

Social media usage and political awareness of the students

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Abstract

Social media has become a primary source of information among students, especially in shaping their political awareness. Because of this, it is important to understand how social media use affects students' political awareness, as their engagement with digital platforms may shape their understanding of current events, political issues, and democratic participation. This study aimed to determine the effect of social media usage on the political awareness of students at Divine Word College of San Jose. This study utilized a descriptive-correlational research design and a validated researcher-made instrument. 67 randomly selected first-year college students participated in this study. The findings revealed that students are frequently exposed to political content, including memes, infographics, short-form videos, and text posts, which significantly influence their political awareness. The results also indicated that while social media increases political awareness, it may also contribute to biased perspectives depending on the type of content viewed. Overall, the findings highlight that social media plays a significant role in shaping students' political views. Thus, teachers may include in their discussions the responsible use of social media, critical thinking, and political awareness. Especially in subjects related to communication, social science, and ethics, this may help students gain a clearer understanding of political memes, infographics, short videos, and text posts before forming their own opinions. This study recommends that the guidance and counseling office implement programs that promote respectful discussion, responsible use of digital media, and awareness of misinformation and online division of opinion. Since social media significantly influences students' political views, these programs may help maintain orderly, positive discourse.

Keywords: social media, political views, political memes, social media usage, political awareness

Social media usage and political awareness of the students

1. Introduction

Day by day, social media continues to evolve. It became a key part of everyday life, especially for students. According to Lenhart (2015), 92% of teenagers (ages 13 to 17) go online every day, with 24% reporting that they are online almost constantly. Furthermore, the rate of social media use by 18–29-year-olds has grown precipitously, from 41% in 2006 to 90% in 2015 (Perrin, 2015). Social media platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and TikTok are no longer used only for social interaction and entertainment. They have evolved into powerful tools for spreading information and for politically motivated posts, ranging from news articles and opinion pieces to memes and short-form videos that can influence students' political awareness, sometimes without them even realizing it.

In the Philippines, where social media usage is among the highest in the world, the political influence of digital platforms is especially common. According to We Are Social and Hootsuite (2024), over 89% of Filipinos are active social media users, and many of them are young adults. This digital engagement is not limited to personal but also political participation. From discussions on governance and policy to viral political scandals, such as ghost flood-control projects and corruption in the Philippines, the social media environment plays a pivotal role in shaping the political landscape. In educational institutions such as the Divine Word College of San Jose, as students grow academically and personally, the information and news they receive on social media can significantly shape their political views and opinions, despite the growing interest among young adults in politics and digital media. There remains a lack of localized, context-specific research on how students at specific institutions are exposed to different types of political content through social media. This study seeks to fill that gap by focusing on the students of Divine Word College of San Jose. It aims to investigate how social media influences their political views, which types of content most affect those views, their level of critical awareness, and the extent to which their online experiences shape their political awareness.

Statement of the problem - This study aimed to determine the role of social media in the political views and opinions of college students. Thus, specifically, the researchers seek to answer the following questions: (1) What is the level of social media usage of the students in terms of memes, infographics, short-form videos, and text posts? (2) What is the level of political awareness of the students in terms of frequency of encountering political content, types of political content viewed, and commonly used platforms for political information? (3) Is there a significant relationship between the level of social media usage and the political awareness of the students?

Significance of the study - This study will explore how social media use affects students' political awareness. Social media is no longer used only for social interaction and entertainment. They became a powerful means of spreading political information through various types of social media content. This study will provide valuable data on the relationship between social media use and students' political awareness. Throughout this study, the following individuals are expected to benefit from the results. First, Students will learn more about how social media can affect their political beliefs and opinions, particularly young adults. As a result, they will become more conscious of what they see and share online. Second, teachers will be able to observe how social media influences their students' political thinking. This can assist them in teaching students to think critically and verify information before accepting or disseminating it. Third, parents will be able to see how social media is influencing their children's political views. They can teach their children the value of social media responsibility and, as a result, improve their communication with them. Finally, future researchers can use this study as a useful reference for those interested in studying the effects of social media on teenagers. It also gives them ideas for improving or expanding the research in the future.

Scope and delimitation of the study - This study aimed to determine the role of social media use in students'

political awareness at Divine Word College of San Jose. The respondents in this study were 1st-year college students at Divine Word College of San Jose. The researchers used quantitative methods, including distributing survey questionnaires to students at Divine Word College of San Jose. All the answers and ideas shared by the respondents served as an important basis for the study. This study was conducted for the 2025-2026 school year. Within the allotted time, the researchers performed the necessary procedures and sought answers while conducting the study. The given specifications guided the researchers in determining the appropriate sampling and methodology, which produced the study's outcomes. This study is limited to senior high school students who use social media for political news.

2. Methodology

Research Design - The study used a descriptive-correlational research design. According to Cohen et al. (2018), a descriptive correlational design allows researchers to analyze relationships among variables as they naturally occur. Researchers used this design to fulfill its purpose and achieve its primary objectives. This approach enables the researchers to provide a comprehensive description of the subject without manipulating any variables, and to analyze potential relationships between variables to determine whether they are connected. This methodology supports the accurate assessment of how social media use influences students' political awareness through structured, systematic data collection. Thus, to describe the level of social media usage and political awareness, a descriptive design was employed. Moreover, a correlational design was used to determine if there is a significant relationship between the two variables.

Respondents of the Study - The first-year (1st) college students at the Divine Word College of San Jose served as the respondents of this study. A simple random sampling technique was used to collect data from 67 students across three courses: BSHM, BSIT, and BSA.

Research Instrument - The main tool used in this study was a researcher-made survey questionnaire. It was designed to determine how social media use affects students' political awareness. The questionnaire has two parts. The first part covers social media usage, including memes, infographics, short-form videos, and text posts, with 5 items per variable. The second part consists of 5 items on political awareness, including the frequency of encountering political content, the types of political content viewed, and the platforms most commonly used for political information. Furthermore, to assess the instrument's validity and reliability, expert validation was conducted. The three experts came from the senior high school department holding the research subject. They were assessed to determine whether the questionnaire's content is relevant to the research objectives. Comments and suggestions were incorporated for the final copy of the instrument. Moreover, the 4-point Likert scale in this study was the level of agreement (4- Strongly Agree, 3- Agree, 2- Disagree, 1- Strongly Disagree).

Data Gathering Procedure - A request letter, signed by the research adviser, was sent to the academic coordinator to seek approval to conduct the study. Moreover, to collect data on the effect of social media use on students' political awareness, the researchers present a consent letter to respondents requesting their voluntary participation. The data were collected by the researchers over one week through a face-to-face survey.

Statistical Treatment of Data - Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to treat the collected data. For descriptive statistics, the weighted mean was used to describe the levels of social media usage and political awareness. Moreover, for inferential statistics, Pearson's r (moment correlation coefficient) was used to assess the relationship between two variables.

Ethical Consideration - This study was conducted in line with the following ethical considerations: First, with voluntary participation: The respondents joined the study willingly and were free to withdraw at any time without facing any consequence. Second, informed consent: Before answering, each respondent was informed of the study's purpose and procedures and agreed to take part after fully understanding them. Third, confidentiality: All personal information and responses were private and used only for academic purposes. No names or identifying details were revealed. Lastly, potential harm: The researchers ensured that no physical, emotional, or psychological

harm would occur during the study.

3. Results and Discussion

Table 1

Mean Level of Social Media Usage in terms of Memes, Infographics, Short-Form Videos, and Text Posts

No.	Indicators (Memes)	Weighted Mean	Description
1	I often encounter political memes on my social media feed.	3.34	Very High
2	Political memes influence how I think about political issues.	2.82	High
3	I share political memes when I agree with their message.	2.77	High
4	I find political memes entertaining, even if they are about serious issues.	2.66	High
5	Memes make politics easier for me to understand.	2.72	High
	Composite Mean	2.76	High
No.	Indicators (Infographics)		
1	Political infographics help us better understand political issues.	3.21	High
2	I usually trust the information I see in political infographics.	2.91	High
3	Infographics make me pay more attention to political issues.	2.96	High
4	I share infographics about politics on social media.	2.55	High
5	Infographics affect my opinions about political leaders.	2.96	High
	Composite Mean	2.92	High
No.	Indicators (Short-Form Videos)		
1	I watch short-form videos about politics on social media.	3.21	High
2	Short videos influence how I view political issues.	2.93	High
3	I trust political information presented in short videos.	2.48	Low
4	I discuss political topics with friends after watching short-form videos.	2.66	High
5	Short videos increase my interest in political issues.	2.99	High
	Composite Mean	2.85	High
No.	Indicators (Text Posts)		
1	I read political text posts on social media.	3.13	High
2	Text posts influence my opinions about political issues.	2.85	High
3	I prefer reading text-based political content over videos or memes.	2.85	High
4	I share or comment on political text posts that interest me.	2.36	Low
5	Text posts help me form my own political views.	2.91	High
	Composite Mean	2.82	High
	OVERALL MEAN	2.84	High

Legend: 3.26 – 4.00 Very High, 2.51 – 3.25 High, 1.76 – 2.50 Low, 1.00 – 1.75 Very Low

Table 1 presents the mean levels of social media usage for memes, infographics, short-form videos, and text posts, with an overall mean of 2.84, interpreted as high. This shows that social media is now a common setting in which respondents regularly engage with a variety of media forms, rather than merely a tool for sporadic communication. Moreover, the overall composite mean score of 2.76, interpreted as high, indicates that political memes were an integral part of students' exposure to political content. The highest-rated item, "I often encountered political memes on my social media feed," has a weighted mean of 3.34, which is interpreted as very high, indicating that students were frequently exposed to political memes in their everyday social media use. This study was supported by Saad & Verma (2021), who found that political memes were highly noticeable and consumed by youth users on digital platforms. The lowest-rated item, "I found political memes entertaining, even if they were about serious issues," had a weighted mean of 2.66 and was still in the high range, indicating that students continued to engage with political memes regularly. The other items, ranging from 2.72 to 2.82, also fell in the high range, showing that students viewed political memes as an important source of information for understanding political issues. These results aligned with the research of Sarwar and Younus (2024), which showed that exposure to political memes improved students' political awareness, increased their involvement, and aided the development of their political beliefs. The study by Moskovljevic (2024) further indicated that frequent exposure to political memes could increase political intolerance, especially when shared by weak social ties. Overall, the data suggest that political memes serve as an accessible, engaging medium for encountering political information, enhancing awareness and engagement while potentially contributing to polarization, depending on exposure patterns and social networks.

Furthermore, the composite mean score of 2.92, interpreted as high, indicated that infographics were generally considered helpful for understanding political content. The highest-rated item, "Political infographics help me

understand political issues better,” has a weighted mean of 3.21, interpreted as high, indicating that students found infographics useful for improving their comprehension of political issues. The lowest-rated item, “I share infographics about politics on social media,” had a weighted mean of 2.55 and was still in the high range, suggesting that although students valued infographics, they were less likely to share them. The other items, ranging from 2.91 to 2.96, also fell in the high range, indicating that students generally trusted and paid attention to the information presented in political infographics. These findings were supported by Lazard and Atkinson (2015), who found that infographics help people understand and process information more effectively, as visuals combined with short text improve clarity. Similarly, Borkin et al. (2016) reported that infographics, such as graphical layouts, help people remember information better than plain text. Moreover, in his study (2017), Ojo noted that designed visual communication materials on social media increase engagement and clarity. Overall, these results suggested that political infographics enhanced students’ understanding and awareness of political issues, even if they did not always share them.

In addition, the composite mean score of 2.85, interpreted as high, suggests that students generally engage with political videos and consider them a source of information. Among the indicators, the item “I watch short-form videos about politics on social media” obtained the highest weighted mean of 3.21, which also falls under the high interpretation. The result implies that many students regularly view political content through short videos on social media platforms. This finding is consistent with Bode's (2016) study, which found that exposure to political content on social media can enhance users’ learning and engagement, making them more aware of current issues. On the other hand, the item “I trust political information presented in short videos” received the lowest weighted mean of 2.48 and was interpreted as low. This indicates that although students watch such content, they remain cautious about fully trusting the information presented in these videos. The remaining items, with weighted means ranging from 2.66 to 2.99, were all interpreted as high. These results suggest that watching short political videos encourages students to discuss political topics with their peers and increases their interest in political matters. These findings are supported by Omar and Dequan (2020), who emphasized that short, visually engaging videos are effective in capturing users’ attention and encouraging interaction on social media platforms. Likewise, Vraga and Bode (2017) found that exposure to political content on social media can shape users’ perceptions and awareness of political issues. Overall, the results indicate that short-form political videos are widely viewed and can help raise political awareness among students. However, they remain careful when evaluating the credibility of the information presented.

Lastly, the composite mean is 2.82, which is interpreted as high, indicating that text-based political posts contribute to students’ understanding of political issues and viewpoints. Among the questions, the statement “I read political text posts on social media” received the highest weighted mean of 3.1,3 interpreted as high. This result shows that students frequently read political information shared through text posts on social media platforms. In contrast, the statement “I share or comment on political text posts that interest me” received the lowest weighted mean of 2.36 and was interpreted as low. This suggests that although students read political text posts, they are less likely to interact with them by actively sharing or commenting. The other indicators, with weighted means ranging from 2.85 to 2.91, were interpreted as high, indicating that text posts continue to influence students’ thinking and help them form their own political opinions. These results support the study by Kim et al. (2015), which found that reading political information on social media can increase political knowledge and foster opinion development, even when users do not actively participate by posting or commenting. Overall, the findings suggest that political text posts remain a useful source of information for students and help shape their understanding of political issues.

Table 5 illustrates how often students encountered political content on social media. The overall composite mean score of 3.29, interpreted as very high, indicated that students were frequently exposed to political content while using social media. The highest-rated item, “I encounter political content while scrolling on social media,” received a weighted mean of 3.43 and was interpreted as very high, indicating that students regularly encountered political content as part of their normal social media activity. The lowest-rated item, “I come across political discussions or debates on social media,” has a weighted mean of 3.19, which is interpreted as high, indicating that

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such discussions were slightly less frequent but still common. The other items, ranging from 3.22 to 3.34, also fell in the high to very high range, suggesting that students frequently saw posts about political leaders, government issues, or content shared by friends and followers. These findings were consistent with those of the Pew Research Center (2022), which reported that many young adults frequently encountered content on social media even without actively seeking it. Similarly, Benkler et al. (2018) explained that digital media environments make political information highly visible and easily distributed across networks, while Lewis et al. (2015) noted that social media platforms expose users to news and information as part of their everyday browsing experience. Overall, these results suggested that students were regularly exposed to political content on social media, which may increase awareness of issues and gradually shape their views even through passive exposure.

Table 2

Mean Level of Political Awareness in terms of Frequency of Encountering Political Content, Types of Political Content Viewed, and Commonly Used Platforms for Political Information

No.	Indicators (Political Content)	Weighted Mean	Description
1	I encounter political content while scrolling on social media.	3.43	Very High
2	Political posts appear on my social media feed even when I am not searching for them.	3.22	High
3	I come across political discussions or debates on social media.	3.19	High
4	I see posts about political leaders or government issues on social media.	3.27	Very High
5	I encounter political content shared by my friends or followers.	3.34	Very High
	Composite Mean	3.29	Very High
No.	Indicators (Types of Political Content Viewed)		
1	I view political memes on social media.	3.21	High
2	I watch short-form political videos (e.g., TikTok, Reels, and Shorts).	3.16	High
3	I read political text posts or status updates.	3.15	High
4	I view political infographics or informational images.	3.18	High
5	I watch live or recorded political discussions or interviews.	3.05	High
	Composite Mean	3.16	High
No.	Indicators (Commonly Used Platforms for Political Information)		
1	I use Facebook as a source of political news and information.	3.13	High
2	I use TikTok to view political content.	3.04	High
3	I use YouTube to watch political discussions, news, or analyses.	3.15	High
4	I use Instagram to access political posts, stories, or reels.	2.78	High
5	I use Twitter/X to follow political updates and public discussions.	2.63	High
	Composite Mean	2.95	High
	OVERALL MEAN	3.13	High

Legend: 3.26 – 4.00 Very High, 2.51 – 3.25 High, 1.76 – 2.50 Low, 1.00 – 1.75 Very Low

Across the different types of political content on social media, the overall mean was 3.16, which is high. This means students often encounter political information on social media. In other words, political content happens frequently in their feeds and online spaces. The statement with the highest rating was “I view political memes on social media,” which had a mean of 3.21, also considered high. This indicates that memes are the most common type of political content students see. This is not surprising because memes spread quickly online and are generally simple, visual, and easy to understand. Many students likely encounter them casually through social media.

On the other hand, the statement “I watch live or recorded political discussions or interviews” had the lowest mean, 3.05, though it is still considered high. This suggests students still engage with this kind of political content, but less than with memes. Students tend to prefer shorter and more visually appealing content, such as memes or short videos. The other items had means ranging from 3.15 to 3.18, which also fall into the high category. This shows that students often see other forms of political content, such as short videos, text posts, and infographics. These types of content likely make political information easier to understand, especially on platforms where people prefer quick, visual content, according to Bradshaw and Howard (2018). They explained that political information spreads more effectively when presented in various digital formats, such as images and videos. These formats make political messages more visible and help them reach a wider audience. Similarly, Ryabchenko et al. (2019) stated that digital technologies, including hashtags and memes, shape how political ideas are communicated and interpreted online.

users content based on their interests. The significant relationship between social media content and students' political awareness suggests that constant exposure to political information online can shape students' understanding of current political issues. As students continue to encounter and engage with political content on social media, their awareness and views of politics may gradually develop. As students see different types of content such as infographics, videos, text posts, and memes, their opinions and beliefs about politics may gradually develop through continuous exposure to these materials. Moreover, the study by Hassan et al. (2024) found that social media is an important platform for sharing political information and shaping public opinion. This explains that different types of content can influence audiences in different ways, especially on digital platforms, where visual and engaging content tends to be more effective. The results of infographics strongly suggest that clear, concise visual presentations of information can help people better understand political topics. Similarly, the significant effects of short-form videos, text posts, and memes indicate that modern digital content shapes students' political awareness. Overall, the results show that social media is a powerful tool in political communication and can influence how students form their political understanding.

4. Conclusion

Based on the study's findings, the following conclusion was drawn: First, students were frequently exposed to political memes in their everyday social media use. Political infographics enhanced students' understanding and awareness of political issues, even if they did not always share them. Short-form political videos are widely viewed and can help raise political awareness among students, although they remain cautious when evaluating the credibility of the information presented. Thus, the level of political content viewed by college students is evident across different formats such as memes, infographics, short-form videos, and text posts. Third, regarding exposure to political content on social media, students frequently encounter political posts on their most-used platforms. Lastly, there is a significant relationship between the frequency of social media use and college students' level of political awareness.

Recommendation - The following recommendations are based on the study's findings and conclusions. First, the DWCSJ Administration may adopt and implement a more comprehensive media and information literacy program for students. Since the study showed that frequent exposure to political content significantly influences students' views and opinions, the school may conduct seminars, training sessions, and other educational activities to develop students' ability to analyze and verify political information on social media. Second, teachers and instructors may include discussions of the responsible use of social media, critical thinking, and political awareness. Especially in subjects related to communication, social science, and ethics, this may help students gain a clearer understanding of political memes, infographics, short videos, and text posts before forming their own opinions. Third, the Student Affairs Office may organize debates, symposiums, and open forums on current political issues. Since most students are merely receivers of information and not actively involved, these activities may help encourage responsible, respectful, and informed participation in political affairs. Fourth, student organizations may take the lead in promoting fact-checking and responsible sharing of political information on commonly used platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter. Student organizations may take the lead. Create content that helps fellow students see all sides of political issues and improve their understanding. Fifth, the Guidance and Counseling Office may implement programs that promote respectful discussion, responsible use of digital media, and awareness against misinformation and online division of opinion. Since social media significantly influences students' political views, these programs may help maintain orderly, positive discourse. Lastly, future researchers may conduct further studies on other factors that may affect students' political views, such as the influence of family, friends, and traditional media. They may also expand the scope of the study to other years of study or to other institutions to provide comparisons and further deepen existing knowledge on this topic.

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