

The Relationship Between Media and Ideology

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Abstract: Before the full usage of online networks, the most effective media were mostly newspapers and letters. Newspapers in the early times were the only window through which average citizens could get a variety of information, no matter whether it was local or countrywide. The communication between the intersection of media and ideology has been a key point in understanding how public opinions are shaped and how they influence democratic processes. This paper will discuss the complex dynamics between media, particularly on new digital platforms like TikTok, and ideology. By examining how these platforms serve as a stage for ideological expression and political mobilization, the study aims to focus on their role in contemporary democratization efforts. Understanding the connection between ideology and media is necessary for understanding how information technology impacts political engagement and democratic processes. In the modern world of information, media platforms not only reflect societal beliefs and public perspectives but also actively shape and challenge them. The focus of this research looks at its possibilities and potential to contribute to the larger discussion on how digital media can both progress and obstruct democratic participation, especially with the young generation. This paper will take a close look at how TikTok creates a unique environment that could both reflect and shape political perspectives among its users. Unlike traditional media, TikTok's wide range and immediate communication style offer a new way for people to express their political perspectives and engagement.

Keywords: Internet media; Ideology; Douyin

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1. Introduction

“We thus study the effects of the media on the classical notion of expressed public opinion, a concept predating modern survey research, and with a focus not on changes in individual behavior or attitudes but instead on the content of the national conversation”^[1]. King and his colleagues' research looks closely into the foundation for understanding the impact of media on political engagement. News media, by shaping the public agenda, influence what the public discusses and prioritizes. The research suggests that media coverage not only reflects but also actively structures political reality by making certain issues more obvious than others. The role of “agenda setting” of the media is important in understanding TikTok's function. Unlike many traditional media, TikTok lets its users,

especially the younger generation, create and share videos about topics that are important to them. In this way, they can bring attention to topics by making their videos popular. This makes the process of deciding which topics are important more democratic, as opposed to traditional media, where only a few main news companies usually decide what to focus on. “While scholars disagree about the media’s importance for strengthening democracy, existing research consistently demonstrates that democracy is insufficient to create free media. Scholars who study media in transitional democracies around the globe suggest a range of impediments to media liberalization, from limited ideological diversity, independence, and professionalization to outright government repression”^[2].

2. Current research

The research by Kellam and Stein particularly focuses on how freedom of the media within democratic societies influences democratic processes.

According to their research, when media freedom is limited, it can suppress democratic engagements like transparent governance, public accountability, and fair elections. Applying this to TikTok, the platform’s relatively open environment allows for a broad range of political expressions. This openness, however, also brings challenges such as the spread of misinformation and the potential for polarizing content, which could influence youth ideologies and participation in democratic processes in various ways that should be explored. “TikTok is a vibrant space for youth activism and political engagement because it invites young people to share their views in ways that are appealing to them, that help them connect to peers, and that are deeply anchored in their interests and their cultural lives.”^[3].

Literat and Kligler Vilenchik’s observations about TikTok point out its role as a “new” type of media that uniquely affects the young generation’s political perspectives. They mention how TikTok functions as a stage for performative activism, where users not only share their own political perspectives but also engage in political activism through very entertaining ways that are capable of catching the attention of others. This way of expression is significantly attractive to younger users, who are able to use the platform’s tools to create engaging content that they can share with their friends, and information is transmitted in a relatable style and recent popular form. TikTok promotes a unique environment of “shared symbolic resources”, like hashtags and memes, which users can manipulate to express their thoughts on certain topics.

The structure for the proposed research would dig deeper into how TikTok reshapes the way political ideologies are formed and connected among the young generation. Unlike traditional media that often presents in order and as well-rounded top-to-bottom information, TikTok represents a bottom-up approach where the youth are not just the audience but at the same time, they could be the creator of content. This shift potentially enhances their role in democratic processes but also presents challenges like echo chambers and the rapid spread of misinformation. The research would aim to unravel these dual aspects of TikTok’s impact on democracy. By combining these theoretical perspectives with empirical research, the study would provide a detailed understanding of how TikTok is reshaping political ideologies and democratic participation among the younger generations. This would contribute to the broader discourse on the media’s role in current democratic societies. The research design plan for studying TikTok’s influence on political ideologies includes various methods, interviews with its users, and combining content analysis with its short videos. Data collection will mainly focus on videos with a range of political hashtags to represent a wide range of ideologies and interviews with active users across various demographics. The analysis will also focus on identifying themes and topics that are related to the use of

symbols, to see how these key figures contribute to the formation of ideological communities. As noted by Literat and Kligler-Vilenchik, TikTok fosters collective political expression among youth by enabling them to connect through shared symbolic resources, an observation central to understanding the platform's role in shaping political ideologies ^[4].

3. Epilogue

This essay has focused on how TikTok, as a popular social media platform, has significantly affected younger generations in their views and activities. Technology like TikTok has come to the center of focus mainly because it gives the younger generation a platform and opportunity by not just being able to watch, but also to create their own videos that can involve influential political views. This change in the shape of media is significant because it gives more people, especially younger generations, a chance to develop a viewpoint and perspective in political discussions that were not as easy to develop and express with traditional forms of media, such as newspapers and television. However, the study also shows that TikTok has its obvious upsides and downsides. Even though the technology has the ability to spread positive ideas and spread content fast and widely, it can also spread misinformation and possibly divide communities by allowing people to only hear perspectives that they agree on and wish to hear through algorithms and blocking outside perspectives. All the research shows the complex effects of platforms like this on politics and democracy, especially among younger generations. It underlines the importance of ongoing efforts to make sure these digital spaces help, rather than hinder, democratic values like free speech, accountability, and political participation. As people move forward, it is important to keep checking how these platforms could affect political engagements in positive and negative ways and how to correctly use them to enhance discussions and democracy.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Reference

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