

The Effects of Interpersonal Relationship and the Internet on the Development of Political Socialization among College Students

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the effects of interpersonal relationships and internet use on the political socialization process among college students in North Cyprus. It specifically compares face-to-face interactions and online engagements to determine which mode of communication exerts greater influence on students' political attitudes, values, and behaviors. Political socialization is a continuous process influenced by various agents, including family, peers, education, and media. The advent of digital platforms has significantly altered this process, introducing complexities such as echo chambers, anonymity, and algorithm-driven information exposure.

This study adopts a descriptive, quantitative case study approach to assess patterns of interpersonal communication in both physical and digital spheres. By analysing peer networks, the processes of communication and information gathering, it investigates how these interactions influence student's political viewpoints. A pilot study was conducted with participants outside the main the main sample to ensure reliability and validity. The final survey was distributed to students in the Faculty of Communication of EMU, with a total of 117 responses. Data were analysed using SPSS.

Findings indicate that while face-to-face communication still holds a strong influence in political discussions, online communication – especially via social media – has a significant and growing impact, particularly among digital natives. The data suggests a generational shift in the channels of civic engagement and points to the role of digital public spheres in shaping political identity.

These findings contribute to ongoing debates about the transformation of democratic participation and civic discourse in the digital age. The results may help educators, policymakers, and communication professionals better understand how youth interact with political content and how to foster more inclusive political engagement in hybrid communication environments.

Keywords: political socialisation, interpersonal communication, civic engagement, social media, college students

ÖZ

Bu tez, Kuzey Kıbrıs'taki üniversite öğrencileri arasında kişilerarası ilişkiler ve internet kullanımı ile siyasal sosyalleşme süreci üzerindeki etkileri araştırmaktadır. Özellikle yüz yüze etkileşimler ile çevrim içi etkileşimleri karşılaştırarak, hangi iletişim biçiminin öğrencilerin politik tutumları, değerleri ve davranışları üzerinde daha fazla etkili olduğunu belirlemeye çalışmaktadır. Siyasal sosyalleşme, aile, akranlar, eğitim ve medya gibi çeşitli etkenlerden etkilenen sürekli bir süreçtir. Dijital platformların ortaya çıkışı bu süreci önemli ölçüde dönüştürmüş; yankı odaları (echo chambers), anonimlik ve algoritma temelli bilgi akışı gibi karmaşık faktörleri devreye sokmuştur.

Bu çalışma hem fiziksel hem de dijital ortamlarda kişilerarası iletişim kalıplarını değerlendirmek amacıyla tanımlayıcı ve nicel bir vaka çalışması yaklaşımı benimsemektedir. Akran ağları, iletişim süreçleri ve bilgi toplama biçimleri analiz edilerek, bu etkileşimlerin öğrencilerin siyasal görüşlerini nasıl etkilediği incelenmiştir. Güvenilirlik ve geçerliliği sağlamak amacıyla, asıl örneklem grubunun dışındaki katılımcılarla bir pilot çalışma gerçekleştirilmiştir. Nihai anket, Doğu Akdeniz Üniversitesi İletişim Fakültesi öğrencilerine uygulanmış ve toplam 117 katılımcıdan veri toplanmıştır. Veriler SPSS programı kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir.

Elde edilen bulgular, yüz yüze iletişimin siyasal tartışmalarda hâlâ güçlü bir etkisi olduğunu gösterirken, özellikle dijital yerliler arasında sosyal medya aracılığıyla gerçekleşen çevrim içi iletişimin giderek artan bir etkiye sahip olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Veriler, yurttaşlık katılım kanallarında kuşaklar arası bir dönüşüm

yaşandığını ve dijital kamusal alanların politik kimlik oluşumunda oynadığı rolü işaret etmektedir.

Bu bulgular, dijital çağda demokratik katılım ve yurttaşlık söyleminin dönüşümüne dair devam eden tartışmalara katkı sağlamaktadır. Elde edilen sonuçlar, eğitimcilerin, politika yapıcılarının ve iletişim profesyonellerinin gençlerin politik içerikle nasıl etkileşim kurduklarını daha iyi anlamalarına ve hibrit iletişim ortamlarında daha kapsayıcı bir siyasal katılımın nasıl teşvik edilebileceğine dair yol göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: siyasal sosyalleşme, kişilerarası iletişim, yurttaşlık katılımı, sosyal medya, üniversite öğrencileri

DEDICATION

I dedicate my work to the future generations of my fellow countryman; may they choose well who would represent.

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I would first like to thank my advisor, dear Assoc.Prof.Dr. Nilüfer Türksöy, on her continuous help, I also want to thank Ersin Çağlar and Deren Fırat for their helping hands during my research.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Humanity has evolved into what it is today through communication, allowing societies to solve or create problems. Every standpoint, belief and ideology, contributes to communion, creating a motive for unity, or conflict among the people. Ideologies and beliefs are inherited through socialisation, from families, peers, media and other agents of socialisation. Typically, an individual's social lens is shaped by primary socialisation. Through these interactions, an individual forms a stable perspective of their environment. However, does interpersonal relationships – online and “on-the-ground” – particularly during college years – instigate a newly formed attitude within their political lens?

The impact of college is significant in a young person's life, as it represents a unique transition into adulthood, the foundation of understanding responsibilities, and the importance of choices. The time in college represents a unique intersection and connection of diverse ideologies and cultural backgrounds of students from different ethnic, religious, cultural, economic and social backgrounds. As young people are exposed to these diverse ways of life, they are introduced to profound ideas that act as an eye-opening catalyst for personal growth and intellectual and ideological reshaping. Different agents of socialisation – peer groups, academic settings and the extracurricular activities students take part in (i.e., academic societies and clubs)

during these few years in college can influence and redefine their political and social viewpoints.

This thesis examines how social interactions during college contribute to the evolution and formation of political ideologies, and social media's impact on redefining viewpoints.

1.1 Background of the Study

Although an individual's political perspective often begins to strengthen and crystalise during college or early adulthood, foundational steps into political understanding, start much earlier during childhood and adolescence. This is a critical period of socialisation, and one where an excessive amount of research has been conducted, often at the expense of the later stages of life that would follow, primarily adulthood. These baby steps into the world of political understanding are achieved by primary socialisation, where parenting plays a significant role in children's early development and the transitional period between adolescence and early adulthood. Parents set standards for their children, who must then decide in their mature years whether to follow this guidance or to be influenced by other agents of political socialisation.

As important as family is, one other significant political and primary socialisation agent is early education, which teaches young people about hierarchy, the figure of authority, and the basic understanding of the norms and values of society, just like families, but do so in an environment filled with people of the same ages, teaching them humility, competition, who to be – the identity of self. Schools are crucial for children to acquire sufficient knowledge to question the world and its workings. The norms of communication established in schools and at home have long-term

implications for young people's engagement with political life, although young people indeed learn who to be and what to believe in through early socialisation, it is also important to recognise that – as the McDevitt and Ostrowski suggests – “learning processes, especially between parents and children, are reciprocal, parents and children learn from each other” (McDevitt & Ostrowski, 2019, p.24).

Political socialisation is a complex process. As Gimpel, et al. (2003, p.33) describe, “It is the transmission of political culture to new generations of citizens”. This process is shaped by a network of macro and micro-level phenomena, including families, social networks, schools, peer groups and the media, all serving as sources of political learning and behaviour. Individuals, typically exhibit an “other-centred orientation”, and make sociotropic judgements about these institutions independent of their feelings towards individuals within these contexts – be it family members, teachers, etc (McLeod & Shah, 2009, p.3). Parents' communication with their adolescent children is particularly important to civic socialisation (Chaffee, McLeod & Wackman, 1973). A child expressing their opinion freely on matters that are at odds with the views of their parents tend to be more politically engaged. However, those raised in an environment where conformity is present are less likely to be as involved as the ones who question. Also, political discussions with family, co-workers and friends have been found to play a vital role in developing civic identity (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995).

The focus has also shifted from traditional civic education and curricula – like textbook learning, to the importance of classroom discussions, civic simulations and service learning (Niemi & Junn, 2000; Walker, 2002). These approaches emphasise high-

quality public discussions and prepare young people to engage beneficially outside school settings – within families, peer groups, and co-workers (Mutz, 2006).

Within the broad array of agents of political socialisation, media usage – whether online, broadcast or print media, has a preponderance over many other agents of political socialisation, mainly because it controls the vast majority's eyes and ears. It is a staple for modern societies, a device to create and destroy that predominantly controls the masses. The impact of each medium depends on its usage level and the size of its effects. "This could be compared to medical research, where the effect of a drug might be a function of dosage size and potency of its effect per unit of dosage. It could be expected by most that the higher the dosage, stronger the effect. However, this is not exactly the case" (McLeod & Shah, 2009, p.4). National television news attracts larger audiences than newspapers do. However, the effect of newspapers on knowledge, political participation and political socialisation outweighed the impact of television news. Much political socialisation research pointed to the significant differences between the youth and adults regarding news media usage. Mindich (2004) noted that the youth are turning away from traditional media in favour of Internet news, making it the primary source of political socialisation.

Although the internet is often criticised for damaging face-to-face interactions, it also offers significant benefits, including enhancing political socialisation. Studies by Min-Woo, Wilcox & Shah (2014) and Lee et al. (2013), suggest that information-oriented use of the internet, such as social and political information obtained through online newspapers, online news, television and interactive messaging through social media offers users with opportunities for civic recruitment and especially encourage political participation. Lee et al. (2013) emphasise that conventional online news significantly

boosts youth civic and political participation, making it clear that these sources of informational content influence youth's political participation. However, media does not directly shape the opinions and beliefs of the masses, which would be quite a difficult task, but instead produces the psychological foundation for evaluation by "altering the comparative weight people give to numerous considerations that make the definite evaluation, rejecting the "Magic Bullet" theory in the process (Eveland & Thomson, 2006).

Informational media usage helps individuals to allocate the resources needed for political discussions. As Mutz (2002) puts it, it generates opportunities for exposure to viewpoints usually unavailable in a person's social network. This directly correlates to Lazarsfeld's model of interpersonal sources – the opinion leaders, interpreting the media messages within the interpersonal network. This points to the fact that – with the testing of Shah et al. (2005), informational media use, either online or offline, influences democratic citizen activities such as civic and political participation through interpersonal communication. This goes to show that informational media usage on political participation, working indirectly through interpersonal communication, increases the levels of – young adults and adults alike, proficiency in politics and political efficacy, which in turn influence the levels of political participation (McLeod, Scheufele & Moy, 1999).

Political socialisation, defined as the lifelong journey through which individuals acquire their political knowledge, attitudes and values, is influenced by a myriad of factors as stated above. Interpersonal communication stands out as one the significant catalysts, wherein discussions, debates and conversations with peers, family members, and co-workers – both online and offline – profoundly impact shaping one's political

consciousness. Family homes, workplaces, within the Internet itself, and in particular, school campuses serve as dynamic hubs of intellectual exchange, fostering an environment where students are exposed to countless different ideas, which in turn develops the ideal understanding of political participation, helping young adults to exchange worldviews and become efficient enough in the world of political experience. Within this context, interpersonal communication's effects on political socialisation become prominent. The idea is that communication effects on civic life, whether at home, in the classroom, or by media, are often indirect, making using the communication mediation model a must.

As it has been stated above, this model theorises that media's influences are strong, yet quite indirect, shaping participatory behaviours, through effects on conventional and online discussion about news and how news consumption and political discussion shape and direct social structural influences on civic and political engagement. It is also important to note, that the citizen communication mediation model contends that there are similarities, yet also important differences between face-to-face communications – political discussions, and expressing political opinions in an online setting – political messaging (McLeod & Shah, 2009), which will be an important factor going into this thesis, the façade's people may wear is an important factor when it comes to political engagements within interpersonal communications. The idea of hiding beneath masks to either lie or tell the absolute truth is a phenomenon many have to succumb to fit in, but more on that will be discussed in the later stages of this thesis. Face-to-face political communications mainly occurs with families, friends, and co-workers – primarily within an individual's network. It is thought to expose people to a more comprehensive range of perspectives, helping individuals interpret media

messages and construct meaning about public affairs. Political messaging on the other hand may share some similar characteristics between political discussions. However, if looking at it in a negative sense, it permits individuals to share views with a much more comprehensive and dispersed array of people, which could always be an important thing in the world of political engagement, but could also result in distasteful events, both in mediatic sense and in a more global, more physical sense.

1.2 The Problem of the Study

The rise of digital communication has transformed political socialization, yet it remains unclear whether interpersonal communication or online interactions have a greater influence on shaping political attitudes. Although previous research has explored the role of social media in political engagements, there is not enough evidence comparing the two, and showing whether or not there is a differentiating impact of the two modes of communication. It is imperative to seek and address this gap by analysing the effects of both modes, and figure out the strength each one has on the process of political socialization through a survey-based approach.

1.3 Aim of the Study

This study aims to explore how interpersonal (face-to-face) communication and online (digital/social media-based) communication each contribute to the political socialization of Turkish-speaking college students in North Cyprus. By using a descriptive, quantitative approach, the study investigates peer networks, communication channels, and civic engagement habits within both online and on-the-ground contexts.

1.4 Research Question

In line with the research aim, this study seeks to answer the following question:

Which mode of communication – interpersonal (face-to-face) or online (social media) – has a stronger influence on the development of political socialization among Turkish-speaking college students?

1.5 Significance of the Study

In the contemporary landscape of information dissemination and social connectedness, the convergence between interpersonal communication and social media emerges as a dynamic force – influencing individuals’ political beliefs, attitudes and behaviours. Political socialisation, a lifelong process through which individuals acquire political knowledge, is undergoing a transformative shift in the digital age. As traditional forms of interpersonal communication seamlessly integrated with the pervasive influence of social media platforms, the connection between these communication channels plays a pivotal role in shaping the political identities of citizens, more significantly – that of the younger demographic, who are immersed in the digital realm. As discussed in previous paragraphs, the rise of social media platforms as conduits for political communication, introduces a complex interplay of influences on an individual’s political socialisation. The virtual spaces where opinions are shared, discussions unravelled, and information is disseminated, have become central arenas for forming political perspectives. In this context, interpersonal communication, facilitated by social media, takes on new dimensions, influencing how political ideas are exchanged, debated and internalized. The thesis aims to understand the relationship between interpersonal communication, as facilitated by both social media, and face-to-face communications, and their effects on the political socialisation of individuals. As citizens engage in conversations, share political ideas and ideals and connect with diverse voices online and “on the ground”, the mechanisms through which these

interactions contribute to shaping political stances and beliefs, warrant a systematic exploration.

1.6 Motivation for the Study

As the new millennia approached, it brought the foundation of a newer archetype of communication, the Internet. It has become one of the most essential tools of communication, and what it represents is a change – a change in behaviour, a change in socialisation, and a change in traditional communication. The environment the Internet provides has become the greatest tool in the world of communication. Daily lives and political and social interactions were much closed off – separate from the rest before, within the compounds of known ones. Now, these separate – closed off spheres have become a part of a digital environment, available for all the world to see. The exchange of ideas was a simple transaction – through intimate, face-to-face interpersonal communication, people socialise, people think, and act upon the ideas they believed in, in a modest environment. However, as the Internet evolved into what it is today, these social interactions, and socialisation, became a global approach to mass communication. The question around the argument of whether interpersonal communication – online and on-the-ground, instigates a newly formed political understanding amongst people, especially young adults, is the primary motivation of this study.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

Even though the study aims to provide grander – more worldwide background information, it will unfortunately fall short of being as comprehensive as one might hope, especially without in-depth interviews. The study is limited by its use of a single, non-random sample from the Faculty of Communication at EMU, which affects the generalizability of findings. The reliance on self-reported questionnaire data may also

introduce response bias. However, the information this study aims to provide will be an extensive substitute. Embarking on this journey, one will delve into the heart of the digital and analogue public sphere, where the convergence of interpersonal communication and social media shapes the political consciousness of individuals, fashioning the citizens of tomorrow.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The chapter will begin by briefly explaining communication, then define communication as a necessity for understanding the values people share for a purpose – per social capital. The review will then explain the forms of communication, most notably that of Interpersonal Communication, then that of New Communication Technologies – Social Network Sites, Facebook, Public Sphere and then the fundamental section of this Review – Political Socialisation, Agents of Political Socialisation, Convergence Between Interpersonal Communication and social media, and Fashioning the Citizens of Tomorrow.

2.1 Communication Defined

“The word ‘Communicate’, corresponds to the Latin verb of ‘communicare’, which means ‘to share, to make common’, which in turn directly relates to the Latin word for ‘common’ – ‘communis’” (Rosengren, 2000, p.1). To communicate is to share, and by sharing, one exchanges ideas, knowledge and beliefs with another, creating a communion within the confinements of assembled values and norms. Within the boundaries of these shared values, communication also plays a vital role in indicating the people’s boundaries within the given society. These social boundaries show the areas of movement of individuals in societies, and within these areas, people engage in Social Production. This ‘Social Production’ occurs between two people, allowing them to continue with their lives. Each individual has a role in this engagement, and

they must communicate and cooperate to survive – after all, the source of connection and understanding; is communication.

Communication is as old as humanity, and throughout time – just like every other thing, it evolved into what it is today. “For thousands of years, humans have used various media to communicate through space and time; wood and stone, parchment and paper, fire, smoke, flags, electricity and electromagnetic waves” (Rosengren, 2000, p.1). Through the changes, the societal need for communication stepped into the realm of Modern Media – that of the Internet, breaking the border of distance that kept humanity in a bubble. Although the Internet is a fundamental tool for communications, it is being used by humans, for humans – so a meaningful message must still be created to link a sender and a receiver. To accomplish this, the sender needs certain types of signs to direct messages – letters, words and symbols are called as codes, and play the role of these signs. Rosengren suggests that “language is the most essential tool humans use to convey information related to actions and tasks.” (Rosengren, 2000, p,30). Thus, through language, codification, and especially nowadays, mass communication is the utmost important factor in human interactions and understanding. People interact, people understand, people communicate. Of course, when discussing mass communication, there must be a source, or a device to disperse around the globe. These devices can be newspapers, radios, television and of course, the Internet. Computer-mediated communication is among the most prevalent in the modern age of human interactions. The virtual environment and what it offers to the masses is unparalleled in today’s world – to access a piece of information, an idea, is simply a click away.

Communication has diverse forms, consisting of Verbal – written and spoken, and Non-Verbal Communication – through gestures, facial expressions and body language – serving as a nuanced and often subconscious means of conveying emotions, and intentions – in basic terms, information. Mass Communication, as it was stated above, is also a form of communication – facilitated by newspapers, radio, and television, in which it plays a part in shaping the public discourse, influencing societal values, and political opinions – in short, the very being of individuals is based on the collective consciousness. Of course, the new era of mass communication – digital communication and social media play a pivotal role in doing what Mass Communication does, only in a grander, global and in a more refined style – allows instantaneous global connectivity, user-generated content and democratization of information dissemination. With the forms of communication discussed, it is also important to talk about the levels of communication, most notably that of interpersonal communication, which will play an integral part in this thesis going forward.

2.2 Interpersonal Communication Defined

As Wood (2010) suggests, ‘Inter’ means ‘between’ or ‘among’, and when the words ‘inter’ and ‘personal’ combine, it means among people. Interpersonal communication is the ‘face to face’ communication, as Tubbs and Moss (1981) put it. Interpersonal Communication stands as one of the most essential forms of communication when it comes to development of individuals. For Interpersonal communication to occur, about two to five people must be present and be participating. Unlike intrapersonal communication – an individual does not speak alone, but communicates with others, exchanging ideas, beliefs, knowledge and information. This level of communication is defined as ‘the first step’ into the world of socialisation. Just like any other form of communication, interpersonal communication is a process in which the sender sends

messages to different receivers. With this exchange, a shared meaning will be created in the receivers' mind.

Forming relationships has long been a fundamental part of social life, and effective interpersonal communication skills play an important role in developing strong, meaningful connections (Bachman, 2009) – this idea of Bachman is an important reminder to the masses, that no matter what an individual does, without positive interpersonal communication, that said individual can never develop enough to understand what it is and what it should be, can never question what it was, and what it would be. Wood suggests that there are three models of interpersonal communication. First is the linear model. This model was developed by Harold Lasswell in 1948, and as the name would suggest, it portrays communication as linear – one way where five questions are asked; “Who, says what, in what channel, to whom, with what effect?”.



Figure 1: Laswell's Communication Model (1948)

Wood (2007, p.18) suggests that the earlier models for interpersonal communications had unfortunate shortcomings. They portrayed communication as a one-way exchange from a sender to the receiver. This idea implies that ideas and knowledge are only received, and the listener never sends any message – therefore, they only passively

receive information. Listeners can always non-verbally send feedback to the sender, but Lasswell's model seems to ignore receivers' feedback.

The second one is considered as the “interactive models”: Unlike Lasswell's Communication Model, Wood's model (2007) states that listeners give feedback to the message they receive. Both sides create and comment on messages according to their knowledge and experience.

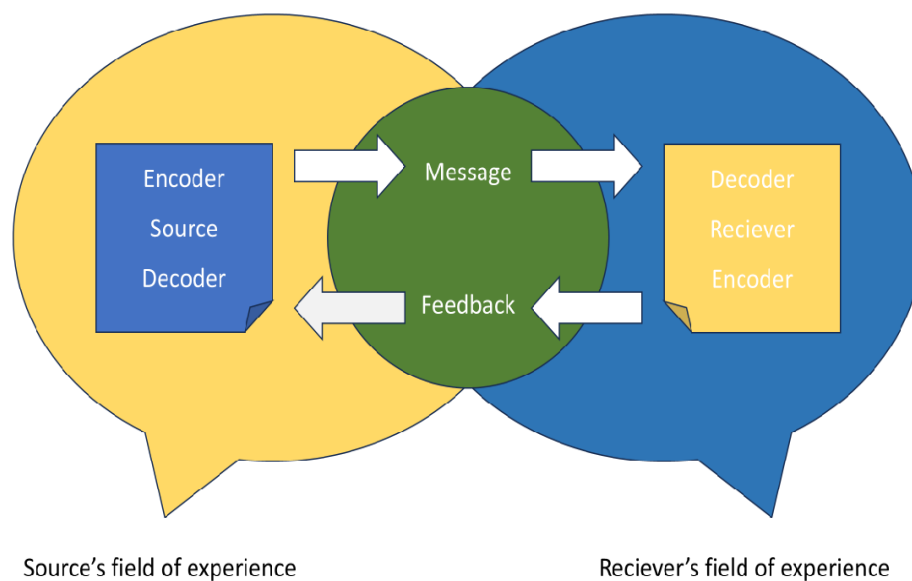


Figure 2: Schramm's Interactive Model (1954)

While Schramm's (1954) Interactive Model is seen as an improvement over the linear model, it still reflects a somewhat one-directional structure, where one party is a sender, and the other is a receiver. As Figure 2 suggests, communication is not a one-way process; knowledge exchange does not happen through one source. It happens reciprocally – people teach others, exchange ideas and beliefs.

The last model is known as the “transactional model”. Contrary to the previous two models, introduced above, this model looks at communication as a two-way

engagement, where both are senders and the receivers. Wood (2010) also suggests that noise is present, as can be seen by Figure 3 below, which is an addition to interpersonal communication. The transactional model also claims that each knowledge exchange of between communicators – their beliefs and ideas, can change over time.

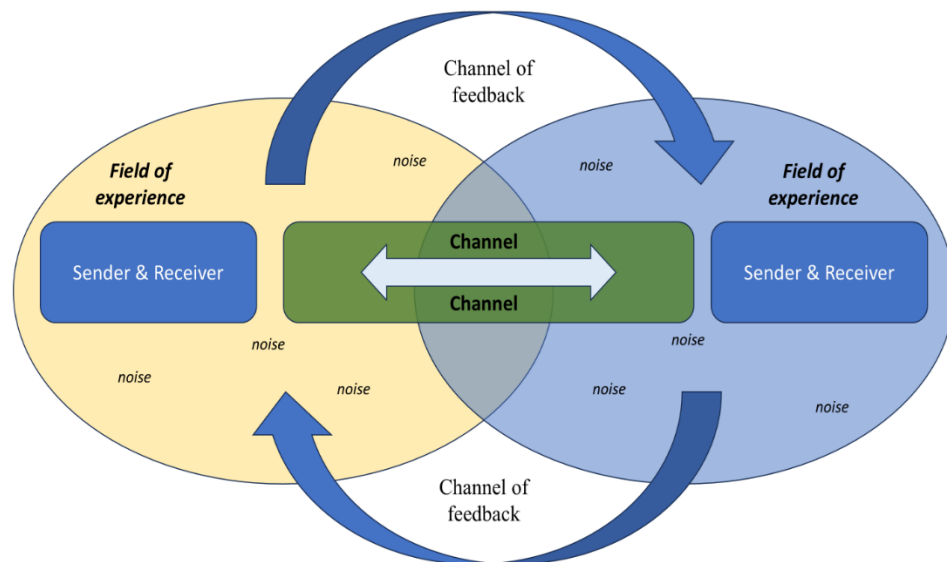


Figure 3: Barlund's Transactional Model of Communication (1970)

As discussed above, the Transactional Model can be defined as a communication method in which both parties are equally present in the process of exchanging ideas and knowledge. As Wood (2007) states that during any moment of communication, one might be delivering a message by speaking and gesturing, receiving a message, or simultaneously doing both, because communication affects each other.

To live, to overcome problems and concerns, people need the support of others, and communication – especially Interpersonal Communication is the key to helping individuals to that end. As Wood (2007, p.10) states, "Interpersonal Communication is central to our lives. We need others to solve our problems; to share our worries and our joys, we need others to grow, personally and professionally". By all means,

interpersonal communication is a processual – an ongoing process. Every segment of the lives of individuals is filled with dilemmas and circumstances, where they learn what to do, how to be – who to be, and through the likes of Interpersonal Communication, those individuals socialise into the very beings they are today, the agents of socialisation, both primary and secondary, help people, no matter the age, to become who they are.

2.2.1 The Difference of Online and On-the-Ground

Interpersonal communication traditionally refers to direct, face-to-face interactions between individuals, as discussed above, and often characterized by immediate feedback, non-verbal cues, emotional nuances, and shared physical context. It typically occurs within established social relationships, such as families, friends, classmates, etc., and relies heavily on personal connections and social context.

On the other hand, online communication through social media often lacks the richness of non-verbal feedback and can vary in synchronicity and anonymity. While digital platforms allow broader and more frequent interactions, they also foster a reduction of accountability. Online communication can be both public through posts, and private or anonymous, enabling individuals to explore different aspects of identity and opinion without the social risk often contracted with face-to-face interactions.

These differences are central to this study, as the modes of communication may influence not only how individuals share political ideas, but also how they shape, moderate and hide their political identities in relation to social pressure and group norms.

2.3 Understanding Socialisation

The term socialisation is the foundation of a grander set of forms that resides within the term itself. It is the process of humans growing into their cultural and social environment, encompassing all aspects of the development of human personality, going back to social influences, including education and instruction.

This concept of ‘education’ represents an intentionally planned effort by society and its institutions – agents of primary and secondary socialization being families and schools, peers respectively, to convey knowledge and skills that are considered a necessity within the society and culture that surrounds the individuals.

The influence socialization has on the development of people, especially at a younger age is an essential aspect of human growth. It is a multifaceted process through which individuals acquire norms, values, behaviours and cultural understanding necessary for effective social engagement. It encapsulates a processual journey of learning, understanding, engaging and internalizing societal expectations, roles and identities.

2.3.1 Agents of Socialisation

This section will discuss the two forms of socialisation, starting with Primary socialisation, the start of the very basic form of societal understandings, and continue with Secondary socialisation, the next and endless step of socialisation.

2.3.1.1 Primary Socialisation: “Steps That Shape”

Lack of human connection – without proper guidance, one cannot integrate oneself and even engage in the simplest forms of communication. The case of the ‘Feral Kids’, Amala and Kamala is an excellent, yet horrifying example of this. Two kids being raised by wolves, in an environment unsuitable for a grown individual, let alone a

child, yet they survived. The only thing was that they didn't grow and socialize in an environment of humans, but by a mother wolf with her three other cubs. These two kids grew up with these cubs, they walked on all fours, mute and not bothered by hot or cold. It is an extraordinary case and an example of the relevance of primary socialization.



Figure 4: Kamala and Amala Aged 8 and 1 Respectively, Midnapore, India, 1920
Timeline – Laura Smith, Nov. 24 2017

The importance of proper parental figures during the stages of primary socialization lays the foundation for an individuals' understanding of social roles and interpersonal dynamics – these early experiences within the family unit significantly influence the development of core values and beliefs.

“Primary Socialisation is a process of self-discovery. Induction occurs in a particular world. Primary Socialisation may be responsible for key facets of individuals' later perspectives. The child subsequently experiences secondary socialization processes,

which aim at maintaining the reality internalized in primary socialization, besides furnishing further internalizations”, says Potts (2015, p.641).

2.3.1.2 Secondary Socialisation: “Steps That Leads”

No matter the age, the core understanding of how the world works never stops changing. The world never stops for anyone, and it is the duty of agents of secondary socialisation to help individuals figure out how to engage in certain things, what to do in certain situations, how to act and how to behave. The secondary socialization process is as important as the latter, and as Appelrouth & Edles (2011) state, “it is a necessity which provides further knowledge, skills and values to those already provided in primary socialization”. “As people step into new domains, they start to leave behind the old norms and roles for the sake of learning newer ones, or holding opposing values and occupying opposing roles” (Nash & Calonica, 1996). Some of the agents of Secondary Socialisation are education, peer groups, and media and technology.

Formal education institutions play an important role in socialization by conveying cultural and societal knowledge, stimulating social interactions and shaping the cognitive development of individuals. This educational environment contributes to the acquiring skills, norms, and values and cultivating a shared civic identity.

Peer groups are an influential socializing agent, particularly during adolescence and beyond. The social engagements within individuals’ peer networks contribute to forming personal identities and values, and developing social skills beyond the family context. People, especially young adults, are influenced profoundly by those they stand close to, and the naivety of friendship, or the need to prove certain things is one of the most significant aspects, which help develop social interactions. People form new

opinions, and new identities, both social and political, for the sake of being understood by their current surroundings.

Within the contemporary era, there is no doubt that media, including television, internet and social media, plays a pivotal role in shaping and influencing perceptions, disseminating cultural narratives, contributing to the construction of social reality, and – depending on where one looks at the dilemma, impacting, positively and/or negatively individuals on a global scale. Media and the Internet are staples for modern societies, a device which creates, a device which destroys, a device which predominantly has control over the masses.

2.4 Technology: “The Age of Tomorrow”

The reason for technology’s ever-evolving nature depends on a single factor, humanity. It develops for the sake of the needs of the people, to affect their lives, social structure and cultures – forming new styles of entertainment and expressions. In the simplest of terms, it is a monumental device for globalization, and global communication. In the past, communication was scarce, to the point of being mere drawings, yet people could communicate using these methods. After all, using symbols and pictures is still a part of communication, maybe not writing on the walls per se, but even that is still a prominent form of communication in the modern world. As technology kept evolving, writing became a medium of communication, where history started to be recorded. Then, along came the printing press, one of the most influential forms of communication. Information scarcity was abolished with the invention of the printing press, and information about everything was available to the masses, being read by people from different cultures. This consumption of information resulted in the creation of shared norms and values of the people.

As with all things, evolution is inevitable, an absolute certainty, and technology evolves better than anything. Its development directly affects the economic and social structures – replacing the outright nature of workforce, the capital of society, with that of the information power, and with this development, computer-supported environments and institutions became dependent on such technological power – the scarcity of information not only was abolished but seized to exist with the age of the Internet.

2.4.1 New Information and Communication Technologies

Every speck of power required for change is in the palms of people familiar with the simplest of technologies. The possibilities it offers are endless, and the changes it can bring about – not just in an individual or a societal sense, but a global one is monumental. One expression, a straightforward idea could bring catastrophe, or communion; the unfortunate thing is that this is the beautiful yet the ugly truth. Self-expression is behind the press of a button, and unlike before, when not everyone was given the chance to express themselves, now has the opportunity to do so. Almost everyone has the possibility to use new media channels, to express and state their ideas. The very concept of democracy, its foundation, lies within the compounds of communication, the freedom to ask, to question and to answer. The Internet provides a new way to obtain information, it offers convenience, making it easy for individuals to grasp and internalize messages with the help of symbols, videos, sounds, and images. It uses these variables more effectively than traditional media. Marshal McLuhan's prediction (1962) about the Internet – 30 years before its existence, is an excellent summarisation. He called it the "Global Village", and unlike the TV, where the sensory organs of individuals – hearing and seeing, are activated, the Internet requires more. It is interactive in its nature, not imposed into the gaping hole of one-

way communication that TV and other traditional media forms offer. It involves participation, it lives off participation – and without it, it ceases to exist. Users gather the information, and they generate and share the information once again, it is transactional, and these users are the audience and the creators. The Internet is a vast organ of new communication, filled with platforms oozing with information. At its core, these platforms are the very foundation of human interactivity. The exchange of ideas transpires within them and creates that modernized form of communication – the transactional period of media communication.

2.4.2 Social Network Sites and Social Media – “Shaping, Forming, Serving”

As a web-based service, Social Media Sites aim to attract people to the ever-expanding virtual environment. Social network sites are considered a subset of social media and broader macro-concepts that have emerged with the rise of the Internet (Asgharkiya, 2009). Social Network in its core is Cyberspace, an electronic medium used to facilitate online communication. In contrast, social media is a system – a system that shares information with others and act as a mechanism to move social interactivity. The core strategy social media has is the possibilities it proposes to people – an interactive environment to be social in, yet be completely alone in the compounds of a phone screen. Social media as a whole is a straightforward system to exchange information, a place where face-to-face interaction is not necessary, as some people would prefer – it has become a new agent of communication – of socialization. It is interactive, and interactivity is crucial in the process of becoming social. Platforms like Facebook offer the same opportunities other communication devices like TV, periodical tabloids and broadsheets like newspapers and magazines offer. Yet it does so in a manner that includes visual, auditory and written materials, and a much-needed interactivity. People can access any information they like, whenever they like, and

whatever information they seek, will always be there, in the palm of their hands no matter the platform.

Each person is, as it were, in touch with a number of people, some of whom are directly in touch with each other and some of whom are not. I find it convenient to talk of a social field of this kind as a network. The image I have is of a set of points, some of which are joined by lines. The points of the image are people, or groups, and the lines indicate which people interact with each other (Barnes, 1954, p.43).

Over half a century ago, Ja Barnes and other thinkers like him saw social networks as a map that shows the relations between people and how they develop as interactions increase and spread. In today's world, social networks have distinguished themselves as a virtual space – one where people create their own social networks, and their social personalities, sharing and communicating with other users within cyberspace. The vastness of the Internet, and within it, cyberspace, is the global connection humanity always dreamed of – an environment that is dedicated to storing even the fraction of the most insignificant piece of information, and next to it, a gateway to an even more vast connectivity between individuals – a place to socialize and to change, a place to shape, to form, and to serve the humanities need for interactivity, for creativity, and authority.

Modern technologies connect distant parts of the world through global networks. In doing so, digital communication encourages the formation of virtual communities, which in turn reshapes both the physical and emotional dimensions of human life. (Khaniki & Babayi, 2011). As stated above, evolution is an absolute certainty, humanity may single-handedly evolve it, but to do so, one must adapt to it as it moves forward. Evolution is constant, and humanity adapts, they make sense of it all and use it as a means of change. Technology, the Internet, and social media serves a purpose,

to bring about change, how humanity brings about that change, depends solely on the character one puts forward. Every generation of the ever-evolving media brought about countless figures with the intent of change, their ideas, beliefs and intentions were on a global scale thanks to the organs of communication. Their ideas tested the naivety of their audience, how easily one can be manipulated or made them drop their false façades, or even worse, made them stop asking, never to speak, never to question, or else be damned 7 generations over. Technology is, and will always be the centre of humanity, but if its strength is used with ill intent, catastrophe is inevitable.

2.4.3 Facebook/Meta – Users and Demographic

Amongst the countless platforms that have amassed a plethora of users, Facebook is one of them, if not one of the most popular platforms within Cyberspace, alongside being one of the most financially successful companies in the world. Information regarding Facebook users, its revenue, demographics, global reach and other statistics were taken directly from official investor reports taken from The Social Shepherd, leading up to the third quarter of 2023 – roughly 3.049 billion users were active monthly, the number of people who use Facebook every day was 2.085 billion, and the size of Facebook’s global advertising audience is 2.249 billion. Although various articles depict a departure from Facebook by the millennials, data shows that young people are still some of the heaviest users of the platform around the globe, especially within developing countries. As of April 2023, 4.9% of users were 13 and 17, and 22.6% were between 18 and 24. Even though there has been a slight decrease in active accounts within the past few years, Facebook is still an attractive platform for young people to present themselves, and share and exchange information with friends and family.

2.4.4 “What Do They Represent?” – Identity and Self-Presentation in Virtual Spaces

Representation is the centre of human ideologies; humanity has the possibility to present themselves the way they truly feel – but do they always do so? People are afraid, afraid of what others might say, and what others might do, they are afraid to not be able to fit in. Everyone wears a façade, a mask for each encounter. These masks represent the very notion of who they want to be, or what they want to hide because, in the end, everyone wants to fit in. It wasn't a common occurrence back before the creation of virtual spaces for a relationship, which was established through interpersonal communication, to realize that there is no need for masks. Given the facts, people did not want to risk being cast aside for speaking their minds. But now, as the age of technology evolves each day, as virtual spaces and social networking have achieved what they have now, people do not need masks, or false façades. They only need a smartphone to be who they want to be. As stated above by Khanki and Babayi (2011), virtual spaces create virtual communities, and within these communities, all parts of human life, both physical and emotional, go through a significant change.

The core concept behind Facebook and other social networking platforms, apart from the money aspect of the business, is to create an environment for people to spend countless amounts of time in, exchange ideas, and be virtual friends with newer people or older friends. People present themselves in whatever fashion they fancy through profiles. People have the opportunity to customize their images, remove characteristics of their faces using apps, or become a completely different person with a different name. These aspects allow users to successfully present themselves to a community,

becoming viral individuals in the virtual space. These aspects matter because many social media users look at comments and likes and gauge their popularity or to see who has viewed or acknowledged them (Bazarova & Choi, 2014). Every new evolution of technology directly or indirectly affects the advancement of cyberspace, and each new advancement is deemed a necessity after its creation. After all, the more the merrier – which sums up today's society.

Cyberspace is an open field, a limitless social space for humanity to enjoy its fruits, no matter how unripe. It has changed the very idea, the ancient understanding of friendships, privacy and for the most part, identity. Within the vastness of this space, there is an endless possibility for self-presentation – through the fundamental interactions within this space, people declare the norm they should and should not adapt to, groups materializing, ideas transpiring, beliefs being created, and everything in the end, becoming part of this ecosystem, free to share, free to exchange and free to fight for, and fight against.

The unripe fruits of socialization are ripe within this ecosystem, alongside other agents of socialization. Still, as technology has become a fundamental part of humanity, social media or other forms of social networks will inevitably claw their way into the process of socialization. These human interactions, both online and on-the-ground, create and define who people are, helping them to realize who they want to be, and shaping their social identities in the real world, and in the world of cyberspace. After all, people are not gifted an identity at birth, they either grow into the stereotypes they are exposed to or decide to bend the rules to their liking.

2.4.5 Public Sphere

The concept of the public sphere, as introduced by Habermas (1991) in his book, “The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere”, refers to a space where private individuals come together to discuss matters of public interest through debate. In its original form, this idea of the “sphere” emerged in 18th century European societies, in cafés, saloons – places where civilians interact continuously, engaging critically with political issues, free from state intervention and consequences. Habermas argued that this form of open dialogue was essential to democracy and for it to function, allowing public opinion to be formed independently outside of institutional power. However, the accessibility and inclusivity of this idea public sphere have been widely debated and critiqued, particularly with the rise of mass media and commercial interests. In today’s media landscape, this concept has evolved into what is now known as the “digital public sphere”.

McLuhan’s idea on this matter provides a valuable lens through which to understand the transformation of political discourse in to this modern – digitalized age. His famous concept, “the medium is the message” (1964), shows that the characteristics of any medium shape how messages are understood and how societies function, no matter the content it carries. In the context of political discourse, this means that platforms like social media influences not only what political content circulates, but also how individuals engage with it. This perspective lays the groundwork for understanding how technological shifts, particularly those which were introduced by Web 2.0, have reshaped the structure and dynamics of the public sphere itself.

With the evolution of the Internet, the concept of public sphere began to take on new forms, particularly through the rise of Web 2.0 technologies, features such as user-

generated content, social media, personalized content via algorithms, etc. began to emerge, making political discourse more participatory, less hierarchical, and often emotionally driven. This allowed digital natives to engage in political debates, activism, and identity-building in ways that were not possible in the obsolete nature of Web 1.0 era, which was mostly static and one-directional. These new technologies blurred the boundaries between creator and consumer, and in doing so, laid the foundation for a new kind of public sphere – one that is decentralized, algorithmically shaped, and fundamentally digital.

2.4.6 Digital Public Sphere

The evolution of communication technologies has fundamentally reshaped how individuals participate in political life. Habermas' concept of the public sphere – a domain where citizens come together to engage in rational-critical debate – was originally rooted in physical spaces such as cafés, salons, and town halls. In the digital age, this notion has expanded into what is now referred to as the digital public sphere, where political discourse occurs online (Habermas, 1991; Dahlgren, 2005).

The rise of web-based technologies, or what some refer to as the web of technologies, has enabled new forms of interactive political engagement. Unlike traditional mass media, these technologies offer two-way communication, user-generated content, and algorithmic personalization. While these tools democratize information access, they also pose challenges to deliberative democracy. The internet allows for an abundance of voices, but the logic of algorithmic filtering often reinforces existing beliefs rather than promoting open debate.

This environment particularly resonates with digital natives – a generation born into the world of interactive media and mobile internet. Unlike previous generations, digital

natives are fluent in digital communication and rely heavily on social media for information consumption and political expression (Prensky, 2001). Their political socialization often unfolds not in classrooms or family discussions, but within digital platforms where identity, ideology, and belonging are shaped by peer validation, virality, and visibility.

However, the digital public sphere is not a perfect replication of Habermas's beliefs. While it offers greater inclusivity and speed, it is also highly fragmented. Social media platforms often foster echo chambers – environments where individuals are exposed primarily to information that aligns with their existing beliefs. This reinforces cognitive biases and diminishes exposure to dissenting views. Closely related is the notion of political bubbles, where ideological segregation leads to the formation of insulated online communities. These bubbles are amplified by algorithms that prioritize emotionally engaging or confirmation-biased content, thus shaping users' perceptions of political reality (Sunstein, 2001; Pariser, 2011).

These dynamics challenge the deliberative function of the digital public sphere. While digital natives may be more engaged and expressive than previous generations, their participation is often structured by invisible architectures of control – algorithms, platform policies, and norms that guide what is seen, shared, and rewarded. So, while the internet can support democratic conversation, it also makes political socialization more complicated by creating systems that often divide people instead of bringing different views together.

It is essential to recognize that political discourse no longer exists solely in either physical or digital spaces. Instead, the modern public sphere is hybrid, blending online

and on-the-ground discussions. These overlapping modes of communication expand the reach of political socialization but also introduce new complexities regarding authenticity, attention, and engagement.

To make sense of this study's findings, it's important to consider how technology, generational media habits, and political conversation all shape one another. Today's young adults navigate political socialization not just through face-to-face interactions, but also within a digital public sphere that is shaped – and sometimes distorted by algorithms and online dynamics.

2.5 The Creation of Identity and Self: “Online & On-the-Ground”

The creation of identity forms through every interaction people does with one another. To ask “Who are you?”, is to ask oneself the same – “What makes you, you?”. The simplest form of interaction goes a long way in understanding that identity is defined by them, by understanding the person in front of you. As it was discussed before, identity is not a singular thing, people must have identities to fit into the world of hierarchy – to be a parent or a child, a student or a teacher, all these identities relate to factors like family, social groups, workplace, schools and so forth.

“Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom”, as the great Aristotle said. Understanding self, questioning “What makes you, you?”, is the foundation of becoming ‘someone’ in the grand scheme of things – that someone who thinks they know the ins and outs of society, what is it is, and what it is not, unclear whether they are right or wrong, part of the system, or labelled as not.

The compounds of the virtual world force an individual to combine the features and characteristics they have of the offline and online world. A person's digital identity is

made up of the information shared during online interactions or exchanges, and it can change depending on what each situation requires (Valkenburg, Schouten & Peter, 2005). The virtual world presents a space filled with ephemeral cultures and identities, just like in the 'on-the-ground' reality. Countless ideas of identities and cultures have flown around ever since the creation of 'self', and yet almost all of them have become niche, disappeared completely, or become the norm for the grander part of society. Sub-cultures are no longer part of the idea of 'not fitting in the system that requires a certainty', the innards of sub-cultures are now for everyone to enjoy, and people who do, are rarely questioned to be part of a group. People can dye their hair acid green, pink and blue and not be questioned about being punk – a slang like 'fam' belonging to the British inner-city Black youth can be uttered by white-collar Caucasians and never be questioned. These things are no longer part of, and an indication of a person's socioeconomic state, they have become a part of the norm, these sub-cultural characteristics do not dictate an individual's identity anymore, all thanks to a specific creation, called the Internet.

With the Internet came the evolution of grander globalization, broadening the social world of individuals and expanding the sphere of global engagement amongst people of all backgrounds and identities, enabling them to represent themselves virtually in whatever fashion they fancy. Representation is an important concept which highlights how, even though media images appear realistic and convincing, they do not accurately reflect the real world (Asgharkiya, 2009). People represent themselves by providing selected imagery, offering ideas that may not always be theirs, and feelings that represent their façade and not their truest selves. This idea of cyberspace is an escape, an escape from bias, from prejudice. It is solely dependent on the individual on whether

or not they would take this escape for granted, by not being naïve enough to fall for the traps of this vast space and the individuals who surround it, who take every bit of advantage to benefit from. After all, cyberspace is a state of mind, shared by countless people who are interconnected within this virtual environment through language and experiences. Although separated by space and time, these individuals are linked through networks of digital technologies and platforms.

Within these social network sites, people gain a digital identity, an identity which is not determined by any nationality, land, language, national and local culture, but through interests in certain subjects which gather these people. It makes them build their identities within the virtual space (Memar, Adlipor and Khaskar, 2011). That is precisely how the ‘Meme Culture’ has become a prevalent feature within cyberspace – people all around the globe have something in common to laugh at, to work on, and to be a part of. Without the creation and circulation of memes, social networking sites would lack much of their cultural richness, rendering them relatively empty and uninteresting spaces.

The things individuals do within the virtual world, activities and every engagement that results in the exchange of information represent the user, their ideas, needs and feelings. Whatever they find humour within the virtual world, whatever activity they find amusing to be part of, is the sum of their identity, and their experiences and beliefs in the world of ‘on-the-ground’ engagement shape a complacent mind within the virtual world. After all, the virtual world is an anonymous space, people do not always suffer the consequences of what they have expressed in Cyberspace. It is a place to remove masks, to be free of labelling and hatred, to be free of consequences – to be free of the norms that make up societies. The easiest thing to do in this world is to stay

quiet when your idea is nothing but a fraction compared to what the masses believe in. All people do is stay quiet, put on a smile and go on, because they know that if they don't, consequences will be inevitable. People fight over the most insignificant of things, families break apart, friends leave, and people lose their jobs. To some, it is necessary to believe in the same God, to support the same political party, and do things the same way that it was. People are afraid of change; they always were and always will be, because to change is to leave behind everything that once made you who you are. In traditional societies, children are taught the same way as their parents, they grow up to be the same, and have the same ideas and beliefs. For the most part, to continue a culture is a sacred duty, but a change is always required to step forward – to carry on the customs and ideas of the people who came before is important, but not as important as the children of tomorrow. Leaving them in darkness for the ideals of yesterday is inhumane. Still, as the age of modernization and the age of the Internet developed into what it is today, children of tomorrow now can look elsewhere and not just at the ideals of their parent. People can follow whichever path they choose, but unfortunately, they sometimes must follow the path they decided privately, because the consequences outweigh the idealistic nature of freedom, even in the modern world.

2.6 Political Socialization – “Imprints of the Past, Foundations of the Future”

Forming an opinion, an ideal in this age of prevalent online status quo is like standing in the fresh breeze, one might feel in two distinct and separate ways – one may feel like the king of the world, loved and supported by the masses, and the other gets sick, crumble within themselves for speaking up, yet however justified getting sick through the breeze is, it is not up to the masses to be the judge, jury and executioner; after all, the foundations of democracy were built on the free will, the free speech of men, and

the court of public opinion does not cause the sickened idea to vanish, it simply lives on, maybe not publicly for all the eyes to see, but silently, especially in today's world where even the most insignificant information makes its way through the unending web that contains almost everything in the written history.

Politics has always been a very grand yet tender subject. Democracy has allowed individuals to speak their minds regarding the opposition. After all, that is the purpose of democracy – to solve problems without resorting to violence, without resorting to the very instinctive behaviour of human nature. Political discussions and socialization have been the foundation of deliberative democracy, where people share ideas and ideals and talk about politics, “where citizens share information about public affairs and participate in political processes” (Kim, 1999, p.361). Interpersonal discourse has been one of the exclusive ways of political socialization, whether it is between relatives, peers, or co-workers. It is one of the only ways for a transactional model of communication, where all parties involved participate and add to the subject. Political socialisation was much more reserved before the creation of the Internet. People listened to their families and their surroundings to form opinions. Over time, the ability to change ideals became apparent – it was up to those individuals to decide what to do with their years of experience in political discourse.

The socialization process never stops, it is an ongoing process that shapes societies, let alone individuals, and especially now with the age of the Internet, political socialization has the means to instigate a new pair of eyes for individuals to look at the world. Everyone within this new sphere could be an active speaker and not just a listener, they can speak their minds, change their minds, and change the minds others.

Taking part in political discussions on social media is recognized as a significant influence on users' levels of participation and the strength of their social networks (Gilde Zuniga et al., 2014). As discussed above, exchanging ideas and views is the foundation of working democracies, with these exchanges, individuals start to express themselves more freely (Price, Nir, Cappella, 2006), and every bit of communication adds to the knowledge of individuals, and with more knowledge gathered through communication, there is always the chance "of being exposed to dissenting opinions" (Mutz, 2006), which is what a healthy democracy is for, to hear, to gather, to express, most of the time.

Although this new sphere of political discussions and socialization is a leeway of foremost freedom of discourse, the decision of most individuals to participate in such topics is questioned – the majority of users seem to shy away from the Internet's participatory culture, preferring not to be visible to a wide audience (Edelmann, 2013). According to Nielsen (2006), the principle of '90:9:1' within an online community is a prevalent feature that shows the average gestures and movements of individuals following the subject they are met with. This principle states that 90 per cent of Internet users on social platforms simply view and analyse other people's contents, making them the 'lurkers' of the Internet. On the other hand, 9 per cent of the users occasionally choose to publicize content for the masses on various platforms, and 1 per cent of these users are active participants who engage in discussions with comments of their own.

The name 'lurker' may have unpleasant insinuations, especially when one associates 90 per cent of Internet users with such a name. Someone who is "actively" non-participatory, does not necessarily make them invaluable to such discussions. Lurkers are valid peripheral members who engage with a community by observing and learning

about its intricate dynamics without actively participating (Honeychurch et al., 2017). As stated above more than one time, socialization is an infinite process, there is no such thing as a “non-active user”, everyone within a sphere, whether it is online or on-the-ground, has active ears to listen, eyes to see, and if the need arises, a mouth to speak. Being a lurker in any of these spheres prolongs the process of amalgamation of knowledge. The lurkers and the participators do the same thing in different ways, with a mouth, a pen, with a stamp on the ballot paper – and the one with the majority is the one with the power.

There are myriad reasons for individuals not partake in such political discussion, whether on the Net or in front of peers or a crowd. People can be reserved to speak their minds about specific topics; it does not matter if it is about politics or not – people withdraw themselves when they are in the minority – when there are not enough people to stand beside them and suppress the incoming noise. Engaging in political discussions can lead to personal or group conflicts, which many people prefer to avoid (Jorda & Goyanes, 2022).

Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann’s (1974) “Spiral of Silence” is an outstanding theory that encapsulates people's will to speak when they are concerned with being cast out for having diverged opinions and ideals compared to the majority. Research done by Rodriguez-Virgili, Fernandez and Serrano-Puche (2020) and also Hampton et al. (2017) indicate that social media is one of the main perpetrators of the Spiral of Silence, hindering expressive thoughts in political discussions among users of the Net. That of course may not always be the case, there will always be people bold enough to speak up, and brave enough to persist – “Users with strong opinions appear to overcome this ‘silence’, perceiving higher levels of attitude congruence, and being

more than willing to express their opinions on such issues” (Hampton et al., 2017, p.1103).

Treré (2020) suggests that every social media platform encourages distinct types of behaviors and ways of engaging in discussions. While X (Twitter) and Facebook function as “frontstage” platforms where users often face overexposure, WhatsApp serves as “backstage” space that can offer lurkers a more comfortable and secure setting, encouraging them to engage more actively (Goyanes & Skoric, 2021). No matter how, a fraction of exposure in the world of political discourse has the tendency to change individuals' viewpoints – no matter how active or a lurker one may be, the smallest amount of involvement is enough for people to view the world and the politics which surrounds it with a different lens – one may actively engage in discussions, change opinions or the opinions of themselves, or be a lurker, feed on the political information of others, learn from them, reflect upon their ideas and reconsider the ideals they once held (Honeychurch et al., 2017).

2.6.1 Political Discussions on Social Media: “To Persuade, or To Be Persuaded”

The prospect of change is often perceived as unsettling, and many societies tend to resist it – whether it involves altering ideas, ideals, religious beliefs, or transforming one’s own identity beyond the constraints of socially constructed roles and expectations – representing what some theorists call the “false-self”. The nature of change is inevitable, but in the absence of questioning, the allure of comfort becomes appealing enough that individuals remain content even as underlying conditions deteriorate. But there will always be figures to show the rotting nature of comfort people are confined in, to persuade them to step outside – and there will always be those who are to be persuaded, and even then, the persuasion goes both ways, the idea

of “ying-yang” – one cannot continue its existence without the other, and the possibility of change grows stronger.

Research by scholars such as Krackhardt (1992), McCombs and Shaw (1972), and Weimann (1994) has demonstrated the impact of news media, opinion leaders, and both strong and weak family connections on persuasion. All of this influences a shift within the political standpoint of individuals within the “on-the-ground” world, and it has been stated that “close-knit social connections make the process of persuasion much easier” (Krackhardt, 1992, p.238). On the other hand, as Fogg (2008) suggests, the creation and the rise of social networking allowed citizens on a global scale, to be able to change their beliefs and behaviors.

In this age of consumerism, the gluttony towards social media is apparent, and this lust for information, for understanding, is in the nature of humankind. People either seek better understanding, or support the ideals they hold as zealots, forever in line, forever devoted. Research that examined the relationship between political persuasion and political discussions (Ardévol-Abreu et al., 2017), opinion leadership (Weeks et al., 2017), and civil reasoning found positive links that support the influence the aforementioned remarks hold within social media (Gil de Zuniga, Barnidge and Diehl, 2018). These studies indicate that both political and non-political uses of social media can cause individuals to rethink or alter their political opinions, particularly among those who rely on social media for news consumption (Diehl et al., 2016).

Another critical aspect of social media, as per the study done by Weeks et al. (2017), is that social networking sites have amplified the influence of highly active users and prosumers in disseminating political information and enhancing the process of

persuading others. While Weeks point out that only a small portion of their sample (12.5%) meets the criteria for highly engaged prosumers, they also highlight that increased social media engagements leads users to view themselves as more politically influential (Goyanes & Skoric, 2021).

An influential figure of guidance is always needed at every step of an individual's lifespan, who guides to create the "perfect specimen" to live out in the "perfect world" of their ideals. These figureheads are not always figures of mass intelligence or mass power. They can be the everyday individual, casting light on facts they deem interesting – they deem a necessity, and the power of persuasion is between the lips. The infinite power a mouth has is an undeniable fact that makes communication inevitable, and through communication, comes political discourse. Through politics, the world keeps on spinning.

This plethora of unique online services provides individuals with ideas they might have deemed uninteresting or dangerous if they had encountered it in a group of minorities. But within this system of grandeur online communication, no idea is in the minority, and every idea has the potential to become something more significant. What a mouth does is apparent in this history of the world – a monarchy toppled by the ideas of equality, democracies questioned, rights fought and earned – all because of something a mouth said, something a mouth deemed essential to rally the people with equal minds, even well before the creation of the Internet. In this day and age, all the Internet does in this regard, is to make these progressive moves easier to commit, create a convenience for people to look for ideas, persuade others for the same ideals, and make or break a system to fit their narrative – it has always been this way, conflicts arose because one side believes in the betterment of "their" world, and so does the other.

This convenience has helped spread ideas, a spread for change – people don't have to quietly whisper their opinions if they find those who believe in the same, they don't have to wear façades to fit in, to be a part of something.

2.7 Spiral of Silence

The Spiral of Silence theory, developed by Noelle-Neumann, suggests that people are less likely to express their opinions if they believe they are in the minority, due to fear of social isolation, and even in some cases, the fear of incarceration caused by the state, or those who possess the power to take such an action. This leads to a “spiral” where dominant opinions appear stronger, while dissenting views become increasingly silenced.

2.7.1 The Spiral “On the Ground”

The environment an individual finds themselves in can become their inevitable destiny regarding beliefs, ideologies, opinions, and the overall understanding of how life should move on. It is not always up to these individuals to make their conclusions on certain subjects; instead, they should have it served on a platter. As that platter gets closer and comfort seeps into every nook and cranny, that individual forgets to look for something else, not realizing they are in a shell of comfort, confined by someone else's opinion. It is always important to look for something else, to broaden the spectrum, and to understand even if one doesn't align with oneself. Yet in this world of “ifs and buts”, the nature of humankind, their curiosity, simply doesn't work where it is supposed to be. People are afraid to be disparate because those who inhabit disparate worlds of thought often fear isolation, “thus triggering the creation of a spiral, in which individuals fall silent about their political opinions” (Turner and Sparrow, 1997, p.122). Not only the fear of social exclusion, but the fear that extends beyond that, including the fear of incarceration or state-led consequences. Particularly in

authoritarian or semi-authoritarian societies, expressing minority opinions may lead to surveillance, censorship, or even legal action, thus amplifying the spiral effect.

According to Christina Malaspina (2014, p.7), “Noelle-Neumann’s spiral of silence (1974) theory is based on four main principles”:

First principle recalls that society threatens individuals with isolation, and so “cohesion in the social collective must be constantly ensured by a sufficient level of agreement on values and goals” (Noelle-Neumann, 1991, p.258). Second principle claims that individuals fear of becoming “social isolates” (Sanders et al, 1985). Third principle addresses the idea that, “People constantly assess the climate of opinion through their personal relationships and through media in order to maintain a high level of awareness concerning the social consensus” (Moreno-Riano, 2002, p.67). And according to her fourth principle, “Based on their perception of the climate of opinions, people will be willing or reluctant to speak out” (Oh, 2011, p.2).

These principles highlight the fact that the sole purpose of this spiral is to establish social control, creating and assessing sanctions for those who do not align with the public opinion of the masses, peers, or families. “Noelle-Neumann’s original formulation of the theory was made in a mass-media context, in which the media were seen as exercising a “strong influence on individuals’ estimates of majority opinion” (Neuwirth, 2000, p.139), “and on their conception of social reality and social climate” (Shahanan, 2004, p.414). However, in this day and age, the formation of the Internet and social media platforms has partially diminished some of these characteristics Noelle-Neumann and other thinkers put forth and added new opportunities that were once the cause of sanctions to take place.

2.7.2 The Spiral Online

Unlike the dynamics of traditional media, the willingness and the ability to voice opinions within the vast confinements of online platforms is apparent. People have the means to talk, and the people to back them up. However, that does not result in a utopia of free speech, where every opinion is regarded as sacred – there will always be those with diverging ideas, some with respect and some with not. These diverging arguments are a reason for a spiral of silence within online environments.

Malaspina puts forward two studies on the formation of online spiral of silence;

The study of the climate of opinion in online settings has shown that even extreme opinions may be seen as moderate, thus triggering a ‘spiral of moderated expression’ (McDevitt et al, 2003). Schulz and Roessler’s (2012, p. 346) more recent research into the changing climate of opinion online showed that individuals select online information by following a ‘subjective-pluralistic pattern (Malaspina, 2014, p.9).

Another prevalent factor that instigates a change in the willingness to speak out is Yun and Park’s (2011) idea of anonymity within online platforms. It is never easy for people to commit to the ideas they hold when that idea struggles against the hegemony. Online platforms create an environment, where being anonymous directly correlates to the attenuation of the tendency to conform to the view of others. The fear of isolation – the primary sanction for not conforming to the hegemonic ideas, dwindles with anonymity because there are no faces to blemish, no mouths to sew, and no personality to degrade forever. As the fear of these sanctions disappears when the façade is displayed, there is no point in conforming to the expected norms. “Online individuals feel less constrained by social pressures and sanctions” (Oh, 2011, p.9).

Political discourse has always been limited by the fear of sanctions – the fear of isolation. These fears frequently turn into the rotting shell of comfort, where the ideas of others seem sweet, simply because it is given, and not looked for. This “spiral” exists solely because one is either too fearful, or too comfortable to speak, or to look for change. People closet themselves to get on with life, not only because of the fear that encapsulates a sense of exile but also because of the frightening nature of change, the nature of stepping outside of one’s shell. Yet, as social media platforms flourish in this day and age, the fear of liaising on sensitive topics, and the fear of socializing on political discussions dwindle, because now, there is something to conceal behind, and commune freely without having to whisper every step of the way.

In sum, political discourse is a step that achieves change. A change of ideas, a change of strength in said ideas. Through various means of communication, this “change” is possible, if only people are willing to crack the shell they are confined in. Those who fight for change – and those who follow quietly, or with a voice of their own, will create a pathway that opens possibilities for many more, enabling them to have a voice of their own, to stand against what they believe is wrong. Although the “Spiral” dawdles still, it has certainly dwindled in the wake of the Internet, and the social platforms which came after it. However, it is crucial to question how platforms and communities affect people who “stay on the ground”, and those who wander online.

2.8 Social Identity Theory – Adapting Identity for Social Acceptance

The instinctive behaviour of human kind is to find a place in this vast World – to be someone, a friend, a family, a co-worker, or a celebrity. Communication is a necessity for all things, to mine for those identities, to achieve change, and to be someone you

were not the day before. It is a step people take for survival, because without identities, what could an individual be?

Social identities arise as a consequence of any shared group membership, such as family groups, community membership, nationality or race, and can be seen as the psychological reification of these group-based memberships (Haslam, 2004). Key influences on the development of social identities include practices within families, within educational platforms, amongst peers, and through broader social forces such as the mass media.

It is all a façade to conform to the surroundings one finds oneself in, to fit in – as stated above, it is a necessity for survival, to be part of something that gives a sense of belonging, a sense of purpose and self-worth. Belonging instils feelings of unity and provides individuals the comforting sense that they are not alone in their experiences. The affiliations of people within the same group usually comes with shared goals, providing the needed purpose one needs, and the achievements they share furnish the group with self-worth. This sense within every identity group an individual belongs to is an important factor in the decisive aspect of political socialisation. A person who surrounds themselves in an environment of like-minded people often makes decisions based on the values that holds true to that particular group. However, if social identity teaches a single thing, that would be the reality of façades. It is a must to masquerade in an environment not attuned to the behaviour of a particular individual. These masks are there to shelter people from being their honest selves, selves that may be questioned, refused, or feared, and that's when the vast environment of cyberspace comes in to play.

2.8.1 The Internet & Social Identity – “Unmasked”

Anonymity is often seen as a means to achieve a desired change, a means to acquire a taste for something new. In the face-to-face lives of individuals, people frequently, and often repeatably interact with others to whom they do not reveal personal information, such as names, occupation, and so forth. However, the dilemma lies within the foundation of real anonymity, because despite this relative obscurity of self, these people could still recognize the person in a different setting. People sporadically engage in what Zick Rubin (1976) called the “strangers on a train” phenomenon, where people live through and share the most intimate details of their lives with total strangers, on the account that they will never meet again.

On the other hand, even when people “openly interact with strangers, providing information about themselves in an open space on the Internet, they often feel relatively anonymous” (McKenna & Bargh, 2000). With this feeling of obscurity, “people feel more relaxed when disclosing personal and intimate information to those whom they may well encounter online again, engaging in the “strangers on the Internet” phenomenon” (McKenna & Seidman, 2005, p.95). The ability to interact anonymously with others comes with the benefit of exploring self, to look for a change of ideas, beliefs, and values, while keeping it hidden from their existing relationships outside, and even inside cyberspace.

These ideas and values of distinct environments may sometimes correspond poorly, thus creating the need to wear a mask. A family of four, especially parents, may have diamond-like prides, solid to the point of indestructibility, sharing values and beliefs that do not align with the standards their kids may have put forth, brings arguments with it. On the outside, the kids put on their masks and act as if they believe in the

same things their parents have injected them with, to have a stable relationship with the people who bear them to life. On the contrary, their ideals are their own, they turn to others, those on the Net, or those who are on-the-ground, to look for something else, something more than the values they were brought up with. They socialise, they learn, they become someone else, all the while keeping up with their façades with those who do not share the same values as them.

Donning this façade is often a necessity in this life. Not everyone can be a beacon of change, but the duty of those who are not, is to support that beacon they believe in. They may be afraid to show their true ideals, in account of being terrified to lose relationships, their comfort zones, so the façades end up being the necessity they look towards. These social identities people set up for themselves is the foundation of political socialisation, because through their need for change, they meet someone new, and that someone new helps them see the World in a different light, and this forever goes on, because the need for change is the imperative nature of this World, without it, everything is blank, and a blank canvas changes more as one paints.

The theories discussed during this chapter, notably Neuman's Spiral of Silence and Social Identity Theory directly informed the development of the survey questions used in this study. For instance, certain questions relating to the willingness to share political views in various contexts were shaped by the Spiral of Silence theory, highlighting the majority opinion people assume and the worry of being isolated. Meanwhile, questions on group identity, conformity, and online self-identification were rooted in Social Identity Theory, which highlights how individuals align their attitudes with social groups to maintain a sense of belonging.

Both theories contributed to framing the core hypotheses of the study and served as a conceptual foundation for understanding how communication mode – online and on-the-ground, shaped the political socialisation process. By embedding these theoretical insights into the research design, the study ensures theoretical accuracy while maintaining its practical relevance.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the methodological framework of the study, detailing the research design, data collection instruments, sampling procedures, and analysis methods used to explore the influence of interpersonal and social media-based communication on the political socialization of college students. A descriptive and quantitative approach was employed to identify patterns and correlations within the target population. The research process included the development and distribution of an in-house questionnaire, supported by a pilot study conducted with participants outside of the main sample group to ensure reliability and validity. The following sections provide a detailed explanation of each component of the research process.

3.1 Research Design

This chapter outlines the research methodology employed to explore the influence of interpersonal relationships and the Internet on the development of political socialization among college students. This study uses a quantitative approach, relying on an online questionnaire to collect data from Turkish speaking students. This method ensures efficient data collection while providing key insights into the relationship between the two variables.

The study utilizes a quantitative case study design to examine the process of political socialization within Turkish speaking students – between the ages of 18 to 25 (30 at most), all from the Communication Faculty of Eastern Mediterranean University. This

approach enables a solid analysis of the dynamics between interpersonal communication and Internet usage while maintaining a focus on how these variables affect the process of political socialization. By collecting and analysing from a single case, this research design provides insights into trends specific to the selected demographic group.

In order to evaluate the influence of the aforementioned variables have on participants, a questionnaire was selected as the survey method in this study. Although, conducting interviews is a valuable method to gather intimate information regarding socialization, a questionnaire is arguably a better design when it comes to demographical information, accumulating more participants of different genders, backgrounds and political affiliation, hence why it is designed as a case study. It is also important to note that, since politics are a very sensitive topic, anonymity is a key factor in gathering more accurate and reliable information.

While designing the questionnaire, the main inspiration was Kyun Soo Kim and Yong-Chan Kim's (2007) work on the role of old and new media in shaping the political engagement of Korean youth. According to their research, they have analysed how exposure to traditional and new media influences political knowledge, discussions and participation.

3.2 Data Collection Tools

The questionnaire contains 25 questions in 5 main sections. The first part consists of background information of the participants which allows for the categorization and analysis of the information gathered from participants, which mainly includes gender,

age, and education level. These details will help analyse how political socialization varies across different demographic groups.

The second section focuses on understanding participants' habits related to political discussions and information gathering. It covers social media usage, face-to-face discussions, and preferred sources of political information. The third section evaluates participants' perceptions of how social media and face-to-face discussions influence their political views. It also explores their comfort levels and confidence in these communication methods. The fourth section compares the impact of social media and face-to-face interactions on shaping political opinions. Participants are asked to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of each medium. The final section concludes the questionnaire by gathering participants' preferences for political discussions and their opinions on which medium will have a greater influence on future political socialization. It also explores the perceived honesty and long-term impact of different communication forms.

In order to develop the most accurate and appropriate questions, few different scales were examined and concluded upon. But in order to complement the chosen scale, a categorization for the questions were to be made. So, to categorize each section with appropriate questions, three different researches were selected to help shape the questionnaire; Noelle-Neumann's (1974) Spiral of Silence, de Zúñiga, Abril and Rojas's (2009) Digital Political Participation, and McLeod and Shah's (2009) Political Information.

Categorization of Digital Political Participation can be traced back to de Zúñiga, Abril, and Rojas's (2009) article about how the Internet changes political environments. They

measured various forms of online activities, such as engaging in political discussions, and sharing political information. They created such a method that captured the frequency and type of political behaviours that represented participation within digital platforms.

Out of many of the researchers, Kim and Kim's (2007) article was similar in regard to the current research at hand – but rather than conducting it upon Turkish speaking youth, it looked at South Korean citizen's perception towards dominant and hegemonical opinions, as well as the fear of isolation that could arise as a result of speaking as the minority.

In McLeod and Shah's (2009) article, they discuss the interaction between media exposure and interpersonal communication as key factors shaping political participation and attitudes. While their work does not propose a formal scale regarding political information, it measures related concepts such as political participation and communication. Such a method of categorization would play an important role in examining the role of media in political socialization, especially regarding how media consumption influences political beliefs, engagement, and affiliation, hence why questions appropriate to this method was used.

Additionally, several questions were informed by Social Identity theory, particularly those addressing the influence of peer groups, anonymity and comfort in expressing political views. these were designed to assess how individuals navigate identity expression in both interpersonal and online settings, and whether perceived social norms or fear of judgement shape their political self-presentation.

To explore participants' attitudes and perceptions related to political communication, selected sections of the questionnaire employed a five-point Likert scale (strongly agree/5, through strongly disagree/1). These scaled questions were used to assess views on the influence of social media and face-to-face communication, the perceived openness of different platforms, and comfort levels in expressing political opinions. While Likert scale was a key component in capturing attitudes, the questionnaire also incorporated multiple-choice questions designed to gather usage habits, beliefs on the effects of both modes, and specific preferences in communication behaviour. This mixed structure enabled both quantitative and descriptive analysis, enriching the overall understanding of participants' communicative and political views and thoughts.

3.3 Population and Sample

This case study included undergraduate Turkish speaking university students between the ages of 18 to 25, with possible exceptions to graduate students, or even undergraduate students who may have exceeded the age of 25, limiting it to the age of 30. A Google Forms link of the questionnaire was distributed via social media platforms, department emails, and community groups (e.g., WhatsApp, Discord). Since the research primarily focuses on Turkish speaking students, the questionnaire was translated into Turkish with all its section descriptions.

This research focuses on undergraduate Turkish speaking Radio, Cinema and Television students of Eastern Mediterranean University, as well as Master students of the Communication Faculty. The total number of undergraduate Turkish students of Radio, Cinema and Television and Turkish Master students of the Communication faculty were calculated to be 155. Using Yamane's (1967) formula from the book;

“*Statistics: An Introductory Analysis*”, the total sample size needed for the appropriate margin of error was determined. The formula is as follows;

n = sample size – 155

N = population size – 155

e = margin of error - %5 (0.05)

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}$$

$$n = \frac{155}{1 + 155(0.05^2)}$$

The desired margin of error is approximately 5%, which equals to 0.05. Since the appropriate numbers above are apparent, the final result will be 111.7, rounding it up to 112 students for 5% of margin of error.

To ensure the reliability and validity of the research instrument, a pilot study was conducted with a sample of participants from outside the target group. Cronbach’s Alpha was calculated to assess internal consistency, yielding acceptable reliability scores across most items. Validity was supported through expert review during the development phase of the in-house questionnaire and refinement based on pilot feedback.

The final version of the questionnaire (see Appendix A) and the research ethics approval form (see Appendix B) are included in the Appendices section.

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

In order to understand what sort of effect online and “on-the-ground” communication have on political socialization process; it was important to establish a unique

questionnaire which could gather necessary information regarding the two variables within the span of the limited time the research has. The questionnaire was designed to be clear, with direct descriptions of each section underlying the importance and meaning they hold, adding the much-needed formality that lacks with every online questionnaire without an authoritative figure.

Before conducting the main procedure of data collection, five participants were chosen to participate in a pilot study to assess the questionnaire's validity, all of whom from outside the sample group. It was important to see how participants with different academic standings would settle with the original questionnaire. Participants were consisted of freshman, sophomore, junior, senior and graduate students. After a thorough examination, the participants were asked of their opinions and feedback in order for any modification needed to achieve the appropriate results. Based on the finding of this pilot study, the final version of the questionnaire was created and distributed to other participants.

25 distinct questions were issued to various individuals with different backgrounds, all between the ages mentioned above, with differentiating cycles in their educational standing. Data was collected using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) software for analysis purposes. The procedure for the data collection started in 9th of January, 2025, and concluded 23rd of January 2025.

3.7 Justification

The assumption underlying this study is that face-to-face communication allows for more meaningful discussions, critical thinking, and a deeper understanding of political happenings. In direct conversations, individuals are able to ask follow-up questions,

challenge viewpoints and engage in debates in a far more emotional state, experiencing firsthand the appropriate sensations the person in front has, leading to a stronger understanding of political concepts, whether differentiating, or similar viewpoints. Interpersonal discussions encourage critical engagement, which is essential in their process of political socialization (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995). Additionally, as stated in previous chapters, interpersonal discourse has been recognized as a key factor in political socialization, as it provides a space where individuals actively participate in discussions with peers, family, and colleagues.

On the contrary, the Internet and social media platforms provides access to an unprecedented variety of perspectives. Online discussions and political content expose individuals to viewpoints they might not encounter in their immediate social circles (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2014). The ability to access diverse perspectives through online platforms opens up opportunities for honest political opinions, as well as encouraging extreme viewpoints to be had, or to be exposed by. An argument can be made to assure the importance of both behaviours, as it is an unlikely occurrence in an unfamiliar environment – having the need to state an opinion. It is a powerful tool for engagement, to experience differentiating viewpoints, and even as a simple viewer – an audience of a political discourse, a simple like, or even a single view goes a long way for that opinion to be exposed to others, as that is how the Internet works, how the algorithms work.

This study aims to clarify the specific contributions of each communication method to political socialization, and determine whether one has more dominant influence than the other.

Chapter 4

FINDINGS AND DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter presents the statistical analysis of the survey responses collected to examine the aforementioned research question, “*Which mode of communication – interpersonal(face-to-face) or online – has a stronger influence on political socialization?*”. The research was conducted in the Faculty of Communication at Eastern Mediterranean University, with participants consisting of Turkish speaking students from the Cinema & TV undergraduate program as well as master's students from the Communication faculty.

The survey included a combination of multiple-choice questions, Likert scale-style questions (Strongly agree/5, Agree/4, Neutral/3, Disagree/2, Strongly disagree/1) and demographic questions to assess participants’ communication habits, political engagement, and perception of political socialization.

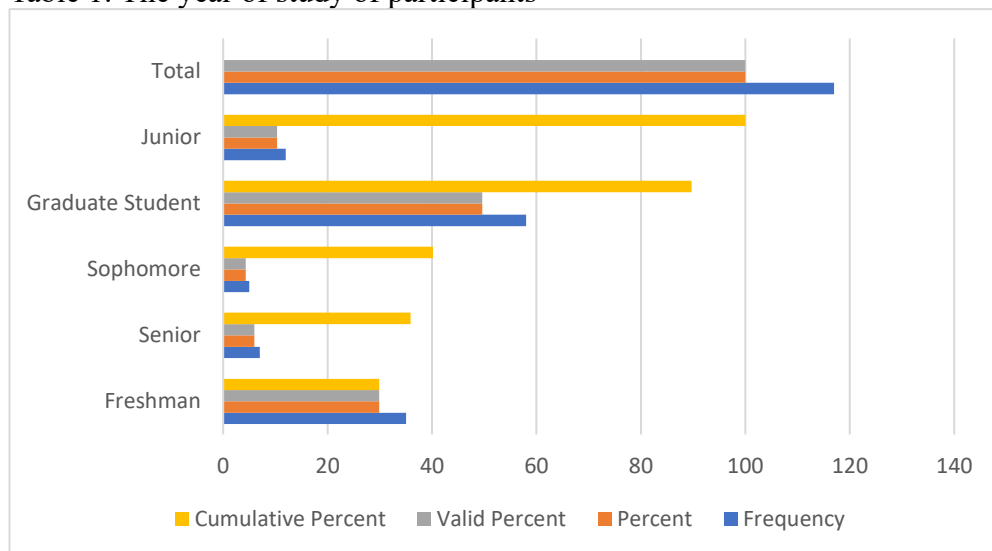
The data was analysed using SPSS, primarily applying frequency analysis to examine the distribution of responses. This technique provides insight into how often students engage in interpersonal and/or online political discussions and their perceived impact on the process of political socialization. The findings will help determine which mode of communication plays a stronger role in shaping political attitudes of young adults.

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The survey was completed by 117 respondents, consisting of 80 males (68.4%) and 37 females (31.6%), indicating a higher number of male Turkish students in the Undergraduate Cinema and TV studies, as well as the Master students of Communication faculty. The gender distribution suggests that the responses may reflect a stronger male perspective on political socialization, although female perspective is still present and represented.

Table 1 indicates the academic level of each participant in the study, with the largest group being Graduate students (49.6%), followed by freshman students (29.9%). The remaining respondents were Juniors (10.3%), Seniors (6.0%), and Sophomores (4.3%).

Table 1: The year of study of participants



The high proportion of graduate students suggests that a significant portion of the sample consists of students with advanced academic experience, which could influence their perspectives on political socialization.

4.2 Political Socialization and Communication Habits

Understanding how students engage in political discussions and consume political information is crucial in analysing the influence of both modes of communication on political socialization. This part of the analysis presents the second section of the survey, regarding students' preferred platforms for political discussions, their primary sources of political information, and their engagement levels in both online and on-the-ground discourse.

Survey respondents were asked which online platform they use the most for political discussions. The results show that X (formerly Twitter) is the most commonly used platform, with 42.7% of students preferring it, followed closely by Instagram (39.3%). In contrast, Facebook (7.7%), TikTok (7.7%) and Reddit (2.6%) had significantly lower usage for political discourse.

Table 2: Most used platforms by the students

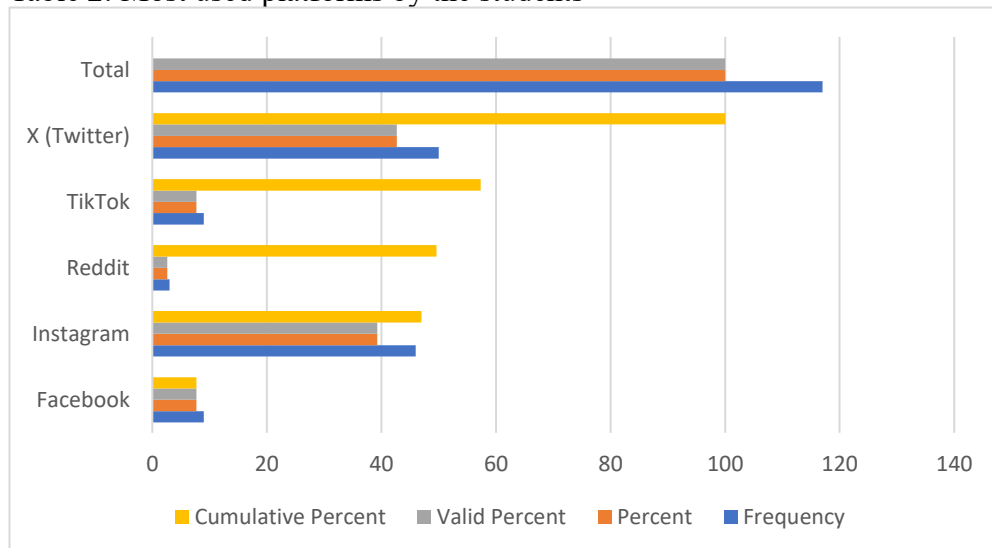


Table 2 indicates the descriptive statistics of students answering to their most used platform for political discussions on political discussions. The dominance of X and

Instagram suggests that students prefer platforms with wider range of interactivity, because compared to Facebook and Reddit, information is a lot more “chosen” than “given”. Very rarely that people come upon with the opinions of others whom they are not friends with or not following, unlike Instagram and X, which has an algorithm that pick and chooses certain posts depending on your clicks, likes and shares.

Table 3: The usual way of getting informed of political issues

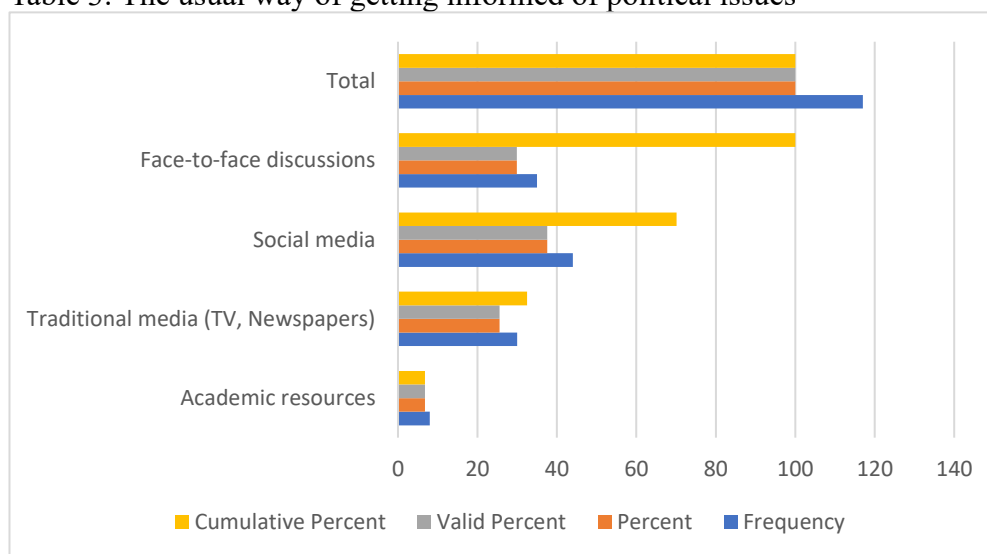


Table 3 indicates the preferred way of students on how they are usually informed on political issues. When asked about their primary sources of political information, social media (37.6%) was the most frequently chosen source, followed closely by face-to-face discussions (29.9%). Traditional media sources (25.6%) were also significant, while academic resources (6.8%) were the least utilized.

Table 4: Amount of time one engages in political discussions on social media

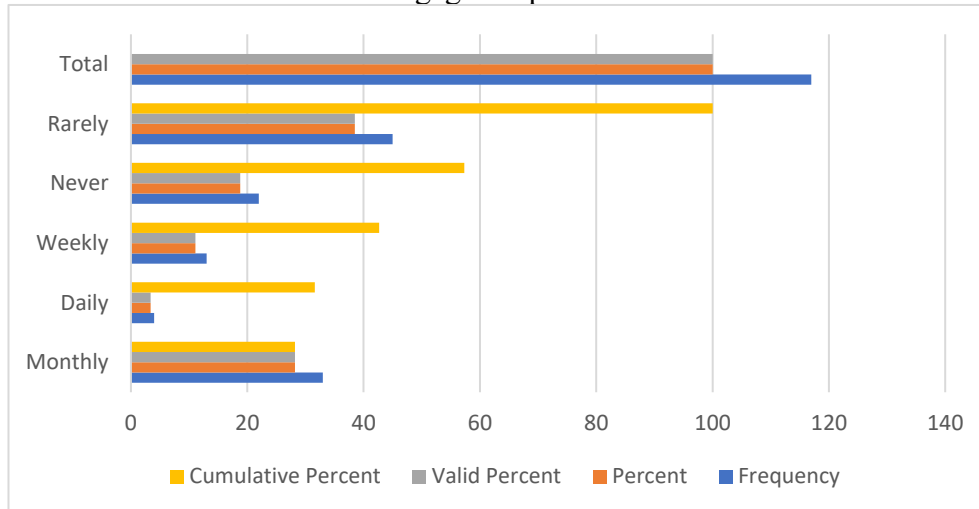
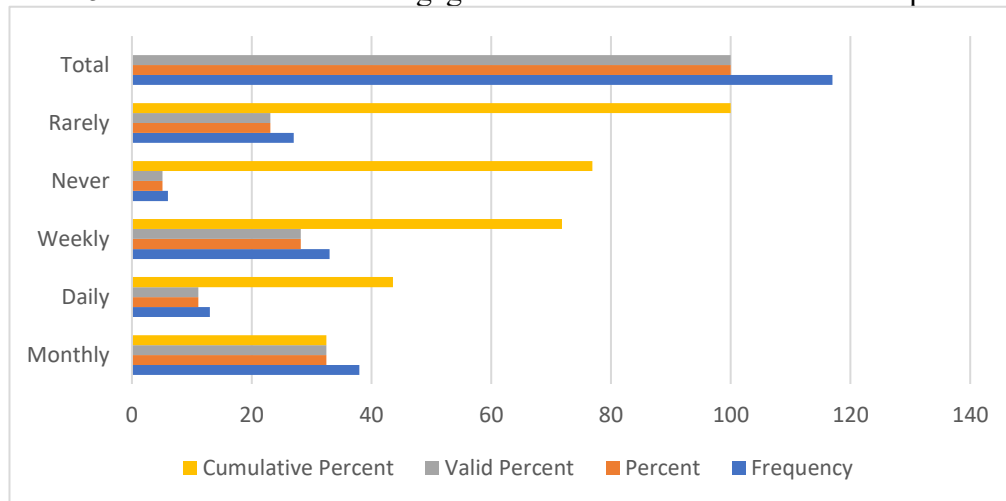


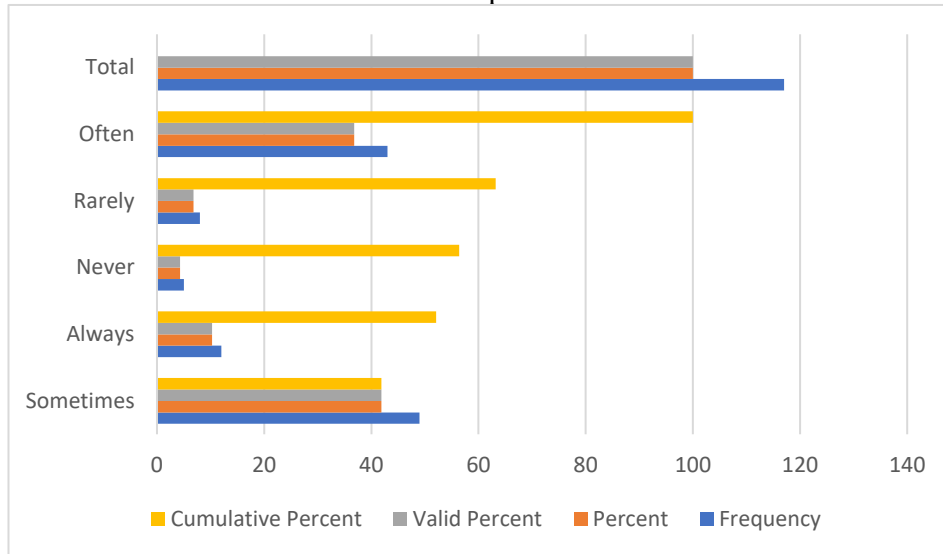
Table 4 indicates the descriptive statistics of students answering to their level of engagement in political discussions on social media. A majority of students (57.3%) either rarely or never engage in political discussions on social media, with only 3.4% engaging daily and 11.1% engaging weekly. This suggest that while social media is a key source of political information, it is not necessarily a platform where students actively discuss political topics.

Table 5: Amount of time one engages in face-to-face discussions with peers



In contrast, face-to-face discussions, as can be seen on Table 5, appear to be more common, with 71.8% of students engaging in political discussions at least once a month when the percentage of monthly, weekly and daily engagements are combined, compared to only 42.7% doing so on social media (Table 4). This indicates that interpersonal discussions remain a more frequent mode of political engagement among students.

Table 6: Amount of time one verifies political information



Lastly on Table 6, participants were asked how often they verify the political information they come across on social media before forming an opinion and sharing it others.

A significant portion of students (41.9%) verify political information only sometimes, while 36.8% verify it often. However, only 10.3% always fact check information, while 11.1%, the combined results of rarely and never, either rarely or do not verify information at all. These results indicate that while many students make an effort to verify political content, a large percentage remain susceptible to misinformation.

Moving on the next section of the survey, which examines perceptions of political socialization, it is essential to explore how these communication behaviours influence students' political beliefs and attitudes. The aforementioned data suggests that while social media provides exposure to political content, the depth and impact of political discussions may still be stronger in interpersonal settings.

Next part of the analysis will showcase how students perceive the role of these communication methods in their own political development, shedding light on whether interpersonal or online discussions have a greater influence on their political awareness, opinions and participation.

4.3 Perception of Political Socialization

This section analyses the perceived influence of both social media and face-to-face discussions on political socialization, based on participants' responses to the following questions. The aim is to examine the impact of exposure to diverse perspectives, confidence in political information, and comfort in sharing opinions.

Table 7: The influence of social media on political views

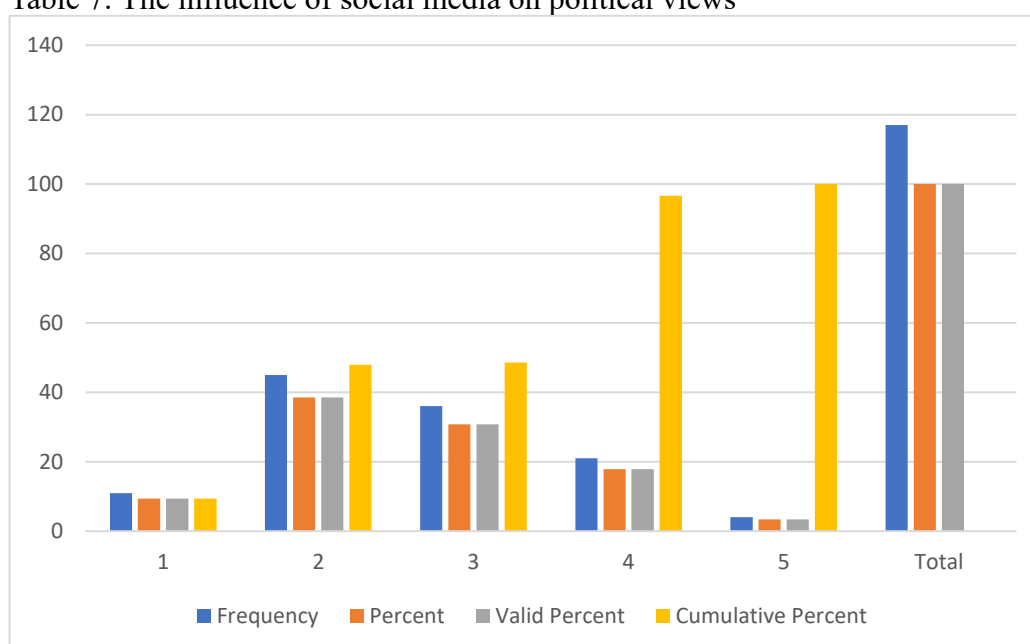
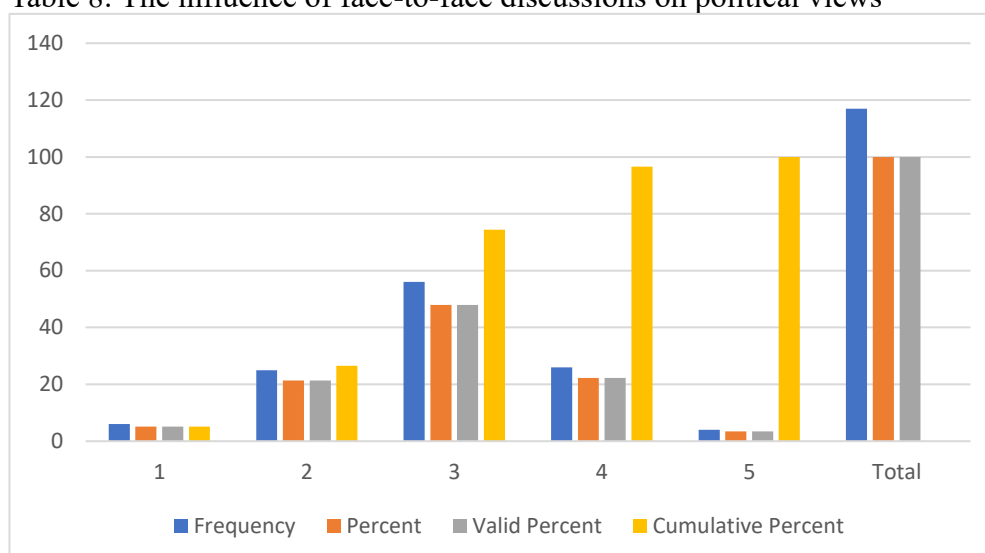


Table 7 asked students on a scale of 1 to 5 how influential they think social media discussions are on their political views. The results indicate that the majority of respondents disagreed (38.5%) or stayed neutral (30.8%) regarding the influence social media have on their political views. Only 17.9% agreed that social media has a

significant impact on their opinions, suggesting a general scepticism towards its persuasive capabilities.

Table 8: The influence of face-to-face discussions on political views



In comparison to the previous Likert scale analysis, Table 8 asked students on a scale of 1 to 5 how influential they think face-to-face discussions are on their political views, and the results indicate that face-to-face discussions were chosen as slightly more influential, with 22.2% agreeing, and 3.4% strongly agreeing that they influence political views. this may suggest that interpersonal interactions hold more persuasive power than online discussions, although very slightly.

In both Table 7 and Table 8, the respondents who stayed neutral, 30.8% and 47.9% respectively, creates an interesting dilemma, as it opens up the gates to a different understanding to how the human mind works. The indecisiveness of the respondents regarding the influence of both modes of communication on political socialization gives a peculiar idea to one's mind; why the neutrality rather than a precise answer to a given question?

The significant neutrality in both questions highlights an important dimension of political socialization, as people may not be fully aware of the factors that shape their political beliefs. This neutrality may also indicate a resistance to self-categorization, as respondents might not want to admit that external modes of communication, whether digital or interpersonal, have the power to shape their opinions and ideas. Individual agency is challenged in everyday life, in its every form, and acknowledging influence may in fact be perceived as a concession of control over one's own beliefs. The human mind values a sort of autonomy, and the reluctance to attribute influence to external factors, whether social media or interpersonal discussions, suggests an inherent desire to maintain a sense of independent thought. In this sense, the results of neutrality may not be a sign of indifference, but rather a subconscious need to defend against the idea of an external factor influencing the opinions of individuals beyond their control.

Table 9: Amount of time one changes their political perspectives after a discussion online

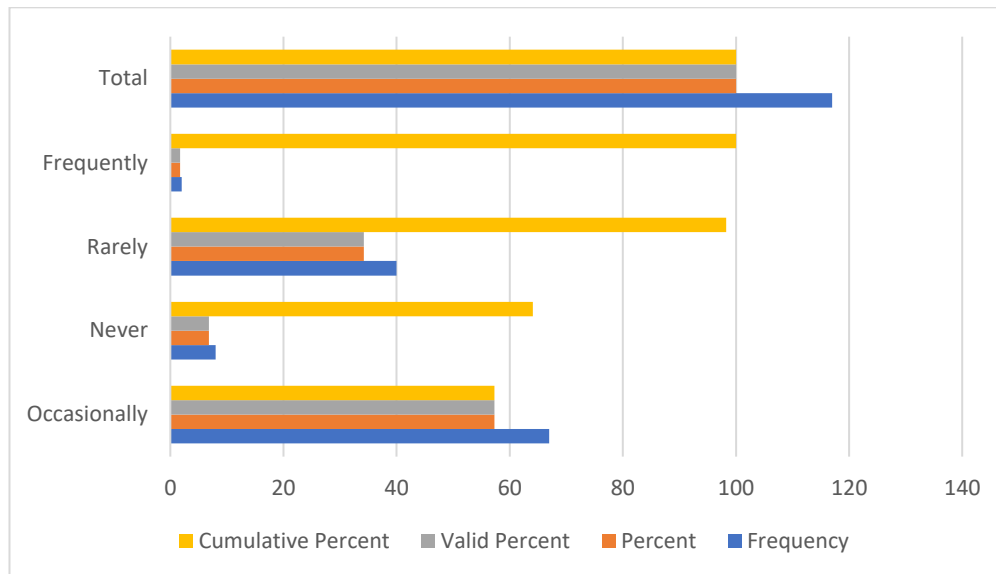


Table 9 asked students the question about the amount of change political discussions cause on political perspectives. A significant portion of participants (57.3%) stated that their perspective changes only occasionally, while 34.2% rarely experience change and only 1.7% frequently change their views. this suggests that political discourse on social media is more about reinforcement rather than transformation of political opinions.

Table 10: Level of comfort when sharing political opinions online and on-the-ground

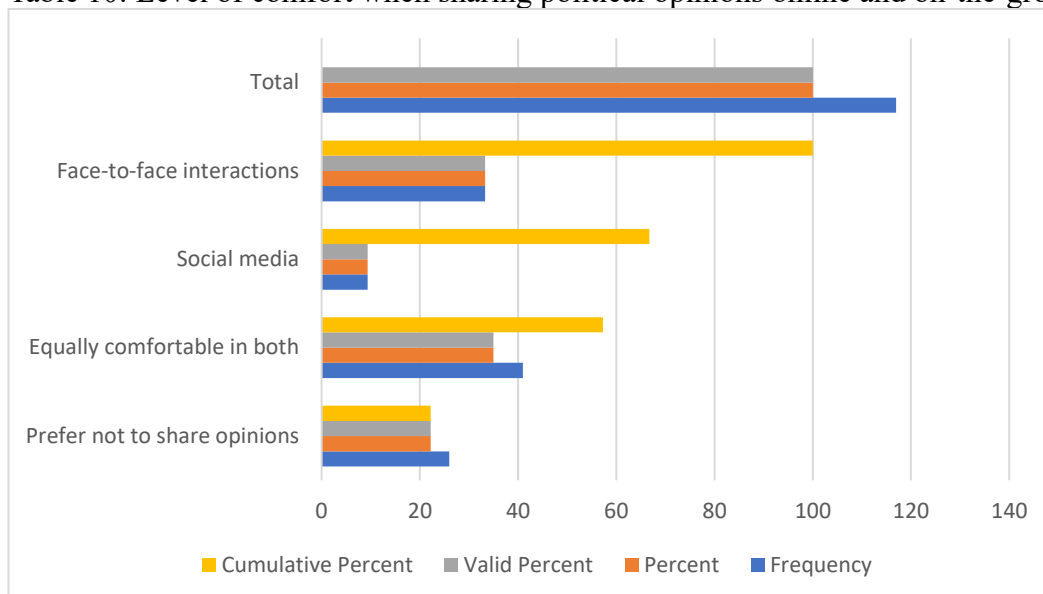


Table 10 asked students which the mode of communication they feel most comfortable when sharing political opinions. While 35% of participants feel equally comfortable sharing political views online and “on-the-ground”, a higher percentage of 33.3% prefers face-to-face discussions, while only 9.4% favouring social media. Additionally, 22.2% avoid political discussions altogether, reflecting a sort of hesitancy in political expression.

Table 11: Mode of communication respondents feel as more effective for shaping political opinions

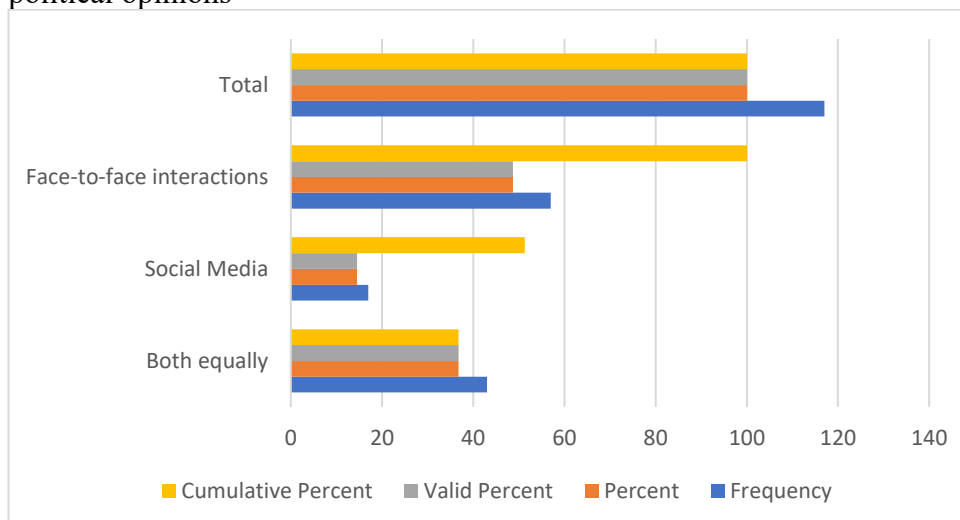


Table 11 shows the thoughts of the respondents when asked which mode of communication they feel is more effective when shaping political opinions. Majority of respondents (48.7%) consider face-to-face interactions more effective in shaping political opinions, while only 14.5% believe social media has a greater impact. However, a substantial number of respondents (36.8%) perceive both modes as equally effective.

Table 12: Social media and face-to-face interaction comparison on whether one is more likely to expose an individual to diverse viewpoints

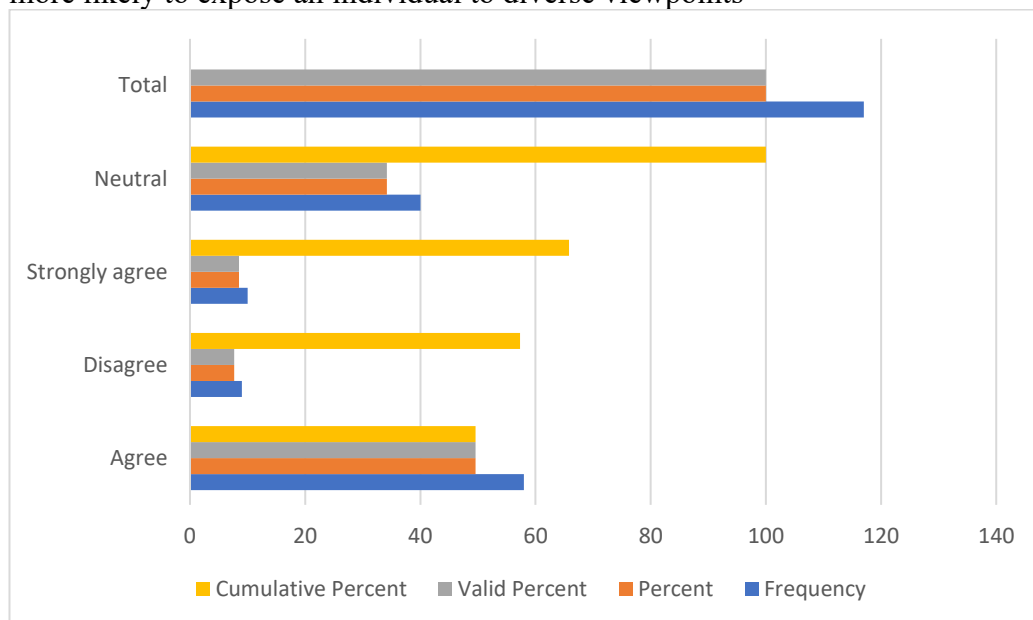


Table 12 asked the thoughts of students on whether if they believe social media is more likely to expose them to diverse viewpoints compared to face-to-face interactions. Almost 50% of participants believe social media exposes them to more diverse viewpoints compared to face-to-face discussions, while 34.2% remain neutral, and only 7.7% of respondents disagreed, with none strongly disagreeing in the process.

Table 13: The accuracy of political information received via face-to-face interactions compared to social media discussions

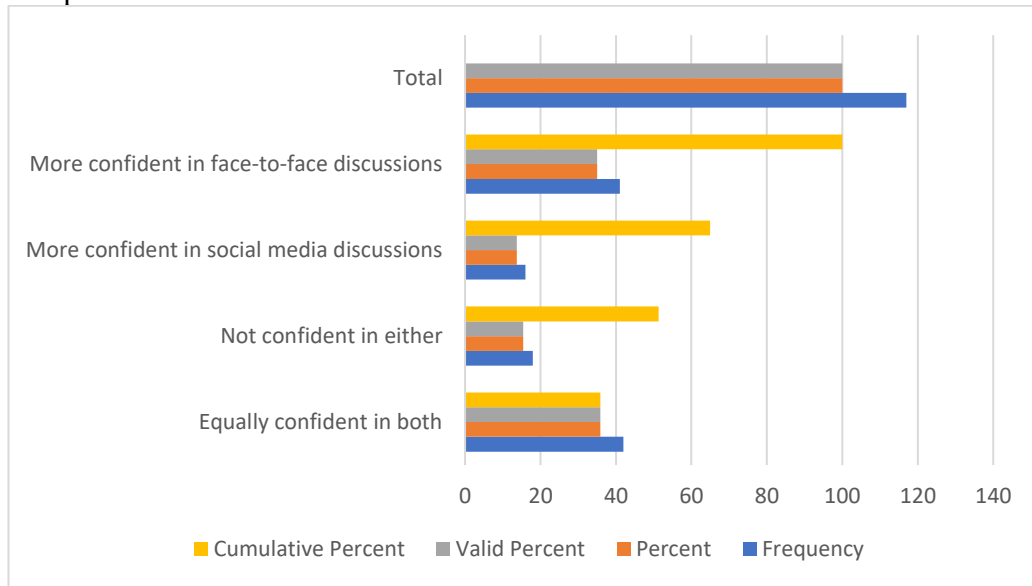


Table 13 questioned the students' feeling towards the accuracy levels of political information received from face-to-face interaction compared to social media. Regarding trust in political information, 35% of respondents trust face-to-face discussions more, while 13.7% prefer social media as a reliable source of information. On the other hand, 35.9% are equally confident in both, suggesting that trust, may depend more on the context rather than the communication medium itself.

4.4 Perception of Communication Platforms and Political Discourse

This section explores participants' perceptions regarding the effectiveness and quality of political discussions across the two communication modes. By comparing online and on-the-ground interactions, the aim is to understand how respondents evaluate these modes in terms of engagement, influence and meaningful dialogue. The findings provide further insight into which mode of communication is perceived as more constructive and impactful in shaping political understanding.

Table 14: Students were asked if social media provides a freer platform for political engagement compared to face-to-face discussions

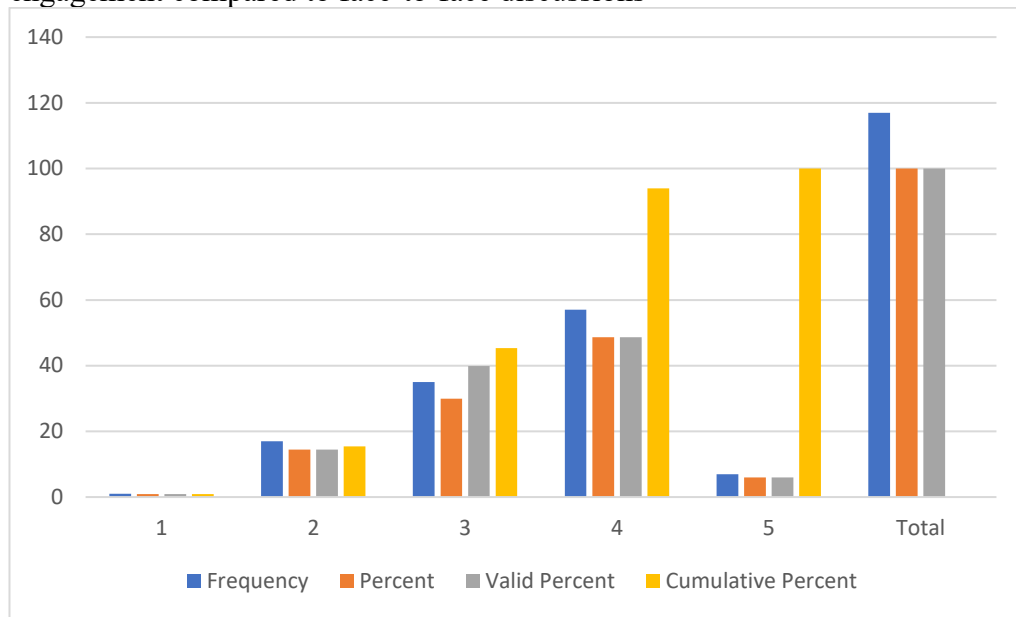


Table 14 shows the Likert Scale statistics on a scale of 1 to 5 on the thoughts of student regarding the statement; “Social media provides a free platform for political engagement than face-to-face discussions”. A large portion of respondents (48.7%) agreed that social media offers a better platform for political engagement, while 29.9% remained neutral. the high agreement amount may indicate the accessibility and reach of social media, but the number of neutral respondents, similar to Table 7 and 8, highlights the complex nature of perceived freedom in digital against physical discourse.

Table 15: If students ever changed or thought about changing political views after a discussion on social media

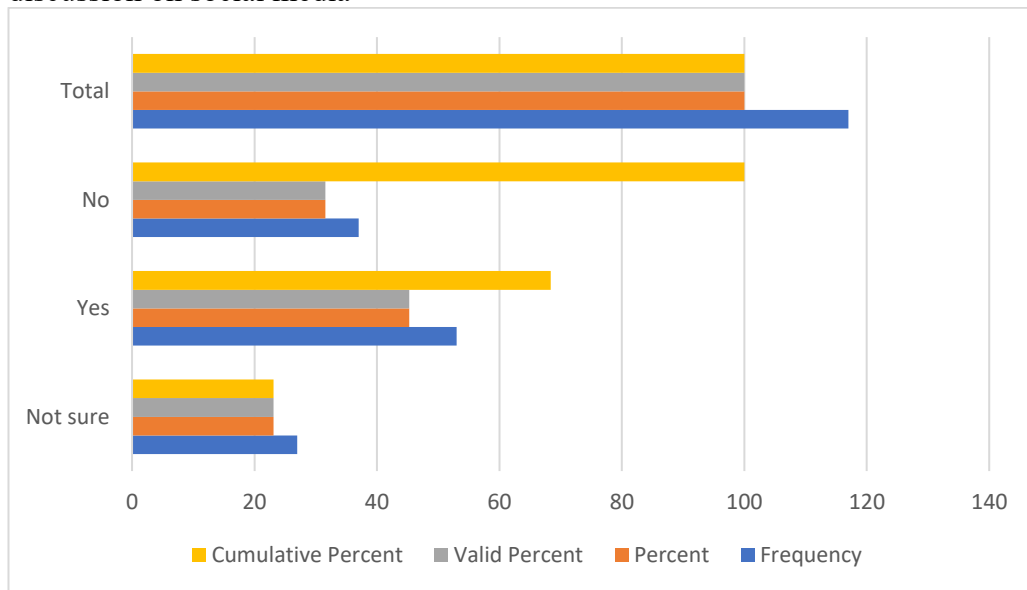


Table 15 asked students if they have, or have ever thought about changing their political beliefs after a discussion on social media. Almost half of the respondents (45.3%) admitted that political discussions on social media either changed or made them consider changing their political stance, which is indeed a notable indication of an influence. However, the significant number for “Not sure” responses (23.1%) once again illustrates the difficulty in pinpointing when and how our political views evolve, perhaps indicating how gradual and somewhat unconscious political socialization can be.

Similar to Table 7 and 8, 23.1% of respondents who answered “Not sure” and staying somewhat neutral, may reflect the complex and often unconscious process of the evolution of political beliefs. This ambiguity in their answers resonates with Gidden’s (1998) notion of reflexive modernity, where he believes an individual always is in constant state of negotiating for identity amidst competing sources of information, yet are unable to often realize when or how their views have evolved.

Table 16: Whether or not face-to-face political interactions is more respectful and constructive compared to social media

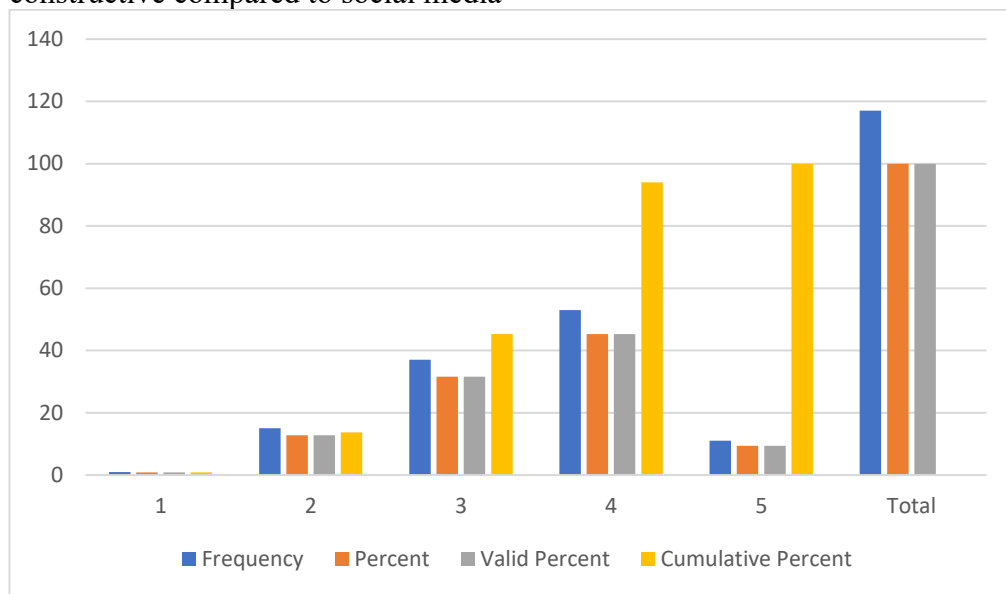


Table 16's Likert Scale graph on a scale from 1 to 5 indicates the opinions of students when it comes to which mode offers a more respectful and constructive environment. Half (54.7%) of the respondents agreed that face-to-face interactions allow for more respectful and constructive discussions. It is plausible that while face-to-face communication is seen as more civil, the online realm could still be an important field in regards to anonymity and of course, a broader reach – even if perceived as less respectful, as it can be seen by the number of respondents staying neutral (31.6%) and disagreeing (13.7%).

Table 17: The medium which is better for understanding political issues

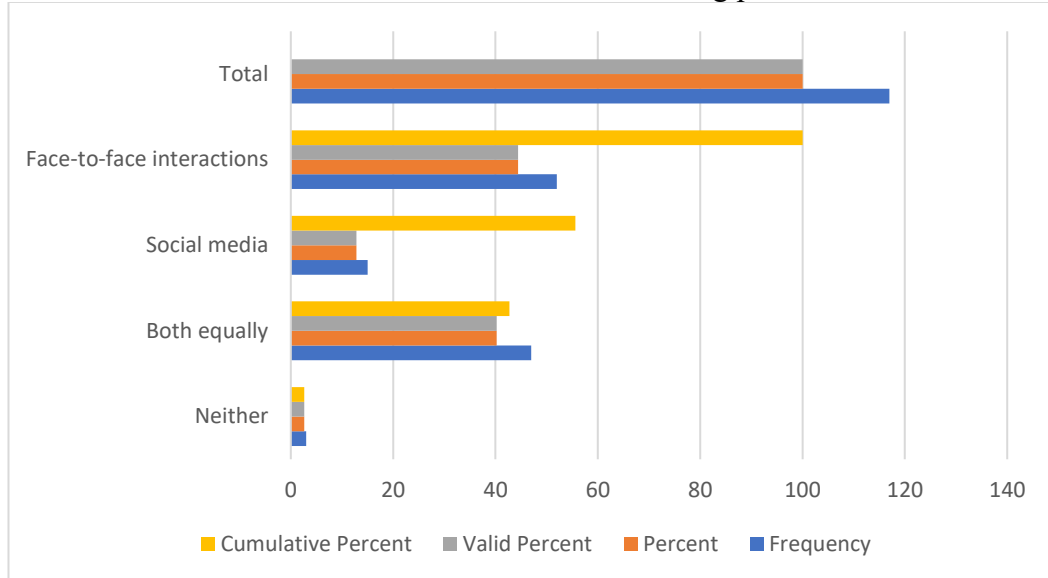


Table 17 asked for the opinions of students regarding the medium they believe is better for understanding political issues. Here, face-to-face communication slightly leads (44.4%) as the “more” effective medium for understanding political issues, but a large portion (40.2%) still view both equally. The distribution suggests that students may value the strengths of each medium individually – for example, social media for “exposure”, and interpersonal communication for “depth”.

Table 18: Whether social media encourages meaningful political engagements or promotes superficial discussions

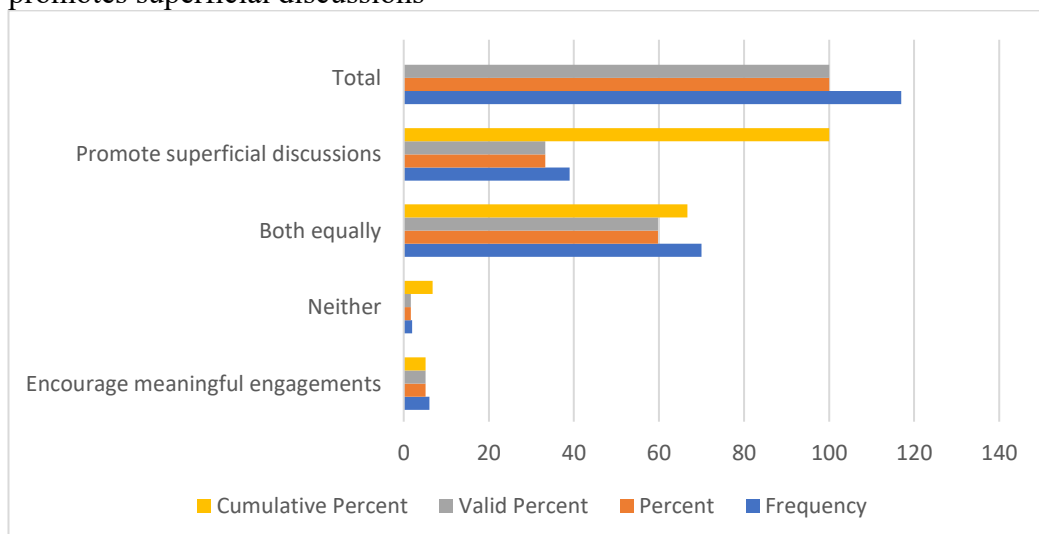


Table 18 asked for the opinions of students on whether they think social media promotes superficial discussions, or encourage meaningful political engagements. A significant number of respondents (59.8%) chose the answer “Both equally”, suggesting students recognize both the positive potential and the unfortunate downside of political engagements on social media platforms. Looking at the individual percentages of the two statements, many (33.3%) believe the field of online interactivity promote a “system” powered by the anonymity it offers. Superficial, and even fanatical discussions have increasingly become easy to manifest in these vast platforms, and it is understandable why some would believe that social media primarily promotes these sorts of behaviours. But nevertheless, over half of the respondents still believe that social media promotes and encourages both stances.

4.5 Political Preferences and Influences

The final section of the questionnaire explores the preferences of students on political discussions, and their beliefs regarding anonymity and politics. These questions aim to provide insight into the effect of anonymity, the ideological affiliations of respondents, and the culmination of their beliefs regarding which mode of communication is more influential.

This analysis will conclude the ideologies of the respondents by gaining a deeper understanding of how students navigate political discussions in an era where traditional and digital modes of communication coexist and compete for influence.

Table 19: The preference of students for engaging in political discussions

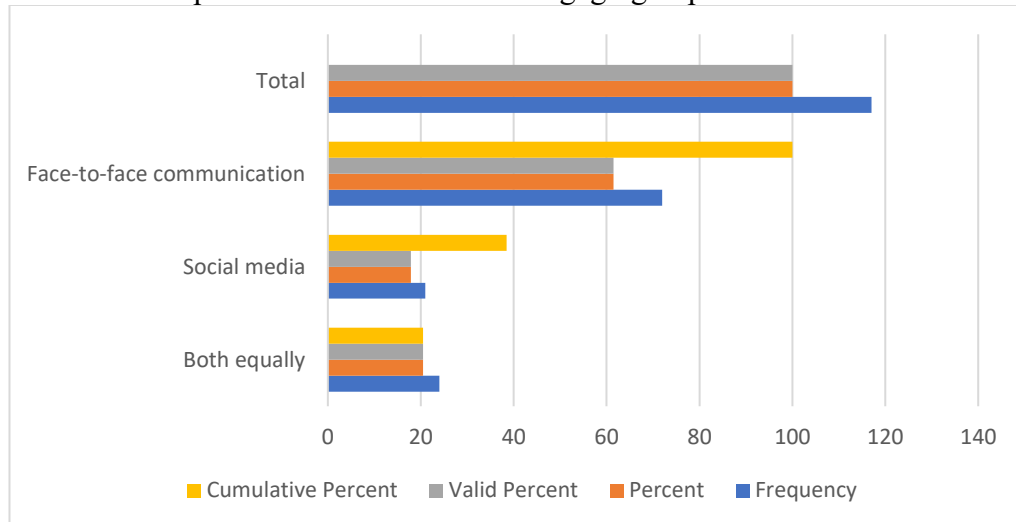


Table 19 shows the answer students gave when asked the medium they prefer to use for political discussions. The results indicate a strong preference for face-to-face political discussions with 61.5%, significantly outweighing social media (17.9%). A noteworthy 20.5% of respondents believe both are as equally as effective. This may suggest that interpersonal communication remains the dominant mode for political engagement, potentially due to the nuances and depth of direct dialogue, which can also be seen on Table 16 and 17 since both questions were answered favourably towards face-to-face communication.

Table 20: The mode that has a greater influence on future political socialisation among students

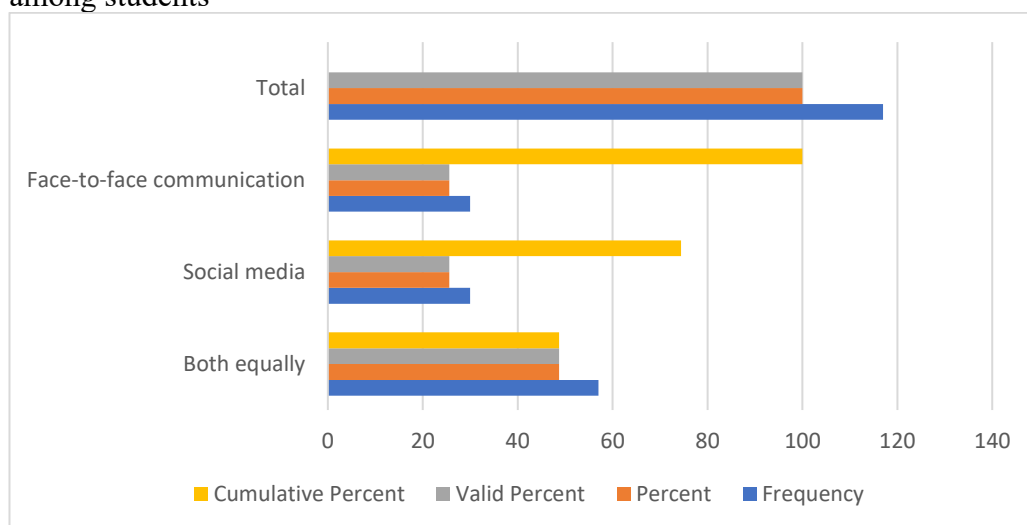


Table 20 asked the opinions of students on which mode of communication they think will have a bigger impact and influence on the future generation of students regarding political socialisation, and interestingly, the opinions were nearly split. While nearly half (48.7%) see both equally shaping political socialization, the remaining responses were evenly divided between social media and face-to-face communications, both being 25.6%. This reflects an acknowledgement of the growing role of digital discourse, while also reinforcing the continued importance of on-the-ground interactions on the process of political socialization.

Table 21: If anonymity in social media contributes to honest opinions or encourages extreme viewpoints

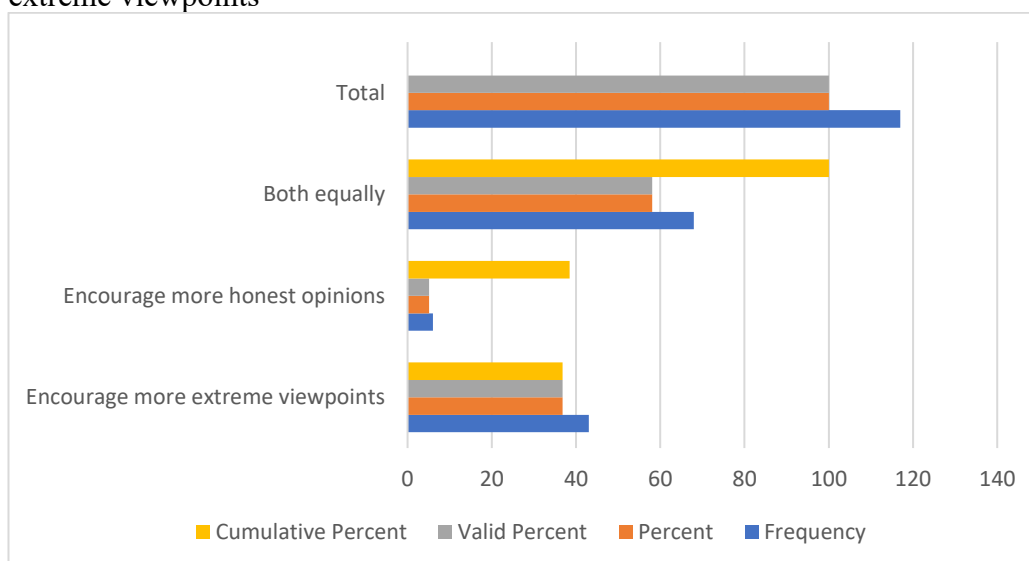


Table 21 asked the opinions of students if they think the anonymity offered by social media contributes to honest political opinions, or encourages extreme viewpoints. The majority of the respondents (58.1%) supports the idea that social media both enables honest opinions as well as promoting extreme viewpoints. However, respondents' tendency to pick (36.6%) the option that supports the idea of anonymity being the cornerstone for extreme viewpoints is indeed peculiar, especially compared to 5.1% of respondents choosing "encouraging honest opinions".

The fact that 58.1% chose to support both ideas equally points to a duality in social media discourse, it acts both as a mirror and a magnifier – a double-edged sword as mentioned above. While anonymity liberate people express truths without fear, it simultaneously removes social constraints, fostering radical and antagonistic ideas – truths of their own choosing.

This result can also be interpreted through the lens of Social Identity Theory, which as a reminder, suggests that individuals often regulate their self-expression in order to

align with perceived group norms. In social contexts, such as peer groups, classrooms, etc., where political attitudes may differ, students may choose to suppress or soften their views to maintain group cohesion and avoid any possible negative outcome.

This finding supports the idea that individuals manage multiple identities across setting, presenting a more socially acceptable version of themselves in interpersonal environments while feeling freer to express their submerged opinions anonymously online. This reflects the tension between the desire for authenticity and the psychological need for group belonging. It also reinforces the notion that online spaces may serve as spaces for individuals to explore political identities that are otherwise masked in on-the-ground interactions due to the pressure created by the need for conformity.

Table 22: The medium that has the most long-term impact on political beliefs

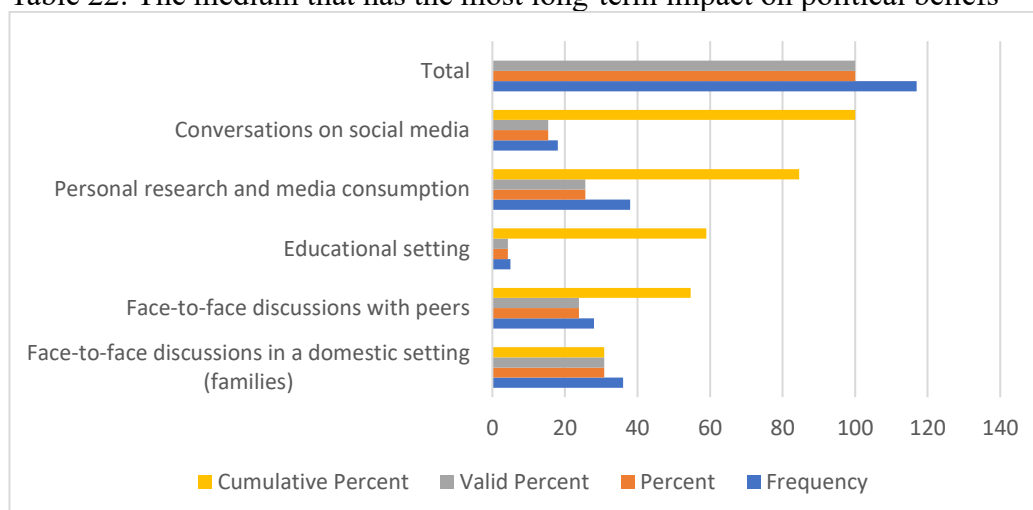


Table 22 indicates the descriptive statistics of students' idea of the most impactful mode for communication, and it shows an almost evenly distributed answers when it comes to the main influence of political beliefs. The strongest influence appears to be domestic discussions within families with 30.8% of the answers, personal research and

media consumption comes in second (25.6%), followed closely by peer interactions (23.9%). Social media, despite being impactful as seen in previous tables during the analysis, ranks the lowest (15.4%), if educational setting is disregarded. Despite its accessibility and reach, respondents perceive traditional modes of communication – albeit interpersonal interactions and independent research as more influential when it comes to its long-term impact regarding political beliefs.

Table 23: The political affiliation of students

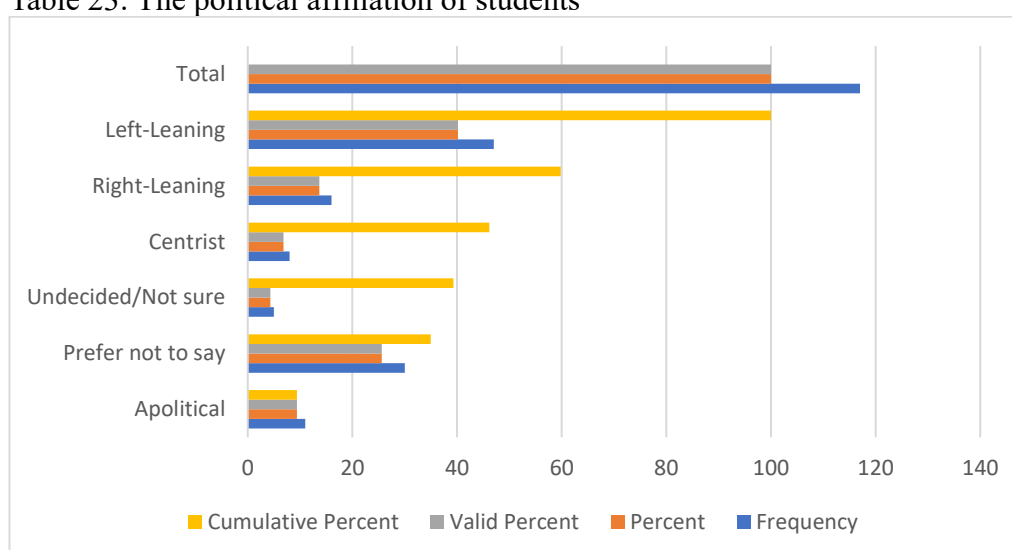


Table 23 shows the descriptive statistics of students' chosen political affiliation. Majority of the respondents (40.2%) identify as left-leaning, while 13.7% are right-leaning. Many students decided not to disclose their political stance (25.6%), and only 9.4% identify themselves as apolitical. Although low, some students are undecided on their political stance (4.3%), and some believe themselves to be Centrists (6.8%). The number of reluctant respondents is an interesting factor for the analysis, suggesting a sense of political privacy, or even an apprehension about self-identification, even though the survey was completely anonymous.

4.6 Reliability Analysis and Scale Limitations

To assess the internal consistency of several – although limited Likert-scale questions related to perceptions of political communication, a reliability test was conducted using Cronbach’s Alpha. An initial subset of 3 questions (Table 7, 8, 14) were used, however the outcome was an inadequate alpha of 0.406. The score falls well below the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70, suggesting that the questions, while conceptually connected, do not measure a single unified construct, or more so that they do not function as a statistically reliable scale. Reasoning behind the lower test scores attributed to a formatting inconsistency during the questionnaire design process, where some items intended to measure attitudes and perceptions were mistakenly formatted as multiple-choice instead of a Likert Scale. As a result, consistency across related items could not be accurately captured. While reliability limitations are acknowledged, the questionnaire still served as a useful exploratory tool for identifying general patterns in the political socialization of Turkish speaking college students.

Table 24: Reliability test

Item Reference	Cronbach’s Alpha	Theme
Table 7, 8, 12	0.406	Perceived Influence and Diversity

Moreover, although several survey questions explored highly interconnected themes, such as anonymity, identity expression and conformity within political contexts, these questions were – as stated above – not designed using a standard Likert format, and thus were not eligible for Cronbach’s reliability testing. As a result, both the statistically unreliable groupings and the non-numeric but thematically significant

questions were analysed as individual items. The study instead draws interpretive insights from their frequencies, response patterns, and theoretical relevance, rather than relying on aggregated scale scores, which will be expanded upon on the following chapter.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study explored how interpersonal and internet/social media-based communication influences the political socialization of Turkish speaking college students of North Cyprus, quantitative research design was employed, using an original questionnaire distributed to 117 students from the Faculty of Communication at EMU. The study aimed to understand whether face-to-face or digital interactions had, or will continue to have a greater impact on shaping political attitudes and behaviours. The results showed that while face-to-face communication remains influential, digital platforms – particularly social media, play an important role in shaping students' political awareness and engagement.

5.1 Key Findings

Through the course of this thesis, one question was always asked as a reminder to its purpose, “which mode of communication – interpersonal or online – has a stronger influence on political socialization?”, and in this day and age, it is important to understand the influence these modes have on such an important and never-ending part of human socialization.

The goal of this study was to figure out the process in which these young adults learn to socialise politically, how their mindset, their beliefs and understandings shape and change as a result of the constant interaction they are exposed to on both modes of communication.

This chapter will discuss the results presented in the previous section, interpreting them through theoretical and empirical lenses, and reflecting on their broader implications. Every single discussion made in previous chapters will be directly reflected during the course of this chapter

5.1.1 The Dominance of On-the-Ground Communication

No matter how internalized Cyberspace has become in the lives of people, there is a certainty which limits its potential – trust. Without utmost trust, people just watch, listen and read, but never take into account the words that are being uttered. After all, trust is earned and not given, and sometimes the unfortunate outcome of untrustworthiness erodes the very ideas that should be influential and to be considered.

Looking at the analysis of the previous section, one of the most consistent patterns in the data was the strong preference for face-to-face discussions. When asked “which mode of communication they prefer for engaging in political discussions” (Table 19), majority of students – a high rate of 61.5%, selected face-to-face communication over social media (17.9%), while only 20.5% preferred both equally. This preference aligns with how respondents perceive the “effectiveness” of each mode, as can be seen on Table 11, 48.7% believed face-to-face interactions are more effective in shaping political opinions, compared to just 14.5% for social media, and 36.8% choosing both equally.

These figures seem to suggest that on-the-ground communication hold a dominant position in the political socialisation process, at least in terms of perceived depth, influence and even clarity. This was further reinforced by the result of Table 10, where 33.3% of participants felt more comfortable expressing political opinions face-to-face, compared to 9.4 of the students who preferred social media as the more comfortable

mode for political discussions. Although 35% of the respondents chose the option for being equally comfortable in both, the substantial lean towards face-to-face settings indicates that respondents associate in-person discussions with stronger psychological safety, trust and accountability.

Additionally, another important finding shows the belief that face-to-face interactions are more respectful and constructive than social media is a widely shared opinion. 45.3% agreed, and 9.4% strongly agreed with the statement on Table 16. This once again suggests that tone, context and a particular mutual presence are seen as critical components in political discourse, a factor that digital platforms may fail to correctly replicate. Faceless interactivity takes away from the very much needed connection people have with each other on social platforms. Although one may agree with an opinion on the Cyberspace, current results of this study indicate that the strength of the influence is considerably lower compared to what on-the-ground interactions have. Coming back to the idea about trust, these results show that without emotions, depth and the “colour” that comes with on-the-ground interactivity, this certain trust cannot seem to be achieved as precisely as interpersonal communication as opposed to interactions within the compounds of Cyberspace.

At the end of the day, ideas are easily shared and exposed to the masses, but that does not necessarily mean opinions and beliefs are shaped as a result of this exposure. Mead’s theory of “symbolic interactionism” holds light to this idea. The theory, in its core, is about the never-ending use of language, be it gestures or spoken, in the anticipation of how others would react. So, it is a frame of reference to better understand how certain people interact with each other to create symbolic worlds, thus as a result, how these worlds shape individual behaviour

(West, R. L., Turner, L. H., 2017). In political terms, this implies that opinions and beliefs are more likely to be somewhat deeply shaped through dynamic and relational communication, rather than in passive online settings, where consumption is usually one way, with little to no feedback between individuals.

Habermas's theory of communicative action (1984) is a direct correlation to the previous results and ideas, where a genuine political, or even regular discourse, depends on rational and reciprocal exchange of ideas, something more likely to happen in direct and personal interactions. The opposing online platforms often suffer from anonymity and fragmentation, and unlike it, face-to-face communication demand a level of engagement, turn-based interactions and recognition of the one in front, which may end up fostering a better political understanding and result in reduction of polarization.

Even when there is a high preference for interpersonal discussions, it is not without contradiction. While the result indicate that students prefer face-to-face engagements, their behaviour does not particularly reflect this. In terms of how often they would engage in face-to-face political conversations, only 11.1% said that they would do so daily, with 28.2% engaging weekly, and 32.5% monthly (Table 5). Although these numbers may seem low, engagement on social media is even less frequent, with only 3.4% participating daily, and the largest percentage, 38.5%, saying they engage rarely (Table 4). These figures suggests that although students value on-the-ground communication more highly, they may not engage politically on any platform regularly, indicating a gap between preference and the actual practice.

Ultimately, even in this digitally saturated world, the dominance of face-to-face communication in the minds of these students reflect a continuing attachment to traditional, interpersonal modes of influence, so it would seem. While social media offer speed and reach, respondents appear to place more trust and credibility in the intimacy and authenticity of real-life dialogue, especially when it comes to forming or expressing political beliefs.

5.1.2 The Role and the Limitation of Social Media

While face-to-face communication was clearly favoured in terms of perceived influence and comfort, the role of social media in political socialisation remains complex and uncertain. As discussed before, the research data reveals that social media is frequently used by students as a space for exposure to political content, but less frequently as a site of meaningful influence or active engagement.

As mentioned above, Table 4 revealed the frequency of social media engagement in regards to political discussions, and the results show that 38.5% said “rarely”, and only 3.4% chose the answer “daily”. In contrast, 57.3% of respondents from Table 9 said that they only change their political opinions “occasionally” when exposed to discussions online, while 34.2% answered with “rarely”, and a mere 1.7% said “frequently”. Although the question does not necessarily ask if the respondents themselves join these discussions online, it was important to know if they are being affected by the political discourse happening around the Net that they are even a passive part of. These numbers reflect a general hesitancy among students to treat social media as a space where beliefs are formed or shifted, even though it is a common space for encountering political content.

But of course, students do recognize the advantages social media offers. Total of 48.7% of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed that social media offers a freer platform for political engagement than face-to-face discussions (Table 14), and nearly 50% of students answered that social media exposes them to diverse viewpoints (Table 12). Although it has a lower percentage of preference, the Internet and social media is appreciated by students for its openness and range, even when it is not as directly impactful to political thinking as interpersonal communication.

When looking beyond the surface level of this “openness” the Internet provides, a dilemma is created. When the students were asked whether anonymity on social media contributes to honest opinions or extreme viewpoints, over half of the respondents answered “both equally” (59.8%), and 36.8% said that it encourages extreme viewpoints (Table 21). Although these students believe that both factors take place equally within Cyberspace, percentage wise, it reinforces a common tension in the digital era, as anonymity allows users to express ideas they may withhold from the public ear, but also removing accountability, thus creating a space for incivility and polarization.

Similarly, this perception coincides with the findings in Table 18, which asked students whether social media promotes meaningful or superficial political discussions. 59.8% of students said “both equally”, similar to Table 21, while 33.3% felt that social media promotes superficiality, and only 5.1% said that it encourages meaningful engagement. The data clearly reflects a sceptical view of depth and even civility of digital political discourse.

Although the questions in Table 21 and Table 18 are not identical, they were both aimed to uncover students' perception of the overall authenticity, tone and depth of political discourse on social media platforms. Taken together, both questions reflect a broader concern about the quality and reliability of political expression within the Net, with the majority of the respondents believing in the problematic nature of online spaces.

These ambivalent results seen in many of the questions supports the idea that political socialization through media is more often shaped by personalized engagement and selective participation, rather than a consistent and communal communication. So, in summary, social media is clearly viewed by students as an essential part of the political landscape, but not as the very core of their political growth. The role of social media is more of an outer – a supplemental influence, valuable for exposure, but not necessarily needed for conversion and for persuasion.

5.1.3 The Ambivalent Responses

During the course of the data analysis section, one striking pattern within the data was the high rates of neutrality and undecided responses across several important questions, particularly ones that are aimed to uncover the communication mode that has the most effect on political views. For example, on Table 7, when asked how influential social media discussions are on student's political views, 30.8% of respondents selected neutral. This sense of ambivalence was further pronounced when participants were asked the same question, but this on face-to-face discussions (Table 8). Table 8 shows that 47.9% of students responded with "neutral".

As it happens, it is important to understand the meaning behind this high rate of neutrality. Rather than indicating a certain passivity, responses such as these may

suggest a complex, and most likely a subconscious relationship with political influence. It is possible that respondents, especially young adults, may find it difficult to understand the degree to which their beliefs are shaped by communication – not simply because the influence is absent, but because it is not as clear as one might think. It is subtle, gradual and it is embedded in everyday life, making socialization a life-long journey. Political socialization is not always a consciously traceable process, as people may adopt or refine views over time through exposure to different modes when not entirely being aware of it.

Circling back to the theories discussed on previous sections, Giddens's reflexive modernity and Mead's symbolic interactionism directly correlates with these responses, as these theories happen to suggest that individuals constantly engage with their environments in ways that shape identity, often without the deliberate recognition. In this instance, this neutrality may reflect a sort of internal negotiation, as respondents may sense that both social media and interpersonal communication influence them, yet hesitate to assign any weight to either of them because of their situational and sometimes overlapping nature.

People like to believe that they are in control, in control of what they see, what they hear, and admitting that one's beliefs are shaped by external factors, especially by platforms like social media, can feel like conceding that control they believe they have. In political contexts, where factors like agency and critical thinking are highly valued, many could prefer to view their positions as self-paved, even if and when they are socially influenced. In this sense, this "neutrality" becomes a protective barrier, a stance to preserve the belief in independent thought.

This ambivalence and complexity points to the generation current students are living through, one that is shaped by simultaneous exposure to traditional political norms and digital communication advancements. The overlap between online and on-the-ground spheres makes it increasingly difficult to disentangle where influence begins, and where it ends. In that environment, this “neutrality” may not signal indecisiveness but an acknowledgement that political socialization today is not just one or the other, but a hybrid of both spheres with the ability to influence in their own unique ways.

5.1.4 The Future of Political Influence

The future of political socialisation – as with every form of socialisation, is endless. The role of the two modes discussed during the course of this thesis reveals a nuanced outcome among the participants. When asked about which form of communication is likely to have a greater influence on political socialisation among students in the future (Table 20), nearly half (48.7%) selected “both equally”, reflecting the belief that online and on-the-ground communication will coexist as formative political spheres. The remaining participants interestingly were divided equally, with both social media and face-to-face communication ending up with 25.6%., suggesting no overwhelming dominance of one over the other in terms of any perceived long-term impact.

However, this balance between online and on-the-ground spheres stands in contrast to Table 19’s results, as 61.5% of respondents seem to prefer face-to-face discussions for engaging in political topics, with only 17.9% favouring social media and 20.5% choosing “both equally”. This gap corresponds with earlier results – while face-to-face communication is currently perceived as more meaningful and trustworthy, students also recognize the inevitable increase of cultural and technological momentum driving political engagements into digital spaces. Students’ acknowledgement of social

media's future influence may be less about enthusiasm and more so about the adaptation to inevitable digital involvement.

Further insight is provided by the responses to Table 22, which asked students the medium they believe has the most long-term impact on their political beliefs. Results show that face-to-face discussion within the family setting ranked highest (30.8%), followed closely by personal research and media consumption (25.6%) and peer discussions (23.9%). Notably, conversations on social media were selected by only 15.4%, while education was perceived as the least impactful (4.3%). These results reinforce the idea that political socialisation remain deeply rooted in intimate, trusted relationships and personal inquiry, and it is safe to assume that social media is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to political inquiry, as personal research can be done online and on-the-ground without the need for an external voice.

Ultimately, these responses reflect a recognition of students – a recognition that while technological and cultural forces are inserting political dialogue into digital spaces, the core of political understanding remains grounded in familiarity, trust, and direct experience of others and one's self. The even division in future expectations does not signal indecision, but the awareness of the complex nature of influence, as there is no single mode of communication that can fully account for how political beliefs are shaped in constantly evolving spheres.

5.1.5 Spiral of Silence, Social Identity, and Political Expression

What emerged as an important theme within the gathered data was the complexity of political expression, especially in the context of identity and anonymity. When asked whether the respondents felt comfortable sharing political opinions on social media or in face-to-face settings (Table 10), only 9.4% chose social media, while 33.3%

preferred face-to-face interactions, and 35% stated that they were equally comfortable in both. Additionally, 22.2% of respondents stated that they prefer not to share their political opinions at all, revealing a substantial degree of reluctance to engage in political discourse in either context.

Looking through the lens of Neumann's Spiral of Silence theory – which suggests that individuals may withhold their opinions when they perceive their views to be in the minority, these findings can be interpreted. In digital spaces where opinions are often amplified, polarized and are subjected to immediate feedback, this “spiral” can be intensified. While social media do offer the technical means for expression, the social consequences of visibility and the potential backlash may block genuine participation.

This pattern can be further seen in Table 21, which explored the perceptions students have towards anonymity on social media. Majority of students (58.1%) believed that anonymity encourages both honest and extremist opinions, while 36.8% felt it mostly promotes extremist viewpoints, and only 5.1% believed that it fosters more honest interactions. This suggests a strong awareness of the conflicting effects of anonymity, as it removes the pressure of face-to-face judgements, it may also reduce the restraint and accountability of individuals, thus leading to more radical and even hostile expressions. This dual perception reinforces the idea that, although the majority agreed social media offers the two sides of the same knife, the belief that it is directly responsible for the freedom of extremism is still a prominent factor in the eyes of the respondents.

Another important theory to factor in to this section is the Social Identity theory, which puts forth the belief that individuals derive a sense of belonging and self-definition

from group memberships. Political affiliation, particularly in youth populations can act as a powerful identity marker. When individuals are unsure of the ideological standing of their “audience”, which is often the case on social media, they may withhold opinions that could estrange them from their perceived group of alike thinkers. The 25.6% of respondents of Table 23 revealed that they prefer not to disclose their political ideology, along with 9.4% who identified as apolitical and 4.3% who stayed undecided, further illustrates a potential avoidance of political labelling, possibly to avoid any categorization to self and their ideologies.

Also, from the perspective of Social Identity theory, the results of Table 21 highlight how the absence of clear group affiliation in anonymous setting may weaken individuals’ connection to social norms. Without visible in-group “cues” or the social accountability tied to an individual’s identity, political expression becomes loose, allowing for either increased honesty or, as can be seen by the results, deviation from socially acceptable interactions. The fact that majority of participants believed anonymity encourages both honesty and extremism suggest that a visible identity play a central role in moderating political behaviour and reinforcing an aligned group expression.

5.1.6 Navigating Political Socialisation in This New Age

Altogether, the findings of this study reflect the complex nature of political socialisation within this age of overlapping communication modes. While interpersonal communication continues to be valued for its perceived authenticity, trust, and emotional depth and value it possesses, digital platforms are acknowledged as expanding political exposure and offering alternate modes of interactivity, albeit with a degree of ambivalence. The frequent neutrality in the responses by students,

their concerns about anonymity, and the reluctance they have to identify themselves ideologically all point to a generation who navigates political development with caution and selective participation. What resurfaces is not a clear divide between online and on-the-ground, but a layered and a dynamic process in which identity, comfort, the context and credibility all shape how individuals politically engage. These patterns underline one important idea – political socialisation today is not dictated by any single medium alone, but instead, how individuals interpret, manage, and express their political selves across different settings.

5.2 Remembering the Research Question

To freshen the mind, this study aimed to examine which mode of communication – interpersonal or internet-based, has a greater influence of political socialization of Turkish speaking college students. Based on the findings presented across Section 5.1.1 to 5.1.6, it is evident that both communication modes contribute significantly but in their own unique ways.

As detailed in Section 5.1.2, Internet-based communication, particularly that of social media platforms, emerged as the most common avenue for students to encounter political content. It provides speed, accessibility, and exposure to a wide range of viewpoints – often reaching students passively through algorithms. Section 5.1.4 also emphasized how students often rely on these platforms to stay updated on political developments and debates.

However, Sections 5.1.1 and 5.1.3 demonstrate that interpersonal communication, especially with close peers and family, was found to be more impactful in shaping students' long-term political views. these face-to-face interactions were associated

with higher emotional engagement, critical thinking, and trust, making them more influential during moments of reflection and decision making. Furthermore, Section 5.1.6 confirms that many students engage with political content online, but process and interpret it more thoroughly in on-the-ground settings.

Taken together, the data supports a hybrid understanding of political socialization – while digital environments supply the content and topics, interpersonal conversations provide the space for discussion, challenge, and internalization. Therefore, to answer question of this research – it is clear that although internet-based/social media communication is more frequently used, interpersonal/on-the-ground communication exerts a deeper – greater long-term impactful influence on political identity formation.

5.3 Conclusion

This study examined the influence of interpersonal communication and internet use on political socialization among college students. Using a descriptive, quantitative case study approach, it compared the effects of face-to-face and online communication. Findings showed that while traditional interpersonal discussion remains significant, digital platforms—particularly social media—play an increasingly important role in shaping political identity, especially among digital natives. These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of civic engagement in hybrid communication environments.

The aim of this study was always to understand and examine the question: “Which mode of communication – interpersonal or online – has a stronger influence on the process of political socialisation”. Looking at the responses from Turkish speaking students in the Faculty of Communication at Eastern Mediterranean University, the

findings reveal a layered understanding of this influence. While both modes of communication play an important role in political engagement, interpersonal communication was consistently seen as more impactful, particularly in shaping long term political attitudes through family, peers, and overall face-to-face discussions. This finding echoes Sevük's (2013), who found that despite the widespread use of Facebook among university students for social interactions, face-to-face communication habits remained central. Similarly, Khan's (2021) observed among Pakistani university students that while social media informs political knowledge, the interpretation and assimilation of political ideas often happen through 'on-the-ground' interpersonal discussions – a pattern resonant with the Turkish context, where family, peers, and social environments hold significant influence. In contrast, Kim and Kim's (2007) study on Korean adolescents emphasized the internet's dominant role in fostering political engagement, reflecting not only generational and cultural differences but also the unique hyper-digital and highly connected media culture of South Korea even two decades ago. Social media on the other hand, although widely used and acknowledged for its endless reach, was approached time and time again with ambivalence – being valued for its ability for exposure to diverse understandings and beliefs, yet often being distrusted for fostering thoughts of extremism within its environment.

Another important highlight gathered through the data was the complexity of political self-expression among the students. Significant number of the respondents expressed neutrality and/or reluctance when they were asked about ideological identity, influence, and communication preferences. As previously discussed on earlier chapters, this suggests a generation that is politically aware but cautious – one that is selective on what they participate in and exposed to, and calibrates its expression based

on audience, platform and of course, perceived risks – one that refuses to bond with self-categorization. This cautious stance parallels Khan's (2021) study, who found Pakistani students carefully manage their political self-presentation online, navigating between opportunities for expression and the risks associated with visibility. This suggests that in culturally conservative or risk-aware environments, young adults may adopt selective engagement strategies, regardless of digital advantages they may possess. Theories such as Spiral of Silence and Social Identity helped illuminate these patterns, offering insight into how individuals manage political engagement within their social and communicative environments.

The unfortunate reality of this study, as it is with many, were its limitations. The sample was limited to a specific academic context, and the population happened to be lower as a result of it, and the survey relied on self-reported data rather than one that was observed first-hand. Although not entirely exponential, some Likert-scale questions were formatted as multiple-choice, which resulted in the inability to achieve the expected result when using Cronbach's Alpha, though the results were finely picked apart and discussed on the previous sections, regardless of the appropriate Alpha score.

Future research could benefit from incorporating qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups, to gain deeper insight into how students navigate political expression across different contexts. Although quite difficult to achieve results, a longitudinal study would be immensely beneficial to dissect the process of socialisation, the direct changes in the course of multiple years as a result of this process. Also, future researchers would achieve better results by having a higher population, either designing the research as cross-cultural, or staying with one culture and one nationality. By going cross-cultural, the results might shed light on whether

these findings are unique to the group of this study, or reflect broader generational trends.

Ultimately, the entirety of this study demonstrates one important result – political socialisation in the digital age is neither wholly shaped by tradition nor driven entirely by technology. Instead, it is a hybrid and context-sensitive process, where individuals respond to influence not simply based on the medium, but based on how they experience and interpret political dialogue within their own social worlds. The findings suggest that, even in an era of constant digital connection, the need for trust, identity safety, and reflective engagement remains central to how young adults form and express their opinions.

In the end, political socialisation does not unfold solely in one space or another, but through a continuous negotiation between online and on-the-ground – where influence is shaped not simply by medium, but by meaning, context, and human connection. Both Sevük (2013) and Khan (2021) emphasize that – while online platforms offer expanded access, the deeper processes of political learning and identity formation are rooted in interpersonal interactions shaped by cultural and societal norms. In contrast, Kim and Kim (2007) highlight a context where digital tools themselves became the primary arena for political socialization, showing how important it is to understand these patterns within the specific technological, generational, and of course, cultural context of each society.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Questionnaire

Section 1: Demographics

1. Gender:

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say

2. Year of Study:

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Graduate Student

Section 2: Political Socialisation and Communication Habits

3. Which one (if any) of the following platforms do you use the most often for political discussions? (Select all that apply)

- Facebook
- X (Formerly Twitter)
- Instagram
- TikTok
- Reddit
- Other:

4. How do you usually get informed about political issues?

- Social media
- Traditional media (TV, Newspapers)
- Face-to-face discussions
- Academic resources

- Other:
5. How often do you engage in political discussions on social media?
- Daily
 - Weekly
 - Monthly
 - Rarely
 - Never
6. How often do you engage in face-to-face political discussions with peers?
- Daily
 - Weekly
 - Monthly
 - Rarely
 - Never
7. How often do you verify political information you encounter on social media before forming an opinion or sharing it?
- Always
 - Often
 - Sometimes
 - Rarely
 - Never

Section 3: Perception of Political Socialisation

8. On a scale of 1 to 5, how influential do you think social media discussions are on your political views?
- 1 (Not at all influential)
 - 2
 - 3
 - 4

- 5 (Very influential)
9. On a scale of 1 to 5, how influential do you think face-to-face discussions are on your political views?
- 1 (Not at all influential)
 - 2
 - 3
 - 4
 - 5 (Very influential)
10. How often do political discussions on social media change your political perspective?
- Frequently
 - Occasionally
 - Rarely
 - Never
11. Do you feel comfortable sharing your political opinions on social media or in face-to-face interactions?
- Social Media
 - Face-to-face interactions
 - Equally comfortable in both
 - Prefer not to share opinions
12. Which form of communication do you feel is more effective in shaping political opinions?
- Social Media
 - Face-to-face interactions
 - Both equally
13. Do you believe that political discussions on social media are more likely to expose you to diverse viewpoints compared to face-to-face discussions?
- Strongly agree

- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

14. How confident are you in the accuracy of the political information you receive via face-to-face discussions compared to social media?

- More confident in face-to-face discussions
- More confident in social media discussions
- Equally confident in both
- Not confident in either

Section 4: Social Media vs. Face-to-Face Political Socialisation

15. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: “Social media provides a better – a free platform for political engagement than face-to-face discussions.”

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

16. Have you ever changed, or thought of changing your political views after discussing political topics on social media?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

17. Do you believe that face-to-face interactions allow for more respectful and constructive political discussions than social media?

- Strongly agree
- Agree

- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

18. In your opinion, which medium leads to a better understanding of political issues?

- Social Media
- Face-to-face interactions
- Both equally
- Neither

19. In your opinion, do social media platforms encourage meaningful political engagements or promote superficial discussions?

- Encourage meaningful engagements
- Promote superficial discussions
- Both equally
- Neither

Section 5: Conclusion and Final Thoughts

20. Which do you prefer for engaging in political discussions?

- Social Media
- Face-to-face communication
- Both equally

21. In your opinion, which one between social media and face-to-face communication will have a greater influence on future political socialisation among students?

- Social Media
- Face-to-face communication
- Both equally

22. Do you think anonymity offered by social media contributes to more honest political opinions, or does it encourage more extreme viewpoints?

- Encourages more honest opinions

- Encourages more extreme viewpoints
- Both equally
- Neither

23. Which of the following do you think has the most long-term impact on your political beliefs?

- Conversations on social media
- Face-to-face discussions with peers
- Face-to-face discussions in a domestic setting (families, next of kin)
- Personal research and media consumption
- Educational setting (classroom, lectures)

24. Which of the following ideologies best describe your political affiliation:

- Left-Leaning
- Right-Leaning
- Apolitical
- Centrist
- Undecided/Not sure
- Prefer not to say

Appendix B: Ethics Approval Form



Eastern Mediternean University
Social, Humanities and Administrative Sciences Ethics Subcommittee

9 January 2025

BAYEK REF NO ETK00-2024-0241

Dear Ozan Oktay,

I am pleased to inform you that your ethics application for your project titled *Effects of Social Media & Face-to-Face Communication on Political Socialisation Among College Students* under the supervision of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nilüfer Türksoy has been approved and you can start data collection.

With all good wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'I. Raman'.

Prof Dr İlhan Raman

Chair, EMU Social Sciences, Humanities and Administration (SOBIB) Ethics Subcommittee