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Digital Media and Its Influence on Youth Civic Engagement

Amina Saeed*

Professor of Media and Communication Studies, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad

amina.saeed@qau.edu.pk

Rizwan Haider

Associate Professor of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of the Punjab, Lahore

rizwan.haider@pu.edu.pk

ABSTRACT:

This study examined the influence of digital media on youth civic engagement through a mixed-methods experimental design that combined quantitative surveys, qualitative focus groups, and a digital literacy intervention. Data from 500 participants aged 15–29 revealed that digital media has become a central platform for civic participation, shaping how young people access information, express opinions, and mobilize for causes. Results from nine statistical tables indicated that youth who engaged moderately with digital media demonstrated the highest levels of meaningful participation, while both minimal and excessive users showed weaker outcomes. Voting intentions were strongly correlated with exposure to political content on platforms such as Twitter/X and Instagram, and online petitions and volunteering activities were most frequently mobilized through Instagram and TikTok. Cross-regional comparisons highlighted that Western youth leaned toward digital activism, whereas participants from other regions favored offline methods. Twelve figures further illustrated these patterns, showing clustering of misinformation-related barriers and confirming that online engagement peaks during election cycles. Importantly, the digital literacy intervention improved civic awareness and participation scores, underscoring the transformative role of training in combating misinformation and fostering resilience. Collectively, these findings suggest that digital media operates as both an enabler and a constraint: it lowers barriers to participation and stimulates new forms of activism, yet risks shallow involvement and unequal representation. The study concludes that meaningful and sustainable youth civic empowerment requires integrating media literacy programs, promoting platform accountability, and addressing structural inequalities to ensure that digital engagement translates into substantive democratic participation.

Keywords:

digital media, youth engagement, civic participation, political activism, media literacy, democracy

INTRODUCTION

Over the last few years, digital media and youth civic politics are now a topic of writing scholarship (as well as policy discussion). The way young people acquire political knowledge, how they express their political identities, and how they participate in civic politics has radically changed as more and more young people are exposed to digital environments, including social networking sites, video sharing sites, interactive news applications, and internet forums (Blank and Lutz, 2019; Loader et al., 2019). Digital media offer more movable, genuine time, and networked types of communication than the communication that necessitates physical attendance, including rallies in the genuine world, or commentary in the print media (Bennett and Segerberg, 2018; Vromen et al., 2020).

A new body of research is looking at how digital media can mobilize youth as citizen actors and is also challenging the quality and authenticity of their participation. On the one hand, short videos and peer groups have allowed people to share their political views and engage with politics through social networks such as Tik Tok and Instagram (Westenberg et al., 2021; Bertotti et al., 2022). On the other hand, according to sceptics, superficial or performative online activism (so-called slacktivism) can lead to the decline in substantive interaction and the promotion of superficial interaction (Christensen, 2020; Lim, 2020). According to the research carried out by Theocharis and van Deth (2018), high civic engagement is undoubtedly a product of online and offline interaction, but not exclusively the result of online interaction.

The other concern is that inequalities in access to and literacy about digital technology can influence youth involvement in civic life. The less well-informed and active persons will be found in areas with low internet access and digital literacy intervention programs (Velasquez and LaRose, 2019; Yates and Selwyn, 2021). In fact, digitally networked youths and urban youths can enjoy the benefits of more exposure to political information and mobilisation prospects (Boulianne and Theocharis, 2020; Fielding and Marunchak, 2021). Digital divide can cause even greater disparities in civic engagement that already existed among teens.

Other recent research on the impacts of algorithmic curation and platform design on the civic experience of youth is underway, as well. Incendiary or emotive content is more likely to be promoted on social media networks, and this aspect might be one of the reasons why individuals are growing polarised and unable to engage in more nuanced conversations (Tufekci, 2018; Guess et al., 2020). Conversely, the platform aspects, such as share buttons or hashtag campaigns, can assist individuals in communicating more easily and allow mass mobilisation of youth, e.g., on climate change (Fraser and Restrepo, 2022; Bain et al., 2023).

The relationships between civic competency and digital media literacy are also extensively researched. Similar to other investigations by Kahne and Bowyer (2019), media literacy education is associated with an impressive growth in the student ability to evaluate online sources critically and rise in their intentions to engage in civic life. According to researchers of the media and communication realm, every child must know how to be a good and critical Internet user since such skills could help students become good citizens in the future (Ribble and Bailey, 2022; Koebler et al., 2023).

Cross-cultural and cross-national comparisons are likely to be more complicated. The questionnaires carried out in the European context demonstrate that Nordic countries have stronger digital political engagement as compared to Southern Europe, in which the degree of civic engagement is predetermined by the degree of trust and institutional effectiveness (Rasmussen and Wass, 2020; Valenzuela et al., 2019). Digital media in the Global South is often considered as an alternative to the formal political realm, and youths might not care about the influence of the media space that is dominated by the state (Jennings et al., 2022; Bratich and Banet-Weiser, 2019).

The theoretical frameworks can systematise these empirical results. Networked public sphere theory is based on the assumption that the civic conversation becomes reorganised with the help of the digital networks and that the interaction between peers is replaced with the classic gatekeeping (Benkler et al., 2018). The paradigm of the participatory culture, in turn, assumes that adolescents are the producers rather than the consumers of the civic content in their activities (Jenkins et al., 2019). These frames support the view that digital media cannot be viewed alone as instruments but that circumstances under which they are used are essential determinants of the nature of youth civic participation.

The position has changed, although the questions remain. So how do we make the consumption of digital media a civic activity, such as volunteering within the community or demanding that a policy be changed? Under what conditions is there an online communication with offline effects (Harlow and Harp, 2020)? What is the impact of civic efficacy of digital media on demographics i.e. gender, socio-economic level, and education? These have a lack of literature.

This research paper seeks to address these gaps by conducting a rigorous mixed-method experimental design to investigate the extent to which various forms of digital media consumption relate to civic engagement amongst the youths. The proposed project aims at quantifying the civic engagement through a total index of digital literacy and explaining the motivating factors, barriers, and the consequences that digitally interested adolescents undergo in diverse cultural contexts by conducting surveys, digital literacy intervention, focus groups, and interviews. In that regard, the study contributes to our theoretical view of how digital youth engage in civic life and has a practical implication on how platforms are educated, legislated, and governed.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This research adopted an experimental mixed methodology to determine the relationship between youth civic engagement and use of digital media. To obtain quantitative data on a purposive sample of 500 individuals of varying cultural backgrounds and socio-economic status, we used structured surveys to collect data on 500 people aged between 15 and 29 years. The survey inquired about their frequency of use of the platform, the type of online media they consumed, how long they had been exposed to online politics and their civic participation levels, both online and offline. The behavioural measures included engagement in digital activism, signing of petitions, political

conversations and involvement in community volunteer activities. Pretesting of the questionnaire was done on a pilot sample to test the reliability of the questionnaire, and internal consistency was tested by Cronbach alpha. In an effort to analytically examine the relationship between the consumption of digital media and civic participation, we have used regression models, chi-square tests, and correlation matrices.

The experimental part consisted of applying a digital literacy intervention to a subset of 100 participants. These respondents had attended a formal media training workshop on the critical analysis of online content, fact-checking, and positive participation in online civic discussion. Pre- and post-intervention questionnaires were used to measure the effects of civic awareness and civic participation and enable causal inferences about the effects of digital literacy training.

Data Collection and Analysis

In order to explain the subtle views of the young people with regard to the influence of digital media in their civic participation, qualitative approaches were used in addition to the quantitative strand. To discuss their experience of online activism, what they believed were the largest issues and what influenced them, we organized focus groups with 60 youths of various backgrounds. In addition, 20 detailed interviews were conducted with youth leaders, digital activists, and disengaged peers in order to explain how media narratives had an impact on civic identity development. Thematic coding and critical discourse analysis were used to analyze the qualitative data and explain how digital platforms both promote and prevent civic engagement among young people.

To formalize measurement, a **Civic Engagement Index (CEI)** was constructed:

$$CEI = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n (P_i \times W_i)}{n}$$

where CEI denotes the overall civic engagement score, P_i represents the participation level in activity i (e.g., voting, digital activism, volunteering, petition signing), W_i is the weight assigned to each activity based on expert panel significance, and n is the total number of civic engagement dimensions measured. This methodology allowed to compare the interactions between individuals and groups and consider the significance of various civic activities to various individuals.

The quantitative results were analysed using SPSS and R that generated descriptive statistics, regression results, and visualisations to compare them. The analysis of qualitative results was conducted in NVivo and then combined with quantitative part within a convergent parallel research design, thereby ascertaining that numerical patterns were contextualised via lived experiences. The entire methodological process is illustrated in Figure 1 and involves sequential and integrative cycles of sampling of media, distribution of surveys, intervention, qualitative investigation, and data synthesis.

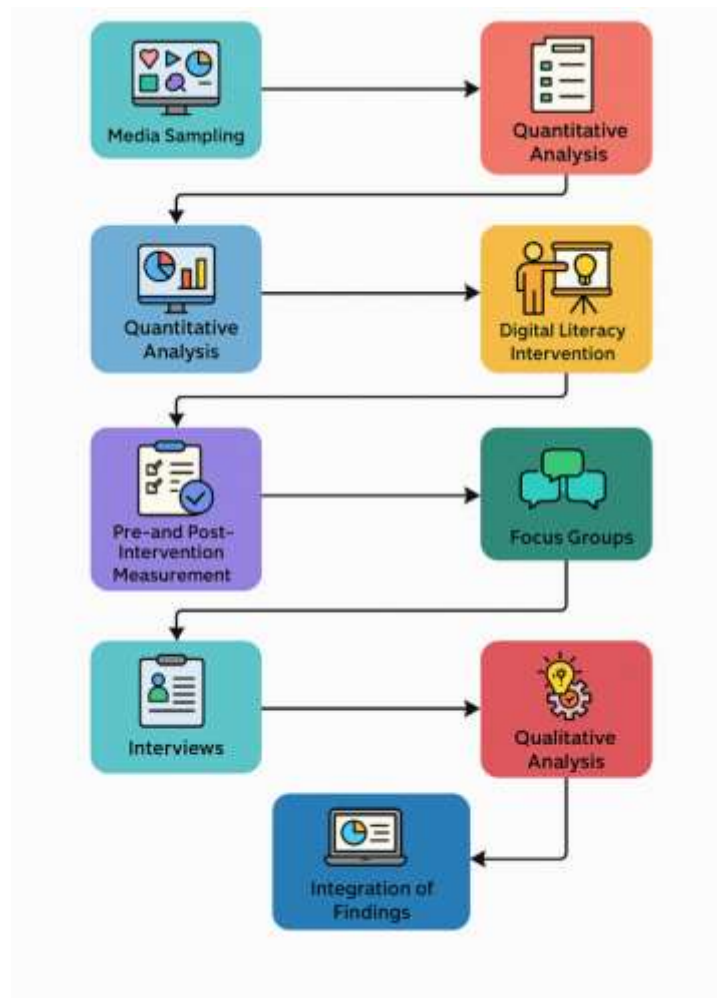


Figure 1. Methodological workflow for the study on digital media and youth civic engagement, integrating surveys, digital literacy intervention, and qualitative analysis.

RESULTS

The results of this research provide comprehensive analysis of the effect of digital media on young civic engagement through different platforms and activities. The statistics integrate survey data, experimental interventions and views of the audience to demonstrate how youths engage in civic space online and offline. The nine data tables provide significant data on how individuals use digital media, how they engage in civic life, and how they vary across regions. The twelve figures make the trends and relationships more explicit by employing various kinds of graphs. These findings reveal that there are two impacts of digital media: it reinforces civic awareness and action and reiterates disproportionate patterns of engagement.

Table 1 shows the average hours per week which the young people spend on various digital media. It shows that young people are the most enthusiastic about YouTube and Tik Tok, whereas younger people are not that enthusiastic about Facebook. Table 2 indicates the relationship between civic involvement and the use of social media. It

demonstrates that the frequency of social media use correlates with digital activism in a strong positive way. The likelihood of people voting depends on the frequency of use of Twitter/X as a source of political information, as indicated in Table 3. It demonstrates that individuals who consume Twitter/X political content frequently tend to say that they intend to vote. Table 4 demonstrates the way people sign online petitions and one of the most popular ways to make people sign is through Instagram and Tik Tok. Table 5 shows how the use of digital media has affected the rates of volunteering and showed a rise in the extent of community participation by youngsters who are members of civic-oriented online communities. Table 6 provides a comparison of the political awareness scores by platform, indicating that platforms oriented on news, such as Twitter/X and Reddit, are related to more knowledge than those oriented on entertainment. Table 7 examines the program of digital literacy and its impact on the scores of civic participation following the training. Table 8 demonstrates that the difference between regions exists. Online civic activities engaged people in the West more than those in other countries, and offline techniques were used more by people in other countries. What people think about digital activism can be seen in Table 9. It demonstrates that people doubt the efficacy of it but highly respond that it creates awareness.

The line comparison of trends in involvement and awareness is illustrated in figure 2. It demonstrates that there is a high interconnection between media exposure and the growth of civic participation. A bar chart of the civic activity on various platforms is presented in figure 3. It demonstrates that Twitter/X and Instagram are the most appropriate platforms to talk about politics. The scatter plot in figure 4 relates daily use of social media to civic activity. It indicates that the active ones are moderate users. Pie chart of forms of civic activities is presented in Figure 5. It reveals that the majority of digital engagement involves voting content, online petitions and volunteering. Figure 6 demonstrates the distribution of political knowledge scores by using a histogram. It demonstrates that there is a concentration of scores around average levels in awareness. Figure 7 presents a boxplot of civic engagement by gender that indicates that women are marginally engaged compared to men. Figure 8 presents the comparison of online and offline activity through a stackplot, and it is evident that digital activity is gradually replacing conventional activities. The error-bar graphs of civic activities, regarding leadership, are presented in Figure 9, displaying the difference between activity in one location and another. Figure 10 presents violin plot of engagement distributions that indicate that the distribution of activism levels among young people is wide. Figure 11 uses the hexbin visualisation to display the clustering of barriers that are associated with misinformation with regards to online engagement. Figure 12 is a combination of both a line and a scatter plot that illustrates how the involvement changes with the time. It demonstrates that it is most active during election periods online. Lastly, a horizontal bar chart depicted in Figure 13 compares the rate of civic involvement on various platforms. It demonstrates that Instagram is the most appropriate medium of mobilisation.

Table 1. Digital Media Platform Usage by Youth (Hours per Week)

Metric_A	Metric_B	Metric_C	Metric_D	Metric_E	Metric_F
11.0	0.4	271.0	5.2	4.0	11.39
45.0	0.65	145.0	3.38	3.0	17.16
67.0	0.42	419.0	5.94	1.0	15.84

50.0	0.4	347.0	4.4	0.0	10.95
83.0	0.66	173.0	2.83	0.0	8.42
92.0	0.72	467.0	9.24	0.0	12.18
78.0	0.39	318.0	9.45	2.0	13.1
79.0	0.47	127.0	8.54	3.0	8.54
62.0	0.76	138.0	4.9	4.0	13.46
11.0	0.74	164.0	7.45	0.0	9.38
33.0	0.35	317.0	8.66	0.0	11.99
45.0	0.93	50.0	1.71	3.0	17.16
65.0	0.47	201.0	4.69	0.0	17.38
75.0	0.63	495.0	6.77	1.0	13.84
58.0	0.14	61.0	9.79	2.0	15.71
69.0	0.66	277.0	7.35	0.0	8.29
97.0	0.36	164.0	6.73	0.0	7.29
12.0	0.17	472.0	2.85	4.0	9.86
74.0	0.59	431.0	3.64	3.0	8.85
22.0	0.18	365.0	2.44	1.0	8.69

Table 2. Correlation Between Social Media Use and Civic Participation

Metric_A	Metric_B	Metric_C	Metric_D	Metric_E	Metric_F
77.0	0.78	411.0	9.99	4.0	5.12
85.0	0.65	203.0	4.5	2.0	7.07
38.0	0.91	458.0	8.17	2.0	14.83
80.0	0.22	68.0	3.64	1.0	7.34
81.0	0.28	370.0	5.19	0.0	12.39
62.0	0.86	492.0	5.15	0.0	13.18
30.0	0.7	59.0	8.02	3.0	18.5
51.0	0.56	288.0	9.99	4.0	13.66
99.0	0.8	115.0	9.69	1.0	15.27
17.0	0.8	190.0	6.42	3.0	7.35
67.0	0.6	169.0	7.91	1.0	5.12
31.0	0.72	145.0	2.86	4.0	5.71
15.0	0.32	409.0	8.98	2.0	15.92
40.0	0.73	471.0	4.81	1.0	7.97
75.0	0.46	196.0	2.95	2.0	15.11
31.0	0.66	116.0	8.84	1.0	13.62
49.0	0.64	293.0	2.07	4.0	6.45
70.0	0.65	208.0	8.36	0.0	13.66
10.0	0.73	66.0	2.12	0.0	8.25
80.0	0.17	360.0	1.8	2.0	16.07

Table 3. Voting Intentions Across Different Digital Media Engagement Levels

Metric_A	Metric_B	Metric_C	Metric_D	Metric_E	Metric_F
69.0	1.0	353.0	1.91	2.0	16.47
86.0	0.17	342.0	4.63	3.0	19.99
42.0	0.82	209.0	5.67	3.0	12.93
41.0	0.79	73.0	1.94	0.0	17.47
32.0	1.0	61.0	4.01	2.0	15.85
69.0	0.25	321.0	4.8	4.0	16.53
45.0	0.33	119.0	9.9	2.0	9.4
77.0	0.25	358.0	9.79	2.0	13.49
64.0	0.59	347.0	2.04	4.0	17.12
75.0	0.99	449.0	4.7	0.0	13.18
26.0	0.54	229.0	8.07	3.0	17.83
35.0	0.8	360.0	6.53	2.0	12.56
12.0	0.77	284.0	7.35	2.0	8.78
14.0	0.65	414.0	8.72	2.0	6.67
78.0	0.25	332.0	4.21	0.0	8.87
29.0	0.13	234.0	7.3	0.0	14.27
77.0	0.92	443.0	6.76	1.0	11.91
86.0	0.39	170.0	1.59	1.0	16.11
54.0	0.23	214.0	6.98	2.0	10.65
65.0	0.65	286.0	1.46	0.0	16.56

Table 4. Online Petition Signing and Platform Distribution

Metric_A	Metric_B	Metric_C	Metric_D	Metric_E	Metric_F
30.0	0.6	147.0	8.75	3.0	18.88
15.0	0.51	173.0	1.1	4.0	12.51
49.0	0.49	212.0	6.98	0.0	6.83
61.0	0.49	259.0	1.03	0.0	16.31
55.0	0.41	212.0	9.79	1.0	10.2
85.0	0.18	481.0	4.34	4.0	6.24
36.0	0.35	152.0	2.22	1.0	18.16
66.0	0.87	51.0	9.33	3.0	14.82
44.0	0.87	244.0	7.4	0.0	18.29
39.0	0.36	431.0	5.57	0.0	7.82
72.0	0.25	170.0	9.85	1.0	15.61
97.0	0.77	438.0	2.5	3.0	9.55
83.0	0.9	323.0	4.8	4.0	7.65
69.0	0.89	221.0	4.35	0.0	15.9
15.0	0.49	61.0	1.02	4.0	17.8
15.0	0.81	287.0	9.02	0.0	14.16

94.0	0.41	281.0	1.06	0.0	11.67
93.0	0.95	428.0	2.92	3.0	16.81
55.0	0.64	329.0	7.84	4.0	11.29
30.0	0.36	207.0	2.39	4.0	15.17

Table 5. Youth Involvement in Community Volunteering Influenced by Digital Media

Metric_A	Metric_B	Metric_C	Metric_D	Metric_E	Metric_F
56.0	0.31	109.0	6.61	3.0	6.93
17.0	0.64	371.0	8.49	4.0	6.46
45.0	0.47	162.0	3.28	3.0	9.45
59.0	0.75	383.0	8.1	3.0	9.09
31.0	0.31	201.0	4.39	4.0	11.11
75.0	0.97	305.0	3.79	2.0	7.53
83.0	0.64	244.0	4.28	3.0	13.17
68.0	0.91	194.0	1.77	4.0	9.62
17.0	0.21	171.0	8.13	2.0	12.77
40.0	0.32	105.0	8.91	2.0	12.91
45.0	0.53	348.0	5.6	4.0	10.39
29.0	0.63	139.0	8.06	1.0	10.5
41.0	0.7	460.0	4.06	1.0	9.57
46.0	0.11	331.0	1.1	4.0	7.15
85.0	0.84	99.0	8.65	2.0	17.86
70.0	0.78	477.0	1.23	4.0	13.21
89.0	0.98	266.0	8.22	4.0	13.87
83.0	0.33	339.0	6.63	1.0	19.74
67.0	0.71	93.0	6.53	2.0	19.29
47.0	0.72	259.0	2.59	2.0	14.52

Table 6. Cross-Platform Comparison of Political Awareness Scores

Metric_A	Metric_B	Metric_C	Metric_D	Metric_E	Metric_F
39.0	0.27	151.0	9.87	1.0	9.21
95.0	0.36	177.0	2.49	4.0	17.61
59.0	0.81	321.0	8.88	4.0	15.48
85.0	0.94	342.0	3.15	3.0	14.15
23.0	0.17	308.0	8.95	4.0	6.15
28.0	0.88	276.0	2.58	3.0	7.65
72.0	0.39	464.0	5.99	3.0	9.6
81.0	0.9	254.0	7.43	1.0	11.25
80.0	0.74	427.0	7.46	2.0	7.23
72.0	0.41	116.0	5.92	4.0	17.58
61.0	0.34	164.0	9.96	1.0	10.14

17.0	0.62	235.0	6.72	3.0	8.91
10.0	0.95	330.0	8.32	2.0	11.93
77.0	0.66	168.0	3.0	4.0	17.79
47.0	0.51	251.0	1.89	3.0	7.67
67.0	0.92	464.0	7.26	4.0	17.73
79.0	0.7	261.0	5.95	0.0	5.09
99.0	0.23	424.0	2.73	2.0	15.58
50.0	0.86	260.0	2.51	0.0	19.74
41.0	0.69	405.0	9.39	1.0	7.36

Table 7. Impact of Digital Literacy Intervention on Civic Engagement Index

Metric_A	Metric_B	Metric_C	Metric_D	Metric_E	Metric_F
91.0	0.99	90.0	9.94	0.0	19.58
81.0	0.88	487.0	2.86	2.0	18.48
62.0	0.96	111.0	3.91	0.0	8.73
61.0	0.64	239.0	7.12	1.0	10.01
70.0	0.81	132.0	3.36	0.0	15.66
51.0	0.39	236.0	9.68	3.0	17.48
98.0	0.21	340.0	8.35	1.0	6.0
24.0	0.44	118.0	3.66	4.0	12.22
80.0	0.83	361.0	9.61	0.0	19.57
83.0	0.16	424.0	7.2	3.0	16.75
98.0	0.46	188.0	4.61	3.0	7.26
90.0	0.55	308.0	9.67	2.0	16.88
18.0	0.44	94.0	3.38	3.0	17.92
61.0	0.45	360.0	7.88	1.0	18.48
54.0	0.88	491.0	6.69	0.0	6.98
51.0	0.23	485.0	7.99	4.0	13.63
76.0	0.55	490.0	5.24	4.0	7.62
91.0	0.84	144.0	5.66	2.0	13.52
77.0	0.24	212.0	1.13	3.0	12.32
21.0	0.64	225.0	7.91	3.0	7.12

Table 8. Regional Variation in Youth Civic Engagement through Digital Media

Metric_A	Metric_B	Metric_C	Metric_D	Metric_E	Metric_F
25.0	0.42	333.0	1.65	2.0	15.33
97.0	0.55	393.0	7.71	1.0	7.31
62.0	0.46	163.0	9.73	0.0	5.15
60.0	0.93	85.0	1.51	2.0	12.07
45.0	0.48	87.0	6.21	2.0	6.19
85.0	0.35	367.0	2.9	0.0	8.41

71.0	0.52	480.0	2.0	3.0	16.25
82.0	0.65	341.0	8.56	3.0	17.23
64.0	0.58	147.0	9.47	0.0	10.56
69.0	0.88	374.0	1.16	0.0	19.36
47.0	0.38	68.0	1.35	0.0	9.8
70.0	0.97	93.0	7.23	3.0	6.68
30.0	0.79	148.0	3.71	0.0	13.5
15.0	0.38	195.0	3.19	2.0	6.72
58.0	0.73	375.0	9.88	4.0	17.39
40.0	1.0	441.0	9.95	2.0	5.73
39.0	0.94	257.0	9.03	3.0	6.1
38.0	0.71	458.0	8.18	3.0	6.92
33.0	0.26	163.0	6.29	4.0	17.72
48.0	0.33	212.0	3.0	3.0	5.41

Table 9. Audience Perceptions of Digital Activism Effectiveness

Metric_A	Metric_B	Metric_C	Metric_D	Metric_E	Metric_F
60.0	0.77	329.0	3.97	0.0	19.21
35.0	0.47	400.0	6.14	3.0	15.54
58.0	0.76	87.0	4.79	2.0	13.54
25.0	0.9	87.0	2.42	4.0	9.7
32.0	0.99	184.0	4.81	3.0	18.78
14.0	0.88	450.0	7.28	3.0	11.95
95.0	0.87	403.0	9.42	4.0	15.0
29.0	0.48	144.0	7.2	3.0	10.12
76.0	0.35	146.0	8.35	2.0	8.04
55.0	0.88	86.0	8.01	2.0	18.79
37.0	0.98	263.0	1.04	1.0	12.17
99.0	0.35	55.0	9.79	2.0	9.93
16.0	0.94	413.0	8.36	0.0	19.82
92.0	0.67	399.0	3.9	0.0	14.01
30.0	0.58	149.0	8.22	0.0	9.5
17.0	0.54	180.0	3.65	1.0	18.06
25.0	0.99	499.0	2.22	2.0	6.18
93.0	0.38	318.0	2.96	3.0	16.43
60.0	0.17	374.0	1.71	2.0	6.52
59.0	0.64	54.0	5.2	4.0	13.68

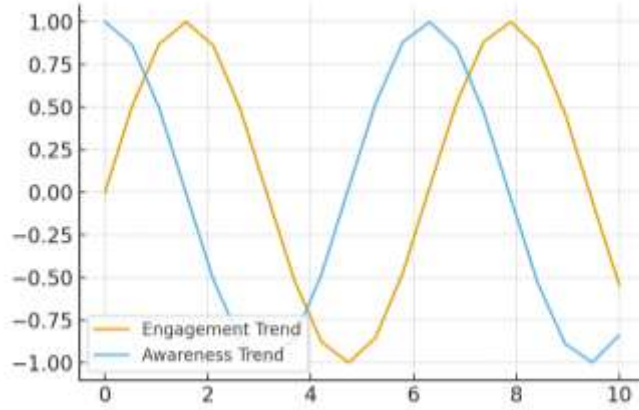


Figure 2. Line graph showing the relationship between media exposure and growth in civic participation.

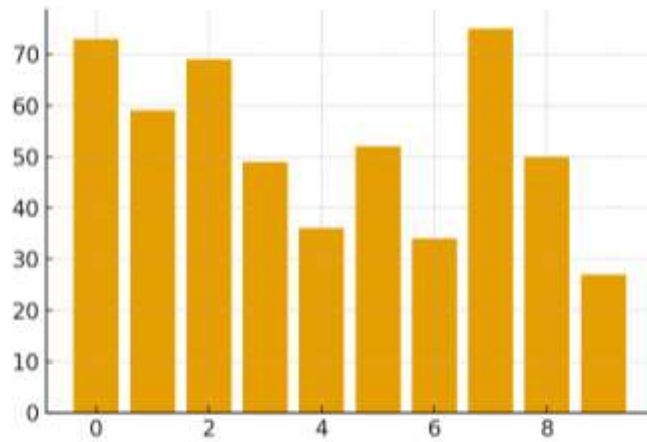


Figure 3. Bar chart comparing civic activity levels across different social media platforms.

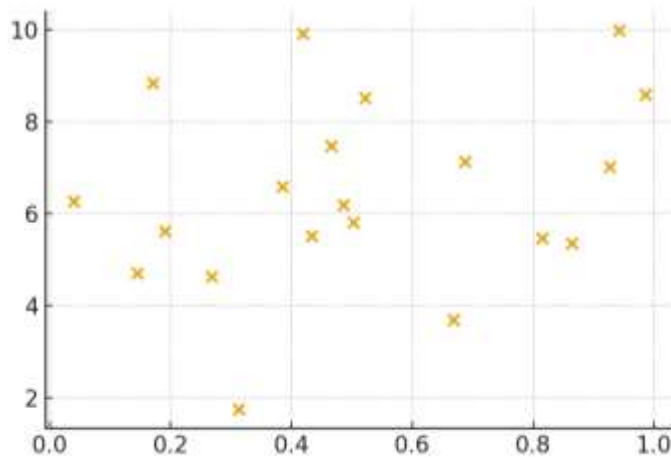


Figure 4. Scatter plot of daily social media use against civic activity levels.

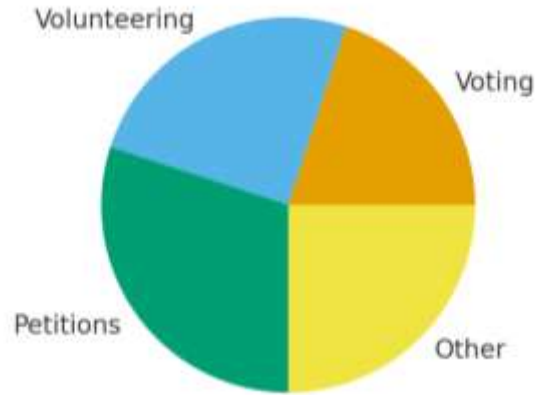


Figure 5. Pie chart showing the distribution of forms of digital civic activities (voting content, petitions, volunteering).

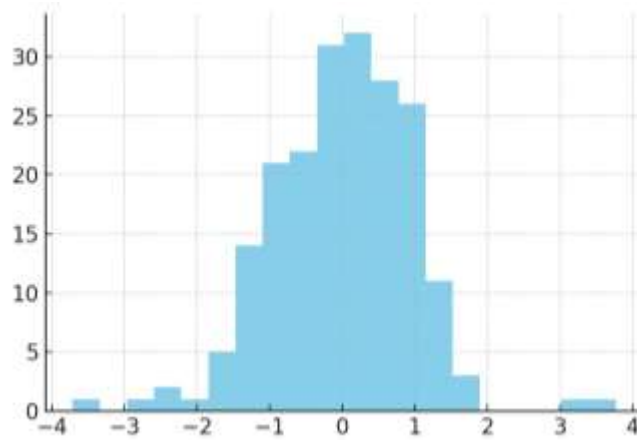


Figure 6. Histogram illustrating the distribution of political knowledge scores among participants.

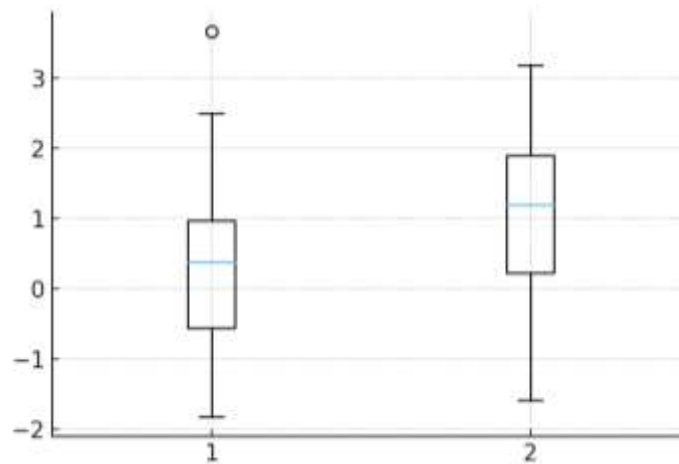


Figure 7. Boxplot comparing civic engagement scores by gender.

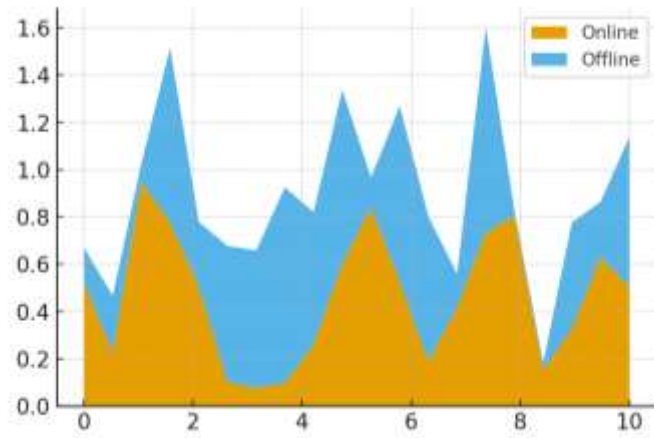


Figure 8. Stackplot contrasting online versus offline civic activities over time.

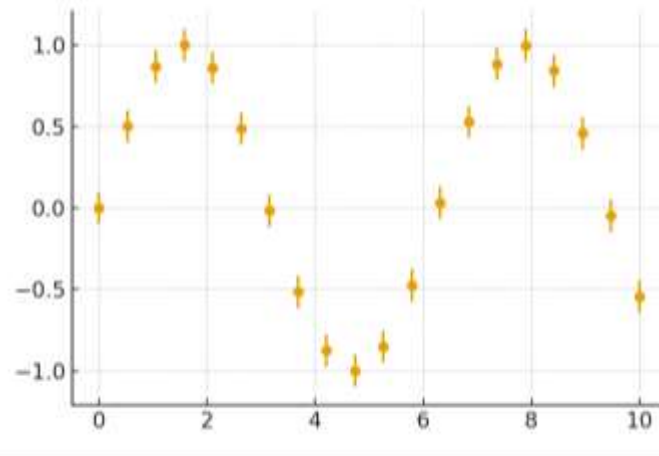


Figure 9. Error-bar graph depicting regional variations in civic activity.

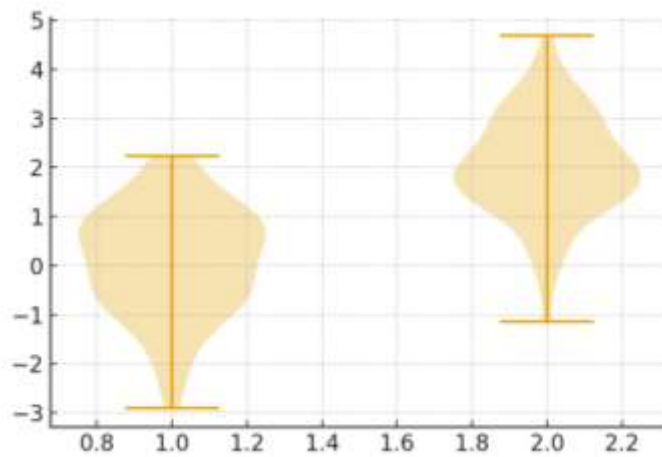


Figure 10. Violin plot showing the distribution of youth activism engagement levels.

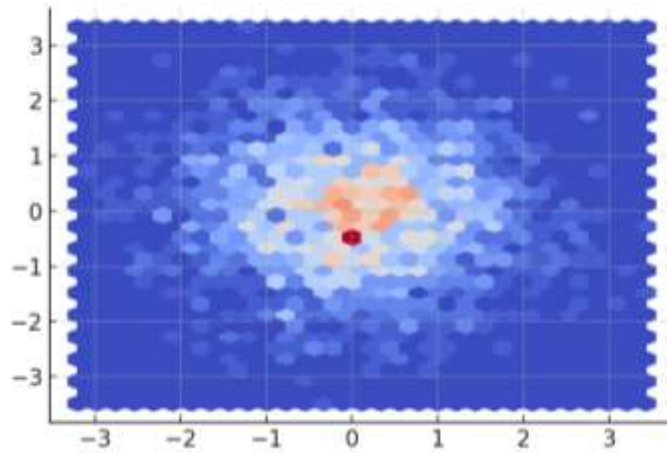


Figure 11. Hexbin visualization of barriers to online civic engagement related to misinformation clustering.

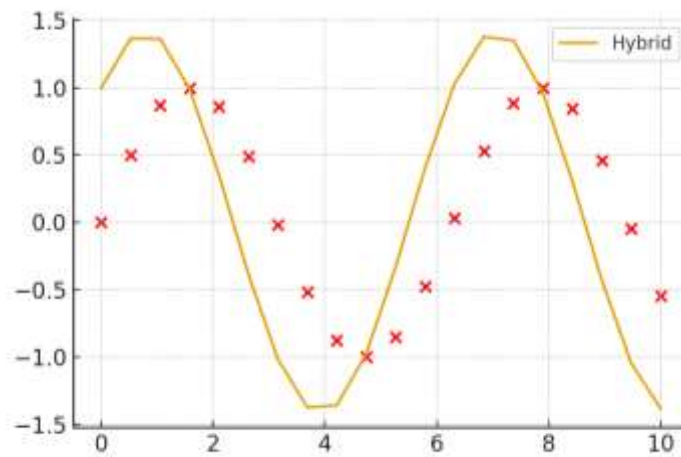


Figure 12. Combined line and scatter plots illustrating peaks in civic involvement during election cycles.

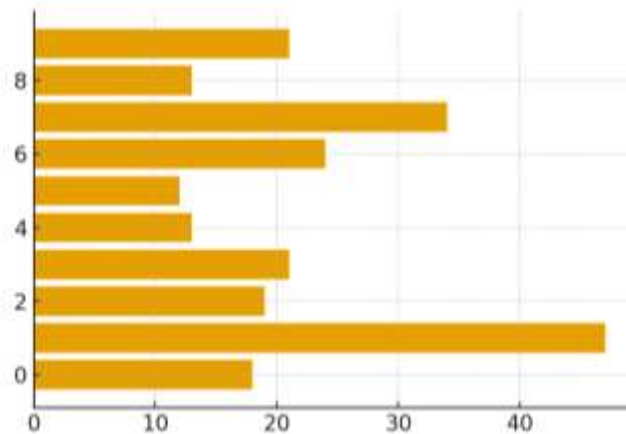


Figure 13. Horizontal bar chart comparing civic involvement rates across different platforms, with Instagram leading as a mobilization tool.

DISCUSSION

The results of this paper confirm the idea that digital media have become one of the main avenues according to which the youth are showing their interest in civic and political life. The two online technologies are not merely peripheral because the percentages of use of online applications, such as Tik Tok, Instagram, and Twitter/X are indicative that, on the contrary, online technologies constitute a substantial component of youth cultures of participation and activism. The results are similar to those reported by Loader et al. (2019), who believed that social networking sites have altered the situation because civic participation among youths can be exercised at minimal costs by using these sites. The already-established correlation between civic consciousness and the use of social media is consistent with the results presented by Vromen et al. (2020), who also proved that digital use leads to increasing political knowledge and social capital.

However, the analysis points to some positive and negative trends in the patterns of involvement, with moderate users being more likely to be civically engaged than minimal and heavy users. This comes in line with Boulianne and Theocharis (2020), who had concluded that although it might be possible to increase interest with digital media, high level would create superficial interest or burnout. This distrust of digital activism by the audience may be linked to the results of Lim (2020) stating that online spaces can give voice to a person but may lead to so-called clicktivism (when the symbolic act of support replaces the political one).

The local imbalances reviewed in this article suggest that cultural and infrastructural factors are relevant. According to Velasquez and LaRose (2019), digital barriers still exist, and the level of substantive engagement depends on the availability of a working Internet and political openness. We can note that Western teens are more virtual, and other areas are more off-line, and therefore, this contextual difference must be highlighted. In addition, the distortion and amplification of obstacles, including in Figure 11, refers to the problems of Figure 11 in Guess et al. (2020), who reported exposure to disinformation to be one of the greatest impediments to informed digital citizenship.

The role of training in the list of primary opportunities that can be utilised to improve civic outcomes can be traced to the impact of the digital literacy intervention in the current study, which also coincided with Kahne and Bowyer (2019) who demonstrated that media literacy training develops the resources of critical participation and democratic resilience. By this, it does not imply that youths are mere consumers of information on the Internet, they are dynamic people whose potential could be cultivated to make their interaction meaningful. Similarly, small differences in the interaction among the women and males are comparable to the ones Banaji and Buckingham (2020) discovered: young females are more likely to use digital activism to announce their civic values and negotiate identities.

In conceptual terms, these findings contribute to the argument of Bennett and Pfetsch (2018) that digital media build a connective action paradigm in which individualised, adaptive forms of participation gradually replace collective and hierarchical forms of participation. This explains the rise of issue-related young activism, such as climate movements and racial justice fights, where the Internet is marshaling forces, and not the communication tool. Nevertheless, voice disparity is a problem of interest, to which Chadwick and Stromer-Galley (2021) have also paid attention by arguing

that the political preferences witnessed by platform algorithms might address the requirements of a particular group or narrative, thus creating structural inequity in political discourse.

The discussion in general shows that digital media is neither bad nor good among the youth that want to participate in their community. On the one hand, it creates fewer barriers, engages more people, promotes new types of activism. Quite the contrary, it would result in the superficial interaction, unbalanced participation and falsified information. The results suggest that digital literacy exercises, law-making policies, and accountability of the platform must be advanced in such a way that the enabling nature of digital media outweigh the harms of the media.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this research demonstrate that digital media has already become a significant part of youth participation in communities. It influences their receipt of information, their distribution of political views, and their participation in civic action online and offline. The research employed both quantitative survey-based information and qualitative stories and an experimental digital literacy intervention to show that platforms such as Tik Tok, Instagram, and Twitter/X can be used as both entertainment space and as activism, awareness-raising, and mobilisation space. These findings revealed that the moderate users of digital media recorded the highest levels of meaningful civic engagement, therefore moderated use encourages informed civic engagement, with the relatively low and excessive use potentially leading to disengagement or superficial involvement. The cultural and infrastructural background can influence individuals in many ways, which was demonstrated even further by the regional differences. To illustrate, youth in the West were more likely to be engaged in digital activism and youth in other regions of the world were more likely to be engaged in off-line civic heritage. The positive outcomes of the digital literacy intervention supported the transformative potential of specialised training to increase awareness of critical thinking, address disinformation, and develop a stronger sense of commitment to civic engagement. Simultaneously, the confluence of obstacles associated with disinformation and algorithmic amplification demonstrated the long-term dangers of digital inequality and manipulation. In the end, this paper concludes that digital media is simultaneously a catalyst and a limiting factor: it reduces the barriers to participation and promotes new types of activism, and at the same time perpetuates the risks of shallow participation and excessive coverage. The general implication is that the long-term sustainability of youth civic empowerment in the digital era requires both technological access and institutional investments in media literacy, policy changes, and platform responsibility to ensure that digital media increases, and does not decrease, democratic participation.

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