

Liberalism and Technology

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The assertion that liberalism is a dominant political ideology in Western democracy cannot in all seriousness be disputed. The premise of this assertion is evidenced through embedded notions of acceptable modalities across economic and social structures within the West and its institutions, both private and public. Liberalism operates and strives to promote the existence and the proliferation of activities that further promote a fundamental precept in the sustainability of the creation of wealth and capital.

Technology therefore is seen as an essential part in sustaining this component. Therefore it can be argued that there exists a strong relationship between the proliferation of social media technology and the vehicle of liberalist thought that promotes its use and sustainability. This is because liberalism consists of a series of underlying values that work to validate the perpetuation of a system whose interests it is to encourage and reward the proliferation of technological 'products'.

However, what is of interest in this discussion, relates to the question as to whether liberalism has the ability to provide the necessary safeguards as part of its pursuit of freedom and of course, profit. For it is argued that liberalism and its manifestation through capitalism, is an essential component to the proliferation of the technology and motive for which social media must attach in order to flourish but without the moral constraints required to ensure fairness and safety to participants. That is to say, without some extrinsic threat to profitability and therefore survival, there is little doubt that social media would not provide in the absence of such threats, the necessary safeguards to society and individual users. Thus, while liberalism as an ideological force in driving the use and development of social media technologies, there remains some ambiguity regarding the success of a liberalist ideology to ensure freedom from State control of social media and safeguards.

The problems for the State, it is argued, is that not only must it reconcile the justification of imposing social media legislation on its citizenry through the prism of various constraints, but also the practical realities of law enforcement in regards to regulating social media. This relates to the technological constraints imposed on

regulating social media. Other constraints associated with successful regulation of social media include jurisdictional issues whereby the reality of enforcement is rendered near-on impossible to achieve.

Following from an understanding of this will be a clearer picture of the nature and the role of the State as a result of the infusion of social media technology and those who use it. This involves a consideration of the various roles and functions between that of the State and its citizenry with a view to determine whether social media has impacted to such a degree that there is now a fundamental shift in roles between the two entities. The underlying rationale for this inquiry is best explained by describing the context and nature of the problems that social media appears to be causing the State. In its simplest form, the problems for the State stemming from social media are both philosophical and technological in nature.

The genesis of the problem between social media and State regulation can be seen as an issue relating to competing rights – on the one hand the rights of users to use this technology unfettered from State interference and on the other, the right of society to be protected from the myriad of harms that are alleged to stem from the use of social media.