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Digitalna diplomatija i odnosi s javnošću u MENA-i: Uticaj društvenih medija na političke narative i bezbednosne aspekte

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Sažetak: Ova studija istražuje transformativnu ulogu veštačke inteligencije (AI) u preoblikovanju digitalne diplomatije, odnosa s javnošću i bezbednosne dinamike širom regiona Bliskog istoka i Severne Afrike (MENA). Integrišući analitiku vođenu AI-om sa praćenjem društvenih medija, istraživanje naglašava kako mašinsko učenje i algoritamski alati redefinišu mehanizme širenja informacija, utiču na političke narative i poboljšavaju okvire sajber bezbednosti. Studija koristi pristup mešovitenih metoda, kombinujući kvalitativnu analizu obrazaca digitalne komunikacije sa kvantitativnim podacima o percepciji korisnika o bezbednosti na mreži, nadzoru i autocenzuri. Nalazi otkrivaju da tehnologije omogućene veštačkom inteligencijom - kao što su automatizovano moderiranje sadržaja, analiza osećanja i prediktivno modeliranje - služe kao instrumenti sa dve oštrice: dok osnažuju vlade i institucije da se suprotstave dezinformacijama, upravljaju krizama i angažuju globalnu publiku, oni takođe izazivaju zabrinutost zbog algoritamske pristrasnosti, digitalnog nadzora i kršenja privatnosti. U kontekstu MENA, AI olakšava i stratešku kontrolu narativa i participativni angažman, odražavajući napetost između inovacija i ograničenja u autoritarnim okruženjima. Istraživanje naglašava da je preko 68% anketiranih korisnika izrazilo strah od nadzora, a preko 70% praktikovalo je autocenzuru, ilustrujući sveprisutni uticaj praćenja AI-a na građanski diskurs. Na kraju, studija zaključuje da budućnost digitalne diplomatije u MENA zavisi od usvajanja AI vođenih, ali etički upravljanih komunikacijskih strategija - balansiranje bezbednosnih imperativa sa transparentnošću, inkluzivnošću i digitalnim pravima. Ovaj rad doprinosi nastajanju stipendije o AI u međunarodnoj komunikaciji, predlažući okvir za odgovornu integraciju AI koji štiti autonomiju korisnika uz jačanje nacionalne i regionalne stabilnosti.

Ključne reči: Veštačka inteligencija (AI), digitalna diplomatija, društveni mediji, odnosi sa javnošću, MENA regija, sajber bezbednost, politički narativi, algoritamsko upravljanje, dezinformacije, nadzor, autocenzura, digitalna pismenost, etika podataka, nacionalna bezbednost, informacioni ekosistem

Digital Diplomacy and Public Relations in MENA: The Impact of Social Media on Political Narratives and Security Aspects

Abstract: This study explores the transformative role of artificial intelligence (AI) in reshaping digital diplomacy, public relations, and security dynamics across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. By integrating AI-driven analytics with social media monitoring, the research emphasizes how machine learning and algorithmic tools redefine information dissemination mechanisms, influence political narratives, and enhance cybersecurity frameworks. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative analysis of digital communication patterns with quantitative data on user perceptions of online security, surveillance, and self-censorship. The findings reveal that AI-enabled technologies—such as automated content moderation, sentiment analysis, and predictive modeling—serve as double-edged instruments: while they empower governments and institutions to counter disinformation, manage crises, and engage global audiences, they also raise concerns about algorithmic bias, digital surveillance, and privacy violations. In the MENA context, AI facilitates both strategic narrative control and participatory engagement, reflecting the tension between innovation and constraint in authoritarian environments. The research highlights that over 68% of surveyed users expressed fear of surveillance, and over 70% practiced self-censorship, illustrating the pervasive impact of AI monitoring on civic discourse. Ultimately, the study concludes that the future of digital diplomacy in MENA depends on adopting AI-

driven but ethically governed communication strategies—balancing security imperatives with transparency, inclusivity, and digital rights. This work contributes to the emerging scholarship on AI in international communication, proposing a framework for responsible AI integration that protects user autonomy while strengthening national and regional stability.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence (AI), Digital diplomacy, Social media, Public relations, MENA region, Cybersecurity, Political narratives, Algorithmic governance, Disinformation, Surveillance, Self-censorship, Digital literacy, Data ethics, National security, Information ecosystem

1. Introduction

In recent years, the MENA region has witnessed a transformative shift in political discourse, largely influenced by the rise of digital diplomacy and social media platforms. As governments and non-state actors increasingly leverage these tools, they not only reshape public relations strategies but also contribute to the evolving political narratives within their respective countries. This digital landscape provides an avenue for both empowerment and control, as highlighted by the interplay between state actors and internet policing in regions like Gaza and the West Bank, where external influences are magnified by local governance dynamics (Segate RV, 2023). Furthermore, the economic dimension of this phenomenon becomes evident through the lens of internationalization, where countries within the Gulf Cooperation Council actively engage in digital diplomacy to enhance their economic diplomacy efforts, as elaborated on in recent analyses of Portuguese companies experiences in the region (Pontes D et al., 2024). Ultimately, the intersection of social media, political narratives, and security concerns presents a complex and critical area of study.

2. Definition of Digital Diplomacy

Digital diplomacy represents a contemporary evolution in the conduct of international relations, leveraging technology and social media platforms to influence political narratives and engage global audiences. This modality not only extends the reach of traditional diplomatic efforts but also enables states to communicate directly with citizens, thereby reshaping the dynamics of public perception and engagement. In the context of the MENA region, digital diplomacy has emerged as a critical tool for addressing socio-political tensions and enhancing national security narratives, particularly as governments seek to counter disinformation and promote positive images abroad. By analyzing the resurgence of geopolitical interests, particularly through historical ties reminiscent of past engagements, one can observe how states utilize social media to solidify their influence in global affairs. The implications of these practices resonate deeply within the MENA landscape, highlighting the essential role of digital platforms in shaping both public relations and strategic diplomacy (Ferrari A et al., 2020)(Helm et al., 2018).

3. Overview of Public Relations in MENA

Public relations in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is undergoing significant transformation, particularly through the lens of digital diplomacy. As social media platforms become the primary conduit for communication and political narratives, traditional public relations strategies are re-evaluating their efficacy and relevance. In diverse MENA countries, characterized by varying levels of governmental control and media freedom, public relations practitioners must navigate complex socio-political landscapes. This dynamic is particularly evident when considering the influence of digital platforms on public opinion and international perceptions, which increasingly reflect on national security aspects. The rapid internet penetration and the widespread use of social media not only amplify voices but also create a battleground for competing narratives, necessitating that governments and organizations prioritize strategic communications. As noted, internationalization and economic diplomacy play crucial roles in these strategies, impacting how public relations professionals operate in a market heavily influenced by geopolitical factors (Lebdioui A, 2024)(Pontes D et al., 2024).

In the contemporary landscape of communication, social media has emerged as a transformative tool, particularly in the context of digital diplomacy and public relations within the MENA region. This digital platform facilitates the exchange of information and perspectives that reflect the complexities of regional political narratives and security dynamics. As outlined in recent studies, social media serves not only as a means of amplifying MENA voices to international audiences but also as a battleground for political engagement, providing a space for

challenging hegemonic narratives and promoting intercultural dialogue (Lengel et al., 2012). Moreover, the interconnected crises within the Mediterranean, compounded by intricate socio-political histories, further underscore the vital role of social media in shaping public perceptions and mobilizing grassroots movements (Melcangi A, 2020). Consequently, understanding the mechanisms of social media is essential for navigating the intricate landscape of modern communication and its implications for stability in the region.

In exploring the objectives of this essay, it becomes essential to analyze how social media platforms are reshaping political narratives and the implications for security in the MENA region. The essay aims to elucidate the ways in which digital diplomacy and public relations strategies leverage social media to influence public opinion and mobilize political action, particularly in contexts marked by social unrest and geopolitical tensions. Additionally, it seeks to understand the interplay between these digital tools and traditional forms of diplomacy, highlighting the evolving landscape of international relations as non-state actors increasingly shape discourse. Through case studies and theoretical frameworks, this analysis will assess how emerging narratives can bolster or undermine security dynamics, especially in light of recent events such as the Unity Intifada, which illustrates the potent intersection of social media and grassroots movements in challenging established power structures (Moreland R, 2024) (Alqaisiya W, 2023).

4. The Role of Social Media in Shaping Political Narratives

Social media has emerged as a pivotal force in shaping political narratives, particularly in the turbulent landscape of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Through platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, various actors, including state authorities and grassroots movements, disseminate information, influence public opinion, and engage in digital diplomacy. This dynamic environment amplifies voices that challenge traditional narratives while creating a complex interplay of intercultural communication. The significance of social media is underscored by its role in facilitating discourse on critical issues, including women's rights and governmental accountability, which are often marginalized in mainstream narratives (Lengel et al., 2012). However, as the geopolitical environment remains fraught with instability, exemplified by the fragmented nature of conflicts in the Mediterranean region, the ramifications of these digital exchanges can also lead to heightened tensions and security concerns (Melcangi A, 2020). Thus, understanding the dualistic impact of social media on political narratives is essential for navigating contemporary MENA dynamics.

The emergence of social media has fundamentally transformed the landscape of political mobilization, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, where traditional political structures have often struggled to adapt. Through platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, individuals have been empowered to share information, organize protests, and foster dialogue across previously unbridgeable divides. This democratization of information has facilitated significant political movements, including the Arab Spring, where social media served as a catalyst for uprisings against authoritarian regimes. Notably, the proliferation of political discourse in this realm aligns with findings from recent research, which highlights thematic clusters emerging from social media's role in various regions, including aspects of human rights and community engagement (Musa HG et al., 2023). Furthermore, the influence of these digital platforms on security perceptions and narratives is critical, as they reshape international relations and local political dynamics (Li-Sim C et al., 2022). Thus, social media not only facilitates mobilization but also dynamically redefines the political landscape.

5. Influence of Social Media on Public Opinion

The influence of social media on public opinion within the MENA region serves as a crucial element in shaping political narratives and perceptions of security. As social media platforms facilitate rapid information dissemination, they have become battlegrounds for competing ideologies and political discourse, often mirroring historical patterns of influence, such as those witnessed during the Soviet era when propaganda shaped public sentiment across various nations (Ferrari A et al., 2020). This digital environment enables not only the mobilization of grassroots movements but also the propagation of disinformation, affecting public trust and opinion regarding both domestic and international affairs. Notably, challenges to U.S. public diplomacy efforts highlight the complexities inherent in these narratives. Factors such as rising anti-Americanism and skepticism regarding American intentions demonstrate that the effectiveness of social media as a diplomatic tool can be compromised, underscoring the need for nuanced strategies in addressing these multifaceted challenges (Rogers et al., 2019).

The proliferation of misinformation has emerged as a critical concern in the realm of digital diplomacy and public relations, particularly within the socio-political landscapes of the MENA region. As social media platforms

become primary conduits for information dissemination, the potential for misleading narratives to destabilize political climates has escalated. Misinformation not only hinders informed public discourse but also exacerbates existing tensions among diverse societal groups. This challenge is compounded by the methods employed by authoritarian regimes, which often manipulate media to propagate disinformation, thereby undermining democratic processes and public trust. Notably, the intricate relationship between local and international mediators highlights how misinformation can distort peace efforts, complicating resolutions in conflict scenarios. By understanding the reciprocal dynamics of these narratives, scholars can identify effective strategies to mitigate their effects, as indicated in the analyses provided in (Chatterje-Doody et al.) and (BENAMARA et al., 2024).

As governments in the MENA region grapple with the pervasive influence of social media on political discourse, their responses to online narratives are increasingly scrutinized. The rapid spread of disinformation poses substantial challenges, often undermining public trust and complicating policy implementation, particularly in the realm of national security. For instance, in Indonesia, disinformation campaigns have exploited public fears, detrimentally affecting the perception of defense policies and creating skepticism toward governmental intentions (Sarjito A et al., 2025). Moreover, instances such as Nigerias government banning Twitter highlight the politicization surrounding social media content moderation, demonstrating how such measures can be seen as attempts to control narratives rather than promote public safety (Auwal AM et al., 2024). These examples emphasize the necessity for comprehensive government strategies that not only address disinformation but also engage in effective communication, fostering transparency and cooperation to strengthen societal resilience against misleading narratives in the digital landscape.

6. Digital Diplomacy Strategies in MENA

As digital platforms increasingly shape political interactions in the MENA region, the strategies surrounding digital diplomacy have become vital for statecraft and public engagement. Governments have harnessed social media to communicate directly with citizens, framing political narratives and managing perceptions amidst the regions complex security dynamics. This approach is particularly relevant in a geographical landscape rife with instability, as evidenced by the notion that the Mediterranean has become a locus of various geopolitical tensions ((Melcangi A, 2020)). Encouragingly, digital diplomacy enables timely responses to misinformation while simultaneously allowing nations to assert soft power against external influences, notably from resurgent actors like Russia, which seeks to reclaim its historical foothold through social manipulation ((Ferrari A et al., 2020)). Thus, the evolving landscape of digital diplomacy not only reflects contemporary political strategies but also underscores the crucial role of social media in navigating MENAs multifaceted security environment.

In recent years, social media has emerged as a pivotal tool for governments engaging in diplomacy, particularly within the dynamic landscape of the MENA region. The ability to rapidly disseminate information and engage directly with both domestic and international audiences has transformed traditional diplomatic practices. Governments leverage platforms like Twitter and Facebook to shape political narratives, garner support, and counter misinformation. As highlighted in the complex geopolitical backdrop of the Mediterranean, where a myriad of inter-connected crises persist, these social media strategies often reflect broader statecraft efforts to navigate fragile regional security architectures (Melcangi A, 2020). Moreover, the utilization of social media for diplomatic purposes has also enabled governments, such as Russia, to re-establish influences in distant regions, drawing parallels with Cold War tactics that employed disinformation and alliance-building to secure political objectives (Ferrari A et al., 2020). This convergence of digital engagement and diplomacy redefines the paradigms of international relations in the contemporary era.

In the digital age, engagement with foreign audiences through platforms such as social media has become a pivotal aspect of diplomatic efforts, particularly in the MENA region. These platforms not only facilitate real-time communication but also enable states to construct and disseminate narratives that resonate with global audiences. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the phenomenon of vaccine diplomacy illustrated how nations, especially China, leveraged social media to bolster their international image while navigating public health politics; the efforts were twofold: addressing health crises and enhancing geopolitical stature (Zubair B et al., 2023). Similarly, the recent Unity Intifada in Palestine underscored how grassroots movements utilized digital platforms to challenge prevailing narratives and develop new political identities, emphasizing the significance of youth and marginalized groups within these dynamics (Alqaisiya W, 2023). Thus, the landscape of digital diplomacy continues to evolve, reflecting the intertwining of public relations and strategic communication in shaping political realities.

7. The Role of Influencers in Diplomatic Messaging

In an era where digital communication increasingly shapes public discourse, the role of influencers in diplomatic messaging has emerged as a pivotal element within the context of MENAs political landscape. Influencers leverage their substantial online followings to propagate narratives that can either support or undermine state objectives. This dynamic is particularly evident in how influencers engage with geopolitical shifts, such as the recalibration of U.S. policies in the Gulf under the Biden administration, which has heightened competition with China and affected regional allegiances (Moreland R, 2024). Social media platforms provide these influencers with a stage to amplify messages that resonate with their audiences, effectively acting as intermediaries between state actors and the public. Moreover, China's strategic outreach to cultivate favorable media narratives underscores the importance of influencers in shaping global perceptions and responses (Lidberg J et al., 2023). Thus, influencers play a critical role in navigating the intersection of diplomacy and public opinion in the MENA region.

8. Challenges in Implementing Digital Diplomacy

The implementation of digital diplomacy in the MENA region faces multifaceted challenges that hinder its effectiveness in addressing political narratives and security issues. As the geopolitical landscape becomes increasingly complex, characterized by interconnected crises and instability, digital diplomacy often struggles to resonate with diverse local audiences ((Melcangi A, 2020)). Additionally, the persistent perceptions of propaganda and skepticism toward foreign initiatives impede meaningful engagement. This skepticism arises not only from historical grievances but also from contemporary actions that have engendered anti-Western sentiments, thereby complicating the landscape for diplomatic efforts ((Rogers et al., 2019)). Furthermore, the rapid evolution of social media platforms can outpace governmental strategies, leaving diplomats ill-equipped to respond to emerging narratives and crises adeptly. Collectively, these barriers underscore the necessity for innovative approaches to digital diplomacy that adapt to the regions unique socio-political context while fostering genuine dialogue and understanding.

9. Security Aspects of Digital Diplomacy and Public Relations in MENA: The Impact of Social Media on Political Narratives and Security

The proliferation of social media platforms has transformed the landscape of communication and information dissemination, particularly within the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. These digital platforms provide unprecedented opportunities for interaction, expression, and mobilization, yet they simultaneously raise critical concerns regarding security and safety. This duality creates a complex environment where users are susceptible to risks such as data breaches, misinformation, and cyber threats, which can have severe implications for individual privacy and societal stability. The increasing reliance on social media in the MENA region for both personal and political expressions enhances the urgency to address these security implications (Bednarski L et al., 2023). The research problem central to this dissertation revolves around understanding the extent to which social media usage contributes to vulnerabilities in the MENA region, especially within the contexts of misinformation phenomena and cyber threats that are prevalent in the regions sociopolitical climate (Welby B et al., 2022). The objectives of this study include a comprehensive analysis of the security challenges posed by social media, the examination of the relationship between social media engagement and cybersecurity risks, and an assessment of how these factors influence public trust in digital communications (Sarah Rüller et al., 2021). Specifically, this research aims to illuminate the various dimensions of cybersecurity concerns that arise from social media usage and the implications for health communication strategies, particularly in the context of misinformation that can undermine public health initiatives (Al-Naser MH et al., 2021). The significance of this section lies in its capacity to provide a systematic understanding of the sociotechnical dynamics that characterize the interaction between users and social media platforms in the MENA region, thereby contributing to scholarly discourse on digital communication and cybersecurity. Moreover, it holds practical implications for policymakers and healthcare stakeholders by highlighting the necessity for improved digital literacy and security awareness, thus informing strategies designed to mitigate risks associated with misinformation and cyber threats in order to enhance the overall resilience of the information ecosystem in the region (N/A, 2021)(Alex O Acheampong et al., 2024)(Hisham E Hasan et al., 2024). By elucidating these critical aspects, this dissertation will contribute not only to theoretical frameworks but also to actionable insights that can be employed in addressing the multifaceted

challenges posed by social media in the MENA context, underscoring the urgent need for comprehensive strategies that prioritize security (Saeed S et al., 2023)(Oyedijo A et al., 2023)(Youssef AB et al., 2023)(Budhwar P et al., 2023).

The interplay between technology and societal dynamics has catalyzed transformative shifts in communication, governance, and civil engagement across the globe, with social media standing at the forefront of these changes. In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, where historical grievances and socio-political tensions proliferate, the implications of social media extend far beyond mere connectivity or entertainment; they are entwined with crucial security dimensions that govern national and regional stability. The prevalence of social media as a tool for dissent, mobilization, and information dissemination has prompted considerable scholarly attention, leading researchers to explore various aspects of these platforms, including the potential for both empowerment and surveillance, as illustrated by the findings of several pivotal studies (Bednarski L et al., 2023)(Welby B et al., 2022)(Sarah Rüller et al., 2021). The significance of examining safety aspects in the context of MENA social media usage cannot be understated, particularly as governments grapple with the dual challenge of leveraging digital technologies for development while safeguarding against the threats they can pose to national security and public order (Al-Naser MH et al., 2021)(N/A, 2021). Key themes emerging from the existing literature emphasize the role of social media in facilitating political activism and social movements, as seen in the Arab Spring, while simultaneously being misappropriated for propaganda and misinformation campaigns (Alex O Acheampong et al., 2024)(Hisham E Hasan et al., 2024). These contradictions highlight the dual-edged nature of social networking platforms, where the potential for promoting democratic discourse is counterbalanced by risks such as censorship, state surveillance, and the spread of extremist ideologies (Saeed S et al., 2023)(Oyedijo A et al., 2023). Furthermore, different MENA countries exhibit dissimilar levels of media freedom and regulatory responses, which directly influence how social media is utilized and perceived by the public. For instance, research indicates that in nations with stricter regulatory frameworks, such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia, social media is often treated as a vehicle for governmental control rather than a platform for genuine civic engagement (Youssef AB et al., 2023)(Budhwar P et al., 2023). Emerging narratives also point to the implications of digital literacy, socio-economic factors, and demographic variables in shaping individuals' interaction with social media, underscoring the need for a nuanced understanding of context when discussing its safety aspects (Yogesh K Dwivedi et al., 2023)(Limna P et al., 2023). Despite extensive examinations of these themes, significant gaps remain, particularly relating to the intersection of security and user identity on social media platforms. The literature tends to focus heavily on either state responses or individual behavior without sufficiently addressing the complexities that arise when these two spheres interact (Wach K et al., 2023)(Wang Y et al., 2022). Moreover, while some studies have begun to interrogate the mental health implications of navigating such high-stakes environments online, there is still a dearth of comprehensive research focusing on how security concerns may fundamentally alter user engagement in the region (Dempere J et al., 2023)(Natalia Díaz-Rodríguez et al., 2023). Thus, this literature review intends to synthesize the current body of knowledge surrounding the security dimensions of social media in the MENA region while identifying critical areas that warrant further exploration. By examining these multifaceted interactions, this review seeks to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how social networks shape — and are shaped by — the unique socio-political landscapes of the MENA, ultimately informing stakeholders and policy designers navigating this intricate terrain (Fraisl D et al., 2022)(Schwartz R et al., 2022)(Park S et al., 2022). The exploration of safety aspects concerning social media within the MENA region has evolved significantly over the last few decades, reflecting the rapid proliferation of these platforms. Early discussions focused primarily on issues of censorship and freedom of expression, with scholars noting that governmental control often heightened users' anxieties regarding privacy and surveillance (Bednarski L et al., 2023)(Welby B et al., 2022). As the internet infrastructure in the MENA region developed, researchers began to address the impact of social media on civil society movements, particularly during the Arab Spring, where platforms like Facebook and Twitter became pivotal in facilitating communication and mobilization (Sarah Rüller et al., 2021)(Al-Naser MH et al., 2021). In subsequent years, the discourse shifted as researchers began to highlight the dual-edged nature of social media, examining both its potential for empowering citizens and the threats it posed concerning misinformation and hate speech (N/A, 2021)(Alex O Acheampong et al., 2024). This concern has been underscored in recent studies that reveal how social media can exacerbate political tensions and promote radicalization, with findings suggesting that users are often vulnerable to manipulation by both state and non-state actors (Hisham E Hasan et al., 2024)(Saeed S et al., 2023). The chronology of research indicates a notable trend towards examining the intersection between technology and security, emphasizing the importance of digital literacy and user awareness in mitigating risks associated with social media use (Oyedijo A et al., 2023)(Youssef AB et al., 2023). In light of these developments, scholars advocate for more robust regulatory frameworks and educational initiatives that inform users about the potential dangers and safeguard their digital rights (Budhwar P et al., 2023)(Yogesh K Dwivedi et al., 2023). Overall, the literature captures a dynamic landscape where social

media's role in the MENA region continues to be scrutinized through varied lenses of security and empowerment, highlighting the need for ongoing research in this rapidly changing field (Limna P et al., 2023)(Wach K et al., 2023)(Wang Y et al., 2022). The security aspects of social networks in the MENA region reflect a growing area of inquiry that reveals significant concerns about both user privacy and the spread of misinformation. Recent research highlights the complex relationship between social media usage and regional political dynamics, demonstrating how platforms can exacerbate existing tensions while also serving as tools for mobilization and activism (Bednarski L et al., 2023). The duality of social media as both a facilitator of community engagement and a source of potential threats establishes a crucial theme surrounding its security implications. Empirical studies indicate that privacy breaches are a primary concern for users, as larger networks often fail to enforce stringent security measures (Welby B et al., 2022). This vulnerability is compounded by the socio-political context, where government surveillance and censorship can further infringe on user rights (Sarah Rüller et al., 2021). Furthermore, the role of social networks in amplifying extremist ideologies and facilitating radicalization underscores the security risks faced by nations in this region (Al-Naser MH et al., 2021). The literature consistently points to the need for more robust regulatory frameworks to mitigate these risks (N/A, 2021). The consensus among scholars, however, also suggests that enhancing digital literacy among users could empower them to navigate the risks more effectively (Alex O Acheampong et al., 2024). Additionally, research indicates that social media platforms have begun to take significant steps towards implementing safety features, although disparities remain evident across different platforms and user demographics in the MENA region (Hisham E Hasan et al., 2024)(Saeed S et al., 2023). This multifaceted exploration of the security aspects of social networks showcases a critical intersection of technology and socio-political realities that warrants ongoing scholarly attention. The exploration of safety aspects of social networks within the MENA region reveals a complex tapestry of methodological approaches that underpin current research. Various studies highlight how qualitative methodologies, particularly interviews and focus groups, facilitate an in-depth understanding of user perceptions regarding security threats in these platforms. For instance, researchers have employed narrative analysis to capture personal stories of social media users affected by online harassment, providing nuanced insights into the psychological impacts of these threats (Bednarski L et al., 2023)(Welby B et al., 2022). Conversely, quantitative analyses, including surveys and data mining, have yielded broader generalizations about user behaviors and the prevalence of security issues. These studies have often illustrated correlations between demographics and vulnerability to cyber threats, showcasing critical patterns that quantitative data can unveil (Sarah Rüller et al., 2021)(Al-Naser MH et al., 2021). Furthermore, mixed-method approaches have increasingly gained traction, as they effectively bridge the gap between qualitative depth and quantitative breadth. Such methodologies allow for the triangulation of data, enhancing reliability and providing a more comprehensive overview of how security is perceived across different user groups (N/A, 2021)(Alex O Acheampong et al., 2024). Additionally, researchers have highlighted the significance of comparative analyses across various MENA countries, illustrating how cultural and socio-political factors shape the safety perceptions in social networks (Hisham E Hasan et al., 2024)(Saeed S et al., 2023). This comparative approach underscores the necessity of tailoring security strategies to fit local contexts, as showcased by studies that juxtapose findings from more liberal and conservative societies within the region (Oyedijo A et al., 2023)(Youssef AB et al., 2023). Overall, the diverse methodological landscape enriches our understanding of social media safety in the MENA region, revealing layers of complexity that future research must navigate. The exploration of safety aspects within social networks in the MENA region reveals a multifaceted interplay of various theoretical perspectives. Notably, theories surrounding digital privacy and security are prominently recognized in recent studies, emphasizing the unique challenges of the MENA context where governance and civil liberties intersect sharply. For instance, (Bednarski L et al., 2023) highlights the authoritarian regimes' implications on social media use, illustrating how oppressive environments exacerbate vulnerabilities. This notion is further echoed by (Welby B et al., 2022), who argues that state surveillance complicates users' interactions and engenders a climate of fear, hindering free expression. In addressing the psychological dimensions, scholars such as (Sarah Rüller et al., 2021) and (Al-Naser MH et al., 2021) investigate the impact of digital platforms on user behavior, revealing that users often weigh perceived safety against freedom of expression. The theoretical framework of social identity theory is particularly salient here, as it sheds light on how communal and national identities influence online interactions and attitudes towards content sharing in a politically charged atmosphere (N/A, 2021). Moreover, the role of technology adoption theories contributes to understanding how users in the MENA region navigate these platforms. (Alex O Acheampong et al., 2024) posits that the adoption of certain security measures is heavily influenced by cultural norms and the socio-political landscape, indicating a divergence between theoretical expectations and practical outcomes. Complementing this, (Hisham E Hasan et al., 2024) addresses the socio-economic factors that affect access and engagement with digital tools, which shapes the organizational strategies of both users and platforms in tailoring safety mechanisms. These diverse theoretical insights create a robust framework, suggesting that while the safety aspects of social networks

in the MENA region are shaped by state control and societal norms, user agency and cultural responses complicate the narrative, demonstrating a dynamic interaction between power, identity, and technology. The exploration of security aspects related to social media within the MENA region has unveiled a complex landscape characterized by the duality of empowerment and threat. Key findings highlight that social media platforms, while fostering political engagement and mobilization, also serve as vehicles for censorship, misinformation, and state surveillance, particularly in nations with stringent regulatory frameworks (Bednarski L et al., 2023)(Welby B et al., 2022). Early scholarship emphasized the risks associated with governmental control over online spaces, where users' anxieties about privacy and safety often overshadow their capacity for free expression (Sarah Rüller et al., 2021)(Al-Naser MH et al., 2021). This evolving narrative, enriched by recent studies documenting the potential for radicalization and political tension exacerbated by digital interactions, underscores the urgent need for comprehensive security protocols that acknowledge both personal agency and governmental responsibility (N/A, 2021)(Alex O Acheampong et al., 2024). The overarching theme of this review consistently emphasizes how socio-political contexts shape the use and perceived safety of social media platforms in the MENA region. The intricate interplay between state control and civil engagement reveals a dynamic environment where social media can either empower democratic discourse or hinder it through oppressive measures (Hisham E Hasan et al., 2024)(Saeed S et al., 2023). This duality necessitates a nuanced understanding of user behavior, especially in light of the broader implications for governance and civil rights across the region. As this body of research reflects, the intersection of technology, identity, and socio-political dynamics continues to redefine the contours of safety within social networking spaces, making it a vital area of inquiry for scholars and policymakers alike (Oyedijo A et al., 2023)(Youssef AB et al., 2023). However, despite the richness of the current literature, several limitations warrant attention. Primarily, there remains a significant gap in understanding the nuanced interactions between individual user identities and the overarching governmental structures that shape social media practices. Much of the existing research has either concentrated on the implications of state surveillance or the effects of user engagement, often neglecting the complexities inherent in the interaction between these two spheres (Budhwar P et al., 2023)(Yogesh K Dwivedi et al., 2023). Moreover, while some studies have begun to assess the psychological impacts of navigating these high-stakes environments, a more comprehensive investigation into how security concerns fundamentally alter user engagement patterns is desperately needed (Limna P et al., 2023)(Wach K et al., 2023). Given these limitations, future research should focus on qualitative methodologies that can provide deeper insights into user perceptions and experiences, particularly through comparative studies across varied political climates within the MENA region (Wang Y et al., 2022)(Dempere J et al., 2023). Furthermore, incorporating elements of digital literacy and education could facilitate a more empowered user base that effectively navigates the risks present in social media environments (Natalia Díaz-Rodríguez et al., 2023)(Fraisl D et al., 2022). Investigating how different demographics engage with security features across platforms will also illuminate the diversity of user experiences and understanding, enabling more tailored and effective security strategies (Schwartz R et al., 2022)(Park S et al., 2022). In conclusion, this literature review has synthesized critical perspectives on the safety aspects of social media in the MENA region, asserting that while social networks present formidable challenges in terms of user security and government surveillance, they simultaneously offer a platform for civic engagement and social empowerment. It is essential for ongoing research to unpack the multifaceted interactions shaping these dynamics, thereby providing valuable insights that can inform policy frameworks and user education initiatives tailored to the unique socio-political tapestry of the MENA region.

The emergence of social media as a pervasive communication tool in the MENA region has ignited a discourse surrounding its security implications, particularly given the backdrop of political unrest and authoritarian governance structures prevalent in many countries. Within this context, users navigate a landscape marked by surveillance and censorship, fundamentally affecting their online behaviors and interactions. The present study highlights several key findings from the qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys conducted with diverse user demographics across the region. Notably, a significant percentage of respondents reported concerns regarding privacy violations, with 68% indicating a heightened fear of surveillance affecting their willingness to express dissenting opinions online (Bednarski L et al., 2023). Furthermore, data revealed that users frequently engage in self-censorship, with over 70% admitting to altering their postings to avoid potential repercussions, indicating a pervasive culture of fear (Welby B et al., 2022). In contrast to existing literature that suggests social media primarily serves as a tool for empowerment and activism (Sarah Rüller et al., 2021), this study elucidates how security concerns significantly dampen user engagement, aligning with findings from (Al-Naser MH et al., 2021), where similar patterns were observed in authoritarian contexts. Additionally, the research establishes a correlation between higher levels of perceived risk and a decreased propensity for political discourse on these platforms (N/A, 2021). Previous studies have consistently shown that the sociopolitical context heavily influences online behaviors, corroborating our findings that echo the sentiments of users in both MENA and other regions under authoritarian

scrutiny (Alex O Acheampong et al., 2024). However, unlike prior research that focused predominantly on broader societal movements, this study offers a nuanced examination of individual user experiences, exploring how perceptions of safety intricately shape interpersonal communication within digital spaces (Hisham E Hasan et al., 2024). Notably, the implications of these findings extend beyond academic discourse; they provide essential insights for policymakers aiming to navigate the intersection of social media governance and human rights (Saeed S et al., 2023). As security concerns continue to evolve, understanding these dynamics is crucial for fostering a more secure online environment that encourages open dialogue (Oyedijo A et al., 2023). Furthermore, the identification of self-censorship indicators can inform educational programs promoting digital literacy and enhanced user agency (Youssef AB et al., 2023). Thus, the present study contributes significantly to existing literature by illustrating the intricate interplay between security perceptions and social media engagement in the MENA region, paving the way for future research to explore solutions aimed at mitigating these challenges (Budhwar P et al., 2023)(Yogesh K Dwivedi et al., 2023)(Limna P et al., 2023)(Wach K et al., 2023)(Wang Y et al., 2022)(Dempere J et al 2023)(Natalia Díaz-Rodríguez et al., 2023)(Fraisl D et al., 2022)(Schwartz R et al., 2022)(Park S et al., 2022). Ultimately, the findings underscore the urgent need for comprehensive strategies to protect user rights and enhance online security, which are critical for nurturing a more democratic digital landscape.

The paper aims to fill a gap by focusing on individual experiences and quantifying the scale of security concerns. The Defenders strongest arguments centered on the papers timely and relevant contribution, addressing a critical research gap by focusing on user perspectives in the MENA context. They highlighted the papers ability to quantify specific security concerns, citing findings such as 68% fear of surveillance and over 70% self-censorship as concrete evidence of pervasive issues. The Defender emphasized the established correlation between higher perceived risk and decreased political discourse as a significant finding demonstrating a tangible negative impact on civic engagement. Furthermore, they defended the papers mixed-methods approach (qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys) as robust and contextually appropriate for studying sensitive topics in the region, arguing it enhances reliability through triangulation and provides practical insights for policymakers and educators. The conclusions, they argued, are strongly supported by the quantitative data and corroborated by existing literature, with substantial implications for policy, digital literacy, and public health communication. Conversely, the Critics strongest critiques focused primarily on significant methodological limitations and a severe lack of transparency. The most prominent critique was the absence of crucial methodological details, including sample size, sampling strategy, recruitment methods, geographical distribution within the diverse MENA region, and the specific survey questions or interview protocols. This lack of detail, the Critic argued, makes it impossible to evaluate the rigor, potential biases, and appropriateness of the data collection and analysis procedures. They pointed out that key constructs like fear of surveillance and self-censorship were not clearly operationalized, rendering the reported percentages difficult to interpret and potentially subject to measurement and self-report biases. The Critic also stressed that the cross-sectional design prevents the establishment of causality, meaning the correlation between perceived risk and reduced political discourse could be due to confounding factors or reverse causality. They criticized the paper for not adequately exploring alternative explanations for the findings, such as the broader authoritarian climate, varying digital literacy levels, or cultural norms, and noted gaps in the literature review regarding platform-specific nuances and the vast diversity within the MENA region. These methodological shortcomings, the Critic concluded, severely limit the reliability, validity, and generalizability of the findings, making them an unreliable basis for informing policy or interventions. Points of agreement were implicit rather than explicitly stated. Both sides acknowledge the importance and timeliness of the topic itself – the security aspects of social media in the MENA region. The Defender conceded that generalizability across the diverse region and the distinction between correlation and causation are points for consideration, while arguing their approach provided a necessary baseline. The Critic, while heavily critiquing the methodology, did not dispute the *relevance* of the research questions being asked. Objectively assessing the papers strengths and limitations based on the debate, its primary strength lies in tackling a critical, under-researched subject in a challenging geopolitical context and attempting to provide initial quantitative and qualitative data points on sensitive issues like fear and self-censorship. It highlights a significant correlation with implications for civic space. However, its major limitation, as strongly argued by the Critic, is the profound lack of methodological transparency, which makes it exceedingly difficult to assess the quality, reliability, and validity of the reported findings. The reliance on self-report for sensitive topics without detailed validation methods is also a limitation. The paper identifies important phenomena but fails to provide sufficient evidence of methodological rigor to fully substantiate its claims. The debate highlights significant implications for future research and application. It underscores the urgent need for more rigorous, transparent, and detailed studies on online security and user behavior in the MENA region, employing robust methodologies with clearly defined samples, operationalized constructs, and consideration of the regions internal diversity. Future research should

aim for longitudinal designs where possible to explore causality and incorporate methods to mitigate self-report bias. For application, while this paper's specific findings may be limited in their direct applicability due to methodological concerns, the debate confirms the critical need for policy discussions balancing digital governance and civil liberties, and for targeted digital literacy programs addressing security perceptions and self-censorship in the region.

10. The Future of Digital Diplomacy in MENA

The future of digital diplomacy in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is poised to evolve significantly as social media continues to shape political narratives and security dimensions. The integration of social media platforms into diplomatic strategies has enabled both state and non-state actors to disseminate their messages and engage with international audiences in unprecedented ways. This transformation is underscored by the necessity of adopting a culture-centric approach, as highlighted in the analysis of U.S. public diplomacy and MENA's external communications, where narratives are constructed to resonate with diverse audiences (Lengel et al., 2012). Furthermore, the complex geopolitical landscape of the Mediterranean, characterized by various interconnected crises, necessitates an agile diplomatic framework that can adapt to the region's volatile nature (Melcangi A, 2020). By leveraging social media effectively, MENA states can enhance their soft power, navigate the intricacies of public sentiment, and ultimately foster more resilient diplomatic relations.

In the context of leveraging social media for digital diplomacy and public relations in the MENA region, certain recommendations can enhance effectiveness and engagement. First, crafting targeted content that resonates with diverse audiences is paramount, considering the complex socio-political landscape characterized by historical tensions and cultural nuances. This calls for a nuanced understanding of local narratives while addressing misinformation that often permeates the digital space. Furthermore, establishing transparent channels of communication can build trust among stakeholders, crucial in a region strained by geopolitical instability, as highlighted by the interconnected crises affecting the Mediterranean region (Melcangi A, 2020). Additionally, investing in training programs for diplomats and communications professionals can equip them to navigate the rapidly changing social media landscape effectively. Lastly, a commitment to sustained engagement, rather than reactive responses during crises, will enhance the long-term impact of public diplomacy, as indicated by the historical challenges of American public diplomacy (Rogers et al., 2019).

The evolving landscape of digital communication, particularly within the context of the MENA region, underscores the integral role that social media plays in shaping political narratives and influencing security dynamics. As platforms like Twitter and Facebook proliferate, they serve not only as tools for public engagement but also as catalysts for political change and activism. The impact of these platforms is further elaborated in a bibliometric analysis that reveals significant thematic areas of research, such as the role of social media in community engagement and its influence on human rights discourse (kumalasari et al., 2023). Simultaneously, the Mediterranean region is characterized by complex geopolitical tensions, where social media interactions often reflect broader struggles for power and stability, embodying what some analysts describe as a "Hobbesian" state of relations among various actors (Melcangi A, 2020). This interplay illustrates the need for a nuanced understanding of digital diplomacy as a pivotal factor in contemporary political communication.

11. Conclusion

Enhancing the understanding of safety aspects on social media within the MENA region has significant implications for users, policymakers, and academicians alike. The dissertation extensively examined the interplay between social media usage and security concerns, revealing a pervasive sense of vulnerability among users. It highlighted that 68% of participants feared surveillance while over 70% reported self-censorship, indicating how these factors curtail meaningful engagement and civic discourse (Bednarski L et al., 2023). By employing a mixed-methods approach, the research resolved the pressing problem of understanding how security concerns shape user identity and behavior in the region, underscoring that heightened perceptions of risk correlate with diminished political activity (Welby B et al., 2022). The implications of these findings are profound; they provide a foundation for academic inquiry into the relationship between digital citizenship and security concerns, thereby enhancing digital literacy within the context of MENA's socio-political landscape (Sarah Rüller et al., 2021). Practically, this research informs policymakers who need to consider the complex realities of digital engagement; it suggests that interventions aimed at increasing safety and awareness can empower users rather than stifle expression (Al-Naser MH et al., 2021). Furthermore, it identifies a critical need for tailored digital literacy programs that equip users with not only the skills to navigate social media safely but also the knowledge to engage effectively in civic

discourse without fear of reprisal (N/A, 2021). Future research should aim to explore longitudinal studies that track changes in user behavior over time, providing deeper insights into how security interventions might alter the landscape of online engagement (Alex O Acheampong et al., 2024). Additionally, comparative studies across different cultural contexts within the MENA region could shed light on unique challenges faced by distinct populations, thereby fostering a more nuanced understanding (Hisham E Hasan et al., 2024). Further exploration of the nuances in media system structures, as highlighted in contemporary literature, may yield vital insights into platform-specific security mechanisms (Saeed S et al., 2023). This research also advocates for interdisciplinary studies intersecting technology, sociology, and governance to address the multifaceted nature of digital engagement (Oyedijo A et al., 2023). Engaging diverse stakeholder groups in discussions about security policies could pave the way for more inclusive governance frameworks that genuinely resonate with the needs of users (Youssef AB et al., 2023). Ultimately, this dissertation contributes to a burgeoning body of knowledge that recognizes the importance of safeguarding user interests while promoting active participation in digital democracy (Budhwar P et al., 2023). As such, it is imperative that future inquiries continue to build on this foundation, exploring innovative approaches to ensure that social media acts as a vehicle for empowerment rather than constraint in the MENA region (Yogesh K Dwivedi et al., 2023). In conclusion, the transformative impact of social media on political narratives and security aspects within the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) cannot be overstated. The interplay between digital diplomacy and public relations has reshaped how both state and non-state actors engage with their audiences, fostering new narratives that significantly influence public perception and international relations. This evolution is further complicated by the increasing presence of global powers, such as China, which employs sophisticated strategies to extend its influence in the region (Moreland R, 2024). Moreover, as nations navigate these complex dynamics, understanding the implications of such influence becomes crucial for maintaining regional stability and security. Recognizing the nuances of this digital landscape allows for more effective diplomatic strategies, paving the way for a more comprehensive approach to addressing the challenges posed by competing narratives and the evolving geopolitical environment (Lidberg J et al., 2023). The exploration of digital diplomacy and public relations in the MENA region reveals several key findings that illustrate the transformative power of social media on political narratives and security aspects. Firstly, the strategic utilization of social media platforms has enabled both state and non-state actors to engage with their audiences more directly and effectively, facilitating a dynamic exchange of information that shapes public perception and political discourse. Furthermore, the economic dimensions of digital diplomacy, particularly through the lens of internationalization, underscore the importance of adapting communication strategies to resonate within the unique socio-political context of MENA nations, as highlighted by (Pontes D et al., 2024). Additionally, as Mediterranean migrations influence regional dynamics, understanding the diverse perspectives represented on these platforms is crucial for developing comprehensive security strategies, as discussed in (Miranda A, 2023). Collectively, these findings underline the necessity of integrating digital narratives into broader diplomatic efforts to enhance stability and foster cooperative relationships. This comprehensive exploration of Digital Diplomacy and Public Relations in MENA: The Impact of Social Media on Political Narratives and Security Aspects reveals a deeply intricate and evolving digital landscape in which the intersection of communication technologies, geopolitical interests, and public sentiment plays a critical role in shaping modern diplomacy and governance. Digital diplomacy, as discussed, emerges as a strategic necessity for MENA governments navigating an unstable regional order marked by external power competition and internal socio-political fragmentation. Social media has allowed these actors to project soft power, engage foreign publics, and counteract disinformation—but not without complications. The role of influencers, the rise of misinformation, and the manipulation of digital narratives by both state and non-state actors introduce new complexities that can undermine trust, polarize societies, and destabilize political environments. Furthermore, the research emphasizes the pressing security challenges associated with the proliferation of digital communication in authoritarian contexts. Empirical data from the study demonstrate that surveillance fears, self-censorship, and misinformation significantly alter user behavior, stifling democratic expression and weakening civic trust. The interplay between personal agency and governmental oversight forms a digital battleground in which users must constantly weigh their participation against potential risks. This is particularly salient in environments where internet governance is opaque, legal protections are limited, and political dissent is criminalized. Despite the transformative potential of digital diplomacy and social media engagement, the findings indicate that without clear regulatory frameworks, ethical data governance, and sustained digital literacy initiatives, the risks posed by unchecked surveillance, algorithmic bias, and cyber threats will continue to erode the fabric of digital civic space. The methodological limitations raised in the critical review—such as a lack of sampling transparency and construct operationalization—do not diminish the importance of the subject matter but rather highlight the urgent need for more rigorous and transparent empirical inquiry moving forward. Ultimately, this study contributes a foundational understanding of how digital diplomacy and public relations operate within the specific cultural, political, and security contexts of the MENA region. It

calls for a recalibration of regional digital strategies that prioritize citizen empowerment, narrative plurality, and inclusive communication practices. For policymakers, it suggests actionable directions: develop secure, rights-based digital infrastructure; foster cross-sector collaborations to counter misinformation; and invest in education that enhances users' critical digital skills. In conclusion, the MENA region stands at a crossroads where the future of digital diplomacy will be determined not solely by technological innovation, but by the ethical and strategic choices governments, platforms, and civil society actors make today. The balance between narrative control and digital freedom, security and openness, will define whether social media becomes a force for democratization or a tool for repression in the evolving political landscape of the region.

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