

Committee: Special Conference on Social Media (SPECON)

Issue: Social media and political activity

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INTRODUCTION

We live in a world engrossed by social media - there are approximately 2 billion people utilizing social media every day. The idea of creating ways in order to spread news and more has been present for the past two centuries. Social media, as we know them today, have been present for the past two decades and have turned massive since then. For example, with newspapers or telegraphs people tried to communicate to limit the distance with other people since the late 1800's. Social media have been very successful and present in people's everyday lives and in the way politics take action. Sites like Facebook and Twitter have become places where people can openly speak about anything giving a very good opportunity for

people to share their political beliefs. Also social media have become a platform for political campaigns and propaganda to creep in as well. It is believed that political activity and propaganda are two things that definitely go hand in hand when it comes to political activity on social media but also in any other media for that matter.

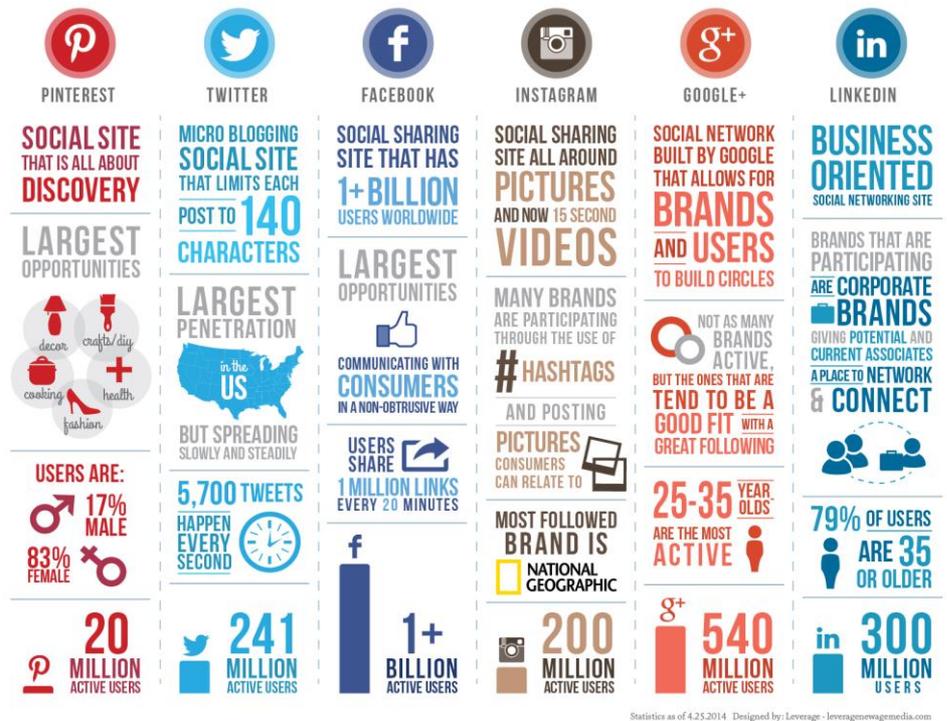


Figure 1: Social media and facts

This study guide aim is to further investigate on the importance of social media in our lives, how politicians and governments and have been using social media to reach out to as many people as possible, to make their campaigns and spread their ideas and beliefs the public trough social media. Finally, it will analyze the presence of propaganda and the different methods used by politicians in their campaigns and also how banning information from can also be considered part of a political campaign.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Social media

Forms of electronic communication which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages and other content.

Propaganda

Ideas or statements that are often false or exaggerated and that are spread in order to help a cause, a political leader, a government etc. Any campaign that is used to persuade can be characterized as propaganda.

Civic engagement

Refers to the ways in which citizens participate in the life of a community in order to improve the conditions for others and in general the community's future.

Political polarization

In politics, polarization usually refers to the declination of political attitudes to ideological extremes.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The idea of social media has been present for over 100 years. Humans tried to "limit" the distance between them and others since the late 19th century. With the evolution of technology, the TV came along and then the internet. Social media, as we know them today, took off during the late 90's and early 00's, when MySpace, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube launched and communication started becoming digital along with advertisement and a few campaigns. As more users started using social media, political debates became more frequent online and people started sharing their views and opinions online with either friends or even strangers.

Civic Engagement (political participation)

As it was previously mentioned, civic engagement is the way citizens are enrolled in their community's future. The question is, however, how social media have affected people's civic and political engagement? Social media have offered ways that people can take part in political issues and be more involved in their country's politics. In a "digital era", , more and more people tend to share their opinions online. When it comes to political participation, social media are a place people already enrolled in politics or that are in them. Regarding even people that aren't linked with politics, social media has managed to bring political campaigns to them. Because social media are so easily accessible, people of all ages are able to get political updates at any time. Due to all the above, usually people get influenced and get more active in politics and in their community's decision-making. may even argue that the social media is an alternative source against the rest of the media which have been characterized as biased. Though to what extend is that true?

Social media used as political platforms

Social media main idea was to create online communities where people that would be easily available to most people. They have provided the public with a way of communicating with a great amount of people from all over the world. Social media have been transformed by people into communities where you can choose who you follow, who you interact with, what is going to be the content that you are going to be sharing etc. Political activity has become part of that as it is an interest that a lot of people are sharing. As more people use social media, more campaigns started becoming digital with a lot of experts hoping that the massive response that social media had been getting would help boost the political campaigns. Social media have been active in the election processes of many countries since 2008, when Barack Obama introduced social media for his presidential campaign and later on more politicians across the globe started doing the same thing e.g. Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump. A lot of politicians have personal accounts on social media where their publicity teams are always active in order to communicate with the public.

Considering the fact that social media have the advantage of being accessible to everyone they are used as political platforms in order to expose a campaign to a great amount of people and make it more successful.

The aim of political groups when making their campaigns digital was to get more people exposed to their ideology and main policies of their groups as social media act as a great tool for that.

SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

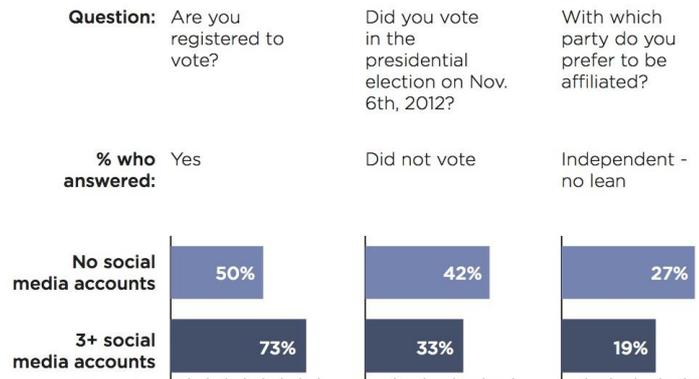


Figure 2: Social media users' statistics

Political propaganda on social media

Propaganda has dramatically changed alongside the evolution of social media. Propaganda is basically information that is used in order to persuade people to act according to a desired way. Politics and propaganda have been linked for centuries. In modern politics, propaganda is always present in campaigns and politicians' speeches. With the evolution of social media, propaganda has evolved as well with new techniques that are found from psychologists in order to persuade more people by either giving out false information but also by changing initial parts of a fact in order to make it that way so it favors them. There are a lot of propaganda techniques:

1. Bandwagon. (trying to pursue people into doing something by saying that most people have already joined.)
2. Testimonial. (getting credibility for your words by someone else's)
3. Glittering Generalities. (using strong and attractive words to prove a point.)
4. Name Calling. (trying to bring a negative look towards others.)
5. Plain Folks. (the candidate tries to appear as a regular person in order to be more appealing to the public.)
6. Card Stacking. (including only positive facts.)

7. Transfer. (the candidate tries to associate with other trusted people.)

All those techniques are used by the publicity teams that political groups have in order to build campaigns with the aim to persuade as many people as possible not just by creating a presentable poster or by uploading a beautiful photograph. Campaigns are created after careful observation of the general voters' behavior as well as the timing of the election so whatever is presented to the public makes sense chronologically. Propaganda is usually used by the government as well and in countries like China and Turkey, where social media are banned by the government, the objective was actually to isolate the public in order for them not to know what is going on in the rest of the world but also for them not to be able to freely express their opinion on political matters. So the way social media are used or banned from political parties or governments can be characterized as propaganda or political activity from their side.



Figure 3: Picture part of the Hillary Clinton 2016 Election Campaign.

In the photograph above we see pictured Hillary Clinton and written the is the slogan 'Would you vote for Clinton as president? 57% Say YES. In the campaign it is evidently used the propaganda method of Bandwagon. We can very easily observe the fact that what this campaign is trying to do is to convince people to vote in favor of Hillary Clinton because other people are doing so.

The benefits of social media on political campaigns

Social media have been dramatically beneficial for political campaigns the past few years. As previously mentioned media have the advantage of exposing political campaigns to larger amounts of people than traditional methods have been doing all those years. Social media is playing the role of delivering the campaign and the message of the political group leading up to the elections and gaining more response than other media do. Campaigns that run on social media have the benefit of realizing different parts of the campaign, visuals, videos, at different times with the minimum cost. Giving a lot of information to the public is a very good tactic in persuading more voters. Secondly, social media have managed to bring

campaigns to the youth and especially people that are voting for the first time because young adults are massively engaged in social media platforms. Furthermore, social media can influence journalists that are active and therefore, be very beneficial for a campaign.

Hence the benefits that social media provide are:

1. Exposing campaigns to more people
2. Sharing a lot of different content
3. Reaching out to the youth and first time voters
4. Influencing journalist reviews

The effect of ISIS on social media.

Although social media have been proven beneficial for politics, they have become a tool that is used to spread beliefs of certain religious groups such as ISIS. Their online efforts are claimed to have been designed this way to recruit and brainwash as many young people as possible. Social media have definitely helped ISIS expand their sphere of influence to a lot of countries and have been beneficial when organizing attacks. ISIS is releasing photos and videos on the internet in order to pursue people into their beliefs and have more lethal attacks all over the world. Although there have been many efforts to censor and eliminate the influence of ISIS online they are finding ways to release their content either way. Apart from releasing photos and videos ISIS has managed to find other ways to separately locate people and try and persuade them the best way possible in order to get them to join the group by using again different propaganda methods.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

| Date | Description of Event |
|-------------|---|
| Late 1970's | Some type of social media starts to appear. Their structure was pretty simple and their capacity really low due to that date's technology. |
| 1990 | The creation of Sixdegrees.com and Classmates.com social media services that were very similar to Facebook. E-mail was established as well. |
| 2003-2004 | Myspace.com and Linkendln are available to the public |
| 2004-2006 | Facebook was created by some Harvard students creating an online |

| | |
|-------------|--|
| | university community Facebook became available to the general public in 2006 and today counts 1,3 billion users. |
| 2008 | Barack Obama massively enrolled social media in his 2008 presidential campaign especially on Facebook changing how political campaigning worked since then. He managed to reach out to the youth encourage them to vote and win 70% of the youth's vote. |
| 2014 | Religious groups are trying to reach out to people and persuade the public by uploading their content on social media. |
| Present day | Everything is easier because of social media and everything has changed because of the media. |

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

Considering the fact that social media are used by most countries in the world, I would say that a lot of countries are involved in the issue. Instantly, the countries that are more popular on this topic concerning their social media policies would be USA, People's Republic of China, Turkey. Either because they are massively enrolled in using social media for the benefit of political campaigns or banning them what so ever to benefit the government's interests. USA on one hand has utilized social media on their favor contrary to other people such as China who have banned certain social networking sites. Both sides work on behalf of political benefits.

People's Republic of China

In China, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube have been banned from the government. Instead users of the internet use Chinese equivalents to communicate with other people inside China. The government filters all information that are released in the media thus creating an environment where in China foreign networks and websites are banned and Chinese people aren't easily able to communicate with people outside the borders. It was found that Chinese internet users are on the internet on a daily basis approximately 2.5 hours per day making them first on the list of developing countries. Social media are linked with politics there since the government is using them as a tool in order to give out either false or diversified information as part of the government's propaganda or to protect the

public from certain information. Another reason that social media are banned is that other political parties apart from the governing one are getting promoted through social media campaigns thus threatening the governmental benefits.

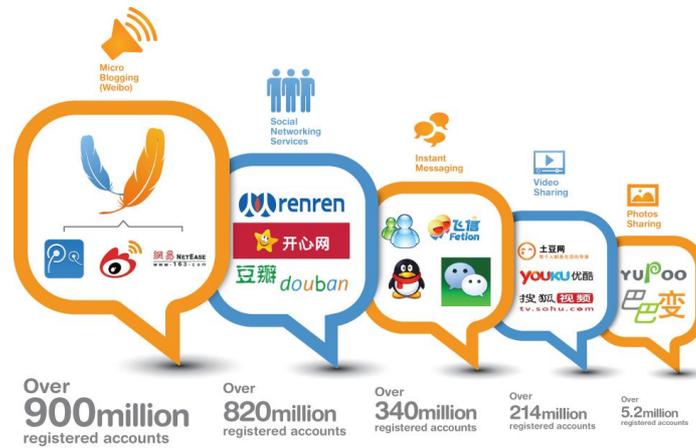


Figure 4: Social media in China

Turkey

In Turkey there are social media restrictions on Facebook and Twitter. The restrictions came after an explosion in the country's capital, Ankara. Internet users started finding out right after the explosion that the networking sites were blocked. President Erdogan is strictly against social media and is definitely not utilizing them in his campaigns. Recent events though showed the power of social media when there was an attempt for a coup in Turkey when president Erdogan used social media to get on TV and requested the public to get out on the streets and stop the army from taking the authority of the country. Thus this constitutes another situation where social media are closely linked with political activity and make a great impact on it because the president of Turkey although not being greatly in favor with social media he utilized them in order to influence the people concerning a political matter.

United States of America

The United States of America is a country where social media are very popular amongst its citizens. In the USA, campaigns are mostly digital due to the massive response that the media has. The government of the USA is in favor of social media being enrolled in people's everyday lives and in politics by utilizing in their favor. Everything concerning politics in the United States is online and social media are available to the public, which however doesn't mean that there is no propaganda as well. In the same way that other countries isolate the public from the rest of the world, the US is one of those countries that

are giving out the desired information to the public through social media and media in general.

Russian Federation

The Russian Federation is the second most active country on social media. Although domestic networking sites are more popular, the majority of the Russian population is active on social media. The information that goes online though is usually filtered by the government. Social media has played a key role in Russian politics filtered or not. The political impact of them varies by platform with the most popular media in Russia being V Kontakte mostly used by young people and bringing politics to them. Same with China, the Russian Federation government is banning and filtering certain parts of the media so that other political parties won't get promoted and threaten the power of the government. The Russian government may feel threatened due to the fact that Russian people may have problems with them.



Figure 5: Popular social media within Russian Federation.

European Union

The 27 countries of the European Union are countries with very internet active citizens. Social media have played a massive role in the European Parliament elections as well as on the separate national elections of each country. In the European Union, social media are linked with democracy and freedom of speech. Since most European citizens are active on social media, online campaigns have been really successful in the EU and most campaigns are social media based in order to pursue more possible voters in their 'offline' events and TV interviews.

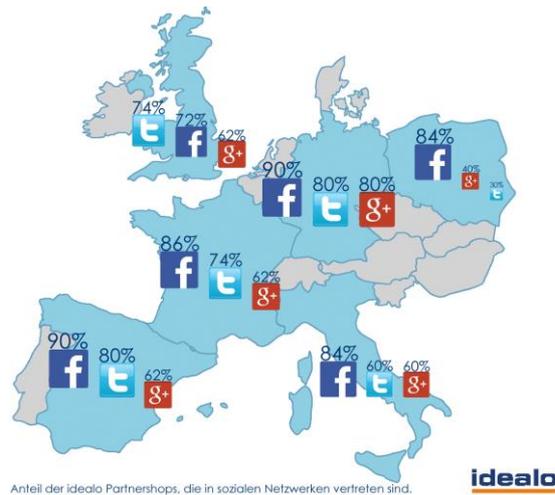


Figure 6: Social media statistics within the EU

UN INVOLVEMENT: RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

Considering that the topic of social media and political activity is a relatively new topic, the UN hasn't taken action or released any official resolutions concerning it. Although it has established the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of opinion and expression which shows how the UN is in favor of people sharing their beliefs online as well as in person but always falling under some guidelines.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

Same goes for this section of the study guide. With this topic being very new there hasn't been any massive attempts into solving such issue specifically. For the past few years' countries have been taking action on their own into setting their regulations and guidelines on how social media shall be utilized as political platforms to spread campaigns. With the issue getting more popular and more people joining on online platforms, we should expect further global interest on it.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Since the topic of social media has been handled all these years by each country separately there hasn't been a terminal solution defined yet concerning on what extend social media can be utilized as political platforms and what rules should be applied.

Yet, delegates could propose various measures to control and limit the influence of social media on people during political elections and other political events.

The main issue that is being addressed on this topic is on what extent can social media be utilized as political platforms and be active on a country's political activity. How can the public be protected by propaganda and how it is used by political candidates? It has to be noted that countries have undergone censoring certain parts of the media because either they want to influence the public in favor of them or think that social media has gone out of hand concerning political activity. The question is if that is acceptable or not and are we able to find a middle ground and work towards a final solution?

- Adopting different regulations and a legal framework on how political campaigns can be accomplished online. Firstly, it should be outlined how important it is for propaganda to not be included in the campaigns or to be performed by the media themselves. Secondly, it is very important to set a specific type of stuff that would be allowed to be uploaded in the media by all political parties.

Concerning how certain countries have decided to ban some social media platforms, it is significant to:

- Emphasize the importance of the media in general and how communicating with different people from all over the globe is an opportunity in order for citizens to broaden the horizons. For this to happen, the UN should organize either conventions/events or campaigns that would be informative concerning the benefits of social media on political activity.
- It is very critical to underline the fact that although there may be disadvantages, social media have been proven to be very beneficial in times of emergency, since the average person has declared that they get informed from the media, thus countries' policies may change towards them.
- Analytical laws have to be implemented that will ban the media from actually expressing their opinion, since this could be very misleading to the voters, as campaigns are already influential on their own.

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Figure 5: <https://www.2checkout.com/blog/article/understanding-russian-social-media-vkontakte-odnoklassniki/>

Figure 6: <http://ecommercenews.eu/facebook-not-popular-with-uk-retailers/>