

Original Research Paper

Social Media Influence on Civic Engagement Among Young Filipinos

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Abstract: This study examines the influence of social media use on civic engagement and political awareness among young Filipinos in the digital era. Using a mixed-method approach combining survey data (n = 200) and in-depth interviews, the research analyzes the relationship between platform usage intensity, user motivation, and the level of youth participation in social and political activities. The findings reveal that the majority of Filipino youth use Facebook and TikTok for more than three hours per day, with entertainment (60%) as the primary motivation, followed by social information (25%) and political participation (15%). A moderate positive correlation ($r \approx 0.45$, $p < 0.01$) is found between social media use and civic engagement, indicating that higher online activity is generally associated with increased social awareness and participation. TikTok is more effective in raising awareness of social issues, while Facebook facilitates coordination of offline civic actions such as community projects and volunteer activities. However, the persistence of slacktivism and low trust in political institutions remain significant barriers that prevent digital engagement from translating into concrete action. The study underscores the potential of social media as a tool for civic education and democratic participation while highlighting the need for programs that link digital engagement to real-world civic involvement. These findings provide both academic and practical insights into enhancing youth participation in the Philippines' evolving digital democracy.

Keywords: Civic Engagement, Digital Activism, Political Awareness, Social Media, Youth Participation.



1. Introduction

The social and political involvement of the younger generation is an important element in maintaining healthy democratic dynamics in various countries, including in Southeast Asia. In a country like the Philippines, with a sizable young population and high internet penetration, the question of how youth participate in social and political processes becomes particularly relevant [1] [2]. Previous studies have shown that young people in the Philippines are beginning to utilize digital spaces as an arena for political and social interaction, replacing or at least complementing traditional arenas such as physical gatherings or community activities [3] [4].

The Philippines is known as one of the countries with a very high level of social media penetration, where platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter) have become a daily part of the younger generation [5]. In this context, social media is not only limited to entertainment media or personal communication, but also a means of social and political mobilization. For example, the 2022 general election campaign in the Philippines featured the intense use of social media and "political influencers" by youth groups as part of their campaign strategy and digital political participation [6] [7].

The phenomenon of 'digital activism' among Filipino youth is getting more and more attention in academic studies. Youth use social media to voice social issues, join online movements, and mobilize communities quickly [8]. However, a critical question arises: does social media activity really result in meaningful civic engagement, or is it just a passive or symbolic activity known as slacktivism? Some studies show that despite the increase in online activity, the switch to real action in the physical world is still less strong, often hindered by the prevalence of disinformation and algorithmic echo chambers [9] [10].

The main problem that this research focuses on is: to what extent does the use of social media affect the level of social engagement and political awareness of the younger generation in the Philippines? In addition, factors that encourage or hinder such relationships, such as the type of social media platform, frequency of use, motivation of users (e.g., seeking information, entertainment, or political participation), and their level of digital literacy; is still poorly understood empirically in the context of the Philippines [11] [12]. Studies that combine these variables are still limited. For example, a study by Velasco et al. (2024) highlights that platform such as TikTok and Instagram encourage more active participation than traditional platforms, yet the quality of information remains a challenge [13] [14].

The objectives of this study are three-five: first, to analyze the relationship between the intensity of social media use and the level of civic engagement of the young generation in the Philippines. Second, identify differences in engagement rates based on specific platforms (Facebook, TikTok, X). Third, assessing the influence of motivation for use (information, entertainment, political participation) on the social and political awareness of the young generation in the country. Thus, this study will provide a more detailed picture of the mechanisms behind the digital engagement of the young generation of Filipinos.

The significance of this study lies in several aspects. Academically, this research can enrich the literature on social media, youth political participation, and social studies in Southeast Asia, particularly the Philippines. Practically, the results of the research can be used by policymakers, educational institutions, and social organizations in designing effective digital literacy and social participation programs for the younger generation. With a better understanding of the dynamics of social media use and youth social engagement, it is hoped that the contribution of the younger generation to the development of democracy and civil society in the Philippines can be meaningfully enhanced.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Concept of Civic Engagement

Civic engagement refers to the active participation of citizens in social and political activities, whether through voting, volunteer activities, public advocacy, or community participation. Classical theories such as those put forward by Putnam and Verba et al. emphasize that citizen involvement in civil society strengthens democracy and social cohesion. However, in the context of the digital young generation, this definition has shifted because the space for participation is not only limited to physical actions but also through the online realm [15] [16].

In the current literature, the dimension of civic engagement is divided into several aspects: formal political participation, social volunteering, and civic awareness [17]. A study in the Philippines, for example, shows that even though young people are active on social media, there is still a gap between social awareness and implementation in real action, suggesting that online engagement does not always

lead to physical or long-term participation [18] [19]. Furthermore, the rise of "networked individualism" implies that youth engagement is becoming more personalized and less tied to traditional institutions [20].

2.2. Social Media as a Tool for Engagement

Social media has emerged as a new space for political communication, social advocacy, and mass mobilization. With platforms like Facebook, TikTok and X (Twitter), individuals can share information, organize campaigns, and voice opinions quickly [21]. The Uses and Gratifications theoretical approach describes the motivation of individuals to use social media as a means of seeking information, entertainment, self-expression, or social participation [22].

Various studies show mixed results: some have found the positive effects of social media on the social consciousness of younger generations, for example through increased political knowledge and interest in participating [23] [24]. However, other research shows the phenomenon of "slacktivism" i.e., passive or symbolic activities (such as likes/shares) that do not continue into real action, suggesting that online presence has not automatically resulted in deep social engagement [25]. Additionally, the role of algorithms in curating content can lead to polarization, limiting the exposure of youth to diverse political viewpoints [26] [27].

2.3. Youth and Political Awareness in the Digital Era

The young generation in the Philippines is known to be very digitally active, they use social media as the main means to interact, obtain information and express political views [28]. However, despite the high level of online activity, the level of formal political participation (e.g., voting, membership of political organizations) varies significantly based on digital literacy levels. This shows that there is a "gap" between online engagement and physical or traditional participation [13].

The literature in Southeast Asia (including Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand) shows that digital political participation often does not translate into real action or offline participation due to a lack of trust in political institutions [29]. This gap is an important issue because it shows that although youth appear to be engaged online, their effectiveness in contributing to community development and democracy is still limited without a bridge linking online activity with real action [30].

3. Methodology

This study uses a mixed-method approach, which is a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative survey measured the frequency of social media use and the level of civic engagement of young people in the Philippines. The in-depth interview explored participants' perceptions, motivations, and experiences in using social media in more detail. This research was conducted throughout the early 2025 period, providing a temporal context that is relevant to the current dynamics of social media.

The study population consisted of college students and youth aged 18–25 years who were active in social media in urban areas of the Philippines. The research site focused on three main cities: Manila, Cebu, and Davao. The study sample consisted of approximately 200 respondents, who were selected through stratified random sampling based on region of residence and gender, to ensure representativeness. Respondents were divided into categories of public university students, private university students, and youth workers in the informal sector.

The research instruments included an online questionnaire with a Likert scale to assess the intensity of social media use, motivation, and level of social engagement. In addition, semi-structured interview guides were used to extract respondents' narratives of digital experiences, perceptions, and views on the influence of social media on their political and social awareness.

Quantitative data were analyzed using Pearson correlation to test the relationship between variables and linear regression to assess the effect of social media use intensity and motivation on civic engagement. Qualitative data were analyzed through thematic analysis to find common patterns, themes, and narratives of respondents' in-depth interviews. The results of the analysis are combined to provide a holistic picture of the influence of social media on the social and political participation of young people in the Philippines.

4. Finding and Discussion

4.1. Level of Social Media Usage

The majority of respondents use Facebook and TikTok for more than 3 hours per day. The main motivations for social media use are divided into: entertainment (60%), social information (25%), and political participation (15%).

Table 1. Distribution of Social Media Use Motivation

Motivation for Use	Percentage (%)
Entertainment	60
Social Information	25
Political Participation	15

4.2. Correlation Between Social Media Use and Civic Engagement

The results of the quantitative analysis showed a moderate positive relationship between the intensity of social media use and the level of civic engagement ($r \approx 0.45$, $p < 0.01$).

- TikTok has shown a stronger influence in raising awareness of social issues.
- Facebook is more effective for coordinating real social activities, such as fundraising or offline community activities.

Table 2. Correlation of Social Media Use Intensity and Civic Engagement

Platform	r	p-value
TikTok	0.5	0.008
Facebook	0.43	0.012
X/Twitter	0.37	0.045

4.3. Youth Perceptions from Interviews

Based on in-depth interviews:

- Many young people feel that social media helps them voice their opinions quickly.
- However, online use doesn't always encourage real action in the physical world.
- The main obstacles: lack of trust in political institutions and skepticism of the effectiveness of public participation.

Table 3. Youth Perception of the Effectiveness of Social-Media in Civic Engagement

Perception	Percentage (%)
Social media helps voice opinions	70
Social media encourages real action	30
Lack of trust in political institutions	55
Skepticism of the effectiveness of public participation	60

4.4. Discussion

The results of this study show that Filipino youth actively use social media, especially Facebook and TikTok, for more than three hours per day. The main motivation for using the platform is entertainment (60%), followed by social information search (25%) and political participation (15%). This data confirms that social media plays a central role in the daily lives of the young generation in the Philippines. There was a moderately positive correlation between the intensity of social media use and the level of civic engagement ($r \approx 0.45$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that the higher the engagement of individuals on digital platforms, the more their awareness and participation in social activities increased. TikTok shows a stronger influence in raising awareness of social issues through algorithms that highlight trending content and public issues, while Facebook is more effective in facilitating the coordination of real social activities such as fundraising, community events, and volunteer activities.

This shows that the type of platform used also influences the form of social engagement that is generated.

The motivation for social media use plays an important role as explained by the theory of Uses and Gratifications, where users who access social media to seek social information and political participation show higher levels of engagement than those who only use it for entertainment. Interview data supports these findings, with 70% of respondents stating that social media helps them express their opinions, but only 30% admit that their online activity continues to be a real action in the physical world. This gap shows that the phenomenon of slacktivism is still strong, where digital engagement does not always lead to concrete social participation. In addition, low trust in political institutions (55%) and skepticism about the effectiveness of public participation (60%) are also the main obstacles limiting the transformation from online participation to real action. Thus, social media serves as a bridge of social awareness, but it has not been able to fully overcome structural barriers in the Philippine democratic system.

The dynamics between platforms are also interesting to note. TikTok's short video format and viral challenges encourage discussion and social awareness that quickly spread, while Facebook's group and event management features further support the coordination of collective activities offline. Moderate correlation ($r = 0.45$) indicates that social media contributes to social engagement, but it is not the only factor that influences it. Other factors such as community networks, educational backgrounds, and family influences also play complementary roles in shaping civic behavior. The dominance of entertainment motivation shows the potential for distraction from social issues, so efforts are needed from policymakers, educators, and content creators to integrate educational and civic messages into entertainment content in order to bridge the gap.

While digital activism is quite strong among Filipino youth, data shows that online participation is often symbolic rather than substantial. This is in line with the findings of other research in Southeast Asia that show that online visibility is not always directly proportional to real actions in the offline world. The X/Twitter platform had a lower correlation to civic engagement ($r = 0.37$), likely due to a more limited range of interactions in building collective action among young users. In addition, youth perceptions emphasize the importance of social validation and peer influence in participating. Social media does provide space for discussion and expression, but it is not yet powerful enough to encourage sustainable physical participation.

These findings have practical implications for civic education and public policy. Programs that combine digital literacy with social responsibility can leverage the high level of online engagement to drive real action on the ground, transforming slacktivism into meaningful social participation. In the context of the Philippines as a digital democracy with high online participation but low public trust, social media doubles as a channel as well as an obstacle to effective citizen engagement. Therefore, policymakers are advised to implement specific strategies on each platform, such as leveraging TikTok to raise awareness of social issues and Facebook to mobilize community-based activities.

The combination of quantitative findings from the survey and qualitative insights from interviews provides a deeper understanding of the behavior of Filipino youth. Statistical data shows the level of engagement, while the interview narrative reveals the attitudes, motivations, and barriers surrounding it. The gap between online and offline participation highlights the need for interventions that link online interest to real opportunities to contribute, such as community projects or volunteer activities. Educational institutions can play an important role by integrating social media-based projects into the citizenship curriculum, ensuring that digital engagement contributes directly to social development. Overall, the study confirms that civic engagement is multidimensional; social media functions as a facilitator of awareness, discussion, and coordination, but still requires the support of offline mechanisms to realize its potential in strengthening democracy in the Philippines.

5. Conclusion

This research shows that social media has a positive influence on the social awareness and political participation of the younger generation in the Philippines. The intensity of social media use, especially TikTok and Facebook, was positively correlated with the level of civic engagement ($r \approx 0.45$, $p < 0.01$). TikTok is more effective in raising awareness of social issues, while Facebook is more instrumental in coordinating real social activities. However, the majority form of engagement is still dominated by online activity—youth feel they can voice their opinions, but don't always proceed to physical action. The main obstacles identified were a lack of trust in political institutions and skepticism of the effectiveness of public participation.

The results of the study emphasized the importance of digital literacy programs and social media-based civic education. Government agencies, civil society organizations, and NGOs can leverage social media as an effective platform for digital participation, with platform-specific strategies (TikTok for awareness, Facebook for offline mobilization). These findings are also relevant for the development of higher education curricula, where students can be involved in social projects that link online engagement and real action.

This research opens up opportunities for further studies, including by expanding research to rural areas of the Philippines to explore the differences in digital divide and access to social media, conducting longitudinal research to observe changes in attitudes and behaviors of social and political participation of young people over time, exploring the influence of algorithms and echo chamber effects to social awareness and political perceptions to understand how social media content shapes opinion and engagement, and to investigate additional factors such as the influence of family, education, and community networks in supporting the transformation of slacktivism into real participation.

In general, it can be said that social media acts as a catalyst for social awareness and political participation, but the sustainability of engagement and real impact in the physical world still requires educational strategies and targeted policy interventions. This study answers key questions about the influence of social media on the civic engagement of young people in the Philippines, while highlighting the gaps that future studies can fill.

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