), influence the materiality (Hepp, 2019) of media and big social data (Coté, 2014).

**Figure 2.** Autonomic network design.



Source: Adapted from *Autonomic Network Management Principles: From concepts to applications* (p. 7), by Agoulmine, N., 2011, Academic Press, Elsevier.

## 7. Conclusions

Among the analyses of platformization in various respects of media, culture, technology, economy, and politics, this study focuses on the inner logic of platformization, such as network effects and the pursuit of data, and regards the process from platform functionality to platform automation as an approach to platformization, and then uses the connection between mobile journalism and political participation to conceptualize mobile mediality and platform-based sociality. Finally, the study proposes a platformization framework shaped by platform logic and platform architecture to develop the mediatization theory in a platform society.

To apply this framework to the broader field of communication activities, mobile journalism is extended to the production, distribution, consumption, and interaction of newsworthy information. Meanwhile, political participation is generalized as a kind of social activity in the public sphere. Furthermore, platform logic is apprehended through the quaternions, i.e., platform functionality, platform automation, mobile mediality, and

platform-based sociality. The platform architecture is perceived as the structural and amorphous form of communication that to a certain extent transcends the delimitation of a specific place and time, on account of virtual reality, AI, 5G, holography, cloud storage and computing, big data processing, etc.

Against the backdrop that digital media platforms are required and accessible to make social contacts, especially in the COVID-19 pandemic and that new communication technologies are being incorporated into daily life (e.g. the metaverse technology), we suppose that it is instrumental to interpret and instruct the new normal of news participation, social contacts, and daily communication, and theoretically elaborate more on the related uncertainties in the public sphere, political participation, and communication.

The classical mediatization theory, which forms the academic school at the beginning of the new millennium, seems too self-limited to model the emerging media and communication practices, particularly with the technological advancement in platform-building and news automation. Efforts of revising the theory are attempted, such as grand mediatization, deep mediatization, and hyper mediatization (e.g., Pérez Tornero, 2020; Hepp, 2019).

Hence, we introduce platformization into mediatization studies from three perspectives, i.e., mobile journalism, political participation, and communication paradigm. The notion of platformization in this study is expanded towards not only social media and the related cultural and economic respects, but also the fields of journalism routines, platform evolution, and the perception of social interaction and political construction.

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