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Information Credibility Mediates Selective Exposure and Algorithmic Personalization Effects on Youths' #IndonesiaGelap Issue Engagement

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Abstract
Social media affords both deliberate selective exposure and algorithmic curation. This study examines which pathway better explains youth online political engagement around #IndonesiaGelap issue and whether perceived information credibility mediates these effects. Using PLS-Structural Equation Modelling based on the survey evidence, we find that engagement is driven chiefly by self-selected exposure. Meanwhile, the algorithmic personalization shows only a modest direct association, functioning mainly as a facilitator of visibility rather than a mobilizer. On the other side, credibility operates as a complementary mediator that amplifies the effect of selective exposure on engagement, while contributing little to the transmission of algorithmic effects. These results indicate that online political issue engagement is not simply an algorithmic by-product but arises from intentional information seeking coupled with credible content. Theoretically, the study sharpens the distinction between algorithmic curation and user agency and specifies credibility as a boundary mechanism that conditions especially when exposure translate into engagement. Findings also recommend communication strategies that foreground credible sources, increase information curation, and build media literacy to support deliberate, informed participation.

Keywords: *Self-selected exposure, personalization, credibility, political engagement, social media*

Paper type: *Research Paper*

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INTRODUCTION

Epistemologically, engagement signifies the "taking part in" or "participating," such that the concept is often associated with participatory behavior. Nonetheless, concept of engagement can be fundamentally understood as a multidimensional construct that encompasses three dimensions: cognitive, affective, and behavioural (Brodie et. al. 2013; Claffey and Brady 2017; Ma, et. al. 2022). Thus, individual engagement naturally constitutes an organismic process wherein cognition, affect, and behaviour are interconnected. In this regard, political engagement refers to an individual's participatory behaviour in matters related to politics, such as engaging in political arguments, following political information, and undertaking political actions. Several studies note that the concepts of political participation and political engagement often appear simultaneously and interchangeably, underpinning the same definitional foundation: participation (Van Deth 2014; Pontes, et. al. 2016; Zukin, et. al. 2011).

Conventionally, engagement in politics itself has been defined as the involvement of ordinary citizens in political agendas, particularly to influence political decisions through formal actions, range from demonstrations to electoral participation (Almond and Verba 1965; Eliasoph, et. al. 1996; Henn, et. al. 2018; Livingstone 2013). However, with the advancement of information technology and the increasing prevalence of networked platforms such as social media, the understanding of political participation and political engagement has expanded to encompass the activation of digital political behaviors. In other words, the digitalized landscape has transformed political behavior into increasingly fragmented forms, distinct from the categorizations of conventional-formal participation (Lilleker and Koc-Michalska 2017; Yang and DeHart 2016).

As a platform endowed with diverse features that enable users to activate themselves, social media has transformed the landscape of political engagement into one that is broader and more complex. Various forms of activation—such as producing political content, commenting, sharing, and inviting others to engage with political content—constitute new manifestations of political engagement

(Feezell 2016; Sairambay 2020; Yamamoto, et. al. 2015; Yamamoto, et. al. 2019). On the other hand, social media encompasses preferential features that are relatively complex, operating on the principles of demand, supply, and distribution. First, users autonomously determine their preferred topics (demand) for content or information they wish to access on social media platforms. This is feasible because social media functions as a prosumption platform (production and consumption), wherein users simultaneously distribute and consume information (Ha and Yun 2014). Second, the computational power of social media algorithms enables users to receive information (distribution/supply) that is deemed relevant by ranking preferred topics according to their patterns of habituation.

The demand context within social media preferences aligns with the notion of self-selected exposure, wherein users exercise full agency and control over what appears on their social media feeds (Ha, 2022; Stroud and Collier, 2018). By contrast, the supply/distribution context reflects a preference designed by algorithms, wherein exposure is pre-selected—what Pariser (2011) once conceptualised as filter bubbles (Flaxman, et. al., 2016; Fletcher, et. al., 2023; Haim, et. al., 2018). In practice, the interaction between self-selected and pre-selected mechanisms operates simultaneously, producing a homogeneous space commonly referred to as an echo chamber—an interplay among media supply, distribution, and demand (Arguedas et. al. 2022; Webster 2018). However, a growing body of evidence suggests that demand-driven selection often outweighs algorithmic curation in producing homogeneity. When issue salience is high, users intensify motivated, confirmatory curation—subscribing to like-minded sources, joining aligned networks, and repeatedly engaging with congruent frames—thereby deepening informational segregation that algorithms then learn from and reinforce. Research on selective exposure and political interest shows that involvement and salience heighten confirmatory attention and sharing, making user agency the proximate driver of homogeneity, with platforms primarily accelerating rather than originating it (Hart et al. 2009; Iyengar and Hahn 2009; Krosnick 1990; Prior 2011).

Empirical studies that isolate or weaken algorithmic signals often find limited effects on attitudes and only modest shifts in exposure patterns over short horizons, suggesting that algorithms mostly amplify pre-existing preferences and

network structures (Dubois and Blank 2018; Haim et al. 2018). Likewise, work on audience polarization and online news consumption shows that while platforms can increase contact with like-minded content, much of the observed segregation is consistent with self-selection and social homophily—demand-side forces that predate and guide algorithmic learning (Barberá et al. 2015; Flaxman et al. 2016; Guess et al. 2021; Webster 2014). In short, echo chambers are co-produced by user choices and system design, but under conditions of strong issue salience. With this study, we argue that self-selected exposure plausibly plays the larger role, with algorithms functioning as systemic amplifiers of user-initiated curation.

As a case study, this research examines the #IndonesiaGelap issue, which went viral and attracted a significant response from a large segment of the social media public. The issue emerged as a virtual movement representing public anxiety over the accumulation of political controversies during the first 100 days of the Prabowo–Gibran administration, such as budget inefficiencies deemed misallocated, the government's perceived incapacity in implementing the Free Nutritious Meal program, the revival of the dual function of the armed forces, and others. Initially, the rise of this issue reflected a form of organic activism. Tracing its activation nodes chronologically, on the X platform the issue first surfaced on February 3, 2025, through the account @BudiBukanIntel, which initiated the narrative using the symbol of the Black Garuda. It subsequently resonated and was widely disseminated (supply and distribution).

According to digital research institutions such as Jangkara and Drone Emprit, the surge of #IndonesiaGelap occurred between mid- and late February 2025. For instance, Jangkara's research recorded that out of 64,816 non-media account comments on X (Twitter), 81 per cent contained negative sentiments, heavily clustered around anger. Moreover, the #IndonesiaGelap issue was also amplified by networks of related hashtags, including #adiliJokowi, #Sukatani, #kaburajadulu, #pertalite and #pertamax, #efisiensianggaran, #elpiji, #retreatkepaladaerah and #danantara, the majority of which carried negative sentiments. This case merits investigation from the perspective of how users organically manage their responses within echo chambers and manifest their forms

of political engagement. In other words, given the breadth of engagement with the issue, a key question arises: does the behavior of actors (users) engaged with the #IndonesiaGelap campaign narrative represent the outcome of pre-selected algorithmic amplification within echo chambers, or does such political engagement instead reflect a selective, intentional choice by users to involve themselves in the issue?

This study seeks to emphasize that, in accessing information and choosing to engage actively with it, individuals may either make selective choices directing them toward the information or, alternatively, be algorithmically exposed to related content based on their habituated behaviors, friendship networks, or prior interests. At the same time, this study argues that the process through which acquired information translates into behavior does not occur automatically; rather, it operates through an awareness of the perceived credibility of that very information.

Several studies have underscored that source credibility is a crucial variable in determining the validity of information, particularly when it is algorithmically driven (Jia and Johnson 2021; Jung et. al. 2017; Tandoc et. al. 2020; Waddell 2019). However, the existing literature largely examines credibility within the dimension of media news exposure, while the context of conversational information in social media environments remains relatively underexplored. This research assumes that within echo chambers, users do not simply become immersed in the flood of information; rather, information credibility serves as a mediating factor within the dynamics of the #IndonesiaGelap case itself.

Building on this discussion, we advance two tightly specified gaps that motivate our research. First, we test a structural model that locates perceived information credibility at the social-media level—where feeds, ranking, and social signals shape how content is encountered—and treat credibility as the proximal mediator linking exposure to online political engagement. Much of the credibility literature operationalizes trust at the level of news stories, outlets, or journalists rather than within platformed interactions, leaving the exposure–credibility–engagement chain underexamined in social feeds (Flanagin and Metzger 2013; Kohring and Matthes 2007; Wathen and Burkell 2002; Westerman et. al. 2014).

Second, we simultaneously estimate two exposure pathways—self-selected exposure and algorithmic personalization—rather than modeling them piecemeal, which is common in studies that focus on either demand-side selection or supply-side curation alone (Bakshy et al. 2015; Barberá et al. 2015; Flaxman et al. 2016; Webster 2014). Accordingly, our study asks: to what extent do self-selected and algorithmic exposures differentially drive online political engagement, and how does perceived credibility mediate each pathway on social media?.

Literature Review

This study develops its conceptual model by grounding it in three principal theoretical aspects. First, it examines how political engagement is operationalized within online media and how it constructs a distinct force of political narrative, adapting various theoretical frameworks ranging from digitally-networked participation to online political participation. Second, from the perspective of echo chambers, the study highlights that emerging informational preferences stem from two distinct pathways: selective exposure, as an intentional attitude and narrowing of preferences, and pre-selected algorithms or algorithmic personalization, as a mechanistic creation that broadens the scope of exposure within the framework of filter bubbles. Finally, in evaluating the impacts and outcomes of online engagement behavior, the study employs theoretical constructs of information source credibility as both perceptual screening mechanism and confirmatory device. Taken together, this framework assumes that different implications and orientations emerge when individuals engage with the #IndonesiaGelap issue, precisely because of the pivotal role played by perceived information credibility. As an illustration, this study proposes the following conceptual model:

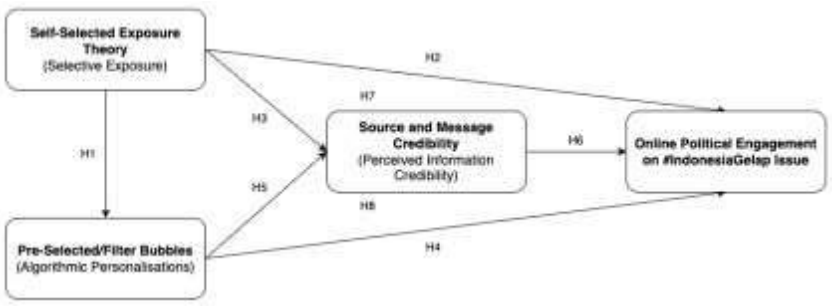

Figure 1. Conceptual Model

Based on the conceptual model, selective exposure is posited as the user's autonomy in choosing and filtering the #IndonesiaGelap issue, thereby contributing to the creation of an echo chamber that is subsequently personalized by the algorithms (H1). Selective exposure is further expected to serve as the foundation driving engagement with the #IndonesiaGelap issue (H2). Because users selectively choose issue-related preferences, the information they obtain is presumed to be more credible (H3). On the other hand, exposure to the issue and online political engagement with the #IndonesiaGelap narrative may also result from algorithmic recommendations, such that users perceive information that emerges through pre-selected processes (algorithms) as relevant and credible (H4 and H5). Moreover, perceived information credibility is expected to strengthen the impetus toward online political engagement with the issue (H6). In its mediating function, perceived information credibility is hypothesized to explain the relationships between both selective exposure and algorithmic personalization on online political engagement concerning the #IndonesiaGelap case (H7 and H8). Through this conceptual orientation, the study aims to contribute to the theoretical–empirical discourse on social media users' attitudes within the domain of online political engagement, which is driven by both self-selected and pre-selected exposures.

Online Political Engagement

Over the past decade, scholars have increasingly agreed that the Internet has been a major driver of disruptive change, particularly in relation to public engagement with politics (Oser, et. al., 2013; Valenzuela, et. al., 2009). Due to the rapid and expansive spread of digitalization within a relatively short period, debates have arisen among political behavior scholars regarding the scope of political engagement, as participation has been transformed into digitally activated behaviors. Examples include signing an online petition, following political information on social media, supporting or subscribing to politicians' profiles or accounts by commenting, liking, and sharing political content or information on online networking platforms—all of which represent new forms of political engagement.

Yamamoto et. al. (2019) note that networked platforms such as social media transcend spatial boundaries, thereby allowing individuals to engage in political discourse with far greater ease and effortlessness. Unlike conventional (offline) political participation, online forms of participation or engagement present several notable novelties. First, online political engagement in digital spaces enables individuals to access information at any time and from anywhere. Second, digitalisation has expanded the meaning of engagement or participation to include behaviours such as following the accounts of politicians, parties, or candidates, or posting comments—all of which may occur at any time. Third, digital penetration via social media allows individuals to interact without spatial limitations, meaning that issues originating in one region can be followed and engaged with by individuals beyond that region. For example, a national political issue may coagulate the attention of individuals across different localities. Fourth, the digitalization of political engagement stimulates previously passive individuals to become active without requiring participation in physical movements.

Although the phenomenon initially received extraordinary attention from various circles, the penetration of digital technologies into political participation behaviors carries significant theoretical implications. One such implication concerns the theoretical positioning of what is meant by political engagement itself. In other words, does the expansion of public accessibility to engagement through social media reduce the meaning of political participation? On this point, some scholars, such as Hoffman (2012), argue that political engagement on social media is reflected in the form of public online discussion, or what Gilardi (2022) terms digitally-networked participation.

By contrast, online political participation is defined as actions aimed at influencing political decisions and political entities (such as government and policy). If online expressiveness remains confined to social media discussions and digital activations, it cannot be understood as exerting political pressure; rather, it represents online engagement without necessarily advancing to the stage of focusing on or pressing for political decisions. In this regard, the present study adopts the delineation proposed by Ekman and Amnå, 2012, which defines online

political participation as an extension of offline participation, such as protest demonstrations, resistance, or criticism of government policies. Thus, it becomes crucial to distinguish between two concepts—online political engagement and online political participation—in order to contextualize the case under study.

Based on this distinction, the research emphasizes that the involvement of netizens on social media in the #IndonesiaGelap case can best be understood by synthesizing the two: as both a manifestation of digitally-networked discussion and a form of online participation. This is because the #IndonesiaGelap issue did not remain confined to digital discussion spaces; rather, it also extended into real-world demonstrations and collective actions within society.

Selective Exposure vs. Filter Bubbles

The concept of selective exposure can, in fact, be traced back to a period long before the advent of social media—specifically to the 1940s in the work of Lazarsfeld, et. al., (1948) during the U.S. presidential election campaign. At that time, they documented that partisan voters tended to consume information or political messages consistent with their prior beliefs rather than those that were uncongenial (Hart et. al. 2009; Knobloch-Westerwick and Meng 2011; Olson and Stone 2005; Stroud and Collier 2018).

From a psychological perspective, the tendency to access congenial information is closely tied to Festinger's (1957) theory of cognitive dissonance, which suggests that individuals will gravitate toward behaviors that minimize the likelihood of experiencing dissonance. Following this logic, communication studies have often found little significant evidence that media can fundamentally change or shape audience preferences; rather, media primarily reinforces or accentuates pre-existing belief patterns. This is because individuals frequently seek ways to satisfy their need for justification rather than pursuing objective truth (Klapper 1960).

In the contemporary context of increasingly sophisticated social media, however, the position of selective exposure becomes more challenging to delineate. The key question is: to what extent does an individual exercise self-selected choice when social media algorithms themselves present information at far greater speed

and, often, with high relevance—thus creating conditions in which users encounter content they did not intentionally seek (incidental exposure)? Accordingly, the behavioral pattern of selective exposure should not be understood merely as an autonomous exercise of user agency but also as involving avoidance mechanisms (Iyengar and Hahn 2009).

In other words, avoidance may take various forms, such as evading misinformation or falsehoods, or deliberately steering clear of counter-narratives. For instance, an individual engaged in the #IndonesiaGelap issue is assumed to be intentionally involved while avoiding counter-narratives or opposing issues such as #IndonesiaTerang and others. This is highly plausible when the individual's conviction regarding the #IndonesiaGelap issue is sufficiently strong and resonant. The complication arises, however, when selective autonomy confronts the pre-selected conditions generated by algorithms, given that a user's habituated behavior of repeatedly accessing information about #IndonesiaGelap further reinforces such algorithmic curation.

Unlike the self-selected exposure, incidental exposure reflects the ability of pre-selected algorithms to configure digital spaces in ways that maximize relevance. If selective exposure is demand-driven, stemming from the user's own informational preferences, pre-selection (algorithms) is distribution-driven, relying on mechanisms such as algorithmic ranking or filter bubbles (Arguedas et. al. 2022; Pariser 2011). At the same time, the outcome of both processes tends to converge: individuals are likely to encounter like-minded information. The distinction, however, lies in their consequences. Selective exposure functions more as a mechanism of narrowing preferences through self-directed accessibility, whereas filter bubbles learn from such patterns and subsequently present a broader spectrum of related exposure. Several factors may shape the interplay between these two processes, including the structural design of social media platforms themselves (Cinelli et. al. 2021), or—as posited by this study—the perceived credibility of the information acquired.

Perceived Information Credibility as Mediator

Credibility is a concept often understood as a process of guiding, evaluating, and affirming the legitimacy of information. Within the context of digital media communication, perceptions of information credibility frequently intersect with heuristic habituation shaped by platform stimulation, narrative construction, or the signaling embedded in social interaction. While the previous discussion emphasized that individuals' tendencies toward selective exposure are largely aimed at reducing the likelihood of cognitive dissonance, as posited by Festinger (1957), credibility emerges as an equally prominent factor underlying such motivational drives. For instance, Metzger, et. al. (2020) demonstrate that perceptions of information credibility are often prioritized over the mere effort to reduce dissonance. In other words, through the screening of information credibility, dissonance is indirectly avoided. Yet, when credible information arises that contradicts an individual's beliefs, credibility nevertheless remains the decisive factor. For example, one may assume that individuals engaged in the #IndonesiaGelap issue implicitly affirm its credibility, on the grounds that the activism emerges from an organic (self-selected) domain; thus, credibility in this case reinforces selective exposure to the issue.

From a theoretical standpoint, the authors assume that individuals do not merely consume like-minded information indiscriminately, but rather engage with it within the boundaries of credibility assessments. Nevertheless, the idea of credibility itself is relatively expansive: it may refer to factual accuracy as an objective truth, or it may denote credibility as constructed through socially mediated confirmation, whereby information attains legitimacy via shared social validation (i.e., common truth).

The fundamental challenge of credibility lies in the context of pre-selected or algorithmically personalized exposure, which increasingly broadens the reach of issues. Here, "broadening" does not necessarily mean moving beyond the issue itself but rather refers to its expansion in terms of volume, frequency, and network distribution. In this context, the ideal perspective suggests that even when individuals are exposed to pre-selected information, they will still filter it based on perceived credibility. At the same time, credibility carries significance across two distinct dimensions: first, the content area, or the credibility of the substantive

content itself; and second, the credibility associated with the distributor or source of the content. For instance, Henestrosa, et. al., 2023) found that news generated by AI did not diminish users' credibility assessments. In other words, information authored by humans may, at times, contain a duality of meaning or duplicate the identity and persona of the writer, potentially making readers uncomfortable. In this case, credibility is judged primarily by the substance of the content. On the other hand, Turcotte et. al. 2015 demonstrated that credibility is reinforced when audiences consider the actors distributing the information. Their study highlights that when issues or information are recommended by opinion leaders, trust and legitimacy in the substantive content are significantly elevated.

Therefore, this research assumes that credibility remains a decisive factor in determining whether the information obtained intentionally (self-selected) or through the process of algorithmic personalization motivates individuals to participate. Put differently, not all information delivered via algorithmic recommendation is automatically accepted as credible, while all information obtained through intentional processes (selective exposure) still requires confirmation of its credibility.

METHODS

This study employs a quantitative design with an explanatory approach to examine the relationships among variables tested in the model. The respondents consisted of young individuals categorised as Generation Z, aged between 17 and 29 years, who are active social media users. Surabaya was chosen as the field site considering its highly urbanised city with dense higher-education ecosystems and a large working-age population, therefore, creating a high-salience environment for youth online politics and issue exposure. Data collection was carried out using a convenience self-administered survey, with questionnaires distributed online via Microsoft Forms. We chose this technique because convenience sampling is efficient for recruting hard-to-enumerate and digitally embedded populations. This technique also works for theory development and prediction-oriented models such as PLS-SEM.

Through this online survey mechanism, a total of 263 responses were obtained. From the demographic profile of respondents, 56.8 per cent were male and 43.2 per cent female. In terms of educational background, the majority of respondents (73.2 per cent) were undergraduate students, while 20.8 per cent were master's degree students; the remainder comprised respondents pursuing diploma-level or equivalent education. To test the conceptual model, the study employed recent Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) techniques, which are considered particularly suitable for model development, following the analytical procedures of the Measurement Model, Structural Model, and the Mediation Analysis (Hair et. al. 2022).

We also note the potential sources of bias inherent in convenience, web-based surveys such as coverage bias, self-selection bias, and nonresponse patterns that may correlate with political interest or platform use. On the other hand, Ethical considerations for online recruitment and data collection were addressed by providing plain-language information and digital informed consent; participation was voluntary, with the option to discontinue at any point. We practiced data minimization and avoided collecting directly identifying personal data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first stage of analysis was conducted to examine the validity and reliability of the model by employing the PLS-SEM mechanism for the Outer Model, as outlined by (Hair 2021; Hair et. al. 2022), using the Confirmatory Composite Analysis (CCA) approach. This included testing the Outer Loadings of each indicator within its construct, followed by the evaluation of Construct Reliability and Validity through Cronbach's Alpha (CA > 0.5), Composite Reliability (CR > 0.5), Average Variance Extracted (AVE > 0.5), and discriminant validity using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT). Meanwhile, the evaluation for inner model focused on the coefficient of determination (R^2) and the Path Coefficients. Hypothesis testing was conducted using the bootstrapping technique with 5,000 resamples, considering a p-value threshold of less than 0.05 and assessing the directionality of the relationships among variables. Finally, mediation

testing was performed by evaluating the Path Coefficients of the specific indirect effects to examine the relationships of SEL and ALG with PCI and OPE.

Evaluation of the Measurement Model

This section presents the results of testing the conceptual model regarding the relationships between selective exposure (SEL) and algorithmic personalisation (ALG) on online political engagement (OPE), mediated by perceived information credibility (PCI). The first stage of analysis involved evaluating the measurement model by examining the results of the Confirmatory Composite Analysis to assess the validity and reliability of the constructs, as well as the validity and reliability of the indicators for each construct. Following the guidelines of Hair, et. al. (2022), several metrics were employed, including Outer Loadings, Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE), as well as Discriminant Validity tests using both the HTMT and the Fornell-Larcker Criterion. The results of this analysis are presented as follows:

Table 1.

Model Quality Criteria

Constructs	Indicators	Outer Loadings	Construct Reliability and Validity			
			CA	CR (rho_a)	CR (rho_c)	AVE
Selective Exposure (SEL)	SEL1	0.888	0.830	0.831	0.847	0.782
	SEL2	0.838				
	SEL3	0.802				
	SEL4	0.861				
	SEL5	0.831				
Algorithmic Personalisations (ALG)	ALG1	0.889	0.827	0.829	0.848	0.820
	ALG2	0.823				
	ALG3	0.709				
	ALG4	0.731				
Perceived Information	PCI1	0.752	0.871	0.871	0.878	0.818
	PCI2	0.863				

Credibility	PCI3	0.930				
(PCI)	PCI4	0.798				
Online Political	OPE1	0.802	0.807	0.811	0.831	0.730
Engagement	OPE2	0.805				
(OPE)	OPE3	0.900				
	OPE4	0.719				
	OPE5	0.839				

Based on the table, each construct demonstrates positive values, indicating that the measurement model in this test meets the requirements for validity and reliability. None of the outer loadings for the constructs fall below the minimum threshold (0.5); the majority range between 0.7 and 0.9, reflecting strong positive correlations between indicators and their respective constructs. In addition, the results of the measurement model show that the quality criteria parameters exceed the minimum thresholds recommended by Hair et. al. (2022). For instance, no construct exhibits a Cronbach's Alpha value below 0.6, and the Composite Reliability (ρc) values are at significant levels, thereby confirming that each construct demonstrates internal consistency. Likewise, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values reveal no construct falling below the minimum threshold. Consequently, it can be concluded that all constructs in this research model satisfy the required criteria.

The next stage in the Confirmatory Composite Analysis involved evaluating discriminant validity using the HTMT (Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio) approach, with a cutoff value ranging from 0.5 to 0.9 (Hair, et. al., 2022). HTMT is regarded as a recommended measurement model approach by Henseler and Schuberth (2020), in addition to the Fornell-Larcker Criterion method. To obtain comprehensive results, this study employed both approaches, with the findings presented as follows:

Table 2.

Discriminant Validity (HTMT dan Fornell-Larcker Criterion)

Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)			
ALG	OPE	PCI	SEL

ALG				
OPE	0.610			
PCI	0.574	0.840		
SEL	0.593	0.785	0.723	

Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	ALG	OPE	PCI	SEL
ALG	0.805			
OPE	0.661	0.854		
PCI	0.746	0.793	0.859	
SEL	0.653	0.786	0.688	0.884

Based on the table, the results overall indicate that the discriminant validity values fall within the recommended range of 0.5 to 0.9, as suggested by Hair (2021). The HTMT test confirms that each construct is distinct from the others. Similarly, the Fornell-Larcker Criterion yields consistent results. This analysis was conducted by taking the square root of the AVE for each construct, which should be higher than its correlations with other constructs. For example, the square root AVE value for ALG is 0.805, while its correlations with OPE and other constructs are considerably lower. This demonstrates a positive outcome.

In summary, the Fornell-Larcker test confirms that each construct in this research model shares more variance with its own indicators than with those of other constructs, thereby supporting the presence of discriminant validity.

Evaluation of the Structural Model

The structural model (inner model) analysis followed the recommendations of Hair et. al. (2022) and Hair et. al. (2011), which include evaluating structural model collinearity, assessing path coefficients, analyzing model fit, and examining the coefficient of determination (R-squared). First, collinearity testing for the

structural model was carried out using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) parameter, with a threshold of no more than 5 (Becker, et. al., 2015; Hair, et. al., 2022; Mason and Perreault, 1991). When the VIF value is below 5, it can be concluded that no collinearity exists among the constructs. The results of this analysis are as follows:

Table 3.

Collinearity Statistics (VIF) Matrix for Inner Model

	ALG	OPE	PCI	SEL
ALG		1.558		1.442
OPE				
PCI		2.050		
SEL	1.000	2.075	1.442	

The VIF values were obtained through the PLS Algorithm command, and the table indicates that no collinearity issues exist among the constructs in the research model. This implies that each construct can be considered distinct from the others, reinforcing the conceptual clarity of the variables. Subsequently, to assess the significance and relevance of the relationships among constructs within the structural model, path coefficients and their levels of significance were examined. Bootstrapping mechanism conducted with 5,000 resamples as the standard procedure for significance testing (Hair et. al. 2022). In this process, the testing criteria were based on one-tailed relationships, with a T-value threshold of 1.64 and a significance level (p-value) of 0.05, as presented in the following table:

Table 4.

Path Coefficients

Path	Org. Sample (PLS Alg.)	Std. Deviation	T Statistics	P Value (<.05)
SEL → ALG	0.554	0.050	11.128	0.000
SEL → OPE	0.432	0.054	7.999	0.000
SEL → PCI	0.556	0.060	9.201	0.000
ALG → OPE	0.072	0.038	1.919	0.028

ALG → PCI	0.238	0.064	3.724	0.000
PCI → OPE	0.456	0.056	8.108	0.000

The table demonstrates that all paths between variables are statistically significant, with p-values below the threshold. The interpretation of path relevance follows the standards proposed by Hair et. al. (2022): values ranging from 0 to 0.10 indicate weak relevance; 0.11 to 0.30 modest; 0.31 to 0.50 moderate; and above 0.51 very strong. Based on this evaluation, the relationships between selective exposure and algorithmic personalisation, as well as between selective exposure and perceived information credibility, exhibit very strong relevance. This finding indicates that selective exposure, representing users' intentional configuration of their preferences on social media, is highly relevant in shaping echo chambers of exposure.

In other words, the contribution of habituation and self-selected preferences indirectly stimulates algorithms to present a much broader spectrum of relevant content. In addition, other relationships among variables in the research model show moderate levels of relevance. Meanwhile, the relationships between algorithmic personalisation and perceived information credibility, as well as algorithmic personalisation and online political engagement, display modest to weak relevance. This evidence suggests that not all algorithmically personalised content effectively drives user engagement. At the same time, the findings also demonstrate that younger generations are relatively intuitive in scrutinizing the flow of information recommended by algorithms.

The next stage involved evaluating the Model Fit, using the criteria of a Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) below 0.08 and a Normed Fit Index (NFI) above 0.90 (Hair et. al.2022). The Model Fit analysis was conducted to assess the extent to which the model accurately represents the explanatory direction of the variables in accordance with the research questions: First, to what extent do selective exposure and algorithmic personalisation drive users' political engagement on social media? Second, does perceived credibility mediate the effects

of selective exposure and algorithmic personalisation on online political engagement? The results of this analysis are presented as follows:

Table 5.
Model Fit

Criteria	Estimated Model
SRMR	0.067
d_ULS	0.779
d_G	0.641
Chi-square	790.312
NFI	0.839

The results indicate that the SRMR value of this research model is 0.067, while the NFI is 0.839. Referring to the conservative assessment criteria of Hu and Bentler (1999), the model can therefore be classified as a Good Fit. Meanwhile, the NFI value of 0.839 suggests that the model is reasonably representative in explaining the research problems. Given that the NFI ranges from 0 to 1, with values closer to 1 indicating better fit, the obtained result demonstrates that the model provides an adequate explanatory representation.

The analysis of the coefficient of determination (R-squared) was carried out to examine the variance explained by each construct as a measure of the explanatory power of the research model, or in other words, the representativeness of how much influence one variable contributes to another (Shmueli and Koppius 2011). According to Joseph H. Hair et al. (2022), an R-squared value below 0.25 is considered weak, a value around 0.50 is moderate, and values above 0.75 are regarded as strong or substantial. The analysis of the coefficient of determination was conducted using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples at a significance level of less than 0.05, with the results presented as follows:

Table 6.
Coefficient Determination (R-square)

Constructs	R-square	R-square adjusted
Algorithmic Personalisations	0.307	0.303
Online Political Engagement	0.741	0.739
Perceived Information Credibility	0.512	0.508

Overall, the results indicate that 74 per cent of the variance in online political engagement is explained by its antecedent variables. This value can be considered substantial according to Hair et. al. (2022). The interpretation suggests that social media users' participation in the #IndonesiaGelap issue is predominantly driven by exposure to relevant information and the perceived credibility of that information. Furthermore, perceived information credibility itself is supported by two main predictors, which together account for 51 per cent of the variance. In other words, individuals perceive that they obtain credible information either through self-selected exposure or via algorithmic recommendations on social media.

What is particularly noteworthy is that the cumulative contribution of self-selected exposure in shaping echo chambers and subsequently being reinforced through the algorithmic recommendations is relatively low, at only 30 percent. This implies that respondents do not fully accept that algorithmic recommendations arise primarily from their habituated self-selected exposure. At the same time, the perception of receiving less relevant information may also help explain this finding.

Taken as a whole, the analysis of the coefficient of determination demonstrates consistency and the absence of overfitting, as evidenced by the relatively small difference between the R-squared and adjusted R-squared values (Hair et. al. 2022).

Hypotheses Testing

To conclude the findings based on the evaluation of the research model, hypothesis testing was conducted to address the research questions and confirm the proposed hypotheses. The decision to accept or reject a hypothesis was determined by evaluating the p-value, with significance established at less than 0.05 for positive relationships, and by comparing the T-value against the threshold of T > 1.64 (one-tailed test) as the decision criterion. The results of the hypothesis testing are as follows:

Table 7.

Hypotheses Test Results

Hypotheses	Path	Org. Sample (Coefficients)	T Statistics	p-value (<0.05)	Decision
H1	SEL → ALG	0.554	11.128	0.000	Supported
H2	SEL → OPE	0.432	7.999	0.000	Supported
H3	SEL → PCI	0.556	9.201	0.000	Supported
H4	ALG → OPE	0.072	1.919	0.000	Supported
H5	ALG → PCI	0.238	3.724	0.000	Supported
H6	PCI → OPE	0.456	8.108	0.000	Supported
H7	SEL → PCI → OPE	0.253	6.239	0.000	Supported
H8	ALG → PCI → OPE	0.109	3.298	0.000	Supported

H1: Selective Exposure and Algorithmic Personalisation

The hypothesis test for H1 shows a significance value of less than 0.05, thereby confirming that selective exposure is associated with algorithmic personalisation. Habituation and the selective choice of information content on social media contribute directly to the algorithmic processes of the platforms. As a result, algorithms increasingly present information exposures that are relevant to users' habitual behaviors. The path coefficient from SEL to ALG is 0.554, indicating a relatively high level of relevance, with T-statistics exceeding the threshold of 1.64. Thus, this relationship is not only positive but also statistically significant and strongly relevant.

Several prior studies corroborate this finding, suggesting that users' selective preference behaviors play a role in shaping the algorithmic framework of social media and reinforcing its operational mechanisms (Bakshy, et. al., 2015). In this context, algorithms function to recommend and display information that corresponds with user behavior and habits (Möller et. al.2018; Rader and Gray 2015). Therefore, the results of this hypothesis test strengthen the evidence that information personalisation on social media is, to a significant extent, a product of users' intentional behaviors and habitual practices.

H2: Selective Exposure and Online Political Engagement

The hypothesis testing for this relationship reveals a positive and relatively moderate effect, with a path coefficient of 0.432 and significance below the p-value threshold. Theoretically, this finding aligns with literature that positions selectivity as a key trigger of engagement: when individuals intentionally seek, choose, and repeatedly expose themselves to pro-attitudinal content, they not only reinforce their beliefs and emotions regarding the issue but also increase their likelihood of expressing opinions, debating, sharing, and participating in online actions surrounding the issue. In the context of #IndonesiaGelap, habituation to thematically similar content (such as educational posts, clarification threads, or calls to action) reflects sustained intention and attention, which subsequently manifest as likes, comments, shares, the creation of counter-content, or participation in forums and discussion spaces.

Empirical evidence supports this mechanism: for instance, Feezell (2016) demonstrates that self-selected exposure—particularly to confirming content—consistently predicts online political participation. Similarly, Weeks, et. al., (2017) integrate exposure patterns with expression on social media and find that selectivity toward congruent content enhances the likelihood of sharing political information, which constitutes a core dimension of Online Political Engagement (OPE).

H3: Selective Exposure dan Perceived Information Credibility

The hypothesis testing further indicates a positive relationship between selective exposure and perceived information credibility, with a relatively strong path coefficient ($\beta = 0.556$; $p < 0.05$). The result suggests that selective choices regarding information related to the #IndonesiaGelap issue stimulate perceptions of its credibility.

Psychologically, when individuals intentionally select pro-attitudinal content, they tend to evaluate such arguments as "stronger/more reasonable," or more credible. In other words, attitude congruence serves as the lens through which credibility is assessed, rather than mere content preference. At the level of source selection, this study also highlights the bidirectional interplay between selectivity and credibility: perceptions of credibility drive the selective choice of informational sources, while congruent selection processes reinforce perceived credibility.

This finding is consistent with Metzger et. al. (2020), who compared two explanatory accounts of self-selective processes—cognitive dissonance and credibility—and found that individuals selectively favor sources they perceive as more credible, rather than those that challenge them. Thus, credibility functions not merely as a consequence but as a mechanism that coexists with selection. In practical, when users deliberately curate congruent informational preferences, they come to perceive that information as valid and trustworthy.

H4: Algorithmic Personalisations and Online Political Engagement

The hypothesis testing between Algorithmic Personalisation (ALG) and Online Political Engagement (OPE) reveals a positive relationship, though with a relatively weak coefficient ($\beta = 0.072$; $p < 0.05$). This finding indicates that while

the two variables are indeed related, the results suggest that the sophistication of algorithms in presenting content related to the #IndonesiaGelap issue is not, by itself, a decisive factor in driving social media users to engage. In other words, engagement does not automatically emerge merely as a result of algorithmically curated exposure.

This finding implies that algorithmic personalisation does enhance the likelihood of exposure to issues such as #IndonesiaGelap and may trigger interactions with related content. However, substantive political engagement appears to be less strongly driven by algorithmic exposure compared to self-selected processes. Put differently, algorithms activate attention and facilitate micro-engagement, but the momentum toward more substantive online political engagement remains contingent on user-driven factors (Guess et. al. 2023).

Furthermore, when compared with selective exposure, algorithmic personalisation functions more as incidental exposure, which may indeed raise online participation but with smaller and more conditional effects than self-selected exposure (Ohme 2019; Valeriani and Vaccari 2016; Weeks et. al. 2017). This explains why the relationship between ALG and OPE is positive yet statistically weak.

H5: Algorithmic Personalisations and Perceived Information Credibility

The hypothesis testing indicates that algorithmic personalisation (ALG) has a positive relationship with perceived information credibility (PCI), although the effect size is within the small-to-moderate range ($\beta = 0.238$; $p < 0.05$). Theoretically, this finding can be explained through three key mechanisms. First, algorithmic curation on social media often optimizes engagement signals such as likes, comments, shares, network proximity, and user browsing history. When information—such as the #IndonesiaGelap issue—appears to be widely supported, users tend to apply bandwagon heuristics (Sundar 2008). In other words, the greater the number of people involved, the more credible the information is perceived to be. Second, algorithms increase the frequency of exposure to content that aligns with users' preferences. Repetitive exposure can produce fluency, or ease of

information processing, which is systematically associated with perceptions of truth or credibility. This effect is commonly referred to as the mere exposure effect or illusory truth effect. Third, algorithmic recommendation and ranking systems act as agency cues, leading users to infer that there is some form of authority endorsing or filtering specific information (Luo et. al. 2022). Thus, repetition of exposure combined with agency or endorsement cues creates a psychological framework that explains the influence of ALG on PCI.

However, the relatively low coefficient observed in this finding may be interpreted to mean that credibility judgments are grounded more in the content and context of distribution. Credibility is not exclusively a byproduct of algorithms but may also depend on the reputation of the source, the framing of evidence, and congruence with personal value orientations, which together constrain the effect (Pennycook et. al. 2018). This reflects the idea that algorithmic personalisation produces consistent effects on perceived credibility, yet these effects are not sufficiently exclusive to override other evaluative factors.

H6: Perceived Information Credibility and Online Political Engagement

The hypothesis testing for this relationship demonstrates a moderate and statistically significant positive effect ($\beta = 0.456$; $p < 0.05$). This finding underscores the role of credibility as a bridge between information exposure and action. When users perceive political information as credible—as in the case of the #IndonesiaGelap issue—at least three mechanisms appear to be at play. First, the reduction of reputational and cognitive risks: users feel more comfortable associating themselves with information they believe to be accurate, thereby increasing their likelihood of liking, commenting on, or sharing it. Second, the enhancement of efficacy and informational utility: credible content is perceived as more useful for persuading others or reinforcing one's own arguments, which in turn encourages political expression and digital participation. Third, the formation of injunctive norms within networks: when both the source and message are considered trustworthy by an individual, there is a normative drive to disseminate the content as part of one's contribution to political efficacy (Metzger et. al. 2010). Moreover, perceived credibility functions as a proximal determinant of behavior.

This finding reflects that in issue-driven environments such as #IndonesiaGelap, trust in content serves as a primary trigger of online expression and engagement. Consequently, the more credible information is perceived to be, the more likely users are to transition from passive consumption toward active participation (Lee and Ma 2012).

H7: Selective Exposure, Perceived Information Credibility and Online Political Engagement

The mediation hypothesis test of perceived information credibility (PCI) between selective exposure (SEL) and online political engagement (OPE) yields a conclusion of partial mediation. The direct effect of SEL on OPE and the indirect effect through PCI are both significant, yet the coefficient of the indirect effect ($\beta = 0.253$) is relatively smaller than the direct coefficient (SEL → OPE, $\beta = 0.432$), with both paths showing significance at $p < 0.05$. This finding suggests that users who intentionally choose and repeatedly expose themselves to information about the #IndonesiaGelap issue indirectly enhance their perceptions of credibility regarding the substance of that information. At the same time, when the acquired information is deemed credible, barriers to engagement—such as hesitation to express oneself—are reduced, thereby fostering the emergence of OPE around the issue.

Theoretically, this finding aligns with Westerwick et. al. (2013), who argue that the selection of like-minded information is associated with engagement once credibility perceptions are established. Overall, the identification of partial mediation underscores the variability among individuals in responding to the #IndonesiaGelap issue. Some social media users may engage primarily due to intrinsic or extrinsic motivations and group identity, whereas others require the perception of credibility as a prerequisite that reinforces their online political engagement with the issue.

H8: Algorithmic Persoalisation, Information Credibility and Online Political Engagement

mediation hypothesis test demonstrates partial mediation between ALG and OPE through perceived information credibility (PCI), with both the direct and indirect effects significant at $p < 0.05$. Notably, the direct effect of ALG on OPE is relatively small ($\beta = 0.072$) compared to the indirect effect ($\beta = 0.109$). Substantively, this indicates that the algorithm primarily functions as a curation system that connects users with content perceived as credible (due to social endorsement and repetition), while it is the credibility factor that ultimately triggers online political engagement. Although the direct effect of algorithms on engagement remains present, its magnitude is minor—most likely because algorithms merely generate opportunities for attention, while the psychological readiness to act depends on whether the information is judged as credible in terms of both content and context (Guess et. al. 2023).

Several studies similarly suggested that the impact of algorithmic structures (recommendation systems) on political behavior often hinges on intermediary psychological variables such as trust, emotion, and identity (Neo 2021). Accordingly, it is unsurprising that the mediation pathway through PCI accounts for a larger share of the effect on OPE than the direct pathway. In the context of #IndonesiaGelap, the practical interpretation is that algorithmic exposure to relevant information drives OPE primarily when users perceive the content as credible; conversely, if credibility is doubted, the likelihood of translating exposure into engagement declines even when visibility is high. The theoretical implication is that algorithms should not be regarded as autonomous drivers of political engagement but rather as facilitators that amplify the chances of exposure to information that appears “worthy” of trust.

CONCLUSION

This study explains youth online political engagement in the #IndonesiaGelap case by contrasting two exposure pathways—selective exposure and algorithmic personalization—with perceived information credibility as the mediating mechanism. The evidence indicates that engagement is primarily a function of user agency: youths who intentionally and repeatedly follow congruent content are more likely to participate online. Algorithms play a secondary role by

broadening visibility and opportunities for contact with the issue, while perceived credibility operates as the psychological bridge that converts exposure into expressive and sharing behaviors. In short, engagement arises from deliberate information seeking coupled with credible content, not from algorithmic push alone.

Several limitations should be noted upfront. First, the cross-sectional design restricts causal inference; second, convenience sampling of Surabaya-based Gen Z limits generalizability beyond similar urban, high-connectivity settings; and third, self-reported measures raise the possibility of common method variance. The issue-specific focus further narrows scope. Future research should employ longitudinal or experimental designs to assess temporal dynamics and causality, conduct platform-specific tests across TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook, and examine moderators such as political efficacy, emotion, and group identity to specify when and for whom exposure translates into engagement.

Theoretically, this study contributes at least three clarifications. First, it positions selective exposure as the primary driver of engagement rather than as a mere complement to the filter bubble phenomenon. Second, it affirms credibility as a proximal mechanism that bridges exposure and user engagement behavior with issues on social media. Third, it recontextualizes the role of algorithms from being active drivers to facilitators, emphasizing that their influence on online political engagement depends on whether the content presented surpasses users' thresholds of credibility. From a practical perspective, the findings reveal that interventions aimed at improving the quality and reliability of information are likely to be more effective in fostering meaningful engagement than those focused solely on visibility.

Empirically, the study contributes Indonesia-based evidence from an urban Gen Z cohort. The results show that intentional information seeking, rather than an algorithmic curation per se, propels engagement with a salient national issue. This also demonstrates that echo-chamber dynamics are shaped as much by deliberate user choices as by system design. Practically, the findings recommend prioritzing

credibility-building over mere reach. Platforms as well as the communicators should elevate trustworthy sources, increase transparency around curation signals that audiences interpret as credibility cues, and invest in media literacy that supports deliberate, informed participation. Therefore, such strategies are more likely to mobilize meaningful engagement.

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