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At the Heart of Social Networks: Influence, Disinformation and Societal Risk.

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Social networks have revolutionised how we communicate, stay informed and share moments of our daily lives. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and TikTok, to name but a few, have become an integral part of our daily lives. We use these platforms to keep in touch with our friends and family, share our experiences, keep informed, and express our opinions. But beyond these personal and often superficial uses, social networks play a much more complex and sometimes troubling role in our society.

The question arises: what impact do social networks have on societal security risk? How can these tools, initially designed to facilitate communication and information sharing, influence or even destabilise our society? In this article, we will attempt to answer this question by analysing the various aspects of the interaction between social networks and public security. We will look at their impact on influencing opinion, their role as a tool of influence, their place in the geopolitical context, the risks associated with Deepfake, their link with radicalisation and their use as a security monitoring tool.

I. The significant influence of social networks

A. The role of social networks in the manipulation of information

Social networks play a key role in the [manipulation of information](#), whether intentional or not (Colon, 2019). With billions of users, these platforms are fertile ground for disseminating [erroneous, biased or](#) malicious information (Balagué & Fayon, 2022).

The example of the various cases of police violence in the United States, particularly those affecting the African-American community ([Georges Floyd](#), [Tyre Nichols](#)) illustrates this reality. The videos and testimonies shared on social networks have often played a decisive role in publicising these events. But sometimes, they can also contribute to the circulation of unverified or even false information, amplifying [confusion and anger](#).

B. The speed and territorial amplitude of information propagation

Another significant aspect of the influence of social networks lies in the speed and territorial amplitude of the [spread of information](#) (Jain et al., 2021). Social networks have made the dissemination of information almost immediate and global with the help of increasingly innovative [dissemination formats](#).

Take, for example, the echo of police violence in the United States in France. Thanks to social networks, the events that took place thousands of miles away directly impacted French public opinion, generating [demonstrations of support and fuelling the debate on racism and police violence in the country](#). These events were taken up by groups defending the rights of black people in France, creating a phenomenon of transnational solidarity and, simultaneously, a feeling of insecurity caused by these demonstrations.

It is, therefore, crucial to understand the influence of these platforms and their role in shaping public opinion, both locally and internationally.

II. Social networks as tools of influence

A. Political influence and manipulation of information

In an increasingly digitised world, social networks have become formidable [tools of influence](#) (Dang Nguyen & Lethiais, 2016).For example, in the world of politics. They allow political leaders and parties to interact directly with their voters, bypass traditional media and control their message by targeting [an often young audience](#).

However, this power [to](#) influence (Fujiwara et al., 2022) can be used maliciously to manipulate information. There is no shortage of examples of disinformation campaigns on platforms such as Twitter or Facebook, whether unfounded rumours, fake accounts or political trolls.

It is important to note that this phenomenon is spreading throughout the world. It is not limited to the United States. In France, politicians increasingly use these platforms to [communicate and influence public opinion](#).

B. Connecting with the younger generation

Social networks are also an effective way of reaching the younger generation. Young people are heavy users of these platforms, which allow them to interact easily with the world around them.

Knowing this, politicians and other influential figures use social networks to [reach and engage this audience](#). They adapt their message, tone and content to connect with these users. It's a way for them to make [themselves more accessible and appear more 'human' in the eyes of young people](#).

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<https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceculture/podcasts/le-temps-du-debat/les-reseaux-sociaux-jouent-ils-un-role-politique-4412226>

However, this proximity can also present risks. Young people are a prime target for misinformation and manipulation, so they need to be trained to decipher information and exercise discernment online, as proposed by [information literacy](#).

III. L'impact géopolitique des réseaux sociaux.

A. State information wars

In today's interconnected world, states have begun to use social networks as a battleground for what is known as "[information wars](#)" (https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guerre_de_l%27information#:~:text=La%20guerre%20de%20l%27information,%27usage%20de%20l%27information).

These battles are not fought with traditional weapons but with true or false information disseminated via social networking platforms. They aim to influence public opinion, destabilise political opponents and promote national interests. For example, electoral interference via social networks has become commonplace, with accusations of orchestrated disinformation campaigns to influence election results.

B. The case of TikTok: doubt and espionage

The case of TikTok's short video-sharing application, which has experienced explosive growth, is a perfect example of how social networks have become a geopolitical issue. Fears have grown that TikTok could be used by the Chinese government to spy on users abroad, leading to its banning in several countries and [the opening of an investigation in France](#). This illustrates how social networks can be used to disseminate information and gather information, creating a new battleground in the digital space.

IV Emergence and risks associated with the Deepfake phenomenon.

A. Definition and examples of Deepfake

Deepfake is an artificial intelligence technique that involves creating hyper-realistic videos of people saying or doing things they have never said or done. This technology uses machine learning and neural networks to superimpose images and voices, creating fake video content. A notable example of Deepfake was the viral [video](#) of former US President Barack Obama, produced by comedian Jordan Peele. Obama appears to say things he has never said.

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bE1KWpoX9Hk>

B. impact and potential risks

Deepfakes represent a major threat to societal security. On the one hand, they can be used to spread false information and influence public opinion, as was demonstrated during [the 2016 US elections](#). On the other, they can also be used to create non-existent scandals, damaging individuals' reputations and privacy. The speed with which these videos can be shared and propagated on social networks intensifies their potential impact. Deepfakes, therefore, represent a major challenge for legislators, social media platforms and society, requiring increased vigilance and regulation.

V. The link between social networks and radicalisation

A. Influence and radicalisation of young people

The influence of social networks does not stop at politics or misinformation; it also touches on subjects as sensitive as the radicalisation of young people. Online platforms have become fertile ground for spreading extremist rhetoric due to their accessibility and the possibility of contacting individuals directly. Extremist organisations have used these platforms to spread their ideologies, often targeting vulnerable young people and exploiting their sense of exclusion or [seeking identity](#) (Lollia, 2021).

B. The Role of the Family and the Internet in Radicalisation

However, it is crucial to note that although social networks play a secondary role in radicalisation, they are generally not the only factor. Research (Lollia, 2021) shows that radicalisation is a complex process, often involving several factors. The family, for example, plays a key role in shaping an individual's values and beliefs. In addition, the Internet as a whole, and not just social networks, provides a space for exposure to extremist ideas but is not the primary factor. It is therefore important to consider these different factors when seeking to understand and prevent radicalisation.

VI. Social networks as a monitoring tool

A. The benefits of monitoring social networks

Despite the risks associated with social networks, it should not be forgotten that they can also serve as invaluable monitoring tools. Indeed, thanks to the vast amount of information shared

and exchanged in real-time, social networks offer the opportunity to quickly identify emerging trends, potential threats or emergencies. What's more, sophisticated data analysis tools can filter and sort this information to detect weak signals that could indicate an upcoming security risk.

B. Proactive response to security risks

If used correctly, social networks can enable individuals and organisations to be more proactive regarding security risks. Rather than reacting to a situation once it has arisen, monitoring social networks can help anticipate and prepare responses to different situations. This can range from managing crises, such as terrorist attacks or natural disasters, to preventing the spread of false information or hate speech. However, this proactive approach requires an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of social networks and the ability to analyse and interpret data critically.

Conclusion

At the end of our analysis, it appears that social networks, well beyond their primary use, significantly influence societal security risks. They are not simply platforms for exchanging and sharing information; they are places of influence, disinformation and the rampant spread of unfiltered data.

Their ability to amplify certain narratives and suppress others can be manipulated to shape public opinion, influence political sentiment and even incite violence. These networks' global and instantaneous nature means that this influence is not limited to national borders. Recent geopolitical struggles and controversial events have made this reality all too apparent.

Moreover, the risk of deep fakes and the use of these platforms for radicalisation present additional challenges that societies and states must face. On the other hand, we cannot ignore the opportunities these platforms offer regarding information gathering and possibilities for proactive action against security risks.

In short, the societal security risk posed by social networks is complex, multifaceted and dynamic. It requires ongoing research, careful regulation and, above all, a comprehensive understanding and critical awareness of all users. As we navigate this digitally connected age, we must remember to look beyond the surface of our social media feeds and always question the information we consume.

So the essential task facing governments, institutions and individuals is to maximise the potential benefits of these platforms while minimising their harmful impact by maintaining a delicate and crucial balance between security, privacy and freedom of expression.

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