# Politicians seeking youth engagement face challenges of social media’s double-edged nature



The rise of social media has dramatically transformed the landscape of political engagement, presenting both opportunities and pitfalls for politicians eager to connect with constituents. For many younger voters disenchanted by traditional political processes, the appearance of elected officials on platforms like TikTok and Instagram might be a refreshing, albeit bewildering, attempt to bridge the generational divide. While some may view these efforts as cringeworthy or inauthentic, others argue they represent a vital attempt to engage a demographic increasingly detached from politics.

Political engagement is at a concerning low, particularly among young people who often regard traditional politics as irrelevant to their lives. This disconnect has prompted some politicians to adopt a more casual, conversational style online. By sharing snippets from their lives or answering questions in real-time, politicians are trying to demonstrate transparency and relatability. This approach can indeed humanise representatives, giving voters a glimpse of the individuals behind the policies. As one observer noted, “It’s important to see what our elected people are up to day-to-day. After all, we voted for them and their salaries are paid by us.”

However, such efforts are not without significant challenges. Critics argue that when politicians engage with social media, they risk creating a perception that they are prioritising popularity over substantive policy discussions. With platforms often dominated by extreme partisanship, as highlighted in analyses of social media’s role in shaping public opinion, it becomes challenging for politicians to gauge true voter sentiment. This distortion can lead to a skewed understanding of the electorate's needs and desires. A recent report emphasised that social media amplifies extreme views, making it difficult to capture the nuanced beliefs of the general populace.

Moreover, the risks associated with misinformation cannot be overlooked. Social media, while providing a platform for rapid communication, is also rife with inaccuracies and false narratives that can undermine informed public discourse. The fast-paced nature of social media can turn 280-character tweets into misleading sound bites, complicating the dissemination of factual information. Politicians who opt to engage on these platforms may inadvertently contribute to the spread of misinformation, putting their credibility at risk.

There are also concerns about privacy and security. With growing threats of online harassment and doxxing, politicians must navigate their public personas carefully. The question remains whether engaging directly with the public on social media serves to bridge the gap or opens them up to unnecessary scrutiny. For instance, sharing personal moments, while potentially increasing engagement, could detract from the serious discussions surrounding their policies, leading some to perceive them as less serious or credible.

These multifaceted issues highlight a broader debate surrounding the appropriate role of social media in politics. Supporters claim that social media can invigorate democracy by inviting younger voters into the conversation, whereas detractors caution against the potential for trivialisation and the erosion of public trust in political institutions. It remains to be seen whether these platforms will ultimately serve as catalysts for genuine engagement or if they will reinforce superficial connections that detract from the critical matters at hand.

In a world where communication increasingly happens online, the challenge lies in leveraging these tools effectively while maintaining the seriousness of political discourse. As the social media landscape continues to evolve, it will be crucial for politicians to strike a balance between relatability and the gravitas that their roles command, ensuring they remain accountable to the citizens who elected them.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraph 1: [[1]](https://www.critic.co.nz/columns/article/11697/debatable-should-politicians-have-social-media)
2. Paragraph 2: [[1]](https://www.critic.co.nz/columns/article/11697/debatable-should-politicians-have-social-media), [[4]](https://politicalmarketer.com/social-media-in-politics-benefits-challenges-and-how-its-used/)
3. Paragraph 3: [[2]](https://time.com/5279157/social-media-partisanship-problem-solvers-caucus/), [[3]](https://lavaque.medium.com/social-media-and-politics-the-pros-and-cons-of-political-campaigning-on-social-media-fc7fae388ed6)
4. Paragraph 4: [[3]](https://lavaque.medium.com/social-media-and-politics-the-pros-and-cons-of-political-campaigning-on-social-media-fc7fae388ed6), [[6]](https://canadianprofessionpath.com/social-media-impact-on-politicians/)
5. Paragraph 5: [[4]](https://politicalmarketer.com/social-media-in-politics-benefits-challenges-and-how-its-used/), [[5]](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1940161220964769)
6. Paragraph 6: [[7]](https://nexnews.org/social-awareness/news/power-and-pitfalls-of-social-media-in-political-discourse)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.critic.co.nz/columns/article/11697/debatable-should-politicians-have-social-media> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://time.com/5279157/social-media-partisanship-problem-solvers-caucus/> - This article discusses how social media platforms have distorted policymakers' perceptions of public opinion by amplifying extreme partisan and ideological views. It highlights the challenges in determining true public sentiment due to the dominance of these extremes online, leading to a skewed understanding of the electorate's beliefs and desires.
3. <https://lavaque.medium.com/social-media-and-politics-the-pros-and-cons-of-political-campaigning-on-social-media-fc7fae388ed6> - This piece examines the advantages and disadvantages of using social media in political campaigns. It outlines benefits such as reaching a broader audience and engaging with younger voters, while also highlighting drawbacks like the spread of misinformation, privacy concerns, and the potential for negative campaigning.
4. <https://politicalmarketer.com/social-media-in-politics-benefits-challenges-and-how-its-used/> - This article provides an overview of how social media is utilized in politics, detailing both its benefits and challenges. It discusses how social media can help candidates connect with voters more easily and get their message out more effectively, but also points out issues like the spread of misinformation and the difficulty in tracking the source of information.
5. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1940161220964769> - This study analyzes the effectiveness of personalization strategies in politicians' Instagram posts and their impact on audience engagement. It finds that while personalized content can increase engagement, it may also make politicians appear less serious and distract from more substantial issues like policy positions.
6. <https://canadianprofessionpath.com/social-media-impact-on-politicians/> - This article explores the challenges politicians face on social media, including the spread of fake news and misinformation, online harassment, and maintaining privacy and security. It emphasizes the need for politicians to actively engage with their followers, address false information promptly, and protect their personal information online.
7. <https://nexnews.org/social-awareness/news/power-and-pitfalls-of-social-media-in-political-discourse> - This piece discusses the dual nature of social media in political discourse, highlighting both its power and pitfalls. It addresses issues like the spread of false information, increased division and intolerance, and growing surveillance and control, emphasizing the need for constructive conversations and positive impacts on the political scene.