The word “politics” may conjure different things in different people. For me, as a former town councilor, it refers to all the unnecessary shenanigans that take place in elections and elected institutions by those seeking to be elected by the popular vote. Politics, I, therefore, find undesirable, and the aim of this book is to show how different strategies and technologies can be used so that public policy—which elected representatives are supposed to implement—is achieved without the unwanted position taking of politics.

I, therefore, introduce the concept of Polnetics – derived from the first three letters of politics and policy, the last three letters of Internet, and the “ics” to signify the link with politics. The title of this book, *Transforming Politics and Policy in the Digital Age*, perfectly sets up the aim of Polnetics – to achieve public policy by transforming political systems so that the partisanism and tribalism are removed so that problems are dealt with without reinforcing the positions of political parties.

Polnetics as a field of study is distinct from other concepts I have worked on, such as network politics and e-politics. Network politics focuses mainly on technology, whether mobile phone networks, engineering, or the Internet. E-politics mainly focuses on government systems and politicians, such as the ways the elected representatives try to “engage” with the public. Whilst e-politics will investigate the relationships between politicians and government in relation to technology, the field of Polnetics looks more at the social aspects of current affairs and online debate shifts, where policymaking is the focus and party politics, and other political issues are seen as getting in the way of policy creation and implementation.

This book is split into four sections. The first section, “Digital Divide and Equality of Access,” seeks to look at the barriers to policy-making by people in minority and other social groups. The first chapter in this section is by Piet Kommers, titled “Sense of Community.” This chapter importantly looks at the issue of the digital divide and equality of access, the perfect chapter to start this section, which features both terms. The chapter argues that a lot is needed to advance past social media in order to have a “Web society,” where tests of emulation, variation, and transformation will allow true 3D environments to exist to alter the way the Internet is imagined as an environment for community and change.

The second chapter in the first section is by me and looks into the information seeking behaviour of a range of people who were born over a 20-year period known as the Net Generation. Whilst many academics have tried to put a date range on the Net Generation, it is clear that in different societies the extent that teenagers have grown up with technology to be the first group of digital teens is different for each country and maybe even each locality. This chapter, therefore, makes an important contribution in understanding the difference between younger generations like this and the older ones (e.g. Baby Boomers) who will have different approaches to using the Internet. The chapter takes a comparative document analysis approach by comparing four relevant research papers and discussing the consequences for understanding the Net Generation.
The third chapter in section one is by Valérie Schafer, Francesca Musiani, and Hervé Le Crosnier. The chapter attempts to look beyond the technical issue surrounding network neutrality. This chapter’s endeavour is to study the set of dimensions that make it possible for net neutrality to be read as a global political issue. The chapter follows the constantly evolving notion of net neutrality as it interrogates the Internet as a laboratory of governance, the actors and dynamics involved in the establishment of a “technical democracy,” and the dialectic between the Internet’s universal, egalitarian ideal and the techno-political measures shaping the “network of networks.” The final chapter in section one is by me and explores the various issues arising out of macroeconomics for education. It looks at the various models of school, from monopolies to perfect competition and discusses their implications in England and Wales, where education policies are quite different.

Section two looks at international, national, and regional issues. The first chapter, by me and Lisa Mannay, looks at the Welsh music scene and how Welsh musician are at a disadvantage, as the political and economic landscape does not on the whole provide for the many creative people that are in Welsh communities. The chapter discusses how, despite social media Websites like MySpace and YouTube as well as Websites like MTV.com, eJay, and PeopleSound providing space for artists to share their works, they do not usually consider the needs of local markets, such as in relation to Welsh language provision through to acknowledgement of Welsh place names and Wales’s status as a country. The second chapter, by Valérie Schafer and Romain Badouard, looks at how the Internet has come about in Europe. How did the “network of networks” and ICTs become political stakes for EU institutions? This chapter proposes to shed light on facts, limits, and tensions of the building of a political union in the ICT regulation field. It analyses the role of various stakeholders, from technical experts to ordinary citizens, according to a historical approach structured around three key notions: appropriating, governing, and using the Internet. Both of these chapters show how the consideration of issues at a local level, and indeed an international level, will impact how people take an interest with others in their communities.

Keren Sereno’s chapter, the third in this section, presents a comparison of news framing in the Holy Land, such as the difference between the mainstream news approved of by the Zionist leadership in the Israeli Authority compared to alternative news Websites, often expressing non-Zionist opinion. This chapter explores the demonstration at the Separation Fence near the Palestinian village of Ni’lin in which Zionist activists took part. The chapter argues that in order to develop a deeper understanding of the role of new media in social protests it is necessary to simultaneously rely on alternative media, theories, and studies in addition to the emerging knowledge regarding the characters and uses of the Internet. The final chapter in this section, by me, presents a longitudinal study of three women in Wales conducted between 2000 and 2013, which by using genre theory shows how the media consumption and audience styles have changed over time so that power structures from both men and traditional media institutions have all but eroded. Both of these final chapters show that the targeting of media at different audiences is a key part of multimedia studies and the extent to which technology can appeal to different audiences.

Section three opens with a chapter by Mary Francoli, which explores the concept of the “Social Media Campaign.” Mary uses the example of the May 2011 election dubbed “Canada’s First Social Media Election.” The chapter asks “What makes a campaign social?” as well as whether the term “social media campaign” adequately describes current campaign practices. Ultimately, the chapter argues we have limited evidence that social media has led to increased sociality when it comes to electoral politics, which calls the appropriateness of the term “social media campaign” into question. The second chapter, by Cédric Gossarw, builds on those in the previous section by examining the extent to which digital technologies can threaten democracy by creating “information cocoons,” within which information is filtered and tailored to individual tastes and prevailing opinions. The chapter suggests a methodology to
evaluate that risk, as well as ways to mitigate it. Various methods have been used to analyse the polarisation of opinions in human societies, such as the ones analysing the traces left by Internet users in blogs or hypertext links. The chapter, therefore, provides a review of these methods after having explained the main factor conducive to the creation of information closure. Both these chapters provide a clear message that public policy and political campaigns need to understand their audience to be effective.

The third and final chapter of the section is by me and looks at using media and genre theories to understand the impact of Internet trolling in the area of current affairs. My chapter tries to distinguish the 1990s kind of trolling from the 2010s kind by referring to the former as classical trolling and the latter anonymous trolling. It concludes by presenting a model for understanding which genres of online community are at risk for particular types of trolling. I would hope that my final chapter in this section extends the discussion on the public sphere through making it possible to see how different types of online media change based on the medium.

The first chapter in section four is from Chantal Enguehard. Chantal’s chapter addresses the topic of Internet voting by describing the characteristics of a democratic election and placing this new mode of voting within the context of the entire family of electronic voting systems. The link between transparency of the electoral system, voter confidence, and legitimacy is then reiterated and the components of reliability and safety requirements of security are detailed. The second chapter by Patricia Mindus raises the concern that an emphasis on Internet politics polarizes the “apologists” that attempt to overcome the one-to-many architecture of opinion-building in traditional representative democracy. The main theme is that there is considerable scope to analyse how and why online politics fail or succeed. The field needs both further empirical and theoretical work. Both of these chapters show that there is a clear fragmentation in how policymaking is done online, showing that there are a number of issues that need to be resolved before the Internet forms a core part of policymaking and problem-sharing.

William R. Sherman, in the third chapter in this section, argues that local governments, and particularly local public officials, have adopted online social networking tools en masse in an effort to communicate with constituents. William argues that the environment constitutes a “civic social network,” which operates as the new public square and efforts by governments to stifle valuable civic communication harms norms of transparency and accountability. The fourth and final chapter by Bert-Jaap Koops and Bibi van den Berg argues that identity information is a major factor in people’s willingness to participate in online applications, but that it is a double-edged sword. The chapter triangulates findings from a survey among Government 2.0 users and quantitative and qualitative analyses of Dutch Government 2.0 Websites. This reveals the identity information Web 2.0 users want to have of other participants and are willing to provide about themselves, the importance of the role of information of civil servants, and the relationship of identity information with the interaction level on Government 2.0 applications. It is clear from these final two chapters that the politicians have a lot to gain from social media and so-called Web 2.0 as applied to party politics.

Through the compilation of chapters in this book, I hope to have shown that there is an alternative to the representative democracy that exists in the West, where decisions are made by politicians, even if they can be made by the people they represent amicably. Politicians, I would argue, should only need to make decisions on two occasions – when the issue is so divisive that the only way to resolve it is through an independent person who carries the legitimacy of being elected or where an essential service or provision that would not be provided without government intervention needs to have the backing of those who are responsible for a constituency where such service or provision is needed.

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