

## **The Role of Social Media in Shaping Public Opinion in Society**

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**Abstract:** Social media has been very successful in shaping public opinion in every society, particularly due to public opinion having now gone so far as to almost disappear forcibly before the power of ruling regimes. In this day and age, social media platforms played their parts through novel communicative methods, widely used across sectors and functions. In fact, this is more than just adding users or building a wide communication network. With attracting more developed audiences, social media has begun making a qualitative impact and has transitioned it as one of the main media networks for informing news and informing opinions. Social media has transformed into the lightning fast way for information and news breaking, and it has become the focus and attention not just of the popular masses but also of more traditional readable and audible media. By juxtaposing the powers of visual and written media over traditional media to this new, increasingly powerful form of online media, which are commonly termed fourth estate resources, social media as a whole can be considered as having overshadowed an earlier era's glory. This is not due to bias or anything else but because traditional media, from newspapers to television channels, being funded and under the sponsorship of such entities, parties, or prominent figures, is well-established with these affiliations already. Social media, on the contrary, has overtaken and surpassed traditional media in terms of independence and liberation from barriers and allegiances.

**Keywords:** Social media, Facebook, public opinion, societal issues.

### **Introduction:**

Social media has gained more attention than ever as one of the focal points of the efforts of many scholars within the fields of communication, political science, and social sciences. These platforms are becoming involved with such a wide range of events, especially political, social and even economic, making this phenomenon even more relevant nowadays. Given its many characteristics particularly its speed, user accessibility, and information sharing capabilities social media has become a powerful mechanism for mobilization, planning, and advocacy for a multitude of events. The idea for virtual communities concepts with specific reference to social networks, virtual communities, and online life have attracted increasing scholarly scrutiny as a consequence of how the internet has permeated daily life for people and groups. Society has evolved over recent years: from social, cultural, political and economic dimensions in ways that structure societies, structuring, building and maintaining stability. There is no denying the role of modern media in these global societal changes. The emergence of interactive media (or social media) has changed many ideas about media and communication. Instead of pure entertainment, these media are instruments to influence public perception and to reshape existing social mores. Subtly, their role has expanded and they generate knowledge, spread information, question existing social norms, and use their vision to shape and style social relations. In these media platforms individuals are both recipients and senders who are potential observers or active participants with a unique vantage point on a topic, document moments, and even create events. It

highlights interactive media's function in the construction of social realities<sup>(1)</sup>. It not only ushered in a new type of media (some have called it interactive and instantaneous) but introduced new varieties to the social scene that no longer had a structural basis. Rather, they are dependent upon the notion of the environment a virtual world where interpersonal relations, reflections, behaviors, interactions, and forms of expression all work as virtual space, free of many of the influences of public authorities. As these digital spaces operate with some degree of independence, it has become increasingly challenging for authorities to control or restrict these phenomena using laws and regulations.

### **Research Topic:**

Social media networks are undoubtedly efficient intermediaries that are able to bring political issues to light when they arise both at the level of politics and at all stages of implementation, and to shape them, for better or worse, to the benefit and harm of political actors alike. In political communication, some politicians engage in a variety of strategies, but some choose more of whatever platform they can find most useful through social platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter which are still the ones being utilized most heavily between elections. In essence, these various communication strategies are in turn open and mimic the public, since they address primarily active voters on social media, who can influence campaigns if they spread ideas. By launching electoral programs, these platforms potentially guide promising candidates by promoting their electoral programs, talking to voters, and the public among the public on these channels. Nowadays in our time, social media now plays a large role in directing, shaping and influencing public opinion. It acts as the nerve center of modern life. Given their role and impact on various public policies, they wield a double-edged sword. On one hand, they contribute positively to forming a public opinion characterized by positivity towards various societal issues. On the other hand, they have a negative aspect, working to fragment and corrupt society and the minds of the youth<sup>(2)</sup>.

The influence on public opinion occurs through various steps and methods. Social media, as a crucial source of information, continually provides the audience with vast amounts of diverse data and knowledge on various issues and topics. This information may be accurate within its natural context, stripped of context, changed in meaning, incomplete and distorted, or intentionally directed. Most recent social media has enabled worldwide engagement, no longer limited by political or geographical borders or cultural isolation in many human societies. In the world today, communication technology undergoes major changes, so political and economic relations and thinking patterns in various societies change. As mentioned above, social media platforms are perceived as being significant and essential components in any political process and social movement. They shattered the wall of fear and media silence that has persisted in traditional channels, especially in the Arab world. They also act as a conduit for communication and intersection of global and local variables. That local interaction happens as part of the global world. This includes growing friendships and social belonging through social transformation. The results of political shifts can be viewed under the political backdrop: an essential component of these networks, the political relations present in both the actual and virtual realms as depicted in social media, which encapsulates the political relations involved. Social media has a significant impact. In particular, political aspects are being exposed.

The prominent impact of social media is clearly evident in political aspects, and this can be substantiated in three points:

1. **Mobilization of Public Opinion:** Groups who are present on social media networks effectively help generate public opinion on political, social, and economic issues. These networks, for instance, are used as the channels to build up public protests and rallies, creating an access point for new political advertising, electoral proposals, and support.

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<sup>1</sup> Salem Sari, Khedr Zakaria, "Contemporary Social Issues: Globalization and the Production of New Problems," Al-Awla'i Publishing and Distribution, Damascus, 1st edition, 2004, pp. 196 and onwards.

<sup>(2)</sup> Zaki, M. (2005). "The Small Screen and Its Impact on Children's Behavior." Journal of Education, Issue 154, Thirty-Fourth Year, National Committee for Education, Culture, and Sciences, Qatar, p. 264

2. **Emergence of Virtual Citizenship:** Social media platforms have opened the space for exercising citizenship issues online. The virtual community becomes a realm for exercising rights and advocating for them.
3. **Activation of Civil Society's Role:** Social media networks are a contributor to increasing the civil society's role activation. Many organizations have already built a virtual presence, utilizing these networks to add memberships and invite beneficiaries to participate in their programs <sup>(3)</sup>

### **Study Questions:**

The current research aims to answer a fundamental question, which is, "What role do social media, especially Facebook, play in creating and shaping public opinion in society?" This primary question can branch into secondary questions, including:

- Where does the ability of social media platforms lie in mobilizing large numbers of individuals around a specific topic and a particular direction?
- To what extent can political benefit be derived from the mechanisms of public opinion formation on social media platforms?

**Research Objectives:** This research aims to:

- Shed light on the impact of social media platforms in shaping and creating public opinion
- and their role in influencing societal issues.
- Highlight the significance held by platforms like Facebook and Twitter in our contemporary era and their influence on various societal issues.
- Identify the influencing factors in crystallizing public opinion among individuals in society and investigate the importance of social media platforms in influencing those in positions of power and subsequently intervening in critical decisions.
- Recognize the significance of Facebook as a tool for advocacy aiming to support social and humanitarian causes.

### **Importance of the Study:**

The present research contributes to the understanding of one of the modern communication mechanisms with widespread global popularity, namely social media platforms. It also investigates the degree to which they impact people. As beneficial as such platforms are on the advantages side, they can also possess a host of important negative effects on society. That calls for regulating and applying standards around social media platforms. Scientifically, the significance for this research is that the role of social media platforms in shaping public opinion and directing society to specific issues needs to be acknowledged, understood, and recognized. Its mission is to show how Facebook mobilizes users around particular social issues and its relation with public opinion formation and, in turn, its impact on social issues and decisions. The study seeks to understand how Facebook affects and has the ability to gather a large number of users in shaping and forming public social opinion.

### **Study Terminology:**

- **Concept of Social Media:** Social media sites are defined as an electronic network system that allows users to create a personal account and then connect it through an electronic social system with other members who share similar interests, hobbies, or networks<sup>(4)</sup>. These sites enable communication between individuals in a virtual community, bringing them together based on

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<sup>(3)</sup> Anwar Atazi, "Social Media: Public Opinion Shaping and Social Pattern Transformation," an article published on the Socialist Union website. [Online] Available at: <https://alittihad.info>.

<sup>(4)</sup> Rady Zaher, The Use of Social Media in the Arab World, Al-Tarbiyah Journal, Issue 51, Al-Ahliyya Amman University, Page 23.

common interests or affiliations<sup>(5)</sup>. Social media includes direct communication services such as messaging or viewing the profiles of others<sup>(6)</sup>. The internet has contributed to the creation of unconventional patterns of groups and social relationships that are not tied to identity, nationality, or geographical boundaries. These relationships form within the digital (cyber) space, unrestricted, undefined in features and dimensions, free, explicitly determined by those with common interests within a unified informational space<sup>(7)</sup>.

Rapid and successive developments facilitated the collection of information, especially after the information revolution in the last two decades. Internet sites and open message pages (allowing individuals to send messages available to anyone who enters the site) are forms of computer-derived data. Social media refers to interactive sites on the internet that allow users to open a page within a specific electronic social system, enabling them to communicate with each other through a virtual space where individuals come together for specific purposes. Notable among these sites is Facebook, which is the central focus of our research.

### **The concept of public opinion:**

Mukhtar Al-Tahami defines public opinion as the prevailing opinion held by the majority of the conscious people within a specific period regarding one or more issues. It involves heated debates and discussions that directly affect the interests or human values of this majority<sup>(8)</sup>. Ismael Saad sees public opinion as the culmination of the thoughts, beliefs, and positions of individuals and societies towards issues that affect the social order. It includes individuals, organizations, and systems that can influence the social fabric through communication processes that may relatively or completely impact human society locally and internationally<sup>(9)</sup>.

Leonard Doob defines public opinion as "an expression of a specific issue discussed by a particular group<sup>(10)</sup>." Ahmed Badr sees it as the "implicit agreement or consensus of a certain segment of society representing a certain degree of importance in facing a specific problem in a specific way."<sup>(11)</sup> He further notes that public opinion is formed by the opinions of individuals representing the public in discussions. Ibrahim Imam defines it as the prevailing idea among the general public, connecting them with a common interest in a specific stance, action, or issue related to their common interests<sup>(12)</sup>.

In summary, public opinion shapes the direction that reflects the ideas and beliefs of a group on an issue or problem concerning the entire society. It represents a real force in society, expressing the viewpoint of the majority that can influence events positively or negatively, affecting the interests of the majority or common human values.

Public opinion does not necessarily mean unanimity among the majority or minority on a single opinion. It becomes public when the minority complies with the majority's opinion, and this compliance is not forced or based on fear. Consensus is not required; instead, public opinion requires the satisfaction of the minority with the majority's opinion, based on conviction rather than coercion.

With these definitions in mind, we can see the larger norms of public opinion that apply:

Public opinion is an evaluative view that an individual holds on an issue that is considered controversial. It ought to be visible as public opinion's expression is the condition of public opinion. And the movement is the dynamism different from stable, unchanging values: it responds to different

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<sup>5</sup> Maryam Nareman Noumar, *The Use of Social Networking Sites and Their Impact on Social Relationships*, Supplementary Thesis for the Master's Degree, University of El-Hadj Lakhdar Batna, 2012, Page 44.

<sup>6</sup> Hanane Bint Shashua Al-Shahri, *The Impact of Using Electronic Social Networks on Social Relationships – Field Study – King Abdulaziz University*, Saudi Arabia, 2013, Page 7.

<sup>7</sup> Dr. Nadim Mansouri, *Sociology of the Internet*, 1st Edition, Forum for Knowledge, Beirut, 2014, Page 13.

<sup>8</sup> Mukhtar Al-Tihami, "Public Opinion and Psychological Warfare," *Dar Al-Fikr*, Cairo, Egypt, 1974, p. 17.

<sup>9</sup> Ismael Saad, "Public Opinion," *Dar Al-Maaref*, Beirut, Lebanon, 1979, p. 57.

<sup>10</sup> Ahmed Badr, "Public Opinion: Its Nature and Formation," *Anglo Egyptian Library*, 3rd edition, Cairo, 1987, p. 27.

<sup>11</sup> Ibrahim Imam, "Principles of Islamic Media and Practical Applications," *Arab Thought House*, Cairo, p. 362.

<sup>12</sup> Mohamed Sabri Ahmed Youssef, "Public Opinion and Its Impact on Political Organization and Constitution Protection," *Doctoral Dissertation*, Faculty of Law, Ain Shams University, 1990, p. 24.

life circumstances. Public opinion is a social product which comes out of the communication of social groups and individuals, requiring objective consensus and open discussion about the public opinion topic. Public opinion is shaped by the social context through which it operates. As the statement of popular opinions states, public opinion is opinion of a large numbers of individuals whose views are linked to disputed topics and common interests. But these opinions do not change the behaviour of individuals and political government entities.

### **Factors Influencing the Formation of Public Opinion:**

#### **Cultural Community Factor:**

The customs, traditions, habits, ethics, arts, values, beliefs, ideas, and experiences constitute the most significant factors influencing the formation of public opinion.

#### **Leaders in Society Factor:**

This refers to the traditional and modern leaders in all societies who play a crucial role in shaping, changing, spreading, and intensifying public opinion.

#### **Communication and Media Factor:**

Undoubtedly, communication and its various tools have objectives aimed at influencing and changing people's positions and opinions to achieve the political and intellectual direction they adopt. The impact of media on public opinion is inherent, as every individual, whether educated or not, must engage with newspapers, radio, or television. In the current era, media and communication tools have diversified and changed, with the emergence of what is known as new media. With the rise of the Internet and the prominence of several social media platforms, these sites have a significant impact on shaping public opinion. Communication, especially in today's world, remains an influential and fundamental factor in forming public opinion.

#### **Nature of Events Factor:**

An event, whether termed an issue, problem, or subject for public opinion, fundamentally enters as an element among the components of public opinion. However, from another perspective, based on its nature, it will affect the directions of public opinion, its spread, intensity, and strength. If the nature of the event is ordinary, public opinion will be ordinary in its directions, strength, intensity, and spread. If the event is extraordinary, an extraordinary public opinion will result in its directions, spread, and intensity<sup>(13)</sup>.

### **Types of Public Opinion:**

Considering one type of public opinion resulting from the noticeable evolution of media:

**Electronic Public Opinion:** This is a communicative message of the Internet, playing its role in viewing and being accessed by anyone who owns or can use that service. Simultaneously, individuals can access it at the same time as others using channels known as electronic opinion. It encompasses any idea, proposal, opinion, participation, or even an angry objection or joke expressing a specific orientation or defending a particular ideology. It follows from an individual or collective personal experience, reaching a general political outcome. In this case, electronic opinion represents all segments that have the means or technological tools for expression, communication, and discussion. If we express this digitally, we have in Egypt no less than 3 million Internet users. The formation of electronic public opinion is linked to two fundamental variables:

Education level, the presence of a communication network, and available internet services are interconnected with various sub-variables. These include the number of schools, universities, and scientific institutes, the availability of internet culture through them, and the level of education. The second variable is linked to the number of telephone lines, the strength of the existing network, the

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<sup>13</sup> Amer Hassan Fayyad, "Methodological Introduction to Public Opinion and Human Rights," Dar Zahran for Publishing and Distribution, Jordan, 2007, p. 26.



number of companies providing such services, as well as internet cafes or public places that offer such services, generally referred to as accessibility, free access, and speed.

Although the activities of the public that represent electronic public opinion are confined to the virtual world, it serves as an effective means of communication, discussion, exchanging opinions, educational processes, raising awareness, and a platform for the dissemination of globalization principles or opposition to them. Recently, the virtual realm has extended to become a stage for civil and revolutionary action in the real world through networking and coordination among activists.

### **Theoretical Perspectives of the Study:**

Analyzing the role of social media in shaping public opinion on social issues requires concepts, theories, and tools that align with it. Theoretical frameworks consist of interrelated concepts, definitions, and issues that form an organized view of phenomena by defining the relationships between variables to explain the relationship between the interests and agendas of social networking platforms. The theoretical perspectives in this study include:

#### **1. Technological Determinism:**

Adherents of technological determinism believe that technology itself possesses the power to change the nature of social relationships and the social reality. Optimists argue that technology inherently brings progress to humanity, serving as a solution to real-world communication failures. Pessimists, however, view technology as a tool for imposing dominance and control over weaker populations, intruding into personal lives, and disrupting real-world social relationships<sup>(14)</sup>.

#### **2. Social Determinism:**

Social determinism asserts that social interactions are the underlying reason for the existence of social networking sites, functioning as the primary impetus for the establishment of these platforms rather than the reverse<sup>15</sup>. Proponents of this theory argue that social relationships are key, causing people to pursue an environment conducive to unity, developing a cohesive structure through different applications via the internet, mobile devices, and mass media aimed at fostering interpersonal relationships, providing a view that differs from technological determinism<sup>16</sup>.

### **Previous Studies:**

Numerous studies have been conducted on the topic of the proliferation of social media and its impact on societies. Here are some studies related to the research topic and the results they have yielded:

#### **1. Arab Studies:**

- **Mohamed Al-Khalifi (2002)<sup>17</sup>:** This study was titled "The Impact of Social Media on Society" and reviewed the benefits; the negative and even positive impacts of the use of social media. It studied the positives and negatives of it to users. The author used 412 students from the College of Engineering as respondents. According to the research, there are a variety of negative consequences of long-term usage of social media; including addiction. But it also pointed to a good side – encouraging people, especially youth and university students to form closer relationships, which can assist them in doing their academic jobs and sharing ideas.
- **Halmi Sari's Research (2005)<sup>18</sup>:** The research titled, "Internet Culture and its Role in Social Communication" was a very good theoretical practical foundation in Information Technology. It

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<sup>14</sup> Social Problems in the Arab Society: School behavior, customary marriage, divorce, sexual deviance, internet addiction. Arab Organization for Administrative Development, 1st edition, 2013, p. 7.

<sup>15</sup> Zaher Radi, "The Use of Social Networking Sites in the Arab World," Education Journal, Issue 15, Al-Ahliyya Amman University, Amman, 2003, p. 23

<sup>16</sup> Dr. Abbas Mustafa Sadek, "New Media: A Study in its Theoretical Approaches and General Characteristics," The Arab Gateway for Media and Communication Sciences, 2011, p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> Mohamed Bin Saleh Al-Khalifi, "The Impact of the Internet on Society: A Field Study," Alam Al-Kutub, Volume 22, Issues 5 and 6, pp. 469-502.

<sup>18</sup> Halmi Sari, "Internet Culture: A Study in Social Communication," Majdalawi Publishing and Distribution, Amman, Jordan, 2005, p. 19.

also explored its negative and positive impacts. In this study, a sample of 539 young men and women in Doha (a population of Qatari youth) were surveyed and this study discovered excessive use of social media is one of the most common causes of psychological and social isolation. Anxiety, frustration and stress were also notable symptoms. The research also found that when young people withdrew into the use of social media, which led to neglect of their relatives' real social life and deterioration of family relationships, dissatisfaction and complaints of their families were also reported to rise.

- **Shuaa Al-Youssef's Study<sup>19</sup>:** The present study is entitled "Benefits and Harms of Modern Technologies and their Negative Effects on Individual Health" and can be considered as a study on the impact of users' technology & internet addiction in order to determine how the individual could regulate the person's self-control and self-actualization behavior in line with well-being and social skill. The research has highlighted one of the major determinants that is indicative for the addiction of people to internet use and new technologies. Its attention to accessibility and usage, particularly by university students, poses some escalated risk. The study highlighted the importance of such monitoring and the creation of controls over the use of such technologies.

## **Secondly: Foreign Studies:**

### **1. Krout et al. Study (2007)<sup>(20)</sup>:**

Title: "The Impact of Internet Use on Social Interaction and Individual Mental Health."

Study Results: Indicated that increased internet use has a significant negative impact on social interaction and the ability to communicate with family. The study also suggested that prolonged sitting in front of a computer and using social media networks can lead to depression and social isolation.

### **2. Nie and Erbing Study (2009)<sup>(21)</sup>:**

Title: "Social Networking Sites and Society."

Study Focus: Explored the effects of excessive use of social networking sites, whether on the internet or through mobile applications, on an individual's ability to socialize with those around them. Results showed that the more individuals used social media, the less capable they were of socializing with relatives and friends.

### **3. Krout and Others Study (2011)<sup>(22)</sup>:**

What the study does: People who compulsively use the internet live life without the joy that genuine social relations and face-to-face connections with relatives and friends bring. Social media addiction results in the experience of intense frustration and severe depression in people who use social media, who attempt to avoid social activities offered to them for entertainment, choosing instead to sit behind a computer screen for long periods of time without trying to break the habit and expand their social horizon. As such, looking at these previous studies and their outcomes, there is a contradiction in the results concerning the influence of internet use on society.

Most research is dedicated to negative outcomes of using social media, with the effect of it being most pronounced on university students. But we need to understand the positive difference of social media sites and the interconnectivity they generate between users. It is worth highlighting that social media

<sup>19</sup> Shuaa Al-Youssef, "Modern Technologies: Benefits and Harms - A Study of Negative Effects on Individual Health," Kitab Al-Ummah - Qatar, Issue 112, 26th Year, First Edition, 2006.

<sup>20</sup> Kraut, R., Lundmark, V., Patterson, M., Kiesler, S., Muko., T., and Scherlis, W. 2007. "Internet Paradox: A Social Technology that Reduces Social Involvement and Psychological Well-being". Journal of American Psychologist Sept., vol.53, No.9, p.1017-1031.

<sup>21</sup> Nie, Norman and Erbing, Lutz. 2009. Internet and Society: A preliminary Report. Stanford Institute for the Quantitative study of Society. Intersurvey Inc., and McKinsey and co.

<sup>22</sup> Kraut, Robert, et al.; 2004. "The Internet and Social Participation Contrasting Cross-Sectional and Longitudinal Analysis". [Web page]. Retrieved July 24, 2006, from world wide web: <http://jcmc.Indiana.edu/vol10/issue1/shklovshi-kraut.html>

impacts all segments of society and not just that of college students. However, due to the heterogeneity of society in levels, classes, and categories, everyone has become accustomed to the constant usage, and they are an essential part of everyday life. This concern deserves careful attention, specialized analysis, and the development of effective measures to counter this issue.

### **Theoretical Framework:**

Digital communication and media are becoming life essentials in modern times. They form a vital connection of all parts and institutions of social construction. It is the responsibility of the media to transmit the light and dark sides of each social institution to others. Media has a crucial and delicate role in the formation of public opinion, because it aligns universities around certain ideas, opinions, trends. The free delivery of information via digital social media platforms has the clear potential of popular movements built on large and accurate knowledge of political and social happenings. These platforms exert powerful influences on decision-makers in shaping public opinion<sup>23</sup>.

Communication media are the mediating bridge connecting the public with decision makers of a society. Most of the time, issues that do not get any coverage in the mainstream media are addressed using the daring and freer-platform nature of social media. There are numerous problems and issues in society that traditional media might overlook due to conflicts with the media owner's policy or because these issues might open doors to other problems, such as corruption issues, which digital platforms may address more extensively due to their freedom of expression and courage in tackling certain topics<sup>(24)</sup>.

The impact of media on shaping public opinion varies depending on the communication environment through which reception processes occur. The effects differ between readable, visual, and audible media, each possessing distinct advantages that make them differ in terms of influence from other media. The repetition of exposure to communication media enhances their impact on shaping public opinion. Social media platforms have distinguished themselves with a powerful influence, combining the advantages of traditional media (readable, audible, and visual) in the messages they present. Therefore, there are two different directions in studying the impact of communication media:

#### **1. Collective Level Direction:**

- This links the changes occurring in public opinion at the collective level to the changes in the content of media messages. When communication media present different and conflicting perspectives on a specific issue, measuring the impact of all these perspectives on public opinion becomes a challenging task.

#### **2. Individual Level Direction:**

- This explains the variance in the impact of media from one individual to another. The effects depend on a two-stage process: exposure to communication messages presented by media and the understanding of these messages (reception stage), and the acceptance of the content of these messages (acceptance stage). These processes are influenced by an individual's level of awareness<sup>(25)</sup>.

There is no doubt that social media has become a hallmark of the era and a highly influential tool in shaping the thinking of societies. It is a double-edged sword, capable of promoting positive behavior within society by encouraging individuals to form friendships, explore new scientific advancements, exchange scientific experiences in all fields, and operate on all levels. However, it can also be a lethal weapon, undermining all the good values an individual should possess, turning them into an excessively aggressive personality by avoiding establishing natural social relationships with those around them, be it family, relatives, or friends.

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<sup>23</sup> Thebsi, Abdul Kareem, and Atahat, Zuhair. "The Role of Social Media Networks in Shaping Public Opinion Among Jordanian University Students." *Journal of Political Science, Volume 40, Issue 1, Petra University, Amman, Page 74.*

<sup>24</sup> Mukhtar Al-Tahami. Previous Source, Page 21.

<sup>25</sup> Zuheir Aabid. "The Role of Social Media in Shaping Public Opinion in Palestine." *Journal of Al-Najah University for Humanities, Issue 6, Volume 24, 2012, Page 142.*



## Social Networking Sites:

There are several definitions specifically related to the concept of social networking sites, including:

- It is a network that includes a group of individuals with similar interests, inclinations, and a desire to form friendships through the use of the World Wide Web<sup>(26)</sup>.
- Social networking sites can also be defined as "a system of electronic networks that allows subscribers to create their own site and then link it through an electronic social system with other members who share the same interests and hobbies."
- Furthermore, social networking sites can be described as a social café where individuals gather to exchange information with a distinction between the real café and the technological café, as the technological café can be carried anywhere<sup>(27)</sup>.
- Social networking sites have been defined as social gatherings on the Internet where participants can engage in discussions during an open timeframe, united by a positive human feeling within a specific framework.
- Additionally, they have been identified as virtual communities on the Internet that bring together individuals sharing common interests, exchanging experiences and information through a specific program or application that they all use<sup>(28)</sup>.

## Types of Social Networking Sites:

Due to the proliferation of many social networking sites, it is challenging to enumerate all sites related to social interaction. Nevertheless, despite the multitude of sites, some stand out prominently in this field, including:

### 1. Facebook<sup>(29)</sup>:

Facebook<sup>(30)</sup> is a social networking site that allows subscribers to communicate with each other through the use of site tools and establish connections and friendships. Individuals, whether real or considered entities like companies, organizations, or institutions, can register for free and engage in communication and interaction with others<sup>(31)</sup>.

### Some key features of Facebook include:

- A. The Wall feature, providing a dedicated space on a user's profile page where friends can send messages or write on the user's wall.

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<sup>26</sup> Dr. Bahaa Al-Din Mohammed Mazyad. "Virtual Communities as Alternatives to Real Communities - The Book of Faces as a Model." *United Arab Emirates University*, 2012.

<sup>27</sup> Dr. Ali Muhammad Rahouma, "The Internet and the Techno-Social System," Beirut, Center for Arab Unity Studies, 2007, p. 75.

<sup>28</sup> Jehan Haddad, "Electronic Cafés and Their Role in Cultural Transformation in the City of Irbid: An Anthropological Study." Yarmouk University, unpublished master's thesis, 2002.

<sup>29</sup> Ihab Khalifa, "Social Networking Sites: Tools of Contemporary Change Online," Arab Group for Training and Publishing, First Edition, 2016, p. 114.

<sup>30</sup> Mark Zuckerberg founded the website in 2004 when he was a student at Harvard University. Known for his keen interest in the Internet, Zuckerberg's goal was to design a site that would bring together his university peers, allowing them to exchange news, photos, and opinions while facilitating communication. The initial focus was not on creating a commercial site to attract advertisements. The site gained popularity among Harvard University students and quickly expanded to include students from other universities and high schools seeking to explore university life. Facebook remained exclusive to university and high school students for two years. In September 2006, Zuckerberg decided to open the site to the general public. Currently, Facebook has a diverse user base, supporting over 70 languages. The platform is not limited to individuals; many companies, organizations, and governments worldwide use it for marketing messages, charitable fundraising, customer and member communication, among other purposes.

<sup>31</sup> Amina Adel Suleiman Al-Sayyed and Wahba Mohamed Khalifa, "Social Networks and Their Impact on Specialists and Libraries: A Comprehensive Study of the Presence and Use of Facebook," a research paper presented to the Egyptian Association of Libraries and Information, participating in the thirteenth conference for library and information specialists, Egypt, 2009, p. 18.

- B. The Pokes feature, allowing users to send a virtual poke to draw attention to each other, serving as a notification that a friend is welcoming them.
- C. The Status feature, enabling users to inform their friends about their current locations and activities.
- D. Notes or comments, a blogging-related feature allowing users to add tags and embed images, facilitating the incorporation or linking of blogs<sup>(32)</sup>.

In addition, Facebook offers services such as messaging, chat, and sending virtual gifts.

## 2. Twitter<sup>(33)</sup>:

Twitter is a social networking site that has significantly contributed to some important political events in various countries, both Arab and foreign. It focuses on sending short tweets that have had a profound impact on recent events. The size of the text messages sent by Twitter is limited to 140 characters per message.

Twitter emerged in early 2006 as a research development project conducted by the American company Obvious in San Francisco. It was officially launched for users in October 2006. Since then, the site has gained popularity as a new service in 2007, mainly known for providing microblogging services. In April 2007, Obvious separated the service from the company and established a new company named Twitter<sup>(34)</sup>.

Motivations for Using Social Networking Sites<sup>(35)</sup>: There are various motivations that drive individuals to use social networking sites, and these motivations vary in terms of goals and reasons. We will elaborate on these motivations as follows:

1. **Distance from Family and Relatives:** The geographical distance between family members and relatives, coupled with the necessity for some close individuals to travel for work or medical reasons, has led to the search for a method and means to communicate with these individuals. This has become a significant reason for resorting to the use of social networking sites.
2. **Family Issues:** Many individuals turn to using social networking sites as an escape from family issues occurring within the home. In an attempt to distance themselves from the stress, individuals seek out new friends as a way to break away from the tension.
3. **Lack of Job Opportunities:** A significant number of young people resort to social networking sites due to unemployment and the absence of job opportunities that allow them to channel their energy and capabilities into meaningful work. They turn to social networking sites to escape from the harsh reality of unemployment<sup>(36)</sup>.
4. **Leisure Time:** Some individuals fill their leisure time by engaging in conversations with friends and forming new friendships. This is an attempt to eliminate feelings of boredom and the desire for renewal, creating a social atmosphere behind computer screens<sup>(37)</sup>.

## Conclusion:

In order to grasp thoughts and opinions of humans, information technology has developed; it has now provided people with an opportunity to communicate. Recently, as social media took off globally, the world has become a small village. From this, social projects emerged, specializing in dealing with

<sup>32</sup> Saleha Al-Damari, "Students and Social Networks: A Field Study on the Uses and Satisfactions of Students at the College of Arts and Media, Facebook as a Social Network," a research paper submitted to the College of Media, Al-Ahgaif University, Yemen, 2010, p. 8.

<sup>33</sup> The previous source, p. 118.

<sup>34</sup> Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia, available at: <http://ar.wikipedia.org>

<sup>35</sup> Khaled Ghassan Al-Muqaddadi, "The Social Media Revolution: The Nature of Social Networking Sites and Their Dimensions," Dar Al-Nafae for Publishing and Distribution, 1st edition, 2014, p. 35.

<sup>36</sup> Basem Al-Ja'abari, "The Internet and Social Networking Sites," Al-Rawad Publishing and Distribution, 1st edition, 2009, p. 121.

<sup>37</sup> The previous source, p. 121.

societal concerns through the shaping of public opinion and influencing decision makers under the influence of online crowds. This channel emerged as a critical and influential force due to how these virtual sites were used by all segments to express their grievances. And, with the benefit of instant and rapid interaction, you're reimagining "the world has become a small village." Social media is now a new kitchen to create and generate a novel public opinion on a myriad of issues.

This is an effective method that no longer leaves without being able to ignore it, especially since it is attracting various ages and audiences. The rapid, immediate interaction characteristic has led to the elimination of the old saying: social media networks make products, such as ideas. Thus, for government institutions and large corporations who enter this field and compete in it, they must understand this. Relying on popular, or well-known, pre-packaged templates, something that no longer appeals to the target audience, they can hardly be trusted to offer authentic products that cater to the taste of the people that wants them to interact with public opinion. Understanding your target audience and its needs is one of the most important strategies to shape public opinion through social media networks. The product or idea is created, and presented to the public, in an interesting and interactive way that allows an audience to give an opinion. It opens a room for feedback through discussion, while organizations and companies have visibility to a community's trends and feedback on the product or idea being proposed and it allows for the feedback to filter down to a decision-making process. It provides entities with a free service to keep track in real-time of what's happening and how they are moving through this world. The third key is focusing on the utilization of social media by the users and raising awareness of how they act to minimize social platform influence on the individual society. Authorities should discourage social media-abusing people from abusing social media for their own personal, or social-punitive gain, or to prevent individuals from using social media in a bad way, to gain personal gain or damage society. Governments should understand that social media platforms such as Facebook are indeed good tools for communication and should be viewed by governments to solve the problem. It is also important, should be implemented that the adoption of effective means by which citizens can respond to society's difficulties and public opinion about problems. There also needs to be an awareness of the myriad effects of these platforms, including the use of the platforms for political goals, incitement to violence, and other negative aspects. Using Facebook as a driver to pressure society for addressing a range of social issues is a critical step forward in harnessing its potential. This can be especially tricky to enforce and help limit abusive behaviors, so monitoring the platform in a way that prevents some bad things from happening should be very much kept in mind, thus turning these sites towards fulfilling the needs of our society. However, we require a holistic awareness initiative to root out false information and promote responsible behaviour, collaboration, and values.

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