

Original Article

The Role of Online Forums in Shaping Public Discourse

Dr. Cat Pause

Senior Lecturer, Massey University, New Zealand.

Received: 11-03-2022

Revised: 11-23-2022

Accepted: 12-02-2022

Published: 12-04-2022

ABSTRACT

The advent of digital communication technologies has made the sphere of communication evolve quite rapidly, which is the fundamental aspect of the way people are stimulated to hold the public discourse. Of these technologies, the online forums have become important platforms of deliberation, forming opinions, and information exchange. The paper will discuss how the online forums shape the discourse of the people based on their structure, social, and algorithmic dynamics. The online forums are different and decentralized as well as participatory in nature in contrast to the traditional media because users have possession and influence to the discourse, in political, social and cultural spheres. This paper explores the benefits of online forums in facilitating the democratization of communication, and at the same time, it presents the issue of misinformation, echo-chamber communication, and polarization. Combining qualitative content analysis and quantitative indicators of engagement allows the study to assess the degree of impact forums have on the formation of an opinion and decision-making process by the population. The methodology will entail sampling data where various platforms (general discussion forums, niche communities and moderated bodies of knowledge sharing) can be sampled. It has been found out that online forums can play a very substantial role in discourse, increasing the voices of varying levels, allowing live responses, and constructing knowledge on a community basis. Nevertheless, due to the lack of rigid moderation and the effects of algorithmic visibility in general, the selected discourse patterns tend to be biased. Another aspect that has been brought out in the study is the role of anonymity in enhancing participation as well as diminishing accountability, which in turn influences the quality of discussions. Moreover, the study presents a conceptual model whereby the architecture of the forum, the behavior of the users and the outcomes of the discourse are correlated. The findings indicate that though online discussions lead to strengthening democracy, they require better governance systems that facilitate beneficial participation. On the concluding part of the paper the author gives recommendations on what platform designers, policymakers, and researchers should ensure to maximize the utility of online forums in terms of creating informed and inclusive public discourse.

KEYWORDS

Microservices Architecture, Observability, Monitoring Systems, Distributed Tracing, DevOps, Cloud Computing, Telemetry Data, Reliability Engineering, System Diagnostics, Distributed Systems.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

The fast development of digital communication has essentially altered the manner in which the discourse of the masses is being produced, distributed, and consumed. Mass media, including newspapers, television, and radio was traditionally used as the main sources of disseminating information, and there were few possibilities of viewers to engage in the process. Nevertheless, the emergence of the internet has led to interactive systems that enabled the audience to actively participate in the communication process, which has taken communication to a new form of participative and decentralized communication process. Of these sites, one of the oldest and most stable forms of internet communication can be found online forums, which offer an opportunity to share ideas, discuss points, and form communities discussing the same interest. The online forums are also structured with a form of a discussion and organized according to topics unlike a lot of the social media in which short interactions with others are not well thought out but rather real-time. Discussions are generally organized in threads whereby a user is able to track the discussions along the way and make meaningful contributions. Also, since forums are usually community-based, both the administrators and users themselves will often moderate with rules and norms that will be enforced. These capabilities promote deeper and protracted discussion which forums are especially effective in the conduct of the popular discourse. The online forums are being instrumental in renegotiating the way people should participate in the digital era by promoting constant interactions and effective dissemination of different ideas.

1.2. Importance of Online Forums in Modern Society



Fig 1 - Importance of Online Forums in Modern Society

1.2.1. Enhancing Public Participation

Online forums are critical in ensuring increased people participation as it presents open and free platforms through which people can voice their views and conduct conversation. In contrast to the traditional media where communication is mostly one-sided, forums provide interactive communication, where users can actively contribute to the discussion, without regard to their social or geographical backgrounds. This inclusivity empowers democratic principles as it amplifies the voice of more citizens and promotes the participation of more people in many social, political, and cultural matters.

1.2.2. Facilitating Knowledge Sharing and Learning

Among the largest contributions made by online forums is that it facilitates knowledge sharing and collaborative learning. The users also get the opportunity to pose questions, exchange knowledge, and give answers to a vast array of issues, both technical and non-technical problem-solving. Such collective intelligence creates a culture of perpetual learning in which the information gets developed and enhanced by means of interaction within the community. Consequently, forums are an important source of education, be it formal or informal.

1.2.3. Building Digital Communities

Online forums assist in the creation of digital communities that focus on common interests, professions or causes. These communities provide one with a feeling of belonging and allow the user to network with fellow minded people. As a result of the long-term interactions, users build relations, share experiences and help one another which helps to strengthen social bonds in virtual realm. These groups can transcend online relationships and affect the relationships and co-operations in the real world.

1.2.4. Influencing Public Opinion

Forums can influence the mass opinion greatly because they shape the way a person perceives the information and processes it. The debates in these sites expose users to different perceptions, arguments and facts, which may affect their ideologies and attitudes. By reading and communicating with others, users are likely to strengthen or re-examine their views. This renders the online forums effective in the formation of group perception and social discourse.

1.2.5. Supporting Real-Time Information Exchange

In the contemporary society, velocity of disseminating information is quite significant and online forums are the best in facilitating quick communication. Users have the option of updating, chatting on the issues occurring, and replying to arising issues in a near real time. This immediacy renders forums highly useful when faced with challenging moments like emergencies, technological changes or social movements, when immediate information and discourse is highly needed.

1.3. Role of Online Forums in Shaping Public Discourse

Online forums are instrumental in the process of social construction and shaping of the discourse of the populace as the medium is active and participatory wherein people can share ideas, explore issues and share sense collectively. People use forums as decentralized systems of communication when compared with the traditional communication channels which are usually dominated by centralized institutions, and anyone regardless of their background can post their ideas to the discussion. This inclusiveness increases the variety of views in the general debate, which makes it possible to reflect more opinions and experiences. The users shape the framing and perception of issues within the digital public as they talk and debate about social, political, and cultural matters. The traces of the intercourse are one of the most important means of discourse formation on online forums. Users can discuss the previous input and create more profound and thoughtful discussions than the short and disjointed interactions seen on other social media platforms in discussion threads. Such a system facilitates reasoned debate, in which it is possible to offer arguments and or put them to test by others and thus improve them. Owing to this, forums help in critical thinking and empower users to have a more meaningful conversation. There is also the online forums that are also part of the agenda-setting process since they define the issues that actively circulate. Trending conversations, which can happen as a result of user interactions and model-based platform attention, may bring focus to particular problems and shape a wider discourse. This influence is however not without its challenges. Misinformation, biased reporting and echo chambers have an ability to influence discourse in such a manner that an existing belief is solidified and not one that promotes fair debate. Nevertheless, it is these restrictions that make online forums very potent in dictating the discourse of the masses, as it allows to keep interacting upon, exchange knowledge, and promote the development of mass opinion in the online era uninterrupted.

2. LITERATURE SURVEY

2.1. Evolution of Online Communication Platforms

The development of online communication services can be seen as one of the movements towards the complex digital ecosystem and interactive features at the expense of the simple text-based interaction. Earlier instants of online communication, including email lists and bulletin board systems (BBS), paved the way to asynchronous communication, where users were able to share information without their immediate availability. These systems were small in scale and use and brought about the digital community concept. As the web-based forums developed during the late 1990s and early 2000s, they made communication much more organized and accessible, as it included threaded discussions, user profiles, and moderation options. Such developments enabled the ability to have protracted conversations and community building even beyond geographical borders. Over the last several years, the layout of traditional forums has changed to incorporate the elements that have typically come with the social media, such as upvoting, tagging, live notifications, and the recommendation of the content based on algorithms. These are not only reasons that increase user engagement but also affect what discussions become visible and cool, therefore, determining the nature of information transfer and engagement.

2.2. Theoretical Perspectives on Public Discourse

Classical theories of discussion used to study the public discussions in online forums stem from deliberative democracy and the idea of the public sphere, resistant to the insistence of the rationality debate, inclusiveness, and collective decisions. Digitally, these frameworks have been spread to take into consideration the decentralized communication and networked nature of communication. Online forums give people of various backgrounds an opportunity to engage in a discussion, which may enhance the level of deliberation as it may bring on board multiple views. This democratization of participation can also be regarded as one of the main advantages of digital platforms. Nevertheless, researchers also point out certain drawbacks, saying that online dialogue does not always follow the best deliberative practices because of the unequal presence of participants, absence of moderation, and the impact of algorithms on platforms. Also, selective exposure to content that users are predisposed to may occur because of the nature of human inclination to listen to content conforming to his or her already held views, which compromises the variety of opinions required in meaningful dialogue on an issue at the societal level.

2.3. Impact of Anonymity and Identity

The issue of anonymity is very instrumental in forming user behaviours in the online forums. Forums will decrease the social and psychological barriers by acclimating people to non-revealing their real-world identities, as it will prompt the people to open up and speak more, especially in the sensitive and controversial topics that are present. This may help build inclusivity and allow the voices of the marginalized to be heard without being judged or reprimanded. But anonymity brings in some issues of accountability and trust as well. In such cases, the lack of information that can be recognized may cause disinhibition that makes the user less bound by the rules of society and can lead to uncivil behavior or harassment or spreading unverified information. Literature indicates that anonymity can help in the exercise of freedom of expression; however, it will need to be checked by some measure to ensure healthy conversations take place. Systems of hybrid identity, i.e. using pseudonymity coupled with reputation measures have been suggested as a means of maintaining the positive aspects of anonymity and limiting the adverse consequences.

2.4. Misinformation and Echo Chambers

The spread of fake news is a burning issue in online forums, which has a major effect on the quality and trustworthiness of the public. User-generated content of forums is diverse; however, it is not necessarily the content of forums that can go through a strict verification process. This opens channels of the fast dissemination of untrue or erroneous information. Secondly, there is an issue of the so-called echo chambers that worsens this problem by surrounding the users with experiences of hearing opinions that are more or less similar to their own. The use of algorithmic recommendation systems and self-selection behavior helps to facilitate this effect, enforcing the current biases and restricting the exposure to other viewpoints. Consequently, users are likely to form a biased perception of the problems, which decreases critical thinking and productive discussion. To deal with these issues and encourage a more informed and, at the same time, balanced discussion in the online communities, scholars stress that better content moderation measures, fact-checking systems and digital literacy programs are necessary.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

The research design of the study is the mixed-methods research design; both approaches will be used to substantially analyze the impact of online forums on how the population talks. The logic behind the use of a mixed-methods framework can be explained as follows because the approach would give a more detailed picture of the complex social phenomenon through the analysis of numerical data and the contextualized understanding of the phenomenon. At the quantitative level, the paper employs the methods based on data to examine the trends of user activity, post frequency, interaction rates in terms of likes, replies, shares, and the dissemination of certain subjects in the context of threads in forums. They are using statistical tools to determine the trends and the correlations and behavioral trends that determine the changes in the discussions and what factors drive content visibility and participation. To supplement it, the qualitative part is devoted to the thematic and discourse analysis of a picked part of the discussions in a forum. This includes the analysis of nature of arguments, tone of communication, bias existing and the variety of opinions used by users. Through the analysis of textual content, the study will attempt to comprehend how meaning is created, opinion bargaining as well as deliberation processes are achieved among people in digital space. Also, the qualitative data will bring forward the subtleties like sarcasm, emotional undertones, and implicit histories which can only be identified using quantitative methods. By combining these two methods, the triangulation of the two is possible, which promotes more validity and reliability of the results. Quantitative findings are generalizable, whereas the qualitative observations can be employed in depth. Collectively, they enable the experiment to produce not only the measures of the influence of online forums on the discussion of populations but also clarify the mechanisms taking place behind the scene to make people interact with each other and form their opinions. This is a well rounded research design, as it is comprehensive, well-rounded, and strong.

3.2. Data Collection

The information in this research was gathered on as varied sample of online forums as possible in order to achieve a good representation of the digital discourse in various situations and among users. The choice of data sources was informed by the necessity to reflect the platform and user behavior and content moderation variations. In this regard, it can be seen that there were three main types of forums namely: general discussion, specialized communities of knowledge sharing, and moderated forums and unmoderated forums. The general discussion platforms entail common forums, on which forums cause discussion on a wide range of issues including politics, entertainment, social issues, and daily experiences. These platforms are useful in the formation of

opinions and informal discourse patterns of people because they have many and diverse users. By comparison, field-specific communities of knowledge sharing revolve around discussions in the specific domain of knowledge, in which users are more structured and information-oriented in interactions. These forums in most cases focus more on expertise, accuracy and problem solving, which translates to ideal forums to analyze the construction, validation and distribution of knowledge in the online settings. The consideration of both general and special platforms allows getting a comparative vision of the variability of the discourse in its depth, quality, and the purpose that is aimed at by the user. Also, the paper draws a distinction between moderated and unmoderated forums to determine the effects of governance and content regulation on communication processes. Another common behavior of moderated and unmoderated forums is the control of community rules, the exclusion of unwanted materials and the favorable development of discussions, where in moderated or unmoderated forum there can be little regulation, so the only realizable outcome can be a more free but very disorganized discussion. The collection of this data was done by scraping publicly-available posts, comments, timestamps and interaction metrics during a specific time span with a focus on maintaining the ethics of anonymity of users and data security. Such a data collection approach, with a multitude of sources and a variety of categories, makes the dataset more powerful and allows conducting a more in-depth study of the way in which various forum environments impact the discourse of the population.

3.3. Analytical Framework

Analytical Framework



Fig 2 - Analytical Framework

3.3.1. Content Analysis

The analysis of the textual data will utilize content analysis to analyze the online forums data systematically, and the focus of the research will be to identify the recurring themes, sentiment and patterns of discourses. This includes the categorization of the posts and comments according to the topics and tone (positive, negative or neutral) and nature of the arguments put forward. Thematic coding and sentiment analysis are amongst the techniques applied to reveal how the users share their thoughts, describe problems, and react to even opposite opinions. This dimension can be used to explain the qualitative features of discussions, such as the bias level, emotional compressiveness, and the general quality of discussions in various forums settings.

3.3.2. Engagement Metrics

Engagement measures aim at measuring user engagement and interaction in the online forums. The number of posts, replies, likes, shares, and response times are some of the key indicators used to measure the activity and responsiveness of discussions. There is also the depth of interaction determined through the amount of discussion threads and the number of times back and forth communications occur between users. These measures enable an understanding of the activity of the

users of the content, which matters are the most popular, and the extent of participation in various forms of forums. The quantitative approach assists in establishing the trends in how users act and which incentives motivate them to continue other engagement.

3.3.3. Network Analysis

The network analysis is used to learn the structural connections among users and the circulation of information within the online forums. The method of mapping user interaction in form of networks has been used to determine the key players, influential users and group of users who are interconnected. Centrality, density, and connectivity are the metrics employed with the goal of being familiar with information dissemination and identifying the users who are prominent contributors to forming discussions. The dimension is also useful in identifying the existence of communities or echo chambers, in which members are well interconnected and have common perspectives. On the whole, network analysis serves as a structural insight into the organization and impact of discourse in the digital environment.

3.4. Evaluation Metrics



Fig 3 - Evaluation Metrics

3.4.1. Diversity of Viewpoints

This variety of opinions is a decisive aspect of measurements of inclusiveness and diversity of the discussions in the Internet forums. This is the consideration of the variety of opinions, views and arguments provided by the users on a particular issue. Increased diversity implies that the platform creates an open discussion and enables people with different backgrounds and beliefs to participate in it. Such a measure is estimated by examining the existence of differentiated opinions, the proportion of the majority opinion and the minority opinion and the prevailing extent to which discursive debate has pluralism instead of being homogeneous. The level of diversity is also likely to be more constructive and informative when more diverse.

3.4.2. Accuracy of Information

Accuracy of information can be defined by reliability and factuality of information posted in online forums. This indicator finds out the level at which information given by the users is substantiated by trustworthy information, logical argument, or facts. The evaluation is done by finding the cases of misinformation, half truths or unsubstantiated views. Forums, which are characterized by a greater degree of informational correctness, have a positive effect on knowledge spreading and informative dialogues. The measure is critical in explaining the level of relative reliability of online platforms as sources of information or vice versa, propagation of false information.

3.4.3. Level of User Engagement

The degree of user interaction is the degree of involvement towards discussions. This involves the analysis of posts comments, replies and interactions in threads. The involvement is also high, which implies that the users are interested and involved in the subject of discussion making conversations more dynamic and long lasting. Moreover, engagement can also help demonstrate the availability and attractiveness of the platform, but also the topicality of the discussed topics. This measure aids in evaluating the success of online forums in encouraging and retaining the interest of the user in the long-run.

3.4.5. Degree of Polarization

The polarization of the level measures the level to which the discourses are subdivided into different sides of the argument usually with a vast contrast in terms of ideological beliefs. This measure looks into the pattern of the users to have balanced discussions or are in hard groupings where interaction is minimal among different positions. The concept known as high polarization usually relates to the conflict, less willingness to another point of view, and support of already existing prejudices. This measure can be used to find out whether online forums can foster healthy debate or intensify disordered and controversial public debate by examining how well and how often these groups agree, disagree and interact.

3.5. Conceptual Model

This study conceptual model describes the correlation between essential issues of the development of online forums and the quality of the created discourse of the population. In straightforward terms, the model explains that discourse quality is based on three significant variables, namely, user behavior, algorithm impact, and moderation processes. The quality of discourse is the state of the discussions in a forum based on their level of being informative, balanced, respectful, and meaningful. The behavior on the part of the users is crucial in influencing such an outcome as it involves interaction levels, opinions, reaction towards others, and participation in discussions. Such positive behaviors like respectful communication, critical thinking, and evidence-based arguments can increase the quality of discourse, and such negative ones as trolling, sharing misinformation, utilizing aggressive language can decrease it. The influence of algorithms is the influence of platform-based processes like ranking of the content, recommendations, and filters of visibility. These algorithms define the kind of posts that become the most emphasized ones, discussions that become popular, and content that users would see first. Due to this, algorithms can contribute to creating a massive impact on discourse by boosting specific perspectives and silencing the others, which can create biased exposure or an echo chamber. Thus, their structure and operation have direct influence on the diversity and the impartiality of talks. The rules together with the policies and enforcement schemes adopted by platform administrators to block user conduct and content are known as moderation mechanisms. Good moderation assists in keeping civil, discouraging the damaging material and encourages healthy interaction. Contained in it are filtering of content, warning of users and deleting of offensive posts. When moderation is neither partisan, moderate, consistent, predictable and categorical, it fosters good discussion, but moderation that is excessive or weak may either hamper free speech or permit disorderly conduct.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Key Findings

The discussion indicates that internet forums are influential in the formation of the mass discourse as it allows participatory communication, enhancing various opinions, and sharing information within the shortest time. Among the most striking observations is the fact that the

forums are a convenient system through which any person can contribute towards a conversation despite their location, social status as well as their institution. Such participatory quality democratizes communication since communication enables the users to share personal views, posing queries, and discussing, ultimately cutting the traditional obstacles to the openness of the masses. Consequently, the online forums are significant platforms of both grassroot discussions and community-based conversations. Besides encouraging engagement, online forums also aid in the enhancement of the voice of divergent opinions. As compared to traditional media, in which editorial control and institutional prejudice tend to constrain the diversity of voices aired in those media, forums permit a great spectrum of voices to be represented. The users, who may have various cultural, professional and ideological orientations, have an opportunity to voice their opinions and the discussions become more diverse and multidimensional. Such diversity adds to a richness of the discussion through bringing in alternative explanations, disrupting baseline accounts and making individuals think critically. Nonetheless, platform design and user behavior usually define to which degree diversity is to be expected. Moreover, because the online forums promote them, the exchange of information is fast, and users share and can get access to it as quickly as possible or even near as possible. Discussions can develop rapidly with many posts and feedbacks being constantly introduced, giving a chance to have dynamic and recent conversations on the new topics. This immediacy comes in exceedingly handy when there is a political event, crisis or even a technical maturation and the timely information is important. Nevertheless, the pace of exchanging information also attracts issues regarding the accuracy of the content and verification. In general, the results of this study demonstrate the revolutionary role of the online forums in stimulating interactive, heterogeneous, and speedy civic discussion.

4.2. Quantitative Results

Table 1: Quantitative Results

Parameter	High Impact (%)	Moderate Impact (%)	Low Impact (%)
User Engagement	78%	15%	7%
Information Diversity	65%	20%	15%
Misinformation Presence	55%	25%	20%
Echo Chamber Effect	60%	22%	18%
Moderation Effectiveness	48%	30%	22%
Influence on Public Opinion	72%	18%	10%

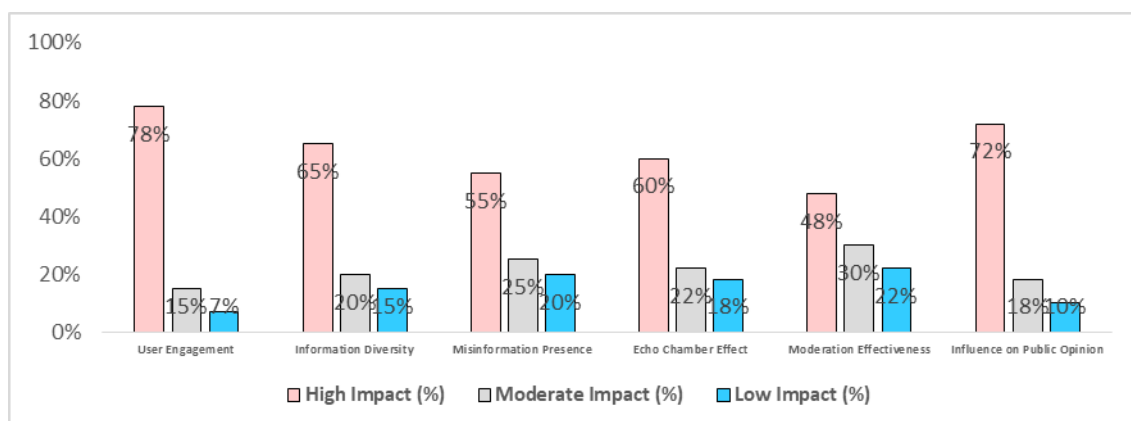


Fig 4 - Quantitative Results

4.2.1. User Engagement (78% High Impact, 15% Moderate, 7% Low)

These findings suggest that the level of user engagement plays by far a key role in the way the public discuss on online forums, with 78% of the observations showing that users were strongly

engaged. This implies that a majority of users are prolific contributors, who post, comment, and get to interact with others so that there are dynamic and lasting discussions. Great participation increases the exposure of subjects and makes discussions essential hence reinforces forums as interactive communication tools. The average proportion of low-impact interactions (7) is quite low, which means that people are not participating passively and these digital spaces are active.

4.2.2. *Information Diversity (65% High Impact, 20% Moderate, 15% Low)*

Information diversity has shown a strong positive effect of 65 percent of which high has been categorized. This indicates the availability of a variety of opinions and varied content in discussions and leads to deeper and more in-depth discourse. Multidimensional information enables the users to understand the various arguments, break assumptions, and formulate wider insights into problems. Yet, the middle-range and low-level of impact (20% and 15% respectively) indicate that there might still be some discussions not so broad, which might be explained by preferences of the user or by the algorithm of the platform that hinders access to diverse content.

4.2.3. *Misinformation Presence (55% High Impact, 25% Moderate, 20% Low)*

The presence of misinformation depicts a significant level of 55 which implies that the reality of false or misleading information is prevalent in the online forums. This brings out a major dilemma, where dissemination of false information may misguide the general population and decision-making. Although a quarter of the cases reveal moderate impact and a fifth of low impact, the results, in general, highlight the importance of more powerful verification tools and content moderation policies in reducing the effects of misinformation affecting the discourse of people.

4.2.4. *Echo Chamber Effect (60% High Impact, 22% Moderate, 18% Low)*

Echochamber effect is reported to have a high influence in 60% of the cases which is an indication that the user tends to interact in groups that share the same beliefs and opinions. This may restrict one to other opinions and strengthen already held prejudices thus, weakening the quality of deliberation discourse. The results suggest that despite the moderate (22) and low impact rates, in fact, highlighting the existence of the echo chambers, which can be affected by the user behavior and the algorithmic filtering of the content is the significant structural feature of the online forums.

4.2.5. *Moderation Effectiveness (48% High Impact, 30% Moderate, 22% Low)*

The effectiveness of moderation is seen to follow quite a balanced distribution of 48 per cent high, 30 per cent moderate and 22 per cent low. It implies that although the mechanisms of moderation tend to be used successfully to ensure that order is observed and the reduction of harmful material is achieved, these mechanisms perform differently on different platforms. Good moderation helps bring about healthier discussions by strict enforcement of rules in the community and facilitates respectful treatment. Nevertheless, this can be inconsistent in implementation resulting either in over restrictive environments or inadequate management of disruptive behavior.

4.2.6. *Influence on Public Opinion (72% High Impact, 18% Moderate, 10% Low)*

Online forums have a significant impact on the opinion of the people with the greatest impact of 72% being high. This implies that conversations in forums largely influence how users perceive, believe, and behave with regard to different matters. The users can change their opinions or strengthen the existing ones through the repeated exposure to opinions, arguments, and information they share. The comparability of low impact at a relatively low percentage (10) only highlights the influence force of such platforms towards the formation of collective and individual opinions.

4.3. Discussion

The results of the given research determine the dual character of the online forums as both the users of the substantial public discourse and the contributors to some communication issues. On the one hand, online forums are of great use in terms of user interaction, as well as diversity of ideas and controlled environment in which people have an opportunity to share their opinions and engage in a discussion. Such participatory space facilitates sharing of ideas among people, diverse social, cultural and ideological experiences, as well as, improving the overall quality of discourse. Nonetheless, the same transparency that allows participation gives weaknesses especially when it comes to misinformation proliferation. Because content is user-created and checkable canals are not always provided immediately, misleading or incorrect information can spread very quickly, with such influence affecting the impressiveness and even distorting the understanding of the people regarding critical problems. The other major point that has been raised in the results is the existence of echo chambers in online forums.

The tendency is to join or participate in communities or conversations that users consider similar to the beliefs that they already hold resulting in selective exposure and less interaction in the contrary arguments. This effect inhibits an argumentative discourse and solidifies cognitive biases, which eventually undermine the deliberative potential of online discourse. Because of this, though forums may offer different levels of participation, the real diversity of users may not extend to the interaction levels and algorithm systems of the platforms. Moderation is one of the main aspects of tackling these problems and keeping the discourses at a high-quality level. Visages with moderate stance and high-frequency moderation have fewer rates of misinformation, and more equal and respectful debate. Moderation is useful in order to filter the bad content, adhere to the community rules, and promote positive interaction among the users. Nevertheless, the balance must be struck because moderation does not suffice on the one hand because it can limit the freedom of expression, whereas on the other hand, insufficient moderation makes the disruptive conduct ensure its continuation. On the whole, this discussion helps to emphasize the necessity of effective moderation systems and knowledgeable involvement of users to make sure that online forums can have a beneficial effect on a discussion.

5. CONCLUSION

Online forums have become an essential part of the contemporary public discourse, and this issue has changed the way people communicate, inform, and interact with the issues of the society as a whole. These forums allow a free discussion and community interaction among various people because of their openness and interactive structures. This paper shows that online forums are effective in opinion formation and they are useful in passing information at a high speed. Their interactive character enables users to actively participate in conversations, criticize the available opinions and develop body of knowledge. Consequently, the online forums help promote the ideals of democracy by making voices heard which would have otherwise not been able to be heard in the real world. Nevertheless, in spite of these benefits, the paper also brings into view various damaging issues which are related to forum-based communication. The prevalence of misinformation is a genuine menace to quality and credibility of civil discourse because a false or deceptive information can easily thrive among the users. Also, the establishment of echo-chambers leads to polarization, as people become more and more exposed to like-minded views, restricting their ability to debate more constructively and argue with the opposing opinion points of view. The platform governance problems also make this landscape even more challenging since the freedom of expression and responsible communication is hard to balance. Online forums can be used to benefit only to the fullest extent with the help of a multi-faceted approach that would help to address these problems.

Moderation strategies are essential in keeping the discourse of the same quality by censoring the harmful material, facilitating amicable communication and deciding the community rules. Meanwhile, algorithmic transparency needs to be improved to minimize the bias of content visibility and give the user a better insight of how information is prioritized and presented. It is equally valuable to promote critical digital literacy in the users as that will enable them to judge information better, identify misinformation, and have more responsible and informed conversations. In the future, the research must be directed towards understanding the society-wide impacts of online forums interactions, especially regarding democratic procedures, and societal cohesiveness, as well as dissemination of knowledge. The digital communication requires also the establishment of adequate frameworks of digital communication which could be more open-minded and yet accountable. It is through these areas that researchers and platform designers can help transform online space into more inclusive and healthy spaces that help establish meaningful and constructive public discourse.

REFERENCES

- [1] J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge, MA, USA: MIT Press, 1989.
- [2] H. Rheingold, *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*. Reading, MA, USA: Addison-Wesley, 1993.
- [3] B. Wellman and M. Gulia, "Net surfers don't ride alone: Virtual communities as communities," in *Networks in the Global Village*, Boulder, CO, USA: Westview Press, 1999, pp. 331–366.
- [4] S. Papacharissi, "The virtual sphere: The internet as a public sphere," *New Media & Society*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 9–27, 2002.
- [5] N. Baym, *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*. Cambridge, U.K.: Polity Press, 2010.
- [6] C. Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations*. New York, NY, USA: Penguin Press, 2008.
- [7] K. N. Hampton and B. Wellman, "Neighboring in Netville: How the internet supports community and social capital in a wired suburb," *City & Community*, vol. 2, no. 4, pp. 277–311, 2003.
- [8] J. Preece and D. Maloney-Krichmar, "Online communities: Design, theory, and practice," *J. Comput.-Mediat. Commun.*, vol. 10, no. 4, 2005.
- [9] E. Pariser, *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet Is Hiding from You*. New York, NY, USA: Penguin Press, 2011.
- [10] C. Sunstein, *#Republic: Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media*. Princeton, NJ, USA: Princeton Univ. Press, 2017.
- [11] S. Vosoughi, D. Roy, and S. Aral, "The spread of true and false news online," *Science*, vol. 359, no. 6380, pp. 1146–1151, 2018.
- [12] K. Starbird, "Disinformation's spread: Bots, trolls and all of us," *Nature*, vol. 571, pp. 449, 2019.
- [13] A. Joinson, "Self-disclosure in computer-mediated communication: The role of self-awareness and visual anonymity," *European Journal of Social Psychology*, vol. 31, no. 2, pp. 177–192, 2001.
- [14] J. Suler, "The online disinhibition effect," *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, vol. 7, no. 3, pp. 321–326, 2004.
- [15] M. Cinelli et al., "The echo chamber effect on social media," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, vol. 118, no. 9, 2021.