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Social media, Memes and Digital Emotional Contagion: Critical Thinking and Emotional Intelligence for Digital Citizenship Education ⁱ

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Abstract

Purpose

This research objective is to investigate the impact of emerging technology, mediated by emotional contagion, on the formation of civic engagement to develop a new conceptual framework for digital citizenship education that promotes critical thinking and emotional intelligence skills.

Design/Approach/methods

Through the utilization of documentary research methods and a critical review of existing literature, we undertook a comprehensive case study of the Egyptian and Tunisian movements within the context of the Arab "digital revolution" and elucidated the impact of social media and memes on civic engagement from the perspective of digital emotional contagion. Through synthesizing results, proffered solutions aimed at fortifying critical thinking and emotional intelligence within media education.

Finding

Emotional contagion permeates via social media and memes, have bolstered the collective emotions of citizens and provided an atmosphere in which silence or fear could be broken, potentially expediting civic movements. Critical thinking and emotional intelligence as essential prerequisites particularly for Generation Z individuals immersed in social media and meme culture to ensure responsible digital citizenship and constructive societal contributions is suggested.

Originality/Value

The study's outcomes contribute to an enhanced comprehension of the impact of new technology and digital emotional contagion on civic engagement. The methodological value of this study can be determined through the need to form critical thinking skills and

develop emotional intelligence as key factors for effective consumption of media content and successful communication in the digital environment.

Keywords: internet meme, digital emotional contagion, social media, digital citizenship education for generation Z, critical thinking, emotional intelligence

Introduction to cultivating critical thinking skills and developing emotional intelligence in media education

The conditions of the modern world dictate the need to form new skills both in the education system and in any professional and personal sphere, which requires communication and correct perception of the current state of affairs. The media sphere and media education are not exceptions. Without developed critical thinking skills and developed emotional intelligence, the use of digital social networks and proper consumption of media content seem impossible.

The need for emotional experience is the strongest motivation in modern media communication. Thus, emotion becomes an integral part of the thought process, helps in obtaining information, forms adequate reactivity in the process of communication. Morozov V.P. considers emotional hearing as "the ability to perceive and understand the language of emotions!" (Morozov, 2017).

The severity of the problem of developing emotional intelligence is associated with a wave of mass crises in which no one is protected from the unpredictable occurrence of anxiety that somehow penetrates into the lives of each of us. Aggressiveness is also increasing vigorously, in which each emotion prepares the body for completely different responses.

Emotional intelligence is represented as a person's ability to operate with emotional information, that is, the information that we receive or transmit with the help of emotions. The principle of

aesthetic cognition of the world through art is expanding to all formats of mastering the surrounding reality. According to D. Goleman, emotional intelligence is "the ability to develop motivation for oneself and persistently strive to achieve a goal, despite failures, restrain impulses and postpone getting satisfaction, control one's moods and not let suffering deprive oneself of the ability to think, empathize and hope" (Goleman, 2009).

Emotion is a reaction to any change in the external environment. Emotional competence includes 4 skills: to be aware of your emotions and the emotions of others, as well as to manage your emotions and the emotions of others. The algorithm for implementing these skills is as follows: awareness of one's emotions, understanding one's goal, determining one's emotional state as effective as possible to achieve the goal, choosing a way to achieve the desired emotional state and, finally, achieving the necessary state using the chosen method. Empathy is a prerequisite for obtaining full-fledged information, from the moment it is received to mastering up to transformation into knowledge.

The results of emotion management should be a decrease in the intensity of a "negative" emotion or switching it to another, if it prevents effective action in the current situation; the emergence or strengthening of a "positive" emotion that helps to act as effectively as possible. The algorithm for managing the emotions of others, based on the principle of civilized influence through emotion management and manipulation, includes such stages as awareness and understanding of the audience's emotions, determining a goal that takes into account the interests of the audience; choosing the most effective emotional state; evoking the desired emotional state in oneself; influencing the emotional state of the audience in the right direction.

Digital Social networks are a media space in which not only thoughts and knowledge are concentrated, but also emotions. People who are able to help others realize their feelings and cope with them have a particularly valuable social authority, they are turned to in moments of greatest emotional distress. In the vast space of social networks, the distance between communicants turns out to be extremely compressed. The consistency of moods is the essence of network relationships. Here, everyone becomes a kind of set of tools to change the mood of their interlocutor. Setting the emotional mode of interaction at a deep level means managing the emotional state of another person. This ability to set an emotion can be called the synchronization effect. At the same time, one of the determinants of maintaining interpersonal relationships is how well people maintain such emotional synchrony. "Thought constructions are formalized in the form of narratives - stories that people tell in an attempt to interpret socially significant events" (Algavi et al., 2023).

The basic skills of emotional intelligence are becoming increasingly important in teamwork and collaboration. Self-awareness in the sense of recognizing feelings and finding connections between thoughts, feelings and reactions allows you to understand what guides a person in making a decision and apply this awareness to decision-making. The ability to cope with emotions means realizing what is hidden behind the feeling in order to bring the matter to an end in accordance with the circumstances. It also provides an opportunity to find a common language with the parties to the conflict and convince them to listen to the other side without interrupting or insulting anyone.

The nature of emotional intelligence is based on the connection between emotional complexes, moods and temperaments that affect the conditioning of an emotion or mood, as a result of which

a person may feel constantly drawn into a toxic state. It is believed that the response of the rational mind takes a little longer than that of the emotional one, that is, in a situation that arouses strong emotions, the initial impulse does not come from the rational, but from the flared emotion that arouses the feeling. This creates a situation in which a person does not choose the emotions that arise at one time or another.

Rational beliefs are logical, objective in nature and can be subject to criticism and change, while the emotional mind defines its beliefs as absolutely true. Therefore, it is extremely difficult to convince a person who is in an emotionally excited state of anything. Any reasonable arguments lose their value if they do not coincide with the current emotional conviction. Feelings justify themselves with their own set of ideas and evidence. If the feelings are strong, then the emotional reaction they trigger is obvious. However, in the case of uncertainty or elusiveness of feeling, there is also no clear definition of the current emotional reaction.

The emotional mind is able to control the rational mind for its own purposes, justifying and logically justifying our feelings and reactions. In this case, the participants of the network communication are absolutely convinced that they know exactly what is happening. Although in fact they may not have any idea about it. At such moments, the emotional mind has adjusted the rational mind, using it to its advantage. In the mechanics of emotions, each feeling has its own specific repertoire of thoughts, reactions, and even memories. At the moment when the communicant experiences strong emotions, these state-specific repertoires begin to dominate.

In today's developing society, social networks have gained great popularity. They are used for entertainment, for work, in the field of world and domestic politics. Social networks form public

opinion, promote political culture, and are a tool for determining mood societies. In the context of political socialization, the media, encompassing social networks, fulfill this role through the articulation and circulation of information, ongoing reflection on political developments, the promulgation of diverse viewpoints, and the provision of political and social analyses (Skvortsova et al., 2022). Furthermore, they contribute to the formation of political and cultural spheres and discourses on a global scale, employing techniques such as mems, propaganda and persuasion. Staton (1994) asserted that contemporary communication technologies have the potential to facilitate widespread educational and enlightenment opportunities for citizens, foster discussions regarding the public good and the means to attain it, and enable individuals to actively pursue self-determination (Leong, 2015). While currently, the pace of social media exceeds that of traditional media, the effective utilization of media communication requires the possession of media competence by the individual (Konkov, 2019). Currently, the term "media competence" is widely used, since interaction with media devices is present in all spheres of life. Media competence is usually understood as a comprehensive personal education, including a set of knowledge about media, skills in their practical application, experience in using media in various fields of activity, and the ability to use by computer. This assumes that a person has critical thinking, cognitive activity, communication skills, creative thinking, reflection, value-semantic concepts of media use activities. The status of media competence is determined by the information conditions of society (Khlyzova, 2011).

According to Fedorov A.V., media competence precisely defines the essence of a person's ability to use and critically analyze, transmit and evaluate media texts in various forms, genres and

types, as well as the ability to analyze the processes of media functioning in society (Fedorov, 2007). J. Potter identified several components of media competence: experience, the more contact experience, the higher the potential of a person in the development of media competence. A media-competent personality actively applies skills in the field of media. Potter names readiness for self-education as the third component (Potter, 2004).

Media competence implies that a person has critical thinking skills. In the scientific literature, critical thinking is understood as a sequence of mental actions aimed at verifying statements in order to find out the inconsistency of statements with facts, values, or norms. There are several levels of critical thinking. Each of the levels has its own type of argumentation, which in turn has different ratios of cognitive and logical components. The empirical level of critical thinking (critical fact checking), the theoretical level (critical verification of theories), and the metatheoretical level of values are distinguished. The third level is the metatheoretical level of values (Fedorov, 2007).

The ability to critically comprehend, analyze media information, "competently understand it, ... have an idea of its mechanisms and the consequences of its influence on viewers, readers and listeners" are becoming very important in the modern information world, provide the audience with the opportunity to determine "the differences between the main and secondary information, between given and well-known facts and requiring verification; reliability of the source information; permissible and unacceptable statements; the difference between main and secondary information; bias of judgment; unclear or ambiguous arguments; logical incompatibility in the chain of reasoning, the power of argument, etc". (Fedorov, 2001). L.Masterman believes that "education in this field should be aimed at developing students'

understanding of the functioning of the media, their use of expressive means of the "mechanism of creating reality" and its awareness by the audience (Masterman, 1993) If we proceed from the thesis that "critical thinking is an antidote to ... control over thoughts" (Halpern, 2000), then it becomes obvious that it needs to be developed in the media educational process.

In light of the pivotal role of critical thinking and emotional intelligence in media education and media literacy in today's digital age, coupled with the transformative influence of new communication technologies on transnational and global movements and digital revolutions, as exemplified by the Arab Spring, there is an urgent necessity to delve into the intricacies of digital media's operational dynamics in relation to political socialization and the emergence of collective movements. This investigation should be particularly focused on members of Generation Z who heavily utilize memes and social media in their daily lives and actively participate in political socialization processes, so that it can lead to the development of educational programs that effectively cultivate critical thinking aptitude and emotional intelligence in education systems, and particularly in the context of social media literacy, which is essential in today's digital age (McDiarmid & Zhao, 2023). Such programs will be essential prerequisites for successful media consumption as well as effective communication in the digital realm. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the ways in which digital media have leveraged their communicative, persuasive, propagandistic, and functional capabilities to shape political socialization and the emergence of collective movements. Specifically, it seeks to explore and examine how social media influences political socialization through memes, with a focus on emotional contagion mechanisms—an intersection less explored by new media studies

in conjunction with critical thinking and emotional intelligence studies. By scrutinizing the genesis of revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia, which have been attributed to the "Internet revolution" and have become significant events in the Middle East and Africa, this study aims to offer insights into the role of digital media and memes in fostering emotional contagion and propagating social actions, particularly among Generation Z in non-western societies, to provide insights that will be instrumental in developing educational programs that promote critical thinking and emotional intelligence skills.

Digital media and memes in collective movement:

The utilization of digital tools in the realm of political communication can significantly influence the perceptions and actions of young people and particularly generation Z as digital natives (Boulianne & Theocharis,2020). A multitude of studies have demonstrated that various factors, such as the prevailing societal conditions, the characteristics of cyberspace (e.g., freedom of expression, rapid message transmission, dialectical power, etc.), the degree of trust in social networks, the distrust of domestic media, and the alignment of social media messages with the desires and needs of the public, play a pivotal role in the acceptance and dissemination of political messages on social networks and in the process of socialization (Omidi & Rashidi Alavijeh, 2012). This phenomenon is closely linked to the attitudes and values of the media (Boulianne & Theocharis,2020). Heitner (2014) asserts that the principal instruments driving the recent uprisings are digital media, with social networks serving as conduits that subvert the traditional media control of the government.

During the period of political uprisings, mobile phones and social media were utilized as tools for coordination and documentation of events. Ahmadpour Turkmani et al. (2018) contend that memes are

the most influential factor in political socialization, leading to informal socialization by creating a participatory and active environment for users of digital networks. The participation and activity of individuals in the Internet and cyberspace have resulted in the formation of a distinct political culture that differs from the political culture that the government endeavors to maintain and transmit.

The emergence of digital social networks and memes has led to the replacement of traditional social engagement formulations with new participatory, expressive, and emotional formulations. Memes have become a tool for interconnection and synergy among nations, affecting the social and political participation of users (Ahmadpour Turkmani et al. ,2018). The ability of memes to rapidly effect change has made them a popular tool for politicians and political activists to achieve their political and social goals (Kulkarni,2017). Digital social networks have taken on the role of political parties and have led to an increase in collective action (Ahmadpour Turkmani et al. ,2018). In the context of online protest campaigns involving memes as a form of communication, pro-government memes frequently utilize straightforward emotional appeals for propaganda purposes, while anti-government memes tend to convey more complex and nuanced political messages (Makhortykh & González, 2020). Memes have revolutionized social media and should be considered as an effective tool in the internet space, which could give the winning card to social and protest movements. Memes in social media plays an important role in creating unity and coordination of individuals towards the political system, and due to its high power in culturing and shaping the attitudes and beliefs of the audience, it is the most appropriate method available for socialization. The level of attention and trust in the media and methods of publishing information is a

determining factor in the acceptance and political orientation of individuals, especially young people and digital native generation (Ahmadpour Turkmani et al. ,2018).According to Shomova's 2022 research, Internet memes play an important role in Russian protest discourse by bringing attention to topics that are ignored by official sources and by giving a voice to those who have no other means of public expression. She believes that memes are seen as a separate news environment that is independent of the official agenda, but they do not necessarily provide an accurate or comprehensive picture of information or reflect diverse viewpoints.

Another paper investigates the utilization of internet memes in protest campaigns in Ukraine (2013-2014) and Venezuela (2018-2019). The authors' choice of case studies is based on the under-investigation role of memes in non-Western contexts and the similarities shared by the media systems in Eastern Europe and Latin America. Their analysis revealed significant differences in the specific cultural objects used for memes construction, but pro-regime activists in both countries were more eager to deploy references to the past traumas. The comparative approach offers valuable insights into memes' role in political self-expression and their potential influence on political discourse and mobilization, particularly in non-Western contexts (Juan Manuel & Makhortykh, 2019).

The role of media and digital social networks in the political and social developments in the Middle East and North Africa has been significant, leading to the label of "Internet revolution" for the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt (Mohammadian, 2014). During these developments, the majority of content produced by protesting and revolutionary forces was created using these platforms. New communication technologies have challenged official borders and provided an alternative voice to the traditional official media of

Arab governments, which often reflected only the official policies and views of these governments. One of the most important political achievements of internet activities in Egypt was the creation of a relatively safe environment for expressing opposition to the situation and order during the time of Mubarak (Elteyameya et al., 2013).

The pivotal role of social media platforms in the Arab Spring uprising cannot be overstated, as they significantly accelerated the most substantial resistance against repressive regimes since the end of the Cold War (Badiei & Mirahmadi, 2013). Cyberspace and social networks have been instrumental in organizing events related to the Arab movement, with announcements, summonses, news, information about the movement, raising awareness, revolutionary and government forces' status, geographical locations, and messages being shared extensively, and breaking the media monopoly held by governments (Mohammadian et al., 2013). One notable example is the widespread display of solidarity among Arab social media users, who changed their profile pictures to their country's flag in support of the Tunisian people (Badiei & Mirahmadi, 2013). The media played a crucial role in raising awareness of revolutionary movements during the 2011 developments in the region, from Tunisia to Egypt. As a result, leaders like Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak were ousted from power due to popular uprisings and revolutions.

The genesis of the Arab revolutions stems from multiple factors, including dissatisfaction with dictatorships, however, Social media played a catalytic role in these events, as Maurushat, Chawki, Al-Alosi, and Shazly (2014) found in their study. The study highlighted cyberspace emerged as a crucial platform for opinion expression, real-event transmission, and information dissemination, fostering public awareness in the Arab revolutions.

It provided a significant opportunity for human rights advocates and served as a model for political participation, enabling deeper engagement in politics. The study underlines the government's actions to restrict internet access, showcasing media's power. Salanova's (2012), Carty (2014), and Farsi Jokar (2016) all highlight the role of social media in these movements, with Farsi Jokar (2016) conducting a comprehensive examination of the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions, revealing that the communication revolution, whether intentional or unintentional, permeated these nations, leading to the establishment of horizontal and egalitarian communication channels. This transformation significantly altered the landscape and facilitated the emergence of a public sphere that resisted oppressive regimes, thereby diminishing the authority of the governments. The study emphasized that the expansion of communication, enhanced data transmission speed, the rise of social networks, and the advent of a technologically savvy generation have transcended temporal and spatial constraints, strengthening social connections, social capital, and the voice of hitherto silent citizens. This process has transcended individuality, bolstered individual capabilities through shared experiences, and fostered a multifaceted public sphere, ultimately paving the way for substantive political and social transformations. Carty (2014) posits the performance of new media playing a significant role in the formation of social movements for the rapid elimination of long dictatorships. digital media and memes published by users served as a means of expressing challenges and protests, providing a space for motivating ordinary citizens to engage in political debate, and fostering trust in this space while distrusting local media. Salanova's (2012) study investigated the impact of social media on the social movement by analyzing the Green Movement of Iran and the Arab Revolution.

The study reveals that online engagement enables individuals to participate in social networks, and in Tunisia and Egypt, social media served as a coordinator and disseminator of information during the protests. Moreover, it functioned as a communication tool that transmitted the revolutionary process globally. While social media cannot be regarded as a revolutionary stimulus in the Arab world, it can be considered a facilitator.

These studies offer invaluable insights into the function of digital media and memes in political communication and socialization during periods of political unrest and revolution. It underscores the significance of digital media as a tool for articulating challenges and protests, challenging media monopolies, and facilitating political engagement, particularly among digital natives. This review also illuminates the role of social media in creating a public sphere that defies oppressive regimes and diminishes the authority of governments. While emotions undoubtedly play a crucial role in human behavior, social life, and online movements, these studies do not provide a detailed analysis of the emotional contagion mechanism underlying these impacts, which is further explored in the following studies.

Social networks constitute a framework for individuals affiliated with a particular group who interact through this structure by freely exchanging their individual and social thoughts, ideas, and activities. they serve as media for social interaction that leverage highly accessible, easy, and scalable communication techniques while facilitating the simplicity of utilizing Internet and mass media tools that contribute to the intensity and acceleration of developments and the rapid occurrence of revolutions (Herati & Ghasemi, 2014). Social networks have ushered in a new form of mass communication that is simultaneously individualized and produced/received individually; however, it has an impact on

public opinion worldwide. These networks have become a tool for social movements seeking to achieve their objectives in three areas: shaping collective identity, convincing their followers, and mobilizing them (Kia & Mahmoudi, 2012). Utilizing new information technologies, these movements can easily achieve all three of these goals through social networks (Herati & Ghasemi, 2014). In these networks, the influence on public opinion and its mobilization is such that through these media, a kind of public space is formed where many people interact without physically seeing or exchanging views like each other; henceforth thoughts and actions are alike (Kia & Mahmoudi, 2012). Through artistic methods such as message production, slogan creation, and thought manipulation, ideas are mobilized and manipulated, and ultimately political activity finds the possibility to merge with daily life (Herati & Ghasemi, 2014). Virtual social networks also serve as a laboratory where social movements test their potential (Herati & Ghasemi, 2014). In such a case, social networks not only act as a political tool but also become a political space (Herati & Ghasemi, 2014). The use of social media allows social movements to more easily utilize traditional methods of expressing their protests, such as marches, protests, slogans, and the use of symbols, and combine new symbols (Kia & Mahmoudi, 2012). Accordingly, these movements have a greater potential to attract the young class of society and shape public opinion (Herati & Ghasemi, 2014). With the application of information technologies, social movements do not need to use mass media coverage (Kia & Mahmoudi, 2012). Hence, through the incorporation of actors and socio-political agents, cyberspace serves as a medium for disseminating political, social, and cultural symbols, as well as the values and ideologies of diverse social entities. Concurrently, cyberspace constitutes a significant source of socio-political awareness and communication

worldwide. Within this digital arena, political activists are intimately connected with the populace and emerge as the foremost catalysts of protest conduct and mobilization of protests globally.

Emotional contagion, Memes and collective movements

To understand intense moments of online interaction during civic movement, we need to rethink theories of politics and communication for the digital age beyond their instrumentalist view as just channels for sharing information. Instead, we should consider communication as both an emotional process involving transformation and intensification through emotion work, as well as emotional contagion (Gerbaudo, 2016). Emotion plays an important role in human actions and social life. Emotions are part of the social context connecting individuals. In this study, emotions are defined as interactive reactions that are mutually formed by individual- and collective-level experiences and expressions. Within online movement, these emotions, or alternatively interactive reactions, are mainly derived from reactions regarding what people experienced, leading them to express their responses in public spaces (Gerbaudo, 2016). Although emotions are personal, they can be described as contagious patterns of human responsiveness (Bulgarova & Tabatabai, 2023). Therefore, through people's experiences and expressions, these interactive reactions were mutually reinforced.

The expression of emotions in digital media is facilitated through various means, including internet memes, which give rise to digital emotional contagion (Bulgarova & Tabatabai, 2023). Internet memes, being one of the primary forms of social media content, are particularly popular among digital natives and have the potential to cause significant emotional contagion. Focused on real-world issues, these memes attract users' attention and prompt to disseminate them further, resulting in extensive consumption and

substantial emotional contagion, lead to the establishment of shared collective emotions, which in turn can leading to collective action (Bulgarova & Tabatabai, 2023). This phenomenon highlights the influential role of internet memes in shaping emotional dynamics and driving societal responses within the digital sphere. Recent research has emphasized the importance of digital emotional contagion as an effective and appealing communication approach, with internet memes being a practical option for achieving this goal (Bulgarova & Tabatabai, 2023).

The initial manifestations of memes, as observed in newspapers, encompassed pictorial representations that disseminated via traditional print media as opposed to digital channels. In contemporary times, however, the term "internet political memes" has been ascribed to the culturally significant ideas that proliferate across digital platforms. Rastogi & Kashyap (2019) elucidate that within the realm of political communication, memes play a pivotal role in evoking emotions, as well as in the diffusion and shaping of perspectives and convictions, rendering them a popular tool in campaign strategies. Furthermore, memes effectively captivate audiences by directing their focus toward specific political issues or figures. A fundamental tactic in political communication involves "culture-jamming," which can be defined as "a user-driven reinterpretation of mainstream culture" (Polách, 2015).

Notably, the historical use of memes for propagandistic purposes dates back to World Wars, where they manifested in the form of leaflet propaganda, satirical texts, images, and artistic expressions. This historical practice involved the commissioning of poets and artists to create and disseminate cartoons and messages through various media platforms (Nieuburt, 2021; Zarifian et al., 2022). Political campaigners can utilize memes as a medium for engaging with online citizens. This involves the employment of paid

bloggers, microbloggers, and commenters to curate content, thereby shaping the perceptions and attitudes of the public through social networks, by maximizing the process of political persuasion and consumption of media messages. Kulkarni (2017) conducted a study on the role of memes in the Indian elections, revealing that memes serve as a significant tool against oppression and as intermediaries for the dissemination of information. The study highlighted the evolution of internet memes from being primarily associated with humor and entertainment to becoming integral to political struggles, thereby demonstrating their political application. Furthermore, the study emphasized that memes function as a tool for political discourse rather than as a catalyst for a change in the political paradigm. It was also noted that political parties utilize memes to either oppose or criticize various aspects of the political landscape.

Hence, memes have emerged as a formidable instrument for political leaders and parties to execute belligerent campaigns in recent times. The 2016 United States Presidential Election served as a precedent for the weaponization of memes, dubbed as the "Great Meme War." Memes have been deployed as a weapon in cultural conflicts and have become a strategic tool for political purposes with the ability to disrupt public discourse and shape public opinion (Merrin, 2019). Extremists have utilized memes as a central weapon in online warfare due to their rapid dissemination, which has contributed to the proliferation of violent ideologies (Crawford et al.,2021).

The weaponization of meme culture is not new, as activists have used technology to further their causes since the advent of the internet (Bennett, 2003). The use of internet memes in collective and protest movements has become a topic of interest for both political communication theorists and practitioners in the internet

industry. Researchers have noted the key role played by images in activists' communication during protest actions, and memes have been identified as an effective visual argument for spreading one's viewpoint rapidly (Moreno-Almeida, 2021). The use of memes in protest movements has been found to engender a sense of solidarity and pride among supporters, and to address issues of surveillance and police accountability (Merrin,2019). Due to its concise and precise nature in expressing a specific emotion, belief, or stereotype, a meme quickly disseminates within a community. It encapsulates the collective emotional response and reactions to contemporary events, manifesting in distinct phrases, images, and videos that hold significance for the community. These digital creations evoke similar emotions among community members and are comprehensible only within this specific cultural context which is what we called emotional contagion. (Shomova, 2022). In nutshell, politics required the utilization of memes to align with the rapid evolution of digital culture and the swift tempo of digital political campaigning (Shomova, 2022).

Mememes have been used to mobilize people into action, as seen in the rise of movements like #StoptheSteal, which can be traced back to the more progressive, equality movement Occupy (Chen, et al. ,2023). The Hashtag Revolution, a recent phenomenon, demonstrates the power of social media in raising global awareness on various issues. Hashtags serve as indirect marketing and advertising tools for activists in the virtual world, addressing challenges such as the environment, civil inequality, animal cruelty, and human rights abuses in both Eastern and Western countries (Oh & Rao, 2015). The hashtag #BarCamp is said to be the first hashtag to be used in the history of social media. It took several years for the world to realize the true power of the hashtag to connect those interested in the "Global Technology Absenteeism

Conference"(chang, 2010). The impact of hashtags is evident in movements like #BarCamp, #OccupyWallStreet, and #PrayForParis, which have brought people together and fostered global solidarity (Dewan et al.,2017, July). The hashtag #Braye, originating from Iran, further highlights the potential of social media in advocating for social and political change, as exemplified by Hajipour's song "Baraye." Social media algorithms play a crucial role in the viral spread of such content, ultimately shaping and advancing social change (Marks, 2023).

Today, governing bodies and media outlets have come to recognize the significance of the content and interactions that transpire within social networks and among the populace. Despite potential opposition to the collective will that emerges from these platforms, they strive to alter the opinions of the people. Social networks can be conceptualized as a domain in which public opinion is formed, albeit with inherent limitations. Even the smallest of actions, such as Hashtags or memes, can impact society and the environment in this arena. The individual's influence can extend beyond their immediate vicinity, akin to the propagation of a viral contagion. This phenomenon, termed "the spread effect," has the potential to impact a broader population (Bulgarova & Tabatabai, 2023). Consequently, political actors at both the individual and institutional levels endeavor to dominate this arena and exert maximal influence over public opinion. In this context, memes and hashtag activism can be considered as mechanisms for shaping public opinion.

These studies present indispensable understandings into the role of emotions in social interchanges, particularly in the digital realm and online movements. They underscore the significance of Internet memes facilitate digital emotional contagion, leading to significant emotional contagion and the establishment of shared

collective emotions. Memes have become a strategic tool for political purposes, with political leaders and parties utilizing them to execute belligerent campaigns. This review also illuminates the role of Memes and hashtag activism to shape public opinion, and social movements utilize them to mobilize people into action. In the following analysis, we explore the ways in which digital media and memes have effectively harnessed their communicative capabilities through emotional contagion for purposes of collective movement, persuasion and propaganda in non-Western societies, specifically within the contexts of Arab revolutions as the “first digital revolution” in Egypt and Tunisia in the Middle East and Africa regions. The Arab Spring, which is not just a historic event but also an ongoing process with ongoing implications for the region, has resulted in political instabilities, social unrest, and challenges to democracy in several affected countries. Hence, the widespread protests in the Arab world should not be viewed as separate national events, but rather as part of a broader and interconnected cycle of struggles. This perspective is supported by autonomist Marxist analysis, which describes these protests as transnational in nature, spreading through emotional contagious and viral spreads. Essentially, the Arab uprisings are not isolated incidents, but rather part of a larger and interconnected movement (Bratich, 2016). Therefore, this section examines the transnational dissemination of social movements through the lens of emotional contagion, exploring the interplay between media networks, and political mechanisms that either facilitate or hinder this contagion.

Digital media in the Tunisian movements

The evolution of popular uprisings in Tunisia has been marked by significant events in 1978, 1984, and 2011, all driven by shared objectives such as labor union independence and opposition to economic hardships and social prejudice. However, the 2011

revolution was distinguished by the influential role of new media, including social media and satellite channels like Al-Jazeera (Ebrahimi, 2013). The Arab Spring began in Tunisia in 2010 with the self-immolation of Tariq Tayeb Mohammed bin Bouazizi, whose protest against economic issues and social prejudice sparked a chain reaction that led to President Ben Ali's departure due to fear of public unrest within three weeks. The Arab League has faced a long-standing unfavorable situation, and its people have been complaining about it for years, but authoritarian regimes' harsh methods have prevented significant action until now. The entire Arab League has been impoverished, unemployed, and facing an economic crisis for a long time, making Bouazizi's self-immolation and subsequent revolution unsurprising (Ebrahimi, 2013). The role of digital platforms in facilitating and amplifying social mobilization during the Tunisian revolution cannot be overstated, with Al Jazeera's extensive coverage highlighting their significant impact on mobilizing individuals and disseminating information. The advent of virtual and electronic mobility in Tunisia can be traced back to the emergence of bloggers in 1998, and Tunisian news outlets like Tunisia News, Nawa, and Istifaqah have played significant roles during subsequent Tunisian revolutions. Tunisian social media youth groups called for protests against police actions following Bouazizi's self-immolation in 2010, and the protests spread to Algiers. The role of digital platforms in the Tunisian revolution is not limited to mobilization but also enhances individuals' capabilities and skills to score protests and expand the scope of awakening among a large number (Heydari et al., 2019). Accordingly, the role of social networks in the Tunisian revolution can be examined in the following three areas:

1. Call for protests: Following the dissemination of news about Mohammad Al-Bouazizi's self-immolation through various

- media outlets on day one, invitations for mass protests were issued via social media. During this revolutionary period, the majority of videos published online or broadcasted via satellite networks were recorded using mobile phones. The proliferation of satellite and online media outside of Tunisian governmental control resulted in increased coverage of mass protests via these mediums (Noor Mohammadi, 2012). Tunisians' fluency in both Arabic and French languages provides them with maximum accessibility to satellite and internet media (Ghaffari et al., 2014).
2. Dissemination of protest news: During recent protests, social media platforms served pivotal functions in disseminating news from within these events' focal points while also guiding protesters' gatherings through audio visual broadcasting. These platforms acted as virtual leaders, expanding protest coverage among Tunisian youth. Users from various sources, such as on-site presence during events and TV networks/news websites, published protest news on their pages, facilitating news dissemination's free flow. The protesters eliminated pro-government media due to social pressures exerted via social media (Ghaffari et al., 2014).
 3. Increasing information flow: digital social network users significantly contributed to the accelerated dissemination of information. The impact of social media in Tunisia is exemplified by its role in facilitating news dissemination during political and social unrest (Ghaffari et al., 2014). The developments in Tunisia demonstrate the critical role of new media, particularly the internet, in political activities and protests (Ghaffari et al., 2014). While media cannot solely attribute political and social change, new media's absence would hinder attempts to gain or exercise power. Social networks have

become a medium for informing, calling for demonstrations, and circulating information. Traditional media also receive news and information from new media, such as the internet.

4. Digital emotional contagion: The rapid and widespread dissemination of emotionally charged content, particularly strong negative emotions like anger (Noor Mohammadi, 2012), is facilitated by emotional contagion in digital social networks, leading to viral content. Images and news related to this tragic incident were quickly published on the internet and social media platforms, and these Tunisian youths, who had enough control over cyberspace and the internet, were affected by these news and images, leading to a massive wave of public anger and hatred in Tunisia. When users share this strongly negative, emotionally charged content, such as a shocking news article, on social media platforms, it evokes strong emotions in other users. These emotional responses can then lead to users sharing the content with their own networks, which in turn can lead to further sharing and amplification of the content and its emotions. Emotional contagion can also make certain types of content more likely to go viral than others. For example, content that elicits strong emotions, such as anger, is more likely to be shared there because a cycle of anger contagion is manifested. This process can result in information spreading rapidly and widely across digital social networks. (Noor Mohammadi, 2012).

Digital media in the Egyptian movements

During the Arab Spring, the impact of new media in Egypt's rapid transformation following the popular uprising in Tunisia cannot be overlooked. Social media played a significant role in mobilizing and organizing protests, spreading information, and challenging state-controlled narratives. Emotions such as empathy, solidarity, fear, anger, hope, and optimism helped to build momentum,

resilience, and accountability among protesters as they recognized the need to take action and make a difference in their communities and societies. Sahar Khomeini and Catherine Vaughn assert that new media played a crucial role in the Egyptian revolution in three interconnected ways: (1) cyber-activism, which served as a critical driver of street activism, (2) mobilization and organization of protesters, and (3) the emergence of citizen journalism, providing a platform for ordinary citizens to express themselves and record their interpretations of reality (Ashraf Nazari and Gholipour, 2018). New media facilitated large-scale mobilization and the implementation of social movements through emotional contagion. Political structures such as the exhaustion of the government, lack of elite rotation, political repression, and widespread corruption contributed to the crisis of legitimacy during the Mubarak era. The Egyptian people's dissatisfaction with the conflict between socio-economic programs and cultural and religious context, coupled with significant challenges, created a deep legitimacy crisis and alienated various social forces from the government. The events in Tunisia and their spread in the Arab world sparked a wave of protests in Egypt, initiated by social media campaigns such as "April6 Youth" and "We are all Khalid Saeed." (Aghaei et al., 2013). Therefore, the role of information and communication technology in the developments in Egypt can be examined in the following areas:

1. Enhancing civic awareness and instilling democratic values: To facilitate active citizenship in various domains, it is crucial to augment the accessibility of information for citizens. The Egyptian government had previously invested heavily in improving digital literacy and enhancing the skills of human resources in utilizing information technology. This investment led to an increase in e-literacy and the development of Arabic

- content on the internet, particularly among young people, who became acquainted with their civil, political, and social rights in line with global trends.
2. Changing the nature and mode of expressing citizens' demands: With the fall of Ben Ali, the demands of Egyptian citizens transformed into a call for a change in governance, and the cyberspace became an arena for expressing these new demands. The content on the internet is now based on the will of the people, as evidenced by the demand for Mubarak's departure, which signified a shift in the nature of citizens' demands.
 3. Shaping and strengthening the public domain: During the pivotal role of cyberspace in creating a public domain, groups like "We are all Khalid Said" and "April 6 Youth Movement" emerged. The latter aimed to support striking workers in Al-Mahalla and gained 70,000 members, primarily young and educated individuals concerned with freedom of expression, government corruption, and a stagnant economy (Badie Azandahi et al., 2012). The Egyptian revolution exposed the survival values of both citizens and elites, as different groups saw their political and economic futures in crisis and threatened each other's survival. (Athari and Hosseini Davarani, 2013).
 4. Weakening of the government: During social unrest, both pro- and anti-government forces leverage social media to mobilize masses. State-controlled media distorts facts, while young people utilize social networks to obtain accurate information. In Egypt's uprising, Vodafone admitted to sending pro-government messages under duress. Internet and mobile coverage were occasionally disrupted (Farsi Jokar, 2016). Since January 25, Egyptian youth have increasingly utilized social media to disseminate information, mobilize, and oppose the government, promoting transparency and accountability. Social media now

enables citizens to document events, police brutality, and quickly share them online, providing evidence, organizing legal protection, and garnering support.

5. Organizing protests and strengthening and intensifying collective action: During the Egyptian protests, social media played a significant role in mobilizing crowds, disseminating information, and facilitating coordination. The page "We are all Khalid Saeed" served as a crucial source of updates and instructions for demonstrators, including "Only Egyptian flags, do not bring any political symbols, no violence, bring plenty of water, do not bring your ID card, etc." (Farsi Jokar, 2016). Individuals also actively participated in the Egyptian revolution without adhering to specific party ideologies. Subsequently, they established a new political party called the Egyptian Current. Egyptian youth abroad also utilized social media to spread news and propaganda about the revolution, showcasing footage of street battles between protesters and security forces. This digital activism not only impacted the Arab world but also gained international attention. (Farsi Jokar, 2016).

Theoretical approach

Political sociability denotes the process by which youth acquire political cognition (knowledge or beliefs about the political system), emotions (loyalty or civic duty towards the system), and political competence (actual or potential role in society and the political system) in response to political crises. This learning process encompasses the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of political socialization that young people acquire through political activity, such as party affiliation, ideology, and voting (Ahmadpour Turkmani et al, 2018). According to Coleman (1994), political socialization refers to the knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs that individuals learn about politics and political norms through

political engagement. In societies with mass communication technologies, the media plays a direct role in shaping the primary directions and specific thoughts of the majority of people (Ahmadpour Turkmani et al, 2018).

Lucien Pai posits that mass media represents the most effective means of socialization and is a pivotal factor in modernization. Mass media is a product of modern society and a consequence of technological advancement, constituting a revolutionary shift in the manner by which individuals acquire knowledge about their surroundings. Currently, all forms of mass media have gained prominence, seemingly assuming a principal role in raising individual awareness and political information. The majority of individuals in contemporary society rely on mass media to obtain political insights and to interpret and analyze political phenomena (Keshyshyan Syraki, 2018). Joseph Nye contends that a realistic approach to international politics becomes more imperative than disregarding a wealth of information. Realists have concentrated their studies on government-government interactions, with domestic communities influencing these interactions solely through their governments. Nonetheless, Nye argues that direct cultural interactions between citizens and groups with another government, as well as interactions between intergovernmental organizations, often result in intriguing new alliances and exert political influence (Nye, 2008).

According to Castells, the network society is the product of the convergence of the information revolution that made possible the emergence of the network society, the restructuring of capitalism and economics based on centralized planning since the 1980s. Expanding the communication infrastructure and increasing the access of members of a society to the media and cyberspace affect the needs, political participation and interaction of citizens with

local, national and international political space. Today, citizens of different countries increase their awareness through communication and information facilities and technology, and publish and follow news and information in cyberspace and communication media (Castells, 2011).

New technologies in the field of information and communication media have accelerated and changed the nature of interaction and communication of human society and human relations with the environment and accelerated institutional changes in economic, political, cultural and social dimensions. As a result of such a transformation, the competence of the citizens and the extent and capacity of their interaction have increased and challenged the authority of the government. Unlike traditional media, which governments have some control over, digital media are outside the control of the government and cause profound changes in the content, context and hierarchy of issues. (Hatami et al, 2014).

Castells believed that networked movements in the age of communication were new types of social movements, movements that were less hierarchical and more participatory, leadership movements that dominated networks. Horizontal, individual political autonomy and unconditional solidarity. Castells believes these movements begin on Internet social networks and spread to the world of wireless communications, such as a contagious virus, through cell phones and the exchange of images and text. He argues that the Internet has created an independent space for information exchange and the sharing of feelings of collective anger and hope. Castells writes in a world networked by wireless Internet, characterized by the viral transmission of images and thoughts. Movements spread through transmission. These movements began in the south and north, in Tunisia and Iceland, and from there threw their flames on the various social landscapes of the quadrangle of

the blue planet, which was destroyed by human greed and intervention (Granpayeh, 2014).

Also in analysis of crowd behavior as presented by Le Bon, it becomes apparent that while crowd size undoubtedly holds significance in determining their power dynamics; it is not solely these factors that define their potency. Rather it is emotional contagion that serves as an essential element in holding crowds together. Le Bon delves into this concept in his writing as he asserts that not every group transform into crowds; emotional contagion is a requisite for this transformation. This mutual susceptibility to ideas, images, emotions, or actions spreads like wildfire from one person to the next, overpowering rational thought or deliberation. Le Bon's argument places us in the realm of anthropology's 'primitive participation,' and late nineteenth-century psychology, sociology, and criminology also drew heavily on these insights, attributing suggestion and imitation as prime movers for various phenomena, such as social movement and collective action (Hayden, 2021). In the context of late nineteenth century French crowd theory within this discourse tradition, scholars observed that contagion also encompassed a disintegration of the individual as a self-contained, stable, and sovereign subject. This fundamentally de-individuating move is intimately related to the phenomenon of contagion, as it signifies a dissolution of the individual's autonomous identity within the collective experience (Hayden, 2021). Consequently, emotional contagion emerges as a critical component within collective movement, which is facilitated through social network connections. Edward Ross in 1908 drew upon the ideas advanced by Gabriel Tarde to assert the novel circumstances created by mass media (specifically the telegraph) for the propagation of "contagion without contact." This concept refers to the unprecedented capacity for suggestion to

spread even, or particularly, through a crowd at a distance. Tarde's theories provided a theoretical foundation for Ross's argument, which highlighted the transformative potential of mass media in shaping social dynamics and uprisings (Hayden,2021).

In Castells' perspective, it is not solely poverty, economic crises, or lack of democracy that precipitate these multifaceted uprisings; rather it is primarily the sense of inferiority arising from the pessimism and selfishness of those in positions of power, be it financial, political, or cultural. Castells posits that these movements are not merely reactions to material deprivation but rather stem from a deep-seated emotional response to the perceived moral deficiency of those in authority. These spaces may evoke memories of past popular uprisings by connecting individuals to history. Social movements create a public space by constructing a free society in a symbolic place, a space for reflection which eventually becomes a political space (Granpayeh, 2014). According to Castells' theory, users gain a plethora of resources and information by connecting to diverse and extensive digital social networks, and this information, when related to politics can significantly impact political socialization. Castells contends that the public space occupied by citizens becomes a political space only when it undergoes a special transformation. The produced political space also becomes a space where members of political groups convene to demand their rights through appropriate political action and achieve what they perceive as being taken away from them.

As per Howard's assertion, the indispensable function of the media becomes more conspicuous when it serves as the sole medium to articulate opinions that contradict the policies of authoritarian regimes and are devoid of any limitations or self-censorship by political activists. In this context, the role of information and

communication technology in initiating, organizing, leading, and promoting actions, movements, and mass protests is undeniable. Digital media, including the internet, social media, and personal blogs, play a crucial role in political discourse, encouraging individuals to participate in and organize their actions, as well as visual connections. These media play a significant role by providing information and experiences and informing people about their political obligations and roles in society and their rights. Digital media has liberated information from the monopoly of the press and the media, making it accessible to everyone (Omidi and Rashidi Alavijeh, 2012).

In accordance with Howard Rheingold's assertion, the emergence of the Internet is ushering in a new era of participatory and council democracy as a public political sphere. New Partnership Democracy, a form of democracy and action that Rheingold refers to, is gaining traction as a result of this development (Rheingold, 2008). This new form of democracy and action has been dubbed "Athens without slaves." The Internet is transforming into a virtual community that mirrors the Athenian city government, with the network assuming the role of the Athenian Agora, where free citizens engage in discussions about public affairs. Rheingold believes that new communication technologies have significant democratic potential, provided they are recognized and utilized by citizens (Rheingold, 2008). Rheingold's work is a significant turning point in the literature on the Internet and democracy and can be used for political activism in cyberspace in this context (Rheingold, 2008). In this scenario, the culture of a networked community shifts to a culture of communication protocols as the sovereignty of the nation-state changes; government networks emerge and eventually power in a network society falls to those who control the communication capacities between networks and

groups within the network. Media systems change depending on the processes in the system-forming spheres and, in turn, influence them. Political and economic factors that determine the essence and nature of media systems remain in the foreground (Yakova, & Volkova, 2023). According to Castells' perspective, networks are shaping the new social form of societies and the spread of network logic is causing significant changes in the operations and outcomes of the processes of production, experience, power and culture.

Based on James Davies' theoretical framework, political stability or instability ultimately hinges upon the psychological disposition and spirit of a society's populace, whether content or indifferent in regards to material possessions, social standing, and power. Satisfied impoverished individuals are more likely to remain politically tranquil, while dissatisfied impoverished individuals are more prone to revolt. Conversely, satisfied affluent individuals are more likely to oppose revolution. Davies posits that it is not the tangible supply of goods, equality, and freedom that primarily incites revolution, but rather the state of dissatisfaction. This revolutionary mindset requires a persistent and dynamic anticipation for increased opportunities to satisfy basic needs. In the event of an abrupt economic downturn, a nation will enter a period of economic recession, which will result in a sense of deprivation in individuals' lives following a period of prosperity and negative impacts on cognitive development. This feeling of deprivation can lead to the formation of political discontent in society (Davies, 1962).

Davies' theory of curves can be applied to the political developments in Tunisia and Egypt, which can be divided into three stages: the first stage, rapid economic growth; the second stage, increasing levels of expectations; and the third stage, the creation of economic recession and the feeling of relative

deprivation. Economic growth in Egypt and Tunisia was due to rising oil prices, fiscal policies, comprehensive economic adjustment planning, and special attention to the tourism industry and the liberalization of the global economy, as well as privatization. This economic growth led to a significant improvement in the standard of living of the people, which can be considered as the first stage of the revolution in Davies' theory. The second stage, the increase in the level of expectations and expectations, was followed by measures taken for education and literacy, resulting in an increase in the number of educated individuals with high levels of political awareness. At this stage, the demands and expectations of the people increased. The third stage, the beginning of economic recession, increased the people's dissatisfaction and ignited the revolution, leading to the fall of the governments of the Arab world (Herati and Yousefi, 2019).

Discussion

In recent years, there has been a growing concern about how new technologies are impacting society in unprecedented ways, particularly in regards to social media. The self-immolation of an individual in a small country sparked a chain reaction that led to a change of government and widespread unrest in a large geographical area and several countries around the world. This event serves as a stark reminder of the power that new technologies hold over society and the need for critical thinking skills in navigating their impact on our lives. We must recognize that teaching critical thinking skills is no longer an optional extra but an undeniable necessity in today's world. However, critical thinking skills alone are not enough in this digital age; emotional intelligence is equally important in managing one's emotions in response to online content. In light to the insights presented in this article, it becomes apparent that the development of critical

thinking among digital natives and the importance of emotional intelligence in media education cannot be overlooked. New times create new skills. This article highlights the significance these skills hold in the spread and impact digital media and memes have on culture and society, particularly among Generation Z individuals in non-western societies. By examining the genesis of revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia, which have been attributed to the "Internet revolution," this article sheds light on the role digital media and memes play in fostering emotional contagion and propagating civic movement.

The study emphasizes that cyberspace and social media has become a significant platform for expressing opinions, transmitting real events and information, and awakening the public mind in the Internet revolution. The expansion in communication, enhanced data transmission speed, the rise in social networks, and the advent in a technologically savvy generation have transcended temporal and spatial constraints, strengthening social connections, social capital, and the voice for hitherto silent citizens. Particularly, the memes provided an atmosphere in which silence and fear could be broken and emotions that transmitted by memes, had a triggering role and performance of emotions while accelerating mobilization, creating the individual and collective level emotions intersection in public spheres of Tunisia and Egypt, and affecting the contagion of emotions over geographical borders. The intersection of individual emotions with collective emotions in the Arab Spring shows that there is an intertwined relationship between emotions, the expression of emotions, and the construction of collective emotions in digital sphere. The rise of negative emotions such as anger, rage, and fear spreads through slogans, memes, symbols, and social media, and encourages others to protest through the content such as blaming injustice. Due to the strength of these negative

emotions, they led to the formation of movements such as the Arab Spring. Then, through the circulation of collective emotions, which creates solidarity and collective identity, negative emotions shift to positive emotions such as hope. This sense of achievement started in Tunisia, was then augmented in Egypt, and became an example of transnational emotional contagion facilitated by digital media. These insights underscore the need for the cultivation and enhancement of critical thinking and emotional intelligence as indispensable preconditions for a discerning perspective and objective analysis in the digital realm, particularly among Generation Z individuals who utilize memes and social networks extensively in their daily lives and activities. Digital citizenship education should focus on enhancing critical thinking to help netizen understand the positive and negative aspects of social media, including its potential to spread hate, bullying, and false information, as well as its role in shaping public opinion, influencing political discourse, and promoting social change. Additionally, media education should aim to develop emotional intelligence, which enables netizens to navigate through online communities, manage conflicts, and build positive relationships. This skill set also helps them develop empathy, which is essential in promoting social cohesion and reducing social polarization. The cultivation and enhancement of critical thinking and emotional intelligence in media education also helps netizens understand the cultural and social context of memes, their potential to spread misinformation, and their role in shaping public opinion. It also helps them develop the skills to create and share memes in a responsible and meaningful way, fostering critical thinking skills, creativity, and the ability to communicate complex ideas through visual media. By development these skills, new generations will be better equipped to navigate the digital realm with critical thinking

and an emotionally intelligent perspective, understand the impact of social media, making them successful media consumers and effective communicators. Netizens will also become empowered digital citizens who can contribute positively to society and culture.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this article provides valuable insights into the nexus between new technologies, media education, critical thinking, and emotional intelligence in the context of social media and memes. It highlights how, by fostering motivation among digital natives and stimulating emotions, social media can enhance public mobilization and participation, which is a key factor in the sustainability of culture. It underscores the importance of teaching these skills particularly Generation Z, who is heavily engaged with these digital platforms. The study highlights how emotional contagion through memes and social media platforms plays a critical role in mobilizing social movements and triggering collective action. Moreover, it emphasizes the need for a discerning perspective and objective analysis in the digital realm, where misinformation, hate speech, and polarization can thrive. By enhancing critical thinking skills, digital citizens can understand the positive and negative aspects of social media, while emotional intelligence enables them to manage conflicts, build positive relationships, and cultivate empathy. Media education should focus on these two pillars to foster responsible and meaningful engagement with social media and the creation and sharing of memes. Equipped with these skills, future generations can navigate the digital realm with a critical mindset, contribute positively to society, and effectively communicate. Overall, this article calls for greater attention to the development of critical thinking and emotional intelligence in media education to ensure informed and responsible digital citizenship.

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