



Social Media and Public Opinion in a Capitalism-Led Society: A Study of Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*

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Abstract:

The goal of this paper is to shed light on the effect of social media in shaping public opinion in communities that are ruled by capitalists, as represented by the Norwegian writer Henrik Ibsen in his "An Enemy of the People." Through a profound reading of the play, this paper aims to reflect how those who have different opinions from those of the authorities are liable to persecution and oppression. The paper also investigates the ways through which the capitalists manipulate power and authority to shape public opinion through press/ social media to serve their purposes and interests. The present study concludes that capitalism exerts an obvious effect on people and reflects that the majority's opinion is so absolute to the extent that any other opinion is intolerable. It also shows that people are affected by the capitalist nature of the society. Public opinions are manufactured according to the consent of the majority in the society. Social media plays a major role in creating opinions and nurturing them. Instead of being an altruistic, positive force, social media exposes itself as an authority purveyor of lies. It functions as a full-time patrol to persuade the people to succumb to the majority as the only refuge for a peaceful life. Therefore, any hope for a dignified life in a community where individual freedom and individuality are respected becomes a far-fetched pursuit.

Keywords: Public opinions, Social media, Capitalism, Societies, Oppression.

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وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي والرأي العام في مجتمع تقوده الرأسمالية: دراسة لمسرحية إيسن (عدو الشعب)

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ملخص:

يهدف هذا البحث إلى تسليط الضوء على تأثير وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي في تشكيل الرأي العام في المجتمعات التي يحكمها الرأسماليون، وتنطلق لتحقيق هدفها الرئيس من قراءة معمقة لمسرحية (عدو الشعب) للكاتب الترويجي هنريك إيسن الذي ناقش في مسرحيته جوانب هذه الإشكالية، موضحة كيف أن الأشخاص الذين لديهم آراء مختلفة عن آراء السلطة يتعرضون للاضطهاد والقمع، مبينا الأساليب التي يستخدمها الرأسماليون في صناعة الرأي العام وتشكيله، من خلال الصحافة ووسائل التواصل الاجتماعي؛ بما يخدم أغراضهم، ويحقق مصالحهم، وخلصت الدراسة إلى أن الرأسمالية تمارس تأثيرا واضحا على الأفراد من خلال تبنيها لفكرة قسدية رأي الأغلبية؛ لدرجة عدم تقبل أي رأي آخر مهما كانت وجهته ومنطقيته، وهو ما جعل الكثير من الأفراد يتأثرون بالطبيعة الرأسمالية للمجتمع؛ باعتبار أن الرأي العام يتشكل بموافقة الأغلبية في المجتمع، كما كشفت الدراسة عن أن وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي تلعب دورا رئيسيا في خلق التصورات والآراء ورعايتها، وبدلا من أن تكون قنوات تنويرية وإيثارية وإيجابية في المجتمع، وتقوم بأدوار فاعلة في نقد السلطة، ومراقبتها، وتقييم أدائها، تحولت إلى منابر دعائية، تلمع الزيف، وتعمل على الترويج لأكاذيب السلطة، التي جعلت منها تابعا وخادما متفرغا لإقناع الناس بالتسليم والاستسلام للأغلبية بوصفها السبيل الأوحى للعيش الرغيد والحياة الكريمة، وإزاء ذلك؛ فإن أي أمل في حياة كريمة في مجتمع يحترم الحريات ويؤمن بالرأي الآخر يبقى مجرد حلم بعيد المنال.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الرأي العام، وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، الرأسمالية، المجتمعات، القمع.

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1- Introduction

Capitalism has been ignored in the literature of discourse and social science. Things have been evolving since the advent of the twentieth century. Consequently, arguments on capitalism vary depending on different factors, so they become more controversial and confusing than ever before. Ibsen is one of the writers who writes about capitalism in many of his works. Looking carefully into Ibsen's plays, it can be seen that he is not only a popular dramatist but also an anti-capitalism dramatist who is obsessed with addressing topics such as the unchanging growth of wealth, rumors and the misunderstandings of unregulated development. "Studying the capitalist, Ibsen shows how the capitalist culture changed his idea of theatre and the role theater plays in his understanding of capitalism" (Sniderman, 2015, p. 28).

Ibsen is an anti-capitalist and an advocate for individualistic values. Individuals have a huge challenge in social customs where the majority interests mislead the commons to recognize the contrasts between facts and falsehood, thus limiting their potential and spirits. Individuals are viewed as irrational and dangerous creatures in such communities. Unless tightly controlled, these creatures would bring severe damage to the community. As a result, the majority forces provoke individuals to conform and submit to them.

The phrase '*enemy of the people*' is often used as an epithet by a subgroup of people to address their opponents to illude that they are enemies to the community in general. It is commonly employed by politicians to describe opposing foreign officials or subversive organizations. According to the New York Times, "it also echoed the language of autocrats who seek to minimize dissent" (cited in Erickson, 2021). That is how dictatorship begins.

To ask, "Where did the phrase come from?" Though it seems that its origin is from politicians, it was revived in literature and art. Henrik Ibsen is most known for his play *An Enemy of the People* (1882), which is the main focus of this paper. It follows a doctor who is on the verge of being kicked out of town because of an article he wrote criticizing the capitalists. Ibsen expresses the play's notion in very concrete terms through his representative, the idealist Doctor Thomas Stockmann, who acts as a spokesperson for Ibsen's anger against corrupted systems. The truth, which has been discovered by the doctor about the bath's contamination, changes the events and embodies the issue. It developed into a battle between two parties: the doctor on one side and the capitalists on the other side. Both parties try to convince the other/public about the righteousness of their ideas.

Ibsen is a dramatist who has reintroduced realism to the stage and explored the media's potential as a means of diagnosing a specific facet of modern life. His choice of a depressing issue is justified by its evident goal: to demonstrate the depths to which people would sink if they allowed themselves to be driven merely by self-interest. To investigate this subject, Ibsen created a hero who opposes the capitalists.



This paper attempts to investigate how Ibsen strives to depict the contemporary man's situation and plight in modern society. A person's present and future life in this community is controlled by the capitalist class or the majority. In his plays, Ibsen attacks society's worm-eaten traditions, limited ambitions, and corrupted institutions and seeks to change the social order. However, he is ostracized and despised. He attempts to create communities that value individual liberty and uniqueness. He strives to be an individual in a society that values individuality. For him, an individual in any society must have an unconstrained responsibility to oppose any type of aggression or violation of widely accepted human ideals. When fighting for the innate right to know the truth, people may have to take a winding and torturous path to bring the logocentric superpowers to their knees if that truth can't be attained through peaceful means.

Ibsen embodies himself as a unique artist who can see beyond the common man's vision. He was displeased due to the public's rejection of his own ideas, which were viewed as old-fashioned. He believes that the solid majority is the most voracious enemy of the new ideas and righteous ones, whereas the minority is oppressed but right.

The major objective of this paper is to show that the majority is too stubborn to reveal the truth. Furthermore, the paper tries to disclose how the capitalist class dingily exploits power to serve their interests. Though - outwardly - social media seems to be a tool that assists public opinion in realizing the truth, the fact is that social media is used to mislead the public to believe the capitalists' falsehood and mendacity. Ibsen portrays how social media betrays the truth.

2- Social Media and Public Opinion

In light of capitalism, the relationship between media and public opinion has existed for centuries. Media's influence manifests itself in the public sphere of life. Media is significant in shifting public opinion from one issue to another. Viewers of media are skeptical of any kind of information they receive, but it does influence their public opinions. Social media has become a new form of capitalism that has emerged as a result of new platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, etc. These platforms provide free services in exchange for monitoring and surveillance of users' behavior by the capitalists.

The impact of social media on public opinion is said to be the most significant impact that media may have on the audience, politicians, marketers, corporations, firms, and even people. Some have used social media as a potent weapon to accomplish their objectives. Social media's usage in public opinion has a variety of goals that vary from one situation to another. They can, however, be summarized in two broad goals: first, changing an undesirable condition by fostering a collective attitude in which citizens can band together to take a stand on social or political problems, and second, establishing a favorable public perception of the brand/politicians.



Furthermore, social media has significantly affected public opinion since the technological revolution overtook the world and changed our lifestyle and means of exchanging information. The behaviors and information in one's environment shape one's awareness, personality, and thinking patterns. Family, friends, schools, places of worship, religious rituals, and any other place or means through which they might engage with others and learn are all parts of that environment. Face-to-face communication and any cultural or artistic forms such as books, music, or movies can be used to accomplish this.

With the emergence of media and the internet, social media platforms have primarily superseded older platforms and have become a significant part of the environment that shapes and influences human consciousness, inclinations, attitudes, and behaviors. It has also become the simplest and fastest means to contact others all around the world, acquire information from a variety of sources, and learn about different civilizations and cultures. This is how social media shapes public opinion and encourages people to engage in desired behaviors.

In his "An Ethics of News" (1989), Wesley Pippert asserts that in a capitalist-led society, the effect of media is less than presupposed. Possibly, the public does not believe that the leaders of our institutions and our government are really as dumb or corrupt as they appear in the press/media. However, Pippert goes further as he believes in the influence of media, which does not change a voter's opinion; rather, its influence lies in choosing the appropriate stories and agenda. As a result, digital society is capitalized, and even the so-called acts of resistance like creative commons are not exempt. It is anti-capitalist opposition from within capitalism, not outside the capitalist framework.

The media covers not only problems but also shapes public opinions. As to Justin Lewis in his *Constructing Public Opinion* (2001), the problem of media coverage of certain issues has not improved but worsened. The media misleads the public by telling them fake stories. "The media is powerful enough to change the minds of the public as it pays attention to problems and how they are presented" (Magnuson, 2003, pp.5-6). The media's power sometimes does not do the job quite enough. The problem of news is about coverage. Thus, some issues are more important than others as they receive more attention. The news media organizes the information they want to deliver to the public hierarchically. The important story gets more coverage than other stories.

Moreover, media platforms aren't simply for pleasure; they also play a critical role in helping social movements achieve their objectives and shift political perspectives. What is called the Arab Spring revolutions (2011) in the Arab World is a case in point. Additionally, it serves as a platform for numerous brands to create their own campaigns in response to social issues. Therefore, social media has a significant impact on public opinion, both politically and socially and economically.



Literature is another field that makes use of social media. In conservative societies like the Arab world, where some books are banned, authors use social media to deliver their ideas to their readers. The novel *Girls of Riyadh* (2007) by Rajaa Al-Sanae is a case in point. At first, it was banned, so the writer wrote it in the form of emails to a group of internet users. Though some conservatives misunderstood it and thought that it was a call for a blind imitation of the Western customs that contradict our religion and traditions, the critical reader can find that it is not anti-Islamic but anti-man-made rules that have nothing to do with religion. The author aims to represent a positive and corrective view of Arab women. The novelist sets out to offer a corrective view of the women of Saudi Arabia. Thus, social media helps writers to express their ideas and communicate them to the public.

Although social media has been praised as a liberating tool in the hands of its users, it has recently begun to exhibit its flaws. False information, harassment, and assaults on users' privacy have all become daily difficulties for users. Owners of social media websites are still working to enforce their policies more firmly in order to avoid such problems. Hence, it can be confirmed that social media has a one-to-one relationship with public opinion. It shapes public opinions in all spheres of life: socially, economically, politically, and artistically.

3- Literature Review

Social media plays a significant role in shaping and directing public opinions and reinforcing pre-existing attitudes, ideas, and beliefs. Recently, news media has become more partisan, motivating people to take action. For instance, just before an election, media attention may drive voters who previously had only a modest inclination for one party or candidate to not only vote but also to contribute money or aid a party organization in some other way. In the play under discussion, the press/ media plays a crucial role in forming public opinion. The capitalists use the media to convey their own ideas and beliefs, and those who oppose them are called 'enemies of the people' thanks to social media.

Despite Norway being a developed country in the nineteenth century, Ibsen condemned the authorities for dominating society and reigning the majority over the minority. Mohamad Tegar Hananto, in his "Tyranny of the Majority Reflected in Henrik Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* Drama (1882): A Sociological Approach" (2015), attempts to show how Ibsen discusses the social problems and how the capitalists utilize the social media to make the public in their side against all their opponents. He depicts how the authorities want the people to be passive players in society and hold to the old beliefs and ideas established by the government.

Another study entitled "The Individualism in Henrik Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* by Ghafourinia, F. & Jamili, L. B. (2013), demonstrates how Ibsen, through his plays reflects that the individual freedom of thinking, reasoning, expression, and action has been violated in various ways by the ruling 'majority' in every



culture, particularly in nineteenth-century Norway. Through a contextual analytical representation of Dr. Thomas Stockmann, the individualist rebel hero in *An Enemy of the People*, the writers trace the struggles of free individuals and visionaries against the tyranny of the majority. This hero opposed the tyranny of the majority in his own unique way, and his efforts to achieve democracy were ultimately doomed to fail. Even if individualism is an intellectual concept, intellectuals must submit to the interests of the majority in a democratic society. The writers aver to reveal that - in his works - Ibsen emphasizes the importance of individualism in modern society and seeks to practice it.

Noorbakhsh Hooti (2001), in his article "The Battle between Responsibility and Manipulation in Henrik Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*," asserts that Ibsen, in this play, focuses on two key concepts: "Responsibility" and "Manipulation." While, in the text, Dr. Stockmann has a strong sense of duty/responsibility, the Mayor, who represents the capitalist class, has a strong ability of manipulation to distort the truth. The play is a fight between the two ideas. No one ever gives up the struggle. The real protagonist and antagonist of the play are "Responsibility" and "Manipulation." Hooti represents the nature of responsibility and manipulation and their role in forming public opinion as well as their never-ending conflict, which results in unintended and unfavorable consequences.

According to M. Roshwald (2004) in his paper "The Alienated Moralist in *An Enemy of the People*," the protagonist is a stubborn and uncompromising moralist. He feels that he is correct and that everyone else is mistaken. As a result, he suffers from his adamant and unyielding stance. This is not an uncommon occurrence, whether in the annals of human history or in modern communities. Social media misleads public opinion to be supportive of the majority against the minority even if the latter is right.

4- An Enemy of the People

Known also as *Public Enemy*, the play *An Enemy of the People* was written in 1882 by Henrik Ibsen, a very well-known Norwegian dramatist (1828-1906) who "introduced to the European theatre a new order of moral analysis that was set against a severely realistic middle-class background and developed with economy of action, piercing dialogue, and rigorous thought. (Luebering, 2010, p. 200). Some other writers describe Ibsen as "the realist, the iconoclast, the successful or failing idealist, the poet, the psychologist, the romantic, the anti-romantic" (quoted in Suliman, 2011, p. 5).

To begin with, it is a must to have a glance at the synopsis of the play under scrutiny. In *An Enemy of the People*, Dr. Stockmann, the protagonist, tries to publish an article in the People's Messenger, the town's liberal newspaper, to warn the public of water contamination in a recently constructed health resort. Dr. Stockmann is initially friendly with the Messenger's editors, Hovstad and Billing, and regards the publication as a symbol of openness, honesty, and advancement in his conservative community. However, it quickly



becomes evident that this idea is incorrect. Hovstad and Billing twist all of their programming to persuade the public to accept their views. They're also unable to adhere to those principles in times of crisis, for their jobs depend on public opinion.

At first glance, the newspaper appears to be a liberal platform fighting for a more equal and liberal administration. At the very outset of the text, Hovstad and Billing meet at Dr. Stockmann's residence to discuss the issues of politics and growth. When Dr. Stockmann's brother Peter, the City's Mayor, arrives, he is annoyed to see them. When Dr. Stockmann tells them about his major discovery, they instantly offer to print it. Hovstad even draws a link between the tainted water and the bigger issue of municipal elites who make decisions that are harmful to public health. However, Hovstad and Billing's private chats reveal a different scenario. Both men are ecstatic that the anticipated article will help the Liberals gain political traction. They're more concerned with creating a political ruse than informing the audience or providing an objective perspective on recent issues. Mr. Aslaksen, the newspaper's publisher, is an extremely cautious guy who prides himself on his loyalty to the officials. Both Hovstad and Billing consider themselves bolder and freethinking than Mr. Aslaksen. However, because Mr. Aslaksen is the financial supporter of the paper, they are compelled to convey his viewpoints. This is just one of several forces that prevent the media from being a tool of reality.

As the play develops, it becomes clear that Billing and Hovstad routinely distort the truth and sometimes create entirely new versions of it. Petra, Dr. Stockmann's daughter, is the first one to notice them. They've asked her to write an English novel for publication in the paper. Hovstad argues that the exaggerated stories are vital to grab the attention of the readers, but Petra is troubled that the newspaper employs deception, and her revelation casts doubt on the audience's faith in the newspaper's positive motives.

As soon as Peter Stockmann exposes his idea to pay for bath repairs by charging the citizens, Hovstad and Billing cancel their plans to assist the doctor, which proves Petra to be accurate in her opposition. They choose to falsify the truth in order to keep their readership, so they print Peter's account of events instead. At this time, their aim is not political but to ensure the newspaper's and its editors' personal prosperity. By the time Dr. Stockmann convened his public meeting, Hovstad and Billing had unambiguously sided with the mayor and inflamed the crowd by wrongly portraying Dr. Stockmann as a lunatic.

After the meeting, Hovstad and Billing get the wrong idea that Dr. Stockmann and his father-in-law, Morten Kiil, conjured up the water contamination to erode public trust in the baths and buy cheap stocks. Thinking that Dr. Stockmann is the person in control of the baths, the media men freely offer to fabricate a fresh version of recent events so as to lead the public to ignore the very real problems of the baths. Dr.



Stockmann and the reader/audience recognize at this time that the media/newspaper is the polar opposite of truth, serving to worsen rather than remedy social issues. Indeed, The People's Messenger, as representative of social media, emerges as a source (rather than a remedy) for the town's corruption at the close of the play, as Hovstad and Billing freely express their plans to alter the facts for their own purposes and reasons. Finally, Ibsen criticizes the media, claiming that its self-interest and reliance on public opinion preclude it from serving as a platform for reality and human reform.

Truly speaking, after reading the story, one can find that *An Enemy of the People* is Ibsen's scathing critique of ignorant public opinions and the corruptible social media/press. Ibsen challenges the social organizations' traditions, morality, and values. The play's individualist rebel hero, Dr. Thomas Stockmann, hails from the middle class and is familiar with social laws, just like the rest of the public. When his discovery is rejected by a large majority, he begins to mistrust social laws and modern humans. He is changed from a naive person to a revolutionary man, superior to all restricting social, political, or moral imperatives. He aims to disclose the unhealthy foundations of modern life. He represents the rebellious and democratic personalities. He is a sort of Henrik Ibsen in practical life.

Dr. Stockmann argues that in this type of capitalized community, individuals do not have the freedom of thought, action, or speech. "The capitalists are in charge and do not allow the individuals' freedom" (Garton, 1994, p. 108). He feels that nobility is required in modern public life for the capitalists and the media/press to function properly. Dr. Stockmann has a strong resolve and an unwavering sense of responsibility. He is the selfless man of science who strives to be a friend to the community and gets booed as an enemy.

Dr. Stockmann, in this social revolution, resists power in order to analyze and protest against man's organized life. "Much of the energy of this play originates from the clash between Dr. Stockmann—really a larger-than-life comic character—and a societal situation which is and remains unregenerately serious and possibly tragic in its ramifications. It's a clash of personalities and worldviews" (Young, 1994, p. 65).

If Dr. Stockmann, with his discovery, were in a democratic society, social media, politicians, and the public would regard him as a national hero. Billing, at the beginning, remarks: "The town ought to give Dr. Stockmann some sort of testimonial?" (Ibsen, 2018, p. 21). But Dr. Stockmann is not that sort of man. "Thank you, thank you, my dear fellows! I feel tremendously happy! It is a splendid thing for a man to be able to feel that he has done a service to his native town and to his fellow citizens," he replies (Ibsen, p. 21). However, it was only a matter of time before he is labeled a "public enemy" (Ibsen, p. 84).

Instead of being supporters, social media and the politicians/ capitalists are the first keys that lead to the public's unwillingness to accept Stockmann's views. He is taken aback when he learns that his 'discovery'



will cost so much and take so long to be implemented. Peter, as a representative of the capitalist class, believes that each individual should follow their rulers' views and beliefs. Contrary opinions are hardly tolerated. This is due to the fact that the capitalists may believe that they are better than others. In *An Enemy of the People*, Peter believes that as a citizen, Dr. Stockmann is forbidden from expressing thoughts that are different from those of his rulers. Allowing second-rank officials to speak out against their superiors will result in irreversible problems. Peter says: "As an individual, he [Dr. Stockmann] has no right to express any opinion which runs contrary to that of [his] superiors. (Ibsen, 2018, p. 40). He added, "I forbid it—I, your chief; and if I forbid it, you have to obey" (Ibsen, p. 41). However, if the news of the baths becomes public, the town would incur massive losses and will be almost annihilated. It is ironic that the community may regard Dr. Stockmann as "an enemy of the people" while in fact he is doing a valuable service to the public. Unlike Peter, who regards the people as a herd that is unworthy of consideration, Dr. Stockmann here believes in everyone's potential and relies heavily on public opinion to appreciate his efforts.

Ibsen attempts to reveal the contradiction between the ignorant public and the idealist. In his lecture, Dr. Stockmann launches into a tirade against the democratic majority, attempting to demonstrate that the common man has no right to express his views on capitalist rule. He sees that every person he wishes to help defeats his rightness. Therefore, he attacks the people and government officials. In his lecture, he is shocked that people are unwilling to accept his discovery. "Don't talk about the Baths! We won't hear you!" (Ibsen, 2018, p. 75). Therefore, he told them that he is not going to speak about his discovery but about something more significant, and when asked about it, he replies, "I have already told you that what I want to speak about is the great discovery I have made lately—the discovery that all the sources of our moral life are poisoned and that the whole fabric of our civic community is founded on the pestiferous soil of falsehood" (Ibsen, p. 75). He added:

The first thing I realized was the colossal stupidity of the authorities... I got the scent of the unbelievable piggishness our leading men had been responsible for down at the Baths. I can't stand leading men at any price—I have had enough of such people in my time. They are like billy goats on a young plantation; they do mischief everywhere. They stand in a free man's way, whichever way he turns, and what I should like best would be to see them exterminated like any other vermin— (Ibsen, p. 76).

Further, he informs the public that these capitalists are not the real enemies of society. "The most dangerous enemy of truth and freedom amongst us is the compact majority—yes, the damned compact Liberal majority" (Ibsen, 2018, p. 77). Although we, as readers, recognize that Stockmann's speech is offensive, he remains sympathetic since the speech's goal is good. He attempts to let people understand his reality while



being true to his principles. He has stated unequivocally that the people are incapable of casting valid votes. He has mocked not only the authorities but also ordinary people. As a result, he is an enemy of the people based solely on this speech. But, in reality, his attack is prompted by nobler motives, and it is only in his disappointment that he makes such sweeping accusations and rebellious actions against everyone he wishes to assist.

Throughout the play, Ibsen attacks capitalism, social media, and the public. The three are related to each other. Politicians or capitalists use social media/press to form public opinion so as to serve their own purposes and interests. To put it differently, when the authority wants the people/public opinion to believe in something, the role of media becomes to manipulate and change the truths so as to make the public opinion believe the capitalists' viewpoints. The media, for example, has the responsibility of persuading the public that politicians support democracy and freedom of speech.

Giving little importance to public opinion will result in garbling the truth. Public opinion appears to be a political game or, in other words, a political business among astute politicians. The common interest of the common people of the society is given less importance in this capitalized world, which can lead to problems in the long term. Indeed, the deceptive and dishonest dissemination of information to the public will foster a sense of pessimism regarding society's many authorities. Jose Maria Maravall (1996) points out:

When politicians change information to which they have privileged access, information and monitoring problems occur. These may have difficulties determining whether positive or negative outcomes are the result of government policies or "objective factors" that cannot be attributed to the government. (Maravall, 1996, p. 6)

The capitalist class manipulates the truth through social media/previously, the press by telling lies and changing the truths, which damage our lives and blemish our honest nature. In *An Enemy of the People*, for example, the mayor, Peter, urges Dr. Stockmann to tell the people a lie about the polluted baths. He told the doctor if he wanted his appointment to be restored, he had to "write a few words of regret, acknowledging [his] error" (Ibsen, 2018, p. 96). But the responsible doctor never agrees. Politicians like Peter are specialists at changing everything without a question. They are highly aware of people's interests and twist the truth in a deceptive manner that appears to be in the people's best interests and well-being. This point is expressed by Jacobs and Shapiro in their book *Politicians Don't Pander* (2000). They remark:

Authorities react to public opinion in a different way: they employ public opinion studies to persuade the public to accept their proposed policies by identifying the most appealing phrases, symbols, and arguments. Politicians utilize public opinion polling to sway public opinion. (Jacobs and Shapiro, 2000, p. 4)



The majority of authorities and politicians appear to believe that manipulating the truth is the best policy rather than telling the truth. They, for instance, frequently discuss poverty and destitution without taking actual steps to address any potential remedies; instead, they simply express their regret for the poor's plight. They may believe that they can gain respect by informing people about their poverty and suffering. Similarly, they pretend to be the foremost proponents of peace while planning and waging many conflicts (economic wars, religious wars, and cultural wars, to mention a few) under various pretexts. In an *Enemy of the People*, the mayor, Peter Stockmann, is a case in point. He claims to reject the discovery of the doctor for the benefit of the city. "The matter in hand is not simply a scientific one. It is a complicated matter and has its economic as well as its technical side" (Ibsen, 2018, p. 40). Capitalists pretend to be the only people who can think and understand and that the public has to be mere subordinates. They have assumed that they can think and feel better than the public. They seem to have forgotten the days when they were begging and bowing their heads in supplication to gain the votes and support of the same people who are now easily silenced and snubbed.

In a world where people are unable to discern the truth, Dr. Stockmann demonstrates his desire to fulfill his duty as a doctor from the very outset of the play. He believes it is his responsibility as a doctor to persuade the authorities/capitalists of the hazards of "polluted bathing." He wants nothing for himself. "If the Baths Committee should think of voting me an increase of salary, I will not accept it," he states (Ibsen, 2018, p. 21). He is content when he is able to contribute positively to the well-being of his fellow citizens. It demonstrates a strong feeling of patriotism and charity in him. Dr. Stockmann wants to inform everyone about the issue or discovery concerning "polluted baths" in order to avoid a public health calamity. When asked by his daughter about the opinion of her uncle, his brother, mayor of the city, he confirms that "he would be very glad that such an important truth has been brought to light" (Ibsen, p. 20). Peter, the city's mayor, on the other hand, refuses to accept his brother's ideas since they contradict his financial plans. He is not pleased with the discovery. He also disagrees with Dr. Stockmann on how people become aware of new ideas and perspectives. Dr. Stockmann thinks that everyone has a responsibility to share fresh ideas with others. He feels that he should carry out his responsibilities regardless of whether he is labeled a "public enemy" or his ideas are referred to as "monkey tricks." (Ibsen, p. 85). He asserts that he would do his "duty towards the public-towards the community" even if they call him "its enemy!" (Ibsen, p. 44). This is the polar opposite of Peter's viewpoint on the subject, as Peter would rather keep the public in the dark about new issues, ideas, and difficulties. He believes that old ideals that are ingrained in every member of society should be preserved. That contradicts the core characteristics of democratic societies, which state that "the rulers should be identified with the people; their interests and will should reflect the nation's interests and will" (Mill, 1991, p. 24). On the contrary, Peter



Stockmann believes that “the public doesn't require any new ideas. The public is best served by the good, old established ideas it already has” (Ibsen, 2018, p. 38). It is clear that Peter, as a politician, is interested in using social media to hide the facts. He prefers people to stick to their old beliefs, even if they are unjustified so that he can change the facts in a more useful way for him.

Reading the text, it can be obvious that not only Peter Stockmann in *An Enemy of the People* represents this capitalist selfish category but many others, especially those in power. Aslaksen and Hovstad are instances of such characters. They are experts in changing the truth. Outwardly, they seem to be interested in doing their responsibilities; however, they actually distort the truth rather than doing their responsibilities. When Aslaksen, the newspaper's printer, hears about the baths' problems for the first time, he claims to assist Dr. Stockmann as it is the duty of any person who works in the press and media to let people be aware of the new issues. He also calls himself “a solid wall” for Dr. Stockmann (Ibsen, 2018, p. 31). On the other hand, when he comes to know about the financial implications, Aslaksen reconsiders his decision and opts not to publish Dr. Stockmann's article about the filthy baths. He tells the doctor, “If you offered me its weight in gold, I could not lend my press for any such purpose, Doctor. It would be flying in the face of public opinion. You will not get it printed anywhere in the town” (Ibsen, p. 68). What is worse is that when he is requested to chair the meeting where Dr. Stockmann is accused of lying about the “polluted baths,” he readily accepts, demonstrating his eagerness to fulfill his responsibilities in response to his friend's request. Aslaksen's actions reveal that he is only interested in carrying out his tasks if they provide him with some profits. He is one of those individuals who just cares about their own interests and never considers the collective good. Ibsen continues his attack against the press/ media through the denudation of the truth of its men. Another instance of the selfish capitalist is Hovstad, the editor of *The People's Messenger* who pretends to be truth supporter. At the beginning, he promised Dr. Stockmann that his discovery would be published. “We are going to stir them up in the paper tomorrow” (Ibsen, p.31). He continues his false claims and says that as a man working in media, he should do his duty even if he “shall be called an agitator” (Ibsen, p. 28). Like Aslaksen, Hovstad is a master at fooling people and distorting the truth. He also misleads Dr. Stockmann by pretending to help him, although he is well aware that his project would not be welcomed by the capitalist class. These examples of rulers are what we have today in every country. They claim to be public servants, but in reality, they are the slaves of their own interests.

Politicians, on the whole, desire to be the persons who provide good news and promote new ideas in society. As a result, we may see them in all of the opening ceremonies, regardless of whether or not they were involved in the project's conception and construction, just to show the public that they are in charge of each and every good achievement in society. “Officials are not generally very ready to act on proposals that come



from other people" (Ibsen, 2018, p. 29). The capitalists not only reject the proposals suggested by the public, but they also use their authority to publish all that serve their objectives, even if they do not align with truth and peace. Through Peter, Hovstad, Aslaksen, and other politicians are very aware that Dr. Stockmann's views on "polluted baths" are true and would contribute to the development of the society, they deform the reality and induce people to declare the responsible doctor "an enemy of the people" solely for their own selfish gains.

The wickedness and offensiveness of those in power are not restricted to distorting the truth and showing him as the enemy of the people. Rather, they punish him and everyone who cooperates or sympathizes with him. Aslaksen says, "This meeting declares that it considers Dr. Thomas Stockmann, Medical Officer of the Baths, to be an enemy of the people" (Ibsen, 2018, p. 84). Therefore, Dr. Stockmann is no longer the medical officer of the baths. Another bad news is revealed by Petra. She tells her parents that she is fired from her job as a teacher. "I have been given notice of dismissal" (Ibsen, p. 91). She informs her mother that her supervisor didn't want to fire her, but she had no choice. "It hurt her [Petra's supervisor] to do it. But she didn't dare do otherwise" (Ibsen, p. 92). It demonstrates how authorities in a society may exert great influence over low-ranking officials and push them to do what they want. The heartbreaking stories are still being told. Captain Horster, a close friend of Dr. Stockmann's who supports his idea, is dismissed from his job. Thus, Ibsen tries to express the modern man's position and predicament in modern society. The capitalist class or the majority controls a person's present and future life in this community. In other words, the majority has influence over a person's fate.

Dictators of the nineteenth century are not different from those of today. The character of Dr. Thomas Stockmann is found at all times and places. John Drew (2020), in his article "It's Easy to Become an Enemy of the People When Speaking Truth," compares Ibsen's hero, Dr. Thomas Stockmann, and many scholars and scientists in various parts of the world. All of them were and are still opposed by the officials for they think and are concerned with collective good and not their own selfish interests. In the play, under scrutiny, after discovering that lucrative baths are polluted with a hazardous germ, Dr. Stockmann goes public so as to warn the people of the pandemic. Town authorities and merchants are quick to lash out. They use their power and authority to instigate the public through social media to call him an enemy of the people. Similarly, Dr. Li Wenliang and his colleagues from China were among the first to recognize a new, hazardous virus in December 2019. Local officials imprisoned and interrogated Li for disseminating information about the infection on social media, and Li died tragically from the coronavirus on February 7, 2020.

Similar patterns have recently appeared in the United States. Dr. Rick Bright, director of the (BARDA), was re-assigned after overseeing the development of a COVID-19 vaccine. Bright attacked the Trump



administration, stating that COVID-19 early warnings were ignored by officials at the Department of Health and Human Services. He further claimed that he was dismissed from his job for refusing to promote hydroxychloroquine and chloroquine as treatments. Bright, like Stockmann in Ibsen's imagined Norwegian town, is a recognized mid-career medical expert who wields significant influence over US public health policy, with the difference that Bright's soft-spoken demeanor contrasts with Stockmann's aggressive demeanor. However, the two share a commitment to professionalism. Stockmann writes an article for the town newspaper, revealing the situation of the baths to the general public. When the mayor of the town learns of the impending public exposure, he confronts Stockmann and urges him to rethink. The mayor notifies the doctor that the repairs to the baths will be prohibitively expensive, take two years to complete, and devastate the town's economy. "According to the information I obtained, the expenses would probably mount up to fifteen or twenty thousand pounds... and the worst part of it would be that the work would take at least two years" (Ibsen, 2018, p. 35). The mayor anxiously suggests that the situation may not be "as bad as you represent it to be" (Ibsen, p. 36). I tell you, it is even worse! —or at all events, it will be in summer when the warm weather comes," Dr. Stockman replies (Ibsen, p. 36). The mayor eventually utilizes his power and clout to prevent the article from being published. Stockmann chooses to tell the truth in a town hall meeting at the play's conclusion. His message is poorly received by the public, and he is sacked and called an "enemy of the people." Bright recently testified in Congress that America is facing "the darkest winter in recent human history." One significant distinction is that the media did not silence Bright's voice. Despite the fact that Bright lost his job, the American people have praised his testimony.

In societies ruled by dictators, social media is utilized just to deliver the ideas and beliefs of the capitalists. If they contradict the capitalist's interests, they are called enemies of the people. At his press briefings, President Trump constantly chastised the media. On February 16, 2021, he called CNN and other outlets "very fake news." Also, in one of his tweets, he called the media the 'enemy of the people' he wrote:

The press is doing everything within their power to fight the magnificence of the phrase, MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN! They can't stand the fact that this Administration has done more than virtually any other Administration in its first 2yrs. They are truly the ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE!

— Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) - April 5, 2019

Before the conclusion, it has to be elaborated that Dr. Stockmann is the representative of the viewpoints of Ibsen. The notions and ideas of the protagonist Dr. Stockmann had been expressed by Ibsen himself when he was in Rome:

Politicians irritate me! They've had their fill of me! They look like goats in a young tree plantation! Everything is destroyed by them! The majority are the most dangerous enemies of truth and liberty!



Yes, you are free to think me down. But you can't accuse me of being incorrect! Unfortunately, the majority has power, but the majority is not correct! A few solitary individuals, such as myself, are the ones who are correct. The minority is almost always correct! (Cited in Meyer, 1971, p. 456).

In reality, Ibsen is a dramatist who has brought a sense of reality back to the theatre and has investigated the medium's potential as a way of diagnosing a particular aspect of modern existence. His "choice of an unpleasant theme is clearly realized by his obvious objective, which is to show to what depths individuals will descend when they allow themselves to be motivated solely by self-interest" (McFarlane, 1960, p. 298). To explore this issue, Ibsen creates a hero who contradicts the capitalists, even if it is his brother.

At the termination of the play, it is shown that despite the fact that the individual is in conflict with society, he believes he is the strongest man in society. Ibsen, through his protagonist, Dr. Stockmann, criticizes society's worm-eaten conventions, limited goals, and tainted institutions. Dr. Stockmann tries to improve the social order, yet he is condemned and rejected by all. However, he feels stronger as a result of this experience and freedom of expression that extends beyond himself. It is averred by Ibsen that "freedom is the first and finest condition of life" (cited in Meyer, 1971, p. 420). As a result, the minority is always correct because they have arrived at a place that the majority has yet to reach.

Dr. Stockmann lives in a culture that disregards individual freedom and individuality. He aspires to be an individual in a culture where individuality is respected. He is convinced of the necessity for freedom, but he has no idea how to use it, and the paths he takes often lead to loneliness and sorrow. Dr. Stockmann is unable to find purpose in a society that has lost all of the values and measurements of a meaningful life. Despite the fact that society has abandoned him, he believes that the "strongest man in the world is he who stands most alone" (Ibsen, 2018, p.110). This conflict continues, but in the end, *Right* triumphs over *Might*. Legitimate rights can only be obtained via resistance and defiant fights. Individuals in any society have the highest responsibility to stand up to any form of aggression. People need to tread a thorny and tortuous path to bring the logocentric superpowers to their knees.

Conclusion

Media faces certain political-economic problems. These problems are either the results of dependence on the interests of leaders or the mobilization of resources without any kind of support. Two contradicting views control media; the first one is the lack of resources, and the other is the absence of visibility and transparency.

To show the relationship between social media and public opinion, in addition to how the former shapes the latter, in *An Enemy of the People*, Ibsen presents a world where politicians have too much authority wielding enormous influence and utilizing social media to manipulate facts and public opinion in their



communities. In such capitalized societies, it is impossible to identify who is telling the truth. Therefore, the public chooses to listen to the authorities because they claim to be acting in the best interests of the people, yet the people are the ones who bear the brunt of the repercussions. In such societies where the public is unable to detect the truth, Dr. Stockmann exhibits his determination to exercise his responsibility as a doctor to persuade the authorities/capitalists of the dangers of polluted baths. On the other side, Peter, the mayor of the city, and the people working with him, including the journalists whose duty is to declare the facts to the public, are always twisting the truth and refusing to accept any opposing views since they conflict with their financial ambitions.

Ibsen employs this scenario to demonstrate that the media (newspapers) cannot be effective custodians of truth because they are swayed by so many self-interested parties and their own financial requirements. Every deceptive decision made by Hovstad and Billing, the newspaper editors, is motivated by the need to appease someone who could harm their newspaper. They, as journalists, must maintain the elites' support: they must follow and satisfy Aslaksen because of his financial support, and they cannot oppose Peter Stockmann because he dominates the town's political environment. Nevertheless, they can't afford to lose the paper's core readership; thus, contradicting public opinion is untenable. In truth, the media reflects the town's overall state of affairs. Public opinion and capitalists' interests wield far too much power over the profession of journalism, just as they do in local politics and administration. While the People's Messenger (representative of social media) looks to be an altruistic and positive force at first, it is exposed as an authority purveyor of lies at the close of the play. Finally, the play implies that the media are too self-interested and rooted in their societies to provide objective or successful criticism.

What Ibsen wants to aver is that the majority of people in the community shown in this play do not value individual dignity or independence. Individual liberty has the least likelihood of being respected by the majority. Furthermore, authorities rely on social media to mislead public opinion and convince the public to follow their own point of view. In truth, there is a profound struggle for a person who fights against the majority and strives to reclaim his rightful place in society, and he should be willing to give up everything to achieve this goal. Every social change has its effect on the people who live in that community, particularly those who are at the center of it.

Further studies in this field may need to address literary works that embody the relationship between social media and public opinion. The urgent need of the hour is to recollect and revive the memories that remind us of how societies have been silenced, oppressed, and excluded by their own capitalist class. Studying such works that highlight these issues will bring about solid awareness of how societies sacrificed everything for the sake of creating the soul of resistance to challenging the unjust capitalist laws that devoid these societies of the right to live in peace and prosperity as anybody else in this vast planet.



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