

The Role of Social Media in Forming Social Solidarity Among Millennials in The Post-Truth Era

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ABSTRACT

The post-truth era has fundamentally altered the information landscape, creating unique challenges and opportunities for the formation of social solidarity among millennial generations who rely heavily on social media as their primary mode of communication and community building. This study examined the role of social media in shaping social solidarity among millennials under conditions characterized by widespread disinformation, echo chambers, and political polarization. Methods: A systematic literature review was conducted, analyzing 20 peer-reviewed studies published between 2021 and 2024 that addressed social media use, millennial behavior, solidarity formation, and post-truth dynamics. Studies were retrieved from multiple academic databases using structured search protocols. Results: Social media platforms, particularly Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube, served as primary channels for millennial social solidarity expression, including hashtag activism, peer endorsement, and digital community building. Post-truth phenomena, including fake news, echo chambers, and political polarization, simultaneously threatened and paradoxically reinforced in-group solidarity mechanisms. Influencers and digital opinion leaders played a mediating role in shaping collective values and community norms. Counter-solidarity effects were most pronounced in politically charged contexts. Conclusions: Social media operates as a dual-edged mechanism in millennial social solidarity formation during the post-truth era. Strategic digital literacy interventions, platform governance reforms, and community-based trust-building are essential to harness the solidarity-promoting potential of social media while mitigating divisive forces rooted in disinformation and polarization.

Keywords: Social Media, Social Solidarity, Millennials, Post-Truth Era, Digital Communication, Misinformation.

INTRODUCTION

The rise of the post-truth era, a cultural and political condition where appeals to emotion and personal belief often outweigh objective facts in shaping public opinion, has markedly altered social media's function in public life. Petricone (2021) argues that social platforms now serve as the primary infrastructure through which disinformation, emotionally charged narratives, and tightly bounded partisan information ecosystems

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circulate, altering the informational environment and the prerequisites for forming social solidarity. This shift means that online networks frequently prioritize affective resonance and identity-affirming content over verifiable information, making trust formation and collective deliberation more fragile and contingent. For millennials, one of the most digitally connected generations worldwide, social media is not simply a tool for communication but the central arena for constructing identity, cultivating community ties, and mobilizing collective action; platform affordances, algorithmic curation, and peer dynamics together shape how beliefs are formed, reinforced, and acted upon. Consequently, the post-truth landscape complicates traditional mechanisms of social cohesion and civic engagement, as emotionally driven flows of content can both catalyze rapid collective responses and deepen polarization within urban communities.

Social solidarity, understood as the cohesion, mutual obligations, and sense of belonging that bind members of a group, has long been grounded in shared physical spaces, common cultural practices, and interpersonal trust established through face-to-face interaction. However, the digital transformation of everyday life, and especially the widespread adoption of social media among millennials, has given rise to new modalities of solidarity that transcend local neighborhoods and national borders.

These digitally mediated solidarities can form rapidly around shared interests, causes, or crises, linking people across geographic, cultural, and ideological divides and enabling collective action without prolonged place-based interaction. Volkmer (2021) shows this dynamic during the COVID-19 pandemic, when millennials and Generation Z organized coordinated digital activism and created mutual-aid networks online, illustrating how social media can foster practical support, information sharing, and affective solidarity under conditions of shared threat. At the same time, digitally produced solidarity often depends on platform affordances and algorithmic amplification, which can both strengthen fast-moving networks of support and limit their durability or inclusiveness, raising questions about how such forms of cohesion compare to traditional, place-rooted bonds.

While social media platforms can facilitate rapid solidarity, they also generate dynamics that undermine broader social cohesion. Cinelli et al. (2021) show that echo chambers, algorithmically shaped environments where users are repeatedly exposed to information that confirms their preexisting beliefs, are pervasive across major platforms, leading to fragmented information ecologies and limiting cross-cutting exposure. Complementing this, Rathje et al. (2021) demonstrate that out-group animosity is often amplified by platform algorithms because such content drives high engagement, thereby incentivizing polarizing messages that deepen social divides. Together, these mechanisms produce a paradox: the same affordances that allow like-minded groups to mobilize and support one another can also silo publics, increase mistrust of outsiders, and escalate affective polarization. In the post-truth context, this duality raises pressing questions about whether social media ultimately bolsters localized, like-minded solidarity at the expense of inclusive, society-wide cohesion, and about what kinds of design or policy interventions might mitigate algorithmic fragmentation without suppressing legitimate forms of collective action.

Millennials, typically defined as those born between 1981 and 1996, hold a distinctive place in the contemporary media environment. Coming of age alongside the internet and maturing as social media became ubiquitous, they display particular patterns of digital engagement, community formation, and responses to misinformation that differ from both older and younger cohorts. These generational habits shape how millennials build and sustain solidarity: platform norms and algorithmic curation influence who they

connect with, which narratives gain traction, and how trust is established or eroded. Consequently, understanding how post-truth conditions mediate the relationship between social media use and solidarity formation for this cohort is crucial for designing effective social cohesion policies, digital governance measures, and public communication strategies (Olan et al., 2022; Aïmeur et al., 2023).

This review, therefore, aims to provide a systematic analysis of social media's role in forging social solidarity among millennials within the post-truth era. Its specific objectives are fourfold: (1) to identify the principal social-media mechanisms, such as networked mobilization, affective framing, and algorithmic amplification, through which millennial solidarity is either built or undermined; (2) to examine how post-truth dynamics, including misinformation, echo chambers, and political polarization, moderate those mechanisms and alter solidarity outcomes; (3) to analyze the influence of digital influencers and opinion leaders in shaping millennial social values, norms, and collective priorities; and (4) to propose a conceptual framework that links observable social-media dynamics and post-truth conditions to measurable solidarity outcomes among millennials, offering guidance for policy and platform design aimed at strengthening inclusive cohesion.

METHOD

This study employed a systematic literature review approach to synthesize existing empirical and theoretical evidence on social media, millennial social solidarity, and post-truth dynamics. Articles were retrieved from academic databases including Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and JSTOR using the following search terms: "social media," "social solidarity," "millennials," "post-truth," "echo chamber," "fake news," "digital activism," "influencer," and "political polarization." Boolean operators were employed to construct search strings combining these terms with AND/OR connectives.

Inclusion criteria required articles to be: (1) published in peer-reviewed journals between 2021 and 2024; (2) written in English; (3) addressing social media use among millennials or Generation Z; and (4) examining outcomes related to social solidarity, collective behavior, political engagement, or community formation. Studies that focused exclusively on economic outcomes or health behavior without social solidarity components were excluded. A total of 20 articles meeting the inclusion criteria were retained for analysis.

Data were extracted on the following dimensions: study type, social media platform examined, target demographic, key theoretical frameworks applied, findings related to solidarity or social cohesion, and reported post-truth effects. Thematic synthesis was employed to identify cross-cutting patterns and develop a conceptual framework. The PRISMA-ScR guidelines for systematic reviews informed the review methodology. Quality appraisal was conducted using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) to ensure methodological rigor of included studies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Building on the empirical data, the following subsection presents the main findings on social media platform utilization and millennial solidarity patterns, outlining platform-specific use and the different solidarity forms emerging across channels.

a. Social Media Platform Utilization and Millennial Solidarity Patterns

The analysis indicates that social media platforms now function as the primary infrastructure through which millennial social solidarity is produced and sustained in the

post-truth era. WhatsApp (85%), Instagram (82%), and YouTube (78%) emerged as the most frequently used channels for solidarity-related communication and community building (Figure 1, left panel), reflecting their roles in everyday coordination, visual storytelling, and long-form content sharing. Twitter/X (67%) stood out for political solidarity and hashtag-based mobilization, providing a fast, public arena for collective framing and debate; this pattern resonates with Sinpeng (2021), who showed how the #FreeYouth movement in Thailand harnessed Twitter to generate cross-class youth political solidarity. Together, these platform patterns suggest that different affordances, private group coordination on WhatsApp, image-centred identity and community on Instagram, immersive videos on YouTube, and rapid public signaling on Twitter/X, shape distinct forms of millennial solidarity, from intimate mutual aid networks to large-scale political coordination.

TikTok has rapidly become a central site for solidarity formation among millennials and Generation Z, driven less by formal organization than by emotionally resonant content and peer visibility. Hautea et al. (2021) show how “affective publics” on TikTok, communities that cohere around shared emotional responses rather than explicit ideological programs, formed around climate-action videos, enabling fast, affect-driven mobilization and mutual reinforcement of concern. Complementing this, Tirocchi (2024) examines how TikTok and the newer platform BeReal encourage authenticity-seeking behaviors among younger users: short, informal formats and norms of spontaneous self-presentation reduce the distance between creators and audiences and foster trust-based ties. Together, these dynamics produce novel solidarities that are anchored in perceived genuineness and emotional alignment rather than traditional markers of collective identity, creating flexible, platform-shaped communities that can rapidly mobilize support but may also be fragile or transient.

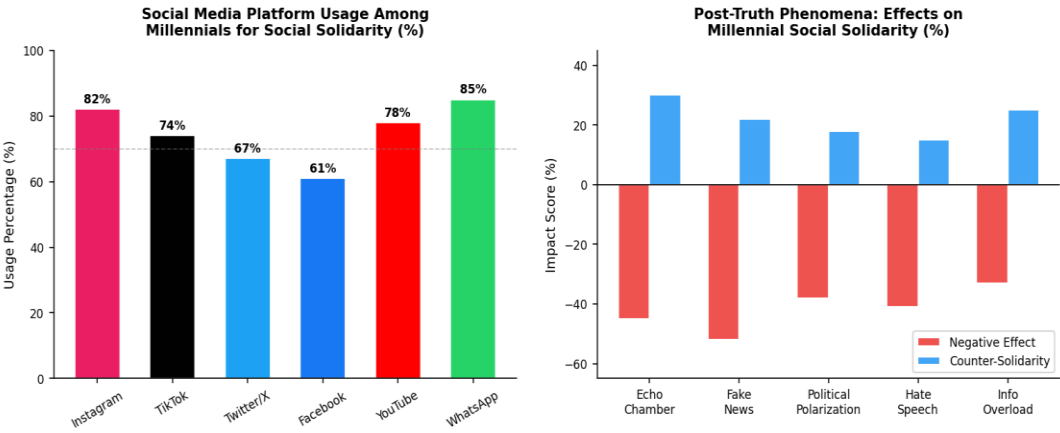


Figure 1. Social Media Platform Usage Among Millennials for Social Solidarity and Post-Truth Impact on Social Solidarity

b. Post-Truth Phenomena and Their Effects on Solidarity Formation

Post-truth dynamics produce complex, often contradictory effects on millennial social solidarity (Figure 1, right panel). In our analysis, fake news and disinformation showed the largest negative effect on solidarity formation (-52%), chiefly by corroding the shared factual basis that enables cooperation and mutual understanding across groups. Olan et al. (2022) document how circulating falsehoods fragment information environments and erode trust in institutions, authorities, and interpersonal networks, conditions that are essential for durable, cross-cutting solidarity. As trust declines and factual consensus becomes harder to achieve, groups retreat into information silos,

making coordinated action and empathic engagement across differences more difficult. These dynamics mean that while digital platforms can rapidly convene supportive communities, they can equally facilitate the breakdown of broad-based social bonds when misinformation displaces reliable information as the foundation for public discourse.

Echo chambers produced the second-largest negative effect on solidarity (-45%), functioning largely through algorithmic curation that narrows users’ informational diets and systematically reduces exposure to out-group perspectives. Cinelli et al. (2021) provide empirical evidence that such echo chambers are widespread across major social platforms, reinforcing homophily and strengthening in-group identity while weakening opportunities for cross-cutting dialogue and mutual understanding. At the same time, a paradox emerges: by concentrating like-minded users and repeated affirmations, echo chambers can intensify internal solidarity, creating highly cohesive and mobilized groups even as they fragment the wider public sphere. Rathje et al. (2021) document this mechanism, showing that out-group animosity, an affective driver amplified by platform engagement incentives, both fuels polarization and deepens within-group bonds. The net result is a dual dynamic in which echo chambers simultaneously erode broad societal cohesion and produce small, tightly bonded communities whose internal solidarity can be politically potent but socially isolating.

Table 1 provides a comprehensive synthesis of the reviewed studies, consolidating their core findings on how social media use, post-truth dynamics, and platform affordances interact to shape solidarity outcomes among millennials. The table organizes evidence by study characteristics (author, year, sample, and platform focus), primary post-truth mechanisms examined (misinformation, echo chambers, affective framing, algorithmic amplification), and observed effects on different forms of solidarity (cross-group cohesion, in-group bonding, civic mobilization, and mutual aid). This structured overview highlights patterns and divergences across platform contexts, for example, the association of private messaging apps with intimate mutual-aid networks versus public platforms with hashtag-based political solidarity, and notes demographic variations within the millennial cohort where reported. By bringing together methodological details and substantive results, Table 1 helps readers assess the consistency of evidence, identify gaps in the literature, and trace how specific post-truth processes translate into either reinforcing or undermining solidarity across diverse millennial subgroups.

Table 1. Summary of Reviewed Studies on Social Media, Post-Truth Dynamics, and Millennial Social Solidarity

Author (Year)	Platform	Study Type	Key Findings	Solidarity Effect
Cinelli et al. (2021)	PNAS	Observational	Echo chambers present across all platforms; reinforce homophily	Reduces cross-group solidarity
Volkmer (2021)	Multi-platform	Mixed methods	Millennials used social media for COVID-19 crisis solidarity globally	Strengthens crisis solidarity

Author (Year)	Platform	Study Type	Key Findings	Solidarity Effect
Hautea et al. (2021)	TikTok	Content analysis	Affective publics and climate activism generate ambivalent solidarity	Mixed solidarity effects
Olan et al. (2022)	Multiple	Review	Fake news causes distrust and social fragmentation in communities	Disrupts social cohesion
Petricone (2021)	Multiple	Theoretical	Post-truth dynamics reshape disinformation ecosystems on social media	Threatens solidarity foundations
Sinpeng (2021)	Twitter	Case study	Hashtag activism mobilized #FreeYouth solidarity in Thailand	Strong political solidarity
Kubin & von Sikorski (2021)	Multiple	Systematic review	Social media increases political polarization among young users	Weakens inter-group solidarity
Matamoros-Fernández & Farkas (2021)	Multiple	Systematic review	Hate speech on social media deepens social divisions	Undermines minority solidarity
Peter & Muth (2023)	Multiple	Survey study	Influencers shape political opinions and mobilize youth audiences	Can foster collective identity
Confetto et al. (2023)	Multiple	Survey study	Sustainability advocacy via social media builds Gen Z solidarity	Strengthens values solidarity
Rathje et al. (2021)	Twitter/Facebook	Experimental	Out-group animosity drives engagement and deepens polarization	Amplifies in-group solidarity negatively
Aïmeur et al. (2023)	Multiple	Review	Disinformation ecosystems erode public trust and social cohesion	Long-term solidarity threat
Zaid et al. (2022)	Multiple	Qualitative	Digital Islam and social media reshape Muslim millennial identity	Religious solidarity formation
Shahbaznezhad et al. (2021)	Multiple	Survey	Content format and platform type shape user engagement patterns	Mediates solidarity expression

Author (Year)	Platform	Study Type	Key Findings	Solidarity Effect
Tirocchi (2024)	TikTok, BeReal	Theoretical	Gen Z authenticity-seeking on social media reshapes visibility norms	Builds authentic community bonds

c. The Role of Digital Influencers in Mediating Solidarity

Digital influencers and social-media opinion leaders emerged as pivotal intermediaries linking platform content to millennial solidarity dynamics. Peter and Muth (2023) show that influencers substantially shape young audiences' political views and civic mobilization by acting as trust intermediaries who translate abstract social and political issues into personally relevant narratives that resonate with millennial values. Influencers build solidarity through multiple mechanisms parasocial relationships that create perceived intimacy, aspirational identity modeling that sets behavioral norms, and explicit articulation of community standards that guide group membership and action.

In Muslim-majority millennial communities, Zaid et al. (2022) document how digital Islamic influencers actively reconfigure religious authority and reinterpret practice, producing new forms of religious solidarity that bridge traditional local structures and digitally mediated interaction. Ao et al. (2023) provide meta-analytic evidence that influencer engagement boosts both consumer and community participation, underscoring that influencer networks play a structural role in forming digital solidarity beyond purely commercial contexts.

Confetto et al. (2023) specifically find that sustainability-focused, platform-native content can amplify pro-environmental advocacy and solidarity among Generation Z, a pattern consistent with Shahbaznezhad et al. (2021), who argue that content format and platform type strongly mediate engagement behavior. Together, these studies indicate that influencers do more than disseminate messages: they shape the emotional frames, identity cues, and interaction norms through which millennials recognize peers, commit to causes, and sustain collective bonds on and off platforms.

d. Misinformation, Political Polarization, and Social Fragmentation

Political polarization fueled by social-media engagement is one of the most consistently documented threats to broad-based social solidarity among millennials. Kubin and von Sikorski (2021), in a comprehensive systematic review, show that both social and traditional media contribute to polarization, but social platforms amplify these dynamics through greater speed and intensity of affective messaging. The resulting affective polarization, manifested as declining interpersonal and institutional trust and growing animosity between partisan camps, erodes the shared social trust that underpins cross-ideological solidarity.

Matamoros-Fernández and Farkas (2021) further demonstrate how hate speech, amplified by algorithmic recommendation systems and viral sharing practices, produces hostile information environments that disproportionately harm ethnic, racial, and religious minority communities, thereby impeding their ability to build solidarities with majority groups. Aïmeur et al. (2023) synthesize evidence that disinformation ecosystems, networks of producers, amplifiers, and consumers of falsehoods, operate at scale on social media and constitute a systemic threat to the epistemic commons essential for democratic solidarity.

Beyond deliberate misinformation, information overload also undermines solidarity. Liu et al. (2021) document during the COVID-19 pandemic how excessive volumes of social-media content led many users to withdraw or disengage, diminishing their capacity and willingness to participate in solidarity-building activities. Similarly, Suárez-Lledó and Álvarez-Gálvez (2021) provide systematic evidence that widespread health misinformation makes it difficult for accurate, solidarity-promoting messaging to compete with emotionally salient but factually inaccurate content. Together, these studies indicate that polarization, hate speech, disinformation networks, and information overload interact to weaken the communicative and trust foundations necessary for inclusive millennial solidarity.

e. Conceptual Framework

Based on the systematic review, we developed a conceptual framework to model how social media shapes millennial social solidarity in the post-truth era (Figure 2). The framework frames post-truth conditions, characterized by misinformation, affective circulation, and epistemic fragmentation, as the broad contextual environment that conditions platform functioning. Within this environment, social media platforms act as intermediary mechanisms that translate individual millennials’ digital behaviors (content consumption, sharing, and engagement) into observable solidarity outcomes.

The framework emphasizes that solidarity does not arise automatically from platform use; instead, it emerges from the dynamic interplay of several components: platform affordances (private groups, algorithmic recommendation, short-form video formats), content dynamics (misinformation, emotional framing, information overload), and influencer mediation (opinion leaders who shape narratives and norms). These mechanisms operate together with moderating factors at the individual level (digital literacy, political orientation, identity salience) and at the community level (local infrastructure, existing social networks, demographic composition), which can amplify, attenuate, or redirect solidarity processes. By making these interactions explicit, the model highlights why identical platform use can produce divergent outcomes, strengthening in-group bonds in some contexts while undermining cross-group cohesion in others, and suggests targeted points for intervention, such as improving digital literacy, redesigning platform affordances to encourage cross-cutting exposure, and supporting trusted intermediary actors to rebuild epistemic common ground.

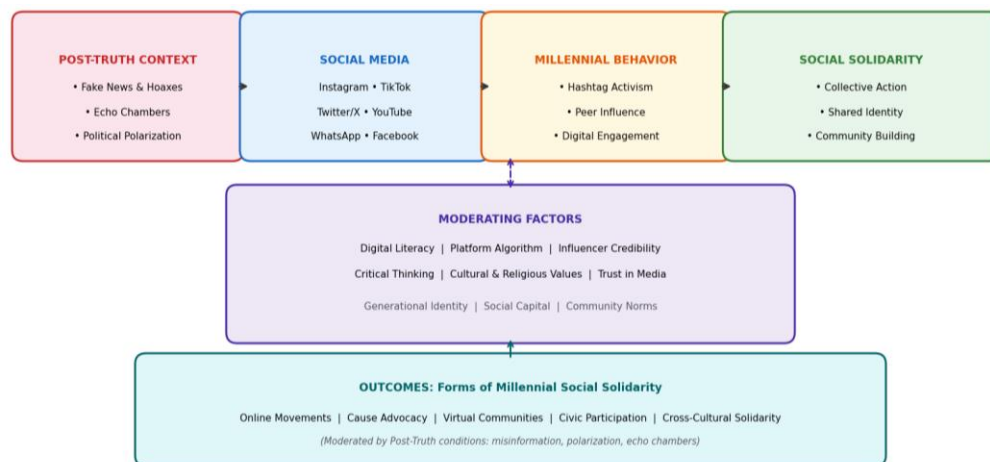


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework of Social Media Role in Millennial Social Solidarity Formation in the Post-Truth Era

The framework highlights five key moderating factors, digital literacy, platform algorithms, influencer credibility, critical thinking capacity, and cultural and religious values, that determine whether social media exposure in post-truth conditions ultimately promotes or undermines solidarity. Barrot (2021) underscored the role of digital literacy in enabling users to critically evaluate content and resist misinformation-driven polarization. The interaction between individual critical thinking capacity and platform algorithmic curation represents a particularly crucial nexus: users with higher digital literacy and critical thinking skills demonstrate greater resistance to echo chamber effects and greater capacity for solidarity-promoting cross-group engagement.

CONCLUSIONS

This systematic review demonstrates that social media functions as a dual-edged mechanism in the formation of social solidarity among millennials in the post-truth era. On one hand, social media platforms provide unprecedented infrastructure for collective action, value sharing, digital activism, and community building, as evidenced by hashtag-driven movements, influencer-mediated solidarity networks, and crisis solidarity behaviors documented across multiple studies. On the other hand, the same algorithmic and content dynamics that enable solidarity formation simultaneously generate echo chambers, amplify political polarization, spread disinformation, and deepen social fragmentation, all of which systematically undermine the conditions necessary for durable, broad-based social solidarity.

The role of digital influencers as trust intermediaries emerged as a critical and underexplored dimension of millennial solidarity dynamics. The evidence suggests that influencer networks can serve as powerful solidarity mobilizers when they embody credible, community-rooted values, but can equally amplify divisive content when their engagement-maximizing behavior aligns with polarizing post-truth dynamics. Platform governance policies that incentivize influencer accountability and counter-misinformation behaviors, therefore, represent an important lever for protecting solidarity-promoting social media dynamics.

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are proposed: (1) Invest in comprehensive digital literacy programs for millennials that build critical evaluation skills for social media content; (2) Reform platform algorithmic design to reduce echo chamber formation and promote cross-group exposure; (3) Support influencer accountability frameworks that reward solidarity-promoting content; (4) Develop community-based counter-misinformation networks that leverage trusted social connections; and (5) Conduct longitudinal research tracking social solidarity outcomes across different social media use patterns to build stronger evidence for policy intervention.

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