



NAVIGATING THE DIGITAL LANDSCAPE: THE EVOLUTION AND IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON GLOBAL POLITICS

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Abstract:

The impact of social media on worldwide politics has been significant, revolutionizing how people engage with political figures and access information about political events. Although social media has many potential benefits, such as increasing democratic participation and empowering citizens, it is important to acknowledge its drawbacks. These incorporate the influence of public opinion, decreased trust in political organizations, and the propagation of disinformation. This article investigates the intricate and diversified effects of social media on worldwide politics, emphasizing the importance of critically evaluating it and developing policies that support democratic principles and civic engagement. It highlights the need to understand how social media is utilized in authoritarian and democratic regimes. Authoritarian regimes make use of social media to promote their ideologies, suppress opposition and control information. The article presents insights into the challenges and potential advantages that social media poses for international stability, human rights, and democracy. It is crucial for individuals, scholars, and policymakers to conduct thorough research to have an in-depth grasp of the impact of social media on world politics.

Keywords: social media, worldwide politics, democratic participation, political organizations, democracy

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1. Introduction

In the past ten years, there has been a rapid increase in the utilisation of new modes of communication, leading to the emergence of social media. This has been made possible by the widespread adoption of platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, and YouTube. Social media has fundamentally transformed how individuals participate in political discourse and access information. Instagram and Facebook, in particular, have revolutionised how people engage with political figures, rally supporters, and shape public perceptions (Baum & Potter, 2019; Kellam & Stein, 2016). While social media has been praised for promoting citizen engagement and fostering democracy (Unwin, 2012), it has also been criticised for spreading disinformation and undermining trust in political institutions (Vosoughi *et al.*, 2018).

The impact of social media on international politics is multifaceted and complex, raising important questions about the relationship between technology and democracy (Taprial & Kanwar, 2012). As we consider both its benefits and challenges, it is essential to analyse its role in global politics and develop policies that encourage civic engagement and democratic values. Social media's influence extends beyond democratic nations; authoritarian governments also exploit these platforms to manipulate information, suppress opposition, and advance their agendas.

Understanding the role of social media in global politics is crucial for individuals, scholars, and policymakers to recognise both the opportunities and threats it presents for security, democracy, and human rights. The article highlights the need for policies that promote democratic principles while addressing the challenges posed by social media, especially in authoritarian contexts. By examining the positive and negative aspects of social media, the study emphasises the importance of ongoing analysis to protect worldwide security, democracy, and human rights.

2. Literature Review

Social media plays a significant role in modern world politics by mobilizing social movements, facilitating political communication and involvement, and influencing political dialogue. This literature review aims to analyze the current scholarship on the impact of social media on modern world politics. It highlights theoretical frameworks, significant debates, and empirical evidence in the discipline. The scholarship on social media and world politics encompasses various theoretical frameworks, including discourse analysis, media ecology, and network theory. Discourse analysis examines the language and narratives used in political communication and investigates how meaning is created, challenged, and negotiated in public domains. Media ecology stresses the influence of media technologies on cultural, social, and political frameworks, illustrating how media affect behaviour, cognition, and perception. Network theory studies the architecture and dynamics of social networks, highlighting the importance of weak ties, essence, and brokering in influencing information dissemination and collective action.

The literature on social media and world politics discusses important arguments such as the role of social media in democracy, the connection between political polarization and social media, and the influence of social media on international relations. A significant debate focuses on whether social media can promote democracy. Some researchers argue that it can create new public forums and mobilize citizens, while others believe it can also weaken democratic institutions, spread misinformation, and increase hate speech. There is a significant debate about the connection between political polarization and social media. Some scholars argue that social media reinforces filter bubbles and echo chambers, intensifying political divisions. Others believe that it can expose users to diverse perspectives and foster intersecting ties, thereby enhancing political understanding and mutual respect. The influence of social media on global diplomatic affairs and international relations is a contentious issue. Some researchers argue that it can promote worldwide social movements and foster innovative forms of citizen diplomacy. Others assert that it may also serve to jeopardize domestic security, incite discord, and disseminate propaganda.

2.1 The Evolution of Social Media

The emergence of social media, powered by new-generation online technologies, brings together people from different locations in a virtual environment. This transformation, driven by internet technology, is now challenging traditional media. The internet began to integrate into our lives in the 1960s, with its initial use in military applications in the 1970s and 1980s through ARPANET, the United States Department of Defense's military network (Daşli, 2019). By the 1990s, the internet had expanded into a globally utilized commercial network, leading to significant structural shifts in 1995. This expansion met the growing demand, with web pages, email, and other services being used for diverse promotional and marketing purposes, meeting the needs and desires of users (Gülner & Balcı, 2011; Kırık, 2014). In the 2000s, the Internet became inexpensive and accessible to everyone, which led to the rise of social networks. According to Daşli (2019), these platforms bring together people from different backgrounds and with different beliefs, gender, race, language and education, breaking down barriers and challenging stereotypes. He also mentions that navigating social media has become a necessity and a habit. Social networks, which have garnered significant attention, especially from young people and children, continue to attract individuals of all ages. Social media goes beyond just sharing information; it serves many purposes, including communication, entertainment, education, and sharing opinions and personal experiences. Defining social media definitively is difficult due to its constantly expanding scope and evolving features (Kırık, 2014). For Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social media is *"a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content"* (p. 61).

The rise of platforms like LinkedIn, MySpace, and Friendster signified the start of a new era in social media. When Facebook was created in 2004, it caused a significant shift in the industry (Gundecha & Liu, 2012), leading to the emergence of other major

social media platforms such as Snapchat, Instagram, and Twitter. Social media has profoundly impacted global politics, changing how the public engages with political affairs and influencing the outcomes of elections and other political matters. It has facilitated connections among people and the coordination of common political goals while providing a platform for diverse and marginalized viewpoints. However, social media has been criticised for its role in spreading disinformation and extreme ideologies (Vosoughi *et al.*, 2018) and for exacerbating political polarization. The influence of social media on world politics will continue to be a topic of debate and discussion in the future, as technology continues to evolve and reshape interpersonal interactions and political participation. Social media seems appealing in the political sphere, as it can facilitate democratization and democracy.

2.2 Types of Social Media

There are numerous approaches for categorizing different types of social media. Based on self-presentation and social presence, various platforms have been suggested for classification, including virtual gaming environments, virtual social settings, blogs, content communities, social networking sites, and collaborative ventures (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). In contrast, Scott (2015) argued that social media provides instruments for users to express their opinions online through blogs, mobile applications, wikis, message boards, chat rooms, social networking platforms, video and image-sharing websites, review sites, listservs, and social bookmarking platforms. Sharma and Verma's (2018) study classified social media sites according to their principal functions, encompassing podcasts, wikis, social networking sites, blogs, video-sharing platforms, content-sharing platforms, discussion forums, and social bookmarking sites. The most popular social media sites among many are as follows:

2.2.1 Blog and Microblogging

A blog is a personal website created by individuals who are passionate about a subject. It provides a platform to share their passion and engage with a community of readers who comment on the author's posts (Scott, 2015). A blog typically covers specific topics with entries organized in reverse chronological order and marked with tags, which help to categorize content, link related topics, and make navigation easier for visitors. Writers have the ability to manage their blogs, including the ability to remove unwanted comments such as profanity or spam. In 2019, there were over 1.6 billion websites, with more than 500 million classified as blogs, which collectively generated over 2 million blog entries daily (Hostingtribunal, 2019). A microblog allows users to send and publish short messages. Tumblr, a popular microblogging site, allows users to easily and quickly publish various types of posts, including text, audio, video, images, and external links (Mclean, 2020). Currently, Tumblr is one of the largest blogging platforms globally, with over 500 million blogs and nearly 14 million daily posts (Tumblr, 2020).

2.2.2 Social Networking Sites

According to Boyd and Ellison (2017), a social networking site is an online service that allows people to create a profile that is either public or semi-public within a specific framework, list other individuals with whom they are connected, and view and navigate the list of links, as well as those created by others on the site. People have various reasons for using social networking sites, including keeping in touch with family, making new friends, socializing, and staying updated on events and news (Brandtzaeg & Heim, 2009). The most common social networking platforms are described and listed below:

2.2.2.1 Facebook

Facebook provides a platform for users to connect and share with family, friends, and colleagues. It allows effortless sharing of photos, links, videos, and text. Users can follow individuals or pages to receive updates in their news feeds. With over 1.73 billion daily active users and exceeding 2.6 billion monthly active users in the first quarter of 2020 (Clement, 2020, January 30), Facebook has become the leading social networking platform. On *Twitter*, users can express opinions and share photos or brief videos within a 280-character limit. Twitter's real strength lies in real-time communication. Tweets may contain hashtags (e.g., #topic) to indicate their subject, making it easier to discover similar tweets. With over 386 million active members, Twitter has established itself as one of the most popular social networks (Clement, 2020, April 24). *LinkedIn* is a professional social networking platform where individuals share more personal information. People use LinkedIn to find job opportunities, while companies use it to find potential candidates. Scott (2015) explains that, unlike social platforms used for maintaining personal connections, LinkedIn is designed to "*connect professionals globally and improve their productivity and effectiveness*" (p. 255).

2.2.2.2 Forum

A forum is an online community that allows users to share and exchange information about common interests (Forum, n.d.). The main purpose of a forum is to create a platform for communication among members, where individuals can post topics for discussion and receive responses from others. While forums cover many subjects, smaller groups are also dedicated to specific issues. Compared to social networking platforms, forums may lack certain features, especially in terms of communication. However, they continue to be popular among Internet users, showing the strong demand for forums. According to Pendry and Salvatore (2015), the value of forums lies in their ability to facilitate threaded discussions on specific topics and in providing a platform for private engagement.

2.2.2.3 Wiki and Podcast

A wiki is a website that allows users to revise, modify, or remove content on the platform. As a result, it provides a convenient platform for knowledge dissemination and collaboration. Wikipedia is the most prominent wiki today, with over 23 million articles

in 275 languages, all contributed by internet users. Wikipedia typically ranks at the top of search results and consistently ranks in the top 10 most visited websites on the Internet (Scott, 2015). A podcast consists of a series of episodes that may include a combination of auditory elements, music, speech, television, or radio. It comprises video, images, audio, and PDF files that users can upload and obtain from a website. Users can receive each new episode instantly by subscribing to a podcast (Van Looy, 2016).

2.2.2.4 Sharing Websites

Distinguishing between social networking sites and sharing websites is challenging, as social networking sites also facilitate content sharing. Although media-sharing platforms prevailed in the market, presentation-sharing platforms (e.g., Slideshare) and document-sharing platforms (e.g., Scribd) are currently available. The shared media is categorised into three distinct groups as outlined below:

- **Video Sharing Platform:** YouTube, a well-known video-sharing platform, has been a subsidiary of Google since 2006. Users can upload, post, and share videos on YouTube, and viewers can subscribe to channels created by others. The platform is available in 80 languages and engages about one-third of internet users, who collectively view 150 million hours of content daily (Aslam, 2020, February 10). Vimeo, another popular video platform, offers a wider range of artistic and high-quality videos compared to YouTube. Additionally, there is a key difference in the commercial content on the platforms; Vimeo limits commercials, while YouTube prioritizes revenue generation through embedded advertisements in videos.
- **Audio Sharing Platform:** Numerous social media platforms are dedicated to sharing and promoting audio, especially music. For instance, SoundCloud was established in 2008 to become the “YouTube of audio”. As of 2019, it boasts over 200 million tracks and is considered one of the leading music and audio platforms. Another popular platform, Last.fm, helps users discover new songs based on their listening history. Platforms like Spotify and Simfy allow users to listen to radio or music and connect with others to share their music preferences.
- **Photo Sharing Platform:** Flickr is one of the earliest platforms for sharing photos, allowing users to manage and share high-quality images. By 2015, Flickr had reported hosting over 10 billion images. As of March 2019, it had over 90 million monthly users (Smith, 2019). Unlike platforms where users collect images from the web, Flickr serves as a personal photo storage space for account holders. On the other hand, Instagram is a mobile-based photo-sharing network that allows users to capture, edit, and share images. Instagram experienced significant growth, reaching 1 billion active users in 2018, up from 800 million in 2017, making it one of the fastest-growing photo-sharing networks worldwide (Clement, 2019, December 3). Pinterest is another platform designed for sharing images and videos, where users can collect media from the internet, organize it into themed virtual boards, and share it with others. While other platforms, such as Facebook,

Twitter, and Flickr, enable photo sharing, they do not allow users to categorize and collect content from external websites, making Pinterest unique in fulfilling this role (Thornton, 2012).

- **Social Bookmarking:** Social bookmarking is a way for users to save, organize, and manage web pages they come across while browsing the internet. This makes it easier to gather information from different sources. The saved pages can be shared with others to collaborate on topics of mutual interest (Lin & Tsai, 2011). Social bookmarking only stores the links to the original content, allowing users to access their saved pages from any internet-connected device. One of its main features is the ability to add keywords to bookmarks, which simplifies the search process for specific information. Some popular social bookmarking platforms are Digg, Reddit, and Newsvine. Reddit is the most frequented website globally, while Digg is the least accessed one.

3. The Impact of Social Media on World Politics

3.1 Political Communication and Social Media

Kellam and Stein (2016) argue that social media has transformed political communication in modern global politics. It provides a platform for people and organizations to engage with political issues and influence public opinion. Social media connects voters with politicians and political organizations, mobilizes support for campaigns, and allows individuals to express political opinions and participate in online activism. It has had a significant impact on election results and other political events. Social media platforms also help spread information and ideas and enable individuals to connect with others who share similar political goals. However, social media has also been used to spread disinformation and amplify extremist views, contributing to the polarization of political discourse (Farkas & Bene, 2021). The influence of social media on political communication is expected to continue to grow as platforms evolve and become more complex. Unwin (2012) emphasizes the importance of critically analyzing the impact of social media on political communication and developing strategies to mitigate its potentially negative effects on democracy and political debate.

3.2 Political Mobilization and Social Media

Social media refers to a variety of virtual platforms designed to facilitate the creation and sharing of user-generated content (Castells, 1996; Newson *et al.*, 2008). This participatory characteristic has played a crucial role in shaping public dialogue and fostering an environment conducive to the sharing of thoughts. Platforms such as Facebook and Twitter were instrumental in mobilizing citizens, organizing protests, and disseminating information during events like the Arab Spring (Ottaway & Hamzawy, 2011). Social media acts as a catalyst, amplifying voices, fostering a sense of collective identity, and enabling the spread of politically sensitive content. The level of social media usage reflects individuals' engagement in the digital realm, with greater frequency indicating

more active involvement (Kim, 2011). The type of social media used determines the nature and extent of online engagement, thereby influencing the impact and structure of political information (Hardy, 2009; Lim, 2012). Metrics such as the number of political organizations or pages visited and interaction with political content provide insights into individuals' engagement and their level of involvement in political dialogue (Howard & Parks, 2012).

The influential impact of social media on global political mobilization, as explained by Goh and Pang (2016), is grounded in Social Movement Theory. This theory examines how collective action emerges from social structures and interactions. Social media platforms play a crucial role in distributing information, organizing, facilitating communication, and driving movements. Research demonstrates that the influence of social media on political participation spans generations, as shown by studies on differences in media use and civic engagement across age groups (Andersen *et al.*, 2020). Online groups, often centred around shared political beliefs, are essential in serving as platforms for activism and free speech (Boulianne, 2016). According to Becker and Copeland (2016), individuals with significant online followings can shape political narratives and influence civic participation.

3.2 Political Propaganda and Social Media

The impact of political propaganda in modern global politics has come under significant criticism, with social media platforms being singled out as a primary catalyst. These platforms enable politicians to quickly and effectively spread propaganda and false information, reaching wide audiences with little regulation. Political propaganda on social media takes many forms, such as videos and images, disinformation, and provocative language intended to elicit a response (Howard *et al.*, 2016). According to Woolley and Guilbeault (2017), political figures have leveraged social media to propagate conspiracy theories, undermine adversaries, and further their political objectives. The rapid growth of political propaganda on social media has eroded trust in conventional media outlets, making it challenging for individuals to distinguish between falsehoods and truths. This has serious outcomes for democratic systems as people and groups are increasingly forming their political views and actions based on deceptive or incorrect content. To address the harmful effects of political propaganda on social media, Chaudhari and Pawar (2021) emphasize the importance of implementing measures that develop critical thinking and media literacy while ensuring that political figures are held responsible for spreading misleading or inaccurate content. Moreover, social media platforms must take greater accountability in monitoring content and encouraging a more open and ethical approach to political discussions.

4. The Impact of Social Media on World Politics

4.1 Positive and Negative Impacts of Social Media in Politics

The impact of social media on global politics has been predominantly positive. One major benefit is its role in increasing access to information and encouraging greater political participation. Social media allows a diverse range of views and opinions to be included in political discussions, leading to better understanding and acceptance of different perspectives. Additionally, social media enables rapid dissemination of news and information, leading to quicker responses to crises and emergencies, particularly in situations where traditional media sources are unavailable or unreliable. In recent years, the significant impact of social media on global politics has become increasingly recognized. Social media platforms have played a crucial role in mobilizing individuals and groups to address various political issues, including significant social movements like the Arab Spring and Black Lives Matter. Overall, social media has the potential to promote a more transparent and active democratic process by empowering citizens to share information, organize actions, and amplify their voices.

However, social media has also produced adverse effects. A major detrimental consequence is the dissemination of misinformation and propaganda. Spreading false information can significantly affect the effectiveness and credibility of political groups. Social media platforms can propagate inaccurate or overtly incorrect material, manipulating public opinion and undermining the credibility of political debate (Zhuravskaya *et al.*, 2020). Another detrimental effect of social media is its capacity to intensify pre-existing societal divisions and biases. Social media algorithms can generate echo chambers and filter bubbles, wherein users are solely exposed to content that reinforces their pre-existing opinions, resulting in an absence of awareness towards individuals with divergent perspectives. Additionally, the dissemination of misinformation can have serious social consequences. Misinformation disseminates rapidly on social media, often lacking verification or context, and is challenging to rectify after it has gathered momentum (Saaïda, 2023). This may lead to scepticism, confusion, and possibly violence. Saaïda (2023) adds that when individuals grow progressively dependent on followers and likes for self-worth, social media can become addictive and detrimental to mental health. Moreover, social media enterprises routinely sell and collect user data, exacerbating surveillance and privacy concerns.

4.2 Optimal Strategies for Political Engagement on Social Media

Social media has changed the way politicians interact with their constituents and gather support for their policies. Saaïda (2023) states that politicians can build a unique brand image and earn the audience's trust by consistently sharing authentic content. He also explained that they can improve their messaging and content for better engagement by analyzing data from social media platforms, which provide valuable insights into the preferences and opinions of their audience. Another advantage of social media in politics is the direct interaction with constituents. Demonstrating a commitment to public

engagement can be achieved through timely and thoughtful responses to comments, messages, and mentions. Visual media, such as videos and photos, can be equally effective in capturing audiences and conveying important concepts. Using social media in politics requires consideration of ethical factors. Proper social media use involves avoiding manipulation and deceptive techniques, transparency in funding sources, and respecting people's privacy rights. By following these guidelines, politicians can ethically and effectively use social media to engage with constituents, build support, and promote their goals (Saaïda, 2023).

5. Conclusion

Social media has profoundly influenced political discourse and propaganda. It has provided individuals with novel avenues for communication and information dissemination, facilitating political actors in articulating their messages more effectively. This has resulted in a range of political events, both beneficial and detrimental. The impact of social media on modern world politics is intricate and varied. Social media has undeniably influenced political systems globally. However, it is crucial to acknowledge its possible adverse effects and implement measures to alleviate these implications. At the same time, there are prospects for constructive transformation and innovation in politics that can be actualized through the judicious utilization of social media. The impact of social media on modern global politics is significant in that it has created new opportunities for political involvement and altered our interaction with political matters. Social media enables individuals worldwide to connect, mobilize, and instigate tangible change. Despite the obstacles and issues linked to social media's influence, its capacity to enhance human connection and political mobilization has undeniably improved global politics. As we manage the complexity of social media in politics, we must guarantee that these revolutionary tools are utilized ethically and responsibly.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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