

Social Media for Political Information: A Systematic Literature Review

JUE JUN TAN

Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman

AMIRA FIRDAUS

Universiti Malaya

IFFAT ALI AKSAR*

Xiamen University Malaysia

ABSTRACT

Social media exerts a considerable influence on the democratic process in the modern digital age. Meanwhile, political information appears to be a precious commodity in the political process and functioning democracy. Despite the proliferation and globalization of research in these areas, lesser efforts have been made to systematically review and integrate discoveries from previous studies to assess the current state of research on social media use for political information. This article aims to systematically collect, condense, analyze and report the holistic, empirical findings from extant literature between 2010 and 2020 to offer a rich overview of research on social media use for political information. The Systematic Literature Review (SLR) integrated both the automatic and manual search strategies for data collection. Out of the 292 papers, 23 primary studies were identified to answer a defined set of research questions. Political communication and political participation were the two most popular themes. Uses and gratifications theory appeared to be the most used theory. Scholars are keen to explore the indirect variables that exist at any stage in between the process of consuming political information on social media and political participation. The review results suggested that although social media is widely used for political information, exploration on the body of knowledge of this domain is not receiving much attention and is reported roughly. An explicit analytical discussion on the review results with identified knowledge gaps that call for further exploration and conclusion is offered.

Keywords: *Social media, political information, systematic literature review, political communication, political participation.*

INTRODUCTION

Social media has evolved into a widely popular and deeply influential platform, playing a significant role in distributing candidates' manifestos for campaigning and engaging with voters (Suhana Saad & Shahrul Nazmi Sannusi, 2023). This pivotal role contributes to shifts in societal perspectives during electoral candidate selection. The large wave of changes in society and politics brought about by the emergence of social media has triggered loads of inquiries about the impact of social media on political information (Casero-Ripollés, 2018), as these impacts may sway the political landscape. Still, fewer efforts have been made to systematically review studies specifically focusing on social media use for political information to offer researchers and practitioners a deep insight of up-to-date empirical evidence relevant to this domain (Kubin & von Sikorski, 2021; Reveilhac, Steinmetz & Morselli, 2022).

This study comes in timely with two main objectives. Firstly, to systematically collect, summarize, analyze and report on the holistic, empirical findings of the said domain from extant literature published between 2010 and 2020; followed by identifying knowledge gaps for further exploration. Three research questions have been put forward:

RQ1: What contexts and themes of social media use for political information can be found in current literature?

RQ2: How does existing literature theorize the use of social media for political information?

RQ3: Which limitations and gaps are highlighted most within the literature on social media use for political information?

With an intensive analysis of 23 selected papers, this review aspires to grow the body of knowledge with more insights into social media and political information with a clear analytical overview and potential areas that await more explorations to the research community, media and information professionals and strategists.

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Conceptualizing Social Media

Xenos et al. (2014) considered social media “to include a variety of Internet-based tools that users engage with by maintaining an individual profile and interacting with others based on a network of connections” (p. 152). As to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), “social media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (p. 61). Cooper (2023) regarded social media as “Internet-based applications and websites that promote the sharing of user-generated content, communication and participation on a large scale” (n.p.).

Taken together, social media users create their profiles within a bounded system, manage their lists of friends, and can view what’s going on in their networks of friends and those of others. With its Web 2.0-enabled user-generated content, as suggested by Eyrich et al. (2008), social media in a sense embraces a wide range of tools such as blogs, applications or micro-blogging like X (previously known as Twitter), video sharing like YouTube, photo sharing like Instagram, social networks like Facebook, wikis, gaming, virtual worlds, text messaging, videoconferencing, intranets, podcasts, PDAs, instant message chat, social event or calendar systems, social bookmarking and news aggregation or RSS.

Social Media Use for Political Information

Prior (2007) defines political information as “knowledge of specific political facts and concepts as well as knowledge of recent noteworthy political events” (p. 28). Ever since digital media has become one of the dominant premises for creating, circulating and consuming political information, scholars have begun to investigate the many possibilities and affordances offered by these platforms in explaining the changing political information cycles and their implications on political processes (Theocharis et al., 2023; Shafizan, 2019).

Research on social media use for political information encompasses many dimensions. Succeeding the evolution of social media being used as a political tool, to mention a few, Kaye (2011) explored the utility and user characteristics of social networking sites and blogs for political information. Bronstein (2013) investigated Facebook use for political communication by the 2012 United States presidential candidates via analysis of 513 Facebook posts from August to November 2012. Kavanaugh et al. (2016) compared the political information utility of social media against other information resources within the scope of its usage and user-

perceived reliability during the 2011 Tunisian revolution. Lane et al. (2017) studied the possibility of sharing political information on social media before political dissent. Meanwhile, Daoust and Sullivan (2017) investigated the impact of online media on political information acquisition. Weeks et al. (2017) explored how both incidental and selective exposure affect political information dispersion on social media. By adopting the political information cycles concept, Lee (2018) observed news information and political messages dissemination on social media within the scope of its interactivity and multiple directions characteristics. On the other hand, Bradshaw et al. (2020) scrutinized the quality of political news and information shared over social media.

METHODOLOGY

Systematic Literature Review (SLR) is “a means of identifying, evaluating and interpreting all available research relevant to a particular research question or topic area, or phenomenon of interest” (Kitchenham, 2007, p. 3). Being regarded as one kind of secondary study, the rigid search process of SLR makes it distinctive from traditional reviews (Kitchenham, 2007).

The current study made reference to Ahmed et al.’s (2019) SLR initiative by adopting Kitchenham and Charters’s three-phase SLR standards which include planning, conducting and reporting the review (Kitchenham, 2007). The three phases were further extended into six sub-stages, which are elaborated as follows.

Review Protocol

To mitigate researcher bias in the SLR exercise, a review protocol was first developed with key elements such as research setting and review questions, search tactics, study selection, quality assessment, data extraction and data synthesis mechanisms based on Kitchenham’s (2007) SLR guidelines.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The current SLR aims to develop a comprehensive grasp in issues surrounding social media use within a political information context. The review involved collecting relevant data from journal articles, conference papers, book chapters and workshops written in English and published in digital databases between 2010 and April 2020. The review exercise set April 2020 as the cut-off time period on the ground that Covid-19 has become popular research topic following the outbreak of the pandemic worldwide since the first quarter of year 2020. The overwhelming interest in Covid-19 related studies have thus diluted scholarly attention in realms and applications of the Internet and social media usage for political engagement. Refer to Table 1 for the inclusion and exclusion criteria set for the current review.

Table 1: Inclusion and exclusion benchmarks

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Full-text was obtainable ● Published between 2010 and 30 April 2020 ● Had an English manuscript ● Related to research questions ● In the realm of social media use for political information ● Published in selected digital databases ● Published in the forms of journal articles, conference papers, book chapters and workshops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Full text was not obtainable ● Beyond the search period ● Published in a non-English manuscript ● Not related to the research questions ● Were duplicated studies

Search Strategy

The current review was conducted via automatic search with manual search as a complement to provide a broader perspective in the studied domain, given that digital libraries search may not be sufficient for a relatively complete SLR as suggested by Kitchenham (2007). Mendeley application was used to organize and sort all primary studies and remove duplicates during the review exercise.

An automated search based on research keywords via online scientific databases was first performed to identify relevant databases. Eight online databases deemed relevant and able to provide comprehensive information pertinent to social media use for political information were shortlisted as the key sources of the review. These databases include Academic Search Complete (EBSCO Host), Communication and Mass Media Complete, Emerald Insight, IEEE Xplore, JSTOR, Sage Journals, Scopus and Social Science Research Network (SSRN).

To set boundaries on what would be considered, keywords of interest were searched using a Boolean-formulated search string based on author-supplied keywords, research titles and research questions. To match identified keywords with the published research and relevant literature, a mix of common social media and political information keywords were employed to sift across the selected databases.

After the first stage automated search, the review continued with a manual search for other sources of evidence. In this second search stage, reference lists of all selected primary studies were scrutinized to trace additional relevant studies.

Study Selection Process

Referring to Figure 1, the current review returned 292 papers after going through the first and second round search by defined keywords. The next step involved sieving through research titles and abstracts of each potential primary studies to determine the actual relevance of these studies. Out of the initial 292 papers, 229 were removed. For the remaining 63 papers, 25 duplicates were detected, and thus were excluded using the Mendeley application. This left a total of 38 papers. This was followed by full-text scanning with the application of inclusion and exclusion criteria to identify if these studies provided direct evidence about the research questions. Again, half of the 38 papers were excluded in this stage, with 19 papers fulfilling the review criteria.

To ensure accuracy and comprehensiveness of the overall search processes, the first stage automated search was followed by the second stage manual search. Google Scholar was used as a means of finding more authentic primary studies. In this stage, reference lists of the remaining 19 primary studies were thoroughly screened and it returned four other studies. This made up a total of 23 primary studies. Lastly, a quality assessment was performed on these 23 papers and none was removed. Therefore, the final result of the SLR remained at 23 primary studies (refer Appendix A).

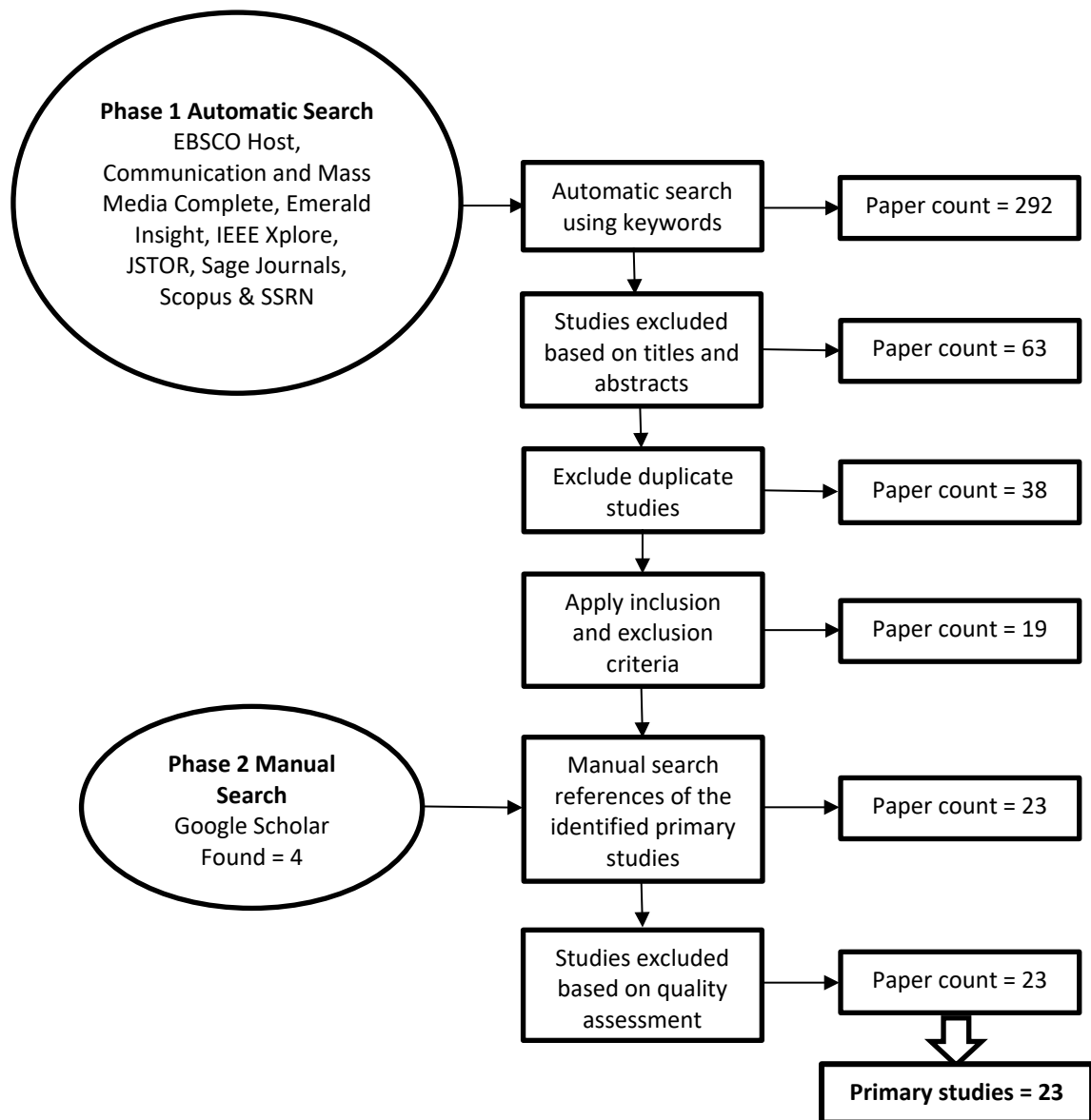


Figure 1: Study selection process

Table 2 shows the distribution of primary studies retrieved from the eight selected online databases. In the initial search, JSTOR contributed the most papers (89), followed by EBSCO Host (71), Scopus (70), Communication and Mass Media Complete (29), Sage Journals (15), Emerald Insight (8), SSRN (7) and IEEE Xplore (3). Google Scholar was not utilized in the first phase of SLR. Final review results show that Scopus contributed the most papers (6), followed by four each from EBSCO Host, Sage Journals and Google Scholar. This is then followed by JSTOR (3), Communication and Mass Media Complete (1) and Emerald insight (1).

Table 2: Search process results

Online Database Used in SLR	Initial Results	Final Results
Academic Search Complete (EBSCO Host)	71	4
Communication and Mass Media Complete	29	1
Emerald Insight	8	1
IEEE Xplore	3	0
JSTOR	89	3
Sage Journals	15	4
Scopus	70	6
Social Science Research Network (SSRN)	7	0
Google Scholar (used only in second stage)	-	4
Summary	292	23

Quality Assessment (QA)

To enhance credibility of the review's findings, on top of the inclusion and exclusion criteria, a quality assessment (QA) was conducted on the selected 23 primary studies. Five QA criteria were adopted and adapted from Ahmed et al.'s (2019) study for this review as below:

- QA1: Is this topic addressed in the paper related to social media use for political information?
- QA2: Is it clear in which context the research was conducted?
- QA3: Is the research methodology adequately described?
- QA4: Is the data collection methodology and process clearly explained in the paper?
- QA5: Is the data analysis approach accurately evaluated in the paper?

To evaluate quality level for each paper, three quality rankings including 'high', 'medium' and 'low' were adopted from Nidhra et al.'s (2013) study; while the tabulation method was adopted from Ahmed et al.'s (2019) study. A rating of 2 was assigned if a study perfectly met a quality criterion. A rating of 1 was assigned if a study partially met a quality criterion. Meanwhile, 0 was assigned if a study did not meet the particular quality criterion at all. Subsequently, referring to the five QA criteria mentioned above, the highest score for a study could reach 10 (or 5 quality criteria × rating of 2), while the lowest possible score could be 0 (or 5 × 0). A high-quality paper would score greater than or equal to 6. When a paper scored 5, it was deemed medium quality, while a paper with a score that is less than 5 would be regarded as low quality. No paper was excluded in the QA exercise. All 23 studies in this review secured a comparatively high score between 7 and 10 (refer Appendix B).

DATA EXTRACTION AND SYNTHESIS

The current study adopted Ahmed et al. (2019)'s data extraction form to record information of the 23 primary studies. Elements of the data extraction form were shown and elaborated in Table 3.

Table 3: Data extraction elements for each study

Extracted Data	Description
SID	A distinctive identity for each paper
Author(s)	Name(s) of the author(s)
Publication Year	The year the paper was published (2010 – 30 April 2020)
Study Title	The name of the paper which appeared in the searching stage
National/Regional	Country/countries included in the primary study
Context	Description of the study setting
Research Topic(s)	Description of the study topic(s)/theme(s)
Methodology	Quantitative, qualitative or mixed-methods approach

Data Collection	Method(s) or instrument(s) used to collect data
Sample Size	Number of sample involved in the study
Theory/Model	Theory/theories or model(s) adopted in the study
Type of Paper	Book chapter, academic journal, conference paper or workshop article
Data Provider	Publisher of the paper

Overview of Publication Sources

As shown in Figure 2, journal articles were the most prevalent publication (16) under the research domain, followed by two conference papers, two book chapters and three workshops.

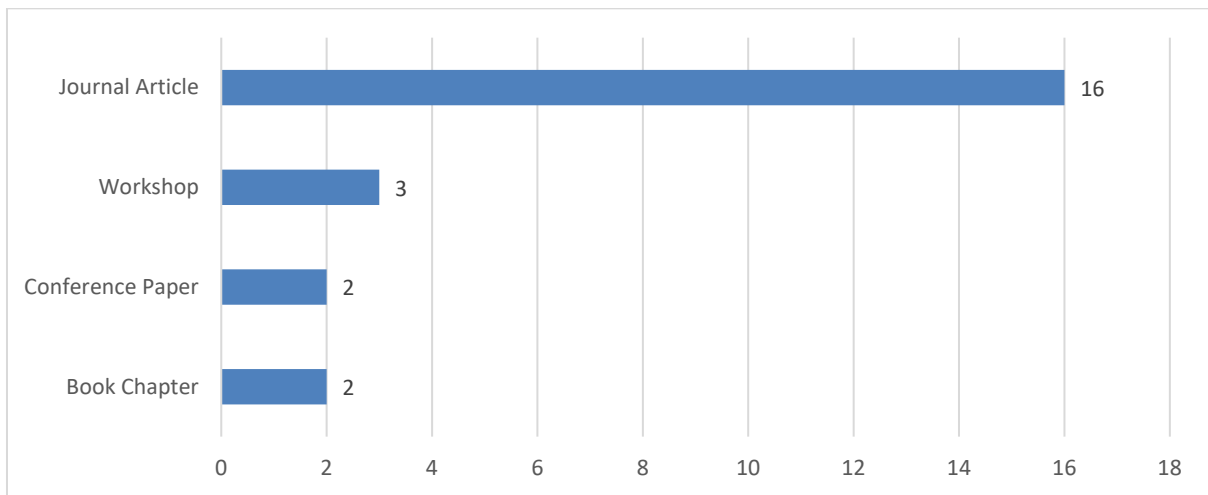


Figure 2: Distribution of studies based on published sources

Chronological View

Figure 3 shows the breakdown of all studies published between 2010 and 30 April 2020. Findings of the review indicate that studies of this domain are increasing gradually, in particular between 2016 and 2018. No publication was identified in 2010. Year 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014 each observed two, one, one and two publications, respectively. No study was found for 2015 again, but studies started to show an increasing trend from 2016 to 2018, with three, five and six publications identified for each year respectively. 2019 recorded a drop with two studies identified; up to 30 April 2020, one study was identified.

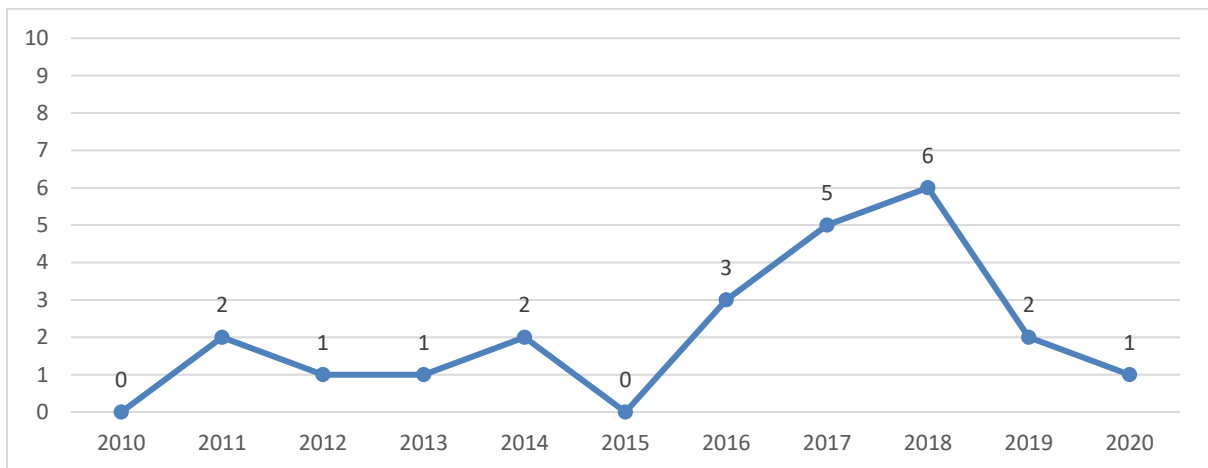


Figure 3: Publication numbers by year (2010 – April 2020)

Overview of Research Methodologies

Referring to Figure 4, out of the total 23 studies, 16 used quantitative approaches, followed by three mixed-methods, two each for qualitative and conceptual methodologies and one was unclear of its nature. Despite multiple methodologies had been administered in social media use for political information research domain, quantitative approaches were identified as the leading type of methodology, with survey as the main data collection instrument.

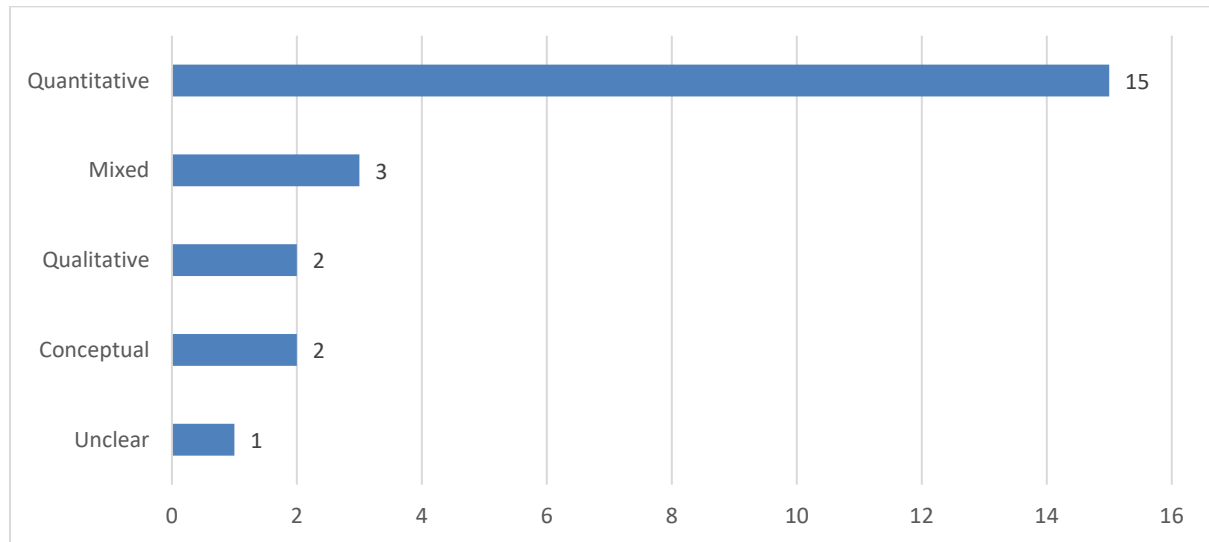


Figure 4: Distribution of research methodologies

Coverage of Research Regions

Studies identified in the present review took place in 26 countries and territories. As shown in Figure 5, North America region yielded the greatest number of studies at 15. This is followed by Europe (6), Asia Pacific (2), and one each from the United Kingdom, Middle East and North Africa. Most of the studies focused on a single country, in particular the United States. To be more specific, among the 16 studies contributed by the North America region, 11 were conducted in the United States.

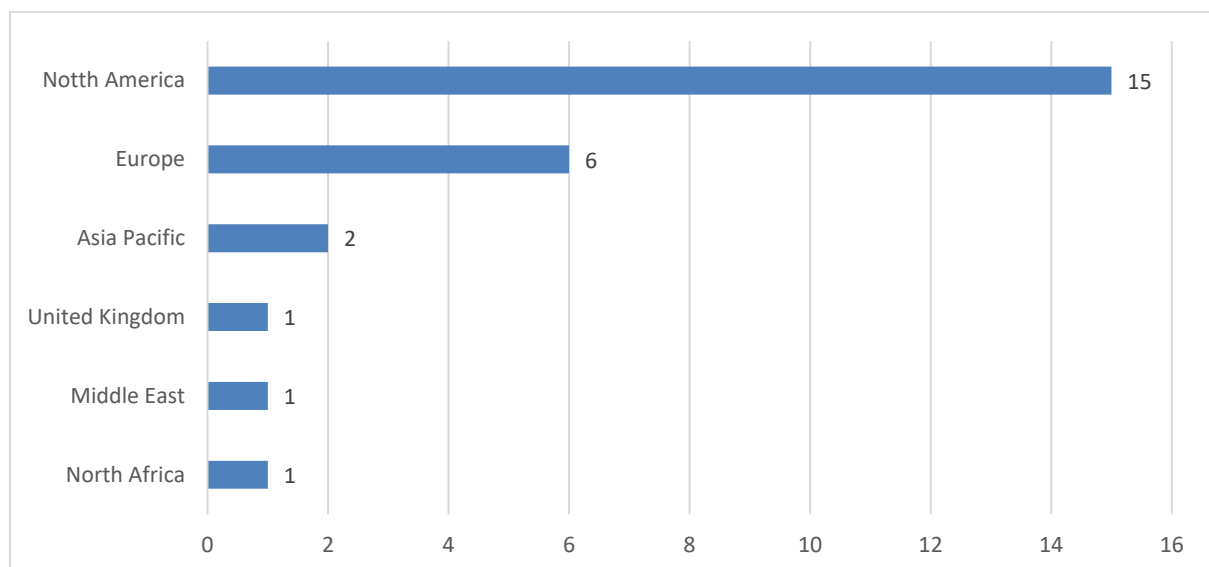


Figure 5: Papers published by regions

DISCUSSION

What Contexts and Themes of Social Media Use for Political Information Can Be Found in Current Literature? (RQ1)

Data extraction results of the current review suggest that, majority of the research in social media use for political information were conducted within the context of politics, with communication, media and information technology as its sub-contexts.

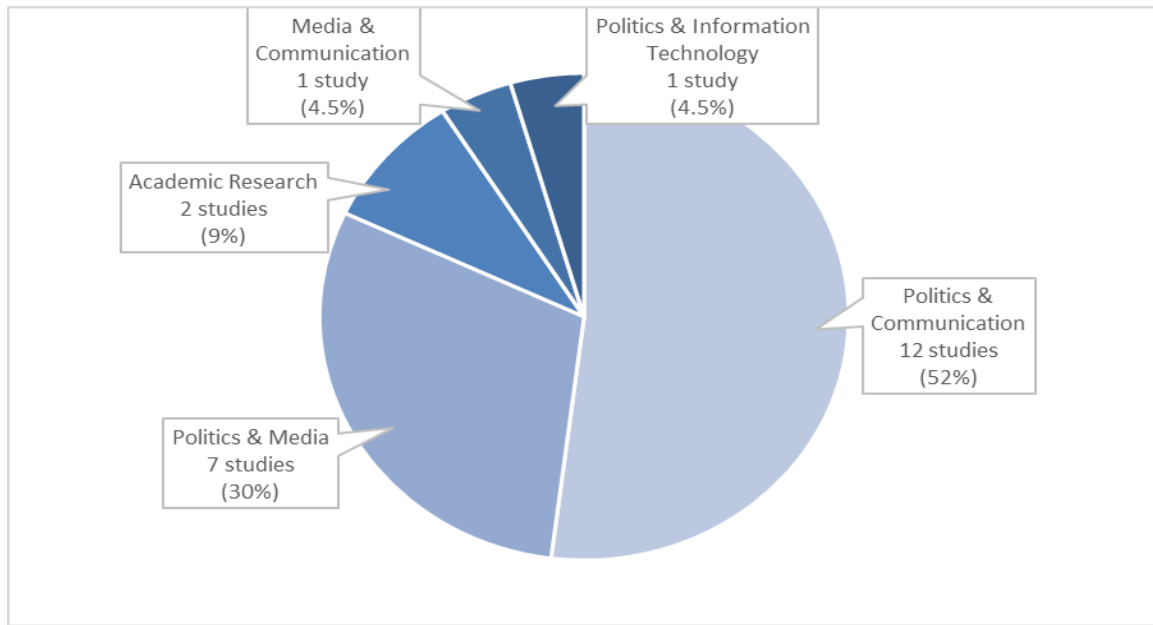


Figure 6: Distribution of primary studies by research contexts

As shown in Figure 6, the majority or 52% of the studies were conducted within the context of politics and communication (12 studies), followed by politics and media (7 studies or 30%), and academic research (2 studies or 9%). Politics and information technology and media and communication each contributed one study. Table 4 shows data synthesis details of each research context.

Table 4: Categorization of social media use for political information research contexts

Research Context	Description	References
Politics and communication	Social media campaigning gains popularity over traditional campaigning. The various social media platforms have been put to use as breeding grounds for influence campaigns and conspiracy as well as the alternative media, with aims to activate, invoke and sway public opinion during elections. Patterns of political information exposure (i.e., incidental and selective exposure) by individuals of different political characteristics (e.g., partisans vs. non-partisans) also result in differing political discourse.	Bagić Babac & Podobnik (2018), Bradshaw et al. (2020), Bronstein (2013), Glowacki et al. (2018), Hedman et al. (2018), Howard et al. (2017), Lane et al. (2017), Lee (2018), Tedesco (2011), Weeks et al. (2017), Yamamoto & Morey (2019), Yamamoto et al. (2019)
Politics and media	Given the distinctive nature and affordances of social media platforms, each of them are playing differing roles as democratic sources of political information and hold different implications on political process.	Daoust & Sullivan (2017), Duong (2017), Elson et al. (2012), Kavanaugh et al. (2014), Kavanaugh et al. (2016), Kaye (2011), Valeriani & Vaccari (2016)

Politics and information technology	The growing use of advent information acquisition tools such as tablet, smartphone news applications, search engines and social media platforms for political and news information warrants attention, in light of their political implications.	Stephens et al. (2014)
Media and communication	Increased selectivity and audience fragmentation brought by the growing consumption of social media for entertainment and information has threatened the conventional agenda-setting power of the traditional mass media. Exposure to political information on social media platforms yields an agenda-setting effect by raising issue salience among the users.	Feezell (2018)
Academic research	Conceptual research to observe and analyze already-present information on social media use for political information. Discrepancies in the definitions of news, social and political content between researchers and social media users as participants were highlighted to enhance research outcomes reliability.	Casero-Ripollés (2018), Vraga et al. (2016)

Despite the relatively narrow spectrum of research contexts, the reviewed research domain yields several themes. Five themes were identified as synthesized and defined in Table 5.

Table 5: Categorization of social media use for political information research themes

Theme	Description
Political communication	Studies investigating consumption of different social media platforms by various actors (conventional and new) in creating and distributing political information to influence citizens.
Political participation	Studies investigating motivations and different patterns of direct and indirect social media use for political information in predicting political participation.
Platforms and impact	Studies exploring and discussing the implications of social media platforms on the production, distribution and consumption of political information.
Media use	Studies testing inferences brought by: 1) patterns of usage or exposure to different media (i.e., traditional, digital and social media) as sources of political information; and 2) users' evaluation of the different information sources during elections and political crises.
Theory application	Studies observing and analyzing empirical phenomena through the lens of theory/concept.

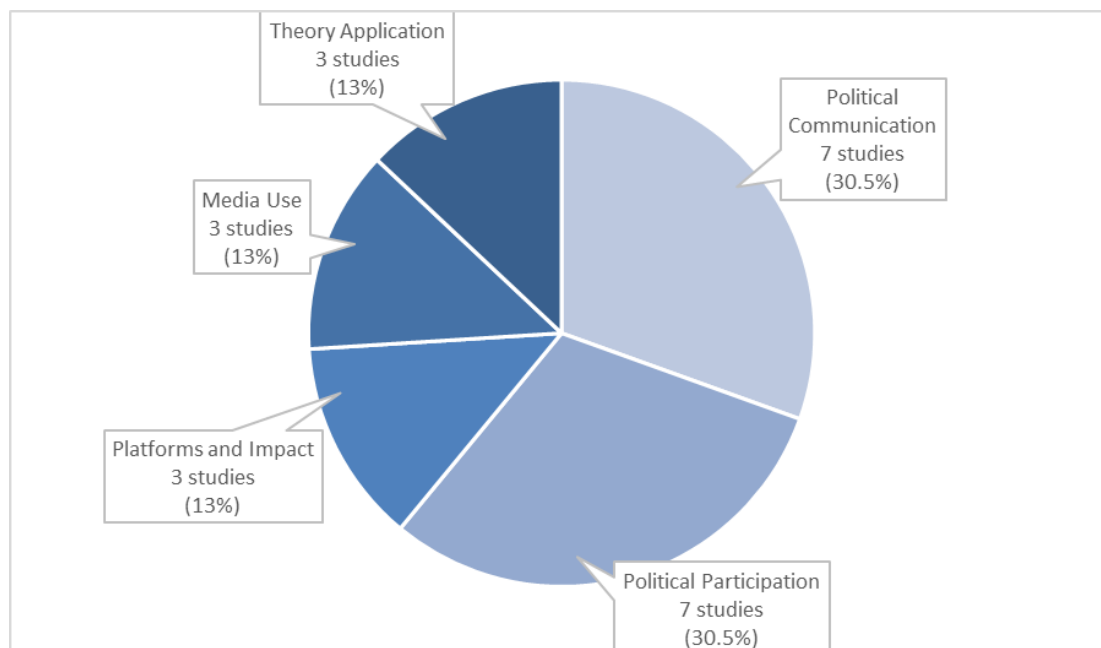


Figure 7: Social media use for political information studies by themes

As shown in Figure 7, political communication and political participation emerged as the most prevalent themes, each with seven studies or 30% of the total number of selected primary studies. This is followed by other themes: media use, platforms and impact, and theory application (each three studies or 13%).

Reviewed studies of the political communication theme mainly examined who, how (the means) and why participate in political content creation, dissemination and consumption on social media platforms during political campaigning and elections period. For instance, Bagić Babac and Podobnik (2018) investigated the ways political parties conducted Facebook election campaigning and its user engagement, while Bronstein (2013) examined how the 2012 United States Presidential candidates used Facebook for political communication. Bradshaw et al. (2020) explored the typology and quality of political content social media users shared over their platforms during the 2016 presidential election and the 2018 SOTU. Via case study of the 2017 Chief Executive election in Hong Kong, Lee (2018) examined different types of intermediary actors who engaged in agenda-steering and frame construction on social media. There are also studies analyzing data about political news and information shared over Twitter and/or Facebook during elections (Glowacki et al., 2018; Hedman et al., 2018; Howard et al., 2017).

Studies in the theme of political participation focused on the extent and patterns of social media use for political information in predicting political outcomes, directly or indirectly. For example, how different patterns of online political information exposure such as incidental and selective exposure on social media envisage political information sharing (Weeks et al., 2017) and political participation (Valeriani & Vaccari, 2016; Yamamoto & Morey, 2019). Lane et al. (2017) investigated how political discourse and motivations for using social media moderate political information sharing on social media which subsequently predicts political participation. Stephens et al. (2014) comparatively examined political implications brought by the use of different information acquisition tools such as search engines and social media for political and news information. Yamamoto et al. (2019) examined the degree to which social

media prosumption via political information seeking, political discussion and internal political efficacy predicts political participation.

Studies on media use theme mainly delved into reasons and the differing factors individuals use social media for political information (e.g., Kavanaugh et al., 2016; Kavanaugh et al., 2014; Kaye, 2011). This is followed by platforms and impact theme which discussed transformation of political information production, distribution and consumption in the realm of social media (e.g., Casero-Ripollés, 2018; Daoust & Sullivan, 2017; Duong, 2017).

Studies classified under theory application theme discussed theories and concepts which are relevant to the realm of social media use for political information. For instance, Feezell (2018) studied exposure to political information via Facebook and agenda setting effect. Tedesco (2011) studied the relationship between exposure to Internet political messages and political information efficacy. Meanwhile, Vraga et al. (2016) investigated how far both researchers and respondents agreed on the definitions of social, news and political posts on Facebook.

How Does Existing Literature Theorize The Use of Social Media for Political Information? (RQ2)

A total of nine theories/models covering the review's different contexts were identified (Table 6). This suggests a range of theories/models have been engaged in research related to social media use for political information so far. Majority of these theories/models are in the scope of communication and social psychology. Among all, uses and gratifications theory emerged as the most used theory, followed by communication mediation models.

Table 6: Theories and models applied in social media use for political information research

Theories/Models	References	No.
Agenda Setting	Feezell (2018)	1
Cognitive Dissonance Theory	Daoust & Sullivan (2017)	1
Communication Mediation Models	Yamamoto & Morey (2019), Yamamoto et al. (2019)	2
Junk News Conceptualization	Bradshaw et al. (2020)	1
Political Information Cycles	Lee (2018)	1
Self-Affirmation Theory	Weeks et al. (2017)	1
Social Network Theory	Kavanaugh et al. (2016)	1
Two-Step Flow of Communication	Feezell (2018)	1
Uses and Gratifications Theory	Kavanaugh et al. (2014), Kaye (2011), Lane et al. (2017), Vraga et al. (2016)	4

Positioned as an audience-centered approach, instead of asking what media do to people, uses and gratifications theory seeks to explain “what do people do with the media” (Katz, 1959, p. 2). This theory assumes that individuals with different social and psychological needs possess differing expectations towards media and thus, predicts distinctive patterns of media exposure or engagement in information related activities, which subsequently results in differing need gratifications and other consequences (Katz et al., 1973). Studies included in this review explored uses and gratifications sought by users who use social media for political information. For instance, Kavanaugh et al. (2016) investigated uses and gratifications citizens obtained from the diverse information sources available to them during the months leading up to the Mexico Presidential elections in 2012. Kaye (2011) compared motivations for using social network sites and blogs for political information during the 2008 United States Presidential election. Lane et al. (2017) investigated how motivations for using social media influence online political discourse and offline political participation. Vraga et al. (2016)

examined the different motivations individuals use social media in predicting their definitions of social, news and political posts on Facebook.

On the ground that political participation can be cultivated, communication mediation models serve as a theoretical framework to understand the integration of additional indirect pathways to participation at any stage in consequence of political communication (Chan, 2016). The models consider influences derived from campaign news use on political behavior are mostly indirect and mediated by what exists amidst news reception (Cho et al., 2009; Shah et al., 2007). Based on communication mediation models, Yamamoto and Morey (2019) and Yamamoto et al. (2019) examined the role of incidental news exposure on social media and social media prosumption in political process respectively.

The remaining theories/models identified in this review include agenda setting theory, cognitive dissonance theory, junk news conceptualization, political information cycles, self-affirmation theory, social network theory and two-step flow of communication. Studies applying these theories/models orbit around emerging issues or phenomena related to media effects, audiences' internal psychological consistency, computational propaganda and political misinformation, changing information cycle and social relationships in transmitting information in the realm of social media use for political information.

Which Limitations and Gaps Are Highlighted Most Within The Literature on Social Media Use for Political Information? (RQ3)

Based on the review results, several limitations and gaps within current research on social media use for political information have been identified as follows:

a. Platform of Study

High proportion of studies in this review focused only on a single platform, particularly Facebook, followed by Twitter. As observed in the latest report of global social networks ranked by number of users 2022 released by market and consumer data provider Statista, Facebook is the most popular social media platform worldwide with more than 2.89 billion monthly active users (Dixon, 2022). Despite Twitter being ranked 15th in the Statista report, it was the second most used social media platform in the United States. In contrast, Facebook was the top platform (Duggan & Brenner, 2013) during the review period. Indeed, majority of the studies reviewed were conducted in the context of the United States. The review time frame of this paper encompassed both Barack Obama (January 2009 – January 2017) and Donald Trump (January 2017 – January 2021) presidency. The former was touted as the social media campaigning champion who used social media such as Twitter, Myspace, YouTube and in particular, Facebook extensively to garner support and mobilize the general public; while the latter uses Twitter as his social media megaphone.

However, as varied social media platforms offer distinctive nature by way of their affordances and functionalities, each may yield diverse outcomes. For example, Twitter stands out with its unique feature in allowing real-time conversations via microblogging, allowing users to read, report and comment on concurrent global events. It is also an acclaimed one-to-many communication platform for individuals to follow influential and affluent people. While being one of the world's widely used mobile messaging applications, WhatsApp facilitates trust building via one-to-one communication in a more personalized manner. Also notable is the newly emerging and fast-growing social media platforms such as TikTok which has extended its influence predominantly on younger generation users beyond entertainment

alone, to news and search functions. For this reason, newly emerging and alternative platforms shall deserve attention in future studies, specifically on few remarkable social media platforms based on different research contexts, given the uniqueness of these differing platforms will ultimately attract different users and thus, furnish different usage patterns and research outputs.

b. Context of Study

Most of the studies prioritized a single country, again, the United States in particular, with a few studies taking other developed Western democracies into consideration, leaving alone the developing countries from Asia Pacific with less or little attention received. Being one of the world's foremost economic and military power, as well as the key leader in international institutions such as the United Nations (UN) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the United States and its politics hold considerable impact on the world. For this reason, it is no surprise for the United States politics to receive more attention among others in the international arena, as well as the scholarship.

Despite the fact that the United States is one of the world's superpower, yet, its global dominance has been challenged by the rise in power and importance of China, as well as India in recent years. This observation is echoed by one of the recent Pew Research Center's reports on global balance of power. According to the report, nearly half of the Americans affirm that the United States' influence in the world is waning in recent years, with two-thirds of the Americans see China is getting greater global influence (Connaughton, 2022). Notably, individuals who perceive the United States as experiencing diminishing international influence, while noting China, India and Germany's ascending influence, tend to possess greater levels of international knowledge (Connaughton, 2022).

As first and third world countries are different in terms of political landscape, economic status and technological infrastructure which may offer distinctive variables (e.g., socio-demographic characteristics, technology and accessibility gap), empirical evidences and conclusions from extant scholarship may now lack compatibility to provide foundation for generalizability and transferability to broader contexts. Future studies shall take into context the differing political landscapes between the developed and developing nations to provide a nuanced cross-country picture of the scope and breadth of contemporary research design in a more global framework.

c. Theme of Study

Given that political communication and political participation are the two most prevalent themes found in the review, studies tend to skew towards campaign-related electoral processes. This is a common finding because majority of the primary studies were conducted in the context of Western democracies, with elections as pillar of democratic governance and political stability. Despite both democratic and communist seemingly advocating sharing the "power to the people" philosophy, in practice, the two political systems are distinctively different in terms of economic and social structure, as well as ideological principles. For instance, people living in a democratic society are free to establish their own political parties, contest and vote in elections, and enjoy a certain degree of freedom of expression. On the other hand, people living in a communist society may not have such privileges because the communist government is controlled by one political party and most of the time, political dissent is least tolerated.

This leads us to ponder research themes beyond campaign related electoral processes. For instance, daily consumption of political information via social media by different actors to understand genres of political information they are exposed to and to what extent they learn from it. Likewise, the different nature of political information and both short-term/long-term and direct/indirect impacts on opinions and attitudes forming which leads to political behaviors under the realm of different political systems is worth exploring as well.

One may also expand lines of inquiry to study social media political misinformation given that it is now more and more difficult to verify the authenticity of information. Also worth our attention is political information feeding and misinformation via more private, one-to-one communication applications such as WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger, due to changing information, news seeking and social exchange behavior (Glowacki et al., 2018).

The above thought further inspired us to advance our query into studies accommodating education and learning, such as media literacy and social media usage patterns for political information. This is because as observed by Bode (2016), user attributes and political information learning may be more puzzling than it seems to be. Education and knowledge in media use are meaningful as they are important variables to the reconfiguration of the processes of information creation, circulation and consumption.

d. Conceptualization and Theoretical Framework

The current review found that there is a lack of clearer and identical conceptualization of political information-related terms in the context of evolving new media landscape and changing information, news seeking and social exchange behavior. For instance, political content (Bradshaw et al., 2020), or to a narrow definition – political information, political news and political messages (Vraga et al., 2016). Not only that, ‘information credibility’ in the context of social media deserves a more identical conceptualization (Bradshaw et al., 2020) because people tend to take information from the known individuals more seriously as the information is deemed more credible (Cooley & Parks-Yancy, 2019). Generating and adhering to a more consistent definition or delineation of these definitions may result in more precise and relevant research outcomes.

In terms of theoretical framework, uses and gratifications theory emerged as the most used theory, followed by communication mediation models. The review results suggest that scholars are more interested to learn about why users prefer social media as a source of political information and its subsequent implications. Likewise, existing studies also incline to learn about the indirect variables that exist at any stage in between the process of consuming political information on social media and political participation given that political participation is important to democracy.

On one hand, social media is identified as a “high choice” media environment (Prior, 2007) whereby users enjoy greater choice in what they consume. This partly explains loads of existing studies mainly orbit around the realm of active audience and selective exposure theories. On the other hand, given the nature of social media use is predominantly to maintain social ties (Kim et al., 2013), content (i.e., political information) available on various social media platforms is thus consumed as a “by-product” of using social media (Baum, 2002; Baum & Jamison, 2006) via incidental exposure. For this reason, theories of incidental/accidental exposure and passive learning deserve attention too because users are exposed to political information while doing other things on social media. These theories offer notable theoretical implications on how we conceive and examine social media as an information delivery

platform. For instance, as found in Bode's (2016) study, despite its personalizability, social media was found to offer a "low choice" media environment whereby users endure passive learning when being exposed to political information on social media.

Another alarming contemporary societal concern which deserves our immediate attention is the mushrooming of fake information/news on social media. Emotional content, sensationalism, and provocative headlines can trigger individuals to share misinformation (Luo et al., 2023). Proliferation of online information has generated fierce competition for attention. However, attention economy would first result in the loss of high-quality information (Menczer & Hills, 2020), and this is where all kinds of fake information emerged. Making matters worse, in the name of providing personalized recommendations based on users' past preferences, search engines, social media algorithms and bots further slim the chances of users' exposure to inconsistent information which may potentially shake people's existing minds. This leads to online social herding and echo chambers which subsequently become potential breeding ground for fake news and misinformation to turn viral. Perhaps insights from the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) can be considered to learn about users' thinking processes via everyday information encounter on social media. To be more specific, due to the constantly changing of information acquisition attitude and sharing behavior, the means, factors and how much effort one is willing to invest in information deliberation which result in the change or unchanged of attitude/belief are worth exploring.

e. Methodology

Scholars have been very dedicated to quantitative approaches, particularly survey as the main research instrument. Taking into account that political communication and political participation are the two most prevalent themes found in this research domain, and studies tend to skew towards campaign-related electoral processes, survey is indeed a relevant method. It helps to collect data from a large number of respondents to generate both descriptive and inferential statistics to depict and summarize the attributes of a data set (a population or sample) and make inferences of the effect or relationship between variables.

Yet, qualitative and mixed-methods approaches have not been extensively applied, with only a few studies taking place. Future studies may want to consult a wide variety of methodological approaches because having a single method, in particular survey, is unlikely to capture the nuances of information acquisition and sharing attitudes, behaviors, as well as cognitive vulnerabilities in using social media. Moreover, there is a lack of more in-depth explanation to factors or forces behind these dynamic gaps.

For instance, via content analysis, Bradshaw et al. (2020) explored the typology and quality of political content social media users shared over their platforms during the 2016 presidential election and the 2018 SOTU. Recognizing the frequently changing new media landscape, they urged studies on the changes in definitions of political content and information credibility. Perhaps in-depth interviews or focus group discussions with different actors are more relevant interrogatives to take heed of Bradshaw et al.'s suggestion.

Next, using two-wave survey data, Weeks et al. (2017) investigated the relationship between incidental and selective exposure, and their causative links to political information dispersion over different levels of strength of political party affiliation. However, with a single survey approach, they were not able to delve further into political information sharing behavior on social media, such as what information is shared and its implications. As a remedy to this limitation, perhaps in-depth interviews, focus group discussions or netnography would complement the survey findings with richer exposition to these gaps.

It is also important to acknowledge the evolving new media ecology by adopting newly emerging methodological approaches apart from the conventional interrogatives. For instance, to study cognitive vulnerabilities of social media users and how algorithms manipulate cognition, future endeavors may consider applying cognitive experiments, simulations, data mining and artificial intelligence as both Menczer and Hills (2020) did at the University of Warwick and Indiana University Bloomington's Observatory on Social Media (OSoMe) respectively.

To complement the discussion, Table 7 outlines an extract from the current review on the pending challenges for studies in the field of social media use for political information.

Table 7: Pending challenges for future research on social media and political information

References	Key Challenges
Bradshaw et al. (2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Go beyond the conventional interrogatives to re-define political content and information credibility under the evolving new media landscape
Bronstein (2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on the use of social media platforms beyond Facebook
Casero-Ripollés (2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Predominance of studies focused on a single country (United States) and a single platform Inclination towards campaign-related electoral processes Platforms which are of one-to-many communication model received more attention than one-to-one communication model Include both the classical and newly emergence actors to study changes in the professional profiles of political communication and analysis of political influence in the digital environment Introduce critical vision with findings relevant to our political system and daily life Embrace methodological heterogeneity and creativity Develop and build strong theoretical models that contribute to the advance of theory in this field
Glowacki et al. (2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research on social media political misinformation shall move beyond public spaces such as Twitter and Facebook into more private, one-to-one applications such as WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger
Tedesco (2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Study both the subtle and explicit persuasion strategies online
Vraga et al. (2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adopt a clearer and relatively narrow conceptualization of political-related terms (i.e., political information, social, political or informational use of social media content)
Weeks et al. (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Study political information sharing behavior on social media, particularly what information is shared and its implications
Yamamoto & Morey (2019)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research shall move beyond political news and information related topics to election and candidates with an inclusion of diverse kind of emerging political content on social media Integrate different types of incidental and selective exposure to political content on social media to advance a more robust comprehension on social media political role via incidental news exposure

CONCLUSION

Premised on a meticulous and stringent analysis of 23 selected papers, contexts, themes, theoretical frameworks, as well as limitations and gaps in the current research about social media use for political information were identified and discussed. Despite meticulous scrutiny, the review exhibits several limitations. First, only academic literature published between 2010 and April 2020 were included in the SLR. Future studies may consider setting a wider time frame. Likewise, the current study did not take into consideration grey literature because it is challenging to distinguish via database searches. The literature searched only involved journal

articles, conference papers, book chapters and workshops. Despite all that, the study acknowledges the inclusion of grey literature in the review as it would improve validity of the SLR results.

All in all, the current review has tried to provide both researchers and practitioners a valuable overview on the extant literature and position of social media use for political information research. In view of the limited efforts made by extant research to systematically review social media use for political information studies, the paper was among the very few studies to delve into this research domain. Such an attempt is meaningful as it serves as a solid ground for more thorough investigations by contributing insightful exploratory inputs to the pool of knowledge of social media and political information.

BIODATA

Jue Jun Tan is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Mass Communication, Faculty of Creative Industries, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR), Malaysia. Her research interests include journalism studies, media and communication (in particular social media and new media), media use and media effects, and media and politics. Email: tanjj@utar.edu.my

Amira Firdaus is an Associate Professor at the Department of Media and Communication Studies, Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences, Universiti Malaya (UM), Malaysia. Amira's core expertise is positive/constructive communication with practical and conceptual applications across three fields: communication, higher education, and positive psychology. Email: amira_firdaus@um.edu.my

Iffat Ali Aksar is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Journalism & Advertising, Xiamen University, Malaysia. Her research interests are more into women and social media, cultural impacts on online practices, and new media technology and wellbeing. Email: iffatali.aksar@xmu.edu.my

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