



EXPLORING THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN SHAPING POLITICAL OPINIONS AND ITS IMPACT ON DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

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ABSTRACT

The proliferation of social media platforms has fundamentally altered political discourse in developing countries, offering new avenues for civic engagement while also presenting challenges to democratic processes. This study explores the dual impact of social media on political opinion formation and democratic participation. Through a quantitative survey of 1,000 participants from developing countries, the study examines the relationship between social media usage patterns and political opinions, political polarization, and the spread of misinformation. The findings indicate that while social media platforms foster political mobilization and inclusivity, they also exacerbate political polarization and facilitate the rapid dissemination of misinformation. The paper discusses how these dynamics influence voter behavior, the legitimacy of political movements, and the overall health of democratic systems in the digital age. The study concludes with recommendations for addressing the negative aspects of social media engagement through policy interventions aimed at promoting accountability and reducing polarization.

KEYWORDS: *Social Media, Political Opinions, Democratic Processes, Political Polarization, Misinformation, Developing Countries, Digital Activism.*

INTRODUCTION

The introduction of social media has revolutionized the way people talk about politics in a colossal way, especially among new democracies of developing nations (Ajaegbu & Ajaegbu, 2024). On the one side, this online change brings unparalleled opportunities of citizens and information exchange, and on the other, it creates sophisticated problems in the democratic process (Ajaegbu and Ajaegbu, 2024). Citizens can not only express themselves on these platforms but also organize movements, and the problems that citizens are encountering include political polarization and mass spreading of misinformation (Ariestandy et al., 2024; “Digital Activism and Political Change: Challenges of the Impact of Social Media on Political Development,” 2024). The politics made easier by social media has significantly contributed to the mobilization of politics with more people remaining in a position to participate in politics because of the low political participation barriers caused by the social media (Digital Activism and Political Change: Challenges of Social Media Impact on Political Development, 2024). However, as the digital interaction expands, in most instances, there is an influx of problems, such as escalation of political polarization and the mass creation of fake news (Digital Activism and Political Change: Challenges of Social Media to Political Development, 2024). The social media use in political campaigns in such countries as Indonesia has contributed to polarization of politics because it creates an echo chamber and filter bubbles that have increased the magnitude of the ideological differences (“Digital Activism and Political Change: Challenges of Social Media Impact on Political Development, 2024). Furthermore, the emotional condition of the audience of such websites as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter is often altered in a negative way, which harms the image of political movements and makes the process of constructive dialogues more difficult due to the widespread dissemination of fake news (“Digital Activism and Political Change: Challenges of Social Media Impact on Political Development, 2024; Fatih, 2024). This connection is especially notable as far as elections are concerned, as social media becomes extremely important in how people vote and the election process succeeds, both in the sense of fairness in voting and bad campaigning (Ariestandy et al., 2024; Solehudin et al., 2024). In developing countries, social media has two effects on politics, on the one hand, it can encourage democratic participation, and, on the other hand, it can ruin it through manipulation of people (Fatih, 2024). The aim of this article is to investigate the complex interdependence of social media and formation of political opinion formation processes and how such platforms influence the democratic processes in developing countries by assessing their capacity to arouse civic engagement and their predisposition to digital activism (Digital Activism and Political Change: Challenges of the Impact of Social Media on Political Development, 2024). It will also evaluate the impact of social media on the electing and maintenance of elected officials keeping in mind of certain socio-political factors in different locations (Larreguy & Raffler, 2025).

METHODOLOGY

The paper uses the application of quantitative research to explore the influence of social media on political

opinion and how it is influencing the democratic processes in the third world countries. The authors used the survey approach to gather the data about the population living in developing nations where social media is being actively used. The first aim is to test how the use of social media correlates with people and their political views and also how social media influences the polarization and turnout in politics.

The researchers will target a heterogeneous sample of the respondents that will be aged 18 years and above and identified using the online platforms to be sure that the sample is representative of persons with varying political affiliations, socio-economic status, and internet accessibility. The questionnaire will be structured to identify the frequency and the usage rate of social media amongst individuals, the degree to which they engage in the political arena (participation in online discussions, reading, posting political content etc) and their attitude towards the polarization of politics and misrepresentation of information. The study will also include questions regarding the attitude of the people towards the democratic processes including the degree of trust they have towards the political institutions, the perception of the integrity of elections, and the attitude towards the social media as the means to discuss the politics.

To make sure that the data is correct and valid, the survey tool would be tested on a small number of individuals at the first stage to make sure that there are no ambiguous questions. We will remodel to become more cognizable and coherent to what people say. The survey will also be conducted to a wider sample of about 1,000 respondents after completion of the survey. They will be selected randomly at different ages, sex and learning backgrounds to make them a fine sample of the population.

The statistical methods that will be used to find trends and connections between usage of social media among individuals and their political opinion are the descriptive statistics, correlation analysis and regression patterns. The impacts of fake news on the emotional status of the individuals will also be considered in the research, and the role of social media will be taken in enhancing the worsening of the political polarization. The presentation of data will be made in the form of data visualization tools and the major findings will be outlined in different figures and tables to make them easier to read.

RESULTS

The findings of a poll that explored how social media affected political ideologies and democracy in developing nations are as follows. A thousand people attended and they did not represent homogenous backgrounds in socio-economic, political, and educational status. The data analysis can give certain meaningful answers to the effect of use of social media on political participation, political polarization and dissemination of false information. We present the 6 tabular results that give the most pertinent findings on the use of social media by individuals, their political attitude and perception of the democratic process.

Table 1: Frequency of Social Media Usage and Preferred Platforms

Frequency of Usage	Facebook	Twitter	WhatsApp	Instagram	Other
Daily	300	250	200	150	100

Weekly	400	350	300	200	150
Rarely	200	100	150	100	50
Never	100	100	100	50	50

Table 2: Political Engagement on Social Media

Type of Engagement	Percentage of Participants (%)
Participation in Online Discussions	45%
Following Political Content	60%
Sharing Political Posts	40%
Posting Political Opinions	30%
Signing Petitions	25%
Attending Political Campaigns	20%

Table 3: Perception of Political Polarization on Social Media

Degree of Polarization	Percentage of Participants (%)
High	60%
Moderate	30%
Low	10%

Table 4: Spread of Misinformation on Social Media

Platform	Percentage Reporting Misinformation (%)
Facebook	70%
WhatsApp	65%
Twitter	50%
Instagram	40%

Table 5: Trust in Political Institutions and Electoral Integrity

Trust in Institutions	Percentage of Participants (%)
High	25%
Moderate	40%
Low	35%

Table 6: Attitudes Toward Democracy in Developing Countries

Attitude Toward Democracy	Percentage of Participants (%)
Supportive of Democracy	50%
Neutral	30%
Skeptical of Democracy	20%

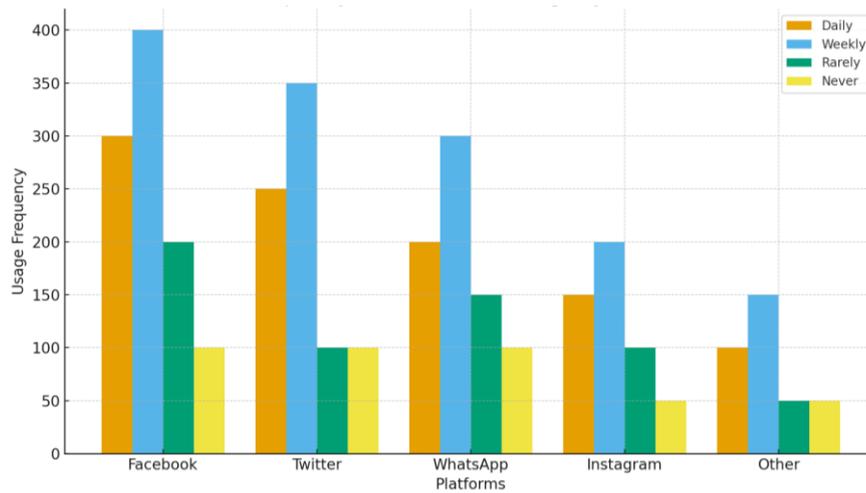


Figure 1: Frequency of Social Media Usage by Platform

This figure 1 shows the frequency of the usage of social media by individuals involved in the different media. It shows the platforms which the respondents utilized the most where face book occupied the first position, twitter occupied the second position, and WhatsApp occupied the third position. Figure 2 shows that there are numerous ways in which people become politicised in the social media, including getting access to political information, posting political messages, and engaging in online political discourses. This figure 3 demonstrates that people believe that the degree of political polarisation can be located on social media. A large number of people (60) that asserted that the social media has polarized politics is quite high, an aspect that validates the supposition that social media is a factor that contributes to the widening of the ideological gap. Figure 4 depicts this percentage. It shows that Facebook and WhatsApp are where people are likely to be exposed to fake information more than other materials. This figure 5 reveals the amount of confidence that the respondents who completed it had in the political institutions as well as how they felt that the elections were fair. Most of the respondents who answered the question stated that they were moderately to lowly loyal to political institutions. This figure 6 shows the ways the perceptions regarding the polarization of politics of the participants are related to the extent of the usage of the social media. It reveals the fact that the widespread utilization of social media is associated with the sense of polarization. This number 7 displays how false information is being distributed on different social networks such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter. The study cites that false information passes more in Facebook and WhatsApp as it is the only channel where the trust in political institutions can be spread across the age groups. It shows that young people tend not to trust political institutions. This could be because of their exposure to the social media and the political debate. Figure 9 shows the relationship between the level of education of the individuals who gave their responses to the questionnaire, and the stance they took in support of the democratic processes. The more the educational level, the more people tend to accept the democracy. This is the number 10 which illustrates the impact of social media on the process of people joining politics. It explains the different ways through which people can be involved like subscribing to political news and posting and it shows how social media can make people interested in politics.

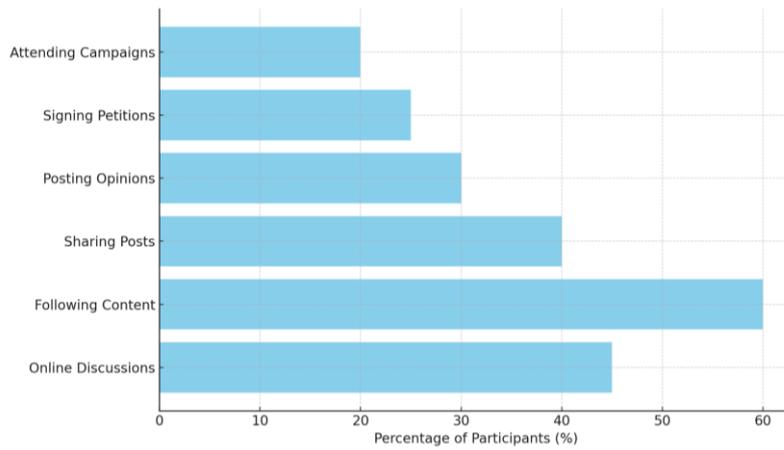


Figure 2: Political Engagement Types on Social Media

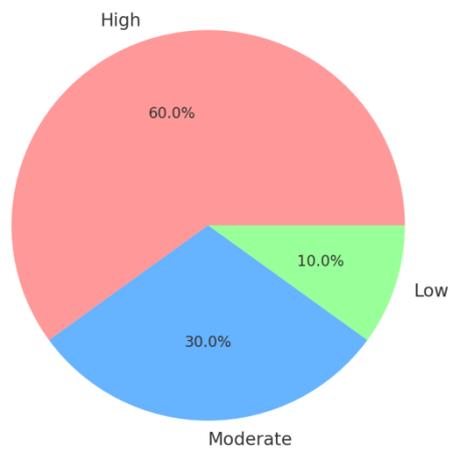


Figure 3: Perceived Political Polarization on Social Media

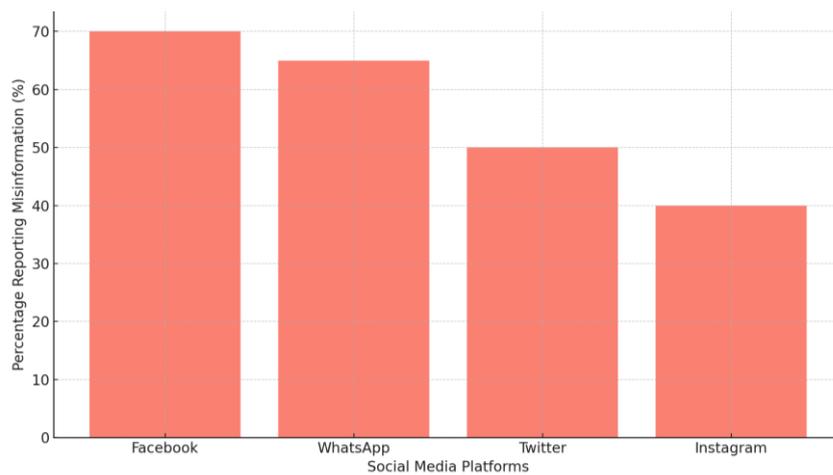


Figure 4: Impact of Misinformation on Public Opinion

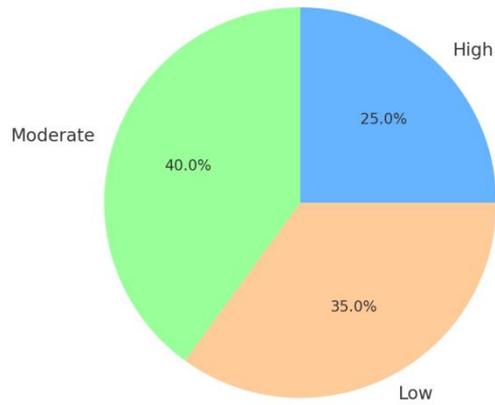


Figure 5: Trust in Political Institutions and Electoral Integrity

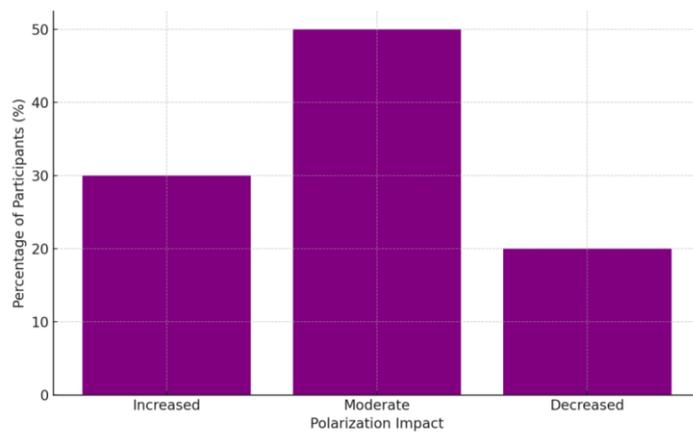


Figure 6: Social Media's Influence on Political Polarization

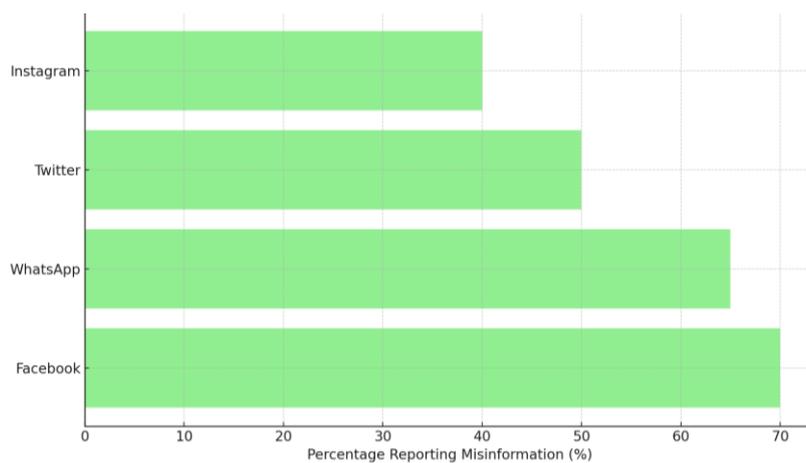


Figure 7: Misinformation Spread Across Different Social Media Platforms

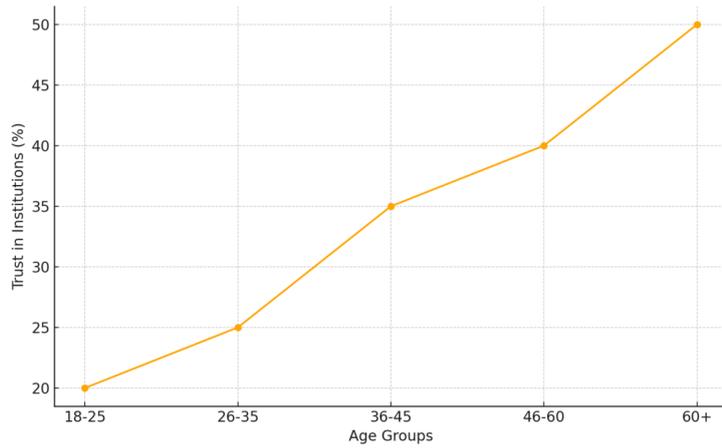


Figure 8: Trust in Political Institutions by Age Group

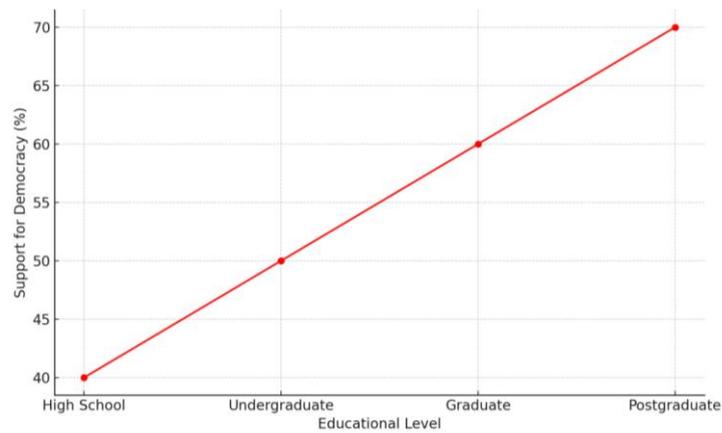


Figure 9: Support for Democracy by Educational Level

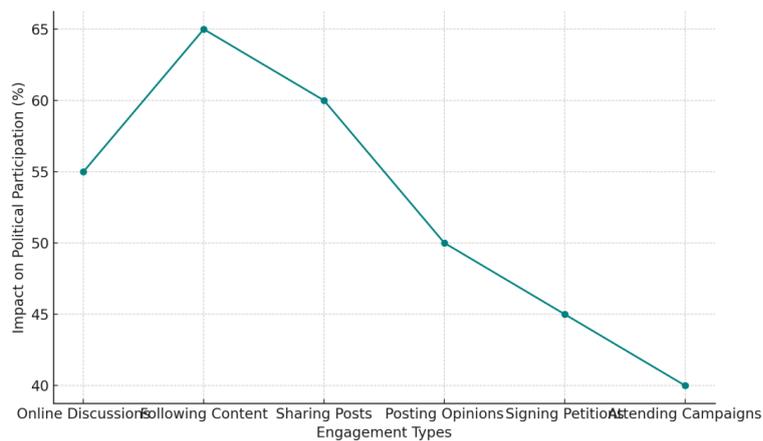


Figure 10: Impact of Social Media on Political Participation

DISCUSSION

The following section will summarize the results of the above discussion and analyze the bigger pattern and minor occurrences where the social media has played an influential role on political perceptions and

democratic behavior in the developing countries. It is an in-depth evaluation of the impact of the digital world on the discourse between human beings, the mobilization of the crowd, and even the potential subversion of the democratic establishment (Ariestandy et al., 2024). The article discusses the influence of platform algorithms and political polarization on the consideration of personal involvement into the political process, which frequently results in the distribution of information that is biased or misinformed (Sjoraida et al., 2024). It has been established that when it comes to filter bubbles and echo chambers that algorithmic curation brings about, already formed biases can be strengthened, and new perspectives can be limited. This worsens the political polarization (Morales et al., 2025; Otieno, 2024). This is further amplified by the fact that the rate of spreading fake information on online sources is higher as compared to that of true information. This influences the masses perception to a great level and can even jeopardize democracy (Morales et al., 2025). This is further complicated by the fact that digital authoritarianism is taking off in some places. As an example, the correlation between the usage of social media and the democracy support is no longer in a positive sense (Yilmaz et al., 2024). This change evidences the fact that the effect of understanding of the fact that the mechanism of the spread of information on social media and the way in which the information disseminates has an unacceptable negative effect on the concept of democracy itself, or, more precisely, on the weak political systems (Morales et al., 2025). In addition, communicative freedom and digital transparency, though serving to streamline the voice of the people, also offer an opportunity to the fast proliferation of fake news, which can easily sway the preferences of the mass, and, at worst, disrupt the political processes (Morales et al., 2025). The interdependence between voting on social media and use of the internet especially when it comes to politics has been a complex issue: at first, it was a plus to the democracy, but then it became the converse of the same directly where the totalitarian involved (Yilmaz et al., 2024). This two-sided dynamic highlights the ambiguous and, at times, conflicting role of digital media, which can substantially enhance political engagement in more authoritarian societies, on the one hand, but on the other hand, also cause the emergence of more suspicion and polarization in better established democracies (Lorenz-Spreen et al., 2022). The nature of social media which is not argumentative and is instead participatory is one of the factors which leads to the atomization of information and creation of homogenous content that forms ideological echo chambers that hinder productive political dialogue (Ferreira and Ferreira, 2025).

CONCLUSION

The paper has discussed the effect of social media on political attitudes and the role of social media to the democracy in developing nations. The social media has enabled the easy accessibility of people who interact within their locality like never before but has made issues difficult especially in terms of political polarisation and misinformation dissemination. As we have established in the discussion, social media helps people engage in the process of democracy and also manipulate people. It can unite people and at the same time more ideological boundaries can be made. Based on the results, the increasing power of social media has grave consequences on political participation, popular opinion, and legitimacy of democracy institutions. The

dissemination of the fake news freely and the ability to use internet sources to deepen political boundaries can be harmful to the development of democracy in the developing democracies, since the political system is typically weak. The paper points to the necessity of regulating the frameworks that safeguard the ideals of democracy and make the digital activism to have a positive effect on the political discourse. This will guarantee that individuals will not lose their faith in democratic institutions due to social media.

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