Traditional vs. Social Media: A Phenomenology of Influences on Political Ideological Development in Adolescents

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Abstract

Increased political polarization in Congress and the general public seems to align with the advent of social media. Events such as the 2019 government shutdown highlight Congressional partisanship that has led to unsettling gridlock. As a truly representative democracy could be at stake, it is important to understand how partisanship among citizens mirrors congressional discord. As Ronald Brownstein asserts in The Second Civil War, "extreme partisanship has produced a toxic environment...that disenfranchises the millions of Americans attracted to pragmatic compromise" (2007, p. 13). According to the Pew Research Center, the gap between political values of Democrats and Republicans is now larger than at any point in Pew Research Center history (Mitchell, 2017).

The cause of this polarization has been tied to many different sources. Traditional media is a linkage institution—a system that connects the government to the people—that has been examined for spurring hyper partisanship. Legislation and court decisions have extended first amendment rights for traditional media, resulting in more biased news sources and possible misinformation, as well as a lack of consistency across the ideological news spectrum. However, traditional media still has an important filter: a large portion of the population doesn't have access to their own news show or newspaper to spread their ideals.

Social media has also become a prevalent linkage institution for constituents and representatives, and can be an accessible way to find information about candidates, parties, and current events. However, it is also easier to spread misinformation to a significant audience.

Many social media programming setups can create an "echo-chamber", and only share information with citizens that strengthens their political ideology.

Another factor differentiating social media from traditional media is the age group it attracts. Approximately 81% of teenagers use social media (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). Because of this, more than half of teens get news from platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter (Common Sense Media, 2019). As teens develop their political ideologies, social media may affect their exposure to information and thus affect socialization towards polarizing issues. Consequently, teens could be developing polarized views at a younger age, affecting future polity tremendously. As such, it is important to develop a better understanding of the difference between the influence of social media and traditional media on teens' development of political ideology. This leads to the question: Since the rise of social media, how has social media affected teen's political ideological development? To answer, I must identify the history and effects of traditional and social media, define terms imperative to my research, and analyze teenage use of social media.

Introduction

Political socialization and efficacy versus political ideological development (PID)

The factor most frequently measured in the political development of adolescents is "political socialization." Socialization alludes to political participation, referring to one's participation in voting, discourse, protests, and political efficacy. As defined by the Bill of Rights Institute, "Political efficacy is one's individual sense of how effective one's vote will be in influencing the political process" [1].

Although political socialization is a credible term for the development of political mindsets, the way it is used in existing literature does not apply to my research. The context and Type of political discussion is largely overlooked in literature studying political ideology development—political participation is often forced in a classroom setting through discussion. Additionally, political ideals are harder to measure in teens simply because most can't vote in elections. Current understanding would benefit from looking into the

progression of internalized biases and hostility in adolescent discussion, or for the purposes of this paper, Political Ideological Development (PID).

Traditional media

There are important distinctions between traditional and social media. As defined by The Encyclopedia of Mobile Phone Behavior, traditional media is "Any form of mass communication available before the advent of digital media. This includes television, radio,and newspapers" [2] An essential factor in considering traditional media is the age group that consumes it. As Figure 1 shows below, Americans over 30 tend to use traditional media, while younger citizens rely more on social media as a news source. Unlike social media, traditional media is constantly scrutinized for validity, as seen with the recent "Fake News" phenomenon.

This is due to how traditional media is produced, with small population (journalists, news channels, etc.) funneling news to a large audience Figure 1.

Social media

Social media is defined by A Dictionary of Social Media as a "Website and/or application that enables users to create and share content or to participate in social networking," and is used more by younger generations, specifically teens [3] 72% of teens use social media [4] and the majority "use it for primarily [news] educational purposes and secondly for entertainment" [5] While traditional media is often scrutinized for legitimacy, social media is perceived as a marketplace of ideas, where anyone can spread content to a large audience. Contrary to traditional media, social media eliminates the filter of a smaller source, as anyone can share anything.

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Television dominates as a news source for older Americans

% of each age group who <u>often</u> get news on each platform

■ TV   ■ News website   ■ Radio   ■ Social media   ■ Print newspapers
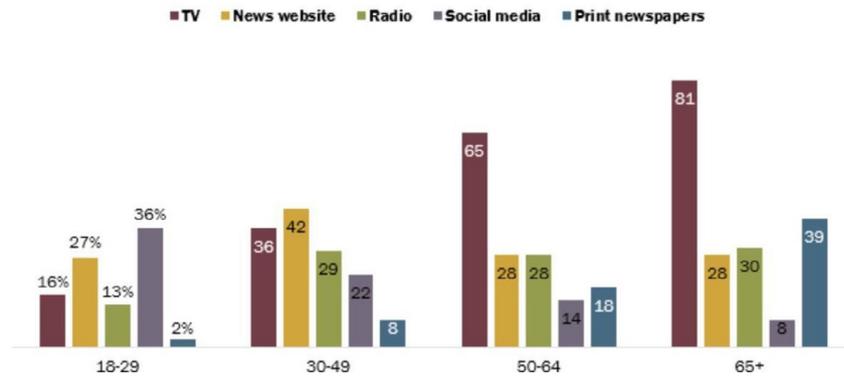

Figure 1. Percentage of each age group (starting at 18 years) who often get news on each platform.

Evolution and Biases of Traditional Media

Legislation and standards

Traditional media was initially extensively regulated, beginning with the Radio Act of1927. The act defined the role of the media as to serve the public interest, as the act only validated broadcasting licenses to those who did so [6] It later was enforced by the Communications Act of 1934 . Expounding on both acts was the Fairness Doctrine in 1949, found in a report entitled In the Matter of Editorializing *by Broadcast Licensees* [7] The Fairness Doctrine's objective was to ensure that different opinions on controversial issues are equally shared. It was repealed in 1987 due to claims of First Amendment violations for broadcasters, and can be correlated with the "explosion of partisan talk radio and television" in the late 1980s and early 1990s [8]. Since then, biases have become more prevalent in television.

A provision of the Communications Act of 1934, the "Equal Time Rule," still stands and is referred to as "the closest thing in broadcast content regulation to the 'golden rule'" [9]. This Equal Time Rule requires radio and television stations to treat political candidates equally in terms of air time [10]. However, in 1959, Congress provided the first exemptions to the rule for regularly scheduled newscasts, news interviews shows, documentaries (unless the documentary is about a candidate), and on-the-spot news events [9] Overall, while TV is still more federally regulated than social media is, the strength of those regulations have decreased.Over time.

Traditional media and polarization

An important consideration in reviewing polarization in traditional media is the difference between cable and network news. As said by Cultivating Political Incivility: Cable News, Network News, and Public Perceptions, "Whereas network television has always attempted to target their news products toward the center of the political aisle. Cable eschews this practice" [11] Since the 1980s, cable news has focused on an "event commentator

Format which feels less objective and could be contributing to distrust of certain news sources. According to Pew Research Center, 81% of consistent liberals distrust Fox News, while 88% of consistent conservatives trust it wholly [12] A 2017 study in American Economic Review additionally estimates that removing Fox News from cable television during the 2000 election cycle would have reduced the overall Republican presidential vote share by 0.46 percentage points. The predicted effect increases in 2004 and 2008 to 3.59 and 6.34 percentage points, respectively. The study found that "The cable news channels' potential for influence on election outcomes would be substantially larger as biases strengthen" [13]

While traditional media is more regulated than social media in terms of fairness and exposure, the rise of cable media biases has still led to increased polarization. It is possible that traditional media has since negatively affected PID in adolescents, but the remaining governance of traditional media makes it less likely. Given the fact that there are still some regulations in place with traditional media, and adolescents today consume more social media than traditional media, it is important to also look into the influence of social media platforms.

Evolution and Biases of Social Media

Differences from traditional media— the "fake news" phenomenon

Whereas debates have surrounded traditional media for over 200 years, social media is new to both its recipients and law. Social media has allowed individuals to spread any news they desire, creating a societal fear of misinformation and provoking blame comparable to that seen in 1950s McCarthyism. According to Echo Chambers in The Age of Misinformation, digital misinformation has become so "prevalent in online social media that it has been listed by the World Economic Forum as one of the main threats to human society." [14]

Regulation of social media has proven difficult. "Fake news", according to Yale Law,

Would typically fall into the category of public discourse and receive substantial First Amendment protection, regardless of its accuracy [15]. The Supreme Court has also held that false speech enjoys full First Amendment protection, as seen in [16]. This has led to a protective barrier around social media's fake news anomaly, where the main legal recourse against spread of misinformation is a defamation suit. However, defamation suits are only applicable if it's proven that the outlet acted with "actual malice" [17], which is difficult for an average citizen and usually only applies to public figures. This safety barrier around social media compares strikingly with the legislation that has surrounded traditional news.

Social media and polarization

Besides lack of regulation, researchers have considered other factors to help explain how social media could possibly affect teen PID. Since social media is a new medium, no theories or studies are especially conclusive, and researchers still dispute whether it has a positive or negative affect on political polarization. However, several factors seem to contribute to social media's negative effects on polarization.

Echo chambers

Social media programs can produce "echo chambers" for users. Media algorithms that track user interests create environments where the user only encounters beliefs or opinions that match their own. This furthers their confirmation bias and strengthens extreme ideas. According to Edward Kessler in Social Media and the Movement of Ideas, "The 'one-

way conversation' is becoming the norm and examples of genuine public dialogue have diminished significantly" [18]. Furthermore, echo chambers may be significant enough to severely affect adolescent PID.

Virtuous circles thesis and reinforcing spiral model

The Virtuous Circles Thesis (VCT) is extremely applicable to social media's effect on adolescent PID. According to the VCT, "the most politically knowledgeable, trusting, and participatory are most likely to tune in to public-affairs coverage. And those most attentive to coverage of public affairs become more engaged in civic life " [19]. It is possible that social media only attracts citizens who are already politically interested and active, and thus plays a role in amplifying strong beliefs.

When combined with the VCT, the Reinforcing Spiral Model (RSM) also suggests social media is detrimental to polarization. The RSM proposes that media consumption influences the beliefs of media users. In turn, the beliefs of media users influence their media consumption.

Over time, the two influences will work cohesively, influencing the user into more extreme versions of their original opinions [20]. These opinions are then shared through social media, influencing others. If RSM is combined with the Virtuous Circles Thesis, it is possible that "a divide between politically engaged and non-engaged citizens emerges" [21] as well as division between political ideologies.

Value, Gap and Hypothesis

Value: As teenagers develop political ideologies, the effect of social media could lead to further hostility in American political culture, as well as political gridlock. If young people become more polarized, it will become extremely difficult to pass legislation, converse civilly, and coexist. Hostility from ideologically developed teens has already been shown to be detrimental in schools. According to Teaching and Learning in the Age of Trump: Increasing Stress and

Hostility in America's High Schools, political hostility in teens has led to an antagonistic learning

Environment, especially for minority groups. The study states, "Individuals who do harbor perspectives and racism and [sic]bigotry now feel empowered to offer their views more naturally in class discussions" [22]. Clarifying the influence of social media on a teen PID could help abate nationwide polarization. The Role of Media Use in the Classroom and at Home in Improving News Consumption and Political Knowledge [23] described a course on how to interpret biases in traditional media that led to an increase in natural civil discussion. My research could help in developing a social media interpretation course, which could have the same positive effects as existing traditional media classes.

Gap: The majority of pre-existing research focuses on political efficacy and participation, creating a gap large enough that I felt the need to establish my own term. Because teens are not yet of voting age and because research on polarization is often funded by political campaigns that care primarily about election outcomes, there is very little research on the ways teen ideology is affected by social or traditional media. There is a lack of research on the PID of teens and its correlation with social media, especially with qualitative data. Usually, political polarization is measured quantitatively with voting statistics.. This can be seen in sources such as It's Partisan Time: Teens Forge Political Identities [24] and #Polar Scores:

Measuring partisanship using social media content [25]. As such, this study aims to provide qualitative data to enhance understanding of social media's influence on teenage PID.

Hypothesis: Considering trends in existing literature, I hypothesize that social media is causing a more hostile PID in teens than traditional media has in the past. As an illustration of this study's hypothesis, the flowchart in Figure 2 below shows how characteristics of PID (political efficacy,
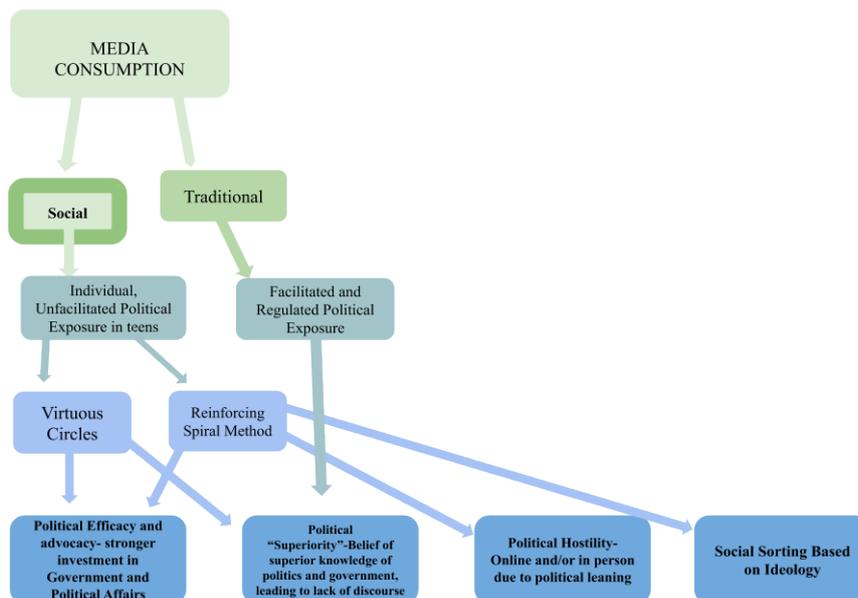
Superiority, hostility, and sorting) could be affected by both social and traditional media. However, existing studies suggest there are more contributing factors to PID from social media than traditional media, which is shown below. If my hypothesis is supported, increased polarization in teens from social media usage is leading to a hostile learning environment, as well as jeopardizing future bipartisanship Figure 2.

Methods

Inquiry process

My research process was an embedded mixed-methods study that used a Non-experimental, exploratory approach, after examining existing literature, I prioritized the collection of qualitative data, which is rarely used in the research community for measurement of polarization. Qualitative data would help determine how and why social media affects PID, whereas quantitative

Adolescent PID

Figure 2. Hypothesis: social media and adolescent PID.

data would help compare polarization in both teens and adults. Research from News Media Use and Political Engagement Among Adolescents highlights the importance of qualitative data: "further consideration of how to best measure news use in today's fragmented media environment is certainly warranted" [21].

To understand how PID is affected by social media, I collected data from current teenagers, who have constant access to social media during their PID, and from adults, who didn't have access to social media during their adolescence. My aim was to compare their PID and separate the nuances potentially caused by social media. I determined surveys would be the most effective method to collect data from both demographics. While interviews are more

In-depth, surveys enable a larger number of people to participate. A large sample size helps decrease bias and provides an overall idea of polarized ideals within the research group. The teen surveys and adult surveys were similar in the collection of quantitative data, including Likert scale forms. I modeled quantitative collection after quantitative-based studies such as College

Freshmen Are More Politically Divided Than Ever [26]. The collection of qualitative data varied. The teen survey (see Appendix A) included more free-response questions based on how social media affects their political opinions, whereas the adult survey (see Appendix B) focused on what they believed was the most influential factor towards their PID as a teen. I sent out a secondary survey (see Appendix C) through social media itself to get a large representation of teen thoughts on solutions against political hostility.

I also obtained permission to observe an AP Government senatorial debate simulation—the notes from that observation can be found in Appendix D. Additionally, I conducted an online interview with several teachers (see Appendix E for the questions), to gain a different perspective on political hostility in the classroom. Questions were loosely inspired by the study in Teaching and Learning in the Age of Trump: Increasing Stress and Hostility in America's High Schools [22]. Overall, my process of inquiry was a phenomenology that prioritized qualitative data.

Participants

At a local Midwestern, medium-sized suburban high school, I sent the adolescent survey through email to students aged 15-18 and received 190 responses. I received an additional 93 responses to the secondary survey sent through social media. My observations of the AP Government class senatorial simulation yielded additional qualitative data from 22 high school seniors and one junior. Finally, five teachers—from the Social Studies, English, Latin, and Student Services departments—responded to my online interview.

I distributed the adult survey through family members, Facebook, and teachers, and received 83 responses. The age of the respondents varied from 19 to 78. Although the survey was originally encouraged for adults of all political leanings, as survey data started trickling in, I noticed an extreme majority of the respondents were Democratic. To increase representation, I requested distribution assistance from self-proclaimed republicans in the community, having them share the survey with adults who are also conservative. In doing so, the number ofRepublican respondents increased to 23 of 83 instead of 15. Overall, the number of participants in this study was around 278[1].

Ethical research practices

To ensure my data would be collected ethically, I submitted an Institutional Review Board (IRB) application to the local IRB board, which helped guarantee participants' privacy and anonymity. With added assurances that respondents would remain anonymous, my application was approved, and I was able to commence my study and publish any significant findings.

Materials

I used the programs Google Forms and Instagram to create my surveys,

and all were conducted and shared through either email or social media. I used a phone to record class discussion during my observation of the AP Government class and the teacher signed an informed consent form (Appendix F) to further ensure my research was ethical. For analysis of survey data, I used Google Sheets.

Data collection

First, I had my high school principal send the teen survey to the entire student body. I then posted the adult survey on my Facebook account and encouraged adults who I knew were willing to share the survey with their peers.

After receiving responses and beginning to notice trends in my initial data, I decided to further my analysis by observing an especially politically-charged class. After detailing my research to the students in the simulation, I recorded and took notes on the debate that included political "hot-button" issues, like prison reform, healthcare, and mental health. I made note of [1]It should be acknowledged that the surveys were anonymous so ensuring there was no overlap between observation participants and survey participants is impossible.That said,the total number of participants would likely still be well over 200,even i fall APGovernment students also took the survey.

Dialogue that consisted of hostility and compromise as well as physical observations (for example, eye-rolling).I then listened to the recording and documented quotes that characterized the debates as a whole (see Appendix G).

I intended to do in-person interviews with teachers to garner a different viewpoint on political hostility in the classroom. However, due to the COVID-19 outbreak, I conducted online interviews with willing teachers. To do so, I created a Google form with only free-response questions asking about their experience with social media, students, and political hostility.

During the online school period I also created a secondary survey for teens, which I sent out through Instagram and was focused on their ideas for curbing political hostility.

Dialogue that consisted of hostility and compromise as well as physical observations (for example, eye-rolling). I then listened to the recording and documented quotes that characterized the debates as a whole (see Appendix G).

Results

Media usage: high school survey

Overall, 57.1% of teens surveyed use social media as their main source of political content, while 29.1% use news applications on their phones and 13.8% use traditional sources of media. Of the teens that prefer traditional media as their main news source, the most common reason was a fear of misinformation. The teen traditional media responses are displayed in Figure 3 below, and noteworthy narrative explanations for this are included in Table 1 below further.

As for the teens who use social media as their main source of political content, 45.65% said they see the most political content from friends and family, 39.6% from news accounts, 6.9% from "trending" hash tags or pages, 6% from both friends, family, and news accounts, and 3% from advertisements. "Trending" hash tags and pages referenced include the Instagram explore page and the TikTok "For You" page. Both use algorithms to prepare content for users that cater to their shown interests. Answers are displayed in Figure 4.

Although some students prefer traditional media over social media, the vast majority of adolescents surveyed use social media. When asked to rate their usage of social media on a scale of 1 (I do not have/use social media) to 4 (I use social media daily, and often I find myself checking social media almost every hour), the majority of students placed their social media use

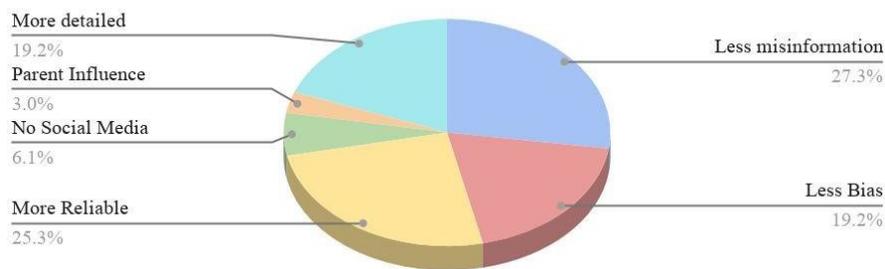Why do you prefer Traditional Media Over Social Media?

Figure 3. Student's traditional media preferences.

Table 1. Narrative responses-traditional media responses.

Why do you prefer Traditional Media over Social Media?	Social Media is full of fake news and traditional media tends to be more reliable. However, it is becoming harder and harder to decipher the bias and reliability of the information we receive.
	Social media is filled with too many rash statements from people regarding politics, "fake woke" people and biased summaries of events. I'd rather read the facts from a reliable source and then form my own opinion, and not automatically conform to whatever harsh opinions I see on social media. Also, nobody on social media is willing to have a mature conversation about politics. It always escalates into insults and adds to group polarization regarding the political parties they identify with.
	Because social media news is usually perpetrated by ignorant individuals whereas, although it isn't perfect, traditional news requires a whole team or staff to be ignorant, in a situation that is much less likely.

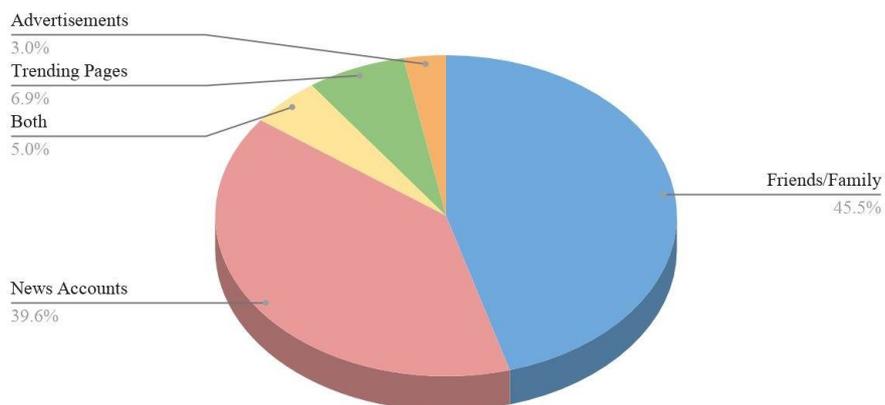From what source do you see most of your political content posted?

Figure 4. Student's social media preferences.

on the scale as a 3 or 4. This shows that although some students trust traditional media more than social media in terms of politics, exposure to politics through social media is still widespread.

The entirety of the student's rankings on the Likert scale is seen in Figure 5.

Although the majority of teens have high exposure to social media, and the majority of teens who use social media as their main political source tend to see the most political content from friends and family, only 37.4% post political content on their own accounts. This may be due to the fact that political content tends to incite negative responses. When asked their opinions on peers' political content, 50.4% responded that political content most often spurs a negative

Change in their opinion towards the peer who posted. The full results can be seen in Figure 6, with narrative responses for this question represented in Table 2, Figure 6.

Media usage: adult survey

2.4% of adults surveyed used social media for political exposure in their teenage years. 61.2% of adults surveyed used television as their main source of political content. However, 52.2% of adults responded that the

effects of media had minimal impact on the growth and development of their political views, which can be seen in Figure 7. A factor commonly referenced in narrative responses was the limited access to different channels, as well as that the news sources they watched were a way to learn information about both sides rather than being swayed with biased information. Narrative responses can be seen in Table 3, Figure 7.

Hostility in the classroom

A large focus of my inquiry was on political hostility in the high school classroom before and after the advent of social media. 68.4% of teens surveyed have seen consistent hostility in school, 9.8% occasionally have, and 21.8% have not. Compared to responses from the adult survey, perceived hostility of any kind jumped significantly between adults and teens. The disparity can be seen in Figure 8. Teen narrative responses describing hostility include accounts of judgment, social sorting, criticism, and lack of discourse, and can be seen in Tables 4 & 5, Figure 8.

Political hostility was also evident during my observation of the AP Government Senatorial Simulation. The class discussed a variety of issues, including mental health, veterans care, Planned Parenthood, and prison reform. Students demonstrated not only partisan hostility, but also

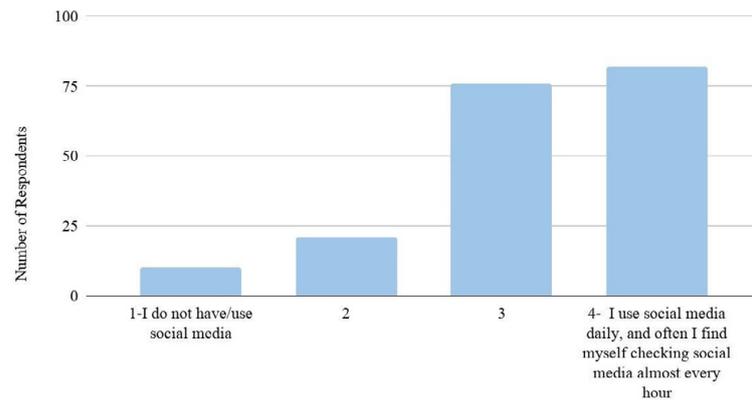## How often do you use Social Media?

Figure 5. Student's social media usage.

If seeing a peer post political content does it NORMALLY incite a positive or negative change in your opinion towards them?
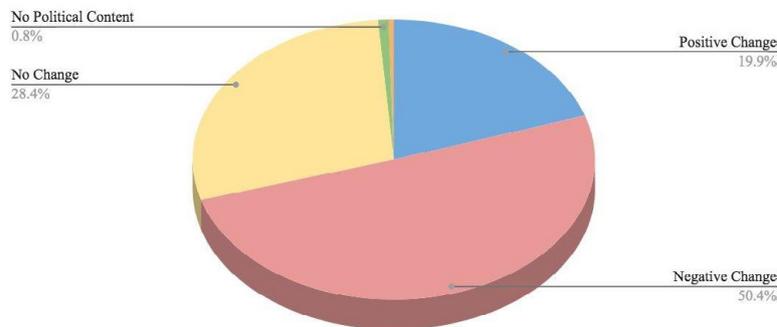

Figure 6. Students' opinions on peer's political content.

Table 2. Students' opinions on peer's political content.

If seeing a peer post political content does it NORMALLY incite a positive or negative change in your opinion towards them?	If a friend posts something that goes extremely against my beliefs, especially if it's not something we've talked about in person, it kind of makes me feel like I don't really know them that well, and if it's about an issue that I feel morally connected to, it could even make me re-evaluate how closely I associate with that person.
	Maybe it's a bit aggressive, but if I see any classmate of mine post pro-Trump content publicly my opinion of them immediately plummets and I won't take what they say seriously anymore.
	Political views represent our moral values, our core beliefs. If someone shares something I believe to be ignorant or harmful, I do not want to be around them if they perpetuate that type of content.

How did (if at all) media affect the growth and development of your political ideas in your youth?
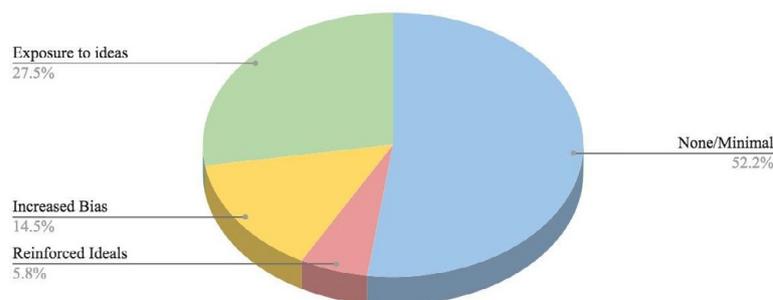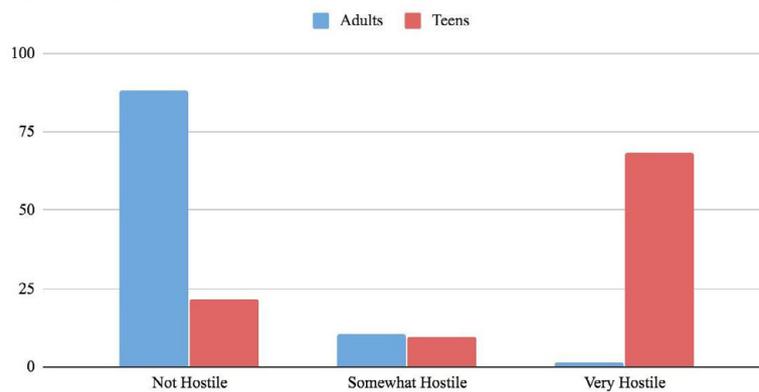

Figure 7. Media's Effect on Adult PID.

perceived political and civil superiority. Students exhibited hostility towards other students, even if they had the same political leanings, based on their constitutional and political knowledge. Further observations are seen in Table 6.

After observing the AP Government class, I included questions about perceived political superiority in my online teacher interviews. However, only the social studies teacher clearly recognized this specific type of hostility. They cited current events, Article I section VIII and

Table 3. Media's effect on adult pid- narrative responses.

How did (if at all) media affect the growth and development of your political ideas in your youth?/Why did you prefer the news source you did?	The effect of the media was more limited than today. We watched the national news on TV every night, which was limited to 30 minutes (including commercials). Newspapers were in print form only, so the news they provided was updated only once per day (if you read the morning paper, you had to wait until the next morning for news updates). We also read weekly news magazines such as Time, which had more in-depth articles but were updated only once per week.
	By supplying neutral information on which I based my opinions.
	It was the 70s. You watched the station with the best reception.
	I think the media explained enough about the differences between the different political parties and the views they represented
	Parents had it on. Preference was not a choice. Only 3 channels

Figure 8. Political hostility in high school: Teens vs. Adults.

Table 4. Hostility in school-teen responses.

Do you notice hostility in school when it comes to discussing politics?	I noticed that some people will get noticeably upset whenever someone has a different viewpoint from them. I've heard stories of students walking out of classrooms during debates when a story stated an opinion that others disagree with. I have also seen students make fun of the appearance of certain students when they had a different stance on abortion during a debate in health class.
	By some, and especially when it is an issue concerning identity politics.
	I, myself, tend to judge people if I see them make a social media post on a topic that I feel strongly about. It makes me want to not talk to them in school.

Table 5. How is hostility in school shown? student responses.

How is this hostility shown, in your experience?	If someone's a democrat they might say a republican's an uneducated person and if someone's a republican they might say that a democrat's a snowflake, without even meeting the person or ever having a conversation with them.
	This one guy said, "I'm a conservative" in the middle of class once and everyone suddenly looked at him differently. The room got quieter. No one said anything though
	In my AP government class, we have discussions about current events and democratic debates. I have found that when people tend to have an opposing viewpoint that leans conservative, many people criticize and say that they are 'stupid'. Despite not saying it openly, I have heard many negative comments, yet in my opinion, people are inclined to speak what they believe.
	My classmates and myself included will talk poorly about people who share political opinions we don't agree with.
	People who I thought were good people have told me that if anyone is a Republican, they would immediately hate that person without giving them the benefit of the doubt, but yet I respect their opinions all of the time even though I don't agree with them. I am not given the same respect, so now I tend not to share my political opinions and no one actually knows what side I am on because of this. I try to just play along but it can be detrimental to one's mental health by holding all of this in on a daily basis.

Other specific constitutional clauses as points of hostility in students. Other interviewees noted general political hostility caused by social media, as seen in Table 7.

Respondents' proposed solutions

After my initial inquiries, I concluded that enough political hostility was shown in my data that collecting more data and ideas would prove beneficial. Every teacher interviewed supported some sort of social media interpretation class, whether it was a unit in an already established class, or a new curriculum altogether. 90% of students surveyed said they would support a social media interpretation class in their social studies curriculum, and 64% believe it should be mandatory. Student reasoning can be seen in Table 8, and other proposed ideas for solutions to political hostility are inTables 8 & 9.

Table 6. AP Government observations.

Hostile Quotes/Dialogue	Physical Observations
"Can we kick_____out?"	Eye Rolling
"I start a motion to censor_____from talking anymore."	Slamming Fists
"Don't bring in your opinion if you don't have solid examples."	Agreed consensus, if the bill wasn't proposed by their party they wouldn't pass
"You're talking too much."	Smirking/Laughing
"I'm not allowing any (democratic) bills to pass."	Whispers, Gossip
"You should KNOW where that is (in the constitution)"	Total shutdown of discourse, student putting head down
"If you don't take human rights seriously I'm not going to take you seriously."	Tears, leaving the classroom after student's bill budget was made fun of

Table 7. Teachers viewpoints-political hostility.

Please analyze/discuss how you feel social media news sources and sharing has pertained to political hostility in your classroom, if at all.	I think we are lazy consumers and allow algorithms to shape the world we see. We also tend to associate with like-minded people and so experience confirmation bias.
	I think students absorb the culture of social media posts and videos. Internet celebrities have a large influence on their opinions. Internet and meme-culture is certainly caustic and pessimistic for the sake of humor. I see many students as highly opinionated with no interest in listening to opposing points of view, though arguing is enjoyable for some. My bias here is that I tend to disagree with most of my students' explicit philosophical and political views. It's also worth mentioning that many students do not really have explicit opinions. Many are apolitical.
	The language used in some political sources shared on social media sometimes comes up in class discussion, which can sometimes be offensive.
	I think that in our society we see a lot more hostile discourse through social media than we do in person. It is much easier to voice hostile comments and beliefs through social media when you are not face-to-face than it is in person (it has become a wall to hide behind for many people). I think that in my class, students are hesitant to be hostile towards each other in an in-person conversation like a Socratic Seminar, but as soon as class is over, I have overheard students speaking poorly about each other behind their backs and have had to address this.

Table 8. Support of social media interpretation class.

Would you be in favor of incorporating social media interpretation classes into your high school social studies curriculum to curb political hostility and stereotyping in your school? Why/Why not?	Social Media is so prevalent in our lives and dominates a lot of our political culture and I think it's important that we learn how to perceive others' opinions and social media posts especially. It can be hard to interpret things online when people are only focusing on their own beliefs when it's so easy to do with social media.
	We need to learn how to have respectful discourse online, as well as knowing how to weed out fake and misleading posts.
	Education about it should have been implemented as soon as it started.
	I observed an elementary school that had a class called 'digital citizenship'. I don't know much about it but I think it's very important in this very digital world.
	In theory, it sounds good, but I doubt most people would take it seriously and it'd end up being a joke.
	Social Studies is a lot about learning about the world around us and how it came to be that way. It's also about what our current world is like and understanding the why's to situations so learning how to interpret social media, which is such a big part of our lives, should be a part of that.
	As developing adults without a ton of real-world experience, we turn to social media for news and information. Biased news will no doubt infiltrate our conscience and shape our opinions

Table 9. Students' proposed solutions to political hostility.

Is there any other/better way to try and stop political hostility in school and encourage students to emphasize respect in their opinions?	Maybe instead of "democrats club" and "conservatives club" you just have a politics club so we're focused on solving our problems, not fighting about them.
	A class/unit seems to be the best because it's attached to a grade, which seems to be the easiest way to make people care.
	The same idea, but I think having an emphasis on how to have respectful dialogue while disagreeing is the most important part.
	More discussion-based learning, and understanding the root beliefs of both parties in an unbiased way. More encouraged political discourse in students who might not have a passion for it/have different opinions.

Discussion

Limitations

Surveys and location: My ability to conduct research was limited by the pool of respondents available to me. The majority of students surveyed were from a single school with required civics education classes and testing—curriculum that may affect teen PID and is discussed further in the Conclusion. Only 17 states require mandatory civics testing in high school [27] so results may have been different with nationwide access to student respondents. Additionally, both the school and adult populace surveyed were predominantly located in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. This region has strong democratic leanings which led to some biased responses that proved difficult to sort. I attempted to mitigate the civics education issue by posting the social media interpretation classes poll on Instagram, where students nationwide had access to the poll. To acquire data from all sides of the political spectrum, I reached out to self-proclaimed conservative voters in my community and asked them to share the survey with like-minded people.

COVID-19: I was also limited by the time allotted for data collection, which initially was about 3 months and was cut shorter by the COVID-19 outbreak. The outbreak hindered my plans for in-person discussion groups with both students and teachers. Online surveys are more effective

in garnering a large number of responses. However, they eliminate the chance to ask follow- up questions and are likely to receive less authentic responses, sometimes due to misinterpretation of the question asked. The number of responses from the online teacher interview was lower than expected, but extremely detailed.

High school political research & internal biases

My age and identity were also constraints on data collection and analysis. As a high school student, I risk not being taken as seriously by participants. Additionally, I have developed my own political biases and have most likely had my PID affected by social media as well. To counteract these limits, I established credibility by communicating professionally, gathering informed consent, and researching existing literature on polarization in social media. I strived to separate my personal political beliefs from my data analysis, as well as establish enough credibility to receive authentic responses from the majority of responses.

Conclusions

My research shows that high school students today are facing more political hostility by far than any other generation surveyed. Additionally, teens are relying heavily on social media as a news source, far more than previous teens relied on traditional media. This is due to the fact that, according to respondents, social media is far more accessible than traditional media.

Traditional media may require paid subscriptions or networks that can be unaffordable.

The data demonstrates the increased polarization influenced by social media, as student respondents mentioned negative responses to political posts against their ideas, which connects to the Virtuous Circles Thesis discussed earlier. Student respondents also noted social sorting, gossip, and stereotyping as evidence of polarization in schools. Signs of perceived political superiority were higher than expected, where students have experienced judgement simply based on their breadth of knowledge of politics. This ties heavily back to the gap between civically engaged/ unengaged students predicted by the VCT and Reinforcing Spirals Model. I can further conclude that the VCT and RSM are causing gaps even between similarly engaged students because of observed perceived political superiority in advanced social studies classes. In these

Classes, the majority of students are civically engaged and political, yet perceived superiority was still observed. The vast majority of teens surveyed was in support of curbing hostility and recognized it as a serious issue. It seems the increase of social media use for politics has created a more hostile learning environment. This may prove detrimental to future

discourse and problem solving as they develop into adults.

My data revealed additional factors I hadn't predicted. My hypothesis stated that social media has caused an increase in political efficacy and participation. In actuality, adult survey respondents referenced protests and campaigning more often than teen respondents. This could be because of the phenomenon of "slacktivism", where people "support a cause by performing simple measures" but "are not truly engaged or devoted to making a change" (Muslic, 2019). Another factor affecting current teen PID is the evolution of civics education classes. A very small number of adults surveyed had civics classes as a teen, so it is possible the amount of civics education could affect PID more than social media. It's also possible civics education classes are just bringing out political hostility rather than causing it, given the goal of civics classes isn't to create opinion but broaden knowledge. Either way, my conclusions connect the rise in social media usage to the rise of political hostility in schools, showing the detrimental effect social media has on teen PID.

Further Research

My research and findings have opened multiple doors for future research. Both teens and teachers supported efforts to curb political hostility in the school. Most recommendations from teens included intervention by school administration, including regulation of clubs and emphasis on respectful discussion. The most common recommendation across the board was the installation of social media interpretation education. Ideas about how to implement this

Curriculum, however, were varied. I recommend further research on the most effective implementation and method of teaching social media interpretation, and how this may affect teen PID. Additionally, it would be beneficial to research the effect on civics classes and mandatory civics testing on PID and increased polarization. Overall, my research highlights the issues behind social media and PID, and I recommend further research to curb the negative effects and emphasize the positive aspects of social media use.

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