



The Future of Social Media in Political Communication

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1. Abstract

Social media technologies are revolutionizing the way political communication takes place in the United States. By increasing the speed with which information travels, social media plays a significant role in shaping political discourse. This is even more true when it comes to establishing the political agenda and shaping political discussion. While there are numerous ways social media performs these functions, press coverage also plays a role. Press coverage both enhances and diminishes this agenda-setting function. Social media and a reliance on traditional news media organizations for information are co-evolving in ways that are important toward understanding why and how information and news are accessed, shared, and spread via social media and news media sources. Social media's transformational role in the political communication of constituents has happened at a rapid pace. In terms of political communication, social media helps politicians, candidates, elected officials, interest groups, and news organizations to spread political information as well as foster interpersonal and group communication with and between people who care about politics (A Ayankoya, 2013). From the formulation of new laws to deliberately spreading propaganda, every area of politics is touched by social media's effects. This social media explosion generates vast and diverse streams of public political data. As the volume and variety of social media data proliferate, so do the methods of



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capturing, measuring, and modeling people's reactions. The accelerated generation of data about public political responses offers researchers unparalleled opportunities to study a wide array of political phenomena, while also presenting serious methodological challenges regarding how best to collect, process, and analyze these data. Social media is a very new concept, despite its continued rapid growth, with only a few years of research available to scientific communities; therefore, building common methodologies and findings has lagged far behind (Billings, 2017). A broader understanding of this newly evolving political-communication paradigm is considered urgent. How the public sphere is changed remains a theoretical and practical challenge.

Keywords: social media, political communication, agenda-setting, information dissemination, political discourse, data analysis, methodological challenges.

1. Introduction

2. Social media have transformed how politics is conducted and how information is disseminated and consumed in politics. Politics are generally presented and discussed in the mass media and in the personal environment. The personal environment consists of newspapers, radio, television or the direct communication from politicians. With the arrival of social media, online political communication became more and more important. There are many different kinds of social media, such as blogs, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, among others. Social media form a new area in which knowledge of how to reach political goals is needed. In this environment politicians, interest groups, and citizens will communicate in an interactive way (A Ayankoya, 2013). The use of social media provides a more personal and interactive environment for politicians and interest groups than the mass media. Many politicians and interest groups have discovered social media as an efficient



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means of getting attention and delivering a message. Social media interact with mass media. News becomes part of the marketplace of politics. Politicians use social media to monitor the influence and opinions of the public. Often the politicians and interest groups are interactively scrutinized by a critical citizenry. The use of social media involves applications like Facebook, blogs, or Twitter for creating new ways of making the electorate get involved with politics. A growing number of followers and users suggests that the application of social media is expanding, politicians make themselves available for direct interaction. Social media has already become pervasive (Van Den Bergh, 2016). It is becoming apparent that those tools are not only useful for politicians and interest groups to disseminate their message. They also alter the way politics are conducted: more interactive, more information available—both intended and unintended information. It is becoming of increasing relevance to perceive the new area's characteristics and to estimate its effectiveness. There is a signal of the importance of understanding the innovative possibilities for conducting the communication of politics and the challenges social media bring for democracies. The ethical considerations of the use of social media are also likely to become of growing importance. This suggests that a balanced view is needed for the positive effect of using social media that fosters the communication of varying political views as well as a critical view on issues that may eventually harm the quality of how politics is presented and preserved. (Baharuddin et al.2022)

3. The Impact of Social Media on Political Communication

The changing face of traditional media avenues has marked the beginning of an inevitable shift in the forms of political communication used by candidates and officeholders, newscasters, and everyday Americans. Social media has taken center stage in the toolkit of candidates seeking election to public office. In recent years, the Barack Obama campaign of 2008 and the Donald Trump



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campaign of 2016 both successfully utilized social media platforms in their election bids (Billings, 2017). The use of social media by those in the running for office, as well as by those currently holding office, has grown substantially, raising the larger question of how this change might alter the way our republic functions. This section seeks to detail the implications of the use or non-use of social media for Americans' political interactions both in campaigns and between the elections. This will be done by examining the role of social media in spreading information, deliberation, equality and inclusivity, and its potential to increase political participation. This research ultimately finds that social media can be an agent of democracy, but that the ways of how are more complex than it at first may seem. As social media is a relatively new technology, far more research is needed to address lingering concerns over bias, the spread of misinformation, and privacy. Still, it is not to be ignored, as it holds substantial consequences for political campaigns and has the potential to change the scope of traditional media engagement. Additionally, it should be held to high priority as its use continues to proliferate. The overarching purpose of this research synthesis was to present a thorough evaluation of the implications of social media use on American politics. First, a brief history of social media networks will be presented, providing some context for their initial use in American politics. This history will frame a discussion centered on how the rapid proliferation of these networks into society catalyzed grassroots political efforts in the 2004 campaign of Howard Dean. Before running an analysis of how social media has since evolved into its own unique medium that has challenged the previously-corporate print-medium paradigm of traditional news, a brief technical overview of how algorithms impacting content engagement are used by social networks is provided. A review of the existing literature is then conducted, with a particular focus on eight scholarly articles evaluating the



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effects of social media use during United States presidential elections from 2004-2016. Generally, the existing research suggests that such networks have assisted in upholding multiple democratic principles in US American society, but with a long list of effects, the existing research is far from comprehensive. Given this, the remaining synthesis provides a look at how social media has affected political events beyond the candidate level and with a high focus on issues relating to bias, misinformation, and privacy. The proliferation of new technology in the last half-century has had large ramifications in the way American governance is performed. Just as George Washington swore in as President on the second floor of Federal Hall in New York City, the first telegraphs began to relay the results of his election to the citizens of the States. The telegram, the first instant form of communication, became the bedrock of reporting on both national and international events throughout the 19th century. When the first radio signals were sent between two ends of Waldorf-Astoria in Manhattan on a snowy night in 1907, President Theodore Roosevelt remarked, “you see how that works; a day may come it will be possible for the President to speak right here in this room and his voice be heard throughout the nation.” The first public speech by a sitting Chief Executive was Wilson’s address, though he was unable to be present in person. Decades later, the whispers President Franklin Delano Roosevelt uttered on B29 forty years later became the bedrock for the start of a moderate communication system between the public and those in the House of Power. Public opinion, media, and government are inextricably tied in American society; every brash policy decision made by Lincoln was shown to the public in the prose of Horace Greeley. Every corrupt bargain of the Reconstruction Era was masked over in the public affairs of Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hurst. Congressional hearings, the wheel that turned Watergate revelations in Miller & Bernstein’s thorough expose, were once so



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banal as to be performed in secret. Telephone masking of the president's call began the horrors of Vietnam and continued, to somewhat less effect, during Iran Contra. At over three-hundred years old, America can no longer be considered a youthful experiment; robust institutions and international standing have been its lot for a century, while establishment and expansion into the New World took the better part of another. Nonetheless, technological advances have always forced adaptation and modernization of the tools of democratic practice. Those same tools have the power to shape American government to a starkly different form a though possible to Americas from earlier centuries. There remains a plurality of will, as well as to the best way to interpret the existing research, and how to explain the overall finding of social networks. Considering one point, one must acknowledge the other; the larger purpose of this synthesis was to present what is understood thus far about the implications of social media on American politics in a readable and informative manner. (Karwacka et al., 2022)

4. Challenges and Opportunities in Using Social Media for Political Communication

The advent of contemporary social media platforms has shaped a new way of using political communication. The appearance of emerging social networks as political actors influencing information and knowledge among the citizens has brought into discussion the debate about cordiality between social media and politics. The dual impact of contemporary social media in political communication makes it an interesting matter for scholars and practitioners. There are challenges that go too quickly in adopting these relatively new tools for political purposes, but there are also opportunities. Challenges related to social media use in political communication include electoral manipulation and distinct misinformation through these networks. Social networks can be



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manipulated by their designers or political activists to allow some social network users political gain. It was shown that after users receive false and politically biased messages for a period of time an increased probability is more likely. Individuals become polarized because they exclusively follow those who share the same belief with them and they display less exposure to diverse information. The existence and impact of echo chambers on political voting behavior was further synthesized. A social network perspective approach was utilized to scrutinize echo chambers and the political behavior of individuals within such information spaces.

Social media has also been acknowledged for its unique propensities for political communication. Social media efficiently disseminates protest messages, which in turn facilitates the mobilization of political interests and political dualization. Advantage is that social media helps the establishment and extension of grassroots movements in groups that share the same concerns and problems. Another opportunity that social networks provide for political use is real-time public conversation with proximate response and feedback. It was exposed that users are more probable to address public officers with requests on the platform and these communications are promptly more likely to receive a response compared to other online political communication channels. Public officials are more likely to engage in communication with users who address them about immediate issues and affairs, compared to users who relay messages on blogs. Dynamic interactions and proximate feedbacks in political communication were identified on online platforms using a multi-platform approach. (Harmatiy et al.2021)

5. The Role of Social Media in Shaping Political Discourse

6. Regulation and Ethics in Social Media Political Communication

There are clear gaps in regulatory frameworks that should respond to the



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challenges social media pose. Transparency obligations, accountability and liability of the network society are under intense scrutiny, while the business models of enabling viral communication that tends to dominant hate speech, harassment and fake news speaks for a new regulatory practice. The key question is what kind of authorities are able to check the algorithms of systematic biases that would affect the fairness of elections, or what can be done to strengthen the role of democratic institutions and prevent information manipulation otherwise (Bayer, 2019). Social media undermine the supremacy of journalism. They empower citizen-journalists but can be easily abused by politicians to avoid media scrutiny and spread disinformation. Though there are rather limited evidence that online echo chambers might make the general public more radical in their opinions, public discourse in Western democracies is deeply polarised. The task of improving the democratic quality of the public discourse is up against the fact that the same social media companies and practices are considered fundamental for freedom of speech and even the weakest voices to be heard in oppressive regimes. The analysis of Hungarian regulations aims at illustrating this conundrum. Similarly to the 2018 UK report, the examination of flaws in current regulations inspires less hope for substantial remedies. On the one hand, social media raise major ethical issues concerning, for instance, transparency and the respect of data privacy. On the other hand, social media are the channels by means of which transparency, the check of power, and privacy can be largely defended. Electoral integrity is another challenge, the emerging forms of which, including foreign interference and the spread of fake news, urge for cooperation.

7. Case Studies of Successful Political Campaigns Using Social Media

The past ten years have shown a noticeable increase in concern about political discourse on social media. The speed and global reach of social media make



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it an important communication platform for politicians, governments, and citizens, but also create problems. Information can flow fast, but this is a double-edged sword. It can also spread disinformation and fake news at the same speed (A Ayankoya, 2013).

People use more and more ways to show their political preferences or discontent. Therefore, the customization of what content they see is crucial. Social media algorithms feed users what they interact with. During the election campaigns or other events of political importance, a campaign can't take chances. It is important for a campaign to have supporters seen as much content as possible. In supporting the campaign, they should shout about the content, which further supports the campaign. It must also protect against attacks by the opponent's supporters.

The strategy of the campaign team that put the most effort into online marketing, and specifically in combining different media and designing an algorithm that controls the interaction between media to maximize efficiency. The future in social media marketing seems to be exactly in this personalization of the content that users see. The profile of the candidate should exist on each page so that targeted advertising can be implemented. At the same time, it is important that the message is adjusted according to the page on which it is distributed. This is because followers are formed in online communities from people with similar preferences, views, and belief systems. For this reason, a message perceived by a community can be completely uninteresting and irrelevant to others, and only a small 'trigger' is needed for the discussion to further expand. (Dwivedi et al.2021)

8. Future Trends and Innovations in Social Media Political Communication

Given its increasing amount of users and features that are constantly updated, social media is anticipated to further evolve as a fundamental communicative



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tool for political purposes. Forecasts for emerging trends and innovations which will shape the future of social media in political communication are addressed in this ahead-looking final section. One potential that is believed to be expanding in the future, is the role of artificial intelligence being exploited for micro-targeting voters and sentiment analysis of the public. Machine learning algorithms will be used to identify individuals on social media who are planning to vote, the type of party they will likely vote for, and where sentiment differs. Social media platforms could develop a two-step approach in which first socialbots place ideologically tuned content and identify susceptible trolls. Significant investments are expected to be made in social media technology which assist citizens as fact-checkers and in the detection of fake news. With the continuous reduction in the cost of development and maintenance costs of computer clusters, the possibilities of the application of big data for political market will be expanding, providing that it is used and viewed as a legitimate tool by the public. There is the potential to predict the bursts of public sentiment before they appear as a trend on social media. Technologies are expected to emerge with the capability of detecting human behavioural trends such as shifts in mood, changes in attitude towards subjects, or emerging dominance of a topic. Social media platforms will be revolutionised by such experiments as the future of political engagement. The importance of visual content, images and video, and the rise of live interactions, live video streams, will proliferate as tools in line campaigns that is also speculated. It will be embraced to provide engaging content. Specifically on the sharing of video content, platforms will invest in new original live formats and develop new features for elected officials. The newly developed features are anticipated to provide the option of basic editing directly, post a video, and embedding them in a message – similar to what is now allowed for pictures. Although these features are very much in



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demand amongst social media editors and digital campaign strategists, the impact of such practices on the news feed is uncertain. As more users opt to receive information through video content rather than text, news on social media is likely to become less diverse. The future landscape of user demographics is expected to force a rethink on messaging strategies. The average age of social media users is ever-increasing, with younger demographics preferring platforms such as Instagram or Insta stories. While one platform has historically been the preferred platform for political communication due to its ability to micro-target and its older demographics, if this trend continues the ‘value’ of an engaged user could be higher for other platforms. In the run-up to elections, one platform deliberately set out to tackle the spread of fake news. As a result, content posted by news pages and users was made equal in the news feed. Instead, priority was given to content posted by friends and family. This change reflects the ongoing evolution of trends in political communication and shows the necessity of political actors to adapt to changes in social media algorithms. With this, there is the potential for a reversal of pre-referendum tactics, where political actors invested in un-targeted video content with the main purpose of creating conversation without prejudice to the represented brand. It implies that adaptability has the potential to make or break a successful social media campaign.

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