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THE ROLE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS IN SHAPING POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES AND THEIR IMPACT ON SECURITY

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Abstract. This article examines the role of social networks in contemporary political communication, the mechanisms through which they shape political ideologies, and the opportunities and threats they pose to national security. The research draws on a systematic review of secondary sources, the comparative-historical method, and a case study of the Arab Spring (2010–2011). The findings show that social networks function simultaneously as a catalyst and a filter in ideological processes: while they broaden political participation, they also heighten the risks of disinformation, polarization, and external interference. The article concludes with recommendations for strengthening information security.

Keywords: social networks, political ideology, national security, disinformation, echo chambers, political communication, digital space, Arab Spring.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, social networks have evolved from a simple means of communication into a central arena where political narratives are created, contested along ideological lines, and amplified to the wider public consciousness. Citizens increasingly rely on digital platforms not only to communicate but also as their primary source of political information and as a key tool for shaping their own political identity. Scholars argue that digital networks can mobilize large populations within a short period of time, lay the groundwork for the formation of new virtual communities, and possess the power to fundamentally transform traditional forms of political participation [1, 2]. For this reason, these issues remain at the center of attention for both the political elite and the academic community.

The expansion of the digital sphere has given rise to new virtual environments in which ideological debate, political mobilization, and the shaping of public opinion occur simultaneously. These platforms create conditions conducive to phenomena such as “echo chambers” and “filter bubbles,” which reinforce selective exposure to information and deepen political polarization [3, 4]. Political actors — governments, parties, social movements, and foreign entities — can exploit these processes to pursue their own strategic aims, disseminating messages, shaping public sentiment, and influencing mass attitudes. Research shows that such interactions can escalate into large-scale political manipulation through misinformation, coordinated disinformation campaigns, and algorithmic amplification [5].

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The prominent role that social networks have come to play in political communication is directly linked to concerns over national security. Digital networks have become an important weapon of information warfare, creating opportunities for state and non-state actors to conduct influence operations, intensify societal conflict and discord, recruit vulnerable population groups, and incite extremist radicalization [6]. These phenomena can be classified within the framework of "information disorder," encompassing misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation [7].

The relevance of the topic is determined by the fact that the complex interplay among political communication, public opinion, and digital manipulation calls for a deeper understanding of how online platforms shape the ideological landscape and what vulnerabilities arise within the national security environment. **The purpose of the study** is to identify the role and mechanisms through which social networks shape political ideologies and to assess their impact on national security. To achieve this purpose, the following **objectives** were set: first, to systematize existing scholarly approaches to the topic; second, to reveal the mechanisms of ideological influence exerted by social networks (algorithmic curation, selective exposure, emotional content); third, to analyze the practical manifestation of these mechanisms through the case of the Arab Spring; and fourth, to develop recommendations for strengthening national security.

The object of the study is the process of contemporary political communication, while its **subject** is the role of social networks in shaping political ideologies and their impact on national security. **Working hypothesis:** social networks function simultaneously as a catalyst and as a filter in ideological processes, and it is precisely this dual nature that makes them a significant factor in national security.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The foreign literature on this topic can conditionally be divided into four strands.

The first strand focuses on network-based mobilization and social movements. Z. Tufekci argues that digital networks make it possible to organize protests rapidly, but that such movements tend to be fragile because they lack durable organizational structures [1]. M. Castells advances the concept of "mass self-communication" enabled by networks, revealing the emotionally driven, horizontal nature of social movements [2]. W. Bennett and A. Segerberg, meanwhile, articulate the logic of "connective action," in which personalized ideas spread through networks alongside more traditional forms of "collective action" [8].

The second strand examines echo chambers and political polarization. C. Sunstein shows that social networks can lead citizens to select only information consistent with their own views, thereby eroding a shared public sphere [3]. E. Pariser, through the concept of the "filter bubble," demonstrates the risk that personalized algorithms isolate users from information that conflicts with their existing views [4]. Empirical research, however, paints a more complex picture: Bakshy and colleagues found that the degree of exposure to ideologically diverse content on Facebook is shaped more by individual user choice than by the algorithm itself [9]; Cinelli and colleagues showed that the echo-chamber effect varies across platforms [10]; Garimella and colleagues analyzed the role of "bridging" users who connect differing viewpoints in political discourse and the social "cost" they

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bear for doing so [11]; and Bail and colleagues demonstrated experimentally that exposure to opposing views does not always reduce polarization [12].

The third strand is devoted to disinformation and information warfare. C. Wardle and H. Derakhshan distinguish among types of "information disorder," providing a conceptual foundation for research and policymaking [7]. H. Allcott and M. Gentzkow assessed the scale of fake-news dissemination during the 2016 U.S. election [13]; S. Vosoughi and colleagues found that false information spreads more widely and rapidly on Twitter than true information [14]. S. Stieglitz and L. Dang-Xuan showed that emotionally charged messages are shared more widely and quickly [15]. J. Prier analyzed social networks as a strategic weapon of information warfare [6], while J. Tucker and colleagues provided a systematic review of the existing scholarly literature [5]. E. Morozov emphasizes that these same tools are also used by authoritarian regimes for propaganda and surveillance [16].

The fourth strand assesses the political role of social networks through the case of the Arab Spring. P. Howard and colleagues sought to demonstrate the significant role of social media in shaping political discourse [17]. M. Lim analyzed the relationship between opposition movements and social media in Egypt over the period 2004–2011 [18]. S. Aday and colleagues examined the relationship between new media and conflict [19]. M. Lynch highlighted both the possibilities and the limitations of online resistance against authoritarian states [20]. G. Wolfsfeld and colleagues argued that the influence of social media depends on offline political conditions — a "politics comes first" perspective [21]. A. Bruns and J. Burgess analyzed the temporary "publics" that form around hashtags [22], while C. Hine laid the groundwork for an ethnographic approach to studying online environments [23].

Thus, the existing literature has extensively examined, each in isolation, the mobilizing potential of social networks, polarization, disinformation, and information warfare. However, studies that treat the mechanisms of political-ideology formation and their impact on national security as an integrated, dual-natured system — particularly in Uzbek-language scholarship — remain insufficient. This article aims to help fill that gap.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a qualitative approach, taking secondary sources — monographs, articles in international peer-reviewed journals, and analytical reports — as its object of analysis. Sources were selected according to their relevance to the topic, the academic standing of the publication venue, and their date of publication (primarily 2011–2021).

The study employed the following methods: a **systemic approach** — examining social networks, ideology, and security as an interconnected, integrated system; **analysis and synthesis** — classifying and generalizing existing theoretical perspectives; **content analysis** — systematically extracting key concepts, evidence, and conclusions from scholarly sources; a **case study** — an in-depth examination of the Arab Spring (2010–2011), with particular focus on events in Egypt, as a discrete case; the **comparative-historical method** — comparing the opportunities and threats posed

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by social networks; and **inductive and deductive reasoning** — moving from particular cases to general patterns and vice versa.

The limitations of the study are as follows: first, it relies on secondary sources rather than primary empirical data (surveys, interviews, or platform-derived data); second, because the case study focuses on a single event, conclusions should be extended to other political contexts with caution. These limitations point to the need for future empirical research conducted within national contexts.

4. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

4.1. Social networks as both catalyst and filter in ideology formation

The findings show that social networks function simultaneously as a catalyst and as a filtering agent in the process of political-ideology formation. Their catalytic function lies in the fact that user-generated content reaches wide audiences without passing through the gatekeeping mechanisms of traditional mass media, creating conditions for the rapid spread of particular ideas [1, 2]. Their filtering function, by contrast, manifests through algorithmic curation and users' own choices, which leave alternative viewpoints on the margins.

Selective exposure reinforces prior beliefs and encourages the formation of ideologically homogeneous communities — so-called "echo chambers" [10]. Within such communities, political discourse tends to become increasingly polarized: repeated exposure to like-minded views heightens confidence in the correctness of one's own position and increases intolerance toward dissenting opinions [11]. At the same time, this phenomenon should not be absolutized. Empirical evidence indicates that exposure to ideologically opposing content often depends more on users' own choices than on the algorithm [9], and that confrontation with opposing views does not always reduce polarization [12]. Ideological polarization, therefore, is not the product of technological factors alone, but of the interaction between technology, human psychology, and social identity.

4.2. Strategic use: emotional content and targeted influence

Political actors and interest groups also use social networks for strategic purposes. Coordinated campaigns, highly precise audience micro-targeting, and content with strong emotional charge are widely used tactics for influencing political attitudes and mobilizing support [5]. For instance, viral content with high emotional impact — particularly content that evokes fear or anger — generates greater engagement among users and spreads more rapidly, thereby extending its ideological reach [15]. The fact that false information spreads more widely and quickly than true information [14] further heightens the risks of such processes. As a result, online platforms expand the capacity to disseminate ideological influence rapidly and on a large scale, beyond the bounds of traditional mass-media oversight.

4.3. Case study: the Arab Spring (2010–2011), the case of Egypt

The Arab Spring vividly demonstrated the role of social networks in shaping political ideologies and influencing national security. In the case of Egypt, the Facebook page "We Are All Khaled Said" united more than 400,000 users, coordinated protest demonstrations, and disseminated reformist messages opposing the authoritarian regime [17]. Twitter, too, saw more than 230,000 users

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actively posting about political events at the height of the protests, creating information flows that rapidly circulated opposition views outside the reach of traditional mass media [18].

Visual content also played an important role. According to available sources, YouTube videos depicting police brutality in Cairo and Suez were viewed millions of times, intensifying public sentiment against state oppression and strengthening solidarity among protesters [19]. Hashtags such as #Jan25 (Egypt) and #SidiBouzid (Tunisia) became central mobilizing symbols of shared grievance and political aspiration, playing an important role in uniting citizens and reinforcing civic activism [22]. In this way, social networks gave citizens the opportunity to encounter alternative viewpoints and to take part in open discussions on democracy, human rights, and governance.

It should also be emphasized that the role of social networks should not be absolutized. Offline political conditions — economic grievances, a sense of social injustice, and the organizational capacity of the opposition — shape the ultimate effect of social media influence [21]; and the fact that crowds easily mobilized through networks often fail to translate into durable political structures illustrates the fragility of such movements [1, 20].

4.4. Opportunities and threats from a national security perspective

Social networks pose a distinct set of risks to national security systems. The rapid spread of politically charged information can be used as a vehicle for disinformation, foreign interference, or radicalization, posing a serious test to the state's capacity for oversight and effective countermeasures. The scholarly literature notes that the spread of digital falsehoods can shift public opinion, erode trust in state institutions, and even influence electoral processes [13].

The case of Egypt also illustrates another dimension of this threat. In late January 2011, during the height of the protests, the authorities first attempted to restrict access to Facebook and Twitter and subsequently moved to shut down internet access almost entirely: on 27–28 January, approximately 93 percent of the country's networks went offline [24]. These measures failed to halt the protests: on 11 February 2011, President Hosni Mubarak resigned. At the same time, online monitoring gives governments the ability to track activists and suppress opposition [16]. Social networks, therefore, can function both as a means of encouraging civic activism and as a tool of surveillance and control.

The Arab Spring also produced significant political and social effects at the international level. Information disseminated through global mass media and social networks triggered diplomatic responses abroad: a number of foreign governments and international organizations issued statements in support of democratic reform, while non-governmental organizations used online content to raise public awareness and coordinate humanitarian assistance. These developments demonstrated the capacity of social networks to project local ideological movements onto the international stage.

The findings of the analysis can be summarized in terms of the dual nature of social networks, as shown in the table below.

Table 1. Opportunities and threats of social networks (author's analysis)

Opportunities	**Threats**

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Expansion of political participation and civic engagement	Disinformation and manipulative campaigns
A space for alternative viewpoints and open debate	Echo chambers, polarization, and intolerance
Rapid mobilization and organization of the public	Foreign interference and influence operations
International visibility for local ideas	Radicalization and extremist recruitment
A feedback channel between the state and society	Declining trust in state institutions; surveillance and control risks

5. CONCLUSION / RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study confirm that social networks function within the contemporary political-communication system not merely as a means of exchanging information, but as a digital space possessing complex mechanisms for shaping ideological constructs, influencing public consciousness, and exerting strategic influence over political processes. The working hypothesis was confirmed: social networks act simultaneously as a catalyst and as a filter in ideological processes.

Social networks are defined by their dual nature. On the one hand, they expand civic engagement, democratize participation in political processes, and give the public access to alternative viewpoints. On the other hand, the digital environment's openness to disinformation flows, manipulative campaigns, radicalization, and foreign interference poses a significant risk to national security. The case of the Arab Spring shows that while social networks play a decisive role in accelerating political mobilization, coordinating mass protest, and forging ideological unity, their control, blocking, or exploitation for political purposes directly affects state stability and information sovereignty.

Based on the findings obtained, the following recommendations are proposed:

1) improve the political and legal mechanisms regulating political communication, while maintaining a balance between freedom of expression and information security;

2) introduce continuous educational programs aimed at raising digital and media literacy among the population, particularly young people;

3) develop sustainable institutional mechanisms against disinformation, including fact-checking systems and practices for the rapid, transparent dissemination of official information;

4) establish cooperation with social media platforms and open a dialogue on the transparency of their algorithms;

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5) develop a scientifically grounded system for monitoring socio-political processes on social networks in order to detect threats at an early stage, implemented in accordance with the principles of respect for human rights;

6) expand empirical research (surveys, content analysis) into the ideological influence of social networks within the context of Uzbekistan and Central Asia.

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