

Political Persuasion Through Social Media

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ABSTRACT

In contemporary society, social media has emerged as the predominant platform for the dissemination of political information, with a primary goal of influencing user perspectives. Despite its prevalence, scant research has scrutinized the cognitive mechanisms underlying the reception of political messages via social media and their consequent impact on attitude transformation. This study endeavors to investigate the nexus between political information consumption on social media and the efficacy of political persuasion, while also probing the roles of political interest and cognitive elaboration in this persuasive process. Employing a survey methodology distributed through social media networks, the study amassed responses from 470 participants residing in Jakarta and its environs. Findings elucidate the discernible influence of social media usage for political information consumption and cognitive elaboration on the dynamics of political persuasion, whereas political interest exhibited negligible impact. Consequently, this study underscores the potential for political information purveyors to leverage social media platforms to foster cognitive engagement among users, thereby enhancing receptivity to political messaging.

Keywords: Political Persuasion, Social Media, Cognitive Elaboration, Political Interest

ABSTRAK

Media sosial telah menjadi sumber utama informasi politik bagi masyarakat. Pesan politik yang disampaikan melalui media sosial bertujuan untuk mempersuasi penggunaannya. Hanya sedikit penelitian yang mengevaluasi bagaimana proses kognitif yang terjadi pada individu-individu penerima pesan politik melalui media sosial berkontribusi terhadap perubahan sikap. Penelitian ini melihat pengaruh penggunaan informasi politik melalui media sosial terhadap keberhasilan persuasi politik. Selain itu, penelitian ini juga mengevaluasi peran elaborasi kognitif dan ketertarikan politik, yang secara konseptual berperan dalam proses persuasi politik. Melalui penyebaran kuesioner dengan menggunakan jaringan yang dimiliki media sosial, penelitian menetapkan penggunaan metode survei, dan diperoleh 470 responden yang merupakan warga Jakarta dan sekitarnya. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa konsumsi informasi politik di media sosial dan elaborasi kognitif berpengaruh terhadap proses persuasi politik, sedangkan ketertarikan politik tidak berpengaruh signifikan. Sumber informasi politik dapat memanfaatkan media sosial sebagai media penyampaian pesan dengan mengedukasi pengguna media untuk melakukan elaborasi kognitif dalam mengonsumsi berita.

Kata Kunci: Persuasi Politik, Media Sosial, Elaborasi Kognitif, Ketertarikan Politik

INTRODUCTION

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In today's society, characterized by the widespread use of social media, individuals are frequently exposed to political information through social media. Social media users utilize these platforms not only to obtain the most recent data but also to socialize, view photos or videos, and seek emotional support (Pew Research Center, 2014). Social media presents an ideal platform for political persuasion, possessing attributes that foster deliberation and encourage users to reconsider their perspectives, thus facilitating persuasive outcomes (Diehl et al., 2016). Despite its primary purpose being social interaction, social media offers avenues for discussing politics and disseminating political information.

Politicians endeavor to persuade others that their party offers the best solutions to the country's issues and represents the interests of many, while also maintaining a favorable self-image. However, political awareness varies among individuals, with some being highly politically conscious and others less so. During elections, citizens are encouraged to familiarize themselves with party platforms, watch political debates, and engage in discussions with their families and social networks. Nonetheless, many individuals require greater political awareness, as their attitudes may be inconsistent and subject to change over time, posing a challenge for politicians seeking to garner public support. Political statements can be distributed using social media aimed at persuading users.

During the Indonesian presidential election campaign of 2024, social media emerged as a key campaign medium for presidential and vice-presidential candidates, as well as aspiring legislative members. At the onset of the campaign period, one presidential and vice-presidential candidate pair reportedly spent Rp2.27 billion on advertising to sway public opinion via social media (BBC, 2023). Political communication in the digital realm diminishes reliance on information from elite institutions, leading individuals to increasingly rely on information within their social circles. With many people turning to social media platforms for information and news, it is evident according to what political content-sharing facilitates greater susceptibility to political persuasion on these platforms (Ofcom, 2015; Center, 2015). Social media simplifies the process of being influenced by peers within one's social network (Bode, 2016). Political content on social media holds considerable sway over persuasion due to the platform's inherent advantages in disseminating information. Diehl et al. (2016) affirm that social media news consumption directly influences American adult political persuasion.

Consuming news on social platform has cognitive effects. Studies indicate that engaging with news or comments on social media fosters a sense of involvement and emotional resonance (Oeldorf & Sundar, 2015). Regarding political messages, accessing information on social platform enhances efficacy and knowledge (Dimitrova, et al., 2014). Multi-platform social media usage involves utilizing multiple modalities of information and communication technologies for use on social networking (Diehl et al., 2019). Previously, "second screening" activities combined television and social media usage (Intyaswati et al., 2023). However, further research on these activities can explore their application across various social media platforms, such as cross-referencing news from one platform with another. For instance, an individual who encounters a political message on Instagram may seek confirmation of the information on another platform like Twitter (referred to as X here). Social media users may either intentionally seek out news or passively encounter it; they may actively seek information on social media platforms or receive news content from their networks (Oeldorf, 2018). Some consumers think they're done using to actively search for news because social media will automatically provide crucial information (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2020).

News elaboration is a cognitive process involved in processing news information, playing a critical role in comprehension (Guo & Chen, 2022). Individuals acquire understanding of using cognitive elaboration to analyze political topics from media. Exposure to social media, even unintentionally, can trigger cognitive clarification since the cognitive process of information processing happens after exposure (Chen et al., 2022). Research indicates that cognitive clarification can mediate accidental encounters and political knowledge (Gil et al., 2021). A study conducted in Jakarta demonstrated that cognitive elaboration mediates the relationship between political persuasion and social media use (Venus et al., 2023). Individuals often read news in a way that confirms their pre-existing beliefs while rejecting arguments that contradict their opinions (Guo & Chen, 2022). According to Motivated Reasoning Theory, individuals exposed to information contradicting their beliefs tend to process biased information and critique arguments opposing their beliefs.

One acknowledged predictor of political interest is one's engagement in politics, which is vital in a democratic society; Lecheler & de Vreese (2017) found that individuals with political interest tend to

seek political information. Prior studies suggest that interest in politics is a significant factor in predicting individuals' public engagement. Politically interested individuals actively follow current affairs (Shehata & Amnå, 2019). Some people have a keen interest in politics, whereas others do not; one way to think of political interest is as an innate incentive to follow and participate in politics, rather than being influenced by external pressure. Intyaswati et al. (2022) discovered that media broadcasts can foster political interest among young people.

While interest reflects an individual's increased attention in response to stimuli from a specific environment, it typically represents sustained engagement with particular content over time. Political interest develops over several years, although there are differing opinions on when this occurs (Neundorf et al., 2013). As cognitive abilities and social experiences evolve, young people's perceptions of politics are presumed to mature with age (Russo & Stattin, 2017). The use of media news and political interest are often linked similar to a causal connection (Möller & De Vreese, 2015; Kruikemeier & Shehata, 2017), underscoring the importance of increasing young people's interest in consuming media news.

Persuasion involves attempting to influence someone through communication, with the person being persuaded retaining mental autonomy to make choices (O'Keefe, 2016). Early research suggested that the reception of persuasive messages depends on the message's source, content, and audience, requiring significant cognitive effort. When individuals engage in cognitive elaboration to evaluate and consider message content, persuasive arguments can lead to opinion change.

The persuasion process regarding misinformation on social media suggests that recipients exert less effort in processing it (Osmundsen et al., 2021). Social media users are more diligent in assessing received information and are less inclined to accept misleading information. Pennycook et al. (2020) demonstrated that prompting individuals to assess headline accuracy enhances the possibility of sharing real posts rather than fake ones. When examining media messages, it is essential to take into account multiple variables rather than drawing partial conclusions, as varied results may stem from different social media platforms (Druckman, 2022). Previous studies suggest that increased news consumption correlates with greater political knowledge (Goh, 2015). Processing exposure to diverse viewpoints necessitates more mental work to assess and incorporate them into pre-existing schemas. Political information-seeking behaviors contribute to persuasion (Nelson et al., 2021).

According to Petty & Cacioppo (1986), the Elaboration Likelihood Model aims to analyze how persuasive arguments create, shape, and reinforce attitudes. The underlying premise is that when individuals are provided with knowledge, some "elaboration" occurs. Here, elaboration refers to an individual's effort to scrutinize, recall, and accept (or reject) a message. According to the paradigm, when presented with a persuasive message, individuals exhibit either high or low levels of elaboration. The level of elaboration determines whether the message is processed centrally or peripherally. In the central processing pathway, individuals engage in substantial mental effort to evaluate the information and arguments in persuasive messages and relate them to their knowledge and values. In the peripheral pathway, attitude changes toward persuasive messages are based on accompanying cues rather than the merits and considerations of the argument. In this study, persuasive messages are assumed to be elaborated upon at a low level (peripheral) with political interest and at a higher level (central) with cognitive elaboration.

Previous studies related to using social media to influence politics (Gil et al., 2018; Weeks et al., 2017; Akdal, 2020) have explored how using social media to obtain political information becomes a medium of persuasion for its users. However, few studies have evaluated how political persuasion through social media networks is elaborated upon by users, both at peripheral and central levels, especially in Indonesia. This study fills this gap in the literature by conducting an evaluation of the direct relationship between political message reception, political interest, cognitive elaboration, and attitude change as a consequence of persuasion through social media. Additionally, the existence of cognitive elaboration that contributes to facilitating political persuasion is highlighted in the Theory of Social Learning, which highlights how social and cognitive factors play a role in learning. The originality of this research lies in its incorporation of political interest into research guided by this theory. Guha (2017) posited that spending a significant amount of time online affects one's social learning ability, making social learning through the media more pertinent than before due to great visibility in the media. This study aims to investigate how social media use affects political persuasion, assuming that social networking experiences on social media, coupled with cognitive elaboration of received political information and political interest, will impact how political attitudes are formed.

The research problem in this study is: Does the use of political information on social media, cognitive elaboration, and interest in politics affect the political persuasion process? Furthermore, several hypotheses are formulated to test these assumptions:

- H1: The use of social media related to political information influences political persuasion.
- H2. There is an influence of cognitive elaboration on political persuasion through social media.
- H3. There is an influence of political interest on political persuasion through social media.

METHODS

The study employed a quantitative approach, utilizing a survey methodology for data collection during June 2023. Questionnaires were disseminated through social media channels employing purposive sampling techniques. The target demographic encompassed residents of Jakarta (Jabodetabek) aged between 17 and 64 years. This demographic subset was chosen to represent social media users in Indonesia, given their extensive exposure to political content across diverse social media platforms and ready access to the internet. Determination of the minimum sample size was conducted using Fisher's formula, with parameters set at a margin of error of $\pm 5\%$, a standard deviation of 0.5, and a confidence level of 95%. Subsequently, 470 responses were gathered, forming the basis of the study's dataset. The research instrument employed measures adopted from previous studies (Gil et al., 2022; Kim, et al., 2018) and met validity and reliability standards.

The study encompasses four research variables, comprising one dependent variable and three independent variables. The independent variables are delineated as Media Use, Cognitive Elaboration, and Political Interest. Media Use variable quantifies the frequency of individuals' engagement with social media platforms for accessing political information. The platforms examined included YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and WhatsApp. Cognitive Elaboration variable evaluates respondents' cognitive engagement with the political information acquired via social media. It encompasses the recognition of received information, its alignment with existing knowledge, and efforts to relate it to personal experiences. Political Interest variable measures respondents' level of interest in political affairs, encompassing their engagement with current events and their involvement in tracking political developments. Meanwhile, the dependent variable, Political Persuasion, investigates the extent to which respondents modify their opinions in response to media information, viral news, and social network interactions concerning the received information. The questionnaire employed a Likert scale to capture respondents' perceptions, with responses ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). Data analysis was executed through multiple linear regression techniques utilizing the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study encompassed a cohort of 470 respondents, comprising 205 males (43.6%) and 265 females (56.4%). The age distribution of respondents was as follows: 17-19 years (134 individuals, 28.5%), 20-23 years (247 individuals, 52.5%), 24-26 years (68 individuals, 14.5%), and 27 years and above (21 individuals, 4.5%), with a mean age of 20.7 (SD = 2.4). Educational backgrounds varied among respondents, including high school (140 individuals, 29.8%), diploma (28 individuals, 5.9%), undergraduate (298 individuals, 63.4%), and postgraduate (4 individuals, 0.9%). Notably, respondents were predominantly aged between 20 and 23, with an average age of 20.7 years, and held undergraduate degrees (63.4%), while the gender distribution was nearly balanced.

Regarding variable measurements, the study found the following averages: use of social media for accessing political information (2.89, SD = 0.65), political interest (3.69, SD = 0.63), cognitive elaboration (3.04, SD = 0.74), and political persuasion (2.83, SD = 0.80). The highest average frequency of exposure to political information was observed on Instagram (3.37), followed by YouTube (3.05), and TikTok (2.99).

Regression analysis findings, as presented in Table 1, indicated that gender, education, and age did not significantly contribute to the occurrence of political persuasion ($p > 0.05$). However, the utilization of political information on social media wielded a substantial impact ($p < 0.05$), with a coefficient of 0.486. The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values for all variables were below 10, satisfying the criterion for absence of multicollinearity in the regression model (Intyaswati, 2023).

Additionally, Table 4 demonstrates a significance value for model I of 0.20 (> 0.05), indicating that the regression model satisfied normal assumptions, thereby supporting the acceptance of Hypothesis 1.

Furthermore, in Model II, additional variables, namely cognitive elaboration and political interest, were introduced to evaluate their impact on political persuasion. As depicted in Table 2, both social media usage (0.298) and cognitive elaboration (0.435) exhibited significant effects on political persuasion ($p < 0.05$), while political interest (-0.012) failed to demonstrate a substantial contribution to political persuasion ($p > 0.05$). Notably, the regression model satisfied the assumption of no multicollinearity ($VIF < 10$), and the significance value for Model II in Table 4 was 0.052 (> 0.05), affirming adherence to normal assumptions. Accordingly, these findings substantiate the acceptance of Hypothesis 2 and the rejection of Hypothesis 3.

Table 1. Regression Output Model I

Model I	Unstandardized Coeff. B	Standardized Std. Error	Coeff. Beta	t	Sig.	VIF
(Constant)	1.671	0.356		4.689	0.000	
Gender	-0.134	0.070	-0.083	-1.919	0.056	1.038
Education	-0.010	0.038	-0.012	-0.274	0.784	1.063
Age	5.095E-5	0.015	0.000	0.003	0.997	1.129
Social_media	0.486	0.053	0.398	9.160	0.000	1.053
R-square(adj)	0.161					

a. Dependent Variable: Persuasion

b. Predictors: (Constant), Social-media, Education, Gender, Age

Table 2. Regression Output Model II

Model II	Unstandardized Coeff. B	Standardized Std. Error	Coeff. Beta	t	Sig.	VIF
(Constant)	1.123	0.356		3.152	0.002	
Gender	-0.117	0.065	-0.072	-1.798	0.073	1.067
Education	-0.041	0.035	-0.048	-1.175	0.240	1.086
Age	-0.005	0.014	-0.016	-0.377	0.706	1.136
Social_media	0.298	0.054	0.244	5.517	0.000	1.288
Elaboration	0.435	0.047	0.401	9.189	0.000	1.258
Pol_interest	-0.012	0.054	-0.009	-0.216	0.829	1.221
R-square(adj)	0.291					

a. Dependent Variable: Persuasion

b. Predictors: (Constant), Social-media, Education, Gender, Age, Elaboration, Pol_interest

Table 3 presents a regression model utilized to assess the potential interaction effect relating to social media use and cognitive elaboration, which have been shown to significantly impact political persuasion. The results indicate no significant effect of the interaction between the two variables, with 0.096 for the coefficient value and 0.102 for the significance value ($p > 0.05$). Additionally, this model reveals multicollinearity, as the VIF value for the variables exceeds 10. This finding suggests that both the use of social media and cognitive elaboration independently exert direct influences on political persuasion, with no significant interaction between them. Notably, the contribution of cognitive elaboration (0.401) surpasses that of the use of social media (0.244). As depicted in Table 4, all three regression equations satisfy the normality assumption, with significance values exceeding 0.05.

Table 3. Regression Output Model III

Model III	Unstandardized Coeff. B	Std. Error	Standardized Coeff. Beta	t	Sig.	VIF
(Constant)	1.958	0.623		3.144	0.002	
Gender	-0.117	0.064	-0.072	-1.827	0.068	1.039
Education	-0.045	0.035	-0.052	-1.291	0.197	1.076
Age	-0.006	0.014	-0.018	-0.431	0.667	1.132
Social_media	0.003	0.186	0.003	0.017	0.987	15.413
Elaboration	0.150	0.179	0.138	0.838	0.402	18.081
Social_media_x_ Elaboration	0.096	0.059	0.423	1.637	0.102	44.470
R-square(adj)	0.295					

a. Dependent Variable: Persuasion

b. Predictors: (Constant), Social-media, Education, Gender, Age, Elaboration, Social-media_x_Elaboration

Tabel 4. Test of One-Sample KS

		Unstandard. Residual		
		Model I	Model II	Model III
N		470	470	470
Normal Parameters	Mean	0.0000000	0.0000000	0.0000000
	SD	0.73243224	0.67193121	0.67002841
Most Extr. Differences	Absolute	0.028	0.041	0.038
	+	0.028	0.031	0.038
	-	-0.021	-0.041	-0.033
Statistic Test		0.028	0.041	0.038
Two-tailed of Asymp. Sig.		0.200	0.052	0.119

N = 470

This study involved respondents with a balanced gender distribution, predominantly young (with an average age of 20.7 years) and mostly possessing undergraduate education. The findings indicate that the three characteristic variables examined did not significantly influence political purpose through social platform. The research highlights social platforms as the main information sources for politics, enabling individuals to be receptive to persuasion. By scrutinizing the connection between political persuasion and the use of social media for political information, the study reveals a direct correlation between these variables. Abdullah et al. (2019) suggested that young adults are more receptive to social learning during persuasion, while older adults prioritize trust. This implies that young individuals engage in a more robust cognitive elaboration process when exposed to persuasion, thus tending to accept political persuasion cautiously.

Regarding the cognitive processes involved in political messages through social media, The results suggest that while the peripheral path (interest in politics) does not significantly affect attitude change among youth in Jakarta (Table 2), the significance of the central path (cognitive elaboration) underscores its role in attitude change resulting from persuasion. This suggests that youth leverage their knowledge and values to evaluate the political messages they receive.

The results demonstrate that utilizing political information through social media contributes to persuasion, consistent with prior research (Diehl et al., 2016). Additionally, West Java legislative members use social media to spread persuasive messages, interact with the public to bolster their reputations, solicit support, and invite criticism (Sjoraida et al., 2021). During the Indonesian presidential candidate campaign, each of the three candidates utilized platforms such as Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), and TikTok to disseminate their political messages, highlighting social media's influential role as a medium of persuasion. Kuada et al. (2023) observed the success of social platform to spread political messages for the Indonesian Solidarity Party in North Sulawesi, where such messages persuaded the public, enabling the new party to secure seats in the provincial legislature. While political content on social media occasionally present conflicting viewpoints, its consumption can catalyze exposure to political content. While exposure to social media may exacerbate

polarization, mechanisms exist whereby individuals opt to consume content with differing views, potentially mitigating polarization (Sunstein, 2017). It is critical to research social media as a political information source because the diverse information it conveys, which may lead to political disputes, especially for those leveraging social platforms for political messages.

In addition to utilizing social media to obtain political information, political persuasion is influenced by cognitive elaboration, while political interest does not significantly impact persuasion. The array of information offered by social media can induce ambivalence among individuals, with cognitive elaboration facilitating the possibility of opinion change. The rising prevalence of potential political disputes on social networks underscores the likelihood of political persuasion occurring (Gil et al., 2016). The magnitude of elaboration activities determines the outcomes of attitude change; thoughtful deliberation fosters persistence and tends to predict subsequent behavior compared to minimal cognitive activity. Cognitive elaboration can imbue individuals with a sense of agency in political and social change (Kim et al., 2019). Social media's diverse news exposure necessitates enhanced cognitive processes to evaluate content and validate diverse viewpoints, potentially prompting individuals to seek further information. Social media plays a pivotal role in generating diverse political opinions, with individuals expected to tolerate differing views, thereby honing cognitive abilities and fostering political engagement. In a democratic society, embracing and understanding diverse viewpoints are integral components of political awareness. Individuals' capacity to diversify their consumption can serve as a crucial cognitive asset in mitigating political polarization and adversarial exchanges among those with differing views.

Social media exposure is sometimes received unintentionally, but that does not necessarily imply complete avoidance of consumption (Karnowski et al., 2017). A person may come across news unintentionally; they might only skim a few lines or headlines without delving into the content. This results in a more intense cognitive elaboration process compared to those who read the entire content (Knoll et al., 2018). Individuals engage in cognitive elaboration by considering the details presented in the news and understanding how it relates to their lives. The elaboration process involves integrating the news material (Kim et al., 2013) with prior knowledge. Involuntary exposure to news increases the likelihood for people to engage with the information they encounter, especially if they find it intriguing or have prior knowledge of it (Karnowski et al., 2017). Engagement with information bears cognitive consequences. News exposure and elaboration are potential variables that warrant further exploration (Shahin et al., 2020). Complete engagement with information and cognitive elaboration fosters processes that enhance recall (Kim et al., 2018).

Currently, political messages through social media are beginning to incorporate elements of humor or humorous visualizations. Wells et al. (2016) found that such a disproportionate number of political elites aim to attract public attention with accounts featuring humorous depictions of prominent people. Additionally, Twitter users retweet accounts that post "silly" stuff, significantly mobilizing social networks. Through amusing viral writings like memes, the American public can establish agendas (Tay, 2014). During the 2024 Indonesian presidential election campaign, one of the presidential candidates also utilized 'gimmick' elements in their campaign strategy to persuade potential voters; campaign visuals adopted Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology, and substantial campaign funds were allocated on social media (Rama, 2023; BBC, 2023). The processing of political messages through political humor among novice voters demonstrates a positive relationship between liking and credible sources; affective factors accompanying exposure to political humor broadcasts trigger message processing (Rahmatika, 2015).

One of the virtues of digital technology is its provision of numerous content alternatives tailored to individual interests. In social media, the principle of 'one man, one vote' is not applied because individuals with numerous followers on social networks can utilize their influence to persuade hundreds or even thousands of followers quickly and on an extensive scale (Sahal, 2023). Effective political persuasion influences public opinion. Media consumers are no longer compelled to consume content broadcast solely by mainstream media. Lodge & Taber (2013), in their study on political persuasion, demonstrated that individuals highly interested in a topic tend to resist persuasive efforts. Pre-existing strong attitudes influence how new information is evaluated and integrated into memory; this initiates a process of cognitive elaboration, resulting in resistance to change regarding issues considered important. When faced with an unfamiliar topic, individuals may struggle to counter-argue due to insufficient information or lack of motivation, as the issue may not seem significant enough to warrant a rebuttal.

Petty & Cacioppo (1986) state that individuals more interested in a topic tend to process information more elaborately, utilizing all available information to make decisions, while those less interested tend to process information more heuristically. Research findings indicate that there is no relationship between political interest and political persuasion, and further studies should be conducted involving the message source (agent) (Friestad & Wright, 1994).

CONCLUSION

This study investigates the interplay between political persuasion processes and the utilization of political information on social media, with a particular focus on cognitive elaboration activities. The pervasive presence of political content on social network platforms presents individuals with many topics from diverse perspectives, often resulting in conflicting viewpoints. As individuals encounter a broader spectrum of information, their exposure to differing opinions increases. Conversely, deeper cognitive elaboration processes foster a richer diversity of information, stimulate profound cognitive engagement, and cultivate more enduring attitudes. Social learning is facilitated through the portrayal of social reality on social media platforms, leveraging media technology's capability to showcase real-time societal conditions, which is further complemented by cognitive elaboration in processing received information messages. The influence of elaboration along the central pathway of the cognitive process on attitude change related to persuasion is affirmed.

Personal attributes and political inclinations were found to have negligible effects on the political persuasion process. Future research endeavors may benefit from stratifying individuals based on age and gender to comprehensively discern their influence on the political persuasion process. Additionally, incorporating variables related to political knowledge in future studies could shed light on the potential moderating role of political interest in the relationship between the political persuasion process and the utilization of social media for political information. It is important to note limitations in measuring the use of political information in this study, as specific topics were not specified, potentially introducing bias.

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