



Students' Perception of Good Government Leadership Through Algorithmic Exposure

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Abstract

Digital platforms serve as primary information sources for the youth; the mechanisms by which personalized content curation shapes political assessment remain under-researched. Grounded in Social Learning Theory, Agenda-Setting Theory, and Uses and Gratifications Theory, this qualitative research utilizes a phenomenological approach to explore the socio-technical environment of digital leadership representation. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with twelve purposely selected participants across grades 7 to 12 and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal that algorithmic amplification prioritized viral, emotionally charged, and often sensationalized content—fosters "filter bubbles" that significantly bias student evaluations. Repeated exposure to narratives focusing on governance failures and scandals tends to diminish institutional trust, whereas visibility of successful humanitarian initiatives correlates with positive leadership perceptions. Results indicate a growing tendency among students to conflate digital popularity with effective governance, though many participants demonstrated emerging agency by utilizing cross-platform fact-checking to mitigate algorithmic bias. The study concludes that algorithmic curation acts as a digital gatekeeper, narrowing the diversity of political discourse and shaping a generation's leadership ideals through curated visibility. These insights underscore the critical need to integrate advanced digital literacy and algorithmic awareness into the educational curriculum to cultivate more critical and informed civic engagement among youth in an increasingly automated information ecosystem.

Keywords: Social Media, Students' Awareness of Algorithmic Exposure, Government Leadership, Political Perception, Media Literacy

Introduction

In today's digital age, technological advancements have significantly influenced every aspect of modern life, particularly among students. According to Bakshy et al. (2015) and Berman and Katona (2020), students have grown up using social media apps like Facebook, TikTok, X (formerly Twitter), and YouTube not just for fun and entertainment, but also as their main source for current events and news, therefore changing the way they understand their world and interpret events. Furthermore, Gerwin et al. (2018) explained that social media applications have caused students to create and build their identities and express themselves creatively, as well as to become more aware and engaged in social or societal issues. In addition, Sivakumar et al. (2023) noted that social media presents political information in various formats such as memes, videos, news articles, and opinion posts, which influence how students interpret and engage with political content.



Before the rise of social media, traditional forms of mass media, including television, newspaper publications, and radio broadcasts, significantly impacted how the public viewed political leaders in the context of governments. Priscilla et al. (2025) and Yamamura and Sabatini (2014) demonstrated that exposure to multiple impressions of political leaders through these channels increased the level of familiarity with those individuals and subsequently impacted people's evaluations of political leaders since the advent of digital media. However, there has been a noticeable change in means by which political information is communicated and accessed.

Currently, social networking sites have become a primary mode for the delivery and acquisition of political information, as well as for obtaining opportunities to engage politically. Stovold (2018) found that research shows that people frequently receive political content on Facebook and other social media sites even if they did not have an intentional desire to view political content, demonstrating the omnipresence of online political content. Similarly, Lee and Kim (2018) emphasized that other research has also concluded that social media serves not only as a method of transmitting political news but also plays a role in building levels of political participation and facilitating political discussion among its members. Moreover, Banzon et al. (2024) revealed that exposure to political content on social media has been shown to increase civic awareness and participation among students, as it encourages discussions and involvement in societal issues. Thus, there is an increasing presence of social networking sites to have an impact on people's perceptions of political leaders and/or political governance.

Twitter and other online platforms evaluate user-related behavior to determine which type of content to show them. According to Thorson et al. (2019) and Ohme, (2021), content that reflects users' interests (or generates a lot of responses) has a higher probability of being displayed to users than other types of content. Ahmmad et al. (2025) explained that this algorithmic filtering can create "echo chambers," where users are repeatedly exposed to similar viewpoints, reinforcing existing beliefs and limiting exposure to diverse perspectives. This causes people to see the same types of political content repeatedly and, therefore, can help reinforce their existing political beliefs and also give them certain ideas about leaders and specific political issues.

Additionally, Getenet et al. (2024) found that studies have shown that digital platforms and algorithm-based systems can enhance student engagement and learning; however, these studies focus more on academic outcomes rather than political perception and leadership evaluation. There is a large amount of research existing about how social media has affected how people become politically involved and how people consume political information, yet not a lot of research has been done to understand how algorithmically chosen posts on social media might influence students' definitions and evaluations of good government leadership. Umali and Brion (2024) and Cadayday et al. (2024) noted that past studies have mainly focused on students' attitudes toward politics in general, how much media they consume, and how involved they are politically, but there has been very little focus on how continuously seeing political content based on algorithms may influence how students define and evaluate leadership, specifically relating to the Philippines.

Furthermore, David et al. (2019) and Landig et al. (2023) suggested that traditional as well as online forms of media play an important part in determining students' involvement and governmental awareness. Many times, those studies don't go beyond analyzing total amounts of student involvement, but rather how individual types of content driven by algorithms affect the students' judgment on qualities associated with leadership or governing style. As such, there is a clear need to investigate further in this space.

Therefore, this research intends to explore the impact of algorithmic exposure through digital media on students' perception of ideal government leadership. This research will highlight digital content's influence relative to algorithm design ability when creating unique opportunities for students with which they can utilize their exposure as guiding principles in determining their political convictions or standards regarding what constitutes great leadership qualities, especially for individuals today and for future generations moving forward into a world governed by technology. It aims to answer the following questions:

1. How does algorithmic exposure on social media influence students' perceptions of 'good government leadership'?
2. In what ways do algorithmic recommendations shape students' political opinions and beliefs?



3. What types of social media content do students encounter most frequently regarding government leadership?
4. How do students distinguish between credible and biased content on social media when forming perceptions of leadership?

Methodology

This chapter has discussed the methodology employed in the research study. The chapter discusses research design, participants, instruments, and the process of data collection and analysis to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. The chapter has also discussed how the data were organized and analyzed to represent the participants' experiences while being mindful of ethical considerations. This research methodology has helped the researcher achieve the objectives of the study.

The objective of this study was to apply a phenomenological approach to analyze the experiences of high school students in Tanjay City Science High School, Tanjay City Division, about their perceptions of effective leadership in government through algorithmic exposure. This research approach allowed the researchers to apply their focus on understanding the experiences of the participants and their perceptions of the political information presented to them through algorithms. This research approach allowed the researchers to gain an understanding of the individual experiences of the participants with political information and its impact on their perceptions of effective government leadership. This research approach also allowed the researchers to gain an understanding of the natural environment in which the participants were exposed to information through algorithms.

The standards for good governance leadership used in the study were derived from the guidelines for good governance outlined by the World Bank and the United Nations (World Bank, 2026; United Nations, 2017) which emphasized the need for accountability, transparency, participation, and efficiency in public service delivery. This research design was relevant because it allowed the researchers to systematically examine social media exposure patterns and their possible relationship to students' leadership standards within the digital environment.

This study was conducted at Tanjay City Science High School, located in Tanjay City, which served as the study's site. This public secondary school had a strong emphasis on teaching science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) subjects. Moreover, students who were exposed to a variety of digital platforms and actively participated in online learning and information consumption, which is why the researchers selected this particular school as the research setting. This school was a suitable place to investigate how social media affected students' political perceptions and opinions on good governance because of the frequent usage of social media by students and the incorporation of technology into instruction.

The Tanjay City Science High School offered a systematic and intellectually engaging learning environment that encouraged critical thinking, student participation in research endeavors, and active engagement in academic and civic-related issues. Being a science high school, it promoted critical thinking, logical problem-solving, and the formation of viewpoints supported by facts, all of which were in line with the study's main objectives.

According to Nikolopoulou (2023), the participants, who were selected through purposive sampling, were students in Grades 7 to 12. They were selected due to the criteria being established by the researchers. The participants must be currently enrolled in Tanjay City Science High School as well as be actively using social media or any online sites where algorithm-driven content is presented, such as "recommended posts" or "recommended videos." Moreover, the student should have prior experience discussing online content with fellow students, as it shows that they are familiar with the effects of online information. Lastly, the student should be willing to participate in the study and give genuine information about the topic being researched. These criteria are important as they ensure that the students chosen are exposed enough to share information about the topic of the study, as they are familiar with it. Also, purposive sampling was utilized in choosing the participants of the study who could provide important information about.

These conditions helped make sure that the students chosen had enough experience with online platforms and could share meaningful opinions about government leadership. Purposive sampling was used so the data gathered would be relevant, accurate, and connected to the goal of the research, not just based on random selection.



Instrument-wise, the researchers utilized a self-made semi-structured interview guide, which was validated by three experts in the field. They validated the questions to ensure they were relevant, clear, and appropriate. Moreover, it was pilot tested on students who had the same characteristics as the participants. This was done to ensure the questions were relevant and easy to understand. The research instrument used in the study was a semi-structured interview guide, which consisted of a set of open-ended questions designed to systematically explore participants' experiences and perceptions in relation to the study objectives. McGrath et al. (2019) emphasized that using an interview guide helped the researcher stay focused on important topics while giving participants the freedom to explain their thoughts in their own words. This approach produced richer and more meaningful information compared to strictly structured surveys.

Moreover, to ensure that the results truly reflect students' opinions of effective government leadership as influenced by algorithmic exposure, rigor was developed in this quantitative investigation. Through the systematic research approach, selection of participants, and the application of instruments and analytical approaches, the study ensured credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, as outlined by Lincoln & Guba (1985). The objectivity, consistency, and integrity of the research findings were ensured through the application of these approaches.

Through the selection of participants, Creswell (2014) highlighted, students had maximum exposure to algorithm-based digital platforms such as social media and content recommendation algorithms, the credibility of the study was ensured. The opinions and perspectives of the participants regarding effective government leadership were ensured through maximum exposure to algorithm-based content related to politics and governance, as compared to limited exposure. Transparency, accountability, efficacy, ethical governance, etc., are some of the facets of effective government leadership that were tested through the application of the survey tool, as was the case with the algorithm-based exposure. By checking item clarity and relevance, minimizing misunderstandings, and making sure the instrument appropriately captured the intended constructs, pilot testing of the questionnaire further increased credibility.

In addition, Polit and Beck (2010) explained that transferability was addressed by providing a detailed account of the research setting, people involved, and procedures followed during the research. In this particular study, there was a detailed account of the background information about the kids, their grade level, their digital media usage habits, and the websites or apps they use algorithms on. The setting, selection, survey administration, and assessment procedures were clearly explained in this paper. This makes it easier for someone to understand if they could apply this information to someone else in similar circumstances. By providing detailed background information, the study helps other researchers decide if the findings can apply to students in similar schools and technology setups.

Moreover, dependability was established by following a clear and documented procedure in this research. Shenton (2004) stated that the same procedures for data collection, developing the tools, and assessment were followed for each individual. A record was kept of all the survey versions, test results from the pilot study, the methods used to code the data, and the statistical findings to make the study process clear and let others repeat the study if they wanted. Peer review by research advisers helped ensure dependability by checking if the research methods and analysis were consistent and suitable.

Moreover, confirmability was ensured by reducing researcher bias and basing all interpretations on real data. Using standard survey tools and statistical methods helped make sure the results came from what people said, not from what the researchers thought. The original data, statistics, and notes explaining the findings were kept so that someone could check everything again and make sure the conclusions about how exposure to algorithms affects students' views on good government leadership were really based on the data. As explained by Lincoln and Guba (1985), this process made the study's findings more objective and neutral.

Thematic Analysis, in line with the guidelines proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), was used to analyze the collected qualitative data from the study participants. This type of analysis provided a flexible framework for analyzing the data in relation to significant themes. The usage of this type of analysis was crucial in that it enabled a detailed and systematic analysis of all collected data from the study participants.



The first step in the process was to get familiar with the collected data. This was accomplished by creating verbatim transcripts of all interview recordings. The transcribed interviews were read multiple times to achieve a complete understanding of the data. Through this process, statements directly related to the research objectives were identified. The opportunity was used to thoroughly familiarize with the collected data, gaining comprehensive knowledge of all the information gathered. An in-depth analysis was carried out by dividing the collected data into different components. The process of analysis took its second turn with the creation of initial codes. Data collection was conducted through relevant information-gathering activities during this stage. Both "in vivo coding" and "descriptive coding" methods were applied to generate codes from the collected data. The in vivo coding method used the participants' exact words to develop the codes, while the descriptive coding method summarized participants' ideas using brief phrases. All relevant data were coded throughout the entire coding process.

The third step involved searching for potential themes. Grouped codes were examined to identify broader patterns that could connect the different elements. Theme categories were created by grouping codes with similar meanings. This step allowed for the development of more general categories that represented the entire collected data after the basic labels had been established.

The fourth step involved evaluating the themes throughout the research process. Themes were used to create essential mappings that illustrated how they connected both the coded data and the complete data set. Certain themes were refined, merged, or removed to ensure coherent results across all research activities. At this stage, distinct themes were established, each of which was supported by valid evidence from the feedback of the participants.

The fifth step was to establish definitions for each of the themes. This helped in organizing the data that was encompassed by each of the themes. This step also helped in clarifying the basic aspects of each of the themes, which were then given distinct and concise titles.

The sixth and final step was to develop the report. A structured report was created to maintain thematic consistency while addressing the research objectives. The direct quotes of the participants were used. The report demonstrated how the data progressed from its original form to the clearly defined final themes.

This study was conducted by strictly adhering to the ethical norms to protect all the participants. First, informed consent was obtained from participants before the study by ensuring that they understood the purpose of the study and that they knew their participation was entirely voluntary. Second, the right to confidentiality and anonymity was maintained by not disclosing the personal information and identity of the participants. Third, the participants were given the right to withdraw from the study at any time, without any consequences. And since there were underaged participants, the researchers gathered the parents' consent. Lastly, the data collected were handled and used solely for academic purposes, ensuring that the data was not misrepresented and did not harm the participants.

Findings and Discussion

This study's key findings are found in this section. By interviewing students and carefully analyzing their responses, we were able to uncover the different ways they feel their social media feeds shape their understanding of what good government leadership looks like. The themes that emerged gave us a real, in-depth look into their personal experiences with political content online, showing just how much those digital spaces can influence their views.

3.1 Theme 1: Algorithmic Amplification and Emotional Exposure

This theme describes how students are frequently exposed to political content by social media algorithms, especially content that is trending, viral, or emotionally triggering. Certain narratives are enhanced, and students' emotional reactions to government leadership are shaped by the algorithmic nature of platforms, which guarantee that content that generates high engagement, whether it be dramatic, controversial, or emotionally provocative, continues to appear on their feeds.

Participant 1 noted, *"I see the same kind of political posts because most of the posts that I see are the same thing. And mostly it's all about the Philippines."*



Participant 2 added, *"Yes. This happens because the topic is popular and many people are talking and posting about it."*

Participant 3 stated, *"I believe that yes, it does show up many times because it is one of the issues that is currently blowing up in our nation... viral."*

Participant 9 explained, *"Yes, I often notice the same kinds of political posts appearing repeatedly. I think this happens because when I become interested in a post, I tend to read the comments and search for similar content. Because of this interaction, social media algorithms continue to show me related posts, which is why I frequently see similar content about government leadership."*

Participant 11 emphasized, *"Yes. Maybe Facebook knows what I am watching because when I like, share, or comment on some political posts or political agendas and political skits done by politicians, the chances of politicians popping up in my newsfeed or FYP on TikTok are skyrocketing."*

Participant 4 shared an emotional exposure, *"Many times."* when asked about encountering emotional, dramatic, and controversial content.

Participant 10 further explained, *"I encounter controversial content almost all the time. There are often new issues raised daily by the media, which keeps political discussions active and emotionally charged."*

Participant 11 added, *"I can say that I encounter them on a scale of 1 to 10, maybe a solid eight. Especially controversial ones, like the flood control issue. People rarely cry, but they get angry because of politics. I see people angry and condemning the politicians."*

The findings indicate that social media platforms that use algorithms that prioritize popular and engaging content ensure that kids are constantly exposed to similar political information. The participants explained that they noticed that they were constantly being shown similar information when they searched for political issues and shared them. Sunstein (2017) explained that this phenomenon corroborates the theory that the filtering effect by social media algorithms ensures that users are constantly exposed to aligned information, as it constantly exposes them to similar ideas. The students also mentioned that they often encounter dramatic, controversial, and emotionally engaging political content, which often triggers powerful emotional responses like rage. This supports the argument of Haroon M. et al. (2018) who stated that content that is extremely engaging and sensationalized is what is amplified by digital platforms. Furthermore, Zuboff, (2019) further argues that social media platforms are designed in a way that they capture the attention of users by showing them information that triggers powerful emotions. Further supporting the argument is a study conducted by Bakshy et al. (2018), which showed how personalization has a large influence on the kind of political information that people get to see. The findings have shown that the selection of content by algorithms has a large influence on how the students get exposed to politics and how they get to react emotionally to national concerns and leadership.

3.2 Theme 2: Digital Platforms and Political Content Formats

This theme explains the different ways that political content circulates, as well as the particular social media platforms and online environments where students can access political information. The platforms include Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, and Google, which are used for various purposes such as fact-checking and searching for information, as well as entertainment and browsing. The content is diverse, and its effect on students is also different: memes, humorous postings, news articles, videos, opinions, and campaign posters.

Participant 1 shared, *"Mostly in Google and Facebook."*

Participant 2 mentioned, *"I usually learn from TikTok posts that appear on my FYP, and I also watch videos about leaders on YouTube."*

Participant 4 stated, *"I mainly use Google. It is the best platform for source verification and checking facts."*

Participant 7 added, *"I usually use YouTube to gather info about politics because it exposes and explores more about what that person did and wants to do in the future."*

Participant 11 explained, *"I use Facebook, when it comes to news about politics, and political figures. And sometimes if I am ready to search further about what is really happening in our country, I will use Google Chrome for a more reliable and credible source."*

Regarding content formats, Participant 1 noted, *"I see a lot of viral memes about government leaders."*

Participant 4 stated, *"I mostly see opinions. I want to hear both my own political views and the views of the opposition."*



Participant 6 emphasized, *"Posts I see on Facebook are headline news, like Bong Revilla being arrested or Sarah Discaya being arrested. So mostly, it's just general news. But sometimes I also see memes."*

Participant 9 explained, *"I usually see a mix of formal and informal content... I sometimes encounter memes... I also see posts highlighting programs."*

Participant 11 added, *"I see memes, articles, videos, and opinions, and campaign content; campaign content only near elections."*

This is a clear indication that students use various forms of social media for various political purposes. For example, Google and YouTube can be used to browse, search, and find facts, as well as in-depth information, whereas Facebook and TikTok can be used to browse, create viral content, and trend updates. Campaigns, videos, viewpoints, news headlines, and memes, to name a few, are some of the ways of acquiring political information during election periods. The nature of political information on social media influences the political participation of students since, for example, some of it promotes information-seeking behavior, while other political information on social media encourages people to laugh. These findings are supported by other studies that show that different social media platforms affect political exposure and participation in distinct ways. Cinelli et al. (2020) argued that the frameworks of different social media platforms create distinct patterns of information consumption. Similarly, Boulianne (2020) has established that digital media affects political engagement based on the way the audience engages with the information. Newman, et al. (2023) further emphasized that the youth are exposed to political news on social media platforms in forms such as headline posts, memes, and short videos.

3.3 Theme 3: Framing, Negativity, and Bias in Political Content

This theme demonstrates to us that what the students are mostly exposed to are political content that emphasizes the negative aspects of the government, scandals, and issues of corruption. The students claimed that what they are mostly exposed to are negative criticisms through social media posts, which are mostly inclined to show bias towards certain issues, focusing more on the flaws of public personalities. The way the information is presented to them will somehow influence their view of political personalities.

Participant 5 emphasized, *"A lot of different topics actually. But mostly issues about politics about the bad governance of some political leaders. Like how bad they lead because of how corrupt they are."*

Participant 12 concluded, *"Usually, on TikTok and Facebook it's mostly about criticizing government leaders, especially the ghost project and corruption."*

On bias in content, Participant 2 stated, *"It's biased if it's mostly about badmouthing certain types of leaders."*

Participant 4 added, *"Biased posts are one-sided, close-minded, and based more on opinions than facts."*

Participant 6 explained, *"Biased posts are usually shared by specific people rather than official news pages. News pages focus on main topics and facts. From what I've noticed, political parties or individuals who post news often adjust it to match their side, making it more biased. Their posts contain more opinions than facts."*

Participant 9 emphasized, *"A post appears biased when it focuses only on positive qualities or achievements and ignores the negative aspects or criticisms. This type of content often uses appealing language and opinions rather than presenting a balanced view of both strengths and weaknesses."*

Participant 11 concluded, *"A post is biased if it contains many opinions instead of facts. If it contains many opinions about a certain political figure, then it is really, really biased. But if it contains facts, then it might be credible, I'll say might, because you need to check if the person is really credible."*

This theme shows that students encounter political content that presents negative perspectives on governance and corruption, and scandals, through TikTok and Facebook platforms. Most posts that participants encounter contain government leader criticism and present contentious topics, which lead them to develop their opinions through these negative stories. Recent studies support this finding, as Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) explained that social media enables the rapid spread of partisan and misleading political information that can shape public perception. Similarly, Fletcher and Park (2017) explained that people develop political cynicism through their regular exposure to negative political news while they lose trust in institutions. In addition, Vraga and Tully (2021) showed that online content that contains strong emotions creates opinion-based material that users use to form their judgments. The students discovered that many posts present a single viewpoint which relies on personal beliefs instead of actual evidence, which research shows that social media platforms tend to boost. The research results demonstrate that social media



platforms that use negative framing and present biased political content affect students' political viewpoints and their understanding of leadership qualities.

3.4 Theme 4: Critical Evaluation and Credibility Verification Practices

The cognitive strategies that students use to verify the credibility of political information that they come across in social media platforms are highlighted in this theme. Students who demonstrate critical thinking abilities engage in source evaluation, utilize credible media sources, cross-reference data from various platforms, and verify the accuracy of information. These strategies act as protective factors that shield students from misinformation and biased information, thus helping them develop more informed perceptions of leadership in the government.

Participant 1 stated, *"Students distinguish between credible and biased content on social media by carefully examining what is being posted and who is posting it."*

Participant 2 added, *"Some students can distinguish credible content, while others cannot. I can tell by checking if the information is believable and by researching it further."*

Participant 4 explained, *"When I see content that I am unsure about, I search for confirmation on Google. Biased content is usually one-sided and close-minded, while credible content can be questioned and supported by facts."*

Participant 7 shared, *"Look up who posts if it's from a verified source, like ABS-CBN platforms, but not always since some platforms are biased as well."*

Participant 9 emphasized, *"Students can distinguish between credible and biased content by examining the information more deeply and thinking critically about whether the content encourages support or opposition toward a particular leader. Conducting further research and comparing information from different sources help students understand which claims are accurate and which perspectives are biased or misleading."*

Participant 11 concluded, *"I distinguish biased content by fact-checking, by background checking who is posting, where that post came from. So, when the source of the content is credible, then I will make my judgment that, 'Oh, this is true.'"*

On the importance of critical thinking, Participant 1 stated, *"It's very important to use critical thinking so you can know if it's fake, if it's true. Because you need to use it to influence other people, whether they are good or bad leaders."*

Participant 2 added, *"Critical thinking is very important because it helps avoid believing fake news and misinformation."*

Participant 4 explained, *"Critical thinking is very important because it helps people make informed decisions and avoid believing fake news."*

Participant 9 emphasized, *"Critical thinking is very important when using social media. It determines whether users act responsibly by verifying information instead of further research, people can easily be misled. Using critical thinking helps prevent being influenced or 'brainwashed' by misleading posts."*

Participant 11 concluded, *"Critical thinking is really important. On a scale from 1 to 10, I would say 10. Not only for learning about government leaders, but critical thinking is really a must. Critical thinking is a must-have for every person."*

This theme highlights how students use critical thinking and verification strategies to evaluate political information they encounter on social media platforms, enabling them to analyze content carefully, question its credibility, and determine whether the information they see online is reliable or misleading. The participants described their process of verifying the content creator's identity by checking their posting history, together with their need to find additional details from online sources, which they would later verify against established news organizations like ABS-CBN. The strategies enable them to identify correct information while they protect themselves from falling victim to false information. Research supports this, as Kahne and Bowyer (2017) argued that media literacy promotes responsible civic engagement and evidence-based decision-making. Vraga and Tully (2021) noted that individuals who have high levels of media literacy skills are able to detect misinformation or biased information online. By combining source evaluation, fact-checking, and critical thinking, students are able to assess political information and form their own opinions about current events.

3.5 Theme 5: Behavioral Responses to Misinformation

This theme illustrates what happens to students when they come across or spread false information. They may respond by adjusting their own perceptions, educating others about false information, or deleting the false information and



developing safe information consumption habits. All these responses indicate different levels of accountability and learning from the misinformation.

Participant 1 shared, *"Yes, I've experienced it once. I believed it was true, but it turned out to be false because the source isn't true on Google or Facebook."*

Participant 2 stated, *"Not really. I try to believe only reliable information."*

Participant 3 added, *"At the time of Leni and Bongbong Marcos' election, they said Leni was a very corrupt person. But now, Bongbong Marcos is more corrupt. After that I switched sides."*

Participant 4 explained, *"Yes. When I realized it was false, I changed my views and stopped believing it."*

Participant 5 shared, *"Yes, I've tried it. But I learned from it to not trust easily and find enough evidence or credible sources."*

Participant 6 stated, *"Yes, I once shared information that turned out to be false. After realizing it was wrong, I told others that my post was incorrect so it wouldn't spread fake news."*

Participant 7 added, *"No, because I always make sure the info that I share is credible and reliable first."*

Participant 9 emphasized, *"So far, I have not encountered information that I believed and later found to be false. This is because I do not immediately believe everything I see on social media and usually take time to evaluate the information first."*

Participant 10 added, *"I have not shared false information on social media. However, I once discussed information with friends before confirming its accuracy. After finding out that the information was false, I informed my friends to correct the misunderstanding."*

Participant 11 concluded, *"I can recall. I don't know if it is fake or true. But really, my mind is leaning toward what is really true between the Marcoses and the Aquinos. So, I might have shared some content before about Marcos that are bad, and maybe false, or I might have shared the good things about the Aquinos and the good things about the Marcoses, but they turned out or ended up being fake. So, after I fact-checked them and deleted some posts that were fake."*

This theme shows how students react when they come across or unintentionally share false information online. While some quickly correct themselves and let others know once they become aware that the information was false, others are more careful with what to believe and share in the future. For instance, there are those who claimed to have previously believed and shared false political information during elections featuring Leni Robredo and Bongbong Marcos but changed their minds after checking the information. Others shared how they planned to delete the shared information, correct the false information with others, and be more careful when sharing information in the future. There are also those who claim that they rarely believe false information on social media due to careful consideration of sources and the use of critical thinking skills before accepting what they read. Pennycook and Rand (2019) found that people are more likely to correct what they believe and be more careful not to spread false information when they are encouraged to check the facts. Vraga & Bode (2017) also found that when they are connected to credible and trustworthy sources of information. This shows that the careful and corrective actions of the students are not far from what others do when engaging responsibly on social media.

3.6 Theme 6: Patterns of Political Engagement and Participation

This theme explains how students engage with political content on social media at different levels and in different ways. Examples of such active engagement include liking, sharing, commenting, and even criticizing posts, as opposed to passive viewing or even intentionally not engaging due to fear of backlash, sensitivity of the topic, or disagreement with family views. All these represent student awareness of social consequences for their online political expression.

Participant 1 shared, *"Yes, I liked it, I commented."*

Participant 2 stated, *"Yes. I watch political videos, especially those that appear on my FYP. I usually do not like, share, or comment."*

Participant 3 added, *"No, I haven't."*

Participant 4 explained, *"No. I stay neutral because I do not share the same political views as my family. I only scroll and watch."*

Participant 5 mentioned, *"I don't do those kinds of things, I only watched and observed."*



Participant 6 shared, *"I've never liked, shared, or commented, but I do watch them because they are catchy and interesting topics, since they are about what's happening in our country."*

Participant 7 emphasized, *"No, because if you share your opinion their supporters will talk bad and be mad at you."*

Participant 9 explained, *"Yes, I have liked, shared, and commented on political content on social media. After doing this, one of my teachers talked to me about my actions and said that I should not share such posts yet because I am not a taxpayer."*

Participant 10 added, *"I have liked some political posts, particularly those related to good governance. However, I avoid reposting or commenting because some posts may not be factual or reliable. For this reason, I limit my interaction to simply liking certain posts."*

Participant 11 stated, *"I've liked, shared, commented, and watched political posts on social media. I even laughed at some and even criticized some posts."*

Participant 12 concluded, *"I only watch but I don't comment or share. Because I know that social media comes with lots of people with different backgrounds and so I try as much as I can to avoid sharing or commenting on anything political because that's a very sensitive topic to talk about."*

This theme looks at how students interact with political content on social media, which can range from actively liking, sharing, or commenting on posts to simply watching without interacting or avoiding political content altogether. Some students limit engagement because their political views differ from their families, they fear negative reactions, or the topics feel sensitive. In fact, one of them reported that a teacher had told them not to share political content publicly because they were not taxpayers yet. These behaviors indicate that the students are conscious of the social implications of sharing opinions on the internet and are able to exercise self-control in order to avoid conflict or misunderstandings. This is supported by research, which shows that young people tend to exercise caution when using digital media, taking into account the social risks involved (Theocharis et al., 2017), and may choose not to participate at all, or even just be passive, such as liking or viewing content, if they are afraid of disagreement or negative reactions (Guess, Nagler, & Tucker, 2020).

3.7 Theme 7: Perceptions of Leadership, Governance, and Accountability

This theme explains how the perceptions and evaluations of governmental leadership by the students are affected by the exposure to political information. With a focus on corruption, accountability, leadership values, and governance outcomes, students' perceptions are shaped by a combination of positive to negative information they are exposed to. Exposure to political content influences not only their views on specific leaders but also their broader understanding of political responsibility and the importance of civic awareness.

Participant 1 shared, *"It makes me think of a good government leader because it always talks about the good sides of this kind of political personality."*

Participant 2 stated, *"Seeing these posts helps me distinguish good leaders from bad ones. Good leaders care for their citizens, avoid unnecessary conflicts, and maintain peaceful relations with other countries."*

Participant 3 added, *"I think more of doing more than just stealing the budget of our country. And just tell the truth and not steal."*

Participant 4 emphasized, *"If the government is competent, it should address fake news by strengthening laws and regulations against misinformation. Seeing efforts to fight fake news strengthens my idea of a good government leader."*

Participant 5 noted, *"These posts really affected me on how I view them when it comes to leading us. They are supposed to be a good example to us."*

Participant 6 explained, *"When we see posts about the good things they do, like programs, it makes us think they are good government leaders because they really help the people. They create programs for the citizens. But there are also times when I think they are bad government leaders because of scandals and corruption."*

Participant 9 elaborated, *"When I repeatedly see posts showing a leader doing good actions, such as helping people during crises, I begin to view them as a good government official. However, if I repeatedly see negative news, such as issues related to corruption or misuse of public funds, it negatively affects my perception of that leader."*

Participant 10 added, *"Repeated exposure to these posts influences my perception of government leaders. I am influenced by opinions that highlight a leader's good actions, as well as by posts that point out their negative sides. Because of this, I tend to view leaders as having both strengths and weaknesses, rather than seeing them as entirely good or bad."*



On corruption awareness specifically, Participant 1 stated, *"Yes, like, about the Philippine government, about corruption. And yes, I strengthened my political beliefs by believing that they are really corrupt."*

Participant 4 shared, *"Yes. I saw posts about the Chinese Embassy and how some senators did not sign a resolution condemning China. This made me question those senators because they appeared pro-China."*

Participant 5 emphasized, *"Even though I'm still a student, my political belief is that the Philippines is a corrupt country. I saw on social media that some politicians were arrested because of the flood control scandal, which strengthened my belief that the Philippines really has corruption."*

Participant 9 explained, *"Before the national elections, I supported Bongbong Marcos. However, after seeing how he leads and observing the current situation of the country—particularly issues related to transparency and alleged ghost projects—my perception changed. The political content I encountered on social media influenced me to question my previous beliefs."*

Participant 12 concluded by questioning leadership, *"That time, you know, when you posted about the president. This reminded me of Marcos. Because before this, I didn't support him before, but I didn't post about him. I just saw those posts and... I questioned him if he was still qualified. I questioned his, like, his work as president because as far as I know, he hasn't done anything good for our country."*

This theme highlights how the students' perceptions about leadership, governance, and accountability are shaped by their endless exposure to political content on social media. As indicated by the participants, this exposure influences their capacity to distinguish between good and bad leaders, particularly in relation to qualities such as honesty, integrity, service to the public, and obligations to citizens. Participants pointed out that frequent encounters with political posts highlighting corruption, scandals, and governance failures have diminished their trust in government, strengthening the perception that corruption is widespread in the Philippines. At the same time, the information from the sources that showed the impact of information from successful programs and humanitarian initiatives created positive attitudes towards leadership, implying that students judge leadership based on their successes and failures. Bandura (1977) explained that this evidence can be supported by the social learning theory, which shows that human beings constantly learn information from the media, which affects their thoughts and attitudes. Recent evidence has also shown that social media affects youth political perception, as it constantly exposes them to leadership behaviors, civic issues, and moral behaviors, which affect their political attitudes and assessments (Keating & Melis, 2017). Research on the impact of digital media on youth civic engagement has also shown that constant exposure to political behaviors makes governance more important, affecting youth attitudes towards leadership quality (Chen & Stilianovic, 2020). Furthermore, Yang and Xenos (2019) emphasized that research on the innovative use of social media has also shown that online political expression allows youth to use their minds critically to analyze political messages, leadership, and governance, which affects their beliefs. This evidence shows that political expression makes students use their minds critically to understand leadership principles, governance, and the importance of governance service.

Conclusion

The findings of this study showed that social media had played an important role in affecting the political perceptions, emotions, and engagement of the students. The politically emotional and popular content was promoted through algorithmic exposure, which affected the perceptions of the students on national issues and political officials. Many students demonstrated critical thinking abilities by fact-checking sources, confirming credibility, and critically analyzing the information to which they were exposed, even though they were frequently exposed to negative and biased narratives. Their actions in response to false information, such as correcting errors and becoming more skeptical, showed that they were becoming more media literate and responsible. However, social pressures, fear of negative reactions, and the sensitive nature of political discussions tended to make students' political engagement cautious and often restricted. In summary, the study found that while students' perceptions of leadership and governance were significantly influenced by their use of social media, the presence of critical evaluation practices was an important protective factor against misinformation and bias in their perceptions. Ultimately, the importance of students' media literacy and critical thinking skills was essential in helping them make sense of the algorithm-driven political environment and develop informed political views.

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