

# Political Participation, Media Consumption, and Misinformation Perception Among Undergraduate Students During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Sampaloc, Manila

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## Abstract

Media consumption as a motivator for political participation among the youth has garnered critical attention from researchers in the past. Several works of literature suggest a relationship between media use and political participation. However, global health crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic alter how people live due to health restrictions, thereby affecting how they collectively participate in political activities. The spread of COVID-19-related misinformation has likewise become prevalent. With the youth comprising 86.8 percent of social media users in the Philippines, the researchers explored whether there was a correlation between political participation, media consumption, and misinformation perceptions among undergraduate students during the COVID-19 pandemic in selected universities in Sampaloc, Manila. An online Google Forms survey with Likert scales was disseminated and used as an instrument to measure the levels of political participation, media consumption, and misinformation perceptions among undergraduate students. Pearson correlation coefficient tests were done to establish the strength and direction between the variables. The findings of the study suggest that the variables are positively correlated. The researchers also found that the levels of political participation, media consumption, and extent of misinformation have increased during the pandemic. With this, the researchers conclude that higher media consumption and news exposure increase political participation levels during the COVID-19 pandemic, and COVID-19-related misinformation perceptions determine the likelihood of individuals participating politically during the pandemic.

**Keywords:** political participation, media consumption, misinformation perceptions, COVID-19 pandemic

## INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged governments across the globe to respond efficiently to its social, economic, and political consequences. It has also imposed mobility restrictions worldwide with the mandate of strict quarantine measures and health protocols. Despite the limitations in people's lives, the pandemic also proved how individuals collectively participate in political activities that could mitigate and address the effects brought about by the pandemic through volunteering, donating, and expressing sentiments online. All these voluntary activities that concern government or state outcomes constitute political participation. Several works of literature suggest a significant relationship between political participation and media use, particularly among the youth since they have the highest number of social media users in the Philippines.

Media consumption refers to how individuals consume information through various media channels, such as social networking sites, radios, and televisions. This could result in activities such as interacting with social media posts, listening to the radio, and watching television.

Media consumption is assumed to evoke political discourse among friends and family, thereby creating political knowledge. While previously conducted studies primarily focus on media consumption under normal circumstances, the advent of global health crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic can alter how people consume media and determine individuals' willingness to participate politically. Although studies discussing media consumption, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, remain scarce, existing literature tackles media use in times of crisis, such as hurricanes. It was also revealed that in times of crisis, individuals use both traditional and social media to share information and reach out to family and friends. This insinuates that there is a shift in media consumption in crises, and political participation activities that prevail during these times are conducted online. Furthermore, the implementation of strict quarantine measures has significantly affected how people mobilize and interact with each other, including participating in political activities such as voting. Since pandemic studies are relatively new to the field as the COVID-19 pandemic is still an ongoing phenomenon, only a few studies tackle the pandemic's effects on political participation.

### **Defining Political Participation**

Montero et al. (2007) describe political participation as the actions of ordinary citizens that aim to influence political outcomes. Similarly, Van Deth (2016) elaborates on this narrative by defining political participation as the citizens' activities that affect politics, such as voting, contacting government officials, boycotting, volunteering, posting on blogs, and attending protests and rallies (Van Deth, 2016). Both authors stress the idea of political participation as a form of activity that entails action by the citizens. Van Deth (2016) provides four main features that comprise political participation: first, it should be understood as an action further confirming the democratic characteristic of the Philippines especially when it comes to elections even in the local level (Manalo, 2021). Second, political participation must be a voluntary act made by individuals. Third, the people participating in these activities must be ordinary citizens or nonprofessionals. Fourth, political participation concerns the government, state, or politics (Van Deth, 2016). In this sense, any voluntary activity made by ordinary individuals that concern the government or affect politics, such as voting, contacting government officials, boycotting, volunteering, posting on blogs, and attending protests and rallies, counts as political participation.

### **Media Consumption among the Youth**

In this digital age, the advent of smartphones and internet technology has become a way of life, especially for the youth. According to the United Nations, the youth is defined as individuals between the ages of 15 and 24 (United Nations, 2022). Media consumption refers to how individuals consume media products, such as interacting with social media posts, listening to the radio, and watching television. A study in the Philippines reported that among the Filipino youth, the use of smartphones for visiting social media apps, using electronic mail or messaging apps, listening to music, and watching online news, among many other media activities, are the top reasons for using these gadgets (Bristol et al., 2016, as cited in Bringula et al., 2018). The same study reported that a hundred and fifteen million Filipinos own smartphones which are around 113 percent of the sum of the total population in the Philippines, proving that a Filipino might have access to two or more smartphones (Igna, 2015, as cited in Bringula et al., 2018). This attachment to gadgets and internet technology paved the way for the young to become enthralled with media consumption.

## Media Consumption as a Motivator of Political Participation

Media consumption is assumed to entail political talk, primarily among friends and family members. Several studies generally found that the use of media provides a positive impact on political participation. It was also cited that social media's function evokes voters' involvement, connection, and mobilization (Bode et al., 2018). Ahmad and Ittefaq (2019) found that an increase in media consumption among university students in urban Pakistan warrants higher levels of both offline and online political participation since the students are influenced by the political information they find on the Internet (Ahmad & Ittefaq, 2019). Similarly, McAllister (2016) denotes that media use among the youth in Australia has significantly increased their political knowledge, as well as in determining their participation in the electorate (McAllister, 2016). Another study conducted among the youth in Mexico, Spain, and Chile tackled online political participation in digital media. It was explained that this specific medium is present in almost any aspect of today's society which has evolved into a new space that caters to political socialization. In addition, the study revealed that the consumption of digital media does not prevent them from bringing in critical discourse, thus committing political participation actions as mainly developed in the digital space (De-la-Garza-Montemayor et al., 2019). A study in Africa also showed a positive correlation between the use of social media for political participation and persuading others to vote for a particular party or candidate. The study further developed the importance of social media in developing democracies like Uganda and suggested considering policy implementation, civic engagement, and inclusiveness as factors affected by social media consumption (Kasadha, 2020).

In crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, how individuals use various media forms can alter. Although studies discussing media consumption, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, remain scarce, existing literature tackles media usage in times of crisis. For instance, Mirbabaie et al. (2020) revealed that Twitter users' tweets during Hurricane Harvey significantly increased. The tweets mainly featured information about the crisis, such as the current news, calls for donations, and other charitable content (Mirbabaie et al., 2020). Moreover, a similar study conducted in China indicated that individuals use both traditional and social media to seek and share information related to a crisis and reach out to their family and friends (Austine et al., 2012). This is connected to the previous notions that media consumption necessitates political participation, even during times of crisis.

*Hypothesis 1:* Higher media consumption and news exposure increase political participation levels during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Misinformation Perception and Political Participation amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic

Literature discussing the effects of pandemics on politics remains scarce. A series of studies concluded that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has limited individuals from participating in political activities. For instance, Miller and Morris (2021) have identified that there has been a reduced voter turnout in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, during the primary US elections. Similarly, Francois et al. (2021) also determined that there had been a significant decrease in political participation during the French municipal elections in 2020. It can be deduced that the decrease in participation among voters during these times was related to the risks and effects brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Contrastingly, several works of literature also expound on how an individual's insights and beliefs regarding COVID-19 could determine their motivation to participate politically. For instance, a study by Nwanko (2021) indicated that individuals in Lagos, Nigeria, would willingly participate in voting even if the elections were to occur during the pandemic.

This is because a vast majority of the respondents in Nwanko's study disagreed with the safety measures implemented to curb the spread of the virus in Nigeria. The results from the researcher's study insinuate that individuals who perceive safety protocols such as wearing face masks and quarantining as unimportant and hold the misconception that the virus does not exist tend to participate more politically during the pandemic (Nwanko, 2021). This is a particularly significant finding since it indicates that misinformation or unawareness about COVID-19-related information could motivate an individual's participation in political activities. Another study conducted by Brosius (2021) in the Netherlands revealed that individuals are more likely to participate politically during the time of the pandemic despite the prevalence of misinformation due to their willingness to act upon the spread of COVID-19 misinformation (Brosius et al., 2021). However, whether the results will also garner the same outcomes when a similar approach is applied in the Philippine context, particularly among Filipino youth, remains uncertain.

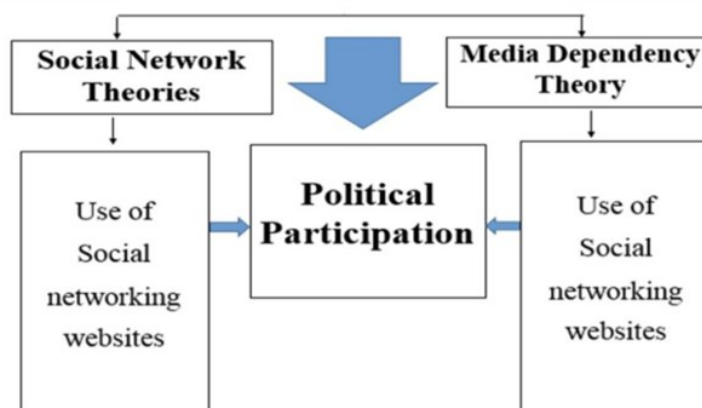
*Hypothesis 2:* COVID-19-related misinformation perceptions determine the likelihood of individuals to participate politically during the pandemic.

### Frameworks of the Study

The relationship between media consumption and political participation has increasingly attracted the attention of many scholars. Studies suggest that forms of communication that take place in social media are significant in consciousness, attitude, and political participation building, which ultimately led to the construction of theories concerning this phenomenon. With this, the social network theory was used in the study. The social network theory was first introduced by political sociologist Manuel Castells in 2005 and was later adopted by scholars such as Ruhul Amin and Ashek Mahmud in 2017. Castells (2005) suggested that individuals are becoming more connected to one another through forms of self-selection networks, which he referred to as socialized communication. He argued that socialized communication systems that take place on social media sites are essential in forming political decisions, thereby increasing the likelihood of individuals to participate politically. In relation to this, Castells also believed that the media remains a powerful tool in making individuals socially and politically active and creating political hegemony through socialized communication (Amin & Mahmud, 2017). Based on these premises, the social network theory emphasizes the role of social media-based communication systems in inducing political behavior and decisions. Conclusively, this theory explains how social media-based interactions can lead to face-to-face political interactions, which is the central focus of this study.

**Figure 1**

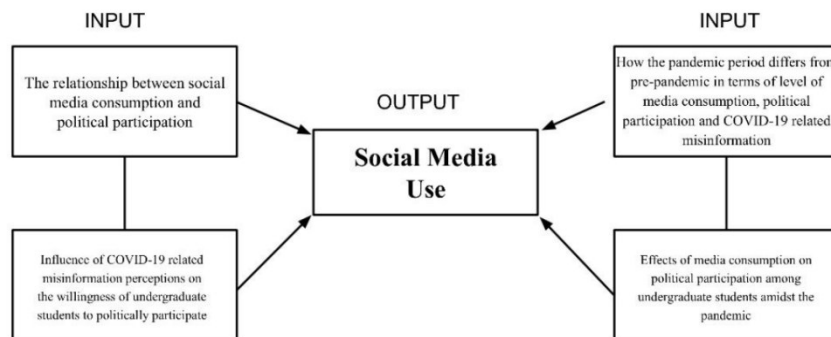
*The Social Network Theory (Castells, 2005)*



Various literature discussing social media and political participation have contrasting results. Some findings indicate that exposure to social media does not immediately necessitate political participation, while some scholars argue otherwise. Therefore, social network theory aims to explain how social media interactions motivate political participation (Amin & Mahmud, 2017). In summary, the social network theory concentrates on how social media-based socialized communication prompts political participatory activities. By adopting the social network theory as a foundation for this study, the researchers may contribute further knowledge to the relationship between media consumption, misinformation perceptions, and political participation. The theory helps in understanding and explaining how socialized interactions that take place on social media sites necessitate the outcome of political participation. Furthermore, the social network theory supports understanding the relationship between social media consumption and political participation.

**Figure 2**

*Application of Social Network Theory in the Study*



While the previous framework discussed the theoretical foundation of this study, the conceptual framework aims to explain how the social network theory will be used in this study. The Social Network Theory serves as a salient tool used to determine whether communications and interactions that take place on social media result in political participation activities. While existing literature discusses the relationship between these variables during an election or campaigning period, this study will be conducted during a global pandemic. With this, it is likewise the goal of this study to identify whether the pre-pandemic period differs from the continuing pandemic period in terms of the level of media consumption, political participation, and the extent of COVID-19-related misinformation.

### Objectives of the Study

The study aimed to establish the relationship between media consumption, political participation, and COVID-19-related misinformation perceptions among undergraduate students. Specifically, the following research objectives:

1. How is the level/extent of an undergraduate student's willingness to politically participate influenced by misinformation perceptions in Sampaloc, Manila?

2. How does media consumption affect political participation and misinformation perception among undergraduate students amidst the pandemic?
3. How does the pre-pandemic period differ from the ongoing pandemic period regarding the level of media consumption, political participation, and extent of misinformation?

## METHODS

### Research Approach

This study utilized a quantitative and qualitative approach. As expounded by Williams (2021), quantitative research is best for observing situations or events that may or may not affect people. This approach provides objective data that can be conveyed in numbers or statistics. Moreover, aggregating and summarizing data using statistical techniques make data analysis more manageable, but these cannot be done with a qualitative approach alone (Babbie, 2008). Meanwhile, a qualitative approach aids in providing an in-depth data analysis through themes, narratives, and stories. The qualitative data that has been utilized as secondary data to strengthen the results that are indicated in the study

### Research Design

This study utilized a correlational research design. Correlational research is used to identify and explain the relationships between relevant variables. Stangor (2011) defined correlational research design as a type of quantitative research method that involves the measurement of two or more variables and an assessment of the relationship between or among those variables, intending to uncover the systematic relationships of those variables with each other (Stangor, 2011). In this study, the researchers identified three variables as their study's focus: political participation, media consumption, and misinformation perceptions. The researchers aim to assess whether these variables have a significant relationship.

While other research design tackle political participation and media consumption as separate variables, employing a correlational research design is appropriate in determining whether there is a significant relationship between variables, which is the aim of this study. Using a correlational design allows the researchers to establish whether the relationship between the variables of political participation, media consumption, and misinformation perceptions project solid or weak relationships.

### Participants and Sampling

Seven universities within the University Belt in Sampaloc, Manila were selected for this study through cluster sampling. Cluster sampling, which is a probability sampling method suitable for large, geographically dispersed populations, allowed the researchers to manage the study's wide geographic scope. From an initial pool of 20 universities within the University Belt, seven institutions were selected for the study: 1) Far Eastern University, 2) The University of Manila, 3) Arellano University, 4) University of the East, 5) San Sebastian College-Recoletos, 6) National University, and 7) Eulogio "Amang" Rodriguez Institute of Science and Technology. The respondents were then randomly chosen from these seven universities to ensure diverse representation within the selected cluster. The researchers established the following criteria in selecting the respondents for this study: the respondents must be 18-24 years old, currently enrolled as undergraduate students in the academic year 2022-2023, attending any of the selected universities aforementioned.

A total of 387 respondents participated in this study. The researchers came up with this number of samples using the Yamane sample size formula. A 5% margin of error was set, with a confidence level of 95%. The population size is 78,565, and the response distribution is 50%. Out of the 387 respondents, key informants were gathered through purposive sampling since it was utilized as supporting data.

## **Research Instruments**

The research instrument used in this study was an online survey. A Likert scale, with values ranging from 1 indicating “always” to 5 indicating “never,” was used to measure the levels of political participation, media consumption, and misinformation perceptions among undergraduate students. Political participation was measured by asking respondents to rate whether they have engaged in political participation activities during the pandemic, such as donating money or supplies to organizations, volunteering, encouraging people to comply with health and safety protocols, and posting calls for action online. These activities were selected since they constitute political participation and were considered the top political participatory activities, especially in times of crisis (Van Deth, 2016). Similarly, media consumption was measured by asking the respondents how often they have utilized various media such as television, radio, and social media sites to watch, listen or read the news. Television, radio, and social media sites were selected as the focus of this study since they are among the most used forms of media among media consumers. Lastly, COVID-19-related misinformation perceptions were measured by utilizing an agreement scale with statements such as “there is a prevalence of misinformation about the pandemic” and “misinformation distorts people’s understanding of COVID-19.”

Key-informant interviews were also conducted to further supplement the survey data provided by the respondents. The interview questionnaire included questions such as which political activities the respondents engaged in the most during the pandemic, how media consumption has influenced them to engage in more political activities, and what are the most common forms of misinformation that they have encountered during the pandemic.

## **Data Collection**

The researchers used Google Forms to create an online survey questionnaire that measured levels of political participation, media consumption, and misinformation perceptions among undergraduate students, which was disseminated through various social media sites such as Facebook, Messenger, and Twitter (or now known as X). The survey questionnaire included questions that measured the levels of political participation, media consumption, and misinformation perceptions. The respondents were asked to rate on a scale of 1-5, with one indicating “always” and five indicating “never,” how often they have engaged in activities that count as political participation, such as voting and donating during the pandemic. These activities were selected since they constitute political participation and were considered the top political participatory activities, especially in times of crisis (Van Deth, 2016).

In constructing the survey, the researchers combined elements from existing literature in measuring political participation, media consumption, and misinformation perceptions among undergraduate students. The researchers built on the work of Van Deth (2016), which identifies the most common forms of political participation. These activities, including voting and donating, were selected as indicators of political engagement. The researchers likewise adopted the survey tool used in Brosius et al.'s (2021) study wherein they conducted a four wave panel survey to measure media usage and political participation during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Questions on media consumption and misinformation perceptions were modified based on prior studies to reflect the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, aligning with research that connects media consumption with misinformation susceptibility.

Media consumption was measured by asking questions such as how often they consume social media and traditional media to watch, listen to, or read the news. Misinformation perceptions were measured by asking the respondents to rate on a scale of 1-5, with one indicating “strongly agree” and five indicating “strongly disagree,” that misinformation is prevalent during the pandemic, false information distorts people’s understanding of the pandemic, and whether the different health protocols mitigate the spread of coronavirus. Key-informant interviews were also conducted by the researchers to gain a comprehensive understanding of the respondents’ answers. The researchers selected five (5) participants for the interview. The interview questionnaire included questions like which political activities they have engaged in the most during the pandemic and how media consumption has influenced them to engage in more political activities.

### **Data Analysis**

The statistical tool used by the researchers is Google Sheets, a spreadsheet application used for statistical analysis. The statistical formula used by the researchers is the Pearson correlation coefficient, which establishes the strength and direction of the relationships between two or more variables. The variables measured in the study are political participation, media consumption, and misinformation perceptions. In interpreting the results of the statistical analysis, the researchers utilized QuestionPro Survey Software’s (2022) guide in analyzing the strength of association among correlational variables. A correlation coefficient from .1 to .3 indicates small positive relationship, while a correlation coefficient from .3 to .5 indicates a medium positive correlation. Correlation coefficients from .6 to 1 indicate strong relationships.

For the qualitative data as supporting data, thematic analysis has been utilized to further expound the data by enumerating and discussing the common themes, portrayals, and depictions of the study, through the study of Braun and Clark (2016) as a reference for this type of data analysis procedure. Thematic analysis will enable a proper and concrete decipher of answers that are based on the actual findings of the results to strengthen the data and have an enhanced cross-analysis of the study.

## **RESULTS**

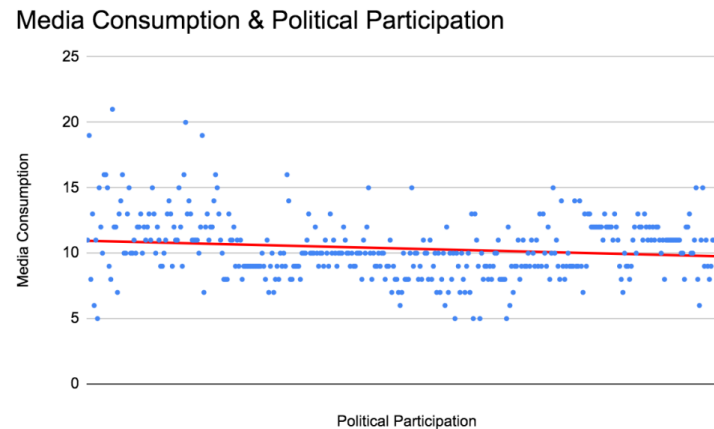
This study aimed to determine whether there is a relationship between media consumption, political participation, and misinformation perception among Filipino undergraduate students during the COVID-19 pandemic. The researchers conducted the study over twenty weeks across different universities in Manila. The universities included were: Philippine School of Business Administration, Far Eastern University, University of Manila, Arellano University, University of the East, University of Santo Tomas, San Sebastian College - Recoletos, National University, and the Eulogio Amang Rodriguez Institute of Science and Technology. Pearson correlation coefficient tests were done to establish the relationship between the variables. In interpreting the statistical analysis results, the researchers used QuestionPro Survey Software’s (2022) guide in analyzing the strength of association among correlational variables. A correlation coefficient from .1 to .3 indicates a small positive relationship, while a correlation coefficient from .3 to .5 indicates a medium positive correlation. Correlation coefficients from .6 to 1 indicate strong relationships.

A total of 387 respondents participated in this study. The respondents of the study were undergraduate students aged 18 to 24 years of age enrolled for academic year 2022-2023 in any of the universities included in this study: the Philippine School of Business Administration, Far Eastern University, University of Manila, Arellano University, University of the East, University of Santo Tomas, San Sebastian College - Recoletos, National University, and the Eulogio Amang Rodriguez Institute of Science and Technology.

### Figure 3

*Results of Pearson Correlation on Media Consumption and Political Participation*

#### Media Consumption and Political Participation

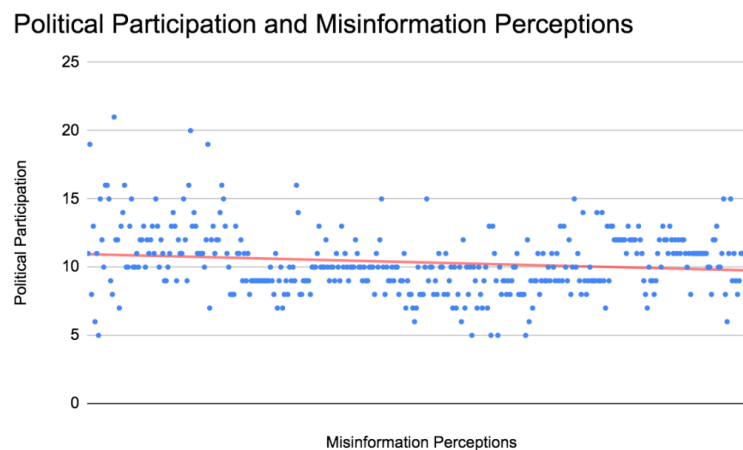


Results of the Pearson correlation suggest that there is a significant medium positive relationship between media consumption and political participation ( $r(387) = .341, p < .001$ ). The results suggest that media consumption and political participation have a positive relationship.

#### Political Participation and Misinformation Perceptions

### Figure 4

*Results of Pearson Correlation on Political Participation and Misinformation Perceptions*

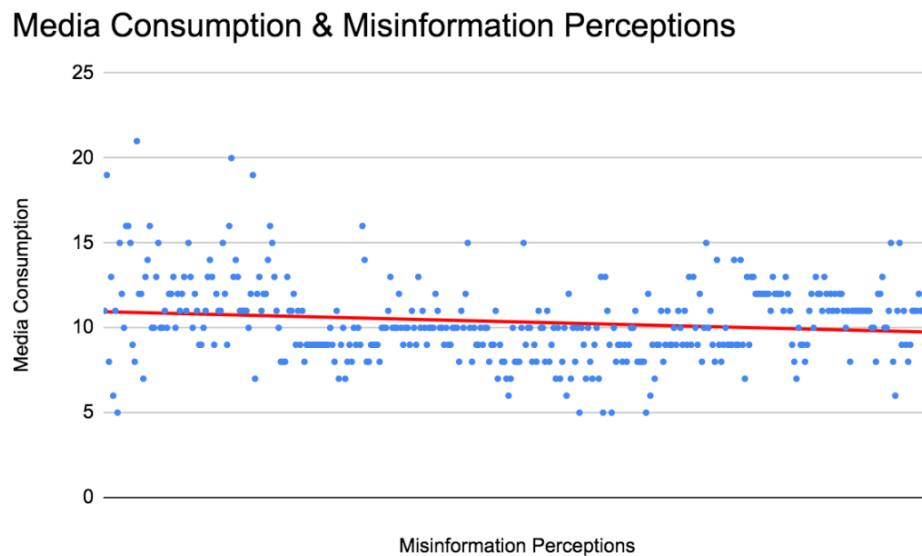


Results of the Pearson correlation indicate that there is a significant large positive relationship between political participation and misinformation perceptions ( $r(387) = .471, p < .001$ ). The researchers hypothesized that COVID-19-related misinformation perceptions determine the likelihood of individuals to participate politically during the pandemic. As indicated by the results, there is a significant positive relationship between political participation and misinformation perceptions.

## Media Consumption and Misinformation Perceptions

### Figure 5

*Results of Pearson Correlation on Media Consumption and Misinformation Perceptions*



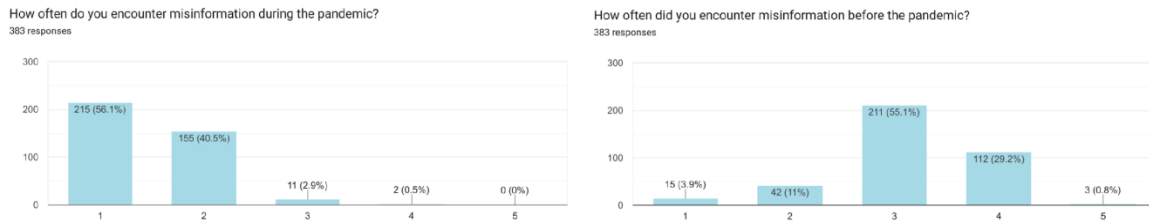
The Pearson correlation results indicated a significant medium positive relationship between media consumption and misinformation perceptions ( $r(387) = .230, p = .004$ ). The data suggests that there is a positive relationship between media consumption and misinformation perceptions.

## Pre-Pandemic Period vs. the Pandemic Period

In order to identify whether the levels of media consumption, political participation, and misinformation perceptions had increased, decreased, or remained the same during and before the COVID-19 pandemic, the respondents were asked to rate how often they have encountered misinformation, engaged in political activities, and consumed both traditional and social media during and before the pandemic. The survey questions utilized a Likert scale which enabled the respondents to provide their rating on a scale of 1-5, with one indicating “always” and five indicating “never” on each statement. Based on the study's initial results, the levels of media consumption, political participation, and misinformation perceptions have significantly increased during the pandemic period.

**Figure 6**

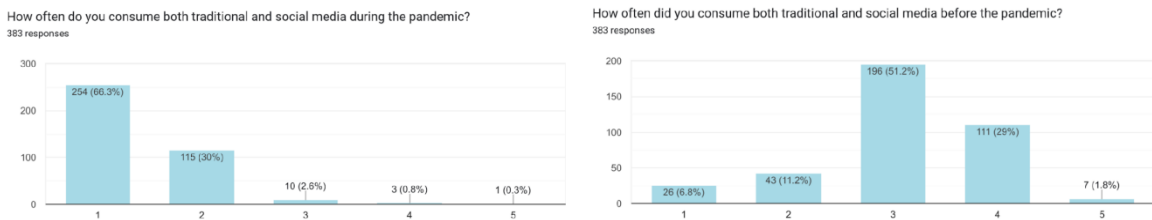
*Prevalence of Misinformation During and Before the Pandemic*



The figure above compares the prevalence of misinformation during and before the pandemic. Based on the results, 56 percent of the respondents answered that they have always encountered misinformation during the pandemic. This is significantly different from the pre-pandemic period, wherein 84 percent of the respondents’ answers indicate that misinformation was less prevalent before the pandemic started.

**Figure 7**

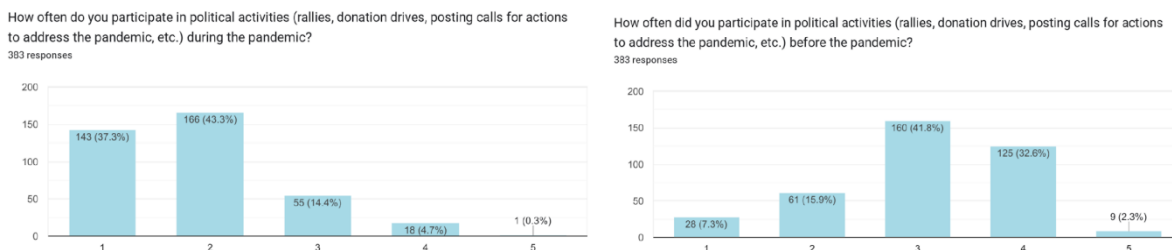
*Media Consumption During and Before the Pandemic*



As shown in Figure 7, there was an increase in the respondents’ media consumption during the pandemic, with 68.5 percent answering that they always consume both traditional and social media. During the pre-pandemic period, however, data shows that respondents consumed various forms of media much less. The results suggest a decline in media consumption before the pandemic, and media usage increased during the pandemic.

**Figure 8**

*Political Participation During and Before the Pandemic*



As shown in Figure 8, the majority of the responses indicate that the respondents engage in various political activities during the pandemic. In contrast to the pre-pandemic period, the respondents participated less in political activities. 80 percent of the respondents' answers indicate that political participation has significantly increased during the pandemic.

Comparing the data from the pre-pandemic and pandemic periods, it is evident that media consumption, political participation, and misinformation perceptions significantly increased during the pandemic. The shift to online platforms for information and social interaction contributed to greater engagement with news and political discourse.

- **Media Consumption:** During the pandemic, 68.5% of respondents reported always consuming traditional and social media, compared to a lower rate before the pandemic. This reliance on media for pandemic updates amplified overall consumption.
- **Political Participation:** A substantial rise in political participation was recorded, with 80% of respondents indicating increased involvement in advocacy efforts, online discussions, and donation drives.
- **Misinformation Perceptions:** 56% of respondents frequently encountered misinformation during the pandemic, compared to only 16% in the pre-pandemic period.

### Thematic Analysis for the Qualitative Interviews

In order to support the findings of the correlation through qualitative data, the proponents utilized semi-structured questions for the key-informant interview. The result of the interview based on the questions given to the randomly selected participants has developed themes that may provide a short discussion to support the findings. A total of six (6) questions were raised with which the researchers have deciphered the answers into descriptions and direct quotations. This approach, in combination with the quantitative data offers a more comprehensive discussion of the results that are relevant for the overall quality of the study.

**Table 1**

#### *Thematic Analysis of the Key-Informant Interviews*

Theme/Question	Description	Direct Quotation
Q1. Which political activities have you engaged in the most?	The majority of the respondents stated that the political activities they have engaged in the most are reading, watching, and sharing the news, engaging in political discourse, and donating and supporting organizations and causes they believed in.	<i>“Sharing the news on politicians, their projects and initiatives amid the pandemic, what have others done, and which politicians lack the capacity to lead during the pandemic. I also watch online debates, speeches then comment on politician's statements. I also make sure to support activities, causes and advocacies circulating the net.”</i>

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Q2. Why do you think you have politically participated more during the pandemic?	The respondents have politically participated more during the pandemic in contrast to the pre-pandemic period primarily due to the quarantine and mobility restrictions caused by the global health crisis. Some of the respondents stated that keeping themselves updated with both local and international affairs made them more politically aware and active. Furthermore, the pandemic also made them reevaluate the competencies of the state leaders in terms of addressing the global health crisis.	<i>“So... being in quarantine for more than four months made me more politically active. Aside from being bored staying at home, the pandemic made me reevaluate how competent our leaders were because during this time, they were our pillars of defense. Prior to the pandemic, politics never really attracted my attention, since I think it did not affect me directly, but because of the global crisis we faced, I now became more interested in how our government would react, respond, and resolve this world problem.”</i>
Q3. How does media consumption influence you to engage in more political activities?	The respondents stated that the media serves as a good source of information that equips them with the necessary tools and knowledge to participate and engage in political activities.	<i>“I believe that media consumption is primarily a good source of information. The reason many people don't participate in politics is simply that they don't know what is occurring in the world around them, which may lead them to believe that political engagement is neither relevant nor important to their lives. Simply knowing more about the state of the world through media consumption will urge people to engage more in the political sphere.”</i>
Q4. What are the factors that could tell why you have consumed media more during the pandemic compared to before the pandemic?	The respondents stated that the need for updated information amidst the shift to the online community due to its accessibility and convenience during the pandemic was the most significant factor in the increase of media consumption more than the pre-pandemic.	<i>“Due to the effects of pandemic, people have started to rely on technology to fulfill everyday duties and provide amusement. Before the pandemic, we could only get updates and news on the television. Nowadays, we can watch everything from our phones and get announcements from different social media. As I have said previously, media consumption made everything accessible, including politics, entertainment, sports, announcements, weather updates, etc., making us utilize media more now compared to pre-pandemic.”</i>
Q5. Do you think misinformation has become more prevalent during the pandemic, or has it remained the same even before the pandemic? Why?	The respondents agreed that misinformation has been more prevalent during the pandemic because of heightened media consumption.	<i>“I think that the pandemic has increased the prevalence of false information, and the rise in general media consumption can be partly blamed for this. Individuals now have more access to social media and the internet, and simply because there is more information available, there is also more information being spread without filter. In addition, not everyone will accurately report a source or relay information because people frequently repeat what they hear verbatim without checking the facts or may add and remove some information when sharing it to others.”</i>

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Q6. What are the most common forms of misinformation you have encountered during the pandemic?	The respondents claimed that the most common forms of misinformation during the pandemic were false political claims and COVID-19-related information such as its severity and transmission.	<i>“Misinformation on COVID-19 transmission, vaccination, symptoms and severity are among the top forms of misinformation during the pandemic that I have encountered. more over the election period especially bbm news”</i>
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### **Increased Political Awareness through Media Consumption**

The participants highlighted that media consumption, particularly social media, has greatly contributed and shaped their awareness during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Their constant access to campaigns, political discourse, and even that of regular news has helped them to stay informed and vigilant giving a much more immersion to social media access.

As stated above, this increase in awareness has been translated into a form of engagement considering that the participants were able to feel a sense of responsibility in terms of exchanging information and their thoughts within the online scale.

### **The Role of Misinformation in Shaping Perceptions**

Misinformation has been considered as another major issue as well, this was determined on how the respondents have taken into consideration on how the government's response to the pandemic was practiced. Both of the participants and respondents felt and expressed their disappointment and frustration within the rampant presence of false information across social media platforms. However, even with these challenges, this did not prevent the participants to be more critical and responsible users of information as they also actively do fact-checking by relying on other credible news outlets.

### **Digital Advocacy and Online Participation**

Because of the pandemic at that time, physical gatherings were restricted and the respondents and participants have turned to several digital platforms for political expression. These expressions would include activities such as signing petitions, donating to causes, and even the usual engagement to online discussions which were already present prior to the pandemic has surged throughout.

### **Evaluating Government Responses and Public Trust**

The political participation of the participants and respondents were usually revolved and motivated by their own evaluation about the government's response to the pandemic. They noted the perceived inadequacies in health policies and pandemic management which prompted them to voice out their concerns publicly, this time through social media.

The shift to online political participation has enabled the participants and respondents to remain engaged among discourses despite the implemented physical restrictions back then. It shows that there is an enriched understanding of factors that drives the political factors during the pandemic back then. It can also be noted that the analysis may serve as a model to further discussions on media literacy initiatives and strategies to mitigate the spread of misinformation and disinformation among digital spaces like social media.

## DISCUSSION

The study aimed to establish the correlation between political participation, media consumption, and misinformation perceptions among undergraduate students during the COVID-19 pandemic. While existing literature discusses the relationship between these variables during an election or campaigning period, this study was conducted during a global pandemic. As discussed previously, the COVID-19 pandemic has altered how individuals interact, participate in political activities, and consume various forms of media. Yet, studies conducted in the context of the pandemic remain relatively scarce, which prompted the researchers to explore this phenomenon. Likewise, the study aimed to identify whether the pre-pandemic period differs from the continuing pandemic period in terms of the level of media consumption, political participation, and the extent of COVID-19-related misinformation, as literature regarding this remains scarce as well.

The results of this study suggest that political participation, media consumption, and misinformation perceptions are positively correlated. This affirms the researchers' hypothesis that higher media consumption and news exposure increase political participation levels during the COVID-19 pandemic. Among the political activities that students have engaged in the most during the pandemic are watching, sharing, and reading the news, joining organizations, and supporting online causes such as donating. The findings also suggest that both media consumption and political participation have increased among undergraduate students during the pandemic. Based on the key-informant interviews conducted among the selected participants, one of the reasons why their levels of political participation have increased more during the pandemic is because of how the pandemic has made them reevaluate the competencies of the state leaders. As stated by one of the key informants, government officials play a crucial role in addressing the global crisis, and seeing how they respond to the demands during a pandemic made them grow more interested in political affairs since the state's actions and decisions are felt throughout the whole population. Moreover, political participation has also increased during the pandemic due to the fact that they became more exposed to political information, thereby allowing them to engage and connect more with people through political discussions. Media consumption has likewise increased since the pandemic has prompted individuals to rely more on technology as the majority of services have shifted online. Apart from this, individuals have also relied on various forms of media as sources of entertainment and important information about the pandemic.

Building on the discussion, the results of this study also suggest that political participation, media consumption, and misinformation perceptions are positively correlated. This affirms the researchers' hypothesis that higher media consumption and news exposure increase political participation levels during the COVID-19 pandemic. Among the factors that explain why media consumption influences political participation is how the media serves as a good source of information and allows individuals to remain up to date with the current political and social events taking place within their locality and around the globe. Simply knowing about the current affairs of the state equips individuals with the necessary information and tools to engage in political discussions with their peers. This is supported by the findings of Ahmad and Ittefaq's (2019) study, which found that increased social media consumption warrants higher levels of offline and online political participation among university students in urban Pakistan. Similarly, McAllister (2016) concluded that media use among the youth in Australia has significantly increased their political knowledge, as well as in determining their participation in the electorate. However, it is significant to note that these previous studies were conducted under normal circumstances, not in times of crisis, such as pandemics. With this, the results of this study indicate that media consumption induces political participation among the youth, even in times of global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, where quarantine measures and mobility restrictions are in place.

The researchers also hypothesized that COVID-19-related misinformation perceptions determine the likelihood of individuals participating politically during the pandemic. The result of the study shows that undergraduate students' political participation has increased during the pandemic. Also, based on the responses from the survey, the majority of the respondents agreed on several notions, such as that there is a prevalence of false information about the pandemic, the different health and safety protocols help mitigate the spread of the virus, and that misinformation distorts people's understanding of COVID-19. This indicates that the respondents are aware of false information regarding the pandemic, whether it is spread online or in traditional media. This is affirmed by studies such as Brosius' (2021), wherein it was revealed that individuals in the Netherlands are more likely to participate politically during the time of the pandemic despite the prevalence of misinformation due to their willingness to act upon the spread of COVID-19 misinformation (Brosius et al., 2021). Yet, at the same time, this diverges with Nwanko's (2020) study, wherein they found that misinformation or unawareness about COVID-19-related information could motivate an individual's participation in political activities in Nigeria. This phenomenon, wherein unawareness and believing in false information could be motivators of political participation, has yet to be explored in further studies.

It was also found that misinformation has become more prevalent during the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the initial findings of this study, around 80 percent of the respondents answered that they encountered misinformation more often during the pandemic compared to the pre-pandemic period. The most common forms of misinformation experienced by undergraduate students during the pandemic are inaccurate claims regarding the severity and effects of COVID-19 vaccines and false political propaganda propagated by politicians, especially during the 2022 local and national elections in the Philippines. This could be explained by how the media, specifically social media, has positive and negative implications. Arugay (2022) stated that the shift of ordinary citizens to social media platforms during the pandemic poses some challenges, such as susceptibility to false information and disinformation, which is the deliberate spread of false information to deceive people. This is because social media has also become a medium for individuals with malicious intent to disseminate false and deceptive information deliberately. Yet, the findings of this study suggest that political participation and misinformation perceptions are positively correlated, which indicates that while misinformation has become prevalent, undergraduate students are still likely to engage in political activities.

## CONCLUSION

Through the analysis of the data and graphs provided by the survey conducted with undergraduates around Manila, the researchers fulfilled the objectives of the quantitative study. The main objectives posed as research questions were answered by the respondents through an online Google Forms survey questionnaire, as seen in the Results and Findings part of the study. With this, the study has successfully established the relationship between media consumption, political participation, and COVID-19-related misinformation perceptions among undergraduate students. Foremost, initial results show that the willingness of a student to politically participate is highly and positively significant with the COVID-19-related misinformation perceptions they encounter, which shows dependence on the participation of students in politics based on the misinformation they consume. Consequently, the foremost findings have also emphasized the relationship between media consumption and political participation. The results found that media consumption and political participation have a positive relationship from which participation increases the more the students consume media content. Subsequently, the results were similar between media consumption and misinformation perception, indicating a positive relationship. Thus, the more the students consume media content, the higher their susceptibility to misinformation.

Lastly, the results illustrated the difference in the stipulated period. In the illustration, it was drawn that the levels of media consumption, political participation, and misinformation perceptions have increased significantly during the pandemic period more than before. This indicates the positive relationship among the three variables in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In conclusion, the hypothesis that higher media consumption and news exposure increase political participation levels during the COVID-19 pandemic was accepted and that the COVID-19-related misinformation perceptions determine the likelihood of individuals participating politically during the pandemic was accepted as well. Ultimately, the study has drawn out implications for politicians, policymakers, and various stakeholders to combat misinformation, assess media consumption and evaluate political participation. Meanwhile, based on the findings and conclusion, future studies might be conducted to examine the impact of media influence and further look into the extent to which political participation can be drawn out based on media contents which include misinformation. Moreover, since the paper has only included 9 universities near Morayta area, future researchers may employ the participation of other undergraduate students among the other top-performing and populated universities in Manila. In addition, other groups of people may be surveyed such as the professionals or working class in order to further determine the relationship between the variables if it will remain the same when the profile of the demographics has been changed. In line with this, other variables such as factors in both traditional and social media as well as factors that contribute to social media becoming a source of misinformation can be included to further establish the depth of the constructs in the study.

Ultimately, the study has drawn out implications for politicians, policymakers, and various stakeholders to combat misinformation, assess media consumption and evaluate political participation. Future studies among policymakers might be conducted to examine the impact of media influence on public support for restrictive or corrective actions toward COVID-19 misinformation. Future studies might be conducted within media institutions to examine the impact of their influence and further look into the extent to which political participation can be drawn out based on media content which may include misinformation.

Since this paper has only included nine universities near the Morayta area, other academic institutions may employ the participation of other undergraduate students among the other top-performing and populated universities in Manila or else the students living in the provinces outside of the country. In addition, other groups of people may be surveyed, such as the professionals or working class, in order to determine the relationship between the variables further if it will remain the same when the profile of the demographics has been changed. In line with this, other variables, such as factors in both traditional and social media, as well as factors that contribute to social media becoming a source of misinformation, can be included further to establish the depth of the constructs in the study. Lastly, this paper may serve as a framework for future studies in terms of finding relevant engagement between media consumption behaviors and political participation and not just in the perceived misinformation.

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## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interests in the conduct of this study.

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