

## Tuesday, 13 June – Opportunities of Social Media

Speaker: **Nishant Shah** (Leuphana University Lüneburg)

Together with NIMD and ISS, SID-NL organized a debate on 13 June on the topic of social media and its opportunities in politics. Nishant Shah works on the topics of internet and society, digital media and has recently starting teaching at ArtEz in Arnhem to teach students on critical thinking towards the concepts related to internet, computers and media. This debate is part of the spring series focussed on doing democracy differently. This session will discuss the increasing important role of social media in politics and how this affects outcomes of elections and political processes.

There has always been the utopian idea that some democracies are better than others. ‘Flawed’ democracies were pointed out for not doing democracy “right”. However, as Nishant explained, democracy was never meant to be uniform, but to be different and uneven. The *technolisation* of the state helps us the better understand the values of democracy. Social media is just one side of the picture.



The digital shift also influences the way democracy is done. Nishant explained the situation in India where the world’s largest biometric database is being build. This system gives citizens their social security number, subsidy grants, tax returns etc.; it is all tied to this number. The new system is pro-poor because an inventory of poverty levels takes place and the poor can get easier access to grants they did not know of before. The system is also anti-



bureaucratic since no more human interventions are needed. The idea behind this is that good technology creates good people. There is no human discrimination in the computer. If the computer says something is true, it is true. This creates a shift from authority to authentication, which focusses on are you who you say you are versus what does the system say about you. As long as the database approves you, the system is happy. This shift also means that having the capacity to

claim whether something is true becomes more important. When the system declares you are dead, you need to go through a lot of trouble to prove that you are indeed alive.

Lastly, there is a shift from identity to identification. There is a historical narrative to claim your rights and this makes you who you are, this narrative now shifts to the process in which you and your future become predictable when you follow the script. The person has to become the dataset the system already created. Nishant states that this system is the only way in which the state will be able to lead the last mile to reach the most far away people and how the last line of the digital frontier shall be reached.

