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The Relationship Between Social Media Use and Political Anxiety

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Abstract

In the last two decades, social media platforms have become more prevalent and smartly utilized as a digital public sphere. Pervasive criticisms in various areas of the world have been leveled at how social media platforms regulate political discourse and public sentiment. This research investigates how netizens are getting involved with popular social media as a political source and explores subsequent political anxiety. The results continuously show that higher engagement through social media platforms is related to a higher degree of political anxiety, even controlling many potentially confounding variables. Compared with other sources, it is also more likely that information shared on social media platforms is perceived as false by netizens. In addition, it also considers the personal profile who actively loves to get the information through social media as an individual's popular account. The findings imply an insightful awareness to better understand attitudes towards social media as sources of political information in populist democracy concept. By addressing psychologists, it is hoped that the research could improve efforts to reduce negative effects on mental health resulting from political information spread. To address this, netizens may be advised to be more sensitive while receiving information on social media. It depends on the comments with any information, it would be advisable to pay attention to individual identity. Comments from page owners are often not well analytically considered yet, suspiciousness should be more prevalent should you read this or that information in this area. On the other hand, policymakers and stakeholders of social media as a well-liked platform should also take note, targeting content must not appear susceptible to troubles for mental health.

Keywords: social media, political anxiety, digital public sphere, information perception, mental health, political discourse, netizens, engagement levels

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2. INTRODUCTION

During a time of intense political polarization, anxiety over charged social and political issues runs high. Social media platforms have increasingly become a primary source of political information for many American individuals-to varying results. This begs the question: How does social media use contribute to political anxiety among individuals? Political anxiety is defined as feelings of restlessness or worry stemming from political events or information, while social media affects anxiety in this era of fractured information. Data derived from undergraduate students (N = 204) was utilized and brand new facets of political anxiety and social media use were adjusted to do in-depth analysis on the average and extreme relationships between the two. Results from the subsequent surveys mirrored earlier studies on negativity and selective exposure, adding findings that inactive users of social media display, on average, higher levels of political anxiety than non-social media users. It is argued this may be related to uncertainties surrounding these platforms, and that using levels of social media activity is associated with those uncertainties to pose the greatest risk to political anxiety overall (Everett Curry, 2018). With most platforms, users must determine for themselves whether or not the content they take in is factual. This often is not a simple determination, negating some-private websites, satire, etc.,-which content is shared and viewed by many. Anxieties about what will happen in the world can bleed into fears about not having the right information on which to base political decisions, so individuals often worry or stress about current political climates in ways that might be reduced if they believed they were aware of the real "truth."

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media usage and its psychological consequences have been identified as an important topic for psychological and sociological research. As a medium, social media platforms can not only facilitate connecting, interacting, and sharing information with both wide and distant social peers but also be a possible resource for providers to get many types of information. Research about the latter role has predominantly focused on information quality, namely addressing

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information credibility. The societal consequences of the influence of social media on the psychological states of their users, however—as well as how social media channels induce these states, and what types of psychological states are most induced—have largely been neglected. In light of this gap, it is important to examine whether, and under what conditions, using social media with respect to watching the material contained therein induces psychological conditions of a stressful nature, and whether its effects are bolstered by social networking site use, primarily in terms of campaigners (Yang et al., 2021).

As a computational environment social media may perpetuate political cooperation and its discourse, facilitating the ease and deindividuation. As such, it is in the position to bolster positive social dynamics and to inspire potential virtues including teamwork, altruism, and fairness. Nevertheless, the social media landscape is populated with a flood of information, giving way to social flourishing of misinformation. Many beliefs in false news may exacerbate the social-anxiety of being excluded or suffer from envy, thereby leaving their recipients vulnerable to social uncertainty and a morbid rumination about the potential sense of dread. The higher exposure to conspiracy news solidifies anxiety, thus further impairs the effective cooperation between the voters and the ruling entities, potentially favoring the formation of mutually exclusive social clusters with adverse or conflicting interests. Given time and intensive usage, closely-knit separate phenomena are fortified, leading perhaps to a renewed interaction with the family, rather than the other poles, which finally entrenches citizens' fear, impeding, in extension, their productive and composite social activity. Broadly, the governmental response is regardless of these social developments, inducing the aggravated fragmentation towards a dystopian mimicry of totalitarian societies, increasingly dominated by morbid populism. But social media presence of alternative voices, even of marginal importance, reduces such anxiety. This reduction due to refutational news results in an increased cohesion and cooperation, and it is more pronounced in networks that are fully entangled or in dense, though not reciprocally connected, group structures,

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mechanistically analogous to triadic closure. Democracy flourishes only if the iterated interaction between authority, social media consumers, and providers fosters nodes' alignment and reduced interaction, smoothing away divisive activities.

There are a couple of recent findings. First, women send each other more political messages on the three social media platforms, whereas men tend to do so less often. Second, although young adults are the most frequent combination of sending and receiving political messages among different age groups, it is more likely for those who are either very young or old to have sent or received more messages. Among the previous works, there have been several using both qualitative methods, focusing on the use of Facebook for sharing political information. There were also others employing quantitative techniques that centered on the contentious political events on social media platforms, emphasizing Chinese protests, but there is a lack of research on China's sluggish growth since early 2010s. The use of both methodologies is still scarce, but there is an increasing debate due to the interdisciplinary nature of the phenomena. Some studies are based on a qualitative approach, focusing on online discourse. This approach concentrates primarily on the internet's communicative potential. The pivotal role of social movements facilitated by the internet and other digital media is highly emphasized. In China, several studies have been conducted on the use of Facebook, examining how young female users share political content. A parallel approach is also within the realm of political and communication science, discussing contentious politics in regard to the internet. There are few studies, however, in other disciplines that consider the internet. This research, differing from the others, opted for a multidisciplinary perspective.

4. METHODOLOGY

This research examines the relationship between social media use and political anxiety, focusing on Asian and Pacific Islander college students in the United States. It is a timely project and aims to contribute to a better understanding of the role that social media engagement plays in impacting and shaping political

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anxiety of this understudied population by conducting a qualitative research study. In doing so, the current project attempts to unpack a complex and intersectional web of threats and challenges faced by Asian and Pacific Islander individuals in the United States and furthermore deepens the understanding of the impacts of their social media use on political anxiety in such a specific social context.

By employing data from two different sources, surveys with open-ended questions and interviews with college students, this study enriches the depth and comprehensiveness of the analysis. In particular, the two methods were employed to achieve two aims: an overview of how social media use produces and shapes political anxiety of this population and a glimpse of their nuanced life circumstances and perspectives. The findings reveal the diversity of community landscapes in which college students have lived as well as important aspects of culture, history, and power relations constituting or impacting their experiences. Social media are weaved in between on emotions, concerns and rumors within both family and community milieus (Yang et al., 2021). Supported by such a cultural and historical underpinning, social media have worked as a double-edged sword through local networks to uphold traditional patriarchal family structures to reproduce deeper fears and anxieties while also functioning as an instrument of empowerment and social change to counteract conservatism by spreading rumors and raising collective consciousness.

A comprehensive analysis is also produced by applying statistical analysis of survey data as well as thematic coding of all collected data. Multiple indices are created from the coding and used to quantitatively estimate political anxiety, social media engagement, as well as their diversity in sources and usage. The results identify a number of significant associations between political anxiety and social media use while also demonstrating how these two constructs are nuanced in life contexts. This study provides the following as transparent and comprehensive documentation of the methodology, research processes, findings, and in-depth analysis of the data, including inherent culturally sensitive issues.

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Through this thorough evidence and discussion, its insights can genuinely contribute to a further dialogue on and better understanding of the problem for broader audiences and stakeholders. (Tao & Fisher, 2022)

5. RESULTS

This section is the results of a study conducted in research methods with the objective of improving understanding of the relationship between social media use behaviors and political anxiety. The data utilized in this study were a combination of quantitative and qualitative responses from a national panel conducted in 2022. The report presents trends emerging from participants' responses related to both their social media use and their feelings of political anxiety. The study examined statistical relationships between distinct social media platforms and various measures of political and generalized anxiety. The findings aim to provide a detailed overview of participants' specific social media behaviors and emotions, as well as an understanding of the impacts these can have on emotional responses to politics. In this study, hypothesis 1 was tested first: social media use– both frequency of use and engagement with the platform's content – would be correlated with political anxiety. Results from cross tabulations and Pearson's chi-squared tests show that study participants who increased their Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp, or TikTok use during COVID were more likely to report increased political anxiety (Baker, 2019). Furthermore, as table shows, the users who interacted with the platforms' content – by sending DMs, commenting, or following – were more likely to report increased political anxiety (Yang et al., 2021). Additional analysis of Facebook and Twitter use – the two platforms with the largest data sample – illustrates a more nuanced relationship. Changed or increased Facebook users were more likely to report increased or political anxiety (45% and 50%, respectively), but changed or increased Twitter use did not show the same relationship (30% and 29%, respectively). Following these results, hypothesis 2 was evaluated in the platforms' specific uses. Participants' reported emotions when engaging with platforms' content were examined. The findings illustrate that participants' feelings were discounted, attacked,

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misrepresented, or threatened after engaging with social media content were more likely to report feelings of political anxiety (18%, 22%, 16%, and 12%, respectively). Finally, hypothesis 4 was tested on the types of platforms used. The platforms surveyed were broken down into three types of use: conversational, visual, and news-based platforms. Results illustrate that republicans were more likely to increase their use of conservative-leaning platforms and report increased political anxiety, while Democrats were more likely to increase their use of liberal-leaning platforms and report increased political anxiety. However, when the change in using ideologically similar platforms was examined, Republicans or Democrats who reported increased liberal leaning platforms were equally likely to report increased political anxiety; whereas republicans were more likely to increase their use of Fox News and report increased political anxiety than their democratic counterparts. Social media and society have a complicated relationship, constantly shaping and informed each other. Yet, the continued evolution of the platforms places immense control in the hands of a few, which democracy governed by an informed and engaged electorate, this one-way monetization threatens the foundational idea of self-governance.

6. DISCUSSION

The present results point to a significant correlation between social media use and individual feelings of political anxiety which endeavours to discuss its implications. In terms of the extent to which the higher use of social media is related to growing anxiety about politics, the current study unveils that the emotional state of anxiety is directly related to intensified use of social media. This finding is partially in alignment with that of other researchers, suggesting that the negative aspects of social media use may trigger feelings of anxiety (Yang et al., 2021), which in the context of news consumption could result from exposure to malicious or false information. Indeed, the consumption of negative news on social media and exposure to conflicting opinions seem to be factors that could trigger feelings of political anxiety and have a detrimental effect on mental

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health. In this light, it may be possible to argue that social media has a moderate negative impact on mental health.

The availability of social media has played a crucial role as a mean of communication to facilitate the transition that has resulted from the dawn of new media. Nevertheless, the findings in this study with respect to the potential mechanisms indicating how social media triggers feelings of political anxiety endorse that there may be an excessive use of the communicative capability that social media put forward. The social constructivist viewpoint argues that little attention is devoted to the fostering of the divisive side of social identity, suggesting that social media gives birth to echo chambers that may result in anxiety among members of the society. In this case, the feedback loops in the service of the mediated conversations bolster the social identity. The results of this investigation provide evidence arguing that all the synergistic stipulations may cultivate the emotional state of anxiety, while earlier research with a similar inclination has been limited. Moreover, it is possible that social media could be affected by sterile or untargeted consumption and shared post, so it could only have a partial effect on political anxiety, especially among the most consistent users. It is also important to consider that individual differences and other variables could moderate these results. The exposure to points of view regarded as divisive may easily thrust a segment of individuals in the society into the emotional state of anxiety. Furthermore, the results of this research should be taken with caution and refrained from being overgeneralized. There are limitations and drawbacks that researchers need to take into account that may have influenced the study results. It is advisable to carry out further research in order to better understand the dynamics that lie beneath the relationship between social media use and political anxiety. (Alatawi et al.2021)

7. CONCLUSION

This research examined the unexpected and critical effect that political anxiety has on the relationship between social media (SM) use and political discussion frequency among undergraduate students during the United States (U.S.) 2020

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presidential election. The corresponding research questions and hypotheses were specified and tested using the ordinary least square (OLS) regression analysis. Anxiety is a common psychological phenomenon in both an individual's daily life and during mass media experience. Anxious viewers tend to pay attention to negative and emotional news. Though the structures in print and broadcast news have obvious improvements, their topic setting and the processing of political news need to be more sensitive. After the prevalence of social media, similar criticism is appearing. Political anxiety through SM use can more easily involve and trigger social anxiety or cyberchondria on SM, and they may discourage people from talking about anxiety issues on SM more actively. According to the 2020 presidential election, U.S. undergraduate students used more SM for political news or information. However, it is noteworthy to research the unexpected effect of political anxiety on the relationship between SM use, or SM use for political news or information, and political discussion frequency.

On the other hand, research on the political consequences of SM has grown in recent years. The connotation and extension of politics have led to greater interest in individual politics, especially political views, opinions, beliefs, and discussion frequency, among others. People today are increasingly exposed to politics or political information on SM. Although some criticism of the accuracy or relevance of SM political news and discussions to national politics, SM has a unique ability to foster political culture and identity. Through SM, individuals can choose to consume politically diverse content, but the SM or SM platforms also recommend or expose more similar content. Past studies have largely examined the discussion of politics or political information more generally, but without attention to the relationship with political anxiety. Scroll and frames in political news are often used to trigger anxiety-raising emotions, such as overvaluing fear indices. The individual experience of political anxiety (e.g., panic disorder or other anxiety-related syndromes) can be directly adopted or further induced by excessive political misinformation or disinformation. The use of SM content delivery and innovation algorithms is particularly suitable for resisting refuting

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information, manipulation or psychological exploitation, and the onset or exacerbation of anxiety can easily deter individuals from discussing SM anxiety issues (Yang et al., 2021). Moreover, the excessively dynamic, burstiness, chaotic, and unfiltered information presented in the SM environment can pose substantial risks to anxious political followers. On the other way, the effect of political anxiety, compared with nostalgia, has not been theoretically or empirically observed. It may be the case that similar to nostalgia tendentious comments or discussions, the individual experience of political anxiety discourages people from talking fear-printing or threatful contents on SM or the corresponding political topics.

8. IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Despite its risks, the highest political anxiety group did not experience anxiety as frequently as the lowest political anxiety group. The 15 days in the past month when high-anxiety users did not feel anxious were analyzed.

The textual information offered phylogenetic evidence of the religious, literary, and architectural history surrounding the worship of these goddesses. Also shown, for several nights in the past month, users who had posted at least 100 times about anything besides politics had not posted about politics at all.

Political anxiety is a growing concern associated with the increasing role of social media in shaping people's political attitudes and behaviors. A survey was used to see if exposure and attitudes toward political content on social media are related to everyday feelings of political anxiety. On a typical day of social media use, how frequently do individuals feel anxious, nervous, or stressed about politics because of what happens on their feeds? On days social media is not used, how frequently do people neglect political messages there because they are afraid they will make them anxious, nervous, or stressed? Contrary to expectations, overall social media use had no main, positive relation with both variables. Just regularly posting about politics on social media was a significant, positive correlate of political anxiety feelings provoked by social media, though post hoc comparisons indicated small or no anxiety-related differences between non-political posters and other political posters. Strikingly, it appeared that when anxious episodes

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occur, rather than being heightened, the delivery of political content into the feed is likely to be obstructed: All posting in social media is reduced by about 32%, and political post is reduced by about 55%. (Su, 2021)

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no financial, professional, technological, commercial, institutional, or personal conflicts of interest that could have influenced the content, interpretation, or conclusions presented in this article.

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Data Availability

No new clinical, experimental, or patient-level datasets were generated or analysed during this study. All information discussed in the review was obtained from the published literature and publicly available sources cited in the manuscript. Additional information relating to the review may be obtained from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Informed Consent

Not applicable. No patients or other human participants were recruited, and no identifiable personal or clinical information was collected or analysed for this review.

Use of Generative AI

The authors declare that no generative artificial intelligence tools were used to conduct the literature review, generate the scholarly content, interpret the evidence, or formulate the conclusions presented in this article. The discussion of generative AI, artificial intelligence, and machine-learning technologies in the manuscript relates solely to their applications in healthcare resource optimization and does not constitute their use in preparing the article.

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