

Lens on Social Media-Driven Misinformation for Critical Analysis and Understanding Level on Political Participation

Lea-Nhel R. Malaylay, LPT

Cosico Avenue, Brgy. Del Remedio, San Pablo City, Laguna

Laguna State Polytechnic University- San Pablo City Campus

0322-3083@lspu.edu.ph

Abstract

In the digital age, social media has become a primary source of information but it also amplifies the spread of misinformation, especially among youth. This study, “Lens on Social Media-Driven Misinformation for Critical Analysis and Understanding Level on Political Participation”, examines the relationship between misinformation exposure, critical analysis, and political participation among Grade 11 HUMSS students during the S.Y. 2025-2026. An explanatory sequential mixed methods design was employed, where quantitative data were collected and analyzed first, followed by qualitative data through Focus Group Discussions (FGD) to further explain the results. Respondents were selected through purposive sampling, and data were analyzed using weighted mean, Pearson R, and thematic analysis. Findings show that students experience high exposure to misinformation, particularly in exposure frequency and algorithmic influence. Despite this, respondents demonstrated high levels of critical analysis, including critical thinking, media literacy, and reflective judgment. Political participation was also high in terms of political interest, civic engagement, and voting behavior. Correlation results indicate that increased social media use is linked to stronger critical analysis and higher political participation. Qualitative results further reveal that while students initially rely on superficial cues, those who practice verification and evaluation exhibit more informed engagement. The study concludes that strengthening critical analysis skills is essential in reducing the negative impact of misinformation and promoting responsible political participation.

Keywords: social media driven misinformation; critical analysis; political participation; HUMSS students.

1. Introduction

In today's digital era, social media has changed the way people access and share information. Social media platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly known as Twitter), YouTube, Instagram and TikTok have become essential to the daily lives of students and the public, serving as major sources of news, entertainment, and communication. However, while social media provides easy and convenient access to information, it also creates a serious challenge, the growth of misinformation and disinformation. The openness, accessibility, and speed with which information spreads have made these platforms not just tools for engagement but also direction for distortion and manipulation. The rise of misinformation is not a new issue, but its scale and impact have been magnified in the digital era. As observed by several scholars, false information spreads faster and wider than factual news, primarily because of social media's algorithmic structures that favor engagement over accuracy. The spiral of silence theory indicates that social media can greatly influence young people's eagerness to express political opinions or participate in civic discussions. When users perceive that their views are unpopular or contradicting to dominant online narratives, they may choose to remain silent rather than risk social isolation. Consequently, misinformation and online pressure can both discourage open political expression and shape collective public perception.

Although social media can encourage political engagement, its influence on politics is not entirely positive. It can easily amplify misinformation, polarize communities, and distort civic understanding. Babii (2020) emphasizes that misinformation thrives largely because many people lack critical thinking skills. Critical thinking requires evaluating information rationally, questioning evidence, identifying bias, and recognizing misinformation. A critical thinker not only evaluates external sources but also examines on their own reasoning, recognizing errors and seeking to correct them. Without this skill, people are more likely to believe false information, spread unverified content, and contribute to the spread of misinformation. Moreover, the rapid growth of misinformation on social media has greatly influenced students' understanding of truth and reality. Many users have mistaken misleading posts or videos for factual content, which in turn shapes their worldview and political attitudes. The spread of false or manipulated information has even led to real-world consequences, such as misinformed political decisions, public confusion, and the erosion of democratic discourse. While

numerous studies have explored misinformation on social media, there remains a notable gap in understanding how such misinformation specifically influences students' critical thinking abilities and political participation.

While there are existing studies on social media and political misinformation, few studies examine how misinformation influences students critical thinking skills and political participation. In this study, the researcher aims to understand how social media-driven misinformation on platforms such as Facebook, X, YouTube, Instagram and TikTok affects students' critical analysis and willingness to participate in political discussions.

2. Methods

2.1 Research Design

The researcher employed an explanatory sequential mixed methods design, in which quantitative data were collected and analyzed first, followed by a qualitative data to further explain the initial findings. This design allowed for the collection and analysis of numerical data to describe existing conditions and examine relationships among variables. It aims to provide an overview of students' exposure to misinformation, their level of critical thinking, and their political participation, and seeks to identify whether a significant relationship exists between these variables. To complement and deepen the results, the qualitative data were gathered through focus group discussions (FGD) with selected students to explore their experiences with misinformation.

2.2 Respondents of the study

The respondents of the study were composed of sixty (60) Grade 11 students from CSTC College of Sciences Technology and Communications, Inc. Lucena Campus. The researcher employed purposive sampling, a method that intentionally chose participants who possessed specific characteristics relevant to the study. The respondents we're chosen from the Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS) strand who is currently taking the subject Philippine Politics and Governance, a specialized subjects of within the strand. In addition, a simple random sampling technique was used to select ten (10) students from the group of sixty (60) students, ensuring each student an equal chance of being included in the focus group discussions. According to Crossman (2020) purposive sampling is a non-probability sample that is selected based on characteristics of a population and the objective of the study. This approach ensured that the collected data was relevant and meaningful, as participants we're chosen for their ability to provide insights relevant to the study topic.

2.3 Research Instrument

In the conduct of the study, a researcher-constructed questionnaire was used. This underwent validation by six experts in the field. The first part, a self-made survey questionnaire designed to measure the influence of social media-driven misinformation on students' critical analysis and political participation. It has four parts: (1) demographic profile, (2) exposure to social media driven misinformation, (3) critical analysis and (4) political participation, with each section composed of ten (10) statements while the demographic profile gathered basic respondent information. Responses were measured using a 4-point Likert scale with the following ranges:

Ranges	Verbal Interpretation	
3.50 - 4.00	Strongly Agree	Very High
2.50 - 3.49	Agree	High
1.50 - 2.49	Disagree	Low
1.0-1.49	Strongly Disagree	Very Low

In this study, a 4-point Likert scale was utilized to measure the In this study, a 4-point Likert scale was utilized to measure the respondent's level of agreement, with corresponding numerical ranges. A mean score ranging from 3.50 to 4.00 is interpreted as Strongly Agree and corresponds to a Very High level, indicating that a strong presence of the variable being measured. A mean of 2.50 to 3.49 is interpreted as Agree and corresponds to a High level, indicating that the respondents generally support the statement. Scores between 1.50 to 2.49 are interpreted as Disagree with a Low level, indicating a lesser extent of the variable. Lastly, a mean score of 1.00 to 1.49 is interpreted as Strongly Disagree and signifies a Very Low level, showing minimal presence of the variable. Second, a focus group discussion (FGD) guide was utilized to collect detailed insights from students about their experiences with misinformation. The FGD guide composed of three (3) main questions, each supported by three (3) follow up questions, to facilitate deeper discussion and elicit more detailed responses from the participants.

2.4 Research Procedure

This study followed a systematic procedure to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the data collected.

The primary instrument used for data collection was a researcher-made questionnaire designed to measure the respondents' exposure to social media misinformation, their level of critical analysis, and their understanding of political participation.

A formal letter was sent to the principal of the school in the approval of the conduct of the study. Informed consent was also secured from the respondents to ensure that the participation was voluntary.

To establish the validity and reliability of the survey, the instrument underwent expert validation and pilot testing. Initially, it was evaluated by a panel of six (6) experts who examine its clarity, relevance, and content validity. Based on their recommendations, several items were revised for precision and readability. Following expert validation, a pilot test was conducted with a small sample of fifteen (15) students to assess the reliability of the questionnaire. The collected responses from the pilot test were analyzed using Cronbach's alpha to determine internal consistency, ensuring that each scale was accurately measured in the intended construct. After revisions, a total of sixty (60) respondents were asked to answer the questionnaire which comprised of two sections and as distributed in printed form. Completed questionnaires were retrieved immediately to secure a high retrieval rate and prevent data loss. Responses were carefully encoded, tabulated, and organized for analysis.

For data analysis, descriptive statistics such as frequency and weighted mean was used to describe the respondents' profiles and responses, while Pearson's r was employed to determine the correlation between the independent variable (social media-driven misinformation and critical analysis) and the dependent variable (political participation).

For qualitative phase, the researcher selected ten (10) students using simple random sampling to participate in the Focus Group Discussion (FGD). The researcher ensured that the session is audio recorded with consent from the participants. The recorded data was transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis.

Statistical Treatment

The quantitative data that were gathered in this study were subjected to appropriate statistical tools to analyze and interpret the results.

1. Frequency and Percentage Distribution were used to describe the demographic profile of the respondents and their exposure to social media-driven misinformation.
2. Weighted Mean were applied to determine the level of exposure to misinformation, critical analysis, and political participation.
3. Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) were used to test the relationship between exposure to misinformation, critical analysis, and political participation.

The qualitative data in this study were gathered through Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and were analyzed using thematic analysis guided by Thematic Analysis Framework developed by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke. The analysis followed the six-phase process, beginning with data familiarization through repeated reading of FGD transcripts. Initial codes were then generated to capture meaningful segments of the participants. These codes were organized to potential themes, which were reviewed and refined to ensure coherency and accuracy in representing the data. The final phase involved defining and naming themes, followed by interpreting the themes in relation to the research objectives. This process allowed for a comprehensive and in depth understanding of the participants' perspectives.

3. Results

Table 1. Distribution of the Respondents in terms of Age

Age	Frequency	Percent
16	33	55.0
17	25	42.0
18	2	3.0
19	0	0.00
Total	60	100.0

The table shows the respondents' distribution in terms of age. It shows that the majority of the respondents are of ages 16 garnering a frequency of 33 and a total percentage of 55. On the other hand, there are twenty-five respondents with age of 17 and got 42%. Also, there are two respondents with the age of 18, and no respondents who were age 19. The result entails that the researcher's respondents were dominated by age 16.

Table 2. Distribution of the Respondents in terms of Average daily time spent on Social Media

Average daily time spent on Social Media	Frequency	Percent
Less than 1 hour	2	3.0
1-2 hours	10	17.0
3-4 hours	20	33.0

5-6 hours	10	17.0
More than 6 hours	18	30.0
Total	60	100.0

The table shows the respondents' distribution in terms of average daily time spent on social media. It reveals that the majority of the respondents spent 3-4 hours in social media with a frequency of 20 and a total percentage of 33. Also, there are respondents who spent more than 6 hours in social media with a frequency of 18 and got 30%. Also, some respondents spent 1-2 hours and at the same time 5-6 hours garnering the same frequency of 10 and a percentage of 17. On the other hand, only two respondents spent 1-2 hours in social media with a frequency of 2 and a percentage of 3. The result entails that the researcher's respondents were spending an average of 3-4 hours in social media.

Table 3. Distribution of the Respondents in terms of Social Media platform used

Main platform used	Frequency	Percent
Facebook	33	55.0
X	0	0.00
TikTok	22	37.0
YouTube	1	2.0
Instagram	4	7.0
Total	60	100.0

The table shows the respondents' distribution in terms of social media platform used. It shows that the majority of the respondents used Facebook garnering a frequency of 33 and a total percentage of 55. Also, the respondents used TikTok with a frequency of 22 and a percentage of 37. On the other hand, some of the respondents used the platform Instagram with a frequency of 4 and a percentage of 7. However, only one respondent used the platform YouTube with a frequency of 1 and a percentage of 2. Lastly, no respondent used the platform X formerly known as TikTok. The result implies that the researcher's respondents were dominated by the used of Facebook as their main platform.

Table 4. Distribution of the Respondents in terms of Voter registration status

Voter Registration Status	Frequency	Percent
Registered	29	48.30
Not registered	31	51.70
Total	60	100.0

The table shows the respondents' distribution in terms of voter registration status. It reveals that majority of the respondents are not registered with a frequency of 31 and a total percentage of 51.70. On the other hand, there are 29 respondents who are registered with a percentage of 48.30. The result entails that the researcher's respondents were dominated by not registered individuals.

Table 5. Respondents Exposure to Social Media-Driven Misinformation in terms of Exposure Frequency

Indicators	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation
<i>As a Senior High School student</i>			
1. I am exposed in political posts on my social media feed that I suspect are false or misleading.	3.57	0.50	Very High
2. I am exposed to social media posts that contains issues or unclear political information.	3.75	0.43	Very High
3. I come across political content that seems to be exaggerated.	3.60	0.49	Very High
4. I see repeated political narrative shared by users.	3.77	0.42	Very High
5. I see viral posts regarding political issues even when I am not sharing them and exposed to sponsored post about politics.	3.82	0.39	Very High
6. I see political information being shared without credible source.	3.75	0.43	Very High
7. I am exposed to the claims of politics that spread fast during major public events.	3.53	0.50	Very High
8. I see political posts about which others have warned might be false or contain misinformation.	3.75	0.43	Very High
9. I am exposed to political posts that are seemingly designed just to stir emotions.	3.70	0.46	Very High
10. I encounter political rumors and unverified claims spreading on my feed.	3.72	0.45	Very High
Overall	3.69	0.27	Very High

Table 5 shows the result in mean distribution and standard deviation of the respondents' exposure to social media driven misinformation in terms of exposure frequency. Statement no. 5, ***"I see viral posts regarding political issues even when I am not sharing them and exposed to sponsored post about politics"***, obtained the highest mean of 3.82 with an SD of

0.39 and a verbal interpretation of Very High. This entails that the respondents are often exposed to political content on social media even without actively searching for it or sharing such information. Statement no. 7, ***"I am exposed to the claims of politics that spread fast during major public events"***, got the lowest mean of 3.53 with an SD of 0.50 and a verbal interpretation of Very High. Although the statement also received a Very High interpretation, it obtained the lowest mean since exposure to rapidly spreading political claims may occurs less consistently compared to everyday passive exposure. Moreover, the overall mean of Table 5 is 3.69 with an SD of 0.27 with a verbal interpretation of Very High. The result indicates that the respondents are frequently exposed to social media driven misinformation and encountered political post that spread during certain events. Based on participants insights, misinformation is commonly encountered and is sometimes difficult to distinguish from credible information. In addition, Guess et al. (2020) emphasized that social media platforms have become fertile grounds for the rapid spread of inflammatory political misinformation. The design of these platforms' which is centered on engagement, virality, and emotional appeal that allows false or exaggerated political content to circulate widely and quickly, often reaching audiences faster than factual news.

Table 6. Respondents Exposure to Social Media-Driven Misinformation in terms of Perceived Credibility

	Indicators	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation
1.	I consider political information coming from accounts that I follow to be credible.	3.53	0.50	Very High
2.	I find political posts with high number of engagements to be more credible.	3.50	0.50	Very High
3.	I consider visually polished content more credible than those in text form.	3.40	0.49	High
4.	I accept political information as fact before checking the source.	3.40	0.49	High
5.	I trust the political post that my friends or relatives spread.	3.25	0.43	High
6.	I believe that some political content reflects public truth even without evidence.	3.30	0.46	High
7.	I trust political news more from pages with high number of followers to be credible sources of information.	3.55	0.50	Very High
8.	I consider the political statements made by influencers as credible information.	3.32	0.46	High
9.	I consider that political information that trends online as credible.	3.32	0.46	High
10.	I trust political post unless I come across evidence that they are incorrect.	3.50	0.50	Very High
	Overall	3.41	0.25	High

Table 6 shows the result in mean distribution and standard deviation of the respondents' exposure to social media driven misinformation in terms of perceived credibility. Statement no. 7, ***"I trust political news more from pages with high number of followers to be credible sources of information"***, obtained the highest mean of 3.55 with an SD of 0.50 and a verbal interpretation of Very High. This indicates that respondents tend to perceive social media pages with a large number of followers as more credible source of political information. On the other hand, statement no.5, ***"I trust the political post that my friends or relatives spread"***, got the lowest mean of 3.25 with an SD of 0.43 and a verbal interpretation of High. This indicates that the respondents' personal connections may influence credibility perceptions but is lower compared to other sources of information. Moreover, the overall mean of Table 6 is 3.49 with an SD of 0.25 with a verbal interpretation of High. This indicates that the respondents perceive political information on social media as credible to some extent such as number of followers, engagements and familiarity with the source. Participants' experiences further show that repeated exposure can increase the likelihood of believing information, regardless of its accuracy. This indicates that misinformation can easily gain acceptance when it appears credible through these cues. As supported by the study of Avram et al., (2020), social engagement cues on misinformation content, including likes, shares, or positive comments, can enhance its perceived credibility and increase individuals' tendency to reshare it, further accelerating the spread of false or misleading information.

Table 7. Respondents Exposure to Social Media-Driven Misinformation in terms of Behavioral Response

	Indicators	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation
1.	I react quickly to political postings even before fully understanding the full issue.	3.30	0.46	High
2.	I impulsively share political content that reflects my initial reactions.	3.32	0.46	High
3.	I am emotionally influenced by political posts that present conflict or alarming messages.	3.58	0.49	Very High
4.	I defend political claims online without verifying their truthfulness.	3.28	0.45	High

5.	I respond to political messages that support my existing beliefs.	3.47	0.50	High
6.	I catch myself forming opinions quickly based on posts that I repeatedly encounter.	3.52	0.50	Very High
7.	I have shared political posts because I feel pressured by their emotional tone.	3.27	0.44	High
8.	I comment on political issues based on what I see online.	3.27	0.44	High
9.	I get swayed by dramatic or sensationalized political messages.	3.43	0.50	High
10.	I follow political narratives that evoke strong emotional feelings in me.	3.38	0.49	High
Overall		3.38	0.25	High

Table 7 shows the result in mean distribution and standard deviation of the respondents' exposure to social media driven misinformation in terms of behavioral response. Statement no. 3, ***"I am emotionally influenced by political posts that present conflict or alarming messages"*** obtained the highest mean of 3.58 with an SD of 0.49 and a verbal interpretation of Very High. This indicates that emotionally charged content on social media strongly influenced respondents' reactions and responses regarding a certain political information online. Statement no. 7 ***"I have shared political posts because I feel pressured by their emotional tone"*** got the lowest mean of 3.27 with an SD of 0.44 and a verbal interpretation of High. This indicates that emotional pressure can influence the respondents' sharing behavior. On the other hand, statement no. 8, ***"I comment on political issues based on what I see online"***, also got the lowest mean of 3.27 with an SD of 0.44 and a verbal interpretation of Agree. This indicates that the respondents are influenced by the political content online when deciding to leave a comment. Moreover, the overall mean of Table 7 is 3.38 with an SD of 0.25 with a verbal interpretation of High. This suggests that the respondents demonstrate behavioral responses to political content encountered on social media. This is supported by the participants responses which suggest that while respondents are behaviorally influenced by social media content, some are developing reflective practices that help manage misinformation and improve their responses. Authors such as De León and Trilling (2021) suggest that there is a negativity bias in emotional engagement with political information, where negative news generates more intense emotional responses and, therefore, is more likely to be shared on social media.

Table 8. Respondents Exposure to Social Media-Driven Misinformation in terms of Algorithmic Influence

	Indicators	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation
1.	I notice that what I see regarding politics becomes more limited or repeated over time.	3.62	0.49	Very High
2.	I feel that my feed normally shows one side of political debates.	3.65	0.48	Very High
3.	I think the social media algorithm affects the political opinions I get exposed to most.	3.65	0.48	Very High
4.	I receive political recommendations based on posts that I interact with.	3.70	0.46	Very High
5.	I am aware that the algorithm amplifies political topics I have previously interacted with.	3.67	0.47	Very High
6.	I believe that recurring political content impacts my judgment regarding political issues.	3.73	0.44	Very High
7.	I believe that algorithms limit the political information I see.	3.67	0.47	Very High
8.	I find that my feed becomes more political immediately after interacting with a few posts that are political.	3.78	0.41	Very High
9.	I often adapt perspectives repeatedly seen through algorithmic suggestions.	3.63	0.48	Very High
10.	I am aware that my political views online are shaped by information filtered through algorithms.	3.62	0.49	Very High
Overall		3.67	0.24	Very High

Table 8 shows the result in mean distribution and standard deviation of the respondents' exposure to social media driven misinformation in terms of algorithmic influence. Statement no. 8, ***"I find that my feed becomes more political immediately after interacting with a few posts that are political"***, obtained the highest mean of 3.78 with an SD of 0.41 and a verbal interpretation of Very High. The high mean suggests that respondents clearly experience fast changes in their feed, making the respondents more exposed to political content. Statement no. 1, ***"I notice that what I see regarding politics becomes more limited or repeated over time."***, got the lowest mean of 3.62 with an SD of 0.49 and a verbal interpretation of Very High. The lowest mean still shows a very high level of agreement, but respondents notice repetition and narrowing of political content less strongly compared to immediate changes in their feed. Moreover, the overall mean of Table 8 is 3.67 with an SD of 0.24 with a verbal interpretation of Very High. This indicates that respondents recognize the influence of social media algorithms on the political content the respondents are exposed to. This shows that algorithms play a role in

shaping the type, frequency and visibility of political information encountered on social media platforms. In connection to this, Zimmer et al. (2019) emphasized that social media algorithms contribute to the misinformation problem. Algorithms dictate content that appears in social media feeds based on users' previous online behavior.

Table 9. Summary of the Respondents Exposure to Social Media-Driven Misinformation

Indicators	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation
Exposure Frequency	3.69	0.27	Very High
Perceived Credibility	3.41	0.25	Very High
Behavioral Response	3.38	0.25	Very High
Algorithmic Influence	3.67	0.24	Very High
Overall	3.54	0.25	Very High

Table 9 shows that the respondents experience a Very High level of exposure to social media-driven misinformation, as evidenced by the overall mean of 3.54 with an SD of 0.25. This indicates that misinformation is consistent and a prevalent part of the student's social media platforms. Particularly, exposure frequency got the highest mean of 3.69 with an SD of 0.27. It suggests that students frequently encounter misleading information and continuous exposure increases the likelihood that misinformation becomes familiar and more easily accepted. On the other hand, algorithmic influence got a mean of 3.67 with an SD 0.24. It suggests that social media algorithms significantly contribute to repeatedly surfacing such content. The perceived credibility got a mean of 3.41 with an SD of 0.25. It implies that the students view misinformation as believable that raises concerns in the ability to evaluate sources. Lastly, the behavioral response got the lowest mean of 3.38 with an SD of 0.25. This indicates that the respondents are likely to engage with such content by reacting to, sharing, or discussing political posts without sufficient verification. Taken together, these findings suggest that misinformation not only frequently reaches students frequently but also influences their perceptions and actions. In connection with this, Avram et al., (2020), stated that platforms rely on engagement metrics such as the number of likes to determine content visibility misinformation can be easily amplified, as high levels of superficial approval may be mistaken for credibility or relevance. In fact, social engagement cues on misinformation content, including likes, shares, or positive comments, can enhance its perceived credibility and increase individuals' tendency to reshare it, further accelerating the spread of false or misleading information.

Table 10. Respondents Critical Analysis in terms of Critical Thinking

Indicators	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation
1. I assess whether political information makes logical sense before I accept it.	3.85	0.36	Very High
2. I question political claims, especially when they are not supported by evidence.	3.67	0.47	Very High
3. I check whether the arguments used in political posts are logical.	3.77	0.42	Very High
4. I avoid coming to any political conclusions without looking into details of the issue.	3.67	0.47	Very High
5. I assess whether political statements are based on facts and not opinions.	3.75	0.43	Very High
6. I weigh political claims before arriving at my opinion.	3.80	0.40	Very High
7. I check political content on the basis of evidence to verify credibility.	3.87	0.34	Very High
8. I challenge political posts that rely on fallacies or emotional manipulation.	3.47	0.50	High
9. I consider alternative interpretations before accepting a political narrative.	3.83	0.37	Very High
10. I reflect critically on the accuracy of political claims presented on social media.	3.87	0.34	Very High
Overall	3.75	0.20	Very High

Table 10 shows the result in mean distribution and standard deviation of the respondents' critical analysis in terms of critical thinking. Statement no. 10, ***"I reflect critically on the accuracy of political claims presented on social media"*** obtained the highest mean of 3.87 with an SD of 0.34 and a verbal interpretation of Very High. The high mean indicates that there is an increasing awareness to misinformation, prompting to a more cautious and analytical approach among respondents. On the other hand, statement no. 8, ***"I challenge political posts that rely on fallacies or emotional manipulation"***, obtained the lowest mean of 3.47 with an SD of 0.50 and a verbal interpretation of High. Although the result still reflects a relatively high level of critical thinking, it suggests the respondents are less likely to engage in participatory actions such as confronting or correcting misleading information. Moreover, the overall mean of Table 10 is 3.75 with an SD of 0.20 with a verbal interpretation of Very High. This indicates that the respondents showed a high level of critical thinking when analyzing political information on social media. While respondents are capable of critically analyzing information, there is less tendency to challenge or intervene when encountering misinformation. Nascimento (2024) emphasized that critical thinking plays a crucial role in combating misinformation by enabling individuals to analyze information rigorously and identify inconsistencies.

Table 11. Respondents Critical Analysis in terms of Media Literacy

Indicators		Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation
1.	I can distinguish between factual political news and opinion-based content.	3.77	0.42	Very High
2.	I fact-check political information through multiple credible sources.	3.90	0.30	Very High
3.	I analyze the origin of a political post before opting to believe it.	3.82	0.39	Very High
4.	I identify possible biases in online political content.	3.73	0.44	Very High
5.	I am aware of common techniques used in digital media to manipulate audiences.	3.68	0.46	Very High
6.	I check authors or pages that post political information on their credibility.	3.82	0.39	Very High
7.	I cross check information if I suspect it may be misleading or incomplete.	3.80	0.40	Very High
8.	I evaluate images, videos, or graphics for their potential of being edited or AI generated.	3.75	0.43	Very High
9.	I examine trends in how misinformation spreads on the internet to better evaluate political information.	3.78	0.41	Very High
10.	I check whether the format, tone or style of a post is intended to either persuade or mislead.	3.72	0.45	Very High
Overall		3.78	0.21	Very High

Table 11 shows the result in mean distribution and standard deviation of the respondents' critical analysis in terms of media literacy. Statement no. 2, ***"I fact-check political information through multiple credible sources"***, obtained the highest mean of 3.90 with an SD of 0.30 and a verbal interpretation of Very High. This indicates that the respondents verify political information by looking for multiple reliable sources, indicating a strong level of media literacy among the respondents. On the other hand, statement no. 5, ***"I am aware of common techniques used in digital media to manipulate audience"***, got the lowest mean of 3.68 with an SD of 0.46 and a verbal interpretation of Very High. This shows that the respondents are aware of the strategies used in social media that influence or manipulate audiences. Moreover, the overall mean of Table 11 is 3.78 with an SD of 0.21 with a verbal interpretation of Very High. This suggests that respondents are capable of verifying sources, identifying biases, assessing the credibility of a certain political content. This implies that although respondents have strong media literacy skills, there is still a need to improve awareness of persuasive and manipulative strategies to achieve more effective and critical evaluation of information on social media. As supported by the study of Umali and Brion (2024), emphasized that critical thinking serves as a protective factor against the persuasive effects of false or misleading information encountered online. Students who are able to evaluate sources, question the reliability of claims, and analyze arguments logically are less likely to accept misinformation at face value. Instead, they tend to verify information through credible references and form opinions grounded in evidence rather than emotion or popularity.

Table 12. Respondents Critical Analysis in terms of Reflective Judgment

Indicators	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation
1. I reflect on my personal biases when evaluating information about political issues.	3.70	0.46	Very High
2. I consider several perspectives before making a political opinion.	3.82	0.39	Very High
3. I change my political views in cases of new or conflicting evidence.	3.62	0.49	Very High
4. I reflect on any political information before taking it as valid.	3.87	0.34	Very High
5. I reflect upon how my personal values shape my political decisions.	3.78	0.41	Very High
6. I analyze the long-term implications of political issues rather than immediately reacting to it.	3.75	0.43	Very High
7. I actively question whether the sources I rely on could be biased or incomplete.	3.63	0.48	Very High
8. I relate current political issues to past events in order to make more informed judgments.	3.58	0.49	Very High
9. I contemplate whether my political opinion is led by emotion or critical review.	3.68	0.46	Very High
10. I reflect whether my interpretations of political information are in line with the facts.	3.77	0.42	Very High
Overall	3.72	0.23	Very High

Table 12 shows the result in mean distribution and standard deviation of the respondents' critical analysis in terms of reflective judgment. Statement no. 4, ***"I reflect on any political information before taking it as valid"***, obtained the highest mean of 3.87 with an SD of 0.34 and a verbal interpretation of Very High. This indicates that the respondents carefully reflect on political information before taking it as valid which shows a strong level of reflective judgment when evaluating political content on social media. On the other hand, statement no.8, ***"I relate current political issues to past events in order to make more informed judgments"***, got the lowest mean of 3.58 with an SD of 0.49 and a verbal interpretation of Very High. This suggests that this practice is less consistently applied compared to other reflective behaviors. Moreover, the overall mean of Table 12 is 3.72 with an SD of 0.23 with a verbal interpretation of Very High. This suggests that the respondents reflect on personal biases, consider different perspectives, and examine evidence before forming political opinions. The result also suggests that while reflective thinking is strong, it is more focused on current evaluation rather than deeper or long-term analysis of political contents. Furthermore, Weston (2021) emphasizes that critical thinking is an essential cognitive skill that enables individuals to use logic and reasoning in evaluating arguments, identifying inconsistencies, and making sound judgments. Critical thinkers are reflective, independent, and analytical, allowing them to assess the reliability and validity of information.

Table 13. Summary of Respondents Critical Analysis

Indicators	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation
Critical Thinking	3.75	0.20	Very High
Media Literacy	3.78	0.21	Very High
Reflective Judgment	3.72	0.23	Very High
Overall	3.75	0.21	Very High

The table shows that the respondents demonstrate a very high level of understanding in terms of critical analysis, as reflected in the overall mean of 3.75 with an SD of 0.21. Among the indicators, media literacy obtained the highest mean of 3.78 with an SD of 0.21, indicating that the respondents are highly capable of evaluating and analyzing the information from various media sources. This suggests that the respondents are aware of how media content is created and are able to identify misleading or biased information. Meanwhile, critical thinking and reflective judgment obtained a mean of 3.75 and 3.72 respectively. The result indicates that the respondents are able to think logically, carefully assess information, and reflect on their beliefs and decisions when exposed to social media content. The consistently very high mean scores across all indicators imply that the respondents are well-equipped with the necessary skills to critically engage with social media-driven misinformation. This may be influenced by their exposure to educational discussions, personal experiences, and

awareness of misinformation which help the respondents become cautious and analytical in interpreting political content. In addition, Orhan (2023) explained that critical analysis in the context of social media goes beyond merely recognizing information; it involves active evaluation of the credibility, accuracy, and relevance of the content encountered. In an environment where information is rapidly produced and widely disseminated, users are often exposed to both reliable facts and misleading or false narratives

Table 14. Respondents Political Participation in terms of Political Interest

Indicators	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation
1. I keep myself inform on political affairs at the local and national level.	3.65	0.48	Very High
2. I actively seek out explanations for political events or issues that I do not understand.	3.58	0.49	Very High
3. I am interested in understanding political processes and systems.	3.78	0.41	Very High
4. I do follow political discussions across different media platforms.	3.67	0.47	Very High
5. I try to become familiar with the background and platforms of political leaders.	3.73	0.44	Very High
6. I pay attention to how political decisions influence different sectors of society.	3.75	0.43	Very High
7. I recognize the importance of political issues in my daily life.	3.85	0.36	Very High
8. I studied political issues to develop an in-depth understanding.	3.72	0.45	Very High
9. I am always curious about different government policies and their consequences.	3.80	0.40	Very High
10. I keep myself updated on political issues that affect my community.	3.70	0.46	Very High
Overall	3.72	0.23	Very High

Table 14 shows the result in mean distribution and standard deviation of the respondents' political participation in terms of political interest. Statement no.7, ***"I recognize the importance of political issues in my daily life."***, obtained the highest mean of 3.85 with an SD of 0.36 and a verbal interpretation of Very High. This reveals that the respondents acknowledge the relevance of political issues in everyday life. Statement no. 2 ***"I actively seek out explanations for political events or issues that I do not understand"***, got the lowest mean of 3.58 with an SD of 0.49 and a verbal interpretation of Very High. This shows that the respondents seek explanations for political events that is hard to comprehend. Although, it is slightly less frequent compared to other aspects of political interest measured in the table. Moreover, the overall mean of Table 14 is 3.72 with an SD of 0.23 with a verbal interpretation of Very High. This suggests that respondents stay informed about political issues, follow political discussions and seek to understand government policies and its effects on society. This implies that the respondents are generally aware, informed, and willing to engage, especially when encountering problems around them. This is supported by the findings in the study of Calawa et al. (2023) in which it showed that participants engage and participate in national and local socio-political issues present in their community. The study found that students start to take part in participating when they gain awareness of the issues. However, without awareness they do not engage, because they do not understand the significance of their participation in the issues.

Table 15. Respondents Political Participation in terms of Civic Engagement

Indicators	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation
1. I engage in conversations that address local or civic issues in my community.	3.60	0.49	Very High
2. I take part in activities that support public awareness or social responsibility.	3.63	0.48	Very High
3. I contribute to projects related in improving the welfare of my community.	3.53	0.50	Very High

4.	I participate in school or community discussions about governance and social issues.	3.75	0.43	Very High
5.	I share my perspectives on issues that affect my community.	3.65	0.48	Very High
6.	I volunteer and advocates public service or civic education.	3.40	0.49	High
7.	I join activities that encourage youth to participate in nation building.	3.52	0.50	Very High
8.	I join groups or activities that advocate for democratic ideals.	3.47	0.50	High
9.	I participate in civic oriented campaigns or outreach activities.	3.42	0.49	High
10.	I engage myself in efforts that contribute to strengthen civic participation among peers.	3.62	0.49	Very High
Overall		3.56	0.27	Very High

Table 15 shows the result in mean distribution and standard deviation of the respondents' political participation in terms of civic judgment. Statement no. 4, ***"I participate in school or community discussions about governance and social issues"***, obtained the highest mean of 3.75 with an SD of 0.43 and a verbal interpretation of Very High. This indicates that the respondents engage in discussions to governance and societal concern which shows an active expression of civic engagement. actively engage in civic actions, thereby enhancing their civic commitment. Statement no. 6, ***"I volunteer and advocates public service or civic education"***, got the lowest mean of 3.40 with an SD of 0.40 and a verbal interpretation of Very High. This indicates that the respondents show involvement in volunteering and promoting civic education, although this from of political participation are less frequent compared to other aspects of civic judgment measured in the table. Moreover, the overall mean of Table 15 is 3.56 with an SD of 0.27 with a verbal interpretation of Very High. This suggests that the respondents engage in community-related discussions, support activities that promote social responsibility and share perspectives on issues affecting the community. This implies that while civic engagement is already strong, it can be further improved by encouraging more hands-on participation, promoting safe spaces for expression and providing more opportunities for youth to get involved in community activities. This critical consciousness is linked to civic engagement, as individuals who are aware of societal dynamics and power relationships are more likely to participate in activities that aim to bring about social change (Sagiv et al., 2022).

Table 16. Respondents Political Participation in terms of Voting Behavior

	Indicators	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation
1.	I consider voting as one of the most important responsibilities in a democratic society.	3.85	0.36	Very High
2.	I consider factual information when deciding which candidates to support.	3.87	0.34	Very High
3.	I judge political candidates based on their platforms and records.	3.73	0.44	Very High
4.	I ensure that false or misleading information does not influence my vote.	3.65	0.48	Very High
5.	I consider the credibility of political advertisements when making voting decisions.	3.80	0.40	Very High
6.	I reflect critically before deciding whom to vote for.	3.83	0.37	Very High
7.	I seek reliable information to take part in elections.	3.78	0.41	Very High
8.	I discuss political issues with others in order to make informed voting choices.	3.70	0.46	Very High
9.	I consider ethical and social implications when choosing candidates.	3.73	0.44	Very High
10.	I take part in election related activities so that I vote responsibly.	3.70	0.46	Very High
Overall		3.77	0.21	Very High

Table 16 shows the result in mean distribution and standard deviation of the respondents' political participation in terms of voting behavior. Statement no. 2, ***"I consider factual information when deciding which candidates to support"***, obtained the highest mean of 3.87 with an SD of 0.34 and a verbal interpretation of Very High. This shows that the respondents' decision when choosing candidates are based on verified and factual information, which indicates a responsible and informed approach to voting. On the other hand, statement no. 4, ***"I ensure that false or misleading information does not influence my vote"***, got the lowest mean of 3.65 with an SD of 0.48 and a verbal interpretation of Very high. This shows that the respondents take steps to avoid being influenced by false or misleading information when voting, although this slightly occurs compared to other voting-related practices. Moreover, the overall mean of Table 16 is 3.77 with an SD of 0.21 with a verbal interpretation of Very High. This suggests that the respondents consider factual information, evaluate candidates' platforms and records, and reflect critically before making voting decisions. The participants' experiences of comparing opinions, searching for information, and dealing with biased content support this finding. This implies that while the respondents already show responsible voting behavior, continuous efforts in promoting media literacy and critical thinking are important to further protect them to misinformation and help them make more informed political choices. In the study of Tandoc-Juan, Juan, and Atianzar (2019), voting behavior can be best understood by looking into the many factors considered in a political candidate. In this study, the major determinant of voting preferences is ascribed to a political candidates' personal and political backgrounds.

Table 17. Summary of Respondents Political Participation

Indicators	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation
Political Interest	3.72	0.23	Very High
Civic Engagement	3.56	0.27	Very High
Voting behavior	3.77	0.21	Very High
Overall	3.68	0.24	Very High

The table shows that the respondents have a very high level of political participation, with an overall mean of 3.68 and an SD of 0.34. Among the three indicators, voting behavior obtained the highest mean of 3.77 with an SD of 0.21 which suggests that respondents are very careful and responsible when making decisions about the candidates. Overall, the results imply that the respondents are not only aware of political issues but are also willing to take part in political processes, especially in voting and staying informed. The slightly lower mean in civic engagement suggests that while respondents are interested and informed, there is still room to encourage more active participation in community programs and civic activities. Moreover, in the study of Jungherr et al., (2020), social media platforms have become a critical arena for civic and political participation. They are key tools in electoral campaigns, in protest events, and the creation of voluntary groups, and may help to form and promote inclusive civic behavior, as well as strengthen participation among younger and disengaged groups.

Table 18. Significant Relationship between Respondent's Profile and Critical Analysis

Demographic profile	Critical Analysis		
	Critical thinking	Media literacy	Reflective judgement
Age	-0.111	-0.117	-0.088
Time spent on social media	0.326*	0.281*	0.232
Social media platform used	0.248	0.156	0.106
Voter registration status	-0.143	-0.156	-0.017

Table 18 presents the relationship between respondents' demographic profiles and critical analysis in terms of critical thinking, media literacy, and reflective judgment. Overall, the results indicate that time spent on social media is the only demographic profile with a statistically significant influence on certain aspects of critical analysis, while age, social media platform, and voter registration status show minimal or no significant effects. This suggests that these factors do not strongly affect how respondents think critically or evaluate information. In the research findings of Gonzales-Cacho and Abbas (2022), which suggest that if social media is used to foster interactivity and collaborative learning, its application can be positive for the development of critical thinking.

Table 19. Significant Relationship between Respondent's Profile and Political Participation

Demographic profile	Political participation		
	Political interest	Civic engagement	Voting behavior
Age	-0.126	0.054	-0.139
Time spent on social media	0.145	-0.131	0.23
Social media platform used	0.278*	-0.243	0.145
Voter registration status	-0.076	-0.182	-0.113

Table 19 presents the relationship between the respondents' demographic profiles and political participation in terms of political interest, civic engagement, and voting behavior. Overall, the finding suggests that among the demographic profile examined, the type of social media platform used is the only factor significantly related to political interest. Other demographic factors including age, time spent on social media, and voter registration status shows non-significant relationships with dimensions of political participation. This indicates that social media engagement can influence political interest while its effect on civic participation and voting behavior is limited. This implies that political engagement is more influenced by the online environment rather than personal demographic characteristics. Similar to the study of Jungherr et al., (2020), wherein social media platforms have become a critical arena for civic and political participation. They are key tools in electoral campaigns, in protest events, and the creation of voluntary groups, and may help to form and promote inclusive civic behavior, as well as strengthen participation among younger and disengaged groups.

Table 20. Significant Relationship between Respondent's Exposure to Social Media-Driven Misinformation and Political Participation

Social media-driven misinformation	Political participation		
	Political interest	Civic engagement	Voting behavior
Exposure frequency	0.342**	0.219	0.424***
Perceived credibility	-0.199	0.271*	-0.03
Behavioral response	-0.261*	0.333**	-0.086

Table 20 presents the relationship between the respondents' exposure to social media-driven misinformation and political participation in terms of political interest, civic engagement, and voting behavior.. Overall, the result suggests that while exposure to social media misinformation may increase political interest and have influence on voting behavior, but its effect on civic engagement varies depending on how individuals perceive and respond to it. Azis (2022), examined how social media use influences political engagement, emphasizing that these platforms not only function as sources of information but also serves as mediators that shape how young people interpret, discuss, and respond to political content.

Table 21. Significant Relationship between the Respondent's Critical Analysis and Political Participation

Critical analysis	Political Participation		
	Political interest	Civic engagement	Voting behavior
Critical thinking	0.571***	0.188	0.711***
Media literacy	0.509***	0.279*	0.754***
Reflective judgement	0.500***	0.282*	0.620***

Table 21 presents the correlation between the respondents' critical analysis and political participation in terms of political interest, civic engagement and voting behavior. Overall, the results indicates that critical analysis play a significant role in political participation. Among the three dimensions, media literacy showed the strongest association with voting behavior while the other variables contributed to political interest and civic engagement. This indicates that individuals who can analyze, evaluate and reflect on information are ore likely to participate actively and responsibly in political processes. Allam et al. (2020) pointed out that the practice of media literacy allows youth to critically analyze the political content and thus engage with greater integrity in political activities.

Table 22. Respondent's Experiences with Social Media Driven-Misinformation

Statements	Code	Sub theme	Theme
“My experience with social media misinformation was very bad because I got scammed... I did not fact-check... I believed it right away... I even shared it immediately...” (P2)	No fact checking	Exposure frequency	Social Media-Driven Misinformation
“Since I am always on my phone... I always read the information... but sometimes, I do not check if it is right or true...” (P5)	Passive reading		
I once believed false information without checking... I shared it immediately... later discovered that the information was wrong” (P1)	Quick sharing		
“It happens more often when the election is near... people spread more negative information about politicians” (P7)	Election exposure		
“I also often see misinformation about politics during election period... people assume without proof... it spreads online...” (P3)	Frequent exposure		
“When a post appears repeatedly... I tend to think it is important, true, or reliable” (P6)	Repetition as truth	Perceived credibility	
“I try to respond honestly... admit it was wrong... look for correct information... focus on facts” (P8)	Correcting information	Behavioral responses	
“I either ignore it, report it, or correct it... check reliable sources first” (P1)	Checking response		
“I usually respond by ignoring it... to avoid conflict or misunderstanding” (P6)	Ignoring information		
“I feel disappointed... I remind myself to be more careful... avoid believing misinformation” (P3)	Learning from mistake		
“My feed usually shows the good things they’ve done... this makes me think I’ll vote for this person” (P9)	Filtered content	Algorithmic influence	
“The more I see a candidate... I start to trust them... it affects my voting decision” (P10)	Repeated exposure		
“Whenever a post appears repeatedly... I think it is credible” (P6)			

These responses show that algorithms can reinforce certain viewpoints and make information appear more credible. This implies that algorithm-driven content may contribute biased perspectives, emphasizing the need for greater awareness of how digital platforms influence exposure and judgment. This observation supports the findings on Bakshy et al. (2015), which discuss how algorithmic filtering and echo chambers shape personalized content can shape perceptions and online engagement. Overall, social media not only exposes students to misinformation but also influences their critical evaluation and engagement behaviors, highlighting the importance of media literacy and reflective judgment in mitigating misinformation effects.

Table 23. Respondent's Experiences with Critical Analysis

Statements	Code	Sub theme	Theme
"Sometimes it is hard to distinguish what is true and what is not... we believe it for a few seconds" (P10)	Difficulty in identifying accurate information	Critical Thinking	Critical Analysis of Political Information
"...after reading the comments or checking further, we realize that it is not true" (P10)	Information verification		
"Critical thinking helps me question the accuracy of political content and avoid believing misleading information..." (P1)	Critical questioning		
"...it helps us avoid being easily fooled... question where	Evidence		

the information came from... whether it is supported by facts" (P4)	evaluation	Media Literacy
"...I can tell that a piece of information is not misinformation based on the page... many followers... well-tested..." (P9)	Source evaluation	
"...I check if a post comes from a trusted news source or official page..." (P2)	Content authenticity	
"...I also make sure the photos are real because AI photos and videos are common..." (P2)	Identification of unreliable content	
"...if a post has no source or is just an opinion, I consider it unreliable..." (P2)	Source Credibility	
"...credible if it comes from a page with many followers... well-known news company" (P2)	Awareness of evaluation skills	Reflective Judgment
"...it is important for us to develop the skill to recognize whether information is correct or not..." (P10)	Awareness of misinformation risk	
"...without critical thinking... easier to believe everything... may end up spreading misinformation..." (P4)	Informed decision making	
"...because of misinformation... I have become wiser in judging candidates... think more critically... helps us make decisions..." (P1)		

These responses demonstrate that participants engage in reflective thinking by considering past experiences and applying the lessons they have learned. This implies that reflective judgment strengthens decision-making and encourages more responsible evaluation of political information. The findings also suggest that students are beginning to connect information evaluation with its real-world implications. Contemporary studies also emphasize that strengthening reflective thinking enhances informed decision-making in digital environments (Gerges, 2025). Overall, the findings indicate that students are gradually transitioning into active and reflective participants in political processes, supported by their developing critical thinking and media literacy skills.

Table 24. Respondent's Experiences with Political Participation

Statements	Code	Sub theme	Theme
“...I’m interested in politics because I see a lot of rumors... I want to correct mistakes in leadership and help improve... help young people develop leadership skills...” (P7)	Political awareness and interest	Political interest	Political participation
“...I feel more motivated to join activities related to politics because I see problems in our community... I want to help solve these problems...” (P7)	Community-driven motivation		
“...in SK... we manage projects about politics... help the youth and make them more aware...” (P5)	Youth political involvement	Civic Engagement	
“...I’m part of an organization... we give suggestions on what young people can do...” (P1)	Organized participation		
“...we helped clean... coastal clean-up activities... we continue to help because we are part of SK...” (P9)	Community participation		
“...social media can be a hindrance... comments are harsh... makes it difficult to respond... afraid of backlash...” (P10)	Fear of online backlash	Voting behavior	
“...seeing different opinions... helps and encourages me to decide which candidate I want to vote for...” (P9)	Influence of opinions		
“...people criticize candidates... creates confusion... I try to search for more information...” (P10)	Information confusion and search		
“...posts are biased... influenced by repeated positive	Exposure to		

posts... sometimes we no longer fact-check..." (P6)	biased content
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These responses show that while participants attempt to make informed decisions, the respondents are still influenced by the nature of information encountered online. This implies that although students demonstrate efforts to evaluate political choices, exposure to biased and repetitive content may still their judgment fairness, highlighting the need to strengthen critical evaluation skills in voting and political decision making. These insights reflect the dual role of social media as both a valuable source information and potential source of distortion. This is consistent with the work of Weeks et al. (2017), which emphasized how misinformation and selective influence can shape political decision making and create confusion among voters. Overall, the data suggest that although the respondents are actively engaged and motivated by political and community concerns, their participation is significantly mediated by their experiences in digital spaces, where both empowerment and limitations coexist.

4. Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusion were drawn.

- The hypothesis stating that there is no significant relationship between the respondents' exposure to social media-driven misinformation and their political participation was not supported by evidence, hence it is not sustained.
- The hypothesis stating that there is no significant relationship between the respondents' level of critical analysis and their political participation was not supported by evidence, hence it is not sustained.

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