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ARTICLE (REFEREED)

## Young People's Interaction with Political Information in Japan

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### Abstract

This paper investigated how Japanese young people's attitudes toward politics and the social environments they are in affect their interaction with political information in their daily life. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with twenty people to gather data about their experiences with political information and their attitudes toward politics. The results show that they have mixed feelings about political information, which arise from personal factors but are interrelated with broader social factors. Their attitude, which comprises their sense of remoteness to politics, low political efficacy, and difficulty understanding politics, reduces their interest in knowing political information. Social factors that limit opportunities for political participation and conversation diminish the utility of information and the motivation for seeking information. The habit of monitoring political information, often facilitated by experience watching television news with family, emerges as a factor that can maintain young people's exposure to political information, regardless of their level of political interest.

### Keywords

**Information Behavior; Political Information; Politics; Young People; Japan**

## Introduction

There has been a certain degree of detachment from politics among young people in Japan. A Japanese government survey shows young people's degree of interest in politics was the lowest compared with those in France, Germany, South Korea, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States ([Naikakufu 2019](#), p. 73). At the same time, in reporting this result in a newspaper, [Akiyama \(2021\)](#) points out they may not be totally indifferent about politics but possess potential willingness to become engaged. [Sawada \(2016](#), p. 42) argues that young people may have an interest in politics but do not show it. This apparent low interest in politics, potentially hiding deeper engagement, highlights the need for understanding young people's underlying attitudes toward politics. 'Political attitude' here means how people perceive politics, which is interrelated with their values or beliefs about politics and their actual behavior such as voting. This attitude can be individual as well as cultural ([Newton & Van Deth 2021](#), pp. 175-197). This understanding implies that while attitudes toward politics among young Japanese are individual, they are also collectively influenced by the social environment.

The democratic system in Japan allows people's free participation in politics. However, [Kabashima and Sakaiya \(2020](#), p. 210) point out that while opportunities for political participation are available equally, these opportunities may not be effectively utilized, causing politics not to respond to the voices of non-participants. The level of political participation in Japan is considered low, and the establishment of an interest-driven Japanese political system strongly supported by rural farmers has alienated urban residents ([Kabashima & Sakaiya 2020](#), pp. 137, 207). Japan has well-established mass media that disseminate political information widely. They primarily consist of national and regional newspapers, private television networks, a public network, and radio stations ([Ōishi 2016](#), pp. 76-85). In addition, the dissemination of news information via the Internet has increased ([Ōmori 2023](#), pp. 19-20). During elections, political parties and candidates spread their messages using methods like campaign cars with loudspeakers, public speeches on the street, and posters. Governments also run campaigns that encourage people to vote.

Young people's engagement with political information is important for the proper functioning of a democratic society both for today and into the future. For a society to become a participatory democracy, the political world should not be separate from people's everyday lives, and political communication must be established in the society ([Fuchs 2008](#), pp. 228-229). Information provides people with a link to politics, which is critical to the proper functioning of democratic society ([Soroka & Wlezien 2022](#), pp. 5-6). However, simple provision of information does not suffice ([Van Dijk & Hacker 2018](#), pp. 3-4). [Dervin \(2003\)](#) points out there have been gaps between the senders and receivers of information. As information receivers need to find value in the information that providers send ([Davies & Williams 2012](#), p. 546), people need to see some value in the available political information when they consume it. Thus, how people perceive or find utility in political information becomes a concern in understanding their interaction with it. People's relation to political information also involves aspects of information literacy, as people should understand information appropriately to make well-informed decisions for political participation, and some of this may contain disinformation ([Goldstein 2020](#), pp. xxiii-xxiv). While there are several perspectives on studying people and their relations to political information, this current investigation concerns how young people are accessing, perceiving or using political information in their daily life.

While surveys and quantitative research in Japan have provided a wealth of data about what media sources young people use to obtain information on politics and how often they do so, as well as their attitudes toward politics, these do not fully provide details of their actual interaction with political information. This calls for further investigation of how they engage with political information, not just how they receive it but how they react to it. Information behavior research is more concerned with 'the user's actual use of the information instead of his or her use of information sources or channels' ([Cole 2013](#), p. 8). Information behavior research increasingly considers various contexts that are interrelated with people's

engagement with information ([Given, Case, & Willson 2023](#), pp. 1-3). Also, information behavior involves various feelings when people deal with information ([Nahl 2001](#)). Thus, examining how young people's attitudes toward politics and other environmental factors relate to the interaction with information should contribute to further understanding of their engagement with political information.

A simpler understanding may be that their low interest in politics overall leads to a low consumption of political information, while political information itself is available widely. However, how social environments affect their attitude toward politics and political information, and how their attitude manifests in their interaction with political information in real-life contexts is not yet fully known. Engaging with political information may be seen as an individual activity but not necessarily for solely meeting personal needs. It differs from other types of engagement with information for personal gains, as it has social importance. Thus, studying their engagement with political information needs to consider social aspects as well as individual aspects. This research intends to contribute to further understanding of what influences their access or exposure to political information and how they view and use such information, with accompanying feelings or attitudes, in their daily life. The research question for this investigation is: how do their attitudes toward politics and the environment they are in affect their information behavior that can lead to indifference to political information? This entails the examination of how they access information on politics and how they react to or use the information they receive in their daily life.

## Literature Review

A survey in Japan showed a lower use of television news and newspapers as sources for news information among people in their teens to people in their 30s than in older people ([Hashimoto et al. 2021](#), pp. 176-177). In another survey, when asked about perceptions of news on politics, economics, and society, a smaller percentage of participants in their 20s, and teens aged 16-19, chose positive statements such as 'interested in knowing' compared to other age groups. Over half of them thought that the news they just happened to notice was sufficient, and less than half of them thought that they obtained news consciously ([Watanabe 2019](#), pp. 50-52). Another survey showed less than 20% of people between 18 and 29 years old see political news daily ([Watanabe, Masaki, & Kōno 2019](#), pp. 7-8). In this survey, 54% of male and 37% of female participants from 18 to 29 years old indicated having an interest in politics; 22% of males and 17% of females in this group indicated they would vote in every election. These figures are the lowest among all age groups ([Watanabe, Masaki, & Kōno 2019](#), p. 18).

The multi-year surveys of high school students in one city in Japan shows that the reasons for not voting, such as disinterest in elections and uncertainty about which candidates or parties to choose, had increased over the years ([Matsumoto 2020](#), pp. 18-19). Their satisfaction with politics is neutral, neither overly positive nor negative ([Matsumoto 2020](#), pp. 21-22). In the previous survey ([Watanabe, Masaki, & Kōno 2019](#)), 64% of males and 68% of females from 18 to 29 years old were dissatisfied or only somewhat satisfied with politics, while it was 68% for all age groups (pp. 16-17). Seventy-four percent of males and 83% of females in this age group think politics does not reflect public opinions enough or at all, while the figure for all age groups is 73% ([Watanabe, Masaki, & Kōno 2019](#), p. 17). This implies low political efficacy among young people. Political efficacy is the perception that they can make an impact on politics, and that the political system is responsive to them ([Kabashima & Sakaiya 2020](#), pp. 91-92). [Harada \(2002, pp. 225-227\)](#) points out that low political efficacy contributes to college students' distrust of politics, which they perceive as lacking transparency and not truly representing the people's will.

The environment where people grow up has an influence over their interest and engagement in politics. [Bastedo \(2015\)](#) studied Canadian youth from communities both engaged and less engaged with politics and found that those who were disengaged had a feeling of distance toward politics and sensed that their voices were not being heard. In the Japanese setting, a study by [Miyata, Yasuno, and Ichikawa \(2014\)](#) shows

that accessing news through television and newspapers facilitates conversations with friends and families about politics. The results of [Yokoyama and Inaba's \(2016\)](#) study showed the positive influence of political conversation in reducing people's sense of remoteness toward politics. [Vraga et al. \(2014\)](#) studied the factors influencing the political stances of adolescents during the 2008 U.S. Presidential election. They found that parents' political stances and resulting conversations might not have as strong an influence over their children as traditionally believed ([Vraga et al. 2014](#), pp. 78-79).

The Internet, especially social media, has provided a new environment where people interact with political information. A study by [Weeks, Lane, Kim et al. \(2017\)](#) shows the existence of both incidental and selective exposure to political information on social media and both influence people's act of information sharing. Also, social media offers new venues for young people's political participation ([Loader, Vromen, & Xenos 2014](#), pp. 1-4). At the same time, the actual efficacy of online political participation is questioned ([Van Dijk & Hacker 2018](#), pp. 72-77). [Goyanes and Demeter \(2022\)](#) cautioned against overemphasizing the positive influence of incidental exposure to news on people's understanding of politics. In Japan, [Kobayashi and Ichifuji \(2015\)](#) demonstrated the effect of Twitter on raising positive attitudes toward a candidate during an election campaign, although no effect on actual voting was observed. [Lutz and Hoffmann \(2017\)](#), pp. 889) identified negative aspects of online political participation, which discourage people from expressing their opinions freely.

Several research efforts have focused on information behavior related to politics. [Ytre-Arne and Moe \(2018\)](#) studied Norwegian people's consumption of news information qualitatively, and their findings showed that people perceive less importance in following news, tend to pay attention to the news of their personal interest or significant events only, miss out on other news of concern to the society, and do not seek sufficient information even on their topics of interest. [Vössing and Weber \(2017\)](#) investigated the influence of information behavior on political preferences and found that actively seeking information, coupled with the quality of the information increases people's retention and acceptance of information, facilitating the development of political preferences. [Williamson et al. \(2012\)](#) studied university students' information behavior toward news media in their daily life in Australia. Their findings included the relevance of news topics, such as their relation to personal interests and life situations, as a key factor that draws their interest. The findings account for both purposeful information seeking and accidental information acquisition in their daily life ([Williamson et al. 2012](#), pp. 262-263). [Smith and McMenemy \(2017\)](#) studied the perceptions of young people aged 14-15 toward political information and identified the use of various information sources, not only mass media sources and social media but also personal contacts such as family and friends and how they engaged in such sources both actively and passively.

The everyday information practices set out by Savolainen ([Savolainen 2008](#)) can provide a framework to study people's interaction with political information in their daily life. Everyday information practices encompass information seeking, information use and information sharing in people's lives ([Savolainen 2008](#), 49-51). These information practices happen in the lifeworld individuals are in ([Savolainen 2008](#), p. 64). Everyday information practices consider people's interaction with information in social contexts ([Savolainen 2008](#), p. 4). People's interaction with political information is not just an individual activity; it also has social implications and influences. [Jaeger and Burnett \(2010\)](#) propose the theory of information worlds to 'enhance our understanding of the role of information in society' ([Jaeger & Burnett 2010](#), p. 7). It acknowledges that individual activities with information 'are socially situated and are shaped, at least in part, by social forces in addition to individual information needs and cognitive factors' ([Burnett 2015](#), p. 9). The theory of information worlds provides a framework to examine information in social contexts from both the lifeworld and small worlds perspectives ([Jaeger & Burnett 2010](#), p. 32). Small worlds and larger social influences both affect information behavior ([Jaeger & Burnett, 2010](#): 7-8). In this theoretical framework, information is considered 'one of the things that allows mediation between the local and the broader social' ([Burnett & Jaeger 2008](#)).

## Method

This research focused on younger Japanese adults with the right to vote. A qualitative approach was chosen to study their information behavior with regards to politics by considering the context in which they interact with information as well as their associated feelings (Cibangu 2013, p. 203). The author conducted semi-structured individual interviews with people who were between 20 and 25 years old at the time of the interview. A human subject research approval was obtained from the author's home institution, and the entire research processes, including recruiting interview participants, conducting interviews, data analysis as well as data retention and presenting results, were done in accordance with ethical guidelines for research with human subjects. Gift cards were offered to solicit participation. Twenty people participated—thirteen females and seven males. Nineteen of them were either college or graduate students, which limited the collection of different viewpoints from non-students. The students belonged to several institutions and resided in several regions of Japan. Three interviews were conducted in person in the author's office and the remaining seventeen interviews were conducted via Zoom, the online meeting application. Each interview lasted approximately thirty minutes to one hour.

The author prepared an interview guide with a set of initial questions pertaining to how they access, react to, and use political information in their daily lives. The previous research on political information use and behavior as well as studies on political participation discussed in the literature review section informed the development of the interview questions. While the overall interview structure followed the interview guide, the author asked follow-up and additional questions as the conversation developed and encouraged participants to talk freely about what they wanted to bring to the fore. During each interview, a participant was asked to recall and talk about recent experiences of seeing political information, and subsequent questions elicited how the participant encountered it, what drew attention, if any, or how s/he reacted to it.

To capture their interaction with political information in a larger context, combined with their stance toward politics, the interview questions were not limited to their exposure to information on politics in media and included other activities such as conversations with others, their perceptions toward politics, and their experience in political participation including voting.

The interviews were conducted while paying attention to differences in understanding of political information and what contents are considered news (Vraga et al. 2016). The participants mostly thought of political information as news coming from mass media such as television and the Internet. Their understanding of what constitutes politics was different. Some had a narrower view of political news, confined to activities of the parliament and politicians, but others had a wider view that encompassed various social issues, which could be viewed as political agendas or civic engagement. In this study, political information encompasses this wider view. The interviews were conducted in a way that the participants were not confined to the narrower view. The author attempted to frame the conversation around this scope as naturally as possible, avoiding being forceful in changing topics or rejecting participants' responses.

The interviews were recorded on an audio recording device for the face-to-face interviews and on Zoom for the online interviews. Recorded data were transcribed for analysis. For online interview sessions, only audio data were used. NVivo was used to assist in analyzing the transcribed data. Drawing upon the method used in constructive grounded theory (Charmaz 2014), the transcribed data were initially coded line-by-line, assigning codes that describe participants' actions and thinking seen in the data. Through organizing and examining the initial codes, the author developed more focused codes that represent major themes that emerged from the data, pertaining to the objective of this study. The focused codes provided perspectives for examining the data, which led to the findings. The analysis included examining variations or similarities among data within a code and comparing data between codes to examine their relationship. Additional interviews were conducted simultaneously while the analysis was being carried out. As additional data were gathered and analyzed, the codes were further modified and organized. The author examined data within

each interview and across interviews to ensure that the results accurately reflected the data. The interviews and data analysis were conducted in Japanese. The quotes in this article were translated to English by the author.

## Findings

### INTEREST IN POLITICAL INFORMATION

Participants' responses about their degree of interest in politics ranged from almost no interest to high interest. About two-thirds of participants indicated their interest as somewhat modest or low. However, the conversations revealed subtleties in their political interest and their self-indication may not have always been in alignment with their actual interest in politics or the amount of political information they consumed. For example, one participant (P7) who indicated little interest was actually consuming news sources and reflecting on them regularly. This person stated at the end of the interview, 'Surprisingly, I found myself trying to reach out to politics'. On the other hand, another participant (P13) stated the reason she considered herself not interested in politics as follows:

I consider myself not interested in politics so much, because I would not seek political news proactively when surfing on the Internet, and when watching television, I would not go to news channels.

Even if they do not seek political information intentionally, they come across it in their daily life. Usually it is when they are online while doing other things. For example, one participant (P12) said, 'When I thought, I might as well check LINE [a social media application popular in Japan], then I run into the news section by chance, and I noticed the news'. But they do not necessarily read the content when it comes to them. Several participants said that only if the news looked interesting and they felt like checking, would they go read actual news articles. This interest can be immediate toward a particular news topic but also towards the topics of their pre-existing interest, for example, gender and poverty issues. Also, topics that were close to or may have had an impact on their daily lives drew their attention, such as the country's pension program, as it is predicted that fewer young people will have to support more older people, and political news related to COVID-19 caught their attention during the pandemic.

Lack of sufficient interest in politics makes them bypass political news even when they come across it, while a few participants felt an affinity toward politics. One participant (P16) came across political news online but said, 'I feel like because I have no interest in politics, I naturally do not go checking news'. The sense of not being able to fully relate politics to their life is one factor that contributes to a lack of sufficient interest in political information. One participant (P11) stated this view strongly:

I have a clear sense that [political news] is not needed for me to live my life. I used to like watching news but now I feel it is a waste of time. Most of the time, news has nothing to do with me.

At the same time, there is subtle or mixed feeling present. This participant (P11) also said, 'Although I do not feel politics is close to me, I think I should and that is why I try to go to vote in elections'. Another participant (P1) said:

I have difficulty feeling that I am participating here. ... somehow I do not feel domestic politics are realistic even though I know I ought to feel they are real. This makes me less interested.

This sense of remoteness of politics to their daily life includes another factor, which is the perception that politics does not reflect their interests or their opinions. They also expressed lack of faith in the ability of politics to change this and feel that they cannot make an impact. For example, one participant (P18)

commented, 'I feel there would not be much influence even though we voted or expressed opinions'. Some expressed a perception that politics was centered on the interests of older people and did not reflect the interests of young people, as seen in responses such as:

Speaking of the recent election, I see a lot of perspectives from older people. I do not think political parties and politicians are talking about national policies for young people to live better. When they put older people's perspectives first and we get treated this way, it makes me less interested (P14).

Dissatisfaction with media coverage can add to their sense of remoteness toward politics. It comes from feelings such as mass media focus too much on political scandals and opposition parties criticizing the government, rather than discussions of real policy issues they want to see more of.

The next factor that leads to their lack of sufficient interest in seeking political information is their feeling that politics is difficult to understand. Several participants stated they do not have enough knowledge about politics or political issues. This feeling makes them less interested in political information and keeps them away from politics even if they have an interest. Several participants stated their insufficient understanding on politics makes them reluctant to engage in politics such as through conversation with others. For example, one participant (P7) stated, 'I think it [politics] is important but have a feeling that it is difficult, so I think I tend to keep a distance from it'. These factors are closely interrelated and cannot be clearly separated in individual participants. The following comment reflects the mix of these sentiments:

I have an image that politics is difficult, and I think like if it [political news] has anything to do with me, it will come to me, without my seeking it. For other news, I think like, I should know it, but it does not get into my head. ... Even though I do not know it [news on a political development] in the making, life gets adjusted to it and it will become a norm, so I may be thinking like, I do not need to know it in advance (P9).

However, those who think they have a lower interest in politics were not always indifferent to political news when they saw the content they came across. It could invoke some feeling or reaction, even if it was just a slight thought or they did not clearly remember what it was. At the same time, their reserved attitude toward politics can appear. For example, one participant (P18) had a moderate interest in politics overall, did not think about going to vote in elections and saw news only from time to time. But she said the following when she once saw a piece of political news: 'I think we should change this situation, but I do not know how to do it. I have mixed feelings'.

## EFFICACY IN USING INFORMATION

The opportunities for political participation, which involve the use of political information, were limited. Other than the two participants who were participating in political activities such as by joining a non-profit organization for anti-discrimination (P6), the remaining eighteen participants showed little direct participation. Besides a low interest in politics, there was some frustration about their inability to find a place to participate and they had a feeling that they were not encouraged to participate in political activities. One participant (P5) stated, 'I feel powerless in being unable to participate in politics'. Another participant (P3) mentioned the atmosphere in Japanese society where being politically active is not well received by others. Online participation is not common, except for the participant (P6) who frequently tweeted comments, another participant (P10) who had an experience of posing a question to someone whom this participant followed on Twitter about a political issue, and a third (P17) who encouraged friends to vote on social media. Besides the lack of interest in online participation, other reasons included concerns about their identities being revealed or that their comments would remain posted.

Three participants had friends with whom they could talk about politics regularly. One of them (P9) stated that the friends who talk about political issues just happen to be around. Among them, conversation

about politics with friends is casual and usually does not last long. The others usually did not talk about politics with friends regularly, which was also the case during high school. Besides a simple lack of interest in political conversation with friends, there are other factors. For a couple of participants (P1, P3), their perception of not knowing enough about politics discourages them from engaging in conversation. Several participants observe that their friends do not show much interest or know enough about political topics to have conversations about these subjects. Even when they felt like talking to friends, they were hesitant to bring up politics during conversation. One participant (P3) talked about an experience of getting teased by friends when he brought up politics during a conversation and he said he subsequently stopped bringing it up. Another participant (P18) stated:

I think I want to talk to [friends] but, to my parents, I can talk without being afraid of how they think of me, but with friends I cannot, because it would be like they might think ‘why bring it up now?’

More than half of the participants stated they would vote in elections. When voting, they considered the information about candidates, political parties, and policies they advocate. How consciously and extensively they try to obtain information varies. On the other hand, a few participants who had voted did not necessarily consider candidates’ or political parties’ policies, and they did not intend to seek information. The information intended to encourage voting and provide election choices was not always perceived as useful. When asked about their reasons not to seek or use information actively, the following answers were given. Sometimes the information is hard for them to understand; differences among candidates are not always apparent in the campaign information; candidates’ and parties’ campaign promises can sound too good or vague. In addition, there are reservations about the political situation in Japan, that is, change of government has rarely occurred, as two participants (P3, P8) stated that, even if they voted, it would have no impact, as the ruling party would win anyway.

### HABIT OF MONITORING INFORMATION

Despite subdued interest in political information and low efficacy in using it, habit is a factor that induces participants to seek information on politics. More than half of them had developed some intention to check news regularly. While participants with a stronger interest in politics tend to have this habit, others who indicate less interest do not always lack this habit. For example, one participant (P17) was watching news on social networking services and a news application daily, even though she said she did not think much about it. Reaching certain stages in life, such as entering or graduating from college, can make them realize that they should know what is going on in society. In addition, seeking employment upon graduation can be another motive, as understanding current affairs is often one of the screening and assessment criteria. High school experiences, such as voter education in school, seemed to have a small influence over their interest in politics or their intention to check the news regularly. Most participants only vaguely remembered such an experience.

Six participants watch television regularly. For them, television is a source for regular encounters with news. Three of them lived with their family and they regularly watched the television that their family left on, usually in the morning or evening, exposing them to news programs. One participant (P11) said, ‘I do not watch TV news on purpose, but I am living with my parents, and they leave the TV on, so I happen to see news’. Four participants who lived by themselves did not own a television. However, some of the participants who do not watch television currently mentioned the experience of watching television news when they used to live with their family. Watching television news in the past influenced participants’ intention to keep up with news information. Once they left their home and started living on their own, often without a television, some of them realized the need to obtain news information. One participant (P7) who used to watch television news at home and now lived in a dormitory talked about her habit of checking



Internet news daily, 'There is no information coming from outside about, say, what is happening in Japan right now, the status of the coronavirus, so, I have become worried'. Another participant (P15) said, 'I would be in trouble if I lost the habit of watching news without TV. Right now, I only have a smartphone, so I follow news on SNS'. One other participant (P14), who used to watch television news at the family home, said, 'I have been checking news regularly with my smartphone. When did I start? I think when I left my parents' house'.

The participants mostly do not recognize the overt influence of their families over their political stance, except that a few participants indicated family influence explicitly. While conversations with family sometimes allow them to share similar political opinions or make them realize differences between their viewpoints and those of their parents, overall, participants' conversations with family in the past were usually casual and short. Such conversations usually took place in the living room or dining room while watching television or with someone in the household who was reading a newspaper, picking up some news topics that were reported. Often, it did not materialize as a conversation, and sometimes they just overheard their parents making a few comments. This daily experience in the past, even just hearing someone's short remarks about the news, can have an additional impact on developing the intention to check the news regularly. One participant (P5) who used to watch television news at home stated, 'I feel like I might as well check news anyways. I think talking with my family has made it a habit'.

## Discussion

While perceived needs for seeking political information are often vague or weak, young people's interest in political news is an immediate factor that induces their consumption of political information. Unless they find interest in the political information they come across, they do not click to see it even if it is immediately available one click away on the Internet. The degree of their interest in seeking political information varies by individual. In everyday information practices, people's interests drive their information seeking, and the degree of relevance of issues to their lives influences their interests ([Savolainen 2008](#), pp. 90-91). This interest is not solely shaped by individual factors; as [Burnett \(2015, p. 9\)](#) notes, people's engagement with information is affected by social factors. Their attitudes toward politics that can reduce their interest in political information comprises the following feelings: that politics has little to do with them, that they cannot make an impact on politics, and that politics is difficult. These are interrelated. A mix of these feelings constitutes their attitude toward politics. How strong this mix of feelings is and which factors are more prominent vary by person. Those who have a stronger interest in politics have less difficulty understanding political news. But they can still have a sense of low political efficacy. This mix of feelings also affects their reaction to the political information they come to read, which leads to their subdued reactions. This attitude toward politics also reduces their interest in political participation. The lack of active conversation about politics is due to the social environment that does not encourage it. This leads to reduced usefulness of and need for political news. This contributes to the feeling that even when information is available, it is not worth knowing.

Habits of monitoring information exist in everyday information practices ([Savolainen 2008](#), pp. 83-84). Obtaining news information is considered one activity that constitutes routine daily life ([Savolainen 2008](#), pp. 51-52). In this study, habit emerges as a factor that facilitates participants' access to political information despite the factors that reduce their seeking political information. While it is a routine activity, this act can also be seen as 'maintaining a willingness to allocate time and resource to it' ([Nahl 2001](#)). This habit can exist even among the participants who have low political efficacy or interest in politics. Among several factors that induce the development of this habit, the interviews revealed the role of television in developing the intention to keep up with the news. At the same time, this suggests that living alone without television, after having left the family home, makes it harder to keep this habit. Watching television with

family members sometimes has the function of facilitating conversations or short comments on political topics. As one implication of the decline in television viewing, [Korenaga \(2021, p. 241\)](#) discusses the change in leisure at home provided by media, suggesting the increased use of the Internet with spontaneous access and lower contact with television are making leisure at home increasingly individual rather than family activities. As such, decreasing use of television may reduce opportunities for hearing others' comments, making conversations, and developing a habit of regularly obtaining information on political issues. As unintentional exposure to television news decreases, maintaining this habit may require a more conscious effort. In the current information and media environment, news information is abundant and continuously sent out without set intervals like television news ([Harsin 2015, p. 329](#)). How this habit can develop and what influences the development in the current information and media environment require further study.

Examining the way young people interact with political information in their daily lives goes beyond an approach that centers solely on the cognitive aspects of information behavior ([McKenzie 2003, pp. 19, 24](#)). Through the lens of the theory of information worlds developed by [Jaeger and Burnett \(2010\)](#), political information, in one way, comes from a larger society to the study participants who live in their own small worlds. The results of this study reveal several instances where they either do not find such information relevant to their worlds or find it difficult to understand. Also, their small worlds affect their interaction with political information. Lack of political conversation with friends or venues for political participation reduce their interest in seeking political information. At the same time, watching television news along with resulting conversation with family that occurs in another small world in their daily life can induce their habit of obtaining political information. Also, a perceived sense of a lack of sufficient understanding on politics among some participants not only leads to their lack of interest in politics but also their reluctance to engage more actively in politics in a larger society. This shows information does not effectively connect them to a larger society where they should be more engaged politically.

This study examined young people's interaction with political information in the Japanese context, and the results show distinctive factors seen in Japanese society and its political system. In Japan, mass media produce abundant political information and access to such information is not overly restricted in the democratic system. However, as the simple availability of information is not sufficient, this study reveals the factors that inhibit their consumption of political information. The increasing availability of political information and opportunities for political participation or communication afforded by the Internet do not improve their consumption of political information, which is crucial for their political participation. These can have global implications and are not just limited to the Japanese context. Their low interest in seeking political information cannot be simply attributed to individuals, as suggested by an approach that views people's interaction with information in their social life ([Lloyd 2010, pp. 247, 249](#)). Environments in which young people can share and talk about politics more freely need to be created, although making such societal changes is difficult. In addition, mass media, politicians, and public administrations should deliver political information in a way that young people find more relevant and useful.

## Conclusion

While young people's individual interests in politics vary, this study has discovered how their attitude toward politics and their surroundings affect their interaction with political information. Their interest is an immediate factor that makes them click to see news content they come across on social media, and the lack of sufficient interest makes them bypass political news, even if its content is one click away. Their feelings that politics has little to do with them, that they cannot make an impact on politics, and that politics is difficult have contributed to their low interest in political information. Their attitude, which is a mix of these feelings, discourages them from actively seeking information and leads to their subdued reactions to political news. The social and political environments that limit opportunities for political participation

and conversation reduce the need for and relevance of political information. In turn, the resulting lack of sufficient information can further alienate them from politics. Under these circumstances, their habit of monitoring political information emerges as an important factor. This habit could develop even when political interest is not strong. Among the factors that encourage the development of this habit, this study found that the environment in which young people watch television news—often with family members, now or in the past—plays a role in developing their intention to keep up with political information regularly. The viewpoints revealed in their interaction with political information and associated feelings are not just individual attributes; they show the interrelated influence of social factors both in their daily lives and the larger society.

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