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Understanding social media and civic engagement research nexus: A systematic literature review

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Abstract
A growing body of research supports the influence of social media on people's personal and professional lives. Differently around the world, research academics have conceived the relationship between social media and civic engagement. Therefore, we attempted to analyse the existing literature on social media and its relationship with civic engagement through a comprehensive study of the literature. We also sought to recognise current trends, gaps in the literature, and different perspectives to develop transpicuous propositions that would guide future study. A total of 110 research publications that were published in journals and included in the Web of Science database were examined using a systematic review methodology, and the findings and outcomes were then summarised considering current research trends. According to this systematic review, social media is seen as facilitator in civic engagement with Facebook, Twitter and Myspace being the most popular social media platforms in previous research studies. The thorough research and systematic analysis of studies in the discourse, which have not yet been consolidated, form the foundation of the paper's originality. Future study directions for examining social media potential in civic involvement are provided by the purposely presented, contextual, and methodological approaches, which have implications for knowledge growth.

Keywords: Systematic literature review, social media use, civic engagement, Social media platforms

Introduction
Social media and well-being are emerging phenomena in contemporary research. Most of the social media research takes it as a common social practice that has both positive and negative effects on an individual's mental, social, and physical health. Despite its negative effects, social media is becoming more popular. Individuals, institutions, and governments across the world are using social media platforms to achieve their goals.

With the ease of Internet and mobile device accessibility, social media users are increasing in India. As per recent data (November 2021) this number stood at 518 million in 2020 and expected to rise to 1.5 billion till 2040. This huge user base offers numerous opportunities and challenges for regulatory institutions. Challenges for managing individual privacy, fake information circulation, digital divide and many more are posing threat for governments. On the other hand, improved communication, citizen involvement, civic engagement, cost saving, social well-being all offers lucrative reasons to use social media for governance purpose.

Social media has emerged as life changing technology for individuals, organizations, and government bodies. It is fostering the communication and connectivity between the entities thus developing new insights, knowledge sharing, innovation, governance, engagements, and involvements into different realms of lives. Social media has penetrated the life of individuals and organizations in such a manner that no one can escape from the impact of social media either positive or negative. With the increasing impact of social media on personal as well as organizational lives, studies on it are also increasing. Many studies have been conducted on impact of social media, its relationship with well-being, different personalities, and other life aspects.

Increasing importance of civic values and people's participation in modern societies, role of social media in civic engagement becomes imperative. Benefits arisen out of civic participation led the countries or economies to promote it through various measures and use of social media is one among them.

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Hence, new mechanism of communication just like social media can change the entire landscape of society functions and citizen participation. Democracy like India, where government is focusing on *less government and more governance* approach, social media offers immense opportunities and advantages for country as a whole. In line with this notion, studies (Warren, Sulaiman, & Jaafar, 2014; Zait, Andrei, & Horodnic, 2017) [41, 44] have confirmed that social media usage and civic engagement is closely intertwined. Zait, Andrei, & Horodnic, (2017) [44] opined that ICT and social media are changing the way citizen are communicating and involving with government in terms of civic engagement. Thus, it would be interesting to find out how research studies across the world are relating civic engagements with different social media users and citizens. At this juncture, it becomes pertinent to go for systemic literature review (SLR) to identify the literature and research gap for enhancing the knowledge base in the arena of social media research. Keeping this discussion as pivotal, present study aims to explore the research studies conducted on social media use and civic engagement, its paradigms, conceptualisation and avenues for future research through systematic reviews.

Purpose of the study and research objectives
Present study attempts to explore the social and civic engagement literature in systemic way so that the following research objectives can be achieved.
a) To explore the general trend in social media and civic engagement research.
b) To identify the dominant social media paradigms in the field of civic engagement.
c) To analyses the current trends influenced the conceptualization of social media in civic engagement.
d) To find out the future avenues for research intertwined social media and civic engagement.

Rationale of the study
World is moving towards more engaged society with increased civic participation at every level. Volunteering in outreach programs, attending society meetings, increased political participation with offline and online modes are popular among certain groups of citizens. Government and enforcement bodies are also taking various measures to increase citizen participation from planning to execution of the policies and schemes. Studies (Swart, Peters, & Broersma, 2019; Shklovski, & Valtysson, 2012) [38, 36] have also indicated that increased civic engagement led to many advantages in terms of cost, time, and effectiveness.

Table 1: Social Media and India (2022)

S. No.	Indicators	Numbers
1	Total population in India	1.40 billion
2	Active social media users in India	0.467 billion
3	Number of Internet users in India	0.658 billion
4	Number of Mobile Internet users in India	0.601 billion
5	Annual growth in active social media users.	19 million + (4.2%)
6	Annual growth of Internet users	34 million + (5.4%)
7	Average daily time spent using Internet	7 hours 19 mins
8	Average daily time spent using social Media	2 hours 36 mins

***Source*:** https://www.theglobalstatistics.com/india-social-media-statistics/ accessed on May 16, 2022.

With total 1.40 billion population in India, from student to elderly, every section of citizens is now active on social media. Table 1 indicates the increasing presence and penetration of social media in Indian society. Thus, using social media as new source for increasing civic participation offers immense opportunities. In line with this notion, present study becomes imperative in contemporary scenario.

Methodology
The methodologies employed in our systematic literature review are described in this section. We describe how studies were collected and reviewed for inclusion in the review, as well as potential sources of research bias.
A systematic literature review (SLR) summarises existing knowledge while also highlighting gaps and prospective research options (Petticrew and Roberts, 2006) [30]. It is methodologically different from tradition or narrative form of literature review. SLR encompasses the elaboration of steps taken to identify, select, scan and analyse the literature in order to increase the reliability, transparency and reduce the biasness (Fink, 2019; Tranfield *et al*., 2003; Bhimani, Mention and Barlatier, 2019) [14, 39, 3]. SLR provides the opportunity to replicate and review differences & similarities thus enhance the knowledge of specific domain/ area. Despite many limitations, SLR is valuable in social media research because of its ever-changing boundaries.
In this study, descriptive analysis has been presented. Various qualitative techniques such as categorization based on social media types & methodology, pattern matching etc. have been used to describe the results.

Research Questions
In order to understand the diversity and role of social media usage in civic engagement and governance related issues, study has used the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria adopted by various scholars in the field of SLR.
The study attempts to answer the following research questions.
RQ1: What is the recent trend in social media and civic engagement research?

RQ2: What are different methodological and theoretical perspectives on social media in civic engagement?

RQ3: What are the dominant social media paradigms in the field of civic engagement?

RQ 4: How have the current trends influenced the conceptualization of social media in civic engagement?
Apart from it, present study also tried to explore different geographical pattern and spread of social media and civic engagement research. At last, the study will suggest some explored areas and future avenues for the research on social media and civic engagement.

Search Strategy
We used three-stage systematic review procedure; planning, execute on and final reporting (Tranfield *et al*., 2003) [39]. Purpose of research and database has been identified at planning stage. In order to achieve stated objectives, broad scanning of articles has been done to include different definitions, paradigms, scopes and development trajectory of research domain. Search of research papers/ studies has been kept limited to peer-reviewed journals of web of

science database (Podsakoff *et al*., 2005) [45]. The initial list of research articles have been generated by using the Web of science (WoS) database. WoS is one of the comprehensive databases of peer-reviewed journals covering the wide range of disciplines. It features many tools for advanced searching, tracking and analysing the research studies. As studies on intersection of social media and civic engagement are spread across the globe and disciplinary boundaries, a comprehensive database was required to ensure that important and significant research work is not excluded. There is an increasing trend of using WoS database in analytical and systematic literature reviews. A substantial number of research studies (Mongeon, & Paul-Hus, 2016; Santini, & Carvalho, 2019) [27, 32] have preferred WoS database for analytical and systemic literature review. Thus, at this point using WoS database for studying the intersection of social media and civic engagement seems appropriate.

Identifying the selection criteria: Keywords and Search terms
The main objective of present study is to study intersection of research on social media and civic engagement. Thus, at first the combination of terms related to both areas (i.e. Social media AND Civic engagement) has been used to identify the research articles. A total of 777 articles have been found. Then, automation tools of WoS have been used to filter and refine the output.

At first, '*Year*' filter has been used to get only last 12 years (2022-2010) studies. A total of 732 articles have been identified by system. Later, '*WoS Categories*' automation has been used to exclude non-related field such as information science library science, Computer science

interdisciplinary applications, psychology clinical, psychology developmental, Anthropology, Language linguistics, Geography, Engineering, Telecommunication etc. Total 554 articles have been filtered by system. Language filter has been used to include only English language articles. With language filter 06 articles have been removed. In '*document types*' corrections, editorials, chapter proceedings, report all have been excluded. Journals are considered as authentic source of reliable studies (Donohue and Fox, 2000) [47], thus only including journal article will improve the rigor of the study. Owning to the linguistic limitations journal articles in different language have also been excluded. Later, 531 articles have been filtered with quick filter '*open access*' to refine the list of articles in order to get full text articles. In order to ensure complete and comprehensive review, only full-text articles were evaluated if they were available in the database. Thus, 132 articles have been identified for further analysis.

Compiling the final included body of knowledge
At first, complete output was '*eye-balled*' for completeness, accuracy and consistency for searched key terms used (Full text availability, English language and journal article type). Second, authors read the abstract from the exported results. A total 113 articles have been selected for further study. In third step, all listed journal articles were read in complete for assessing social media and civic engagement approaches, paradigms, different types, theoretical models, impact & influence, respondents, and research methodology. After all these three steps, final selection of 110 articles has been done from WoS database. Layout of complete search strategy has been given in Figure 1.
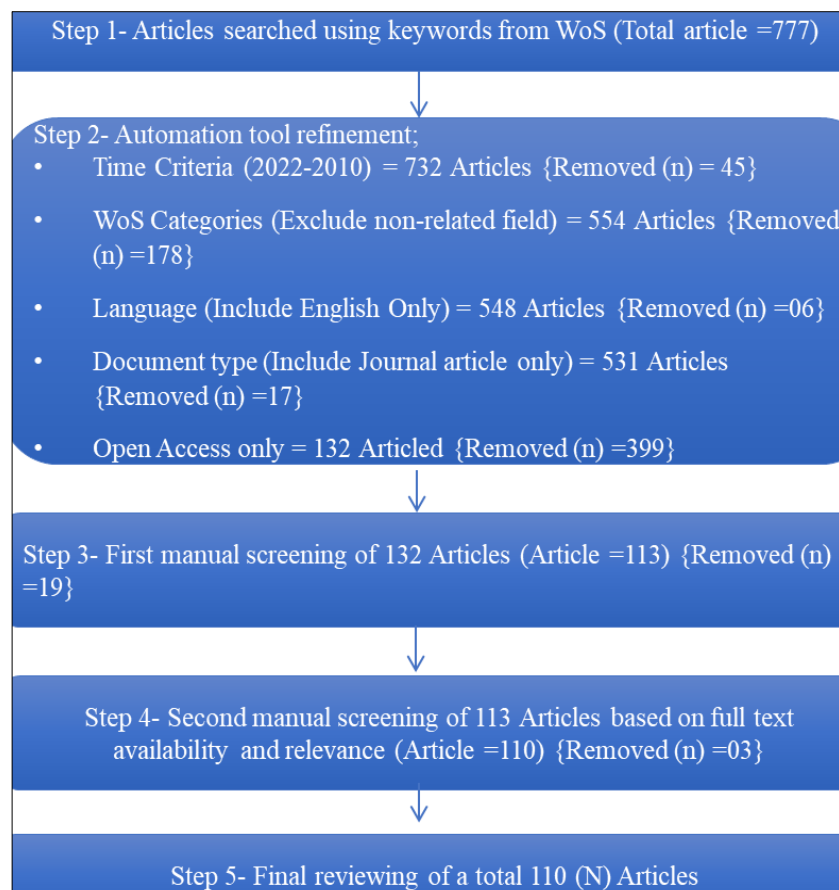

Fig 1: Literature search Procedure

Findings and Discussion
General trend in literature
This part of paper deals with trend and emergence of social media research in civic engagement on the basis of time, country, funding agencies, citations, publications, authors and categories.

Year wise
Figure 2 indicates the increasing trend of social media and civic engagement research. It can clearly be seen from the graph that role of social media in civic engagement is on increasing trend since 2011. This emergence suggests a wider acceptance of social media role in managing civic engagement at different level.
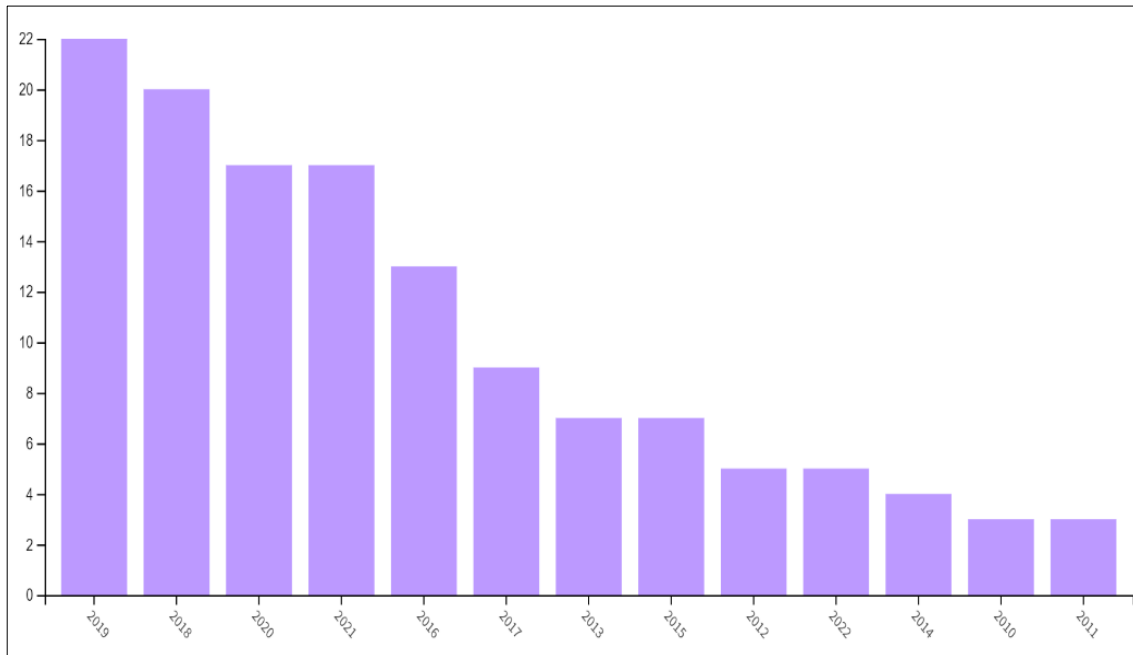
Fig 2: Year wise trend of social media and civic engagement research

Country and Regional focus: United States, England, and the Netherlands are the top three countries for social media and civic engagement research (Figure 3). Many wealthy nations are concentrating on leveraging social media to increase civic engagement. Comparatively fewer poor nations are represented in research on social media and civic involvement. In order to have a civically engaged society through the effective use of social media, this area can therefore be investigated more in the context of developing nations.
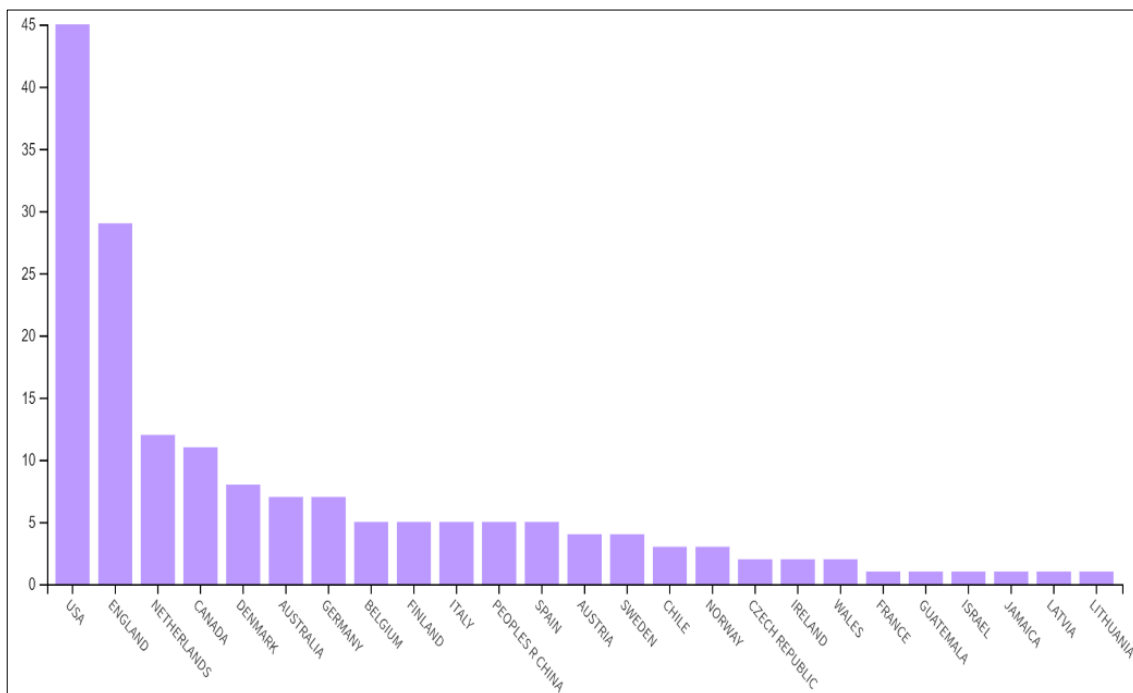

Fig 3: Country wise trend of social media and civic engagement research

Funding agencies: The funding sources for research on social media and civic involvement are shown in Figure 4. It is evident that the agencies in developed countries are proactive in funding the research on social media and civic engagement. The top three funding organisations for integrated research on social media and civic participation are the European Commission, the UK Research Innovation (UKRI), and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC, formerly the Social Science Research Council and part of UKRI). All these financial organisations are based in Europe, a sign of the region's government's growing interest in using social media for civic engagement.
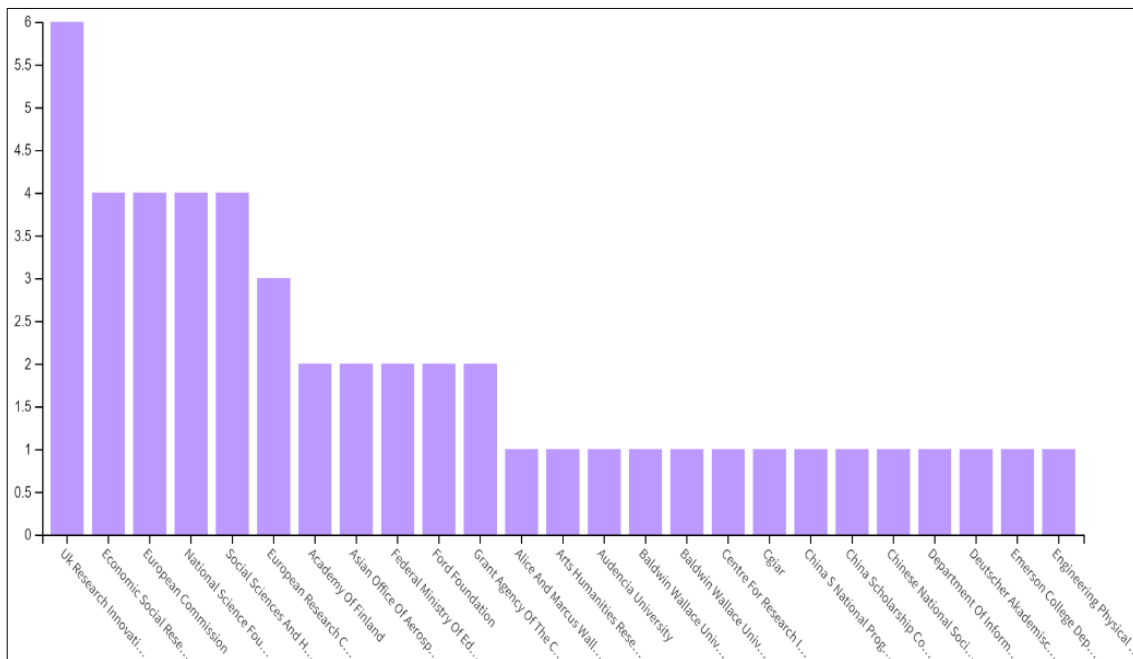

Fig 4: Funding agencies wise trend of social media and civic engagement research

Citations: Figure 5 indicates that with the increasing number of studies, the citations are also increasing. Since 2011 to 2021 increasing citation indicates a growing importance and significance of social media and its role in promoting civic engagement.
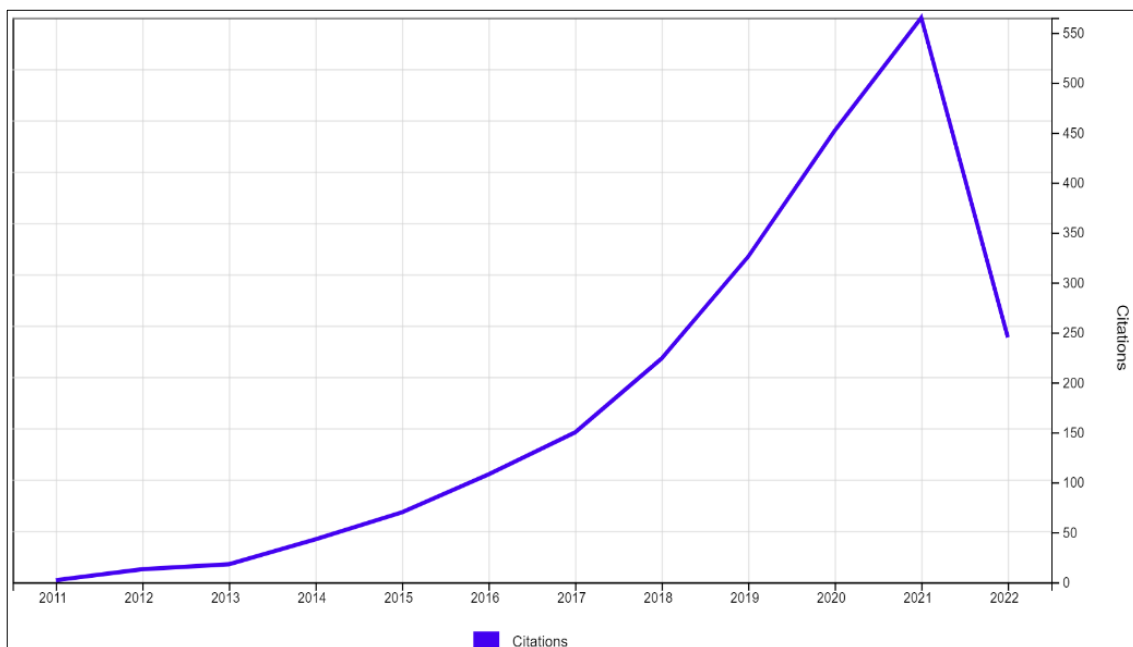

Fig 5: Citation wise trend of social media and civic engagement research

Important Authors and Publishers: Important writers and publishers in the field of social media and civic engagement research are highlighted in Figure 6 & 7. Three well-known researchers in this area are De Zuniga HG, Boulianne S, and Lane DS. While the major publishing companies that produce comparatively more research works about social media and civic engagement are Sage, Taylor & Francis, and Elsevier.
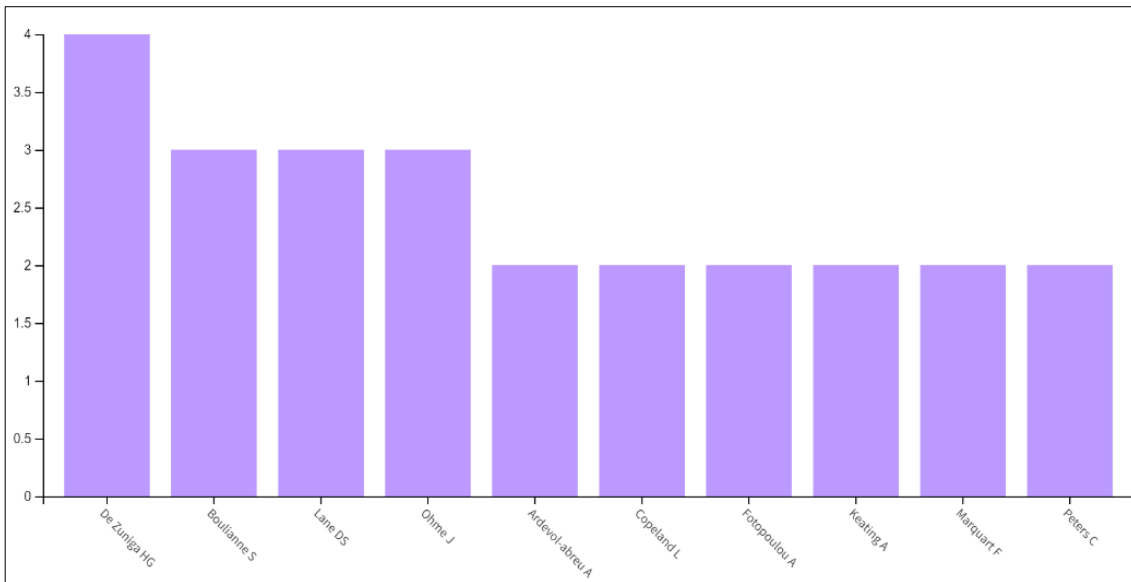
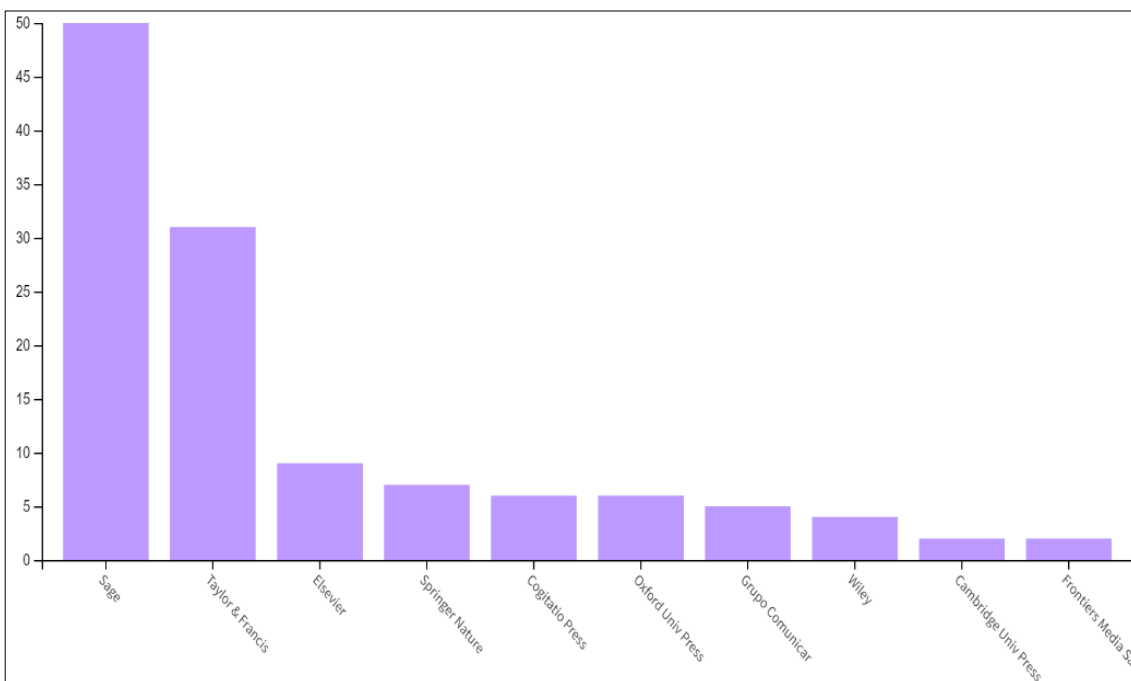**Fig 6:** Important authors in social media and civic engagement research

Fig 7: Significant publishers in social media and civic engagement research

Different categories research contribution: Figure 7 & 8 indicate that most of the research studies on social media and civic engagements are conducted and published in communication discipline followed by sociology and political science. Social sciences interdisciplinary and psychology multidisciplinary domain have also seen a good number of publications on social media and civic engagement. However, business, development studies and economic domains have seen comparatively less emphasis on this area of research.
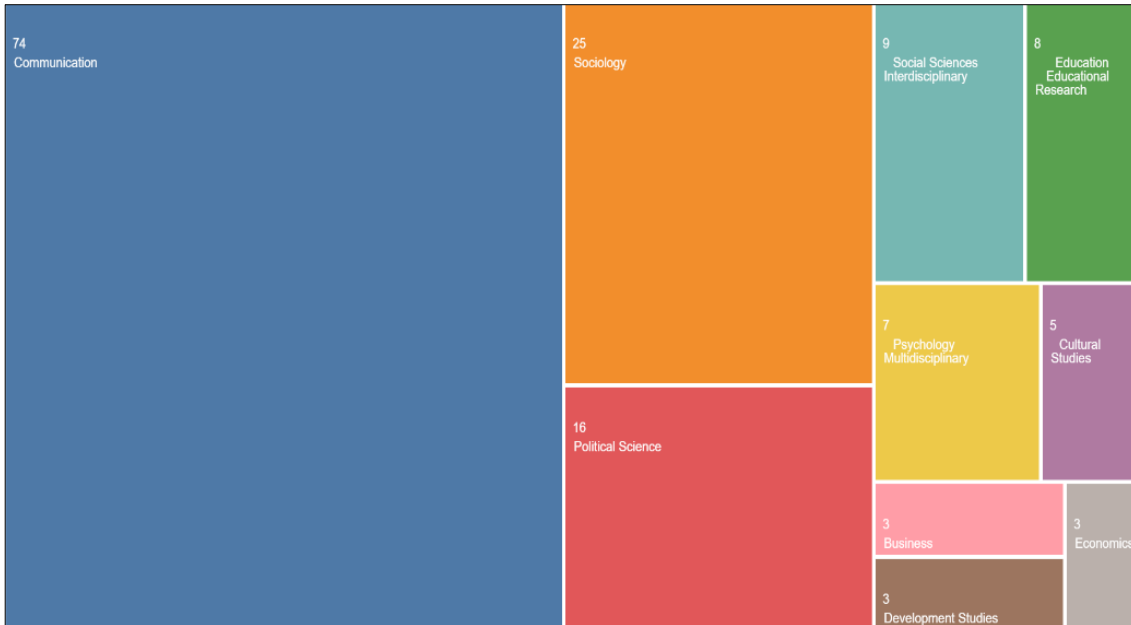
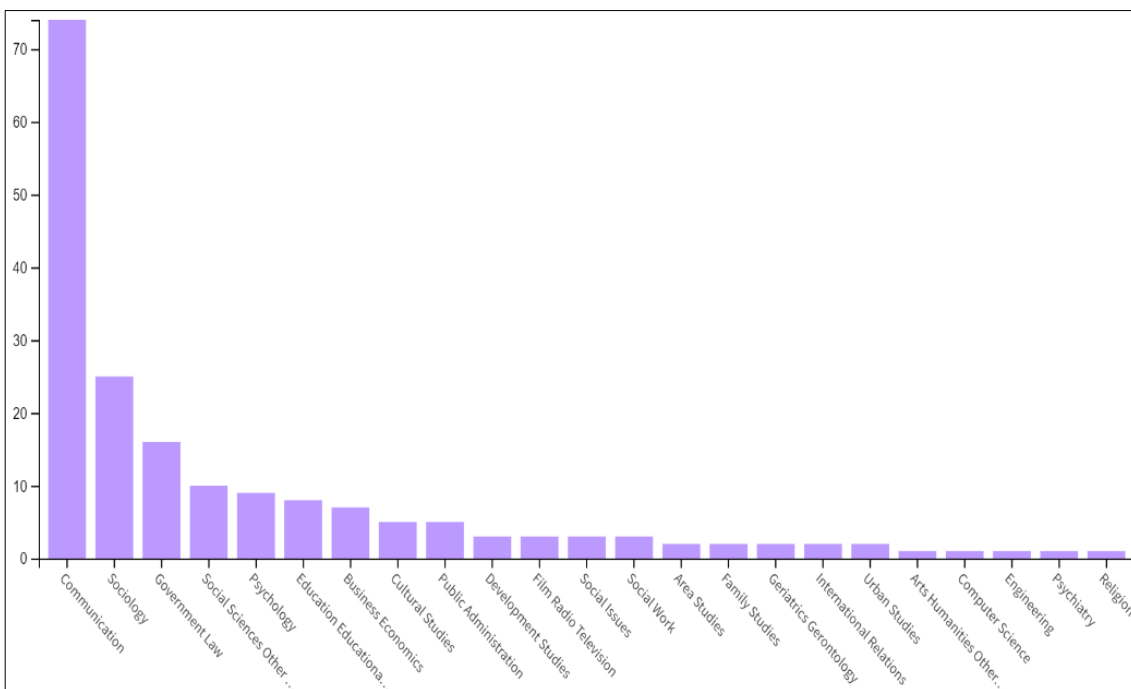**Fig 8:** Diagrammatic representation of domains

Fig 9: Important domains on social media and civic engagement research

Methodological and Theoretical Perspectives of Social Media and Civic Engagement

Analysis suggests that most studies (Culver, & Jacobson, 2012; Selva, 2016; Keating, & Melis, 2017; Dumitrica, & Bakardjieva, 2018; Adi, Gerodimos, & Lilleker, 2018; Mandarano, Meenar, & Steins, 2010; Rice, & Moffett, 2019; Hujanen, Dovbysh, Jangdal, & Lehtisaari, 2021) [8, 34, 19, 11, 1, 24, 31, 17] in the area of social media and civic engagement have adopted a quantitative research approach. However, only a small number (Brainard, & Edlins, 2015; Faith, & Prieto-Martin, 2016; Bartoletti, & Faccioli, 2016) [5, 12, 2] of studies have also used qualitative research methods, with content analysis as the focus. Youth and adult have been the focus of most studies. Few studies (Chan, 2019) [6] have also

tried interventionist approach to understand the actual impact social media on civic engagements.

Detailed and qualitative analysis of 110 articles revealed few important theoretical perspectives in the field of social media and civic engagement. Numbers of studies (Mandarano, Meenar, & Steins, 2010; Rice, & Moffett, 2019; Hujanen, Dovbysh, Jangdal, & Lehtisaari, 2021) [24, 31, 17] have explored the role of digital technologies in different forms of civic engagements such as public participation, digital social capital, political engagements & mobilization, citizen empowerment, social engagements & change, digital activism, energy use, civic crowd funding, community policing efforts, civic culture, civic learning and many more. However, most of these studies are concentrated on

outcomes-based research work, focus on process is relatively less.

What are the dominant social media paradigms in the field of civic engagement?

Social media has become the most important tool for information sharing and knowledge creation in our industrial era thanks to technology advancements, especially when many stakeholders are involved in the process (Suwana, 2020) [37]. Social media can therefore play a significant role in shaping any form of civic engagement. It allows the individual citizen to connect, interact and collaborate with large, diversified audience with fewer spans of time and cost. Thus, creates favourable environment and lead to mobilization & participation of large section of the audience. Additionally, numbers of studies (Moisescu, Dan, & Gică, 2022; Setiawan, Y., & Hamdi, 2022) [26, 35] have confirmed that social media also influences the attitude of individuals towards any object or event. Therefore, in case of civic engagement, social media can play driver as well enabler role in generating civic participation.

Social media platforms, software and technologies are the extension of exchange and sharing need of human being (Fernando, 2010) [13]. Thus, it is based on social need of human being to maintain relationship with diverse group of society and community (Schneckenberg, 2009) [33]. However, there is no common consensus on the definition of social media but generally it may be defined as *'collection of software tools that enables individuals to exchange information, collaborate, create and grow communities'* (Berners-Lee *et al*, 2006; Fernando, 2010) [46, 13]. Different social media sites (Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, Linkedin, MySpace etc.) and applications are becoming popular among individuals. Organizations and governments are also using social media technologies to enhance their knowledge sharing practices. Increasing number of studies (King, Gurbaxani, Kraemer, McFarlan, Raman, & Yap, 1994; Dierckx, & Stroeken, 1999; Yao, Ye, & Zhao, 2022) [21, 10, 43] is claiming the positive impact of social media usage on information sharing and innovation. In the domain of governance, social media is also playing important role ensuring the participation from diverse group of citizens, especially in democratic settings. Different research studies have also emphasized the role of social media in political engagement, mobilization, and participation as well (Culver, & Jacobson, 2012; Selva, 2016; Keating, & Melis, 2017; Dumitrica, & Bakardjieva, 2018; Adi, Gerodimos, & Lilleker, 2018; Mandarano, Meenar, & Steins, 2010; Rice, & Moffett, 2019; Hujanen, Dovbysh, Jangdal, & Lehtisaari, 2021) [8, 34, 19, 11, 1, 24, 31, 17]. Social media helps the government to realize the very basic principle of democracy by ensuring citizen participation from planning to execution level. However, few studies have also found out the disruptive impact of social media on democratic principles. Figure 10 elaborates the paradigms in emergence of social media in the field of civic engagement and participation.
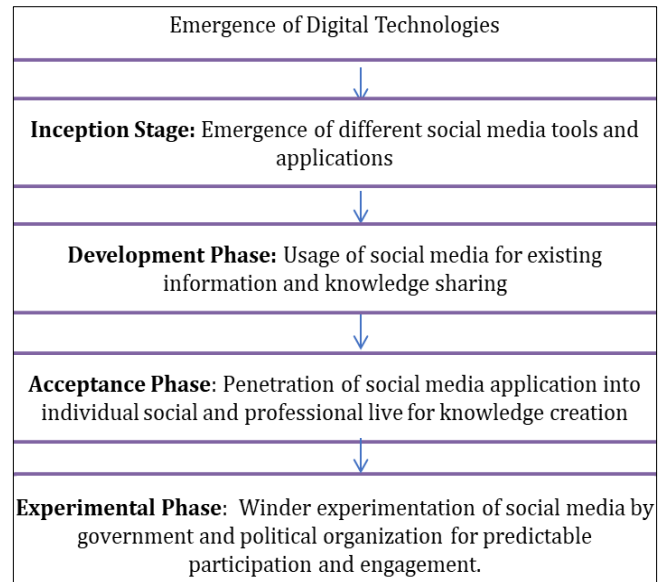

Fig 10: Paradigm shifts in social media emergence and development

How have the current trends influenced the conceptualization of social media in civic engagement? Social media and civic engagement

Over the period, many social media platforms have emerged and differentiated themselves as domain and interest specific mode of communication and participation. Distinguished platforms of social media have emerged for citizen engagement and participation in community issues and activities. Twitter is predominantly used for sharing political, environmental, and economic views whereas; Facebook is widely used for personal and societal views. Similarly, LinkedIn and Research Gate like platforms are profession and occupation specific. As a result, the emergence and conceptualization of social media as domain specific communication and participation platforms has led the individuals to use it as per their interest. Individuals use each social media platform as per their social network and resources availability to achieve their personal and professional goals (Gil de Zúñiga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012) [15]. Individuals are engaging themselves into different community-based activities and discussions over these social media platforms. However actual precipitation of these discussions into engagement and participatory behaviour is another area of research.

Current social media types found in literature

Most of the studies (Tsatsou, & Zhao, 2016; Adi, Gerodimos, & Lilleker, 2018; Rice, & Moffett, 2019) [40, 1, 31] have explored platforms such as MySpace, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter for studying the impact of social media on civic engagement. Although, direct messenger platforms are heavily being used by groups and institutions to promote civic engagements and participation, they have been less explored in realization of civic engagements. Few studies (Dumitrica, & Bakardjieva, 2018) [11] have also explored the print media such as newspapers, digital technologies as simulation games (Mandarano, Meenar, & Steins, 2010; Nash, 2015) [24, 28], hyper local media (Hujanen, Dovbysh, Jangdal, & Lehtisaari, 2021) [17] and virtual internship (Chen, & Stoddard, 2020) [7] on civic engagements.

Under explored areas in social media and civic engagement

There is an increasing trend of research studies on social media and civic engagement. However above discussion reveals few areas that can be further explored by research scholars such as: Direct messaging platforms /systems' impact on genuine civic participation; Civic involvement through social media in business, development studies, the environment, and the economy and Social media in developing and least developed economies for fostering more civic engagement.

Exploring the process would be a fascinating area to investigate because most studies (De Marco, Robles, & Antino, 2017; Kibet & Ward, 2018; Bobkowski, Jiang, Peterlin, & Rodriguez, 2019; Kunst, Porten-Cheé, Emmer, & Eilders, 2021) [9, 20, 4, 23] on social media and civic involvement are outcomes driven. Additionally, it is possible to do research to determine the true influence of social media on civic engagement by examining if this civic engagement translates into actual participation at various levels. Most of the studies (Xu, Ye, & Zhang, 2018; Koivula, Kaakinen, Oksanen, & Räsänen, 2019; Peters & Allan, 2022) [42, 22, 29] on social media and civic engagement are dominated by political consumerism, participation and involvement in different contextual settings.

Limitations and future directions for research

This section covers the limitations and shortcoming of existing literature found after SLR so that directions for future research can be captured. First, SLR is always based on previous research studies, identifies the current trends on particular topics and gives directions for future research. However, these propositions and recommendations are not empirically tested that should be next required step. Thus, empirical testing of these propositions offers lot of avenues for future researchers. Second, this study only included the journal articles from WoS database, other significant database might have significant research studies that have been omitted in our final body of knowledge. Number of research studies (Meho & Yang, 2007; Hicks & Wang, 2011; Mongeon and Paul-Hus, 2016) [25, 16, 27] indicated that many databases under-represent particular discipline, and many have the dominance of one language. Hence, this study and body of knowledge may also suffer from this representation issue. Thus, repeating the same study using other databases or combing different databases may provide more comprehensive body of knowledge and better insights. Thirdly, we have refined and limited our search strategy on exclusion of books, chapter proceedings, editorials, corrections and non-English articles. However, through methodological rigour, we tried to reduce the probability of an omitted paper bearing critical and important findings for analysis and interpretation of the results. Nevertheless, studies specially targeting books, chapter proceedings, editorials, corrections, and non-English articles may provide newer and different insights on social media and civic engagement. Fourthly, conceptualization and operationalization of civic engagement and social media may also be different in various studies; using different conceptualization may advance the body of knowledge in this field. Lastly, studies on different regions, countries also offer future avenues for research. Undoubtedly, there is a wide range of study in the area, and future studies may build on the ideas presented in this review to promote civic involvement and engagement through social media use.

Implications

This, study presents many practical as well as theoretical implications:

Practical Implications

Beyond organizational, industry, and market barriers, social media allows for one-to-many and many-to-many timeless interactions, fostering innovation, transparency, wellbeing, civic engagement in the society. For future of technological world, engaging the target audience on humanitarian and social ground, this analysis of literature on social media and civic engagement reveals that citizen are embracing social media and it is impacting their engagement on civic duties and responsibilities. Thus, policy makers should be concern of social media and its intersection with civic engagement. Government, regulatory and enforcement bodies are now one step ahead on technology adoption. However, technology acceptance and follow up by citizens are creating challenges for authorities. Thus, present study provides the insights on how social media can be leveraged to improve civic engagement among citizens. Apart from this, the review also contributes to the section of knowledge on social media and its impact on individual lives.

Theoretical Implications

Role of social media is well documented in governance research. However, literature is silent on role and impact of social media on promoting civic engagements and participation especially in context of India. Thus, present study provides a strong theoretical foundation for exploring the role of social media in different contextual settings of India. Research can target the different outcomes, antecedents, and determinant of social media usage for less engaged civic societies. This study offers numerous avenues for pursing social media and civic engagement research for long-term advantage to the societal development.

Conclusion

This systematic review was conducted to find out the current trend and research gap in social media and civic engagement research. This SLR paper has provided an overview of research studies related to impact/role of social media on civic engagement. The study shows that increasing number of research on social media and civic engagement are empirical and outcome based with quantitative research approach being preferred methodology. Present study has identified popular sample unit, types of social media used, most focused countries and different civic engagement types. Besides, we also found that dominant civic engagement type/means currently being explored by researchers are political engagement and mobilization. Additionally, the societal and environmental facets of civic involvement are less studied. Aside from that, research on social media- civic engagement has tended to focus more on rich and developed nations; developing markets and least developed nations have received less attention. This paper lays the groundwork for future research on the relationship between social media and civic engagements. It clarifies theoretical and contextual dynamics and provides the ways for additional analyses to enhance the existing quantitative findings.

Acknowledgment

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