University of Sharjah

Literature Review: Central Asia Multi-Country, Important Issues, Social & State Media

Prepared for: Statistics for Communication- 11 - الإحصاء للاتصال

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Introduction

Since the end of World War II, despite the noted shortcomings, in Central Asia, many emerging authoritarian governments have incorporated some sort of voting process into their governing systems. However, the reasons why individuals choose to participate in elections in this region, known for its landscape and limited democratic history, have not been thoroughly explored (Arafat, 2022). These changing and diverse political systems during a time of digital media growth have not been extensively studied in modern research. In these regimes, there is a body that citizens can elect with legislative powers. Nonetheless, these elections are generally not viewed as free or fair like those in other countries. Despite this perception people still take part in the voting process. The motivations driving participation under these circumstances are not fully understood (Lemon & Antonov, 2020). While past studies suggest a link between Internet usage and political involvement, the influence of the internet on engagement in contexts remains unclear. Particularly how digital media impacts situations where voters may realise their vote doesn't carry weight or that the electoral system is flawed is still not completely clear. Research indicates that the internet has the potential to spark protests, in scenarios (Schneider, 210).

The impact of consuming media on types of engagement, such as voting in authoritarian settings, has not been extensively studied. Current research often uses samples and lacks comparative analysis. By examining these aspects, we aim to gain insights into how social media influences democracy and important issues within these nations (Gainous & Wagner, 2014).

It's important to integrate the results, from the survey mentioned by the professor of statistics during the communication statistics lecture. The survey offers perspectives on the environment and how it impacts democratic procedures in the area. Data will be attached within the annexed section for reference's sake.

Overview of History, Culture and Democracy

To understand the impact of media and democracy on Important Issues in Central Asia (with a focus on Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan), it is crucial to grasp the historical, cultural, and democratic backgrounds of these nations. This summary will lay the groundwork for delving into how social media interacts with each country's Most Important Issues.

Georgia

Located at the crossroads between Eastern Europe and Western Asia boasts a narrative that spans millennia. Its prime location, along the Silk Road, has contributed to its complexity. Throughout its history, Georgia has endured periods of rule. Fought for autonomy. The nation's vibrant cultural legacy encompasses customs, literature, cuisine and the ancient Georgian alphabet. The constitution of the Democratic Republic of Georgia in 1918 marked an endeavour towards establishing a government but was cut short by Soviet intervention (Shatberashvili, 2023). Throughout its history, the nation has nurtured ties with neighbouring cultures while safeguarding its customs. A prime illustration of this is Georgia's

architectural heritage, which traces back 8,000 years and embodies the country's historical legacy and cultural essence (Skhirtladze, 2022).

Georgia's democracy has undergone significant political transformations since gaining independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. It has made considerable progress in democratic reforms, especially in the 2000s, with efforts to improve governance, fight corruption, and hold free and fair elections. However, challenges remain, including political polarisation and concerns over judicial independence (Shatberashvili, 2023, pp. 1918–21).

Kyrgyzstan

The culture of Kyrgyzstan is strongly connected to the stories and myths of the Kyrgyz Oghuz, which hold importance in comprehending the history, customs, faiths and ceremonies of the Kyrgyz community. These tales have been pivotal in uniting the fabric of Kyrgyz society, with a rich cultural heritage that shines through its focus on storytelling, music and indigenous games. Its past is defined by its location on the Silk Road enabling cultural interactions that shaped its growth (Isaacs & Marat, 2021).

Kyrgyzstan is often cited as an island of democracy in Central Asia, having experienced several peaceful transfers of power through elections since independence. However, it has also faced political instability, with two revolutions in 2005 and 2010, and ongoing challenges related to governance, human rights, and the rule of law (Anisov et al., 2021).

Kazakhstan

For centuries, the wide plains of Kazakhstan have been home to groups adding to a diverse cultural legacy encompassing music, dance and handcrafted items. With a history marked by relationships with neighbouring nations, the country played a role in the Soviet Union before achieving autonomy in 1991 (Isaacs & Marat, 2021).

Kazakhstan has been focusing on maintaining stability and fostering growth with Nursultan Nazarbayev leading the country as president, from its independence until 2019. Despite progress in development, the nation has faced scrutiny for its governance approach, lack of diversity and constraints on freedom of expression and gathering (Schiek, 2022).

Tajikistan

Tajikistan's cultural heritage reflects its origins, which can be seen in its language, literary works, and musical traditions. Throughout its history, the nation has been under the rule of empires and was a constituent republic of the Soviet Union until 1991. The aftermath of the war that ensued after gaining independence continues to shape the country's trajectory (Isaacs & Marat, 2021).

It is known for its leadership with President Emomali Rahmon holding office since 1992. The administration has faced backlash, for stifling dissent regulating media content and restricting freedoms (Fisher Melton, 2023).

Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan takes pride in its heritage, having played a pivotal role as a major hub along the historic Silk Road. The nation has made advancements in fields such as science, art and architecture while also reflecting the influence of Islam, in its customs and way of life (Isaacs & Marat, 2021).

Ever since Uzbekistan achieved independence, it has been governed by President Islam Karimov until his passing in 2016, when he was followed by his successor, Shavkat Mirziyoyev. Despite some efforts to introduce reforms that promote transparency and enhance rights, the political environment continues to be closely managed, leaving little room for opposing voices (Aziz, 2020).

Survey Analysis

The previously mentioned survey has effectively collected data, from 6044 participants from Georgia (n = 1233), Kyrgyzstan (n = 1207), Kazakhstan (n = 1201), Tajikistan (n = 1202), and Uzbekistan (n = 1201) using survey questions, with 57% female and 43% male gender distribution. While this is not the study exploring the connection between Internet use and traditional political involvement in Western democracies, it is the initial one to carry out a cross-national comparison within Central Asia. This presents an opportunity to investigate how digital media and democracy interact in a region that hasn't received attention from political experts. It's important to recognise the value of focusing on a demographic in our sample rather than the general population, particularly in the realm of digital media

research. Firstly, the targeted age group is more likely to engage with media and rely on the internet for news. Secondly, if the trends and behaviours observed within this group are notably different, they could potentially indicate changes as this generation grows older and assumes more influential roles in society. Lastly, statistically speaking, concentrating on a cohort strengthens the reliability of our conclusions about this demographic compared to having a mixed-age sample size. In essence, this method gives us a sample of young individuals than usual existing data in the literature.

The fieldwork took place from November to December 15 2023, where interviews were conducted in languages or Russian. The methodology used was Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) along with a Random Digit Dial (RDD) approach to participants. In the RDD process telephone numbers were randomly generated using software without employing any stratification techniques. To maintain data accuracy, extensive quality checks were carried out, including back checks and statistical controls. Survey weights were calculated using the Iterative Proportional Fitting algorithm. Applied to ensure that the surveyed population's demographic composition was accurately represented. These adjustments considered key demographic factors, like gender, age, settlement type, ethnicity and educational background to align with national census data.

The CAB survey uses an approach within the limitations of our data, to explore how people's preferences for media platforms relate to their views on artificial intelligence (AI). It started by looking at the numbers for AI optimism. How much people use platforms like TikTok, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and VKontakte? Then we ran some tests using Least Squares (OLS) regression. At first, we looked at how AI optimism is influenced by using

algorithm-based platforms (such as TikTok, Twitter, and Instagram) versus social-focused ones (like Facebook and VKontakte), treating them as separate factors in our analysis. These platforms were then grouped based on whether they're algorithm-driven or more about social networking, and adjusted our regression models accordingly. Our analysis also factored in things like trust in media, attitudes towards tracking, demographic details (such as age, location type, gender, education level, income) and specific indicators for Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan compared to the democratic country, in our dataset. This method allowed us to explore if the connection between using algorithm-based platforms and having optimism about AI is stronger compared to the link between using media and having optimism about AI. It's important to include control factors like trust in media and attitudes towards tracking in our models as they can affect how optimistic people are about AI. Trust in media reflects a person's belief in the reliability of media content, suggesting that being sceptical of media could lead to scepticism towards AI. Similarly, views on tracking, which involve opinions on privacy and how platforms handle data, may shape perceptions of AI technologies since these technologies often involve tracking. By considering these factors we hope to understand how social media usage impacts optimism about AI.

To improve the analysis, measures for both algorithm-based platform use and social networking platform used incorporating them into our OLS regression models were developed. Recognising that our dataset is observational and may not support conclusions we used Coarsened Exact Matching (CEM) to deal with biases and enhance the reliability of our findings. Lastly, we established user profile models using OLS for both the algorithm-

driven platform use and social networking indices while taking into account the control variables from our examinations.

Survey Results

After categorising each of the 19 issues mentioned in the survey into 4 groups, constructing our independent variable into the following:

- Economic Factors

- Political Factors

- Social Factors

- Infrastructure Factors

Then index each of the related scalable (where applicable) dependent questions into the following indexes by averaging their scalable questions them:

- Gender

- Demographic Index (made up of 8 questions)

- Trust in Government Indexes (made up of 6 questions)

    o Overall Trust in Governments Index

    o Western Governments (US + EU)

    o Eastern Governments (China + Russia)

    o Local Governments (Local + Federal)

- Attitude Toward Governments' System Index (made up of 9 questions)

- Political Participation Index (made up of 10 questions)

- Attitudes about Democracy in Country Index (made up of 9 questions)

- Social Media Usage Indexes (made up of 8 questions)

  - Overall Social Media Usage Index

  - Western Social Media Platforms Index

  - Eastern Social Media Platforms Index

- Sources of Political News Indexes (made up of 6 questions)

  - Overall Media Sources Index

  - Traditional Sources Index (TV specifically)

  - All Social Media Platforms, split also to:

    - Western SM Platforms Index

    - Eastern SM Platforms Index

We saw a focus from the public on Economic issues covering around 56%, more than the others combined, as shown in Table 1.

Issues Distribution

	Economic	Political	Social	Infrastructure
Series1	3914	1287	1420	357

Percentages shown: Economic 56%, Political 18%, Social 20%, Infrastructure 5%. Y-axis: Number of Issues.
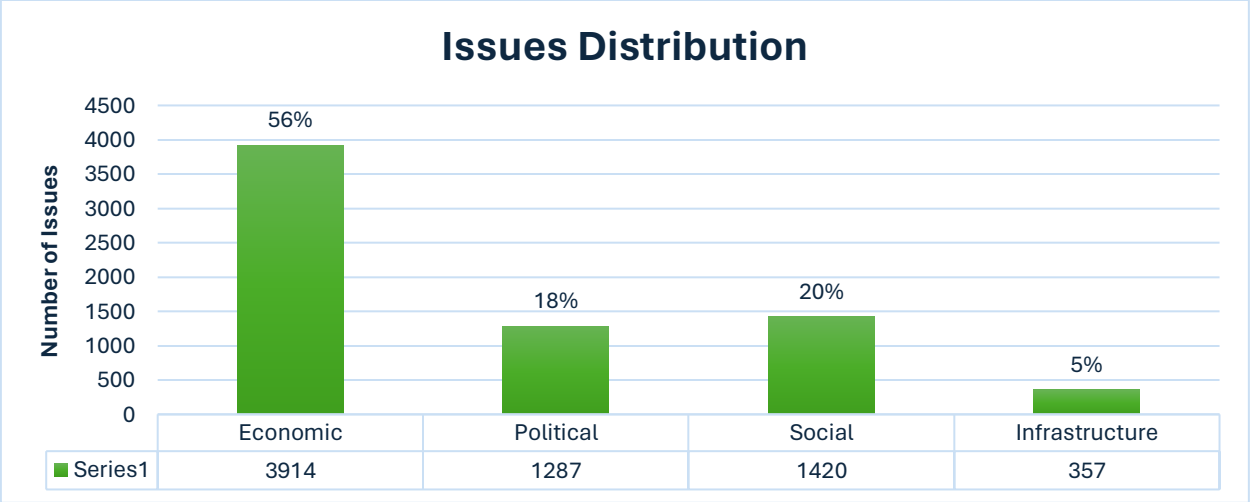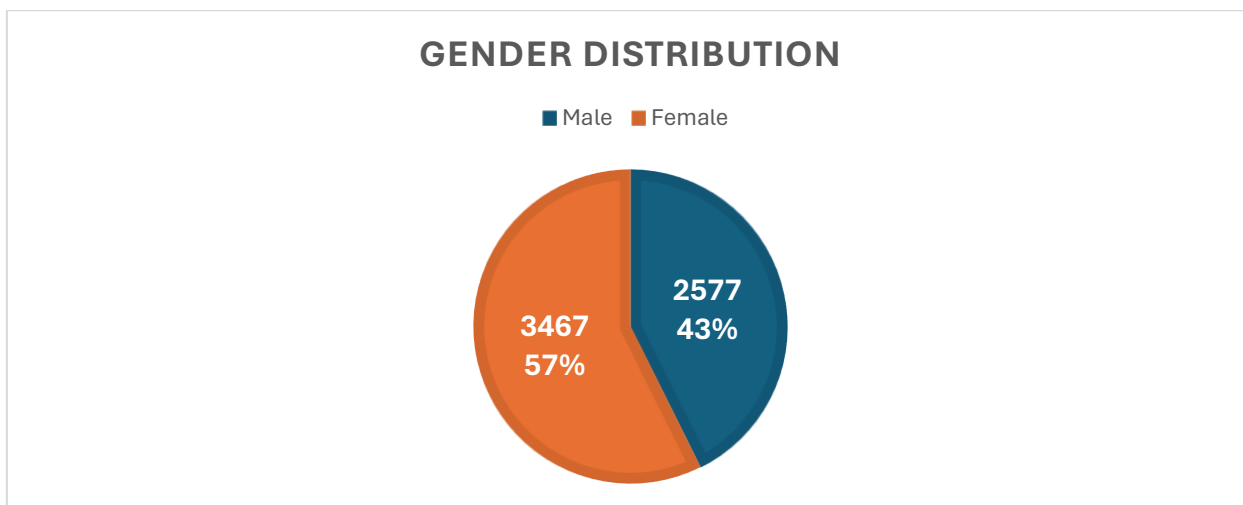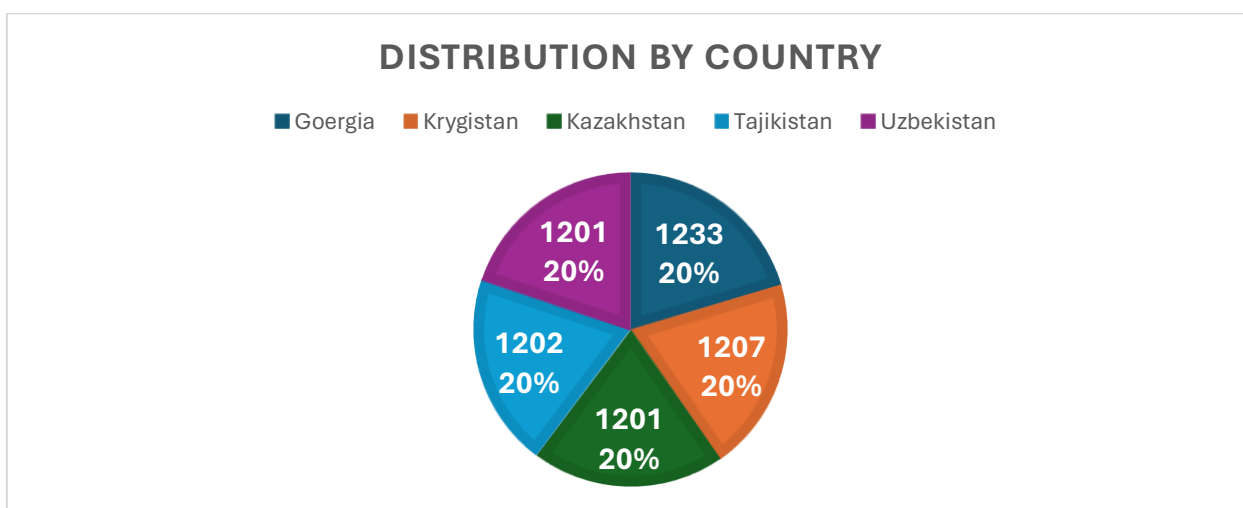
Table 1: Most Important Issues in Each of the Countries

Accroding to the demographics, we believe the survey was representative from Gender and Country wise, as can be seen in Graphs 1 and 2 below.

GENDER DISTRIBUTION

■ Male ■ Female

2577
43%

3467
57%

Graph 1: Participants' Gender Distribution

DISTRIBUTION BY COUNTRY

■ Goergia ■ Krygistan ■ Kazakhstan ■ Tajikistan ■ Uzbekistan

1201
20%

1233
20%

1207
20%

1201
20%

1202
20%

Graph 2: Participants' Country Distribution

However, further work needs to be done regarding age, as we believe the survey focused on participants age 30 and less, as can be seen in Graph 3. A disclaimer: this paper will not

look into the data from an age perspective, though literature does suggest and might explain

some of the data found.
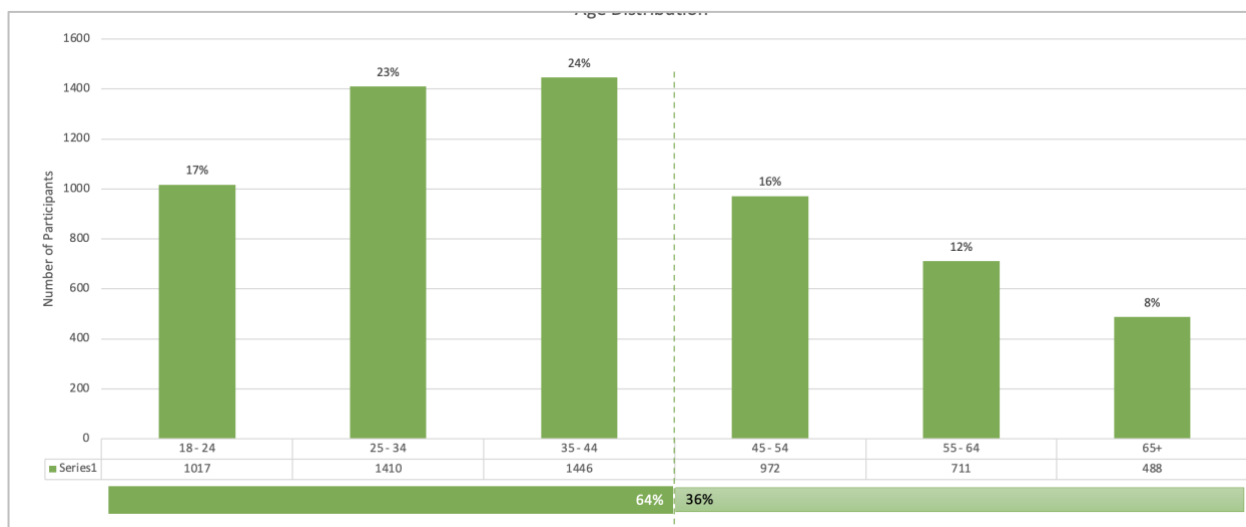
Graph 3: Participants' Age Distribution

Using regression between the independent variable and all of the dependent variables

showed an interesting pattern of relationship between the different segments, as shown in

Table 2.

Indexes\Issues	Economic	Political	Social	Infrastructure
Demographics Indexes				
Female	***	***	0	0
Male	***	***	0	0
Demographics Index	*	***	0	0
Trust In Government (Trust in Institutions and Media)				
All Governments	**	***	***	0
Western Governments	**	**	0	0
Eastern Governments	***	***	*	.

Local Governments	0	0	0	0
Attitude about Country's Government and Government System (Political Engagement and Views)				
Attitude toward Gov. System Index	****	****	0	0
Political Participation (Political Engagement and Views)				
Political Participation Index	**	***	0	0
Attitudes about Democracy in Country (Political Engagement and Views)				
Democracy Index	*	**	0	0
Social Media Use (Social Media Use and Influence)				
All Social Media Platforms	***	*	***	0
Western SM Platforms	***	*	***	0
Eastern SM Platforms	**	*	**	0
Sources of Political News (Trust in Institutions and Media)				
Media Platforms Sources	0	0	0	0
Traditional Platform Sources (TV)	0	***	*	*
All SM Platforms Sources	0	0	0	0
Western SM Platforms Sources	0	0	0	0
Eastern SM Platforms Sources	0	*	0	0

Table 2: Regression Analysis between IV and each indexed DV across 5 countries.

Results Interpretation

The below section attempts to interpret the results of the analysis made in the CAB data mentioned earlier.

Gender Difference

Looking at the data from the "Transition Theory" lens, Table 2 clearly shows that participants from the five countries show a difference in how they prioritise issues based on gender. Males seem to focus on matters, while females show a preference for political issues. This shift in emphasis can be seen across subjects.

Shared Historical Experience

The shared historical background during the Soviet Union era has impacted gender relationships and widened gender differences in the five Central Asian countries. This impact is complex, originating from initiatives regarding gender equality during the period of change following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the revival of values.

During the Soviet Union era, they actively advocated for gender equality as a component of their goals, intending to involve women in various aspects such as employment, education, and political participation (Kamp, 2016; Khitarishvili, 2016a). In this era, there were improvements in the rights of women and their involvement in affairs with the Soviet government, implementing measures to liberate women from conventional duties and involve them in the socialist community and economy. Women in Central Asia had more opportunities for education and jobs than before, leading to changes in societal perceptions of gender roles.

However, the fall of the Soviet Union led to a period of transition that had an effect, on gender relationships (Khitarishvili, 2016b). After the fall, there were changes in society and the economy, leading to a revival of fashioned gender norms and a decrease in government

backing for gender equality efforts. During this time of change, there was a return to values that prioritised men's roles and highlighted women as nurturers and homemakers in response to the Soviet influence on gender regulations (Droeber, 2006; Kamp, 2016). The divergence was also impacted by difficulties and increasing joblessness, particularly hitting women harder, causing them to leave employment and return to traditional household duties (Khitarishvili, 2016b). Explaining why Females don't see Politics as an important issue that needs fixing and Males focus on Economic factors.

Generational Divide

In addition, the era following the collapse of the Soviet Union has seen a resurgence of practices and a revival of Islamic religious traditions predating the Soviet era. These developments have impacted gender norms and societal expectations. At times, this resurgence has resulted in limitations resurfacing on women's freedoms, affecting their ability to make choices about their sexuality and bodies. The resurfacing of beliefs and the impact of religious practices have led to an increased gap between genders, resulting in women facing more restrictions on their liberties than during the Soviet era (Droeber, 2006).

The lasting effects of the Soviet Union's efforts for women's inclusion are evident in Central Asia, where a mix of Soviet-era progress and traditional beliefs clash, posing challenges to achieving gender equality. This blend of present influences highlights the generational battle between modern ideals and older traditions in shaping gender dynamics in the region (Droeber, 2006). However, as mentioned in Graph 3, further data preparation needs to be done to have a more representative sample on age.

Economic Focus

The shift from communism to market economies in the 5 mentioned countries has had a notable impact on gender relations, leading to a rise in gender disparities. This change is linked to the reorganisation and societal shifts that occurred with the transition from planned economies during the Soviet era to more market-driven systems. Here's how the economic emphasis during and post-communism contributed to this transformation.

Economic Restructuring and Job Losses

During communism, women were encouraged to join the workforce as part of government initiatives, resulting in increased job opportunities and educational attainment for them. Nevertheless, the shift towards market-based economies brought about changes in the economy, leading to the closure or downsizing of state-run companies. This had an impact on industries where women made up a large portion of the workforce. This led to a rise in the number of women without jobs and a return to traditional gender roles, where men were mainly viewed as the primary earners (Sasser, 2001).

Policy and Support Systems

During the transition period, there was also a decrease in government-backed childcare and benefits for mothers, which had previously helped women stay involved in the workforce. With these supports being taken away, it became harder for women to juggle their jobs and family responsibilities, often leading them to make decisions between the two (Legrand, 2015).

Social Media and Owners' Influence

From Table 2, there is a clear correlation between Social Media consumption and its orientation toward political issues, regardless of whether it is Local, Western or Eastern governments.

Social media plays a critical role in influencing the landscape and public perception of governments in Central Asian 5 nations. Social media platforms have become crucial arenas for political discourse activism and shaping public viewpoints on both local and foreign governments.

If we look into the gap from the "Algorithmic Mediation Theory" lens, one would say that social media platforms are invested and actively in creating these filter bubbles. On the other hand, if we look into the table from the "Uses and Gratifications Theory" lens, the data will tell us that users are more attracted to the least resistant ideas, hence will be attracted to either Western or Eastern values. The authors of this paper are more lenient to the "Algorithmic Mediation Theory" way of thinking due to the strong significance of such correlations with coefficients closer to 1 and away from 0. If the coefficient is closer to 0, that means that there is a healthy mix between the 2 opinions, but having them on extreme ends (closer to 1 or -1), means that the algorithm is pushing them in these directions. We can compare this we the Cambridge Analytica scandal, where the purpose of his algorithm was to identify the participants with extreme ends and target them (Heawood, 2018).

Influence on Youth Political Engagement

In Kazakhstan, social media plays a role in involving people in political activities and advocacy. The research titled "Digital citizenship in the 21st century: Analyzing the impact of social media on youth political activism and civic engagement" showcases how Kazakh youths utilize digital channels to boost their understanding of politics and engagement (*Digital Citizenship in the 21st Century*, 2023). This indicates that social media is playing a role in shaping the youths' public perception, steering them towards embracing democratic values over traditional authoritarian tendencies.

Platform for Dissent and Critique

Social media platforms also offer a public sphere for critiquing and questioning governments' actions. In situations where traditional media is frequently under state control or subject to censorship, social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and regional platforms like VKontakte serve as channels for sharing information and voicing opposition (Gaur & Gupta, 2021). This could result in more attention being paid to the actions and policies of government encouraging citizens to be better informed and involved.

Exposure to Global Political Narratives

Access, to media and political discussions on social media platforms shapes how people in different nations view and engage with governments from the East and West. Social media channels that enable interactions introduce users to viewpoints potentially influencing their opinions, on foreign policies and global diplomacy (Gaur & Gupta, 2021). Global events and foreign government policies shared in media have the power to influence opinion either

leaning towards Western or Eastern values. As suggested in Table 2, by Western values we indicate economic issues (more capitalist values) and by Eastern values, we indicate social issues (more socialist values).

Conclusion

In short, local cultures and social media impact Central Asia by redirecting attention to various governments through increased involvement of young people, offering a space for expressing disagreement, introducing citizens to worldwide political stories, economic reforms, and supporting social activism. These interactions showcase the relationship among technology, political and cultural norms in the area.

Possible Hypothesis & Future Areas of Study

Research questions that can be investigated further:

- **Impact of Various Social Media Platforms on Public Framing;** Investigate the impact of social media platforms, on shaping views and opinions by presenting topics in unique ways. It aims to investigate how platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and local Social Media Platforms contribute to shaping the public's frame in political and economic matters.

- **Analysis of Key Issues Across Multiple Index Dimensions;** Explore and examine the challenges on local, national and global scales. The focus would be on comprehending the differences in priorities and issues across these levels and

identifying the factors that influence these discrepancies. New horizontal dimensions like:

- o **Chronological:** Needs indexing by age, hence requires data manipulations as mentioned in Graph 3.

- o **Geopolitical:** Index by Global, National, and Local issues. Then cross-analysis between the different dimensions vertically and horizontally.

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