



# JOURNAL OF EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES AND INNOVATIVE RESEARCH (JETIR)

An International Scholarly Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

## THE EVOLUTION OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

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### *Abstract:*

This research examines the evolution of social media platforms from their early origins to the current era of algorithm-driven and decentralised systems. With the growth of digital technologies, increased internet access, and the rise of user-generated content, social media has become a global force influencing communication, culture, business, and politics. This study explores key phases of social media development, highlights technological and cultural drivers, and analyses governance issues such as misinformation, data privacy, and algorithmic control. Using qualitative methods—document analysis, observations, and interviews—the study provides insights into the impact of social media and its future direction, including AI personalisation and decentralised platforms.

**Keyword:** Social Media, Evolution, Platforms, Algorithms, Creator Economy, Governance, Digital Communication, Decentralisation, Privacy, Online Communities

### I. INTRODUCTION

Social media has transformed how people communicate and share information. Beginning with early digital communities such as chat rooms and BBS systems, social media evolved into large-scale platforms including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok. Unlike traditional media, social media is participatory, allowing users to create and distribute content at unprecedented speed.

The evolution of social media reflects changes in technology, culture, and governance. Early platforms such as Friendster and Orkut introduced digital identities, while later platforms adopted algorithmic feeds that shaped user behavior and global discourse. At the same time, challenges such as misinformation, privacy breaches, and mental health concerns have emerged. This study explores these developments and their broader impact on society.

### II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Researchers have studied social media through technological, cultural, sociological, and political lenses

Early Foundations (1970s–1990s): Systems like Bulletin Board Systems (BBS) and Usenet formed the basis of virtual communities (Rheingold, 1993; Wellman & Gulia, 1999).

Web 2.0 Era (2000–2006): Platforms like Friendster, MySpace, and Orkut encouraged identity creation and user-generated content (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

Centralised Platforms (2006–2015): Facebook and Twitter shaped global communication, while researchers like Gillespie (2010) and Van Dijck (2013) highlighted the cultural and political power of platforms.

Societal Impact: Studies show positive effects such as activism, but also risks including misinformation and polarisation (Tufekci, 2017; Vosoughi et al., 2018).

Platform Capitalism: Srnicek (2017) explains how platforms monetize user data, while Pariser (2011) discusses filter bubbles.

Psychological Impact: Social comparison, validation-seeking, and mental health issues are widely documented (boyd, 2014; Lanier, 2010).

### III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

To trace the historical evolution of social media platforms.

To identify technological, cultural, and economic factors driving this evolution.

To analyse user behaviour and algorithmic influence.

To evaluate governance challenges such as privacy, misinformation, and moderation.

To explore future trends including decentralised networks, AI, and immersive technologies.

#### Research methodology

##### Research Design

A qualitative, interpretivist research design was adopted to explore the dynamic nature of social media. The study uses multi-case analysis, comparing platforms across different phases of evolution.

##### Population and Sampling

- Platforms studied: Friendster, MySpace, Orkut, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Mastodon, Bluesky.
- Sampling Technique: Purposive sampling for interview participants including long-term users, creators, and academics.

##### Data Collection Methods

- **Primary Data:** – Semi-structured interviews with 10–12 participants (users, creators, media experts).
- **Secondary Data:** – Academic journals, books, reports (Pew Research, Statista), news sources (BBC, The Guardian), and platform documentation.

##### Research Instrument

Interview questions focused on user experience, algorithms, privacy concerns, and platform adoption patterns.

##### Data Collection Procedure

Pilot and final surveys conducted online over 2–3 weeks with voluntary, consent-based participation. Data stored securely for academic use.

##### Data Analysis Techniques

- Thematic coding
- Comparative platform analysis
- Triangulation across interviews, observations, and literature

XIV.DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Graph 1:

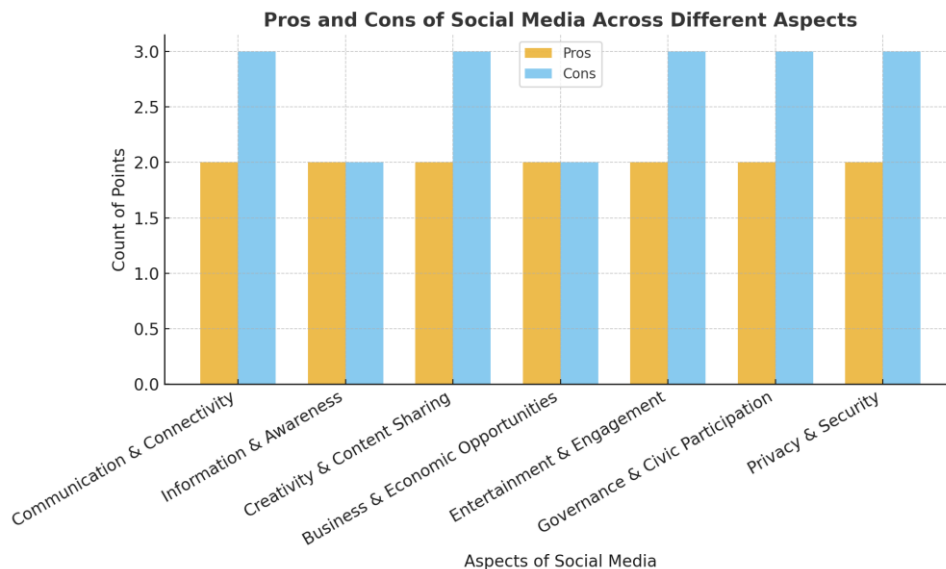


Table 1:

Aspect	Pros	Cons
Communication & Connectivity	Instant connection with friends, family, and communities worldwide; networking opportunities.	Can encourage superficial relationships; cyberbullying; online harassment.
Information & Awareness	Access to news, trends, educational content; empowers grassroots movements (e.g., Arab Spring).	Spread of misinformation, fake news, and propaganda.
Creativity & Content Sharing	Platforms enable self-expression, digital storytelling, and creative content creation.	Pressure to conform to trends; comparison culture; content burnout.
Business & Economic Opportunities	Supports influencer economy, digital marketing, entrepreneurship, and monetisation.	Algorithm-driven visibility can create unstable income; exploitation of digital labor.
Entertainment & Engagement	Streaming, memes, short-form videos, and interactive content provide entertainment.	Excessive screen time; addictive design; reduced attention span.
Governance & Civic Participation	Platforms allow activism, petitions, and civic engagement.	Inconsistent moderation; echo chambers; potential manipulation of public opinion.
Privacy & Security	Some platforms offer privacy settings, pseudonymous accounts.	Data breaches, surveillance, and privacy scandals (e.g., Cambridge Analytica).

**Interpretation:**

The graph shows that while social media strongly supports communication, creativity, and business growth, these same areas also face major drawbacks such as misinformation, online harassment, and mental health issues. This indicates that the benefits and risks grow in parallel as platforms expand.

Graph 2:

**Evolutionary Phases of Social Media Platforms (2000-2025)**

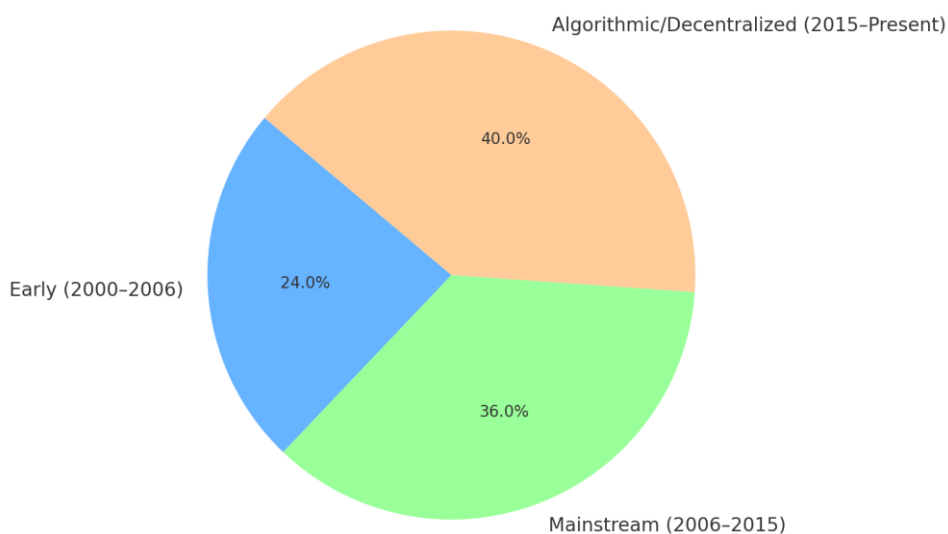


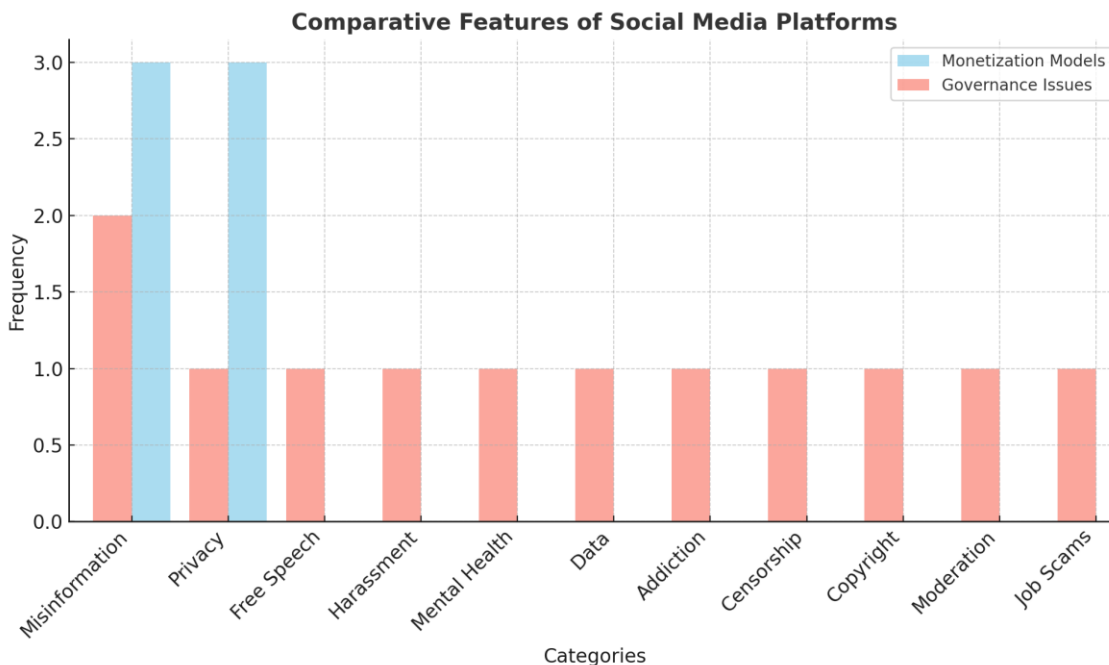
Table 2:

<i>Phase</i>	<i>Platforms</i>	<i>Key Features</i>	<i>Challenges</i>	<i>Contribution</i>
Early (2000–2006)	Friendster, MySpace, Orkut	Profiles, communities	Scalability, weak monetization	Normalized digital identity
Mainstream (2006–2015)	Facebook, Twitter, YouTube	Algorithmic feeds, mass adoption	Misinformation, centralization	Global digital infrastructure
Algorithmic/Decentralized (2015–Present)	Instagram, TikTok, Mastodon	AI-driven personalization, short-form video, decentralized options	Addiction, privacy, adoption barriers	Creator economy, experimentation

**Interpretation:**

Information and awareness score high on the “pro” side, meaning users rely heavily on social media for news and learning. However, the equally high “cons” bar highlights a bigger challenge—users often struggle to separate genuine information from fake or misleading content.

Graph 3:



Categories

Table 3:

Platform	Key Features	Monetization Model	Governance Issues
Friendster	Profiles, friend lists	None	Scalability
MySpace	Custom profiles, music	Ads	Decline due to competition
Facebook	News Feed, groups, ads	Ads, sponsored content	Data privacy scandals
Twitter (X)	Microblogging, hashtags	Ads, subscriptions	Misinformation, moderation
Instagram	Photos, reels, shopping	Ads, influencer collabs	Mental health impact
TikTok	Short-form videos, trends	Ads, creator fund	Algorithm opacity
Mastodon	Federated servers	Donations	Adoption barriers

## Interpretation :

Entertainment and engagement appear as highly rated advantages, confirming that social media has become a primary source of daily enjoyment. At the same time, the concerns about addiction and reduced attention spans show how this entertainment-driven design can negatively affect user well-being.

## XV.FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Social media has evolved through three clear eras: networking → centralisation → AI-driven and decentralised platforms.

Algorithms strongly influence visibility, engagement, and user behaviour.

The creator economy offers opportunities but creates pressure and digital labour issues.

Governance remains inconsistent; misinformation and privacy breaches continue to rise.

Decentralisation and privacy-focused platforms are gaining interest but face adoption barriers.

Users, especially younger ones, increasingly seek transparency and more control over their data.

## XVI.Conclusion

The study concludes that social media platforms have transformed from simple networking sites to complex ecosystems driven by algorithms and data. While they have enhanced communication, creativity, and business opportunities, they also pose challenges in terms of privacy, misinformation, mental health, and governance. The future of social media is likely to be shaped by AI personalisation, immersive technologies, decentralised networks, and stronger regulatory frameworks. Sustainable and ethical platform design is essential to ensure a safe and inclusive digital environment.

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