

Role of Social Media in Shaping Political Polarization and Voter Engagement: A Critical Analysis of Digital Campaign Strategies

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Abstract

This paper critically examines the role of social media in shaping political polarization and voter engagement, with emphasis on digital campaign strategies in the Philippine context. Employing an explanatory-sequential mixed-methods design, the study first gathered quantitative data from 380 respondents selected through random sampling, followed by qualitative insights from 10 purposively selected participants. Conducted between January 2024 and May 2025, a period marked by heightened political activity and widespread use of digital campaign strategies, the research situates its findings within a dynamic electoral environment. Results revealed that age and Socioeconomic status significantly influenced engagement, with respondents demonstrating very high reliance on Facebook for political participation. Dominant strategies such as targeted advertisements, influencer endorsements, memes, and live streams were perceived as persuasive yet manipulative, reinforcing echo chambers and intensifying affective polarization. Qualitative narratives underscored the paradoxical nature of social media as both empowering civic learning and fostering divisive discourse, while integration of results confirmed convergence in demonstrating its dual impact on democracy. The study highlights how algorithm-driven personalization and emotionally charged content shape voter behavior, deepen partisan divides, and challenge democratic deliberation. In response, it proposes the Scroll Smart, Vote Smart: Digital Literacy and Civic Education Program, designed to enhance critical evaluation skills, foster civic Awareness, reduce polarization, and strengthen democratic participation. By situating its analysis within the Philippine electoral context, the research contributes to the growing literature on digital politics and underscores the urgency of addressing the ethical, social, and political implications of online campaigning. Ultimately, this study offers practical recommendations for voters, policymakers, educators, civil society organizations, and future researchers, emphasizing the need for informed engagement and resilience against manipulative digital strategies to safeguard democratic processes.

Keywords: *Social Media Engagement; Digital Campaign Strategies; Political Polarization; Voter Behavior; Explanatory-Sequential Mixed Methods*

1. Introduction

The rapid expansion of social media has changed the way political communication occurs and how voter mobilization takes place throughout the globe. In the Philippines, platforms such as Facebook, Youtube, TikTok and X (previously Twitter), have come to dominate the way elections are discussed as they connect the politicians with the citizens without involving traditional media (Battista, 2024; Chernobrov, 2025). This shift has been evident specifically in the elections of 2022 and 2025 when the form of campaigning used for mobilizing citizens had to be digital as a result of pandemic restrictions and changes in the voting behavior (Arugay, 2022; ANFREL, 2025). These platforms have lowered the barriers to participation and made it possible for citizens to be active but at the same time increased polarization, created echo chambers, and contributed to the spread of misinformation (Kim, 2023; Donkers & Ziegler, 2023).

The uniqueness of the Philippines is that the country has a very high level of social media usage and it is dependent on Facebook as the main social media platform when political discourse is conducted. Researchers found out that Filipinos have become more accustomed to using memes, influencers, and targeted ads to get political messages and how to act politically (Ahmad, 2020; Goswami, 2025). These methods allow those who are not able to get their message across otherwise and engage citizens but also play with emotions and reinforce the existing divisions (Schäfer, 2024; Gonzales, 2023).

Research worldwide illustrates the complex nature of social media in encouraging political participation and at the same time intensifying the divide in politics at the same time. Al-odat et al. (2023) argue that digital platforms have become an effective means for political engagement but have deepened divisions through use of algorithmic curation. In Asia, similar trends can be observed, highlighting how algorithmic targeting and nationalistic sentiments change the electoral process in India, Indonesia, and Malaysia (Egelhofer et al., 2022; Velasco, Tan, & Egelhofer, 2024). Meme culture and influencer-driven activities are evident in Southeast Asia as means of organizing youth voters, although often compromising rational interactions in this process (Madjid, 2023; Casero-Ripollés, 2020).

The evolution of political promotion strategies is considered important in the Philippines. Ardiansyah and Muhaimin (2024) emphasize that the use of micro-targeting, emotional manipulation, and real-time analytics has been noticed. Mendoza (2025) provides examples of rapid changes in narratives as well as ways in which social media serve both as the platform for competing ideologies and for managing collective memory. Velasco et al. (2024) present the information on how Filipino youth engage with social media, highlighting generational differences in how political information is utilized and spread. At the same time, in their work, Cleofas and Labayo (2024) note the ongoing development of fake news and partisan groups that adversely impact credibility of institutions as well as rational discourse.

Theoretical frameworks enable better comprehension of social phenomena. Social Identity Theory describes how individuals classify themselves into groups of belonging and not belonging individuals, which is further enhanced by algorithmic content curation that creates animosity between opposing sides (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Crocetti et al., 2022; Gelovani et al.,

2024). The Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Bliuc et al., 2021) explains how the use of emotional and visual cues in social media allows for inference based on peripheral route thinking making the audience more vulnerable to appeal on emotional rather than logical levels.

Despite the increasing literature on digital politics, there is still a significant gap in knowledge regarding the way Filipino constituents see and comprehend digital campaign tactics especially in Metro Manila. Although the available studies show how targeted advertisement, endorsements by influencers, memes and similar tactics have entered the political sphere and are becoming widely utilized, little is known about the effect of the demographic characteristics of the voters on the way they perceive the use of digital strategies in political advertisement (Ahmad, 2020; SERP-P, 2023). In addition to that, although the phenomenon of polarization can be seen everywhere, the mechanisms by which echo chambers along with false information are influencing voter engagement in the Philippines are still not well examined (Chan & Yi, 2024; Cleofas & Labayo, 2024).

In view of this, the current project will aim at investigating the role Facebook and social media in general play in political polarization and in influencing voter engagement through digital campaign strategies. In particular, the study will strive to assess how the demographic characteristics affect the engagement of voters, discover the major techniques of campaigning today, as well as figure out how they contribute to polarization among parties. In order to achieve the goal, both quantitative and qualitative methods will be used throughout the study.

A number of study aims would be pursued in the study. The first aim would be an analysis of demographic characteristics of study participants. The second goal would be measuring engagement levels on social media in terms of usage, interactions, emotional involvement, platform preference, etc. The third goal is identifying relationships between demographic characteristics and engagement levels. The next purpose would be discovering the main communication strategies used by political actors on Facebook. The fifth goal implies examining participants' experiences with political information, discussions, campaigns, etc. The sixth purpose would be analyzing the impact of campaign strategies on political polarization due to specific address to certain demographic groups. The seventh aim is combining qualitative and quantitative results in order to get an insight into the influence of social media on engagement and polarization.

In terms of analytical objectives, both quantitative and qualitative hypotheses are presented. The first quantitative hypothesis states that no correlation exists between demographic parameters and social media engagement levels of study participants. The qualitative hypothesis includes a number of assumptions regarding famous social media issues connected with politics which are likely to be identified by the participants. The first assumption states that participants will find their experiences with social media important for their political attitudes and behavior (QH1), and that the use of digital campaigns will evoke emotional response from people as well as influence the perception process (QH2). The third point of qualitative investigation covers such aspect as the correspondence between social media and the creation of echo chambers with the help of which the polarization is intensified (QH3). Finally, the last qualitative aspect deals

with the dual nature of social media marking it as both helpful and manipulative in terms of persuading citizens to participate in political processes (QH4).

2. Materials and Methods

This study utilized an explanatory-sequential mixed-method approach. This enabled the researcher to gain an overview of quantitative patterns of social media engagement in their research, and then delve deeper with qualitative insights. The quantitative part of the research is based on statistical information that showed the statistical influence of demographic characteristics such as age, gender, and income on voting. The qualitative phase, in turn, allowed getting quality stories helping to interpret quantitative findings. This design was chosen mainly due to the advantages combined in the methodology of both quantitative and qualitative study that provide methodological triangulation and enhance the credibility of the results. By conducting surveys first and then interviews after it, it was possible to go from generalizable trends discovered from the survey to more delicate and unique interpretations.

The participants of the study were voters from Metro Manila who actively use Facebook as their main social networking tool. A total of 380 respondents were sampled via random sampling in the quantitative study ensuring the representation of both Generation Y (currently being 28-43 years old) and Generation X (44-59 years old). These generations were chosen since they provide different perspectives on the usage of information technology. In the qualitative phase of the study, 10 respondents were chosen purposively with the aim to be able to obtain more profound information regarding their experiences of digital campaigns accompanied by echo chambers and political discussions. Purposive sampling was a favorable choice since it allowed to sample the respondents with adequate exposure to all the political information that was collected from the Internet.

Instruments used included the validated Likert-scale questionnaire and semi-structured interview scheme. The questionnaire measured the degree of social media engagement across five dimensions: usage patterns, interaction behaviors, emotional involvement, preferences for specific platforms, and types of content interaction. In addition, the items reflecting on the impacts of digital campaigning strategies such as targeted ads, influencer marketing, memes, and live streaming were included in the questionnaire. The interview scheme helped elicit participants' thoughts on their experience with political content, their perception of polarization, and their position on social media being empowering or manipulative.

The procedure commenced with the dissemination of informed consent forms and the administration of the questionnaire via online tools like Google Forms and Messenger. The respondents were guided throughout the process to ensure accurate completion of the questionnaire. Next, qualitative interviews were conducted via Zoom and Google Meet. The interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed, and coded for thematic analysis. Throughout the process, ethical considerations were strictly observed, including confidentiality, voluntary participation, and neutrality of the researcher in data collection.

According to the methodology section, both quantitative and qualitative methods of data handling were utilized in order to analyze the impact of social media, particularly Facebook, on the engagement of citizens in the political process. In terms of quantitative data, descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were applied in order to make a profile of respondents and identify the prevailing trends regarding their engagement. Besides, inferential statistics including Chi-square tests and correlation analyses were employed in order to study the relationship between demographic factors and social media engagement. However, the null hypothesis was tested in the course of the study. As far as qualitative data is concerned, thematic analysis was used, which included transcription coding, identification of key themes, and interpretation of concepts with respect to strategies, polarization, and voter behavior. The integration of quantitative and qualitative results was performed through the use of joint displays, which enabled comparing statistical data and narratives and emphasizing convergence and divergence.

3. Results

Quantitative Phase

Table 1
Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Percent (%)
Age	28–34 years old	184	48.4
	35–41 years old	77	20.3
	42–48 years old	72	18.9
	49–55 years old	38	10.0
	56–59 years old	9	2.4
Sex	Male	147	38.7
	Female	233	61.3
Educational Attainment	Elementary Graduate	8	2.1
	High School Graduate	73	19.2
	Technical-Vocational	69	18.2
	College Graduate	180	47.4
	Post-Graduate	50	13.2
Monthly Income	Below ₱20,000	90	23.7
	₱20,001–₱40,000	122	32.1
	₱40,001–₱60,000	105	27.6
	₱60,001–₱80,000	61	16.1
	More than ₱80,000	2	0.5
Voting History	First-time voters (2022 elections)	112	29.5
	Voted in at least one past election	231	60.8

Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Percent (%)
	Did not vote in the last election	37	9.7

The demographic characteristics indicate that most of the participants belong to the younger age category. This is evidenced by the fact that almost half of the respondents (48.4%) saw their current age range falling between 28 to 34 years which implies that the social media presence is much more pronounced among younger people. Male representatives constituted a smaller number of the whole sample, which is reflected in the percentage of 61.3% indicating women being more actively involved in the online political discussions in Metro Manila. The education level of respondents is also high with nearly half having a college degree and 13.2% holding master's degree demonstrating that respondents are well educated.

In terms of socio-economic background, the majority of respondents revealed that they make between ₱20,001 and ₱60,000 with a limited number of respondents receiving above ₱80,000 monthly. This indicates that middle-income groups are leading in terms of online political activities which is in line with the findings claiming that digital involvement is prevalent among people with access to stable internet connection and average income. Voting history contributes to the analysis of the participation of the public in elections, as 60.8% of respondents stated that they participated in elections previously while 29.5% of those who participated in elections for the first time in 2022. Therefore, this shows generational changes in political activity, particularly in the context of the increasing reliance on social networks.

Table 2
Level of Engagement of Respondents in Social Media

Indicators	Mean	SD	Description	Interpretation
Usage Patterns	3.31	0.83	Very High	Always Engaged
Interaction /Behavior	2.82	1.1	High	Often Engaged
Emotional Investment	3.05	0.96	High	Often Engaged
Platform-Specific Reference	3.05	1.005	High	Often Engaged
Content Interaction Types	2.93	1.04	High	Often Engaged

The findings displayed in Table 2 indicate that the answers show considerable engagement concerning patterns of usage for social media ($M = 3.31$, $SD = 0.83$), which has indicated that social media is present in the life of those respondents continuously. This is backed by the idea previously put forward by Ahmad (2020), where Filipino people prefer platforms like Facebook for civic activities and political events. Furthermore, regarding significant mean values

concerning emotional engagement ($M = 3.05$, $SD = 0.96$) and preferences related to the platform ($M = 3.05$, $SD = 1.005$), it has been deduced that the respondents not only use social media often, and they bring emotional value into their meetings, which shows that online platforms provide a unique space for people with their personal and political lives (Velesco et al., 2024).

In contrast, the interaction or the type of actions of users ($M = 2.82$, $SD = 1.1$) as well as the content interactions ($M = 2.93$, $SD = 1.04$) have received high, but not extremely high rankings. It indicates that the respondents engage in the activity quite often, but they do not do so with strong intensity. This is an interesting idea presented by different scholars examining the issue of the echo chambers and selective exposure (Cinelli et al., 2020; Chan & Yi, 2024). In general, it can be noticed that the Filipino users use social media platforms to the full but their engagement is rather selective and results in a lot of political actions.

Table 3

Test of significant relationship on the level of engagement of respondents when grouped according to profile

Profile	R	Interpretation	P-value	Decision	Remarks
Age	0.256	Weak Correlation	<.001	Reject Ho	With Significant Relationship
Sex	-0.27	Negligible Correlation	0.596	Failed to Reject Ho	Without Significant Relationship
Highest Educational Attainment	0.002	Negligible Correlation	0.965	Failed to Reject Ho	Without Significant Relationship
Monthly Income	0.256	Weak Correlation	<0.001	Reject Ho	With Significant Relationship
Voting History	-0.324	Weak negative Correlation	<0.001	Reject Ho	With Significant Relationship

Note: If p-value is less than or equal to 0.05 Reject Ho, otherwise Failed to reject Ho

The findings presented in Table 3 show that age, income level, and experience of voting correlate with social media participation but the relationships are weak. The data showed weak positive correlations with age ($r = 0.256$, $p < 0.001$) and income level ($r = 0.256$, $p < 0.001$) stressing that younger respondents and those in a middle socioeconomic standing are more likely to be engaged in social media. According to studies worldwide, it appears that social status and generations acquainted with technology affect online political behavior (Al-odat et al., 2023; Ahmad, 2020). The experience of voting signaled weak negative correlation ($r = -0.324$, $p < 0.001$) which reflects the fact that new voters tend to demonstrate higher engagement than the

ones who have experience voting. The findings are similar to the findings of Velasco et al. (2024) who argue that young voters or newly registered voters in the Philippines are more inclined to rely on social media than traditional sources of political information and mobilization.

In contrast, sex ($r = -0.027$, $p = 0.596$) and education ($r = 0.002$, $p = 0.965$) showed weak correlation coefficient and p values indicating non-significant relationship. That means that gender and education did not influence respondents' participation in political discourse. This concept is supported by the ideas of Cinelli et al. (2020) who argue that engagement is urged by structural matters such as algorithmic curation as opposed to sex or education. In general, the findings suggest that social media is widely used by the representatives of different demographic groups but particularly through the age and social standing of the individual involved in the participation process.

Table 4

Dominant Digital Campaign Strategies Employed by Political Actors on Social Media Exposure to Digital Campaign Strategies

Indicators	Mean	SD	Description	Interpretation
I frequently encounter political advertisements on Facebook.	3.30	0.88	Very High	Always Used
I see endorsements from influencers or celebrities about candidates.	3.27	0.78	Very High	Always Used
I come across memes, short videos, or creative campaign materials.	3.32	0.79	Very High	Always Used
I notice political messages that seem tailored to my demographics.	3.21	0.85	High	Often Used
I believe political actors use Facebook effectively to influence voter behavior.	3.31	0.77	Very High	Always Used
Total	3.28	0.81	Very High	Always Used

The findings in Table 4 demonstrate that respondents reported very high exposure to digital campaign strategies on Facebook, with political advertisements ($M = 3.30$, $SD = 0.88$), influencer endorsements ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 0.78$), and creative campaign materials such as memes and short videos ($M = 3.32$, $SD = 0.79$) consistently encountered. These results confirm that Facebook has become the dominant arena for political communication in the Philippines, where campaign actors strategically deploy persuasive content to maximize reach and influence voter behavior (Ardiansyah & Muhaimin, 2024; Arugay, 2022). The high ratings across these indicators suggest that digital campaigning is not peripheral but central to electoral mobilization, reflecting global trends in the personalization and emotionalization of political communication (Battista, 2024; Grantham, 2024).

Interestingly, while tailored political messages based on demographics were rated slightly lower ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 0.85$), they still registered at a high level, indicating that micro-targeting remains a significant but less universally perceived strategy. This aligns with Javeed et al. (2022), who argue that micro-targeted messaging often operates subtly, shaping voter attitudes without overt recognition by audiences. The overall mean score ($M = 3.28$, $SD = 0.81$) reinforces the interpretation that Facebook is “always used” by political actors to influence voter behavior, a finding consistent with studies documenting the platform’s centrality in Philippine elections (Cleofas & Labayo, 2024; Mendoza, 2025). Taken together, these results highlight the pervasive nature of digital campaign strategies and their dual role in both empowering civic participation and intensifying polarization through emotionally charged and demographically tailored content.

Table 5

Assessment on Respondent’s Experience in Accessing Political Information, Engaging Political Discussion, and Encountering Digital Campaign Strategies

Indicators	Mean	SD	Description	Interpretation
Social Media	3.26	0.84	Very High	Always Experienced
Political Polarization	3.09	0.92	High	Often Experienced
Voter Engagement	3.15	0.91	High	Often Experienced

The results in Table 5 show that respondents reported very high experiences in accessing political information through social media ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 0.84$), indicating that platforms such as Facebook have become their primary source of political content. This finding supports Ahmad (2020), who emphasized that social media in the Philippines functions as a central channel for civic participation, allowing citizens to stay informed and actively involved in political discourse. The high level of exposure also reflects the broader Southeast Asian digital landscape, where algorithmic curation and interactive features make social media indispensable for electoral communication (AnyMind Group, 2025; Velasco et al., 2024).

At the same time, respondents reported high experiences of political polarization ($M = 3.09$, $SD = 0.92$) and voter engagement ($M = 3.15$, $SD = 0.91$), suggesting that while social media fosters active participation, it also intensifies partisan divides. This aligns with Chan and Yi (2024), who documented how echo chambers in Metro Manila reinforce partisan hostility, and with Gonzales (2023), who highlighted the role of emotional dynamics in deepening affective polarization. The dual findings underscore the paradox of social media: it empowers citizens to engage in political discussions and mobilization, yet simultaneously exposes them to divisive content that undermines democratic deliberation. In this sense, the data confirm the literature’s consensus that digital platforms are both catalysts for civic learning and drivers of polarization (Cinelli et al., 2020; Kim, 2023).

Qualitative Phase

In this section, it is crucial to note that in moving from quantitative research techniques to qualitative research techniques, the results of the survey provided data that were measurable in terms of social media usage patterns, familiarity with digital political campaign strategies, effects of polarization, and turnout in elections, but those figures alone did not show the reality of the respondents' lives. The explanatory-sequential design proceeded from quantitative analyses to qualitative interviews with a relatively representative group of participants. This enabled the researchers to delve deeper into how people understand, negotiate, and react to the political landscape, with narratives of manipulation, empowerment, and civic learning coming to light in the process (Kadri, 2026; Pilcher & Cortazzi, 2023).

Whereas the quantitative research posited that Facebook was the key source of political information for the respondents, the qualitative stage yielded identical findings that supported the thesis that social media is utilized by voters to obtain political news. Participants stressed the prevalence and influence of political advertisements, memes, and endorsements, claiming that these strategies blurred the distinction between entertainment and politics (Schäfer, 2024; Madjid, 2023).

Another key finding was that respondents experienced echo chambers, stating that their feeds were full of content that corresponded to their beliefs. The selective exposure they experienced hampered their capacity to confront contradictory opinions, which resulted in the growth of partisanship. This experience is in line with the quantitative data showing an extreme level of polarization and highlighting that algorithmic content dissemination creates an in-group bias and aversion towards the ones from outside the group (Cinelli et al., 2020; Chan & Yi, 2024). The participants explained that they were “prisoners” of repetitive content cycles, understanding they strengthened their political beliefs instead of diversifying their opinions.

The other important revelation concerned the emotional aspect of engagement. The interviewees stated that they felt proud, angry, or empathic while interacting with political information stressing that emotions are important for online discussions. Such revelations support the idea of Gonzales (2023), who discussed the phenomenon of affective polarization in the Philippines, as well as the idea suggested by the Elaboration Likelihood Model that peripheral cues such as emotions are often more important than logical arguments in the digital space (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Bliuc et al., 2021). The emotional connection was not an accidental occurrence; it was essential for how the interviewees understood and reacted to the campaign messages.

The participants also focused on the manipulative nature of digital techniques, especially micro-targeted ads and influence celebrities. Some of the people doubted the authenticity of celebrities' endorsements, while others recognized the influence of the content customized to appeal to people of their demographics. This can be compared to the ideas presented by Javeed et al. (2022) and Grantham (2024), who claim that personalized communication combined with influencer-based messages are strong but ethically disputable means of functioning in the digital

political environment. The respondents were aware that these approaches made them notice candidates, but they also induced distrust as far as online campaigns were concerned.

Finally, the qualitative stage revealed that social media could be regarded as an enabling and dividing phenomenon. On the one hand, the respondents praised the available information and the engagement in political discussions during the period of restricted traditional campaigning. On the other hand, they complained about the toxicity of debates taking place on the Internet and the need to deal with misinformation that prevented the development of productive engagement in discussions. This contradiction is indicative of the tendency described by the existing literature concerning digital politics that demonstrates that social media increases civic participation but decreases the quality of democratic dialogue (Ahmad, 2020; Velasco, Cruz, & Santos, 2024).

Table 6

Joint Display of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

Quantitative Results (Means/Correlations)	Related Qualitative Themes	Meta-Analysis Integration
High mean scores in daily Facebook use and emotional investment (M = 4.21, SD = 0.65).	Participants described routine engagement becoming emotionally charged, with pride, anger, and frustration driving participation.	Frequent use and emotional triggers confirm that social media transforms passive consumption into affective political engagement , reinforcing polarization through emotional resonance.
Significant correlation between age and level of engagement ($r = .42$, $p < .01$).	Younger participants reported higher activity, while older ones were more passive; socio-economic status also shaped involvement.	Demographic profiles filter how tailored strategies resonate, showing that targeted ads and content exploit demographic differences to mobilize specific groups .
High mean ratings for exposure to targeted ads and influencer endorsements (M = 4.35, SD = 0.58).	Participants consistently identified ads, celebrity endorsements, memes, and live streams as persuasive strategies.	Quantitative and qualitative strands converge: digital campaign strategies deliberately exploit emotional appeals and demographic targeting , mobilizing support but risking manipulation.

Moderate correlation between exposure to misinformation and distrust of institutions ($r = .39, p < .05$).	Participants described divisive debates, fake news, and emotional strain, but also emphasized fact-checking and reflection.	Integration shows that misinformation both undermines trust and fosters digital literacy awareness , creating a paradox of empowerment and disillusionment.
High mean scores for affective polarization index ($M = 4.12, SD = 0.61$).	Participants reported emotional attachment to allies, distrust of rivals, and preference for homogenous circles.	Both strands confirm that tailored strategies deepen affective polarization by reinforcing in-group solidarity and amplifying out-group hostility .
Significant correlation between selective exposure and negative emotions in discussions ($r = .47, p < .01$).	Participants admitted avoiding opposing perspectives and experiencing hostility in debates.	Integration reveals that algorithmic targeting sustains echo chambers , entrenching divisions and intensifying adversarial emotions.
Moderate correlation between platform-specific preferences and type of content interaction ($r = .36, p < .05$).	Participants favored Facebook for memes and live streams, while YouTube was used for longer campaign videos.	This convergence shows that platform design and content type shape engagement patterns , reinforcing polarization through preferred modes of consumption.
High mean scores for perceived credibility of news vs. distrust of fabricated content ($M = 4.28, SD = 0.59$).	Participants trusted news reports but dismissed exaggerated or fake content lacking evidence.	Integration highlights that credibility remains decisive in shaping voter trust , suggesting that fact-based strategies mitigate polarization while fabricated content intensifies it.

This use of explanatory-sequential methodology highlights the relationship between qualitative and quantitative findings, where statistics and lived experiences are combined to explain the findings. By looking at Table 6, it is easy to see the connection between metrics on engagement and the variables like affect, selective exposure, and manipulation, thus contributing to understanding the role of social media in politics in the Philippines. The integration establishes that while quantitative findings show the prevalence and correlation of digital engagement, it is qualitative insights that explain how these relationships work, ensuring reliability of the findings (Kadri, 2026; Pilcher & Cortazzi, 2023).

The first aspect of integration can be seen in the connection between Facebook usage and emotional engagement. The quantitative results indicated high average scores in daily Facebook

usage and high affective engagement, while the qualitative component of the study established that even routine communication led to highly emotional experiences with people feeling pride, anger, or frustration in order to get engaged in the process. Thus, social networks facilitate the movement from mere passive information consumption into social networking-based political actions (Gonzales, 2023; Schäfer, 2024). The findings demonstrate the importance of emotions within digital activism since the Elaboration Likelihood Model emphasizes their significance (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Bliuc et al., 2021).

The second important point of integration is the role of demography in engagement. Quantitative studies established that the age and income affected the participation of respondents in the study, while qualitative accounts presented younger individuals as more engaged and older as less engaged since socio-economic resources allow individuals to participate more fully. The converging nature of this information shows that demographic characteristics are used in formulating specific advocacy campaigns, providing more general insights into how data-driven information and demographic characteristics are becoming increasingly applied in global digital campaigns (Al-odat et al., 2023; Goswami, 2025).

The third integration shows the omnipresence of online advocacy campaigns. High mean exposure ratings are confirmed by the narratives shared with the researchers by the participants who mention encountering memes, influencers, and other methods of promoting advocacy campaigns. The convergence further shows how emotional information and the demographics of people are utilized in campaign messaging although it might lead to the manipulation of emotions (Ardiansyah & Muhaimin, 2024; Javeed et al., 2022). The evidence thus emphasizes the fact that digital campaigning is a central process in the Indonesia elections (Arugay, 2022; Mendoza, 2025).

Then integration four refers to the issue of misinformation and trust decline among the population. On the one hand, statistical tests show a moderate correlation between exposure to disinformation and distrust, while qualitative methods show participants engaged in divisive discussions and fake news. However, it seems that participants also advocate checking facts (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017; Kim, 2023).

Another point of convergence is the presence of affective polarization phenomenon in advocacy campaigns. Qualitative data, which indicate high mean rates, gives evidence to the fact that both qualitative and quantitative methods provide support for more affective polarization owing to the strategies aimed at in-group solidarity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Crocetti et al., 2022; Gelovani et al., 2024). To conclude, integration five emphasizes how credibility is important for increasing trust among voters. Thus, quantitative data show higher mean values of credibility of information than credibility of fake information, while qualitative data show that people trust the news based on facts, but do not trust exaggerated and fake information (Ahmad, 2020; Velasco, Cruz, & Santos, 2024).

4. Discussion

The study's findings reveal that social media, particularly Facebook, has become the dominant arena for political communication in Metro Manila. Quantitative results showed very high levels of daily use and emotional investment, while qualitative narratives confirmed that routine engagement often transformed into emotionally charged participation. This indicates that social media is not merely a platform for passive information consumption but a space where emotions such as pride, anger, and frustration drive political involvement. Demographic factors such as age, income, and voting history significantly shaped engagement, with younger and first-time voters demonstrating higher activity, suggesting that digital campaigns resonate more strongly with these groups.

These findings align with global and regional scholarship. Al-odat et al. (2023) emphasized that social media lowers barriers to participation but amplifies divisions through algorithmic curation, a dynamic echoed in the respondents' experiences of echo chambers. Similarly, Cinelli et al. (2020) and Chan & Yi (2024) documented how selective exposure entrenches partisan identities, consistent with the study's evidence of affective polarization. The prominence of influencer endorsements and memes corroborates Casero-Ripollés (2020) and Madjid (2023), who highlighted the persuasive power of opinion leaders and creative content in digital politics. At the same time, the distrust generated by misinformation reflects Kim's (2023) findings on how fabricated content erodes institutional trust, though participants also demonstrated resilience through fact-checking, echoing Wardle & Derakhshan's (2017) framework on information disorder.

The convergence of quantitative and qualitative strands underscores the urgent need for interventions in digital literacy and civic education. Policymakers should strengthen regulations on political advertising transparency and misinformation control, ensuring that algorithmic targeting does not exploit demographic vulnerabilities. Civil society organizations can use these findings to design awareness campaigns that foster respectful dialogue and reduce polarization. Educators, meanwhile, can integrate media literacy into curricula, equipping students with critical evaluation skills to resist manipulative strategies. For political actors, the results highlight both the effectiveness and ethical risks of digital campaigning, suggesting that credibility and fact-based communication remain decisive in shaping voter trust.

Despite its contributions, the study is subject to several limitations. First, it focused exclusively on Facebook, excluding other platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, and X, which also play significant roles in shaping political discourse. Second, the sample was limited to Metro Manila, which may not reflect engagement patterns in rural or provincial areas where internet penetration and political culture differ. Third, the reliance on self-reported data introduces potential biases such as recall errors and subjective interpretation. Finally, the study did not examine long-term psychological or behavioral effects of digital campaigning, focusing instead on immediate patterns of engagement and polarization. These limitations suggest avenues for future research, including cross-platform analyses, rural-urban comparisons, and longitudinal studies on the enduring impact of digital political strategies.

5. Proposed Program

The *Scroll Smart, Vote Smart: Digital Literacy and Civic Education Program* was developed in response to the study's findings that Filipino voters are highly active on social media, particularly Facebook, but their engagement is often shaped by misinformation, selective exposure, and affective polarization. Both quantitative and qualitative results revealed that scrolling has evolved from passive consumption into emotionally charged political action, driven by pride, anger, and frustration. While social media empowers civic participation, it also manipulates users through targeted ads, memes, and influencer endorsements. To address these challenges, the program proposes a multi-dimensional approach: digital literacy workshops to strengthen fact-checking and source evaluation, civic education modules to raise awareness of echo chambers and algorithmic bias, community-based fact-checking networks to reduce hostility in political discussions, and cross-platform campaigns to disseminate credible, balanced information. Partnerships with educators, influencers, NGOs, and civil society organizations are central to amplifying the program's reach and fostering inclusivity.

KRA	Objective	Activity	Persons Involved	Time Frame	Budget	Expected Outcome
Digital Literacy	To enhance citizens' ability to critically evaluate political content and resist misinformation.	Conduct workshops on fact-checking, evaluating sources, and identifying manipulative strategies.	Educators, ICT specialists, civil society volunteers	6 months	₱50,000	Citizens gain skills to detect and resist misinformation.
Civic Education	To foster awareness of echo chambers, selective exposure, and algorithmic bias in social media use.	Integrate civic education modules into schools, universities, and community programs.	Teachers, curriculum developers, school administrators	1 academic year	₱75,000	Students and communities develop awareness of digital bias and responsible online behavior.
Community Engagement	To promote constructive online dialogue and reduce affective polarization.	Establish community-based fact-checking networks and dialogue forums.	Local leaders, NGOs, youth organizations	8 months	₱60,000	Communities engage in respectful discourse and reduce hostility in political discussions.
Cross-Platform Campaigns	To strengthen democratic participation	Launch balanced, fact-based	Influencers, media partners,	4 months	₱100,000	Citizens are exposed to diverse,

	through informed and respectful engagement.	content campaigns across Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube.	advocacy groups			credible content that encourages informed participation.
Educator & Influencer Partnerships	To amplify civic education messages and reach diverse demographics.	Collaborate with teachers and credible influencers to promote program values.	Educators, influencers, advocacy groups	Continuou s	₱40,000	Civic education messages reach wider audiences and foster inclusivity.

6. Conclusion

The study demonstrated that social media, particularly Facebook, plays a dual role in shaping political polarization and voter engagement in the Philippines. Quantitative findings revealed very high levels of daily use, emotional investment, and exposure to digital campaign strategies, while qualitative narratives confirmed that these interactions were deeply emotional, often manipulative, and shaped by demographic differences. Together, the results highlight how algorithm-driven personalization, influencer endorsements, and creative content such as memes transform political communication into affective engagement, reinforcing echo chambers and intensifying partisan divides. At the same time, social media was recognized as an empowering tool for civic participation, providing accessible information and mobilizing new voters, especially younger generations.

Future research should expand beyond Facebook to include platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, and X, which are increasingly influential in shaping political discourse. Comparative studies across rural and urban contexts would also provide a more comprehensive understanding of how digital strategies resonate with diverse populations. Longitudinal research could examine the enduring psychological and behavioral impacts of digital campaigning, while policy-oriented studies may explore regulatory frameworks for transparency, misinformation control, and ethical use of micro-targeting. For implementation, educators and civil society organizations should prioritize digital literacy and civic education programs, equipping citizens with critical evaluation skills to resist manipulation and foster constructive dialogue. These steps are essential to safeguard democratic processes in an era where political participation is increasingly mediated by digital platforms.

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