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The Role of Social Media in Shaping Political Discourse and Public Opinion in the Digital Age

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Abstract

The main objective of the research is to explore how social media in the digital age influences political conversations, attitude construction, polarization, and political activism in the political society. Nevertheless, to assess the effects of social media on the political process and information flow, the qualitative research methodology was adopted in this study, and this required interviewing the respondents and studying the contents of their posts. The information indicates that social media drives individuals to extremism and hate and dictates political language. The findings of the research indicate that fake news and bais have a role in the formation of opinion among the consumers, where a significant number of users could not tell the difference between fake and real news. Findings of this paper further reveal that social media constitutes an important source of both digital activism, culminating to slacktivism, also known as low-effort activism, and political events where they happen. In this regard, the research addresses the gaps in the literature by presenting a more complex and elaborate view of the opportunities and challenges that social media may present to the political world. It also demonstrates how social media can be used to polarize and empower the political participation of people. The conclusion of the paper will provide thoughts and suggestions on possible future studies of the potential of social media to foster polite dialogue and social depolarization.

INTRODUCTION

The successful application of Web 2.0 technologies influenced the perceptions and opinions of people and made them increasingly popular during the past 20 years. Digital media social media (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter) have emerged as significant means of political communication in terms of the distribution, publication, screening, and response to political information by the population. The two main features of the social media, unlike the traditional media, which disseminates information and advertisements are speed and the capacity to enable direct communication between users. The properties were essential during political campaigns, political debates, and social mobilization (Xu, 2020). The aim of the

paper is to determine the effects of social media on the dynamics of political issues, their polemics, and the establishment of attitudes.

Social media politics has acquired a new dimension because of the rise in Internet traffic and use across the globe. Therefore, the number of people using social media is predicted to rise to over half of the global population by the year 2024 (Hruska and Maresova, 2020). This activity has facilitated the sharing of information among the masses by political actors like activists and political leaders without the involvement of media outlets (Korschun et al., 2020). This has led to encouragement of wider political actions via the social media where ordinary citizens can engage in political processes, express their ideas and even demand to the society. Nevertheless, this change brought about the polarization, the spread of fake news, and the questioning of the quality of political discourse (Allen et al., 2021; Azzimonti and Fernandes, 2023; Salvi et al., 2021).

One of the most evident political effects of social media is the possibility to create various types of direct contact between the leader and electorate. The current political landscape that involves social networks to connect with the voters has characterized the manner in which the politicians and political parties manage political information (Slothuus and Bisgaard 2021). This leadership would help in making politics more open and accountable. Nevertheless, it is dangerous too, particularly in the places where political leaders might use the algorithms to develop divisive or sensational material that is likely to make people communicate with each other more than typical (Stark et al., 2020; Khalil, 2024). The Facebook and Twitter algorithms, which appear to be innocuous at first, are created to spread the information which provokes engagement responses, e.g., likes, shares, and comments. This propagates the polarizing political rhetoric and hate even more (Jaton, 2021). Because users are presented with only such content that fits their worldview, overall tendencies of this process are to polarize political dialogue even more.

Besides the role played in political discourse, social media plays an important role in perception. The social media role makes it possible as it enables people to access opinions on political issues through numerous media outlets such as citizen journalism and mainstream media, and social media. Nonetheless, such accessibility also promotes the selective exposure effect according to which an individual is mainly exposed to media messages that reinforce his or her political ideology (Iyengar and Hahn, 2009; Ekstrom et al., 2022). This is in fact called the echo chamber effect and assists individuals to be exposed to information that mostly favours their beliefs. Sunstein's GetValue (2017). The outcome is the increasing polarization of the political discourse and Balkanization of the public sphere.

What is more, the role of the social networks in the development of the opinion of the people is more directly connected with the spread of fake information. Social media political posts are rather hard to verify because of the format of modern resources and the rate of information distribution (Casero et al., 2020). One should also keep in the back of the mind that the particular path that misinformation will follow will largely depend on the origin of the individuals that will be fed through the media misinformation system. The study showed that counterfeit news spreads faster on the social network than verifiable information, particularly when it provokes an emotion such as fear, anger, or the like (Liu and Wu, 2020; Horner et al., 2023). The LPM theory states that users can influence polarized opinions due to their dependence on inaccurate and/or biased data received in the social media and the opinions can be transferred to the electoral process and policy debates.

On its part, social media can organize political protests and raise people awareness. As examples of BlackLivesMatter, MeToo, or the Arab Spring demonstrate, social

media mobilization can demonstrate that through the use of social media, activists are able to organize, spread, and broadcast messages to mobilize individuals to protest online. These movements demonstrate how Twitter and social media overall can ensure that the participation threshold remains low so that individuals who are otherwise not engaged in activism can get engaged in politics (Jost et al., 2018; Jenkins, 2016). It is also possible that social media makes the activists become the creators of media, and raise the subject matter that mainstream media does not address. In this way, the fact that movements can open up easily and people can be rapidly united through the web itself makes the question of the effectiveness and stability of online activism and its capacity to bring a real change to the political sphere a concern (Earl et al., 2022).

However, it brings a problem of political polarization and false information that come with using social media. On the one hand, social media promotes a higher level of political turnout and voting, on the other hand, it leads to the polarization of the political spectrum and increased ideological division. The formation of efficient strategies at the political speech of the current generation presupposes awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of social media as a platform of political discussion and dictatorship on the polarization of the political speech. Considering the fact that social media has its own effects, negative, as well as positive, on political communication, the current state of this phenomenon is only befitting to be explored in this study.

METHODS

To explore the influence of social media on political speech and political opinion in the digital era, the qualitative approach was chosen. The approach adopted was qualitative to obtain a comprehensive idea of how individuals interact with social media platforms in the political arena, and how the latter affect their views and inject them into the political discourse. Through exploration of lived experiences and social media users, this study sought to explain the dynamics and intricacies that might be missed by quantitative research design.

The case study design was suitable in the analysis of the specifics of the effect of social media on the development of political discourse. Case studies provided us with an opportunity to analyze in detail particular examples of political activity on social media, and have a comprehensive understanding of the relationships and processes occurring in this place. This design was especially helpful in the case of examining some political campaigns, events or movements like an election, protest, or an activist movement that became famous on social media.

The combination of semi-structured interviews, content analysis, and monitoring social media activities allowed gathering the research data needed in this study. Such techniques provided a wholesome grasp of the study issue by introducing a three-dimensional triangulation of data sources.

The sample was composed of twenty interviews that would be active social media users, political campaigners, journalists as well as political communication specialists. Purposeful sampling was used to select the participants, and this gave an opportunity to include those people with the pertinent experience of using social media in politics. The interviews were semi-structured and thus flexible because the participants could express themselves and give their views and experiences and still steer the discussion to the main topics of the research. All the interviews took place either face to face or through video conferencing software and they took around forty five to an hour. The main themes related to political speech and opinion formation on social media were recognized with the help of recordings, transcripting, and analyzing the interviews.

Besides interviews, the study was supplemented with content analysis of the social media posts, comments, and discussions of political issues or events. The investigation focused on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram platforms that are popularly known to be used in political communication. During six months, a picture gallery of posts about significant political events was gathered such as in the form of protests, and national elections. This was also a time of high political activity and thus, a rich area to analyse. The trends of the type of political discourse that took place, the tone of such discourse, and the occurrence of polarization or fake information were identified through thematic coding.

The dynamics and interaction of users and social media politics were better known with non-participant observation of political discussions and debates on social media. To investigate the role of online politics, the researcher systematically followed the course of the situation on the social media pages, Facebook groups, and hashtags where the most active political discussion is observed. The approach enabled the researcher to study the interactions of the users in real time thereby enabling him know how individuals used social media platforms to share their political beliefs, interact with others and respond to political postings.

The data collected have been analysed in a thematic analysis technique in relation to the findings of the interviews, content analysis and field observation. The objective of this strategy is to reveal, analyze and explain common trends (themes) in the data set. In order to conduct this analysis through a six-stage process, the following actions were made: 1) The researcher has been orienting himself/herself with the data through re-reading and listening to the interviews transcripts, reviewing social media information and using field notes; 2) The data was coded which was both deductive that is, according to the already existing study framework and inductive that is, according to elicit the emergent themes; 3) The coded data was grouped into certain more general categories, in which the researcher has ensured the coher 6) The results were presented in a coherent and logical order, on the one hand, there are statements and literal expressions of the interviewers, and, on the other hand, real.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The speed of the information flow combined with the algorithm designed to attain the interaction is radically different in comparison with the previous approach to the consumption of the political material. Twitter is a political news, opinion and an activism platform, yet a divisionary, and misinformation platform. Nevertheless, the present study adopted a qualitative research design and therefore had a purpose of adding further illumination to the dynamics through interviews and content analysis of how social media affects political behaviors, opinions and actions. Overall, the findings are invaluable in terms of the information about the mechanisms that one may detect behind these tendencies and allow having a rough picture of the partially virtual political space.

Political Discourse amplification

The social media has contributed to the escalation of political rhetoric, and this is one of the greatest transformations that took place during the last several years. The social media regime (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram) provides a unique environment in the context of which the conversation about the political problem can go viral and cover a great number of people within a surprisingly short period. Such platforms are not only of nature that facilitates the sharing of political content but also allows sharing of ideas, opinions and criticisms promptly. The feature that renders social media vastly different to traditional media is that social media is the interactive and real-time media that enables the users to engage with the content, to respond in real time and even to take an active role in on-going discussion.

One of the key findings of the interviews held in the course of the current research is that social media substantially boosts the extent of political discourse as it offers individuals and groups a platform by which members can contact a large audience that is not within their personal spheres of influence. Political messages which once required years of awareness campaigns to reach the masses via the traditional media channels now need to be viral and be able to reach millions of users in different parts of the world within a few minutes. A political activist, who was among participants of the interviews, elaborated it,

> *"Prior to social media, we could hardly deliver our message without media contacts. We can make one post or tweet and begin a discussion that is being talked about nationwide in hours."*

This is where social media has the power of circumventing the old information gatekeepers, allowing individuals and grassroots movement to become part of the political dialogue.

This amplification does not come without its challenges as the interviews showed that there was an increasing concern as to the quality of discourse that is being amplified. Some of the interviewees indicated that social media enhances political messages but does this without looking at the accuracy or even subtlety. A journalist, who often reports on political developments was one of the participants, and said,

> *"Social media makes everything, the good and the bad bigger. A properly considered policy discourse may go viral, and so may fake news and incendiary speech."*

This fact shows the duality of the situation with social media and its contribution to the role of enhancing political communication. On the one hand, it is a democratization of access to political debate; on the other hand, it may also cause the diffusion of fake news and the development of extreme opinions.

Also, the algorithmic structure of social media contributes to this process of amplification. The nature of platform design reflects how they encourage content that produces the greatest engagement, so they tend to encourage sensational or provocative content over more calculated or nuanced political debates. This may create an echo chamber effect, since they are mainly exposed to political opinions that support their own beliefs, which support their prior beliefs. One interviewee, who is a professor of political science stated that,

> *"The political discourse does not merely get magnified by social media, but it gets filtered in a manner that forms bubbles. Users are presented with what the algorithm believes they prefer to see and this can promote divisions."*

The nature of social media is algorithmic in nature hence, not only magnifying the political discourse but also having an effect of what kind of discourse is given the most attention.

Furthermore, the study content analysis further justified these findings of the interviews where emotionally charged words, sensational headlines or controversial opinions were more likely to be shared and commented on in comparison to the less emotive or policy-focused discussion. Using posts about a recent election as an example, it was observed that posts with inflammatory rhetoric about the rival political parties or candidates gained significantly more engagement than posts about detailed policy proposals. This development implies that politicization of social media might be skewed towards greater interaction at the cost of the content, and this can influence how the people perceive the political issues.

Social media has also increased political dialogue because the marginalized or underrepresented groups could have a platform through which they can air their

grievances and request changes. These groups did not receive audience in the traditional media because their issues were either overlooked or not newsworthy. The social media has however provided a playing field that such voices are heard by more people. A participant in one interview was a representative of a local political organization and they commented,

> *"We used to struggle to get any kind of media coverage for our issues. But with social media, we can put our message out there directly and reach people who care about the same things we do."*

This strengthening of the marginalized voices has made the political discourse more varied, yet it also gives rise to the concerns on the risks of polarization and fragmentation in the common space.

Public Opinion Formation

The digital age has introduced a paradigm shift toward the formation of opinion amongst people. The mass media to be used was the traditional media such as television, newspapers and radio and was once the primary sources of information to create the opinion of the masses. These media were mostly single direction and there was minimal possibility that one could have an immediate response or discussion. With the advent of social media this has been altered but has offered a more interactive platform on which individuals can contribute to politics, air out their ideas and get to interact with others in real time.

The social media element of participation has played this role in changing the way the opinions of the masses are formed in a significant degree. Users no longer remain passive recipients of political content, they are content creators and distributors. Through social media, individuals can provide their political opinion and even convince their colleagues through the communication. The interviews that were utilized in this study showed that a substantial amount of individuals believes that the social media is the medium that makes them have the ability to influence the multitude and shape their thoughts with the stroke of their bells. A regular user of social media stated in one interview that she used the social media quite often,

> *"I feel like my opinion matters more now because I can actually put it out there and people respond. Sometimes, a simple tweet can start a huge conversation."*

This implies that the social media has democratized the process of constituting the masses opinion through providing the people with avenue in which to provide their input into the political debate.

The research also established that social media increases the rate at which the people opinion is made. Unlike in the traditional media where information is distributed at predetermined time (through daily newspapers or nightly news casts), social media is real-time. The political occurrences, words and concerns have the power to invoke instant response on the social sites, usually a few minutes after they happen. This speed of information and opinions dissemination enables the fast shaping of the mass opinion. According to one interviewee who is a political analyst,

> *"Previously, it was common to see that the public opinion would take days or even weeks before changing following a large political event. And now, through the social media, you are in a position to view the change in public sentiment in real time, as people respond to the action.*"

Such real time interaction gives the public opinion a chance to change very fast as the political events unfold.

Nevertheless, this urgency also has its problems. The rate of opinion formation in social media may result in shallow or reflexive judgments. Interviewees shared their

worry that the hurriedness characteristic of social media speech tends to evoke people to make their opinion grounded on the partial or misleading facts. A political campaign manager, who was also interviewed as another respondent, explained as follows,

> *"Individuals respond to matters in social media in such a fast manner, even before all the facts are known. It is as though everybody has to express their opinion right now, and it can cause misinformation or simply make wrong conclusions."*

This shows a critical problem with the role of social media in the formation of the opinion of the population: it is possible to engage quickly, but it is also likely to promote the support of misinformation and misconstructions of opinions.

Furthermore, the algorithm structure of social media affects the formation of the opinion of the population. Algorithms on social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are concentrated on the content which is more likely to produce a high engagement level, including posts containing a highly emotional or divisive content. Consequently, there is a greater likelihood of the user being influenced by sensationalism or extreme opinion which might bias their view about political matters. The phenomenon can be described as the so-called echo chamber effect and it strengthens already existing beliefs by showing users mostly the information that echoes their own beliefs, and it filters out information opposing their beliefs. A social media strategist who was one of the participants noted,

> *"The algorithms work so that you are entertained; therefore, it will only present you with things that you will most likely concur with. That is excellent in terms of keeping people on the platform but it also means people are not getting the entire picture as far as political issues are concerned."*

This finding highlights the way in which the design of social media can affect the masses by strengthening prejudices and restricting the way to hear various points of view.

Moreover, the content analysis of the social media posts in the given study was able to substantiate these findings by showing a very prominent trend when it comes to posts that were emotionally evoking or polarizing to a certain extent when it came to engagement and shareability when compared to posts that offered a more neutral or balanced perspective. Such tendency can imply that a highly polarized content tends to influence the opinion of most people on social media and does not always reflect the political issues complexity. As an example, in the study of the posts on a large scale political controversy, it was discovered that those posts that had words of inflammatory nature or appeals to emotions were always the ones that drew the most likes, shares and comments than those posts that provided a more balanced or factual analysis. It shows that the character of material promoted in social media can greatly influence the development of the opinion of the population, which tends to focus on emotional reactions rather than on rational thought.

Political Polarization

Political polarization has been one of the biggest causes of social media, which has further added to the divide between various ideological groups. The manner in which social media sites are configured, along with their nature of being algorithmic in nature has led to a situation whereby users will be more prone to being exposed to information that supports the beliefs they already hold, whilst excluding information that would challenge their beliefs. The combination of such selective exposure creates an effect of an echo chamber, whereby people tend to be exposed to a specific content that reinforces their own political beliefs. Consequently, social media does

not only enhance the political rhetoric but also adds to the polarization of political affiliations.

Among the main results of the research, there was the tendency of social media to make political discourse polarized by offering problems in the form of good/bad, right/bad, and there is no opportunity to argue about the issues or take a moderate position. It is based on the interviews that it has been found that the users are frequently subject to being pressured into making a firm position on political matters, which causes them to become more aggressive toward people with different opinions. As one interviewee, a university student active in political discussions, explained,

> *"When you are on social media, you have the feeling that you are obliged to choose one side. Otherwise you are sidelined or beaten up. This is one thing like there is no middle ground to opinions."*

This compulsion to either conform to one end of the political spectrum can result in the marginalization of those who have more moderate or subtle opinions which further polarize the political arena.

The content analysis of political posts in social networking sites such as twitter and facebook showed high propensity of the posts to use extreme or sensational language especially in political times of controversy. Articles with framing designed in a very partisan way or articles that criticized political adversaries were more likely to get the greatest engagement likes, shares and comments. This observation is consistent with the fact that social media rewards emotional and polarizing content that consequently shapes the perception of political issues by the users. A journalist, who was one participant, noted that,

> *"I have also observed that posts that have more extreme positions always receive greater attention. The social media has been like it needs to cause divisions since it keeps people up to date. People become involved the more heated the argument is."*

Such a trend is fuelled by the social media algorithms, which reward engagement and, thus, by emphasizing more extreme views, contributes to the polarization cycle itself.

Another finding of the interviews was the indication that social media influence the polarization of politics beyond the realms of ideological differences; the media also contributes to the enmity between the various political groups. Some of the interviewees have provided an account of how they have experienced aggressive or hostile behavior when participating in political debate on the internet. One interviewee, a social media influencer who is also politically advocating, said,

> *"Having a respectable political discussion on social media is hardly a possibility. You get insulted or attacked so fast because people think that you have a different opinion. It's exhausting."*

Such culture of enmity, which is enhanced by the anonymity and the distance offered by internet interaction, tends to discourage civil discussion and even deepen political divisions. Social media has often become the source of political fighting instead of creating a healthy discussion.

In addition, the researchers concluded that political polarization in the social media tends to distort political realities. This is because of the continuous availability of one-sided or extreme opinions and perception of political events and issues. Such biased exposure may cause one to conclude that their perception is more common than it is, a phenomenon that is called the false consensus effect. It is the point one interviewee, and a professor of political science, pointed out, saying,

> *"Individuals get locked into these echo chambers where they end up being exposed to opinions that reflect their views. It gives this perception that everybody thinks just like them, but that is not exactly the case. It complicates even further intermingling or accommodation between political groupings."*

The sense that everyone agrees with them in their own political camp breeds a culture in which people feel right in rejecting or demonizing opposing ideas, further polarizing them further.

Lack of accountability of misinformation is another important issue that leads to the polarization of issues related to politics through social media. The research found that fake or deceptive political information tends to go viral on social media-especially one that is consistent with what the users already believe. They often apply this misinformation to demonise political opposition or reduce complex issues to simplistic, which leads to further polarization of political discourse. As a player, one political campaign consultant remarked,

> *"Misinformation is like wildfire in a social media because it is often what people already assume to be the case. It complicates the possibility of any actual kind of debate due to the fact that people are operating in diametrically opposite sets of facts."*

The unregulated extension of misinformation not only deceives masses of people but also divides the political lines by an inflammatory attitude towards opposing groups.

Digital Activism and Mobilization.

Political polarization has been one of the key roles of social media, which has widened the disparities between various ideological groups. The mechanisms of the functioning of social media platforms, along with their algorithmic construction of the environment, have predisposed the audiences to receive information that confirms their previous assumptions and block out the opposing opinions. Such selective exposure leads to an echo chamber effect, whereby those interact with content that only reinforces their political beliefs. Consequently, the social media does not just escalate political discourses but it also helps in increasing the political divides.

Among the most important results of the analysis was the fact that the social media is one of the aspects that polarize the political discourse and make issues appear in a good/bad, right/wrong, black/white dichotomy with little space to have the subtle conversations or royalist positions. The interviews showed that users are often under pressure to choose one certain position regarding political issues, which results in the growth of hostility toward users with different opinions. As one interviewee, a university student active in political discussions, explained,

> *"On the social media, you think that you have to choose a side. Otherwise you are disregarded or become the victim. It feels like there is no space to the middle ground views."*

Such demand to fit in either side of the political spectrum has the potential to isolate people with more moderate or nuanced opinions and even more polarize the political arena.

The content analysis of political posts on social networks such as Twitter and Facebook used in the study showed that posts tended to use extreme or sensationalized language especially when there was a controversial situation in politics. The posts that put issues into very partisan terms or attacked the political opponents were more likely to receive the most engagement likes, shares, and comments. This observation conforms to the notion that social media favors emotionally oriented and polarizing information, which subsequently leaves an

impact on the way users feel about political matters. A journalist was one of the participants, and he noted,

> *"I have found that posts that have more radical opinions always receive more attention. Social media is created in such a way that it fosters segregation as it keeps the people entertained. The hotter you make the argument, the more involved people become."*

This is a process that is fueled by social media algorithms, as the media focuses on enhancing engagement, and thus the polarization cycle by making extreme views more noticeable and more prominent is reinforced.

Another observation made during the interviews is that social media has contributed to the polarization of politics beyond the ideological parameters; it also leads to the enmity among various political groups. In their interactions with politics in the online environment, some of the interviewees described how they experienced aggression or threatening behaviors on political forums. One interviewee, a social media influencer, who engages in political activism, shared the following remark,

> *"You can hardly discuss politics respectfully on the social media. People are way too fast to insult or to attack you just because you have a different opinion. It's exhausting."*

This culture of aggression, supported by the veil of anonymity and distance afforded by online communications, tends to suppress civil dialogue and deepen the political rifts. Rather than creating positive communication, social media sites are more often than not arenas of political mugging.

Moreover, the researchers established that political polarization on social media can usually distort political realities. The daily exposure to one-sided or extreme opinions builds a distorted image of political events and issues. The resulting bias of this selective exposure is that such individuals may think their opinions are more popular than they are, and this is referred to as the false consensus effect. This was pointed out by one interviewee, a professor of political science, who said,

> *"These echo chambers trap people in the sense that they only view views that resonate with them. It gives the illusion that everybody has the same way of thinking as themselves, which is not always the case. It compels trade or negotiation between varying political parties even more difficult."*

This sense of popular opinion among the individual members of the specific political party leads to a situation whereby people feel justified in disregarding or demonizing the others, which further polarizes.

One more important factor which brings about polarization in politics on social media is that there is no accountability of misinformation. The researchers found that fake or misleading political news tend to go viral on social media and especially when it fits within the already held perceptions of the social media users. This false news is also often employed to vilify political otherness or to simplify complicated matters, which adds to the further polarization of political discourse. Political campaign consultant, who is one of the participants, observed,

> *"On social media, misinformation is viral, particularly when it aligns with the story already in a person's mind. It complicates the possibility of a real debate of any sort since individuals are operating off of entirely different sets of facts."*

Not only are the masses misled by the spread of false information without any restrictions, they also divide the political lines into opposing sides by fueling hatred at the expense of the opponents.

The paper has touched on the impact of social media in political communication, perception, politicization and organization in the online activism with a view of supporting the new knowledge on the transformative role of the digital media era. The fact that this paper examines the effects of social networking sites on politics fills the knowledge gap of the literature that expects politically motivated effects of the social media as one dimensional. In contrast to other literature, which mostly focused on the positive side of the digital activism (Greijdanus et al., 2020), or the adverse effects of polarization and misinformation that social media is imposing on the political process, this paper examines both of these factors, which provide a more international picture of what exactly is happening to the political process, and with the help of social media.

Of particular importance, the literature is conceptually vague when it comes to how social media is a catalyst of political acceleration that fosters sectional and two-polar discourse. The role that social media has in political messaging has already been admitted in previous studies (Kreiss et al., 2020), but it has not received enough attention due to the fact that the process creates the situation where the political discourse is simplified, leaving no room or not much to moderate it. This work goes further than the research of over-simplification and over-valuation to show that social media actually promotes polarized perception and this was as confirmed by sample of textual contents and self-generated interviews.

It was found in the analysis that the posts, which used very polarizing party political language, achieved higher reach and interaction indicating that the social media content recommendation systems support polarization (Yarchi et al., 2021). This is in agreement with Bright et al. (2020) ideas of the echo chambers where the overwhelming majority of individuals interact with the views that positively favor them. Nonetheless, this work extends these results by illustrating the pernicious role of social media in politics by also revealing how the design of social media predetermines the impossibility of moderation and nuance. Therefore, as much as the existence of the echo chambers as earlier argued has been postulated, this paper will provide a vivid account of how the social media has contributed to the polarization of politics.

The research adds to the knowledge of sharing fake news in social media users and the effects of fake news on the political views of the individuals. The emergence of fake news and the variables that influenced the minds of the population (Carlson, 2020) are extensively studied but most of these studies have been of an exploratory nature. Such premises are used in this paper because it provides additional information on how the users encounter and experience mis information.

At the interviews, the interviewees have reported that most of them have a hard time differentiating fake news and real news bearing in mind that the former has a tendency of always having the correct political orientation with regards to politics. To support the research in progress, one can point to the study by Semeraro (2022) who is optimistic that partisanship has an impact on the scare reasoning when users are shown fake news on the Internet. However, this paper goes further and takes into consideration the fact that the velocities are rapid and the amount of information shared on the social media sites is enormous; thus, misinformation is sure to thrive. It is the opposite of traditional media who through their journalists can at least impose some controls on the spread of what, despite its part, is, fake news, to the public. This is a social media aspect that strengthens the concern of the misinformation which influences the opinion of individuals especially in the real world significantly.

The process of political polarization is not a novelty, but the application of social media as a tool of reinforcing the political polarization would become a topical issue

that works that delineate how the polarization becomes larger by providing the user with what he already holds to be true. This research supports their conclusions but also offers more insight as to how the social media is encouraging the presence of factors that encourage enmity among political parties.

According to the results of the interview, similarly, the majority of the users tend to speak about political issues that contribute even more to the confrontation rather than to the exchange of ideas. In social medial the respondent noted that, it is virtually impossible to conduct a civil political dialogue. It annoys people especially women when you are a bold person to come out of your box or raise your voice or have a different opinion about something. Little attention has been paid to this hostility within the previous literature because most of the precedents used mention the role of polarization intensity, but these are not referring to the role that social media play to drive the actual conflict of people of different political parties into reality. This research therefore indicates some semblance of polarization being not only ideological but interpersonal in the sense that users in social media are rendering social media more personal, aggressive and confrontational.

One of the major contributions made by this research is the way the social media is useful in the mobilization of political causes and the same way it creates concern in sustaining the cause of activism. It is analyzed with reference to the previous literature that described the importance of social media in terms of mass protests and social movements (Grodal et al., 2021), but disclosed the detrimental aspect of activism through the Internet. On the one hand, the structure of the unification of the activists is facilitated without the possibility of organization and communication of the mobilization beforehand, that is, the social media. The social media platform enables one to reach every person within few days, which is why it took weeks to organize protests as witnessed by one of the respondents of this research.

The problems that may hinder the likelihood of success in online activism such as slacktivism and fake news among others can also be experienced in this study. The second research area which has gained more prominence recently is lurking and clicktivism/ slacktivism which can entail such actions as clicking a key button to like a page or a photo without the corresponding offline action (Grodal et al., 2021). This question receives support on this study that vaguely indicates that, as much as social media is effective in as far as the formulation of awareness is concerned, the long term political action is ineffective. Nevertheless, this is precisely the sort of misrepresentation that leads to the difficulty in the dissemination of the misleading information since it is presented at the very top by the interviewees who represent the activist movements thus making the process of the mobilization more complicated. Therefore, since digital activism is a giant leap forward, this research paper is of the view that the flaws of the system are not to be ignored since its sustainable success must be pursued.

CONCLUSION

The whole controversial and non-conformative procedures of the initial formation of the political culture and political communications of SNS and interrelation between the two subjects, polarization or activism is revealed and highlighted in the given paper. It is indubitable that the social media has taken the most significant utility in the development of political movements, as well as to embody the dominated, and to affect the processes on a political level. Thus, the gap to be discovered within the framework of the current work is the possibility to obtain the clear picture of the social media in contemporary politics and their benefits and drawbacks. The successful variants of depolarization and amelioration of the beneficial functions of the social media in respect of the growth of the democratic and civil activities in the country and effective enlightenment agendas would be topical.

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