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Is Twitter a bad place? The responsibility that social media may have had in the 2021 storming of Capitol Hill.

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IS SOCIAL MEDIA BAD FOR PEOPLE?
THE 2021 STORMING OF THE US CAPITOL COMPLEX

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

"*In this Twitter, tweet, meme, mean world that we've created for our children, the least we can do is consider what we've done and think about the young people, the future and individually, collectively do the best we can to try and turn this thing around.*"

- Denzel Washington, from his AFI Life Achievement Award acceptance speech (2019)

The events of 6th January 2021 in the United States of America, where rioters stormed the heart of their democracy, the US Capitol Complex (which houses their bicameral parliament) were shocking to see. The reasons for this riot were myriad, including to protest the outcomes of the presidential elections and two senate elections, as well as to prevent the counting that day of the electoral votes that formally certify the election result. These events will be analysed and reflected upon for years to come, and blame will be placed at many people's doors, and inevitability one that has already been singled out is social media. As Irish-born CNN reporter Donie O'Sullivan said during the event: "*In 2016 people tried to write off anything about social media, saying oh, it's only a few Facebook posts, what harm? Here's the harm. The harm of conspiracy theories, the harm of people living in these online and Trump media echo chambers.*" And now questions are being asked of social media, including Facebook and Twitter, the primary communication media of President Donald Trump.

<Summary of rest of paper>

KEYWORDS: Digital Ethics; Social Media; Cyberharassment; Echo Chambers.

1. INTRODUCTION

Facebook and Twitter allow people to join its service without verifying their identity, and therefore allows people to create anonymous identities irrespective of their motivations or true character. Research indicates that these anonymous (or fake) identities encourage people to share untrue or controversial content without potentially damaging their self-image or social relationships (Zhang and Kizilcec, 2014). This, by itself, wouldn't be as problematic as the fact that Facebook and Twitter also recommends people to follow based partially on commonly-shared interests, therefore people who share false content will inevitable connect with others who also share fake content, which invariably creates a "filter bubble" that produces polarization and echo chambers, and results in an exogenous isolation effect, as well as a lack of full discussion of all aspects of topics (Min, *et al*., 2019).

Although social media companies do have tools and personnel to help monitor and remove contentious or libellous postings, and they use a combination of artificial intelligence and professional moderators to review and remove these postings; there are issues with the moderation process; the

scale of the task is enormous, and the moderators are often hired based on the lowest salary, and may lack knowledge of the platform-specific guidelines, as well as the linguistic fluency in the language of the content (Roberts, 2019). They also have issues with the notoriously inconsistent application by social media platforms of their own norms of acceptable speech.

The interactions on social media can sometimes make susceptible people think that a celebrity or politician is speaking directly to them, which can be empowering but can also have deleterious effects on the individual, where the distinction between the virtual and real worlds become blurred. This can also blur the differentiation between public spaces and private spaces, which philosophers like Jürgen Habermas (1991) and Hannah Arendt (1998) have explored this by asking questions such as; who has responsibility in these spaces? And what is truly private? This delusional perception of direct communication also leads to the creation of "divides" between in-groups and out-groups based on very simplistic criteria such as gender, race, and social status (Taijfel, 1970). This in combination with the anonymity of identity can lead to harassment and bullying on-line, which is often directed at women and minority groups, making them more likely to leave these platforms or at least be silenced in these domains (Chawki and el Shazly, 2013; UN Broadband Commission for Digital Development, 2015; World Wide Web Foundation, 2015). This ultimately leads to an amplification of white, male voices on social media platforms, and the development of misogynist and racist groups, such as the Incel Movement (Taub, 2018), and Stormfront (Jones, 2006). All of this invariably leads to Groupthink, where people feel they have to behave in a particular way because (they think that) everyone that they are friends with are behaving in that way (Nemeth, 2018). Other typical characteristics of Groupthink are also present on Facebook and Twitter, where so-called "mind guards" act as self-appointed "protectors" of the group who try to stop members being exposed to adverse views to maintain unity within the group, as well as their believe in the inherent morality of what they are doing, they feel they are trying to expose the massive election fraud as well as liberal bias of Facebook and Twitter (who engage in surreptitious actions such as "shadow banning"), and therefore any tactic is acceptable in exposing that hypocrisy and (as they see it) gross injustices perpetrated.

This is not to imply that Facebook and Twitter was solely responsible for the riots, in fact, a study by Prabhu *et al*. (2021) found concerning content on both Twitter and Parler, and noted that a significant proportion of traffic on Parler was in support of undermining the veracity of the 2020 US Presidential Elections, as well as being hate speech (as a result of Parler's relaxed community guidelines) and manipulated. In fact, Omidyar (2018) identified six ways that social media systems are a threat to democracy: (1) Echo chambers, polarization, and hyper-partisanship; (2) Spread of false and/or misleading information; (3) Conversion of popularity into legitimacy; (4) Manipulation by "populist" leaders, governments, and fringe actors; (5) Personal data capture and targeted messaging/advertising; and (6) Disruption of the public square

Fuchs (2021) suggests that because Donald Trump used the imagery of a boxer and told them to "fight like hell", he communicated to his followers that a battle was needed, and his supporters chanted on its way to and inside of the Capitol, "Fight for Trump! Fight for Trump! Fight for Trump!". But Fuchs highlights that it was not a single speech that incited a coup, but "a long chain of events that unfolded as a consequence of Trump's authoritarian ideology, authoritarian personality, and authoritarian practices". Atari *et al*. (2021) highlight the fact that on the day of the riot Donald Trump tweeted "These are the things and events that happen when a *sacred* landslide election victory is so unceremoniously *viciously* stripped away from great patriots who have been badly & unfairly treated for so long" and suggest that these types of tweets create a perception of moral homogeneity, and a moral obligation to defend the in-group even by radical means.

The events of 6th January 2021 led to the deaths of five people, and they show that social media companies will either need to rapidly make changes to the services to prevent a recurrence of these kinds of tragedies, or ban Donald Trump from their services.

This is not to suggest or imply that social media is all bad, in fact, it can be used for a range of positive cases, and it is worth noting that during the riot social media was indeed used to support victims and inform law enforcement personnel of the on-going developments.

This issue is one of grave concern, and is one of a rapidly growing number of computer ethics issues that have been emerging recently, to such an extent that a number of third-level institutes across Europe are collaborating to explore some of these key ethical challenges, and to develop educational content that is both based on pedagogically sound principles, and motivated by international exemplars of best practice to highlight these matters as part of the Erasmus+ Ethics4EU project[1] (O'Sullivan and Gordon, 2020). One specific development that is being undertaken is the creation of a lesson focusing on the ethics of developing software that can have a negative impact on people's lives.

2. METHODS
<ETHICS4EU project>

3. DISCUSSION
<Stuff>

This is my theory on a lot of the bad things that happened: "**poor performing males**" !!!!

Male behavior towards female gamers

See also: Sexism in video gaming

A 2015 study found that lower-skilled male players of *Halo 3* were more hostile towards teammates with a female voice, but behaved more submissively to players with a male voice. Higher-skilled male players, on the other hand, behaved more positively towards female players. The authors argued the male hostility towards female gamers in terms of evolutionary psychology, writing, "female-initiated disruption of a male hierarchy incites hostile behaviour from poor performing males who stand to lose the most status".[100]

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[1] http://ethics4eu.eu/

Laura and I are watching the scenes of mayhem unfolding at the seat of our Nation's government in disbelief and dismay. It is a sickening and heartbreaking sight. This is how election results are disputed in a banana republic – not our democratic republic. I am appalled by the reckless behavior of some political leaders since the election and by the lack of respect shown today for our institutions, our traditions, and our law enforcement. The violent assault on the Capitol – and disruption of a Constitutionally-mandated meeting of Congress – was undertaken by people whose passions have been inflamed by falsehoods and false hopes. Insurrection could do grave damage to our Nation and reputation. In the United States of America, it is the fundamental responsibility of every patriotic citizen to support the rule of law. To those who are disappointed in the results of the election: Our country is more important than the politics of the moment. Let the officials elected by the people fulfill their duties and represent our voices in peace and safety. May God continue to bless the United States of America.

Donald J. Trump ✔
@realDonaldTrump

Watch @marklevinshow at 11:00 P.M. (now!) and @SteveHiltonx at 12:00 A.M. on the Great Election Fraud of 2020!

⚠ **This claim about election fraud is disputed**

4:00 AM · Dec 7, 2020 ⓘ

♡ 36.6K   💬 12.8K people are Tweeting about this

Donald J. Trump ✔
@realDonaldTrump

I hope House Republicans will vote against the very weak National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), which I will VETO. Must include a termination of Section 230 (for National Security purposes), preserve our National Monuments, & allow for 5G & troupe reductions in foreign lands!

1:36 PM · Dec 8, 2020 ⓘ

♡ 10   See Donald J. Trump's other Tweets

Donald J. Trump ✔
@realDonaldTrump

Georgia, where is signature verification approval?
What do you have to lose? Must move quickly!
@BrainKempGA @GeoffDuncanGA @GaSecofState

10:35 PM · Dec 11, 2020   ⓘ

♡ 5   👤 See Donald J. Trump's other Tweets

Donald J. Trump ✔
@realDonaldTrump

The BIG Protest Rally in Washington, D.C., will take
place at 11.00 A.M. on January 6th. Locational details
to follow. StopTheSteal!

7:23 PM · Jan 1, 2021   ⓘ

♡ 4   👤 See Donald J. Trump's other Tweets

Donald J. Trump ✔
@realDonaldTrump

Mike Pence didn't have the courage to do what should
have been done to protect our Country and our
Constitution, giving States a chance to certify a
corrected set of facts, not the fraudulent or
inaccurate ones which they were asked to previously
certify. USA demands the truth!

⚠ **This claim about election fraud is disputed**

7:24 PM · Jan 6, 2021   ⓘ

♡ 194.6K   💬 146.5K people are Tweeting about this
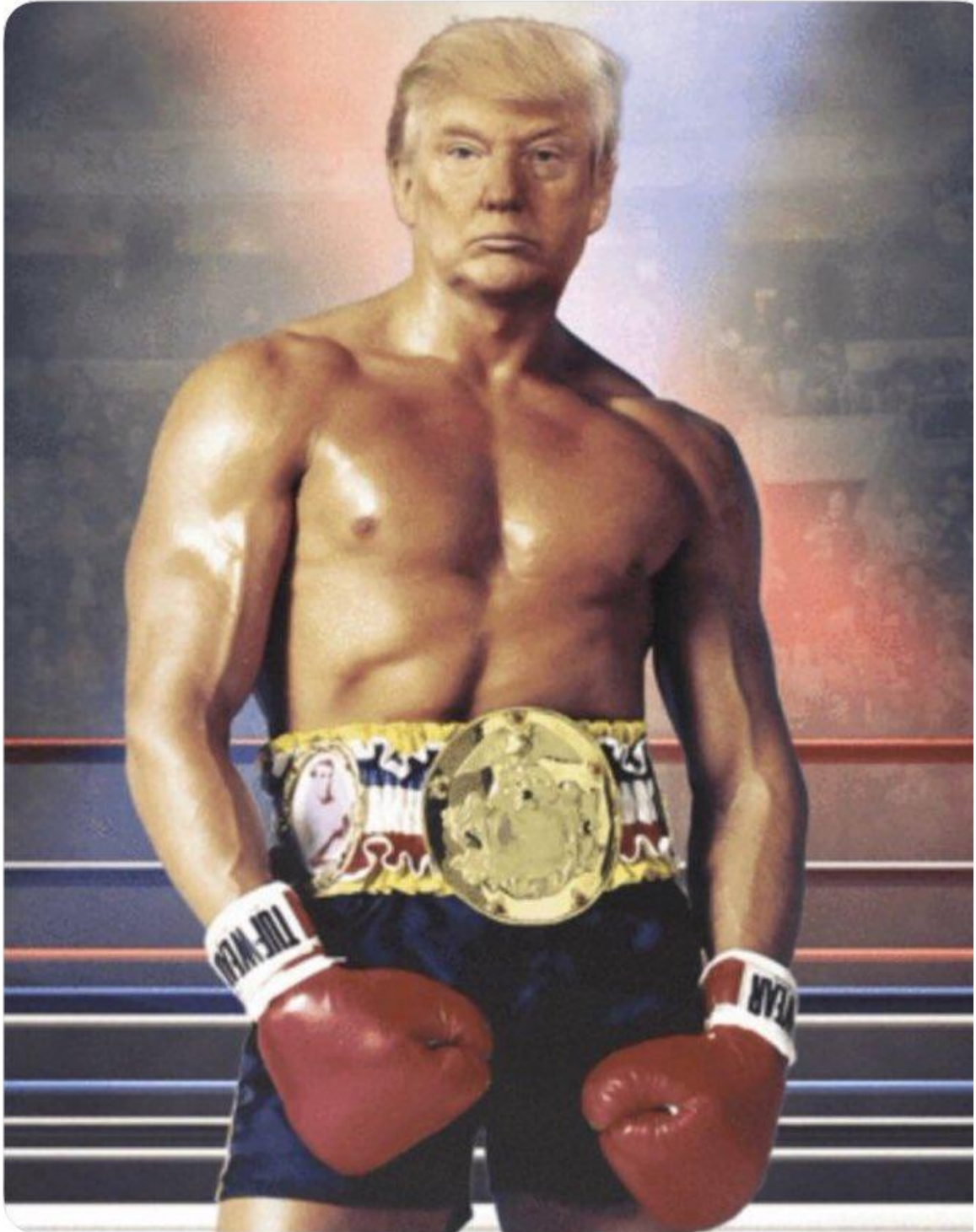
Donald J. Trump ✓
@realDonaldTrump

These are the things and events that happen when a sacred landslide election victory is so unceremoniously & viciously stripped away from great patriots who have been badly & unfairly treated for so long. Go home with love & in peace. Remember this day forever!

11:01 PM · Jan 6, 2021   ⓘ

♡ 66   💬 19 people are Tweeting about this

This Tweet is no longer available. Learn more

Donald J. Trump ✓ @realDonaldTrump · 28m   ⵔⵔⵔ
These are the things and events that happen when a sacred landslide election victory is so unceremoniously & viciously stripped away from great patriots who have been badly & unfairly treated for so long. Go home with love & in peace. Remember this day forever!

⚠ This claim of election fraud is disputed, and this Tweet can't be replied to, Retweeted, or liked due to a risk of violence.

16:54 · 27.11.19 · Twitter for iPhone
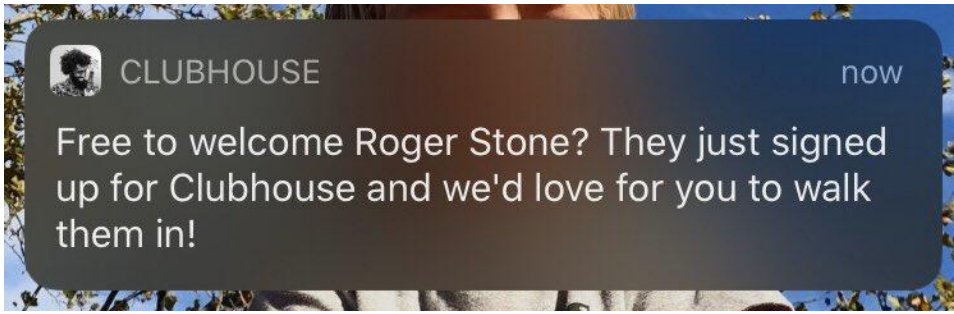
Mark Zuckerberg ✔
57m · 🌐

The shocking events of the last 24 hours clearly demonstrate that President Donald Trump intends to use his remaining time in office to undermine the peaceful and lawful transition of power to his elected successor, Joe Biden.

His decision to use his platform to condone rather than condemn the actions of his supporters at the Capitol building has rightly disturbed people in the US and around the world. We removed these statements yesterday because we judged that their effect -- and likely their intent -- would be to provoke further violence.

Following the certification of the election results by Congress, the priority for the whole country must now be to ensure that the remaining 13 days and the days after inauguration pass peacefully and in accordance with established democratic norms.

Over the last several years, we have allowed President Trump to use our platform consistent with our own rules, at times removing content or labeling his posts when they violate our policies. We did this because we believe that the public has a right to the broadest possible access to political speech, even controversial speech. But the current context is now fundamentally different, involving use of our platform to incite violent insurrection against a democratically elected government.

We believe the risks of allowing the President to continue to use our service during this period are simply too great. Therefore, we are extending the block we have placed on his Facebook and Instagram accounts indefinitely and for at least the next two weeks until the peaceful transition of power is complete.

Dr Catherine Flick @CatherineFlick · 7h   ···
Not interested in this place for this and many other reasons. Clubhouse is an
ethical mine field and super illustrative of the SV bro culture which gives me
the creeps.

> **Taylor Lorenz** ✓ @TaylorLorenz · 18h
>
> Roger Stone is the latest in a slew of far right figures finding a home on
> Clubhouse. Cernovich and others also are building audiences on the app
> twitter.com/BrandyZadrozny...
>
> Show this thread

    ◯   ⟲ 1   ♡ 5   ↥

Kevin Sorbo ✓ @ksorbs · Jan 21   ···
Public
Follow me over to Clouthub!

getclouthub.com/kevin

#socialdistancing #socialmedia #BidenHarris2020 #Trump2020 #truth
#america #freedom #Government

KEVIN SORBO | CloutHub
CloutHub is the first-ever social media platform specifically created for
civic and political networking and engagement.
⌗ getclouthub.com

Scott Baio ✔ @ScottBaio · Jan 23 · · ·

I JUST JOINED GAB. Follow me over there at @RealScottBaio Some s██head already took my @ScottBaio name over there.

> 🐱 **Catturd** ™ @catturd2 · Jan 23
>
> Gab is really taking off - can't believe I already have 215,000 followers - my handle there is @Catturd
>
> I'll be joining other social media sites who still believe in free speech, soon.
>
> It's called Turd-diversification. 😂

💬 487   🔁 725   ♡ 4K   ⬆️

President Trump ✔ @POTUS · 1m   ₀₀₀

🏳️ US government account

As I have been saying for a long time, Twitter has gone further and further in banning free speech, and tonight, Twitter employees have coordinated with the Democrats and the Radical Left in removing my account from their platform, to silence me — and YOU, the 75,000,000 great...

💬 1.1K   🔁 5.4K   ♡ 10.2K   ⬆️

Show this thread

President Trump ✔ @POTUS · 1m   ₀₀₀

🏳️ US government account

Replying to @POTUS

...also look at the possibilities of building out our own platform in the near future. We will not be SILENCED! Twitter is not about FREE SPEECH. They are all about promoting a Radical Left platform where some of the most vicious people in the world are allowed to speak freely...

💬 92   🔁 1.9K   ♡ 5.8K   ⬆️

President Trump ✔ @POTUS · 1m   ₀₀₀

🏳️ US government account

...STAY TUNED!

💬 324   🔁 1.9K   ♡ 5.9K   ⬆️

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4. **CONCLUSIONS**

<Stuff>

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