

Discussion 7 General Comments

Keep in mind that *both* these questions demand that you use a critical theory approach *and* the things that Fuchs lists on page 13. This means that political economy needs to be touched on, as should *what you should do* in the face of these communications methods. There are five things that need to be assessed. Very few drafts did these things.

The political change via social media question

Use a critical theory approach and assess the ability of social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook to bring about political change. Make sure that you are taking into account Fuchs' position on this but also to make sure that this is extended/challenged.

1. Consider the possibility that meaningful participation *might* be possible simply online. Be clear about what this would look like and realistic about its prevalence and impact.
2. Keep in mind what Habermas wants with a public sphere, a place for political conversation to shape political action that is immune to the power asymmetries of elsewhere. Fuchs is using the idea of a public sphere as a test of political value when considering social media. You need to do the same: do social media promote *real/meaningful* political change or is this just an illusion that serves the political economy of such media? Whatever the answer you need to show evidence.
3. Note the existence of an echo chamber effect which leads to the gathering together of like-minded people, shielding them from challenging ideas and leading to a false view of the state of the world. You can find good articles about this.
4. It should be pretty straightforward to find examples beyond what Fuchs lists of people asserting that social media is "revolutionary". Have a look at these and consider the extent to which they are.
5. If you are looking for some fresh arguments about the power of social media to bring about political change then look no farther than the US election.
6. There are studies that can show the influence of social media on politics (or the lack thereof). Find them. Use them.

The social media and communication relationship question

Use a critical theory approach to assess the communication styles/modes/methods that are promoted by social media platforms like Twitter (short/terse messaging) and Facebook ("likes" and now emoticon responses). Yes, Fuchs needs to be drawn on to make this assessment but keep in mind earlier authors like Baudrillard and Enzensberger.

1. If you are looking to question the "realness" of online interactions then consider looking at [this article from *The Atlantic*](#).
2. Note that a dislike button would bring with it similar ambiguities as the like button. Hitting dislike in the case of the Auschwitz post that Fuchs uses as an example is a case in point. Would people be disliking the content of the post or that it was posted. It seems that someone could dislike Auschwitz but like that it was being remembered or vice versa (and this isn't even considering "ironic" dislikes and the like). The point is that as much as a dislike button might expand the ability to comment it still fails to capture the intricacies of full human communication.
3. Yes, likes and emoticons limit conversation, but what about the comments feature? Will this satisfy requirements for more meaningful interaction? To answer this you will need to make an assessment of the comments and conversations that are had with this feature. This assessment should ideally go beyond a knee-jerk/opinion-based reaction. See if you can find some evidence one way or the other. Also make sure to assess what sorts of conversations are prompted by the format of this method (how are comments ordered? What is given precedence? What do you see when you first look at a post? etc.)

This is likely the hardest question from the social media topic. Answering it will require you to carefully pick through how the way a platform allows you to communicate shapes the content of the communication. Evidence will need to be offered for this. The dialectical nature of this also needs to be shown so make sure the influence of our communication on the technology platforms is also evident.