

Modern Social Media Platforms and Teenage Political Perceptions and Knowledge

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ABSTRACT

Past research demonstrates the evolving nature of teenage engagement with political content through digital modes of expression, highlighting the importance of civic engagement. The purpose of this study is to contribute to an identified research gap by examining the association between modern social media platforms and increased high school teenagers' political perceptions and knowledge in the United States. This study included 25 American high school students in a suburban high school in the Northeastern United States. Through a Microsoft Forms questionnaire, data from the 25 participants revealed TikTok and Snapchat as the most utilized platforms, suggesting their impact on political engagement among teenagers. Analysis of Likert-scale questions indicated a prevailing belief among the participants that social media content influences political perceptions and knowledge, with moderate levels of exposure to political content on social media feeds. However, there was a moderate level of skepticism regarding the trustworthiness of political information on social media. The role of social media in facilitating civic engagement with American politics yields mixed sentiments. Thematic analysis of structured interviews highlights that the participants could reference current political events, particularly conflicts in the Middle East, as significant sources of political information on social media. Moreover, social media serves as a tool to mobilize teenagers politically, spurring engagement and activism. The implications of employing modern social media platforms in the United States as a tool for teenagers to remain engaged with current political events and directions for future research are considered.

Introduction

In an era where teenage civic engagement holds great significance, this study explores the intricate relationship between modern social media platforms and teenage political perceptions and knowledge. As current and future generations of teenager's grapple with evolving political structures and modes of expression, understanding civic engagement is vital. Recent generational declines in teenage civic participation underscore the urgency of investigating factors that influence political awareness. Moreover, the connection between political discourse and social media platforms, present an opportunity to examine how American digital spaces shape political perceptions and knowledge among high school students. Recognizing the relationships between social media, political current events, and teenage civic engagement is essential for navigating the future landscape of informed and active citizenry in the United States.

Literature Review

This study investigates an association between social media and teenage political perceptions and knowledge in high school students. To do so, it is important to understand and contextualize politics, the prevalence of

teenage civic engagement with current political events, and the development of social media platforms that influence teenage political perceptions.

Politics and Current Events

Given the parameters of the existing literature, politics can be defined as the systematic organization and management of societal affairs, encompassing the creation and execution of policies that influence the functioning of a community (Majid et al., 2021). Modes of political engagement are classified into expressive and virtual forms of communication. Scholars have described that expressive forms of political communication include “actively taking part in [an] organization and administration of collective action to improve social and community problems through community work, boycotting, even protest” (Owen & Soule, 2015, p. 5). Other scholars further developed this definition by mentioning that “political participation can also involve civic activities that have no age limits such as volunteering for social organizations, discussing politics with friends and family, or participating in political demonstrations” (Oden & Porter, 2023). With the rise of digital technologies, virtual forms of political communication are now more prevalent and have evolved into “more unconventional manners because teens do not have voting rights and there is a strong sense of distrust towards politicians...” (Gibson et al., 2005). Teenagers can engage with politics digitally by participating in online discussions, sharing informative content on social media, and using digital platforms to organize events and express their opinions. This mode of youth political engagement is significant as it challenges the conventional notions of political participation, highlighting the need for a study that recognizes modernized approaches to teenage civic engagement in the United States.

The content displayed on social media platforms connect to American current political events, which refer to the most recent social or political developments (Oden & Porter, 2023). The multifaceted interaction between current political events and digital engagement was exemplified in a recent study conducted by Oden and Porter (2023), which focused on “an Ohio train derailment [that] endangered the local community of East Palestine with hazardous materials, but it went nearly unnoticed by mainstream news media.” This prominent current political event challenged the traditional gatekeeping role of mainstream media, prompting a reconsideration of how society consumes political news. Although social media platforms create opportunities for teenagers to engage in politics, there have still been drastic generational declines in teenage civic engagement. These drastic declines in civic engagement may be attributed to factors such as increasing digital distractions, lack of civic education, diminishing trust in political institutions, and competing priorities in teenagers' lives (Majid et al., 2021).

Studies on the Prevalence of Teenage Civic Engagement

Teenage civic engagement cultivates informed and active citizenship from an early age, instilling a sense of responsibility, promoting critical thinking, and shaping the future leaders and contributors to American democracy (Oden & Porter, 2023). As illuminated in a recent study on the prevalence of teenage civic engagement, “research suggests that giving young people opportunities to become engaged in civic activities increases the likelihood they will become healthy, active citizens” (Michelsen et al., 2002). However, teenagers are currently experiencing a decline in political engagement that stems from a lack of interest in current political events. As highlighted in a study conducted by Galston (2001), the decline in civic engagement can be attributed to students that “characterize their volunteering as an alternative to official politics, which they see as corrupt, ineffective, and unrelated to their deeper ideals” (p. 220). Galston's insights underscore the urgency of discovering new methods to increase civic engagement amongst American teenagers. When adolescents remain informed on current political events, their active participation cultivates responsible and active citizenry.

Although scholars have argued that civic engagement can be influenced by socializing agents (friends, family members, public figures, etc.), recent foreign studies give credence to social media as a new effective

method of engaging in political discourse. In Korea, a study was conducted by Seongyi and Woo-Young (2008) on 100+ teenagers that were involved in the 2008 Candlelight Protests in South Korea. The authors concluded that Korean teenagers struggled to participate in digital political discussions because of academic challenges and competition. In their 5-point Likert scales, “46% responded that they use the Internet on a daily basis to obtain information related to sociopolitical issues” (Seongyi & Woo-Young, 2008, p. 245). This study highlighted the role of the Internet in shaping political information habits, indicating a substantial reliance on digital platforms to stay informed about political and governmental matters in Korea.

In a similar study conducted in Pakistan, Muzaffar and his colleagues (2019), described how the Pakistani government has historically controlled forms of communication like TV, print media, and private channels. While focusing on BS and MS/M postgraduate students, the authors created “an achievement test [comprised] of 15 multiple choices related to the political science and basic knowledge of day-to-day politics...” (Muzaffar et al., 2019, p. 8). This comprehensive approach gathered nuanced insights into the political awareness and academic proficiency of Pakistani students. The results of this Pakistani study were similar to an Italian youth study that found “an apparent reduction in the way political participation is expressed by younger generations...[which] confirms the existence of gender differences in adolescence related to political interest...” (Albanesi et al., 2012, p. 361). The existing body of literature illuminates the need for a study that focuses on social media platforms and American high school students.

Social Media Platforms

Given the parameters of the existing literature, modern social media platforms can be defined as online services or applications that enable users to create, share, and interact with content that fosters the spread of information. The most common modern social media platforms include TikTok, Snapchat, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube (Oden & Porter, 2023). In a poll conducted by O’Keeffe and Clarke-Pearson (2011), “22% of teenagers log on to their favorite social media site more than 10 times a day, and more than half of adolescents log on to a social media site more than once a day” (p. 800). On modern social media platforms, digital content is considered user generated. According to Boulianne (2014), user-generated content refers to any content, such as text, images, videos, reviews, or other multimedia materials, that is created by individuals rather than brands. User-generated content has become a driving force in shaping online conversations and fostering community political engagement. This content amplifies individual voices and plays a pivotal role in shaping the political narrative on social media.

In a study conducted on 15-20-year-old Austrian adolescents, the authors categorized teenage motivations to view political content into intentional and incidental modes of exposure. According to Heiss and fellow researchers (2020), “the intentional mode of exposure refers to actively seeking and processing political information. In the incidental mode, users stumble upon political content only by accident, for example, when political content is shared by acquaintances in their networks” (p. 672). The existing body of literature primarily emphasized that intentional modes of exposure increase with the spread of user-generated content. Another issue that influences how teenagers make content choices on social media is the potential spread of negative political misinformation and biases. The ability to post anonymously online can be utilized to easily influence teenage political perceptions and knowledge (Oden & Porter, 2023). The circulation of misinformation on social media platforms raises new concerns about how teenagers may fail to recognize biased political perspectives relating to current political events.

Studies on the Modes of Digital Political Engagement

Building upon the challenges posed by the circulation of misinformation on social media, it is important to discuss previous studies conducted on teenage political engagement on social media. Teenagers engage in digital political spaces through various means, including active participation in online discussions, sharing political

content on social media platforms, and consuming news digitally. Social media platforms allow teenagers to explore political topics, share perspectives, and contribute to broader discourse (Muzaffar et al., 2019). Recent studies illuminate that political participation is always highest during American election cycles. During the 2008 American election cycle, a study was conducted on 574 respondents selected from the voting age population near a metropolitan area in the United States. The conclusions of this research study found that “just over 55% of the adult U.S. population sought some level of online involvement; 45% of Internet users watched videos online, a more traditional form of political content consumption” (Himmelboim et al., 2012, p. 93). Not only does digital political engagement expose teenagers to civic opportunities, but it also prepares them for future civic responsibilities, such as voting at the age of 18. Based on the findings of the literature review, the current study will examine the hypothesis that social media is positively associated with increased political perceptions and knowledge in American high school students.

Method

Overview

My research method consisted of ten main steps: 1) create consent forms (Appendix A), a Microsoft Forms interest survey (Appendix B), a Microsoft Forms questionnaire (Appendix C), and authentic interview questions (Appendix D), 2) request a school authority to send out the interest survey to all students, 3) use the email address of respondents from the interest survey to send out details on Microsoft Teams about collecting consent forms, 4) collect signed consent forms at lunch, 5) send out the Microsoft Forms questionnaire on Microsoft Teams to the participants that completed the consent forms, 6) conduct the interviews, 7) transcribe the interviews using Microsoft transcription software (Appendix E), 8) analyze the quantitative data from the Microsoft Forms questionnaire on Excel, 9) analyze the qualitative data from the interviews using a thematic approach (Appendix F), and 10) interpret and discuss the results.

I used correlational research because I investigated the association between social media and teenage political perceptions and knowledge. Correlational research was also the most feasible method for me as a high school student with limited time and resources.

Ethical Considerations

Participants were recruited with school authorities' help to support my research study's advancement. There was a summary explaining the project and an offer to learn about findings in the future. Each participant turned in parental consent and signed student assent regardless of age. All human subjects were anonymous, voluntary, and allowed to withdraw from the study at any time. Furthermore, strict adherence to data confidentiality protocols were upheld, guaranteeing that participants' sensitive information always remained protected. Before conducting my research, my study was also approved by the Institutional Review Board. These measures upheld the highest standards of ethical conduct in human subject research.

Participants and Procedure

The present study consisted of 25 participants recruited at a suburban high school in the Northeastern United States. Of the total respondents, 60% were female, 28% were male, 6% were non-binary, and 6% preferred not to say. I used reliable survey tools to collect my data: Likert scales, multiple-choice, and authentic interview questions. I created my eleven-item questionnaire regarding social media habits and broad political statements using Microsoft Forms. The ten-question structured interview focused on social media and current political

events that helped me to draw correlational conclusions. The interviews were recorded with an iPhone on voice memos and used transcription software services provided by Microsoft to aid the data collection process. The data obtained addressed the gap because it asked high school students about their experiences regarding social media and their political perceptions on current political events in the United States. Once the questionnaire and interview questions were created, I developed an interest survey on Microsoft Forms to identify those interested in my study. The interest survey had two multiple-choice questions about interest and grade level along with two short-response questions requesting the student's email address. The interest survey was shared to students on Microsoft Teams, the school's learning management system, with the help of the Dean of Students, teachers, and clubs. Interested students completed the interest survey and then were sent an email regarding details to get student assent and parental consent forms signed. When participants returned the appropriate signed consent forms to me, I emailed them a link to the Microsoft Forms questionnaire. Throughout this three-month process, I sent Microsoft Teams chat reminders to the participants to return their signed consent and assent forms. After the Microsoft Forms questionnaire was completed, structured interviews were conducted during school hours with the participants in a secluded setting to ensure confidentiality.

After sending out the interest survey, 24 students responded positively to the interest survey and approximately 62.5% (15 students) went on to complete the research study. The remaining 10 students were recruited by word of mouth. When I first started receiving responses to my interest survey, there was a low response rate. The need for student and parental consent forms were an obstacle to the completion of my Microsoft Forms questionnaire and interview. The data collection occurred from January 2024 to March 2024 and was stored using a secured laptop that had access to Excel and Microsoft interview transcription software.

Measures

Five-Point Likert Scales

In political science research, Likert scales have become a widely recognized and credible tool for measuring political perceptions and knowledge. Past studies leverage 5-point Likert scales as the standardized survey format, facilitating the ease of interpretation for participants and ensuring consistency across different studies. In a study conducted on the relationship between adolescents' civic knowledge and their future likelihood of voting, Cohen, and Chaffee (2013) describe their methodology consisted of calculating current event knowledge using Likert scales and multiple-choice questions. In my research study, the Likert scales were developed to reflect the opinions of the participants on how social media platforms influence their political perceptions and knowledge. I chose 5-point Likert scales because they are free, reliable, and consistently used in scholarly political science research.

Interviews

In this study, qualitative data was collected through a series of authentic interview questions designed to explore participant's interactions with social media and its influence on their political perceptions and knowledge. I crafted my interview questions to best suit the specific variables and nuances identified in my literature review. These authentic interview questions delved into content engagement, political content encounters, sources of political information, and American current political event topics. With a focus on current political events, I conducted research to find the most pressing topics that attract teenage political participation. I discovered that the 2024 election cycle, climate change, and national security issues were most reflective of teenage political perceptions and knowledge. These current event topics best reflect political perceptions and knowledge because studies illuminate that political participation is always highest during American election cycles.

Data Analysis

Using Excel, I relied on basic statistical analyses (mean, median, mode, and standard deviation) to explore the distribution of teenage political perceptions and knowledge in the total sample to understand its composition. The mean provides an average score representing perceived influence of each Likert scale response, while the median offers insight into central tendency, especially if responses are skewed. Identifying the mode reveals prevailing attitudes among respondents, and calculating standard deviation indicates the variability in perceptions.

Results

Research Question

To what extent do modern social media platforms influence the political perceptions and knowledge of American teenagers?

I hypothesized a positive association between modern social media platforms and political perceptions and knowledge of American teenagers. For the total sample, mean, median, mode, and standard deviation were calculated on the Likert scale responses.

Table 1. Do you believe that the content you engage with on social media platforms influences your political perceptions and knowledge on American political current events?

Total Sample	N	25
	MEAN	3.36
	MEDIAN	4
	MODE	4
	SD	0.757

Table 2. How often do you come across political content (e.g., news, opinions, discussions, political influencers) on your social media feeds?

Total Sample	N	24
	MEAN	3.458

MEDIAN	3
MODE	3
SD	0.658

*One participant did not respond
to this question*

Table 3. To what extent do you trust the information related to politics that you find on social media?

Total Sample	N	25
	MEAN	2.56
	MEDIAN	2
	MODE	2
	SD	0.870

Table 4. Social media allows me to remain civically engaged with American politics, allowing me to make informed political choices.

Total Sample	N	25
	MEAN	2.68
	MEDIAN	3
	MODE	3
	SD	1.03

Data Analyses – Total Sample

In the Microsoft Forms questionnaire, the 25 participants were asked to state which social media platform they use most often. After conducting percentage analyses, the data revealed that TikTok and Snapchat are used

most often (32% for both), then Instagram (28%), and lastly Pinterest and YouTube (4% for both). The distribution of social media platform usage among the surveyed participants, with TikTok and Snapchat emerging as the most frequently utilized platforms, holds significant importance in understanding the landscape of political engagement among teenagers. Given the prevalence of these platforms in their daily interactions, it suggests that political content disseminated through TikTok and Snapchat may have a broader reach and impact on this demographic. Understanding the preferred platforms allows for more targeted and effective strategies in delivering political information and fostering civic engagement.

Based on the Likert-scale question assessing the influence of social media content on political perceptions and knowledge (Table 1), the data from the sample of 25 participants suggests that, on average, individuals lean towards agreement, with a mean score of 3.36. The median score of 4 indicates that the middle response falls on "Agree", showing a tendency towards agreement, while the mode score of 4 suggests that "Agree" was the most common response among participants. This indicates a prevailing belief among respondents that social media content does influence political perceptions and knowledge, with low variability in opinions, as reflected by the standard deviation of 0.757.

The data collected from 24 participants (one participant elected not to respond) regarding the frequency of encountering political content on their social media feeds indicates a moderately frequent exposure (Table 2), with a mean score of 3.458. The median score of 3 shows that the middle value of responses lies at "Occasionally", indicating that many respondents report encountering political content with some regularity. The mode score of 3 further reinforces this, indicating that "Occasionally" was the most common response among participants. The standard deviation of 0.658 suggests low variability in responses, indicating a degree of consistency in how frequently individuals come across political content on their social media platform feeds.

Based on the responses of 25 participants regarding their level of trust in political information found on social media (Table 3), the data reveals a moderate level of skepticism. With a mean score of 2.56, the average sentiment leans towards "Not Very Much" trust. The median score of 2 suggests that a sizable portion of respondents also hold this view, with "Not Very Much" being the middle value. Moreover, the mode score of 2 indicates that "Not Very Much" was the most frequently chosen response, emphasizing a prevalent lack of trust. The standard deviation of 0.870 suggests a moderate degree of variability in responses, indicating that while skepticism is common, there are some variations in the trust among individuals.

Based on the responses of 25 participants regarding the statement concerning social media's role in facilitating civic engagement with American politics and informed political decision-making (Table 4), the data suggests a mixed sentiment. With a mean score of 2.68, the average falls between "Disagree" and "Neutral", indicating a tendency towards disagreement but not strongly so. The median score of 3, along with the mode score also being 3, suggests that a sizable portion of respondents chose "Neutral", indicating uncertainty or a lack of strong opinion on this matter. Additionally, the standard deviation of 1.03 indicates a notable degree of variability in responses, signifying diverse perspectives among the participants.

Data Analyses – Structured Interviews

After transcribing the structured interviews, I engaged in a process of thematic coding, where I identified recurring themes across the interviews. Each interview was systematically coded based on prevalent themes, allowing for the organization of quotes into distinct categories within a Word document (Appendix G). Subsequently, I reviewed the coded quotes, highlighting those deemed most representative of each respective theme. Below, an analysis was conducted to display the conclusions discovered from each thematic code within the interviews.

Methods of Engagement with Politics on Social Media Platforms

The first thematic code that was discovered throughout the interviews, methods of engagement with politics on social media platforms, illuminates the intricate ways in which modern social media platforms influence the political perceptions and knowledge of American teenagers. As highlighted by Student D, who noted, "I usually see image and video posts because I use Instagram and TikTok," there is a clear preference for visually oriented content among this demographic. This preference underscores the significance of visual communication in shaping teenage political perceptions and knowledge. Additionally, Student O observed that engagement with political content on social media is "just randomized..." highlighting the algorithm-driven nature of content dissemination. Most participants' political knowledge was shaped by the algorithms on social media because the spread of information was encountered incidentally rather than through intentional seeking. Student G further mentioned "a lot of posts go viral, and then if more people interact with it, then I'll more likely see it" which exacerbates the role of viral political content on social media as a method to increase teenage political knowledge.

Examples of Current Political Events Discovered on Social Media

The second thematic code that was discovered throughout the interviews, examples of current political events discovered on social media, focused on the most referenced current political events that the participants mentioned increased their political perceptions and knowledge. Most participants highlighted a common theme prevalent on social media platforms, particularly concerning the spread of current event information related to conflicts in the Middle East. Student F pointed out, "I think the thing with like Palestine and Israel," emphasizing the ongoing discourse surrounding the Israel-Palestine conflict. Student S echoed this sentiment, "probably the conflict occurring in the Middle East right now with Israel and Palestine." Similarly, Student T noted, "I've seen a lot about the Israeli Palestine crisis," while Student W affirmed, "the conflict in the Middle East with like Palestine." These quotes collectively underscore the prominence of discussions related to current political events on modern social media platforms, reflecting teenage political engagement.

Social Media as a Tool to Mobilize Teenagers Politically

The third thematic code that was discovered throughout the interviews, social media as a tool to mobilize teenagers politically, discovers how social media platforms can be used as a tool to keep teenagers informed, knowledgeable, and active with politics. Student B recounted how harrowing images from the Russia-Ukraine war spurred them to seek more information and become more engaged, stating, "I definitely think so because with the like Russia and Ukraine war for example, like I saw a lot of photos about like children...just like disgusting photos." Student C emphasized the importance of integrating politics into various social media platforms to increase exposure among young adults, noting, "I feel like a lot of young people...they use social media a lot and they also use a bunch of different platforms." Additionally, Student T acknowledged the current trend of social media posts advocating for political participation, stating, "I think that social media is used a lot to spur on like I know that a lot of posts are being made right now about people voting and how voting is very important."

2024 United States Election Cycle

The fourth thematic code that was discovered throughout the interviews, 2024 United States election cycle, analyzed information that the participants encountered on social media relating to the upcoming 2024 United States election cycle. Student C acknowledged the influence of political posts on social media, noting, "I have on like politicians, accounts that I follow." Moreover, Student C emphasized how these posts impact their knowledge and voting decisions, stating, "yeah, I think those posts definitely, they influence like my knowledge and like what I know about the candidates in the election, and then it ends up influencing like who I would vote for." Student G recalled encountering election-related content on TikTok, highlighting its potential to raise

awareness among users, stating, "recently I saw an ad on TikTok, and it was for the 2024 election, and it was basically from, like the Democrats account on TikTok and they were just posting like a funny TikTok. I guess just to get people um like to like be aware of, like the election that's coming up." Student S noted encountering campaign ads on TikTok, indicating the platform's role in disseminating political information, stating, "I've seen campaign ads on TikTok." Student G highlighted their evolving political perspective on their future role in voting, stating, "obviously we have a choice like I don't necessarily have to vote, but then at the same time, it's like the country that I'm living in...I would do it because like it's impacting a bunch of people and myself." Student M reflected on the importance of civic duty and informed decision-making, remarking, "I want to have like my [pause], I feel like voting will like even if it's just like one vote can have a like a really drastic like impact." As social media is utilized to spread election information, these platforms can be used to keep American teenagers informed and engaged with United States election cycle content.

Climate Change

The fifth thematic code that was discovered throughout the interviews, climate change, focuses on environmental policies and climate content on social media. Student C discussed the content they encountered on social media regarding climate change, stating, "like the Canadian wildfires, the California wildfires...snow caps and ice caps melting." This quote illustrates their awareness of environmental issues portrayed through social media content. Student G mentioned their exposure to climate-related content, particularly concerning animal habitats, saying, "I've seen a lot of things relate to climate change, especially with a bunch of animals that go extinct." This highlights the impact of social media in spreading awareness about the consequences of climate change on biodiversity. Student M reflected on their increased awareness resulting from social media exposure to climate change content, noting, "I definitely like, felt more...aware of the topic and I've started to use like products that are like more sustainable."

National Security

The sixth thematic code that was discovered throughout the interviews, national security, focuses on current event issues like the Israel conflict and Ukraine War, signifying teenage political perceptions and knowledge on this issue. Student A highlighted how social media, particularly TikTok, has informed them about the issues between Israel and Palestine, stating, "I have because I've seen on TikTok about...the issues that are happening in Israel and Palestine. And it's...allowed me to be more informed of the matter." This quote underscores the role of platforms like TikTok in providing information and raising awareness about global conflicts. Student P reflected on the emotional impact of social media content on global crises, stating, "they do...make me want to research more about it...So, I feel like it does like make me want to be more interested because it's like sad to see like what's happening to these people."

Discussion

Study's Overall Current Findings

The integration of quantitative data and qualitative insights offered an understanding of how modern social media platforms shape the political perceptions and knowledge of American teenagers. The quantitative analysis revealed a prevalent belief among respondents on the influence of social media content on political awareness, as evidenced by their average scores leaning towards agreement. The frequent exposure to political content on social media feeds further solidifies the platform's role as a primary source of political information for teenagers. Despite this, a notable level of skepticism regarding the reliability of political information disseminated

on social media platforms is evident, suggesting a critical approach to online content consumption among teenagers. Qualitative exploration dives into the intricacies of how social media platforms impact political awareness among teenagers. Themes such as the preference for visual content and the mobilization of teenagers through social media underscore the platform's significant role in shaping political perceptions. Also, most of the participants were able to mention specific examples of current political event topics from social media like the 2024 United States election cycle, climate change, and national security. To navigate this landscape effectively, it is imperative to promote critical thinking skills among teenagers, empowering them to engage with political content online to form their own opinions.

Implications

The research findings underscore the profound influence of modern social media platforms, particularly TikTok and Snapchat, on the political perceptions and knowledge of American teenagers. With these platforms emerging as the most frequently used among surveyed participants, it becomes evident that political content disseminated through them holds significant sway over this demographic. Social media serves as a powerful tool to allow teenagers to become engaged with political content, offering them accessible avenues for information and discourse. However, this study highlights the crucial role of school systems and education in teaching students how to differentiate between misinformation and credible content on social media platforms to form well-educated political opinions. By promoting critical thinking skills, educators can empower teenagers to navigate the digital landscape responsibly and discern accurate information from misinformation and disinformation.

Moreover, the research suggests that social media can mitigate the drastic decline in teenage civic engagement witnessed in recent generations by exposing young individuals to a plethora of current event topics. By providing access to diverse perspectives and facilitating discussions on political issues, social media platforms inform teenage knowledge on political discussions in the United States. Through targeted interventions and educational initiatives, stakeholders can harness the potential of social media to promote informed political participation among teenagers and cultivate a more engaged and civically aware generation.

Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations to the present study. Although this study addressed a research gap in the literature by sampling American high school students, the sample may not be representative of all types of students. As noted, there was a low response rate to the interest survey because some students were ready to participate until there were more steps before completing the survey and interview. Due to the small sample size, suburban setting, and the requirement to sign student assent and parental consent, the sample may be biased to students that followed through on the protocol. Many surveys were obtained from students in AP history courses which may have skewed the participation to a restricted range of student characteristics. The study was correlational in nature, so casual interpretations cannot be drawn. The study's participant composition also skewed towards a higher representation of females, comprising 60% of the sample, while males accounted for 28%. Consequently, the data was only analyzed in total rather than by gender to avoid potential biases resulting from unequal gender representation.

Another limitation in the present study is that the nature of current political events is constantly evolving, making it challenging to isolate the influence of modern social media platforms on the political perceptions and knowledge of American teenagers from other external factors. While efforts were made to control confounding variables, such as current events, it is possible that participants' political perceptions and knowledge were influenced by factors beyond the scope of this research. Additionally, the Microsoft Forms questionnaire

with a 5-point Likert scale may have introduced social desirability bias, as participants may have been inclined to respond in a manner that they believed would be viewed favorably by the researcher.

While it would have been beneficial to introduce participants' political affiliations as a new variable in the study, allowing for a deeper understanding of how individual political ideologies interact with social media, ethical considerations prevailed. Analyzing political affiliations could potentially intrude upon participants' privacy and may deter some from participating in the study, leading to a smaller and potentially biased sample size.

Future Research

Future research needs to focus on conducting comparative studies to examine how various social media platforms, such as TikTok, Snapchat, and Instagram, differ in their impact on teenagers' political perceptions and knowledge. By analyzing the unique features, algorithms, and user interactions on each platform, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of how several types of content and engagement mechanisms shape teenagers' political awareness differently. Comparative research across these platforms can identify patterns of engagement and content dissemination, informing strategies for promoting informed political engagement and media literacy tailored to the specific affordances of each platform, while also highlighting disparities in access to diverse political content among different demographics.

Future research should also prioritize investigating misinformation on different modern social media platforms to gain insight into the unique mechanisms that influence the political perceptions and knowledge of teenagers. The findings of a positive association between social media and increased American teenage political perceptions and knowledge demonstrates the need for further studies of American high school students to enhance the future political landscape, civic engagement, and democratic participation of adolescents.

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