

The role of social platforms as archives deserves attention. Posts can vanish when users delete them or when moderation removes them. Journalists who rely on such material for accountability should preserve copies with hashes, timestamps, and links, and store them securely. Collaboration with civil society archiving projects adds redundancy and supports later legal use. Clear policies about when to blur faces, when to share full files with investigators, and how to describe edits in captions, prevent disputes about authenticity.

Taken together, these practices suggest a clear conclusion. Social media, in wartime, is not inherently a threat to professional standards. It is a stress test. Where institutions chase speed without structure, standards erode. Where institutions invest in verification workflows, ethical rules tuned to conflict, operational-security awareness, staff care, and transparent correction norms, standards hold and can even be advanced. The platforms will continue to amplify both signal and noise. The craft of journalism is to separate them, to explain how the separation was done, and to accept that sometimes the right answer is to wait.

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Distorted Digital Dialogue: How Echo Chambers and Parasocial Ties Impair Critical Perception

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The contemporary digital era presents a paradox: on one hand, we have unprecedented access to information; on the other, we are witnessing growing societal polarization and an erosion of critical thinking. Technology platforms promised a «global village» and open dialogue, but in practice, they often

facilitate societal fragmentation and create conditions where disinformation and biased opinions spread with immense speed. To understand this phenomenon, we must revisit classic models of media influence and analyze the new mechanisms shaping public opinion online.

In the mid-20th century, sociologists Paul Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Elihu Katz proposed the Two-Step Flow theory (TSF). According to this model, ideas from the media do not reach the audience directly but are mediated by «opinion leaders»—more informed and active individuals who interpret and relay information to their social circles. This theory challenged earlier notions of an all-powerful, direct media influence, highlighting the role of interpersonal communication[1].

The digital age has not nullified this model but has radically altered it. The role of traditional opinion leaders is now filled by digital influencers, and social circles have transformed into online communities, often shaped by platform algorithms. This has created the central problem of our time: why, in an era of information abundance, do we see not a rise in awareness but an increase in affective polarization—emotional hostility—and vulnerability to manipulation

This article argues that the degradation of critical perception is a result of the combined effect of two key phenomena: the informational isolation of echo chambers and the trust mechanisms based on parasocial relationships with influencers. Analyzing this interplay helps explain how the architecture of modern platforms fosters group identity more than informed discourse, ultimately undermining the foundations of rational dialogue.

Distinguishing Concepts: Echo Chambers, Filter Bubbles, and Informational Isolation.

To analyze how digital dialogue becomes distorted, it is crucial to differentiate between two often-conflated concepts: echo chambers and filter bubbles. They describe different, though related, phenomena.

An echo chamber is a communicative environment where individuals primarily encounter opinions that confirm their own. It is a «closed media space that reinforces the messages transmitted within it and insulates them from rebuttal». The primary cause is social dynamics, not technology. Two psychological mechanisms are at play: homophily—our natural tendency to associate with similar people—and selective exposure—the tendency to seek information that aligns with our beliefs and avoid contradictory information. Thus, the user and their social network play the leading role in forming an echo chamber. Research confirms the existence of echo chambers, especially in the context of online political polarization.

The term «**filter bubble**» was introduced by internet activist Eli Pariser to describe a state of intellectual isolation created by algorithms. Unlike an

echo chamber, a filter bubble is a product of technology. Platforms like Google or social networks use algorithms to analyze user behavior (clicks, likes, search queries) to create a personalized news feed. The driving force here is the platform's technology, which opaquely curates content, potentially limiting a user's exposure to diverse viewpoints. This phenomenon exists exclusively online [2].

In practice, echo chambers and filter bubbles reinforce each other. The human tendency to connect with like-minded people (the echo chamber) provides data for algorithms, which in turn create a personalized feed (the filter bubble) that reflects and amplifies the group's preferences. When users see content that aligns with their circle's views, their own convictions are further strengthened.

The distinction between these two concepts is crucial. An echo chamber's primary mechanism is social dynamics, such as homophily and selective exposure, with the user and their social network acting as the driving force. It can exist both online and offline, and its key effect is the reinforcement of group identity and shared opinions. In contrast, a filter bubble is driven by technology—specifically, the platform's algorithms. Its mechanism is algorithmic personalization, it exists only online, and its main effect is creating a state of personalized informational isolation for the user.

The true scale of these phenomena is debated in academia. While many studies confirm the existence of echo chambers, the hypothesis of all-encompassing filter bubbles is criticized. Some work suggests algorithms can actually diversify news feeds, though users may not always engage with contradictory content. Nevertheless, the danger lies in their interaction. Social choice (the echo chamber) and technological selection (the filter bubble) combine to create a stable environment of informational isolation.

Alongside the formation of isolated information spaces, another mechanism of influence has evolved: parasocial relationships (PSRs). First described by Donald Horton and Richard Wohl in 1956, this term refers to the one-sided emotional bonds that audiences form with media figures. Social media has not only transferred this phenomenon online but has amplified it, creating what can be called an «illusion of bilateral communication.»[3].

Unlike traditional celebrities who seemed distant, digital influencers build their influence on a sense of accessibility and closeness. They interact with followers through comments and live streams, creating a feeling of personal acquaintance and even friendship. This effect of mutual awareness, however illusory, strengthens the parasocial bond. Influencers often present themselves as «ordinary people» who have achieved success, making them more relatable than professional actors or journalists.

Forging strong PSRs is the result of an influencer's deliberate work. The result of these efforts is a high level of trust, which is built on several key factors. Perceived authenticity is achieved by creating an «ordinary person» image and showing vulnerability, which increases trust and relevance. Intimate self-disclosure, such as sharing personal information and experiences, enhances feelings of closeness and «friendship.» Social attractiveness and attitude homophily, based on a similarity in views, values, and lifestyle, foster identification and a sense of belonging. Finally, simulated reciprocity—achieved by responding to comments, hosting live streams, and addressing the audience directly—creates the illusion of a two-way conversation.

This trust influences not only consumer decisions but also political views and information perception. The influencer becomes a trusted source whose judgments are often accepted without further verification. Thus, «authenticity» in the digital sphere becomes a powerful tool of influence. It allows influencers to bypass traditional filters of critical perception. A follower trusts the influencer's personality more than the specific claim. When a trusted fashion opinion leader starts broadcasting political propaganda, that trust is often transferred uncritically to the new content.

The central thesis of this work is that the combination of informational isolation (echo chambers) and emotional trust (parasocial relationships) suppresses critical thinking. These two phenomena do not merely coexist; they amplify each other.

In the context of media consumption, this is not just skepticism but a set of skills: the ability to analyze information, identify bias, distinguish facts from opinions, evaluate source credibility, consider alternative viewpoints, and—crucially—be willing to revise one's own beliefs in light of new evidence. It is a purposeful, self-regulated judgment process.

The interaction of echo chambers and PSRs undermines every component of critical thinking.

First, the echo chamber as a low-dissonance environment. By their nature, echo chambers minimize contact with information that challenges a user's beliefs. In such an environment, there is simply no need to apply critical analysis skills. Instead, the environment actively encourages confirmation bias—the tendency to seek and interpret information in a way that confirms one's pre-existing views.

Second, the parasocial relationship as a «cognitive shortcut.» Within this comfortable environment, a PSR with an influencer function as a heuristic. Trust in the source replaces the evaluation of the information's credibility. A follower does not need to spend energy fact-checking or seeking alternative opinions if the information comes from a trusted opinion leader. The emotional bond («I like them, I trust them») becomes more important than rational assessment («Is what they are saying true?»).

This combined effect leads to the abandonment of key critical thinking practices:

1) Evaluating evidence is ignored because the source is considered reliable by default.

2) Identifying bias becomes impossible, as the views of the influencer and their audience align, and bias is perceived as common sense.

3) Considering alternatives is actively suppressed, as disagreeing with the group threatens social exclusion.

4) Self-correction becomes nearly impossible, as admitting a mistake means questioning not just one's opinion but also the authority of a «friend»—the influencer—and the entire social group.

This process can be illustrated by the spread of misinformation about COVID-19. Studies show that opinion leaders created echo chambers using emotional language to unite followers against a common «enemy» (e.g., state institutions), bypassing rational discussion. Being in such an echo chamber directly correlated with an increased belief in fake news[4].

Ultimately, information consumption transforms from a cognitive act into a social act of confirming group loyalty. A like or a share becomes a signal of «I am one of you.»

Failures in critical perception at the individual level lead to serious social problems that threaten the stability of society. The consequences manifest in three areas: the rise of affective polarization, the spread of disinformation, and the fragmentation of the public sphere.

Modern polarization is not just a disagreement on views but a rise in emotional animosity toward other ideological camps. Echo chambers create the ideal conditions for this: they form cohesive in-groups that constantly see content demonizing opponents. As a result, political adversaries are perceived not as people with different views but as enemies.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a clear example of how these mechanisms work. Studies showed that the discourse about the pandemic was highly politicized. Groups like «Doctors for the Truth» used their professional status to create powerful echo chambers spreading disinformation. They denied the virus's severity and discredited official health bodies, relying on the trust of their followers. This led to tragic real-world consequences, including vaccination delays in many countries [5].

The ultimate and most dangerous consequence is the destruction of the shared reality necessary for democracy. When different social groups exist in parallel information universes, dialogue between them becomes impossible. Society breaks down into warring clusters that do not share common facts or values, undermining the possibility of compromise and collective decision-making.

This analysis demonstrates that the erosion of critical perception in the digital age is not an accident but a systemic outcome of the interplay between platform architecture and fundamental human psychology. The combination of user-created echo chambers, driven by a natural affinity for like-minded individuals, and parasocial relationships with influencers, built on an illusion of intimacy and trust, creates a closed system. In this system, emotional attachment to an opinion leader and group loyalty replaces the rational evaluation of information, thereby blocking critical thinking.

Because the problem is complex and socio-technical, its solution cannot be simple. Restoring healthy critical discourse requires a multi-layered approach that logically follows from the mechanisms analyzed.

1. Individual and Educational Strategies: Countering Psychological Vulnerabilities. Since the system exploits cognitive biases—such as confirmation bias and the need for social belonging—the first line of defense is to strengthen individual cognitive skills. Media literacy plays a key role here. Educational programs should focus on developing specific abilities: verifying information from multiple sources, identifying bias, and distinguishing between fact and opinion. A particularly promising approach is «psychological inoculation» or «prebunking»—preemptively exposing users to manipulation techniques to help them build «immunity» against disinformation, directly countering the mechanisms of uncritical trust.

2. Systemic and Technological Strategies: Reforming the Digital Environment. Individual efforts are insufficient, however, when the environment itself encourages uncritical behavior. Therefore, changes are needed at the platform level to correct the architectural flaws that foster echo chambers and the abuse of trust. Greater algorithmic transparency is necessary so that users understand why they see certain content and have more control over their information streams. It is important to recognize that platforms' business models, aimed at maximizing engagement, often conflict with these goals. Nevertheless, platforms can implement design elements that «nudge» users toward more thoughtful behavior—for example, by adding a delay before reposting to encourage reflection or by asking direct questions about the credibility of information.

Ultimately, the challenge posed by distorted digital dialogue requires a concerted effort from users, educational institutions, technology companies, and regulators. Only a comprehensive approach—aimed at both empowering the user and reforming the technological environment—can create the conditions for the revival of the critical discourse necessary for a healthy and functional society.

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Концепт «праця» у стандарті Міжнародної ради з питань преси та телекомунікацій

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Категоризацію медіаконтенту регламентують різні стандарти, одним з яких є *Media Topics*, розроблений Міжнародною радою з питань преси та телекомунікацій (International Press Telecommunications Council, IPTC) [2]. Це стандарт медіатем, який спеціалізується на категоризації тексту та являє собою таксономію, організовану за ієрархічним принципом; набір понять, або категорій, які можна використовувати для опису новин та контенту. Наразі це п'ятирівнева таксономія, що охоплює понад 1200 понять.