Political Efficacy and Social Anxiety from Social Media Usage as Predictors of Youth Political Disengagement

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ABSTRACT

Youth involvement in politics is pivotal in a democratic society, with social media becoming an emerging tool of communication and information in contemporary social activism. While political participation among younger generations is prevalent online, a tendency toward low political participation remains. This study determined if the lack of political participation among youth is explained by their political efficacy and social anxiety from social media usage in an age of online activism.

Online surveys served as crowdsourcing to employ a non-experimental, cross-sectional, and predictive design among a convenience sample of 373 youth voters and social media users in Pampanga, Philippines. The levels of political disengagement, political efficacy, and social anxiety from social media usage were analyzed using descriptive analysis, while Pearson's R correlation and multiple linear regression were used for inferential analysis.

Results revealed that, overall, youth do not engage in online activism behaviors that appear convenient to them, despite not having an entirely negative attitude toward the nature of activism. Across all dimensions, youth have been found to have high levels of internal political efficacy and privacy concern anxiety. Political disengagement is only significantly correlated with internal political efficacy and shared content anxiety at the correlational level, which further analysis revealed are significant predictors of their lack of political participation.

This study concludes that youth's disengaged paradigm is attributed to their lack of confidence in their ability to engage in political matters actively and their fear of being scrutinized for the content they share online. Although further scholarly discussion is needed, these findings provide a basis for understanding

youth's ambiguous political participation and serve as a springboard to strengthen civic education programs that encompass the importance of fostering a positive climate in digital spaces.

Introduction

The involvement of youth in politics is crucial and required in a democratic society, as this serves as a catalyst for democracy to exist continuously and progress (Novak, 2020; Russo & Stattin, 2016). Promoting youth participation helps advocate for a free, democratic, and inclusive society where youth have access to justice and education and can freely participate in all social, cultural, political, and economic activities (Terram Pacis, 2020).

Notably, new forms of social and political participation are emerging among young people, with social media becoming a valuable tool of communication and information in contemporary social activism. Youth are observed to be increasingly using social media to consume and create political information (Booth et al., 2020; Daanoy et al., 2021; Khaza'leh & Lahiani, 2021; Labor & San Pascual, 2022; Marcaida, 2020). Furthermore, these developments in youth political participation may point to a more fundamental transformation of contemporary democracy (Forbrig, 2005).

In this era of technological devices becoming crucial elements of our lives, citizens are now embracing virtual community platforms to discuss and exchange ideas, perspectives, and experiences (Saud et al., 2020). The breakthroughs in internet technology have enabled society to discuss its mass reactions and political ideas in virtual media, just as it used to do in the squares (Kirik et al., 2021). With the advent of the internet and social media, protest activity has become virtualized, as encapsulated by a myriad of terms associated with digital activism, such as internet activism, online activism, e-activism, social media activism, and cyberactivism (Butler, 2011; Christensen, 2011; Foster et al., 2019; Joyce, 2010; Lewis et al., 2014; McCaughey & Ayers, 2003, Meisner, 2000, as cited in Marcaida, 2020).

While political participation among younger generations is prevalent, the tendency toward low political participation continues to occur (Dahl et al., 2018; Reyes & Polias, 2019). According to a longitudinal study conducted by the FEU Public Policy Center (2018), Filipinos between 17 and 24, referred to as "Generation Z," cannot critically analyze information on digital platforms, which has implications for how they perceive socio-political issues. As many as 86 percent of those polled indicated they had never demonstrated for a cause, and 71 percent said they had never worked on a national or local campaign. Furthermore, only 39 percent believed they were good or excellent at keeping apprised of current events and national issues. According to Punongbayan (2018), youth who are immersed in social media could be more diligent critical thinkers and politically engaged. Even though youth are exposed to sufficient

information daily, they have no firm positions on the country's most prevailing issues, indicating that Filipino youths' responses to current problems in society and governance appear subdued (FEU Public Policy Center, 2018; Sta. Maria & Diestro, 2009).

An individual's inactive participation in political activities is seen as a lack of interest in politics, whether it is interest apathy, voter apathy, or information disinterest, eventually leading to political disengagement (Dahl et al., 2018). The nation's democracy may be in jeopardy as young people's enthusiasm is frequently met with impediments. Hence, a sizable portion of the population may have little to no influence over choices that affect group members' lives (ACE Electoral Knowledge Network, 2018). If a segment of the population is stripped of their voting rights or is not politically active, the legitimacy and representativeness of these processes may be imperiled. As a result, there is a need to uncover the shifting nature of youth politics to understand their seemingly ambiguous political orientations (Arguelles, 2020). This may help lay the groundwork for discussions about youth political participation and deepen understanding of the new generation's civic consciousness. For this to materialize, understanding the underlying behavior that may or may not influence the disengaged paradigm of the youth is paramount, which the present study aimed to establish.

In this regard, the present study has employed two predictive factors to explain the underlying behavior that manifests the lack of political participation among youth: political efficacy, a term to describe an individual's perceived capacity to participate in and create an impact on the political system (Yeich & Levine, 1994), and social anxiety concerning social media usage, which is based on the novel and psychometrically sound scale developed by Alkis et al. (2017), designed to measure and assess an individual's social anxiety while using social media platforms.

Political Efficacy

Political efficacy is among the most prominent psychological concepts closely linked with individuals' political actions, which is also one of the myriad aspects influencing political behavior (Aish & Joreskog, 1990). The distinction between internal and external political efficacy characterizes the study of political efficacy. Internal political efficacy is emphasized on a micro level and, more generally, with "beliefs about one's potential to understand and participate effectively in politics." External political efficacy, in contrast, examines "beliefs about the responsiveness of government authorities and institutions to public demands." which is at the macro level (Niemi et al., 1991).

Political efficacy polarized policy preferences (Sulitzeanu-Kenan & Halperin, 2013). People with high efficacy are more apt to express policy preferences that

align with their ideological orientation, and they are more likely to believe that government institutions will meet their demands (Chan & Guo, 2013; Sulitzeanu-Kenan & Halperin, 2013). Similarly, they tend to think that voting offers citizens a voice in how the government operates and that ordinary people can substantially impact the government (Pew Research Center, 2020). In contrast, low political efficacy is attributed to apathy toward politics and government and citizens' perceptions that government officials and institutions do not represent their interests (Hu, 2016). As a result of this, citizens express more moderate to low policy preferences (Pew Research Center, 2020; Sulitzeanu-Kenan & Halperin, 2013).

Internet users engaging in political communication online are regarded as the strongest predictor of political efficacy (Moeller et al., 2014), aided by the growth of political knowledge, political interest, and political action (Arens & Watermann, 2017; Levy, 2013; Reichert, 2016). The present study examined whether the inadequacy of these factors results in political disengagement.

Social Anxiety from Social Media Usage

The concept of social anxiety is identified as a specific form of anxiety disorder in which people are afraid or worried when dealing with or being judged by and examined adversely by others in a social environment (Richards, n.d.). According to Hartman (1986), social anxiety is defined as an "enduring experience of discomfort, negative ideation, and inept performance in the anticipation and conduct of interpersonal transactions."

Social anxiety is relevant to online social interactions. Several research studies have discovered a link between anxiety and distinct patterns of individual behavior in a social media environment (Grieve et al., 2013; McCord et al., 2014; Shaw et al., 2015). For instance, people frequently regard Facebook as a social media site that plays a "somewhat big role" in social lives, with the possibility of being an essential social arena for socially anxious persons (Shaw et al., 2015).

For this matter, the novel concept of social anxiety from social media covers four aspects of anxiety in relation to the use of social networking sites: Shared Content Anxiety, which is the social anxiety caused by sharing content on social media platforms, whether by oneself or by others; Privacy Concern Anxiety, which is the social anxiety caused by disclosing and sharing personal information on social media platforms; Interaction Anxiety, which is the social anxiety that develops from having an interaction or communication with others on social media platforms; and lastly, Self-Evaluation Anxiety, a form of social anxiety brought on by how a person perceives and assesses himself or herself as a result of what others think of him or her on social media platforms.

In politics, anxious citizens may be less engaged, less interested, and less confident in political matters (Landwehr & Ojeda, 2020; Ojeda, 2017; Podob, 2020). Similarly, a study suggested that signs of sensitivity to threat may be linked to a more conservative political orientation (Hatemi et al., 2013). People are convinced that participating in politics requires greater mental and physical effort (Landwehr & Ojeda, 2020). With that said, anxiety can be a motivator for some people, but it can also have negative downstream consequences on political participation and civic engagement for others. While a bit of anxiety can lead to political activity, overwhelming anxiety can lead to avoidance behaviors and disengagement from the political process (Podob, 2020).

Given that social anxiety is associated with the use of social media (Grieve et al., 2013; McCord et al., 2014; Shaw et al., 2015), which also influences different sorts of social interaction and communication, privacy concerns, the fear of negative evaluation and social media avoidance (Alkis et al., 2017), the present study has incorporated the concept into politics and investigated whether this could be attributed to a lack of political participation.

The Present Study

Given that digital technology has become the standard tool of choice for anyone intending to cause positive social or policy change, the way people raise awareness of issues and organize social movements is changing due to digital activism. In an age where online activism is becoming increasingly widespread in the Philippines (Arugay, 2022; Astudillo, 2014), and given that technological advancements have mobilized the majority of the population (Statista, 2021), political disengagement or lack of political involvement continues to remain understudied, as recent studies have focused primarily on the factors that constitute political engagement (e.g., Daanoy et al., 2021; Ida & Saud, 2020; Labor, 2017; Marcaida, 2020; Yue Feng Zhu et al., 2019). This highlights the lack of research on political disengagement, particularly among the youth, which merits further studies to understand their ambiguous political orientation (Arguelles, 2020).

Similarly, integrating the relatively new concept of social anxiety from social media is, to the researchers' knowledge, the first to apply it in politics. Studies in the Philippines have also utilized a range of scales to assess young people's social anxiety in association with social media use (e.g., Reyes, 2018; Tus, 2021), but to the best of the researchers' knowledge, no studies have used the scale developed by Alkis et al. (2017) in the local context. Thus, this research will address the gap by incorporating the test to measure one of the study's predictor variables.

This research determined if the lack of political participation is predicted by political efficacy and social anxiety arising from social media usage in an age

where online activism is prevalent. Specifically, this study also determined the level of political efficacy among youth in terms of internal and external political efficacy, as well as the prevalence of social anxiety tendencies from social media usage in terms of shared content anxiety, privacy concern anxiety, interaction anxiety, and self-evaluation anxiety.

This study will be a significant endeavor to enrich knowledge concerning the current state of political participation in the Philippines. Especially now in the digital age, where most Filipinos indulge in social media (Statista, 2021), understanding social media usage and its benefits for political aspects is crucial. Exploring the probable reasons for political disengagement may be beneficial in disseminating knowledge regarding certain attitudes and behaviors toward the political system. This is essential because, in a democratic country such as the Philippines, the citizens themselves are the ones who elect the government that will regulate the nation's affairs. The relevance of political participation will eventually foster one's political efficacy (Finkel, 1985). Conversely, political engagement matters because it ensures decisions and policies that reflect the desires and hopes of the citizens. Thus, high levels of political disengagement might affect the legitimacy of a government, along with its policies and system in general.

Ultimately, the findings of this study will help shape policies by supporting youth advocacy organizations, yielding quality research to engage with public officials, and strengthening the formation of national youth councils and initiatives to acknowledge the significance of youth political participation. Moreover, this is also pertinent for educational policymakers in developing strategies to undermine anxiety-inducing behaviors and make the necessary amendments to course design by harnessing the advantages of social media platform usage. This also implies ensuring that digital spaces are safe for young people by protecting data and enhancing the laws and regulations to protect user data and avoid anxiety-inducing online content. Considering such possibilities will ultimately result in valuable measures that will serve as an impetus to enhance the civic consciousness of the youth.

Theoretical Framework

The present study has integrated two theoretical models that served as a foundation to explain the lack of political participation among youth. First, it should be underscored that acknowledging the role that social cognitive theory plays is necessary to have a novel and accurate assessment of political efficacy (Bandura, 1986, 1997; Caprara et al., 2009).

Anchored on Social Cognitive Theory, Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory is deemed relevant to this paradigm (Bandura, 1993, 2001). In this context, self-efficacy is the belief and confidence in one's ability to successfully carry out a specific behavior. When this concept of self-efficacy is incorporated into politics, the individuals' perceptions of their ability to actively and successfully engage in specific political activities are used to assess political efficacy (Caprara et al., 2009).

To put it simply, the Social Cognitive Theory enables the current study to embed political action within a broader theory of human agency. It emphasizes political self-efficacy beliefs or judgments people hold about their potential to perform effectively in the political sphere (Caprara et al., 2009) and considers the role it plays in the lack of political participation.

Second, another framework that may be attributed to the current study is the Cognitive Behavioral Model of Social Phobia (Clark & Wells, 1995), which provides a cognitive-behavioral formulation of social anxiety. The notion is that much of social phobics' evidence for their negative beliefs stems from their perception of how they appear to others rather than observation of others' reactions (Clark & Wells, 1995).

People who suffer from social anxiety are overly concerned about social events and outcomes, both before and after they occur. Fears that are frequently manifested include the fear of being negatively judged by others and the fear of asserting or acting in a way that they consider will embarrass or humiliate them (Clark & Wells, 1995). This eventually results in automatic changes in behavior and cognitive processing, to name a few, all of which are intended to safeguard the person from harm.

If these fears are incorporated into the current study, it can be explained that having a high level of social anxiety may prevent a person from participating in politics because they are concerned about how others will perceive and scrutinize them. As previously noted, anxious individuals may be less engaged, less interested, and less confident in political matters (Hatemi et al., 2013; Landwehr & Ojeda, 2020; Ojeda, 2017; Podob, 2020).

To summarize, the current study integrates the Social Cognitive Theory, or more specifically, the Self-Efficacy Theory, which emphasizes a proper assessment of political efficacy (Bandura, 1986, 1997; Caprara et al., 2009), and the cognitive-behavioral model of social phobia (Clark & Wells, 1995), which is anchored in the study of social anxiety from social media usage.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for the current study is summarized in Figure 1. The diagram shows that political efficacy and social anxiety from social media usage are predictor variables for political disengagement. Based on the literature, political efficacy is demonstrated as having a reciprocal relationship with political knowledge (Arens & Watermann, 2017). Moreover, internet usage, as well as distinct factors such as political interest, political skills, and government trust, aids the growth of political efficacy (Levy, 2013). On the other hand, the development of the novel concept of social anxiety through social media usage is influenced by the different types of social interaction and communication, privacy concerns, the fear of negative evaluation, and social media avoidance (Alkis et al., 2017). The framework also acknowledges that political disengagement is deemed to be caused by interest apathy, voter apathy, and information apathy toward politics (Dahl et al., 2018), with additional consideration of economic, democratic, and socio-political factors that vary for every country (Reyes & Polias, 2019).

Figure 1.

Conceptual Framework
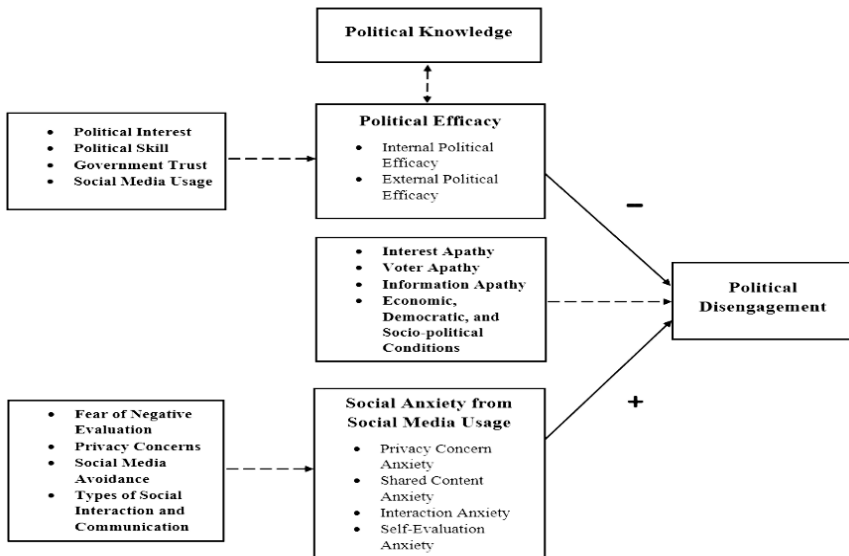
For this paradigm, it is underscored that, on one hand, low levels of political efficacy, whether internal or external, signify apathy toward politics and government (Hu, 2016). This suggests that citizens exhibit moderate to low policy preferences (Pew Research Center, 2020; Sulitzeanu-Kenan & Halperin, 2013).

As a result, the lower the political efficacy among youth, the more disengaged they are in political matters. On the other hand, because anxiety among citizens can result in a lack of engagement, interest, and confidence in political matters (Landwehr & Ojeda, 2020; Ojeda, 2017; Podob, 2020), the current study implements a framework that may indicate that higher levels of social anxiety from using social media platforms predict a lack of political involvement.

Methodology

The research study employed a non-experimental, cross-sectional, predictive research design to determine if the lack of political participation is predicted by political efficacy and social anxiety arising from social media usage in an age where social media activism in the Philippines is ubiquitous. The respondents to the study are 373 social media users and registered voters living in Pampanga, Philippines. The total number of respondents to an online survey between September 15 and September 30, 2022, ranged in age from 18 to 24 ($M = 20.97$, $SD = 1.214$). This sample is sufficient in comparison to the power calculation model performed using an online sample size calculator, which indicated that a minimum of 366 respondents are required to achieve a 95% confidence level that the real value is within 5% of the measured/surveyed value and an estimated proportion of 39% politically engaged (FEU Public Policy Center, 2018). Convenience sampling was used to recruit study respondents, allowing researchers to quickly and cost-effectively recruit participants through easily accessible means (Zigmund & Babin, 2007).

Research data were collected by using tests with sound psychometric properties. This includes the demographic questionnaire, the Online Activism Scale (Dookhoo, 2015), the Political Efficacy Short Scale (Groskurth et al., 2021), and the Social Anxiety Scale for Social Media Users (Alkis et al., 2017). The Online Activism Scale was used to measure the online activism behaviors of youth. The items were rated on a seven-point Likert scale. All scale item-related questions were phrased as follows: "In the past six months, I have:" The scale has 22 items and is divided into four sections: Slacktivist Behaviors (e.g., *Posted a status/tweeted about a social-political issue.*); Mobilize Others (e.g., *Mobilized online support for a social-political issue.*); Tangible Online Activism (e.g., *Changed my social media profile picture surrounding a social-political issue.*); and Negative Perspectives which are reverse coded (e.g., *I do not agree with many online views of those in my social network.*). The Political Efficacy Short Scale was used to measure the youth's perceived political efficacy, measuring the internal and external subscales. The internal subscale ("*I am good at understanding and assessing important political issues.*" and "*I have the confidence to take active part in a discussion about political issues.*") and

the external subscale ("*Politicians strive to keep in close touch with the people.*" and "*Politicians care about what ordinary people think.*") contain a total of four questions, in which each scale consists of two items. Lastly, the Social Anxiety Scale for Social Media Users (SAS-SMU) was utilized, which is designed to measure and assess an individual's social anxiety while using social media platforms. It has 21 items covering four dimensions of social anxiety in connection with social media usage: Shared Content Anxiety (e.g., *I am concerned about being ridiculed by others for the content I have shared.*); Privacy Concern Anxiety (e.g., *The possibility that others can take part of my private information makes me feel anxious.*); Interaction Anxiety (e.g., *I am afraid of interacting with others.*); and Self-Evaluation Anxiety (e.g., *I am anxious about making a negative impression on peopl*).

The standardized scales were used, and the authors' permission was obtained via email before data collection. The researchers maximized utilizing the Internet as a crowdsourcing platform since an online survey has a high response rate when used for studies among Internet-savvy samples (Van Selm & Jankowski, 2006). Target respondents who met the set criteria had the chance to respond via Google Forms at their convenience from September 15 to September 30, 2022. This study adhered to the researchers' code of conduct at the institution and the Data Privacy Act of the Philippines. Furthermore, electronic informed consent was provided to each respondent who voluntarily agreed to participate during the data collection, which may help them decide whether or not to participate in the study.

The study used frequency and percentage distribution to analyze the respondents' demographic information regarding age, sex at birth, and whether a respondent is a registered voter and a social media user currently living in Pampanga, Philippines. The frequency of using social media and the corresponding frequency of consumption per day was also analyzed in the distribution table. Descriptive statistics, specifically the mean and standard deviation, were utilized to determine the level of political disengagement, political efficacy, and social anxiety from social media usage. The analysis of the relation between the interval variables was carried out with Pearson's correlation coefficient, calculating the correlations' effect size based on the correlation coefficient value ($\geq$ 0.10-0.29: small; $\geq$ 0.30-0.49: medium; $\geq$ 0.50: large) (Cohen, 1988, pp. 79–81). Lastly, a regression model was estimated by computing the effect size based on the determination coefficient ($R2$) and its confidence intervals. Before regression analysis, several assumptions were first tested, such as the assumption of multicollinearity, which is present when moderate-to-high intercorrelations (e.g., $r > .90$) among the predictors. This poses a real problem for the researchers because it makes it hard to interpret coefficients and reduces the power of the model to identify statistically significant independent variables (Khanna, 2020). This collinearity

problem is examined using the values generated from the variance inflation factor (VIF) and tolerance. Finally, the study also tested the assumptions of normality, linearity, and independence of residuals in the regression to evaluate potential violations in regression analyses.

Results

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the respondents recruited in the study. Three hundred seventy-three respondents are aged 18-24, registered voters, social media users, and residents of Pampanga, Philippines. The respondents with an age of 21 constitute almost half of the sample, whereas those who are 18 represent only 2.7% of the respondents. Most respondents were female (61.9%), whereas only 38.1% of the sample was male. 89.5% of those polled are enrolled in school, with the remaining 10.5% having graduated or not currently enrolled. Regarding social media usage, an average of 97.6% of respondents use social media every day, with only 2.4% using it twice or three times a week. Lastly, 37.5% of the respondents used social media for more than five hours on a typical day, while 12.9% used it for less than two hours.

Table 1.

Characteristics of the respondents (N=373)

Profile	n	% of sample
Age		
18	10	2.7
19	33	8.8
20	65	17.4
21	157	42.1
22	80	21.4
23	14	3.8
24	14	3.8
Sex at Birth		
Male	142	38.1
Female	231	61.9
Registered Voter	373	100.0
Resident of Pampanga, Philippines	373	100.0
Social Media User	373	100.0
Frequency of Social Media Usage		
Everyday	363	97.6
Twice/Thrice a week	10	2.4
Once a week	0	0

Profile	n	% of sample
Frequency of Social Media Usage per Day		
Less than 2 hours	48	12.9
2-3 hours	102	27.3
4-5 hours	83	22.3
More than 5 hours	140	37.5
Studying at Present		
Student	334	89.5
Not a student	39	10.5

The respondents' total political disengagement was analyzed using the online activism measure, where the subscales Slacktivist Behaviors, Mobilize Others, and Tangible Online Activism were all reverse-coded to indicate that higher means scores correspond with higher levels of political disengagement. On the other hand, the Negative Perspectives subscale was coded as it is since the items listed in this component were already reverse-worded. Overall, the mean score for total political disengagement is 93.94 (*min* = 23, *max* = 154), with a standard deviation 35.39. The descriptive statistics generated for each of the four components are shown in Figure 2. Overall, the mean scores across these political disengagement behavior scales illustrated that youth are not primarily engaging in slacktivism behaviors (*M* = 34.20, *SD* = 16.79). The Negative Perspectives subscale, on the other hand, received the lowest overall mean scores across all dimensions of political disengagement (*M* = 15.64, *SD* = 7.54).

Figure 2.

*Respondents' Level of Political Disengagement*
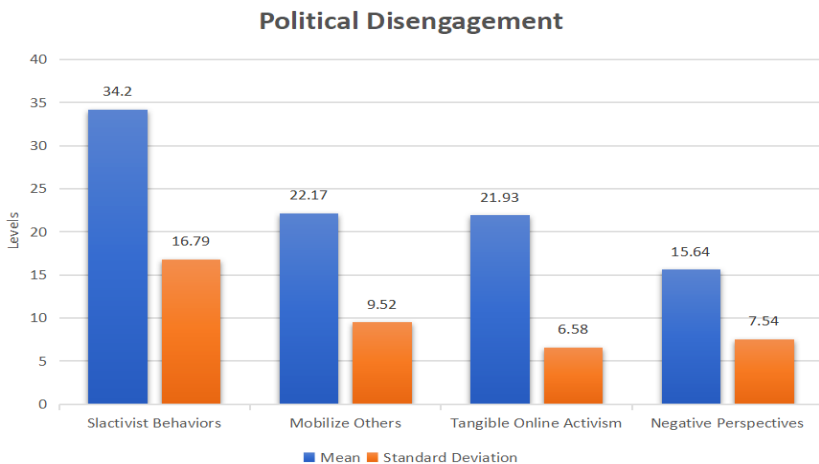
Figure 3 displays the respondents' assessment of their internal and external political efficacy using the Political Efficacy Short Scale. The mean for measures of central tendency and standard deviation for measures of variability were used to analyze the data. Overall, mean scores across these political efficacy subscales demonstrated that youth-registered voters have a greater level of internal political efficacy (M = 7.21, SD = 1.92), in comparison to their level of external political efficacy (M = 5.99, SD = 1.96).

Figure 3.

Respondents' Assessment of their Internal and External Political Efficacy
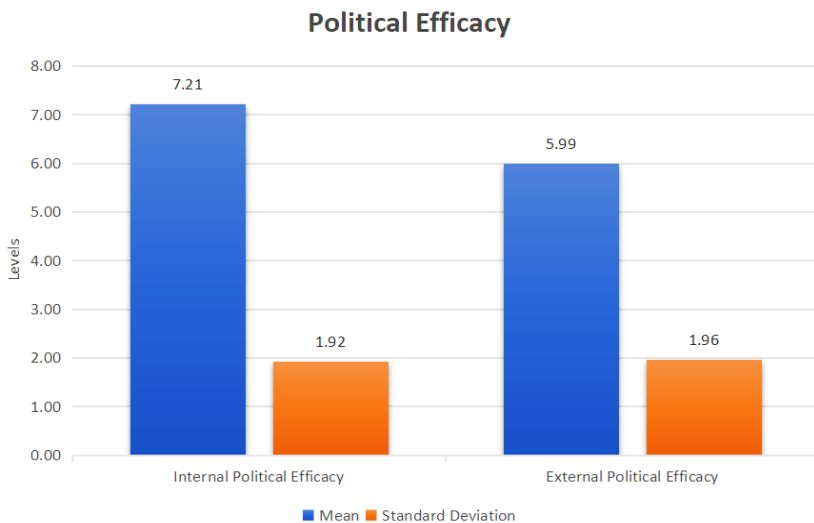

The mean and standard deviation were used to represent the data to analyze the social anxiety levels among youth registered voters using the Social Anxiety Scale for Social Media Users (SAS-SMU). As shown in Figure 4, the respondents demonstrated the highest levels of anxiety for the subscale pertinent to privacy concerns (M = 19.01, SD = 4.65). On the other hand, the subscale Self-Evaluation Anxiety received the lowest overall mean scores (M = 9.62, SD = 3.33). Lastly, the Interaction Anxiety and Shared Content Anxiety were nearly equivalent about average scores: (M = 18.57, SD = 5.44) and (M = 18.32, SD = 6.72), respectively.

Table 2 presents the correlation analyses of the relationship of respondents' total political disengagement to their political efficacy and social anxiety from social media usage. Results showed that the total political disengagement of youth registered voters is negatively correlated to their internal and external political efficacy with Pearson r values of -0.560 and -0.10, respectively. Findings also revealed that respondents' political disengagement is significantly correlated

Figure 4.

Respondents' Assessment of their Social Anxiety from Social Media Usage
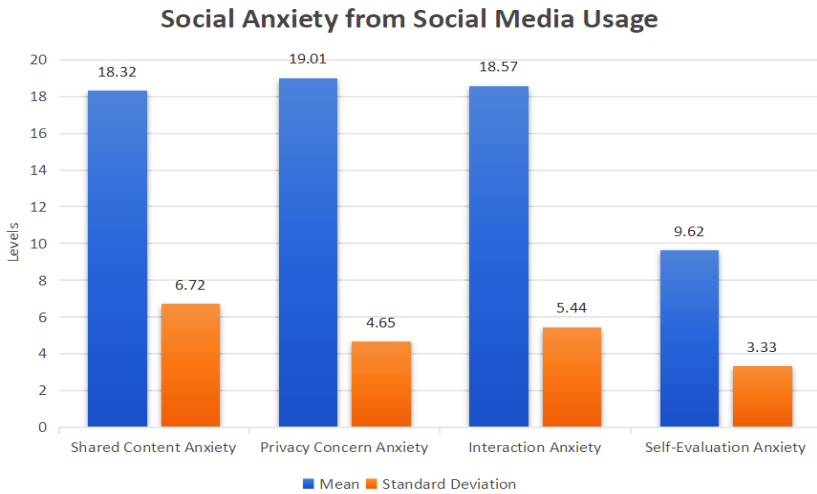
to their internal political efficacy ($p < 0.01$) with a strong negative association but no significant correlation to their external political efficacy ($p = 0.05$). Moreover, political disengagement is significantly correlated to their shared content anxiety ($r = 0.167, p < 0.01$) but not to their privacy concerns, interaction, and self-evaluation anxieties as dimensions of their social anxiety from social media usage.

Table 2 also summarizes the results obtained from the variance inflation factor (VIF) and the predictor variables' tolerance value. In this study, the tolerance value for each independent variable exceeded the required value of greater than .10, with Self-Evaluation Anxiety being the closest at .49 but still inadequate. This is also supported by the VIF values of the variables, which are well below the cut-off of 10. Based on these results, it can be concluded that none of the tested models have a multicollinearity problem. Preliminary analyses were also conducted as part of the regression procedures to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, and independence of residuals in the regression. Fortunately, none of the values generated exceeded the expected criteria, indicating that the regression assumptions were met.

As shown in Table 3, the coefficient of determination $R^2 = 0.334$ demonstrates that the predictor variables account for 33.4% of the total criterion variable. This indicates that 33.4% of the total political disengagement of youth-registered voters can be attributed to political efficacy and social anxiety from social media usage. Further, these variables statistically significantly predicted political disengagement, $F(6, 366) = 30.602, p < .0005$. The adjusted R^2 accounts for the percentage of 32.3%.

Table 2.

Correlations, Tolerance, and VIF of political efficacy subscales, social anxiety from social media usage subscales, and political disengagement

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Tolerance	VIF
1. Political Disengagement	—								
2. Internal Political Efficacy	-.560**	—						.894	1.118
3. External Political Efficacy	-.101	.241**	—					.852	1.173
4. Shared Content Anxiety	.167**	-.132*	.169**	—				.562	1.779
5. Privacy Concern Anxiety	-.027	-.028	-.038	.322**	—			.799	1.252
6. Interaction Anxiety	.020	-.110*	.194**	.374**	.337**	—		.703	1.422
7. Self-Evaluation Anxiety	.069	-.108*	.162**	.645**	.374**	.491**	—	.497	2.011

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Table 3.

Model Summary for Political Disengagement

Model	R	R²	Adjusted R²	EE
1	.578ª	.334	.323	29.1124

Note: a. Predictors: (Constant), Internal Political Efficacy, External Political Efficacy, Shared Content Anxiety, Privacy Concern Anxiety, Interaction Anxiety, Self-Evaluation Anxiety

Figure 5 presents the regression coefficient of the effect of respondents' political efficacy and social anxiety from social media usage on their total political disengagement using the computed standardized regression coefficients (β). Results revealed that only the respondents' internal political efficacy and shared content anxiety were predictors of their total political disengagement, with computed p values of 0.000 and 0.005, respectively, making a unique statistically significant contribution ($p < 0.01$). Furthermore, internal political efficacy is the strongest predictor of political disengagement, with the highest beta value (β = -0.558) among all predictor variables. Although weaker than internal political efficacy, shared content anxiety predicts political disengagement significantly (β = 0.162). The T-values of the beta regression coefficients of the predictor variables are highly significant ($p < 0.01$), with -12.379 and 2.85 for internal political efficacy and shared content anxiety, respectively.

Figure 5.

Regression Coefficient of Political Efficacy Subscales and Social Anxiety from Social Media Usage Subscales on Political Disengagement
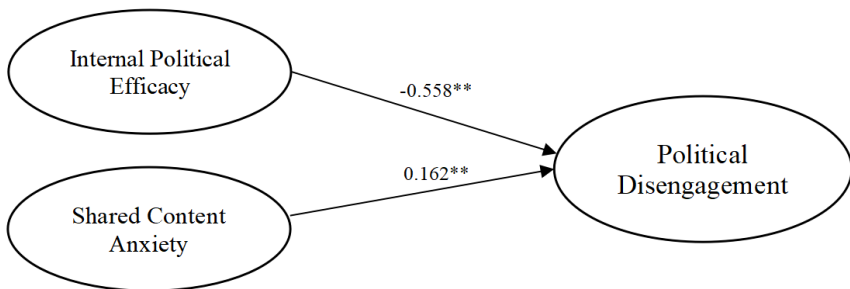
Note. **Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Discussion

As reflected during the period of the national election, activist movements, and social reactions have manifested chiefly on digital platforms, where social media served as the primary medium for the deliberation of current political and societal issues. Younger individuals are expected to be more engaged in their prevailing inclination towards online activities at present. However, the tendency toward political disengagement still exists. The study aims to determine whether political efficacy and social anxiety from social media usage can determine the underpinning reasons why youth resort to portraying a lack of political participation in an age where online activism is prevalent.

Results determined that youth are less likely to engage in slacktivism or online activism behaviors that require little time and effort, such as posting, liking, or sharing posts relevant to political matters. However, the study's findings also revealed that, in general, youth have the lowest negative perspective subscale scores, implying that their negative perceptions of social media as a vehicle for the propagation of social and political agendas are not entirely reflected in them. These findings may mean that youth do not engage in activism behaviors that appear to be convenient to them (e.g., liking, favoriting, sharing, or retweeting a post about a social-political issue). However, they do not appear to have an entirely negative attitude toward engaging in online activism behaviors. These results provide new evidence in contrast with findings that proved participants' willingness to affiliate with various domains of activism is reduced as they encounter and perceive negative stereotypes about activism (Bashir et al., 2013; Marcaida, 2020). The present study did not show high levels of negative perspectives among youth since the component relevant to negative attitudes toward activism was not fully evident. Based on the studies of Dookhoo (2015), if individuals are found to have a high level of negative attitudes toward activism, this may imply a high level of narcissistic tendencies because they refrain from expressing their personal opinions about social-political issues online. Simply put, youth are not politically involved in social media, yet they do not appear to have negative beliefs toward the nature of activism.

The present study also revealed that youth exhibited higher internal political efficacy levels than external dimensions. This suggests that the youth trust their ability to influence and transform the system more than the government's capacity to meet their needs. This is consistent with research showing that people with lower trust in the system also tend to have higher internal political efficacy (Hu, 2016; Morrell, 2003). According to the study, young people are less confident in their capacity to make political decisions than in their ability to trust the government. Research suggests that citizens are less likely to trust

lawmakers, political institutions, and public officials when governance is less efficient and democratic and when the government fails to meet the needs of the people (Cheema, 2010; Christensen & Laegreid, 2005; Uslaner, 2002; Yang & Holzer, 2006). This is noteworthy because citizens may evaluate government performance not only in terms of service delivery but also in terms of the efficacy and fairness of government policy and government ethics (Yang & Holzer, 2006).

Among the dimensions of social anxiety from social media usage, youth have mainly demonstrated a tendency to anxiety regarding privacy concerns. This implies that youth are largely anxious about the possibility of their personal information being shared online. Research suggests that concerns pertinent to information privacy are heightened when users are unaware of who is accumulating their personal information, how social networking sites obtain their information as part of information privacy practices, or how the information is used (Hong & Oh, 2020; Lanier & Saini, 2008; Nowak & Joseph, 1995; Smith et al., 1996). There is also evidence that adolescents' privacy concerns as users of social networking sites influence their social anxiety (Liu et al., 2013). This suggests that social anxiety among adolescents with high privacy concerns may also make them less likely to share and exhibit personal information online (Liu et al., 2013). Furthermore, youth are least anxious in self-evaluation, which means that the anxiety derived from how a person evaluates and views himself or herself as a result of what others think about him or her on social media platforms is the least of their concerns. This could be due to evidence that people are already aware that waiting to be liked or seeking other similar types of gratification has negative consequences, so people recognize that it is better to assume and acknowledge that others will have varying preferences of oneself and that attempting to avoid any judgment appears futile (Anderson & Rainie, 2018; Bettino, 2021).

At the correlational level, this study showed a significant negative correlation between internal political efficacy and political disengagement. Thus, lower levels of internal political efficacy are associated with higher levels of political disengagement, implying that when youth are not good at understanding and assessing important political issues, they tend to be more disengaged in politics. Furthermore, if a person needs more confidence to participate in a discussion about political issues actively, they are more likely not to be involved in political matters. This parallels previous findings where internal political efficacy plays a significant, positive role in political participation, indicating that increased internal political efficacy is associated with increased political involvement (Condon & Holleque, 2013; Krampen, 2000; Schulz et al., 2010). This supports research suggesting decreased political efficacy is attributed to apathy toward politics and government (Hu, 2016; Pew Research Center, 2020; Sulitzeanu-

Kenan & Halperin, 2013). The current study also found that internal political efficacy is, to a greater extent, associated with political participation behavior than external political efficacy, contrary to a study that proved external political efficacy to be more likely to influence political participation experiences than internal political efficacy (Finkel, 1985). The present study showed no significant relationship between political disengagement and external political efficacy.

The findings also demonstrated that the dimension of shared content anxiety from the Social Anxiety Scale for Social Media Users has a positive and significant relationship with political disengagement among young people. Although said links are weak, these findings, notwithstanding, suggest that those who have high levels of shared content anxiety—that is, people who are worried about being mocked and scrutinized because of the content they share on social media—are more likely to choose not to participate in the political process. For instance, a survey conducted by Duggan and Smith (2016) stated that many users perceive social media as a place where people are afraid to speak their minds for fear of being criticized. Generally, this can be explained by a multitude of factors, including fear of stalkers, fear of being catfished, or, more commonly, fear that their peers will criticize them, to name a few (Fasulo, 2021). This may also be supported by evidence that youth avoid sharing entirely for fear of embarrassment (Anderson et al., 2022).

Regarding political participation, this may be explained by findings that some people avoid sharing their opinions on political issues on social media for fear of being criticized or judged (Duggan & Smith, 2016; Gordon, 2020). It can be acknowledged that this is also relevant to the novel "woke" culture, which refers to a raised awareness of social and political issues, as it is seen in the context of politics. Adhikari (2023) asserts that while being "woke" elevated critical social issues to the fore of the public's consciousness, critics contend that it can, at times, become performative or excessively divisive, resulting in "cancel culture" and stifling genuine debate. As noted, disagreements may have emerged due to the convenience and influence of social media in sharing political views, which frequently results in name-calling, shaming, labeling, and, in some cases, other forms of violence threats (Gordon, 2020). Furthermore, when people speak about their political beliefs, they start making assumptions about how others perceive them. This frequently leads to their belief that they are being judged and that others are displeased or disagree with them (Gordon, 2020). As an outcome, people are afraid to express their political views on social media for fear of being judged or labeled based on the content they share.

In response to the analysis of what component has the strongest predictive power, it is evident that internal political efficacy has a negative value and is the strongest predictor of political disengagement. This denotes that youth's

lack of confidence in their political ability contributes significantly to their lack of involvement in the political process. In contrast, youth are presumed to be actively involved in politics if they possess increased internal political efficacy. Based on studies, a person who acknowledges himself or herself as an efficacious citizen also acquires competence and power in politics (Finkel, 1985, 1987; Niemi et al., 1991). If people do not believe that they comprehend how the system of politics operates, they are most likely to be disengaged in activities that concern the political system. This is also explained by research implying that citizens distance themselves from the system when they perceive a low ability to influence political processes (Magni, 2017). Contrarily, citizens are more likely to pursue democratic endeavors if they believe they can understand politics and have their voices heard (Gil de Zuñiga et al., 2017). Besides, high levels of efficacy are considered desirable for the stability of democracies because efficacy is linked to people's belief that they can influence government actions (Schulz, 2005). Hence, it is expected that internal political efficacy is regarded as a factor in pathways to political participation (Condon & Holleque, 2013; Finkel, 1985, 1987; Krampen, 2000b; Schulz et al., 2010); thus, the lack of this dimension plays a crucial role in the emerging disengaged paradigm of youth.

Limitations

The findings of the study should be viewed in light of several limitations. First, because the research design used is cross-sectional, the temporal relationship between the predictor and outcome variables is limited in evaluation because both are examined simultaneously. For instance, a few studies in the past used longitudinal designs to study political efficacy (Arens & Watermann, 2017; Reichert, 2016), whereas the current study used a short-scale measurement to quantify a gauge of the behavior. Second, a convenience sample of youth in Pampanga, Philippines, was used for sampling. Our sample is heterogeneous, albeit not representative, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Another potential limitation was the study's purely quantitative nature. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, it would be valuable to conduct a qualitative or mixed-method investigation that includes interviews that may also incorporate other variables relevant to their lack of political involvement. Finally, more prior research is needed on how internal and external political efficacy affects political participation. Laying a foundation for understanding how the internal dimension affects political participation is difficult given that there may be little if any, prior research conducted in general. Although no significant links are found for the external dimension, it would be beneficial to assess further external political efficacy and how it influences youth

political disengagement. This could help improve understanding of political behavior related to a youth's satisfaction and trust in government officials and institutions.

Conclusion

The current study explored the predictive relationship of political efficacy and social anxiety from social media usage to the youth's lack of political participation behavior. This study concludes that the youth's disengaged paradigm is attributed to their lack of confidence in their ability to engage in political matters actively and their fear of being scrutinized for the content they share online.

Across all the dimensions incorporated in the present study, internal political efficacy negatively predicts youth political disengagement, which also has the most potent predictive power on youth political disengagement. This implies that the tendency of youth to be disengaged from politics is significantly shaped by their ability to comprehend and evaluate important political issues. Furthermore, a person's lack of confidence to actively participate in a political discussion influences their likelihood of being uninvolved in political activities. Suppose this is construed with the self-efficacy theory. In that case, the person's belief and confidence in his or her capacity have a profound influence on their ability to successfully carry out a given behavior, which in this case is the belief in one's ability to actively participate in political activities (Bandura, 1993, 2001; Caprara et al., 2009). Hence, lack of political participation may be explained by a person's lack of belief in his or her ability to comprehend politics and engage in political matters.

Moreover, albeit weaker than internal political efficacy, shared content anxiety predicts political disengagement. This suggests that the tendency to be concerned about being mocked and critiqued for the content one may share on social media may inhibit youth from participating in the political process. If this is embedded in the cognitive behavioral model of social phobia, a person's negative beliefs stem from their perception of how others perceive them (Clark & Wells, 1995). This eventually results in changes in behavioral and cognitive processes that protect the individual from harm, in this case, the inability to participate in political matters due to concerns about how others will perceive and scrutinize them (Clark & Wells, 1995). Thus, political disengagement may be explained by an individual's perception of being negatively perceived and scrutinized by others, which prevents them from becoming involved in politics.

Recommendations

In light of the study's findings, several recommendations are suggested. First, because social media outlets have become the primary means of communication for politically oriented actions, it is also worthwhile to consider the lack of political involvement among youth in traditional settings. This merits future research attention to acknowledge disengagement in offline political participation despite digital activism becoming the central medium to display socio-political concerns. Additional relevant constructs could also contribute to the disengagement phenomenon observed among youth. These factors include, but are not limited to, demographics and various contextual factors.

Furthermore, our investigation has found that anxiety stemming from content dissemination on social media platforms constitutes a significant contributory element influencing youth political disengagement. Hence, future research should also explore strategies through which youth can mitigate this anxiety, thereby reinforcing their participation. Such strategies may encompass the emergence of pseudonymous or "dummy" social media accounts, among other potential avenues for investigation. Finally, it is recommended that future researchers explore alternative research methodologies, such as qualitative or mixed-method approaches, to acquire a more comprehensive perspective on the phenomenon of youth political disengagement.

Ultimately, the results of the study may serve as a springboard for strengthening civic education programs among youth, better equipping and emboldening them to participate in democratic processes while also educating them on the importance of fostering a positive emotional climate in digital spaces that is mutually respectful, equitable, and encouraging. This will also allow younger generations to identify methods in which social networking organizations might build commitment and engage the youth in ways that increase understanding of social dilemmas where their action should be oriented (LaRiviere et al., 2012). Establishing and sustaining this level of learning can take various forms, including classroom-based learning or mass media campaigns. If civic education becomes a standard component of the curriculum in primary, secondary, and tertiary schools, the tendency of learners to be politically disengaged may decline. This will also observe an impartial provision of information in addressing a wide variety of the present political and social issues in a developing third-world country, such as the Philippines. Taking these possibilities into consideration will ultimately prompt valuable measures that will catalyze fostering the civic consciousness of Filipino youth.

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