



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF MEDIA AND PUBLIC OPINION: THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE POLITICAL OPINIONS OF THE YOUTH

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#### ABSTRACT

Members of the youth sector play an essential role in the society. They are expected to participate in the development of the nation and aid in the alleviation of current social problems. One of the channels wherein one can partake in the community is social media. Therefore, the project is focused on identifying the impact of social media on forming the political opinions of the youth, as utilizing online platforms for discourse and discussions have been prevalent amid the pandemic. The initiative will administer the active participation of the youth in the current political situation of the country in social media platforms through articles, community threads, and webinars. To ensure the smooth implementation of the project, proponents of the team have collaborated with Gana Philippines, a youth-led organization that aspires to aid its members towards finding their own advocacies. Throughout the course of the study, the members have achieved an amazing feat in finishing the needed articles, community threads, publication materials, and webinars that were planned before the implementation. The project, all through the 2 months duration, has achieved the objectives that were initially set; although there were problems and obstacles along the way, the group has still managed to inform and impart knowledge to everyone through different social media platforms. By conducting the initiative in an online community, the team has raised awareness on the current events witnessed by society, informed the youth on its role in society and what members of the sector can do in the present political climate, and shared tips on fact-checking and the proper use of social media. With this, the group hopes that the learnings we have disseminated will be used by the community in their future endeavors.

#### INTRODUCTION

In Article 2 Section 13 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution, the State recognizes the vital role of the youth in nation-building and shall promote their physical, moral, spiritual, intellectual and social well-being. Thus, it is imperative for the members of the youth sector to participate in the development of the society—whether it be through voting in the elections, joining events like the National Youth Congress, or voicing their political opinions on platforms fit for discourse. The youth sector is defined as individuals between the ages of 15 and 24 years, without prejudice to other definitions by Member States (United Nations, 2014). Social media plays a big role in teen culture today. According to the American Academy of Child and Adult Psychiatry (2018), surveys show that ninety percent of teens ages 13-17 have used social media. Seventy five percent report having at least one active social media profile, and 51% report visiting a social media site at least daily. Two thirds of teens have their own mobile devices with internet capabilities.

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On average, teens are online almost nine hours a day, not including time for homework. Due to how the pandemic has affected our daily lives and has forced into utilizing the resources that are currently available, social media and technological advancements have been an avenue for connecting with one another as well as gathering information or sharing opinions on controversial issues and national matters. With the use of social media, one is bound to encounter countless pieces of information, may it be legitimate or a hoax, that is able to shape one's point of view or perspective on the state of the country in terms of crucial matters that involve the political sector. Thus, the project is focused on identifying the impact of social media on forming the political opinions of the youth, as making use of online platforms for discourse and discussions has been prevalent recently. Political opinions refer to a broad category of attitudes individuals may have on matters concerning the state, government, and society (Kacou, n.d.). Amid the pandemic, organizations have emerged into enticing the youth to personal advocacies, wherein similar sentiments are shared within a group; therefore, the proponents considered an active youth organization as the community for the project. The chosen youth-led organization, Gana Philippines, anchors its purpose to guiding the youth in navigating their advocacies by serving

as an instrument to bring awareness to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and to equip them with skills that they need to partake in creating tangible impact. As stated in SDG 16, which is Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions, it aims to promote inclusivity in decision-making that would most likely affect the majority of society, wherein the youth's involvement would be timely and relevant. By collaborating with Gana Philippines, the project which falls under the name Gana+, seeks to analyze whether or not the youth, particularly in this setting of the pandemic, would most likely shape their opinion on the state of the country's political sector. Through the maximization of the organization's social media accounts on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, Gana+ implemented a series of informative articles, webinars, and community threads in and out of the Gana Philippines community composed of the Core Team members and advocates.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

**This section** should comprise concise description of the materials, procedures, and equipment used, including how the study was conducted, how data were collected, and what statistical and/or graphical analyses were carried out. The project process was divided into three phases: preliminary assessment, initiative implementation, and post-project assessment.

### Preliminary Assessment



Figure 1. Letter of Intent

To properly implement the project to an online youth community, the proponents have collaborated with Gana Philippines, a youth-led organization that aspires to aid its members towards finding their own advocacies. A letter of intent was first sent to the executive committee of the organization for us to discuss the project basics and flow with the co-founders of Gana Philippines.

### Initiative Implementation



Figure 2. Introduction of Gana+ on the official webpage of Gana Philippines

In the initiative implementation, the major outcomes were the community threads, articles, and webinars. Deliberate research was conducted to complete the three community threads that tackle emerging issues in our country. The researchers have based the information included in the threads on news articles and journals that have been published recently by reliable sources. For the articles, the team cooperated with the Publications Department of the organization. A total of six articles were published during the duration of the implementation. Members of the project assisted in the gathering of data needed for the articles and proofread the write-ups before submitting them to the Marketing Department for posting.

The project team was also responsible for creating the publication materials to be posted along with the articles. Two webinars were conducted for the community project. First and foremost, the group members have decided on contacting the desired speakers for the webinars through emails. However, those who were initially contacted did not have the capabilities to accept the invitations as there were contradictions in the schedules; thus, the members have chosen notable PSHS alumni to speak during the planned webinars. Both speakers were contacted through personal messages and emails for the briefing of the overall project and programs of their respective webinars. Before the conduct, the team was also tasked to create publication materials for the webinars to boost the events. Certificates for the participants and speakers were given after the webinars.

**Initiative Implementation:** For the final phase, post-project assessment, a google form was created for the overall evaluation of the community project. The form was sent to batchmates of the group, members of the Gana Philippines community, and participants of the webinars as well.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As the project has been implemented in the span of 2 months, the proponents have achieved an amazing feat in finishing the needed articles, publication materials, community threads, and webinars that will be done within that time frame. For the community threads, 3 topics were discussed in the community's facebook page.

These topics are (1) the government's plans for the pandemic, (2) the country's response to natural disasters and calamities,

and (3) the upcoming 2022 elections. By engaging and reading our community threads, members of the community have learned additional information about these topics.



Figure 3. Community thread about 2022 Elections

Despite the lack of comments however, reactions on each post show the acknowledgment of the threads by the members. Six (6) articles were released on the different social media accounts of Gana Philippines. For every 2 weeks during the implementation, an article, along with its corresponding publication material, will tackle one topic from the proposed subject matters. Articles that were written were about the *current political situation, role of the youth in the society, importance of fact-checking, press freedom, effective use of social media, and importance of exercising our rights to vote.* The amount of engagements from the articles show that individuals who follow Gana Philippines’s accounts and their respective friends/followers have read or seen the article.



Figure 4. Community thread about the country’s response to natural disasters and calamities

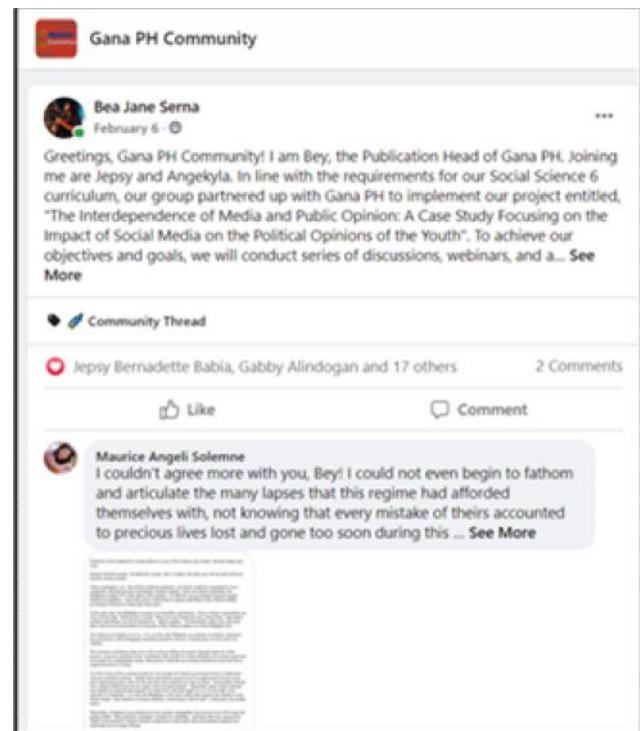


Figure 5. Community thread about the government’s actions and plans amidst the pandemic



Figure 6. Article release about The Right to Vote

For the webinars, the group was supposed to conduct three which were *Webinar on Fact-Checking and on the Proper Use of Social Media, Webinar on What the Role of the Youth is and What We Can Do in this Political Climate,* and lastly, *Webinar on the 2022 Elections: How to Register to Vote and How the Elections Work.* The webinar on the 2022 elections was not pushed through as we weren’t able to contact anyone from the government or people from the comelec that would be knowledgeable enough to talk about this topic. The webinar on “What the Role of the Youth is and What We Can Do in this Political Climate” was conducted last March 20, 2021. The speaker was able to acknowledge and answer the insights and questions from the participants. Moreover, they were also able to learn heaps from the webinar.

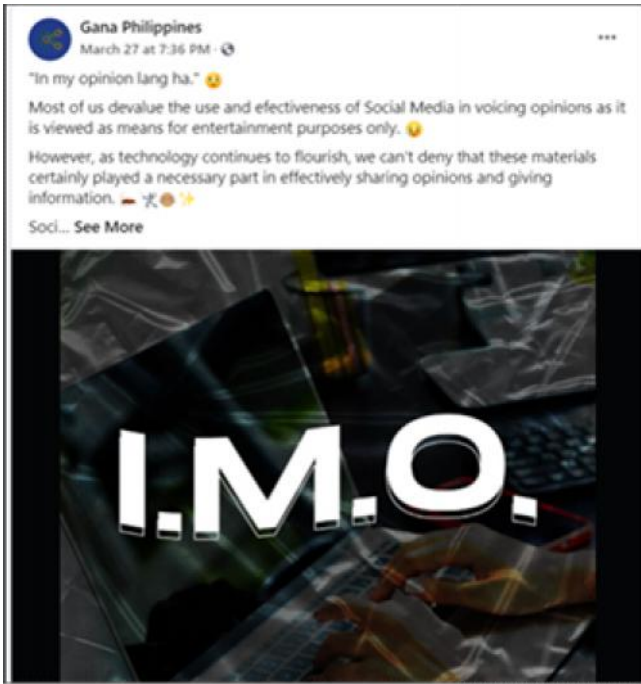


Figure 7. Article release about the Responsible Use of Social Media in sharing opinions



Figure 9. Article release about Press Freedom



Figure 8. Article release about the Importance of Fact-Checking Media

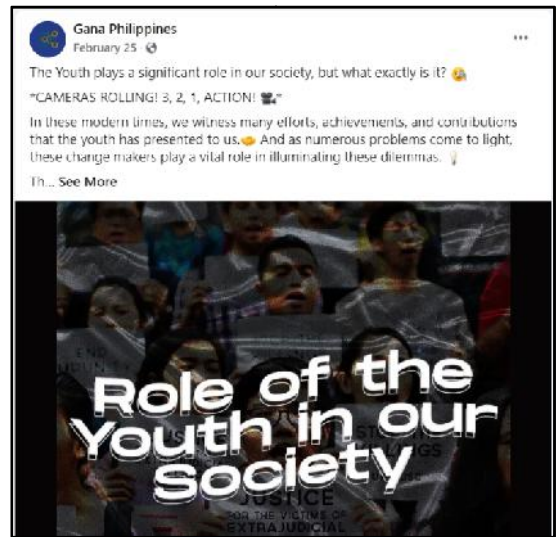


Figure 10. Article release about the Role of the Youth in our Society



Figure 11. Article release about the current political state of the country

For the “Webinar on Fact-Checking and on the Proper Use of Social Media” which was conducted last April 11, 2021, both the members and the participants have learned how to cross-reference and check from other reliable sources the facts that were presented in different social media platforms. The project, throughout the 2 month duration, has achieved the objectives that were initially set; although there were problems and obstacles along the way, we still managed to inform and impart knowledge to everyone through different social media platforms. The figures below will include 3 evaluation forms; two from the webinars conducted and one overall evaluation form from the community itself.



Figure 12. Screenshot of YOUTHink: Webinar on the Role of the Youth.

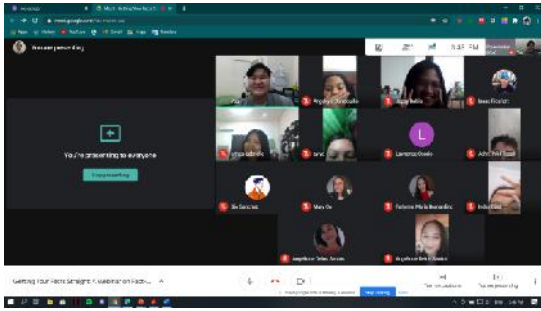


Figure 13. Screenshot of Getting Your Facts Straight: A Webinar on Fact-Checking and Proper Use of Social Media

The overall positive evaluation and feedback from the community is a manifestation of the remarkable implementation of the project objectives.

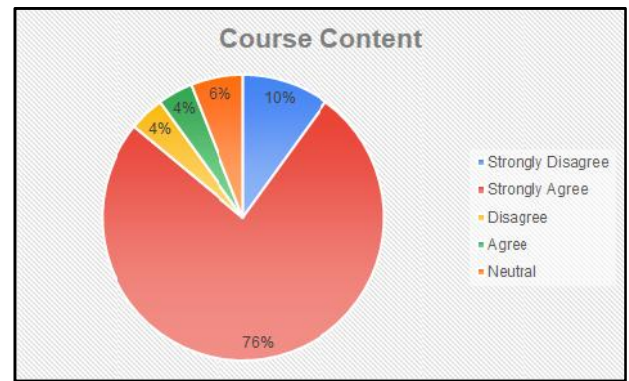


Figure 16. Overall feedback about the Course Content of the YOUTHink: Webinar on the Role of the Youth

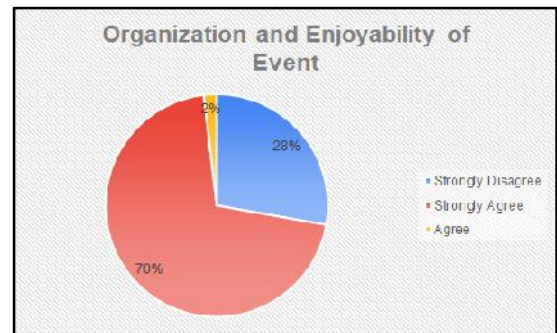


Figure 17. Overall feedback about the Organization and Enjoyability of Event of the Getting Your Facts Straight: A Webinar on Fact-Checking and Proper Use of Media

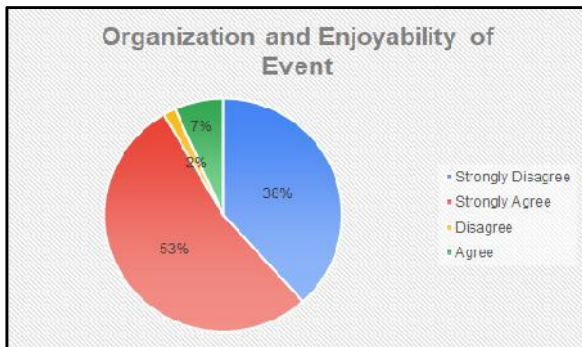


Figure 14. Overall feedback about the Organization and Enjoyability of Event of the YOUTHink: Webinar on the Role of the Youth.

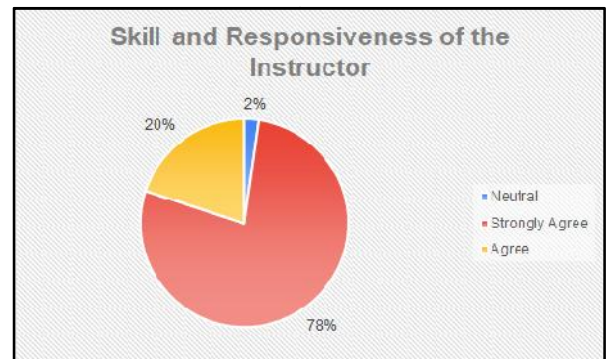


Figure 18. Overall feedback about the Skill and Responsiveness of the Instructor of the Getting Your Facts Straight: A Webinar on Fact-Checking and Proper Use of Media

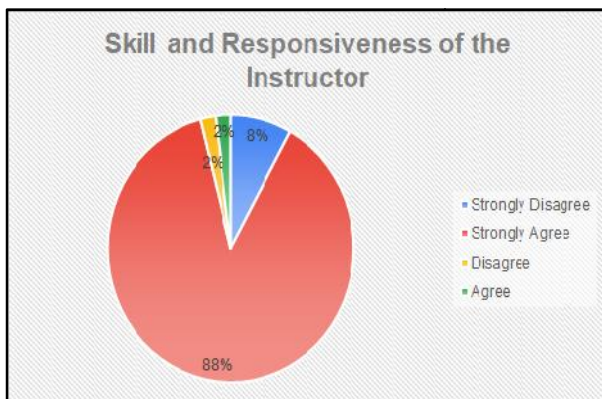


Figure 15. Overall feedback about the Skill and Responsiveness of the Instructor of the YOUTHink: Webinar on the Role of the Youth

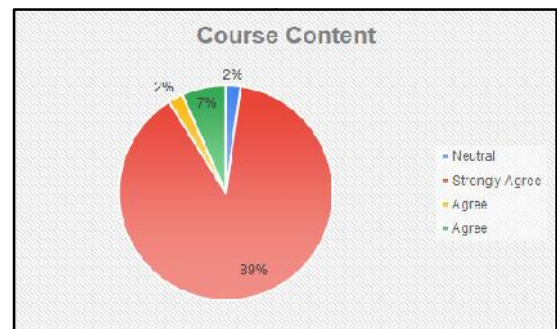


Figure 19. Overall feedback about the Course Content of the Getting Your Facts Straight: A Webinar on Fact-Checking and Proper Use of Media

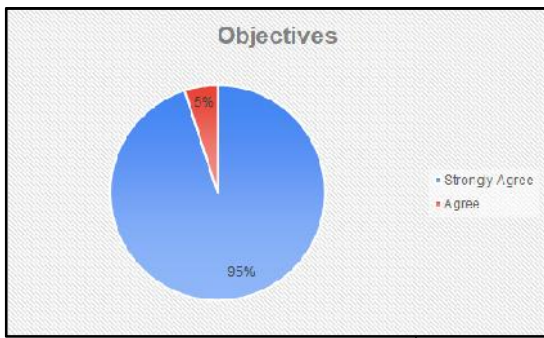


Figure 20. Overall feedback about the objectives laid out by Gana+ from Gana Philippines community

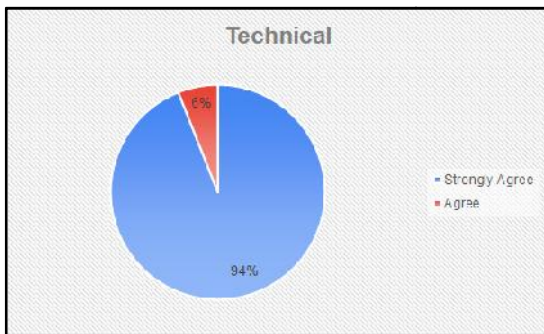


Figure 21. Overall feedback on Gana+'s Technical Aspect from the Gana Philippines community

The project contributed to nation building by informing the public about the current situation of our country and how they can help even if they are still students. This, in turn, may have opened the eyes of those who are unaware of the current situation of our country. By producing articles, creating community threads, and conducting webinars, the team has helped in raising awareness to the public's eye about certain problems that affect the wellbeing of everyone. Despite the short amount of time given in completing the project, the proponents have pulled through and managed to follow the deadlines set for every activity planned.

**Sustainability:** The project aims to engage in healthy discussions and discourse among the youth regarding the political situation of the country by maximizing the reach of social media through the chosen organization's account in various platforms. By publishing articles that cater controversial matters and issues that are timely and relevant in the political aspect, the audience will be able to access information through the implemented project, as the proponents seek to determine whether social media serves as an avenue in shaping the youth's political opinion. Needless to say, the project raises awareness on what is happening in society today, while it also teaches the youth on its role in society as well as even knowing whether or not the information being shared is factual (through published articles and webinars). It is one of the swiftly accessed benefits that the chosen community within and beyond the organization has enjoyed as the fruit of the team's labor. Given that the nature of the project implementation is anchored on information dissemination on the political state of the country, in order to be sustainable, further collaboration should be made possible to continuously provide the audience which is composed of the youth easier access to new knowledge and information on the political aspect.

When taking into consideration a long-term duration of the project implementation, the youth will be more aware of the political happenings and events that have a direct or indirect impact on the members of the aforementioned sector. This entails a more interactive society wherein the members of the youth would now grab the opportunity to have a say on what is currently happening in the community.

### Summary, Conclusion and Recommendation

Throughout the course of the project, our team has raised awareness on the current events witnessed by society, informed the youth on its role in society and what members of the sector can do in the present political climate, and shared tips on fact-checking and the proper use of social media. By conducting the initiative in an online community led by youth leaders, we have witnessed how members of the organization are concerned with the current state of the country. Owing to their genuine interest and participation, they have engaged with the plans proposed by our group. Not only that, but an increase in involvement was also observed for the duration of the project. While implementing the project, the group has mastered the skill of verifying information and examining sources. As we were completing the community threads and articles, we have ensured that facts and figures included were from notable and trustworthy references. News articles and analyses included in our writeups were from ethical and reliable sources. Furthermore, proofreading articles have also helped the members in developing their communication and grammar skills. Despite the difficulties faced when planning for the webinars, the talks conducted were of great help for both the team members and participants from the community; the knowledge imparted by the speakers were timely and significant. Our team hopes that the learnings we have disseminated will be used by the community in their future endeavors. As members of the youth sector, it is vital that we engage in societal issues that affect the nation. It is imperative for the members of the youth sector to participate in the development of the society— whether it be through voting in the elections, joining events like the National Youth Congress, or voicing their political opinions on platforms fit for discourse. By doing so, not only can we help society progress for the better, but also develop ourselves to become better individuals.

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