

Social Media: A Public Deliberation or a Social Accountability in Morocco

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How to cite this paper: Azelmad, S., & Harroudi, Y. (2024). Social Media: A Public Deliberation or a Social Accountability in Morocco. *Advances in Journalism and Communication*, 12, 529-540.

<https://doi.org/10.4236/ajc.2024.124029>

Received: August 11, 2024

Accepted: December 1, 2024

Published: December 4, 2024

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Abstract

Social media is increasingly providing a wide range of new modes of interaction that go beyond the public sphere. Social media is witnessed to increase the homophily and polarization of citizen participation in public governance and policy in Morocco. Facebook is now summoning up similar voices toward deliberative practices. The following study investigates the roles of social media in promoting social engagement and giving voice to the voiceless. Drawing on a survey of 213 activists on Facebook indicates how social media facilitates these deliberative interactions into social accountability actions. The findings contribute to the measurement of the government's responsiveness towards social accountability on Facebook.

Keywords

Social Media, Homophily, Polarization, Citizen Participation, Public Governance, Facebook, Public Deliberation, Social Accountability, Responsiveness, Answerability

1. Literature Review

1.1. The Public Sphere in Social Media

The concept of the public sphere, often associated with the work of German philosopher and sociologist Jürgen Habermas, refers to a space in society where individuals come together to engage in rational discourse and discussion about important societal and political issues. The public sphere is a space where our social life and public opinion can be formed. It guarantees access to all citizens (Habermas, Lennox, & Lennox, 1974: p. 1). This space can take various forms, including coffeehouses, newspapers, social media platforms, where people can

chat and deliberate online. In the public sphere, citizens can express their opinions, debate, and reach a common understanding, ideally influencing public opinion and policy decisions. The public sphere, as put by Jürgen Habermas in 1962, became a pivotal discussion in political and social theory, communication, democracy, and public discourse. The notion of the Public Sphere changed throughout history and sparked debates and discussions about the role of media, in our time, and the quality of public discourse, raising the question for new researchers: **How to maintain a vibrant public sphere in modern democracies**. Critics have also raised questions about the idealized nature of the public sphere and its historical exclusions. **Table 1** indicates the evolution of the public spheres:

Table 1. The evolution of public spheres.

Source information	Source of information	Target of Information	Speed of Information	Public Deliberation
Coffee House	Many	Many	Slow	Passive
News	One	Many	Slow	Passive
Papers	One	One	Fast	Active
Telephone	One	Few	Fast	Active
Radio/TV	Many	Many	Fast	Active
Internet 1.0	Few	Few	Fast	Active
Internet 2.0	Many	Many	Fast	Active

1.2. Homophily

“All the Birds of a feather flock together” is a familiar buzzword that encapsulates the principle of homophily, which extends from social psychology to the realm of social media. It is a study by (Barberá, 2015), titled “Birds of the Same Feather Tweet Together”, which examined the influence of echo chambers on political polarization using Twitter data. The study explained how the users, on Twitter, follow and interact with others who share similar political beliefs. This pattern results in echo chambers, where individuals are primarily exposed to content and opinions that align with their political views. The research confirmed the existence of homophily on Twitter, which is the tendency for users to connect with others who have similar political preferences. In this context, users were more likely to follow and engage with accounts that shared their political ideologies. Furthermore, the Echo chambers, created by this self-selection and homophily, tend to reinforce users’ existing political opinions. Users are more likely to encounter content that reaffirms their beliefs, contributing to ideological polarization. Overall Barberá and Rivero (2015), Colleoni, Rozza, and Arvidsson (2014), and Barberá (2015) highlight the role of echo chambers on social media, intensifying political polarization. The findings emphasize that the platform’s network structure, which encourages the interaction of like-minded

individuals, can contribute to a more polarized political discourse in bubble-filtered public spheres. All the mentioned studies contributed to the understanding of social media echo chambers in the context of citizen engagement, polarization, and participatory governance.

1.3. Monophily

While birds of a feather may flock together, people's social psychology is more complicated. Monophily describes a situation where social media users, can have extreme and opposite preferences, regardless of their similarities. Monophily, a term derived from Latin meaning "love of one," refers to a scenario in a social network where individuals exhibit strong preferences for a particular attribute, irrespective of their characteristics. In this era, in a network characterized by female monophily, it does not mean that we can not meet males who tend to connect primarily with individuals of the other gender on social media. However, what makes monophily distinct is that these individuals themselves could prefer to be more homophilous with females than males, or vice-versa, especially in rainbow flag countries, for example. So, sex is not a determining factor in their preference for connecting with others. In essence, they exhibit a strong bias or preference for one gender but are not necessarily exclusive to that same gender themselves. However, monophily remains a significant component in social network analysis, as it helps identify and understand patterns of connections and preferences within a network, shedding light on how individuals form relationships based on specific attributes or characteristics. It is also important to explore the dynamics of social connections and the potential implications for issues like gender dynamics and network structure (Altenburger & Ugander, 2018).

1.4. Polarization in Social Media

Wu et al. (2011) in their study, on polarization discovered how the "attention is highly homophilous, with celebrities following celebrities, media following media, and bloggers following bloggers". In this direction, every group subscribes and likes the pages of the other. Using the same approach, Sunstein (2002) in his article: *The law of group polarization* questions the effect of social media on political polarization. Sunstein (2002) assumes that social media will allow individuals to selectively follow the people that they already support or support their cause, regardless of their gender, religion, and ethnicity. Thus, it will create groups of people who will be similar to each other in their political convictions and who will reinforce each other in their ideological logic. Sunstein proposed that political homophily similarities can increase the levels of political polarization and citizens' participatory inclination for democracy governance, voicing their political correctness. On the other hand, Sunstein (2002) has expressed concern about the increasing polarization in modern democracies. He believes that polarization can be a double-edged weapon, excluding and hindering productive minorities from public deliberation. Indeed, people in marginalized areas can not have access to

Internet 2.0, which makes it difficult for these views to find a place in the virtual public sphere. Sunstein (2002) has advocated for deliberative social media respectful discussion polls to create politically correct public spaces with respectful discussions among individuals and with diverse and plural perspectives as well for constructive decision-making and Good Governance.

1.5. Filter Bubbles in Social Media

Filter bubbles are a result of algorithms used by online platforms to customize the content of homophilous users (adherents) and polarize them in their preferred siloed zones of interest, conforming and reinforcing their own beliefs, based on their past behaviors and preferences. When algorithms filter and prioritize content according to a user's history, they inadvertently create a bubble around the user. A filter Bubble is a metaphorical space where individuals are primarily exposed to information, opinions, or beliefs that reinforce their existing views. This reinforcement occurs because people tend to connect with like-minded individuals and consume content that aligns with their perspectives. In the context of social media and online communities, algorithms and user choices can create echo chambers, where people are more likely to encounter and interact with information that supports their existing beliefs (Colleoni, Rozza, & Arvidsson, 2014). Barberá (2015), in her research, examines how the network structure of political discussions on social media, especially Twitter, emphasizes the roles of Echo Chambers in clustering users according to their ideological, democratic, and political choices in homogeneous groups. In this regard, similar voices may be echoed in their common chambers leading to gridlock, if not to deadlock polarization. The act can spill over social media from mere public deliberation into social accountability (Harmono, 2024), making it challenging for policymakers to find common ground and pass reactive policies. Gridlock occurs as policymakers face opposition from entrenched, ideologically driven polls.

1.6. Echo Chambers in Social Media

Sunstein (2002) has explored the role of echo chambers and filter bubbles in exacerbating polarization. He suggests that the availability of personalized content, driven by algorithms and social media, can help these homophilous groups to echo-chamber together and convince each other of their political ideas (magic bullet theory) to exercise pressure on decision-makers. On the other side, the filter-bubbled-personalized content algorithms can limit exposure to diverse information, hindering its contribution to the process of polarization in social media (eli2011flr). Barberá and Rivero (2015) in their study titled *Birds of the Same Feather Tweet Together*, analyzed the impact of echo chambers on effective decision-making. The study delves into the concept of echo chambers and it affects the flow of information in a magic bullet, influencing individuals' perceptions, and potentially contributing to increased polarization (Barberá, 2015).

2. Research Methodology

2.1. Research Framework

The previous literature indicated how homophily can increase polarization in different preferred siloed Echo chambers and bubble-filtered public spheres, which can increase (social accountability) and gridlock policymakers to respond to citizen demands (State Answerability).

Based on this theoretical and empirical background, the researcher proposed this theoretical framework developed as shown in **Figure 1**, for quantitative study. In this regard, four hypotheses are suggested accordingly.

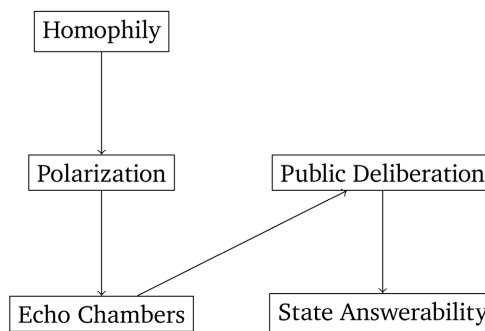


Figure 1. Research framework.

2.2. Research Hypotheses

H1: There is a positive relationship between Political Homophily and Political Polarization on Facebook in Morocco.

H2: The existence of filter bubbles and echo chambers is positively correlated with increased polarization.

H3: The increase in Political Polarization on Facebook mediates Quality deliberations and increases decision-makers answerability.

2.3. Data Collection Techniques

The methodology applied for this research is quantitative with some descriptive statistics, where only 210 users managed to fill out the questionnaire online. The sample was chosen since active users or subscribers on political Facebook pages are connected. (only 3 pages are chosen):

- 1) The Facebook Page of Dr. Abderahim Bouaida from the south of Morocco,
- 2) The Facebook Page of Dr. Nabila Mounib from Casablanca,
- 3) The Facebook Page of Hamid El Mehdaoui, Director of Badil Website.

3. Data Analysis

3.1. Qualitative Analysis

The Homophily tendencies on the word cloud in **Figure 2** indicate how the Facebook users are more homophilous around the following polls, some polarize and subscribe, whereas others just echo chamber and comment on these public

spheres.



Figure 2. Homophily word cloud on Facebook in Morocco.

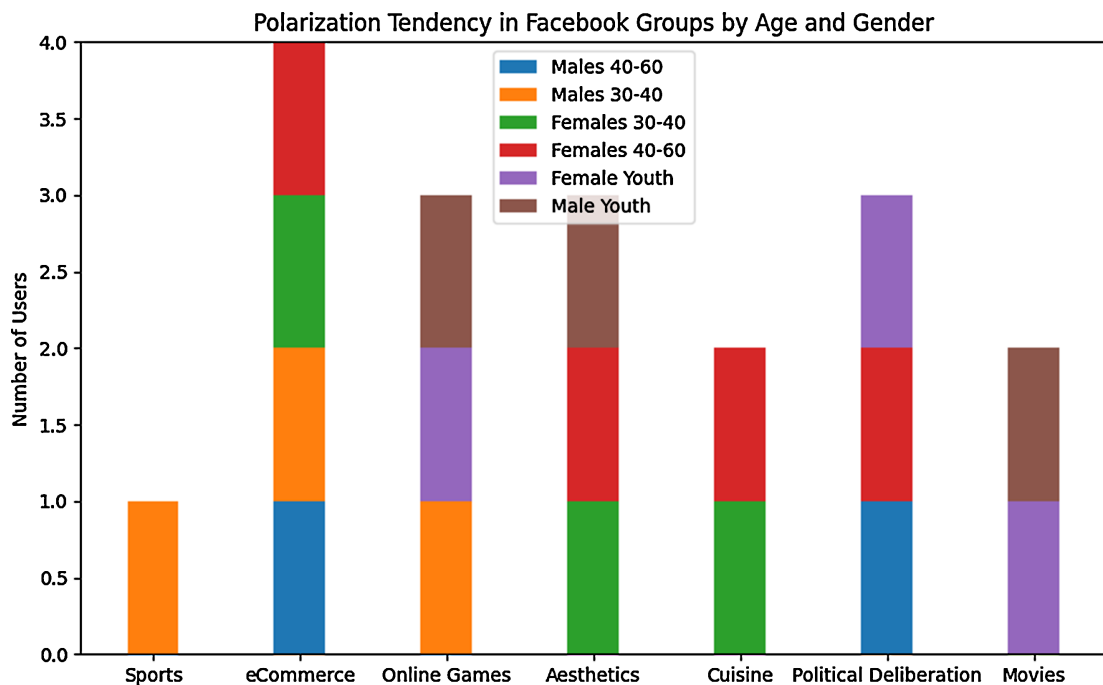


Figure 3. Homophily and Polarization on Facebook.

Figure 3 is a descriptive analysis within the studied Facebook pages, which indicates the polarization preferences and tendencies of among the studied age/gender groups within Moroccan Facebook communities which highlights the areas where polarization or shared interests occur. The polarization is most pronounced in political deliberation, which primarily attracts males aged 40 - 60. Descriptive statistics suggest that different age and sex groups have varying interests or tendencies. For instance, younger males and females (16 - 30) tend to have common interests in Online Games and Movies, while older males (40 - 60) are more inclined towards Political Deliberation.

- **Males 16 - 30:** Polarize around Aesthetics, Online Games, and Movies.
- **Females 16 - 30:** Polarize around Online Games and Movies.
- **Males 30 - 40:** Polarize around Sports, eCommerce, and Online Games.
- **Females 30 - 40:** Polarize around Aesthetics, eCommerce, and Cuisine.

- **Males 40 - 60:** are more homophilous towards Political Deliberation. They polarize around public governance and policy in Morocco (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001).
- **Females 40 - 60:** Polarize around Aesthetics, eCommerce, Cuisine, and Political Deliberation.

Males between 40 - 60 are highly homophilous towards political affiliations on social media; hence, deliberative conversations within the clusters are echo-chambered on governance and public policy issues.

3.2. Quantitative Analysis

The scale is tested for normal distribution of the generated data using a visual approach, as illustrated in **Figure 4**, using Python library Matplotlib, which allowed for clear and detailed visualization of the distribution pattern. By plotting the data, we are able to assess whether it aligns with a normal distribution, indicated by the familiar bell-shaped curve. The graphical method is a complementary statistical test for an intuitive understanding of the data's curve, making it easier to identify any deviations from normality that might affect subsequent analyses, before a correlation analysis. Furthermore, Cronbach's alpha measured the internal consistency of a scale and its questions. A higher Cronbach's alpha indicates greater reliability, with values above 0.7, which is considered acceptable, but not ideal, accordingly (Staller & Chen, 2022).

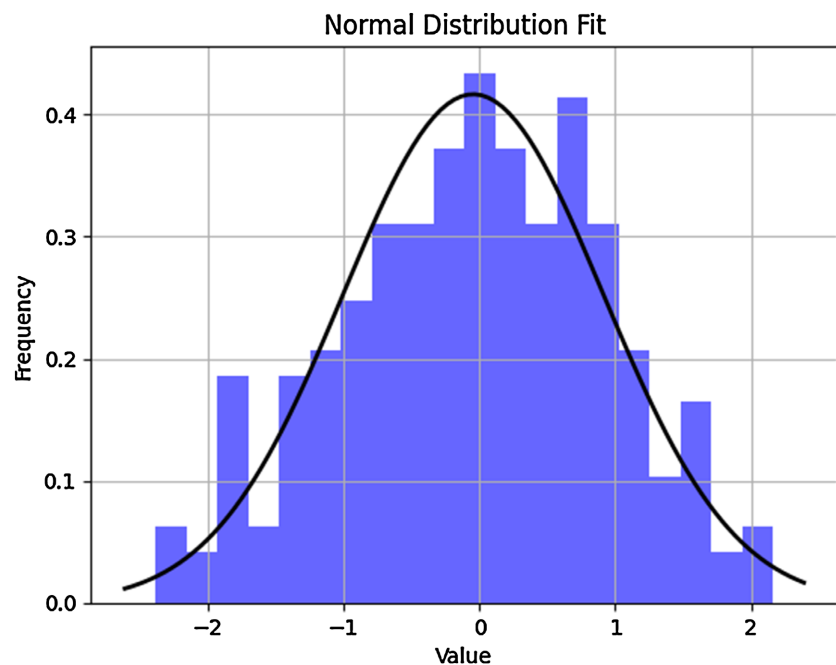


Figure 4. Data distribution.

The collected data was analyzed using NumPy and Matplotlib as fundamental packages for scientific computing with Python (Hunter, 2007). The software is a high-performance multidimensional array, that conducts other statistical tests,

based on 213 score points summation out of a Likert scale-ordinal data, in which the interviewees indicated their opinion in **Figure 5**.

Positive Linear Correlation between Political Homophily and Political Polarization

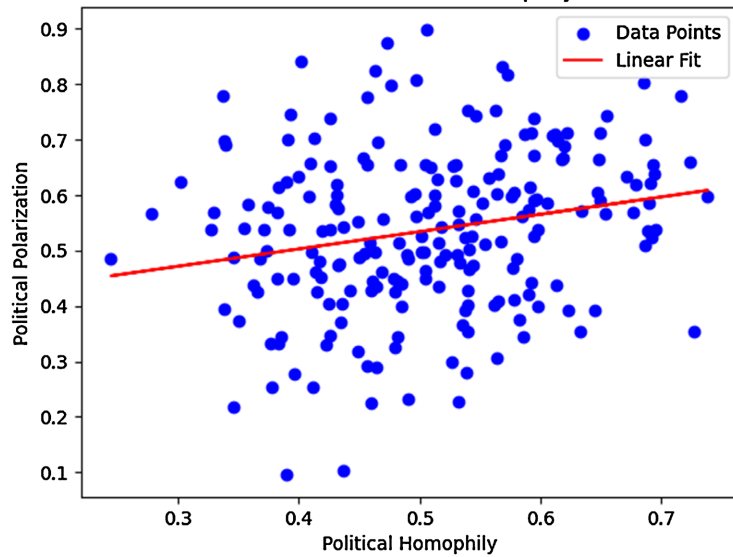


Figure 5. Correlation between political homophily and polarization on Facebook.

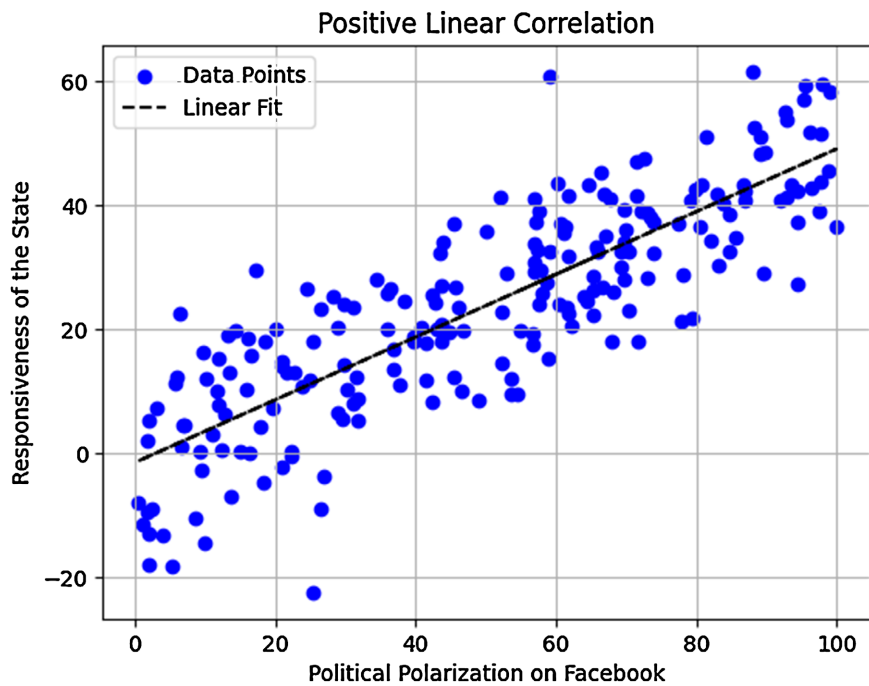


Figure 6. Correlation between political polarization and state answerability on Facebook.

The scatter plot, in **Figure 6**, shows a positive linear correlation between Political Polarization on Facebook and the Responsiveness of the State. Here is what you can infer from the plot:

- 1) Positive Correlation: As you move from left to right on the scatter plot, there is a general upward trend. This indicates that as Political Polarization on Facebook

increases, the Responsiveness of the State also tends to increase. In other words, there is a positive relationship between these two variables.

2) Linear Relationship: The data points on the plot roughly form a straight line. This suggests that the relationship between Political Polarization and the Responsiveness of the State can be approximated by a linear equation, meaning that for every increase in Political Polarization, there is a corresponding increase in the Responsiveness of the State.

3) Scatter: While there is a clear positive trend, the data points are not perfectly aligned along the regression line. There is some scatter, indicating that other factors may also influence the Responsiveness of the State. This scatter represents the variability in responsiveness that cannot be explained by Political Polarization alone.

4) Outliers: There might be a few data points that deviate significantly from the general trend. These outliers can represent cases where the relationship between Political Polarization and Responsiveness of the State is different or is influenced by other unaccounted factors.

5) Overall, the scatter plot suggests a positive linear correlation between Political Polarization on Facebook and the Responsiveness of the State, meaning that, in general, as Political Polarization increases, the state tends to be more responsive.

3.3. Data Interpretation

One possible interpretation of this finding is that increased political polarization on social media platforms, like Facebook, may drive citizens to engage more with the political process.

1) Social Media is not only a public deliberation but a social accountability of citizens, holding their regimes accountable.

2) Higher political polarization may lead to increased public pressure on the state and its representatives. Elected officials may feel a greater need to respond to the diverse and often strongly expressed views of the large populace. This can contribute to a more accountable and responsive government.

3) Policymakers and government officials could consider the role of social media in shaping public discourse and political engagement, and how they can use these platforms to improve citizen-state interactions.

3.4. Research Limitations

For transparency of the conducted research, some limitations may be affecting, especially:

- Limited sample size 213 can affect the generalizability of findings.
- We advocate for further research in several areas to understand the link between other social forms like organizations, associations, cultural communities and marginalized minorities' access to social media.
- It is important to consider that correlation does not imply causation, and other factors may play a role in this relationship.

4. Conclusion

The importance of this study is unique in its investigation of the key dimensions of contemporary public discourse and politics. It seeks to enhance our understanding of political polarization, echo chambers, public deliberation, and social accountability, which have profound implications for informed decision-making, civic engagement, and the quality of democracy in Morocco. The findings of the study offer practical recommendations for mitigating polarization and promoting more diverse, inclusive, and accountable public discourse on social media since the viewpoints are reproduced out of expertise that represent an educated mature populace (age between 40 - 60). Ultimately, this research has the potential to inform both policy and public discussions, making it a vital exploration of our socio-political landscape. Citizen participation is essential in shaping these endeavors and making quality governance decisions. The study summarizes how:

- 1) The availability of personalized content, driven by algorithms on social media, can reinforce these homophilous groups to echo chambers together to exercise pressure on decision-makers.
- 2) Extreme polarization can lead to policy gridlock, making it challenging for governments to address pressing issues (Social Accountability).
- 3) Addressing these challenges may require efforts to promote information diversity, encourage civil discourse, and foster a more open and inclusive political environment to facilitate policy-making in the age of social media.

Social media has had a profound impact on how people engage with their governments and hold them responsible, which frequently presents both possibilities and difficulties for social responsibility. Social media gives people and organisations a platform to openly and effectively express their issues, complaints, and viewpoints, which can facilitate direct connections between the public and decision-makers (Harmono, 2024). It is a plethora for public deliberation, participative governance and decision-making. Indeed, social platforms may be used to mobilise widespread public pressure, which compels governments to address social concerns, making direct pressure to influence policy or at the very least force governments to respond to popular priorities. In fact, with the public's input now available to governments nearly instantly, governments may respond more quickly to new challenges. Polarisation and echo chambers on social media also pose pressure on governments to act quicker when it comes to participatory governance. Personalised algorithms tend to organise people into homogeneous groups based on common beliefs, and these groups frequently mobilise swiftly to make agreements and coordinated demands. Governments are frequently forced to respond quickly to preserve public confidence and stability in the face of strong and perhaps overwhelming public pressure from these divided groups (Malila, 2019). All in all, social media poses issues even as it strengthens the state's capacity to hold governments responsible and respond more quickly to citizen requests. The state's responsiveness may occasionally be hampered by the amplification of

divisive voices and echo chambers, which frequently makes it challenging for governments to enact policies that balance competing agenda items and appease the divergent public opinions. However, social media platforms remain a real public opinion barometer, enabling decision-makers to assess the seriousness of situations, track public opinion, and modify policy as necessary (Norris, 2009). Social media platforms will enhance the whole-of-society and whole-of-government coordination to reform governance and decision-making procedures, in a streamlined C2G and G2C collaboration. It is a platform for interaction and real-time dialogue, transparency, mutual accountability for a more inclusive and participatory society for more good governance (Azelmad, 2024).

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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