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# A New Era of Minimal Effects? the Changing Foundations of Political Communication

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The great thinkers who influenced the contemporary field of political communication were preoccupied with understanding the political, social, psychological, and economic transformations in modern industrial society. But societies have changed so dramatically since the time of these landmark contributions that one must question the continuing relevance of paradigms drawn from them. To cite but a few examples, people have become increasingly detached from overarching institutions such as public schools, political parties, and civic groups, which at one time provided a shared context for receiving and interpreting messages. What are the implications of this detachment on how people respond to media messages? Information channels have proliferated and simultaneously become more individualized. Is it still relevant to conceive of “mass media” or has that concept been made obsolete by audience fragmentation and isolation from the public sphere? Does this new environment foreshadow a return to a time...

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