

# ***The Impact of Social Media on Democratic Politics in the Western Background***

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**Abstract:** The advent of social media has revolutionized the landscape of Western politics, presenting both opportunities and challenges. This paper explores the profound impact of social media on political engagement and discourse, analyzing its effects through the lens of social psychology, media theories, and political science. This paper recognizes that while social media platforms have democratized access to political dialogue and fostered cross-cultural exchange, they have also exacerbated polarization and disseminated misinformation. Furthermore, this paper recognizes that through the formation of insular online communities and the proliferation of demagoguery, social media has intensified societal divisions and eroded trust in democratic institutions. Moreover, the anonymity of social media has facilitated the spread of fake news, undermining the integrity of public discourse. This paper underscores the urgent need for effective regulation and critical media literacy initiatives to mitigate the negative consequences of social media on Western politics and promote informed civic engagement.

**Keywords:** social media, politics, democracy, social psychology, rhetoric

## **1. Introduction**

In recent years, the utilization of social media platforms such as Twitter (now known as X), Facebook, Instagram, and even YouTube has surged among Western politicians and governments, as they recognize the immense potential of these platforms as potent tools for propaganda and political engagement. Concurrently, these social media channels have evolved into vibrant forums where ordinary citizens engage in discussions about politics, leading to a proliferation of political discourse across these platforms. Consequently, the ascendancy of social media in the realm of politics has exerted a significant influence, reshaped the landscape of Western democracies, and altered the political and social psychology of key stakeholders, including politicians and the general public. This essay will explain the significant impact that social media and the social psychology associated with it has had on Western politics, primarily through the presentation of cases and the analysis of social psychological theories, media theories, and political science theories of the cases.

## **2. Positive affection**

Social media is making some positive differences to the politics.

Social media has ushered in a multitude of pathways for political engagement, significantly amplifying public scrutiny of political affairs. “Social media is an effective platform that provides democratic values to

the public and is also effective for political discussion for political disclosures.” [1] At the heart of this transformative impact lies the technological prowess inherent in social media platforms. Their hallmark traits, namely the immediacy of information dissemination and the inclusive accessibility they afford, render civic participation and information exchange more attainable than ever before. Particularly within Western-style democracies, the infusion of social media injects a new dimension of openness into policymaking processes and governmental operations. These democracies, proud of their universal values and steadfast pursuit of freedom, find in social media a potent ally that mirrors and amplifies these principles.

By democratizing access to political discourse, social media broadens the audience for political content, circumventing the constraints imposed by the formal tone and lengthy formats characteristic of traditional media outlets. Instead, individuals can now engage with political news and information through succinct videos and concise comments, thus lowering the barriers to entry for political engagement considerably. Earlier studies have shown that “the data suggest that the Facebook social message increased turnout directly by about 60,000 voters and indirectly through social contagion by another 280,000 voters, for a total of 340,000 additional votes.” [2] It goes without saying that the use of social media in politics has expanded popular participation and made the broader meaning of democracy seem more real. Consequently, as more individuals become active participants in political dialogue, the dynamics of the herd effect and interpersonal attraction are further reinforced among like-minded individuals rallying around common causes.

The insights of literary critic Kenneth Burke illuminate this phenomenon, as he discerns how political rhetoric cultivates a sense of identification among individuals, fostering the formation of closely-knit groups united by shared identities. “You persuade a [person] only insofar as you can talk [their] language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with [theirs].” [3] It is with these elements that social media spreads its message, and this “persuasion” will in turn bring many people into a group through the herd effect. In essence, social media serves as a catalyst for the convergence of disparate voices into cohesive communities, amplifying their collective impact on the political landscape.

Furthermore, social media provides a platform for individuals to communicate and interact with people from different cultures, backgrounds and perspectives across geographical and social boundaries. This cross-border political dialogue and exchange helps to reduce political polarization and social divides and promotes social integration and consensus formation. Through social media, individuals can participate in diverse political discussions, listen to the voices of different groups, and find common understandings and solutions. This trend has also made it possible for the voices of some marginalized groups to be heard, “social media improves access for everyone, especially individuals who may have difficulty accessing health information by traditional means, such as younger people, racial and ethnic populations and lower socioeconomic groups. It has also been shown to be effective in changing health behavior,” [4] said George, who research about the role of social media usage and health literacy among African American women. And the political opposition to the pure establishment under the influence of the psychology of seeking differences has, to a certain extent, also criticized elitism in the full sense of the word, making it possible for more people to take part in political discussions and decision-making.

In summary, the positive impact of social media on politics comes from the interplay between its technological features of openness and timeliness and the people's herd and divergent mentality. This has led to a trend in Western politics towards an era of greater openness of information, greater accommodation of the interests of marginalized groups and greater transparency of scrutiny.

### 3. Negative affection

Social media is also making some negative differences to the politics.

The advent of social media has undoubtedly reshaped the political landscape, yet its ramifications have not all been positive. Instead, it has catalyzed a discernible decline in the fairness and authenticity of political discourse. Social media's proliferation has fostered a fragmentation of political consensus, giving rise to heightened discord and conflict among diverse audience factions. This phenomenon stems from the innate capacity of social media to engender the formation of distinct groups within the realm of political information dissemination.

As elucidated earlier, social media facilitates the creation of new group identities, concurrently with the establishment of these digital communities. This process of identification formation mirrors the dynamics of the herd effect, whereby individuals seek validation and affirmation by aligning with like-minded peers. The echo chamber effect also dramatically affects this process. Research has proven that people are more inclined to believe in ideas and groups that agree with their own views. [4] When people of the same viewpoint hold the same viewpoint and this consensus grows, the bonds in the group become stronger. Consequently, these factions coalesce into insular in-groups, predisposed to defending their shared ideologies or interests at the expense of engaging with alternative viewpoints. This insularity often leads to confrontational behavior, as in-groups perceive out-groups with differing perspectives as threats to their own agendas.

Moreover, social media's transcendence of temporal and spatial constraints amplifies these tendencies. It facilitates swift connections among individuals sharing similar viewpoints, thereby accelerating the dissemination of information and expanding the reach of group affiliations. The resultant proliferation of interconnected groups reinforces the persuasive power of prevailing sentiments within larger communities, perpetuating a cycle of polarization and antagonism. Much of this persuasion comes from the increase in the population of these groups. A broad consensus on a particular idea can inspire a feeling of subordination.

Inevitably, this trend fosters a climate of escalating conflicts, as groups vie vehemently to uphold their respective positions. "The 'social influence effect' diminishes the diversity of the crowd without improvements of its collective error." [5] This adds to the solidification of the two groups of people. Concurrently, the desire to assert distinctiveness intensifies, leading to a polarization of perspectives and a deepening societal divide. On the other hand, the falsity of personal identity on social media has led to a lack of accountability systems, allowing for person-to-person attacks to be carried out in extreme ways. Thus, while social media has democratized access to political discourse, its unchecked expansion has inadvertently exacerbated the fragmentation of public opinion and engendered a climate of heightened hostility and discord.

The deleterious influence of social media on politics also emanates from the custodians of information. Within the capitalist framework of Western political systems, where two- or multi-party structures predominate, capitalists and their allied politicians leverage extensive propaganda to cultivate electoral advantages. This milieu is typified by a propensity for exaggeration, demagoguery, and the proliferation of misinformation.

Politicians' political campaigns on social media often unfold through sophisticated rhetoric. These rhetoric often tend to exaggerate to create a fervor for a single value among the masses. The surge of demagoguery and incitement has been exacerbated by the proliferation of social media platforms. Unlike in the past, where such tactics were confined to campaign events or traditional media outlets, today's digital landscape enables the rapid dissemination of false narratives to the masses. Consequently, there has been a noticeable escalation in groupthink, as individuals are increasingly swayed by misleading information. Former U.S. President Donald Trump's encouragement for supporters to storm Capitol Hill stands as a glaring illustration of this phenomenon. This manipulation

of public sentiment is further compounded by the Milgram Effect, wherein individuals exhibit a propensity to blindly obey authority figures. [6] It is even in the face of outrageous directives. Extremist ideologies like populism and ultranationalism are deliberately exploited by politicians and media outlets, perpetuating division within society. Through selective reporting and hyperbolic rhetoric on social platforms, these actors not only fuel the proliferation of radical beliefs but also consolidate their own power at the expense of democratic principles and societal cohesion.

The anonymity afforded by social media, coupled with the challenge of ensuring accountability, has precipitated an alarming proliferation of misinformation. This phenomenon, commonly referred to as fake news, has significant ramifications, particularly within the realm of public politics. When false narratives gain traction on a large scale, they sow seeds of confusion and discord among the populace. Misinformation has the insidious capacity to mislead the public, providing a fertile ground for politicians to exploit sentiments and vilify adversaries for personal gain. Consequently, this exacerbates societal fissures and erodes trust in authoritative figures at an alarming rate.

#### 4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the integration of social media into Western politics marks a pivotal shift towards enhanced engagement and communication. Its democratizing influence has significantly broadened access to political information and fostered interconnectedness among diverse communities. Yet, alongside these strides, social media has given rise to concerning trends: the fracturing of public opinion, the proliferation of misinformation, and the amplification of divisive narratives. The unchecked dissemination of falsehoods and the exploitation of digital platforms for political advantage have eroded the integrity of political discourse and eroded trust in institutions. Moving forward, it's imperative to confront these challenges head-on and harness social media's potential for positive change while curbing its adverse effects. Through the promotion of transparency, accountability, and responsible engagement, we can steer towards a more inclusive and constructive political sphere, where voices resonate and democratic principles thrive.

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