

**BEYOND THE HASHTAGS: CONSTRUCTS OF POLITICAL SCIENCE STUDENTS ON SOCIAL MEDIA AS A FORM OF JUSTICE**

**Abstract**

The pace of growth across social media sites is something to be astounded at. The constantly evolving digital media environment is changing the mechanisms of political action and social transformation in many societies. This study entitled, ***Beyond the Hashtags: Constructs of Political Science Students on Social Media as a Form of Justice*** had its purpose to answer these two questions the constructs of Political Science students on social media as a form of justice and its effects to the perspectives of Political Science students on the concept of justice. The study implored a qualitative method using phenomenological study as its research design. It had utilized interview guide as its research instrument and a one-on-one interview for its data gathering. Also, thematic analysis was used in the study for the data analysis. The findings of this research concluded that the perceptions of the Political Science students vary and could hold alike or different explanation from one another; therefore, it is guaranteed that participants would have different standpoints, and those who hold the same could be alike but the explanations underlying them may differ. Given the diversified answers, as a result, the researchers have verified that social media cannot be a form of justice but can also be used to propagate information and awareness. It also reduces the ignorance of netizens when it comes to the occurrences of the country and around the world. People on social media could also understand the story of both sides and weigh what is right and wrong, distinguishing what is true and not. Social media is a tool in which people can convey their feelings and experiences. It's an outlet for human behavior and public concern, but it is not enough to secure justice for those who seek it.

**Keywords:** *Hashtag, Political Science Students, Social Media, Justice, Constructs*

**INTRODUCTION**

Social Media has a wide array of influence when it comes to delivering issues to the public. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram not only just relay the news to discuss; but also establish a viewpoint of a story for the public to flock upon. It can also be considered to be a public court since it already procured a verdict even before the court does. Clark (2012) explained that when crimes are served on the platform the public immediately establish a trial upon publicity which makes it a challenge for the attorneys, defendants, and judges to settle. As the number of media users continues to grow, the same way goes for the amount of connection they can impact on the people that communicate through communities and interacts with organizations (Baym& Boyd, 2012). With the use of social media, the people can come up with their own conclusion and verdict on the issue at hand. Using naught but their devices and through the power that social media can hold; they can build a life and destroy one at the same time. In this day and age, one click from you can reach thousands of media users worldwide.

It has come to a conclusion that technology has reached the height of its momentum as it serves as a platform for people who wants to be the change; their voices be heard Schaffer (2021). Hashtags back then were just used for political publicity in line with a catchy slogan. However, Azi, and Nili (2021) pointed that in the year 2017 #MeToo movement stirred the social media platform as it slowly turned

into a global movement. It was first used by American Activist Tarana Burke on 2006 and was revived on October 15 on the said year as Alyssa Milano tweeted about the sexual assault that Harvey Weinstein did to her. The hashtag activism continued to prove its relevance as it held precedence and brought issues to light such as the #BlackLivesMatter, #IceBucketChallenge, #WomensMarch, and so many more. Another successful social media campaign resulted in the problem of 'upskirting' becoming a crime in the United Kingdom after the UK Parliament passed a bill Goswami (2018). The issue was brought to light when a woman in the United Kingdom was upskirted during a concert. She told her story through a Facebook post, which went viral and was picked up and shared by thousands of other women, who also shared their stories. Following the overwhelming response, she launched an online petition to criminalize upskirting, which received over 50,000 signatures (Alamán 2020). A member of Parliament took up the petition and introduced it as a Private Members Bill. After overcoming parliamentary hurdles, the bill was passed into law.

The Philippines has been named the world's social media capital for the fourth year in a row. According to We Are Social's Global Digital Report in 2019 by Kemp, there are 76 million active Filipino social media users – 71 per cent of the populace – who devote an average of four hours a day on various social media sites. In 2020, the latest annual study on social media and digital developments, where the Philippines is the world's largest users of Internet and social media, and the most active, with an average of three hours and 53 minutes a day on social media. The term "trial by publicity," resonated all throughout the social media sites in today's age Khandelwal and Khandelwal (2021). The Philippines have long accustomed to this kind of "swift justice" where they resort to social media to mend their problem rather than to a file a case and have it legally consulted where certain procedure must be thoroughly observed. This has recently been proved in the case by Christine Dacera when the Philippine National Police released insufficient information about the suspects involved and have considered the case close without the testimonies of the alleged suspects of the rape-slay case and enough evidence for basis. With this, the public have lashed out about the case and have concluded the verdict among themselves Newnham & Bell (2012).

To put the problem in the local context, in the year 2019, the case of teenage girl had made ruckus in the world of social media, more precisely in Facebook. She was slain and dumped wherein she was found afloat in a river in the municipality in Banga. Netizens have claimed their own opinions of the perpetrator and verdicts on the case. To the point that it has influenced the process of the case that until then is considered unsolved. In Facebook, a lot of people joined the conversation and had their own point of view, they even pointed their fingers to the mother of the victim thus circulating another theory.

With this, as social accountability continues to rise, this helps people to be held responsible for their actions and demand justice. In the same manner, as the use of online platforms continues to increase, it can result in a scenario wherein 'fiction might find a way to become a fact.' Thus, these issues created an interest and motivated the researchers to recognize and identify the constructs of Political Science students of Notre of Marbel University with the topic of social media as a form of justice. In this way, the researchers can see and grasp the constructs of the political science students towards social media as a form of justice.

### **Statement of the Problem**

This study had aimed to determine the constructs of social media as a form of justice. Specifically, it sought to answer the following:

1. What were the constructs of Political Science students on social media as a form of justice?
2. How did these constructs affect the perspectives of political science students on the concept of justice?

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

This study had focused generally on the constructs of social media as a form of social justice that aimed to specifically seek an answer from Political Science students of Notre Dame of Marbel University College Department. This study had implored a qualitative method using phenomenological study as its research design. Phenomenology is an approach to qualitative research that focuses on the commonality of a lived experience within a particular group. The fundamental goal of the approach is to arrive at a description of the nature of the particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). The purpose of the phenomenological approach is to illuminate the specific, to identify phenomena through how they are perceived by the actors in a situation. Through the use of this research design, researchers aimed to identify the constructs of Political Science students on social media as a form of justice and how these constructs affect the perspectives of the said respondent.

### **Setting of the Study**

The study was conducted at Notre Dame of Marbel University located at Rafael Alunan Ave, Poblacion, Koronadal City, South Cotabato. This is an institution situated in the province of South Cotabato, in the island of Mindanao, Philippines. This is the perfect location for the interview because the researchers were able to collect plenitude of significant information, different ideas, and distinct opinions from real experiences of the AB Political Science students that are needed for the study. The said local of the study is situated in an area where the researchers can easily approach and make contact with. Also, Notre Dame of Marbel University is the only school who offers AB Political Science in Koronadal City.

### **Participants**

The participants of this study are Political Science students from Notre Dame of Marbel University. The study had utilized the purposive sampling technique. This sampling technique was used with the knowledge of the researchers on the topic, they could make inclusion criteria that would ensure to choose eligible participants for the study. The following criteria are set by the researchers as they deemed necessary in the conduct of the study. First, participants must be enrolled as political science students of Notre Dame of Marbel University in the school year 2020-2021. Second, the participants could be coming from any year level in college (1st year- 4th year). Lastly, they should also have social media accounts (Twitter or Facebook) that updates them of current issues. Morse (1994) suggests at least six participants should be interviewed in a phenomenological study. The participants will be eight or until saturation is reached. The participants were interviewed one on one through ZOOM meeting.

## **Research Instrument**

The instrument that the researchers had used is a one-on-one interview for the process of gathering the requisite information about the constructs of social media as a form of justice. One-to-one interview is a widely used method of data gathering in health and social research. Individual interviews are a helpful opportunity to obtain transparency into people's attitudes, understandings and perspectives about a particular phenomenon and may lead to an in-depth compilation of results.

One-on-one interview was used by the researchers as it provides flexibility to the interviewers and the responses of the interviewees wouldn't be affected by the other candidates. The interviewer could also judge the non-verbal behavior of the participant, and it would be easier for them to ask follow-up questions for more detail and accuracy. Semi structured interview was also being used by the researchers as questions were formulated ahead of time. It's also been used to dive deeply into personal and often sensitive issues; and to discuss participants' opinions, emotions, and convictions about a specific subject. This aided the interviewers in being primed and appearing efficient during the interview. Participants were also capable of expressing themselves in their own terms during the semi structured interview. The guide questions asked were the researcher-made questions which had undergo validation to check the reliability and validity of the questions in consideration of the research questions. The suggestions given by the validators had been applied to the said guide questions.

## **Data Gathering Procedures**

The study was conducted following a series of procedure, first the researchers produced a letter that was electronically signed by the teacher-in-charge and the NDMU IBED SHS principal. After the approval, in gathering the data, the researchers prepared a self-made questionnaire that was approved by the experts. With the limitations set upon by the COVID-19 IATF policy the researcher conducted a one-on-one interview through an online meeting. With the use of inclusion criteria, the researchers asked for a permission to the qualified interviewees and instructed through a short briefing: on how and what to do during the interview. The interview guide has 2 sections that are aligned with the statement of the problems. The researchers gave an ample time for the participants to think and discuss their thoughts. After the discussion, the researcher gathered the voice recording, then transcribed it into words and analyzed it.

## **Data Analysis**

In this research, the interview between the researchers and participants was recorded using a mobile phone sound recorder application and transcribed every single word the participants uttered in the zoom meeting as the text segments. To check for accuracy, the researchers listened to each interview while reading the transcripts. The researchers used thematic analysis as a tool where the text segments were analyzed to get codes that answer the questions. After getting the codes from the text segments, the researchers clustered the participant's same thoughts or answers to create themes. The themes collected were analyzed if it answered the statement of the problem, and discussed using related literature. The data was analyzed by getting codes and creating themes that answered the statement of the problem. It is a flexible technique that can be used for both exploratory studies, where you do not have a clear understanding of what pattern you want to find, and further analysis would be needed to determine exactly what you are searching for (Mortensen, 2023).

## **Ethical Considerations**

The researchers followed an e-interview protocol before conducting the interviews. Therefore, with an e-letter containing the participants' rights to agree or refuse to be interviewed, informed consent was requested from each research participant. The study adviser accepted and signed an electronic letter to perform the individual interviews using e-signature. It also expressed that their identity will be kept in private and all responses that will be used for academic purpose only shall be treated with utmost confidentiality.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Constructs of Political Science Students on Social Media as Social Form of Justice Awareness**

People engaged more of their time— 4.57 billion people worldwide now use the internet, of those users, 346 million new users have come online within the last 12 months browsing about the current issues happening in our surrounding on social media. In terms of social media as securing justice, many participants said that social media is a platform to express and voice out one's opinions, experiences, and feelings to be known by other people. Just like participant 5 also indicates that social media has a significant contribution in securing justice as it serves as a platform to express the experiences and feelings of a person (Ure (2019)). It is also used to spread information such as evidence and support that help secure justice and for the people to enlighten and have their own judgment. Also, an awareness as people will be aware of the information and evidence that is seen in social media. Social media refers to a platform where individuals state and express their judgment to a person, or scenario, affecting and influencing them. It is a platform where netizens fight for justice (Dollahide, 2023). Just like what participant 4 said, "it is a medium of communication which can probably spread necessary information that will educate people." Social media is a significant cause for people to be aware of a specific problem or topic, but no action is being done in actuality. They also claim that there is little social shift in social media but that it serves to apply society's current ideals (Madrigal, 2010). People encounter a lot of information on social media that contributes an impact to every individual especially in securing justice. As what participant 4 and 5 commonly said, "Social media is a way to inform people about relevant issues in our country." Interconnection on social media has exploded, meaning that knowledge about the world now gets out to billions of people a lot quicker and much more rapidly, which means the world is an even more interactive place. In securing justice, information coming from different people, especially the factual ones, is essential as people express their opinions and perspective. Through the fast spread of information posted online, people will be aware of their rights that should not be violated and ignored just what participant 5 said, "We ask for awareness of their rights and what they should have. Social media is a great medium to be heard and a great opportunity to be a catalyst against various injustices." Focusing on what people want to say is critically important because it is both real and on-time: people offer a first-hand perspective on the biggest problems of the day to everyone on social media. Also, this can be shown by the effectiveness of online social media to educate (Selepak, 2017).

### **Contingency approach**

Contingency approach Participant 7 said, "there are no universal implications whether it is relevant or what, as its implementation depends on the context and circumstance." Through this, he or she believes that securing justice on social media is like the context of contingency approach— the

contingency approach is a management theory that suggests the most appropriate style of management is dependent on a specific situation and that people can be adopting a single, rigid style is inefficient in the long term Ahmad, Alvi, & Ittefaq (2019). Information on social media can be easily manipulated, and it caused misleading of justice. However, to attain justice on social media, we must stick in the judiciary's empirical system, which is verifiable by the fairness of the judges Valenzuela (2013).

### **Criticism**

Social media is a massive platform for everyone where people can post their opinion through a particular situation regardless of the impact of the information— positive or negative. Social media negatively impacted the people as some of them oppose other people's opinions or perspectives. Like what participant 1 said in answering if social media has a significant impact on securing justice, he or she said, "using social media people criticize each other." Through this statement, he or she believes that justice through social media is not effective as it will result in criticism. People are often fearful of using social media for negative purposes and hurtful comments on organizations, such as blogs and websites (Richardson, 2013). Mainly when they think of attacking organizations, writers, and a specific individual, it's very popular among 'trolls' posts that gain a lot of attention in social media. Social media criticism could take the form of personal attacks, unpleasant content, or general craziness. Criticizing other people in social media is rampant, and it does not help secure our justice. Other people believe that once their values have been violated, it doesn't matter what they feel as long as they must defend them; whether they have rational or irrational reasons, it does not matter Harlow (2011).

### **Critical Thinking**

The news media has written a lot about fake news and other forms of misinformation, but scholars are still trying to understand it — for example, how it travels and why some people believe it and even seek it out. The rise of fake news highlights the erosion of long-standing institutional bulwarks against misinformation in the internet age (Lazer, 2018). From what Participant 2 had said, "Positive and negative information taken from soc med can serve as contrasting points in weighing and distinguishing what is true and not." It means to say that, inaccurate beliefs pose a threat to democracy and fake news represents a particularly egregious and direct avenue by which inaccurate beliefs have been propagated via social media. (Pennycook, et. al 2018) It used to be that we could have a civilized conversation about political ideas. We used to have civilized conversations about disagreements in terms of issues, in terms of values, in terms of ideologies. What makes democracy work is that we can look across the aisle and have a decent conversation, but much has changed since the proliferation of what is commonly called fake news on social media platforms.

## **Effect of Constructs on the Perspective of Political Science Students on the Concept of Justice**

### **Common Topic**

Social media gives access to wide variety of information in forms of photo, video, news, and other forms (Mallinson and Hatemi 2018). In today's world, it is undeniable that social media plays an important role in impacting our culture, our economy and our overall view of the world. Social media is a new forum that brings people to exchange idea, connect with, relate to, and mobilize for a cause, seek advice, and offer guidance. According to participant 4, "Social media had been used by people in

forming public opinion through sharing of posts. Like of course there are news or issues on social media and people just comment and share their opinion regarding that issue. And the more information we seen, the more that the opinion will be formed and it depends on us on how we make our judgement." By being exposed to this information and through exchange of ideas, public opinion became influenced by this Martin (2014).

Social media has the potential to magnify different voices, quickly distribute information, and bridge different classes of people. Using social media lets the user give updates about his/her personal lives. To participant 5," By simply posting information that can be catchy to the viewers. Hence, can produce a lot of views, comments and reactions. ". The acquisition of information through media use is positively associated with an increased understanding of civic concerns by a person and an increased likelihood of political participation (Perry, N, 2014).

### **Fake News and Trolls**

Social media's features allow people to impart knowledge, opinions, or anything that a person wishes to share in their posts. Furthermore, Mangi, Tabassum, and Baloch, (2018) explained that the amount of fake news and trolls has increased in a concerning amount. According to participant 7, "It has two faced, the wickedness of fake news and trolls rather than informative facts, how? Because of the demagogues whose agenda is to manipulate and succumbed the villainous acts of acquiring power and corruption not only in the resources of the state, also corrupting the minds of its multitude." From the statement of Sharp (2018), the material that is being disseminated via social media lacks validity. With the lack of validity, and people believing this information, public opinion became influenced.

### **Established Belief**

Online interactions (social media) are becoming more open and pervasive, allowing for the free exchange of ideas and thoughts, and they are playing an increasingly important role in society's transformation and cohesion (Sobkowicz, Kaschesky& Bouchard, 2012). Social media's features allow people to impart knowledge, opinion, and wide variety of different information. Rather than being influenced, to participant 2, "No, for the reason that I will uphold to my principle and I respect other people's opinion. If they see a certain issue the other way around, I see. But I believe that at the end of the day what is true and just will remain and prevail." Some users of social media use social media for personal use and have their established beliefs that lets them keep holding to it even encountering different opinions.

### **Changed influence by social media**

Gravelin (2017) explained (Mallinson and Hatemi 2018). In today's world, it is undeniable that social media plays an important role in impacting our culture, our economy and our overall view of the world. Social media is a new forum that brings people to exchange idea, connect with, relate to, and mobilize for a cause, seek advice, and offer guidance. According to participant 4, "Social media had been used by people in forming public opinion through sharing of posts. Like of course there are news or issues on social media and people just comment and share their opinion regarding that issue. And the more information we seen, the more that the opinion will be formed and it depends on us on how we make our judgement." By being exposed to this information and through exchange of ideas, public opinion became influenced by this Martin (2014).

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### **Changed influence by social media**

Gravelin (2017) explained that people's opinions and ideas are shaped by what their friends said and what they read or watched on mass media. Using social media expose you to different people's ideas, knowledge, and opinions. According to participant 5, "Yes, not all information is true but not all are also fake. I believe I have what it takes to distinguish what is right and not. I do not know everything that's why it's a great medium to acquire more knowledge about certain things for our personal views are not constant, and by this, I can be corrected for the things that I believe is true, which is not." Being able to see different opinions and sides of a certain issue, one can come up with their opinion base on present facts and by weighing different sides (Madrigal, 2010). This is parallel to what participant 7 said, "Affirmative, because as I said as rational, we must accept to ourselves that sometimes things don't adhere to what we dreamt of, we must not isolate ourselves to what is being presented, because that is the essence of Intelligence, I know that I do not know. That is our perspective is dynamic, but after which we weight things, we must stand to what is right, good and virtuous in a sense that it contributes to building the nation. As our nation is thirsty of a being that has an integrity and thinks of the social welfare of the society.

## **Insights**

As this research studied the perceptions of the political science students towards social media as a means of justice, the researchers set out to gather findings from the purposive sampling procedure in which various responses are extracted. The findings of the research concluded that the perceptions of the participants vary on how the constructs of the political science students on social media as a form of justice on their viewpoints; therefore, it is guaranteed that participants would have different standpoints, and those who hold the same could be alike but the explanations underlying them may differ. In addition, discrepancies between participants' stances often depend on other aspects, including how often they utilize their social media, what platforms they have used, who and what pages they follow so that they could access posts or tweets relating to the attainment of justice, the experiences of the participants and their personal views.

As a result, with these diversified answers, the researchers in this study verified that social media cannot be a form of justice but can be used to propagate information and awareness. It also reduces the ignorance of netizens when it comes to the occurrences of the country and around the world. People on social media could also understand the story of both sides and weigh what is right and wrong, distinguishing what is true and not. Social media is a tool in which people can convey their feelings and experiences. It's an outlet for human behavior and public concern. It establishes a path for individuals to be informed as well as to keep them connected on relevant issues, and that is the work of social media, it is not a stance to ensure justice for the people.

In view of this, social media may not yet be able to achieve justice; though, it has the ability of influencing the perception of the person as it enables cognizance and other insights to consider, to empathize and to be perceived. Social media could also be used in the process of establishing public opinion by posting information, comments, and people exchanging opinions through the sharing of posts.

## **Implications**

The main aim in this study is to address the constructs of Political Science Students on Social media as a form of justice. The researchers have done so by the one-on-one interviewing of NDMU political science students, with special attention to the ideas whereby these students made themselves knowledgeable for all practical purposes, as dictated by their specific course and principles. As the situation of today's age comes up to a momentum wherein Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other social media applications are at its height of governing the body of netizens flocking for issues and answers for unsolved crimes, our study helps in raising awareness and providing adequate practical knowledge on the society in raising justice on social media platforms.

Therefore, the community should be aware for their actions in making their opinions on different issues such as political and governmental using social media. Because, inaccurate beliefs pose a threat to democracy and fake news represents a particularly egregious and direct avenue by which inaccurate beliefs have been propagated via social media. (Pennycook, 2018). In this sense, the researchers believe that the study is especially timely in the aftermath of the glaring issues on social media like the case of Christine Dacera and Tulfo's program which is hand in hand with the public and encourages public assumption. Thus, it is important to apply the construct of weighing the facts and false information brought about by the influence of social media. Social media users should exercise

making good decisions in terms of using and interacting opinions on social media in terms of stating opinions publicly. The rise of fake news highlights the erosion of long-standing institutional bulwarks against misinformation in the internet age (Lazer, 2018).

It is with great responsibility that users of social media applications must apply validity in seeking out information. Everyone should be knowledgeable in terms of promoting equality in the justice system. Social media gives access to wide variety of information in forms of photo, video, news, and other forms (Mallinson, 2018). For example, without proper evidence the police have released a verdict in pointing the suspects of a specific crime but then comes out to be false denying the due process of the law. It resulted to the suspects receiving death threats all over the internet. Thus has caused backlash and have violated human rights. Thus, Political Science and students and other social media users could be able to understand the lived experience of how the justice system is. Our opinions and ideas are shaped by what our friends said and what we read or watched on mass media (Hu & Zhu, 2017). When such a hot topic comes out, many netizens will ride along the issue and can broaden out the fire and in turn create another issue to talk about.

With this, it is also an important discovery for every user of social media applications to not trust everything on the internet. Fairness of justice should be granted to every individual. In accordance to Lee, Ma, and Goh(2011).) when they wrote the Five Ways to Shape Ethical Decisions: Fairness Approach, it focused on the fair and equitable distribution of good and harm, and/or the social benefits and social costs, across the spectrum of society. It started with the premise that all equals should be treated equally, and those who are unequal due to relevant differences, should be treated differently in a manner that is fair and proportionate to, or commensurate with, their difference.

## Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was noted by the researchers that the following notable conclusions are drawn up. As a result, the researchers were able to come up with three themes from the perspectives of the participants, these are contingency approach, critical thinking, and criticism. On the other hand, how these views affect their perspective, it was revealed by the participants that common topic, fake news and trolls, established belief, and changed influence by social media were the center focus of the results on this problem. It is therefore imperative that the researchers were able to fully digest the needed data to answer the researchers posited in the study.

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