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The influence of the Internet and social networks on political behavior in modern society

Abstract. *This article presents an analysis of the literature on the influence of the Internet and social networks on political behavior. The study covers the effects on opinion formation, mobilization, agitation, and issues related to disinformation. The results emphasize the complexity of the influence and highlight the need for further research in this area.*
Both positive and negative aspects of the impact of the digital space on the political sphere are analyzed. The Internet expands access to information and increases citizen participation in political life, but there are also risks of manipulation and destructive influence.
The article underscores the importance of subsequent research, especially in the context of the constantly evolving digital landscape and the evolution of social networks. This analysis provides a fundamental basis for a deeper understanding of the influence of the Internet on political behavior in contemporary society.
Keywords: *internet, social networks, political behavior, disinformation, digital space, list experiment.*

Introduction

Studying the effects of the Internet and social networks on political behavior holds significant importance, as in the modern world, these technologies play an increasingly vital role in shaping public opinion and influencing political processes. Understanding these effects will enable us to better grasp how digital technologies are altering the ways in which political actors and citizens communicate, mobilize, and interact. This knowledge can lead to the development of more effective strategies for political engagement, safeguarding democratic values, and promoting constructive political dialogue in the online environment.

During the 2010s, there was a noticeable surge in protest movements worldwide. The "Arab Spring" served as a catalyst for waves of protests that swept through various countries. Significant protest events took place in Algeria, Bolivia, Catalonia, Chile, France, Hong Kong, Iran, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, Sudan, and Venezuela. Even in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, protests persisted, continuing to capture the attention of society. These protests stemmed from various causes, ranging from opposition to enforced isolation to protests against racism in the wake of the killing of George Floyd by a police officer. In the news, protests received extensive coverage, and public interest in them has been growing (Barrie, 2021). The Internet and social media play a pivotal role in these protests, as they serve as platforms for disseminating information to the public. Some political actors may leverage these influence tools to sway public opinion in their favor. Consequently, social media and the Internet serve as potent instruments that shape and transform societal structures. Swift and radical shifts in the political landscape are observed both in democratic nations, where a substantial number of voters support populists with authoritarian tendencies, and in autocratic regimes, where

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Педагогика. Психология. Әлеуметтану сериясы
ISSN: 2616-6895, eISSN: 2663-2497

waves of protests and revolutions emerge. The Internet and social media play a crucial role in amplifying economic, political, and cultural grievances worldwide; however, they can also be utilized by autocratic regimes for control and propaganda. Low entry barriers and a reliance on user-generated content distinguish social media from traditional media. They enable new political actors to assert themselves but can also facilitate the dissemination of extremist ideas. It is important to understand that social media wield significant influence over political processes and induce diverse effects in different countries and regimes (Zhuravskaya et al, 2020). Social media constitutes a tool that exerts influence at both micro and macro levels, with extensive capabilities that many countries, brands, and companies actively leverage.

Lorenz-Spreen and colleagues (2021) conducted a review of studies on the relationship between digital media and political variables. The findings indicate that the use of digital media is associated with an increase in political activity and information consumption, which is favorable for democracy. However, there is also noted a decrease in trust in politics, advantages for populists, and a rise in polarization, which is unfavorable for democracy (Lorenz-Spreen et al., 2021). Certainly, discussions regarding the role of digital media in democracy evoke disagreements and yield contradictory results. Digital media have a dual impact on democracy: they can promote citizen participation and democratization, but also induce polarization and populism. For instance, history demonstrates that radio and other communication technologies can be employed for both propaganda and resistance against authoritarian regimes (Lorenz-Spreen et al., 2021). For a deeper comprehension of the influence of social networks and the Internet on people's political beliefs, qualitative and quantitative research in this domain is imperative. Furthermore, such studies necessitate funding and the application of new experimental methods to assess causal relationships involving new media and its impact, and such endeavors are currently sparse in Kazakhstan.

One of these studies is by Bekmagambetov and colleagues (2023), who contend that in countries with a more pronounced democracy, such as Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, individuals who frequently utilize digital media are more inclined to participate in elections. For instance, in Kyrgyzstan, where the use of digital media is high, there is approximately a 65% likelihood of voter turnout. Meanwhile, in less democratic countries, such as Uzbekistan, with the same level of digital media usage, the probability of voting stands at only 45%. This underscores that the impact of digital media on electoral participation is heavily contingent on the political context. In countries with more developed democracies, where public opinion holds greater significance, digital media play a role in galvanizing civic engagement. Whereas in less democratic countries, where the political system is more centralized, the influence of digital media on electoral participation is less pronounced. These findings highlight the importance of accounting for the political context when analyzing the influence of digital media on voting participation (Bekmagambetov et al., 2023). The relationship between the online space and political beliefs is deeply intertwined, underscoring the significance of this area of research.

The primary objective of this study is to contribute to the understanding and analysis of the relationship between contemporary digital media and political dynamics. Additionally, it seeks to expand our knowledge regarding the influence of social networks and Internet platforms on political beliefs, as well as provide an analytical perspective on issues related to trust in political institutions, the rise of polarization, and the development of populist tendencies. Our aim is to make a contribution to academic research in this field, laying the groundwork for more in-depth analyses in the future.

Methodology: Meta-Analysis and Bibliographic Analysis

Using the VOSviewer software, a bibliographic analysis was conducted, identifying 903 works based on keywords (Table 1). This study represents an analysis of the impact of social media and the Internet on politics from 2010 to 2023. The analysis was carried out using data from the Scopus database to identify keywords strongly associated with this topic, leading to a better understanding of academic trends reflected in research publications. This also aids in

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gaining deeper insights into studies, particularly in the social sciences related to this subject. The overlap analysis provides an overview of trends in the examined areas over the past 13 years, and density analysis helps identify keywords with potential for further exploration of the influence of social media and the Internet on politics.

Methodology for searching bibliometric references

Search term	Relationship between social media and Internet with politics
Query string	(TITLE-ABS-KEY (social AND media) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (Internet) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (politics)) AND PUBYEAR > 2009 AND PUBYEAR < 2024 AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , «SOCI») OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , «PSYC») OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , «ECON») OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , «DECI») OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , «BUSI»))
Period	2010-2023
Document type	ALL
Language	ALL
Search date	6 October 2023

In Figure 1, the research findings are presented in various clusters, each denoted by different colors corresponding to their respective themes. Clusters ranging from purple (up to 2016) to yellow (2020 and beyond) are divided into different periods. This demonstrates the level of density, indicated by the frequency of keywords frequently discussed by researchers.

Figure 1. Bibliometric analysis with VOSviewer

Some of these keywords represent extensively researched topics. Unlike smaller-scale themes such as "protest" and "activism," "fake news," "disinformation," and "digital activism" indicate that this area has not yet received widespread scrutiny. Words highlighted in yellow

have been actively discussed in the academic community in recent years, many of which are linked to the development of the online space. Therefore, the opportunity to discuss and explore these topics remains widely open.

Let's delve deeper into this subject, beginning with an analysis of the global spread of social networks and the identification of their peculiarities. Social networks constitute a significant phenomenon in the modern world, encompassing various corners of the globe. Their influence extends across diverse spheres of life, from communication to their impact on political and societal processes. Tracking their proliferation and patterns of use will provide valuable insights into how social networks shape public dynamics, interactions, and information exchange in contemporary global activities.
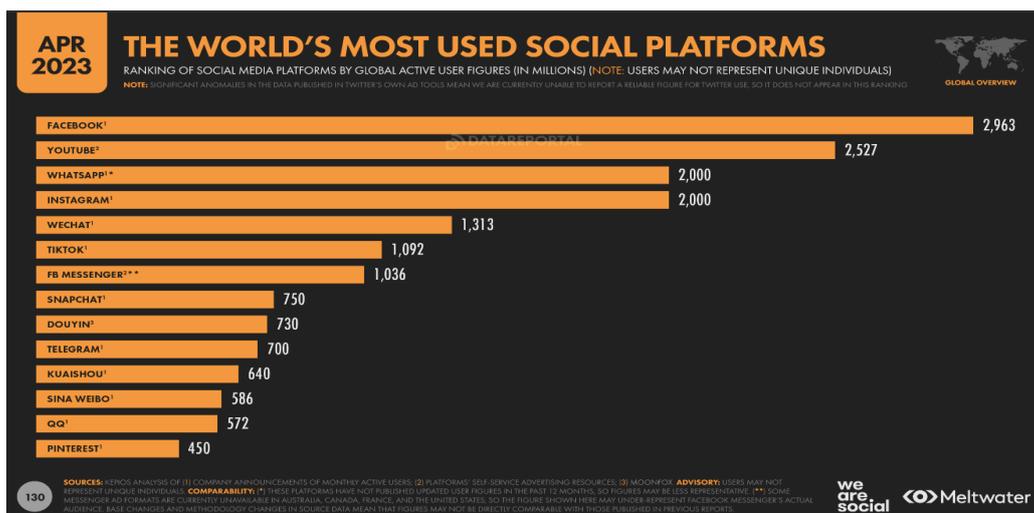
Figure 2. The world's most used social platforms

Source: Chaffey, D. (2023, June 7). Global social media statistics research summary 2023. Smart Insights. https://www.smartinsights.com/social-media-marketing/social-media-strategy/new-global-social-media-research/

Figure 3. Figure 3. Social media users 2023

Source: Shewale, R. (2023, September 12). Social Media Users — Global Demographics (2023). Demand Sage. https://www.demandsage.com/social-media-users/

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Figures 2 and 3 present data from SmartInsights regarding the global spread of social networks. Globally, there are 4.9 billion social media users, indicating that 60.49% of the world's population utilize social media. Facebook stands as the largest social media platform with 3.03 billion users. The global penetration rate of social networks is 59.4%. On average, a social media user engages with 6.6 platforms. Eastern Asia is the region with the highest number of social media users (26%) as of 2023. China, with 1.02 billion users, leads as the country with the highest number of social media users. India and the United States rank second and third, respectively, with 755.47 million and 302.25 million users. On average, an individual spends two hours and thirty-five minutes on social media per day. Millennials and Generation Z are the most active social media users. The fastest-growing social network is TikTok, which has increased its audience by an astounding 105% in the United States over the past two years (DemandSage). In the context of Kazakhstan, TikTok and Instagram are the leading platforms, with a majority of users being young people. Facebook, on the other hand, is predominantly used by the older generation.

Discussion: Are Social Networks Good or Bad?

The question of whether social networks represent good or evil, and how they influence people's political beliefs, is a complex and multifaceted issue with varying perspectives. On one hand, social networks provide a platform for free exchange of opinions and ideas, allowing citizens to express their political beliefs and participate in public discussions. They can also contribute to the dissemination of information about political events and increase public awareness. This can be favorable for democracy as it promotes active civic participation. Zhuravskaya and colleagues (2020) argue that in some cases, the Internet and social networks contribute to pro-democratic changes, especially when society is dissatisfied with corruption, power undermining, and control of traditional media by autocrats. In such cases, unrestricted Internet and social networks contribute to improving accountability and public awareness, as well as organizing protests. However, there is another side to this; for example, autocrats often resort to Internet censorship, banning social networks that are not under their control, and filling other social networks with disinformation (Zhuravskaya et al, 2020). They can create "echo chambers" where people are exposed exclusively to confirming information, which can lead to the reinforcement and entrenchment of their own beliefs and distortion of reality. This can contribute to societal polarization and reduced dialogue between different groups.

Therefore, in democratic countries, they contribute to increased political participation and diversity of opinions, but they can also undermine trust in political institutions. While they may amplify populism and polarization, which can be advantageous for certain political regimes, it can have negative effects on pluralistic democracy. These conclusions are supported by various methods of analysis, indicating their reliability (Lorenz-Spreen et al, 2021). This topic is extensive and complex, requiring numerous studies to fully comprehend. Researchers Rogers, R., & Niederer, S. (2020) also support this idea and state that digital media serve as a double-edged tool. On one hand, they provide citizens with a means to exert influence, as seen in examples like the Arab Spring, the "Fridays for Future" movement, and the #MeToo movement. On the other hand, digital media can also be a means to incite disruptive behavior and shape trends, including polarization and populism. A tragic event associated with this is the attack on the United States Capitol in January 2021 (Rogers, R., & Niederer, S., 2020). They also note that unlike traditional broadcasting, digital media platforms are not content creators. Their power lies in providing and managing the digital infrastructure. Despite this infrastructure serving as an online public sphere, platforms significantly influence the flow of information.

Examples of historical cases where media have been used for both constructive and destructive purposes underscore the complexity of this issue. Digital media can simultaneously enhance civic engagement and contribute to destructive phenomena such as polarization and populism. Furthermore, they possess the characteristic of ease in creating and disseminating content, and large platforms have significant control over the flow of information. Many scholars seek to

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ISSN: 2616-6895, eISSN: 2663-2497

provide a scientifically grounded understanding of the relationship between digital media and political aspects like participation, trust, and polarization (Lorenz-Spreen et al, 2021). However, the political role of the Internet and social networks is not yet fully understood. There is some evidence that populist parties, both right and left, may benefit more from the strengthening of social networks and the Internet compared to central political forces (Zhuravskaya et al, 2020). Thus, the influence of social networks on political beliefs depends on a multitude of factors, including how they are utilized and how society reacts to this tool. Further research in this area is important to gain a more comprehensive understanding of all aspects of this issue and to develop strategies for balanced and responsible use of social networks in a political context.

Results and Recommendations

For a more comprehensive understanding of this topic, it is important to examine the global spread of social networks and their distinctive features. Analyzing large volumes of data collected from social media posts will help better understand how misinformation spreads, how coordination occurs within social networks, and the role played by the structure of these networks. Experimental methods are crucial in this regard.

Experimental research plays a significant role in understanding the response of political elites to protest movements. In the context of political sociology of protest, they allow us to identify how individual preferences and perceptions of legislators influence their reactions to the demands of protesters. Experiments provide the opportunity to create controlled situations in which specific variables can be manipulated and observe how it affects the decisions of political elites. For instance, experiments can be conducted by providing legislators with different information about the scale and support of protests to see how it influences their reactions and decisions. Such studies help expand the understanding of the mechanisms of interaction between protests and political actors, and identify which factors may have the greatest impact on elite decision-making in response to protests (Barrie, 2021).

For this study, the "List Experiment" method can be employed, which is often used for sensitive questions, including political ones. Obtaining truthful answers to delicate questions is a central methodological challenge for researchers in various disciplines. Over the past few decades, various survey methods have been developed and successfully used, including the method of randomized responses (Tourangeau and Yan, 2007). The List Experiment is applied to study delicate behavior, ensuring complete anonymity of participants. Participants are randomly presented with blocks of statements, including both benign and sensitive elements. Participants only indicate the total number of statements that apply to them, without disclosing specific elements. Comparing mean values across groups allows determining the baseline rate for sensitive behavior. An important advantage of this method is its ability to provide participant anonymity and reduce data distortion (Ahapt and Sackett, 2004).

The List Experiment is a methodology gaining popularity due to its ability to measure sensitive attitudes, with behavior being less influenced by social desirability. The results of this study emphasize that this experimental method can be a valuable tool in analyzing sensitive topics in sociology. By employing the randomized response method, the List Experiment can provide a more accurate estimate of the prevalence of stigmatized attitudes and behavioral patterns (Zhanadilova, 2023). We have also applied the List Experiment method in studies regarding the impact of social networks and the Internet. The results of these studies will be presented in upcoming publications.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is essential to emphasize that studying the effects of the Internet and social networks on political behavior holds great significance for contemporary society. Considering the substantial influence of digital media on shaping public opinion, mobilizing citizens, and impacting political processes, it is crucial to continue deep and systematic research on this

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subject. Understanding the effects of the Internet and social networks on political behavior will aid in developing effective strategies and policies to uphold and strengthen democratic processes and safeguard public interest. Further research in this field necessitates the collaboration of interdisciplinary teams and broad public support to ensure the most comprehensive understanding and positive impact of digital media on the political sphere.

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Интернет пен әлеуметтік медианың қазіргі қоғамдағы саяси мінез-құлыққа әсері

Аңдатпа. Бұл мақала интернет пен әлеуметтік желілердің саяси мінез-құлыққа әсері туралы әдебиеттерді талдау жасайды. Зерттеу пікір қалыптастырудың, жұмылдырудың, үгіт-насихаттың және жалған ақпарат мәселелерінің әсерін қамтиды. Нәтижелер әсердің күрделілігін және осы саладағы қосымша зерттеулердің қажеттілігін көрсетеді.

Цифрлық кеңістіктің саяси салаға әсерінің оң және теріс аспектілері талданады. Интернет ақпаратқа қол жетімділікті кеңейтеді, азаматтардың саяси өмірге қатысуын арттырады, бірақ манипуляция мен деструктивті әсер ету қаупі де бар.

Мақала кейінгі зерттеулердің маңыздылығын, әсіресе үнемі өзгеріп отыратын цифрлық ландшафт пен әлеуметтік медиа эволюциясы аясында көрсетеді. Бұл талдау интернеттің қазіргі қоғамдағы саяси мінез-құлыққа әсерін тереңірек түсіну үшін іргелі негіз ұсынады.

Түйін сөздер: интернет, әлеуметтік медиа, саяси мінез-құлық, жалған ақпарат, сандық кеңістік, тізімдік эксперимент.

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Влияние интернета и социальных сетей на политическое поведение в современном обществе

Аннотация. Данная статья представляет собой анализ литературы по воздействию интернета и социальных сетей на политическое поведение. Исследование охватывает эффекты формирования мнений, мобилизации, агитации и проблем дезинформации. Результаты подчеркивают сложность влияния и указывают на необходимость дальнейших исследований в этой области.

Анализируются как положительные, так и отрицательные аспекты воздействия цифрового пространства на политическую сферу. Интернет расширяет доступ к информации, увеличивает участие граждан в политической жизни, но существуют также риски манипуляций и разрушительного воздействия.

Статья выделяет важность последующих исследований, особенно в контексте постоянно меняющегося цифрового ландшафта и эволюции социальных сетей. Этот анализ предоставляет фундаментальную базу для более глубокого понимания влияния интернета на политическое поведение в современном обществе.

Ключевые слова: интернет, социальные сети, политическое поведение, дезинформация, цифровое пространство, списочный эксперимент.

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