



## Plato's Theories Reflecting the Adolescent Choice of Social Media as a Main Source for News than Conventional News Outlets

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**Abstract.** *This study aims to demonstrate that a lack of curiosity is a fundamental factor influencing adolescents' preference for social media over traditional news outlets. To examine this issue, the research employed a mixed-method approach combining quantitative and qualitative data gathered through questionnaires. A total of 30 informants participated and were categorized into two developmental groups: early adolescents aged 12–14 and middle adolescents aged 15–17. The questionnaire explored respondents' curiosity levels, information-seeking habits, and motivations for choosing certain media platforms. The findings indicate that low curiosity significantly contributes to the preference for social media among early adolescents. At this stage, their interest in deeper information is still limited, making them more inclined toward fast, simple, and entertaining content. However, the hypothesis is less applicable to middle adolescents. Although they also frequently use social media, their media choices are influenced by additional factors such as peer dynamics, a growing sense of autonomy, and broader exposure to information from various sources. This difference suggests that the relationship between curiosity and media preference becomes more complex as adolescents mature. Overall, the study highlights that strategies to encourage critical information-seeking behavior must be tailored to adolescents' developmental stages.*

**Keywords:** *Adolescence; Allegory of the Cave; Curiosity; News Outlets; Plato; Qualitative; Quantitative; Social Media; Tripartite Soul.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent observations, there is an increase in adolescent social media consumption from the ages of 13 to 17 years old (Monica A, Michael F, Jeffrey G, 2023). The report published by the Pew Research Center in December 2023 states that in spite of negative features and developing concerns about social media's effect on youth, high schoolers proceed to utilize these platforms at high rates – with a few depicting their social media utilization as “almost constant.”. This statement stretches out into various standpoints/points of view – and even problems – one of them being how adolescents rely more on social media platforms for gathering information or news rather than using traditional media outlets such as news sites or articles published by certain journal companies. In the new advanced media world, young people have begun to use social media in large numbers to get news about politics and public issues (David CC, San Pascual M.RS, Torres M, 2019). With that context, a narrative can be drawn about social media use amongst adolescents and how they choose to approach and/or consume general news– whether it is political or for the purpose of daily entertainment.

“Social media use is widespread in teens.”–Plaisime, Robertson-James, Mejia, Núñez, Wolf, Reels, 2020. Moreover, social media has become one of the most pivotal tools in our society, especially for adolescents, where teenagers can overlook information while consuming it for entertainment. Social media is not only a platform filled with information, but also misinformation (Aïmeur, E., Amri, S., & Brassard, G, 2023). In January of 2024, an

article was published by Leon Chaddock. According to Chaddock, surveys suggest that over 93% of teens use social media, which is approximately 37 million teenagers in the USA alone. With this, we observe that there's an increasing number of social media users are youth. "Relying" more on social media platforms can be a result of various root causes. For starters, sharing information or news on social media platforms has certain distinct approaches. Most of the social media content is catered to a much younger audience. Short-form content is much more appealing to younger audiences because it's easier to digest. Considering teenagers have a shortened attention span, said media does not allow room for curiosity to grow. In this research, we will explore the reasoning behind the ideas of short-form content, and the decreasing curiosity of adolescents regarding media consumption/sharing through one particular thinker, Plato.

Speaking of curiosity, Plato has a few ideas that can mitigate the lack of curiosity, especially one title inside his book "Republic". Within Republic, Plato presents the cave allegory, where prisoners are locked in a cave and can see the shadows of real objects as it were. Initially content with the shadows, the prisoners speak to people who lack curiosity or awareness of deeper truths, and the philosopher, driven by the want to understand, escapes the cave, arguing that curiosity is basic to accomplishing higher knowledge. The prisoner's journey out of the cave and into the light the prisoner perceived symbolizes Plato's journey from carelessness to expertise. This allegory can be understood as an investigation of the awakening of intellectual curiosity (Plato, 2010).

Plato also has another piece that correlates with resolving the lack of curiosity inside Republic as well (Fine, 2021). His idea of the three-part soul is one of his ideas that offers insight into curiosity and the potential loss of it. Plato's tripartite model of the soul suggests that curiosity, in a general sense, is tied to the rational part of the soul. Curiosity and the pursuit of knowledge are likely to prosper when the soul is appropriately balanced, with reason leading and the other harmony parts. Then again, a lack of curiosity may result from an imbalance where the desires of the soul or appetite overshadow reason. Hence, according to Plato, cultivating a balanced soul is key to sustaining and maintaining intellectual curiosity (Annas, 1981).

Plato addresses the issue of a lack of curiosity by advancing a philosophical life where reason oversees and guides the soul. His ideas suggest that a well-ordered soul, a genuine pursuit of knowledge, and an educational process emphasizing memory and self-discovery are key to fostering and resolving curiosity-related issues. By creating an environment where reason and curiosity are central to one's life and education, Plato gives a system for overcoming

the lack of curiosity.

Despite Plato's intriguing theories that address the lack of curiosity and how to open your soul to knowledge, there are flaws in his theories that fit this context. Plato's theory of the tripartite soul and his thoughts around knowledge propose a somewhat static view of human nature and learning. The division of the soul into reason, spirit, and appetite can suggest that people have a fixed disposition towards curiosity based on the dominance of one part of the soul over the others. This theory may imply that those whose appetitive or spirited parts dominate are less able to create curiosity, which isn't fundamentally true in practice. The Allegory of the Cave could be a powerful allegory for intellectual awakening and the interest in knowledge, but it is simply theoretical and may not give concrete guidance for how to develop curiosity in everyday life. Though the allegory successfully illustrates the journey from ignorance to knowledge, it doesn't offer practical steps for encouraging curiosity among people who are "within the cave." It can also be interpreted as suggesting that most individuals are content with ignorance, which might discourage efforts to develop curiosity in broader, more open ways. This research aims to showcase the importance of media literacy and approaching it through curiosity.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the introduction, we briefly discussed Plato's theories relating to a lack of curiosity and how Plato resolves it with his theories. In this chapter, we will dive deeper into Plato's theories – including the Allegory of The Cave and the Tripartite Soul – showcasing what lies behind the framework of Plato's theories. Plato's Allegory of the Cave is one of the most famous philosophical metaphors in Book VII of his work *The Republic*. The allegory is a symbolic story that explores the nature of reality, human perception, and enlightenment.

A group of prisoners is chained inside a dark cave. They have been there since birth and cannot move their heads, so they can only see the wall before them. Behind them is a fire, and between the prisoners and the fire, there's a border along which puppeteers can walk, casting shadows on the wall. The prisoners believe that the shadow is the only reality because they know nothing else. The cave symbolizes the world of the senses, where people are bound by their own perceptions and all the prisoners can see is the shadow on the wall, it represents an illusion or false reality that people believe to be true based on their limited sensory experience.

Plato uses this to illustrate how most people live in a state of ignorance, seeing only what is presented to them by the material world, without seeking deeper knowledge. One of

the prisoners is freed and compelled to turn around and see the fire and the objects casting shadows. This is an uncomfortable and painful experience at first because his eyes are unaccustomed to the light, but eventually, he understands that the shadows are not reality and that the real objects (and the fire) are more substantial than the shadows. This step symbolizes enlightenment—the painful and difficult journey from ignorance to knowledge. It represents the philosopher's path, as Plato believed that philosophers, through education and critical thinking, could rise above the sensory world to understand deeper truths. The allegory illustrates the struggle between ignorance and the pursuit of true knowledge. Plato pointed out that most people live in ignorance, perceiving only shadows of reality, while true understanding requires a difficult spiritual journey. Plato saw philosophers as those who have left the cave and seen the true nature of reality. Their task is to return to the cave and try to help others see the truth, even though this may be a difficult or dangerous task.

Another of Plato's theories that includes this thought of curiosity is the Tripartite soul—as specified within the introduction of this journal. Plato's "Tripartite Soul" theory, displayed within *The Republic* (especially in Books IV and IX), is his model of the human mind, which he separates into three particular parts. Plato's tripartite theory reflects his belief that the human soul is complex and that understanding its components helps explain human behavior, virtue, and society's ideal organization. The rational part of the soul is responsible for logic, reason, and intellectual decision-making. This is the part of the soul that seeks truth and wisdom. For Plato, the rational part of the soul should govern the other parts because it is the only component capable of discerning true knowledge and understanding justice and goodness. Plato associates this rational part with philosophers who believe that the soul is best suited to control because it values reason and wisdom over personal desires and ambitions. Plato suggests that the rational part is the "guiding principle" and must control the other parts to maintain a harmonious soul and society. The spiritual part of the soul is associated with emotion, will, honor, and courage. Plato identified it as the source of assertive emotions such as anger and indignation, accompanied by a sense of justice or righteousness. This part of the soul motivates people to protect themselves and others, to take pride in their actions, and to fight against actions they consider unjust. The "unstable" part strengthens the rational part, supporting it by acting as an ally and giving it the emotional motivation to seek justice and goodness. In Plato's ideal society, this aspect of the soul corresponds to the class of "warriors" or "guardians" who protect society and enforce its laws and values through their courage and loyalty. The appetite consists of wants and desires for physical pleasures such as food, drink, and material possessions. It is related with fundamental physical needs and urges as well as

more hedonic wants for quick satisfaction. Plato considered this portion of the soul vital but possibly dangerous in controlling the person. According to Plato, the most essential and rebellious part of the soul is the greedy part. He warns that when desires dominate, they bring about excess and imbalance, causing unrest of mind. In his ideal society, the greedy side corresponds to the producer or merchant class, who contribute to society by fulfilling an essential economic role, but do not govern. For Plato, justice is achieved when each part of the soul performs its function without interfering with the roles of the other parts. Just as in a balanced society, each class (philosophers, warriors, producers) plays its role for the common good, so a balanced soul requires harmony between the rational, temperamental, and greedy parts, with reason dominating the mind and appetites. Plato's theory provides a basis for understanding the internal conflict between reason, emotion, and appetite. It suggests that a moral life requires achieving balance within the soul and that moral failure is the result of internal disharmony rather than external circumstances.

These theories/concepts appear in *The Republic*, written in the form of a dialogue primarily featuring Socrates. Plato used these theories to illustrate key points about human nature, morality, and the ideal state. The allegory of the cave is found in Book VII of the *Republic*. Plato uses the allegory as a powerful metaphor for enlightenment, the nature of reality, and the role of the philosopher. The allegory may have originated from Plato's belief that most people are trapped by their limited perception, limited to seeing shadows of reality rather than its true form. Plato was heavily influenced by Socratic philosophy, especially Socrates' emphasis on questioning and seeking deeper understanding rather than accepting appearances at face value. Socrates believed that most people were in a state of ignorance about essential truths, and he viewed philosophical inquiry as a way to "turn the soul" toward true knowledge.

Plato introduced the tripartite theory of the soul in Book 4 of the *Republic* to consider the nature of justice in both the individual and the state. He shows that the soul is composed of three distinct parts - rational, spiritual, and appetitive - that correspond to different aspects of human behavior and principle. Socrates often spoke about the internal conflict humans face when rational and irrational impulses merge, but this concept was developed further by Plato. By dividing the soul into several parts, Plato was able to explain the inner conflict and the need for balance. The tripartite model of the soul corresponds to Plato's ideal state in which society is divided into three classes: rulers (reason), protectors (temperament), and producers (desires). Plato developed a psychological framework for understanding human behavior and morality by dividing the soul into three parts. He considered the rational part necessary for wisdom, the

temperamental part necessary for courage, and the appetitive part necessary for moderation. In other words, justice is the harmony of all three. This model provided a structured approach to ethics and self-governance that Plato considered essential to living a good life.

Though these theories present themselves as quite impenetrable, there are a few thinkers who oppose Plato's theories, especially the Allegory of the Cave and his model of the Tripartite soul. Plato's student, Aristotle, rejected Plato's Theory of Forms, which correlates to the Allegory of the Cave. Aristotle believed that forms do not exist in a separate, abstract realm but are embedded within objects themselves. Unlike Plato, who saw the sensory experience as deceptive, Aristotle argued that knowledge comes from observing and understanding the physical world rather than seeking a transcendent reality. He focused on empirical observation and argued that the physical world is real and knowable, challenging Plato's view of sensory reality as merely "shadows." Aristotle's approach to philosophy is grounded in practical application, focusing on ethics, politics, and natural sciences, all of which are based on observable facts. For example, his *Nicomachean Ethics* emphasizes virtue as practical wisdom acquired through lived experience rather than abstract reasoning. Plato's allegory advocates an idealized journey from ignorance to intellectual enlightenment, often interpreted as privileging philosophical knowledge over practical concerns. Aristotle's focus on practical reason—learning through experiences, choices, and concrete actions—directly opposes Plato's ideal of purely abstract knowledge as the highest form of understanding.

Martin Heidegger offered critiques of Plato's philosophy, specifically regarding the Allegory of the Cave and Plato's concept of reality, though he did not address the Tripartite Soul directly. While Heidegger did not directly critique Plato's Tripartite Soul Theory, his philosophy can be seen as indirectly opposing it through his emphasis on existential unity rather than division. Plato's model divides the soul into rational, spirited, and appetitive parts, each with distinct functions and virtues. Heidegger, however, argued for a more holistic understanding of human existence. Heidegger also resisted Plato's view of a fixed, ideal human nature defined by the virtues of the rational, spirited, and appetitive parts. Instead, his philosophy assumes that human beings are defined by being itself; the choices, actions and possibilities inherent in each individual's engagement with the world. He considered Plato's model too rigid and restrictive for human experience, which in his view was characterized by freedom, possibility and an openness to being. Heidegger's criticism of Plato's Allegory of the Cave and, indirectly, the Tripartite Soul Theory, reflect his opposition to the rigid division of reality into higher and lower realms and his rejection of the fragmented view of the human mind. Heidegger's philosophy is centered on the unity of existence, challenging Plato's

approach and his focus on eternal forms as the highest truth.

### 3. METHODS

This research employs a qualitative method to explore the significance of media literacy and the role of curiosity through the lens of Plato's Allegory of the Cave, using a mixed approach that combines survey-based data collection and an in-depth literature review to establish a comprehensive philosophical and empirical foundation. Data are gathered through surveys distributed via Google Forms to adolescents aged 12–17, following SurveyMonkey's definition of a survey as a set of questions used to collect, summarize, and analyze responses, while the literature review, aligned with the University of Gadjah Mada's standards, provides an overview of relevant theories, authors, and approaches including insights from Plato, Hank Green, and other thinkers to strengthen the analysis. Participants are selected based on the World Health Organization's classification of adolescence into early and mid stages, enabling the identification of patterns in their responses based on developmental differences. The data are analyzed thematically to identify recurring themes related to how adolescents perceive curiosity in relation to media literacy, while the literature review is synthesized to draw parallels between classical and contemporary interpretations of the Allegory of the Cave and the Tripartite Soul in understanding media education for each adolescent stage. The survey consists of 15 questions, including 5 multiple-choice items that establish foundational information such as age and media sources and 10 long-answer questions designed to capture deeper perspectives essential for thematic interpretation.

### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This segment presents the key discoveries of the study taken after the sent questionnaire, followed by a discussion of the concerning patterns by analysing and cross-referencing said patterns to Plato's theory of both Allegory of the Cave and the Tripartite Soul from *The Republic*. Within these discoveries, the analysis reveals multiple themes that support the initial hypothesis with complexity. Ages 12-14 show more quick –yet a comprehensive– explanation– while ages 15-17 show more complex and elaborate answers with reason and further explanations.

Informants from the early stage can be summarised as one statement: majorly on the surface. The early stage category is one of the variables to determine their confirmation of the initial hypothesis which suggests that the lack of curiosity is one of (if not the main) reasons for the choice of social media rather than news outlets.

**a. Easily influenced**

In this context, the term "influenced" implies that an individual's initial opinion becomes the opinion of a figure, or that an individual has no opinion and is inclined to trust an entity or figure based on the number of times they encounter that figure on social media. Within the analysis, it is recognized that adolescents ages 12 to 14 are easily influenced by social media. According to an informant, they are more inclined to trust Tiktok, because they use the app the most.

**b. Visually attentive**

“Visuals” in this context can be equal to the tone of the media and/or the physical aesthetic of the media (such as colors and text). While analysing, it is concluded that the informants in the early stage of adolescence value the visual aspect of media, and sometimes rely on it for the consumption of it. This does not only appear in the early stage of adolescence, considering even a 16-year-old informant stated that “more visuals and better layout” would make them more curious in seeking out news from traditional sources.

To sum up the early stage category, informants ages 12-14 answered with straight (yet understandably explained) answers, easily influenced by the media, and visually attentive.

Informants in the middle stage category show more complexity, and elaborated with other points of view in mind. This stage –like the previous– serves as a variable to the study, making sure that the different development stages can be in contrast to determine a theme.

**c. Harder to be influenced/ careful while consuming media**

Unlike the early stage of adolescence, it is determined that, through analysing, the informants' ages 15-17 are harder to be influenced by considering their careful method of consuming media. Such as one informant, when asked about the importance of knowing the person behind the making of a form of media, stated that it's important that the person writing the article is trustworthy, doesn't have a history of spreading misinformation, or doesn't favor one side of the story. In addition to complexity– they added that on the other hand, everyone deserves to share their perspective, and even their biases or stories can help to better understand different perspectives. Even another informant stayed to their morals– confided that because they live in a predominantly conservative area, they do not trust everything they hear/read about.

#### d. Mostly curious

Moreover, the informants that are categorized within the middle stage of adolescence show curiosity. When asked the question: “What motivates you to explore news or information beyond what you see on social media?” 15/20 adolescents answered that curiosity is the reason. This can be seen in multiple answers by informants, some say that they validate the reliability of information by digging deeper into the topic and following reliable sources to further their knowledge, comparing their findings with another source to differentiate them, and even taking a background check on the author who made a piece of media to determine if it is bias or not.

To conclude the middle stage category, informants ages 15-17 answered with complex and comprehensive answers. Then after analysing, it is shown that they are careful when consuming media and mostly curious.

The initial hypothesis stated that the lack of curiosity is one of (if not the main) reasons for adolescents' choice of consuming news/media on social media platforms rather than news outlets. It is shown in the data from the informants that this hypothesis has some element of truth in it. In the early stage of adolescence category, this hypothesis shows more truth than the middle stage of adolescence category. Nonetheless, both categories are considered to have one unifying factor: assumed credibility. According to Plato's Allegory of the Cave, it is stated that the prisoners in the cave only see shadows of what the puppeteers make. This allegory can be referenced and seen in the phenomena of this study— where the informants resemble the prisoners, and the puppeteers resemble the idea of constant, blissful, certainty. A novelist named Hank Green once said: “If you want to have an allegiance to truth, you have to trade in the comfort of constant certainty”- Hank Green, 2024. This quote reflects Plato's Allegory of the Cave, where the plague of constant and blissful certainty of being in the cave shows a statement that in this study, adolescence is a process— where the early stage is more content in their constant certainty, and the older the stage (referring to the middle stage) are slowly coming out of the cave, not being plagued by the content of certainty, and encouraging curiosity. Plato's model of The Tripartite Soul (Rational, Spirit, and Appetite) suggests that if one part of the model is dominating the others, the self will be unstable. This occurs within the lack of curiosity the informants have; with the Appetite dominating the other parts of the soul, the idea of being too content in the unknown, and prioritizing comfort over intellectual findings in life. Because of this, the other parts of the soul are overpowered. The spirit part that drives passion and ambition

lessens its power, and the rational part of the soul weakens its power— therefore the self may not see the value in learning and questioning what is under the iceberg; inevitably destabilizing the self.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The study's hypothesis was to show that lack of curiosity is a reason for adolescents choosing social media platforms for consuming news rather than traditional news outlets. The initial hypothesis lives up to its purpose but is not quite as finite as intended. It was expected that both stages of adolescence would have the same outcome and support the hypothesis. However, after analysing, the hypothesis is only supported by the early stage of the adolescent category, with being easily influenced and being visually attentive as factors that contributed to this study. It is found that the middle stage of adolescence shows more maturity and complexity, as their answers are considered from different points of view. In discussion, it is recognized that Plato's Allegory of the Cave and his model of The Tripartite Soul correlate to the phenomenon of the middle stage of adolescence in this study, and reflect the release of their comforts within constant certainty.

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