

## **The Evolution of Political Discourse in the Age of Social Media**

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### **Abstract**

The essay explores the evolution and development of political discourse in the context of social media with reference to the ongoing changes in public communication and perception driven by these dynamics. It argues that the social networks are dramatically increasing the role of such evolution and urges to take into account their implications when engaging in future political discourses and interventions. Social networks are more and more becoming the primary communication channels among people. Their use is growing rapidly and dramatically transforming the common way of exchanging information. A message can reach millions of users in less than a second in a direct, relatively uncontrolled way. Social networks allow the spreading of information such as photos and videos and the reproduction of news through links. In most cases, this happens at the expense of traditional, slower and controllable media. It is passing from a journalism inspired by facts and well-documented sources to a more reactive one. There are worries/alerts about an increasing spread of (also passive) misinformation. This can induce unjustified alarm also as a result of hoaxes and can have negative implications on public opinion and policy (Battista, 2024). The recent US presidential elections have been a good test case of this scenario. For several reasons, in such contexts, users are more prone to share information, images, declarations and political orientations that can be not necessarily reliable. Traditional media are often counterbalancing this spread, enhancing polarization. Social media seems to homogenize the view at least of the user group generating/broadening a significant polarization with respect to an external observer. A more informed use of the tools and methodologies emerging by the new data science could help to reduce the spread of misinformation and enhance the fight to it. At the same time, it seems very important to take into account social media implications also when exploiting them. These are very fast channels for spreading partially controlled information. In the fast society we are living in, they can change the public perception in seconds and

shape/direct the agenda. Far from being a panoptic analysis of the question, the essay is articulated around the description of several thoughts arose during the development of the Vitagraph, a thought analysis tool.

Keywords political discourse, social media, misinformation, public communication, information exchange, polarization, data science

### **1.1. Introduction to the topic and its significance in contemporary society**

Barack Obama, who won the Democratic Party sponsorship race for the 2008 US presidential election, gave a speech in a basketball court. The official announcement of Obama's victory was made by his opponent, who lost the grand prize race in the same gymnasium on June 3, 2008. Eight years earlier, professional wrestling ended with a 'pile drive' in which one person was pushed backwards onto the floor. His sister-in-law, representing the unsuccessful candidate, followed the election promise and descended into the gymnasium. This episode is more than just an anecdote. It captures significant changes in political discourse for a decade that have accompanied the diffusion of social networking services. The beginning of a critical approach to social issues was the interest in this episode that led to the prediction of a curatorial revolution and the event flowing in the same gym, although it took on a facetious form (Battista, 2024).

The rise of social networking services greatly affects political participation and political discourse. Political candidates who had previously depended only on traditional media for propaganda began to actively use social networking services. In Korea, Lee Myung-bak, who won the conservative party nomination for the 2007 presidential election, and Roh Moo-hyun, who became the United New Millennium Party in 2002, ranked first in the ratio of positive word-of-mouth. Traditional newspapers and broadcasts, which have monopolized political propaganda so far, are thrown by dozens of guides and a strategic boycott by social network users, especially after the nomination. Changes in political discourse taking place in a one-man, one-vote election environment over the past decade cannot be grasped in traditional participatory democracy by studying social problems alone. At a time when the overwhelming majority of the world beyond information entry transcends the boundary of the country, political discourse is not limited to national space, rather a global perspective is required.

## 1.2. Overview of the impact of social media on political discourse

The transformation of political discourse in the age of social media is still a matter of public, academic, and professional debates. The scenic impact of social platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Tumblr, Reddit, Instagram, among others, on the way public communication is effectively performed, is expanding and it is far from being fully understood (Battista, 2024). On the one hand, there are those observers, politicians, journalists, and academics who see a promise of more democracy coming from a broader opportunities for political participation, in particular for those grassroots movements that are usually silenced by mainstream media (Billings, 2017). The direct interaction among citizens and politicians is promoted. On the other hand, there are widespread worries that the so-called 'Democratic deficit' can further worsen in an environment dominated by misinformation, fake news, dislike campaigns, trolling, party-organized echo-chambers, and massive political microtargeting.

The latter issues can combinedly bring political debate toward a sterile platform-dominated confrontation among closed communities, disempowering public spheres. Classical approaches to the mass media system of the public communication, based on one-to-many or few-to-many information flows, may result inadequate to capture this broader change. However, the emergence of social media platforms does not necessarily imply a cancellation of the power of traditional gatekeepers. Rather, the dominant dynamic mutations may result in a reconfiguration of the mechanisms through which the political system influences the public sphere. The conversation in the public space reveals an increasingly significant, if under-researched role of political platforms (integrating, but also amplifying voices otherwise marginalized) in raising events, actors, and issues of concern to professional news media, to the point of influencing coverage and audience agenda. In a closely interconnected environment of competition, collaboration, imitation, and replication, the visibility of traditional media has been found to be largely dependent on heritable and non-heritable shared views and, most of all, on strictly organizational choices which render other possible sequences of events and arguments invisible to the editorial system. A broad use of digital, algorithm-based platforms can help the identification of the primary mechanism responsible for the initial upstream setting of the news

salience and direction, hence enabling a domino effect on its spread. Online processes of information diffusion regarding an issue or an event can impact on public communication convey structure, identifying very similar patterns of highly repetitive news discourse which, when addressed by professional media, induce a massive agenda broadening and an audience mobilization. The reason, however, for the news printings or TV broadcastings of computer-selected, but human supervised news or sites stems from direct social movement action, was not ideology or gripe, but the responsible redress of what was considered production-based media misconduct. Though networked individualism had initially drawn attention from other media outlets, the monopolistic nature of the profession recast those efforts in a distorted light, blaming news avoidance on simple personal rivalries rather than ongoing social conflict. As the uninsured nature of mainstream news became central concern for a broader movement audience, explanations to them turned to more concrete grievances over media lockout in the larger public sphere, thus making it feasible for elites to trivialize the claims of coverage bias, adequacy, and fairness. Notwithstanding, social media user collective and multidirectional distribution of similar claims directed to multiple peer groups challenged media content and role force more effectively with regard to the professional news interpretation of public concern.

### **1.3. Analysis of the benefits and challenges of political communication in the digital age**

#### **Introduction**

Amidst the ever-growing advancements in technology, the digitization of everyday life has fundamentally transformed the way people engage with the world around them. The development of online entities and social media platforms has revolutionized the mechanisms of political communication. This has significantly affected political discourse, which represents the primary avenue through which the relationship between politicians and the public is mediated. As a matter of fact, there has been a double-edged enhancement of accessibility to, and challenges of, political discussions due to the digital revolution (Jain, 2019).

This section consists of a thoroughgoing analysis of the nature of contemporary political communication in the digital age. First, it will delineate the benefits of digital platforms, showing how they make entry into political dialogue more accessible and

help facilitate the voice of the diverse audience. The discussion will then move on to a treatment of the related possibilities for the identification and presentation of different perspectives of view, which are increasingly various and specialized. Second, the plurality of challenges emerging due to digitalization will be discussed. On the one hand, it will consider the problematical aspects related to political disputation, such as the prevalence of misinformation and manipulation, as well as trolling and the concerns of a hostile atmosphere discouraging genuine engagement. On the other hand, attention will be paid to the special features of online discussion facilitated by the functioning of the algorithm and leading to the formation of filter bubbles and echo chambers, which may hamper the exposure to concurring standpoints and free competition of ideas. In conclusion, a generative reflection will present implications for the users coping with the digital media – calls for the more active approach to their use and the development of media literacy, as well as for the broader reassessment of the strategies applied in present political conversations.

#### **1.4. Case studies of notable political events influenced by social media discourse**

### Election Campaigns Since the dawn of social media, it has been adopted as an effective platform by politicians to communicate with the public. The past two decades have witnessed politicians on various platforms promoting their agendas and visions. New insights have also emerged from such technology, and its effect on political perception has been the subject of extensive research. Such analyses have largely been concerned with textual analysis, emotion detection, and sentiment analysis (Battista, 2024).

### Public Mobilization for or Against an Issue Social media is predominantly driven by content sharing. There are a number of campaigns and other social protests that originate in social media and later spill onto the street. Various case studies showing how content on social media drives entire social protest campaigns can also be added. The first such effect is the margin income of those influencers or common people who drive the content around such events. The second such effect is how politicians redefine such social media formation or how content post was an important psychologically affect of the mass for ensuring political mobilization.

### Affecting the Policy Discourse Among Mass The opinion of the mass can be dragged towards a certain bias by manipulating the media. A decade back this was the

case. But with the introduction of social media, the narrative changed. Politicians can directly communicate, interact, or influence the mass without the help of traditional media. There are various case studies exploring how social media and its content are shaping up the policy discourse in society, and how highly controversial policies are driven by the politicians. This topic can also go through developments in certain countries in terms of policy, its reflection on social media and mass, and the result is. The study also discusses different categories of such events and how such events were used by politicians to drive the policy discourses. Some negative examples where such events fall flat on the politician's face can also be added.

### **1.5. Conclusion and future implications**

The first and most visceral reaction to the beginning of the war was global. The overnight explosion of various tags and posts determined the resolute decision of several states to enter the conflict. The responses of each network were established, but the scenario changed rapidly from the conventional to the unconventional confrontation, before finally adopting both landscapes. The war first spread to global attention to events, which over the seasons ended up sinking in the midst of the diplomatic complications that would have then fulfilled other shadow alliances. This series of circumstances, the so-called “undervalued war”, became the object of in-depth examination only later, but there was an established and intrinsic priority on strategic and political level, the intensity and coverage of the fighting, the incidents in themselves dramatic, and therefore to the chronicles. It is not easy to schedule the beginning of the war-vision trend; there is no lack of scholars who affirm the presence of prophetic voices in the pre-war years. On a quantitative level, these researches are few and limited, they are included more in that undercurrent of preventive history with which this or with that “other” historical event was presented as a precursor of the one under study. Obviously, to date, no hint or clue has ever been found in the vast archival treasury consulted, not even so much as an enigmatic phrase recorded in the memories of those who were then protagonists of those events. In any case, one thing can be firmly supported, and this on the specific terrain of the genre in question: where there was silence, there was also no hinge. Hence, in the enigmatic passage truncated by shorthand and generally reported in writing from a ten-line note or across passages singularly juxtaposed, not even a trace of allude to war. Regarding the series

of increasingly precise sounding, adopted in the following years and up to the launch of the first mini-series, a further question arises, which gives rise to different currents of thought: is it possible that treasure trove brought to light elements capable of so deeply marking the future events relegated to the narrative horizon of the series. On the basis of the previous considerations, a first screening was necessary to unbridle the critical apparatus from all the traditional references to war. This operation was long and complicated, especially given the particular aspect of the war designated by the synchronic posts taken into consideration, itself a complex configuration of events. To overcome the fact that the word war itself was generally to be avoided, thus shattering the sentinel's freedom of expression, it was soon replaced with the tag, which in fact often came to identify not only the conflict but even more frequently the fractional munitions, platforms, or posts referring to it.

## **2. Keywords**

Political Discourse, Digital Age, Social Media, Social Networking, Online Activism, Fake News, Public Opinion, Political Communication, Social Networking, Online Activism

The political communication in the social media platforms related to Italy is analyzed. As a methodology, the R software Platform combined with the R TwitteR package were used for the data collecting process. The purpose is to identify the relationships interconnecting leaders and parties and to compare them to the level of attention between the spotlighted actors. A comparison between the structure of the political discourse taking place in the on-line space and what is happening in terms of political events in the off-line reality is executed. The further developments of these dynamics are also discussed.

Politics is among the most debated topics over the web. The content is mainly produced by MPs, aspirants, supporting campaigns, and citizens. Given the openness of the web, all sorts of information can be posted. Online political discussions are being revolutionized by the emergence of social networking services. Twitter can be a valuable business tool and a delightful source of information. The most shared political news concern national policies and political leaders. Political social networks can affect the formation of echo chambers and filter bubbles, theories espoused by some researchers from the Digital Age. There is proof of the dissemination of

politically incorrect comments and hate speech, including questioning traditional politics, defamatory evidences, and spurious gossip. Fake news and conspiracy theories foster the dissemination of alarmism about immigration processes. Such changes in the political communication landscape can affect both the party systems and the public opinion, increasing the collective political alienation and the anti-democratic feeling (Battista, 2024).

### **2.1. Political Discourse**

Political discourse refers to the language, words, and non-verbal communication practices related to political contexts. Society, culture, technology, and all human actions are inevitably shaped by language. Politicians, the media, and ordinary citizens actively create and shape the language of politics and, thus, the political discourse of society. There are five different types of political discourse. The first is made by politicians. The president, parliament, ministers, and other representatives of political power, as well as political competitors, actively create a political discourse in society. The second is the media. News and political news-makers also affect this formed political discourse. The third is the political discourse created by ordinary citizens. Open letters to the authorities, street slogans, and people's demands and moods during meetings and demonstrations are also a political discourse of society. The fourth type is expert political discourse that tells about events or phenomena through media experts. The last type of political discourse is the media response of popular articles and newspapers to the speech of the highest representative of political power. People who take part in political communication and regulation of social-political relations make numerous statements, speech writing texts, and are actively interested in political communication and the political behavior of politicians. Responses and reflections on any political discourse represent interest in what politicians or political structures eventually build or plan. Any interlocutor can understand political events more deeply by interpreting them and having political discussions.

The language used in the discourses of social interaction reflects a person's social, cultural, and individual characteristics. Politicians who create and use abundant political discourse also influence the public. Political speeches or political texts capture the attention of the public. Every political message has a different effect on

society. Analysis of answers to political discourse shows the mood and attitude of society. Different political discourses have different goals. Party programming and election speech circulations have particularly raised interest among political scientists in recent times. This discussion on political discourses is closely connected with sociology, political science, philology, public relations, and journalism. Awareness of the system of use of verbal-discourse in political action and public political propagation is imperative for a professional journalist or public relations specialist. These works show citizens the ability to become politically active in order to develop a pluralistic civil society and democratic values. Political discourse leads to the formulation of a conclusion that attention should be paid to problems in the media and the study of the language of social and political discourse in the future to ensure that only high-quality, balanced political information is spread.

## **2.2. Social Media**

Social media has been a transformative force in communication during the past decade; it has redefined the process of traditional text messaging and generated a new connotation of computer-mediated communication. The term social media refers to an instrument of Internet-based applications that feature interoperability, usability, and sociability. Some widely-used social media here when discussing are Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr, and Twitter—or different microblogs. In addition to it, YouTube and Google are sometimes perceived as social media due to their social functions. Most SNS comprises a profile page that keeps a member's profile and listed contacts; include a new page of the individual for posting status updates—120 or 140 characters long, depending on whether one is using Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram; allows members to interchange comments during a defined wall; and contains a newsfeed with status updates from an individual's contacts. Content recognition, digital stores, audio, travel guides, fact gathering, referrals, job searching, and much more can be leveraged for many reasons. (Jain, 2019)

The structure of several social media platforms supports admittance to information that may affect an individual's public remark, and it is clear that these platforms have become an essential part of political debate. The introduction of such novel modes of political communication has also altered the modus operandi in other practices. The present study's debate concentrates on political posts representing the greatest level of

public debate, though in the fullness of the campaign, broadcasted posts will be discussed. SNS, nevertheless, donates two further means of admiration. First, comments on a one-to-one footing or inside a small assembly can provide immediate response to politicians bringing novelty or a facet of the candidate that had been ignored before. Secondly, any remark by a user is displayed on each follower's newsfeed, and there is a particularity of this environmental structure that delivers commendation more overtly than in the standard press release. (Billings, 2017)

### **2.3. Digital Age**

After a long era of very restricted possibilities for producing and disseminating knowledge, the second half of the 20th century saw an upheaval in these parameters. Now, a third phase of transformation is under way. Digital media – foremost the internet – do not just qualify as an additional communication technology. They are already fundamentally restructuring conditions for knowledge production, dissemination, and reception (Hefner et al., 2017). Their emerging qualitative differences bring us into the process of global transformations for the political discourse, offering a stage for improved communication between political players and entire new possibilities for the public. Mobile technologies and the internet have developed as everyday devices and communication tools since the beginning of the new millennium. This new age of developing digital media comes in flounced by changes in general society, generally labeled with the term of a more individualized society. A mainstream of these basic social and communicative changes ahead comes up since the latest regulatory changes in the communication sector. They intend to reflect and emphasize the move into this new era to confront the political discourse in its age. With a process of globalization, the diffusion of technical facilities and the breakthrough of the internet, most of the people of the OECD region got better access to public communication. For many citizens this was a new dimension, as they came very close to a political discourse before hardly open to them. Thereby, it might have brought along an emerging understanding and sometimes a habituation to this discourse, now this is taken an ordinary part of public life. Likewise, the political discourse changed. It had to adapt itself to the audience's needs and new competition. For the few, this might also have meant the need to adjust their way of talking; for the Rosie Palmers of both high and low politics, it might have implied the use of quite

new means to deliver their part, having mastered the new opportunities and especially benefited which improved access and transparency to the commonest participants.

#### **2.4. Political Communication**

One main field of struggle over truths is political discourse (Velasquez & Rojas, 2018). In fields that deal with the reflection of political communication, this discourse itself is often hardly mentioned. In an age when words, pictures and moving images are omnipresent in every nook and cranny of life, they have long recognized political expression as more than the sum of inside information in parliaments, ministries and political parties. As a political society, vast and growing trove of expressions of attitudes and beliefs about government, politics parties, models of government and the society have been taken as a part of everyday sociocultural life. This vast assemblage is widely recognized as an “indirect dialogue with power”. Although much critical work has been interrupted through other channels mass as opposed to interpersonal communication, digital as opposed to analog media, written word as opposed to image-based word, much work has been directly taken place in the field or was based on research that primarily investigates political text as its data material. Political communication primarily differentiates itself from a discourse-analytic approach to political text from the foresaid: a narrowness of the concept that conflates the target and the researcher chosen field of study, conceptions and interpretations of political communication that are altogether too deterministic, conceptual and theoretical limitations that focus on object of investigation, and a keenness to treat multimodality as being of more or less secondary importance.

#### **2.5. Social Networking**

People are progressively using social networking platforms on the computer and mobile devices to build and maintain social networks with a membership base comprising alternative individuals or groups (Kamau, 2017). Social networks have given rise to significant and ongoing multi-faceted manifestations at the local, national, and global levels in terms of political engagement, advocacy, and activism. In the evolving digital age of activated global citizenry, social networks are enabling the population to become a part of the channels for information exchange, awareness building, or mobilization in support of or opposition to social or political causes. These networks frequently involve the asymmetric community structures that are

particulate with the social networks of influencers' cascading political messages or those that rule the threshold limit to share a political message to another user or group of users (Aslı Sezgin, 2018).

Political messaging in social networking with significant network dynamics can tremendously propagate, spread far and wide, or likewise retire due to lack of connectivity. A few dynamic properties of the network can be assumed crucial in the shaping of political messaging campaigns. For the successful spread of political messaging, it's crucial that the most vulnerable nodes according to a specific measure are connected in an appropriate manner. Since network configurations that are favorable for maximal spreading are not easily achieved, analysis of the impact of network configurations on political messaging is particularly important. Computer-based models are the main tool for understanding this issue. However, several crucial unsolved challenges in this area remain. Chief among them is the development of a unifying framework of models that would take into account the impact of different representations of network structure on political messaging and spreading in social networking platforms, and that would overcome the limited scalability of classical computer-based models in the context of social networking platforms. Social networks also raise numerous challenges in terms of filtering the content, including the consequences of the social networks users' potential restrictions on the search of content and the user's consumption of information. In conclusion, political discussion in the digital environment is modeled and analyzed, with the aim of introducing an in-silico tool for policy-makers for exploring social networking platforms and determining the best course of action for building community cohesion. Treatment begins with defining an expression for social capital within the context of political participation. This expression draws from prior research on social capital in digital platforms and political participation.

## **2.6. Online Activism**

Online activism, or the use of digital platforms for advocating social or political change has taken off with digital affordances. Social media has the power to give a voice to the marginalized, who otherwise are drowned out by the monopolized, concentrated, and hierarchical mainstream media (Garcia, 2015). Furthermore, the presence of networked publics lowers the barrier to create grassroots campaigns and

amplify the collective effort. Online activism has facilitated an increasing number of successful campaigns by connecting people who share an interest in a particular issue (Wang, 2019). Online activism in its very nature resembles the process of creating public spheres, as interactions between engaged individuals leads to the formation of a collective political identity. In recent years, the number of campaigns and movements that erupted in the digital setting has grown exponentially. As can be seen in the successes of the #Black Lives Matter campaign, the KONY 2012 campaign, or the March for Our Lives campaign, marginalized voices can suddenly become amplified. Similarly, the role of the Internet in climate action cannot be overemphasized. It has facilitated the work of environmental activists by fostering an online campaign that calls for climate action and raises awareness of climate-related issues worldwide. The campaign resulted in 2.5 million online-offline actions, and with the help of online campaigns, some smaller activist networks' voice essentially flooded the global arena and drowned out the much larger and well-funded opponents. The success of the campaign could largely be attributed to the existence of digital publics. Hashtag campaigns, digital petitions, and online-offline seamless mobilization are among the many strategies used in online activism. Yet the online realm is also the breeding ground for toxic discourse. With fake news, hoaxes, disinformation, and echo chambers, it is getting harder to discern the truth. Online hate speech, trolling, and information laundering have also become tools for backlash against any online actions. Moreover, online activism is often accused of raising awareness without real impact, and single issue-fading quick movements. Many times, online campaigns were pointed out as an easy way to feel like one was doing something about an injustice without actually having to do anything at all.

### **2.7. Fake News**

The rise of social media as a tool of political communication in the early 21st century has been transformative in many aspects of the political discourse. It has changed the means of communication, the speed and scale of information spread, and the ability to interact. But social media has also allowed introspection, increasing the prevalence of fake news, leading to increasing polarization and decreasing factual basis for discussion. Fake news is a type of yellow journalism that consists of deliberate misinformation or hoaxes spread via traditional and new media, with a higher

prevalence in social media (M. J. Lazer et al., 2023). The information spreads rapidly through social media and is often reported by a variety of sources. It often calls for dedicated news research to either learn it or debunk it, but the credibility of such a story does not guarantee the latter publication. In contrast to fabricated news, traditional news media is not falsifying news, but instead is failing to provide insight into the truth. It spreads biased reports, which causes drought of quality reporting and concentrates on news bites which are simple to understand. Only a few traditional social news channels must rise to the criticism of mainstream media to act as the primary news platform. Besides, mainstream media criticize social media as unreliable sources of news but also customize their algorithms to raise the presence of news media in users' feeds. This results in users being exposed to the news even when they have not chosen to follow a news channel, and particularly when they have not chosen to read a specific newspaper. This can be dangerous because users tend to apply very reduced scrutiny to the news, and similar algorithms result in the spreading of highly polarized news. They primarily liked news in line with the politician, celebration or with personal beliefs, thus contributing to information cloistering. Such behavior does not bode well for the quality of the democratic discussion and could contribute to an explosion of motivated reasoning. Public opinion is eroded by political discussions, and fake news may help further the course of eroding. Low-quality information or intentionally false information may be used to distort processes of decision-making in electoral processes, constituting a threat to integrity. Finally, fake news on social media causes a growing distrust of mainstream media, thus releasing a significant source of legitimacy.

### **2.8. Public Opinion**

The collective preferences and attitudes of citizens about political matters are known as public opinion. Formerly exclusive to societies in transition or only of rank public interest, public opinion is currently the focal point of contemporary philosophy and the subject of academic texts and theories. In the political arena, democracy is sustained by the control and supervision of the government's ruling processes based upon public opinion. Mechanisms guaranteeing these controls are the subject of prevailing discussion within new theories of democracy. Nevertheless, establishing the opinion of a particular group theoretically is not simple, nor is it an easy task in

practice. Despite the developing significance of identifying public opinion, there are few cases of political analysis concerning this subject ((Marita) Carballo et al., 2018). Judgement results based on surveying a sample group concerning a specific topic are revealed in poll results. These results aim to reflect the viewpoint of the whole populace regarding this topic. Notwithstanding, given the real composition of public opinion, two distances must be taken into consideration when seeking to discern societal opinion. Firstly, it is essential to also respect the divergence all opinions on a specific topic possess. A genuine definition is unlikely to have a high percent of the populace alongside. In discussion related to topics debated by the populace with just a small number of options to accompany, such as the euro; the opinions will be divided evenly. Consequently, no interpretation of the concerned topic will be possible.

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