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Abstract

The onset of the Internet era and the digitalization of the past 20 years have reshaped political communication. Social networking sites have become a tools of political parties, candidates for various highest authorities, voters, civil society institutions, and the media. TikTok has also recently entered the world of politics, media, and election campaigns. The use of this app has spread in political campaigning, be it interaction and communication, debate broadcasting, seeing the opponent's view, or analyzing the public mood. The shift in using TikTok in political communication and electoral campaigning in the world has become a subject of interest for researchers. This research, in its early stage, has not reached a full scope either. This article is a report of a systematic literature review that searched for studies that examined the participation of political parties in the election campaign on TikTok.

Keywords: Political Communication; Election Campaigns; Social Media Platforms; TikTok; Political Parties, Youth.

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Title

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Abstract

The onset of the Internet era and the digitalization of the past 20 years have reshaped political communication. Social networking sites have become a tools of political parties, candidates for various highest authorities, voters, civil society institutions, and the media. TikTok has also recently entered the world of politics, media, and election campaigns. The use of this app has spread in political campaigning, be it interaction and communication, debate broadcasting, seeing the opponent's view, or analyzing the public mood. The shift in using TikTok in political communication and electoral campaigning in the world has become a subject of interest for researchers. This research, in its early stage, has not reached a full scope either. This article is a report of a systematic literature review that searched for studies that examined the participation of political parties in the election campaign on TikTok.

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Usage of Social Media Networks in Political Communication

In fact, since the year 2000, politicians and academics have been deeply concerned about the increasing separation of the public from politics. As a result, politicians significantly increase the use of

social media platforms in election campaigns to attract public attention Abejón-Mendoza; Sastre-Asensio; Linares-Rodríguez, [2012](#). Moreover, the tremendous use of social media platforms for political communication and election campaigns by political parties, candidates, voters, and the public



has led to a sustained increase in research on the topic.

Political communication digitalization is the combination of digital media's functionalities with conventional media's vital principles Chadwick, [2013](#). The matchmaking of political parties, interest organizations, and ordinary individuals has fueled the development of an online community focused on exchanging and promoting ideas, as well as using political authority Bennett, [2012](#). Online political events have gained significant importance over the last two decades and have had a significant influence on political processes in a number of democracies globally Howard and Parks, [2012](#); Steenkamp and Hyde-Clarke, 2014. Numerous studies have concluded, for example, that online campaigning often preserves the status quo.

In the realm of political communication, researchers hailing from several academic domains such as media, political science, communication studies, and computer science are actively investigating the significance of social media platforms. The proliferation of internet and mobile technology has greatly facilitated communication among individuals, leading to the empowerment of grassroots networks and action on a worldwide scale (Lee et al., [2017](#); Segerberg and Bennett, [2011](#)). According to Diaz, Gamon, Hofman, Křćman, and Rothschild ([2016](#)), politicians have the ability to directly interact with consumers who possess distinct demographic features and political interests on these platforms.

Scholars adopt diverse viewpoints and employ a multitude of approaches, disseminating their research outcomes through scholarly publications. According to Chopra ([2014](#)), there is a suggestion that new political parties have had success in conducting online campaigns. The wide range of methodologies employed in studying the utilization of social media platforms in political campaigns results in a fragmented body of research, frequently missing a thorough examination of the available information.

Social media has become an integral component of politicians' communication tactics, with its utilization being particularly prevalent during election campaigns. The influence of digital platforms on political communication in mature

democracies has been steadily increasing since US President Barack Obama's innovative utilization of social media during his 2008 election campaign (Bimber, [2014](#)).

Recent research has examined the utilization of social media platforms in the context of electoral campaigns (Arag3n et al., [2013](#); Jungherr, [2014](#)). Nevertheless, there is now a dearth of cohesive research and shared findings explicitly pertaining to the utilization of TikTok for political communication.

The objective of this study is to address the existing disparity by presenting a thorough examination, therefore furnishing researchers with a compilation of results. This research enables scholars to either corroborate or question established findings, so propelling the investigation into the political applications of TikTok in political communication from limited case studies to a more advanced phase.

TikTok: Social Media Site

TikTok, developed by ByteDance, a technology startup headquartered in Beijing, first introduced Douyin in China in September 2016. In 2017, TikTok was subsequently launched for global markets. In 2018, TikTok and Musical.ly, a social media application, joined to create a more extensive community for sharing videos. As of October 2019, the combined monthly active user base of TikTok and Douyin amounted to 800 million individuals. Among TikTok's 26.5 million monthly active users in the United States, 60% fall between the age range of 16 to 24. The primary mode of operation for TikTok is through a smartphone application, however, it is feasible to access videos on non-mobile devices, albeit with restricted capabilities for content creation or engagement with user comments. According to Medina et al. ([2020](#)), TikTok has a significant impact on the political outlook of young adults.

TikTok provides users with the ability to generate and distribute innovative movies, encompassing self-portraits, their immediate environment, or assemblages of other audiovisual materials. Basic movies typically comprise text shown on a colorful backdrop, although more intricate ones may integrate graphics, video clips, and audio. The application offers a range of features, including

voice effects, picture filters, and video speed settings, which enable users to visually alter photos and recordings. The video post has a maximum duration of 60 seconds, and movies might consist of a sequence of shorter segments that together narrate a story. Individuals have the ability to include subtitles accompanied by hashtags in order to provide descriptions for their videos. These hashtags might be relevant to popular subjects on the platform.

TikTok is classified as a social networking platform because of its similarity to Twitter and Instagram since it allows users to have followers and follow other users. Nevertheless, TikTok distinguishes itself from other social media platforms by its utilization of ambient music. Individuals have the option to select background music from a diverse range of genres or generate their own sound clips. Other users have the ability to choose any sound samples, including user voice messages, to incorporate into their videos. Music frequently assumes a pivotal position in dancing routines, lip-synching competitions, or comedic performances, while also serving as a means to communicate a particular message. For instance, a renowned audio clip integrates music with a vocal message to question the legitimacy of some reasons by employing gunshots and visual components to imply that there is no genuine justification to endorse them.

TikTok and Political Communication

TikTok, a social media platform renowned for its dancing activities and fashionable material, is undergoing a transformation into a versatile platform that may be utilized in diverse manners (Schellewald, 2021). According to Medina Serrano, Papakyriakopoulos, and Hegelich (2020), this phenomenon offers a potential avenue for political communication. The responsiveness to the political choices of people is of utmost importance for politicians seeking to secure elections (Downs, 1957).

Currently, TikTok has the title of being the most widely downloaded application globally and ranks as the third most downloaded app in Spain, trailing behind WhatsApp and Messenger. According to Omnicore (2020), the number of downloads in Spain in 2020 amounted to 14 million.

Nevertheless, there remains an unresolved inquiry regarding whether politicians tailor their online communications to correspond with the preferences of a wide-ranging audience or certain segments of social media users. In contrast to the research conducted by Druckman et al. (2010), which focused on conventional methods employed on campaign websites, our argument posits that social media offers a distinct communication environment. According to Bode et al. (2016), politicians are situated inside an interactive environment that shapes their communications to conform to the topic preferences of their nearby communication network. This phenomenon may be regarded as a deliberate decision aimed at augmenting the efficacy of their communications, or alternatively, as an inadvertent consequence of politicians' own use and interaction with social media platforms.

TikTok and Politically Motivated Youth

Regarding the political involvement of young individuals, the data reveals intriguing patterns. According to Fernández de Castro et al. (2020), the proportion of Spanish individuals between the ages of 18 and 24 who participated in the General Elections conducted in Spain during April 2019 fell below the national average. This observation implies that younger individuals may exhibit lower levels of engagement in the political sphere compared to their older counterparts. According to recent research conducted by the IAB in 2020, the Internet has emerged as the main information source for several young individuals in Spain. Indeed, almost 50% of young persons depend on the Internet as their primary source of information, but radio and printed press are utilized less frequently, with 40% of young adults never relying on them as information sources.

Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that although young individuals heavily depend on the Internet for obtaining information, a substantial proportion, almost one in three (35%), do not experience a strong sense of association with any political party (Injuve, 2021). The disparity is further exacerbated in terms of endorsing particular political factions. This observation suggests a possible disparity between the digital

information environment and the political alignment of young individuals in Spain.

TikTok and Political Parties

The rapidly changing landscape of political communication increases the importance of the use of social media platforms by political parties all over the world. An example of Pakistan Tehreek e-Insaf which is one of the leading political parties in Pakistan can serve as a prominent case. In the case of this party, which is the plaintiff in the conclusion of this research, and the period from the 2018 elections to the dissolution of its government through a vote of no-confidence that followed this period, it actively used the influence of TikTok to actively engage, inspire and impacting its country's youth. A short review of its case was made above. It can be concluded with the following notion.

PTI deviated from the conventional political campaign strategy. The political party proactively used TikTok to engage with the country's youth, inspiring them to be politically active and aware due to the extensive reach of this social network. This observed pattern should be extended to a larger trend. Other political parties are aware of TikTok's potential as a powerful tool to actively engage and influence their country's youth. For example, academic research on the 2014 total election in India well documents the effort of the Bharatiya Janata Party to win the elections as a major ruling party. On the other hand, it should be noted that up to now developing political parties also show signs of success with their online campaign strategy. In contrast, it can be also observed empirically that opposition and developing political parties are more proactive in digital technology use compared to incumbent ruling parties. There are multiple researches, including that indicate this trend.

TikTok and Election Campaign

Almost 815 million people cast ballots in the 16th Indian general elections, which took place from April 7 to May 12, 2014, and are acknowledged as the greatest democratic exercise in history (Taylor and Kaphle, [2014](#)). The election procedure was executed in 10 distinct stages, culminating in an unprecedented voter participation rate of 66.4%. The results indicated a notable triumph for the

right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which achieved a majority, a distinctive event in the political chronicles of the country, marginalizing both non-coalition administrations and the Indian National Congress (INC), another prominent political entity. The BJP's victory also signified the initial instance since 1984 in which a political party has achieved an unequivocal majority, obtaining 272 parliamentary seats out of the whole 545.

TikTok has evolved as a popular social media tool during the 2020 presidential elections, serving as a medium for individuals to express their ideas and disseminate prejudices and disinformation. Politicians hailing from many regions throughout the globe have also adopted TikTok as a strategic tool to enhance their electoral appeal. The individuals and their media teams utilize TikTok as a means to cultivate trust among prospective voters through the production of material that is congruent with the views and values of their intended demographic, so exerting an impact on their perspectives.

Previous electoral cycles witnessed the utilization of alternative social media platforms, including Instagram, Facebook, Google, and YouTube, by politicians. Nevertheless, TikTok has emerged as a recent tool in their repertoire, functioning as a medium for fostering positive perspectives among prospective voters. An illustrative instance of TikTok's political impact may be observed through the prominence of its primary political account.

TikTok and Candidates and the Voters

According to Digital India ([2014](#)), the level of social media usage in India was only 12% in 2014. However, a study conducted prior to elections indicated that the utilization of social media for campaigning purposes could potentially influence the electoral results in 160 seats. This study effectively-established social media as a significant and influential factor in shaping the political landscape of India (Patel, [2014](#)). According to Haq and Ray ([2013](#)), empirical evidence suggests that social media campaigns exert a greater influence on voters compared to conventional television advertisements. As a result, social networking platforms such as Facebook and Twitter had significant usage throughout the political campaigns of 2014.

TikTok uses artificial intelligence to assess users' interests and preferences based on their interactions with material, rather than depending solely on connection networks. This is one of its most notable features. The TikTok algorithm customizes material for individual users by means of the "For You" tab, which offers video suggestions derived from their interactions inside the application. While the majority of social media platforms prioritize the establishment and maintenance of relationships, TikTok's "For You" Page sets itself apart by presenting a wide array of material, encompassing both widely popular videos and those with little viewership. Every user has the opportunity to achieve viral status using this strategy (Cervi, [2021](#)).

Discussion

The outcomes of this study demonstrate a distinct kind of political communication occurring on TikTok. While the decentralized character of communication persists, as observed on other social media platforms where users engage in the generation, sharing, and dissemination of information, TikTok users beyond the basic act of circulation and remark. On the social media platform TikTok, individuals assume the role of engaged political information presenters. In comparison to social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, where users frequently engage in the sharing of news stories via URLs and utilize comments and feedback postings to express their political viewpoints, TikTok users assume the role of dynamic conveyors of political beliefs. Every individual on TikTok assumes the role of a performer, expressing their particular political perspectives through audiovisual performances. This phenomenon leads to a heightened level of interactivity in political communication, surpassing the ordinary experiences witnessed on platforms such as YouTube or Instagram. Since users want to enlarge their popularity and spread their ideas on a larger scale – it is not surprising that politics is transformed into compact political shows. Unlike regular TV broadcasts, where the anchors and reviewers act as actors, the TikTok framework allows everyone to be engaged in activities.

This is precisely why this colorful image platform seduces not only due to reason in general but because the platform attracts youthful people interested in political affairs – they behave as various ratings confirm this position. The duets also seem to be highly critical in making political discussions on TikTok participative. A significant portion of the usefulness of TikTok films is dependent on duets allowing consumers to produce copies using various components – in many circumstances; facial expressions, and textual excerpts have been utilized as points to assess the degree of interpreting. Some go so far as to replicate the text of a film with their interpretations on a filter point and offer answers. In this circumstance, the duets are a feature that entirely incorporates the decision-making operation into the social network, since edge rotations allow numerous ratings to be placed concurrently – this provides the audience with the opportunity to effectively oppose one another and create an audience.

Although the primary emphasis of this study was on political partisans creating material and engaging with others on TikTok, it is important to investigate other aspects of political communication as well. On TikTok, news agencies and political candidates have created a presence to distribute stories and connect with the voters, despite the fact that news media URLs are not as commonly shared as on other social networks. TikTok's recent prohibition on political commercials, like Twitter's measure, directly influences political campaigns and the shaping of public opinion, necessitating further extensive investigation in the future. This encompasses the investigation of overall user behavior on the platform, analyzing the potential impact of TikTok's design and recommendation algorithms on the polarization or division of social groupings, as well as the influence of hyperactive user activity on the site's agenda. In addition to TikTok's primary emphasis on authentic users who authentically present themselves on camera, it is essential to examine the existence and management of disinformation and contentious matters inside the network. Researchers should conduct an investigation to ascertain the prevalence of inappropriate and discriminatory content on TikTok.

TikTok not only facilitates political communication but also gives rise to further political issues around user privacy and security. Although there have previously been expressed issues over user privacy on TikTok because of its open nature, these concerns require a more thorough assessment. Although users have the ability to produce private movies that are only viewable to their friends, the site predominantly promotes the creation of viral videos, hence facilitating the accessibility of data for data mining purposes. TikTok serves as a valuable repository of information since its material offers valuable insights into many aspects of individuals' personal features, encompassing their physical looks, personalities, traits, vocal characteristics, and perspectives. The categorization of individuals based on their partisanship is a potential avenue for machine learning algorithms to detect political material and autonomously assign party affiliation to TikTok users. This information has the potential to be utilized for political or advertising objectives, akin to the behaviors observed on social media sites such as Facebook. Nevertheless, the potential hazards are amplified on TikTok as a result of advancements in face recognition technology, which enable the identification of specific users and their association with citizenship data. TikTok users who are actively engaged tend to be willing to openly provide their biometric data, which increases the likelihood of their data being included in electoral or other databases that may be utilized for various purposes. Political campaigns and third parties may exhibit a keen interest in gathering data pertaining to young individuals, a significant portion of whom are either first-time voters or have not yet reached the age of voting. This is due to their ongoing development of political identities. The ideas of individuals might be influenced by the material they come across on social media sites such as TikTok.

TikTok possesses the capacity to reshape political communication by establishing itself as a novel public platform for civic deliberation. TikTok's open nature, unlike other social media sites that rely on buddy systems and might unintentionally foster echo chambers, has the potential to allow cross-partisan conversations. Nevertheless, although this premise has potential, it requires more investigation. Although this concept may be

valid, it is important to note that political disputes can have a negative impact, especially on a platform that emphasizes the popularity and comedic nature of its material. Videos containing caustic and mocking content have the potential to intensify bullying and other detrimental behaviors, which is particularly worrisome for adolescents. Hence, it is imperative for the research community to do supplementary investigations encompassing psychological assessments of the platform's impact on adolescent users.

Conclusion

According to Jewitt (2009), there is a contention among scholars regarding the inherent inclusion of multiple modes in all forms of communication. However, it is indisputable that social media platforms integrate various modes of communication, including video, audio, text, images, emoticons, and others, into a cohesive and interconnected resource for the purpose of constructing meaning (Adami, 2014). In contemporary times, social media has the potential to generate differences between political factions, and extant scholarly works indicate that this separation may be exacerbated when combined with other social media platforms. TikTok has a substantial influence on the political perspectives of young adults. One concern regarding political films on the site is the prevalence of a highly biased first-person perspective, which may possibly exacerbate polarization within public conversations.

Within this particular context, our research findings are consistent with previous studies that indicate political parties, as a whole, have not effectively utilized the potential provided by social networks to cultivate a more engaging connection with the general public. Alternatively, they frequently utilize these platforms as unidirectional conduits for promotional objectives (Miquel-Segarra, López-Meri, Viunnikoff-Benet, 2020; García Ortega and Zugasti Azagra, 2018).

It is crucial to recognize the boundaries of our investigation since we encountered limitations pertaining to time and resources. Although it is possible to consider different research methodologies, our study offers significant contributions to understanding the difficulties

presented by online activists and political influencers for political parties. The "For You" tab on TikTok is anticipated to emerge as a significant instrument for political candidates in the foreseeable future. This platform possesses the

capacity to elevate individuals to the rank of internet sensations, particularly in terms of exerting influence on political beliefs and prejudices.

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