Influence of the Social Media on Political Decisions Worldwide on Example of Donald Trump

It is without a doubt that the use of social media has become the new phenomenon in the world that covers major issues including matters concerning the political spectrum. It has recently become an increasingly powerful tool in the political sphere most notably in the United States, since the most popular social media sites emanate from there, but also in other parts of the world. To a greater extent, one must acknowledge that the use of social media has heavily influenced political decisions around the globe, although must also take into account other factors that nullify the effectiveness of the influence of social media in politics around the globe. A critical assessment of this essay seeks to assess and evaluate the changes and impact that internet has brought to politics all over the globe as it unfolds.

Firstly, the use of social media allows for the existence of unverifiable versions of the truth circulating that may greatly influence the opinion of the public. In cases of of voting or polls, the political landscape tends to fall victim to biasness especially on social media whereby there is no regulation or justifiable means by which an individual may verify the truth, and no moderation has been implemented to avoid this. (H. Satterfield 2016) argues that most people nowadays use social media sites such as Facebook and twitter mainly to follow politicians and to get updated on political news. This allows the circulation of biased information or unproved information such as “the birther movement” to gain ground biased on unsubstantiated claims, leading to unexpected results. Taking into note the birther movement that was used to taint the Obama administration and question its legitimacy, it can therefore be argued that these unsubstantiated claims later led to the election of the current United States president Donald Trump, who some have called a radical in contrast to Barrack Obama especially concerning issues such as immigration, gun reforms and foreign policy amongst other things. One can therefore say that the influence of social media allows room for biased information to grow which later leads to radicalization therefore influencing the political decisions of the people.

In addition, In the case of the United Kingdom; the Brexit campaign outcomes have been largely questionable especially taking into account the content that was rampant on social media pages of people such as Jayda Fransen, or the British first political page. Those pages successfully exploited the fact that social media is unregulated to convince and encourage the people of the United Kingdom to opt out of the European Union, although it is still questionable if they did that on purpose of accidentally. The Brexit campaign was a campaign run on negative emotions, whereby immigration and refugees became the main concern that drove the public that had a mantra to “take their country back”. A close analysis of the Brexit campaign shows two different approaches between the British public and the political elites. For a rather length time period, the political elites in the United Kingdom complained about the bureaucracy in the European Union as the main issue that needs to be tackled whereas when the Brexit campaign was being run, it was largely about immigration, however the photos of immigration circulating on social media were of Africans and Pakistanis, people who managed and still manage to migrate to the United Kingdom because of the Commonwealth, not the European Union. Using this as an example, one can further buttress the above-mentioned point that social media has helped to influence political decisions globally by misleading the public either intentionally or accidentally.

Moreover, social media also leads to reckless foreign policy planning in various matters affecting countries all over the globe. Social media platforms such as Facebook have become news hubs where most people especially the young generation that normally does not sit down and watch news can find the latest and breaking news on social media sites such as Facebook. It has been argued that most people now view news on social media other than any other news outlet either traditional media or online. (J Amedie 2015). The most striking effect of the use of social media on foreign policy matters is that it helps to propel the travelling of news faster especially news that may lead to conflict or tensions. One such case is the case of the Libyan Benghazi crisis, in which when the crisis heightened, and social media was filled with posts about it, it did not allow ample room for the Obama administration to plan properly on how they would react to the conflict there resulting in messy operation that led to the death of an American ambassador and four marines. In contrary to this, when the Cuban missile crisis during the Kennedy administration happened, the administration had 6 days to properly plan how they would respond to the situation in a proper manner. One can therefore say that social media influences political decisions by helping to accelerate news and making the public anxious in which forcing to government to issue out a response quickly and that may lead improperly planned foreign policy conducts.

In addition, the use of social media has led to the increased election of populist political candidates into office. In its truest sense, populism is a term that is applicable to many individuals in terms of politics, however in this case, the populist politicians to be discussed are those that tap onto the emotions of the public to achieve a certain goal. Politicians such as Geert Wilders of Netherlands have used a lot of unverified information on social media to appeal to the public and validate their points that migration inflow has disastrous consequences on the society of the country. In most cases, Geert Wilders used to post on his political page crimes committed by migrants in the country. One important thing to note is the difference between academic, economic migration and refugee crisis. In the case of Geert Wilders, he posted an article about a crime that was committed by an African immigrant by the name of Benjamin Tagoe to emphasize on his point against the migration crisis or rather refugee crisis. Benjamin Tagoe is a legal migrant in Netherlands and the crimes he committed had no relation whatsoever to the refugee crisis or let alone migration, however on social media, these differences are not visibly seen and as a result the public falls victim to such information helping populists such as Geert Wilder to gain political base in the country and parliament, and this may later lead to him being an influential voice in Netherlands and thus social media influencing the political decisions of the country of Netherlands.

Moreover, in the United States, the election of Donald trump was largely due to the use of social media. It is without a doubt that the duration of the Obama administration had been marred by terrorist attacks, the rise of Isis, and the issue of migration. Whilst Obama, stuck to political correctness and avoided the use of questionable statements such as Islamic terrorism to avoid any sort of backlash from any group of people, Donald Trump through social media managed to mention a lot of statements that would be considered as politically incorrect such the building of a wall on the border with Mexico, linking terrorism to Islam and promising to segregate Muslims in migration openly causing a lot of backlash from politicians. The main argument here, is not the fact that Donald Trump said these things, but however the fact is that Donald Trump managed to simplify politically complicated situations to a language that is understandable to the ordinary American with basic political knowledge. What further precipitated this was the fact that other politicians were not able to say these things as they often appeared to be divisive, full of racial undertones and politically incorrect. The effect of that was the election of Donald Trump

as the American president, and upon looking at the occurrence of this event, one therefore safely state that the use of social managed to influence political decisions as in the United States it managed to help Donald Trump into office.

Moreover, social media was used in Zimbabwe to encourage a strike and protests against the government of the former president Robert Mugabe. In Zimbabwe, a pastor by the name of Evan Mawarire, recorded a video of himself with a flag of Zimbabwe on twitter and circulated the video through WhatsApp. This video was carrying a message that encouraging people to stand up to the government that was causing suffering in the country and strike and protest. This video led to a massive strike in the history of the country that shackled the government from its comfort zone. Although later Evan Mawarire was arrested and accused with attempting to overthrow a democratically elected government, the social media was able to organize and unite people to carry out a massive protest in the country that even the police or soldiers were not able to control. This exposed the effectiveness of social media and the dangers it posed to a government that had managed to ruthlessly crash any grouping of people in order to avoid protests. The main weakness faced by the government was the privacy policy of these social media sites that allow discretion to the users and as a result the government was not able to stop this protest in its infancy, thus social media managing to influence political decisions by helping the organizing of a protest in a country of harsh government clampdown on protests.

In addition to the above-mentioned point, social media managed to continue being useful as the effects started by Evan Mawarire, did not lose ground, and later led to coup d'état that saw the removal of the Robert Mugabe from the office of president after 37 years. The initial protest did not impact in anyway the manner that the president was removed from office, or let alone how the military intervened, but however the army generals used the same means to communicate with the people and hint on a coup d'état. This later proved to be useful as it helped the military generals who forced the ouster of Robert Mugabe to legalize the act of the coup which s not allowed in most African countries and not recognized by the African Union. However, because the public was tired from the rule of Robert Mugabe and the fact that the news had been hinted on through social media before, this allowed for the new Junta government to argue that the Zimbabwean people agree with the act and that this was an act of the people of Zimbabwe. Taking all of this into account, one can therefore say that in this case, the social media helped either intentionally or accidentally to make the coup in Zimbabwe a recognized government, thus social media influencing political decisions in Zimbabwe.

Moreover, social media allows the public to influence the decisions made by the government or courts. Through social media sites such as Facebook or twitter, the public can sign up petitions requesting a change in a decision made. At the present day the use of petitions has been very useful for lobbyists who manage to use this is a “power of many” to influence decisions made by the government according to renowned scholar T Murse. (T Murse, 2019). In most cases, the use of petitions has been useful in matters relating to court cases on matters relating to the death penalty in the event that they may strongly believe that the convicted individual is innocent. This has been useful in delaying the sentence so that the trial can be made one more time. Most notably the signing of petitions on social media occurred during the Brexit event where those that wanted to stop Brexit went online to sign a petition encouraging people to sign up the petition and cancel Brexit, but however the numbers were not high enough to be recognized by Theresa May’s government, and as result the petition did not bear any positive results. However, even though that may be the case, it must be noted that the use of petitions is increasing immensely and as a result in the near future it will allow the public to voice their

concerns loudly on social media through these petitions and this may produce more positive results. Taking all this into cognizance, one can therefore safely state that through the use of petitions on social media, it is has been noted that social media does influence political decisions around the world.

However, it must also be taken into account that other factors nullify the effectiveness of social media on political decisions in some areas of the world. In terms of technological advancement, most third world countries do not have cheap or easy access to the internet which is very essential for social media. In cases where there is access to the internet, the cost would be so high to such an extent that only a handful number of people have access to it, whilst the rest is not able to access it and as a result relies on traditional media such as television and radio stations. Taking all of these into account, it must be noted that there are some factors that act as a hindrance to social media's influence on political decisions around the world and hence reducing the effectiveness pf social media on those areas of the world, thus social media not being able to influence political decisions in those areas of the world.

Conclusively, social media has grown to be a very effective political tool across time. It has led to election victories; significant petition signing and protests just to mention a few. It has become a tool that most politicians fear and despise yet rely on in desperate times of need or in cases where the support is required by a non-politician as in the case of Donald Trump. The above essay attempted to show the reasons behind the powerful influence of social media around the globe, exploring different parts of the world and how social media has proven to be effective in helping to push certain agendas or influence the voice of the public leading to a changed political decisions. Upon this above assessment, the statement that social media influences political decisions around the globe proves to be true to a greater extent as mentioned in the above essay on how it easily manages to achieve political goals especially in an age whereby people suffer from a form of addiction of phone use that is 90% related to the use of either one of the social media platforms WhatsApp, Facebook, twitter, Instagram etc just to mention a few. However, although all these things prove to be true it is also noted, although to a very insignificant extent that in some parts of the world social media may prove to be not so useful especially in influencing politics or political decisions. Taking all the factors into account, it seems a fair assessment to conclude on the note that social media does influence political decisions to a greater extent around the globe.

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