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SOCIAL MEDIA EXPOSURE AND POLITICAL MATURITY OF COLLEGE STUDENTS IN BALIUAG UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the relationship between Baliuag University college students' level of exposure to social media and their level of political maturity, as measured by their awareness of political issues and political participation. Kruskal-Wallis H-test and Spearman rho were used to analyze the data. Results revealed that students are aware of certain global, national, and local issues but have very limited participation on political discussions. Moreover, students' political participation and awareness do not differ across age, sex, and year level. In addition, students' frequency of visit to and the number of hours spent on Facebook is correlated with students' political awareness.

Keywords: awareness, participation, political maturity, social media exposure and websites

The Philippines is known as the social networking capital of the world, with students being the highest number of users. The websites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube are among the most popular among college students. Nowadays, social media is the fastest and easiest way to connect or to communicate with other people. Users can do several things in social media such as uploading photos, videos, and messages. One of the advantages of these websites is that news, current issues, and all kinds of information are available to readers who want to have an access with the website.

As espoused by Karadkar (2015) there are many reasons why students love to spend time socializing. Firstly, social networks provide them the freedom to do whatever they want—to upload what they want and talk to whomever they want. They like to make new friends and comment on the lives of different people. Students can create other online identities that are not real. This gives them the freedom to do anything without revealing their own identity. Never before has it been so easy for students to create a digital image of their actions through such a spontaneous medium.

Furthermore, social media, as currently employed on the internet, has the advantage of being brief, targeted, and instantaneous. While it has gained in popularity worldwide, social media is not new. With the widespread adoption of personal computers in the mid-1990s, services such as chat rooms, newsgroups, and instant messaging were among the early attractions for users of the World

Wide Web (Thurlow, Lengel, & Tomic, 2004). What is new, however, is the attention that has been given to expanding forms of social media – YouTube, Facebook, and especially Twitter – as a means of not only creating virtual communities, but as a way of instantly communicating, being aware of relevant issues, and involving oneself to what is happening.

According to Strandberg (2013), the use of Facebook and Twitter generates a great effect to engage in politics. Social media users, who lack interest and motivation in politics, would get exposed to political content consciously through social media. For instance, in general elections context, social media use for political activities is one of the predictors of political participation, mainly for turnout and voting.

Today, social media are perceived to be of great importance in society. They have gone beyond being just tools for communication among friends and colleagues. They may now be adopted by states as a bridge to connect itself to its people. Thus, these social media play a big and important role in our society as they disseminate public information, raise social consciousness and political awareness, encourage political participation, and even promote good governance, transparency, and accountability in the government.

It is in this light that this study is conducted in order to find out the students' level of social media exposure and if it has a relationship with their level of political awareness and political participation.

Review of Related Literature

Political maturity. The Child and Youth Research Center (CYSC, 1971) defines *a politically matured person* as one who knows the essentials of the Philippine system of government; aware of and interested in current local, political, social, and economic issues and problems; shows willingness to sacrifice personal interest for public good; willing to discharge his/her duties and responsibilities as a citizen in a democracy; respects the law and encourages others to uphold it; is involved in the political and civic life of the community of which he/she is a part; and participates actively in civic projects and activities.

Political maturity, in the context of this study, is defined as the students' political awareness and participation in political discussions or groups through social media. For instance, in the study conducted by Reyes (2000) on the factors affecting political maturity of the adolescent of the Bulacan State University, it was found out that the level of political maturity, as measured by political awareness and participation, of the BSU adolescents in the secondary level do not differ from those of the tertiary. Likewise the home, church, school, and the mass media factors all have a great influence on the level of political maturity of the BSU adolescents.

Dela Paz (1987) did a study comparing the political maturity between high school and college students. He concluded that there was no significant difference between the two groups of students. Furthermore, he also concluded that political maturity is independent of sex. He found no significant difference in the influence of home, school, church, and the mass media. He further stated that through time, with political or technological developments, superseding factors completely change the total picture of political maturity.

Meanwhile, Nepomuceno (1996) studied political maturity of voters in Legaspi City in the 1995 local elections. The findings revealed that the voters' political maturity was significantly related to educational attainment, mass media exposure, which includes TV viewing and newspaper reading. This is because social media are not yet very prevalent during those times. Now that the dominant media is the social media due to its accessibility event through cellphones, it could have indeed an influence on an individual's political maturity. On the whole, the findings revealed that the voter with high educational attainment and more exposure to media, including TV viewing and newspaper readings, showed high political maturity.

The previous studies cited are related to the present study since they all focused on political maturity of the Filipino youth. Variables such as age, gender, and mass media exposure (Reyes, 2000; Dela Paz, 1987; Nepumuceno 1996) were likewise investigated in these studies. The present study, while examining the same variables, also included political awareness on global, national local issues and the level of political participation of students using social media such as Face Book, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and Google.

Political participation. *Political participation* is generally under-stood, according to Verba, Scholzman, and Brady (1995), as an "activity that has the   intent or effect of influencing government action –either directly by affect-ing the making or implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make those policies."

Political participation is further divided into two categories: online political participation and offline political participation. Towner (2013) states that today, political participation is "the ability to express political opinions and exert political influence in both online and offline platforms." She provided indicators or examples of political behavior under each of these platforms. Online political participation can include activities suchas "forwarding political e-mail, posting a political comment on a blog, and following a candidate online."

On the other hand, examples of offline political participation activities are attending a rally, donating to a candidate, talking to people about political parties, and participating in elections through voting (Towner, 2013). Drawing from these definitions, social media complement political participation in such a

way that it acts as a tool that can facilitate the activities considered as political participation.

The phenomenal popularity of social media has provided opportunities for various people's online political participation. Internet users with political interest can share their political views on SNS with friends, join interest groups on SNS, forward political videos or ads via YouTube or SNS, follow political characters on Twitter, tweet or retweet any political comment, publish blogs about important social and economic issues, and pin their favorite political images/videos/websites on Pinterest. Many political and communication scholars applauded the tremendous democratic potentials of social media for online civic and political participation (Holt, Shehata, Strömbäck, & Ljungberg, 2013; Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010).

With the advent of modern technology, Instagram as a mobile, desktop, and Internet-based photo-sharing application and service, allows users to share pictures and videos either publicly or privately. Users can apply various digital filters to their images, and add locations through geotags. They can add hashtags to their posts, linking the photos up to other content on Instagram featuring the same subject or overall topic. Users can connect their Instagram account to other social media profiles, enabling them to share photos to those profiles as well.

On the other hand, most of the content on YouTube is uploaded by individuals, but also media corporations including CBS, the BBC, among others. Unregistered users can only watch videos on the site, while registered users are permitted to upload an unlimited number of videos and add comments to videos. Videos deemed potentially inappropriate are available only to registered users affirming themselves to be at least 18 years old.

In sum, on the basis of the number of studies cited above related to political maturity, there is no universal and predictive application on it simply because of the dynamism involved and the interplay of all factors points to the complexity that seems to evade simplification of this term. However, as shown by some other literature, social media truly influence one's participation in politics. Therefore, social media play a big role in our society as they disseminate public information, raise social consciousness and political awareness, and encourage political participation.

Statement of the Problem

The main purpose of this study is to find out the relationship between social media exposure and political maturity of college students in Baliuag University.

Specifically, it sought answers to the following sub-questions:

1. Is there a significant difference between socio-demographic profile and
   a. level of political awareness?
   b. level of participation?

2. Is there a significant relationship between the length of exposure to social media and
   a. level of political awareness?
   b. level of participation?

Hypotheses of the study. The following are the hypotheses of the study:

1. There is no significant difference between socio-demographic profile and the following:
   a. Level of political awareness
   b. Level of participation

2. There is no significant relationship between the length of exposure to social media and the following:
   a. Level of political awareness
   b. Level of participation

Theoretical Framework

Political maturity, as used in this study, is indicated by the level of political awareness of an individual on global, national, and local issues. The indicators of *political maturity* are interest and engagement in politics, *political* knowledge, as well as consistency and stability in *political* attitudes (Bergh, 2013).

With regard to social media, the youth today are frequently getting their political information from social networking rather than traditional media. The information given is more interactive, user-centered, briefer, easier to process, and visually attractive. People are increasingly posting online their views concerning politics and social issues, sharing news articles, following political figures, watching videos connected to politics and tweeting about politics. Use of social media can mean more exposure to information and also a higher interest in politics. Therefore, it can be concluded that social media is suitable to spread knowledge among the youth and implicitly increase their political awareness and participation.

According to Shahid (2013), the rising importance of the Internet in every walk of life is evident. People do prefer to use internet and new media to facilitate their life and fulfill communication needs than any other communication media. Having access to that information increases their chances

of being better informed. Being better informed leads to political discussions. Political discussions lead to participation. The process of political socialization is no longer a passive transfer of information from parent to child. Because the youth are more technologically savvy, the political socialization process is evolving. With the increased availability of the media to youth at an earlier age, children are active participants in their political development. Therefore, it is undeniable that political maturity is related to political literacy (Yurni, 2015). Having high political maturity enables youths to be rational and highly principled in their political decision and action.

Likewise, as espoused by Box (1998), an important aspect of citizen participation is collaboration (Zavattaro & Sementelli, 2014). Thus, political participation is a type of political behavior that can be manifested and facilitated by social media through these embedded collaboration- and co-creation-supporting mechanisms. In this setup, social media may serve as tools or as avenues for political participation by providing new means for users to go about and achieve their goals of "influencing government action and policymaking." Therefore, it can be said that social media complement political participation.

Obviously, the phenomenal popularity of social media has provided various opportunities for people's online political participation. Internet users with political interest can share their political views on social networking sites with friends, join interest groups on SNS, forward political videos or ads via YouTube or SNS, follow political characters on Twitter, tweet or retweet any political comment, publish blogs about important social and economic issues, and pin their favorite political images/videos/websites on Facebook. Many political and communication scholars applauded the tremendous democratic potentials of social media for online civic and political participation (e.g., Holt, Shehata, Strömbäck, & Ljungberg, 2013;Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010).

Therefore, this present study is anchored on the above cited theories related to politics, political socialization, and social net workings which are all described as how people become mature and evolve politically through the use of social media, an interplay of all factors towards political awareness and participation. These theories are the foundation for understanding the concept of this present study.

Conceptual Framework of the Study

As may be noted in Figure 1, there are two frames of variables presented in the study. The socio-demographic profile and the social media exposure are the independent variables (IVs), and political maturity as measured by the level of awareness and the level of participation are the dependent variables (DV).
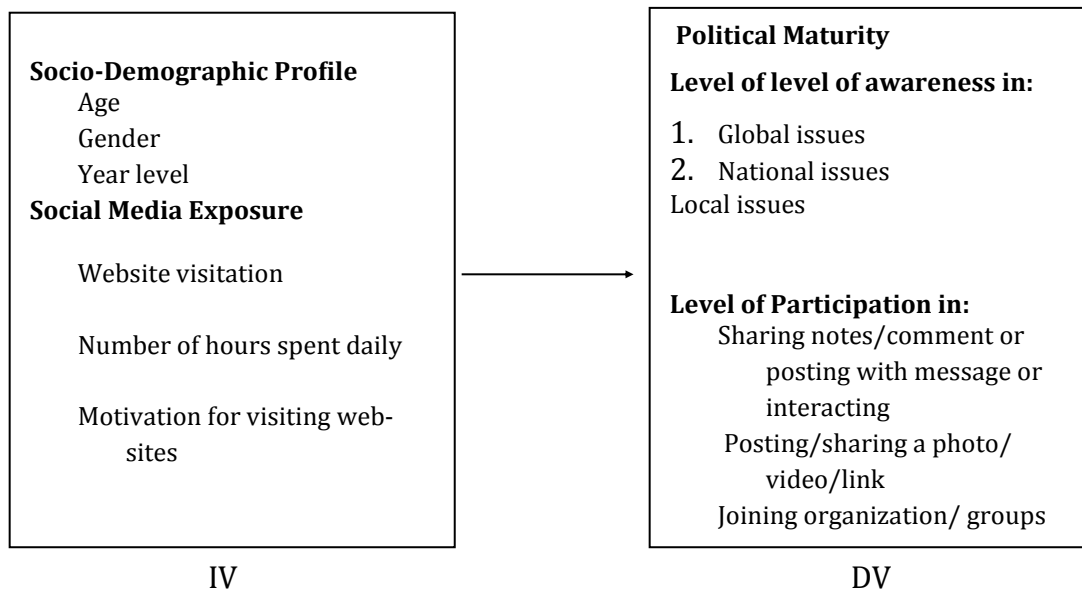
Socio-Demographic Profile	Political Maturity

Figure 1. The paradigm of the study.

Method

This is a descriptive correlational study that aims to describe the relationship between socio-demographic profile, social media exposure, and level of political awareness and participation of BU college students.

The participants in this study are college students enrolled for the first semester 2017-2018 in the seven different departments of Baliuag University. Using Slovin's formula, from the college population of 1,820, a total of 328 were randomly selected to participate in the study.

The instrument used consists of a survey questionnaire divided into four parts. The first part is the socio-demographic profile of the participants. The second part consists of 15 items that measures the motivation or reasons for using social media. The items had a Chronbach's alpha of .87. The third part measures the level of awareness of respondents on global, national, and local issues that were trending in social media at the time the survey was conducted using a 4-point Likert scale such as 4, very much aware; 3, aware; 2, somewhat aware; and 1, not aware. It consists of 15 items, with five issues each under global, national, and local levels. In global issues, sample issues are international terrorism, climate change, and the West Philippine Sea. For national issues, taxation, infrastructure projects, and political dynasty were included, while for local issues, included were internal revenue allotment, bird-flu cases in San Luis, Pampanga, and lack of employment opportunities in the locality. The overall alpha for the three dimensions was .86; for global issues, .77; for awareness on national issues, .66, while for local issues, alpha was at .83.

Part 4 comprises 15 items that measure the level of political participation of students. Using a 4-point Likert scale, the items were rated with 4, highly participated; 3, participated; 2, least participated; and 1, not participated. It has an overall alpha of .96, with the following dimensions yielding an alpha of .92 under *sharing notes/comments/tweeting*; .91 for *posting/sharing photo or video link*; and .^{3}8 for *joining a political organization/group.* The alpha's values attest to the internal consistency of the items in each of the questionnaire, which are all above the acceptable level of .60.

The instruments were answered using paper and pencil survey. Hard copies were gathered after and responses were tallied in Excel and treated in SPSS. Part I includes socio-demographic profile and amount of time on social media exposure. BU college students were asked about their personal profile such as age, gender, college department, course, and year level. On social media exposure, they were likewise asked which social media websites they visited most, how much time they spent daily, and what motivation they have in using social media to participate in political discussions and issues.

The data collection began on the third week of November 2017 and ended on the second week of the month of December. Through personal and close supervision, the questionnaires were retrieved on the same day. The researcher tried to ensure a hundred percent retrieval of the questionnaires.

Survey responses were processed and an Excel database was created. The data were then subjected to SPSS to compute for frequency, mean, and percentage. Chi-square was also utilized to determine the association between respondents' socio-demographic profile and level of political maturity as measured by level of awareness on global, national, and local issues as well as level of social media of exposure and level of political maturity.

Data Analysis and Statistical Treatment

After the questionnaires were gathered, they were sorted, tabulated, and treated in a statistical manner. The following statistical tools were employed:

1. Frequency and percentage were employed to present the frequency distribution of the profile of the respondents and social media exposure.

2. To determine the significant difference between profile of respondents and political awareness and participation, Kruskal Wallis H-test was utilized.

3. To analyze the relationship between the exposure to social media and the level of political awareness and participation of respondents,

Spearman's rho was used.

To facilitate the analysis of the data, a four-point Likert Scale was used and interpreted as follows:

Mean Range	*Social Media Exposure*	*Political Motivation*
3.26 - 4.00	Frequently Visited	Strongly Agree
2.51 - 3.25	Visited	Agree
1.76 - 2.50	Seldom Visited	Disagree
1.00 - 1.75	Not Visited	Strongly Disagree

Mean range	*Level of Awareness*	*Level of Participation*
3.26 -4.00	Very Much Aware	Highly Participated
2.51 -3.25	Aware	Much Participated
1.76 -2.50	Somewhat Aware	Least Participated
1.00 -1.75	Not Aware	Did Not Participate

Results and Discussion

Table 1. Kruskal-Wallis H-Test between students' profile and political participation and level of political awareness

	Mean Rank	
Age	Level of Participation	Level of Awareness
18-20	162	160
21-23	145	178
24-26	227	169
27-29	184	117
30-32	253	15
χ^2	4.88	3.81
df	4	4
p	0.3	0.43
Sex	Level of Participation	Level of Awareness
Male	174.59	156.04
Female	154.26	165.66
χ^2	3.62	0.81
df	1	1
p	0.06	0.37

Table 1. Continuation

Year	Mean Rank	
	Level of Participation	Level of Awareness
1	163.37	153.92
2	159.57	169.76
3	165.23	215.45
χ2	0.14	5.89
df	2.00	2.00
p	0.93	0.05

Age and political participation and level of political awareness. A Kruskal-Wallis H test showed that there was no statistically significant difference in the level of political participation of students according to age group, $\chi2(4) = 4.88$, $p = 0.30$, with a mean rank score of 162 for 18-20 years old, 145 for 21-23 years, 227 for 24-26, 184 for aged 27-29, and 253 for 30-32 years old.

This means that political participation of students are the same regardless of the age group. As Table 5 shows, students do not actively participate in political activities such as joining political discussions and political groups. The result is somehow affected by the wide discrepancy in the number of students contained in each group, particularly for age groups 27-29 and 30-32 which registered one participant only for each group.

Moreover, to test if there was a difference between age and level of political awareness of students, the same test showed that there was no statistically significant difference in the level of political participation of students according to age group, $\chi2(1) = 3.62$, $p = 0.06$, with a mean rank score of 160 for 18-20 years old, 178 for 21-23 years, 169 for 24-26, 117 for aged 27-29, and 15 for 30-32 years old.

This means that political awareness of students in terms of global, national, and local issues is the same regardless of age.

Sex and political participation and level of political awareness. A Kruskal-Wallis H- test showed that there was no statistically significant difference in the level of political participation of students according to sex, $\chi2(4) = 4.88$, $p = 0.30$, with a mean rank score of 175 for male and 154 for female. This means that the level of political participation of male and female are the same.

On the difference between sex and political awareness, the same test was performed which revealed no significant difference according to sex, $\chi2(1) = 0.81$, $p = 0.37$, with a mean rank score of 154.04 for male and 165.66 for female.

This means that political awareness of students, whether male or female, are of the same level. Table 4 shows that respondents are aware of the political events that took place during the period the survey was undertaken.

Year level and political participation and level of political awareness. A Kruskal-Wallis H- test showed that there was no statistically significant difference in the level of political participation of students according to year level, $\chi 2(2)$ = .14, p = 0.93, with a mean rank score of 163 for first year, 160 for second year, and 165 for third year students. This means that the level of political participation of students across the year level is the same.

In terms of level of awareness, there was a statistically significant difference between year level and political awareness of students, $\chi 2(2)$ = 5.89, p = 0.05, with a mean rank score of 154 for first year, 170 for second year, and 215 for third year students. This means that the level of awareness of students vary across their year level, with third year students having the highest mean rank score. This shows that third year students have a higher level of awareness on global, national, and local issues compared to students of the lower year levels.

Table 2. Spearman Rho's result on frequency of visits to social media and level of political participation and political awareness

Social Media	Mean	*SD*	Interpreta-tion	Political Awareness		Political Participation	
				r	*p*	*r*	*p*
Facebook	3.70	.6694	Frequently	0.26	0.05*	-0.08	0.89
Tweeter	2.22	1.2092	Seldom	0.41	0.07	0.03	0.54
Instagram	2.65	1.1308	Sometimes	0.44	0.06	0	0.99
Youtube	3.05	.9625	Sometimes	0.38	0.28	-0.04	0.48
Google	3.01	1.2017	Sometimes	0.11	0.82	-0.011	0.85

*Note. * Significant*

Table 2 shows the relationship between the frequency of visit to a particular social media site and the level of political participation and political awareness of students. As presented, only the frequency of Facebook visits showed significant relationship with political awareness (p = .05, $r > 4.6^0$), although the relationship is negligible. Other social media sites such as Tweeter, Instagram, Youtube, and Google did not show significant relationship with frequency of visits.

Since Facebook has the highest number of visits, it can be surmised that it had an impact on the level of political awareness of students.

Meanwhile, there was no significant relationship on the frequency of visit on social media sites and the level of political participation of students. This is confirmed by the results in Table 2, showing students are not active participants in political activities.

Table 3. Spearman Rho's results on hours spent daily on social media and level of political participation and political awareness

Social Media	Mean	SD	Interpretation	Political Awareness		Political Participation	
				r	p	r	p
Facebook	2.24	1.08	3-5 hours	0.11	.048**	-0.008	0.89
Tweeter	1.15	0.98	1-3 hours	0.1	0.07	0.03	0.54
Instagram	1.41	0.99	1-3 hours	0.11	0.06	0	0.99
Youtube	1.92	1.02	3-5 hours	0.06	0.28	-0.04	0.48
Google	1.67	0.95	1-3 hours	0.13	0.82	-0.011	0.85

Table 3 shows the level number of hours spent by students and its relationship on the level of political participation and political awareness of students. As shown, the number of hours spent on Facebook has a relationship with political awareness of students (p = .048, r > .55), although the strength of relationship is almost nil. Spending time in other social media sites did not yield a significant relationship on the level of political awareness of students.

Meanwhile, spending time on social media has no relationship on the level of political participation of students. This means that no matter how much time a student spends on social media in whatever form does not have any influence on their level of political participation. It may be said that involvement in politics is dictated by one's ideals and values, and not by one's awareness of a certain issue or time spent using social media.

Conclusions

1. Facebook is the most frequently visited social media site by college students of Baliuag University. On the average, they would spend about 3-5 hours on the site daily. The main motivation of students for using social media is its accessibility and ease of getting information.

2. It may be concluded that college students are not politically matured. While they are generally aware of global issues, national issues, and local issues through their use of social media, they do not get involved or participate in political discussions or groups.

3. Students' level of political awareness and their level of political participation are the same across students' sex, age, and year level. They are aware about certain political issues, but do not get themselves involved.

4. Students have just the right amount of exposure to social media particularly Facebook, which they frequently visit for at least 3-5 hours daily. Their exposure to Facebook makes them aware of global, national, and international issues, although this awareness does not drive them to participate in political issues by joining in discussions or political groups. This shows that one's political awareness does not necessarily translate to political participation.

Recommendations

With reference to the findings and conclusions of the study, the researcher recommends the following:

1. In order to increase online political participation through which the students can express their political opinions as well as exchanging knowledge and information among themselves, the institution should set up online political discussions/forums through the sponsorship of the Student Council. In addition, there should also be a body, preferably social and political science teachers, empowered to oversee these discussion/forums and to digest the general student's opinions.

2. Replication and parallel studies may be conducted to continuously monitor the development of political maturity of students. Items on political issues that are evolving should be included under awareness. Moreover, it is worthy to conduct a survey among political science students and compare their level of political maturity with other students of the same age or year level

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