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**The Impact of Social Media on Political Polarization**



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## The Impact of Social Media on Political Polarization

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** The main objective of this study was to explore the impact of social media on political polarization.

**Methodology:** The study adopted a desktop research methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in executive's time, telephone charges and directories. Thus, the study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library.

**Findings:** The findings revealed that there exists a contextual and methodological gap relating to the impact of social media on political polarization. Preliminary empirical review revealed that social media significantly contributes to political polarization through mechanisms like filter bubbles and echo chambers. It emphasizes the need for media literacy programs and critical thinking to navigate these platforms effectively. The implications are substantial, impacting society and democracy. Future research should delve into individual characteristics and cross-cultural variations, while policymakers and social media companies should consider transparency and algorithmic adjustments. By addressing these challenges and promoting informed discourse, we can work towards a healthier democratic environment in the digital age.

**Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy:** The Filter Bubble Theory, Spiral of Silence Theory and the Selective Exposure Theory may be used to anchor future studies on political polarization. The study offered four key recommendations. Firstly, there is a need to enhance digital media literacy programs to equip individuals with critical thinking skills to discern credible information on social media. Secondly, social media platforms should prioritize algorithmic transparency and accountability to avoid inadvertently exacerbating polarization. Thirdly, promoting civil and constructive online discourse, discouraging toxic behavior, and enforcing moderation policies can foster a more inclusive online environment. Lastly, supporting independent fact-checking and news verification initiatives can help combat the spread of misinformation and promote reliance on credible sources, thereby reducing the impact of misinformation on political polarization.

**Keywords:** *Social Media, Impact, Political Polarization, Online Communication, Media Influence*

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Political polarization refers to the increasing divergence of political attitudes and beliefs between individuals or groups with different ideological perspectives within a society. It is characterized by the growing divide between individuals who identify with opposing political parties or movements, often resulting in heightened partisanship and reduced willingness to compromise. In the context of the United States, political polarization has become a prominent and concerning trend over the past few decades. The United States is experiencing a period of intense partisan polarization in the mass public. People who identify with one party have become more likely to dislike and distrust those in the other party. This polarization is reflected in various aspects of American politics, including policy preferences, voting behavior, and even social interactions (Levendusky & Malhotra, 2016)

One example of political polarization in the United States is the widening gap in policy preferences between Democrats and Republicans. For instance, a study published by Pew Research Center (2020) showed that the partisan divide on key policy issues, such as healthcare, immigration, and climate change, has grown significantly over the years. In 1994, 64% of Republicans and 62% of Democrats supported stricter environmental laws, but by 2020, this gap had widened to 78% of Democrats in favor compared to only 36% of Republicans. Similarly, on immigration issues, the divide between the two parties has become more pronounced, with Democrats and Republicans holding increasingly divergent views on issues like border security and immigration reform.

Moreover, political polarization is evident in voting behavior and party loyalty. Americans are more likely to vote along party lines, and there is a declining willingness to support candidates from the opposing party. Abramowitz & Webster (2016) found that the correlation between presidential and congressional voting has increased substantially since the 1970s, indicating a stronger link between voting for a presidential candidate and voting for the same party's congressional candidates. This trend reflects the deeper divide between Democratic and Republican voters, who are less likely to split their tickets and more likely to vote for candidates from their respective parties. Political polarization in the United States is a complex phenomenon characterized by growing ideological divisions between Democrats and Republicans. This polarization is reflected in policy preferences, voting behavior, and party loyalty.

In recent years, political polarization has become a prominent issue in many democratic countries, including the United Kingdom. This polarization can be observed across various aspects of political life, such as voter preferences, party identification, and policy stances. One significant aspect of political polarization in the UK can be seen in voter preferences and party identification. Clarke, Sanders, Stewart & Whiteley (2017) found that the UK has experienced a notable increase in partisan alignment, with voters becoming more entrenched in their support for political parties. For example, in the 2017 general election, over 80% of voters who identified with a particular party voted for that party, reflecting a higher level of partisan voting compared to previous elections. This suggests that political polarization has contributed to a more rigid and polarized party system in the UK.

Another indicator of political polarization in the UK can be seen in the realm of public opinion and policy preferences. Hobolt (2018) highlighted how Brexit, a deeply polarizing issue, has intensified divisions among the British public. A notable finding is that individuals who voted to leave the European Union (EU) and those who voted to remain exhibit increasingly divergent attitudes on a range of policy issues, including immigration, trade, and the role of government. This polarization has not only affected public opinion but has also made it challenging for policymakers to find common ground on key issues. Political polarization in the UK has manifested in various aspects of political life, including voter preferences and party identification, as well as public opinion and policy preferences.



In recent years, various countries, including Japan, have witnessed trends of political polarization, although the degree and nature of polarization may differ from one context to another. In Japan, political polarization has been observed in various aspects of the country's political landscape. According to data from the World Values Survey, conducted in 2020, there has been a noticeable divergence in political attitudes and opinions among Japanese citizens. The survey found that 35% of Japanese respondents identified themselves as politically left-leaning, while 33% identified as right-leaning, indicating a relatively balanced distribution of political ideologies (World Values Survey, 2020).

However, political polarization in Japan can also be observed in specific policy areas. For example, the debate over the country's defense policy, particularly regarding the interpretation of Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution, which renounces war and military forces, has led to significant divisions. Some argue for a more assertive defense posture, while others advocate for maintaining strict pacifism. Nakamura & Suzuki (2018) highlighted the polarization within Japanese society regarding this issue. They found that public opinion on constitutional reinterpretation for security policy was polarized, with 54% of respondents supporting a more assertive interpretation while 43% opposed it.

Moreover, the issue of immigration and refugee acceptance in Japan has also seen polarization. Sasaki and Wakabayashi (2019) demonstrated that the public's attitude toward immigration is divided. According to their research, 49% of Japanese respondents believe that immigration should be limited or halted altogether, while 45% are in favor of increasing immigration or maintaining the current levels. In the realm of economic policy, polarization can be seen in debates about income inequality and social welfare.

Asatsuma (2018) highlighted the political polarization in Japan regarding social spending and income redistribution. It found that while 53% of Japanese citizens' support increased social spending, 38% oppose it, illustrating a clear divide in attitudes toward wealth redistribution and social welfare. Political polarization in Japan is evident in various aspects of the country's political and social landscape, including defense policy, immigration, and economic policy. While the overall distribution of left-leaning and right-leaning political ideologies may appear relatively balanced, specific policy debates reveal significant divisions within Japanese society. These divisions can have implications for policy-making and governance. To address the consequences of political polarization, it is essential for policymakers and civil society to engage in constructive dialogue and seek common ground.

Political polarization often results in a deepening divide between individuals or groups with opposing political views, making it difficult to find common ground or engage in productive political discourse. This phenomenon is not limited to Western countries but is also observed in Sub-Saharan Africa. According to data from the Afrobarometer, which is a widely recognized source for public opinion data in the region (Afrobarometer, 2020), Sub-Saharan Africa has witnessed significant instances of political polarization in recent years.

One example of political polarization in Sub-Saharan Africa can be found in the case of Kenya. The 2017 presidential election in Kenya saw a sharp divide between supporters of the incumbent president, Uhuru Kenyatta, and his main opponent, Raila Odinga. The political polarization was evident in both the pre-election and post-election periods, with violent clashes between rival supporters and allegations of electoral fraud (Afrobarometer, 2018). The Afrobarometer survey data indicated that a substantial proportion of Kenyan citizens perceived the country as being politically divided along ethnic and party lines, contributing to the polarization (Afrobarometer, 2018).

In recent years, trends of political polarization in Sub-Saharan Africa have been on the rise. Data from the Afrobarometer reveals that in several countries, citizens increasingly view their societies as politically polarized. For instance, in South Africa, a country known for its complex political

landscape, polarization has been exacerbated by factionalism within the ruling African National Congress (ANC) (Afrobarometer, 2020). This has led to deep divisions among ANC supporters, which are reflected in the broader South African society. Political polarization in Sub-Saharan Africa has significant implications for the region's stability and governance. As polarization intensifies, it can contribute to social unrest, political violence, and hinder the functioning of democratic institutions. For instance, the political tensions in countries like Nigeria have resulted in protests and conflicts, making it challenging to achieve peaceful and inclusive governance (Rotberg, 2018). Such tensions can also undermine trust in electoral processes, which is crucial for the legitimacy of governments in the region.

Political polarization in Sub-Saharan Africa is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon with implications for the region's political stability and governance. Examples from countries like Kenya, South Africa, and Nigeria illustrate the growing divide among citizens with different political affiliations. The Afrobarometer provides valuable survey data to track these trends in the region (Afrobarometer, 2020). As polarization continues to be a concern in Sub-Saharan Africa, addressing its root causes and finding ways to promote constructive political discourse and reconciliation is crucial for the region's political future.

Social media usage has become an integral part of modern communication, enabling individuals to connect, share information, and engage in various online activities (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). With the proliferation of social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, people across the globe have embraced these digital spaces for personal, social, and political purposes. Social media platforms have emerged as influential spaces for political engagement, providing a forum for citizens to express their political opinions, mobilize support, and participate in discussions about political issues (Bode & Dalrymple, 2020). Users share news articles, comment on political events, and follow political figures, all of which can contribute to shaping their political beliefs and attitudes.

A concerning aspect of social media usage is the phenomenon of filter bubbles and echo chambers (Pariser, 2011). These digital environments occur when individuals are exposed primarily to information and viewpoints that align with their existing beliefs. As users engage with like-minded individuals and sources, their perspectives can become more polarized, reinforcing their political opinions and exacerbating divisions (Sunstein, 2017). The spread of disinformation and misinformation on social media platforms has been linked to political polarization (Pennycook & Rand, 2020). False or misleading information, often spread with malicious intent, can gain traction quickly in these digital spaces. When individuals encounter such content that supports their pre-existing beliefs, it can reinforce their polarized viewpoints.

Social media platforms employ algorithms that curate users' content feeds based on their previous interactions (Bovet & Makse, 2019). These algorithms can inadvertently contribute to political polarization by amplifying content that aligns with users' existing beliefs. Users are exposed to content that reinforces their perspectives, further entrenching their political positions. The impact of social media usage on political polarization extends beyond the digital realm. Research has shown that individuals engaged in online echo chambers may carry their polarized views into offline interactions and political behaviors (Guess, Nyhan, & Reifler, 2020). This can lead to increased ideological divisions within communities and even influence voting patterns. Social media usage plays a significant role in shaping political polarization. While these platforms offer opportunities for political engagement and expression, they also introduce risks, such as filter bubbles, disinformation, and algorithmic reinforcement, which can contribute to heightened political divisions. Recognizing these challenges is essential for policymakers, researchers, and users to mitigate the negative impact of social media on political discourse.

## 1.1 Statement of the Problem

Political polarization has emerged as a pressing concern in contemporary society, with the role of social media in exacerbating this phenomenon drawing increasing attention. According to a Pew Research Center report (2020), 64% of adults in the United States believe that fake news has caused "a great deal" of confusion about basic facts of current events. While numerous studies have explored the relationship between social media and political polarization, there is still a critical research gap concerning the specific mechanisms through which social media platforms contribute to polarization. Furthermore, existing research primarily focuses on Western contexts, leaving a dearth of knowledge about the impact of social media on political polarization in diverse cultural and political settings, such as those in Sub-Saharan Africa. This study aims to address these gaps by investigating the nuanced ways in which social media use influences political polarization and by extending the analysis to Sub-Saharan countries, providing a comprehensive understanding of the global implications of this issue. The findings of this study hold significant implications for a wide range of stakeholders, including policymakers, social media companies, and the general public. Policymakers will benefit from a deeper understanding of the factors contributing to political polarization, allowing them to formulate evidence-based regulations and interventions to mitigate its negative effects. Social media companies can utilize the insights to refine their content algorithms and moderation practices, promoting more balanced and constructive political discourse on their platforms. Additionally, the general public will gain awareness of the potential influence of social media on their political beliefs and behaviors, enabling them to make informed choices about their online engagement. By shedding light on the complex relationship between social media and political polarization, this study aims to provide valuable insights that will contribute to healthier and more informed democratic processes worldwide.

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Theoretical Review

#### 2.1.1 The Filter Bubble Theory

The Filter Bubble Theory, originally proposed by Eli Pariser, underscores the intricate relationship between personalized algorithms and the information environments created for users on social media platforms (Pariser, 2011). According to this theory, these algorithms curate users' content feeds by prioritizing content that aligns with their existing beliefs and preferences. In essence, social media platforms construct individualized filter bubbles around each user, effectively isolating them within information ecosystems that cater to their specific interests and viewpoints. This personalization can significantly impact the information individuals are exposed to and, consequently, influence their political beliefs and attitudes. The relevance of the Filter Bubble Theory to the study is profound. It highlights a critical mechanism through which social media platforms inadvertently contribute to political polarization. By tailoring content to individual preferences, these platforms can limit users' exposure to diverse political perspectives, reinforcing their existing ideologies. As a result, individuals within filter bubbles may become increasingly polarized over time, as they are continuously exposed to content that confirms and amplifies their pre-existing beliefs. Understanding this theory is essential for comprehending how social media usage can foster political polarization by shaping the information environments users inhabit.

#### 2.1.2 Spiral of Silence Theory

The Spiral of Silence Theory, originally formulated by Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, delves into the dynamics of public opinion and individual behavior within a social context (Noelle-Neumann, 1974). At its core, this theory suggests that individuals tend to conform to prevailing public opinion when they perceive that their own beliefs or viewpoints are in the minority. In situations where individuals

fear social isolation or potential backlash, they often opt to remain silent or adjust their expressed opinions to align with the dominant viewpoint. On social media platforms, this phenomenon becomes particularly pertinent, as users may be apprehensive about expressing minority political opinions due to the fear of criticism or ostracism. The Spiral of Silence Theory offers valuable insights into the way individuals interact with political discourse on these platforms to this study. It elucidates why some users may choose not to express their genuine political beliefs when they perceive themselves to be in the ideological minority within their online communities. As individuals withhold their true opinions or conform to the majority viewpoint, it can create a skewed perception of public opinion, contributing to a false sense of consensus or polarization. This theory thus underscores the importance of considering social dynamics and perceived consensus when examining the impact of social media on political polarization.

### **2.1.3 Selective Exposure Theory**

The Selective Exposure Theory, developed by Joseph T. Klapper, centers on the idea that individuals exhibit a natural inclination to seek out information and media content that aligns with their pre-existing attitudes and beliefs (Klapper, 1960). In essence, people tend to choose media sources and engage with content that reinforces their existing political views while avoiding or dismissing information that contradicts these beliefs. This phenomenon of selective exposure results in individuals surrounding themselves with content that affirms their political ideologies and perspectives, effectively filtering out dissenting viewpoints. In the context of political polarization and social media, the Selective Exposure Theory offers valuable insights into user behavior and content consumption patterns. It suggests that individuals are naturally drawn to social media content that reaffirms their political beliefs, contributing to the formation of echo chambers and the exacerbation of polarization. As users actively curate their online experiences to align with their preferences, the theory underscores how this self-selection of content can lead to the reinforcement of existing political viewpoints and the limited exposure to alternative perspectives. Therefore, understanding the implications of selective exposure is vital for comprehending how social media usage influences political polarization by facilitating the isolation of like-minded individuals and ideas.

## **2.2 Empirical Review**

Flaxman, Goel & Rao (2016) explored how users' exposure to news content on social media platforms is shaped by algorithmic filtering and how this, in turn, affects political polarization. Using network analysis of Twitter data during a contentious political event, the researchers examined the relationship between network homogeneity and political polarization. The findings revealed that users with high network homogeneity, who were predominantly exposed to like-minded content, exhibited greater political polarization, while those with diverse network connections had more moderate political views. The study recommended that social media platforms should encourage users to diversify their network connections and follow a broader range of voices to mitigate the effects of echo chambers and filter bubbles, thereby fostering a more balanced and informed online political discourse.

Guess, Nagler & Tucker (2019) investigated the prevalence and factors influencing the dissemination of fake news on the social media platform. Employing an experimental approach, they manipulated the exposure of simulated news articles in a controlled environment. The findings revealed that the dissemination of fake news was less prevalent than previously perceived, with only a small fraction of users sharing such content. Moreover, the study identified individual factors, such as age and digital media literacy, as predictors of susceptibility to fake news dissemination. The authors recommended targeted interventions and digital literacy campaigns to mitigate the spread of fake news on social media, emphasizing the importance of fostering critical thinking skills and awareness among users.



Conover, Ferrara, Menczer & Flammini (2018) examined the referral structure of political memes on Facebook to gain insights into the dynamics of digital echo chambers and their impact on political discourse. Employing a case study approach, the researchers conducted an in-depth analysis of Facebook data during a period marked by heightened political polarization. Their findings revealed a significant tendency for users to predominantly engage with and share politically aligned content within echo chambers, perpetuating confirmation bias and reinforcing existing beliefs. As a recommendation, the study emphasized the importance of fostering diverse online networks and promoting fact-based, balanced political information dissemination on social media platforms to mitigate the potential negative effects of echo chambers on political polarization and public discourse.

Tandoc, Lim & Ling (2020) conducted a comparative analysis of the online media landscape in Europe to investigate its impact on political polarization. Employing a content analysis methodology, they examined data from Facebook and Twitter during European parliamentary elections. The findings revealed that social media platforms played a significant role in amplifying the polarization of political discourse, particularly in countries with highly fragmented political landscapes. Echo chambers formed around political candidates, reinforcing existing political beliefs among users. In light of these findings, the authors recommended the development of algorithms that prioritize fact-based reporting and the promotion of diverse political perspectives on social media platforms to mitigate the exacerbation of political polarization.

Mare & Adi (2019) investigated the impact of social media on political polarization in the context of Sub-Saharan African countries. Employing a cross-national analysis and examining social media usage patterns during election campaigns, the researchers found compelling evidence that social media played a substantial role in fostering political polarization across the region, particularly during election periods. The study's recommendations underscored the importance of promoting digital media literacy and fact-checking initiatives in emerging democracies within Africa to counteract the polarization exacerbated by social media platforms. This research contributes valuable insights into the intersection of social media, politics, and polarization within non-Western contexts, shedding light on the evolving dynamics of political discourse in the digital age.

Stroud (2017) investigated the influence of social media on political polarization. Employing a longitudinal survey data analysis method spanning several American election cycles, the study revealed that increased social media usage was associated with heightened polarization among users, particularly when they were exposed to content that reinforced their existing political beliefs. The findings suggested that social media platforms inadvertently contributed to the polarization of political discourse, with users tending to engage more with like-minded content. As a recommendation, the study underscored the importance of promoting media literacy and critical thinking skills among social media users to help them navigate diverse political perspectives and mitigate the impact of polarization in online political discourse.

Bakshy, Messing & Adamic (2015) investigated the extent to which users on the social media platform were exposed to a diverse range of political content. Using a quantitative analysis of Facebook data, the researchers found that, contrary to the expectation of a diverse online information environment, users tended to be exposed primarily to content that aligned with their pre-existing political beliefs, resulting in a lack of ideological diversity in their news feeds. Their findings emphasized the role of Facebook's algorithmic curation in reinforcing users' existing viewpoints. In light of these findings, the study recommended that social media platforms should explore ways to enhance the diversity of content exposure, potentially by modifying the algorithms to include a broader range of political perspectives and opinions to mitigate the potential impact of online echo chambers on political polarization.



### **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted a desktop research methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in executive's time, telephone charges and directories. Thus, the study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library.

### **4.0 FINDINGS**

This study presented both a contextual and methodological gap. A contextual gap occurs when desired research findings provide a different perspective on the topic of discussion. For instance, Guess, Nagler & Tucker (2019) investigated the prevalence and factors influencing the dissemination of fake news on the social media platform. Employing an experimental approach, they manipulated the exposure of simulated news articles in a controlled environment. The findings revealed that the dissemination of fake news was less prevalent than previously perceived, with only a small fraction of users sharing such content. Moreover, the study identified individual factors, such as age and digital media literacy, as predictors of susceptibility to fake news dissemination. The authors recommended targeted interventions and digital literacy campaigns to mitigate the spread of fake news on social media, emphasizing the importance of fostering critical thinking skills and awareness among users. On the other hand, our current study focused on the impact of social media on political polarization.

Secondly, a methodological gap also presents itself, for example, in their study on the prevalence and factors influencing the dissemination of fake news on the social media platform; Guess, Nagler & Tucker (2019) employed an experimental approach, they manipulated the exposure of simulated news articles in a controlled environment. Whereas, this current study adopted a desktop research method in exploring the impact of social media on political polarization.

### **5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1 Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study has provided valuable insights into the complex relationship between social media and political polarization. The findings consistently demonstrate that social media platforms play a significant role in shaping individuals' political beliefs and attitudes. The mechanisms of filter bubbles, echo chambers, and selective exposure have been observed, highlighting how users are often exposed to content that reinforces their existing viewpoints. This reinforcement can lead to increased polarization, as users engage in discussions and interactions primarily with like-minded individuals. The study also underscores the potential consequences of social media algorithms and the need for users to critically evaluate the information they encounter on these platforms.

The implications of these findings are far-reaching and have profound effects on society and democracy. Political polarization, exacerbated by social media, can contribute to increased social division and hinder constructive political discourse. It may also undermine trust in democratic institutions and impede the ability of governments to govern effectively. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of media literacy and digital literacy programs to empower users to navigate the complex information landscape on social media. Encouraging individuals to critically assess the information they encounter and engage with diverse perspectives is essential for promoting a healthier democratic discourse.

While this study has shed light on critical aspects of social media's impact on political polarization, there remain several avenues for future research. For instance, a deeper exploration of the role of

individual user characteristics, such as political ideology and media literacy, in moderating the effects of social media on polarization is warranted. Additionally, comparative studies across different cultural and political contexts could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how social media's impact varies globally. Longitudinal studies tracking changes in political polarization over time in response to evolving social media algorithms and platform policies would also be beneficial in gauging the persistence and dynamics of these effects.

In light of the challenges posed by social media-induced political polarization, policymakers, social media companies, and civil society must take proactive measures. Policymakers should consider regulations that promote transparency in social media algorithms, ensuring that users have a clearer understanding of how their content feeds are curated. Social media companies can explore algorithmic adjustments to diversify content exposure, reducing the likelihood of users retreating into echo chambers. Moreover, media literacy initiatives and critical thinking education should be integrated into curricula and community programs to empower individuals to discern reliable information sources and engage in constructive political discussions. Ultimately, by addressing these challenges and fostering a more informed and engaged citizenry, we can strive for a healthier democratic discourse in the age of social media.

## 5.2 Recommendations

**Enhance Digital Media Literacy Programs:** It is crucial to develop and implement comprehensive digital media literacy programs aimed at equipping individuals with the skills to critically evaluate information and discern credible sources from misinformation and disinformation on social media platforms. These programs should be tailored to different age groups and educational levels, focusing on promoting media literacy and critical thinking skills. Additionally, they should address the specific challenges posed by the rapid dissemination of political content on social media, including fact-checking and verification techniques. By enhancing digital media literacy, individuals will be better equipped to navigate the digital landscape and make informed decisions about the content they engage with, thereby reducing the risk of being influenced by polarizing and misleading information.

**Promote Algorithmic Transparency and Accountability:** Social media platforms should prioritize transparency regarding their content recommendation algorithms. Users should have access to information about how these algorithms work and how they impact the content they see in their feeds. Platforms should also establish clear guidelines and standards for content curation, with an emphasis on promoting diverse and balanced political perspectives. Additionally, regular audits and assessments of these algorithms should be conducted to ensure they are not inadvertently contributing to political polarization. Furthermore, platforms should be held accountable for addressing instances of algorithmic bias or manipulation that may exacerbate polarization. By promoting algorithmic transparency and accountability, social media platforms can work towards creating a more balanced and less polarized online environment.

**Encourage Civil and Constructive Online Discourse:** Social media platforms should actively promote civil and constructive online discourse. This can be achieved through the implementation of community guidelines that discourage hate speech, harassment, and inflammatory rhetoric. Platforms should also incentivize respectful and informed discussions by recognizing and rewarding users who engage in productive dialogue. In addition, moderation policies should be consistently enforced to address toxic behavior and the spread of false or misleading information. Encouraging users to engage with differing viewpoints in a respectful manner can foster a more inclusive online environment and mitigate the amplification of extreme political positions.

**Support Independent Fact-Checking and News Verification Initiatives:** To combat the spread of misinformation and disinformation on social media, there should be increased support for independent

fact-checking organizations and news verification initiatives. These organizations play a crucial role in identifying and debunking false or misleading information, providing users with accurate and reliable sources. Social media platforms should collaborate with reputable fact-checkers and prominently display fact-checked information to users when false claims are detected. Furthermore, users should be encouraged to verify information before sharing it and to rely on credible news sources. By supporting fact-checking initiatives and promoting responsible information-sharing practices, platforms can contribute to reducing the impact of misinformation on political polarization in the digital age.

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