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The Impact of Social Media on Political Participation and Public Opinion in Recent Democracies

تأثير وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي على المشاركة السياسية والرأي العام في الديمقراطيات الحديثة

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ملخص:

أثر الاستخدام المتزايد لوسائل التواصل الاجتماعي بشكل كبير على السياسة وتكوين الرأي في الديمقراطيات الناشئة ذات المؤسسات الضعيفة والمعايير المتغيرة باستمرار فيما يتعلق بالمشاركة. تتناول هذه المقالة مسألة كيفية تأثير وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي على المشاركة السياسية وتكوين الرأي في الديمقراطيات النامية. كما تبحث في استخدام وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي كشبكة تجزئة خطابية وتمكينية. ووفقاً للنظرية المنهجية، يمكن ملاحظة أن الديمقراطية التشاركية، ونظرية التعبئة الرقمية، والمجال العام الشبكي، تتكامل معاً.

اعتمدت المقالة منهجاً تحليلياً تفسيريًا لدراسة كيفية اكتساب القضايا، عبر الوساطة الرقمية، للمعلومات، وخلق المساءلة، وبناء السرديات في الهند والولايات المتحدة. تُظهر النتائج أن وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي تُسهّل المشاركة وتوسع فرصها. إلا أن الجهود المبذولة لدمج السرديات تُعمّق الانقسام في المجتمع بسبب التضخيم الخوارزمي وغرف الصدى التي تُخاطب المشاعر.

تُقدّم هذه المقالة إطاراً مفاهيمياً متنوعاً يُفرّق بين أنواع النشاط الرقمي السلبية (التي تستخدم المنصات الرقمية نفسها) وأنواع المشاركة الرقمية الإيجابية. تعتمد قدرة وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي على تعزيز الديمقراطية على قوة المؤسسات، ونجاح الجهات الرقابية، ومستوى الوعي الإعلامي، وآليات بناء الثقة القائمة آنذاك. ووفقاً للمقال، لا يقتصر هذا العمل على توضيح القضايا فحسب، بل يتناول أيضاً العلاقة الوثيقة بين الحكومة الديمقراطية والتكنولوجيا في المستقبل. وستساهم عملية المشاركة الرقمية في ترسيخ الديمقراطية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، المشاركة السياسية، الرأي العام، الديمقراطيات الناشئة، التعبئة الرقمية.

Abstract:

The growing usage of social media has drastically impacted on politics and opinion formation in emerging democracies with weak institutions and ever-changing norms about participation. This article examines the question of how social media influence the political participation and opinion formation in developing democracies. The article investigates the usage of social media as a discursive fragmentation and empowered network. According to the systematic theory, it can be observed that participatory democracy, the theory of digital mobilization, and the networked public sphere will go together.

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The article adopted an analytical-interpretative approach to see how issues, via digital mediation, gain information, create accountability and build narratives in India and the US. The findings show that social media lowers barriers to participation and widens opportunities for participation. Efforts to weave the narrative together further divide society due to algorithmic amplification and echo chambers that communicate emotionally.

This article generates a varied conceptual framework which separates negative types or digital activism (which use the same digital platforms) from the positive types of digital engagement. The ability of social media to promote democracy depends on the strength of institutions, the success of regulators, the level of media literacy, and the arrangements for trust in place at that time. According to the article, this work not only clears up issues, it also looks at the close relationship of the democratic government with technology in the future. The added process of digital involvement will help in the achievement of democratic consolidation.

Keywords: Social Media, Political Participation, Public Opinion, Emerging Democracies, Digital Mobilization.

Introduction:

The structural foundations of political participation have reorganized due to social media.

With the soaring success of social media, it becomes possible to reach and persuade nearly 97 million voters. Getting engaged in political processes is the need of the hour. This particularly holds true for young democracies where the flexible nature of institutions and questioning action of institutional legitimacy prevail. Once the aforementioned parameters are satisfied, digital platforms no longer remain active socio-political infrastructures. They re-assign information access, re-adjust agenda setting hierarchies and re-shape the epistemic conditions that supports public opinion. In simple words, they are important. That is to say, these are not places where anyone can give their opinions.

Understood by many as a replacement of party-centered, hierarchical means of mobilization with decentralized and networked forms of contact, social media is associated with a re-composition of the relationship between people, elite, and institutions. It makes sense to want to get in on current social media narratives because success lowers entry barriers and opens up alternative means of expression. Nonetheless, it also integrates them into structural distortions

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through governmental algorithmic amplification and affective communication and information environments. It can take place on multiple levels and rhythm. It reduces the barriers, which is not the case in spite of this. Because of it, the internet space will also become a space for civic empowerment and a space that interruptions can happen.

On the one hand, social media can increase accountability, transparency and participatory inclusiveness. Social media can increase polarization, lower institutional trust and usually give greater value to emotional mobilization than to reasoned deliberation. In contemporary democracies wherein the democratic norms are still undergoing a process of consolidation, the processes have important consequences for the legitimacy and stability of political institutions.

These days, the linear transmission of media ultimately cannot create a public opinion. The interactions of active users, political agents, and algorithms actively generate it. Public opinion is heavily influenced by these interactions. As a result of this change, the classic democratic assumptions regarding the coherence of the public space and the logic of the growth of collective will must be rethought. Development on the whole is what matters, and this is so. With this in mind, the study objective is to scheme social media as a transformational governance variable which is embedded form of wider process of democratic consolidation. This study seeks to determine if participation through digital mediation both serves as a stabilizer for democracy or if it reorganizes political participation in such a way that it undermines the institutional conditions that are necessary for democracy to persist.

Importance of the Study: A major development of the democratic system recently took place. This article will elaborate on the same. People are using Facebook and other online social networks to discuss issues and develop campaigns to exert political pressure. The access of applicants is restricted over time to become a lobbyist. This is because the entry requirements as well as the legitimacy of the institution is becoming more stringent.

Political science doesn't just look for digital optimism or decline. It also examines how group networked communication affects the efficacy of the democratic institution of a community. The usefulness of social media for building theoretical discourse on legitimacy and participation and for what is being increasingly called the 'bubbling' of the public sphere as a socio-political infrastructure deployed within unstable institutional frameworks.

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The study adds value to governance, regulatory framework, and civic education in polarized and information-fragmented contexts. In the new digital age, the question is whether digital communication can strengthen or weaken democracy.

Research Objectives:

1. The aim of the research paper is to see how social media is changing people's engagement in politics and the engagement itself in almost democracies.
2. Digital networks have worsened as much as improved the legitimacy of democracy, confidence in institutions and formation of attitudes.
3. To understand the social media conditions under which facilitations are made more civic, or civil discourse is reduced to polarization and fragmentation.
4. To create a positive framework that seeks to understand the contribution of digital technology to participation in weak or developing democratic institutions.

Research Problem: Considerable discussions have occurred about the role of social media in politics, but critical academic research is lacking on the structural effects that one can observe in the developing democracy-building countries. Although social media is perceived to be a tool of empowerment, it is accompanied by structural distortions that include algorithmic amplification, polarization and fractures of the public sphere. These distorting factors are contrary to the legitimacy and trust placed in institutions in society. As per the social media research done, up till now, most importantly, has been more of a medium than characterization, significantly a transformational infrastructure, which is deeply penetrated within dynamic political systems. This study explores how participation mediated by digital technologies strengthens and undermines democracy in contradictory yet interconnected manners. Likewise, it investigates when the execution of these actions enhances and when it restrains the citizen's agency and public discourse.

Research Hypothesis: This research shows how social media serves as both a 'friend' and enemy of democracy. Political engagement and civic empowerment rise on the one hand, however, at the same time, polarization, fragmentation of information as well as mistrust of institutions increase. Whether social media will interfere with the democracies will depend on contextual factors like institutional resilience, media literacy, regulatory frameworks and configuration of digital networks. When we take into consideration the technical affordances

and the socio-political context, digital mediated involvement can support or spoil democracy.

The Methodology of Research: In this article, and by using an analytical-prospective approach, it seeks to understand the double-faced action of social media on contemporary democracies. In that purpose, it focuses on how digital platforms mediate participation, legitimacy and public opinion formation through structural, institutional and discursive manipulations. Furthermore, this work also attempts to compare their influences across degrees of empowerment and fragmentation. Over time, by taking into account the progressive evolution of digital interaction, it is expected that the parallel trajectories will be shaped. It is worth stressing that, here, the element using scenarios is used to illustrate the potential of institutional resilience, regulatory systems, and civic literacy, when used to democratize the effect of social media. Consequently, the study provides for the complexity of social media and highlights it as both reinforcing and subversive element of democratic institutions; hence, requiring forward-looking critical analysis rather than sheer description.

The Structure of Research:

- **Theoretical Foundations & Conceptual Framework**
- **Methodology & Analytical Assessment**
- **Prospective Scenarios and Democratic Implications**

I. Theoretical Foundations & Conceptual Framework

1. Classical & Contemporary Theories of Democratic Participation

Participation largely enunciates democracy which is not only a political goal, but a social principle. According to Robert Dahl and Jurgen Habermas' theories, citizens' participation is important for legitimacy and collective deliberation. According to Dahl, democracy is optimum when individuals have and can exercise the capacity to influence the process of governance⁽¹⁾. Dahl emphasizes participatory procedures that furnish active and inclusive decision-making. Similarly, according to Habermas the public sphere is the medium through which diverse public opinions are formed and pressure is put on political authorities through critical rational discussion⁽²⁾. Participation involves deliberative contact, equality of speech, and discursive engagement in this ethical order of participation. The engagement of people should not only quantitative, but qualitative.

However, the older models were created for a more stable media environment dominated by print and broadcast communication and not new media. The

political spaces that emerged within the public sphere in the 18th and 19th centuries almost encouraged political communication. They were still restricted on account of economic inequalities which made access difficult^(۳). While bourgeois public spaces played a role in the formation of early democratic discourses, Habermas notes that they were not fully inclusive, as women, working-class men, and non-propertied members were barred from accessing them^(۴). The stricture enables the tension between the normative aspiration of universal participation and the structural reality to interact in the best way possible.

Recent research continues to draw these classical principles, which have been altered due to the shift in the media condition. The spread of connectivity has modified both the architectural framing of participation and the epistemic conditions of public discourse. *Manuel Castells* introduces the concept of network society referring to an organization that social, political and economic relations are organized through technology^(۵). Citizens are the nodes in these environments, capable of launching, replicating and sustaining political activity without organizations. There is no central agent in a decentralized environment. *Bennett & Segerberg's* (2013) theory of connective action extends this conceptualization by focusing on (i) the ways that digital platforms enable individuals to perform personalized actions while simultaneously coordinating collective outcomes and (ii) socio-political coordination via social media^(۶). Nowadays, participation is increasingly organized through networks rather than institutions and mediated through platform algorithms rather than organizers.

Over the last two decades, the process through which public opinion and democratic legitimacy are shaped has shifted from structured deliberative arenas to communication. In traditional thinking, rational-critical discussions were part of a communicative access and equality. But this has experienced a change that necessitates a rethink of participation criteria and normative expectations.

2. Social Media as a Structural Factor in Political Participation & Public Opinion

In contemporary democracies, social networks and other new media do not only change the form of participation, but also the form of public debate, it is argued. Yochai Benkler, for example, states that “networked information systems will make the production of politically relevant information, however you choose to define it, dramatically cheap. It will allow a vast quantity of politically relevant material to be produced, much of it escaping the existing gates of traditional

mainstream media organizations.” The communicative models we are accustomed to are generally hierarchized and difficult for the public to participate in. New media communication allows and assists citizens to self-assemble and mobilize, and create an impact on agenda-setting.

The structural biases of social media are closely linked to the algorithms that determine what media people are exposed to and the rewards that respond to indicators of engagement, or social media activity – clicks, shares and such – directing movements of attention. This phenomenon has been named as an erroneous form of political communication where we are pictured as people who don't count and we receive selected information of a certain kind based on algorithms.

According to *Sunstein*, these elements may create filter bubbles and echo chambers where, instead of grappling with different ideas which cause us to rethink the position, “we are likely to find things we already agree with.” Thus, one ends up with more noise and less clattering; there is more people but more often than not, the discourse is more fragmented. The digitalized mobilization is producing a context of “embattled public sphere” in which the formation of public opinion is taking place. The user-generated content, feedback loop and virality within these networked contexts redistribute discursive power. The traditional conception of mass communication involved a top-down model from elites to masses. However, in this new media-mediated case it is the influence in question which is being constituted through visibility, emotions, and algorithmic reinforcement^(v). The disruption of the social sphere can allow social media to increase polarization as well as dismantle it. Social media can be used to galvanize and empower communities.

Some studies on new democracies show that social media may enable the quick mobilization of public interest groups around a host of issues. The effect of social media is tremendously escalating. Different protests through co-ordination may help people cross the limits of bureaucracies and institutions and also pressurize policy-makers collectively^(^). Misinformation can spread quickly and polarize emotions creating a lack of trust in democratic institutions. And much more.

3. The Structural Tension: Civic Empowerment, Polarization, & Institutional Legitimacy

The dual-application of social media creates a structural tension in the democratic processes. As a citizen, the exercise of civil rights has been facilitated for public participation on the one hand with breaking barriers to participation. Enriching the political speech. Enabling coordination by income and geography. Through digital media, marginalized groups can have an influence on public discourse, which enhances their lives and representation.

Nonetheless, these platforms cause a number of structural distortions. The amplification process by algorithm adjusts itself in such a way that it gives preference to emotional content which facilitates such affect-driven mobilization that sometimes overtakes reasoned deliberation⁽⁴⁾. The public sphere could best be likened to echo chambers. Because of our biases and selective exposure behavior, the mirror public develops a severely distorted image of political reality. According to Sunstein, this conduct will undermine people's faith in institutions. In addition, it will corrode public confidence in collective decision-making processes⁽⁵⁾.

On January 6 and 26, events showcase multiple forms of political violence, such as a large mobilization, infiltration and betrayal, along with a relatively spontaneous protest in ontological conflict. Ontological conflict answers questions about adversaries' conception of themselves, of their identity and of their status in the regime. Conflict over an arrangement occurs when only one party recognizes it. In many parts of the world, the US, the India, the Turkey, the Israel, the Brazil to list a few, we have seen a deepening of ontological struggle.

4. Toward an Integrated Conceptual Model

The study offers a conceptual framework that embeds social media as a transformative socio-political infrastructure. The findings gathered are synthesized to develop this framework. Digital platforms, according to this concept, have the following⁽⁶⁾:

- A.** One way to make your aspirations achievable is to offer support to the needy.
- B.** Using algorithms to shape people's views, and then using networks to facilitate social interaction.
- C.** The relationship between structural tensions that affect political legitimacy, polarization and the coherence of deliberative discourse should be incorporated into it.

The contextual factors that determine the democratic outcomes of digital participation, such as media literacy levels, regulatory authority capabilities,

institutional resilience etc. make a significant part of the conceptual frame. The media sociology point of view on social media is that it should not be seen as a given, but rather a variable whose impact is mediated by structural, institutional and socio-cultural factors. Social media is something we created, and is not simply 'given'. As a result of this, the framework combines old deliberation practices with contemporary networked mobilization applications. This is essential reference material for the analytical and prospective assessments that will appear in coming sections.

The integrated conceptual framework outlines the main variables and relationships to model in the future empirical inquiry. The conceptual basis of this framework was developed before. The general public views social media as not only a form of communication but also a structural force that shapes participation, opinion formation and the legitimacy of institutions. As discussed in earlier sections, the selection of analytical indicators and design of research instruments is motivated by the conflict between civic empowerment polarization. As a result of the new method a qualitative and quantitative understanding of involvement becomes organized and regulated by technology. It will provide a more complex assessment of the varied effects of social media in developing democracies.

II. Methodology & Analytical Assessment

1. Rationale for an Analytical–Prospective Approach

This study adopted an analytical–prospective methodology on the dual dimension of social media's influence on political participation and public opinion in recent democracies. The "analytical dimension" looks at existing structural and discursive mechanisms. The prospective dimension looks into future scenarios of online politics. By doing this, the limits of a descriptive approach, unable to deal with the fluid and networked nature often found in the digital world would be surpassed⁽¹⁷⁾.

The analytical-prospective approach is well-suited to social and political systems where institutional consolidation is not yet complete and succession of political culture. Combining modelling and scenario analysis, the project pinpoints reinforcements, fragmentation and algorithmic interactions. In addition, threats and opportunities to the consolidation of democracy can be identified⁽¹⁸⁾.

The method would be the main concern of the study, in light of chapter one framework. Participation is a public debate on governance, algorithms and

overall logics of participation of the social media platform. We can certainly form a judgment on these. Social media is now more than a medium for communication; the structural force is also a medium. The approach subsequently translates the theoretical ideas of “polarization” and “institutional legitimacy” into measurable variables.

2. Analytical Dimension: Assessing Digital Participation and Structural Effects

They have presented the findings of the analysis in a section which is called ‘Media and Modes of Social Participation: Understanding the Inequities in Digital Participation’ which examines how social media hygiene mediates participation and opinion formation. Three inter-related processes will be utilized in the analysis.

2.1 Patterns of Empowerment

Evidence from theory and empirical work shows that social media reduces participation costs by allowing citizens to access information, express political opinions and coordinate joint action without formal mediators⁽¹⁴⁾. There are three measures for empowerment in this study.

- A. The accessibility of political information refers to the frequency they encounter political issues and the variety of such political information relating to the policy.
- B. Horizontal communication describes the extent to which a person participates in one-on-one and group political communication that exceeds economic class and spatial or territorial limits.
- C. The ability to mobilize is demonstrated by off-line actions initiated through coordination using digital means.

Originating from *Bennett & Segerberg*, these indicators draw upon the empirical findings pertaining to personalization and decentralization of digitally mediated political engagement⁽¹⁵⁾. Patterns defining empowerment are also contextualized with Castells’ idea of the “networked public sphere” showing a-global in nature and infused with power⁽¹⁶⁾.

2.2 Patterns of Fragmentation

Fragmentation is the structural counterpart of empowerment; more citizens can participate while the quality and coherence of the discourse suffer. The selective exposure to algorithmically tempered polarization and echo chambers created by digital platforms may give rise to different public spheres in one polity⁽¹⁷⁾.

Fragmentation is put into action through⁽¹⁸⁾:

- **Polarization Metrics:** Differing opinions on ideology and demographics.
- **Content Diversity:** The variety of perspectives faced by users.
- **Information Segmentation:** Algorithmic filtering and visibility through engagement are quite common.

By employing these parameters, we can analyze how structural design and algorithmic governance impact collective opinion. The social media platform exhibits a two-pronged dynamic as per conceptual framework which enables stable and destabilizing⁽¹⁹⁾.

2.3 Algorithmic Influence

Algorithms help decide what content gets seen, engaged with, shared. An exploration of algorithm effects on political behavior.

- When a design maximizes engagement, there is affective mobilization and not deliberative reasoning.
- The recommendation systems significantly contribute to issue salience, agenda setting, and public opinion formation, among others.
- The clustering of networks, as well as homophily, fosters enclaves of one's own kind.

An examination of the interaction patterns of social media platforms, the velocity of content, and the network can quantitatively measure how algorithms effect change. By adding analytic approaches that focus on qualitative discourses to this evaluative plan, we will be able to grasp the nuances of narrative.

3. Integrating Institutional, Cultural, and Discursive Factors

Strength of institutions, cultural norms and civic literacy affect participation in different digital activities. Therefore, an analysis will be made of contextual factors that can explain the effects of social media including:

- A. Institutional Resilience:** The ability of democratic institutions, rules and transparency to prevent.
- B. Civic Literacy:** As per Tata Institute of Social Science, it is the capacity of individuals to assess information.
- C. Discursive Norms:** The collective attitude of the people in a social unit towards a matter is what is referred to as prevailing attitude in a society.

The attitudes prevailing in society can have an impact on the behavior, beliefs, and feelings of all those involved. The culture, country, or community they belong to, also influences them. This article will deal with the common attitude of society.

4. Methodological Instruments

The study employs a mixed-method design employing quantitative and qualitative research:

- **Secondary Data Analysis:** We will examine participation dynamics, diversity of viewpoints, and algorithmic exertions based on available data and existing studies and reports on social media usage in recent democracies.
- **Discourse Analysis:** Examining political narratives, markers of polarization, and content on civic engagement.
- **Network Analysis:** To identify influential nodes, echo chambers and clustering phenomena by mapping the interaction structure.

5. Prospective Dimension: Scenario-Based Reasoning

The future component is the set of alternative pathways of digital engagement that draw on the insights from the analytical dimension along with future scenarios. Simulation of three situations.

- A. In the consolidation scenario,** Durable networks that anyone can join can be created when there are strong institutions, a media literate citizenry, and regulated platforms.
- B. Fragmentation Scenario:** The reduction of faith in one another, the degradation of institutions and the phenomenon of misinformation has discorded the society.
- C. Hybrid Scenario:** The outcomes might result to be opposite. On the one hand, the digital empowerment brings social empowerment in some sections. Meanwhile, other countries are experiencing local fragmentation.

This study's findings may help to formulate better policies, regulation and civic education on this dimension to improve market efficiency. This establishes a linkage to the research axis 3: Prospective Scenarios and Democratic Implications and ensures conceptual and methodological coherence with the other two axes.^(٢٠)

6. Analytical–Prospective Integration

The dual analytical–prospective methodology ensures that:

- The things we see nowadays are empowerment, fragmentation and algorithmic determinism.
- Visualizing future scenarios is quite possible as they are feasible and linked to structural conditions.

- This finding is in accordance with the conceptual framework that social media is a structural force as revealed through literature.

When the operationalization of the high strategy is reaching a critique of institutions, culture and discourse becomes in focus, tension regarding the first study axis was detected. There is a debate ongoing about social media's effect on democracy. *What is the impact of social media on stability of democratic processes?* It depends upon the context; they find it is a bit of both⁽¹¹⁾.

The strategy involves both quantitative and qualitative analysis and gives impetus to rise social media empower people and fragment social structures. The analysis made use of an analytical-prospective technique that serves as a pipe to channel the theoretical result of the first chapter into a political participation case, which is measurable, public opinion result, and institutional legitimacy. This method will create conceptual and empirical continuities that provide an analytical framework for someone that projects alternative scenarios about the effects of social media on political participation and public opinion. The project's third research axis or part relates to the analysis of prospective scenarios and democratic implications. This gives a better overall perspective of the phenomenon.

III. Prospective Scenarios & Democratic Implications

1. From Structural Dynamics to Democratic Futures

The results of the analysis in the second research axis show that the social media infrastructure is two-sided; where it can create discursive fragmentation and also allow political involvement. Structural dynamics have long-term benefits with respect to institutional strength, regulatory regimes, and civic literacy and the likes. These dynamics structures have a clear effect on new democracies. To study the social media impact in future, one must mix possible historic outcomes with existing trends.

Over the recent years, the interaction occurring between platforms and users shows different results in different democracies. An instance of this was the WhatsApp campaigns that were especially blamed for the spread of disinformation during the election of 2018 in Brazil resulting in unprecedented levels of political polarization. During a six-month electoral cycle period⁽¹²⁾, We observed a 31% rise in negative sentiments toward competing parties. Conversely, the information presented by the Estonian administration implies that platforms can maximize participatory legitimacy according to the evidence. In the 2019 parliamentary elections, citizens cast more than 44 per cent of the

total votes online reflecting their confidence in the institutions and faith in digital infrastructure. Since 2005, Estonia has had the opportunity to build a good quality digital governance with e-voting system^(٢٣).

Based on these instances, the suggestion is clear that the Effect of social media is not given, but it is influenced by political, cultural, and institutional forces that were already there. Due to the strength of regulatory frameworks, civic education and digital literacy, the emotive mobilization and algorithmic amplification and echo chambers get mediated. The young people's protests of 2013–2015 show how platforms can mobilize civil society movements in weak institutional settings such as Tunisia after the Arab Spring. However, as the subsequent years unfolded, fragmentation and disinformation also ensued in the platforms, hurting confidence in democracy^(٢٤).

Social media's impact on the public sphere can be examined from a social structural perspective, as it decentralizes the public formation. Likewise, it allows individuals and their networks the agenda to be shaped without and plans. However, this decentralization produces “networked volatility”, where an instability of information quickly emerges but unevenly. As it does so, multiple publics interpret political reality in divergent ways^(٢٥). Given the situation, the future trajectory of democracies greatly depends on the path they take which relies on the manner in which operational and regulatory institutions adapt in order to govern, enlighten, and engage with the digital infrastructure.

Scenario A: Democratic Consolidation

The first scenario depicts a path in which social media complement and therefore support democratic consolidation rather than disrupt it. When the digital platform is integrated into the governance framework including civic literacy, algorithm accountability and transparency, the situation arises.

Integration of Institutions and Intelligent Regulation: The NetzDG Act (2018) require social media platforms to remove illegal content within twenty-four hours or face fines. The objective of this regulation is ensuring correspondingly accountability and not censorship^(٢٦). The European Union's Digital Services Act 2022 The Digital Services Act 2022 applies obligations on online social media platforms and search engines as to their content moderation, transparency measures and safeguards for users. The strong regulatory design of these frameworks can minimize the impacts of algorithmic amplification and echo chamber effect. Once the judging process gets successful and institutions would be able to look credible on social media and make their mark.

Empirical Outcomes: Countries that have strong digital governance and participatory structure show measured improvements in political participation. Digital literacy and e-governance execution project in Estonia was able to increase youth participation by 14% from 35% in 2010 to 49% in 2019^(٢٧). Since 2010, this growth has been registered in 2023. Similarly, a public conversation on municipal budgets hosted by Naver and other South Korean digital platforms improved the level of civic participation in the participatory budgeting process by 26% between the years 2015 and 2020^(٢٨).

In this regard, public space needs to be redefined for the sake of algorithmic mediation for democratic consolidation. This decision can harm consequences. There are linkages of institutionalized norms to platforms that would open deliberative spaces and give meaning to civic responsibility. Digital networks are literally like scaffolding infrastructure which attempts making more inclusive and open, thereby transforming individual agency into collective legitimacy^(٢٩). The linkage between freedom in digital spaces and responsibility refers to the participatory democracy that is strengthened rather than undermined through the ethical deployment of platforms.

Policy Applications^(٣٠):

1. The establishment of algorithmic monitoring committees aims to ensure fairness and transparency in the system concerned.
2. Eligible voters must be made compulsory for a course in civic and Internet literacy.
3. Encourage platform participation with independent fact-checking organizations.

Scenario B: Algorithmic Fragmentation

The results of the analyses provide an empirical basis that can be employed to study possible routes to democracy. The study of digitally mediated participation, the structural robustness of institutions, the design of regulation, civic literacy and the sociality of democracy, can shape alternative democracies in the age of social media ecosystems.

On the other hand, the second situation shows pathways determined by algorithmic fragmentation and networked instability. The second example explains this path. In this context, social media contributes to divisions, erosion of trust in institutions, and the mobilization of emotions rather than reason as the main focus^(٣١).

Historical Precedents & Empirical Data: A good example of algorithmic fragmentation is the USA. During the 2016 presidential election, Facebook users and Twitter users were targeted with lies while the recommendation system's algorithms recommended pro-Trump content and gave rise to partisan polarization with emotionally-charged content^(٢٧). As per surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center, online partisan polarization grew by 20% between 2012–2016. Similarly, trust in Congress fell by 14%^(٢٨).

India witnessed a number of misinformation campaigns on WhatsApp during the national elections of 2019. The political narratives that were made about the countryside were seriously affected by these. Research done by the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi found that thirty-eight percent of the rural respondents claimed that they came across misleading political messages. Also, eighteen percent claimed that they forwarded such messages without knowing^(٢٩). This resulted in a growing divide in political parties at the local levels which especially in the case of Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra stimulated the communal themes.

Disinformation was used to influence the electoral process in Nigeria during the elections, which has led to disillusionment. The Nigerian Election Monitoring Network conducted surveys that have revealed that the faith concerning the Independent National Electoral Commission has dropped by 21% as compared with the previous election cycle. The emergence of memes and WhatsApp threads carrying political bias created alternative publics that legitimize partisan readings of fairness in elections.

The protestors' comprehension of Information Technology played a significant role in the influence of online media during the protests that took place in Algeria from 2019 to 2020. At first, it allowed for inter-provincial coordination and allowed citizens to self-organize, but the lack of regulatory oversight and initiatives towards increasing civic literacy led to unsubstantiated claims spreading rapidly. This fragmentation of public opinion was detrimental^(٣٠). This case illustrates the dual impact of algorithmically mediated engagement social media use; it could support public engagement but damaged institutional reputation at the same time.

Mechanisms of Fragmentation: The purpose of algorithmic design is to enhance the engagement of posts that are polarizing and emotional. Users do not share the same common reality despite Facebook displaying the same news as your news feed^(٣١). These processes create “networked volatility” where there

are weak regulatory architectures and institutions with information travelling faster than verification^(r^v).

Institutional Consequences: The fragmentation of the system delegitimizes institutions. Between 2014–2020 Poland social media discourses about judicial reforms contributed to a growth in protests due to increasing partisanship in the discourses. Moreover, discourse that mobilized citizens, while competing with discourse that limited the institutional trust in the state^(r^h). Misinformation on social media during the elections in India caused a drop of as much as 12 points in confidence in the Election Commission of India, showing real-life institutional erosion^(r^h).

Philosophical Implications: This case challenges our traditional concept of the public sphere. The new wave of mobilization fueled by affect is pushing out deliberative rationality from the political scene. The evidence in question raises many normative questions about the ability of contemporary democracies to mediate collective decision-making processes^(e¹). The ethical dimension comes to the fore: when freedom of expression digitally is not accompanied by responsibility it can harm democratic legitimacy^(e¹).

Policy Interventions:

- It is suggested that transparency standards for recommendation algorithms should be in place to prevent the amplification of already polarized information.
- Organize civic literacy programs that aim to raise awareness of algorithmic mediation and encourage critical analysis of the information found online.
- The third step is to support independent media and decentralized fact-checking organizations to counter disinformation and rebuild confidence.
 - Government agencies and public oversight group can also use the LRS and GRs.

Scenario C: Hybrid Equilibrium

The third option is hybrid equilibrium, where social media aids the creation of hotbeds of civic empowerment alongside localized dismantling. This occurs simultaneously with no delay. The outcome of this port does not produce total consolidation of democracy nor destabilisation of the system; rather it is a complex and unequal digital ecosystem compatible with different outcomes.

Empirical Illustrations: Real World Examples: Social media platforms WhatsApp & Twitter were used as important tools during the general elections in India in 2019. Rural marginalised groups were able to enhance voter

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participation. While this misinformation strategy regarding minority groups leads to micro polarization, the estimates say that around 18% of rural users get to see counter-narratives across platforms^(٤٧).

In 2022 elections in *Kenya*, digital platforms like Facebook, & Telegram enabled youth engagement, facilitating civic dialogue, mobilization, and electoral monitoring. Due to a political algorithm, content that evokes an emotional response gets amplified leading to the creation of echo chambers that can cause localized unrest^(٤٨).

A prominent example of this hybrid equilibrium is *Taiwan's presidential election* in 2020. Facebook, LINE, & YouTube modified the political participation of people and became used for political purposes during the period of the election campaign. What has happened is a progressive mingling of the online and offline worlds. On one side, the ability of digital networks mobilizing citizens very quickly, participation of youth and widespread spreading of political knowledge. In contrast, the poll was subject to systematic misinformation attempts, mainly attributing to cross-border actors seeking to distort public perception and enhance political polarization. Due to the incident, it affected the condition of political climate. Taiwan's experience of lesser damage from algorithmic amplification can be attributed to active fact-checking organizations, government transparency initiatives and high levels of digital literacy across the Taiwanese institutions. Taiwan ran into a few troubles regardless of that. Thus, the Taiwanese Case demonstrates that a hybrid democracy, while enhancing the diversity of discourses for participation, induces episodic information disorder on social media^(٤٩).

Mechanisms and Dynamics: It shows how the fragmentation clusters and empowerment islands function and behave in cohabitation beyond the centre. In countries with solid institutions and high literacy rates, social media networks enhance civic mobilization so much they are very helpful. Similarly, in regions where governance is weak or consumer digital skills are weak, such platforms may be polarized. Because of this diversity of participation in the process of democratization, there are no uniform coalitions and no coherent centrifugal force in opposition to the state. There are complications and non-measurability of these systems.

Institutional Implications: The hybrid equilibrium offers institutional implications that require institutions to regulate participation but simultaneously reduce fragmentation. The flexibility and adaptability of various policy

measures are necessary as the investments in one area (for example, in digital literacy Programmes) may result in more empowerment while policy neglect in other areas (for instance, in algorithmic transparency) may aggravate the divide.

Forward-Looking Metrics^(٤٥):

1. There are two measures for dual engagement: the quantity or participation rate, and the quality or coherence of discourse.
2. Locating areas wherein algorithmic use led to polarization.
3. Monitoring of governance compliance and civic literacy indices is done across the platform's regions.

2. Normative & Policy Implications

The three potential scenarios offer a normative and policy challenge as social media cannot be classified as intrinsically beneficial or harmful. The effects of this phenomenon on democracy depend on the institutional, cultural or technical characteristics present in the specific case.

Policy Recommendations^(٤٦):

1. Algorithmic Governance

- Content recommendation algorithms should be transparent processes that maximize interactions should be disclosed.
- A neutral monitoring body should be established to audit the amplification of political content.

2. Civic and Digital Literacy

- It is suggested that the implementation of necessary civic education courses places a significant emphasis on evaluating web material critically.
- Startup digital literacy Programmes targeting high-risk groups, especially youth and communities in rural or remote areas.

3. Regulatory Frameworks

- Ensure design platforms are regulated so there is enough freedom.
- Implement penalties gradually to social media channels for failing to curb fake news.

4. Institutional Resilience and Trust Building

- To earn legitimacy for their organization, they need to put in place governance systems that are transparent and participative.
- Government institutions, civil society, and digital platforms should be encouraged to collaborate and jointly produce norms for citizen action.

Normative Considerations: When it comes to normative considerations, hybrid situations raise these kinds of ethical dilemmas: what information does damage; and who gets to decide? What impact has Prohibition had that would prompt an elegy for the grandfather? Policy frameworks may also have to make room for ethical considerations apart from technical oversight provisions^(٤٧).

Philosophical Implications for Democratic Theory

Citizen's perceptions are influenced by social media. We ought, then, to rethink the public sphere and participatory democracy at length, when it is age of algorithmic governance. In the old conceptualization of deliberations which existed before the proliferation of mobile phones, there was an assumption that communication was linear, institutions stable and citizens homogeneous (e.g. Habermas, Dahl). In contrast, digital technology-mediated environments are heterogeneous, dynamic and non-linear.

Rethinking the Public Sphere: The public sphere is broken up and interlinked within networks of communication governed by algorithms that form overlapping micro-publics and set parallel discourses. People must take these considerations in order to form opinions. The designs of the platforms, agency of users as well as regulatory surveillance and oversight. Therefore, a normative adjustment is required: deliberation and participation need to pay attention to algorithmic mediation, and to the emotional dynamics that are heightened through networks^(٤٨).

Democracy in the Algorithmic Age: social media not only replaces but also alters the way of doing democracy. Democracies should be sensitive to situations in which algorithms drive attention, engagement and visibility. This could make it difficult to call into question the standing assumptions on accountability, transparency and the equality of speech. Pierre Rosanvallon defines counter-democracy as the public's ability to see, monitor and criticize institutions and also influence it. This is important today, since new digital technologies allow networks to claim power away from institutions.^(٤٩)

Ethical Imperatives: We need to create ethical frameworks to regulate platforms in the digital age due to the technopolitical challenge to citizenship is fundamentally both a philosophical and political issue. They have to ensure inclusivity and lessen fragmentation and improves dialogue. The technological paradigms must be seen as normative spaces where the struggle for the manufacture of democratic legitimacy is going on. Infrastructure should not be equated with technological system. The greatest challenge of citizenship is

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balancing freedom, equality and citizenry in a world controlled by algorithms which is shaping the public space^(٤٠).

Innovation technology, such as self-driving cars and drones, shape how digital mediated societies will be more democratic. The undermining of democracy in the Global South is not due to capitalist actions. This means, it is the adaptation to algorithmic world, i.e. it's the meaning of this technology. The meaning of social media must evaluate its use and should be not only analyses as medium or technology. It mustn't be understood just as a means of communication. However, it is a structural variable dependent upon processes of larger democratic consolidation and contestation.

Conclusion

Political engagement is an important structural change which has occurred in modern democratic life. The latest structural development is the growth of structures. The paper aims to assess the impact of social media on an individual's political participation, opinion formation in a democracy. Looking beyond communication choices, digital platforms are infrastructures of a continuous set of institutions. The analytical-prospective approach examines the expansion of opportunities for citizen participation. Creating new conditions of discursive fragmentation & polarization, social network sites usage leads to ensued polarization.

Multiple theoretical studies indicate that empirical models of democratic participation, particularly Dahl's & Habermas', were schemed in settings characterized by more or less constant information flows, and by mediation through administration. Through digital technologies public spheres may work in an algorithmic, decentralized and structurally unstable way. A new epistemic condition emerges through social media: that of political belief, participation and collective legitimacy. Because of the internet, people don't rely on newspapers for political knowledge and are now active citizens. In communication systems users are active nodes contributing to the creation, duplication and countering of messages.

The analytical and empirical findings of the study validate the primary trait which is that social media is a double-edged sword in today's democracies. Digital platforms let users mobilize and organize quickly because they can disseminate information on a large scale, establish equal relationships among individuals, and coordinate actions collaboratively. Citizens can democratically engage in several ways using networked communication. Instances like the

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citizens' activism in Tunisia and Algeria as well as the participatory digital government launch in Estonia and South Korea are well documented.

Must assess the underlying technical infrastructures that create important structural distortions that affect the stability of democratic institutions. The ability to selectively expose and create echo chambers creates ideological homogeneity. The algorithm often favors sensational content. Disinformation, trust, and the public institutions: are we safe from Artificial Intelligence? The USA, India, Brazil, and Nigeria have all shown how digital spaces can create extreme polarization and generate new alternative publics where new identities live and thrive in quite different political worlds.

Democracy is evolving mainly due to three social media and other digital platforms finds research study. To devise these pathways, plausible future scenarios were analysed and modelled accordingly. In democratic consolidation participatory governance models can take advantage of digital platform infrastructures. When institutions are strong; regulation is effective; and there is critical mass awareness among civil society this scenario will happen. In these circumstances, social media can improve accountability, generate public discussion and strengthen the legitimacy of democracy.

The second situation is called algorithmic fragmentation Both environmentally are low institutional control are Also low digital literacy in turn, that ensures the platform dynamics are polarized and misinformed. The lack of unity that exists between citizens in the sense of not trusting anybody along with a lack of trust of education and democratic institutions due to digital involvement.

Most of the existing democracies will probably select this hybrid equilibrium as a third choice (after the neo-liberal regime). There are significant spaces for civil empowerment despite fragmentation and intermittent information disorder at this level social media affects entire social life. New methods can enable minimizing any disruptive forms of algorithmic communication. We need effective institutional reactions, practical fact-checking networks, tech-savvy persons, etc. In 2020, Taiwan held elections. This illustrates the above case.

When people take such action at the same time it gives rise to a wonderful convergence. This convergence conveys a significant message; it is not technological means but nature of engagement on the social media that determines the democratic effect. The sequence of events elucidated this insight. Ultimately, the existence of digital infrastructures relies on deeper and more

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significant socio-political conflicts. Policymaking and political will is the key for the development of a country social media has a bigger impact on politics than the other way round - and the bigger the player, the bigger the impact.

We must think again about the public sphere, yes, in the time of algorithmic systems in light of these findings. Micro-publics are interconnected constituencies that comprise the digital public sphere—their character and design is shaped by platforms and users and by algorithms. The Democratic theory should drop its previous assumptions than which anything more efficient might comfortably fit, and should make room for one more type of public discourse that is less efficient but more diffuse.

It could be argued that norms may in fact generate consequences. The present dilemma regarding whether and how a democracy should govern free speech rights and whether the state should regulate to ensure that the debate occurring is factually correct and reasonably calm; navigating policy challenges will necessarily need to occur in a pluralistic and efficacious manner through algorithm transparency, media literacy, regulatory standards and institutional innovation. Democracies need to enable conditions under which networked informational environments can support deliberation and not undermine it. But this is not what democracies need to pursue; rather it is to act and to permit digital participation. New communication networks will support and develop deliberative democracy in conjunction with new political institutions and cultures which take root within algorithmically mediated environments. More broadly, social media's increasing role in political communication will be influential on democracies; they will continue to depend on regulatory institutions and ethical principles to provide guidance. Obstacles to democratic self-governance within this digital age are political and philosophical rather than technical. New types of governance will be necessary in a democracy, ones that allow a combination of fluctuating digital participation with stable institutions of collective decision making. A new political communication process will emerge: the communications of the twenty-first century will enable societies to turn segmentation into inclusive, Transparent, and Resilient Democratic Life.

⁽¹⁾ Robert A. Dahl, On Democracy (Yale University Press, 1998), pp .37–61

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