



Review Article

The Influence of Social Media on Public Discourse: Examining How Social Media Shape Popular Opinion

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Abstract	Manuscript Information
<p>This research takes an analytic approach to contemporary public debate by especially looking at the role of social media in people's attitudes in the present context. The study appreciates the fact that social media has gone global and that it has advanced from being just a communication tool to activism where it influences people's betters at all levels of hierarchies. And while the research also finds some positives, such as increased collaboration across borders, it also focuses on the challenges that globalization presents; particularly the issues of misinformation and disinformation, their scope, and strategies. The theoretical model of social media is a type of communications technology that enhances online communication, verifies the offered typologies of social media, and studies the content user interaction or content incorporation. The term public opinion refers to collective systems of values, attitudes, national cultures, and social contexts shaped by a set of conditions. The research study uses already existing secondary information published by various sources as Government reports, articles, and journals. The study seeks to understand the relationship that social media has with public discourse drawing attention to the former's role in enabling healthy interaction and breaking the old ways of censorship. It suggests a relationship between how often a person is exposed to a particular social media platform and their willingness to participate in constructive discourse, such engagement likely spreading to real life. The purpose of the research also analyses the role of social media in citizens' participation in civil society within the spheres of influence beyond public content and asserts that such concern is unfounded as social media is conducive to social capital and citizens' activity. The main conclusion of the study situates social networks as a key space in the prototype of any society, emphasizing their power in shaping public sentiments and other aspects of society, hence calling for an urgent need to examine the role of social networks in the context of commercial activities, the activities of the state and personal choices. When considering elements such as the validity of information, informal influencing, population differences, and the rapid spread of social networks, it nevertheless recognizes the shortcomings and counsels people to develop the vital skill of sorting information in the ever-dynamic web space. The conclusions reached in the study emphasize the importance of a more elaborate approach in managing the complex social entanglement posed by modern social networks and their place within society.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ISSN No: 2583-7397 ▪ Received: 21-08-2024 ▪ Accepted: 25-09-2024 ▪ Published: 01-12-2024 ▪ IJCRM:3(6); 2024: 112-117 ▪ ©2024, All Rights Reserved ▪ Plagiarism Checked: Yes ▪ Peer Review Process: Yes <p>How to Cite this Manuscript</p> <p>Shumpenthung Ezung, Kekhronei O Koza. The Influence of Social Media on Public Discourse: Examining How Social Media Shape Popular Opinion. International Journal of Contemporary Research in Multidisciplinary.2024; 3(6): 112-117.</p>

KEYWORDS: Social Media, Public Discourse, Digital Age, Public Opinion, Civic Engagement, Information Accuracy

1. INTRODUCTION

Social media is a concept that encompasses all internet-based systems and tools that encourage communication, sharing of information, and social networks. Social media has a multitude of functions that allow its users to post and share any material on the World Wide Web – be it a text, a video, an image or their private data. To engage in social media, a user has to access an app or software connected to the internet which can either be a computer, smartphone, or tablet. The paper examines the effect of social media on the behavior of the youth. Social media has undoubtedly infiltrated every aspect of our lives and it is ‘hard’ to live without it nowadays (Ezung & Baksh, 2023). People appreciate the presence of social media platforms in the current world as they play a major role in connecting people with ease within a very short period (Wahyoedi, Suherlan, Rijal, Azzaakiyyah, & Ausat, 2023). As many social media platforms, people, who are more than defined the interactive web, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok (Tarigan, Harahap, Sari, Sakinah, & Ausat, 2023) transformed communication, the sharing of information, and even the expression of individual opinions.

Social media significantly contributed to the changed dynamics in communication in the world today as it gave every person a larger world stage to speak out their mind without constraint (Maitri *et al.*, 2023). Collectively, these transformations have created a new environment for social interaction that has revolutionized the shaping of public opinion and changed the way these changes can be made in particular spheres, namely, in the formation of public opinion. The rapidity and simplicity of the interaction of social media users made it possible for Ideas and Information to travel easily beyond national and cultural barriers. This creates a different situation where discussions, despite being on sensitive issues such as social, political as well as economic issues, can take place within any level of society or geographic location and at any time. The inventive potential of social media, allows it to build a global community where users can come together, engage in discussions, and debates, and provide their inputs on different issues at hand (Ausat *et al.*, 2023). It presents a platform not only for the development of new ideas but for the integration of the ideas into the existing ones. Thus, in this case, social media cannot be perceived only as a means of communication, as it starts to impact meaningfully public attitudes, which in turn can influence and even change the course of external political, economic, or social developments.

The influence of social networks on the formation of public opinion and public discourses is an emerging trend that is actually on the rise. The emergence of this shift is becoming more and more prominent as the more advanced and sophisticated social media platforms quicken the pace of distribution of information regarding products, brands, services, and investment opportunities. Social media users’ remarks, ratings, and recommendations can affect consumers’ assessment and response to a particular object or service, and thus shift the attitudes and beliefs correlated with it. But social media’s impact on the economy extends beyond its ability to sway consumer behaviour. Using social media to create and promote advertising

campaigns has a significant impact on how consumers make purchases (jamil, *et al.*, 2022). Businesses may create campaigns that grab attention, elicit strong feelings, and give their target audience pertinent information by using the creative and interactive elements of social media (Dwivedi, *et al.*, 2021). Social media serves as a medium for communication as well as a strategic platform where companies, consumers, and marketers engage, impact one another, and ultimately determine the discourse and trends in public opinion. It’s crucial to acknowledge that social media does not always have a favorable impact. In this context, it’s critical to acknowledge that not all information that is extensively shared on social media is reliable or accurate. Erroneous or even deceptive information can spread quickly across the internet and negatively impact how much customers value a good or service (Fârte & Obadă, 2021).

Within the current discourse, it is imperative to acknowledge the vital relevance and potential influence of research on the function of social media in influencing public opinion. In a time when social media has taken center stage as the primary platform for exchanging ideas, knowledge, and perspectives, it is critical to track and examine how these platforms affect public opinion, consumer behavior, and, ultimately, the making of economic decisions. Further research should be done on the impact of social media on consumer behavior, mindsets, and economic decision-making processes. In this regard, a more thorough investigation will reveal the intricate and frequently indirect processes by which ideas, attitudes, and trends shared on social media progressively permeate people’s perceptions and viewpoints, impacting their choices and behaviors. We can gain a better grasp of these mechanisms and how social media may influence public dynamics and society at large in more profound ways through them. By doing this, it will be easier to adjust laws, corporate plans, and social policies to the new realities supported by social media’s increasing power.

Moreover, people gravitate toward others who share their ideas. The growth of extensive social networks has drastically altered the way that people consume and disseminate information (Lewis, Gonzalez, & Kaufman, 2012) (Onnela & Reed-Tsochas, 2010). News organizations may now disseminate content more quickly, broadly, and efficiently thanks to their integration with active online social networks (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). Moreover, social network users can now produce and share material, selectively spread information, and express their ideas in addition to being passive information consumers (Kleinberg, 2013). These modifications have significantly impacted public conversation and opinion formation: People are more likely to follow others who share their opinions and find evidence to support their beliefs, which reinforces underlying socio-cognitive biases (Quattrociocchi, Conte, & Lodi, 2011). Because recommendation algorithms foretell and present the material that people are most likely to consume, they exacerbate these biases even more (Lazer, 2015). Network and data scientists have also been interested in the role of opinion-based confirmation bias in the spread of rumors and fake news, and several empirical research concentrates on the content consumption patterns of social network users in the age of disinformation. The

propagation of rumors and the division of their adherents can both be strengthened by echo chamber effects (Fu & Wang, 2008) (Webster & Ksiazek, 2012).

Examining how the media and public debate interact is the aim. It offers a practical investigation of how social media shapes public opinion and influences public debate.

2. METHODOLOGY

In this investigation, the author applies a broad-spectrum approach to literature, specifically secondary sources like academic books, scientific journals, and relevant articles. The work provides a systematic review of available literature in order to evaluate and summarize the findings of others regarding the role of social media on public discourse and public opinion formation. The choice of sources is influenced by the understanding of, the reliability of, and the relevance of the sources concerning the subject matter. A thematic analysis approach allows for the identification of patterns, trends, and key issues within the examined literature. The research technique emphasizes the need for a wide range of perspectives and expert opinions to provide an in-depth analysis of the subject matter. It is also observed that the chosen works have constraints such as biases and changing theories over periods. Lastly, the study contributes to the existing knowledge by integrating and analysing data from several secondary sources.

3. Theoretical Framework and Public Opinion

Social media, a somewhat recent concept in the worlds of Marketing and Communication, refers to those online activities and forums where people can communicate, share, and connect through various forms of activities (Obar & Wildman, Social Media Definition and the Governance Challenge: An Introduction to the Special Issue, 2015). It allows them to create, upload, and share written, pictorial, audible, and visual content to many people. The chief aim of social networking services is to bring people together and help them communicate and share information (Yohanna, 2020). The flow of information between users on their social media platforms is not one-way. There is exchange and users can like, comment, share or even respond to what other users are sharing. Overall, this creates a more open and interactive environment than the passive absorption of content characteristic of traditional forms of media. Moreover, social sites allow individuals to build interconnections with other users as close as friends, relatives, work-mates, and complete individuals from all over the world (Appel, Grewal, Hadi, & Stephen, 2020).

- To this end, different economies of communication have emerged, each presenting distinctive features and goals.
- Etc. are few of the many examples of social networking sites which are also called as 'social media' –
- Facebook: This is one of the most common social networking sites where one can set up their profiles and update the status, pictures and videos into the page as well as interact with other members in the page via comments, and likes.

- Twitter: It is a social networking site on which posting short messages, known as "tweets," are allowed within limited character' span. Tweets can also be followed, replied to or retweeted along with other accounts.
- Instagram: The main purpose of this application is to enable the sharing of images and videos. Also, users include hashtags, filters, and other graphics to help search and share content that is in a particular theme.
- LinkedIn: a website where users can build a professional network, share their career history, and search for, job vacancies with the major focus being work-related.
- TikTok: A social network made up of short clips where users capture and upload their creative self, most times, set to music or to a theme.
- YouTube: it's a video hosting site mainly, but also contains social interactive functions such as commenting, subscribing, and uploading videos to other users.

The influence of social media lies in the way individuals consume content, interact, and connect in cyberspace. However, one should remember that there are also disadvantages of social media, such as privacy concerns, spread of disinformation, or unhealthy obsession with the internet.

4. Public Opinion

An inherent trait of every society is the collection of views of individuals on a particular issue, event, or personality that is important to the society, and this is what is known as public opinion (Moussaïd, Kämmer, Analytis, & Neth, 2013). It's the process where members of society interact and share their views, ideas, and experiences that will give rise to public opinion (Mallinson & Hatemi, 2018). Most of the issues addressed by public opinion may be social, political, cultural, and more broadly all aspects of human life. In today's societies, public opinion is indispensable in the democratic process, and all decision-making processes, in general. Public opinion is one of the factors that is often paid attention to by states, public institutions, non-state actors, and even commercial agencies when formulating strategies to introduce laws, to design products or services, or to assess reactions to certain undertakings (Gadzali, Harahap, Tarigan, Nasution, & Ausat, 2023).

- Since it can motivate citizens to partake in social movements, support policies, or make political choices, public opinion mirrors the social/political structure of society.
- Information: People's knowledge and information have a significant impact on how the public forms opinions. More often than not, factual, credible, and all-rounded information tends to leave a good impression.
- Media: Public opinion is highly impacted by the media, more so the print and social media. The two also influence the perceptions of the audiences towards an issue depending on the type of plots used, how it has been packaged and the extent of coverage.
- Social Interaction: Engagement in social interactions with family members, colleagues, or friends may also influence

the public. Often, people absorb and get swayed by the thoughts of those around them.

- **Education and Background:** A person's stance concerning a topic is also affected by her or his upbringing, educational level, and personal history.
- **Personal Experience:** There are circumstances when even personal experiences regarding a particular issue may go a long way in shaping someone's views.
- **Social and Political Context:** The way people think and react to issues is sometimes determined by the social and political context of the time such as elections, significant events, and changes in policies.
- **Emotions and Values:** Feelings and principles of individuals can also influence their attitude about certain issues. For instance, knowledge is impacted in an individual by factors such as amusement, angst or anger.

Public cognition may be considered as all the variables that are liable to change with the period. Some people's views and understanding of the environment and its constituents may be volatile and open to the forgoing aspects. Thus, as a result, research in social, political, and economic fields is incomplete without taking into consideration the aspect of public opinion.

5. Social Media and Public Discourse

Through "meetings, debates, dialogues, and discussions," people can freely communicate ideas in a public arena that is facilitated by social media (Cogburn & Espinoza-Vasquez, 2011) (CHADWICK, 2008) (Habermas, 1991). Individual citizens can now readily access and acquire information on a variety of political and social topics through social media, making them more knowledgeable and logical (Dahlberg, *The Internet and Democratic Discourse: Exploring The Prospects of Online Deliberative Forums Extending the Public Sphere*, 2001). Furthermore, social media and computer networking provide for "cheap, decentralized, two-way communication" and allow users to engage virtually in forums, electronic message boards, online chat rooms, and other similar platforms. Consequently, social media offers a special online forum where people may have free and transparent discussions on shared issues. Participants present and refute arguments and claims, never stopping until they are happy that the strongest arguments have been made and well supported. In response to stronger arguments, participants reflexively adjust their pre-discursive perspectives to better comprehend their interlocutors.

Although social media is arguably the channel where censorship is most challenging to implement, the government nonetheless closely controls the content of mainstream media, including newspapers, TV, and even the Internet. For example, thousands of users of social networking sites can rapidly access and share political criticism on these platforms with their friends and followers. Additionally, posts can be rapidly shared and reshared on social networking sites, reaching a sizable audience in a matter of seconds. Due to the ease of filtering and the speed at which information spreads, social media provides a unique forum for regular people to express their thoughts and problems (Yang, 2010). For instance, a woman bemoaned in a message

shared among her social media friends about her homes being seized by the local government for the purpose of creating an industrial park, all the while receiving insufficient payment. After being shared in the woman's media groups, the message swiftly and extensively circulated across friends' social media networks.

According to the theory of cyberspace's involvement in public discourse, those who use social media more frequently would be exposed to a wider range of online topics and information, increasing their likelihood of participating in these online public debates and discussions. We contend that social media's beneficial effects can permeate offline spaces and advance public conversation in general. In particular, if people actively participate in online conversations about certain topics on social media, it is only natural for them to take these talks to their networks of friends, acquaintances, coworkers, and classmates and continue the conversation or argument with them. Consequently, social media use ought to have a favourable relationship with both online and overall public discourse.

6. Social Media and Civic Engagement

Social media not only encourages public conversation, but it also can engage people in civic engagement. The term "civic engagement" describes individual and group efforts aimed at recognizing and resolving public interest concerns. There are various ways to engage in civic life, such as volunteering on an individual basis, joining organizations, or casting a ballot (Ehrlich, 2000) (Obar, Zube, & Lampe, *Advocacy 2.0: An Analysis of How Advocacy Groups in the United States Perceive and Use Social Media as Tools for Facilitating Civic Engagement and Collective Action*, 2012). It is debatable how information and communication technology fit into civic engagement. Putnam (1996) asserts that the United States' dwindling civic engagement is caused by television consumption. Three further factors are said to deter people from participating in civic affairs (Kraut, et al., 1998) (Putnam, 2000). First, people are probably less interested in civic issues when they spend the majority of their internet time shopping and entertaining. Second, governmental, and corporate monitoring and censorship may deter people from engaging in public affairs. Lastly, online communication does not support healthy civic engagement because it is merely a poor substitute for conventional face-to-face conversation. However, several studies suggest that the Internet—especially social media—promotes civic involvement, defying the popular wisdom that it discourages civic participation. People can maintain offline interactions and stay in touch across geographic borders by using online communication (Helliwell & Putnam, 2004).

Research also demonstrates that volunteering for charities is positively impacted by internet usage. Social capital may be the mechanism underlying the favorable association between civic involvement and social media. The definition of social capital is "the totality of the actual or potential resources associated with having a long-lasting network of mutually recognized or acquaintance relationships" (Bourdieu, 1986). People who engage in virtual participation through electronic message

boards, online chat rooms, and similar platforms bond around common issues, passions, beliefs, and values and develop a feeling of community. These social media sites maintain interpersonal relationships comparatively cheaply and simply by connecting strangers (Davis, Baumgartner, Francia, & Morris, 2008). As a result, online communities are created to offer unofficial venues for association and are crucial in displacing the deteriorated public realm of contemporary cities. Research indicates that social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter encourage civic participation. Events and activities that were limited to a certain location can now be held anywhere thanks to social media. In China today, it is easy to find examples of social media promoting social activities and preserving social bonds. Traditionally, it took a lot of work and inefficiency for someone to call each person to send out the invitation and finally get a confirmation of presence. These days, though, they may enjoy a class reunion carnival almost every day thanks to social media's group chat feature. Some studies claim that because of social media, anyone can now "throw" a reunion suggestion in a group chat, which usually sparks a contentious debate and leads to a get-together anywhere. Participating in volunteer work and humanitarian endeavors is now a lot simpler thanks to social media. These few observations clearly show how social media may get people involved in civic activities including networking gatherings, interest-based groups, and volunteer and philanthropic endeavors.

7. CONCLUSION & LIMITATIONS

It may be inferred that social media plays a major role in influencing public opinion and shaping popular opinion in the digital age, which is marked by the prominence of social media. Social media allows people to communicate with each other, share information, and take part in conversations that help to create society's opinions on a variety of topics. The discussion and debate that occurs on these platforms shape public opinion, and the data and material disseminated by social media can affect the opinions and financial choices of people, businesses, and even governments. There are numerous significant ramifications from social media's significant influence on public opinion formation and shaping public opinion. First and foremost, businesses and brands need to comprehend how social media shapes brand perception and influences customer buying behaviour. Second, governments must take social media into account when developing social and economic policies and raising the digital literacy of the people. Thirdly, in order to prevent the propagation of inaccurate and biased information, people must acquire key skills in information sorting on social media. Furthermore, there are certain flaws in this research. Thus, the research has the following limitations. First off, there is a lack of information accuracy: Social media posts frequently contain information that has not been fully checked, which might create erroneous or misleading impressions. The second type of impact is non-representative influence: decisions and opinions expressed on social media are not always indicative of society at large. Third, effects related to age and demographics: Depending on factors like age, background, and other demographic

circumstances, social media may have different effects on shaping public opinion. Fourth, the study neglected to thoroughly examine other various elements, that could also have an impact on shaping public opinion. Lastly, the quick evolution of social media: The social media ecosystem is still changing quickly, so if new platforms and user behavior trends emerge, the research findings can become less applicable. People can use and assess information more wisely in an increasingly complicated digital world if they are aware of the implications and recommendations drawn from studies on the influence of social media on public discourse in examining how social media shape's popular opinion.

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