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Rebuttal Outlines: Social Media and Democracy
Resolved: Social media is harmful to democracy.

PRO SIDE: HARMS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

INTRODUCTION

In this speech, I will refute each of my opponent's arguments.

But first, let's discuss the framework.

FRAMEWORK

We believe our framework is preferable because...

1. Credibility: Our definitions are from Oxford, a trusted and fair source.
2. Reasonability: Our framework focuses on justice and fairness, not just opinions.
3. Fairness: Our interpretation allows both teams to debate equally.

Both teams should use the value of Justice and the criteria of on balance.

So, on balance, the side that best upholds justice in a democracy should win the debate.

Now, I will refute their first argument... Making Voices Heard.

Rebuttal Outlines: Social Media and Democracy
Resolved: Social media is harmful to democracy.

vs. CON-01: Making Voices Heard

They said... Social media lets everyone share their voice.

We say... Social media does NOT let everyone share their voice equally.

Because...

First... Voices Are Not Treated Equally

According to... Professor Asha, Yale University, BBC News, October 12, 2024

<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c94e54t57eo>

[Nicholas Barrett, How Have Social Media Algorithms Changed the Way We Interact? BBC News, October 12, 2024]

Original: This idea of a “marketplace of ideas” feeds into a view of social media as offering a level playing field, allowing all voices to be heard equally. When he took over Twitter (now rebranded as X) in 2022, Elon Musk said that he saw the platform as a “digital town square”. But does that fail to take into account the role of algorithms? According to US lawyer and Yale University global affairs lecturer Asha Rangappa, Musk “ignores some important differences between the traditional town square and the one online: removing all content restrictions without accounting for these differences would harm democratic debate, rather than help it.” Elon Musk has compared X to a “digital town square” – but some argue that is distorted by algorithms. Introduced in an early 20th-Century Supreme Court case, the concept of a “marketplace of ideas”, Rangappa argues, “is based on the premise that ideas should compete with each other without government interference”. However, she claims, “the problem is that social media platforms like Twitter are nothing like a real public square”. Rather, argues Rangappa, “the features of social media platforms don’t allow for free and fair competition of ideas to begin with... the ‘value’ of an idea on social media isn’t a reflection of how good it is, but is rather the product of the platform’s algorithm.”

It states... social media is unfair because algorithms control which ideas people see, so not all voices are heard equally, and hurts democracy because the value of ideas are based on algorithms instead of truth.

This proves... it was incorrect for our opponent to say that social media gives people a voice, because an algorithm decides which voices are heard, harming democracy by ignoring less popular and smaller ideas.

Also... Interfering with Free Speech

According to... Professor Arvind, Princeton University, BBC News, October 12, 2024

<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c94e54t57eo> [Nicholas Barrett, How Have Social Media Algorithms Changed the Way

We Interact? BBC News, October 12, 2024] Original: As Arvind Narayanan, professor of Computer Science at Princeton University, has said: “When we speak online – when we share a thought, write an essay, post a photo or video – who will hear us? The answer is determined in large part by algorithms.” By determining the audience for each piece of content that’s posted, platforms “sever the direct relationship between speakers and their audiences”, argue Professors Riemer and Peter. “Speech is no longer organised by speaker and audience, but by algorithms.” It’s something that they claim is not acknowledged in the current debates over free speech – which focus on “the speaking side of speech”. And, they argue, it “interferes with free speech in unprecedented ways”.

It states... social media platforms interfere with free speech by using algorithms that decide who gets to see each post, breaking the normal connection between people who speak and those who listen.

This proves... it is incorrect to say that social media supports equality and free speech, because algorithms decide who gets to be heard, reducing fairness and weakening democracy’s most important freedoms.

Finally... Bot Accounts Threaten Election Results

According to... the Brennan Center for Justice, June 13, 2023

<https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/how-ai-puts-elections-risk-and-needed-safeguards>

[Mekela Panditharatne & Noah Giansiracusa, How AI Puts Elections at Risk — And the Needed Safeguards, Brennan Center for Justice, June 13, 2023]

Original: The episode heralds a new era in elections. Next year will bring the first national campaign season in which widely accessible AI tools allow users to synthesize audio in anyone’s voice, generate photo-realistic images of anybody doing nearly anything, and power social media bot accounts with near human-level conversational abilities — and do so on a vast scale and with a reduced or negligible investment of money and time. Due to the popularization of chatbots and the search engines they are quickly being absorbed into, it will also be the first election season in which large numbers of voters routinely consume information that is not just curated by AI but is produced by AI.

It states... artificial intelligence now makes it easy to create fake voices, images, and online bots that can spread false information and imitate real people during elections.

This proves... it was incorrect for our opponent to say that social media makes voices equal, because AI technology allows fake voices to overpower real ones, hiding truth and damaging trust in democracy.

Therefore... social media does NOT let everyone share their voice equally.

The next argument I will refute is... Holding Government Accountable.

Rebuttal Outlines: Social Media and Democracy
Resolved: Social media is harmful to democracy.

vs. CON-02: Holding Government Accountable

They said... Social media holds leaders accountable

We say... Social media does NOT hold leaders accountable

Because...

First... Echo Chambers Protect Leaders From Accountability

According to... *The Journal of Strategic Information Systems*, June 2025

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0963868725000198> [Jiaying Liu, *Conceptualizing Echo Chambers and Information Cocoons Journal of Strategic Information Systems*, Volume 34, Issue 2, June 2025, Article 101904] Original: Echo Chambers and Information Cocoons have become the subject of a multifaceted academic debate – ranging from the proper conceptualization and delineation of related concepts, to questions about their prevalence and uniqueness in the online environment, to arguments about their societal impact and the role of digital technologies. This study presents a systematic literature review that analyzes the existing research to synthesize relevant findings and build the missing foundations of these phenomena. This study follows a hermeneutic analytical approach to the literature to clarify and model the distinction between information cocoons and echo chambers. Furthermore, we summarize the selected literature and identify existing knowledge gaps to outline future research opportunities.

It states... echo chambers and information cocoons isolate users by surrounding them with similar opinions, reinforcing their beliefs and blocking out opposing views.

This proves... it was incorrect for them to say that leaders are accountable, because echo chambers protect leaders by keeping supporters inside biased places so that they continue to believe the same false ideas.

Also... System Bias Prevents Accountability

According to... *the SHS Web of Conferences*, November 14, 2024

<https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/202420205001> [Link] [Salsa Delta Gultara Putri, *Echo Chambers and Algorithmic Bias, SHS Web of Conferences*, Volume 202, 2024, Article 05001] Original: The internet has fundamentally transformed the way we obtain and utilize information in the modern era of technology. Nevertheless, this progress in technology has also led to a troubling occurrence — the emergence of echo chambers and the magnification of algorithmic prejudice. With the growing personalization of our internet experiences, we are constantly exposed to content that supports our preexisting opinions. This creates a self-reinforcing pattern that might result in the convergence of perspectives and the decline of critical thinking. The algorithms powering social media platforms and search engines are designed to deliver content that is tailored to our individual preferences, based on our browsing history, search queries, and interactions (Harambam et al., 2018). While this personalization can be convenient, it also has the unintended consequence of shielding us from diverse viewpoints and alternative narratives. As we're exposed to a narrowed range of information, our understanding of the world becomes skewed, and we become increasingly susceptible to misinformation and confirmation bias (McBrayer, 2020).

It states... algorithms on social media personalize content to fit each user's beliefs, creating echo chambers that show only one side of issues and reduce exposure to different opinions.

This proves... it was incorrect for our opponent to say that social media holds leaders accountable, because biased algorithms keep users trapped in one-sided spaces, which protects leaders from criticism.

Finally... Silencing Opponents and Rewarding Lies

According to... *Harvard University*, December 9, 2021

<https://www.hks.harvard.edu/faculty-research/policycast/nobel-peace-prize-winner-maria-ressa-how-social-media-pushing> [Maria Ressa, Nobel Peace Prize, *PolicyCast*, Harvard University, December 9, 2021] Original: And it was ICFJ that did the study that showed that 60 percent of the attacks that were targeting me were meant to tear down my credibility. And 40 percent were just meant to tear down my spirit. They're just truly dehumanizing. They're two goals of making you a target. The first thing is to just pound you to silence. And the second is to create a manufactured bandwagon effect, a fake bandwagon effect. And that is where you seed a meta narrative. There's all these things. I am writing a book about this, but I think in the end, the impact of all of this is that you have this loss of trust that is so corrosive to society. And you also have people not believing in anything. I'm sitting now trying to figure out what to say in the Nobel lecture and I don't think I've lived through a time when I... Things get bad, but they've never gotten to the point where anger and hate are being thrown around like this. I've never seen an America as divided as it is today. And we saw these divisions beginning in 2010 and on Twitter maps that we were doing, but there was still a bridge. And you didn't have a leader who, when they're caught in a lie, just doubles down on the lie. I think that's the... So people don't know what to believe, that's it. So that's the end goal. The end impact of all of this is that we don't have a shared reality.

It states... online attacks are used to silence people through hate and lies, creating a fake sense of agreement that spreads distrust and confusion until people no longer know what is true.

This proves... it is incorrect to say that leaders are accountable, because it allows powerful figures to silence critics with hate campaigns and lies, while their followers keep believing false information without question.

Therefore... social media does NOT hold leaders accountable.

So, for all these reasons, please vote for the PRO. Thank you.

Rebuttal Outlines: Social Media and Democracy
Resolved: Social media is harmful to democracy.

CON SIDE: BENEFITS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

INTRODUCTION

In this speech, I will refute each of my opponent's arguments.

But first, let's discuss the framework.

FRAMEWORK

We believe our framework is preferable because...

1. Credibility: Our definitions are clear and come from Oxford, a reliable source.
2. Reasonability: Our focus on justice is fair and balanced.
3. Fairness: Both sides can argue under the same standard.

Both teams should use the value of Justice and the criteria of on balance.

So, on balance, the side that best upholds justice in a democracy should win the debate.

Now, I will refute their first argument... Impacting Voters.

Rebuttal Outlines: Social Media and Democracy
Resolved: Social media is harmful to democracy.

vs. PRO-01: Harming Voters

They said... Social media harms voters.

We say... Social media does NOT harm voters.

Because...

First... Protecting Against Misinformation in Elections

According to... *The New York Times*, August 23, 2022

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/23/technology/midterms-misinformation-tiktok-facebook.html> [Stuart A. Thompson, *To Fight Election Falsehoods, Social Media Companies Ready a Familiar Playbook*, *The New York Times*, August 23, 2022] Original: The election dashboards are back online, the fact-checking teams have reassembled, and warnings about misleading content are cluttering news feeds once again. As the United States marches toward another election season, social media companies are steeling themselves for a deluge of political misinformation. Those companies, including TikTok and Facebook, are trumpeting a series of election tools & strategies that look similar to their approaches in previous years.

It states... social media companies have rebuilt their election tools, restored fact-checking systems, and added warnings to reduce false or misleading content during the election season.

This proves... it was incorrect for our opponent to say that social media harms elections, because these platforms are actively fighting misinformation to protect voters and keep elections fair.

Also... Preventing Election Problems from AI

According to... *ABC News*, February 17, 2024

<https://abcnews.go.com/Business/tech-giants-combat-deceptive-deepfakes-ahead-2024-elections/story?id=107296901> [Emmanuelle Saliba, *Tech Giants Come Together to Combat Deceptive Deepfakes Ahead of 2024 Elections*, *ABC News*, February 17, 2024] Original: Twenty leading technology companies, including Google, Meta, Microsoft, OpenAI, TikTok, X, Amazon and Adobe vowed Friday to help prevent deceptive uses of artificial intelligence from interfering with global elections. At the Munich Security Conference, these companies announced the "Tech Accord to Combat Deceptive Use of AI in 2024 Elections," which is a voluntary agreement with a set of eight specific commitments to deploy technology countering harmful AI content. "Democracy rests on safe and secure elections," said Kent Walker, president of global affairs at Google at the Munich conference. "Google has been supporting election integrity for years, and today's accord reflects an industry-side commitment against AI-generated election misinformation that erodes trust. We can't let digital abuse threaten AI's generational opportunity to improve our economies, create new jobs, and drive progress in health and science."

It states... major technology companies have agreed to a new global plan to stop the spread of false AI-generated images, videos, and voices that could mislead voters in upcoming elections.

This proves... it was incorrect for our opponent to say that social media harms elections, because these companies are working together to prevent false AI content from tricking voters and damaging democracy.

Finally... Threat of Misinformation is Overstated

According to... *Cato Institute*, June 26, 2025

<https://www.cato.org/policy-analysis/misleading-panic-over-misinformation> [David Inserra, *The Misleading Panic Over Misinformation: And Why Government Solutions Won't Work*, *Cato Institute*, June 26, 2025] Original: Misinformation is widely viewed as one of the most serious challenges facing modern societies. Together with the related terms "disinformation" and "malinformation," nearly every present-day issue involves claims of misinformation. As a result, a host of actors have dedicated significant amounts of resources to the problem of incorrect or misleading information, especially online. Such efforts, however, have raised serious issues that this paper will address. The key findings are as follows: The prevalence and impact of online misinformation is vastly misunderstood and overstated. Meaningful misinformation is still a relatively small amount of content online and is concentrated in communities already predisposed to believe it. The panic over technology-powered misinformation is little different from moral panics throughout history in which elite institutions and interest groups feared giving greater expression to average people. Americans should renew their belief in free expression as the most powerful tool to discover truth, debate hard topics, and counter bad speech with good speech.

It states... misinformation online is much smaller and less dangerous than many people think, because most false content spreads only among small groups, while open debate and free expression remain the best tools for finding truth.

This proves... it was incorrect to say that social media harms democracy, because misinformation is not as wide or harmful as claimed, and social media helps people challenge false ideas instead of silencing them.

Therefore... social media does NOT harm voters.

The next argument I will refute is... Causing Anger

Rebuttal Outlines: Social Media and Democracy
Resolved: Social media is harmful to democracy.

vs. PRO-02: Causing Violence

They said... Social media causes people to get angry.

We say... Social media does NOT cause violence

Because...

First... No Proven Link Between Social Media and Violence

According to... *the United Nations, December 3, 2017*

<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000260382> [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), *Youth and Violent Extremism on Social Media: Mapping the Research*, United Nations, 2017, pp. 48–49] Original: Based on descriptive evidence, it may be further hypothesized that chatrooms can act as accelerators of transformation where their members are self-selected and positively predisposed for extremist ideology. However, the researchers could not find empirical evidence to suggest that such is the case, nor any evidence to contradict it. No empirical evidence was found that Facebook, Twitter, and other platforms have a causal impact on the outcomes of violent radicalization among young people, nor is there evidence to contradict it. Facebook is possibly a space of first approach for online radicalization and a space where extremist ideas are disseminated, without necessarily transitioning to violent beliefs or violent actions by receivers of such content.

It states... researchers found no proof that social media directly causes violent radicalization or that online extremist content leads users to commit violent acts.

This proves... it was incorrect for our opponent to say that social media causes violence, because studies show no clear evidence linking social media use to violent behavior or radicalization.

Also... Not the Main Cause of Violence

According to... *National Institutes of Health, December 2007*

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC2704015/>

[L. Rowell Huesmann, *The Impact of Electronic Media Violence: Scientific Theory and Research*, *Journal of Adolescent Health*, December 2007, Vol. 41, Issue 6, Supplement 1, pp. S6–S13]

Original: Violent or aggressive actions seldom result from a single cause; rather, multiple factors converging over time contribute to such behavior. Accordingly, the influence of the violent mass media is best viewed as one of the many potential factors that influence the risk for violence and aggression. No reputable researcher is suggesting that media violence is “the” cause of violent behavior. Furthermore, a developmental perspective is essential for an adequate understanding of how media violence affects youthful conduct and in order to formulate a coherent response to this problem. Most youth who are aggressive and engage in some forms of antisocial behavior do not go on to become violent teens and adults. Still, research has shown that a significant proportion of aggressive children are likely to grow up to be aggressive adults, and that seriously violent adolescents and adults often were highly aggressive and even violent as children. The best single predictor of violent behavior in older adolescents, young adults, and even middle aged adults is aggressive behavior when they were younger. Thus, anything that promotes aggressive behavior in young children statistically is a risk factor for violent behavior in adults as well.

It states... violence is not caused by one single thing but by many factors working together, such as personal history, emotional health, and environment. Media influence is only one small part of the bigger picture.

This proves... it was incorrect for our opponent to say that social media causes violence, because it is not the root cause of violent behavior; violence results from many complex factors beyond social media.

Finally... Helping Police Prevent Violence

According to... *the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), February 11, 2020*

<https://leb.fbi.gov/spotlights/social-media-spotlight-communication-as-a-tool-to-fight-violent-crime>

[*Social Media Spotlight: Communication as a Tool to Fight Violent Crime*, *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, February 11, 2020] Original: A sudden surge in violent crime hits many American cities almost simultaneously. The old culprits—gangs, drugs, and guns—are to blame. As law enforcement agencies work to stem this dangerous tide, they set up task forces with local, state, and federal partners and go to work to make arrests and take guns and drugs off the streets. But many agencies add another critical element to their crime-fighting efforts—communication. Progressive law enforcement agencies are not just out there taking down bad guys. They are bringing the community they serve into the huddle with them using their own department’s social media platforms. Employing services like Facebook and Twitter, police can talk directly to the public, particularly communities ravaged by violence, and leverage support for the crackdowns.

It states... police departments use social media to connect with the public, share safety information, and build trust by involving communities in efforts to fight violence.

This means... social media is not causing violence but helping reduce it, because it allows law enforcement and citizens to work together to stop crime and make neighborhoods safer.

Therefore... social media does NOT causing violence.

So, for all these reasons, please vote for the CON. Thank you.