Digital Society Initiative

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The political power of online platforms – too big to regulate?

Much of the focus of the debate about platforms is about governing the economic power of platforms – be that their ability to exclude competitors, build data monopolies or manipulate the behaviour of consumers. But platform power is about more than economic power. Platforms such as Facebook or YouTube use their control over massive amounts of data and sophisticated digital technology also to exercise more and more political power. In the elections in the US, Brexit, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, France and others, Facebook and Google were pivotal distribution points for political microtargeting, with increasing amounts of campaign budget being invested in the sophisticated tools that these platforms offer to target and monitor voters and campaigns. Platforms are not only facilitators of political power, they also turn into active political actors. With more than 2.1 billions active users, Facebook is uniting more voters than any country on this globe. Or, to quote Marc Zuckerberg: "Facebook is now more like a government than a traditional company". What approaches can we observe in the few existing initiatives to deal with the political power of platforms? What are promising new regulatory concepts? Or is it too late already, and are platforms too big to regulate? These are some of the questions that I would like to explore in my talk.

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The political power of online platforms – too big to regulate? (Presentation in Englisch)

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