

Meeting summary for Public AI Seminar (2/27/2024)

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Quick recap

A participant discussed the importance of digital public infrastructure and AI during the pandemic, highlighting their role in efficient benefit distribution to citizens in emerging markets. They emphasized the inefficiencies in the current US government structure, suggesting room for improvement. The participant further discussed the concept of digital public infrastructure, a shared platform for services to improve access and reduce duplication. They mentioned the growing effort in many countries to establish digital identity systems and the potential for these systems to be used for other services, including banking and cell phone access. Finally, the participant touched upon the challenges faced during the early stages of technology development, the need for sovereign control in payment systems and identity management, and the shift in the global power dynamic.

Summary

The meeting involved several participants, including discussions about time zones, weather, and a book called "Ministry for the Future." The primary topic of the meeting was a seminar featuring Lawrence Lessig, a professor at Harvard Law School known for their expertise in Internet policy.

AI, Democracy, and First Amendment

Participants discussed the interplay between AI and democracy. One participant highlighted the significance of social media and game design in relation to digital public infrastructure. Another shared views on the evolution of the first amendment in American law, stressing that the current legal framework was crafted against a different technical reality, with significant implications for the regulation of speech in the digital age. The complexities of regulating digital spaces were discussed, arguing that these spaces are often treated as a form of speech subject to First Amendment protection. The need to shift the paradigm of regulation in these spaces, rather than focusing on code as speech, was emphasized. It was suggested that regulations in digital spaces should be translated back to the type of regulation that would be applied in physical spaces, such as privacy regulations. The difference between disliking laws and deeming them unconstitutional was also distinguished, warning against the risk of subjecting every regulation in the digital space to constitutional scrutiny.

Regulating AI and Social Media: Challenges and Solutions

The regulatory challenges posed by AI and social media companies were discussed. One participant expressed pessimism about finding a solution but emphasized the importance of continuing to try. The impact of regulation on the internet, the role of market forces and technical design, and the influence of entities such as states and corporations were highlighted. The infiltration of technology money in the Democratic party and the subsequent failure to regulate tech companies were lamented, while another participant suggested that technology could be used to improve the situation.

Evolving Democracy: Citizen Assemblies and AI Power Dynamics

The need to evolve democracy, emphasizing the potential of citizen assemblies as a complement to representative democracy, was discussed. The importance of relocating democratic activities into protected spaces not susceptible to corrupting influences was referred to, along with the power dynamics in AI and its relation to their work, expressing optimism that structures for humans to engage in deliberative discussions might be a solution. The conversation ended without a clear resolution on the matter.

Corporate Power and Regulation Discussion

Participants raised concerns about the increasing power of corporations and the potential threat they pose to society, using specific companies as examples. Questions were asked about perspectives on the issue, with responses indicating that the assumption that productivity and income rise together is not always true and that effective regulation is necessary to ensure progress is shared. The need for public AI as a crucial component of regulation was mentioned. The pessimism in the discussion was pointed out, and the role of the state in shaping the economy was discussed, with a participant maintaining that there is currently no evidence of a shift in mindset in the United States.

Impact of Engagement-Based Media on Democracy

The impact of engagement-based media on democracy and understanding was discussed, noting the creation of echo chambers and reinforcement of already held beliefs. Concerns about the emerging challenge of deep fakes and disinformation were raised, highlighting the need for effective countermeasures. The role of AI in shaping public perception and the difficulty of fact-checking in the context of manufactured realities were touched upon. The rise of broadcast technology and polling, and how they contributed to 'broadcast democracy', which helped educate and discipline the public around key issues, leading to societal progress, were discussed. However, the conditions for a 'rational public' have been deteriorating since the mid-1980s due to factors such as cable television and the internet. The importance of polling in providing a representative view of the public's opinion was stressed, suggesting the need to recreate contexts where the public's opinion can be trusted, such as deliberative polling or citizen assemblies. The importance of rebuilding democracy in a protected space, away from

the influence of AI and media manipulation, was emphasized. A break was announced towards the end of the discussion.

Digital Challenges and Copyright Law in Libraries

The significance of libraries as trusted public institutions and the difficulties they encounter, particularly with obtaining digital materials, were stressed. Legal challenges faced by key allies with digital archives were mentioned. The importance of legislative support and concern over copyright law, arguing that it creates a monopoly for content producers and potentially limits access to works, were discussed. The conversation concluded with a discussion on funding for deliberative tooling to support citizen assemblies.

Regulating Corporate Power and Building Public Infrastructure

The necessity of regulatory systems and alternative approaches to compete against corporate power was discussed. Proposals for building public infrastructure as a form of hard power and the importance of regulation to internalize negative externalities created by concentrated corporate power were made. The potential of a public alternative to social media, suggesting a quadratic engagement tax on social media companies, and the urgent need to rethink public AI and its potential role in improving democracy and journalism were highlighted. The need for resilient democratic systems that can withstand AI and other emerging technologies, suggesting the creation of robust governance structures, was expressed.

White Paper, Wiki AI, and AI Impact Discussion

A forthcoming white paper was discussed, focusing on the potential of Wiki AI, a concept inspired by Wiki's collaborative governance. The potential impact of AI on culture and knowledge, the importance of understanding power dynamics, building reciprocity, and considering the broader impact of AI on