



The Impact of Social Media on Public Opinion and Social Movements: A Review of the Literature on Social Media's Role in Shaping Public Opinion, Political Engagement, and Electoral Outcomes

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ABSTRACT

Over the past two decades, social media platforms have transformed how individuals communicate, organize, and participate in public life. This review synthesizes contemporary literature examining social media's influence on public opinion, political engagement, and electoral outcomes. Drawing from global research across communication studies, sociology, and political science, it explores how digital platforms facilitate opinion formation, mobilization, and collective action while simultaneously intensifying polarization and misinformation. Classic frameworks such as agenda-setting, framing, and the spiral of silence are revisited within the context of algorithmic curation, virality, and networked publics. Empirical findings suggest that social media both democratizes information dissemination and amplifies ideological divides, challenging deliberative democratic ideals. The review highlights how social media fuels social movements, reshapes campaign communication through microtargeting, and influences electoral behavior. Yet, methodological challenges—data inaccessibility, algorithmic opacity, and cross-cultural variability limit causal inference. The paper identifies emerging hybrid frameworks that merge network analysis with theories of affective publics and digital populism. Future research should emphasize longitudinal, comparative, and interdisciplinary designs integrating computational methods with normative media theory. Overall, this review underscores the dual nature of social media as both an enabler of participatory democracy and a conduit for manipulation and disinformation, calling for greater transparency, regulation, and civic education to sustain an ethical digital public sphere.

Keywords: Social media, public opinion, political engagement, digital activism, electoral outcomes and misinformation.

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Introduction

Over the past two decades, social media has revolutionized global communication, reshaping how people create, share, and engage with information. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter/X, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp have evolved from personal networking tools into major spaces for political discourse, activism, and public opinion formation (See Figure 1). This shift has blurred traditional boundaries between journalism, politics, and citizen participation, giving rise to a digital public sphere where information circulates rapidly and interactively [1]. The participatory structure of social media has democratized communication, enabling ordinary users to influence political conversations once dominated by elites. However, the same openness that fosters civic engagement also facilitates the viral spread of misinformation, manipulation, and hate speech, creating complex challenges for democratic stability and public trust [2]

Scholarly inquiry into social media's societal and political effects has expanded significantly, exploring its role in shaping public opinion, political mobilization, and collective behavior. Empirical studies reveal that the architecture of social platforms driven by engagement-based algorithms shapes users' exposure to information and viewpoints, influencing perception and opinion dynamics [3]. Algorithmic personalization often reinforces confirmation biases, leading to the formation of “echo chambers” and “filter bubbles” that fragment public discourse [4]. Despite these concerns, social media also provides marginalized groups with powerful tools to amplify their voices and challenge traditional gatekeepers. The interplay between empowerment and distortion defines the ongoing academic debate: does social media enhance democratic participation or undermine it through polarization and disinformation [5]. Globally, social media's influence on political engagement and activism has become increasingly visible.

From the Arab Spring uprisings to the #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo movements, digital networks have demonstrated the capacity to mobilize individuals, foster solidarity, and challenge authoritarian power structures [6]. In electoral politics, social media has transformed campaign strategies through microtargeting, political advertising, and data-driven persuasion. Research on the 2016 and 2020 U.S. presidential elections, the Brexit referendum, and elections in India and Brazil highlights how digital platforms can sway public perception and voting behavior [7]. Yet, these same tools have been exploited for disinformation campaigns and foreign interference, raising serious concerns about electoral integrity [8]. As a result, social media occupies an ambiguous space simultaneously serving as a tool for democratization and a channel for manipulation.

Despite extensive research, the literature remains divided on the magnitude and nature of social media's political impact. While some scholars argue that digital communication enhances political participation by lowering barriers to entry and fostering deliberation, others emphasize its contribution to fragmentation, emotional polarization, and information overload [9]. Methodological challenges also persist: data access restrictions, platform opacity, and cultural variability complicate the generalization of findings. Moreover, comparative studies indicate that social media's political effects vary widely across contexts, strengthening civic activism in liberal democracies but serving as a tool for surveillance or propaganda in authoritarian regimes [10]. Consequently, understanding social media's evolving role in shaping public life requires interdisciplinary frameworks combining media theory, sociology, data analytics, and political science.

The purpose of this review is to synthesize contemporary scholarship on the relationship between social media, public opinion, and political engagement, with an emphasis on its implications for democracy and governance. It seeks to provide a balanced and integrative overview of existing research, highlighting both the empowering and destabilizing potentials of digital communication. The review will explore how social media facilitates opinion formation, mobilization, and electoral behavior while examining challenges such as algorithmic bias, disinformation, and participation inequalities. It also aims to identify theoretical and methodological gaps within the current body of knowledge, encouraging interdisciplinary dialogue and innovation. Ultimately, this work aspires to contribute to a nuanced understanding of social media's dual role as a catalyst for civic engagement and a vector of democratic risk and to guide future policy and scholarly efforts toward building a more transparent, ethical, and inclusive digital public sphere.

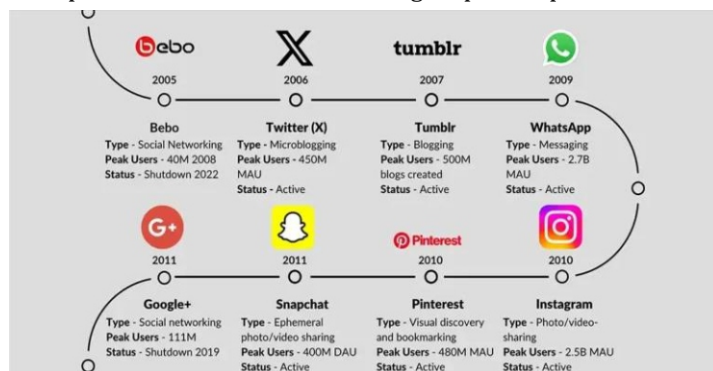


Figure 1. The evolution of connection. It depicts the evolution of connections within the context of social interaction and communication technologies. This progression underscores the pivotal role of social media in reshaping public opinion, political participation, and collective action.
Source: [11]

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Understanding how social media shapes public opinion, political engagement, and electoral behavior requires a strong theoretical foundation. Traditional communication theories continue to inform this evolving field, while newer models capture the complexities of networked interactions and algorithmic mediation [12]. Social media's influence on public opinion draws from both classical and emerging communication theories. Table 1 summarises these frameworks, illustrating how traditional models like agenda-setting and framing intersect with newer digital concepts such as the hybrid media system and affective publics. Together, they provide a multidimensional lens for understanding how online networks shape perception, engagement, and collective behavior.

Theories of Media Influence

The Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs and Shaw, 1972)

This theory posits that media determine which issues are perceived as important by controlling visibility and salience. On social media, agenda-setting is decentralized: influencers, users, and algorithms collectively shape what trends [13]. Studies reveal that viral hashtags and trending topics can influence public priorities and policy discussions, amplifying issues such as climate change or racial justice [14].

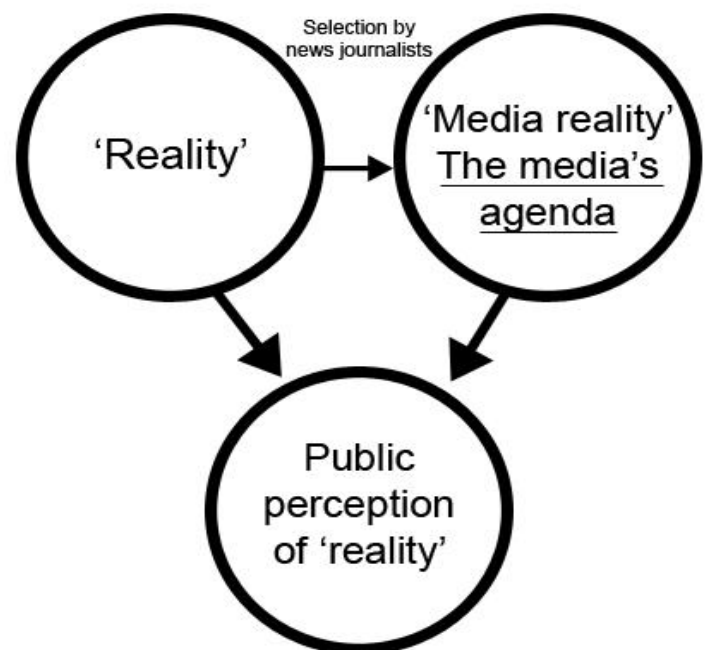


Figure 2. Agenda setting theory. This figure illustrates the agenda setting Theory, which explains how media influences the public agenda by determining the salience of issues and shaping the priorities of public discourse.
Source: [15]

The Framing Theory

Framing Theory explains how media construct meaning by emphasizing specific angles or moral dimensions of issues [16]. On platforms like Twitter and TikTok, framing occurs through memes, images, and emotional narratives that define political identity and polarization [17]. The viral circulation of emotionally charged frames often enhances engagement but can oversimplify complex issues.

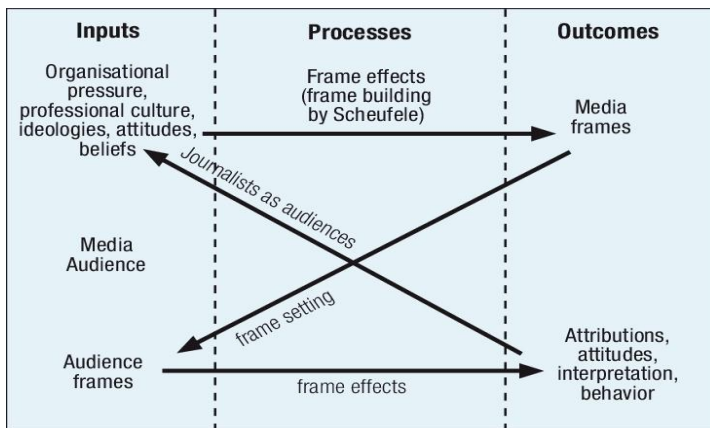


Figure 3: Process model of framing. This figure presents the process model of framing, outlining how information is constructed and interpreted to influence audience perceptions and attitudes.

Source: [18]

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT)

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) conceptualizes audiences as active participants who purposefully engage with media to satisfy cognitive, social, or affective needs [19]. In the digital era, social media platforms serve as interactive spaces where users seek political information, foster a sense of community, and express personal or collective identities [20]. UGT provides a useful framework for understanding the high levels of political engagement among youth, which are often characterized by personalized and expressive participation rather than traditional institutional involvement.

As illustrated in Figure 4, the Uses and Gratification Model of Interactive Information Retrieval Systems [21] extends this theoretical perspective by emphasizing the reciprocal relationship between users and digital platforms, highlighting how user motivations, system interactivity, and feedback mechanisms collectively shape media use and gratification outcomes.

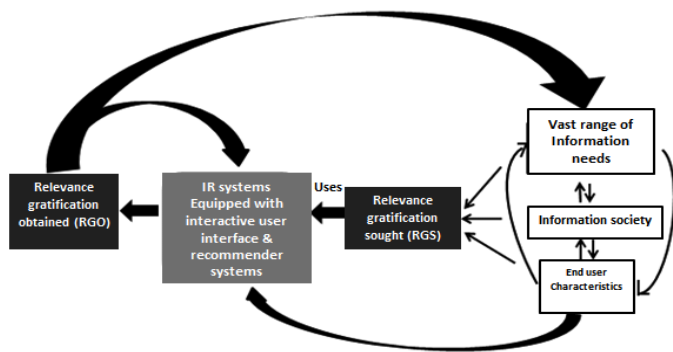


Figure 4: The uses and gratification model of interactive information retrieval systems. This figure illustrates the uses and gratification model of interactive information retrieval systems, showing how user motivations, system interactivity, and feedback processes interact to influence information-seeking behavior and satisfaction.

Source: [21]

The Spiral of Silence Theory (Noelle-Neumann, 1974)

The Spiral of Silence Theory posits that individuals may withhold dissenting opinions due to fear of social isolation [22]. In online environments, this dynamic often appears as self-censorship within polarized networks and the emergence of algorithmic “filter bubbles” that amplify dominant perspectives [23]. While some scholars contend that online anonymity can lessen this effect, others emphasize that social norms and digital sanctions continue to shape public discourse. Figure 5 illustrates this process, depicting how perceived majority opinion influences individuals' willingness to express views in both offline and digital contexts.

Downward Spiral Of Silence



Figure 5: The spiral of silence theory. This figure illustrates the spiral of silence theory, demonstrating how fear of social isolation leads individuals to suppress dissenting opinions, thereby reinforcing dominant viewpoints within social and digital environments.

Source: [24, 25]

Conceptualizing Public Opinion and Social Movements in the Digital Era

The Networked Public Sphere: It reframes public discourse as decentralized and participatory. Digital media enable horizontal communication, empowering citizens to challenge institutional narratives. Empirical research shows that social platforms foster “networked counterpublics,” where marginalized groups can mobilize visibility and solidarity [26].

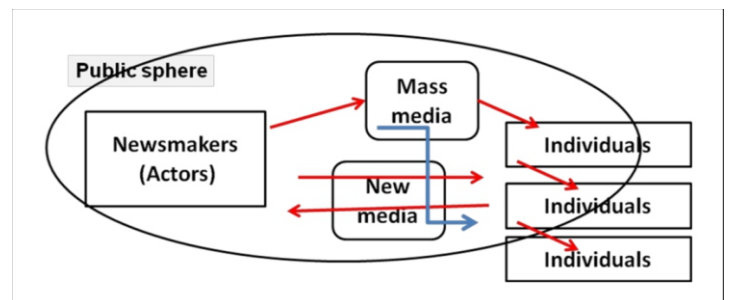


Figure 6: Public sphere communication model. It presents the public sphere communication model, highlighting the dynamic interaction between media, citizens, and institutions in shaping public discourse and democratic participation.

Source: [27]

Hybrid Media System Theory: It explains how digital and traditional media co-evolve. Political communication now involves hybrid interactions between journalists, influencers, and citizens, where news flows across multiple media ecosystems [29]. Politicians leverage hybrid strategies combining mass broadcasting with microtargeted engagement to manage public attention and control narratives.

Connective Action Framework (Bennett and Segerber: It captures the shift from hierarchical organization to individualized mobilization. Movements like #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter exemplify “connective” rather than “collective” action mobilizing through personalized sharing rather than centralized leadership [30]. These dynamics democratize participation but also fragment sustained organization.

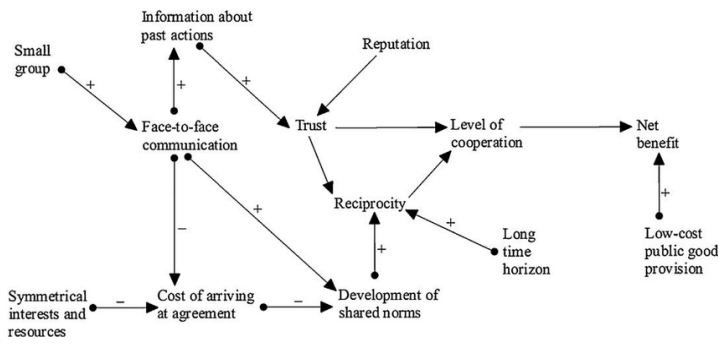


Figure 7. Collective base action theory. This figure presents the foundational principles of the "Collective Action" paradigm, illustrating how individuals join forces to pursue shared goals, yet must navigate obstacles such as the free-rider dilemma and coordination costs.

Source: [31]

Emerging Frameworks and Hybrid Models

Recent scholarship emphasizes affect and algorithmic mediation in shaping public discourse.

Table 1. Summary of theoretical and conceptual frameworks on social media influence

Theory / Framework	Core Concepts	Applications to Social Media	References
Agenda-Setting Theory	Media shape public priorities by highlighting specific issues.	Trending hashtags and algorithmic amplification co-define issue salience and public focus.	[35]
Framing Theory	Media framing influences interpretation and meaning.	Visual memes and moral-emotional language frame narratives that polarize audiences.	[36]
Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT)	Audiences actively seek media for personal and social needs.	Users engage with platforms for identity, connection, and civic participation.	[37]
Spiral of Silence Theory	Fear of social isolation suppresses minority opinions.	Online echo chambers and social sanctions discourage dissenting views.	[38]
Networked Public Sphere	Communication occurs in decentralized, participatory networks.	Citizens co-create discourse and mobilize through peer-to-peer communication.	[39]
Hybrid Media System	Digital and traditional media interact dynamically.	Political actors use multiple platforms to influence narratives and voter behavior.	[40]
Connective Action Framework	Personal networks drive mobilization through digital sharing.	Hashtag activism enables fluid, individualized participation.	[39]

Social Media and Public Opinion Formation

Social media platforms have introduced novel mechanisms through which public opinion is shaped, often diverging from the linear models of traditional mass media. One important mechanism is the role of virality and information cascades, where content spreads rapidly through sharing, retweeting, or forwarding, even when the source is weak or non-expert. Algorithms amplify engagement-driven content, ensuring that posts with high interaction receive greater visibility, thereby influencing what issues gain attention and how opinions are formed [1]. Meanwhile, the architecture of platforms facilitates the creation of echo chambers and filter bubbles, as users are systematically exposed to content aligning with their beliefs, reinforcing pre-existing attitudes and reducing exposure to opposing viewpoints [2].

Empirical studies provide evidence of significant opinion polarization associated with social media use. For example, research shows that exposure to ideologically homogeneous content is associated with more extreme opinions and lower tolerance of opposing views [2]. Complementary studies exploring the relationship between social media data and traditional survey data reveal both opportunities and challenges: while digital trace data offer fine-grained temporal insights into opinion dynamics, issues such as selection bias, platform opacity, and cultural variability limit their standalone validity [3]. Furthermore, the influential role of influencers, bots, and algorithmic amplification complicates the story;

Affective Publics [32] describes how emotions such as outrage or empathy circulate through networks, transforming political communication into emotionally resonant storytelling. Similarly, digital populism leverages affective engagement to mobilize identity-driven communities. Parallel to this, the concept of Information Disorder [33] examines misinformation and disinformation as systemic outcomes of algorithmic amplification and cognitive bias.

Echo chambers and automated bots exacerbate polarization, influencing electoral perceptions and trust in institutions. Together, these frameworks offer a multidimensional understanding of how social media reshape political communication from agenda-setting and framing to emotional contagion and misinformation dynamics. The digital public sphere thus emerges as a hybrid, affective, and algorithmically mediated space, where power, participation, and persuasion continuously evolve [34].

disinformation campaigns exploit the same sharing and amplification features that allow grassroots opinions to flourish, thereby altering opinion dynamics in unpredictable ways [4]. From a theoretical perspective, social media transforms public opinion formation by enabling a more interactive and networked environment where users do not merely consume information but also produce and circulate it. This shift challenges traditional models of media influence and invites a reconceptualization of public opinion as emergent from networked interaction, emotional contagion, and algorithmic mediation rather than simply broadcast by mainstream media [5]. It also underscores the need for greater attention to temporal dynamics (how opinions change over time), platform heterogeneity (differences among Facebook, Twitter/X, WhatsApp, TikTok), and cross-cultural variation in social media effects [6].

In summary, this section highlights that social media influences public opinion through multiple intertwined mechanisms: algorithmic amplification, networked sharing, emotional contagion, and engineered manipulation [7]. There is strong evidence of polarization and filter-bubbled exposure, yet limitations in measurement and cross-platform comparability persist. These findings emphasize the imperative for future research to adopt longitudinal, comparative, and mixed-methods designs to map out how online opinion formation translates into offline behaviours and decision-making [8].

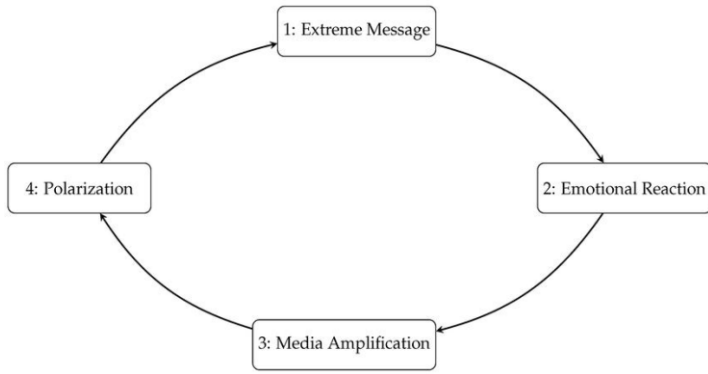


Figure 8. The feedback loop in political communication. This figure illustrates the feedback loop in political communication, showing the continuous exchange between media, political actors, and the public, where audience responses influence subsequent messaging and agenda formation.

Source: [9]

Social Media, Political Engagement, and Mobilization

Social media platforms have redefined political participation, providing spaces for users to express opinions, share political content, and mobilize collective action. Through their interactive and decentralized nature, these platforms have democratized access to political discourse but also created new challenges such as misinformation and polarization [10]. Recent research explores how digital networks facilitate different levels of engagement from online expression to organized activism, while revealing inequalities in participation across demographic and socio-economic groups [11].

From Clicktivism to Activism

The transformation of online engagement into real-world activism represents one of social media's most significant impacts on civic life.

Initially characterized by “clicktivism” or low-effort online actions (likes, shares, hashtags), social media activism has evolved into powerful mobilization mechanisms. Movements such as #BlackLivesMatter, #MeToo, and the Arab Spring demonstrate how digital platforms enable grassroots organization, agenda-setting, and rapid information dissemination [12]. Empirical evidence shows that online engagement can foster offline participation, particularly when digital interactions build social trust and collective efficacy. However, scholars caution that digital activism's effectiveness depends on sustained offline organization and institutional responsiveness [13]. While social media lowers entry barriers to participation, it also risks promoting superficial engagement without meaningful structural change.

Youth Political Engagement and Participation

Youth engagement is one of the most researched dimensions of digital politics. Young people increasingly rely on social media for political information, peer interaction, and civic expression. Platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter) function as spaces for informal political learning, where humor, memes, and influencer commentary shape attitudes toward governance and elections. Studies in both developed and developing contexts indicate that digital engagement enhances political interest and discussion among youth [14]. A study by [15] (See Table 2 and figure 9) suggests that there is a direct relationship between Facebook use, quality information, political interest and online political participation. Yet, the depth of this participation varies, urban youth, with greater access and literacy, tend to engage more meaningfully than rural counterparts [16]. These disparities highlight the need for inclusive digital literacy programs to bridge generational and socio-economic participation gaps.

Table 2. Online Political Participation and Engagement

	Variables	α	M	SD	1 2	3	4	5
1	Online Political Participation	.701	3.7806	.6730	1.000			
	Facebook Use	.827	4.2367	.5783	.293* .394**	1.000		
2	Interactivity with Politicians	.789	4.0582	.6594	.427** .495**	.404**	1.000	
3	Information Quality.	.725	3.6364	.6110	.378** .396**	.346**	.496**	1.000
4	Political Interest	.776	4.1042	.6119	.492** .412**	.336**	.505**	.455**

Significance * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Source: [17]

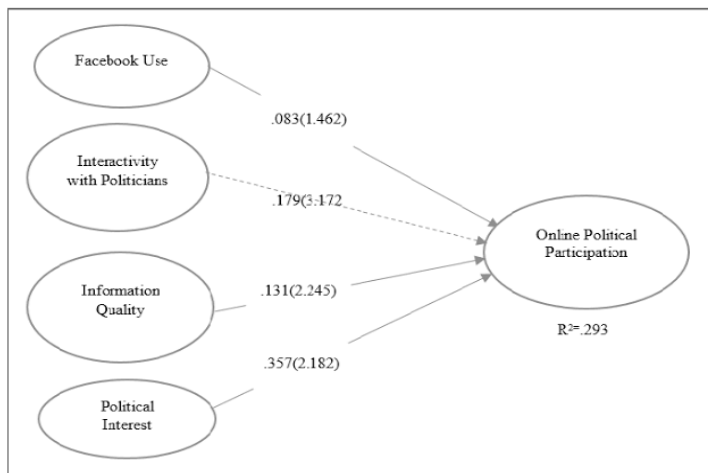


Figure 9. Online political participation and engagement. This figure depicts online political participation and engagement, emphasizing how Facebook use facilitates information sharing, mobilization, and interactive political discourse among users.

Source: [18]

Digital Inequalities and Participation Gaps

Despite the participatory potential of social media, structural inequalities persist in who engages, how, and to what effect. Factors such as internet access, algorithmic bias, education, and cultural norms influence digital inclusion [19]. For instance, marginalized groups often face reduced visibility or harassment online, limiting their political voice. Furthermore, algorithms that prioritize engagement can amplify extreme or sensational content, deepening polarization [20]. Studies from Nigeria, Indonesia, and Pakistan show that digital participation correlates strongly with socio-economic privilege and technological literacy [21, 22]. Addressing these inequalities is essential to ensuring that social media functions as a tool for empowerment rather than exclusion in democratic participation.

Social Media and Electoral Outcomes

The rise of social media has fundamentally reshaped electoral processes, transforming how political communication, voter persuasion, and mobilization occur. Digital platforms now serve as arenas for real-time engagement, microtargeted advertising, and opinion manipulation, blurring the boundaries between traditional campaigning and online activism. Scholars emphasize that social media's electoral effects are complex, mediated by algorithms, data analytics, and institutional contexts [23, 24].

Campaign Communication and Voter Persuasion

Social media enables political actors to communicate directly with voters, bypassing traditional media filters. Platforms like Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and TikTok allow personalized messaging, image branding, and data-driven targeting. Through digital microtargeting, campaigns tailor messages to small voter segments based on demographics, interests, and online behavior. Studies show that microtargeted ads can slightly enhance persuasion rates, though their overall effect remains modest [25]. Moreover, digital platforms facilitate viral political content such as memes, videos, and slogans that can rapidly reach millions without formal campaign structures [26]. However, the lack of transparency around algorithms and data use has raised concerns about manipulation and unequal access to information.

Case Studies and Empirical Evidence

Empirical evidence from recent elections underscores both the transformative potential and inherent limitations of social media's electoral influence. In the U.S. elections (2008–2020), digital platforms enhanced voter engagement and grassroots mobilization but simultaneously facilitated the spread of misinformation and political polarization [27]. Across Europe, microtargeting practices produced diverse though not necessarily negative campaign messages during multiple electoral cycles [28]. In the Global South, nations such as India, Nigeria, and Brazil demonstrate how platforms like WhatsApp and Telegram have become central to local political communication, often amplifying populist and ethnically charged narratives [29].

Collectively, these patterns indicate that while digital campaigning has become indispensable, its outcomes are shaped by contextual factors such as political culture, regulatory frameworks, and technological capacity [30]. Table 3 further illustrates this trend by presenting the mean and standard deviation of the influence of social media use on political engagement and voter turnout among youths during the 2023 Nigerian general elections. The data reveal a significant increase in youth participation in political activities facilitated through social media platforms [31].

Table 3. Mean and standard deviation of the influence of social media use on political engagement and voter turnout among youths during the Nigerian 2023 general elections
Adapted from [32]

S/N	Item Statements	N	X	SD	Remarks
1	Social media platforms increased my political awareness about the candidates, parties, or election issues.	400	3.26	.956	SA
2	I engaged with political content on social media platforms by liking, sharing, or commenting during the elections.	400	3.15	.840	SA
3	I came across social media campaigns or messages aimed at encouraging voter turnout.	400	3.11	.847	SA
4	Social media platforms motivated me to vote in the 2023 general elections	400	3.22	.832	SA
5	I encountered obstacles in accessing accurate and reliable political information on social media platforms.	400	3.06	.906	SA
6	I actively participated in political discussions or arguments on social media platforms during the 2023 general elections.	400	3.10	.832	SA
7	Social media platforms positively influence political engagement and voter turnout.	400	3.11	.910	SA
	Overall Mean		3.15	.614	SA

Key: N = Sample population, X = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation, SA = Strongly Agree

Misinformation, Polarization, and Electoral Integrity

One of the most debated aspects of social media's electoral role is its connection to misinformation and the erosion of electoral integrity. Coordinated disinformation campaigns and algorithmic amplification have been shown to distort voter perceptions and foster distrust in democratic institutions [33]. Automated bot networks and partisan influencers can manipulate narratives during elections, as evidenced in the 2016 U.S. and 2019 Indian elections [34, 35].

Moreover, the microtargeting of deceptive content undermines transparency by delivering personalized messages that remain invisible to the wider public. Table 4 provides empirical insight into this phenomenon, presenting the mean and standard deviation of how fake news and disinformation on social media influenced youths' perceptions of the credibility and legitimacy of the 2023 Nigerian general elections. Scholars argue that addressing these challenges requires stronger digital campaign regulations, enhanced platform accountability, and comprehensive voter education to strengthen information literacy and democratic resilience.

Table 4. Mean and standard deviation of ways fake news and disinformation on social media influenced the perceived credibility and legitimacy of the Nigeria 2023 general elections among youths
Adapted from [36]

S/N	Item Statements	N	X	SD	Remarks
1	I came across many instances of fake news and disinformation related to the 2023 general elections on social media.	400	3.24	.956	SA
2	Fake news and disinformation on social media influenced my perception of the credibility and legitimacy of the elections.	400	3.19	.723	SA
3	I found it challenging to distinguish between accurate information and fake news/disinformation on social media.	400	3.09	.832	SA
4	Fake news and disinformation on social media affected my trust in political parties, and candidates.	400	3.16	.809	SA
5	I verified the accuracy of political information or news shared on social media during the 2023 general elections.	400	3.04	.849	SA
6	During the elections, fake news and disinformation spread on social media were later debunked on the platforms.	400	3.08	.893	SA
	Overall Mean		3.13	.558	SA

Key: N = Sample population, X = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation, SA = Strongly Agree

Methodological Trends and Gaps in the Literature

Research on social media's influence on public opinion, political participation, and electoral outcomes has expanded rapidly, driven by the increasing complexity of digital platforms and data ecosystems. Scholars have adopted diverse methodological approaches to capture these dynamics, yet the field remains fragmented by disciplinary boundaries and technological constraints.

Dominant Research Methods

Quantitative and computational methodologies dominate this area of inquiry. Large-scale surveys, sentiment analyses, network mapping, and experiments have been widely used to examine online behavior and its political consequences [37]. The rise of digital trace data such as tweets, hashtags, and engagement metrics has enabled fine-grained analyses of information flows, opinion polarization, and mobilization trends. Computational methods employing natural language processing and machine learning have enhanced the precision of content classification but often depend on proprietary data, limiting reproducibility and transparency [38]. Although these methods have improved scalability and predictive modeling, they frequently fail to establish causal relationships between online activity and political outcomes due to cross-sectional designs and limited temporal scope.

Challenges in Studying Social Media Impact

Despite methodological innovation, significant challenges persist. Data accessibility remains a major limitation, as platforms increasingly restrict researchers' access to APIs. Algorithmic opacity further complicates analysis, making it difficult to verify how content visibility shapes opinion dynamics [39]. Ethical issues including user consent, privacy, and misinformation exposure have sparked debate about responsible data use [39]. Moreover, much of the research remains Western-centric, overlooking digital political behavior in the Global South where platform use and sociopolitical contexts differ substantially.

Identified Gaps and Directions for Future Research

The field would benefit from integrating longitudinal and mixed-methods designs that blend computational analytics with qualitative depth. Long-term studies could illuminate how repeated exposure to political messaging influences opinion change, while cross-cultural comparisons would expand understanding beyond Western democracies. Greater interdisciplinary collaboration between data scientists, political theorists, and sociologists is essential to building holistic frameworks that link digital communication patterns with democratic participation. Future studies should also embed ethical reflexivity, ensuring that analyses respect data privacy and mitigate algorithmic bias. Strengthening methodological transparency, data sharing, and reproducibility will enhance the credibility and global relevance of social media research in the political sphere.

Conclusion

Social media has fundamentally reshaped the landscape of public opinion, political engagement, and collective action. As this review highlights, platforms such as X, Facebook, and TikTok have become central arenas for political discourse, enabling rapid information sharing, mobilization, and civic participation.

At the same time, they have amplified challenges, including misinformation, polarization, and algorithmic manipulation that threaten deliberative democracy. The reviewed literature shows that while social media enhances inclusivity and real-time activism, it simultaneously deepens divisions through echo chambers and selective exposure. Theoretical frameworks like agenda-setting and the networked public sphere help explain these paradoxical effects, revealing how digital communication can both empower and distort public discourse. Evidence from global case studies from #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter to electoral campaigns in the U.S. and Europe demonstrates that social media's influence is pervasive but context-dependent.

Methodologically, advances in computational analytics and mixed-method research have expanded the field's empirical base, yet limitations remain in causal explanation, cross-cultural diversity, and data transparency. Addressing these gaps will require ethical, interdisciplinary collaboration that balances innovation with accountability. In conclusion, social media represents both an opportunity and a challenge for modern democracy. Its ability to inform, mobilize, and connect citizens depends on responsible governance, digital literacy, and transparent algorithms. Strengthening these dimensions will be essential to ensuring that social media continues to serve as a force for democratic participation rather than division.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declared that there are no conflicts of interest.

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