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## Rethinking Free Speech in Digital Age: Insights from John Stuart Mill.

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### Abstract

The circumstances under which the freedom of speech functions has greatly transformed due to the digitalization of communication. On the one hand, social media platforms have opened up more opportunities to express oneself and engage in the global discussion, and on the other hand, social media also brings certain issues such as misinformation, fake news, domination of algorithms, and echo chambers. The increasing numbers of regulatory measures by the state and nonstate actors are also introducing challenges to free expression. The article reinvestigates the traditional defense of free speech as presented by John Stuart Mill in the works under *On Liberty* (1859) and also tries to determine its applicability in the new digital space. The fallibility, dissent value, and harm principle-based framework by Mill offers a solid basis for the analysis of the contribution of free expression to the democracies. Even though, Mill believed in rational discussion, modern digital communication makes that kind of discussion more difficult to happen because online platforms work in very different ways. The article claims that although the principles of Mill are still normatively relevant, they have to be substantially reinterpreted along with the line of algorithm-based communications and excessive information flow. The paper will be based on the current theoretical frameworks and will investigate how digital space can affect the shaping of popular opinion and can cause a pause in the freedom of expression. It also examines feasible interventions, such as making algorithms transparent, becoming digitally literate, and responsible in content moderation, as potential solutions to the problem of reconciliation between freedom of expression and new harms. The article concludes that free speech within the digital era requires a fine balance between the liberty of an individual and curbing the emerging dangers of digital communication frameworks.

**Keywords:** Digital Public Sphere, Algorithms Governance, Free Speech, John Stuart mill, Harm Principle.

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### Introduction:

Extensive digital communication infrastructures have made the world we inhabit more inter-linked than ever before. Information and opinions now travel continents in real time and has the most fundamental impact in how politics are communicated. This revolution of digitalization has altered the traditional historical communication patterns. The traditional top-down and centralized forms of communication have now transformed into horizontal and more decentralized communications (Papathanassopoulos and Giannouli, 2025). The

social media platforms, such as Facebook, X (previously Twitter), WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube have become leading platforms of political discourse and opinion formation. These platforms are now virtually acting as modern public spheres where the citizens are taking an active part in discussing and shaping political thought (Shaholli, 2025).

Taking a broader perspective, the above-mentioned technological changes seem to have enhanced the freedom of expression by availing unparalleled opportunities to the ordinary citizens to engage in political discussion (Puri, 2025). With the digital platforms, unlike in the past, when only the political elites and the traditional media houses had access to the communication channels, millions of people can now create, distribute and challenge ideas in the society. However, the growth of online communication has also presented some huge challenges as far as the practice of free speech is concerned. Misinformation is likely to spread faster and further due to increased flow of facts, politicization persists, and social divisions happen (Gomathy et al., 2024). Counteracting this, governments and technology companies are becoming more and more involved in the process of censoring content, deactivating accounts, or limiting the exposure of this or that type of expression. Although such interventions are commonly defended on the basis of ensuring the order in the society or avoiding harm, they also bring up essential issues simultaneously about censorship and oppression of lawful dissent (Fitzgerald and Lokmanoglu, 2023).

These tensions can be well depicted by recent political happenings. As an example, statements of an Indian political spokesperson Nupur Sharma about the Prophet Muhammad created a horrific spread of the misinformation and gave rise to the debates on the regulation of the online speech in India (Reuters, 2022). On a related note, following the 2023 earthquake in Turkey, the government was reported to censor online freedom of expression by journalists and citizens who opposed the government in their critique (Buyuk, 2023). In Nigeria, Twitter has temporarily blocked a post which contained the controversial message by the president and the government decided to ban Twitter temporarily (Macleod, 2021). Still more recently, in March 2026, the Department of State Services allegedly arrested Nigerian social commentator Sani Waspapping because of a social media post concerning the US-Iran-Israel dispute (DSS Arrests Social Commentator Sani "Waspapping" in Kaduna over Post on US-Iran-Israel War | Sahara Reporters, 2026).

These events point to an on-going paradox that lies at the core of democracies in modern societies, the way to strike a balance between civil peace and protecting the freedom of speech. In order to solve this tension, one should go back to the work of one of the most influential philosophers of liberty, John Stuart Mill. Mill, writing in nineteenth century, came up with an eminent argument in defense of free speech based on the spirit of individual liberty and open debate (*On Liberty*, 1859). His arguments have remained useful in the quest of the modern societies to balance the principles of free expression with the complicated issues presented by the digital communication mediums.

### **Intellectual Background: Life and Influences of Mill:**

In a variety of aspects, each and every thinker is a product of his or her historical and intellectual habitat. To gain a proper insight into the defense of free speech by John Stuart Mill it is thus important to look at the formative factors that shaped his philosophical perspectives. John Stuart Mill was born in 1806 in the year Pentonville, London in the family of James Mill and Harriet Barrow (Macleod & Miller, 2016). His father James Mill was a right hand to Jeremy Bentham and a true follower of the doctrine of utilitarianism (Macleod &

Miller, 2016). James Mill was so motivated in developing a mature and disciplined intellect that he exposed his son to a rigorous and highly disciplined education at a tender age. At age three, Mill started studying Greek, later studying Latin at age of eight and by the time he was twelve, he was well acquainted with the topics of classical literature, as well as logic, geometry, political economy and calculus (Macleod & Miller, 2016). However, this process of intellectual development was accompanied by a considerable psychological cost. Such strict training, caused a pitiful mental collapse when he was in his early twenties. It is this crisis that made a turning point in his intellectual growth. With the involvement of the Romantic poets, especially William Wordsworth, Mill started to see the significance of emotion and individuality and the sensitivity of morals, things that in his previous education were relatively ignored (Macleod, 2016). Wordsworth also made Mill exposed to other thinkers like Thomas Carlyle, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Those experiences opened up his intellectual insight and made him realize the weakness of the utilitarian approach. Taking a look back at his early life, Mill in later years acknowledged to have only exposed to one side of the truth (Mill, 1873/2007). This would subsequently form part of his defence of free speech specifically, no one opinion can assert that it holds the absolute truth.

Of all the influences of his life, the role of Harriet Taylor is one which is prominent. Their intellectual collaboration between them significantly influenced the opinions of Mill in the liberty and individuality. Taylor advanced the contributions of Mill particularly on female rights and personal autonomy. She also brought refinement in the thinking of Mill on the correlation between the individual autonomy and the social advancement. *On Liberty* was a collective work that Mill himself termed as a joint production, and he emphasized that they worked together (Popova, 2019). The language and especially the socio-political situation of the nineteenth century England also largely acted as determining factor behind the thought of Mill. This era was characterized by the severe censorship regulations, such as the Six Acts of 1819, which placed a lot of restrictions on the freedom of political communication and press (History Hub, 2021). Simultaneously, the British society was reshaping itself through the Industrial Revolution, urbanization, the growth of political engagement, and the emergence of new democratic perspectives.

Taken together, these factors contribute to the explanation of the philosophical premises that ensued in the defence of free speech by Mill. His early experiences of intellectual narrowness and this was accompanied by his experience in the world of various points of view, that made him denounce the notion that truth can be born out of one source of authority. Rather, Mill came to think that truth is developed through the clash of ideas. Therefore, silencing dissenting opinions prevents society from gaining knowledge. More to the point, these experiences also contributed to the development of the harm principle. After observing the evils of repression of intellectual thought, as well as the worth of variety of thought, Mill was trying to create a scheme that would possibly enhance the freedom of the individual and avoid harm to society. The fact that he differentiates between the allowed expression and detrimental forms of incitement, shows that he tries to make a compromise between the freedom and responsibility. This remains the dominant part of the modern controversy on the freedom of speech on the Internet.

### **Mill's Defense of Free Speech:**

The philosophical defense of free expression by John Stuart Mill, which he expressed at greatest length in the 1859 treatise *On Liberty*, has been a staple of liberal thought ever since. And still has influence on legal and political discussions today. Although it is not a monolithic offer, Mill's defense of free speech is a multi-layered and multi-pronged framework composed of the principles of fallibility, utility, and human flourishing (Mill, 1859). The reasoning presented by Mill in this defense can be dismantled into a set of interdependent justifications,

### **The Tyranny of the Majority and the Assumption of Infallibility:**

The essence of the ideas by Mill on liberty is that the nature and extent of the power that society is allowed to wield on the individual is debated. More importantly, he recognizes the greatest enemy to liberty not in the blatant actions of a tyrannical regime, but rather in the tyranny of the majority, which is more thorough and systematic (Eduardo, 2025). Such social repression, manifested in an opinion and emotion may be more disturbing than law itself, since it offers fewer way to escape, blends in fabric of life, and enslaves the soul. In his book *On Liberty*, chapter 2 which is called, *Of the Liberty of thought and Discussion*, Mill contends that suppression of an opinion is a special evil that is enough to forcefully take away both the present and future of the human race (Mill, 1859). This argument is based on the value of human fallibility. Silencing dissent is equivalent to assume one's own infallibility, which is not acceptable at all by Mill. According to him, there is no period that will be without mistakes and most of the concepts that were popular at one time or another have been proved to be not true or even stupid (Mill, 1859).

### **The Three fundamental dimensions of Free Expression:**

The greatest contribution of Mill into the philosophy of free speech is his systematic argumentation of why even false or unpopular views have high utility values. This argument is commonly formulated in a three-pronged or tripartite frame, showing that even in any possible situation, the act of inhibiting discourse is harmful to the quest of knowledge and truth (Eduardo, 2025).

- **The Truth That May Be Silent:** The primary and the most basic debate that is presented by Mill is that the opinion that is censored can be true. The censoring of such opinion can be likened to robbing the society of the chance to substitute falsehood with truth (Mill, 1859). Mill gives this argument by citing instances of past times when routinely believed ideas were found to be invalid. As an example, previous orthodoxies like the belief of a flat Earth were heavily upheld, with the opposing views pushed to the edges or even out of the discussion, only to be later on accepted to be right. Mill also contends that human beings exhibit a major intellectual vice of halting critical thinking once a belief has seemed to have been established. He notes that people tend to stop doubting ideas that are accepted and therefore they are considered to lose their energy and thus might not be challenged even when the ideas are invalid. This tendency is the one that explains a considerable percentage of human error (Mill, 1859). Here, Mill is focused on the power of free discussion as a tool of keeping the process of critical inquiry alive. Allowing the representation of different and even opposite beliefs, the society can be certain that beliefs constantly undergo testing and reinforcement, which makes society a step closer to truth (Jacobson, 2020).
- **Even a False opinion Has a Part in the Truth:** Secondly, Mill argues that even views that

are generally regarded as false can have some of the truth which can contribute to a larger perspective of the truth. It is important that one opinion does not encompass the totality of the truth. So, it is must to interact with another and present conflicting views. The engagement and opposition of opposing views is what will help to arrive at a more detailed grasp of the truth (Turner, 2021). According to Mill, beliefs which are not questioned easily become hard in nature, which is one-dimensional and loses its in-depth quality and criticality. Instead, dissent teaches people to renegotiate and clarify their opinions and continue holding truth as an active lived and rational belief instead of letting it deteriorate into blind dogma (Mill, 1859).

- **Keeping Truth Alive by Debate:** Lastly, Mill believes that even a truth-based opinion should always be submitted to persistent challenge and debate (Jacobson, 2020). In the absence of such critical engagement, people will put their believe in something without thinking about the reasoning behind them. Truth in this scenario becomes numb to the intellectual activity and according to Mill, it is a “dead dogma”, a belief that is accepted on paper but not one that is truly believed in (Mill, 1859, p.58). Mill points out that truth is not just valuable because it is accepted but that it is valuable because we understand it. Unless the beliefs are challenged, their intent becomes fatigued and they stop impacting character and behaviour in a purposeful manner. Therefore, a constant struggle is necessary in order to make the truth alive, which must be based on logic and self-contemplation instead of accepting the truth passively (Eduardo, 2025).

#### **Democratic Life, Autonomy and Citizenship:**

Mill uses the defense of free speech to be closely connected with his overall understanding of autonomy of individuals and democratic involvement as well. He also claims that a freedom to express personal position is significant to the attainment of self-rule and an independent judgment. These persons who are not given a chance to express and to argue their point of view are less likely to develop intellectual freedom that is needed to play a significant role in the life of society (Mill, 1859). In this sense, free speech is not only an individual right, but also a necessity of democracy. An open expression society stands better chances of creating knowledgeable and participatory citizens who are able to discuss issues of common interest. With the free speech, this allows everyone to be involved in the establishment of common decisions that enhance the democratic legitimacy (Kasper and Kozma, 2024). Further, the development of individuality is considered by Mill to be a social good. Diverse views and ways to live make sophistication within the society since they promote experimenting and innovating. Freedom of expression in this sense not only serves the purpose of political democracy, but also cultural and intellectual life.

#### **The Philosophical Boundary of Free Speech: Harm Principle:**

The core in the philosophy of liberty as expounded by John Stuart Mill in his masterpiece book *On Liberty* (1859), is a simple yet influential principle concerning to the legitimate claim of social or state authority over the individual. This principle, which is widely known as the harm principle, lays down the most crucial basis of justification of coercive intervention. Mill famously argued “*That the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others.*” (Mill, 1859, p.16). This concept the best and most significant attempt in the political philosophy which establishes a border line between the freedom of a person and the social

control. The primary idea of Mill was to take a strong stance in favour of the freedom of individuals, although, at the same time, he was willing to give society certain regulations, which could help it operate smoothly and avoid hurting other people.

### **Self-Regarding and Other-Regarding Actions:**

The argument as presented by Mill relies on two distinct forms of human action namely self-regarding and other-regarding actions which influence the individual and the other people respectively. Mill holds that an individual can fully possess his body and mind when the issue at hand is very much personal to him or her. When that happens, the society can give advice, guidance, or persuasion but it has no right to apply law or social pressure so that one can act in a given manner for their own good, whether physical or moral. But once the actions of a person begin to influence other people and he or she causes or even threatens harm to them, the society or the law can control that person. The harm principle claims that avoiding harm to others is not merely a motivation of interference, however, it is the only proper reason (Mill, 1859).

### **Harm versus Offence:**

John Stuart Mill formulates in *On Liberty*, the harm principle, according to which the individual liberty can only be interfered with to avoid harming other people. Also, he formally does not distinguish between harm and offence but, such a distinction is clearly visible in his argument. Bare offence such as listening to an unpopular view or a criticism, does not warrant censorship. To Mill, disagreement and intellectual disquiet are the critical constituents of a democratic discourse. Societies that lack the input of divergent views in them are likely to have their intellectual faculties stagnate (Mill, 1859). But speech which directly incites violence or has the immediate effect of harm may fairly be suppressed. The famous example of corn dealer that was described by Mill exemplified this concept. A newspaper article that criticizes corn dealers is not objectionable since it contributes in the body of conversation that people engage in. However, saying the same to a crowd full of angry people in the front of the house of a corn dealer might start a fight and thus it is not covered by the act of freedom of speech (Mill, 1859).

This difference is still the focus of the modern political and legal discussions. The contemporary democratic societies tend to find it difficult to establish what could be termed as harm in regard to speech. Whereas the framework as developed by Mill focuses on the safeguarding of dissenting and minority opinions, there are more problems like misinformation, online harassment, and digital radicalization, which the modern policymakers are more urgently faced with, and these phenomena is gradually erasing the distinction between speech and harm (Kalliris, 2024).

### **Placing Mill in modern Theory:**

Although the defense of free speech made by Mill is fundamental, theorists in the present-day society have raised significant issues about the practice in the contemporary times of communication. The idea of a public sphere proposed by Jurgen Habermas underlines the necessity of the rational-critical debate as a system of democratic legitimacy (Habermas, 2023), but researchers assert that such a set of values is frequently violated in the context of digital platforms because there is a lack of deliberation and critical debate. Equally important, Cass Sunstein lists such a danger as echo chambers (Sunstein, 2001) where people are becoming progressively exposed to only similar-minded opinions and so the deliberative

value of free speech is becoming undermined.

These simply imply that the circumstances under which Mill proposes the truth-seeking discourse are no longer entirely in place within contemporary digital systems of communication. Consequently, in order to go back to Mill in the present day, the affirmation of his principles is necessary, as well as the investigation of the structural limitations that are faced by modern communication.

### **The online era and the New Dynamics of Free Speech:**

The situation has changed dramatically due to the digital age and freedom of speech. Leaving the print-based communication system that existed in the times of John Stuart Mill, the modern world is being defined by all the social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, X, Redditt, Telegram and others) that have interconnected in a radically different way, extending the reach, speed and scale of human expression. The most popular modern definition of free speech is the one that is used by the Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which describes the right to seek, to obtain and convey information and ideas of all type irrespective of borders, orally, in writing or in print, in art or any other media of choice as the right to free speech (United Nations, 1966). This right is not absolute however. Article 19(3) states that under such freedoms, there are special responsibilities and duties. Hence the service of such freedoms can be subjected to some obligatory limitations, including the limitations maintained by law and necessities to the respect of the rights or the reputations of others or the safeguarding of national security or of the order of society or of the health or the morals (United Nations, 1966). In such a way, the fundamental structure of free expression has remained consistent with the principles of harm as articulated by Mill. However, the expression and its regulation have had significant transformations in the digital environment.

- **Truth-Oriented Discourse to Emotion-Driven Communication:** Among the best alterations, it is possible to distinguish the change of the truth-oriented discourse to the emotional one. The instrumentation of free speech was appreciated in the Millian model as a tool of seeking the truth via rational debate, critical interaction and the “collision of adverse opinions” (Mill, 1859, p. 89). The aim of truth assumed that the participants are devoted to the rational discussion. They are allowed to be persuaded by more appropriate evidence or reasoning. Modern social media ecosystems, conversely, are prone to boosting emotionally expressive and attention-seeking content. These are extremely polarizing and sensational in nature because the algorithms of the platforms functions to push such contents (Vosoughi et al., 2018). When it comes to discussion on digital platforms, it frequently reflects interests more towards finding reach, visibility, engagement and popularity than finding the actual truth. Studies often show that falsity propagates in a larger volume, influence, rapidity, and extensively than the truth within the social media (Vosoughi et al., 2018.). Therefore, the essence of the free speech, the pursuit of truth in the form of stated reasoning is becoming blurred by the logic of entertainment and virality.
- **The Economic Rise of Podcasts: Echo Chambers and Algorithms Curating:** The second, major revolution is the shift in its power of debate to conformity and reinforcement. Open disagreement was intensely defended by Mill. He even tried to explain that by arguing that even false opinions are intrinsically valuable since they dispute dominant beliefs and thus tend not to degenerate into dead dogma (Mill, 1859). But AI-based and

algorithm-driven content curation in digital medias is more likely to support prior preferences and beliefs, and thus generate so-called echo chambers and filter bubbles (Jindal and Gouri, 2024). All this leads to a situation in which users can be mostly subjected to the pre-existing opinions. This keeps them distant from the opinions that are difficult to agree with and undermines the crucial culture of critical discourse. This trend is almost strikingly similar to what Mill described as the tyranny of the majority. Which he fears “more formidable than many kinds of political oppression” (Mill, 1859, p. 7). Algorithm curation in the digital realm sometimes intensifies this. Such curation deliberately avoids dissonant voices by filtering them out and reinforces majoritarian opinion. This process could simply compromise the existence of meaningful intellectual exchange.

- **Quality of Discourse, Accountability and Anonymity:** Third major change is the fact that complex tension between anonymity and responsibility in the public discourse. In situations where social repercussions can create the feeling of wearisomeness, anonymity can encourage people to voice their opinion and express themselves without the fear or the consequence of punishment. This is important to democratic engagement and can even prompt people to have an honest conversation about a highly sensitive topic (Jordan, 2019). Mill's emphasis on accountability in public discourse highlights the needs for individual to support their opinions with reasonable reasoning. However, this is challenged by the consequences of the anonymity in digital space, where the absence of accountability can introduce suspicions and hinder the quality of public discourse (Doyle, 2015).
- **Between Small-Scale Circulation and Virality on a Large Scale:** A fourth significant change is the one related to the shift from the limited circulation to the large-scale virality. Before the advancement of digital platforms, the circulation of ideas and information was very much limited. But in contemporary times because of digital platforms the instant spreading of messages has become new normal. Ideas and information can now reach a large number of audiences all over the world, which significantly increases the scale of coverage and the impact of speech as well (Dhaliwal, 2025). The real-time and large-scale information flow is able to intensify the potential damage of the expression as the contents that are misleading, inflammatory or hostile can quickly come into social or political effects. The example of the corn dealer which Mill used to distinguish between legitimate criticism on newspaper and incitement before angry mob (Mill, 1859), is further undefined under the new conditions of the digital age. In which one post can be circulated to millions of people within hours, can potentially be connected by a single, incitatory post, and organized violence or harm.
- **Technological Intensification and Continuities of History:** It is necessary to state that, most of the phenomena that are commonly described as being specifically digital in nature such as hate speech, public mockery, social exclusion, and misinformation, have their historical origins that date prior to the internet. Historical research confirms that the same practices were present during the era of Mill such as the marginalization of the dissenting voices, propagation of false or biased views through partisan newspapers and the use of language to cause social exclusion (Gordon, 1997). The contemporary age is a distinctive one not because of the presence of such phenomena but because of their magnitude, pace, and impact that has been immensely magnified by digital media.

Last but not least, the regulation of speech on social media platforms is now a central role of both social media sites and governments. Meanwhile, content moderation, account restrictions or bans, and shadow banning, which involves blocking internet contents without notifying anyone, are forms of control practiced by the platforms (Hojati and Nault, 2025). Governmental control has also become more obvious, as content is being struck down by order without clear communication to the users (Hojati and Nault, 2025). Although these actions are reasonable under some circumstances, it also creates an issue of overreach, lack of openness or toleration, and preventing lawful expression. To sum up, besides the general similarity between the basic principles of free speech in the digital era and the Millian framework, digital era has brought forward many others, which has made its practical application harder. The critical task today is not to disregard the principles, but rather to redefine them in a way that can safeguard the liberty of the individual and also can deal with the emerging challenges posed by modern modes of communication.

### **How to protect Digital Free Speech: Practical Ways:**

Mill would have most likely been astonished or appalled to witness the contemporary mode of discussion. However, the central challenge of *On Liberty* remains the same, how can societies guard the terms of an open, free and rational argumentation, without permitting anarchy? The philosophical model of Mill that includes the search of truth through the conflict of opposing opinions and preventing harm to others can continue to offer normative direction even in recent days to solve the emerging problems of the digital communication. A number of sensible reforms based on the Millian ideals can be used to bring modern platform governance in favour of the spirit of individual autonomy, deliberative process, and free speech.

The quick propagation of fake news or misinformation is one of the key problems under the umbrella of digital age. To resolve this problem the majority of people should strive to be certain and to analyse information. One of the points that Mill considers is that, people who solely receive one view do not truly know what they believe. So, they should analyse multiple views to come up with a conclusion (Mill, 1859). Fact checking sites, including PolitiFact, FactCheck.org and FactChecker.in are thus essential in facilitating the healthy discussion. Also, new technologies, such as artificial intelligence, may be used to find misleading content and give readers an overview about the context and credibility of information (Chakrabarti, 2025).

The issue of content moderation and takedown is equally critical. The decision to remove posts or to restrict or suspend the accounts of the users should be based on clear principles that are in line with the harm principle. The justification of restrictions only takes place when such speech presents a real threat of harm but there must be transparency and accountability in such decision making. It is important to strengthen the legislation to create a clear framework based on which the content moderation should be performed by the private companies. Giving users clear reason behind the content removal should also be considered. All these may successfully contribute in preventing unfair censorship and may increase confidence in digital regulation (Jhaver et al., 2024). There is also a need of algorithmic transparency. Algorithms used by social media rarely reveal the way they give more priority to one type of content over the other. Increased openness would enable the researchers and policymakers to appreciate the influences of the digital flows of information and their implication on citizens (MacCarthy, 2020).

Moreover, the successful operation of the free speech in digital era is highly subjected to the evolution of digital literacy, critical thinking and tolerance. The development of technology on its own cannot support any meaningful discourse unless the ways people interact with information improve. The only way to overcome the impact of the algorithm-based curation of content is exposure to a variety of perspectives. This is likely to solidify pre-existing beliefs in most cases. Inviting people to support more diverse views can stem out the development of the echo chambers and enable a more stable public space. Also, there are new technologies like the blockchain that can provide ways to protect the freedom of speech. Being a decentralized and unalterable system, blockchain may offer new opportunities to safeguard digital contents and minimize the possibility of unfair bans (Ritu et al., 2023). Meanwhile, separate community-based moderation systems, including participatory flagging or vote systems, might be useful in analysing potentially toxic materials as well. These measures can potentially assist in negotiating between free expression protection and the necessity of responsibility on the Internet. Overall, technological innovation, institutional transparency, and personal duty should be involved in changing the framework of Mill in accordance to the digital era. Through this combination, one will be able to retain the fundamental values of free speech and work towards the challenges introduced by modern-day communication settings.

**Conclusion:**

The defense of John Stuart Mill on free speech is one of the strongest defenses on the connection between liberty, truth, and democratic life ever made. His statement that to be an intellectual is to be a dissenter and to forbid a opinion is an unjustified assumption of infallibility, is still echoed in modern discussions. However, the digital era poses itself with threats that Mill would not have ever envisioned. The advent of the algorithm-based communication space, the fast proliferation of fake news and the increased contribution of both governments and private companies in the process of speech regulation on digital platforms, make it more difficult to employ his framework. Within these conditions, the sense of expression and harm is becoming blurrier. This paper has suggested that the principles formulated by Mill need not be discarded, but rather revisited in the context of these changes. The harm principle, specifically, has to be construed in the environment where speech can rapidly scale and have indirect but considerable consequences. This appeal to the truth that comes about through free discussion should also consider the structural distortions that are presented by online platforms. What has made Mill always relevant is not the ready-made solutions, but rather the normative base through which the contemporary societies can re-examine the circumstances of free speech and expression. The balancing of the freedom of speech in the digital age should then be careful between safeguarding individual liberty and the changing manifestations of the harm that come along with the new systems of communication.

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