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Digital exposure and youth political values in Mongolia

© **Namsrai Amgalangiin**
Ph.D candidate student in political science,
School of Social Sciences and Humanities,
Mongolian National University of Education,
Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar, 14191, Baga Toiruu-14, 8th khoroo, Sukhbaatar district
namsrai.a@msue.edu.mn;
ORCID: 0009-0002-1516-5679

Abstract. This article examines the relationship between digital exposure, information literacy, algorithmically mediated information environments, and the political values of Mongolian youth aged 18 to 34. The empirical basis is a cross-sectional quantitative survey of 522 respondents from 21 provinces of Mongolia and nine districts of Ulaanbaatar. Scale reliability was assessed using Cronbach alpha, the measurement structure was examined through principal component analysis, and the hypotheses were tested with Pearson correlation, multiple linear regression, mediation analysis, analysis of variance, and cluster analysis. The findings indicate that high digital exposure is not associated with a simple linear transition toward post-materialist values. Rather, a hybrid structure emerges in which democratic and traditional values coexist. Information literacy partially mediates the association between digital exposure and support for the protection of democratic institutions. Self-reported algorithmic influence is positively associated with radical protest orientation and authoritarian attitudes. The article argues that information literacy should be treated not merely as a technical skill, but as a democratic competence to be integrated into civic education and youth policy.

Keywords: youth political values, digital exposure, information literacy, democratic institutions, post-materialist values, algorithmic environment, echo chamber, political participation, transitional democracy, Mongolia, civic education.

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1. Introduction

Digital platforms have become one of the principal environments in which political information is distributed, interpreted, contested, and transformed into political attitudes. Globally, the number of internet users has exceeded 5.35 billion, while in Mongolia 83.9 percent of the population aged 16 and above uses the internet. These figures indicate that political socialization is no longer mediated predominantly by family, school, newspapers, radio, or television. It increasingly unfolds within algorithmically organized digital information flows [15; 16].

This transformation has ambivalent implications for democratic politics. On the one hand, young citizens gain faster access to information, lower-cost opportunities for expression, and more flexible forms of civic participation. On the other hand, algorithmic filtering, selective exposure, echo chambers, viral misinformation, and emotionally charged political content may narrow the range of viewpoints to which users are ex-

posed and may intensify polarization [9; 11; 12; 13; 14]. The same digital environment that can support civic learning can also amplify distrust, affective mobilization, and radicalized forms of political expression.

The Mongolian case is analytically important because it combines a relatively young democratic regime, continuing socio-economic transition, strong traditional social norms, and a high level of everyday platform use among youth. This configuration raises a core question: do young people in Mongolia move linearly from materialist to post-materialist values as classical modernization theory would suggest, or do democratic, traditional, materialist, and post-materialist orientations coexist in a hybrid value structure?

The purpose of this article is to examine how the political values of Mongolian youth aged 18 to 34 are associated with digital exposure, information literacy, and algorithmically mediated information environments. Three hypotheses are tested. First, higher digital exposure is expected to be positively associated with democratic and post-materialist orientations. Second, information literacy is expected to partially mediate the association between digital exposure and support for the protection of democratic institutions. Third, higher self-reported algorithmic influence is expected to be positively associated with group influence, radical protest orientation, and authoritarian attitudes.

2. Theoretical framework

Ronald Inglehart's theory of cultural change argues that economic security, education, and modernization gradually shift citizens from materialist priorities toward post-materialist orientations, including self-expression, participation, freedom, human rights, and environmental concern [1; 2; 3]. The theory is important because it explains democratic consolidation not only through institutions, but also through deeper changes in citizens' value orientations. In this perspective, stable democracy depends on the emergence of citizens who value autonomy, participation, and emancipative freedoms [4].

However, the value transformation observed in transitional democracies is rarely linear. Economic insecurity, weak institutional trust, family-centered social capital, and the continuing force of traditional norms may preserve materialist and traditional orientations even among digitally connected younger cohorts. For this reason, the political values of Mongolian youth should not be interpreted only in terms of a simple post-materialist transition. They should also be examined as a potentially hybrid structure in which democratic, traditional, materialist, and post-materialist elements coexist.

Media system dependency theory provides a second conceptual lens. According to Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur, individuals become dependent on media systems in order to understand the social environment, reduce uncertainty, and make decisions. The stronger this dependency, the more significant the cognitive, affective, and behavioral effects of the media system are likely to be [5; 6]. In the digital era, this dependency is no longer limited to mass media institutions. It is increasingly mediated by platforms whose recommendation systems organize visibility, relevance, and attention.

Digital exposure is therefore more than the amount of time spent online. It includes frequency of exposure, source type, political content, interaction patterns, and the algorithmic curation of information. Selective exposure, filter bubbles, echo chambers, and the viral diffusion of false or emotionally charged content may reinforce prior beliefs and intensify intolerance toward competing viewpoints [9; 10; 11; 12; 14]. Research on

social media and polarization also suggests that platform environments can alter the relationship between political information, identity, and participation [8; 13].

In this context, information literacy may function as a democratic protective mechanism. It includes the capacity to search for information, evaluate sources, verify claims, understand the logic of media production, and share information responsibly [17]. Prior studies have shown that information literacy can improve the identification of misinformation, reduce motivated reasoning, and support critical civic judgment [18; 19]. The present study treats information literacy not as a purely technical competence, but as a mediating civic capacity through which digital exposure may be translated into more stable democratic orientations.

3. Methodology

The study used a quantitative cross-sectional design. The target population was citizens of Mongolia aged 18 to 34. The sampling strategy was based on quotas for age, gender, and location. The fieldwork covered all 21 provinces of Mongolia and the nine districts of Ulaanbaatar. A total of 637 questionnaires were collected through a self-administered online survey. After excluding incomplete, uniform, and analytically unusable responses, 522 questionnaires were retained for the final analysis.

The questionnaire contained 30 substantive questions and 201 indicators. The main measures included frequency of digital exposure, information literacy, democratic values, traditional values, online political behavior, offline political participation, and a composite index of algorithmic influence. Most items were measured on a five-point Likert scale. The algorithmic influence index combined indicators of echo-chamber exposure, perceived majority influence, reported change in political position after exposure to social media content, and responsiveness to emotionally triggering information.

The internal reliability of the scales was assessed using Cronbach alpha. Construct validity was examined with principal component analysis and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin and Bartlett tests. The hypotheses were tested using Pearson correlation, multiple linear regression, mediation analysis with the fourth model of Hayes' regression-based approach and 5,000 bootstrap samples, analysis of variance, and k-means cluster analysis [20].

Table 1

Structure of the survey sample, %

Indicator	Share
Male	50,0
Female	50,0
18 to 23 years	34,9
24 to 29 years	31,4
30 to 35 years	33,7
Ulaanbaatar	59,6
Provinces and soums	40,4

Note. Author calculations based on the survey dataset

A methodological caution is necessary. Cross-sectional data can identify statistically significant associations among variables, but cannot establish directional causality. Accordingly, the article avoids strong causal language and uses the terms association, mediation pathway, and empirical support for hypotheses. Similarly, algorithmic influence is measured through self-reported perceptions rather than platform server-side trace data. The findings should therefore be interpreted as evidence of perceived algorithmic exposure and its association with political orientations.

4. Results

4.1. Reliability and measurement structure: The principal scales demonstrated acceptable to very high internal reliability. Cronbach alpha values ranged from .752 to .973, and most scales exceeded the conventional .800 threshold. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin values were also adequate for factor analysis. These results indicate that the measures used in the subsequent correlation, regression, mediation, and cluster analyses were statistically reliable for the purposes of this study.

Table 2

Reliability of the main measures

Measure	Items	Cronbach alpha	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin
Democratic values	16	.954	.969
Assessment of governance quality	8	.951	.937
Forms of political participation	8	.880	.891
Post-materialist and materialist items	4	.830	.783
Value hierarchy	22	.973	.957
Traditional values	6	.847	.836
Use of information sources	11	.896	.881
Level of digital use	5	.881	.806
Online political behavior	12	.933	.945

Note. Author calculations based on the survey dataset.

4.2. Digital exposure and political values: The mean index of digital exposure was 3.95 on a five-point scale, indicating a high level of exposure. Among information channels, social media showed the highest mean score, followed by online news websites. Traditional media channels such as television, radio, and newspapers had lower mean scores. This confirms that the political information environment of Mongolian youth is increasingly platform-centered.

The value structure of respondents was not one-dimensional. Democratic values, hybrid values, and traditional values all recorded relatively high mean scores. This pattern suggests that the political values of Mongolian youth cannot be adequately described as a simple movement from materialist to post-materialist orientations. Rather, democratic and traditional elements coexist in a mixed value configuration.

Table 3

Mean scores for main information channels

Channel	Mean	Interpretation
Social media	3,83	Highest digital exposure
Online news websites	3,56	Second major source
Television	2,95	Moderate exposure
Radio	2,49	Low exposure
Newspapers	2,30	Lowest exposure

Note. Author calculations based on the survey dataset.

Pearson correlation analysis showed that digital exposure was positively associated with information literacy and online participation. A strong positive association was also observed between offline political participation and active online political participation. This does not mean that online participation automatically replaces or produces offline participation. It does, however, indicate that the two forms of participation are statistically connected in the sample.

Table 4

Correlations among key variables

Association	**r**	**p**
Digital exposure x information literacy	.451	< .01
Digital exposure x online participation	.308	< .01
Offline participation x active online participation	.712	< .01

Note. Author calculations based on the survey dataset.

The regression models including digital exposure were statistically significant for the assessment of justice, intention to participate in elections, and democratic values. The model explaining democratic values had an R-squared value of .235, meaning that it explained 23.5 percent of the variance in the dependent variable. These results support the first hypothesis in a cautious associational form: higher digital exposure is positively related to democratic and post-materialist orientations.

Table 5

Regression models including digital exposure

Dependent variable	F	R-squared	p
Assessment of justice	4.358	.135	< .001
Intention to participate in elections	7.142	.204	< .001
Democratic values	8.602	.235	< .001

Note. Author calculations based on the survey dataset.

4.3. Mediating role of information literacy: The mean index of information literacy was 3.41, which is above the midpoint of the scale. No strong statistically meaningful difference was observed across age groups, but respondents with a bachelor's degree or higher tended to report higher information literacy. This pattern is consistent with the interpretation of information literacy as a learned civic and cognitive competence rather than an automatic consequence of age or digital use.

The mediation analysis showed that the path from digital exposure to information literacy was positive, and the path from information literacy to support for the protection of democratic institutions was also positive. The indirect association was beta = .232 with a 95 percent confidence interval from .146 to .318, which does not include zero. Because the direct association remained statistically significant, the appropriate interpretation is partial mediation rather than full mediation. The second hypothesis is therefore supported.

Table 6

Mediation analysis for information literacy

Path	beta	p	Interpretation
Digital exposure -> information literacy	.451	< .001	a path
Information literacy -> protection of democratic institutions	.515	< .001	b path
Indirect association	.232	< .001	95% confidence interval [.146, .318]
Direct association	.129	.018	Partial mediation

Note. Author calculations based on the survey dataset.

4.4. Algorithmic influence and radical orientations: The composite index of algorithmic influence had a Cronbach alpha of .824 and a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value of .812, indicating that the index was sufficiently reliable for further analysis. Among its components, responsiveness to emotionally triggering information had the highest mean score, followed by exposure to content consistent with one's own views, which corresponds to the echo-chamber dimension.

Table 7

Components of the algorithmic influence index

Indicator	Mean	Loading
Echo chamber, content consistent with one's views	3.41	.786
Following the majority position	3.18	.742
Social media content changed one's position	3.06	.801
Reaction to emotionally triggering information	3.52	.768
Composite index	3.29	-

Note. Author calculations based on the survey dataset.

Regression analysis indicated that self-reported algorithmic influence was positively associated with radical protest orientation and authoritarian attitudes. Analysis of variance showed statistically significant differences among quartile groups of algorithmic influence for both radical protest orientation and authoritarian attitudes. These

results support the third hypothesis, while remaining subject to the limitation that algorithmic influence was measured through self-reported perceptions rather than through direct platform data.

Table 8

Algorithmic influence: regression and analysis of variance

Dependent variable and analysis	**beta or F**	**p**
Radical protest orientation, regression	beta = .346	< .001
Authoritarian attitudes, regression	beta = .218	< .01
Radical protest orientation, analysis of variance	F = 13.445	< .001
Authoritarian attitudes, analysis of variance	F = 5.396	< .001

Note. Author calculations based on the survey dataset.

4.5. Clusters of political value orientations: Cluster analysis was conducted using the principal variables of digital exposure, information literacy, algorithmic influence, democratic values, and online and offline political participation. The silhouette coefficient was .42, indicating a moderate level of cluster separation. Taking both statistical diagnostics and theoretical interpretability into account, a three-cluster solution was selected.

The first cluster, the low-activity majority, accounted for 63.4 percent of respondents. This group scored below the sample mean on online participation, algorithmic influence, and radical protest orientation, while democratic and traditional values remained close to the mean. The second cluster, polarized digital activists, accounted for 33.3 percent of respondents. This group scored above the mean on online participation, algorithmic influence, radical protest orientation, and authoritarian attitudes. The third cluster, an institution-centered democratic minority, accounted for only 3.3 percent of respondents, or 17 individuals. It is theoretically meaningful, but should not be generalized to the broader youth population without caution.

Table 9

Standardized cluster means

Indicator	**Low-activity majority**	**Polarized digital activists**	**Institution-centered democratic minority**
Digital exposure	-0.14	0.40	-1.37
Online political participation	-0.45	0.95	-0.99
Information literacy	-0.19	0.54	-1.75
Liberal democratic values	-0.13	-0.11	3.65
Offline political participation	-0.35	0.74	-0.74
Authoritarian attitudes	-0.26	0.69	-2.01
Radical protest orientation	-0.40	0.83	-0.69
Algorithmic influence	-0.41	0.91	-1.26
Number of respondents	331 (63.4%)	174 (33.3%)	17 (3.3%)

Note. Author calculations based on the survey dataset.

5. Discussion

The findings indicate that the political values of Mongolian youth cannot be fully explained by a classical linear modernization model. Democratic values are relatively strong, but traditional and hybrid orientations remain salient. This result is consistent with the idea that transitional democracies may produce mixed value structures in which young citizens support participation, freedom, and rights while also maintaining commitments to family, tradition, stability, and economic security.

The mediating role of information literacy is one of the central findings of the study. Digital exposure alone should not be assumed to produce democratic outcomes. The more important mechanism is how young people process, verify, and evaluate digital information. Information literacy appears to help transform digital exposure into support for democratic institutional protection. It should therefore be conceptualized as a civic competence, not merely as a technical skill.

The positive association between algorithmic influence and radical protest orientation or authoritarian attitudes highlights the ambivalence of digital politics. Platform environments do not expand political participation only in a democratic direction. Because recommendation systems are organized around attention, prior behavior, emotional engagement, and network similarity, they may create conditions in which repeated exposure to homogeneous content strengthens group polarization [9; 10; 11].

At the same time, these results should not be overinterpreted as evidence of direct algorithmic causality. The index used in this study measures respondents' self-perception of algorithmic influence. Future research should combine survey data with platform trace data, qualitative interviews, and longitudinal or experimental designs in order to estimate algorithmic effects more precisely.

The relationship between online and offline political participation also deserves careful interpretation. Although the correlation between active online participation and offline participation is strong, the mean level of offline participation remains relatively low. Online actions may function as an entry point into civic engagement, but they do not automatically translate into sustained institutional participation. This finding speaks to the continuing relevance of the debate on connective action and slacktivism [7; 8].

6. Conclusion

This study shows that the political values of Mongolian youth aged 18 to 35 are shaped in a digital environment but do not change in a single ideological direction. Democratic, traditional, materialist, and post-materialist elements coexist. Young people express relatively strong support for democratic values, yet their assessment of governance quality and their level of offline political participation remain more limited.

The theoretical contribution of the study is threefold. First, it tests Inglehart's theory of value change in the context of a transitional democracy and finds evidence of a hybrid value structure. Second, it extends media system dependency theory to the platform and algorithmic environment by showing the partial mediating role of information literacy. Third, it provides empirical evidence from Mongolia that self-reported algorithmic influence is associated with radical protest orientation and authoritarian attitudes.

The policy implication is clear. Information literacy should be systematically incorporated into general education, higher education, teacher training, civic education, and

youth participation policy. It should be understood as a competence that supports democratic participation, source evaluation, critical thinking, lawful political expression, and tolerance of pluralism. In this sense, information literacy can become a practical policy instrument for reducing the political risks of the digital environment.

The study is limited by its cross-sectional design, self-reported data, quota-based sampling, and subjective measurement of algorithmic influence. Future research should use longitudinal panel data, digital trace data, in-depth interviews, and experimental approaches to better identify how platform exposure and information-processing capacities interact in shaping youth political values.

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Conflict of interest

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Цифровое воздействие и политические ценности молодежи в Монголии

Намсрай Амгалангийн
Ph.D., политология
Факультет социальных и гуманитарных наук
Монгольский педагогический университет
namsrai.a@msue.edu.mn
ORCID: 0009-0002-1516-5679

Аннотация. В данной статье исследуется взаимосвязь между цифровым воздействием, информационной грамотностью, алгоритмически опосредованной информационной средой и политическими ценностями монгольской молодежи в возрасте от 18 до 34 лет. Эмпирическую основу исследования составляет кросс-секционный количественный опрос 522 респондентов из 21 провинции (аймака) Монголии и девяти районов Улан-Батора. Надежность шкал оценивалась с использованием коэфицента альфа Кронбаха, структура измерительной моделианализировалась методом главных компонент, а гипотезыпроверялись с помощью корреляции Пирсона, множественной линейной регрессии, медиативного анализа, дисперсионного анализа и кластерного анализа. Полученные результаты показывают, что высокое цифровое воздействие не связано с простым линейным переходом к постматериалистическим ценностям. Напротив, формируется гибридная структура, в которой сосуществуют демократические и традиционные ценности. При этом информационная грамотность частично опосредует связь между цифровым воздействием и поддержкой мер по защите демократических институтов. Кроме того, субъективно воспринимаемое влияние алгоритмов положительно связано с радикальной протестной ориентацией и авторитарными установками. На основании полученных результатов, в статье обосновывается тезис о том, что информационную грамотность следует рассматривать не просто как технический навык, а как демократическую компетенцию, которую следует интегрировать в систему гражданского образования и молодежной политики.

Ключевые слова:политические ценности молодежи, цифровое воздействие, информационная грамотность, демократические институты, постматериалистические ценности, алгоритмическая среда, эхо-камера, политическое участие, переходная демократия, Монголия, гражданское образование

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