

Effects of Social Media Literacy and FoMO on Voting Intention of First-time Voters in the Philippines

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Abstract. Social media has become a critical influence on the political engagement of first-time voters in the Philippines, serving as both an information hub and a source of misinformation. This study explores how social media literacy, and the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) impact the voting intentions and behaviors of first-time voters, using the Theory of Reasoned Action as a framework. A survey of 233 Filipino neophyte voters was conducted, with data analyzed through Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to examine the relationships between social media literacy, FoMO, attitudes, subjective norms, and voting behavior. Results indicate that higher social media literacy fosters positive attitude toward voting and reduces vulnerability to misinformation, while FoMO significantly influences social media literacy and shapes subjective norms by driving heightened engagement. Additionally, attitudes and subjective norms were found to strongly predict voting intentions, which in turn drive actual voting behavior. These findings highlight the importance of equipping young voters with social media literacy skills to navigate digital misinformation and mitigate the negative impacts of FoMO. The study underscores the need for voter education initiatives and broader digital literacy programs to support informed electoral participation among first-time voters in the Philippines, with implications for similar digitally connected populations globally.

Keywords: FoMO, First-Time Voters, Philippine Elections, Social Media Literacy, TRA

1. Introduction

The rise of fake news, algorithmic content curation, and unverified information has made it increasingly difficult for voters to distinguish credible sources from false narratives, amplifying the need for digital literacy and critical evaluation skills. For neophyte voters, who often rely on social media for their initial exposure to politics, these challenges can be particularly influential. Young voters tend to engage with information online differently than older generations, frequently depending on digital spaces not only for news but for shaping political opinions and social identities. A study by the Asia Foundation [1] highlighted how Filipino youth increasingly turn to social media to stay informed, yet their lack of experience with the voting process leaves them vulnerable to online manipulation.

Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) adds to this complexity, which significantly influences how young voters interact with social media. Defined as the pervasive anxiety of being excluded from engaging experiences or important updates, FoMO drives heightened social media use, particularly among younger demographics [2]. In elections, FoMO is a compulsion to stay constantly updated on political trends, candidate movements, and peer discussions. While this may encourage greater awareness, it can also result in cognitive overload and uncritical information consumption. A study by Abel et al. [3] suggests that individuals experiencing high levels of FoMO are more susceptible to misinformation and impulsive decision-making, as the desire to remain connected can overshadow the ability to evaluate content critically. This is especially relevant for first-time voters, whose decisions are often shaped by personal values and perceived social norms.

Social media literacy, therefore, is emerging as a critical skill for first-time voters navigating this complex information environment. The ability to evaluate source trust and filter credible information from bias is essential to ensuring informed decision-making. Research by Mihailidis and Viotty [4] suggests that higher levels of social media literacy are associated with more active political engagement, as users with

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these skills are better equipped to detect misinformation and engage in constructive dialogue. For Filipino first-time voters, building social media literacy could mitigate the risks posed by digital misinformation, while also addressing the behavioural effects of FoMO, ultimately fostering a more informed and responsible electorate.

2. Related Literature, Theoretical Framework, and Hypotheses Presentation

2.1. Social Media Literacy

Social media literacy refers to an individual's ability to critically evaluate and engage with information encountered on social media platforms. It includes technical skills in using these platforms and cognitive abilities in recognizing credible information from fallacy, understanding the effects of algorithmic curation, and identifying biases in content. According to Livingstone [5], media literacy involves the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media in various forms. When applied to social media, this concept extends to the awareness of how information is distributed and consumed on platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

Existing research suggests a strong link between social media literacy and political participation [6]. Scholars like Mihailidis and Viotty [4] argue that individuals with higher levels of social media literacy are more likely to engage in political discussions, share credible information, and participate in civic activities, including voting. In particular, first-time voters, who may be less experienced with political processes, are influenced by their ability to assess the credibility of political content they encounter online critically. Several studies have highlighted the importance of social media literacy in election contexts. For instance, Guess, Nyhan, and Reifler [7] found that individuals with low media literacy are more exposed to misinformation which can distort their political views and decisions. In the Philippines, where social media is a dominant news source for many voters (particularly younger demographics), media literacy is important for ensuring informed electoral choices.

2.2. Fear of Missing Out

Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) is characterized as the apprehension that others might be experiencing rewarding moments from which an individual is absent, leading to a pervasive desire to remain connected with one's social network through digital platforms. Przybylski et al. [2] identified two key components of FoMO: the cognitive perception of exclusion and the compulsive behavior aimed at alleviating such anxiety by staying socially connected. This phenomenon has grown in significance with the increased reliance on social media, where real-time updates amplify the potential for comparison and perceived exclusion [8], [9]. Empirical studies suggest that FoMO drives excessive online activity, including frequent checking of social media and engaging in reactive behaviors triggered by social notifications [9]. FoMO has been associated with both positive and negative outcomes. On one hand, it fosters social connection and engagement; on the other, it may lead to heightened anxiety, disrupted focus, and problematic use of digital technologies, particularly during critical events like elections [8][9].

FoMO's implications for political engagement are particularly pronounced among first-time voters, who are often keenly attuned to their peer groups and the broader sociopolitical discourse. Chen and Wen [10] noted that social media algorithms amplify the visibility of popular topics, which, when combined with FoMO, may drive individuals to engage more actively with political content out of fear of being excluded from trending discussions. For young voters in the Philippines, where social media is a dominant information source, FoMO can significantly shape electoral behavior. Saavedra and Bautista [8] highlighted that FoMO influences the deliberative process, leading individuals to form opinions and make decisions based on perceived trends and peer behaviors rather than critical evaluation. In this way, FoMO serves as both a catalyst for political participation and a potential risk factor for misinformed voting.

2.3. Structural Model Development and Theory of Reasoned Action

The Theory of Reasoned Action has previously been applied to the voting behaviour of citizens in India, particularly among the Y generation [11]. This model proves suitable for the current study, which focuses on first-time voters in the Philippines during the election season. The primary constructs of the Theory of

Reasoned Action are Attitude, which Ajzen defines as a social predisposition reflecting a tendency to react to a particular object or situation in either a positive or negative manner; and Subjective Norm, which refers to the perceived social pressure to perform or not perform a particular behaviour. Both constructs influence the third primary construct, Intention, defined as the readiness or willingness of an individual to perform a specific behaviour.

The first additional construct is the Level of Social Media Literacy, derived from a systematic review of the concept and competencies associated with social media literacy. Research has demonstrated that social media literacy directly affects a person’s critical evaluation of content, thereby influencing their attitudes toward the information they encounter online [12][13]. With this established, the study incorporates this construct into the Theory of Reasoned Action to investigate whether the Level of Social Media Literacy positively affects the attitudes of first-time voters during the election season. In addition to this, a study done in Indonesia on Entrepreneurial Intention [14], has proven that social media usage has a positive effect on Subjective norms, even proving that Social Media Usage had the most significant effect on the Subjective norms.

The second additional construct is the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), defined by the dictionary as the anxiety that an exciting or interesting event may currently be happening elsewhere, often aroused by posts seen on social media. While its description already portrays it ties to social media, a longitudinal study was conducted on the interplay of psychological need satisfaction and psychological well-being, has found out that both FoMO and social media use has significant influential relationship with each other [15]. Because of these findings, this study hypothesizes that FoMO has a positive effect on the level of social media literacy in the context for first-time voters in the Philippines, during the election. Furthermore, this study also wants to explore the effect of FoMO on the Subjective Norm of First-time voters of the Philippines as discussed in past studies [8]. Below is the model of the modified Theory of Reasoned Action including the additional constructs and proposed hypotheses as depicted in Figure 1.

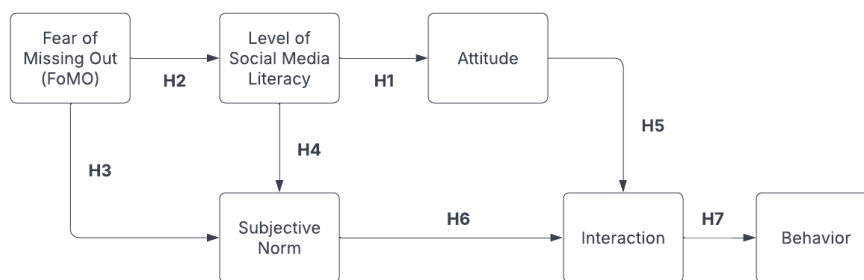


Fig. 1: Theoretical Model

3. Methodology

To test our hypotheses, we approached first-time voters in the Philippines during the election season. An online survey with items representing the six constructs (Level of Social Media Literacy, Attitude, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), Subjective Norm, Intention, and Behaviour) was deployed online in October 2024. The original constructs of the Theory of Reasoned Action (Attitude, Subjective Norm, and Behavioural Intention) were adapted from previous studies [16]. The survey instrument underwent validation using data from 30 respondents. Demographic data, including age, gender, hours spent on social media, and social media platforms used, were collected to contextualize the responses. The constructs—Social Media Literacy, FoMO, Attitude, Subjective Norms, Intention, and Behaviour—were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) and adapted from previously validated scales, we applied Partial Least Squares (PLS) analysis using SmartPLS to assess the reliability and validity of the measurement instrument [17]. Reliability and validity were assessed through Cronbach’s Alpha, Composite Reliability, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The results confirmed that all constructs met the minimum thresholds, with the lowest Cronbach’s Alpha recorded at 0.681, Composite Reliability at 0.825, and AVE at 0.612, meeting the minimum thresholds for sufficient reliability and validity [5], where thresholds of 0.60 for exploratory studies were considered acceptable based on the guidelines provided by George and Mallery [18] and Hair et al [19] ensuring the instrument's robustness for further analysis.

Following validation, a total of 233 respondents were utilized for hypothesis testing via bootstrapping technique. This process was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS software. Bootstrapping was employed to evaluate path coefficients and t-values, which determined the significance of relationships between the constructs in the theoretical model. This approach allowed for precise assessment of the hypothesized effects, even with relatively small subgroups or constructs with exploratory tendencies.

Demographic analysis of the 233 respondents showed a diverse sample. Among the participants, 24.9% identified as male and 72.7% as female, the distribution of social media usage was as follows: 47.5% reported spending 7 or more hours daily on social media, 45.1% spent 4-6 hours, and 7.4% spent 0-3 hours daily. The respondents reported varying hours of social media usage and engaged with different platforms such as Facebook/Meta and Tiktok, reflecting a broad spectrum of social media behaviour.

4. Discussion

As displayed by Table 1, all the posited hypotheses of the study have been confirmed to be accepted. This includes the relationships of the original constructs included in the TRA, as well as the relationship of the additional constructs towards it, proving that the chosen theoretical model is a good fit for this study. The high t-statistics, which all surpass the threshold value of 1.96, with many exceeding 2.58 or even 3.29, demonstrate that all of the relationships evaluated were statistically significant. With a t-statistic of 9.622, the link between attitude and social media literacy (H1) specifically indicates that favourable attitudes toward voting are significantly increased by greater social media literacy. This result is in line with the study by Manca and Gatti [20], which discovered that social media literacy and other forms of digital literacy increase people's knowledge and engagement, which in turn improves political participation. Similarly, with a t-statistic of 7.882, FoMO has a positive impact on social media literacy (H2), showing that social media involvement and literacy are increased by FoMO. With a t-statistic of 4.357, FoMO also significantly affects subjective norms (H3), showing that those who experience FoMO are more likely to follow social norms related to voting. In the context of Philippine culture, where bayanihan (community spirit) and social pressure to contribute to society are important aspects of daily life [21], this relationship highlights the role of social norms in shaping behavior, such as voting. With a t-statistic of 2.332, the association between social media literacy and subjective norms (H4) is weaker, but it still suggests that social media literacy influences how people perceive social norms.

Table 1: Path Coefficients

Path	Standard Deviation	T-statistic	P Values	Significant
H1: Level of Social Media Literacy → Attitude	0.058	9.622	0.000	Yes
H2: FOMO → Level of Social Media Literacy	0.070	7.882	0.000	Yes
H3: FOMO → Subjective Norm	0.075	4.357	0.000	Yes
H4: Level of Social Media Literacy → Subjective Norm	0.080	2.332	0.020	Yes
H5: Attitude → Intention	0.057	9.631	0.000	Yes
H6: Subjective Norm → Intention	0.060	4.565	0.000	Yes
H7: Intention → Behavior	0.048	8.894	0.000	Yes

The findings of Chaiken and Trope [22], who looked at how social media literacy can affect subjective norms surrounding voting and other activities, are consistent with this. More positive attitudes about voting greatly improve the likelihood of forming an intention to vote, according to the findings of the very strong link between attitude and intention (H5) (t-statistic of 9.631). The work of Krosnick et al. [23], which showed that favorable attitudes toward voting were powerful predictors of voting intentions, is supported by this finding. With a t-statistic of 4.565, subjective norms also have a significant impact on intention (H6), suggesting that social pressure significantly shapes voting intentions. This supports the use of the TRA, as demonstrated by Ajzen, who discovered that subjective norms significantly influenced voting intentions. In the Philippine context, where there is strong public discourse reinforcing the importance of voting as a civic duty and a societal obligation [24], social pressure to participate in elections is especially influential.

Lastly, with a t-statistic of 8.894, it was discovered that intention was a strong predictor of actual voting behavior (H7), indicating that people who have a strong intention to vote are very likely to really do so. This outcome is in line with Rinker's [25] findings, which showed that voting intention was a crucial predictor of actual voting behaviour.

5. Conclusion

Based on the results from this study, several important conclusions can be drawn regarding the factors influencing the voting intentions and behaviors of first-time voters in the Philippines during the election season. The study confirms that social media literacy, fear of missing out (FoMO), and subjective norms significantly shape voting behaviors, with all posited hypotheses supported by statistical evidence. These findings validate the use of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) as an appropriate theoretical model, enhanced by the inclusion of social media literacy and FoMO as additional constructs. These results align with previous research indicating that social media literacy plays a critical role in shaping political behavior, especially in the context of younger, digitally native populations [12], [17].

However, this study had several limitations. The sample size of 233 respondents, while sufficient for preliminary insights, remains relatively small and may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the study relied solely on quantitative methods through an online survey, which restricts the depth of understanding that could have been gained through qualitative methods such as interviews. As suggested by Mihailidis and Viotty [4] and Porto et al. [26], combining qualitative and quantitative methods can provide a fuller understanding of the complex psychological and behavioral factors influencing voter engagement and voting behaviour.

The implications of this study are significant for policymakers, educators, and social media platforms. Efforts to improve social media literacy among young voters could mitigate the effects of misinformation and strengthen the democratic process. By enhancing critical thinking and media literacy skills, first-time voters are better equipped to navigate the complexities of political information and make more informed voting decisions.

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