

Startups for Journalists: PositionDial

 blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2014/04/11/startups-for-journalists-positiondial/

2014-4-11

PositionDial – what's yours?

Post by Mariam Cook

Where do you stand? Why? And what are you doing about it?

Citizen's views must be heard, debated, contested, and taken account of, for democracy to truly function. So said Habermas's work on the public sphere.

With the advent of the internet – we have the opportunity to speak, to reach one another like never before: but how can we all be heard? How can we all influence? Avoid the topocratic nature of previous social and political systems simply following us, smugly, into this hyper-connected era?

As individuals we still doubt our great power centres much of the time. Public trust is persistently low in politicians, corporations, and media. Even charities.

For their part, those in power care. They want our trust. MPs grapple with the 'crisis' in voter engagement in special committees and companies woo us with CSR initiatives and communications – suggesting we kiss for peace, so that we will love them more.

But yet a disconnect persists. A [recent study by the Social Market Foundation](#) found only 2% of shoppers say they mostly have enough information to judge the ethical position of companies whilst 73% say they lack such information most of the time. And on the political side, a survey by 38Degrees found that even those people who *do* vote, do it out of a sense of civic duty, not because they think their vote will make a difference.

We want to know more, to know who to listen to, to have better ways of connecting where we stand with what we do: from who we vote for to what we buy and support.

Chantal Mouffe challenged the Habermasian public sphere model mentioned above: arguing that power relations affect the opportunity and weight given to every voice; that untenable antagonisms flourish when some voices are pushed out in the name of 'liberal consensus.' That we should not strive for homogenous and artificial agreement, but rather for tenable but agonistic pluralism. Importantly, she argued that extremists triumph and violence erupts when voices are marginalised.

Yet the screen-filled world we now inhabit does not enable diverse voices to be easily accessible and navigable. Instead, most of the time, we inhabit what Eli Pariser has described as 'filter bubbles.' Search engines lead us down paths that we self-determine, with the results we receive increasingly tailored to our own previous behaviour. While social networks work on the basis of who we choose to follow and like.

But there are different sides to every story: sides that we are missing out on. If we can see and understand alternative perspectives, not just the ones we already agree with, we make better decisions. We fight less. Innovate more. Occasionally we may even change our minds.

[PositionDial](#) enables you to discover more, faster, about the issues you care about. To explore the whole spectrum of opinion, and get your own, personal PositionDial. Your [PositionDial](#) is at once intimately personal, 100% private but uber-social in the possibilities it offers. It is a representation of your values, and what matters to you. With your



PositionDial in hand, you can make decisions that chime with where you stand, instantly.

Position is not everything. It is the only thing. Every thought, act, hope we have, is based on our unique perspectives. The one-off journey we have taken through life. Every time we read, learn, watch TV, we are forming positions and opinions. Imagine having the power to effortlessly capture and put them to use.

On our site right now you can see the different sides of the story and get your [PositionDial](#). We have exciting and not too distant plans to start integrating action recommendations. We are new and growing. Please visit, have a play, and send us your feedback [@PositionDial](#).

It was a great honour to speak at the Polis conference. Not least because [PositionDial](#) is very much inspired by the great teaching I had in and around Houghton Street. Thank you for giving me the platform, and look forward to seeing you all over mine.

Mariam Cook presented PositionDial at the 2014 Polis Annual Journalism Conference.

- Copyright © 2014 London School of Economics and Political Science