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IS SOCIAL MEDIA A PANACEA OR DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD FOR POLITICAL LEADERS: A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of social media platforms has fundamentally changed how political leadership is exercised by reshaping how authority is communicated, built, and challenged in the digital world. This article examines the evolving link between political leadership and social media by examining how interactive platforms enable direct engagement, personalize messaging, and enable real-time responsiveness, while also introducing new structural risks and vulnerabilities. Drawing on leadership theory and the academic community's input on contemporary political communication, the study analyzes the transition from hierarchical broadcast to digitally networked. The synthesis discloses three core, underlying themes: the strengthening of visibility and agenda-setting capacity, the development of relational legitimacy through perceived authenticity and emotional resonance, and the growing dependence of political authority on algorithmic infrastructures (which can often intensify polarization, misinformation, and manipulation). Indeed, social media enhances transparency, ensures accountability, fosters participation, and mobilization. Conversely, social media can exacerbate informational instability, leading to fragmented public spheres and weakening institutional mediation. This paper delves into wide-ranging contexts and selected leaders, such as Presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, to show how social media has been used or is being used to influence the public. The findings suggest that social media does not simply strengthen or weaken political leadership; rather, it reconfigures the structural conditions under which legitimacy is cultivated and sustained. The paper concludes by pointing out the need for ethical governance frameworks and the responsible use of social media by all who use it, including for political discourse and propaganda. Social media should be safe for everyone.

1 Introduction

Over the past three decades, the rapid expansion of digital communication technologies has left a monumental impact on the foundations of communication and the practice of political leadership. Since the early diffusion of the internet in the 1990s, global connectivity has expanded dramatically, and social media platforms such as Facebook, X/Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have

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become central arenas of political interaction. According to the latest report published in late 2025, well over 5.66 billion people worldwide actively use social media, making these platforms central to political mobilization, mutual influence, and competition [1].

Traditionally, Political leadership has been seen as a process of exercising influence within institutional hierarchies. [2] describes leadership as adaptive work, requiring the capacity to respond to rapidly evolving social and political challenges. [3] frames leadership as a mobilizing process in which leaders detect and define problems, offer prescriptions, and rally followers around shared interpretations of collective realities. In both perspectives, communication plays a central role. Authority depends not only on formal office but also on personal power, the ability to persuade, coordinate, and maintain legitimacy among followers and constituents. [4] demonstrates that digital platforms increase political participation, encourage citizen engagement, and enhance transparency in governance. Simultaneously, these platforms reshape public expectations of leadership. Citizens progressively expect immediacy, responsiveness, and accessibility. Political authority is not just visible, but also increasingly appears to face realities on the surface. Leaders are not only policy actors but effective communicators who leverage online platforms to shape public opinion. This forced leaders to be digitally aware, more visible, present, and responsive.

The transformation encompasses multiple hierarchical levels. [5] argue that digital leadership unfolds at macro, meso, and micro levels of political communication. At the macro level, it has been evident that social media influences national and transnational political discourse. At the meso level, integration of digital communication became central to parties and campaigns for strategic communication. At the micro level, leaders interact directly with individual users, blurring the boundary between institutional authority and personal identity. It created a form of good governance and democracy. These shifts suggest that social media does not merely introduce new tools; it modifies the structural conditions under which political legitimacy is constructed and exercised. In other words, it redefined political communities and political communication.

Barack Obama’s 2008 and 2012 presidential campaigns are often seen as key moments in digital political communication, demonstrating how social media influence voters' perceptions, mobilize supporters, and integrate value-laden terms such as “change” into broader campaign strategies [6]. Similarly, Zohran Mamdani’s victory as the Mayor of New York represents a modern expression of this trend. Mamdani heavily used short-form video content on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook to engage with Gen Z and younger voters. His digital strategy involved "polyglot social media monologues" and a "joyful" presentation of his political agenda, which transformed him into a digital superstar and enabled effective fundraising through grassroots-level and small-donor networks [7] By synthesizing contemporary scholarship from political communication, leadership studies, and digital governance, the article advances a conceptual framework to understand the mutual influence between political authority and social media. Rather than viewing digital platforms as peripheral communication instruments, the analysis treats them as fundamental environments that shape how authority is recognized and exercised.

This paper uses critical discourse analysis to uncover hidden power relations and ideological purposes in political messages. It examines specific linguistic features used by political leaders to attract public attention to their social media messages. The selection of cases is based on the representation of those leaders in challenging traditional institutional norms of communication. Scopus and the corpus are used as primary sources to extract data from relevant papers and official digital documents, such as Facebook posts, tweets, and campaign videos, between 2008 and 2025. The study uses the Network Authority Model as an analytical lens for evaluating the case studies [8].

2 Social Media, and the Transformation of Political Communication

Nowadays, social media platforms serve as structural environments for political communication. As technology and smartphone access advanced, it became much cheaper and easier for politicians to get their message out. Leaders started using social media for governance and communication routines, from campaigning to crisis management [9]. These platforms allow the leadership to speak directly to people in real time, bypassing the need for press conferences or official spokespeople [10]. This marks a major shift from the era of TV and radio, when public opinion was greatly shaped by major news outlets and institutions.

In the past, politicians just sent out messages to a quiet audience. Social media changed by allowing everyone to respond and engage. Nowadays, politicians can reply to people instantly, see what they think right away, and change their message on the fly. This speed makes it much easier to control the narrative. [11] points out that digital platforms expedite the spread of news and information, thereby eroding the power that traditional media outlets once wielded as "gatekeepers." [10] agree, showing how social media alters the relationship between politicians and journalists by enabling leaders to speak directly with the public and in this environment, being visible and staying active online grants someone authority. Having political influence isn't just about your policies anymore; it's about never stopping the conversation. Significant visibility also changes how political leaders act. Social media fosters personal connections, pushing politicians to build a "human" brand. [12] Jiménez and Fitzpatrick (2024) argue that digital leadership operates at several levels, and being seen as "real" and responsive makes a leader look legitimate. This shift focuses more on the person than on the party's platform. Basically, authority isn't just about the office you hold anymore; it's about how well you perform online [13].[14] states that social media has changed the way people engage in politics. It's now much easier to comment, share, and organize around different causes. If a politician takes too long to respond, it looks like they don't care. While this constant visibility can make things more transparent, it's a double-edged sword. One mistake or controversial comment can go viral in seconds, potentially ruining a reputation overnight [15]

On a deeper level, now digital systems run by algorithms. These algorithms love anything that gets a lot of clicks or shares. This can be great for grassroots movements, but it also creates a lot of noise and distorts public debate. It's not just a tech update; it's a fundamental shift in who holds power and how they use it. Ultimately, social media has sped everything up and made it more personal. This creates a new environment where political power relies heavily on digital platforms, bringing both new opportunities and new risks.

3 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework in Figure 1 visualizes the interdependence among the dimensions. Digital platforms amplify leaders' visibility, which facilitates relational legitimacy through interactive engagement and identity construction. At the same time, this relational authority is conditioned by algorithmic systems that organize the circulation of content and engagement-driven communication. The model therefore emphasizes that digitally mediated authority is not a linear process but a recursive interaction between communicative amplification, relational validation, and structural exposure to algorithmic constraints.

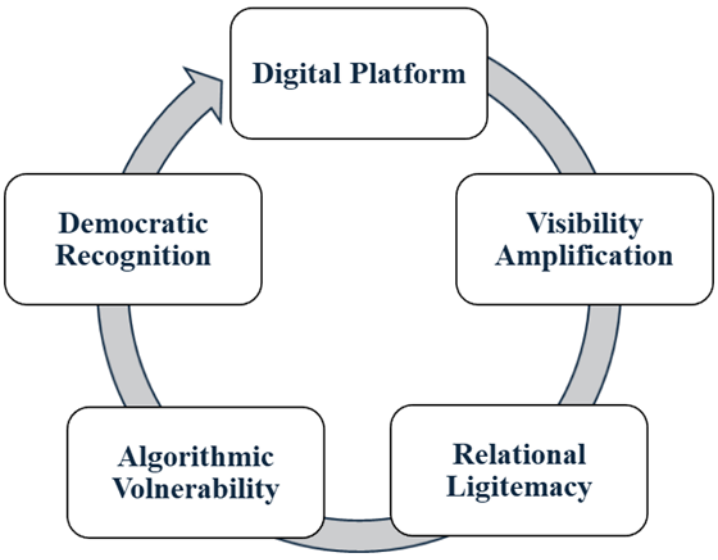

Figure 1. Networked Authority Model

4 Social Media and Political Leadership: Positive Impact

The way leaders and citizens interact has completely shifted because of social media. While we always hear about the downsides, like misinformation and everyone being so polarized, research shows that these digital platforms open up a lot of doors for people to get involved. It makes politicians more reachable and lowers the barrier for regular people to participate in civic life.
Leadership and its constituents can now communicate directly. In the past, anything a politician said was filtered through journalists who decided how and when to report it. Now, the "middleman" is largely gone, and leaders can communicate in real time and adjust their messages based on the public's reaction. [16] Scholars have noted that this makes leaders feel much more approachable, changing the whole dynamic of their communication strategies and authority. We saw a massive turning point with Barack Obama's 2008 and 2012 campaigns. They were pioneers in using social media to mobilize supporters and create a shared sense of purpose. A key part of their success was reaching younger voters who weren't necessarily looking for politics [6]. Many young people just "stumble" onto political content while they're doing other things online. This "incidental exposure" means that social media isn't just an extra tool for a political campaign; it actually changes who participates in the first place.

It is not just about winning elections; these platforms also help people organize around specific policy issues at both the local and national levels [17]. Citizens can now comment on decisions and speak directly with representatives, compelling leadership to engage in conversation rather than deliver a one-way speech. [18] highlighted that this digital infrastructure makes governance much more interactive. Transparency is another crucial piece that can be achieved through social media. Leaders use these platforms to explain their decisions or deliver updates during a crisis. [15] explains that this direct dialogue allows for immediate feedback, which, if handled well, can build significant trust and accountability. This aligns with Heifetz's [2] concept of "adaptive work," in which leaders must be visible and responsive to emerging concerns.

Finally, as social media reminds us once again, authority is set in motion in days; being a legitimate leader often means being relatable. This is why we see politicians sharing personal thoughts, informal comments, or behind-the-scenes clips to humanize themselves. [14] argue that this individualized approach is becoming a core part of modern leadership. (Table 1) below highlights the main advantages of social media for political leadership.

Table 1. Major advantages of social media for political leadership.

Dimension	Description	Key surrounding sources
Direct communication	Leaders bypass traditional media and communicate directly with citizens	Papathanassopoulos & Giannouli (2025)
Political mobilization	Social media facilitates campaign organization and grassroots participation.	Zhuravskaya et al. (2020)
Citizen engagement	Interactive features allow citizens to comment, share, and respond to policies.	Puri (2025)
Transparency and accountability	Leaders provide real-time updates during crises and policy decisions	Nath (2019)
Personalization of leadership	Informal posts and personal content help leaders appear authentic and relatable	Aprianto et al. (2025)

Source: Author's own creation

5 Social Media and Political Leadership: Negative Impact

Social media might offer people more varied opportunities to get involved, but it also creates multiple vulnerabilities for political leaders. The same features that make these apps great, such as their speed and the personal nature of the interactions, also make it easier for misinformation to spread, for people to become more divided, and for bad actors to interfere. All of this makes it much harder for a leader to maintain their authority.

A major challenge is the speed at which fake news spreads. Information is being pumped out so quickly and on such a massive scale that it's almost impossible for anyone to verify it all, or for institutions to correct the record in time. [19] point out that these platforms make it easy for people to coordinate massive campaigns that can sway public opinion. [11] notes that because everything moves so fast, traditional institutions can't keep up. By the time the truth comes out, the lie has already gone viral. To make things worse, the corrections usually reach fewer people than the original fake post did. [20] found that when people are constantly seeing misinformation, they start losing trust in everyone, not just the politicians, but the entire democratic system. Eventually, people just stop believing in the credibility of both digital news and the government itself. [21] argues that emotionally charged stories only lead to confusion and hostility online, making it easy for people to exploit those divisions. On top of that, [22]) suggest that when people are constantly exposed to misleading political content, they eventually tune out and stop participating in civic life altogether. So, social media is a bit of a double-edged sword: it can bring people together for a cause, but it can also push them away when the internet is drowning in distortions.

Polarization is another huge hurdle. Social media algorithms tend to boost content that triggers strong emotions because that's what gets likes and shares. [23] Describe how this creates "echo chambers" where you only see things you already agree with. [24] points out that these "filter bubbles" prevent us from seeing different points of view, thereby weakening the idea of a healthy democracy. When everyone is stuck in their own digital bubble, it's way harder to find common ground, and leaders might find it easier to just play to their base instead of trying to bring everyone together. These conditions often lead to a lot of aggressive, "us versus them" talk. [20] points out that intense, emotional language travels fast on social media, which actually pushes leaders to act more polarizingly to stay in the spotlight. While this might make their die-hard fans more loyal, it deepens societal divides and diverts attention from actual policy discussions. Basically, because engagement metrics reward drama, leaders feel forced to compete in a world that's constantly reacting to the next big thing. Polarization of social media is wide open to manipulation and cyberattacks. You've got bots, automated accounts, and fake news campaigns that can hijack the conversation by making certain stories seem way more popular than they really are. [25] have shown that this kind of digital ecosystem is linked to instability in democracies worldwide. To make things even messier, [26] talk about the new risks from AI-generated content, which makes it even harder to tell what's real and what's just a fake political message. It really blurs the line between people actually caring about their community and a carefully planned influence operation.

Foreign interference through cyber threats only exacerbates these problems. [27] explains that coordinated digital attacks can easily cross borders, leveraging social media's design to undermine a country's political stability. [28] point out that these external interventions undermine public trust in elections and lead people to doubt the apps they use to communicate. Basically, the internet has stopped being a neutral space for regular people to talk and has become a battlefield in global power struggles. This new reality completely changes how leaders have to do their jobs. Nowadays, being a leader isn't just about being a good talker; it's about knowing how to survive in a chaotic digital world. You have to react to viral stories the second they hit, often without even knowing if they're real or where they came from. When governments try to step in and regulate misinformation, it just creates more drama between keeping the internet safe and protecting free speech. All of this makes managing our digital world an absolute nightmare for anyone in charge. Just because social media is risky doesn't mean it isn't still a great way for people to get involved. What it really shows is that being a political leader today means working in a world where information is messy and totally unpredictable. You can't just rely on your title anymore; authority has to be earned repeatedly while dealing with algorithms that blow things out of proportion, the constant fear of a ruined reputation, and an audience that's split into a million different groups. Table 2 below illustrates the structural risks posed by social media to political leadership and democratic governance.

Table 2. Structural risks of social media for political leadership and democratic governance

Risk Category	**Description**	**Key References**
Misinformation and fake news	Rapid spread of unverified information influencing public opinion	Gadjanova et al. (2019)
Political polarization	Algorithms amplify emotionally charged content and deepen ideological divisions	Ajaegbu & Ajaegbu (2024)
Echo chambers and filter bubbles	Users mainly encounter content that confirms existing beliefs	Drobot (2022)
Manipulation and bots	Automated accounts artificially amplify political narratives	Lorenz-Spreen et al. (2022)
Foreign interference	Cross-border digital campaigns influencing domestic political processes	Avcı (2024)

Source: Author's own creation

6 Multiple Case Studies

Real-world examples make it much clearer how social media actually changes political leadership. While the theory is great, seeing how real people use these tools in their own countries shows us how digital strategy affects things like mobilization and democratic stability.
[14] Note that this was a huge shift toward a leadership style that felt more personal and interactive. In the end, this approach helped people feel like they were part of a team, making the campaign feel more legitimate and powerful.

Donald Trump's use of Twitter shows just how much the old rules of political communication have changed. [29] points out that Trump used direct, unfiltered posts to go around journalists and drive the news cycle himself in real time. His style was all about being fast and emotionally intense, which helped him stay in the spotlight and fire up his most loyal supporters. But this approach also made society more polarized and made aggressive arguments feel like the new normal online. This case really shows how social media algorithms favor content that gets a big reaction. In this world, being a leader is more about putting on a show and constantly jumping into the conversation than it is about traditional debate or slow decision-making. Donald Trump's use of (unmediated communication) is an effective strategy that bypassed traditional gatekeepers to establish a particular type of (networked legitemacy) [30].

Narendra Modi's digital style shows a different side: how social media can be used for nationalist goals and government strategy. His team uses digital platforms to roll out new policies, push his political message, and connect with people both at home and abroad. [13] notes that modern politicians are becoming very adept at tailoring their messages to specific audiences, which places the focus squarely on the individual leader's personal brand. Modi's success proves that while the tech is the same everywhere, digital leadership still has to adapt to a country's specific political culture to really work.

Political movements are another great way to see both the power and the weaknesses of digital tools. The Arab Spring is still an example of how social media can help people organize and move fast. During the 2011 Egyptian revolution, activists used digital apps to share news, plan protests, and completely bypass the government-controlled media outlets [31]. In that moment, social media shifted power back to the people and accelerated the uprising. But the protest

movements in Iran show that there are real limits to this. Even with a ton of online coordination, they didn't see lasting political change, largely because the government just shut down the internet and blocked the apps. [32] point out that how well digital organizing works depends on factors such as a country's infrastructure and laws. Authoritarian governments still have the power to cut off access, mess with the narrative, or just break the networks entirely. Basically, while the internet can get a protest started quickly, it can only last if the political situation on the ground allows it to. In authoritarian settings, social media platforms are used for surveillance and repression to promote conformity and spread propaganda. Scholars argue that while social media platforms were once a source of liberatory technology, they have now often become a source of digital authoritarianism. Furthermore, in democratic contexts, leaders use personal accounts to enhance their reputations by emphasizing transparency, mobilization, and the democracy hypothesis [30] [33]. In contrast, in authoritarian regimes, leaders prefer power-projection accounts to cultivate a reputation [35].

Looking at all these cases, a few clear patterns jump out. Social media lets leaders stop relying so much on traditional intermediaries and instead build their own personal brand of authority. The way these platforms are actually built encourages content that either pulls at your heartstrings or gets people riled up. While digital tools can get people moving incredibly fast, they’re still at the mercy of government rules and whoever controls the actual tech infrastructure. Basically, social media isn't just a new way to talk; it’s completely changed the playing field where political power is won and lost.

How digital leadership actually works depends on the mix of tech features, local political rules, and cultural habits in each country. Moving social media to the center of politics has created some massive ethical and legal headaches. These platforms help more people get involved, but they also bring up tough questions about data privacy, how algorithms are run, and how to moderate content without killing free speech or hurting democracy. Since political power is tied so closely to digital tech, our laws need to catch up so we can keep leaders accountable without stripping away people’s rights.One of the biggest worries is how personal data is being used. Social media companies collect a mountain of real-time information on users, which lets politicians send hyper-targeted messages. [14] point out that because digital content changes so fast, it’s really hard for regulators to step in, especially when dangerous information spreads like wildfire. Beyond just checking what people post, this massive data collection enables "microtargeted" ads that can sway voters' thinking at a very deep level. [34] shows how these digital messages can actually shift public mood during a crisis. This whole situation raises serious red flags about surveillance, whether people are actually consenting to this, and where we should draw the line on political persuasion.

The way these digital platforms are run is also tied up in messy global politics. [42] Describes how internet filtering is often a battle between governments seeking to stay in control and citizens seeking to keep communication open. [43] call this "digital sovereignty," where countries fight to own the actual infrastructure of the web. In this kind of environment, social media isn't just a neutral tool for chatting anymore; it’s become a full-blown battlefield for political power. Trying to balance free speech with responsible posting is still one of the toughest parts of leading in a digital world. [16] argue that the people running these platforms must deal with harmful content without inadvertently killing off democratic debate. We saw this during the Brexit referendum, where emotional and unverified stories spread so fast they swayed public opinion before anyone could even step in to correct them [26]. But at the same time, if the rules get too strict, they risk silencing people who have a legitimate reason to disagree with the government.

All these ethical and legal fights show that modern political leaders are operating in a really messy environment. Leaders have to figure out how to talk to the public while dealing with legal limits and the pressure to be held accountable for what they say. These ongoing dilemmas prove that we really need to rethink what political leadership looks like in a broader context of digital order and of keeping our democracies strong. This means that being a leader isn’t just about how you connect with people anymore; it’s also shaped by technical systems that are often confusing and barely regulated. Ultimately, the whole debate over how to govern the internet shows that digital authority is stuck inside a system that controls what we see, how information spreads, and whether we can hold anyone accountable. (Table 3) below provides a comparative overview of selected political leaders and their social media use.

Table 3. Comparative overview of selected political leaders and their use of social media

Leader / Movement	Country	Digital Strategy	Political Outcome
Barack Obama	United States	Social media mobilization, youth engagement, grassroots fundraising	Increased voter participation and campaign mobilization
Donald Trump	United States	Direct and unfiltered communication via Twitter/X	Strong supporter mobilization, but increased polarization
Narendra Modi	India	Personalized messaging and nationalist digital branding	Strengthened leader-centered political communication
Arab Spring Activists	Middle East	Social media coordination of protests and information sharing	Rapid mobilization but uneven long-term political outcomes
Iranian Protest Movements	Iran	Online coordination under restrictive political conditions	Limited success due to state control and internet shutdowns

Source: Author's own creation

7 Analysis

The data disclosed above underscores that social media is a double-edged sword for political leaders. It gives them more ways to talk to people, but it also makes their position much more shaky. These apps make everything feel immediate and personal, but they also crank up the chaos, deepen divisions, and force leaders to rely on algorithms they may not control. The real question isn't if social media helps or hurts a leader; it’s that it’s completely changed the rules for how they get and keep power in the first place.

Empirical studies highlight that digital platforms are fundamentally transforming how leaders, institutions, and citizens behave as well as political culture. Mainstream media outlets no longer hold the same power they once did, giving politicians much more freedom to frame and set their agendas. Nevertheless, this freedom is limited by algorithms that prioritize whatever gets the most likes and shares. This creates weird pressure: to stay visible in a crowded digital space, leaders often feel they ought to use more emotional or dramatic language. It’s a bit of a paradox that social media gives them more control over their message while also forcing them to play by a new set of rigid rules [44]. That transformation similarly changes the relationship between leaders and their followers. Citizens aren't just sitting back and listening anymore; they’re actively engaging with, twisting, and sharing content. While this can make democracy feel more alive and help people find their community, it also means the public is split into different "bubbles." Because of this, leadership isn't about speaking to a single unified public anymore: it’s about navigating several distinct, often isolated online communities at once. This study highlights how all of this works in practice. Leaders who figure out how to apply digital platforms to their overall political strategy can get people moving and build a stronger connection with them. But just being "seen" doesn't mean your position is safe. Algorithms can make divisions much worse, and fake news can completely eat away public trust. These days, being a political leader really depends on your ability to handle a rambling information world while trying to remain believable to a bunch of different, often clashing, audiences.

Another big piece of this is how political leadership runs things. Trying to correct misinformation, hold platforms accountable, and keep elections fair raises some tough questions. If you regulate too much, you risk killing free speech; if you don't do enough, you leave the door open for people to mess with and destabilize the political environment. Digital leadership is essentially playing out in a giant tug-of-war among new tech, national law, and global power struggles. All these patterns show that social media is fundamentally changing, and make it more perplexing how political leadership influences political communities and various media platforms. Being in charge isn’t just about having a fancy title or a high-ranking government office anymore. Instead, authority is

something leaders have to constantly win over and defend within the digital order. If political leaders want people to see them as a "legitimate" leader today, they ought to be visible enough, proactive, quick to respond to their followers, and good at crafting their narrative. But there's a catch: the digital systems we use for this can easily blow things out of proportion or twist the truth. To really understand leadership in this digital age, you ought to look at how political leadership tries to connect with and influence public opinion, and the technical rules they enforce.

8 Techno-Legal Framework and Digital Transformation

Establishing legal and regulatory aspects for the digital world is a massive challenge. Since these platforms work across borders, it's really hard for a country to enforce its own laws. As the 2024 study "Digital Activism and Political Change" points out, online communication just ignores traditional boundaries. [31] Show a similar problem: digital movements often move way faster than any government office can react. Without a set of international rules everyone agrees on, bad actors can easily exploit loopholes to run disinformation campaigns or interfere with other countries [36]. Lately, we've seen some real attempts to fix these gaps. The European Union (EU) has stepped up with its Code of Conduct on Hate Speech, the Digital Services Act (DSA), and the EU's Action Plan on Disinformation. These efforts are to make platforms more transparent about what's on their websites, be honest about political ads, explain how their algorithms actually work, and mitigate systematic risks such as misinformation and disinformation [37]. Similarly, the United States established initiatives such as the Honest Ads Act, which aims to broaden transparency in online political advertisements following the 2016 election [38]. South Korea also updated its election laws to try to keep online campaigning honest. It's becoming clear that if we want digital leadership to work in the long term, we need serious oversight to manage the risks built into these platforms[14]. But when governments try to step in, they create their own set of headaches. Efforts to moderate content often get blasted for shutting down free speech or giving the state way too much power. [39] shows that there's a global tug-of-war among protecting privacy, keeping countries safe, and defending civil liberties. [40] even warns about the "Balkanization" of the internet, essentially, a future in which every country imposes strict controls that block information from flowing across borders and undermine user freedom. As [41] argues, any legal move to protect elections has to walk a thin line between stopping fake news and protecting our constitutional right to speak our minds. These digital constitutional frameworks for digital transformation balance the rights for political participation while preventing political and societal manipulation [45].

9 Conclusion

To conclude, it can be said that social media has become the most preferred communication channel for political leaders worldwide to reach a vast number of people. This means it can be used as a tool to reach large audiences and constituents quickly. But this shift, moving leadership from old-school hierarchies to fast-paced digital networks, is a major change in how political power operates. This research demonstrates that social media serve as a double-edged sword: they can facilitate positive direct engagement and transparency, while also presenting systemic risks that may undermine democratic institutions.

To stay effective, modern leaders need to build relational legitimacy through appearing authentic, responsive, and relatable in real time. Nevertheless, this move toward personal connection and immediacy often makes leaders vulnerable to algorism, polarization, and misinformation. When leadership is increasingly focused on viral engagement, the attention may shift rapidly from long-term problem-solving to short-term symbolic victories.

As observed in the cases of world leaders, the ability to sidestep traditional media gatekeepers gives political leaders considerable agenda-setting power. However, it also places them and the public at risk of informational instability and the loss of a unified national narrative.

In today's era, to succeed and gain domestic and international recognition, a political leader needs more than just policy knowledge; they must develop a new set of meta-skills. Additionally, aligning international digital ethics standards with national constitutional rights will ensure that social media remains a safe and useful space for democratic debate, rather than becoming a platform for

propaganda and digital disinformation. This will help leaders to solve public problems rather than winning a viral argument.

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