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BERNHARD POERKSEN (2022).
DIGITAL FEVER. TAMING THE BIG BUSINESS OF DISINFORMATION.
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The burgeoning sense of a rapidly growing number of frightening crises challenging humanity is all-pervasive. Even worse is that the shifting media landscape with a thriving disinformation industry and the imminent risk posed by social bots or brainwashing propaganda shows no signs of mercy. Now Bernhard Poerksen provides the thought-provoking opportunity to learn more about the roots of the information society problems and explore the lurking dangers of the digital age. However, unlike most researchers, the author of *Digital Fever. Taming the Big Business of Disinformation* does not leave the readers without hope for change as he paves the way to a brighter future (or at least he tries to).

The first of the seven chapters, entitled *Clash of Codes: Or the Age of Indiscreet Media*, offers a quite informative and truly engaging introduction to the topic. The starting point for further consideration is an accurate remark regarding media users who suffer from titular *digital fever*, which manifests by a severe flood of push notifications about yet another supposedly “shocking” affair. Nowadays, this never-ending breaking news cycle is constantly fueled by indiscreet media that easily publish often secret or confidential information, thereby destroying the remnants of privacy. Moreover, these serious incidents or worthless pseudo-scandals are interpreted in an extreme variety of ways resulting in the immediate confrontation of multiple modes of perception, also known as the *clash of codes*. Bernhard Poerksen, by bringing up these threads at the beginning of the book, clearly presents the subject matter, and that undoubtedly helps readers define what to expect and decide whether to continue reading.

The second chapter, *The Crisis of Truth: Or the Suspicion of Manipulation*, is not only a knowledge pill about the networked world where almost every media user can find confirmation for their blind fanaticisms but at the same time is afraid of being cheated or manipulated. It is also a concise overview of factors contributing to the situation, in which certainties are incessantly called into question. Within this synopsis, Bernhard Poerksen smoothly adapts, as well as extends, current approaches, and introduces original concepts – for example, *information laundering* – that can enrich the ongoing discussion. And, to top it all, the author is not afraid to challenge accepted theory: even though some readers

might consider the rejection of the diagnosis of a *post-factual age* as far-fetched, it is still worth familiarizing yourself with a fresh line of argumentation.

In the third chapter, *The Crisis of Discourse: Or the Diminishing of the Gatekeepers*, readers are provided with a brutally honest description of how public discourse has changed in the digital age. However, reflections on society's struggle with ever-changing limitations on what can be said while the culture of hate is flourishing in the background are not so intriguing as the valuable thoughts on the fifth power, also included in this book's section. Furthermore, Bernhard Poerksen – with the characterization of the transition from the media democracy to the *outrage democracy* – not only provokes by saying the final goodbye to the gatekeepers of the old type but also tries to familiarize the public with the new order in the form of an algorithmic prefiltering system.

A new perspective on the relentless but unsuccessful pursuit of role models can be found in the fourth chapter, entitled *The Crisis of Authority: Or the Pains of Visibility*. Bernhard Poerksen's pertinent comment on the disappearance of the protected spaces of intransparency and the growing importance of being under permanent observation casts doubt on the possibility of becoming an old-fashioned role model nowadays. Nevertheless, on the one hand, those who still do not wish to lose their authority status should as soon as possible familiarize themselves with the *fourfold effect of the disclosures* and the *general over-illumination* constructs. On the other hand, those who would like to earn people's respect immediately need to become acquainted with the redefined idea of authority described as the *ideal of authenticity*.

The fifth chapter, *The Crisis of Complacency: Or the Collapse of Contexts*, raises a question that will haunt readers long after they have finished the last page: is it already time to banish the *filter bubble* theory in favor of the notion of *filter clash*? While finding a clear-cut answer seems unrealistic, Bernhard Poerksen neatly points out that despite being closed in pre-filtered information environments, media users are continually confronted with various kinds of news presented in multiple ways. This riveting and comprehensive description of today's reality, where digital publicists take over the role of instances of agenda setting, is spiced up by concepts worth careful study, such as *simultaneity of the disparate*, *digital butterfly effects*, or *context violation*.

The sixth chapter, *The Crisis of Reputation: Or the Omnipresence of Scandals*, makes readers aware that pillories are no longer the exclusive domain of the elite, and, as a result, each man in the street can become a victim of public hatred. By accurately picturing the mechanisms of scandals in the digital age, Bernhard Poerksen reminds media users how vulnerable and defenseless they are against online bashing, which, despite numerous counteracts, might completely destroy someone's reputation. Nevertheless, reflections on the anatomy of scandals are not as absorbing as the delineation of the clash of two colliding visions of scandal:

one as a positive aspect that might consolidate social norms and the second as a destructive feature that damages systemic trust. As an aside, regarding all the above-mentioned threats, it is impossible to agree that the author tries to tame the big business of disinformation: the considerations presented in this book go much beyond the disinformation aspect.

Despite presenting the bleak description of the new media landscape, at the end of the book, Bernhard Poerksen encourages readers to fight the digital challenges. The author's recipe for success lies in creating an *editorial society*, a community that, through education in the form of a special school subject, not only knows but also follows the rules of good journalism. On the one hand, given the ease of publishing any content, the idea that both journalists and internet users should adhere to principles such as transparency of procedures, truth orientation, or a plurality of perspectives sounds sensible. On the other hand, it is unknown who will be responsible for implementing this ambitious plan which – as a not-so-former student from a country where media education is not a part of the curriculum and educators report a lack of skills to teach how to become media literate (Stępińska & Halagiera, 2022) – bothers me deeply.

Moreover, this enthusiastic dream is accompanied by a righteous willingness to redefine the journalistic role, from omniscience proclaimer to listener, moderator, and discourse partner. However, in light of media workers' perceptions of increasing work difficulty and declining institutional support (Picard, 2015), calling for change may fall on deaf ears. However, it is even more difficult to believe in the last part of the plan, which aims to harness social media platforms by implementing discourse or transparency regulations. Guidelines, ethical codes, ombuds-committee, and transparency reports sound like a pipe dream as Twitter suspends the accounts of several journalists who have been critical of the company and Elon Musk's takeover (Isaac & Conger, 2022). After all, the seventh chapter, *The Tangible Utopia of an Editorial Society*, should be viewed as a constant reminder of what values are worth pursuing and what solutions are worth considering.

On the whole, Bernhard Poerksen uses plain language and clearly explains the intricacies of the new media environment. Moreover, non-specialist readers will not feel lost or confused at any moment as the principles of the digital age are deftly illustrated by real-life examples. In turn, experts – for whom part of the considerations might be just a repetition of well-known facts – should be (at least) triggered by dumping the *filter bubble* theory, which may result in picking up the gauntlet and trying to accept or reject newly-coined constructs. Finally: if it is impossible to defeat enemies until while not knowing who they are, *Digital Fever. Taming the Big Business of Disinformation* is worth a try.

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