A Study of College Students' Perception on Online Political Campaign：The role of Party Tendency, Media Literacy, and Political Expression on Social Media

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Abstract

This study explores how Taiwanese university students perceive online political campaigns, focusing on media literacy, political labeling, and political expression on social media. Using a quantitative-method approach with surveys, data from 376 students revealed that higher media literacy is linked to stronger fact-checking and lower self-censorship, while political orientation significantly affects engagement. Pro-Green students show more active participation, whereas politically indifferent students tend to stay silent. The study highlights the need for improved media literacy education to foster open and rational online political discussions among youth in Taiwan.

Keywords: media literacy, political labeling, self-censorship, online political campaign, Taiwanese university students

摘要

　　本研究探討台灣大學生如何看待線上政治宣傳活動，重點聚焦於媒體識讀、政治標籤化與社群媒體上的政治表達。

本研究採用量化研究方法，使用問卷的方式蒐集了 376 位學生的資料。結果顯示，較高的媒體識讀能力與更強的事實查核行為及較低的自我審查傾向呈現正相關，而政治傾向則顯著影響政治參與程度。

綠營支持者表現出更積極的參與行為，而政治冷感的學生則傾向於保持沉默。研究指出，應加強媒體識讀教育，以促進台灣青年在網路上進行更開放、理性且健康的政治討論。

關鍵詞：媒體識讀、政治標籤、自我審查、線上政治宣傳、台灣大學生

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INTRODUCTION

Research Background

Over the past decade, social media has reshaped how young people encounter and discuss politics. Platforms such as Facebook, Dcard, and Instagram have become central venues where university students access, interpret, and circulate political information. These spaces encourage participation but also amplify partisan narratives and identity-based labeling.

In Taiwan, political labeling has become particularly salient. Expressions such as *"Bluebird," "Little Grass," "1450,"* and *"side wing"* frequently appear in online discourse, symbolizing a polarized communication culture. While these labels facilitate political identification, they can also produce stereotyping, group antagonism, and self-censorship among young users. Drawing on the Spiral of Silence theory, this study assumes that political labeling may influence individuals' willingness to express opinions to avoid social isolation. Moreover, party identity and labeling are closely intertwined in Taiwan's online political communication, shaping how users perceive and engage in discussions.

Although digital media increasingly affects political awareness, prior Taiwanese research has concentrated on voting behavior and 3, paying less attention to how media literacy interacts with political labeling to shape online political expression. This study therefore seeks to address that gap by examining how university students interpret and respond to politically charged information within social media environments.

Research Problem and Purpose

This study investigates how political labeling and media literacy jointly relate to Taiwanese university students' political expression on social media. It examines whether online labeling constrains open discussion and whether higher levels of media literacy reduce the impact of misinformation and partisan framing.

The objectives of this study are to:

Assess students' perceptions of online political information and their ability to evaluate credibility.

Examine students' attitudes toward political labels such as "Bluebird" and "Little Grass."

Analyze how media literacy influences expression and self-censorship in online political communication.

Using a quantitative survey design, this study aims to extend existing research on youth political communication in Taiwan and to provide implications for media education, digital civic literacy, and constructive online discourse.

Research Motivation

The motivation for this study arises from two perspectives. Socially, university students are at a formative stage of political development, and their engagement with online political dialogue can influence their long-term civic participation. Observing how they respond to political labels and polarized discourse helps illuminate broader issues of political identity and democratic participation in Taiwan. Academically, there remains a lack of empirical research that integrates media literacy and political labeling within a single analytical framework. Previous studies have often discussed these variables independently, leaving unexplored how literacy might mitigate the restrictive effects of labeling on expression.

By examining this intersection, the study contributes theoretically, by clarifying the mechanisms connecting literacy, labeling, and expression, and practically, by informing educational efforts to enhance digital literacy among Taiwanese youth. Ultimately, this research is motivated by the need to understand how young citizens navigate political identity, information credibility, and labeling pressure in digital environments—knowledge that is vital for fostering democratic resilience and inclusive civic culture.

Research Question

I.   How do Taiwanese university students assess the credibility and bias of online political information?

II.   What are their attitudes and experiences regarding political labeling on social media?

III.   Does media literacy reduce the influence of labeling and misinformation on their expressive behavior?

IV.   Are political stance and social media usage habits associated with online political expression or self-censorship?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In the digital age, the intersection of social media and political participation has become a focal point of scholarly inquiry. As political communication increasingly shifts to online platforms, understanding the dynamics that govern user behavior, information dissemination, and opinion formation is essential. The literature reviewed herein explores the multifaceted roles that social media plays in shaping political engagement, with a particular emphasis on the Taiwanese context. Key areas of focus include digital political participation, the emergence of cyber armies and orchestrated disinformation campaigns, university students' political attitudes, media incitement, public opinion formation, and the strategic manipulation of online discourse by political actors. Together, these themes underscore the transformative potential—and democratic risks—of networked communication in contemporary politics.[1]

Media Literacy and Political Awareness

The intersection of media literacy and political awareness has become a focal point of academic inquiry in the digital age.[2]As social media increasingly shapes how individuals access and interpret political information, media literacy plays a vital role in determining the accuracy, openness, and quality of democratic dialogue. In this section, prior studies on Taiwanese university students and international research are discussed to highlight how digital literacy influences civic consciousness and online participation. The discussion integrates Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) to

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[1] Gibbins, Eliot. "Identity and Democratisation: Lessons from Taiwan."
[2] Lin, Tzu-Bin. "Navigating through the Mist: Media Literacy Education in Taiwan." In Media Education in Asia, edited by Chi-Kim Cheung, 165-83. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2009

explain how users actively engage with political content and how literacy mediates their perception and participation.

Media Literacy and the Interpretation of Political Information

As social media has become the primary source of political information for young people, the design of these platforms—particularly their filtering and recommendation mechanisms—has gradually transformed the patterns of political participation and opinion formation.[3] Algorithms tend to promote content that users have previously engaged with or shown a preference for, further increasing the visibility of information that aligns with their existing views. This leads to the emergence of "echo chambers" and "filter bubbles," resulting in a decline in the diversity of accessible information. [4]Among Taiwanese university students, popular sources of political information include Instagram, Dcard, and YouTube. The combination of user behavior and platform design creates an information environment that is "easy to access, but hard to verify."[5][6]

However, having media literacy does not automatically translate into concrete fact-checking behavior. Research has shown that although most Taiwanese university students believe they are capable of identifying fake news, they often rely on subjective experience and the perceived credibility of the source when confronted

[3] Buarki, Hanadi, and Hui-Yun Sung. "Use of Social Media by Lis Students in Kuwait and Taiwan: A Comparative Analysis." Information Services and Use 44, no. 2 (2024): 107-19

[4] William Hung, "Media Literacy Education: Taiwan's Key to Combating Disinformation," *Global Taiwan Institute* (March 6, 2024 2024).

[5] Eric Hsu, "The Impact of TikTok on Taiwanese Youth and PRC perceptions: A 2025 TikTok User Study — Summary version," *Medium*,

[6] S. C. Hung, S. C. Yang, and Y. F. Luo, "New Media Literacy, Health Status, Anxiety, and Preventative Behaviors Related to COVID-19: A Cross-Sectional Study in Taiwan," *Int J Environ Res Public Health* 18, no. 21 (Oct 26 2021), https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph182111247.

with suspicious political information, rather than actively verifying the content.[78]

Additionally, even among those who are aware of fact-checking platforms, the actual

usage rate remains relatively low.[9] This gap between awareness and action suggests

that media literacy education still lacks sufficient emphasis on practical application.

There is also a positive correlation between media literacy and political

participation. Individuals with higher levels of media literacy tend to demonstrate

stronger critical thinking and greater flexibility in their views when facing polarized

speech and misinformation, thereby helping to preserve openness in public

discourse.[1011] Comparative studies from Europe, North America, and Hong Kong

further reveal that young people who receive systematic media literacy training show

significantly greater confidence in engaging in political discussions and stronger

abilities in verifying information.[1213]

The Rise of Social Media

The emergence of social media has fundamentally transformed how individuals

interact, access information, and engage in political discourse. What began as

platforms for social networking have evolved into powerful tools that shape public

opinion and influence democratic processes. The proliferation of platforms such as

Facebook and Twitter has not only decentralized information flow but also redefined

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[7] Huang Chao-Hsi, Ping-Han, Cheng ,Tsung-Shun, Hsieh ,Kuo-En, Chang "Development and exploration of news media literacy scales in Taiwan," *International Journal of Innovative Research and Scientific Studies* (2025/01/01), https://www.ijirss.com/index.php/ijirss/article/view/3485.
[8] Chao-Hsi, "Development and exploration of news media literacy scales in Taiwan."
[9] Tzu-Bin Lin, "Navigating Through the Mist: Media Literacy Education in Taiwan," in *Media Education in Asia*, ed. Chi-Kim Cheung (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2009).
[10] Yi Fang Luo, Shu Ching Yang, and Seokmin Kang, "New media literacy and news trustworthiness: An application of importance–performance analysis," *Computers & Education* 185 (2022/08/01/), https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2022.104529, https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0360131522001002.
[11] Luo, Yang, and Kang, "New media literacy and news trustworthiness: An application of importance–performance analysis."
[12] Hung, "Media Literacy Education: Taiwan's Key to Combating Disinformation."
[13] Hung, "Media Literacy Education: Taiwan's Key to Combating Disinformation."

the mechanisms through which news is consumed and disseminated. Recent studies have highlighted how user behavior on social media especially in relation to news content is shaped by factors such as political identity, social connections, and algorithmic filtering. For instance, research on the dissemination of news content demonstrates that users are more likely to share news when it aligns with their partisan beliefs and when they are connected to journalists or news organizations online. These patterns indicate that social media does not merely reflect public opinion but actively molds it through personalized content and social reinforcement. Moreover, the intersection of partisanship and online engagement fosters echo chambers, where users are increasingly exposed to ideologically congruent information.[14] This has significant implications for democratic societies, as it challenges the ideal of an informed public capable of deliberative reasoning across political divides. As social media continues to evolve, understanding its role in the transformation of civic life becomes essential. Far from being neutral platforms, these digital spaces serve as dynamic arenas for influence, polarization, and the strategic dissemination of information.[15]

Social Media as a Space for Political Expression

Social media is not only a channel of information but also an arena for identity performance and political dialogue. However, these same platforms impose social and algorithmic constraints that influence whether and how users express opinions. The following subsections integrate the Spiral of Silence Theory and Political

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[15] Buarki, Hanadi, and Hui-Yun Sung. "Use of Social Media by Lis Students in Kuwait and Taiwan: A Comparative Analysis." Information Services and Use 44, no. 2 (2024): 107-19

Communication Theory to explain how self-censorship and selective participation

occur within Taiwanese online political culture.[16]

[16] Noelle-Neumann, Elisabeth. "The Spiral of Silence a Theory of Public Opinion." Journal of Communication 24, no. 2 (2006): 43-51

University Students' Political Attitudes and Participation

As a politically formative demographic, university students' political attitudes and behaviors have garnered increasing academic interest. Research suggests that students' academic experiences—particularly exposure to political science curricula—are significantly associated with higher levels of internal political efficacy and formal political engagement. Participation in extracurricular organizations likewise plays a salient role in fostering political involvement.[17]

The concept of "perceived school efficacy"—defined as students' subjective evaluation of institutional responsiveness to student needs—has been shown to be a decisive factor in shaping students' sense of political efficacy and, by extension, their engagement in political processes.[18] This suggests that experiences within academic institutions may inform broader political attitudes and behaviors.

Notably, research on Taiwanese university students reveals a discrepancy between high internal political efficacy—a belief in one's own capacity to understand politics—and low external political efficacy, or the perceived responsiveness of government institutions.[19] Whether this disconnect shapes students' interpretations of and reactions to online political propaganda represents a key concern of the present study.

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[17] 張卿卿, "大學生的政治媒介認知、政治媒介行為與其政治效能與政治參與之間的關係," [Media Perceptions, Media-Related Behaviors and Political Consequences: The Role of Media in the Political Socialization of College Students in Taiwan.] *選舉研究* 9, no. 2 (2002), https://doi.org/10.6612/tjes.2002.09.02.37-63.

[18] 陳陸輝 and 黃信豪, "社會化媒介、在學經驗與台灣大學生的政治功效意識和政治參與," [Socialization Agents, College Experience, Political Efficacy and Political Participation among College Students in Taiwan.] *東亞研究* 38, no. 1 (2007), https://doi.org/10.30402/eas.200701_38(1).0001.

[19] 陳陸輝 and 黃信豪, "社會化媒介、在學經驗與台灣大學生的政治功效意識和政治參與."

Political Expression, Self-Censorship, and the Influence of Platform Mechanisms

Although social media platforms provide spaces for opinion expression, the mechanisms of these platforms and their associated user cultures also create pressures on speech. This is especially evident on public platforms like Facebook and Instagram, where users' identities often overlap with their real-life social circles.[20][21] In such environments, political expression is not just a matter of conveying one's stance—it also involves maintaining interpersonal relationships and managing social perceptions. To avoid controversy or misunderstanding, many young users opt for silence or restrict the content of their expression, resulting in a phenomenon of self-censorship.[22]

By contrast, anonymous platforms such as Dcard and PTT, where users are not tied to identifiable profiles, tend to encourage more direct or intense speech. However, this does not necessarily imply that anonymous platforms offer greater freedom of expression. Some studies suggest that such anonymity can also intensify emotional attacks and group-based exclusion, leading to a different form of constrained discourse.[23][24]

In addition, user interaction mechanisms—such as likes, shares, and comments—can significantly influence the willingness to participate in political discussions. Content with clear or strong political stances is more likely to attract engagement and spread widely, whereas neutral or nuanced perspectives may be overlooked or misinterpreted. This dynamic pushes political expression toward simplification and

[20] Robertson, "Taiwan's Youth Are Still Politically Engaged, But for New Reasons."
[21] Robertson, "Taiwan's Youth Are Still Politically Engaged, But for New Reasons."
[22] Nachman, "Feeling Blue: Are Taiwanese Youth Becoming Less Pro-Independence?."
[23] Will Hung, "The Wild Card of Youth Voters in the Taiwan Elections," *Indo-Pacific Program* (September 11, 2023).
[24] Hung, "The Wild Card of Youth Voters in the Taiwan Elections."

polarization.[25]As a result, some young people choose to only consume content without expressing their views, or they participate through temporary formats such as Instagram Stories as a strategy to minimize personal risk.[26]

Internet Troll Operations and the Erosion of Youth Trust

The issue of internet troll operations has long existed within Taiwan's political context. Abnormal activities by political accounts and the spread of disinformation during multiple election periods have drawn public concern and weakened trust in political information.[27] As a result, young people's trust in online political information sources has been increasingly challenged—especially when specific accounts are clearly affiliated with political parties. In such cases, some youth opt to withdraw entirely from political discourse online.[28]

Research also shows that when young people perceive online political discussions as being manipulated or controlled by organized groups, their existing media literacy is not always sufficient to bridge the trust gap. Under these circumstances, individuals tend to rely on partisan alignment and peer opinions to guide their judgment.[29] This phenomenon becomes particularly pronounced during national election periods and warrants close attention.

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[25] Hung, "The Wild Card of Youth Voters in the Taiwan Elections."
[26] HSIN-TZU YANG, "Taiwan's blueprint for youth electoral engagement.," *Community of Democracies YouthLead* (February 14, 2024).
[27] Ming Hung   Wang et al., "Understanding potential cyber-armies in elections,"   (2020/3/1), http://www.scopus.com/inward/record.url?scp=85083229095&partnerID=8YFLogxK.
[28]Robertson, "Taiwan's Youth Are Still Politically Engaged, But for New Reasons."
[29] Hsin-Huang Michael Hsiao, "Generational Consciousness and Political Mobilisation of Youth in Taiwan," *China Perspectives*   (2022), https://doi.org/10.4000/chinaperspectives.13373, https://journals.openedition.org/chinaperspectives/13373.

The Role of Party Identity and Political Tendency

The final dimension of the literature review addresses how political identity and partisan alignment shape individuals' interpretation and behavior in digital politics. Party identity influences labeling, emotional tone, and participation patterns, making it a critical mediator between literacy and expression.

Political Labeling Language and Group Categorization Effects

The language style of political discourse in Taiwan has become increasingly characterized by labeling. Terms such as "Bluebird" (青鳥), "Little Grass" (小草), "1450," and "Ta Lu Ban"(塔綠班) are widely used on social media as tools for identifying political stances.[30] These terms are often simplified or distorted from their original meanings and carry strong emotional connotations. As a result, they not only signal one's political position but also play a role in shaping social identity and drawing lines between allies and opponents.[31] The use of labeling language reduces the space for rational debate, turning dialogue into antagonistic exchanges and weakening the potential for public discussion.[32]

According to the Spiral of Silence theory, when individuals perceive that their opinions are not accepted by the mainstream, they may choose to remain silent to avoid social isolation.[33] This mechanism is particularly evident in Taiwan's online political landscape. Some young people report refraining from expressing political views or even deleting past posts out of fear of being misidentified as supporters of a

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[30] Tanguy Lepesant, "Generational Consciousness and Political Mobilisation of Youth in Taiwan," *China Perspectives* 2022, Issue 1, pp. 57–67 (2022), https://doi.org/10.4000/chinaperspectives.13373, https://journals.openedition.org/chinaperspectives/13373.

[31] Lepesant, "Generational Consciousness and Political Mobilisation of Youth in Taiwan."

[32] Eliot Gibbins, "Identity and Democratisation: Lessons from Taiwan," (October 2023 2023), https://www.indopac.nz/post/identity-and-democratisation-lessons-from-taiwan.

[33] Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, "The Spiral of Silence a Theory of Public Opinion," *Journal of Communication* 24, no. 2 (2006), https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1974.tb00367.x, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1974.tb00367.x.

specific political faction.[34] At the same time, political polarization leads to reduced interaction between groups, and labels become tools for blocking communication rather than facilitating it.[35][36]

It is worth noting that some users regard political labels as symbols of identity. For instance, individuals who self-identify as "Little Grass" may see it as a sign of resistance against the mainstream or the establishment, thus reinforcing their political self-identity.[37]However, research also indicates that most young people view these terms as discriminatory and derogatory, and believe they negatively impact public discourse.[38][39]This contradiction reveals the flexible and ambiguous nature of political language in different social and cultural contexts.

Background Variables and Differences in Online Political Participation

Political expression and participation behaviors are also influenced by individual background variables. Research indicates that one's political orientation is significantly associated with how political information is interpreted, the level of tolerance toward labeling, and the willingness to express opinions.[40]Those who lean toward the pan-Green or pan-Blue camps exhibit distinct differences in interaction styles and frequency of content sharing on platforms, whereas individuals with neutral

[34] Stella Robertson, "Taiwan's Youth Are Still Politically Engaged, But for New Reasons," *Domino Theory* (Oct 8, 2024), https://dominotheory.com/taiwans-youth-are-still-politically-engaged-but-for-new-reasons/.

[35] Lev Nachman, "Feeling Blue: Are Taiwanese Youth Becoming Less Pro-Independence?," *Kissinger Institute on China and the United States* (October 24, 2024).

[36] Orson Tan, "Taiwanese Youth Voting for Taiwan: Studying Identity Formation in Taiwanese Youth and its Impact on Voting Patterns in Taiwan," (2023).

[37] Yi-wei Chu, "Cross-Strait Identity Formation Among Taiwanese Youth: Media Exposure, Political Socialization, and Civic Engagement in a Democratic Society," *International Journal of Science and Society* 7, no. 2 (04/22 2025), https://doi.org/10.54783/ijsoc.v7i2.1416, https://ijsoc.goacademica.com/index.php/ijsoc/article/view/1416.

[38] Dr Nathan Attrill, "China's love-bombing of Gen Z Taiwanese has its limits," *ASPI* (26 May 2025 2025), https://www.aspi.org.au/strategist-posts/chinas-love-bombing-of-gen-z-taiwanese-has-its-limits/?

[39] Attrill, "China's love-bombing of Gen Z Taiwanese has its limits."

[40] YANG, "Taiwan's blueprint for youth electoral engagement.."

or politically indifferent stances tend to show lower levels of participation.[41]

Additionally, the amount of time spent on social media is positively correlated with both the reception of political information and the frequency of political engagement activities.[42]

Among young people, political interest and motivation for participation manifest in diverse forms—not limited to voting or elections. [43]Their engagement often includes actions such as sharing posts, leaving comments, or creating memes. These behaviors carry symbolic meaning, reflecting young people's emotional attitudes toward public issues and their participation in political culture.[44]

Summary

Overall, the three dimensions of media literacy, label perception, and self-censorship are deeply intertwined and influenced by platform mechanisms, linguistic culture, and individual background variables. Although young people are frequently exposed to political information, their actual participation and expression are often constrained by multiple structural pressures. This study aims to clarify the relationships among these variables through empirical survey data and to address the current gap in the literature regarding quantitative research in this area.

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[41] Lin Thung-Hong, "Political Identity of Young Generation in Taiwan, 1995-2015," *香港社會科學學報* (2024).
[42] Thung-Hong, "Political Identity of Young Generation in Taiwan, 1995-2015."
[43] TEDS, "The Survey Of Yunlin County Magistrate Elections in 2009," (Taiwans Election and Democrazation Study, 2009).
[44] Hanadi Buarki and Hui-Yun Sung, "Use of social media by LIS students in Kuwait and Taiwan: A comparative analysis," *Information Services and Use* 44, no. 2 (2024), https://doi.org/10.3233/isu-240228, https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.3233/ISU-240228.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a cross-sectional quantitative survey design to examine Taiwanese university students' perceptions of online political campaigns and their patterns of political expression on social media. A quantitative approach was appropriate because the research focused on measuring relationships among clearly defined variables, including media literacy, perceptions of political labeling, and online political expression.

Survey-based quantitative research has been widely applied in political communication and media studies to identify population-level tendencies and test statistical relationships. By collecting data at a single point in time, this design allowed for systematic comparison across demographic backgrounds, political orientations, and media usage patterns.

Study Population and Sampling

The study population consisted of Taiwanese university students, a group that plays a significant role in Taiwan's contemporary political communication environment. University students are heavy users of social media and are frequently exposed to politically charged content, often without clear indicators of its origin or intent. Their online behaviors and perceptions are therefore particularly relevant for examining political labeling, misinformation, and media literacy.

Participants were recruited using a convenience sampling strategy through academic and student networks. Data were collected from students enrolled in universities across Taiwan, representing a range of academic disciplines and political orientations. A total of 376 valid responses were obtained.

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Most respondents were between 18 and 23 years old, with a slightly higher proportion of female participants. In terms of political orientation, approximately one-third identified as Pro-Green, while others identified as Pro-Blue, Neutral, or politically indifferent.

Research Instrument and Data Collection

Data were collected through a structured online questionnaire consisting primarily of closed-ended questions measured using Likert-type scales. The questionnaire was designed to assess respondents' levels of media literacy, perceptions of political labeling, and tendencies toward political expression or self-censorship on social media platforms.

A small number of open-ended questions were included to allow respondents to provide brief descriptive feedback. These responses were used for contextual understanding only and were not subjected to formal qualitative coding or thematic analysis. The primary focus of the study remained quantitative.

Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics were first applied to summarize demographic characteristics and general response patterns. Inferential statistical techniques, including cross-tabulations, analysis of variance (ANOVA), and correlation analyses, were then used to examine differences across political orientations, media usage levels, and demographic variables.

The analyses focused on identifying variations in political attention, information verification behaviors, and silence tendencies in online political discussions. These statistical procedures allowed for systematic testing of relationships among the key variables.

Ethical Considerations

All participants were fully informed of the research purpose, their right to withdraw at any time, and the procedures for data anonymization and secure storage. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their participation. The data were used solely for academic purposes, and participants' identities were kept strictly confidential.

Limitations of the Methodology

Several methodological limitations should be acknowledged. First, the use of self-reported data may have introduced response bias, including social desirability effects and recall errors. Second, although the sample included students from diverse backgrounds, the convenience sampling strategy may limit the generalizability of the findings to all Taiwanese university students. Finally, while a small number of open-ended responses were collected, these data were not analyzed qualitatively and therefore provide only supplementary insight.

Summary

This chapter outlined the methodological framework of the study. By employing a quantitative survey design, standardized measurement instruments, and statistical analysis, the research examined Taiwanese university students' perceptions of online political campaigns and their patterns of political expression. The methodology provided a systematic and reliable foundation for analyzing the relationships among media literacy, political labeling perception, and online political participation, which are discussed in the following chapter.

DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter presents the statistical analysis results used to answer the four research questions. The analysis is organized around three major constructs—media literacy, political labeling perception, and political expression/self-censorship—and follows the theoretical framework of Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) and the Spiral of Silence Theory.

Rather than merely reporting statistical outcomes, this chapter emphasizes the interpretation of findings within their social and communicative contexts. By integrating empirical results with Uses and Gratifications Theory and the Spiral of Silence Theory, the analysis aims to explain not only whether differences exist, but why such differences emerge among Taiwanese university students in digital political environments.

Descriptive Statistics of Participants

A total of 376 valid responses were collected, with a gender distribution of 58% female and 42% male. The majority (86%) were aged between 18 and 23. Political orientation was distributed among Pro-Green (31.9%), Pro-Blue (20.7%), Neutral (26.6%), and politically uninterested students (20.7%). Most students used social media more than three hours daily, with Instagram, Dcard, and YouTube being the most common sources of political information.

The demographic characteristics suggest that the participants represent a generation deeply embedded in social media ecosystems. The dominance of platforms such as Instagram, Dcard, and YouTube indicates that political information is primarily encountered through algorithm-driven environments rather than editorially curated news outlets. This context is critical, as such platforms are more likely to expose users to political labeling, polarized discourse, and peer surveillance, all of

which shape subsequent patterns of political expression and self-censorship observed in this study. From the perspective of the Spiral of Silence theory, such algorithm-driven environments are especially relevant, as they increase visibility of dominant opinions and heighten users' awareness of potential social judgment. This contextual background is essential for interpreting later findings related to self-censorship and political expression, particularly in addressing RQ3 and RQ4.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Participants

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	158	42.0
Gender	Female	218	58.0
Age	18–20	142	37.8
Age	21–23	180	47.9
Age	24–26	54	14.3
Political Orientation	Pro-Green	120	31.9
Political Orientation	Pro-Blue	78	20.7
Political Orientation	Neutral	100	26.6
Political Orientation	Uninterested	78	20.7

Factor Analysis

Exploratory factor analysis was conducted to identify underlying dimensions among the measurement items. Three major constructs were extracted with satisfactory factor loadings (all above .50):

1. Media Literacy (ML1–ML6) – Items such as "I actively verify the political information I encounter" (loading = .817) and "I can distinguish whether political

information comes from reliable sources" (.763) loaded strongly on this factor.

2.   Political Labeling Perception (PL3–PL7) – Items such as "I have personally been labeled with a specific political stance online" (.844) and "I believe such labels intensify online hostility" (.807) captured participants' perceptions of labeling dynamics.

3.   Political Expression and Self-Censorship (PESC1–PESC6) – Items including "I have deleted political statements I previously posted" (.843) and "I have blocked or cut ties with others due to political disagreements" (.784) reflected individuals' self-censorship behaviors and expressive tendencies.

The factor structure confirms that media literacy, political labeling perception, and political expression/self-censorship are empirically separable constructs, yet conceptually interconnected. Media literacy captures cognitive competence in evaluating political information, whereas political labeling perception reflects social and emotional pressures embedded in online interactions. Political expression and self-censorship represent behavioral responses shaped by the interaction of these cognitive and social factors. This separation is theoretically meaningful, as it suggests that self-censorship is not merely a direct outcome of political labeling, but a behavioral response mediated by perceived social pressure. Such a mechanism is consistent with the Spiral of Silence theory, which emphasizes perception and anticipation of social consequences rather than direct suppression of speech.

Table 2. Summary of Factor Loadings

Construct	Items	Factor Loadings
Media Literacy	ML2, ML3, ML1, ML6	0.817, 0.770, 0.763, 0.443
Political Labeling Perception	PL4, PL6, PL3, PL7	0.844, 0.807, 0.758, 0.569
Political Expression & Self-Censorship	PESC3, PESC6, PESC4, PESC2, PESC5	0.843, 0.784, 0.725, 0.556, 0.517

The factor structure confirms that media literacy, political labeling perception, and political expression/self-censorship are empirically separable constructs, yet conceptually interconnected. Media literacy captures cognitive competence in evaluating political information, whereas political labeling perception reflects social and emotional pressures embedded in online interactions. Political expression and self-censorship represent behavioral responses shaped by the interaction of these cognitive and social factors.

Notably, the distinction between political labeling perception and political expression suggests that labeling does not suppress expression directly. Instead, labeling appears to operate as an intermediate mechanism that heightens perceived social risk, which subsequently leads to self-censorship. This structure is consistent with the Spiral of Silence Theory, which emphasizes perceived social consequences rather than overt coercion as the primary driver of silence.

Media Literacy and Evaluation of Online Political Information (RQ1)

Descriptive analysis shows students' media literacy levels were moderately high (M ≈ 3.8 for source credibility, M ≈ 3.6 for fact-checking behavior). Media literacy was moderately correlated with fact-checking behavior (r ≈ .45–.50), indicating students with higher literacy were more likely to verify information. This finding

indicates that media literacy functions as an active cognitive resource rather than passive knowledge. In line with Uses and Gratifications Theory, students with higher media literacy are more likely to consciously adopt verification strategies to satisfy their informational needs and reduce uncertainty when encountering political content.

ANOVA results revealed Pro-Green students showed significantly higher fact-checking levels than politically uninterested students ($p < .01$), suggesting political involvement strengthens evaluative behaviors. This suggests that political motivation and identity salience strengthen the practical application of media literacy. Therefore, media literacy alone does not guarantee critical engagement; its effects are amplified when individuals perceive political information as personally relevant, directly answering RQ1.

The moderate correlation between media literacy and fact-checking behavior suggests that students with stronger evaluative skills are more likely to engage in active information verification. This finding aligns with Uses and Gratifications Theory, which posits that media users are purposive actors who actively select strategies to fulfill cognitive needs.

However, the observed differences across political orientations indicate that media literacy alone is insufficient to explain evaluative behavior. Students with clearer political identification demonstrated stronger fact-checking tendencies, suggesting that political motivation and perceived relevance amplify the practical application of media literacy. In contrast, politically uninterested students may possess basic evaluative skills but lack sufficient incentive to deploy them consistently

Political Labeling Perception (RQ2)

Around 70% of students understood the meanings of political labels such as "Bluebird" and "Little Grass," while 60% perceived such labels as discriminatory or polarizing. About 30% reported having been labeled online. This proportion is significant because it demonstrates that political labeling is not an abstract or symbolic phenomenon, but a lived experience for a substantial portion of students. Being personally labeled transforms political discourse from opinion exchange into social evaluation. ANOVA results showed that politically neutral or politically uninterested students were more negatively impacted by labeling, reporting higher discomfort and anxiety levels ($p < .05$). Labeling discomfort positively correlated with self-censorship tendencies ($r \approx .40$), supporting the Spiral of Silence mechanisms. This pattern supports the Spiral of Silence theory by showing that discomfort caused by labeling increases perceived social risk, which in turn leads individuals to withdraw from expression. Importantly, this effect is strongest among politically neutral and uninterested students, suggesting that labeling disproportionately excludes those without strong political identities, directly addressing RQ2.

The stronger negative reactions observed among politically neutral and politically uninterested students reveal an exclusionary dimension of online political discourse. While politically active individuals may reinterpret labels as identity markers or signals of group belonging, less engaged students perceive labeling as stigmatizing and threatening.

This asymmetry suggests that political labeling functions as a gatekeeping mechanism rather than a tool for debate. Instead of facilitating discussion, labeling narrows participation by discouraging individuals who lack strong political identities.

This finding extends the Spiral of Silence Theory by demonstrating how symbolic language—rather than explicit majority opinion—can trigger withdrawal from political expression.

Political Expression and Self-Censorship (RQ3 & RQ4)

Around 55% of respondents reported staying silent due to fear of conflict, and 45% had deleted political posts. This result suggests that political silence among university students is not primarily a result of indifference, but a strategic response to anticipated interpersonal conflict. Silence, therefore, reflects risk management rather than lack of political awareness. Regression analysis indicated media literacy significantly predicted lower self-censorship ($\beta \approx -.22$, $p < .01$), while labeling anxiety increased it ($\beta \approx .30$, $p < .01$).

These findings illustrate the interaction between individual competence and social pressure. While media literacy reduces uncertainty and fear of misinformation, labeling anxiety operates as a social constraint that limits expression even among capable individuals. This interaction explains why political silence persists despite relatively high levels of media literacy, answering both RQ3 and RQ4. ANOVA results showed that Pro-Green students expressed political opinions more freely, whereas politically indifferent students had the highest silence scores ($p < .001$). Students relying more on traditional media demonstrated deeper political engagement than those who mainly consumed social media content.

The regression results indicate that media literacy serves as a protective factor against self-censorship, reducing students' tendency to remain silent in political discussions. This suggests that confidence in information evaluation mitigates fear of making incorrect or socially unacceptable statements. However, the strong effect of

political labeling anxiety highlights the limits of cognitive competence in socially hostile environments.

Political orientation further differentiates expressive behavior. Students with clear political alignment consistently demonstrate higher willingness to express opinions, whereas politically uninterested students show the highest silence scores. This pattern suggests that silence should not be interpreted solely as apathy, but rather as a strategic response to environments perceived as judgmental or conflict-prone.

Taken together, these findings suggest that online political participation among university students is shaped by the interaction of individual competence (media literacy), social pressure (political labeling), and identity clarity (political orientation).

Summary

Media literacy plays a protective role by reducing self-censorship and promoting critical engagement. Political labeling significantly affects students' willingness to express opinions, especially among neutral or politically indifferent youth. Social media environments, though convenient, amplify labeling and polarization, contributing to silence and selective expression. Overall, the results demonstrate that online political participation among Taiwanese university students is shaped by the combined effects of cognitive ability, social labeling, and political identity. Rather than reflecting apathy, political silence emerges as a rational response to polarized and judgmental online environments. This confirms the explanatory power of Uses and Gratifications Theory and the Spiral of Silence theory in understanding youth political behavior in contemporary digital contexts.

Table 3. Summary of Major ANOVA Results

Test	Variables	Statistic	p-value	Significant Difference
ANOVA	Age × Political Attention	F(2,359)= 5.462	0.005	18–20 < 21–23
ANOVA	Political Orientation × Fact-checking	F(3,359)= 4.814	0.003	Pro-Green > Uninterested
ANOVA	Political Orientation × Silence	F(3,359)= 7.249	<.001	Pro-Green < Uninterested
Chi-square	Gender × Political News Following	χ²=42.99	<.001	Male > Female
ANOVA	News Source × Engagement	F(3,359)= 2.916	0.035	TV/News > Social Media

Table 4. Regression Predicting Self-Censorship

Predictor	B	Beta	p
Constant	3.064	-	0.000
Political Expression (PESC3)	0.164	0.224	0.004
Political Expression (PESC4)	0.081	0.117	0.043
Political Expression (PESC6)	-0.004	-0.006	0.939

Table 5. News Source and Political Engagement

Variable	Category	Statistic	Significance
News Source Type	Social Media vs TV/News	F(3,359)=2.916	0.035
Engagement Depth	Traditional > Social Media	F(3,359)=3.142	0.026

CONCLUSION

This study explored Taiwanese university students' perceptions of online political campaigns, focusing on media literacy, political labeling, and political expression. The findings show that while social media broadens access to political information, it simultaneously reinforces polarization and pressure to conform. Several key conclusions emerge:

Media Literacy as a Protective Mechanism

Students with higher media literacy demonstrated stronger fact-checking behavior, better credibility evaluation, and significantly lower self-censorship. This reflects the central idea of Uses and Gratifications Theory: individuals with stronger cognitive skills actively manage their media environment. Media literacy thus not only enhances information accuracy but also cultivates resilience in polarized online spaces.

Political Labeling and the Spiral of Silence

Political labeling—such as "Bluebird," "Little Grass," and "1450"—has become a defining feature of Taiwan's online political discourse. While some politically active students treat labels as identity symbols, politically neutral or politically indifferent students experience significant discomfort, leading to heightened self-censorship. This supports the Spiral of Silence Theory, demonstrating that fear of social isolation continues to shape youth political participation.

Political Orientation and Digital Expression

Political orientation strongly predicts engagement and political expression. Pro-Green respondents showed the highest levels of political attention and willingness to express views, while politically uninterested students remained the most silent. These

results suggest that expressive behavior is not only shaped by literacy, but also by identity and motivation.

Implications for Media Education and Civic Participation

The findings highlight the urgent need to strengthen media literacy education in Taiwan, not only as a tool to combat misinformation but as a means to foster empathy, reduce labeling, and support open and rational public discourse. Schools and institutions should incorporate media literacy curricula to help students recognize algorithmic biases, understand political labeling, and engage respectfully across differences.

Limitations and Future Research

This study relies on self-reported data, which may be influenced by social desirability bias. The sample includes only university students; results cannot be generalized to the broader population. Future research could adopt mixed methods, conduct longitudinal analyses, or compare youth from other democratic societies to further explore cultural factors in labeling and digital political expression.

Overall, this study demonstrates that media literacy and political identity jointly shape young citizens' engagement in Taiwan's digital political sphere. Strengthening students' analytical thinking, emotional resilience, and civic awareness is essential for cultivating an informed and inclusive democratic culture.

APPENDIX

親愛的同學您好：

我們是文藻外語大學的學生，目前正在進行一項有關「台灣大學生對網路政治宣傳的認知研究」之研究。本問卷採匿名填寫，所有資料僅供學術研究使用，絕不涉及任何個人資訊，請您放心填寫。本問卷約需 5-7 分鐘 完成，填答完畢即視為您同意參與本研究，您可隨時退出或不作答，研究團隊將尊重您的決定。

我們將會從所有填表單的人中抽出 20 份 300 元禮卷，另外第 31 題，填寫願意參與線下訪談的，我們會另外抽出 10 位來參與我們線下的訪談。

訪談會提供基本茶點以及紅包，歡迎大家踴躍參加。

訪談地點：文藻外語大學周邊的路易莎或者星巴克。

若被選中，我們會寄 E-mail 通知。

研究主題：台灣大學生對網路政治宣傳的認知研究
指導老師：林建宏教授
研究團隊成員：溫耀生 李滄賢 黃子嘉 曾宥齊

一、基本資料

1.性別

29□男 □女 □其他

2.你的年齡

□18-20歲 □21-23歲 □24-26歲 □其他

3.你就讀的學院

□文學院 □社科院 □理學院 □工學院 □商學院 □其他

4.你的政治立場傾向

□偏綠 □偏藍 □中立/游移 □不關心政治 □不願回答

5.你每日平均使用社群媒體的時間

□少於一小時 □1-3小時 □3-5小時 □超過5小時

6.你最常使用哪些平台獲取政治相關資訊？（可複選

□Facebook　□Instagram □ Dcard □ PTT □ YouTube □ Threads □其他

7.你是否關注政治新聞或選舉相關資訊？

| 非常不同意 | 1 ○ | 2 ○ | 3 ○ | 4 ○ | 5 ○ | 非常同意 |

8.你是否參與政治性活動（例：投票、連署、遊行）？

□ 有 □ 沒有 □ 不願回答

二、媒體辨識能力

9.我能分辨政治訊息是否來自可靠訊息

| 非常不同意 | 1 ○ | 2 ○ | 3 ○ | 4 ○ | 5 ○ | 非常同意 |

10.我會主動查證我看到的政治資訊

| 非常不同意 | 1 ○ | 2 ○ | 3 ○ | 4 ○ | 5 ○ | 非常同意 |

11.我知道有哪些事實查核機構可以使用

| 非常不同意 | 1 ○ | 2 ○ | 3 ○ | 4 ○ | 5 ○ | 非常同意 |

12.我曾不小心分享過錯誤的政治訊息

| 非常不同意 | 1 ○ | 2 ○ | 3 ○ | 4 ○ | 5 ○ | 非常同意 |

13.我覺得社群平台的推薦內容容易造成資訊偏差

非常不同意　　1　　2　　3　　4　　5　　非常同意

14.我會刻意關注與我立場不同的政治觀點

非常不同意　　1　　2　　3　　4　　5　　非常同意

三、政治標籤化感知

15.我知道「青鳥」和「小草」分別代表什麼立場

非常不同意　　1　　2　　3　　4　　5　　非常同意

16.我認為這類用語具有歧視意味

非常不同意　　1　　2　　3　　4　　5　　非常同意

17.在網路上，我曾因發表政治相關言論而被他人冠上特定政治立場的標籤

（如「青鳥」、「小草」等）

非常不同意　　1　　2　　3　　4　　5　　非常同意

18.曾被貼上這類政治標籤後，我感到不適，或因此減少參與政治相關討論

非常不同意　　1　　2　　3　　4　　5　　非常同意

19.我覺得這些分類術語讓討論變得更激烈

非常不同意　　1　　2　　3　　4　　5　　非常同意

20.我會因為某人被標籤為「青鳥」或「小草」而減少互動

| 非常不同意 | 1 ○ | 2 ○ | 3 ○ | 4 ○ | 5 ○ | 非常同意 |

21.我覺得這些用語有助於了解彼此立場

| 非常不同意 | 1 ○ | 2 ○ | 3 ○ | 4 ○ | 5 ○ | 非常同意 |

22.我希望網路政治討論能避免使用這些術語

| 非常不同意 | 1 ○ | 2 ○ | 3 ○ | 4 ○ | 5 ○ | 非常同意 |

四、政治表達與自我審查

23.我會在社群平台發表我的政治看法

| 非常不同意 | 1 ○ | 2 ○ | 3 ○ | 4 ○ | 5 ○ | 非常同意 |

24.我曾經刪除過自己發表的政治言論

| 非常不同意 | 1 ○ | 2 ○ | 3 ○ | 4 ○ | 5 ○ | 非常同意 |

25.我會擔心被他人誤會我的政治立場

| 非常不同意 | 1 ○ | 2 ○ | 3 ○ | 4 ○ | 5 ○ | 非常同意 |

26.我會因為擔心對立而選擇保持沉默

| 非常不同意 | 1 ○ | 2 ○ | 3 ○ | 4 ○ | 5 ○ | 非常同意 |

27.我曾因政治意見不合而封鎖他人

非常不同意　　1　2　3　4　5　　非常同意
　　　　　　　○　○　○　○　○

28.我願意與立場不同的人理性討論政治議題

非常不同意　　1　2　3　4　5　　非常同意
　　　　　　　○　○　○　○　○

29.我會避免在政治議題下留言或分享

非常不同意　　1　2　3　4　5　　非常同意
　　　　　　　○　○　○　○　○

五、總結與意見

30.你認為目前台灣的網路政治言論環境是健康的嗎？

非常不同意　　1　2　3　4　5　　非常同意
　　　　　　　○　○　○　○　○

31.是否願意參與線下訪談

○ 是 ○否

32.你認為要如何敢擅目前過於對立的政治討論風氣？

個別作答

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