This dissertation focuses on the political changing effect of the social media platforms on different regime types. The goal of the research is to formulate a theoretical model that can answer the question of why American social media platforms, which are available to all players in the international system equally, affect the political systems in different countries in a different way. Previous studies that dealt with the different effects of social media platforms in democratic regimes versus non-democratic regimes cannot provide an answer to the phenomenon of the rapid decline of democracy in Brazil compared to the decline in the United States, even though both are democratic countries. These studies will also not be able to explain why there is a different effect when actors in two authoritarian countries use the same social media platforms - how it happened that the social media platforms actually strengthened the Chinese regime while in Egypt they ignited a coup that led to the fall of the regime.

This research tries to contribute to the body of knowledge in international relations and comparative politics by creating a broader perspective than the existing studies. It will show that the influence of social media platforms on the politics of countries is indeed not uniform. The research will create a classification and generalization of the different effects of the social media platforms and will offer an explanation that the different effect is derived from different combinations of the type of regime that exists in the country together with the state's capabilities. This approach represents an innovative approach that has not yet been identified in the existing research literature. The resulting explanation could help policymakers anticipate what might happen in similar countries where the impact is still unclear and could help them take preliminary steps to prevent the same phenomenon.

The research presented in this work is pioneering and innovative for two main reasons. First, this is the first study of its kind that tries to explain the variation in the influence of social media platforms through a combination of two variables common in the world of political science - state's capacity and regime type. In this way, the research tries to connect two worlds that usually do not reside together - the world of technology and the world of political science. Until today, the studies that dealt with the effects of social media platforms were satisfied with one of the variables or looked for explanations from the world of technology and not from the world of political science. Second, the present study offers a parsimonious explanatory model for the variation in the influence of social media platforms. The proposed model is a 2x2 causal model where the state's capacity and the regime type are the independent variables in the model which creates four possibilities: strong democratic regimes, weak democratic regimes, strong authoritarian regimes and weak authoritarian regimes. The model presents four well-differentiated effects of the social media platform on the countries' political systems (the dependent variable): weakening, intensifying, radicalizing, and destabilizing.

To explain the four different effects, four research hypotheses are examined: the first hypothesis was that the social media platforms have a weakening effect on strong democratic regimes, the second hypothesis was that the platforms have an intensifying effect on weak democratic regimes, the third hypothesis was that the platforms have a radicalizing effect on strong authoritarian regimes and the fourth hypothesis The platforms have a destabilizing effect on weak authoritarian regimes. This study deals with confirming these hypotheses and falsifying the possible alternative explanations. The research tries to explain the political influence of social media platforms on the politics of the countries, by examining the use of platforms by three types of political actors: domestic opposition (dissidents or populist candidates), external forces (other countries or multinational corporations), and the governing regime.

To test the research hypotheses, a qualitative study using test cases was used to confirm/falsify the research hypotheses (a separate case study was used for each hypothesis). The research included a methodological combination of two research methods: the Congruence method and the Process Tracing method. This methodological combination aims to strengthen the internal validity of the study, prove the causal relationship between the variables and reduce false relation problems.

The empirical findings of the research show how social media platforms have weakened strong democracies (the United States). These platforms allowed external forces (Russia) and the populist candidate (Donald Trump) to lead polarizing campaigns during and after the 2016 presidential elections that were full with misleading information and fake news, sowed doubt and distrust in the democratic system and created an alternative truth in order to influence citizens' perceptions. The goal was to influence the vote of enough citizens in order to win the election. The various players used several features of the platforms that were developed as part of their knowledge power and the main ones were: managing targeted advertising, exploiting the bubble-filter, and promoting sensational publications. These activities caused an undermining of public trust in the democratic political system, weakened the democratic norms and institutions and inevitably led to the weakening of America both internally and externally and to the weakening of the entire democratic narrative of the international system. This process could have been more radical without the power of the strong checks and balances that weakened the polarizing effect.

In weak democratic regimes, similar processes happened around the Brazilian presidential elections in 2018, when the Russian intervention and Bolsonaro's polarizing messages during and after the elections led to a decrease in the citizens' support for the democratic system and institutions in Brazil and pushed the regime in an illiberal and even authoritarian direction. Bolsonaro's continued confrontation with the democratic norms and institutions even after his victory in the elections, especially the attacks of the voting system and the election process, caused the weakening of Brazil's already weak checks and balances and the continuation of the radicalization process.

The empirical findings concerning authoritarian regimes show the intensifying of strong authoritarian regimes (in our case China) inwardly while utilizing the knowledge power of social media platforms in order to track and thwart uprisings of regime opponents and to shape the perceptions of citizens according to government directives. The intensifying abroad is attributed to the export of the tools and model of "digital dictatorship" to other authoritarian countries which strengthens the authoritarian narrative in the world and the sphere of influence of those strong regimes. In weak authoritarian regimes, social media platforms are used by opponents of the government to destabilize the regimes to the point of overthrowing the government (as happened in Egypt). The inherent anonymity on these platforms, their accessibility, the ability to spread messages through them quickly and the government's inability to deal with them have made them a central tool in the hands of the opponents. Weak authoritarian regimes that have developed the ability to block social platforms and the ability to influence the network discourse are better able to deal with insurgencies from within.

Theoretically, the conclusion that emerges from the research is that there is a significant political impact of social media platforms on the regimes. In addition, there is variation in the impact of the platforms on different regimes and by using the proposed causal model, it was possible to create four well-differentiated types of effects - weakening, intensifying, radicalizing, and destabilizing. The research also shows a difference between strong regimes whose influence is projected both internally and externally and weak regimes where the influence is only internal. The logical-parsimonious explanation of the influence of social media platforms as a function of the state's capabilities and the type of regime creates a deductive model that is empirically tested, and which allows us to extrapolate from the case studies we have distinguished to the general cases. In this way, it can contribute to identifying similar processes that occur in countries with similar characteristics (strong democracies, for example) even before they occur and be a tool for decision and action by the decision makers in these countries.