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Social Media as a Transformative Agent of Political Behavioramong Political Science Students in a Component City

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ABSTRACT

The political future of the Philippines depends on young people getting involved. This study investigated the use of social media as a transformative agent in changing the political behavior of political science students in a component city. This study was done in the City of San Fernando, La Union. Marshall McLuhan's Media Ecology Theory and Herbert Blumer's Uses and Gratification Theory was used as the theoretical bases. Both descriptive-correlational and quantitative methods were employed in this study. A researcher-made questionnaire was used to collect data. The researchers included 350 political science students. The results showed that the respondents were frequently exposed to political and election-related information on social media. Also, social media was regarded as relevant in changing respondents' political participation. However, this information was only appropriate for a limited range and was not strong enough to change their political behavior. The findings suggest that social media is still significant to students' political lives. The findings revealed no critical link between the level of exposure to political and election-related content and its relevance in changing political behavior among respondents, with a p-value of 0.574 (Negligible Positive Relationship). A validated curriculum review and recommendation for special topics for Bachelor of Arts in Political Science is recommended to help improve the identified weaknesses.

INTRODUCTION

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, social detachment has become the worldwide standard, and many aspects of civic life, including political campaigns and voter registration efforts, have relocated to virtual surroundings. Over 60% of youth surveyed by Circle for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (2020) reported that creating social media content helped them feel more informed, represented, and heard; however, 37% of youth do not feel qualified to voice their political opinions online.

In the Philippines, media personalities and members of political clans make up most election participants. This is consistent with previous studies indicating that candidate winnability is frequently referred to as a "personality versus platform" issue and that voters rely on candidate-centered factors rather than issue-based factors during elections (David & Legara, 2015), where social media plays a significant role.

Given the contradictory literature on the role of social media as a transformative agent of political behavior and the paucity of research that directly establishes the relationship between the two variables, the purpose of this study was to examine the influence of social media as a transformative agent, which may have relevance in transforming the political behavior of the participants in a component city.

The study was conducted in the city of San Fernando, La Union, and investigated the unique political behavior of political students in the city. The researchers believed that since no previous study had been conducted in this field with political students as the respondents, the findings would be useful to evaluate the strength and weaknesses of the political science curriculum and practices of the institutions studied. The study would also be used to prove or disprove the results of other studies on the same subject.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The revised 2021 Social Media Demographics Guide reveals that most individuals aged 18 to 29 use Facebook (86%), Instagram (67%), and Twitter (38%). According to Chen & Wang (2021), social media is a popular online platform for public sharing, creation, and communication. Younger individuals globally use social media at a faster rate than older people, and there is a substantial association between smartphone ownership and per capita gross domestic product, according to the study (Gonzales, 2020). In addition, it was claimed that sharing political information on social media is a very easy form of political expression and involvement that has become an increasingly common online practice (Weeks, et al., 2017). Concurrently, the internet and social media make it possible for individuals to encounter political material in a variety of ways, which may alter the extent to which it influences their political conduct (Macaraeg, 2021). In general, social media utilization is a very personalized experience, and its effects vary considerably on how individuals engage with it (David et al., 2019).

On social media networks, citizens can participate in public political communication since they allow users to interact with online content using social buttons. As a result, 62% of people also declared that they feel better about themselves when people react positively to what

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they post on social medi (Seiter, 2020). According to Tinampay (2021), the findings of the survey conducted by Youth-Led PH in collaboration with SWS revealed that, moreover, half of the Filipino youth engage in politics on social media, notably Facebook and Twitter. Meanwhile, 33% of people follow a politician or a political-related social media account, and 27% make their political comments. In recent years, social media has played a crucial role in increasing political awareness among individuals (Buenaobra, 2016).

The widespread use of social media may have disseminated information, whether true or false. Globally, the impact of social media on political awareness was variable (Brown et al., 2019; Mourtada & Salem, 2011; Yunus, 2013; Bailard, 2012). Correspondingly, survey data from online social media and political awareness in Russian parliamentary elections demonstrate that the use of Twitter and Facebook considerably boosted respondents' perceptions of election fraud, which led to election protests (Reuter, 2013). Social media are a very customized area, and their consequences depend on how individuals utilize them. Although internet usage as a source of political news in the Philippines ranked third after television and radio, a resounding 48 percent of internet usage is sufficient for this purpose. Furthermore, utilizing Facebook as a source of political information is positively associated with frequent political debate with others (David et al., 2019).

Despite the high correlation between Facebook usage and political awareness, Facebook does not influence political involvement, according to the data. It was stated that Facebook may not be an efficient method for mobilizing those with a poor interest in politics (Cornelio, 2017; David et al., 2019). Foreign scholars have concluded that motive and user behavior significantly dictate how individuals use social media; individuals may avoid or actively seek out political material (Baek, 2015; Tang and Lee, 2013). Even though consumers are exposed to political material, they may not engage in political involvement. In particular, the growth of social media has likely contributed to the phenomena of unintended or unintentional exposure to current affairs news, as such content is frequently "pushed" to individuals by their friends (Tang & Lee, 2013). Consequently, researchers routinely examine contextual variables that increase the likelihood of inadvertent exposure.

Media Ecology Theory
According to many definitions, Media Ecology Theory (Milberry, 2012) studies media, technology, and how they influence human lives through media environments. Neil Postman debuted it in 1968. Marshall McLuhan was the inspiration. Furthermore, it determines how people behave in their encounters with the media. This idea theorizes the complex interplay between humans, technology, the media, and the environment to identify the mutual effects. It provides a lens for understanding the changes brought by technology and the media to human life.

Media ecology aims to delve into how technologies and communication control information and affect people's beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions (Shaffer, 2016). More so, as discussed by Ohlendorf (2008) and cited in Shaffer (2016), media ecology affected modern-day and past politicians' discourse. People's choices for Lincoln and Douglas' presidential campaigns were influenced by television and the internet. They emphasized that the speeches made by these candidates were second only to how they were projected on television in their campaign. This theory is also useful for understanding this study, which tries to determine how media and technology may influence people's views as they engage with different social media sites. According to the idea, the technology that humans use to think, communicate, and represent their experiences effects their behavior and perception of reality. Since social media offer users with indirect representations of reality, communication academics have been particularly interested in how individuals build cognitions of social reality based on their media usage and attention (Media and Perceptions of Reality, n.d.).

The Uses and Gratification Theory
The Uses and Gratification Theory (Katz & Blumler, 1974) states that people use media to satisfy their wants and needs. In this theory, users are perceived as active agents who have control over their media usage. This theory was introduced in the 1940s as an expert study of why people choose to consume various forms of media. By the 1970s, the theory was credited to Jay Blumler and Elihu Katz when they focused on the effects of media use on the social and psychological needs of people. In the study conducted by Hossain (2019), on the effects of Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) on social media use, the researcher investigated the intention of Facebook users through the explanation of the theory. The research revealed that the reasons people use Facebook, as analyzed by 287 respondents, were: for enjoyment, passing time, information seeking, self-presentation, social presence, and social interaction. Additionally, user habits and subjective norms partially mediate the connection. From the study, it can be deduced that Facebook users seek various gratifications to fulfill their needs and wants (Cheung et al., 2011; Dhir & Tsai, 2017).

In this study, this theory was used to understand people's motivations for choosing a media platform and the satisfaction they get from it.

MATERIALS AND METHODS
In this study, a descriptive-correlational research design was used, which is quantitative. As Nasaji (2007) defined, descriptive research is a research method that can determine the situation in the current phenomenon. As cited in Ohrvall & Oskarsson (2018) in Walliman's (2011) paper, descriptive research relates to an observation in collecting the data, such as the level of exposure to politics and election-related content posted on social media among Political Science students in a component city.

Meanwhile, correlational approach analyzes associations between two (or more) variables without the researcher influencing or altering any of them. It was a sort of quantitative study that was not experimental. In a correlational design, variables were measured without being altered (Walinga & Stangor, 2014). The study also determined the relationship between the level of exposure to political and election-related content posted on social media and how it acts as a transformative agent in the political behavior of Political Science students in the City of San Fernando, La Union.

The data obtained were tabulated, summarized, analyzed, and interpreted. The following are the statistical tools used for the treatment of the data gathered for this study parallel to the statement of the problem of this study. With regards to the relationship between the level of exposure to politics- and election-related content and its degree of relevance in transforming the political behavior of the respondents along with the identified areas, the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (Pearson-r) was utilized by using the Microsoft Excel version 2016

Mathematical Expressions and Symbols

In this study, the researchers employed descriptive statistics in order to present the tabulated data.

To compute for the weighted mean, the researchers used the formula presented below:

$$\sum ni=1 \ (xi * wi)/\sum ni=1wi \ (1)$$

To compute for frequency and percentage, the researchers utilized the formula listed below:

$$\% = (f \ / \ n) \times 100 \ (2)$$

Finally, to compute for the relationship between the level of exposure to politics- and election-related content and its degree of relevance in transforming the political behavior of the respondents along with the identified areas, the researchers used the formula for Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (Pearson-r), which is listed below:

$$r = (n \ (\sum xy)-(\sum x)(\sum y))/(\sqrt{\ [n \ \sum x^2-(\sum x)^2][n \ \sum y^2-(\sum y)^2]}) \ (3)$$

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results and discussion include the findings, analysis, and interpretation of 350 respondents from the City of San Fernando, La Union. It addresses how social media can change people's political behavior. This also examines the significant relationship between respondents' exposure to political and election-related content posted on social media and their ability to change their political behavior as Political Science students.

The Level of Exposure to Politics- and Election-Related Contents posted on social media among Political Science students in a Component City

The level of exposure to politics and election-related content posted on social media among Political Science students is gauged along with the respondents' frequency of manifestations and interaction with politics- and election-related *fora or interviews and debates; online campaign rallies via live stream; infographics and other related content featuring political aspirants; political blogs and articles; audio-visual presentations including vlogs, podcasts, and other associated contents; mock elections, polls, and surveys; and Public Documents including legal documents involving political aspirants.*

Table 1 below shows the level of exposure to the most common politics and election-related content posted on social media among political science students in a component city. As can be gleaned from the table, the computed overall grand mean is 3.50, which has a descriptive equivalent rating of Sometimes. This implies that Political Science students are less frequently exposed to political machinery propagated on social media. In effect, Political Science students are generally less likely to be seen participating in election-related activities conducted during the said period. It further implies that the said students do not often use social media to acquire related information. Students majoring in political science are somewhat exposed to election- and politics-related information posted on social media, according to the research's generally positive findings.

The data presented above shows the computed means along the measured indicator to investigate whether social media is relevant in transforming the political awareness of Political Science students in the City of San Fernando,

Table 1: The Level of Exposure to Politics- and Election-Related Content posted on social media among Political Science students in a Component City

No.	Indicators	WM	DER
1	Infographics and other related content featuring political aspirants	4.12	O
2	Mock elections, polls, and surveys	4.12	O
3	Online Campaign Rallies via live stream	4.02	O
4	Audio-visual Presentations including vlogs, podcasts, and other related contents	3.95	O
5	Fora or Interview and Debates	3.85	O
6	Political blogs and articles	2.35	S
7	Public Documents including legal documents involving political aspirants	2.10	R
	Grand Mean	3.50	S

The Degree of Relevance of social media on Transforming the Political Behavior of Political Science Students in a Component City

Table 2: Degree of Relevance of social media on Transforming the Political Behavior of Political Science Students in terms of their Political Awareness

No.	Indicators	WM	DE
1	Identifying the critical roles of voters in participating in the elections	4.22	VR
2	Evaluating the candidates' accomplishments in his/her past and current term as a politician	4.19	VR
3	Knowing the importance of exercising the right to suffrage	4.18	VR
4	Following the political perspectives of every candidate regarding their standpoints on relevant socio-political issues (economic, health, education, and the like)	4.15	VR
5	Knowing the important role of democracy, especially in the conduct of elections	4.15	VR
6	Assessing its impacts on the electoral process in the Philippines	3.93	VR
7	Discerning factual and false political-related information	3.82	VR
8	Learning/identifying national and local issues that need to be addressed	3.8	VR
9	Asserting the important roles played by the historical events and narratives in the Philippine political climate	3.78	VR
10	Keeping away from or avoiding the prohibited acts that violate election rules (omnibus election code - Article XXII)	3.36	R
	Grand Mean	3.96	VR

La Union. The overall mean, as can be gleaned in the table is 3.96 which is classified as Very Relevant. The study's findings revealed that social media influences political knowledge by mediating online discussions across various social media platforms. The more students use social media to discuss political issues, the more knowledgeable they become. Table 2 is backed by the two theories: The Uses and Gratification theory and The Media Ecology Theory. The Uses and Gratification Theory is the most relevant theory used in this table in the sense that the participants use social media as a critical engagement on how to deal with their needs and wants, such that the Political Science students engross in the different social media platforms to satisfy the needs of their knowledge insufficiency specifically in politics- and election-related contents. According to Kasirye (2022), the Uses and Gratification theory is known as a mechanism for

meeting one's condition in socio-political issues using social media.

Table 3 reflects the extent to which social media has influenced the political behavior of political science students in the City of San Fernando, La Union in terms of their political preferences. The overall mean, as shown in the table, is 3.48, which is classified as Relevant. This finding demonstrates the importance of social media as viewed by the participants in influencing their political preferences. This implies that Political Science students confidently consider social media as one which transforms and influences their political preferences. This is backed by the research of political scientists who have begun to examine how individuals connect with and express their political views online utilizing this rich data source (e.g., Barberá 2014, Bond et al., 2012; Butle & Broockman; Butler et al., 2012). This assumes that students of

Table 3: Degree of Relevance of social media on Transforming the Political Behavior of Political Science Students in terms of their Political Preference

No.	Indicators	Mean	DER
1	Create a set of standards that candidates must meet in order for me to select them	4.23	VR
2	Choose the best potential candidate I should support and campaign for	4.16	VR
3	Assess whose candidate's platforms will deeply create an impact on the national interests	4	VR
4	Support the candidate who shares the same political views such as mine	3.76	VR
5	Check if my political preference is similar or different with people in my social media network and community	3.54	VR
6	Become a non-partisan citizen to avoid political biases	3.52	VR
7	Inhibit myself to choose the least favourable candidate	3.42	R
8	Validate if the candidate's words/advocacies match his/her accomplishments	3.14	R
9	Vote the candidate that has the most entertaining campaign materials posted on social media	2.94	R
10	Choose based on social media presence	2.12	BR
	Grand Mean	3.48	R

Table 4: Degree of Relevance of social media on Transforming the Political Behavior of Political Science Students in terms of their Political Participation

No.	Indicators	Mean	DE
1	Go out and vote during elections	4.23	VR
2	Participate, as a spectator, in online campaign/debate/fora/rallies	3.55	VR
3	Call out and report enablers and perpetrators of fake, false, and misleading information	3.53	VR
4	Create campaign materials to be posted on social media	2.82	R
5	Help delving in the political aspirant's campaign fund	2.75	R
6	Participate in any online rallies (such as uniform profile pictures and the like)	2.73	R
7	Post online criticisms about and against the status quo.	2.65	R
8	Initiate fundraising activities or donation drive to support a competent political aspirant	2.62	R
9	Lobby for possible legislation for the betterment of the National and Local Elections	2.29	BR
10	Verbally bash candidates/supporters for illegal political agenda	2.02	BR
	Grand Mean	2.92	R

political science view social media as a tool that changes and impacts their political choices. According to Eusebio (2021), Facebook contributed over 16 million votes to President Rodrigo Duterte's election.

Table 4 shows how much social media has influenced political science students' political behavior as measured by their political participation. It indicates the grand mean of 2.92, which has a descriptive interpretation of Relevant, which means that social media is viewed as relevant in transforming the political behavior of political science students in terms of their political participation. This is supported by the study of Sandoval-Almazan, & Gil-Garcia, (2014) who insisted that web 2.0 applications have played an important role in influencing governments decision making and in shaping the relationship between the government - citizens, citizens, and politicians. The data dispensed in Table 4 supplements the two theories established in the study: The Media Ecology Theory and the Uses and Gratification Theory. It endorsed Media Ecology Theory as it shows the degree of relevance of social media in transforming the political behavior of political science students in their political participation. This theory examines the complex connection between humans, technology, the media, and the environment to identify the mutual effects. Additionally, it provides transparency in understanding the changes brought by technology and the media to human life. Moreover, Media Ecology Theory aims to dig deeper into how technologies and communication control information and affect people's beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions. The data conclusively show that, while social media is only relevant to transforming political behavior of political science students, it still has an impact on political participation of political science students.

Uses and Gratification Theory was also perceived based on the findings. The overall mean equates to Relevant, which corresponds to belief with average confidence that politics - and election-related contents can transform political behavior. This also indicates that political science students still spend their time browsing social media to inform themselves and participate in political concerns or issues.

Summary of Degree of Relevance of social media on Transforming the Political Behavior of Political Science Students

As shown in the table, it accumulated a grand mean of 3.45, with a descriptive equivalent rating of Relevant. This data states that social media is essential in changing the political behavior of the respondents. Furthermore, this is supported by the study of Boulianne and Theocharis (2020), which claims that there is evidence to suggest that social media usage has something to do with youth social and political engagement. The table delineates that Political Awareness had the highest average mean of 3.96, corresponding to Very Relevant. This indicates that social media has a significant influence on improving people's awareness of politics and election-related content. The usage of social networks has a considerable favorable effect on students' political knowledge and mediates the positive influence of social networks on Iranian

Table 5: Summary of Degree of Relevance of social media on Transforming the Political Behavior of Political Science Students

Identified Areas	Mean	DE
Political Awareness	3.96	VR
Political Preference	3.48	R
Political Participation	2.92	R
Grand Mean	3.45	R

Table 6: Relationship between Level of Exposure of Social Media Use among Political Science students and its Degree of Relevance in Transforming their Political Behavior

r	DER	p-value	decision
0.030	Neg.+r	0.574	Not Significant

Legend:

Level of Significance = 0.05

Neg.+r = Negligible Positive Relationship

DER = Descriptive Equivalent Rating

university students' political activity. Meanwhile, Political Participation has the lowest average mean of 2.92, which is described as Relevant. This shows that social media still is influential on the political involvement of every respondent.

Correlation of Analysis of the Level of Exposure to Politics - and Election-Related Content posted on social media among Political Science Students and its Degree of Relevance in Transforming their Political Behavior

Table 6 shows the interpretation of the relationship between the level of frequency of social media use among political science students and its degree of relevance in transforming their political behavior which is computed as 0.030 which is described as having a Negligible Positive Relationship. The relationship between the two variables indicates that the increase in exposure to social media will likely increase the degree of relevance. However, the degree of relationship is said to be Not Significant as the computed p-value of 0.574 was greater than the significance level (0.05); thus, the null hypothesis is accepted. Hence, there is no significant relationship between the level of frequency of social media use among political science students and its degree of relevance in transforming their political behavior. The results further imply that the relevance of social media in transforming the political behavior of political science students does not depend on their level of exposure to social media. A probability value (p-value) assists in identifying the significance of the results concerning the null hypothesis when performing a statistical test. As McLeod (2019) emphasizes, the rejection of the null hypothesis with a probability value of or 31 percent does not imply that there is a 69 percent chance that the alternative hypothesis is accurate because the p-value is greater than.05; rather, it indicates strong evidence for the null hypothesis. This indicates that the researchers maintain the null hypothesis while rejecting the alternative hypothesis. It also means that researchers cannot accept the null hypothesis, as we may either reject it or fail to reject it.

A p-value larger than 0.05 implies that the researchers accept the null hypothesis, as indicated by the results. The finding might be read as showing that there is no significant association between the frequency with which political science students use social media and the importance of social media in influencing the political conduct of respondents. Furthermore, the finding does not imply that it does not demonstrate that social media platforms have no effect or influence on the political behavior of political science students, given that a statistically significant result cannot prove that a research hypothesis is correct, as this would imply a certainty of one hundred percent. Specifically, the finding did not reject the null hypothesis.

CONCLUSIONS

According to the findings enumerated in the study, the researchers concluded that Political Science students

are frequently exposed to politics- and election-related content often on social media. This entails that political science students are not entirely using social media as a source of politics- and election-related information. The politics- and election-related content posted on social media are only relevant to a certain extent, and not strong enough to transform the political behavior of political science students. Additionally, the political behavior of political science students is affected by the length of their exposure to any politics- and election-related content posted on social media, hence the lesser their exposure is to the said content, the less likely their political behavior is transformed. Finally, it can be deduced that social media is considered relevant in transforming the political behavior of political science students in terms of their political participation.

Based on the findings in the study, the researchers suggested that Educational Institutions offering Bachelor of Arts in Political Science, must adopt the reviewed curriculum and integrate the special topics to enhance the political behavior of the students. The implementation of the reviewed curriculum and integration of the special topics should be committedly executed and can also be applied in other areas where the students do not perform well in line with one of the core values of the institution – Excellence. To apply the updated curriculum, the academic dean, program directors, professors, and instructors must confer. All BAPS-offering higher education institutions must consider adopting the suggested Curriculum Review and Recommendation for Special Topics for the Bachelor of Arts in Political Science Program (BAPS).

Parents, teachers and heads, and experts should collaboratively guide the political science students on how to develop a sense of political awareness, enjoin them to select with utmost sincerity and wit, and encourage them to be engaged and participate more often in the political processes, thereby enhancing their political behavior. The instructors, students, and program head should undergo orientation on how the Curriculum Review and Recommendation for Special Topics for the Bachelor of Arts in Political Science Program (BAPS) will be implemented in enhancing political behavior and responsible social media use. Moreover, the Curriculum Review and Recommendation for Special Topics for the Bachelor of Arts in Political Science Program (BAPS) should be implemented in the nearest academic year to record its three-year impact on the 2025 midterm elections. Future researchers should also consider other factors that affect the political behavior of political science students aside from social media use as a basis for another enhancement program.

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