ABSTRACT

Social media is becoming an integral part of our lives as a new-age communication medium due to the rapid penetration of smartphones and high-speed Internet. There is a consensus among researchers that when there is an increase in social media diffusion in society, there tend to be positive externalities, such as higher civic engagement and increased awareness about various global issues. Despite such benefits, it is also important to note that an increased social media diffusion can also have harmful societal impacts, such as fake news spread, making it a double-edged sword. Although the existing social media literature has inquired about the various impact of increased social media use at an individual level, there is a limited understanding of the country-level impact of such increased social media use due to high social media diffusion in society. Therefore, the primary objective of this thesis is to empirically investigate the societal impact of increased social media diffusion at a country-level. While understanding the societal impact of increased social media diffusion is critical, from a policy perspective, it is also important to understand how to influence such diffusion consciously. This is only possible when there is a clear understanding of what factors drive social media diffusion at a country level. However, the literature review of the past studies indicated that there is no holistic understanding of such factors. Therefore, the first step in this thesis was to bridge this gap by undertaking a study focused on exploring the country-level determinants

of social media diffusion. Once the determinants of social media diffusion at a country level were clear, the next step was to explore the societal impact of increased social media diffusion in a country. To this end, this thesis conducted a detailed literature review, which identified three issues (i.e., foreign disinformation, subjective well-being, and corruption) that are understudied but of contemporary relevance. Further, the review also found that only a few studies have theoretically argued how social media, in its various roles, alters already well-established relationships between various factors and their impact on society. Given the aforementioned research gaps, this thesis investigates the (1) country-level determinants of social media diffusion and (2) how social media impacts society in its three different roles: (i) an agenda-building platform, (ii) an amplifier or attenuator of effects of societal characteristics, and (iii) a source of communicative power, in the context of foreign disinformation, subjective well-being (SWB), and corruption, respectively.

The first study, titled "Country-level determinants of social media diffusion," carried out an empirical exploration of the country-level determinants of social media diffusion. Based on past studies, the study constructed a government-technology-people (GTP) framework of information, communication, and technology (ICT) diffusion, which is used to investigate the determinants of social media diffusion. A panel data analysis empirically established the direct effect of (1) the importance of ICT in the government's vision, (2) ICT law maturity, (3) Internet

bandwidth, (4) ICT cost, and (5) capacity to own ICT, on social media diffusion.

The second study, titled "Social media as an agenda-building platform: Foreign disinformation, domestic online media fractionalization, government's control over cyberspace, and social media-induced offline violence," carried out an empirical investigation of the role of social media as an agenda-building platform in the context of foreign disinformation. Particularly, drawing on agenda-building theory, the study examined how countries use disinformation through social media to instigate social media-induced offline violence by fractionalizing online media in a rival country. Further, the study highlighted the importance of incorporating the role of the government while adapting the agenda-building theory to the foreign disinformation context and showed that the government's control over cyberspace plays a critical role in negating the effects of foreign disinformation through social media. Furthermore, this study presented a conceptual framework to guide researchers in advancing this field of research.

The third study, titled "Social media as an amplifier or attenuator: How social media diffusion shapes the influence of culture on subjective well-being?" conducted an empirical investigation of the role of social media as an amplifier and attenuator of cultural impacts. Drawing on the affordance-based institutional logics perspective, the study examined how a high social media diffusion can amplify and attenuate the strengths of

already well-established relationships by shifting logic centralities. Specifically, the study inquired about the moderating effect of social media diffusion on the relationships between six cultural dimensions and SWB. The results from the dynamic panel data analysis suggest that social media diffusion in a country (1) attenuates the effect of power distance, (2) amplifies the impact of individualism, and (3) does not influence the impact of masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation, and indulgence on SWB. In short, this study explored and contributed to a highly relevant but yet under-explored area of research, the influence of social media diffusion on societal logics, by offering rich theoretical explanations on the "culture—SWB" relationship.

The fourth study is titled "Social media as a source of citizens' communicative power: Relating social media diffusion, e-participation, and corruption." This study carried out an inquiry of the influence of social media on corruption. Drawing on Habermas' theory of democracy, this study developed a conceptual framework to investigate whether social media diffusion, by increasing the communicative power of citizens through informal participation, could reduce corruption in a country through e-participation, a formal participative mechanism to channel the communicative power for societal change. The results from a panel data analysis suggested that a high level of social media diffusion could reduce corruption by increasing e-participation. Nevertheless, the strength of such influence may not be constant and wanes over time. The findings

underscored the vital role that social media could play in leveraging citizens' power to reduce corruption.

In sum, this thesis seeks to theoretically and empirically explore the country-level determinants of social media diffusion and investigate social media's role as a double-edged sword, which can be used to solve societal problems or be misused to create societal problems. However, the existing literature on social media falls short in the theoretical understanding of country-level causes of social media diffusion and social media's various roles through which it affects society. The thesis aims to bridge this gap by first exploring the country-level determinants of social media using a new framework and then theorizing its various roles in impacting society by positioning social media as an agenda-building platform, an attenuator/amplifier, and a source of communicative power.