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# Chapter 1. Introduction: Public Communication in Freefall

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## Abstract

This editorial introduction examines whether public communication is in freefall. It argues that the main five functions of the media, as identified by Jay Blumler and Stephen Coleman (2015), are not being carried out satisfactorily. A number of structural and cultural changes to the political communication system combine to weaken its capacity to sustain a normatively healthy democratic relationship between citizens and representative governments. The authors outline six features of the contemporary media that characterize this weakened relationship, and argue that while the basic principles of political communication remain relevant, the methods and channels through which these principles are enacted must evolve. We would wish to see an agenda for change addressing the form, scale and values of the political public sphere. The introductory chapter also sets out the structure and chapter themes for the volume.

## Keywords

media functions, democratic politics, crisis, freefall, values, norms

# Introduction

Democratic politics stands or falls by the quality of the relationship between citizens and the governing institutions that purport to represent them. Political communication is central to that relationship and in this respect the media serve five key functions (Blumler and Coleman 2015):

Firstly, they provide citizens with meaningful access to the political world with a view to making it as transparent, meaningful, and accessible as possible to them. In a mediated world, where visibility and awareness of major events is rarely through direct experience, citizens depend upon the media to tell them about events, trends and upheavals that are likely to affect them. In a now famous phrase, the media do not tell people what to think, but what to think about. Ensuring that there is a correspondence between people's interests, concerns and values and the information they are able to receive about the world is a fundamental prerequisite of functioning democracy.

Secondly, they provide citizens with clear choices about how they might live together locally, nationally and globally. This entails more than simply drawing attention to points of disagreement between competing parties, elites or movements. Before reporting such disagreements, a primary purpose for democratic media is to clarify what is at stake in any argument about policy, values or competing interests.

Thirdly, they ensure that all parts of society likely to be affected by a social decision are recognized, heard and treated with respect as actors in its public consideration. It should not simply be up to citizens to assert their voices on matters that they care about, but for the media to provide them with inclusive spaces and resources to exercise such public voice.

Fourthly, they hold power holders to public account. Be they political, economic or cultural elites, and regardless of traditions of secrecy, a key purpose of democratic media is to interrogate power in the public interest.

Fifthly, they establish communicative connections between citizens and ultimate decision-takers, affording them genuine opportunities for meaningful dialogue. In a representative democracy, this entails contributing to ongoing relationships between the represented and those who claim to represent (by speaking for) them.

In recent times many scholars and commentators have observed that these basic functions are not being carried out satisfactorily and the civic texture of public communication is in disrepair (Davis 2019; Chadwick 2019; Bennett and Livingston 2020; Reese 2020; Coman et al. 2021; Bennett and Kneuer 2024). That is not to say that political representatives fail to speak for the interests of citizens all or most of the time; that journalists and other political commentators across various media constantly fail to provide information that democratic citizens need; or that publics are bereft of civic resources and energies. There are significant elements of the political communication system that work well much of the time, albeit with less confident swagger than they once did. But a number of structural and cultural changes to the political communication system combine to weaken its capacity to sustain a normatively healthy democratic relationship between citizens and representative governments. We begin by outlining six features of the contemporary media that characterize this weakened relationship.

Firstly, the fragmentation of the mediated public sphere makes it increasingly difficult for local, national or global publics to be reached in one place or time. With abundant channel

and platform options to choose from, people turn to news and discussion sources that only address people who think like them, excluding themselves from exposure to issues and forms of address that they find unappealing, disturbing, or bewildering. The algorithmic nature of content distribution significantly impacts what political content is seen, by whom, and how frequently. This shift is said to have decentralized the control of information away from established news organizations to platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok, which often prioritize engagement over informational accuracy. Distinct issue publics gather in mediated silos to listen to the echo of their solipsistic predilections. Such 'echo chambers' or 'filter bubbles', where individuals are exposed primarily to information and opinions that reinforce their existing beliefs, can exacerbate polarization and reduce the potential for democratic discourse. Much audience reception in the new conditions turns on a tension between a greater freedom to choose and an increased inability to avoid political information. When social attachments become narrowly homophilic and the experience of being in the world ever more atomised in this way, the inevitable consequence of such fractured mediated sociality is a weakening of mutual recognition, so that encounters between fragmented publics are blighted by suspicion.

Secondly, as competition between largely commercially-driven media outlets intensifies, and the news cycle is driven by a relentless 24/7 rhythm, there is a greater than ever tendency towards the episodic coverage of civically important issues, breaking them up into forever smaller, more disconnected chunks presented at an ever more accelerated, incoherent unintelligible speed. Such fast news is all too fleeting to make sense of, but taken in sufficiently to make an impression that can be processed through a filter of prejudice and fear. In this manner bad news unfolds at a frantic velocity, either turning everything that happens into a discrete effect of a cause that is too complex to explain or blurring each news story into a jumbled account held together by a pervasive sense of disorientation and stymied agency. Human brains are simply not built for such hyper-accelerated cognitive processing.

Thirdly, as time-pressed journalists come to work with increasingly shrinking generic templates, they often turn to over-determined narratives whereby news stories are packaged into cliched tropes of Good v Bad; West v East; Us v Them. Unlike great stories which stimulate us to think anew about our values and commitments, over-determined journalistic narratives offer pat confirmation of lazy preconceptions. Attracting readers in this fragmented, accelerated, and commercially-driven attention economy, news journalism has to compete with social media platforms designed to keep users engaged, often leading to the prioritization of sensationalist or emotionally charged content over substantive political discourse.

Fourthly, except in the increasingly rare cases of media institutions bound by public-service principles, the scaffolding of civic connection tends to be low on the list of media values. Duties of civic care matter less than ratings, profits and appeals to crude demand. In the absence of such values, the world made visible through mediation is bereft of some of its most civilizing features. Useful civic information comprises knowledge that people don't necessarily know they need to know, but will benefit from being exposed to. Democratic civic communication entails engaging with people and ideas that one might not choose to encounter. In many of the most popular media channels and platforms, from Fox News to Facebook, there are built-in disincentives for such opportunities.

Fifthly, large and growing parts of the contemporary media system are not just doing a bad job in feeding citizens the information that they need, but are consciously structured to disseminate and amplify misinformation. Indeed, the mediation of strategic deception, once the marginal province of the dark arts of psychological warfare, is now one of the fastest-

growing areas of techno-cultural innovation, especially when supported by recent developments in artificial intelligence. The new challenges posed by deepfakes and other AI-generated content complicate the ability to discern truth from falsehood in political communication, marking a significant departure from the traditional issues of media bias and selective reporting. Employed by a range of actors, from rogue states opposed to liberal democracy to ideologues seeking to promote their own pernicious agendas, disinformation occurs within public discussions about risk (from health pandemics to climate change), the targeting of specific groups (such as immigrants, ethnic minorities, women and non-heterosexuals) and attempts to influence elections through voter suppression, character assassination and agenda-rigging. While most focus has been upon disinformation within liberal democracies, some of the most egregious examples occur in illiberal states where companies like Russia Today, China Global Television Network, StarTimes, Pressenza, Yala News and Channel3Now have immense global reach, especially in Africa and the Arab states, and absolutely no accountability to democratic standards of journalism.

Sixthly, while the mediation of politics had once been the province of regulated national broadcasters and a pluralistic press, the media have expanded in scope and territory to the point of becoming a co-producer of political reality. From being an observer and interpreter of the political scene, scribbling interpretive reports from the sidelines, the media are increasingly staging and defining the political through their mediatizing power. And at the same time the unregulated online communicative sphere throws old norms of information veracity, transparency and balance into chronic disarray through its business model which is governed by the algorithmic amplification of the most controversial stories and messages, regardless of their correspondence to reasonable truth or verifiable reality.

Should we think of these failings as a crisis? Let's return to that question a little later, for now noting that these specifically media-related trends are compounded by three further tendencies that lie beyond the characterization of the media, but contribute to the enervation of democratic politics.

Firstly, globalization has changed the scale of political action which is increasingly conducted beyond any realm of sovereign accountability by opaque supra-national actors and institutions that have little or no regard to what we had once thought of as inalienable democratic norms. The old Westphalian notion of the nation state presided over by political actors adhering to the predictable rules of an established game is increasingly irrelevant. While orthodox political discourse remains fixated upon scales of power in which sovereign states grasp on to illusory control (think Brexit or the nationalist fantasies of the US MAGA ideologues), the effects of global power trigger levels of uncertainty as to the sources of politico-economic phenomena for which democratic politics lacks any adequate response. Most of the transnational bodies of governance (from the UN to World Bank) lack democratic legitimacy, while the most powerful corporate global actors possess wealth and policy influence beyond the wildest dreams of most political states. As a result, when citizens from Delhi to Detroit ask themselves who is responsible for decisions that affect their lives, they lack communicative connections with the unaccountable institutions that shape and constrain the possibility for national policy intervention.

Secondly, long-established norms of political conduct, which had once guaranteed a degree of basic social cohesion, are being cast aside under conditions of intense polarization whereby political groups assume postures of partisan enmity, acting as if those who disagree with them have no place within the polity and therefore should be denied the right to be heard or even represented. At the same time reckless electoral players demonstrate a willingness to do or say anything in order to gain executive power, even going so far as to refuse losers'

consent when defeated. In some cases political leaders have simply abandoned the rules-based order, established over the course of the long twentieth-century; in others there is a degree of backsliding whereby executive diktat trumps legislative deliberation. As illiberal states dangerously chip away at the independence of the judiciary, overturn long-established human rights (from assembly and protest to reproductive liberty) and, perhaps setting the scene for all of these incremental losses, confer seemingly limitless power upon economic elites (often comprising corporate entities rather than accountable actors), an ethos of free market dominance over the regulatory scope of democratic politics is reinforced. This leaves elected governments all too commonly reduced to managerial technocrats, constantly needing to appease impersonal forces referred to as 'the markets'.

Thirdly, public trust in the democratic system is in decline, hardly surprisingly given the trends we have outlined. People tend to trust institutions capable of protecting their interests and responding to their values. When evidence of such responsiveness declines and people's subjective sense of democratic efficacy is in freefall, it is not entirely irrational to look elsewhere for political solutions. Across the world the magical thinking of populism appears to offer that solution by presenting a lazy vision of radical change without having to make any significant alteration to social structure or received culture. Cynical demagogues thrive politically upon such wishful thinking. The fantasies of populism tend to draw strength from a wish to return to an uncomplicated past, but invariably the consequence of transferring trust to demagogic pedlars of such myths is tragic betrayal of their followers' hopes.

The consequence of these tendencies is a pronounced lack of confidence in the potential of democracy as a procedural and moral mechanism for acting collectively and effectively with a view to determining the structural and normative shape of the future. Most people, when asked, agree that democracy is a good idea. But the same people, when questioned further, express the view that established democratic policies, institutions and processes are unlikely to change their lives. This paradox of confidence in the system and profound scepticism regarding the political efficacy it affords constitutes a problem that unaddressed can only get worse.

# Crisis, freefall – or what?

How should we characterize the problems that we have identified? Let us not get hung up on semantic labels. Turning to the substance of analysis, when in 1995 Jay Blumler and Michael Gurevitch attempted to investigate what they described as a 'crisis of public communication' they were surely correct in acknowledging that although democracies face many urgent problems requiring a considered canvassing of difficult choices, and although frequent attention to such problems in our expanded communication system ensures broad public awareness of them, formats of constructive discourse about them are in rare supply in the established news media'. (Blumler and Gurevitch 1995, p.213-4). Nor was Blumler off the mark fifteen years later, writing this time with Stephen Coleman, in arguing that

> … the system that is "bust" is a communication ecology that is unsuited to the democratic needs of contemporary society … Political representation has come to be an act of ventriloquism in which the public is left feeling like inanimate dummies, spoken for and sometimes spoken to, but rarely spoken with. The demos have become outsiders, some gaping at the political show through the prism of an increasingly cynical media that appears to be run by a clique of entrenched insiders, others firmly turning their backs on it in varying degrees of distaste. (Blumler and Coleman 2010, p.142)

Whether we refer to these trends as a crisis depends upon whether we understand the term as referring to an imminent systemic breakdown of an apocalyptic nature or, as Blumler (1997, p.396) suggests, quoting the political theorist John Dunn (1994, p.6) 'a diffuse awareness that practices may have to change and change sharply if their core purposes are to be sustained'.

This introduction argues that while the basic principles of political communication remain relevant, the methods and channels through which these principles are enacted must evolve. Two conclusions seem evident. The first is that the characterization of the situations in 1995 and 2010 are now significantly worse, mainly because we are now faced not only with a political communication system that is 'unsuited to the democratic needs of contemporary society', but because political democracies themselves are at best fragile and at worse hovering on a dangerous precipice (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018; White and Neblo 2021; Diamond 2022). This is a global phenomenon which threatens the sustainability of values and practices that have characterized democratic progress over the past century. Secondly, a diffuse awareness does exist, certainly amongst liberal-minded politicians and citizens, that practices must change sharply if we are to avoid a further slide into the post-democratic unknown. Given these conclusions, we would argue that whether or not we wish to describe the current situation as a crisis, we should certainly respond to it as if it were a crisis. For this is one of those moments in history in which doing nothing amounts to moral irresponsibility.

Of course, the question of how to respond is by no means obvious. Perhaps three ways of thinking about this might usefully be acknowledged. Firstly, we should not proceed as if there is a golden age of democratic politics and public communication to which we hope to return. Many of the foundational practices of the past were patrician, exclusive and over-centralized. Secondly, not everything needs to be-reinvented. There are existing models of media and politics that can fruitfully be refreshed for contemporary usage. For example, public service broadcasting might these days be addressing a more active and pluralistic public than it did in the past, perform less as a service than a means of communicative facilitation and operate beyond the metaphor of broadcasting, but there are still great values associated with that model which offer an important contrast to the current commodification and commercialisation of the public sphere. Thirdly, determining politically smart strategies should not be left to elites, which includes the privileged inhabitants of academia, but should entail a more open and creative process involving the broadest and most diverse range of citizens possible, utilizing innovative forms of deliberation and co-production. Democratization as well as democracy depends upon the legitimizing force of the demos. Social media has enabled citizens participation. This 'democratization' of content creation has empowered marginalized voices. However, it has also blurred the lines between professional journalism and opinion-based content.

The chapters that follow should be read as an exploration of possibilities for a sustainably democratic future. They delve into the specific ways in which political communication has been transformed in the current age, examining both the challenges and the opportunities that these transformations present for democratic governance. For our part, we would wish to see an agenda for change addressing the form, scale and values of the political public sphere.

In relation to form, this entails moving beyond now obsolete analogue/digital, online/offline dichotomies. Thought needs to be given to creative ways in which publics are enabled to appear (not just to themselves, but to others who might not share their experiences or values), express themselves and find pathways to socially constructive interconnections. This depends upon the creation of safe civic spaces of horizontal interconnection in which networks of local experience can interact reciprocally with institutions of national and global macro-decision-making.

Much of this relates to the necessity of re-thinking the scale of political mediation. Since the middle of the seventeenth century politics has been conceived as an intra-territorial activity conducted within and by nation states. The conception of the globally dominant capitalist market as a 'world system' was elaborated in the mid-1970s by Immanuel Wallerstein (2011 [1983], p.390) who urged social scientists to abandon the reification of the nation-state as the primary unit of politico-economic analysis, arguing that capitalism could only operate as a world economy 'with a single division of labor and multiple cultural systems'. Given that the most pressing and intractable contemporary challenges can only be addressed through global coordination, it is no longer relevant to be locked into national media and state sovereignty. Paradoxically, the more that the logic of globalism becomes inescapable the greater the intensity of reactionary nationalist desire to retreat into separatist silos. However, social reality is not moving in their direction and the democratic imperatives of creating untrammelled global flows of information, means of holding global elites to account and creating what Limor Shifman (2014, p.155) has referred to as 'user-generated globalisation' cannot be ignored if political communication is to correspond to the geography of real-world power. Social media networks transcend national boundaries, creating global conversations around political issues. This is relevant in the context of transnational movements and global crises, where social media facilitates cross-border solidarity (but also spreads misinformation internationally, as discussed earlier).

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, the exploration of democratic possibilities must be framed by values. As Jay Blumler eloquently put it,

> In my eyes, political communication was – and is – an inescapably normative domain, intimately involved in the realization of (or failure to realize) collectively self-determining processes of citizenship and democracy … it has prescribed regular attempts to look normatively at prevailing political communication arrangements, at how they relate to defensible civic ideals and whether there are ways in which they might be improved. (quoted in Parry and Moss 2015, p.211)

One of the most conspicuously troubling aspects of contemporary erosions of democracy has been the abandonment of values, at first shockingly, but over time and incrementally taken for granted. The reduction of politics to a Machiavellian game in which partisan victory is seen as being more important than contribution to the common good; the institutionalisation of deception and bamboozlement as a liminal zone between psychological warfare and everyday agenda control; the casual resort by journalists and politicians to trickery and law-breaking; the descent into dog-whistle propaganda, with its grievous effects for victimized groups; and the neglect of the public sphere in favour of corporate priorities all contribute to a society in which democratic politics as a means of human self-determination begins to seem like a quaint piety. Such values have to be challenged and political/media structures built upon such values cannot be allowed to persist as if they are natural phenomena.

Recent history offers some grounds for optimism in relation to the possibilities we have set out. Think about the different political trajectories of Hungary and Poland in the past few years. In the former a deeply undemocratic nationalist cabal led by Viktor Orbán has curtailed press freedom, weakened judicial independence and undermined multiparty democracy, describing its position as 'illiberal Christian democracy'. In Poland the similarly illiberal nationalist Law and Justice Party was in power from 2015 to 2023, hijacking the national media, assaulting judicial independence, targeting its opponents and attacking the liberties of women, gays, migrants and trade unionists. In 2023, after a heatedly contested election, a liberal government was elected, largely thanks to communication networks that evaded the power of the authoritarian state. Both Poland and Hungary have faced a battle of

political values, thus far with different outcomes. The same can be said for Brazil, in which the populist rule of Jair Bolsonaro was finally defeated and its disastrous policies reversed and Argentina in which a dangerous experiment in extreme market deregulation is in process. Indeed, it is increasingly the case that politics is fought over basic values about the kind of society people want to live in, commonly involving imaginative forms of mediation and new scales of transnational solidarity. If there is a message that we would hope this book leaves you with, it is that democracy, and the political communication system that sustains it, is not definitively shaped, but constantly open to the values and ingenuity of human agency.

## The organization of the book

The chapters in this book address key challenges facing global political communication at a time in which transformations in political practice, media ecology and cultural expectations both threaten traditional democratic norms and point to potential for new ways of enacting political democracy. Drawing upon the outstanding theoretical insights of Jay Blumler to our understanding of the norms and practices of political communication, but also critically interrogating and updating them where appropriate, the chapters ask timely questions about what publicness and democracy mean in the second half of the 2020s. We compile these chapters in 2024, as half the global population are living in countries holding national elections this year.

Many people are talking and writing about the crisis of political democracy, fewer are talking about the role of the media in relation to that crisis. While many scholars have responded in an ad hoc way to the various crises -- populism, polarization, mis and dis information -- the chapters in this book show how Jay Blumler's scholarship provides us with the tools and a framework to research and understand the changing communication environment systemically and rigorously.

We hope this book demonstrates the applicability and relevance of Blumler's work in explicating the current crisis of communication and the need for fresh and radical thinking in tackling it. The breadth and depth of chapters from a broad range of scholars from the North and South, as well as from those in the early stages of their career to long-standing contributors to the field, combine to produce a thoughtful and provocative invitation to reflect upon the concept of the question, 'Is there still a crisis of public communication?'.

The collection is organized into three sections, beginning with a set of chapters that provide foundational context and current understandings of the crisis in public communication. Chapters in the second section move on to the specific challenges and disruptions posed by the digital age, and those in the third section offer cross-national studies and global perspectives on contemporary issues in political communication. The book finishes with an Afterword by Zizi Papacharissi reflecting on the continued relevance of Jay Blumler's work.

The three chapters in Section One set the scene for the rest of the collection. In a re-print of their much-cited journal article from 2015, Jay Blumler and Stephen Coleman offer a re-evaluation of the Political Communication Process in Chapter 2, reminding us of the need to repeatedly revisit the conditions of the performance of political communication in light of new media developments and democratic challenges. Blumler and Coleman reconsider some of the foundational concepts used to analyse and evaluate political communication. They propose a communication-sensitive definition of democracy that emphasizes civic engagement, collective self-determination, and the role of media in providing meaningful

political choices. As subsequent chapters illustrate, their critique of the shortcomings of the news media in promoting inclusiveness, accountability, and democratic values, and their suggestions for reforms that better align media practices with democratic ideals has not lost its relevance.

Based on his belief that 'serious and re-energized analysis of systemic political communication could never be more critically important', in Chapter 3, Russell Neuman considers the current challenges facing the democratic public sphere. He explores the crisis of independent journalism, the spread of misinformation, growing political polarization, and finishes by attributing the decline in media to a lack of news coverage recognized as authentic and genuine by those who feel most alienated. Aligning with Blumler's perspective, Neuman suggests various solutions to these challenges, which he argues requires creativity and a rethinking of how media can fulfil its role in a democratic society,

In Chapter 4, Sang Jung Kim, Yibing Sun, Erik Bucy, and Dhavan Shah begin by reviewing Blumler and Kavanagh's (1999) three ages of political communication, giving context to their exploration of what Blumler called 'the fourth age' of political communication, marked by the onset of digital communication and rise of social media. Kim and colleagues suggest this 'fourth age' is characterized by four phases: the search stage, the social media stage, the citizen journalism stage, and the multi-modal stage. Their discussion of these stages illustrates the dual potential of digital media to both enhance democratic engagement and pose serious risks to the quality of public communication. Having explored these phases, they consider how three key vulnerabilities of digital media threaten to undermine democratic processes: the unchecked spread of misinformation, the rise of populist narratives, and the commodification of users. Kim and colleagues conclude that navigating these challenges will require critical media literacy, regulatory interventions, and a renewed focus on strengthening democratic norms in the digital age.

Section Two develops these themes by explicitly addressing that 'fourth age' of political communication through insights into ways that utopian 1990s predictions of digitally enabled democracy have fallen short. We start the section with Chapter 5: Paul D'Angelo and Erik Bucy seeking a fresh perspective on Blumler and Gurevitch's (1995) notion of a 'chronic state of partial war' between journalists and politicians. They connect a 'post-truth' sensibility to political and media culture which allows little room for compromise and dialogue, reminding us of the need to interrogate the fast-shifting institutional contexts of political communication.

Curd Knüpfer argues in Chapter 6 that the 'crisis' is upon us. His focus is the rise of (substantially online) illiberal, far-right counter-publics serving as opposition to a perceived 'mainstream'. He applies a cross-national perspective to his analysis of factors leading to their rise. Knüpfer observes that these actors advance an ideological project of dismantling the very same institutional foundation that they are demanding access to.

In Chapter 7, Hungarian political scientist Márton Bene examines the phenomena of the viralization of political communication, through which politicians and media tailor their messages to the demands of citizen communication, especially that transpiring through social media. He argues this is a process favouring a negative, populist, and visual style of communication which frames issues in terms of morality. The result is a spiral of ever greater partisanship.

Authors in our third and final section address dilemmas of citizen engagement from the perspective of the Hambermasian public sphere. In Chapter 8, addressing political campaign communication in sub-Saharan Africa, Teke Ngomba helps us to see Blumler's legacy in the

context of efforts to de-westernize communication theory. Ngomba shows how analyses of campaign communication in sub-Saharan Africa is improved by the adoption of a systems framework, an approach he argues makes clear the need for greater nuance in debates about the inapplicability of 'Western' theory.

William Dutton and Grant Blank from the Oxford Internet Institute ask us to reconsider the scourge of online 'filter bubbles' and 'echo chambers' in Chapter 9. They illustrate in their survey-based study where news audiences turn for political information in France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States. While they find sources are more diverse than researchers often suppose, they see a pattern of people selecting media content which confirms pre-existing biases. They then extend their analysis to the context of autocratic societies, and the role of powerful state disinformation, using the example of Russia and that country's war on Ukraine.

In Chapter 10, Zrinjka Peruško directs our attention to the information environment of Central and Eastern Europe, addressing determinants of citizen engagement. She includes among these the supply of political information; quality of news; media concentration and diversity of news; fragmentation and polarization; relativism in news; and the degree of inequality in political knowledge. Peruško argues that a crisis of political communication is often worsened by pre-internet political logics and practices existing alongside those from the digital age.

Finally, the editors are delighted to conclude this volume with an Afterword in which University of Illinois political scientist Zizi Papacharissi asks, 'What Would Blumler Do?' in the context of contemporary political crises. Papacharissi reminds us that democracy is hard and that it will take time and collective efforts to rebuild trust in journalism and to strengthen our civic infrastructures: 'What would Blumler say, advise, or do? Learn from the past, fight for the present, and imagine a future built for times ahead, rather than a rendition of times past.'

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