Impact of Digital Technology on Politics

Digital technology has fundamentally changed the landscape of politics. Figures like Donald Trump, Calin Georgescu, and Nigel Farage are prime examples of politicians who have leveraged digital technology to gain fame and power. Technology has had both positive and negative effects. Transparency and accountability have arguably grown following the surge in social media. Campaigns have used AI to better connect with voters by translating speeches and analysing public sentiment.[1] The sheer quantity of content and the blazing speed with which it spreads have made social media a prime choice for political discussion. However, as it is incredibly hard to regulate social media, users circulate a vast volume of misinformation every day. Moreover, while often used to ridicule politicians instead of serving as a serious weapon for campaigning, the rise of deepfakes creates a dilemma in distinguishing between what is real and what is fake.[2][3]

The role of digital technology in the 2016 US presidential election was pivotal, fundamentally changing the landscape of politics. Trump, often described as the "Ernest Hemingway of a hundred and forty characters," skilfully utilised Twitter to his advantage.[4] His tweets, many of which contained false statements like describing Hillary Clinton as

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[1] [The apocalypse that wasn't: AI was everywhere in 2024's elections, but deepfakes and misinformation were only part of the picture – Ash Center](#)
[2] [AI is helping shape the 2024 presidential election in an unexpected way | AP News](#)
[3] [Deepfakes, Elections, and Shrinking the Liar's Dividend | Brennan Center for Justice](#)

[4] [Pithy, Mean and Powerful: How Donald Trump Mastered Twitter for 2016 - The New York Times](#)

Zara Ali

"unbalanced" and "totally unhinged," kept him in the public eye and ensured substantial media coverage.[5] By extensively tweeting, often timed with significant events, Trump shaped public discourse, framing issues on his terms. He capitalised on this attention, using his unconventional approach to win widespread support. A populist at heart, his slogan "Make America Great Again" resonated deeply with many voters. Social media allowed him to share his personal life, detach himself from the political establishment, and present himself as being with the people.

Digital technology also allowed millions of supporters to amplify his message and divert attention from the controversies he stirred up intentionally. Politicians, meanwhile, are exempt from fact-checking on platforms like Facebook and Instagram, reducing the effectiveness of fact-checkers in scrutinising political content.[6]

With its low cost, large user base, and accessibility, social media has become the primary news source for many. By 2020, 15% of adults and 59% of Twitter users obtained news from the platform on a regular basis.[7] People read traditional media outlets, like newspapers, far less, especially with the rise of mobile phones.

Following the 2020 election, Trump shared around 14 tweets each day challenging the results until his account was permanently suspended on 8th January .[8] He even claimed to have won the election 25 times, distorting the truth and undermining the public's faith in

[5] Trump brings up Clinton's health, questions if she's 'loyal' to Bill | CNN Politics
[6] OII | Election Interference: How tech, race, and disinformation can influence the U.S Election

[7] Social Media and News Fact Sheet, 2024 | Pew Research Center.
[8] 60% of President Donald Trump's post-election tweets sought to undermine legitimacy of the presidential race - Issue One

Zara Ali

democratic processes.[9] This rhetoric contributed to the January 6th Capitol Riot, demonstrating the power of digital technology to incite political violence. Social media algorithms prioritise content matching users' interests, so MAGA supporters were more likely to see posts supporting Trump's claims, eroding trust in the legitimacy of the incumbent government and diminishing confidence in democracy. People perceive platforms like X to promote free speech. Therefore, efforts to counter hate speech are viewed as infringements on fundamental rights.

By 2024, the involvement of media tycoons like Elon Musk and Mark Zuckerberg further entrenched the political influence of digital platforms. The rise of artificial intelligence has enabled more sophisticated microtargeting, allowing political campaigns to synthesise data and deliver highly tailored content to specific audiences.[10] This has made digital technology an even more powerful tool in shaping political narratives and mobilizing voters.

The Romanian presidential election, which took place in November 2024, saw significant involvement of digital technology, especially in the form of TikTok, and resulted in the victory of Calin Georgescu. This came as a surprise to many, as he had attracted only around 5% support in opinion polls ahead of the election.[11] Calin Georgescu is a controversial figure due to his far-right, ultra-nationalist stance. Even more controversial than his personality, however, is the Russian involvement in the election, which highlights

[9] 60% of President Donald Trump's post-election tweets sought to undermine legitimacy of the presidential race - Issue One
[10] Generative AI in Political Advertising | Brennan Center for Justice
[11] Calin Georgescu takes shock lead in Romania's presidential election | Elections News | Al Jazeera

Zara Ali

the broader issue of foreign interference in democratic processes. TikTok played a central role in disseminating false information and promoting narratives appealing to nationalist sentiments. Georgescu rose from relative obscurity to securing over 2.1 million votes, despite being unknown until just two weeks before the election, when there was a sudden appearance of 25,000 pro-Georgescu TikTok posts.[12] The involvement of external forces raises concerns about the legitimacy of the election results and the ability of citizens to make informed choices free from foreign interference. This demonstrates how digital technology can disrupt the fairness of elections. On 6 December, the Supreme Court (High Court of Cassation and Justice) nullified the election results due to evidence of extensive foreign interference.

Another question that foreign interference raises is the impact of digital technology on political relationships with foreign governments, particularly regarding defence and cybersecurity. Communication with foreign delegates has become much easier, more accessible, and more effective due to technological advancements. Ministers can discuss policies in real-time without having to travel, a dynamic particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic when leaders across the globe communicated virtually. Additionally, nations can respond swiftly to natural disasters and offer their condolences and humanitarian aid, demonstrating how technology facilitates global diplomacy and collaboration during times of crisis. Military tactics deployed by the government are also

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[12] Rise of unknown Romanian presidential candidate preceded by Telegram and TikTok engagement spikes - DFRLab

Zara Ali

rapidly evolving. For example, the use of drones to gather intelligence has become an increasingly significant and emerging practice in modern military operations.

 However, technology has also made defence systems more vulnerable, with the looming threat of cyberattacks a growing concern. Governments are increasingly reliant on technology to ensure the smooth running of the country. To protect sensitive data from cyberattacks, organisations employ tools such as firewalls, Intrusion Detection Systems (IDS), and encryption technologies.   This focus on cybersecurity reflects the rise of cyber warfare, where attacks on digital infrastructure can disrupt economies, compromise government operations, or target industrial infrastructure.[13]

As these technologies advance, protecting citizens' personal data has become a key issue in political discourse. To address concerns over state surveillance and data collection, laws like the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012 were introduced, which offer citizens greater protection by ensuring proper scrutiny of security services and oversight of surveillance activities. However, the effectiveness of this law remains a topic of debate, as risks to individual privacy and civil liberties persist.

In conclusion, digital technology has become a significant force in politics, and its role will continue to grow. It has the power to mobilise large groups of people worldwide to unite in solidarity and fight for common causes, such as climate change protests. From the first televised war, the Vietnam War, to the present-day atrocities in Gaza, technology has enabled people across the globe to unite in support of one another, condemn government

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[13] What Is Cyber Warfare? Various Strategies for Preventing It | American Public University

Zara Ali

actions, and pressure authorities to initiate peace talks. While digital technology offers

unprecedented opportunities for diplomatic communication and enhanced defence

capabilities, it also presents complex challenges concerning security, privacy, and

governance. It has transformed how politicians campaign, providing them with new tools

to connect with voters and spread their messages. At the same time, it has created fertile

ground for populists to thrive, allowing them to reach a wider audience and influence

political discourse. Ultimately, digital technology is reshaping global politics, presenting

both remarkable potential and considerable risks.

Zara Ali

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Zara Ali