



**UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES
OPEN UNIVERSITY
MASTER OF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION**

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**YOUTH OFFICIALS' USE OF NEW MEDIA FOR POLITICAL PARTICIPATION
DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: CASE OF SANGGUNIANG KABATAAN
MEMBERS IN LAUREL, BATANGAS**

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20 August 2022

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Acceptance Page:

This paper prepared by **GENIE VILLANUEVA DELA CUEVA** with the title: “**Youth Officials’ Use of New Media for Political Participation During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Case of Sangguniang Kabataan Members in Laurel, Batangas**” is hereby accepted by the Faculty of Information and Communication Studies, U.P. Open University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Program.

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Biographical Sketch

Genie Villanueva dela Cueva or simply “Genie” is often described by her group of friends as a goal-oriented person. She was born in Batangas on February 10, 1992 as the youngest among the three siblings of a former teacher and a former overseas Filipino worker. Genie grew up dreaming of changing the lives of people, through her God-given skills, strengths, and support systems.

After receiving her Bachelor of Science in Development Communication degree with major in Science Communication from the University of the Philippines Los Baños in 2012, Genie worked as a development worker for nine (9) years in World Vision Development Foundation, an international non-government organization, and at the Department of Information and Communications Technology, a national government agency, before she decided to go into public service in her hometown, through the City Government of Sto. Tomas, Batangas, in 2022.

Genie took two courses from the University of the Philippines Open University: Diploma in Language and Literacy Education (2015) and Masters of Development Communication (2022). In addition to being a student, Genie also balances her time as a public servant, a leader of Singles for Christ in Batangas North Chapter, and a fur parent to her dog named “Hiccup.”

Acknowledgment

This study would not be possible without the guidance of God Almighty, my Lord and Savior. I thank Him for sending these people who helped me in my MDC journey.

Members of the Sangguniang Kabataan in Laurel, Batangas, for taking the time to complete the survey. Despite your busy schedule and short notice, you were able to help me. May you continue to serve more people in the future.

My adviser, Dr. Serlie B. Jamias, who assisted me in making sense of my work. Your words of support are both encouraging and uplifting. Thank you for making me feel confident that I could complete this degree.

The members of my MDC Graduating Committee, Dr. Benjamina Flor and Dr. Grace Alfonso, for your patience and advice in making my thesis a success. Thank you for believing in my ability to make this happen.

My friends who stood by me and never left me in good and bad times. This is also your achievement!

Of course, I am grateful to my family for their understanding, love, and support in all my accomplishments in life.

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzed how members of the Sangguniang Kabataan in the Municipality of Laurel, Batangas use new media for political participation during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study employed a descriptive research design using self-administered survey questionnaires from April 23, 2022 to May 22, 2022. The respondents included 136 respondents from 21 barangays in the municipality of Laurel, Batangas.

Contrary to findings from previous studies showing the political apathy and disengagement among the youth, the youth council members demonstrated a strong digital inclusion and high political interest, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. They primarily used Messenger, TikTok, and Facebook for at least three hours a day and incidentally encountered political information that helped to increase their interest in and participation in political activities online. These included reposting or sharing political events and updates, organizing online fundraising campaigns, joining political events or meetings, and attending political-related webinars.

Hence, although the youth council members' primary motivation in using the new media was self-expression and social interaction rather than getting political news and information, they still participated in political activities during the COVID-19 pandemic, showing that the younger generation are politically conscious and engaged in their communities.

KEYWORDS: youth in politics; political communication; political participation; online participation; youth in government; social media users; Sangguniang Kabataan

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, previous research found that young people (15-24 years) who consume “new media” or the social networking sites and Internet are more likely to engage in civic and political activities as a result of their increased awareness and interest in social and political issues (Bachmann & de Zuñiga, 2013; Machackova & Ere, 2017; Middaugh et al., 2017). Because of technological advancement, political activities have become digital, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2020) reported that the pandemic caused numerous youth-led organizations worldwide to use new media to reach and help more people. They launched online campaigns on how to combat false information on the Internet, developed digital platforms that offer practical advice on how to deal with mental or physical health issues, stigma, and discrimination, and created digital contents that engage other youths in decision-making.

The significant role of new media in transforming young people's political engagement has been a source of debate among scholars for many years. They are debating whether it is an individual's ability to communicate and connect online that makes them more engaged and responsible citizens or whether using new media for other purposes distances them and undermines civil society (Bugeja, 2013; Ahmad, et al., 2019; de Zuniga & Shahin, 2015). The use of new media to acquire and exchange information frequently creates opportunities for civic recruitment and political participation (Gil De Zuñiga et al., 2012), but citizens can abandon news for

entertainment resulting in their lesser engagement in both online and offline political activities (Kim et al., 2013; De Zuñiga & Shahen, 2015; Reichert, 2015).

According to Cohen and Kahne (2012), young people who are exposed to views and content that align with their own are those who consume, circulate, and create new media. Within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, where the majority of young people have access to technology and digital skills, as well as civic education and open civic space for activism, they were able to use new media to develop civic identities, mobilize others, and creatively express political stances through collective actions such as videos, memes, and artwork (Pelter, 2020).

In the Philippines, the spirit of "Bayanihan," which was traditionally offline, has taken on a digital dimension during the COVID-19 pandemic, via Facebook, the country's most popular social media platform. Filipinos found ways to lend a virtual helping hand, from online concerts to cause-related game streaming (Mirasol, 2020). According to The Business Mirror (2020), various organizations and individuals in the Philippines are utilizing new media to organize donation drives to aid Filipinos hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. Since most Filipino youth own smartphones, they use them to access the Internet, making these types of political engagements easier and faster to facilitate (Kemp, 2021).

However, in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, Filipinos, especially the youth, consumed the new media differently. For example, people accessed travel-related content before the pandemic, but they learned to use e-commerce and streaming services during the pandemic (Kemp, 2021; Rappler, 2021). This shift in interest and utilization of new media outlets during the COVID-19 pandemic may have an effect on their ability to stimulate participation in both offline and online channels (Banaji & Buckingham, 2010; Abdu, 2017). Moreover, the proliferation of

misinformation and disinformation in new media during this pandemic may have an effect on young people's understanding and behavior regarding civic and political issues (Middaugh et al., 2017; Machackova & Erek, 2017; World Health Organization, 2020), causing them to become disengaged and divert their attention to other uses of new media.

One of the established youth groups in the Philippines is the Sangguniang Kabataan (SK), which is composed of one chairperson and seven councilors per barangay. They have been granted a seat in the local government through an election, which entitles them to participate in decision-making, program development and implementation, and to initiate youth activities that promote civic identity (Balanon et al., 2007; Palomares et al., 2021). These local youth councils have undergone controversies in the past as they were accused of being the “breeding ground for political dynasties” and were questioned about their important contributions in the society (Tubeza, 2013). In 2018, a total of 38,708 SK chairpersons were elected nationwide. Members of these youth councils are the representatives of 31.77 million Filipino youths aged 15-30 years old (2021 Youth Statistics Update).

The Republic Act No. 10742 or the Sangguniang Kabataan Reform Act of 2015 aims to establish reforms in the SK, one of which is the change of age requirement from 15-17 years old to 18-24 years old as it allows them to legally enter contracts and be held liable. This council, which belongs to Gen Z and Gen Y (Millennials), had been recognized for its civic and political efforts to help fellow youths during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as in the preparation for local and national election, both online and offline. So far, few studies have been conducted in the Philippines examining how these local young officials use new media to participate in political activities during a

pandemic. Also, most of the previous studies on new media use are from developing countries, which differ from the Philippine context.

Statement of the Problem

As development communication focuses on communication as an agent for individual and societal transformation and growth, the widespread use of new media as a source of information and interaction during a pandemic may create new opportunities for young people to develop their potential as game-changers of this generation.

With the advancement of digital technologies, examining how young people, or as the International Telecommunications Union (2020) referred to as “digital natives”, use new media for political participation during a pandemic is an intriguing and timely area of study in the field of development communication.

This research determined how the youth council or Sangguniang Kabataan in the Municipality of Laurel, Batangas used the new media for political participation during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Specifically, this research tried to answer the following questions:

1. What is the profile of the members of the youth council?
2. What is the level of political interest of the members of the youth council?
3. How do the youth council members use new media during the COVID-19 pandemic?
4. What are the motivations of the youth council members in using new media during the COVID-19 pandemic?
5. How do the youth council members encounter political information in new media during the COVID-19 pandemic?

6. What political activities do the youth council members engage in during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Objectives of the Study

This study determined how members of the youth council or Sangguniang Kabataan in the Municipality of Laurel, Batangas use the new media for political participation during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Specifically, it aimed to:

1. Determine the profile of the members of the youth council;
2. Determine the level of political interest of the members of the youth council;
3. Describe how the youth council members use new media during the COVID-19 pandemic;
4. Describe the motivations of the youth council members in using new media during the COVID-19 pandemic;
5. Discuss how the youth council members encounter political information in new media during the COVID-19 pandemic; and
6. Discuss what political activities the youth council members engage in during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study can assist the local government units (LGU) in effective use of new media in keeping young people aware, informed, and engaged in local and other political issues, especially during times of global crisis.

Findings can also help community organizations in using new media to develop strategies and other initiatives that can mobilize, harness, and engage young leaders and other young members of the community.

Moreover, it can encourage practitioners and researchers in development communication to conduct studies on the use of new media during a pandemic or other crisis, as the trend toward using new media changes over time.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

The respondents of this study are limited to the elected Sangguniang Kabataan in the Municipality of Laurel, Batangas from 2018 to 2022. Therefore, the analysis and results cannot be generalized beyond this population.

The study was conducted from April 23, 2022 to May 22, 2022, a period when the COVID-19 pandemic was on its second year, and the national and local elections have just finished. During this time, misinformation, conspiracy theories, and disinformation circulated on the new media platforms. Thus, the findings of this study could be influenced by these events.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter presents previous studies aligned with the objectives of the research. These include political interest among young people, the use of new media during a pandemic, motivations of young people for using new media during a pandemic, modes of exposure in using new media, and the effects of using new media during a pandemic.

Political Interest Among Young People

Political interest and participation are vital to democracy (Solhaug & Kristensen, 2013). Research reveals that media stimulates political interest and engagement as it shapes people's sense of civic duty, attention to issues, interest in public affairs, and motivation to get involved in the political process (Boulianne, 2019). The youth's interest in political activities is also found to be the consequences of higher usage of social media as a platform for political participation (Ahmad et al., 2019; Abdu et al, 2017). In addition, the low cost of the new media to acquire and access political information is fast and unlimited. This can lead to information exposure, and thus produce an increased level of political interest and participation (Anduiza et al., 2009).

In their goal to better understand how young people discover and develop their political interest, Solhaug & Kristensen (2013) found that young people's interaction with the environment as well as their positive and negative experiences helped to accommodate new knowledge and information that greatly influence their rationality. In their qualitative study, they interviewed six minority students and four ethnic Danish students aged 16-17 years, where they asked how they became interested in politics.

Results revealed that their family, school, media, and peers became their source of information and sphere of political influence. For example, these students developed a political interest when they watched TV together with their family and then heard them commenting, discussing, or debating on events and other issues. Some family members were disinterested in politics, thus influencing students' apathetic political attitude. School and peers also enriched their social experiences, allowing them to explore social and political information that helped them in identifying their interests and independence.

Moreover, Keiting and Melis (2015) concluded in their study that the principal driver of online political engagement is political interest and that the new media provides a new outlet for some young adults to engage in activities online but not re-engaging those who have lost interest in politics. In their argument, the political interest of an individual is triggered by social media and the social mobilization of friends and family. Using a latent class analysis of a unique web survey, they examined whether the reasons of young adults aged 22-29 in Britain for using social media for political engagement could be explained by socio-demographic resources or political interest. They found that since political interest develops during childhood and adolescence, socio-demographic characteristics play a vital role in shaping the behavior of young adults. Moreover, they found that these young people only use social media for political engagement if they are already interested in politics.

The study of Pap et al. (2018) also found that the use of social media networks such as Facebook for political discussions increased the youth's political interest. Using an online survey, a convenient sample of 220 young people aged 15-29 years old in Croatia were surveyed in 2017. Results showed that the more active young people on Facebook, the greater is their political interest. Interestingly, not all social networks

had the same effect on political interest. In the same study, they found that Twitter did not have any significant effect in young people in Croatia as this is not widely used in the country.

In the Philippines, Cabo (2018) stated that Filipino youth are not just interested in political participation in the country through voting, but rather they are also interested in other activities that support democracy and good governance even if they are aware of the weaknesses of the political environment, like corruption. The community pantry, for example, was initiated by a young woman in Quezon City who has seen the imbalance of government financial provision during the pandemic. This kind of activity has proven the youth's capacity to respond to the people's needs (Gozum, 2021) and has carried a very strong political message (Jimenez, 2021). Because it became viral on social media, the pantry sparked the interest of many people, including the younger generation, to be involved in such activities.

Use of New Media during a Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic's lockdown and physical isolation accelerated the existing use of new media, particularly among young people (15-24 years old), who are more digitally connected than the rest of the world's population (ITU, 2020).

Volkmer (2021) conducted a global study on digital crisis interaction with nearly 24,000 Gen Z and millennials from 24 countries and discovered that these young generations typically access social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, and Instagram via their mobile smartphones. Additionally, these young people have been utilizing smaller platforms such as Discord, an instant messaging service geared toward gamers, and other instant messaging apps that utilize end-to-end encryption to prevent messages and other data from being viewed by third parties,

such as Telegram, Viber, Line, KakaoTalk, and Wickr. According to the study, mobile smartphones have changed the game for young people by making it easier to connect and interact with one another. However, the digital divide and affordability of mobile smartphones in low, middle, and high-income countries have a negative effect on young people's global awareness of social and political issues, as they lack the means to connect and access the Internet.

Fernandes et al. (2020) examined differences in the online habits of young people living in Mexico, India, the Philippines, Malaysia, and the United Kingdom before and after the government imposed a lockdown to contain the spread of the coronavirus. They surveyed respondents online to ascertain their frequency of use of online apps on their devices, what they typically do online prior to and during the pandemic, and their level of concern about coronavirus and the pandemic. They discovered that while young people increased their use of social media sites and streaming services during the COVID-19 pandemic, their use of apps and websites devoted to online shopping decreased significantly. Additionally, there was an increase in the use of social media in various parts of the world, with many teens reporting that they use social media (Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok) to communicate with their peers.

Meanwhile, the Philippines, dubbed as the “world's social media capital” due to millions of Filipinos spending nearly four hours a day on social media sites, most notably Facebook, consistently ranked first in global social media users both before and during the pandemic. The majority of Filipino media users, according to statistics, own a mobile phone, which they use to access the Internet. In terms of social media platforms, Filipinos use Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Instagram, WeChat, and Tiktok (We are Social and Hootsuite, 2021).

Moreover, the candidates for the 2022 local and national elections have used social media as the government's COVID-19 restrictions made it difficult for them to hold a face-to-face campaign. The social media platforms have played a significant role in the lead-up of the May 9 presidential elections in the country (Grounds & Koff, 2022).

Corpuz & Vargas (2021) examined Filipinos' use of social media and level of satisfaction, focusing on residents of Barangay San Fabian, Sto. Domingo, Nueva Ecija, Philippines. Using the Uses and Gratifications Theory, the study discovered that the majority of their 100 respondents are young people between the ages of 16 and 20, who spend the majority of their time on smartphones, specifically Facebook. According to the study, these young people use Facebook for entertainment and socialization, Google for knowledge acquisition, and online gaming sites for relaxation.

Moreover, Malawani (2016) found that many young Filipinos were influenced by the images posted on Facebook during the 2016 election and surmised that the social media determined who would win as president. In his research during the 2016 Presidential campaign in the country, Malawani found that 76% of the 289 online respondents in his survey indicated that social media is a determining factor in the presidential campaign process during the 2016 election because it is an effective medium for delivering critical campaign information.

Motivations for Using New Media During a Pandemic

COVID-19 is the first pandemic to strike the world in the age of new media. Due to the phenomenon's unfamiliarity, many people turn to new media for information in order to become aware of it. However, as the number of infected individuals grows, the amount of information available online grows as well. This "infodemic" or the rapid

and widespread spread of information and misinformation online (World Health Organization, 2020) affects how people use new media.

Ripolles (2020) asserted that COVID-19 significantly increased news consumption. He compared news media consumption before and during the pandemic outbreak in an online survey of 8,914 Americans from March 10 to 16, 2020, and discovered that citizens who were typically disconnected from the news experienced a significant increase in news consumption as a result of the coronavirus outbreak. There was also an increase in young people's consumption of political news during the outbreak.

Moreover, Dahiya et al. (2021) discovered that new media usage increased dramatically between February 2020 and May 2020, before gradually declining thereafter. They revealed that as a result of the outbreak, people increased their use of the Internet to look for work and access educational materials. The researchers analyzed trends from December 2019 to June 2020 using an analysis tool from SEMrush. The tool allows users to view website traffic, the number of visits, and the change in unique visitors over time.

Due to the restrictions on social interaction during the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of new media for online communication with family and friends increased (Kemp, 2020). Those who are unfamiliar with and less tech-savvy about the use of online and mobile apps for instant messaging, as well as voice and video conferencing, may be unable to connect to society, as they lack access to new modes of communication.

Nguyen et al. (2020) found that during the pandemic, young people in the United States (US) used text messages, phone calls, social media, and video calls more frequently. They gathered data from 1374 Americans between April 4 and 8, 2020, two weeks after the United States went into lockdown, via an online questionnaire administered by the Cint survey firm. While in Canada, Bilodeau et al. (2021)

conducted the Canadian Internet Use Survey from November 2020 to March 2021 and discovered that approximately 44,800 young people aged 15–34 living in ten provinces used videoconferencing services to connect with family and friends. Additionally, they viewed streaming video content such as Netflix, Crave, news, concerts, and fitness videos, as well as placed online orders for physical goods, which they did more frequently than they did prior to the pandemic. Additionally, these activities were shared with their friends and relatives.

Saud et al. (2020) conducted a quantitative study from March to April 2020 to determine the strengths of social media in promoting social support, awareness, and updates about the global situation. They surveyed 348 respondents from Indonesia about their average daily use of online platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Line, and YouTube, as well as whether or not social media has aided them in being aware of outbreaks and how they were collecting medical information about the pandemic. They discovered that Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and Line were viewed as useful apps for information sharing and pandemic awareness, with young people aged 21–25 being the most likely to use social media to access and seek medical information about the pandemic.

With the prevalence of social media and an increasing number of social media users, political campaigns, advertising, and networking activities have been taking advantage of the wider and broader reach of these platforms. In her research on how social media networking sites help in effective political campaigning, Vonderschmitt (2012) concluded that candidates can use Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to create effective political strategies as these platforms have different capabilities to reach their target audience. Political advertising through the use of new media offers another way for citizens and politicians to be connected and involved in democracy. It serves as a

valid source of information about the candidates during a campaign. Scholars argue that political campaigns and advertising play a vital role to increase voter turnout and political knowledge (Masood, 2018).

Young people regularly use social media to stay informed and share information, which has increased their awareness and influenced their behavior toward illness, their own health, and the health of others in their daily routines. Interestingly, respondents in Saud's study acknowledged that their social media friends have shared and advised them to engage in innovative ways to keep themselves occupied at home, such as updating new information about COVID-19, volunteering to participate in local discussions, and creating YouTube videos. The study's findings indicate that people are increasing their time spent on social media platforms not only to stay connected and share public information about the virus and illness but also to provide psychosocial support to their social networks.

Graciyal & Viswarm (2018) also pointed out that social media serve the purposes of connecting, networking, and voicing opinions. Users have also exercised the freedom of speech and expression through social media. In their survey of 100 online users, they found that the youth were more addicted to politics and had opinions so they supported political activities and gave ideas beneficial for the future. Moreover, using social media was seen as an opportunity for these youths to express their views through feedback, which were mostly portrayed as comments, which naturally built to conversation that were sometimes represented by emojis, memes, or trolls.

Young people use social media for impression management and self-expression in the complex process of globalization and rapid social change, according to Takahashi (2016), which is motivated by their desire for acceptance and evidence of their existence. They negotiate the relationship between the opportunities and the risks

implicit in their use of social media as they create and recreate themselves through both mediated and non-mediated interactions online.

Pulse Asia Research, Inc. conducted a national survey in the Philippines from June to September 2021 on news sources and the use of the Internet, social media, and instant messaging applications. They discovered an increase in the percentage of Internet users who went online to read, watch, or listen to news about the government at the national level, election-related news in the Philippines, as well as other topics of interest such as movies, recipes, and celebrities' news. Additionally, the percentage of people who conducted online shopping, sent or received emails, and engaged in formal and informal online learning increased during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Modes of Exposure in Using New Media

The use of new media to disseminate information frequently results in opportunities for civic recruitment and political participation (Gil De Zuñiga et al., 2004). Individuals who are exposed to social and political issues on an incidental or intentional basis are more likely to participate in and be involved in civic activities (Cohen & Kahne, 2012).

According to Pulse Asia (2018), 51% of Filipinos' political views and opinions concerning politics and government were influenced by the information they see, read and/or listened to in the new media. Social media platforms and digital intermediaries are becoming more important for sharing and reading news. This makes it more likely that citizens will see online news even when they aren't looking for it, which affects their knowledge of politics and public affairs (Goyanes, 2019).

Lee et al. (2021) found that incidental exposure to political news on Facebook and Twitter had no impact on political knowledge or participation. They emphasized that the characteristics of the political content available on the various platforms may vary,

which may affect the outcomes of an individual's incidental exposure to political news. A two-wave panel survey was conducted during the 2020 U.S. presidential election, with 1,363 and 752 respondents, respectively, in Waves 1 and 2. Using three social media platforms - Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube - they came to the conclusion that incidental exposure to social media may not necessarily have a positive effect on political learning and participation, and YouTube, in particular, can inhibit political learning.

Similarly, Nanz et al. (2020) discovered that incidental exposure had no effect on political participation, but that non-political motivation can result in incidental exposure to political information. This was the outcome of their two-wave panel survey study on the antecedents and consequences of incidental and intentional exposure behavior to political information of 559 Australians on social media. In addition, their study revealed that politically motivated individuals may be more likely to recall political information through intentional exposure to social media than those who are not politically motivated.

Effects of Using New Media During a Pandemic

Individuals were able to break out of isolation and find common ground through online spaces to support the well-being of others, regardless of their nationality, health, socioeconomic status, or political views (Yang et al., 2020). Additionally, these new media became critical in resolving pandemic-related challenges such as access to information and communication, as well as responding to the "new normal" activities (Badjpai & Biberman, 2020).

Due to school closures as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, young people have turned to new media to engage in learning and earn an income. This shift in interest

and utilization of new media outlets during the COVID-19 pandemic may have an effect on their ability to stimulate participation in both offline and online channels (Banaji & Buckingham, 2010; Abdu, 2017). When citizens abandon news for entertainment, they may become less engaged in both online and offline political activities, undermining participatory behavior (Kim et al., 2013; De Zuniga & Shahen, 2015; Reichert, 2015). This is because new media can use algorithms to direct young people's attention away from more pressing social issues that require their involvement.

The United Nations Development Program (2021) conducted a rapid analysis to ascertain how young civic actors in Europe and Central Asia use digital tools for political and social participation, their motivations, and the opportunities and barriers they face in their digital activism during the COVID-19 pandemic. Between August 2020 and January 2021, they surveyed, interviewed, and consulted 130 young civic actors aged 15–29 years who are based in Europe and Central Asia. They discovered that young civic actors used social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube to keep up with developments in social and political issues. They used the live sessions they watched on Facebook and Instagram as effective communication and advocacy tools, particularly during protests and street movements, but also during strategic debates. They were able to create and share written posts, images, and memes online via social media.

However, Liu et al. (2021) found that social media fatigue, fear of COVID-19, and information overload affected Gen Z, or those born between 1997 and 2012, in their social media use during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. The researchers examined the effect of information overload on social media users' internal psychological well-being and, consequently, their intention to discontinue social media

use using the stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) model. The online survey of 322 Gen Z social media users in the United Kingdom between April and May 2020 showed that, from the users' perspective, this information overload triggered psychological discomfort, resulting in user fatigue with social media. Social media fatigue and fear of COVID-19 significantly increased users' intentions to discontinue social media use. These findings demonstrated how an individual's social media use behavior can be shaped by the psychological mechanism of an overload of COVID-19 information on social media.

Cohen and Kahne (2012) asserted that young people's use of new media for information can expose them to diverse perspectives and help them develop a participatory culture that can increase their awareness of political issues and civic participation. Those motivated by interest, on the other hand, have a high level of participatory politics (e.g., reaching large networks, shaping agendas through dialogue and feedback to political leaders, and dissemination of political information).

According to Waeterloos et al., (2021), new media technologies enable citizens to establish new social ties and a sense of collective identity outside of physically defined communities. The researchers examined how news consumption, interpersonal communication, and political antecedents, in combination with local integration, affect three types of civic participation, including volunteering, consumerism, and participation in Hopplr, an online neighborhood network akin to Facebook groups that were created for neighborhoods in Belgium and the Netherlands during the COVID-19 pandemic. The online survey of 7,137 Hopplr users from May 8-18, 2020 showed that increased news consumption and civic conversations with peers likewise increased civic engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the findings, information overload and subsequent evasion of news could impair democratic functioning and

numb civic engagement. Citizens who had a low level of interest in politics were less likely to participate in civic activities.

Gil de Zuñiga & Sahin (2015) discovered that consuming news via social media is more likely to result in civic engagement. They argue that an individual's civic behaviors – whether offline or online – are influenced by demographics, social orientation, news media use, and discussion networks, all of which evolved as new media emerged. They noted that the proliferation of online social networks to which an individual connects and communicates increases an individual's exposure to information about civic organizations and activities around the world, which can result in civic participation.

Boulianne (2009) analyzed the findings of 38 American studies to determine whether Internet use has a positive or negative effect on civic and political engagement. She used multivariate analyses to focus on three measures: the number of positive and negative effects, the number of statistically significant and insignificant effects, and the average effect size. According to the analysis, the effects of Internet use on engagement are increasing over time and across situations (e.g., studies conducted during election period). Additionally, because the Internet reduces the cost of accessing political information and provides more convenient ways to engage in political life, individuals who are interested, knowledgeable, and already engaged in the political process take advantage of these opportunities when they use the Internet. Further, she discovered that when political interest and Internet use are combined, there is a significant effect in predicting civic and political engagement, or behaviors directly related to political institutions and their work, such as voting, donating money to a campaign, working for a political campaign, attending meetings or rallies for a candidate, as well as volunteering, collaborating with others to solve a community

problem, and serving a community. She concluded that Internet use is not a factor in the civic decline, as increased access to a diverse range of political information via the Internet may help re-energize one's civic life.

Chadwick (2020) rapid research on Voluntary Services Overseas Youth Networks discovered that young people are taking innovative actions to support their communities by utilizing offline and online strategies to raise public awareness about COVID-19 risk information. Additionally, they assist one another in developing resilience, demonstrating leadership, and identifying potential opportunities to strengthen and expand their reach.

Ohme (2018) investigated the relationship between increased use of new media for a variety of purposes (social interaction, creative expression, online news consumption, and social media news consumption) and shifting patterns of political participation at the political system, community level, and non-political but politically motivated activities. The findings of an online survey conducted in Denmark between 2014 and 2015 ascertain the impact of digital media use on civic participation and understanding. Findings showed that using digital media in a creative and informative manner can increase political participation. Middaugh et al. (2017) also discovered in their study on the social implications of adolescent new media use that new media have empowered individuals and groups in the political realm by enabling them to participate online with a single click or communicate with institutions, politicians, and other authoritative sources of information. According to the study, when young people express their political views online, they risk being exposed to stereotypes and hate speech, which can have a detrimental effect on their well-being.

Theoretical Underpinnings

The use of social media to engage in social and political issues via offline or online channels can be further understood through the Social Media Political Participation Model (SMPPM) developed by Knoll et al. (2018), as shown in Figure 1.

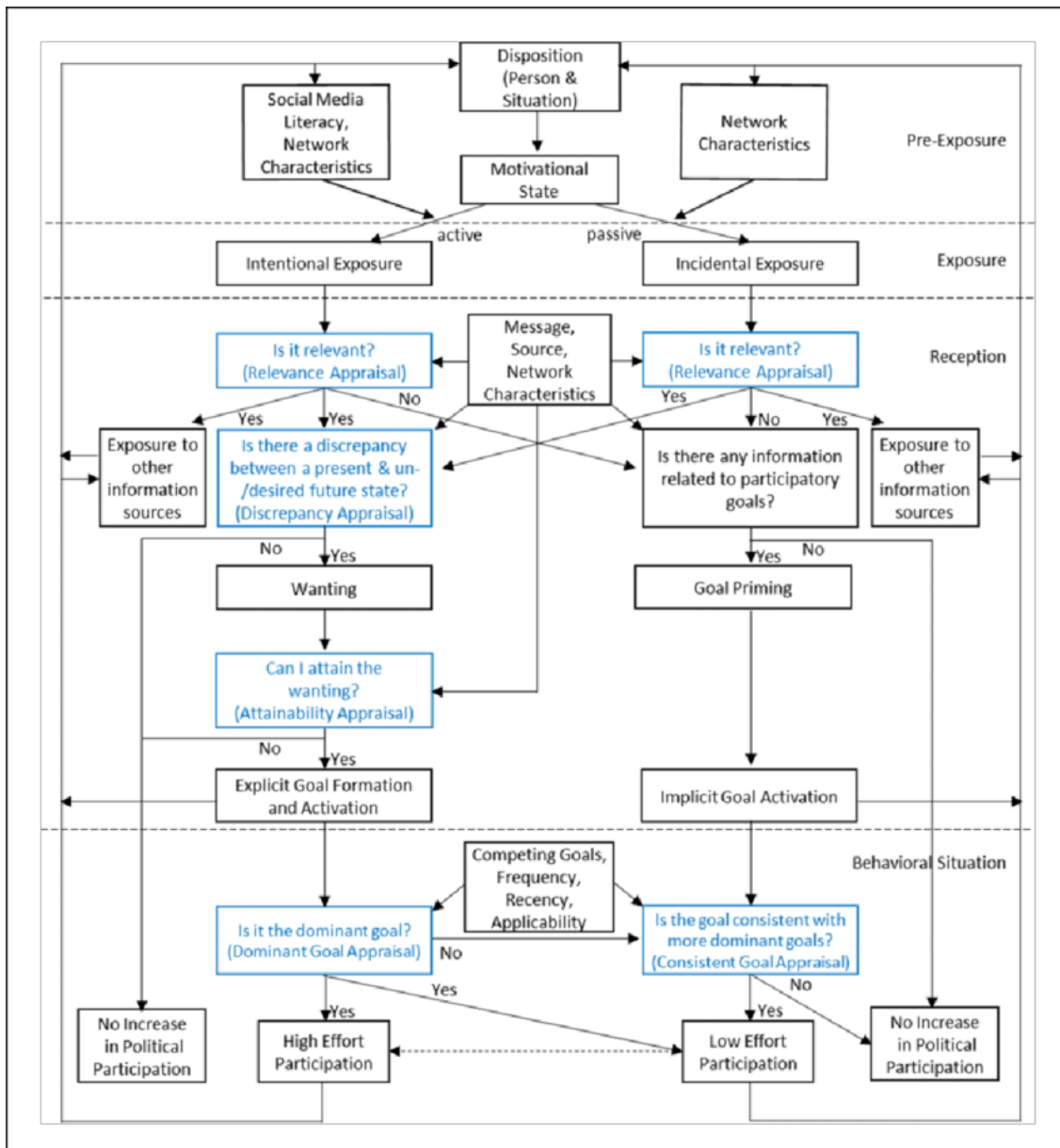


Figure 1. The SMPPM Model by Knoll et al. (2018)

The SMPPM is an integration of goals system theory, uses and gratifications theory, appraisal theory, and the priming paradigm. It fills a gap in theorizing about the

psychological processes underlying the relationship between social media use and political participation. Specified is a series of interconnected processes that must occur in order for social media use to have an effect on political participation.

Pre-exposure is the first step in the process, and during this time, the user's individual characteristics, such as personality traits, emotional states, sex, age, or instilled preferences, may have an impact on the kind of political information that the user is motivated to become familiar with.

The next step is determining the extent to which the user was exposed to political content while using social media. It can be deliberate exposure, in which the user actively seeks political information via new media, or accidental exposure, in which the user receives political information via social media.

The next process is political content reception, which refers to how the user processes the political information gleaned from his/her exposure. Depending on the user's assessment of political information, he or she can formulate and activate his or her goal explicitly or implicitly, which results in the final process of his or her behavior situation. If the primary goal of the user is participation, he or she is more likely to make a significant effort in political participation. However, if the user's primary objective is something else (e.g., online shopping), he or she is less likely to make a significant effort in political participation. This model demonstrates how a media user processes political information obtained through new media in order to engage in high-effort political activities.

Analytical Framework

Following the SMPPM model, the analytical framework of the study (Fig. 2) demonstrates the process by which the socio-demographic profile as well as the political interest of the youth council members in the municipality of Laurel, Batangas determine their motivations to use the new media.

An individual's socio-demographic profile such as age, gender, civil status, educational background, family members, address, and position in the council affect the youth's political interest. Their personal experiences and character determine their motivations in using the new media. These motivations can be politically-related or not. This is the first process that the youth council members undergo before they are exposed to political information in the new media.

Next, when they have the motivation to use the new media, they now have to select the new media applications that they need to use in order to support their interests. Their new media consumption will also determine how they become satisfied with the contents they access. However, because of the massive contents available in the new media, these youths may not be directly getting the information they need in the new media they consume. Rather, they may be getting exposed to other information which affects their interests and preferences. This exposure process leads to their reception and behavior situation.

The last stage of the process is the participation of the youth council members in political activities whether online or offline. This is the result of their new media use. These kinds of participation can be seen during the COVID-19 pandemic, Taal volcano situations, and the local and national elections in 2022.

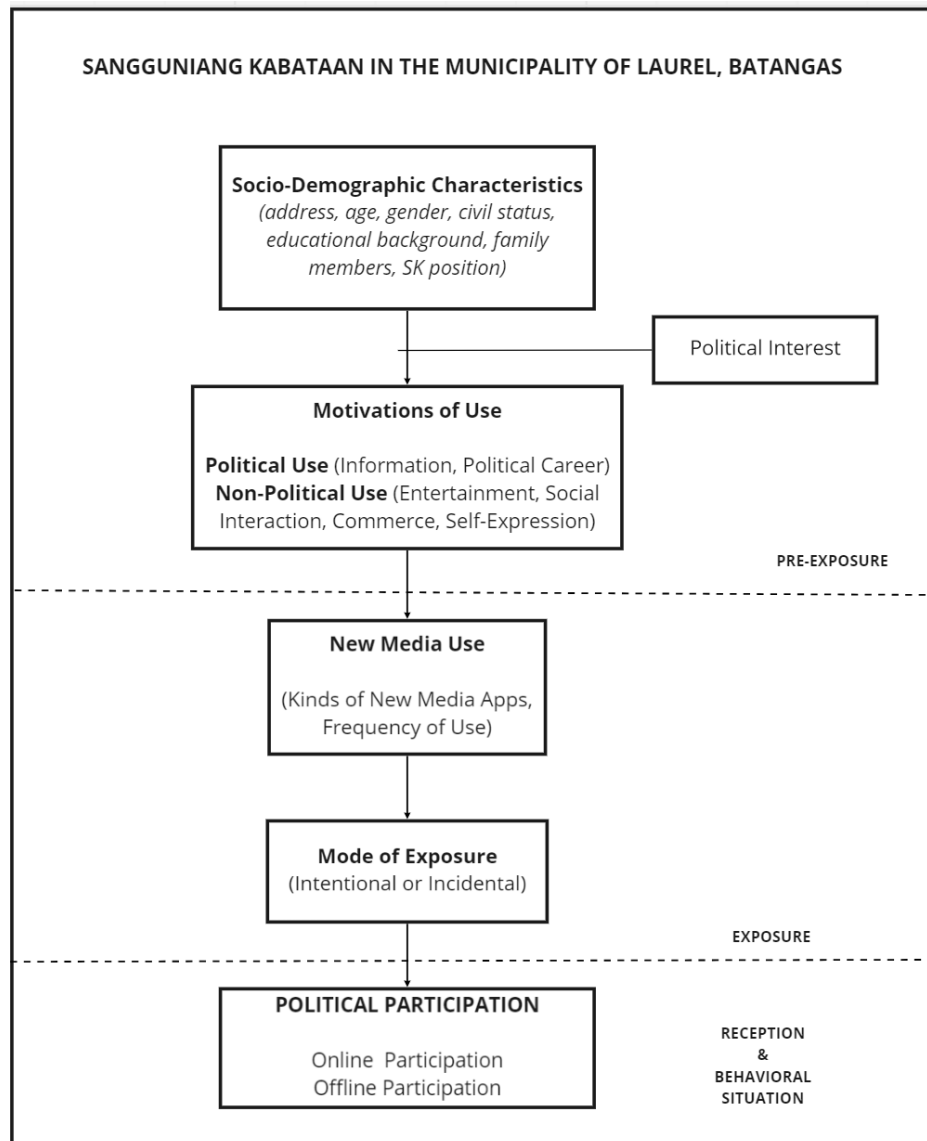


Figure 2. Analytical Framework of the Study

Operational Definition of Terms

In this study, the following terms will be used:

New media refers to the digital interactive media that is shared and distributed through computers and the Internet such as social media, websites, and mobile phone apps

Political interest refers to the users' attention to political issues and activities during the COVID-19 pandemic

New media use refers to the types of new media platforms that the users' access and the time they consume the new media

Motivations of use refers to the reasons why the youths use the new media. It can be divided into two types:

A. Political Motivation

- a. **News and Information** refers to the users' intention to gather political news and information from the new media during the COVID-19 pandemic
- b. **Political Career** refers to the users' intention to gain attention that could advance their political careers during the COVID-19 pandemic

B. Non- Political Motivation

- a. **Entertainment** refers to the user's intention to use new media for personal enjoyment during the COVID-19 pandemic
- b. **Social interaction** refers to the user's intention to communicate or engage with other people during the COVID-19 pandemic
- c. **Commerce** refers to the users' intention to use the e-commerce services for business transactions during the COVID-19 pandemic
- d. **Self-expression** refers to the users' intention to show others something about themselves during the COVID-19 pandemic

Modes of Exposure

- A. Incidental exposure** refers to the users' accidental encounter of acquiring information while using new media during the COVID-19 pandemic

B. Intentional exposure refers to the users' planned encounter of acquiring information using new media during the COVID-19 pandemic

Political participation refers to the users' participation in political activities during the COVID-19 pandemic. It can be in a form of online or offline participation.

A. **Online participation** refers to political activities participated in a virtual sphere during the COVID-19 pandemic. These include the following:

- Visit a website of a political party/youth organization
- Send emails to politicians for pandemic-related concerns
- Start or organize fundraising campaigns for the pandemic
- Volunteer for online campaigns or events
- Join virtual political groups or communities for COVID-19
- Write pandemic-related blogs
- Create personal vlogs and other online contents to express my support to political activities
- Repost/ share political events updates
- Attends politics-related webinars

B. **Offline participation** refers to political activities participated face to face or in person during the COVID-19 pandemic. These include the following:

- attending a face-to-face political meeting
- writing a letter to a newspaper, television station, or calling a radio station in order to express my opinions on political issues
- contacting politicians in order to discuss political issues during COVID-19
- attending political movements and campaigns

- establishing community pantry for those affected by COVID-19
- giving donations in community pantry for those affected by COVID-19

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the research design, the locale of the study, respondents and sampling, research instrument and data gathering, and data analysis.

Research Design

A descriptive survey research design was used to obtain information on how the youth council members in the municipality of Laurel, Batangas use new media for political participation during the COVID-19 pandemic. This research design was used to describe the independent variable (new media use) and the dependent variables (political participation, modes of exposure, and political interest).

Research Method

The study used a quantitative research method, through a printed survey questionnaire, which was distributed on April 23, 2022 and collected until May 22, 2022 from the elected SK members in the municipality of Laurel, Batangas. Quantitative study assists in making generalizations as it gathers numerical data, which can be ranked, measured, or categorized through statistical analysis.

Variables and Measures

The variables and measures used in this research are organized in Table 1.

Table 1. Variables and Measures for the Objectives of the Study

VARIABLES	MEASURES
Objective 1. Profile of the youth council members	
Address	Barangay in Laurel, Batangas where they live
Age	Actual years of age
Sex	Being male or female
Civil status	Being unmarried, married, separated, widowed
Educational background	Highest education level attained
Family size	Number of household members including the respondent
Objective 2. Level of political interest	
Political interest	Being not interested (1) to very interested (5)
Interested issues	Political, environment, health, international, poverty, inequality, science, technology, entertainment, business, others
Objective 3. Use new media during the COVID-19 pandemic	
Types of new media	Google, Yahoo, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Vimeo, Spotify, Messenger, Viber, Tiktok, Others
Frequency of Use	Less than 30 minutes, 30-60 minutes, 1-2 hours, 3-4 hours, more than 4 hours, others
Objective 4. Motivations in using new media during the COVID-19 pandemic	
Political Motivation	
a. News and Information	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Get information on political issues 2. Follow current political events 3. Learn about political perspectives 4. See how people from my network think about political issues
b. Political career	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Post personal political insights 2. Share political achievements 3. Share political plans
Non-Political Motivation	
a. Entertainment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pass time 2. Find entertaining information 3. Watch entertaining videos 4. Listen to music or podcasts 5. Play online games
b. Social interaction	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Stay in contact with other people 2. Show people that they care about them 3. Maintain existing friendship 4. Make social contacts
c. Commerce	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Buy essentials and non-essential needs online 2. Sell essentials and non-essentials needs online 3. Transact online
d. Self-expression	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Express interest in others 2. Show others what they are doing 3. Post pictures, videos, and other updates

Objective 5. Encounter with political information in new media during the COVID-19 pandemic	
Intentional encounter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively search for political information • Follow political information sources • Take care of seeing political information on their newsfeed
Incidental encounter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stumble upon news only by accident • Only see political posts when other people from their network post about politics • Do not seek political information, but sometimes see political information by accident
Objective 6. Political activities the youth council members engaged in during the COVID-19 pandemic	
Offline political activities (adapted and modified from the research of Strömbäck et al., 2017; Jiang, 2017; Ohme, 2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attending a face-to-face political meeting • writing a letter to a newspaper, television station, calling a radio station to express my opinions on political issues • contacting politicians to discuss political issues during COVID-19 • attending political movements and campaigns • establishing community pantry for those affected by COVID-19 • giving donations in community pantry for those affected by COVID-19
Online political activities (adapted and modified from the research of Strömbäck et al., 2017; Jiang, 2017; Ohme, 2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit a website of a political party/youth organization • Send emails to politicians for pandemic-related concerns • Start or organize fundraising campaigns for the pandemic • Volunteer for online campaigns or events • Join virtual political groups or communities for COVID-19 • Write pandemic-related blogs • Create personal vlogs and other online contents to express my support to political activities • Repost/ share political events updates • Attends politics-related webinars

Locale and Period

The research was carried out in the Municipality of Laurel, a third-class municipality in the province of Batangas. It has 21 barangays and a population of 43,210 as of 2020 (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2020). According to the municipality's profile, it

ranks first in the Disaster Risk Reduction Plan, Annual Disaster Drill, Early Warning System, and Local Risk Assessment when it comes to resiliency.

As an "Agri-Eco tourism hub" with fishing port access to Taal Lake, the town is considered one of the most progressive municipalities in the province of Batangas. Rice, corn, coconut, and fish are their main products, and farming and fishing are their main industries. However, it is also situated at 7 to 15 km radius danger zone of the Taal volcano.

Data were gathered from April 23, 2022 to May 22, 2022.

Respondents and Sampling

Complete enumeration was used in selecting the respondents of the study. Out of 168 elected Sangguniang Kabataan officials from 21 Barangays in the Municipality of Laurel, Batangas, 136 respondents agreed to participate in the study. This made up 80.95 % of the population.

The barangays and the number of officials is summarized in Table 2:

Table 2. Barangays and number of respondents

BARANGAYS	N=136	PERCENTAGE (%)
Asis	5	3.68
Balakilong	8	5.88
Berinayan	4	2.94
Bugaan East	8	5.88
Bugaan West	3	2.21
Buso Buso	7	5.15
Dayap	6	4.41
Gulod	8	5.88
Leviste	6	4.41
Molinete	5	3.68
Niyugan	4	2.94
Paliparan	8	5.88
Pob 1	8	5.88
Pob 2	8	5.88
Pob 3	8	5.88

BARANGAYS	N=136	PERCENTAGE (%)
Pob 4	6	4.41
Pob 5	8	5.88
San Gabriel	5	3.68
San Gregorio	5	3.68
Sta. Maria	8	5.88
Ticub	8	5.88

Research Instrument

A self-administered questionnaire in the English language was to gather data. The instrument is composed of four (4) parts:

Part 1 elicited the demographic profile of the respondents;

Part 2 consisted of questions about the respondents' level of political interest;

Part 3 consisted of questions on the respondents' new media use in terms of apps that they accessed and frequency of consumption during the COVID-19 pandemic. Options were provided in these questions, and respondents just needed to tick the answers that were applicable based on their personal experiences;

Part 4 consisted of motivations of new media use during the COVID-19 pandemic. The questions were adapted and modified from the study of Nanz et al. (2022), which used a 5-point Likert scale;

Part 5 consisted of questions on the mode of exposure that the respondents had in getting political information during the COVID-19 pandemic. The questions were adapted and modified from the study of Nanz et al. (2022), which used a 5-point Likert scale;

Part 6 consisted of questions on the political participation that the users engaged in during the COVID-19 pandemic. The questions were adapted and modified from the research of Strömbäck et al. (2017), Jiang (2017), and Ohme (2018). This used a 5-point Likert scale.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the MS Excel program to generate descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentages, weighted mean, and rank analysis.

Research Ethics and Data Management

As the study involved young Filipino political leaders, their participation and answers demanded strict ethical standards from the researcher. First and foremost was the request for permission to conduct the study from the youth council leaders.

The youth council members were asked to sign an informed consent detailing that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any point if they felt any discomfort.

They were assured of anonymity and confidentiality of their identities and answers. Hence, the survey questions were coded.

For data management, the researcher placed the data in one computer that is password-protected. These were seen only by the researcher and only the coded answers were shown to the adviser. The raw data would be kept for a year and then deleted.

Results of the data were presented to the UPOU panel members and intended only for official conferences and a possible journal article.

Chapter IV

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the results gathered to analyze how the members of the Sangguniang Kabataan in the municipality of Laurel, Batangas used new media in political participation during the COVID 19 pandemic. This consists of six (6) parts: the respondents' (1) socio-demographic profile, (2) level of political interest, (3) new media use, (4) motivation in using new media; (5) mode of exposure to political information; and (6) their political participation.

Socio-Demographics Profile of the Youth Council Members

Out of 168 elected SK officials in 21 barangays in the municipality of Laurel, Batangas, 136 (80.95%) agreed to take part in the study. A total of 21 (15.44%) are holding the position of SK Chairperson, while 115 (84.56%) are SK Councilors. They were all elected officials since 2018.

The respondents were asked about their socio-demographic profile, or their age, sex, civil status, highest educational attainment, and family number. Socio-demography of the young people can affect the knowledge and interest in politics (Solhaug & Kristensen, 2013). Moreover, this also affects how they use and access the new media to participate in political activities online.

The summary of the socio-demographics profile is shown in Table 3.

Age

The youngest respondents of this research are 20 years old, while the oldest respondents are 27 years old. These age groups belong to Gen Y or Millennials and

Gen Z, respectively, which according to the International Telecommunications Union, are the “digital natives” and the solution-shapers to our digital future.

Sex

There are more male (66.18%) compared to female (33.82%) youth officials. This shows that the municipality has a male-dominated political landscape, which is similar to the overall Philippine political landscape. The COMELEC (2019) reported that only 23.13% of elected candidates in both local and national elections are female compared to 76.87% of males.

Civil Status

There are more single (94.85%) youth officials compared to married (5.15%) respondents, which is expected because of their young age.

Highest Educational Attainment

Most of the respondents have finished college education (89.71%), while some respondents finished senior high school (8.82 %), and junior high school (1.47%). Hence, they are generally well educated considering their age.

Family Size

The smallest family size of the respondents is three, while the largest is 11. Most respondents have a family composed of five to six members (33.09%).

Table 3. Socio demographic profile of the respondents

VARIABLE	MEASURES	FREQUENCY (N=136)	PERCENTAGE (%)
Age	20-21	10	7.35
	22-23	47	34.56
	24-25	48	35.29
	26-27	31	22.79
Sex	Male	90	66.18
	Female	46	33.82
Civil Status	Single	129	94.85
	Married	7	5.15
Highest Educational Attainment	College	122	89.71
	Senior High School	12	8.82
	Junior High School	2	1.47
Family size	3-4	27	19.85
	5-6	45	33.09
	7-8	26	19.12
	9-10	36	26.47
	more than 10	2	1.47

In summary, there were 136 elected Sangguniang Kabataan from 21 barangays of the municipality of Laurel, Batangas who served as respondents of the study. They hold the positions of chairperson and councilors for three years from 2018 to 2022. Their age ranges from 20 to 27 years. There are more males than female respondents. Majority are single and college graduates. Their household size ranged from 3 to 11.

Political Interest of the Youth Council Members

To discuss the media use and political interest of the youth better, a timeline of events that happened in the world and in the province of Batangas is presented in Figure 3. The timeline includes events before and during the data collection from April 23 to May 22, 2022. The context can help explain how the respondents used new media and their possible influence on their political participation during the Covid 19 pandemic.

While the Philippines is still undergoing the scourge of the COVID-19 pandemic, the world is experiencing the ongoing impact of the Ukraine-Russia war. Before the conduct of the survey on April 23, 2022, the Philippine election campaign of local candidates has already started on March 25, 2022. In Batangas, there were reports of Taal tremors and changing alert levels of the volcano as well increasing number of individuals infected by the COVID-19 virus from March 26, 2022 to April 22, 2022.

While the survey was being administered from April 23, 2022 to May 22, 2022, the respondents experienced many 'lifeshaking' events. The 2022 election campaign heightened in the Philippines; a new monkeypox virus was being reported; a new case of COVID-19 Omicron subvariant was detected; and the 2nd booster shot for senior citizens and frontliners were administered.

One momentous event in April 2022 was the Philippine president signing the new SK law (R.A. 11768). The law grants monetary honorarium to all council members including the appointed secretary and treasurer in each barangay. Before the end of the study's survey on May 22, 2022, the respondents also experienced natural disasters such as Habagat or southwest monsoon and a series of earthquakes in Mt. Taal, Batangas.

These events may have had an effect on how the respondents thought, felt, and behaved about the political issues surrounding them during this period.

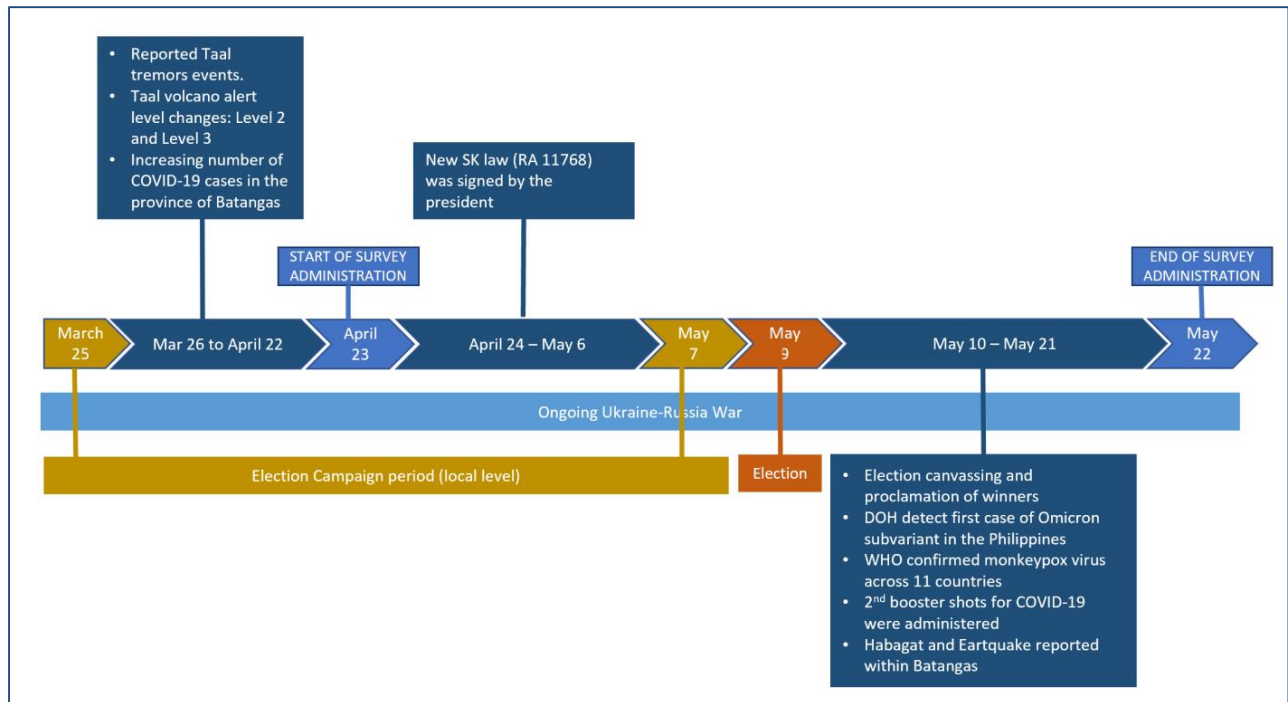


Figure 3. Timeline of events from March to May 2022

Respondents were asked to rate their interest in politics and rank the issues that they were most interested in during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 4 shows that more than half of the respondents (74.26%) were interested in politics. Those who have enjoyed their service for three years were the ones who were interested. Their interest in politics may have increased as a result of being personally involved in and experiencing politics as SK officials.

It is interesting to note, however, that 14 (10.29%) were uninterested and 12 (8.82%) were very uninterested in politics. This is ironic considering that they are supposed to be youth officials in local government and have a direct stake in politics. While serving as SK members since 2019, they may have experienced some things that have caused them to lose interest and become uncertain or disillusioned about politics.

Table 4. Respondents' level of interest in politics

LEVEL OF INTEREST	FREQUENCY N=136	PERCENTAGE (%)
<i>Very uninterested</i>	12	8.82
<i>Uninterested</i>	14	10.29
<i>Neither uninterested nor interested</i>	9	6.62
<i>Interested</i>	60	44.12
<i>Very Interested</i>	41	30.15

Table 5 shows the issues that the youth council members were interested in during the pandemic. The rank analysis shows that the top issues were international concerns, science, inequality, and politics. The topic of health came after politics.

International Issues

As seen in the timeline of events (Figure 3), some of the international issues before and during the time of survey administration were the ongoing Ukraine-Russia war, which started on February 24, 2022. The war has resulted to rising inflation of commodities across the globe, foremost being gasoline – the fuel that runs the economy. The confirmed and suspected cases of monkeypox from 11 countries were also reported by World Health Organization on May 20, 2022. The youth's high interest in these issues may be related to the impacts brought about by these events, which they experienced.

It is possible that the fast, easy, and low-cost acquisition of information through the new media has allowed these young people to know and become aware of different issues in and outside of their community. This exposure as explained by Anduiza et al. (2009) produces an increased level of political interest and participation.

Science Issues

Figure 3 shows that the second booster shots for COVID-19 in the Philippines started to be administered, and the first case of Omicron subvariant was detected and reported in the country in May 2022. The monkeypox virus, which is a new threat to one's health, was also the trending issue during this time. The youth's reliance on scientific facts to understand what was unknown or unfamiliar to them may have resulted in their high interest in science issues.

Inequality Issues

The high prices of commodities, which were exacerbated by the ongoing Ukraine-Russia war, greatly affected the ordinary and working low-income Filipinos. According to the Philippine Statistics Authority, from 2.1% in May 2020, the inflation rate rose to 4.5% in May 2021, which was an increase of more than 100%. The youth's high interest in these issues may be related to what they observed in their environment as public servants and possibly also what they observed in their own families. But it is also most probable that they learned of these issues by watching or listening to various news media.

Political issues

The campaign period started on February 8, 2022 for the national candidates and on March 25, 2022 for the local candidates, and these ended on May 7, 2022. The general election happened on May 9, 2022, while the canvassing and proclamation of winners happened from May 10-18, 2022. Also, a new SK Law (RA11768) was signed by the president on May 6, 2022.

The youth's high interest in political issues may be related to the 2022 elections, where candidates raised pressing social issues in the public agenda. Furthermore, different TV networks and social media platforms hosted candidate debates throughout the election season. This may have enhanced the youth officials' awareness, knowledge, and understanding of national and local political issues.

Health issues

Reports of individuals affected by the COVID-19 and of the new virus, monkeypox, were increasing during the administration of the survey. These viruses posed threats to the health of individuals globally. Moreover, there were also reported and suspected cases of the new COVID-19 Omicron subvariant in the Philippines on May 13, 2022. The youth's high interest on these issues may be related to the health news and information that they acquired from news media, which they also shared.

Poverty issues

The persistent issue of poverty, which existed even before the pandemic, was ranked 6th among the priorities of the respondents. This may be because poverty has become a way of life or that they felt that they could do nothing about it. However, this may seem ironic because as elected officials, they are expected to help the local and national governments ensure the welfare of the citizens, and this definitely includes alleviating the poverty situation in their barangays.

Entertainment Issues

Contrary to expected of the youth, these youth council members did not really use new media for entertainment issues. This may be because they are elected officers

who are serious about their responsibilities in helping their fellow youths become aware of local and global issues that may affect their lives. Since it was the election period, the respondents were more focused on sharing insights about the right to vote and how they should participate in the election rather than having an interest in entertainment news.

Environmental Issues

Surprisingly, environmental issues were among the least important concerns of the respondents, considering that some of the barangays in their municipality are within the 7-kilometer zone of the Taal volcano. Before the administration of the survey, the Taal Volcano was on Alert Level 3 on March 26, 2022, which was lowered to Alert Level 2 on April 9, 2022. This may explain why the youths' interest in these issues were not as high as expected. It also suggests that these young officials may already be resilient to natural disasters, particularly in light of the occasional activities of Taal volcano.

Technology Issues

The respondents found technological advancements for the COVID-19 pandemic to be the least interesting topic. This may help to explain why the youth council members were not particularly interested in these issues since these did not directly affect them or their capacities as public servants. During the survey, the election was the most trending topic, and even if the technologies were continuously evolving, the respondents were not interested in these issues.

Table 5. Rank analysis of political issues that respondents are interested in

ISSUES	SCORE	RANK
International	106	1
Science	125	2
Inequality	173	3
Politics	180	4
Health	190	5
Poverty	238	6
Entertainment	240	7
Environment	251	8
Business	335	9
Technology	577	10

Note: Highest rank is 1, lowest rank is 5.

In summary, the findings showed that the top issues that the respondents were interested in were related to (1) international news, (2) science, (3) inequality, (4) politics, and (5) health. This suggests that even if these youth council members were already elected and directly involved in politics, they were not particularly interested in learning about political issues surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. Rather, they were mostly interested in learning about the current global situation and issues that they considered as posing a greater threat to them, their families, and their communities.

New Media Use

The youth council members were asked what new media they used during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as their frequency of use.

Table 6 shows that the top five apps that they used were Messenger (97.79%), Tiktok (97.06%), Facebook (93.38%), YouTube (76.47), and Instagram (62.5%). These apps were mostly used via smartphones. According to Volkmer (2021), mobile smartphones have changed the game for young people by making it easier to connect and interact with one another.

Facebook Messenger, or simply "Messenger," is a messaging service that lets users interact and communicate with one another quickly and creatively on the social media site. It has at least 99.8 million users around the world, and where the majority are young people (Kemp, 2022). Because it has entertaining and engaging features like group or individual chat, video and audio recording, and image sharing, it is easier for the youths to stay connected and updated with one another. The app is also accessible via smartphones, which most young people have.

Because the youth council has a group chat using the Messenger app, this can easily facilitate communication among members of their barangay when issues such as the change of alert level for Taal volcano or cases of COVID-19 in the province. The app also has a feature of sharing pictures, which updates the youth council members on the whereabouts of their fellow youths. According to them, they also used the video feature of Messenger to exchange conversations with one another, especially during calamities. Sometimes, they also conducted meetings with the officers using this feature. This can explain why the youth council members primarily used this messaging app during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Tiktok is a 15-second video-sharing app that enables users to make and share videos on any subject. It provides a variety of audio clips from songs that users can use to make their own videos. It is very simple for people to continue watching random videos for hours due to the type of the content's addictive nature. As it offers original

content, this is a fantastic form of entertainment. In addition, it offers users the chance to learn about fresh opportunities both inside and outside the nation.

The youth council members may be very active in these kinds of apps and may have viewed or created short videos as a form of entertainment during the COVID-19 pandemic. The contents they created could have helped others become updated on the latest situation in their barangay. When they posted Tiktok videos, it eased the worry among their family members outside their barangay because the latter knew that they were safe and still had time to enjoy during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Facebook, on the other hand, is a social networking site that makes it easy for one to connect and share with family and friends online. It has features that allow users to share various types of content, including pictures and videos from various sources. Users have the option to respond to and comment on the content that is available. Facebook users can also advertise their companies and reach a larger audience. With the ability to perform live streaming, Facebook can turn into users' go-to place for news updates and entertainment. Users can also create or join private or public communities where they can talk about subjects that interest them. In addition, studies have shown that Facebook, which provides a forum for political discourse, can increase the political interest of young people (Pap et al., 2018).

The youth council members used the Facebook page, one of the features of this app, to share updates on their programs, activities, and projects for the barangay. When posted, it facilitated discussions among the youths, generated ideas, and elicited suggestions to improve the plans they crafted. It also updated the youths on the latest news and activities in their barangay, which could mobilize them to join or participate in these projects. During the election, most of the contents shared in

Facebook were about the youth councils' advocacies to encourage their barangay mates to choose the right candidates in leading the country and their locality.

YouTube is a website where users can watch and upload their own original videos or videos made by others. It can give everyone a voice and expose them to the outside world. Moreover, users can comment and rate these videos. This interactive and entertaining website gained popularity, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, because most people preferred watching videos to reading text.

The youth council members shared pertinent and significant videos using YouTube as part of their roles as public servants. During the survey, they widely shared election videos to help their fellow youths become aware about the candidates and their accomplishments. YouTube allowed people to comment on the uploaded videos, which also facilitated discussions among the members of the community. These comments provided additional information to the viewers, which helped them decide whether to believe or support what they watched, and whether they would share these with their other friends. The youth council members may have wanted to learn more by watching and listening to the videos. YouTube also offered them entertainment and information that suited their needs and preferences.

Instagram is a photo and video sharing app that lets users make their own profiles and connect them to active social networking profiles on various platforms. Users are directed to images, videos, or web pages that have been uploaded and shared globally using hashtags. Its many photo and video editing features inspire users to be imaginative and creative. In addition, users can respond to and comment on the contents they view. This app also for private messaging to keep friends in touch. The youth officials also use Instagram because they can follow influencers and well-known individuals to stay current on world events.

The youth council members used this app to stay in touch and learn about their friends and loved ones. During the election and other events, Instagram was filled with photos and videos that shared information about the election campaign to encourage the youth to support certain political candidates.

According to Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2021, social media apps such as YouTube, Facebook, Facebook Messenger, TikTok, and Twitter are being used as a source of information in the Philippines. According to previous studies, these apps were used by young people to communicate with family and peers, most especially during the COVID-19 pandemic (Fernandes et al., 2020). Moreover, the election campaign advertisements were effectively facilitated through these apps (Malawani, 2016).

It should be noted also that many of the youth council members mentioned shopping apps such as Shopee (78%), Lazada (51%), Gcash (60%), and Paymaya (25%). During the pandemic, online selling became brisker because of limited face-to-face transactions. Hence, ordering online became more popular and paying for these online transactions became more common. Since the municipality is geographically far from other shopping establishments, the youth members may have enjoyed shopping online in order to purchase what they needed during the time of the pandemic.

Meanwhile, only a few respondents used Vimeo (13.24%) for movie or video production or Tinder (11%). These apps allowed viewers to initiate communication and make comments, which may have helped the youth councils expand their networks and create more opportunities to meet other people online.

Table 6. New media apps that respondents use

NEW MEDIA	FREQUENCY (N=136)	PERCENTAGE (%)
Messenger	133	97.79
Tiktok	132	97.06
Facebook	127	93.38
YouTube	104	76.47
Instagram	85	62.50
Twitter	75	55.15
Viber	44	32.35
Spotify	40	29.41
Vimeo	18	13.24
Others (Tinder)	15	11.03

Moreover, they were asked the time they consumed in using these new media. Table 7 shows that almost half of the respondents (44.85%) were using new media between 3 to 4 hours, while 25% of the respondents were using these media for more than 4 hours.

This finding is similar to the Philippine statistics for the new media use among young people. The report showed that only 3.68% of the respondents were using the new media for less than 30 minutes. It should be noted that worldwide, the Filipinos ranked

first in terms of new media consumption, spending at least 4 hours a day to access new media (Kemp, 2021).

Table 7. Respondents' consumption of new media

TIME OF CONSUMPTION	FREQUENCY (N=136)	PERCENTAGE (%)
Less than 30 min	5	3.68
30-60 min	14	10.29
1-2 hours	22	16.18
3-4 hours	61	44.85
More than 4 hours	34	25.00

In summary, the top five apps that the youth council members used were Messenger, Tiktok, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram. These apps were mostly used via smartphones. They primarily used Messenger, an app that enabled them to maintain social interaction and connection with their family and peers. TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram allowed them to be entertained and at the same time, updated on the latest news and trends around the world during the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, they spent at least 3 hours a day using these new media.

Motivations for New Media Use

The respondents were asked their motivations for using the new media during the COVID-19 pandemic. The motivations were divided into two: political motivation and non-political motivation (Table 8).

Political Reasons

The reasons for the use of new media among the respondents included obtaining news and information and advancing their political careers. Based on the average weighted mean (Table 7), more respondents used new media for news and information (3.66) rather than for advancing their political career (3.25).

News and Information

This was positively rated by the respondents with an average weighted mean of 3.66. The respondents used social media for politics, first in seeing how people in their network think about political issues (3.75), in following political trends (3.73), in getting information on political issues (3.64), and in learning about political perspectives (3.50).

The political viewpoint of others in their networks can enhance their initiatives, projects, and programs. The people in their network can also assist them in gaining new information and insights that could help them understand politics better. Receiving news and information, particularly about topics that are unfamiliar to them, could help them prepare for any future political plans. Being public servants, they wanted to be updated on the latest political issues that could help them become better officials in their barangay. As this was their first term in service, the views and opinions of those in their network would be essential in improving their politics. Furthermore, because it was election season, news and information from other individuals helped them in deciding what to do or who to vote for.

The youth council members also wanted to keep up with political trends, or be informed about key matters that might affect their lives or interests. When using social media, they could prioritize the postings that they follow. The trending or viral news, in

particular, was the first to display on their news feed as were the most shared videos or information from their network of social media connections. This raised their awareness of current events and political issues.

The youth council officials also wanted to learn more about political issues. New media allow more individuals to readily access and exchange information. This can alert people to urgent problems that require immediate action or answers. During the survey, or at the peak of the election campaign season, so many issues and the people's opinions and comments on these issues were broadcast in many Internet platforms. The youth council members possibly felt that these issues could help them in planning initiatives or activities for their fellow youths. These could also be useful when they address related political matters with their fellow public officials during regular sessions in their municipality.

Respondents also used new media to learn about the political perspectives of political candidates, possibly to help in their voting preferences. As members of the youth council, they respect the insights shared by other politicians in social media. They may have wanted to understand more how these candidates thought and felt during the election. They may also have wanted to know more about other events and topics they were expected to participate in as young local government officials.

Political Career

This was positively rated by the respondents with an average weighted mean of 3.25. Numerous political events occurred while the survey was being administered, which may have given the respondents an opportunity to discuss their plans and activities in relation to the issues. Previous studies found the effectiveness of using social media in political advertising (Malawani, 2016; Massod, 2018). Based on the

findings, respondents found it helpful to share their insights (3.31), plans (3.24), and achievements (3.21) during the pandemic through social media to advance their political careers.

It is understandable that the youth council officials would aspire to stay involved in politics after serving three years as public servants in the barangay. The use of new media can assist them in sharing publicly pertinent and factual information about themselves, their thoughts and insights on political topics, as well as their plans and achievements. Doing so could gain the public's trust and, as a result, develop a group of followers or supporters for their political careers. In fact, there were two respondents who ran as municipal councilors.

However, based on the findings, their political career is not something they prioritized when using new media during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 8. Respondents' political use of new media

MOTIVATIONS	WEIGHTED MEAN	ADJECTIVAL RATING
NEWS AND INFORMATION		
See how people on my network think about political issues	3.75	AGREE
Follow current political trends	3.73	AGREE
Get information on political issues	3.64	AGREE
Learn about political perspectives	3.50	AGREE
AVERAGE WEIGHTED MEAN	3.66	AGREE
POLITICAL CAREER		
Post political insights to advance my political career	3.31	AGREE

MOTIVATIONS	WEIGHTED MEAN	ADJECTIVAL RATING
Share political plans and activities that could advance my political career	3.24	AGREE
Share political achievements during my term to advance my political career	3.21	AGREE
AVERAGE WEIGHTED MEAN	3.25	AGREE
OVERALL AVERAGE WEIGHTED MEAN	3.45	AGREE

Legend:

Strongly Disagree	1 and below
Disagree	1.01 - 2
Neither Agree nor Disagree	2.01 - 3
Agree	3.01 - 4
Strongly Agree	4.01 - 5

Non-political Use

The non-political reasons for the use of new media among the respondents included self-expression (3.95), social interaction (3.83), entertainment (3.60), and commerce (3.30) (Table 9).

Self-expression

This was rated positively by the respondents with an average weighted mean of 3.95, meaning that the respondents were using new media to express themselves freely. By revealing who they were in and outside the political realm, they hoped to gain the trust and appreciation of people. Hence, they shared online their personal interests or hobbies, daily routines or activities, pictures or videos, and other updates during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their posts included their strong support for a political candidate and encouragements to choose the right candidate for the election. They

also shared their whereabouts during this period, such as what they were doing during calamities or who they were with during the election. According to Takahashi (2016), young people use social media self-expression to satisfy their desire for acceptance.

Social Interaction

This was positively rated by the respondents with an average weighted mean of 3.83. This shows that some of the respondents were using new media to maintain social connections, to show others that they care, to sustain friendships, and to stay in touch with villagers during the COVID-19 pandemic. They were able to maintain contact with their friends both inside and outside of their communities, forge new contacts and relationships, and keep in touch with each other through the communities, groups, and pages that they subscribed to and followed.

The youth council members have their social media groups, where they could share almost anything with all the members of the group. Also, as some barangays were far from the municipal proper, they were updated and could meet or cope with the challenges brought about by the pandemic and other calamities such as the Taal volcano activity through the group chat or group page. This online community also helped them to monitor the status of their fellow youths and provide help to those affected if necessary.

Entertainment

This was positively rated by the respondents with an average weighted mean of 3.60. This implies that some of the respondents were using new media to pass time or ease boredom, find entertaining information, watch entertaining videos, listen to music or podcasts, and play online games during the COVID-19 pandemic. The social

media apps that they were using have features for entertainment and are easy to use and share.

The needs for something that would entertain and relax them may be understood in the context of the proliferating misinformation and disinformation in all media that have made them stressful and ‘toxic’. The entertainment helped them disengage even if only partially or temporarily from the everyday life in politics, which included dealing with misinformation.

Commerce

This was positively rated by the respondents with an average weighted mean of 3.30. This implies that the respondents were using new media to buy or sell essential or non-essential needs online, and transact online during the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the youth council’s Facebook page, they conducted fundraising activities to help alleviate the impact of COVID-19 in their barangay through buy and sell. It was earlier found that they used online business transactions such as Shopee and Lazada and paid online using Gcash and Paymaya.

Table 9. Respondents’ non-political use of new media

MOTIVATIONS	WEIGHTED MEAN	ADJECTIVAL RATING
SELF-EXPRESSION		
Post and/or share pictures, videos, and other updates online	4.07	STRONGLY AGREE
Express personal interests or hobbies to others	3.94	AGREE
Show my daily routines or activities	3.10	AGREE
AVERAGE WEIGHTED MEAN	3.95	AGREE

MOTIVATIONS	WEIGHTED MEAN	ADJECTIVAL RATING
SOCIAL INTERACTION		
Make social contacts	3.95	AGREE
Maintain existing friendship	3.83	AGREE
Show people that I care about them	3.80	AGREE
Stay in contact with other people	3.72	AGREE
AVERAGE WEIGHTED MEAN	3.83	AGREE
ENTERTAINMENT		
Find entertaining information	3.65	AGREE
Listen to music or podcasts	3.64	AGREE
Play online games	3.63	AGREE
Pass time or ease boredom	3.55	AGREE
Watch entertaining videos	3.51	AGREE
AVERAGE WEIGHTED MEAN	3.60	AGREE
COMMERCE		
Transact online	3.36	AGREE
Buy essential or non-essential needs online	3.32	AGREE
Sell essential or non-essential needs online	3.23	AGREE
AVERAGE WEIGHTED MEAN	3.30	AGREE
OVERALL AVERAGE WEIGHTED MEAN	3.67	AGREE

Legend:

Strongly Disagree	1 and below
Disagree	1.01 - 2
Neither Agree nor Disagree	2.01 - 3
Agree	3.01 - 4
Strongly Agree	4.01 - 5

In summary, the youth council officials used new media to (in order): 1) post and/or share pictures, videos, and other updates online (4.7; self-expression); 2) make social contacts (3.95; social interaction); 3) express personal interests or hobbies to others (3.94; self-expression); 4) maintain existing friendship (3.83; social interaction); and 5) show people that they care about them (3.80; social interaction).

The series of events during this period may have pushed them more to use these social media platforms and access information that they used to express themselves and interact more with their online networks. It can be seen that the youth predominantly used social media for self-expression and social interaction. But these may also be related to politics. Looking closely at their answers, it may be surmised that being youth officials, they have to update their followers about their activities; make social contacts who may help in their political careers; and show a sense of empathy as public officials to gain the trust of the community.

Modes of Exposure to New Media

The respondents were asked to rate their exposure to political information online during the COVID-19 pandemic. The modes of exposure are divided into two: (1) Intentional and (2) Incidental (Table 10).

Incidental Exposure

This was positively rated by the respondents with an average weighted mean of 3.81. This means that the youth council officials encountered political information when they stumbled upon news only by accident (3.89). They did not seek political information, but sometimes saw political information by accident (3.81). And they saw political posts only when other people from their network posted about politics (3.73).

This suggests that even if the respondents were not specifically looking for political information, they may nonetheless unintentionally come across it through their use of new media. In addition, since the respondents were exposed to the campaign season, they would most likely have come across political advertisements and information. This information can increase their knowledge and can result in participation and involvement in political activities (Cohen & Kahne, 2012).

Intentional Exposure

This was positively rated by the respondents with an average weighted mean of 3.24. This means that the respondents followed political information sources online (3.40), actively searched for political information online (3.23), and prioritized seeing political information first on their newsfeed (3.1).

This suggests that the respondents, being involved in politics, showed interest in political information and issues. Using new media, they intentionally developed a way to stay informed and updated on political news and information that may directly or indirectly impact their personal worldviews and beliefs.

Table 10. Respondents' modes of exposure to political information

MODES OF EXPOSURE	WEIGHTED MEAN	ADJECTIVAL RATING
INCIDENTAL		
I stumble upon news only by accident	3.89	AGREE
I do not seek political information, but sometimes I see political information by accident	3.81	AGREE

MODES OF EXPOSURE	WEIGHTED MEAN	ADJECTIVAL RATING
I only see political posts when other people from their network post about politics	3.73	AGREE
AVERAGE WEIGHTED MEAN	3.81	AGREE

INTENTIONAL

I follow political information sources online	3.4	AGREE
I actively search for political information online	3.23	AGREE
I prioritize seeing political information first on my newsfeed	3.1	AGREE
AVERAGE WEIGHTED MEAN	3.24	AGREE

Legend:

Strongly Disagree	1 and below
Disagree	1.01 - 2
Neither Agree nor Disagree	2.01 - 3
Agree	3.01 - 4
Strongly Agree	4.01 - 5

In summary, the respondents used new media for exposure to political information both incidentally and accidentally. However more respondents did not actively seek these political contents themselves but were able to encounter political information only accidentally.

Political Activities of the Youths

The respondents were asked to rate the political activities that they engaged in during the COVID-19 pandemic. These activities are divided into two: online participation and offline participation. Results are shown in Table 11 and Table 12.

Based on the weighted mean, the respondents' participated more in online activities (3.43) compared to offline activities (2.54) during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Online Participation

The overall weighted mean for respondents' participation on political activities online during COVID-19 is 3.44, which implies that the respondents often participated in online activities. Within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the majority of young people have access to technology and digital skills, as well as civic education and open civic space for activism (Pelter, 2020). This allows them to participate in online activities and create opportunities to mobilize people from all over the world. The top four activities in new media of the youth council officials included reposting or sharing political events and updates, organizing online fundraising campaigns, joining political events or meetings, and attending politics-related webinars.

Reposting and sharing of political events and updates

This activity has the highest weighted mean of 4.11, which means that the respondents always participated in this online activity during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the respondents experienced the campaign period alongside the pandemic, much political information, especially about the election and candidates, were shared in different social media platforms, and it was imperative that they kept up with the latest updates.

Most of the new media apps that the respondents were using have features for creating and sharing information, which facilitated their sharing and reposting of political updates. Sharing these contents enabled their peers to become more aware and knowledgeable about political issues.

Moreover, the respondents have a group chat and group page that they used to connect with their fellow youths in the barangay. These serve as avenues for them to share and repost political updates and events that could encourage and mobilize the youth and others to participate in political events, especially in the barangay. Such posts included activities on political campaigns and political meetings during the election and other events in celebration of national events (e.g., International Women's month, Earth Day, Fire Prevention Month, etc.).

Organizing online fundraising campaigns

This activity has 3.99 weighted mean, which means that the respondents often participated in this online activity during the COVID-19 pandemic. Because many people were affected by the COVID-19 and the Taal volcano eruption, the respondents were able to raise funds online to help affected people. Doing activities online helped them reach more people and collect more funds for their programs. This activity is similar to what the OECD (2022) reported that many youth-led organizations have implemented programs to help others during the pandemic. Because of limited face-to-face interaction, the fundraising activities were facilitated through online drives, which they shared with all their online friends. They accepted both cash and in-kind donations to provide help to those greatly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. As public servants, it was their responsibility to extend help to those affected and to ensure their welfare.

Joining political events or meetings

This activity has 3.70 weighted mean, which means that the respondents often participated in this online activity during the COVID-19 pandemic. Because the

respondents serve as the youths' representatives in their respective barangays, they were all invited to their municipality's political events or meetings. The availability of the Internet connection in some parts of the municipality allowed them to join these online meetings, where they could freely voice their opinions and suggestions on matters that affected them and their constituents.

The respondents had monthly meetings with their fellow youth council members to discuss updates and concerns in their barangay that needed to be resolved, and activities that needed to be conducted in the next months. The use of technology facilitated these online meetings that were vital during this period. Because some of the respondents have evacuated during the Taal volcano's increased alert level, they were far from the municipality, but they still wanted to continue participating in the activities in their locality.

Attending politics-related webinars

This activity has a 3.48 weighted mean, which implies that the respondents often participated in this online activity during the COVID-19 pandemic. There were various seminars online that discussed issues and concerns about COVID-19 since the pandemic began in the country. These provided insights and strategies that could help the youths develop a deeper understanding and knowledge of political matters. Such webinars conducted were focused on mental health awareness, guidelines on the alert level system, gender equality, guidelines on voting, youth movements, and sustainable development goals. Attending these kinds of webinars may have helped increase the youths' interest in political matters and other relevant issues that required their decisions and involvement, most especially during the global crisis.

Other online activities that the respondents engaged in included sending emails to politicians to address political issues. This primarily included a letter of support for their activities for COVID-19 pandemic such as fund raising and organizing webinars. They also joined political groups and communities align with their interests. These groups were open to all who have social media account, which allowed them to gain insights and information on political issues, which they shared with their fellow youths.

They also visited websites of political parties or youth organizations to better understand the profiles of the political candidates and parties and how other youth groups were supporting and facilitating activities during this period. They wrote and created vlogs to express their insights, views, and opinions on political events and helped encourage others to also support and participate in political activities online. The features of the apps that they used made creating new contents online like blogs and vlogs easier.

Table 11. Respondents' online political participation during the COVID-19 pandemic

ONLINE ACTIVITIES	WEIGHTED MEAN	ADJECTIVAL RATING
I repost or share political events updates	4.11	ALWAYS
I start to organize online fundraising campaigns for the pandemic	3.99	OFTEN
I join virtual political events or meeting	3.70	OFTEN
I attend politics-related webinars	3.48	OFTEN
I send emails to politicians to address political issues	3.33	OFTEN

I join virtual political groups or communities	3.21	OFTEN
I visit a website of political party or other youth organizations	3.18	OFTEN
I write political blogs	3.06	OFTEN
I create personal vlogs and other online contents to express my support to political activities	2.87	OFTEN
AVERAGE WEIGHTED MEAN	3.44	OFTEN

Legend:

Never	1 and below
Rarely	1.01 - 2
Sometimes	2.01 - 3
Often	3.01 - 4
Always	4.01 - 5

Offline Participation

The top three activities included attending a face-to-face political meeting, establishing a community pantry, and contacting politicians to discuss political issues.

Attending face-to-face political meetings

This activity has a weighted mean of 3.15, which means that the respondents often participated in this kind of activity during the COVID-19 pandemic. The province of Batangas was under the COVID-19 Alert Level 1 since February 2022 and face-to-face meetings were allowed but with strict observance of minimum health protocols. As public servants, the youth council leaders' presence and participation in political meetings were expected. In the meetings, they were allowed to voice out their insights and opinions on political matters. These meeting included discussions on the current

updates of the barangay, the issues that they needed to address, and the activities that they needed to plan for the next months.

Through new media, the youth council leaders understood why they needed to attend these meetings. The information they obtained from new media helped them in contributing to the discussions in the meetings. And what they learned from the meetings, they also shared with other barangay officials.

Establishing community pantry

This activity has a weighted mean of 2.96, which means that the respondents sometimes participated in this kind of activity during the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of their programs, the youth council leaders were able to establish community pantries in different parts of their municipality in 2021. Using of new media facilitated the sharing of information about the community pantry so that the community members would become aware of their existence. However, since some barangays were affected with both COVID-19 and the Taal Volcano eruption, they were the ones who actually needed assistance. The youth council members took the lead in raising donations for the pantries on top of their voluntary contributions.

However, the pantry stopped operating in 2022 as many other events overtook their efforts. Foremost of these events were the national election and the inflation rates brought about by the war in Russia and Ukraine. Gas prices hiked that affected all industries and the basic needs of citizens. As the restrictions for face-to-face became lighter in later months, the community in Laurel, Batangas slowly began normalizing also.

Contacting politicians to discuss political issues

This activity has a weighted mean of 2.81, which means that the respondents sometimes participated in this kind of activity during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the respondents were already involved in politics, contacting the politicians who could help address their issues and concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic became easier. The politicians were supporters of youth activities in the barangay, hence the youth leaders used these opportunities to ask for assistance. However, during the data gathering, there were election ban on various activities, causing them to halt some programs that needed the politicians' support. Also, the politicians were too busy campaigning such that only a few of them could really discuss political issues with the youths. Hence, there was a decline in these activities during the pandemic.

The youth council members revealed that they sometimes attended political movements and campaigns to support their chosen candidates, especially the national candidates. For the local candidates, they participated in the barangay campaigns and meetings, but this did not hold true for all the 21 barangays in the municipality. Rather, support to the local candidates was expressed more online than offline.

Lastly, the respondents revealed that they never wrote a letter to newspaper, television station, or called a radio station in order to express their opinions on political issues. They were more preoccupied with activities in their localities rather than with national media. Also, their use of new media transcended local and national boundaries, they pointed out.

Table 12. Respondents' offline political participation during COVID-19 pandemic

OFFLINE ACTIVITIES	WEIGHTED MEAN	ADJECTIVAL RATING
I attend a face-to-face political meeting	3.15	OFTEN

OFFLINE ACTIVITIES	WEIGHTED MEAN	ADJECTIVAL RATING
I establish community pantry as part of my political achievements	2.96	SOMETIMES
I contact politicians in order to discuss political issues	2.81	SOMETIMES
I attend political movements and campaigns	2.77	SOMETIMES
I voluntarily give donations to community pantry to personally help advance my career in politics	2.57	SOMETIMES
I write a letter to a newspaper, television station, or calling a radio station in order to express my opinions on political issues	1.00	NEVER
AVERAGE WEIGHTED MEAN	2.54	SOMETIMES

Legend:

Never	1 and below
Rarely	1.01 - 2
Sometimes	2.01 – 3
Often	3.01 - 4
Always	4.01 - 5

In summary, the respondents who used new media were able to participate in both online and offline activities during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, there were more respondents involved in political activities online compared to those who participated offline. Their top online activity was reposting or sharing political events and updates during the COVID-19 pandemic, while the top offline activity was attending face-to-face political meetings. This can be explained by previous studies showing that the interest of young people in politics is the result of their higher usage of social media as a platform for political participation and discussion (Ahmad et al., 2019; Abdu et al., 2017; Pap et al., 2018).

Chapter V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This study analyzed how the members of the Sangguniang Kabataan in the Municipality of Laurel, Batangas used new media for political participation. Specifically, the study answered the following research objectives:

1. Determine the profile of the members of the youth council;
2. Determine the level of political interest of the members of the youth council;
3. Describe how the youth council members use new media during the COVID-19 pandemic;
4. Describe the motivations of the youth council members in using new media during the COVID-19 pandemic;
5. Discuss how the youth council members encounter political information in new media during the COVID-19 pandemic; and
6. Discuss what political activities the youth council members engage in during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The study employed a descriptive research design using self-administered survey questionnaires from April 23, 2022 to May 22, 2022. Complete enumeration of respondents was done with a total of 136 respondents from 21 barangays in the municipality of Laurel, Batangas.

Highlights of the findings are the following:

Profile of the Youth Council Members

There were 136 elected Sangguniang Kabataan from 21 barangays of the municipality of Laurel, Batangas who served as respondents of the study. They hold the positions of chairperson and councilors for three years from 2018 to 2022. Their age ranges from 20 to 27 years. There are more males than female respondents. Majority are single and college graduates. Their household size ranged from 3 to 11.

Level of Political Interest

Majority of the respondents were interested in politics. The top political issues that the respondents were interested in during the pandemic were related to (1) international news, (2) science, (3) inequality, (4) politics, and (5) health. This suggests that even if these youth council members were already elected and directly involved in politics, they were not particularly interested in learning about political issues surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. Rather, they were mostly interested in learning about the current global situation and issues that they considered as posing a greater threat to them, their families, and their communities. This may have been affected by the war that erupted in Ukraine and Russia that had consequences worldwide and felt locally such as the jacking up of prices of basic commodities and gasoline.

Use of New Media During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The top five apps that the youth council members used during the COVID-19 pandemic were Messenger, Tiktok, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram. These apps were mostly used via smartphones. The respondents primarily used Messenger, an app that enabled them to maintain social interaction and connection with their family and peers. TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram allowed them to be

entertained and at the same time, be updated on the latest news and trends around the world during the COVID-19 pandemic. They also spent at least three hours a day using these apps.

Motivations for the Use of New Media During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The series of events during this period may have pushed them more to use these social media platforms and access information that they used to express themselves and interact more with their online networks. It can be seen that the youth predominantly used social media for self-expression and social interaction. But these may also be related to politics. Looking closely at their answers, it may be surmised that being youth officials, they have to update their followers about their activities; make social contacts who may help in their political careers; and show a sense of empathy as public officials to gain the trust of the community.

For political reasons, they used new media more for news and information rather than to further their political careers. The respondents used social media for politics, first in seeing how people on their network think about political issues, in following political trends, in getting information on political issues, and in learning about political perspectives.

The non-political reasons for the use of new media among the respondents were more on self-expression and social interaction. They (in order): 1) post and/or share pictures, videos, and other updates online (self-expression); 2) make social contacts (social interaction); 3) express personal interests or hobbies to others (self-expression); 4) maintain existing friendship (social interaction); and 5) show people that they care about them (social interaction).

Encountering Political Information in New Media During The COVID-19 Pandemic

The respondents used new media for exposure to political information both incidentally and accidentally. However more respondents did not actively seek these political contents themselves but were able to encounter political information only accidentally. For instance, they were able to encounter political information from the posts and shares of their social media friends or when it appeared in their newsfeed. Nevertheless, even the accidental encounters helped them to become aware of the political issues that could influence their participation in political activities.

Political Activities Engaged in During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The respondents who use new media were able to participate in both online and offline activities during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, there were more respondents involved in political activities online compared to those who participated offline. Based on the weighted mean, the respondents' participated more in online activities (3.43) compared to offline activities (2.54) during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The top four online activities in new media of the youth council officials included reposting or sharing political events and updates, organizing online fundraising campaigns, joining political events or meetings, and attending politics-related webinars.

Meanwhile, the top offline activities included attending a face-to-face political meeting, establishing a community pantry, and contacting politicians to discuss political issues.

Conclusion

Contrary to the previous studies on political apathy and disengagement among young people, the Sangguniang Kabataan members in the Municipality of Laurel, Batangas demonstrates a strong digital inclusion and positive political participation, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. They primarily used Messenger, TikTok, and Facebook for at least three hours a day and incidentally encountered political information that helped to increase their interest to participate in political activities online. These included reposting or sharing political events and updates on the new media, organizing online fundraising campaigns, joining political events or meetings, and attending politics-related webinars.

Hence, although the youth council members' primary motivation in using the new media was self-expression and social interaction as compared to getting political news and information, they still participated in political activities during the COVID 19 pandemic, showing that the younger generations are politically conscious and engaged in their communities. The new media created opportunities for them to actively participating in political activities that they were interested in and to perform their roles as young local government officials.

Implications and Recommendations

For Development Communication

Development Communication deals with human communication to help in societal transformation. The study has shown that as technology advances, new media continue to evolve, but communication and interaction still take place primarily online. The relevance of today's technology to bring about the societal change is an important area in the study of development communication.

From this study, the youths were seen as catalysts of change as they were actively participating in online activities, which could provide support to their peers and family members, especially during a pandemic. The events that have happened in the Philippines during the data collection show that there is a strong need to use new media for news and information. They serve as effective channels of communication because the youths were able to experience social equality as they were able to adapt with the changes in their environment and to express themselves freely on things that mattered to them.

These behaviors underscore the need for more research as the new media continue to evolve over time. This research provided empirical data that could be the basis for the formulation of new theories and policies in the field of development communication using new media.

For Political Communication

Political communication deals with the production of information that affect public discourse and human behaviors toward politics. New media play a significant role in how an individual behaves towards political information. It can be effectively used in the political process, especially during an election campaign and political advertisement.

The findings of this study showed how the youths' political interests enabled them to use new media. In contrast to the earlier study on apathy and political disengagement, results showed a high level of political participation online among young people during the COVID-19 pandemic. It adds to the body of evidence in this debate and helps explain why only a few studies have been conducted in the countries that specifically identify Sangguniang Kabataan members as new media users.

Suggestions for Further Studies

For further studies, the researcher suggests a comparative study between the new media use of Sangguniang Kabataan members in rural and urban areas to see if their difference could also result to active participation in politics-related activities.

It can also be a comparative study of the elected youths and ordinary youths in the community. This is to have a heterogeneity of the population.

Moreover, it is suggested that future researches use different research designs and methods to have an in-depth understanding of the youths' political views, backgrounds, and interests. The shift in the use of new media across time and situation is an interesting topic in the field of development communication.

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