



# Societal Implications of Media Platformisation

*Opportunities and Pitfalls for Policy and Governance in the Digital Age*

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# Digital Governance Dilemmas:

Likelihood of Proportional and Effective Regulatory

Measures Beyond Europe

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# Sobering Thoughts to Begin ...

## ***The Machine Stops***

‘We created the Machine, to do our will, but we cannot make it do our will now. It has robbed us of the sense of space and of the sense of touch, it has blurred every human relation and narrowed down love to a carnal act, it has paralysed our bodies and our wills, and now it compels us to worship it. The Machine develops — but not on our lines. The Machine proceeds — but not to our goal. .... But Humanity, in its desire for comfort, had over-reached itself. It had exploited the riches of nature too far. Quietly and complacently, it was sinking into decadence, and progress had come to mean the progress of the Machine’.

*(The Machine Stops, E. M. Forster, 1909)*

‘A democratic system is damaged as a whole when the infrastructure of the public sphere can no longer direct the citizens’ attention to the relevant issues that need to be decided and, moreover, ensure the formation of competing public opinions....’.

*(“Reflections and Hypotheses”, Habermas, 2022)*



# Outline

- The challenge & questions
- Tour of digital governance beyond the EU
- Reflecting on ‘Tinkering and Tweaking’
- Conclusion



# Core Challenge & Questions

## The Challenge:

Capitalist institutions grant rights to private capital permitting capture and monetizing of data.

## Conflict:

- Innovation & Public Values
- Corporate Rights & Citizen Rights
- Harms Protection & Freedom of Expression & Privacy
- & Environmental Sustainability

## Questions:

- Are governance approaches ‘emancipatory’ or just new forms of ‘empowerment’, granting agency to some actors?
- Are governance measures disrupting the hegemonic power of digital service providers?



# External Measures (Intergovernmental)

UN - Global Digital Compact & a one-stop-shop for coordination.

UNESCO – Guidelines for regulating digital platforms.

OECD – Research needed on risk mitigation & future guardrails.

G7 - Responsible innovation, stock taking, principles and global standards.

Key concerns:

- Trade, security & rights.

Emphasis on:

- risk assessment methodologies & reporting
- transparency & accountability
- ethics
- voluntary coordination & cooperation
- proportional responses & balancing interests



# External Measures (US, UK)

## US approach to AI

- Biden-Harris promoting responsible AI innovation
- New research institutes
- Public evaluation of AI systems
- Policy Guidance

‘Slowing the deployment of technologies in favor of added cybersecurity could prevent physical or psychosocial harms. However, such slowing could doom American companies in the race to market’.  
(Georgetown Law Centre on National Security 2022).

Criticised for not being sufficiently concerned with safety and controllability.

## UK approach to AI

- AI - Pro-innovation; a superpower
  - Address risks when needed
  - No new legislation, coordinate but weaken checks on corporate activity
- Online Safety Bill
  - Regulate the lawless ‘wildwest’!
  - Proactive take-down of illegal content if ‘reasonable grounds to infer’ illegality
  - Speech/expression treated as a risk, not a right
  - Client-side content scanning to work around end-to-end encryption (surveillance)
  - An authoritarian proposal



# “Tinkering & Tweaking”

## Digital Governance:

“Privacy has been extinguished. It is now a zombie”. UK and **EU approaches as stepping stones** to new laws allowing societies to decide what is done with data.  
(Shoshana Zuboff, Jan 2023)

“We can have an internet that works for Silicon Valley and telecom companies, or we can have an internet that works for the people. But we cannot have both.” We need **wholly new ownership and governance models**.  
(Victor Pickard, 2023)

We need “**radical projects and even utopian visions** that go beyond simply tweaking algorithms or implementing better platform moderation policies”.  
(Frank Pasquale, 2018)

“The case against GAFAM+ has become orthodoxy, anchored in misguided conceptualizations of ‘big tech’”. What we need are **structural separations, firewalls, public obligations, and public alternatives**.  
(Dwayne Winseck, 2022).

## AI “Existential Threat”?

“Warped hallucinations are indeed afoot in the world of AI, however – but it’s not the bots that are having them; it’s the tech CEOs who unleashed them, along with a phalanx of their fans, who are in the grips of **wild hallucinations, both individually and collectively**”.  
(Naomi Kleine, 2023)

“Hand-wringing about “AI” getting “out of control” is a distraction; it’s humans we need to worry about. .. Loose talk about autonomous machines distracts our attention from the humans and organizations who deploy digital technologies. Even worse, it **draws attention away from the rewards and penalties created by our rules, economic incentives and property**”.  
(Milton Mueller, 2023)

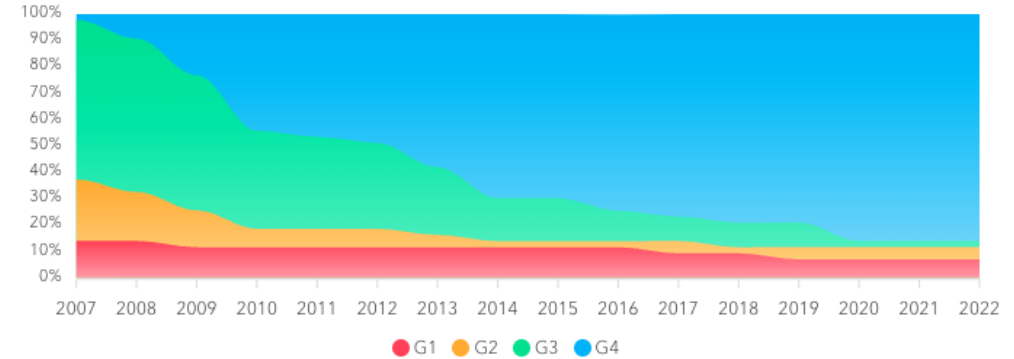




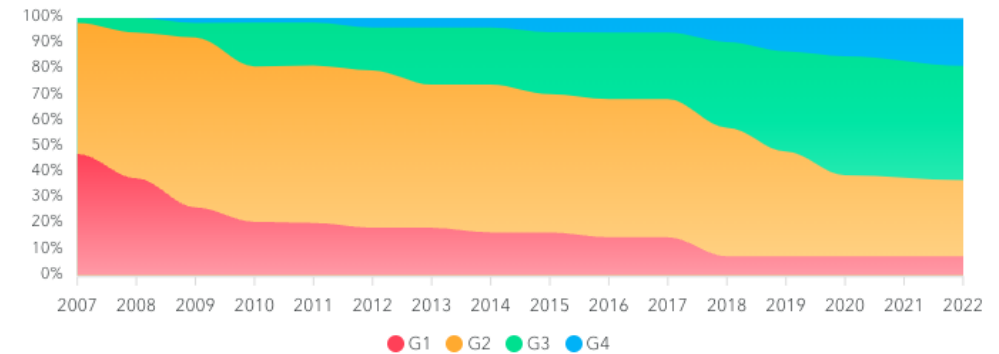
# Reflections

- Myth enables an imaginary of “responsible innovation” to be treated as “fact”.
- Diminishes possibilities for scrutiny of whether harms of digital innovation are being mitigated through policy interventions.
- The export of ‘Western templates’ for regulatory best practices is progressing, but uneven due to varying approaches to rights protection and resource constraints (see ITU Regulatory Tracker)
- On content moderation, co-regulatory initiatives are challenged by big tech companies that want to ensure that “lack of access to or insight into this process is by design”. (Robyn Caplan, 2023)

Europe, 2007 - 2022



Africa, 2007 - 2022



# Conclusions

- “Proportionate” responses and efforts to “balance” interests only tinker with the problem of incentives.
- Dominant business model means companies (and countries) benefit from ‘free’ data globally, disrespecting human rights along the way.
- Digital technology (including AGI) is not the biggest problem; it is those in government, business and many scientific & tech communities who see no harm in the commodification of data.
- A shift is needed – tackle incentive structures, finance public interest alternatives that do not monetize data and tackle underlying societal inequalities and injustices.
- Emancipation is not likely otherwise.

# Thank you for your attention



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