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## Tweeting for Change: Social Media's Influence on Political Engagement

### Article

The rise of social media has transformed the way we communicate, share information, and engage with others. One area where its impact has been particularly significant is in politics. A study by Wharton marketing professor Pinar Yildirim and two co-authors suggests that social media can have a positive impact on political engagement.

The research found that political newcomers can get a substantial boost in support by using social media channels, which cost next to nothing and are easily accessed by anyone with an internet connection. Candidates who use Twitter can raise between 1% and 3% of what they would have raised in a two-year traditional campaign within the first month, a gain that favors newcomers.

Moreover, social media platforms, especially Twitter, allow new candidates to humanize themselves and connect with potential voters in a more personal way. By sharing personal stories, insights, and policy proposals, politicians can create engaging content, building trust and closer relations with their followers.

Although social media has been an enabler of accessible communication and citizen engagement, its impact on democracy and politics is not entirely positive. A survey by Pew Research Center suggests that while 57% of people in advanced economies believe that social media has had a positive impact on democracy, 35% say it has had a negative impact. The US scores particularly poorly, with only 34% of adults saying that social media has been good for democracy, while 64% assert the contrary.

Moreover, a startling 84% across the 19 countries surveyed believe access to the internet and social media platforms have made people more susceptible to false information and rumors. A further 65% say that social media has increased political polarization, deepening existing divisions and radicalizing views.

However, to combat the negative impact of social media on democracy and politics and promote healthy, constructive discourse online, Aviv Ovadya proposes "bridging systems." These systems prioritize posts that resonate with diverse audiences, promoting "productive conflict" while building respect for different viewpoints.

In conclusion, while social media has its drawbacks, it has become an essential tool in politics, enabling newcomers to compete more effectively with incumbents. However, more research on



the intersection of social media and politics is required. Bridging systems like Ovadya's could be one approach to promoting healthy interactions online and ultimately strengthening democracy.

## Agenda

### Political Engagement

- The level of involvement and participation of individuals or groups in political activities or issues

- *"Social media has been found to increase political engagement among young voters."*

### Traditional Campaign

- A campaign that relies on conventional methods such as billboards, TV ads, and rallies

- *"The candidate decided to run a traditional campaign in addition to using social media."*

### Humanize

- To make something or someone more personal or relatable

- *"By sharing personal stories on social media, the politician was able to humanize themselves to their followers."*

### Accessible Communication

- The ability to communicate easily and conveniently

- *"Social media has made communication more accessible for people living in remote areas."*

### Democracy

- A form of government where power is held by the people through free and fair elections

- *"Many argue that the rise of social media has strengthened democracy by giving a voice to more people."*

### Polarization

- The process or result of becoming divided, especially in politics

- *"Social media has been criticized for increasing political polarization by creating echo chambers."*

### Productive Conflict



- A disagreement that leads to positive outcomes or progress
- *"Bridging systems aim to promote productive conflict online by encouraging the exchange of diverse viewpoints."*

## Incumbents

- Individuals or parties currently holding political office
- *"Social media provides a platform for new candidates to challenge incumbents."*

## False Information

- Incorrect or misleading information
- *"Social media has been accused of spreading false information and contributing to the spread of fake news."*

## Resonate

- To have a strong or lasting effect or impact on someone
- *"Posts that resonate with diverse audiences are prioritized in bridging systems to promote productive conflict."*

## Discussion

1. How can social media be used to amplify the voices of underrepresented groups in politics? What are some examples of successful campaigns or initiatives that have leveraged social media to promote equitable representation and ensure that diverse perspectives are reflected in policy-making?

2. Despite the potential benefits of social media for political engagement, there are concerns around the spread of misinformation and the amplification of extreme views online. How can we promote critical thinking and media literacy to help people navigate the complex landscape of political discourse on social media? What role do educators, journalists, and social media platforms themselves have in this effort?

3. Aviv Ovadya advocates for "bridging systems" as a way to promote constructive dialogue and mutual respect online. How might such systems be designed and implemented? What challenges

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might arise in building these systems, and how can we ensure that they are effective in promoting productive conflict and healthy discourse?

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