

PIBCI - Monthly Perspective

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Stuck in a loop?

Are we living in a loop that cycles through the same old politics, the same old economics and the same old ideas?

Have you ever stopped to think if we have been caught in a loop? I'm not referring to the nine to five loop nor the weekly routine, but a larger and more insidious loop that refashions old ideas into new ones. Despite the apparent choice of political parties and social movements, the public seems to be presented with the same old ideas and the same old options. Come election day, the majority of the public resorts to backing the same old major political parties who pursue the same old social and economic solutions to some the most pressing issues of our age.

Has the public's attention been captured and manipulated by the mass media and the digital world that fails to challenge the dominant narrative and locks us into echo chambers? Despite the appearance of choice, are we living in a one-dimensional world of news, views and opinions that ultimately serves to maintain the status quo? Clearly, the thought of being caught in a political and economic loop is disturbing given that loops invariably result in a downward spiral that snuffs out hope. Have the political and corporate elite trapped us in a loop that is designed to perpetuate the neoliberal order?

Political and economic loops

A political or economic loop describes a situation in which a dominant political or economic order creates the necessary environment for it to self-perpetuate. In effect, it establishes the necessary conditions to sustain itself without relying on other supports or influences. Such loops are clearly evident in our society. For example, the dominant form of politics that holds sway in Australia and in many other western nations can be traced back to a single ideology - neoliberalism. Despite the illusion of having the choice to vote for an array of political parties, both the Labor and Liberal parties continue to dominate the political landscape. Behind the apparent differences between both sides of politics, the major parties subscribe to the one and only neoliberal ideology. Economically, western nations like Australia have been locked into a market system of economics. The illusion of difference in

economic policy are merely conflated by the major political parties who in reality pursue very minor differences on how the economy is run. In the end, the major political parties work towards maintaining a market economy by excluding all other alternatives, opinions and ideas whilst pressing ahead with a neoliberal agenda.

Political and economic loops extend into other aspects of life such as culture. Where cooperation and collective action that once formed the backbone of our society and held our communities together, they have been supplanted by consumerism and hyper-individualism. This dominant form of culture directs the public towards pure self-interest. The public is encouraged to seek wealth and instant gratification through buying and selling. Consumerism, competition and self-interest are the values that holds the public's attention via the power and influence exercised through the mass media, advertising and the digital world.

Political and economic loops are unhealthy as they shut down alternative views, dissuade the public from collective action and undermines critical thinking. Such loops create an environment for political and economic stagnation and ultimately lead to collective compliance. Loops that are permitted to function over many years are able to nurture deep beliefs within society that reinforce the dominant narrative whilst stifling dissent and closing the mind to alternatives.

Controlling the loop

Regardless of growing inequality, poverty, conflict and the imbalance in power, the political and corporate elite are focussed on ensuring that the status quo remains firmly in place. In spite of the pain and suffering endured by the most vulnerable in our society, the 1% greatly benefit from the existing state of affairs. Key to perpetuating the status quo is their ability to keep the public bogged down in the deep cyclic groove that reinforces a distorted view of society and how the world functions. Through the mass media, social media, public policy, institutions and think tanks, the political and corporate elite aim to lock the public into a self-perpetuating loop that benefits the small section of society that control the means of production, distribution, communication and exchange. By presenting the public with a false reality, we are collectively led to believe in a fantasy land. This alternative universe proclaims how much better we are than other nations. It professes that alternative views to theirs are dangerous and opinions counter to the current order are suspect and run contrary to Australian values. If we remain stuck in a loop for long enough, certain views become

beliefs and half-truths become truths promoted by the mass media. Ultimately, the public's ability to see through the façade becomes weakened, thereby helping to preserve the status quo.

Tools of the trade

For decades, Australia's legacy media has increasingly become concentrated in the hands of the few. Today, Australia's major television and radio broadcasters along with the major newspapers are owned and controlled by a clique of billionaires. Alongside the billionaire owned media is the government-controlled media. Despite the apparent differences between media outlets, they work in lockstep with each other promoting the dominant narrative that does not stray beyond the parameters of the neoliberal ideology. The mass media plays a significant role in creating and advocating a specific form of reality for public consumption. This version of reality encourages consumerism despite the waste, exploitation and environmental degradation mass consumption has heaped up on the world's doorstep. The mass media has been an effective tool promoting the privatisation of public assets despite decades of job losses, collapsing quality of service and rising profits that have been exclusively transferred to the corporate sector.

The dominant narrative promulgates deregulation which has stripped back the health and safety net that has protected generations of Australian workers from exploitation, dangerous work places and wage theft. The mass media have played a pivotal role endorsing a form of globalisation that seeks to enforce a neoliberal template on all nations regardless of each population's wishes. The mass media backed by likeminded think tanks, global institutions (eg. World Bank, IMF, NATO) and transnational financial institutions have supported the implementation of neoliberal policies on nations, whether that be through explicit or tacit means. Decades of sanctions imposed by leading neoliberal nations have been backed up by regime change, colour revolutions and military force. Much of this has been presented to the public as serving democracy. Yet, democracy has served as a guise to further the ambitions of leading neoliberal nations to exploit other nations and help to increase the profits of transnational corporations and international arms companies.

Manufacturing reality

Creating reality has been made all the much easier via the digital media. Our growing dependency on news and opinions fed via digital devices are fuelled by algorithms. These

algorithms create mirror chambers which feed us more and more of what we like. The upshot is that we get trapped in a one-dimensional world that presents us with multitudes of the same news and opinions from the same pundits. Instead of delivering quality news inspiring questioning and debate, algorithms are designed to feed us based on quantity: more of the same. As a consequence, people become disconnected from alternative views. Algorithms help to carve out a groove which gets deeper and deeper, trapping people in a one-dimensional loop that does not challenge the intellect and stunts critical thinking.

The insidious means and methods used to nudge the public into political, economic and cultural loops have long-term effects that are detrimental to society. Differentiating quality news from artificially manufactured news is fast becoming difficult to discern. This has led to rising levels of public cynicism and apathy.

The manipulation of reality by the political and corporate class further undermines the public's ability to apply independent thinking. The creation of such loops promotes closed collective thinking. Uniform views are promoted in the media that encourages compliance and conformity.

Breeding conformity

Through the powerful and influential levers of the mass media, social media, advertising and social psychology, the public has been primed for manipulation and propaganda pumped out by large corporations and governments. With the necessary tools in hand, the small section of society presents the public with the illusion that the status quo is supported by the majority of the population. It is noticeable that challenging the status quo is becoming increasingly difficult. A not-so-subtle change has occurred as the act of questioning public policy rapidly translates into challenging common sense. Disputations over legislation supporting the corporate world are promptly deciphered as condemnations, and disagreements with the dominant narrative are interpreted as radical and militant denunciations by the mass media. Instead of encouraging public consultation and robust discussion on public policy that may open up opportunities for intellectual debate, they are shut down and ridiculed. This tactic helps to manipulate public opinion by manufacturing the illusion of consensus around the dominant narrative which is promoted by the political and corporate elite. A false reality is designed to influence the public into believing that the current system is the most fair and effective form of rule, and to keep it stable the public need to comply and conform with the dominant narrative.

Illusions of consensus lead many of us to censor our real opinions and conform with the collective illusion presented by the mainstream media. It is highly plausible that the public are led to believe that the majority of people subscribe to the dominant narrative, when in fact most people choose not to question or challenge the dominant narrative. Loops are designed to smother dissent, discourage questioning and undermine critical thinking with the ultimate aim of perpetuating the status quo that keeps the 1% in control.

Breaking out of the loop

For decades, the public have been walked down the neoliberal path. Prompted by the mass media, nudged by social media, blinded by advertising and immersed in a fantasy world designed and directed by social psychologists, we have been led astray. Decades of neoliberal indoctrination have replaced collective action, cooperation and a sense of community with consumerism, competition and hyper-individualism. In effect, a new reality carved out by the political and economic loops have been set to repeat. In order to free ourselves from the invariable detriments of such loops, it is vital that the public recognises the symptoms. By doing so, we can treat the condition by getting to the root cause that perpetuates loops in our society.

Identifying the tools and techniques used to perpetuate such loops will give the public the necessary clarity to grasp the current circumstances that props up the 1%. Recognising that the dominant narrative does not necessarily represent the view of the majority will provide citizens with the confidence to challenge the political and corporate elite. Acting on the social and economic injustices that prevail in our society are the key steps to putting an end to political and economic loops that sustain those who benefit from the status quo.

Support a viable social, political and economic alternative movement by joining PIBCI today.

Anthony B – Website Editor
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