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Knowing How to Know
in the Public Sphere

Media Competence and
Democratic Equality

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Remix

DE GRUYTER

Moral Philosophy and Politics 2019; aop

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Inoculation against Populism: Media Competence Education and Political Autonomy

<https://doi.org/10.1515/mopp-2018-0035>

Abstract: This paper offers an analysis of the relation between political populism and mass media, and how this relation becomes problematic for democratic societies. It focuses on the fact that mass media, due to their purpose and infrastructure, can unintentionally reinforce populist messages. Research findings from communication science and political psychology are used to illustrate how, for example, a combination of mass media agenda setting and motivated reasoning can influence citizens' political decisions and impair their political autonomy. This poses a particular normative challenge for modern democracies: how to counter these populism-supporting effects within the constraints of democratic legitimacy? After showing how severely limited legal measures to curb populist media effects would be, the paper argues in favour of media competence education as a way of providing future citizens with an epistemic toolkit to navigate the media environment and strengthen their political autonomy.

Keywords: populism, media, democracy, liberalism, education, autonomy



Roadmap

- The Role Mass Media in Political Philosophy
- Mass Media and Democracy
- Civic Knowledge
- Media Competence as
 - Civic Knowledge
 - Political Epistemic Virtue
- Knowing How to Know and Democratic Equality

Media & Political Philosophy



Current TV programmes are bad for democracy (with the exception of Sesame Street).

Gutmann 1987



Media are part of the background culture of society and not part of the political sphere.

Rawls 1993



Democracy needs self-regulating media systems independent from social environments.

Habermas 2006





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Media & Democracy

Mass Media contribute to forming political opinions in modern democracies.

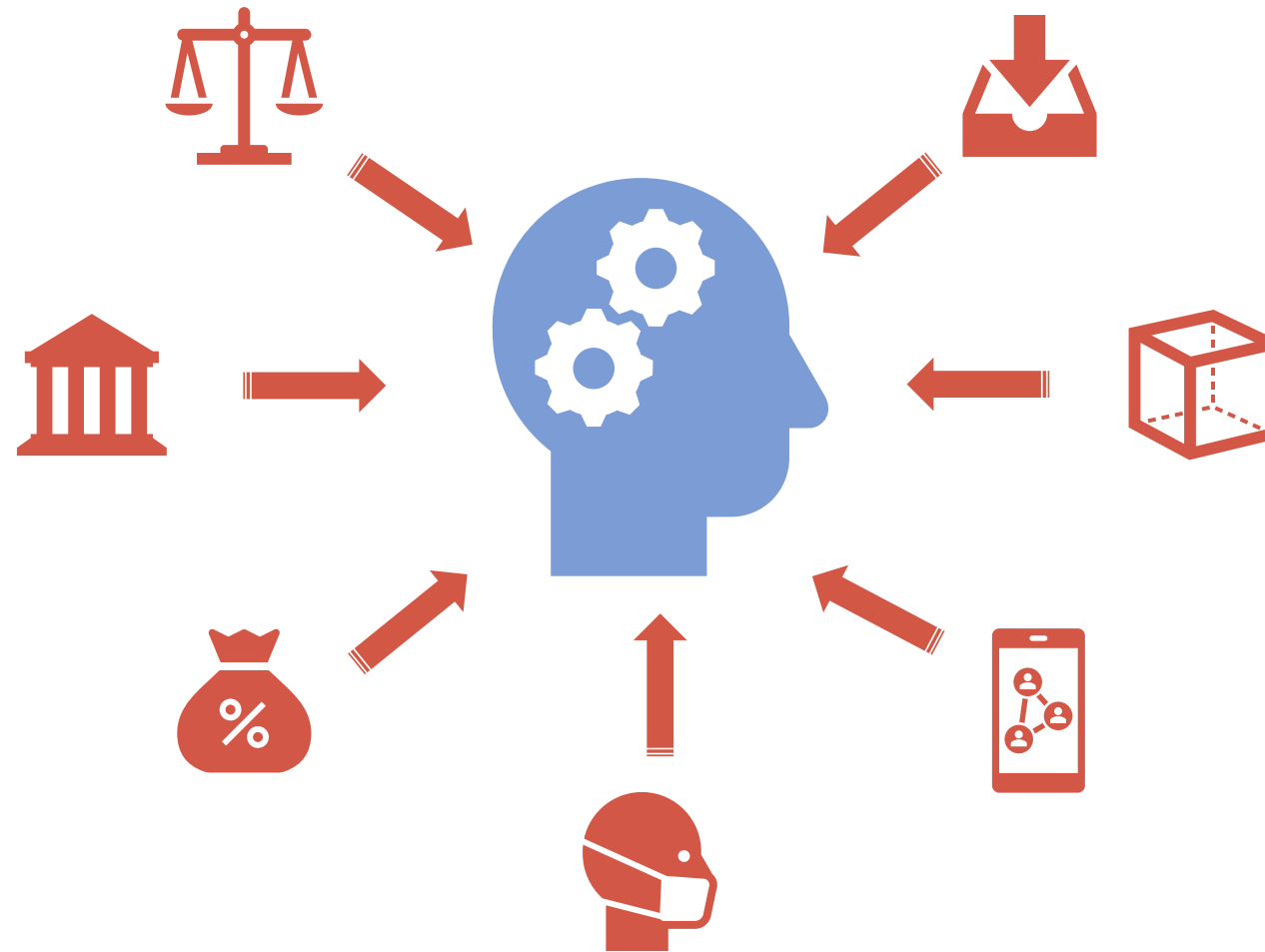
How they work is relevant for democratic theories, regardless whether, e.g., deliberative or aggregative.





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Civic Knowledge





Media Competence



Media Competence as Knowledge

- about structural factors, e.g., agenda setting
- about psychological factors, e.g., motivated reasoning



Media Competence as Epistemic Virtue

- making a habit of applying above knowledge



Knowing How to Know & Democratic Equality

1

Democracy requires participation

2

Democratic participation requires political knowledge (PK)

3

Media competence improves the quality of PK

4

Individual qualitative differences in PK == instance of democratic inequality



States are justified to and should promote media competence



Summary

- Mass media are important providers of political information in modern democracies.
- Mediated information is shaped by structural conditions and psychological biases.
- Media competence training can improve people's evaluation of mediated information and supports them in making better political decisions.
- Media competence contributes to better and more equal political participation and counteracts episto-democratic inequalities.
- Spending resources and effort on media competence education and training are justified for liberal democratic states.