

Scrolling Culture and Social Awareness: A Study of Youth in the Context of Expanding Digital Communication and Online Interaction

Mergo Duyte¹

¹University of Philippines Diliman, Philippines

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of digital communication and online interaction has significantly transformed how young people engage with social issues. This study examines the phenomenon of scrolling culture and its relationship with social awareness among youth in the Philippines. Scrolling culture refers to habitual, continuous consumption of digital content across social media platforms, which shapes perceptions, attitudes, and engagement with societal concerns. Using a mixed-methods approach combining survey data and in-depth interviews, this research explores how digital exposure influences awareness, empathy, and participation in social issues. The findings indicate that while scrolling culture increases access to information and enhances awareness, it often leads to superficial engagement characterized by passive consumption rather than active involvement. However, in certain contexts, digital interaction can also foster critical thinking and encourage youth participation in social movements. This study highlights the dual role of digital media as both an enabler and a limiter of meaningful social awareness, emphasizing the need for digital literacy and critical engagement among young users.

Keywords: Scrolling Culture, Social Awareness, Digital Communication, Online Interaction, Social Media Engagement

Introduction

The proliferation of digital technologies has reshaped the landscape of communication, particularly among young people who are considered digital natives. In the Philippines, one of the most active social media user populations globally, digital platforms have become central to everyday interaction, information dissemination, and social engagement. The increasing accessibility of smartphones and internet connectivity has facilitated a culture where individuals spend substantial time scrolling through content across various platforms (Baym et al, 2020; Lupinacci, 2021; Reeves et al, 2021).

The digital environment has evolved into a central space where information, interaction, and identity formation intersect. For young people, online platforms are not only tools for communication but also arenas where values, opinions, and social perspectives are continuously shaped. The ease of accessing diverse content has created new opportunities for learning and engagement, while simultaneously raising concerns about the quality and reliability of information consumed (Arnone et al., 2011; Rambe, 2012). As digital interaction becomes increasingly embedded in everyday life, understanding how these patterns influence awareness and behavior is essential for examining the broader social implications of youth engagement in the digital era (Pawluczuk et al, 2019; Stavropoulos et al, 2021).

Scrolling culture, characterized by continuous and rapid consumption of digital information, has emerged as a defining behavior in the digital age. While this practice allows users to stay informed about current events and social issues, it also raises concerns about the depth of engagement and the quality of understanding (Coates, 2005; Senior et al, 2018). Many young

individuals encounter a wide range of social topics from poverty and inequality to environmental concerns through brief, fragmented content that may not encourage critical reflection.

At the same time, social media has been recognized as a powerful tool for raising awareness and mobilizing collective action. In the Philippine context, digital platforms have played a significant role in amplifying social campaigns, community initiatives, and youth-led movements. This creates an important question: does scrolling culture enhance genuine social awareness, or does it contribute to passive consumption and performative engagement?

This study aims to analyze how scrolling culture influences social awareness among youth in the Philippines within the broader context of expanding digital communication and online interaction. Specifically, it seeks to understand the extent to which digital exposure translates into meaningful awareness, critical thinking, and active participation in social issues. By examining both the opportunities and limitations of digital engagement, this research contributes to ongoing discussions on the role of technology in shaping socially conscious youth in the contemporary digital era.

Methods

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to examine the relationship between scrolling culture and social awareness among youth in the Philippines. Quantitative data were collected through an online survey distributed to young individuals aged 15–24 who actively use social media platforms. The survey measured variables such as frequency of social media use, types of content consumed, levels of social awareness, and forms of engagement with social issues. A purposive sampling technique was used to ensure that participants were representative of active digital users. The quantitative data were then analyzed using descriptive statistics and correlation analysis to identify patterns and relationships between scrolling behavior and levels of awareness. To complement the survey findings, qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with selected participants. These interviews aimed to explore in greater depth how youth interpret digital content, reflect on social issues, and translate online exposure into offline or online action. The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns, perceptions, and experiences related to scrolling culture and social awareness. By integrating both quantitative and qualitative findings, this study provides a more comprehensive understanding of how digital interaction shapes youth awareness in the context of expanding online communication.

Results and Discussion

The findings reveal that scrolling culture is deeply embedded in the daily routines of youth in the Philippines. The majority of respondents reported spending between 3 to 7 hours per day on social media platforms, with scrolling identified as the dominant mode of interaction. Platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram were the most frequently accessed, primarily for entertainment, news consumption, and social connection. The data indicate that scrolling behavior often occurs in short but frequent sessions throughout the day, particularly during idle times such as commuting, waiting, or before sleeping. This pattern suggests that digital engagement is not only habitual but also integrated into micro-moments of everyday life.

In terms of content exposure, respondents encountered a wide range of social issues, including poverty, environmental challenges, gender equality, and public health concerns. However, the nature of scrolling encourages rapid and fragmented consumption of information. Many participants acknowledged that while they are frequently exposed to socially relevant content, they often do not engage deeply with it. Instead, interaction tends to be limited to passive

behaviors such as liking, sharing, or briefly commenting. This indicates that scrolling culture contributes to increased visibility of social issues but does not necessarily guarantee comprehensive understanding.

Furthermore, the results show a significant variation in how youth interpret and respond to the information they consume. Some participants demonstrated higher levels of critical engagement, seeking additional information beyond social media and participating in discussions or community activities. Others, however, exhibited signs of information fatigue and desensitization due to the constant flow of content. This suggests that while scrolling culture has the potential to enhance awareness, it also risks reducing the depth of cognitive and emotional engagement when users are overwhelmed by excessive information.

Overall, the first set of findings highlights that scrolling culture plays a dual role in shaping youth interaction with social issues. It functions as a gateway to information, increasing exposure and initial awareness, but at the same time, it reinforces patterns of superficial engagement. These results underscore the importance of examining not only the quantity of information accessed but also the quality of interaction and interpretation among young digital users.

Table 1. Daily Social Media Use and Scrolling Behavior

Variable	Category	Percentage (%)
Daily Social Media Usage	1–3 hours	18%
	3–5 hours	34%
	5–7 hours	29%
	>7 hours	19%
Primary Activity	Scrolling feeds	61%
	Messaging	21%
	Content creation	10%
	Others	8%
Type of Content Frequently Viewed	Entertainment	42%
	Social issues/news	27%
	Educational	18%
	Others	13%
Engagement Behavior	Like/react	48%
	Share	22%
	Comment	15%
	No interaction	15%

The data in Table 1 show that the majority of respondents spend a considerable amount of time on social media, with 63% reporting usage between 3 to 7 hours per day and an additional 19% exceeding 7 hours. This indicates that social media consumption is a dominant daily activity among youth in the Philippines. Scrolling feeds emerges as the primary activity (61%), significantly higher than messaging or content creation, highlighting the passive nature of digital engagement.

In terms of content exposure, entertainment dominates (42%), followed by social issues and news (27%). This suggests that while young users are exposed to socially relevant topics, such content competes with highly engaging entertainment material, which may influence attention and retention. Furthermore, engagement behavior is largely passive, with nearly half of respondents (48%) interacting only through likes or reactions, while active engagement such as commenting (15%) and sharing (22%) remains relatively limited.

These findings reinforce the notion that scrolling culture facilitates high exposure to diverse content but tends to encourage low-effort interaction. While awareness of social issues is present, the depth of engagement appears constrained by habitual and rapid scrolling practices. This pattern supports the argument that digital communication environments shape not only what youth see, but also how they respond to social realities.

To examine how scrolling culture influences social awareness among youth in the Philippines, the study analyzed respondents' levels of awareness, understanding, and participation in social issues. The findings are presented in the following table:

Table 2. Social Awareness and Engagement Levels

Variable	Category	Percentage (%)
Awareness of Social Issues	High	36%
	Moderate	44%
	Low	20%
Depth of Understanding	In-depth understanding	22%
	General awareness	51%
	Limited understanding	27%
Source of Awareness	Social media	68%
	School/education	17%
	Traditional media	10%
	Others	5%
Participation in Social Issues	Active participation	19%
	Occasional participation	37%
	Passive (online only)	44%

The data in Table 2 indicate that most respondents possess a moderate level of social awareness (44%), followed by a high level (36%). This suggests that exposure to digital content particularly through social media, which accounts for 68% of the primary source of awareness plays a significant role in informing youth about societal issues. However, a closer look at the depth of understanding reveals that only 22% of respondents demonstrate in-depth comprehension, while the majority (51%) remain at the level of general awareness. This gap highlights a key limitation of scrolling culture: while it effectively disseminates information, it does not always facilitate deeper cognitive processing.

Furthermore, participation patterns reveal that engagement with social issues tends to be largely passive. A significant proportion of respondents (44%) engage only at the online level, such as liking, sharing, or reposting content, without translating this awareness into concrete actions. Only 19% reported active participation, such as volunteering, advocacy, or involvement in community initiatives. This finding suggests that although scrolling culture can raise awareness, it often results in what can be described as “low-commitment engagement.”

Overall, the second set of findings demonstrates that scrolling culture contributes to the expansion of social awareness among youth in the Philippines, but this awareness is often superficial and not consistently linked to meaningful action. The results emphasize the importance of fostering critical digital literacy and encouraging more active forms of engagement to bridge the gap between awareness and participation.

The third part of the analysis illustrates the progression from digital exposure to actual social engagement among youth in the Philippines. The diagram below visualizes how scrolling culture translates into different levels of awareness and participation.

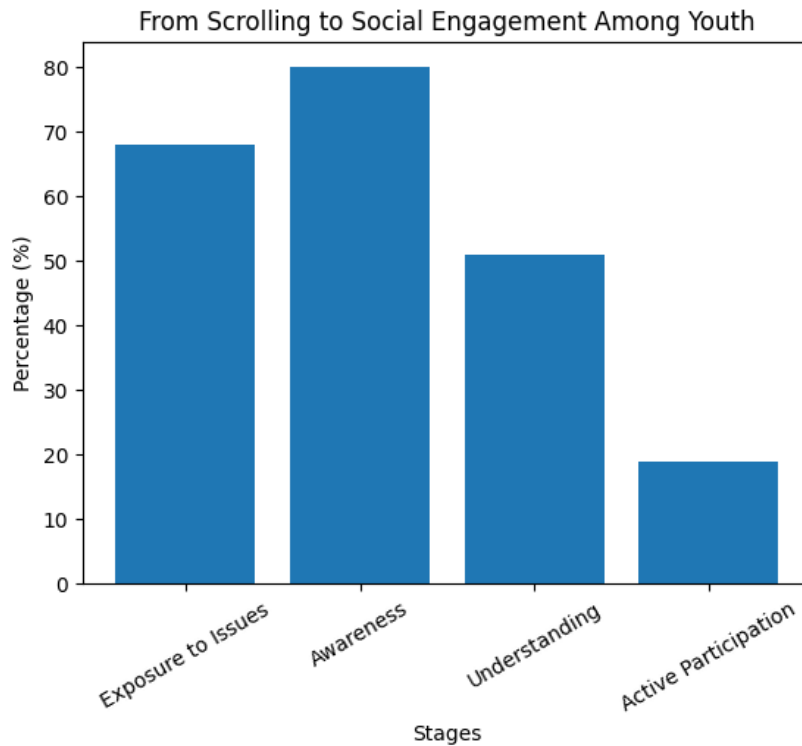


Figure 1. Scrolling to Social Engagement Among Youth

The diagram shows a clear progression but also a significant drop at each stage. While exposure to social issues through social media is high (68%), this does not fully translate into deep understanding (51%), and even less into active participation (19%). This pattern indicates a “filtering effect,” where only a small proportion of digitally exposed information leads to meaningful engagement.

This finding reinforces the concept that scrolling culture primarily facilitates initial contact with social issues rather than sustained involvement. Although digital platforms are effective in spreading awareness, the transition from awareness to action remains limited. Factors such as information overload, short attention spans, and the dominance of entertainment content contribute to this decline. Therefore, strengthening critical thinking skills and encouraging participatory digital practices are essential to transform passive scrolling into active social engagement.

The findings of this study highlight the complex and dual nature of scrolling culture in shaping social awareness among youth in the Philippines. On one hand, the high level of exposure to social issues demonstrates the significant role of digital platforms as primary sources of information. Social media has effectively lowered barriers to access, enabling young individuals to encounter a wide range of societal concerns in their daily lives. This supports the argument that digital communication environments are instrumental in expanding the reach of social knowledge, particularly in highly connected societies.

However, the results also reveal that increased exposure does not necessarily translate into deeper understanding. The dominance of rapid and fragmented content consumption limits opportunities for critical reflection. Many respondents remain at the level of general awareness, indicating that scrolling culture encourages breadth rather than depth of knowledge. This aligns with existing perspectives that digital media environments often prioritize speed and volume of information over analytical engagement, potentially weakening the quality of social awareness.

Furthermore, the gap between awareness and active participation is particularly significant. Although a large proportion of youth are aware of social issues, only a small percentage engage in concrete actions such as community involvement or advocacy. This phenomenon can be associated with what is often described as “slacktivism,” where individuals express support through low-effort online activities without deeper commitment. The findings suggest that scrolling culture may inadvertently reinforce this pattern by promoting quick, surface-level interactions.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that not all digital engagement is passive. A subset of respondents demonstrated the ability to critically engage with content, seek additional information, and participate in meaningful discussions or activities. This indicates that scrolling culture does not uniformly produce superficial awareness; rather, its impact depends on individual digital literacy, motivation, and the context of media consumption. Thus, the digital environment can serve as both a limitation and an opportunity for developing socially aware youth.

Overall, this study emphasizes the need to move beyond simply increasing access to information toward fostering deeper engagement and critical thinking. Educational institutions, policymakers, and digital platforms should play an active role in promoting digital literacy and encouraging participatory practices. By doing so, scrolling culture can be transformed from a passive habit into a productive tool for cultivating informed, empathetic, and socially engaged young citizens.

The findings of this study align with existing literature that highlights the pervasive role of digital media in shaping youth awareness and everyday experiences. Young people today operate within an increasingly connected digital ecosystem, where online interaction is continuous and deeply embedded in daily life. This condition reflects the broader concept of techno-social life, in which digital media structures how individuals perceive and engage with the world (Chayko, 2020). Early perspectives on youth in the digital age also emphasize how online environments influence identity formation, literacy, and social understanding (Thomas & Thomas, 2007; Harris, 2014).

In this context, scrolling culture becomes a dominant behavioral pattern, often occurring habitually and even unconsciously, as individuals remain constantly connected to digital streams of information (Lupinacci, 2021). Furthermore, digital interactions are not static but evolve over time, as users revisit, reinterpret, and construct meaning from their online experiences (Robards & Lincoln, 2017; Møller & Robards, 2019). These dynamics help explain why youth in this study demonstrate high exposure to social issues but often engage with them at a surface level.

At the same time, the study’s findings regarding limited depth of understanding and low levels of active participation are consistent with research on the challenges of sustained engagement in digital environments. The “always-on” nature of social media can lead to cognitive overload and reduced capacity for critical reflection, requiring individuals to actively manage their digital consumption to maintain well-being (Nguyen, 2021). Additionally, the design of social media platforms particularly features such as infinite scrolling encourages prolonged but passive engagement, making it difficult for users to transition from awareness to meaningful action (Rixen et al., 2023).

While online peer interaction can foster both positive and negative forms of engagement during adolescence (Van Zalk & Monks, 2020), the dominance of rapid and fragmented content often limits deeper involvement. As a result, although digital platforms are effective in increasing awareness, they do not automatically facilitate active participation. These findings reinforce

the need for stronger digital literacy and more intentional engagement strategies to transform scrolling behavior into meaningful social action.

Conclusion

This study concludes that scrolling culture plays a significant role in shaping social awareness among youth in the Philippines, particularly by increasing exposure to a wide range of social issues. Digital platforms have become the primary source of information, allowing young people to stay informed and connected to societal concerns in real time. However, the findings reveal that such exposure is often characterized by superficial engagement, where awareness does not consistently translate into deep understanding or meaningful participation. The dominance of rapid and fragmented content consumption limits critical reflection, resulting in a gap between knowing and acting. Furthermore, the study highlights that while scrolling culture has the potential to foster social awareness, its impact largely depends on how individuals interact with digital content. A small proportion of youth demonstrate active engagement and critical thinking, indicating that meaningful participation is possible when supported by strong digital literacy and motivation. Therefore, it is essential to encourage more reflective and participatory digital practices. Transforming scrolling behavior into a more intentional and critical activity can help bridge the gap between awareness and action, ultimately contributing to the development of more socially responsible and engaged youth.

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