

What Role Do social media Play in Politics in Europe and the US?

Jin Yan *

Beijing Foreign Studies University Beijing China

* Corresponding Author Email: yanjin20000328@gmail.com

Abstract. This essay analyzes the role of social media in information dissemination, populist dissemination and political interaction in EU and US from a political perspective. What's more, social media also can spread fake news or used to manipulate public opinion. This essay summarized the role played by social media though examples, like Trump interact with voters through Twitter to enhance his reputation, Activists use social media to organize protest activities, etc. This paper has important implications for future research related to politics and social media.

Keywords: social media; politics; EU and US.

1. Introduction

Social media has achieved rapid development under the progress in communication technology and the diverse needs of audiences. This paper primary research the role of social media in the politics of Europe and the United States, and analyzes it with examples such as the 2006 and 2018 United States presidential election and the 2010 British student protest. First of all, social media is an important platform for political communication and the main channel for political information dissemination, which can be effectively used for organizing activities, raising funds, and online communication in EU and US. Secondly, social media can also be manipulated by politicians through computational propaganda and other means to spread false political information. Finally, social media also provides channels for the spread of populism, this essay take Trump's activities on social media as an example. Social media has been developed and popularized worldwide, which has triggered a revolution in the field of communication. Social media has had a significant impact on politics, society, and people's lifestyles. Therefore, this essay studies the role of social media in politics in the United States and Europe from a political perspective.

2. Main body

S Woolley and P Howard (2018) proposed that social media is an important platform for political participation and an important channel for disseminating news information. What's more, social media platforms are the main media for young people to develop their political identity. Kaplan & Muchael (2010) think that social media users can develop their ideas, express their content and ideas, and communicate with other users in social media. In other words, social media is a tool or a platform which enable people to share opinions, perspectives, ideas, and experiences, such as Facebook, Twitter and WeChat. Therefore, in some democratic states, most voters use social media to share political news and information, especially during elections. For instance, Obama extensively utilized social media and successfully won the presidential election in 2008, which shows the importance of social media in political election and indicates that it plays a role in spread information in politics.

Thompson, J. B. (2020) thinks that social media is a wonderful environment for intermediary online interaction. Social media provides a unique form of online social interaction, creating an expanding social network. They enable users not only to see other users' personal information, but also to communicate and interact with them, allowing individuals to establish connections with many distant people, which would otherwise be impossible to establish. Tufekci, Z. and Wilson, C. (2012) found that social media played a crucial role by investigating the use of social media by participants in the Tahrir Square protests in Egypt. More than half of the data obtained were related to protests

heard through various media channels such as Facebook, Twitter and email. It can be seen that social media has brought news, information, and social support related to political protests.

Due to differences in political systems and ideologies, the information dissemination role that social media play in politics in the US and Europe is different from China. In China, social media is control by Chinese government, and only report content which has undergone government censorship rather than independent in EU and US. What's more, people can free talk on EU and US social media and can discuss political topics. China has relevant laws to control people's speech on the internet, so people cannot freely discuss politics.

Fenton, N. (2012) believes that social media is the core of Radical politics in the digital era. Social media can stimulate local election campaigns and promote transnational Political movement. The reason why social media is very suitable for Radical politics is that social media is a medium which is easy to connect with young people. Dahlberg (2007) believes that radicalism can be defined as an alliance that expresses opinions, viewpoints, and expressions, which are excluded from the political stage of the Parliament. Social media is important for radicalism, it can bring these excluded and marginalized voices into political debates. For example, In the autumn of 2010, tens of thousands of protesters, mostly young people, gathered at universities during large-scale student protests across the UK. In this protest, social media was used to organize protests, mobilize protesters, and disseminate protest related information. Protesters use social media to express their dissatisfaction. What's more, social media helps to create an atmosphere of political unity, hope, empowerment, and possibilities. In conclusion, social media is a platform which can connect and express dissenting opinions and become the key to organize their participation and take them to the universities, which means the protest scene.

Cogburn and Espinoza-Vasques (2011) summarized the advantages of politic election through social media. Max Weber (2002) defined politics as "striving for a share of power or for influence on the distribution of power". Politics is closely related to power, such as the distribution of national leadership and some politic activities such as president election. The develop of social media has brought several novelties to political campaigning. To start with, compared with traditional media, social media costs less. Secondly, social media can be effectively used to recruit volunteers, organize events, mobilize masses, and raise funds (K.Strandberg, 2013). Thirdly, due to the large amount of user information collected by social media such as Facebook, politicians can send customized campaign information to specific voter groups. Finally, social media may bypass users' self-selected push requirements and expose them to campaign information. Hall, et.al.(2018) summarized the use of social media in politics from the following three aspects. For the government, analyzing social media data can better understand citizens' participation, opinions, and political preferences. For individual, these platforms can be used to advance various agendas just with a set of functions such as following, sharing and thumbing. For politicians and political parties, social media is widely used for citizen voting, participating in debates, and providing national election information.

However, S Woolley and P Howard (2018) also proposed that although social media plays an important role in the dissemination of public policies and political ideologies, it is also used as a tool to manipulate public opinion. Fake news reports widely spread on social media platforms. This phenomenon can be regarded as a form of computational propaganda. Computational advertising is the use of algorithms, automation, and human planning to purposefully disseminate misleading information on social media networks, including learning from real people and imitating real people, in order to manipulate public opinion on various platforms and device networks. Robots are usually used to be the typically key tools for promoting such false information on websites such as Twitter, Facebook, and Reddit. Both state and non-state political actors can intentionally manipulate and amplify fake information online through computational propaganda. (Woolley & Howard, 2016).

Hypodermic needle theory holds that the audience is passive, homogeneous, and easily influenced (Perera, A., 2023). People need to focus on personal privacy and data security. The hypodermic needle theory is a prominent theory in social media that affects the understanding, attitudes, and behavior of individuals, based on this theory, Mehrad J, Eftekhari Z (2020) argue that media is powerful and

dangerous source because the user or audience is vulnerable against the effect of a certain message. The media field of modern politics is a battlefield. The 2016 US presidential election raised serious concerns among scholars, political observers, and others about the role of social media played in spreading fake information and polarization during the election. Tom Durso (2020) analyzed data related to elections on Facebook and Instagram in 2020 and found that the algorithm ranking system and platform functions can achieve viral transmission, which has impact on people's experience on these platforms. This transmission model can also affect people's political attitudes and behaviors outside the social media platform. Although social media provides an excellent platform for the dissemination of political information, it also can be used as a tool which can manipulate and dominate public thinking, such as spread rumor and fake information. Government and platform owners should deal with these potential risks and make effort to create a healthier online politic exchange environment.

Populism has become a label to refer to all those political phenomena considered to be dangerous, irrational and demagogic (Taggart, 2002). Social media provides a suitable place to spread typical populist themes, such as "emphasizing the sovereignty of the people" and "Attack the elite". The reason why social media is suitable to populism is that social media bypasses the traditional role of news and journalists as gatekeepers, providing a free access for audience (Jacobs, L., 2023). Gerbaudo (2018) believes that proficiency in social media is a characteristic of many other populist movements and candidates. Because social media promote personalized discourse and emotional appeal, use algorithms to cover very specific audience and allow them to interact directly with supporters.

Müller, Jan-Werner (2017) defined populism as a moral monopoly on political activities. Populists often claim to be the only representative of the interests of the entire people, they also oppose diversity, criticize and doubt the elite. For example, Trump narrowly defeated Hillary Clinton in the presidential election, social media has played a decisive role in this process. Trump chose Twitter, which has over 50 million followers, as his preferred way of interacting with citizens and voters. Trump's language is often crude and exaggerated, his views are strongly expressed, his advocates are straightforward, and he often expresses the theme of putting the people first. In the eyes of his supporters, Trump's true nature gives the impression of an ordinary person with genuine emotions and firm beliefs, rather than a calculating politician. This has also brought Trump great popularity in mainstream media. Social media is conducive to the rise of the populist movement because it provides a space for people to discuss and gather, and people who support Trump can quickly unite to form a group of Trump supporters.

3. Conclusion

To summarize, social media has played an important role in politics in Europe and the United States. First of all, social media provides a platform for the public to participate in politics. People also can communicate and explore political information through social media. In radicalism, social media is used to organize protest activities and disseminate protest related information. What's more, social media is also related to populism, and typical themes of populism are disseminated on social media. For example, Trump and other candidates speak on social media and communicate with voters which aim to win people's support. However, social media is also a tool for manipulating public opinion, and governments or politicians can use social media to spread false information or news that is beneficial to them.

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