

## The Influence of Social Media Use on the Political Participation of Generation Z

**Kenanga Rahma Sadikin<sup>a, 1\*</sup>**

<sup>a</sup> Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Indonesia

<sup>1</sup> kenangarahma@upi.edu\*

\*korespondensi penulis

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### ABSTRACT

*This research is based on the effect of the use of social media on the political participation of generation Z. The purpose of this study is to determine how the influence of the use of social media on the political participation of generation Z, as well as the impact on generation Z of the use of social media on political participation, and whether There are factors that influence the political participation of Generation Z in using social media. This study uses a survey research method with a cross-sectional design which is carried out with one answer to the questions that have been made. Methods use questionnaires. The data analysis method was carried out according to the problem formulation, with three problem formulations. The results of this study indicate that the use of social media will affect the political participation of Generation Z, in using social media there is also a positive impact on political participation of Generation Z and there are also factors in using social media that can influence Generation Z for political participation.*

### ABSTRAK

**Pengaruh Penggunaan Media Sosial Terhadap Partisipasi Politik Generasi Z.** Penelitian ini berfokus pada pengaruh penggunaan media sosial terhadap partisipasi politik generasi Z. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui bagaimana pengaruh penggunaan media sosial terhadap partisipasi politik generasi Z, serta dampak yang ditimbulkan kepada para generasi Z dari penggunaan media sosial terhadap partisipasi politik, dan apakah terdapat faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi partisipasi politik para generasi Z dalam menggunakan media sosial. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode penelitian survei dengan desain cross-sectional yang dilakukan dengan sekali jawab pertanyaan yang telah dibuat. Metode pengumpulan data dilakukan dengan menyebarkan kuesioner. Metode analisis data dilakukan sesuai dengan rumusan masalah, dengan tiga rumusan masalah. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa penggunaan media sosial akan berpengaruh terhadap partisipasi politik generasi Z, dalam menggunakan media sosial pun terdapat dampak positif terhadap partisipasi politik generasi Z serta terdapat pula faktor-faktor dalam menggunakan media sosial yang dapat mempengaruhi generasi Z untuk partisipasi politik.

Kata kata kunci:

Media Sosial;

Partisipasi Politik;

Generasi Z.

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## Introduction

The presence of social media today is highly significant for individuals across all walks of life. Social media appears to play a unique role in the everyday lives of many people. It has become a source of information, a medium for interaction, and a platform for social engagement. Initially, social media served primarily as a tool for self-expression and personal existence. However, its functions have now expanded to encompass the political sphere in Indonesia. With the rapid advancement of internet-based technologies, communication can now take place globally with ease, unrestricted by spatial or temporal boundaries. Moreover, social media enables real-time interaction through various features, including video calls, allowing users to see and communicate with one another directly (Milenkova, & Lendzhova, 2021).

Social media offers something distinctive: it creates an online network environment that brings together individuals with shared interests. As information is dynamically disseminated among users, their engagement within these networked environments fosters political awareness and experience (Sites, 2010). This indicates that social media also facilitates interpersonal relationships within political contexts. Passive users may choose to avoid political exposure by unfollowing news outlets and political figures; however, social networking platforms continue to connect them with individuals who are politically engaged. These politically active individuals can serve as sources of political information, messaging, and motivation. Such communication networks contribute to the perception that politics is a part of everyday life. By observing the political activities of friends or supported political parties, individuals may be encouraged to remain aware of political issues, thus counteracting the tendency to disengage from political matters (Sundar & Limperos, 2013).

Political participation is defined by Arifin (2013: 67) as the personal involvement of citizens in political activities at various levels within the political system. Budiardjo (2013: 367) further explains that political participation involves the active engagement of individuals or groups in political life. Through such participation, citizens can influence policies and decisions that affect a broad range of societal and national aspects. Participation is especially crucial in democratic countries, as it serves as a measure of citizens' concern and engagement with their nation. When citizens perceive themselves as integral parts of the political system, they are more likely to be consciously aware of national issues and motivated to contribute to the progress of their country (Harun & Sumarno, 2006: 133).

Such political awareness also enables better oversight of government actions by the public. Consciously or unconsciously, the development of digital technology—particularly new media and social media—has influenced the political participation of citizens (Akmal & Salman, 2015). While political participation was once conducted through “traditional” means (without the use of new media), it can now also occur through digital platforms, including social media (Salman & Saad, 2015; Halim & Dyah, 2019).

All segments of society, without exception, have equal opportunities to participate in political discourse. The advancement of the digital era has further facilitated individuals in expressing themselves—especially Generation Z, who not only have the right to vote but have also been exposed to the internet from an early age, making political participation more accessible for them. There are numerous ways for citizens to engage in political activities. According to Teorell et al. (2007), forms of political participation include voting in general or local elections, sending letters or messages to government officials, joining protests or demonstrations, becoming a member of a political party or civic organization, running for public office, donating to political parties or politicians, and participating in fundraising programs (Morrison, 2016).

Several theories support the concept of social media. The term itself derives from the combination of “media” and “social,” which, when merged, refers to a form of media that facilitates interaction. One definition is provided by Mandibergh, who states that “social media is a platform that facilitates collaboration among users to produce content (user-generated content)” (Nasrullah, 2017:11).

Similarly, Boyd describes social media as a collection of software tools that allow individuals or communities to gather, communicate, share, collaborate, or even engage in recreational activities. A key characteristic of social media is its reliance on user-generated content (UGC), where content is created by users rather than edited and published by institutions, as is the case with traditional mass media. According to Nasrullah (2017:11), social media can be examined from communication, cultural, and socio-technological perspectives. From these definitions, social media can be understood as an internet-based platform (online media) that enables individuals to socially interact, communicate, collaborate, and share with others.

Political participation is one of the most widely recognized concepts in political science (Rohaniah & Efrizah, 2015: 468), particularly in democratic political systems where the core philosophy is governance “by the people, for the people, and of the people” (Mudjiyanto, 2012). However, in its early development, the concept of political participation primarily centered on political parties as the main actors. As democracy evolved, public disillusionment with political parties grew due to their tendency to focus on limited issues while neglecting broader societal concerns. As a result, there is an emerging hope that civic movements through direct public action can more effectively influence government policy-making processes, thereby ensuring that citizens play a more active and impactful role in governance (Rohaniah & Efrizah, 2015; Gultom, 2024).

Theocharis (2015) argues that analyses of political engagement today must take into account the role of digital platforms such as social networking sites. The use of social media and political participation serves as a means to disseminate content to followers, primarily to raise their awareness of various issues (Calenda & Meijer, 2009). This type of participation can influence political knowledge, political behavior, and—most importantly—can promote online political participation (Bode, 2017). Social media is widely recognized as having a powerful impact on political engagement. Various cross-national studies have examined its influence on political participation and the implications for society (Saldana et al., 2015). The importance of communicating political ideas and activities has made media—particularly social media—an essential tool. The connection between media and politics is of critical significance, as social media plays a key role in shaping political behavior and the number of votes obtained (Arumsari, 2018).

Several previous studies have explored the relationship between social media and political participation. One such study is titled “*The Influence of Social Media on the Political Participation of Millennials in the 2019 General Election in Tareran District, South Minahasa Regency.*” This research focused on how millennials participated in the election, what factors influenced their participation, and sought to identify ways to support their development into informed political participants. Another study, “*The Influence of Social Media Use on the Behavior of First-Time Voters in the 2020 Simultaneous Regional Elections in Barru Regency,*” aimed to assess respondents’ perceptions of social media’s impact on first-time voter behavior. The results indicated that social media had a significant influence on the behavior of first-time voters during the 2020 local elections in Barru.

What distinguishes this current research from previous studies is its focus on how the use of social media influences the political participation of Generation Z. New media provides various conveniences that encourage active political involvement. It eliminates the need for in-person discussions about political issues, as conversations can now take place via private or group chats on platforms such as WhatsApp.

The objectives of this study are to explore how social media use affects political participation, to identify the impacts of social media on political engagement, and to determine whether certain factors influence political participation through social media. The fast-paced and borderless nature of social media opens up opportunities for the spread of negative political content, such as “black campaigns,” which can mislead or misinform the public. Responses to such information, including its spread, can occur very rapidly. For example, during the events in Tunisia and Egypt in 2011, Blankson & Murphy

(2007) noted that political communication and social actors played a major role in mobilization efforts, facilitated by close access to communication technologies. A widely cited statement by Hillary Clinton (2010) emphasized that internet freedom had become a new pillar of U.S. foreign policy.

This research is important to conduct as it seeks to understand the influence and impacts of social media use on political participation, as well as the factors that may affect it. The dynamics of national political contests have become increasingly compelling, as they involve individuals from various generational backgrounds simultaneously. Among these, the younger voter group, commonly referred to as Generation Z, has received significant attention from both politicians and academics. The benefits of this study for the researcher include gaining deeper insights into the impact of social media on political participation. For other researchers, this study can serve as a valuable reference on the intersection of social media and political engagement. For students, it can serve as a useful guide for conducting similar research in the future.

According to Nasrullah (2015), social media is an internet-based medium that enables users to represent themselves, interact, collaborate, share, and communicate with others to form virtual social bonds. In social media, three forms of social meaning are highlighted: cognition, communication, and cooperation. Van Dijk, as cited in Nasrullah (2015), describes social media as a media platform that focuses on user existence, facilitating them in carrying out activities and collaborations. Therefore, social media can be viewed as an online facilitator that strengthens user relationships and social ties. Boyd, also cited in Nasrullah (2015), defines social media as a collection of software tools that allow individuals or communities to gather, share, communicate, and in some cases, collaborate or play together. Social media derives its strength from user-generated content (UGC), where the content is created by users rather than editors, as seen in traditional mass media institutions. Essentially, social media enables two-way activities in various forms of exchange, collaboration, and social acquaintance through text, visuals, or audiovisuals. Social media is rooted in three key elements: sharing, collaborating, and connecting (Puntoadi, 2011).

Social media acts as a bridge for long-distance human communication. It is an online platform where users can easily join, share, and create content such as blogs, social networks, wikis, discussion forums, and virtual worlds. Among these, blogs, social networks, and wikis are the most commonly used forms of social media worldwide (Wulan, 2015). Furthermore, Kotler and Keller (as cited in Hartanto, 2013) describe social media as a way for consumers to share information—text, images, audio, and video—with one another and with businesses, and vice versa. As explained above, social media utilizes web-based technology that supports social interaction and transforms communication into an interactive two-way conversation. Over time, social media has become an essential tool in the process of political communication. Particularly during election campaigns, politicians can conduct mass outreach from remote locations to their voters, acting as communicators. Thus, communicators can use social media to engage politically with their supporters and constituents, allowing them to shape public opinion and mobilize large-scale political support.

According to Karjaluoto, as cited in Wahyuni (2015), there are six forms of social media: (1) blogs – Websites where individuals or groups can post written content and where readers can leave comments. Blogs are popular because they provide a comprehensive and original perspective on specific topics; (2) Forums – Sites where multiple users can create and comment on discussion topics. Forums often serve as a hub for users interested in certain themes. One well-known example in Indonesia is Kaskus, which hosts a variety of user-created topics; (3) Content Communities – Platforms where users can post and share content, typically videos or photos, often accompanied by voting features for relevance; (4) Virtual Worlds – Online environments that simulate real-world interactions. Users can interact, cooperate, or compete with others in these spaces, as often seen in online games; (5) Wikis – Sites that compile information or documents, where registered users can edit or add content, such as Wikipedia; (6) Social Networks – Virtual communities that allow users to connect with others. Some

are intended to expand group networks (e.g., Facebook), while others are based on specific regions or interests.

The use of social media for news consumption and political engagement began to grow during the 2009 presidential election and played an even larger role in the 2014 election. Social media provides a unique value by creating online networked environments where individuals with shared interests gather. A person's presence in such a networked environment can lead to political experiences through the constant circulation of information among users (Sites, 2010). This indicates that social media also facilitates interpersonal interaction related to politics. Users who are not politically active tend to avoid political content on social media and are less likely to follow political news or figures.

Political participation is one of the most popular concepts in political science (Rohaniah & Efrizah, 2015: 468). This is particularly true in countries that adopt a democratic political system, as the fundamental principle behind the concept is governance *by the people, of the people, and for the people* (Mudjiyanto, 2012). However, in the early stages of the study, this concept primarily focused on political parties as the main actors. Over time, as democracy evolved, citizens became increasingly disillusioned with the performance of political parties, which tended to concentrate on specific issues, leaving many others unaddressed. The emergence of citizen movements aimed at influencing the decision-making process regarding national policies has become a more effective way to involve citizens directly in government decisions (Rohaniah & Efrizah, 2015: 469).

In general terms, political participation refers to the involvement or engagement of citizens in exercising their rights to express opinions in the decision-making process on matters concerning the public interest, either directly or indirectly. Surbakti defines political participation as all forms of involvement by ordinary citizens in selecting decisions that affect their lives (Surbakti, 1999: 140). Meanwhile, Budiardjo states that political participation is "the activities of an individual or group to play a role in public affairs, such as influencing the increase of political participation among first-time voters in Makassar City, and actively participating in political life, including choosing national leaders and influencing government policies either directly or indirectly" (Budiardjo, 2008: 367).

Based on these definitions, political participation can be understood as the involvement of individuals or groups as citizens in the political process through activities aimed at actively participating in political life to influence government policy. This participation is visible through various political activities, the most common being voting, whether to elect representatives or a head of state (Maran, 2001: 148). Other forms of political participation include sending messages to government officials, engaging in protests or demonstrations, joining political parties or civic organizations, running for public office, donating to parties or politicians, and participating in fundraising campaigns.

The theory of generational differences has emerged in various forms, aiming to distinguish general characteristics of individuals born during specific time periods. The foundational premise of this theory is that a group of individuals is shaped by historical events and cultural phenomena that occur and are experienced during formative stages of their lives (Twenge, 2000; Noble & Schewe, 2003). These events and phenomena lead to the formation of collective memory, which significantly influences their lives (Dencker et al., 2008).

A study by the Institute for Emerging Issues (2012), for instance, identifies Generation Z as the most unique and technologically sophisticated generation. It is therefore not surprising that Generation Z is considered the first generation to grow up highly connected to technology. In much of the literature, Generation Z is also referred to as the *iGeneration* or the *internet generation* (Singh & Dangmei, 2016).

## Method

This study employs a survey research method. According to Zikmund (1997), survey research is a method of collecting information from a group of individuals through a series of questions. Survey research refers to a broad category of studies that use questionnaires and interviews as data collection

tools (Gay & Diehl, 1992). Bailey (1982) adds that the survey method employs data collection techniques involving either written or oral questions. Suwartono (2014:127) also emphasizes that surveys involve a large number of subjects or respondents, often covering an entire population (census). The research design used in this study is a cross-sectional survey design. A cross-sectional study is conducted at a specific point in time and is only used during a particular period. The main instrument used in this research is a questionnaire. The procedure in accordance with a cross-sectional design includes: identifying the research problem, developing the questionnaire, determining the sample, conducting a pre-test with the questionnaire, collecting data, and then processing and analyzing the data obtained. For this study on the influence of social media, the minimum number of participants is 32, all of whom belong to Generation Z, with an age range of 9–24 years.

## Results and discussion

### The Impact of Social Media Utilization on Political Participation

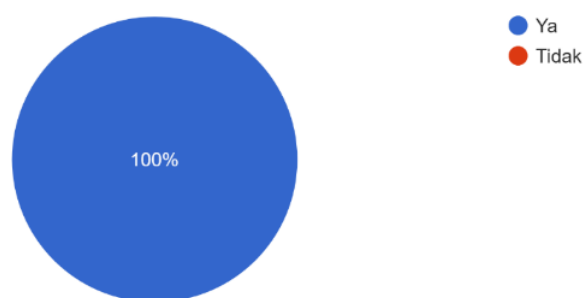


Figure 1. The Influence of Social Media Use on Political Participation

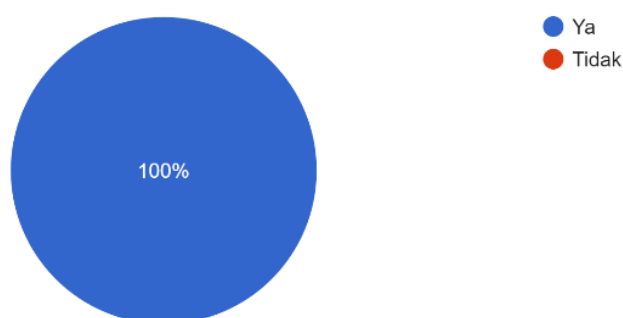


Figure 2. The Impact of Social Media Use on Political Participation

Based on the data above, 100% of the respondents, consisting of 32 individuals, are Generation Z who use social media. Additionally, the data shows that 100% of Generation Z agree that the use of social media can influence political participation. Politics and social media are closely related, making it seem almost impossible to separate the two. Social media serves as a tool commonly used in the political arena, either as a means to uphold the current rulers or as a tool to dismantle those on the opposing side.

One of the impacts of social media on political participation behavior is determining the level of political participation among Generation Z in political activities. Therefore, the impact of social media on political participation is significant, including measuring interest and willingness to support the youth. In addition to influencing the level of political participation among Generation Z, the impact of social media on political participation behavior also includes expanding political interactions. For instance, political interaction can involve communication and socialization between potential candidates and their supporters.

The process of planning, strategy, and political management conducted by politicians requires consideration of the level of political participation they receive and their chances of winning the election. Additionally, political candidates need to carefully plan various activities they will undertake during the election and prepare everything they need. Besides strategy and planning, social media also influences the political management policies taken, depending on the situation and conditions in the media.

According to Milbrs and Goel, political participation in democracy can be divided into three categories, as quoted from the book *The Basics of Political Science*: 1. Gladiators or Players: People who actively participate in politics, including those who run for political positions, either in the executive or legislative branches. 2. Spectators: People who engage in minimal political activities, such as using their voting rights. 3. Apathetics: Individuals who are politically inactive, completely indifferent to politics, and do not use their voting rights as citizens. The theory followed by both assumes involvement based on personal desire and involvement promoted by others.

From the various forms of political participation described above, we can conclude that there are many forms of political participation.

The impact of social media use on political participation.

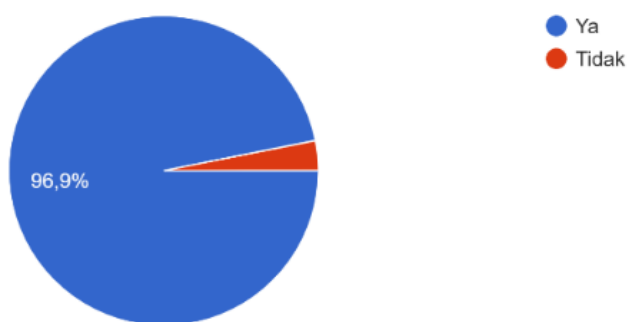


Figure 3. The Impact of Social Media Use on Political Participation

Based on the data above, 96.9% of respondents stated that there is a positive impact of using social media on political participation, while the remaining 3.1% stated that there is no positive impact on political participation from using social media.

According to Eveland and Scheufele (2000), access to social media can have both positive and negative effects on individual political participation. The negative impact may include a decline in political engagement, as individuals may receive news and information that reflect democratic practices that deviate from normative expectations. On the other hand, the news and information obtained through social media can also enhance individuals' or communities' trust in the government, thereby increasing political participation (Andriadi, 2016).

One of the positive impacts of using social media for political participation is cost efficiency. Social media can reduce operational costs, making it an effective platform for both political campaigns and citizen engagement. Unlike traditional methods, social media requires relatively minimal operational expenses. Additionally, its use expands the reach of political participation, allowing it to be visible to various political parties. This broader visibility can also lead to increased support through online political engagement.

Younger generations tend to be indifferent when it comes to politics, as they often perceive political discussions as unpleasant and a waste of energy. Indeed, political conversations are often tense, especially when individuals defend the political parties they support. However, it is important to explore whether campaigns and active participation through social media can create significant opportunities for political candidates to gain greater support, particularly from young people. Youth interest in politics

may be captured through the strategic use of social media for political engagement. Factors influencing political participation through social media use include:

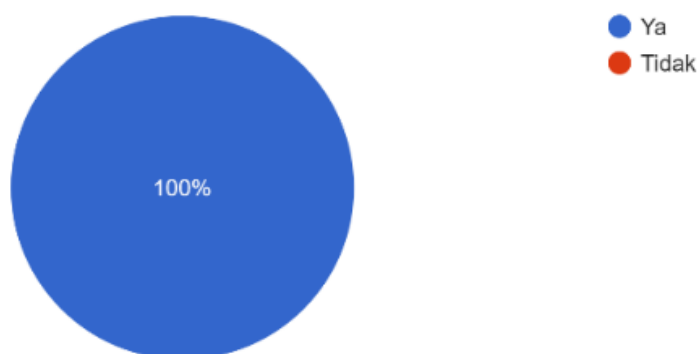


Figure 4. Factors Influencing Political Participation through Social Media Use

Based on the data above, 100% of respondents indicated that there are various factors influencing political participation through the use of social media. Low levels of political participation in a country can be improved. Several implications may encourage individuals who are previously apathetic or hesitant to become politically active. These influencing factors can lead to such changes. According to Surbakti (2010:184), “factors that are believed to affect the level of political participation include political awareness and trust in the government (political system).” According to Almond (as cited in Andriadi, 2016), there are three main factors that can foster the desire to engage in governmental processes.

First, modernization, which directly or indirectly encourages political participation. Modernization has transformed many aspects of societal life, including through innovations influenced by new technologies. These technological advancements have undeniably made it easier for individuals to engage in various activities, including political participation. For example, simplifying the universal voting system can increase voter turnout. Second, the influence of intellectuals and modern mass communication. Intellectuals play a critical role in promoting citizens’ political participation. As a social group, they serve as a benchmark for the political attitudes of the general public. Their scholarly authority often makes them a reference point for others when forming political opinions, making it easier for people to be persuaded to adopt similar positions. Third, government involvement in social, economic, and cultural issues. Government engagement in various aspects of citizens’ lives also encourages political participation. When people perceive that the government is attentive to their needs and interests, they are more likely to view political participation as necessary and meaningful. Digital technology significantly enhances the government’s involvement in these areas by enabling more efficient and effective state governance.

Based on the data presented, 100% of respondents agreed that social media plays a significant role in influencing political participation. This indicates a paradigm shift from traditional political engagement—such as voting or joining political organizations—toward *digital political participation*. Generation Z tends to express their political views through online campaigns, digital petitions, participation in social media discussions, and by creating or consuming political content on platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok.

The findings reinforce the relevance of classic factors that influence political participation, as identified by Surbakti (2010), including *political awareness* and *trust in government*. However, these factors are now being mediated by digital platforms. Generation Z, having grown up in a digital ecosystem, shapes its political awareness not merely through formal education or direct experience, but through daily exposure to political narratives online. This reflects a shift toward *issue-oriented participation*, rather than loyalty to traditional political institutions or parties.



These findings align with prior research. For example, Loader et al. (2014) found that young people increasingly use social media as a deliberative space to discuss public issues and mobilize political support. Similarly, Theocharis and van Deth (2018) emphasized that political engagement among young citizens has become more flexible, personalized, and digitally driven, manifesting as online activism rather than engagement through formal institutions. A study by Nugroho and Laksani (2021) in Indonesia also revealed that Generation Z prefers responsive and non-bureaucratic forms of political participation, such as participating in online polls, joining political webinars, or producing educational content about politics via social media. The current findings reinforce these insights by highlighting that political engagement among youth is shaped not only by structural or institutional factors, but also by psychosocial variables such as *political trust* and *digital community dynamics*.

The theoretical framework proposed by Almond (as cited in Andriadi, 2016)—which identifies *cognitive*, *affective*, and *evaluative orientations* as key components of political participation—is reflected in the behavior of Generation Z. Their *cognitive orientation* is expressed through active information seeking online; their *affective orientation* through emotional identification with issues (e.g., climate justice, gender equality); and their *evaluative orientation* through open criticism of public policies via social media.

This study contributes to a deeper understanding of political engagement among Generation Z, particularly by emphasizing that political participation should now be viewed as a complex digital-social phenomenon. Key drivers such as *trust*, *awareness*, and *agency* are dynamically shaped within online environments. These findings call for a redefinition of classical political participation models to include emergent forms such as *clicktivism*, *hashtag activism*, and *memetic engagement*, which are increasingly relevant in the digital age.

## Conclusion

Based on the research conducted, it can be concluded that the use of social media has an influence on political participation, particularly among Generation Z, which is the focus of this study. This influence can be seen in the degree to which Generation Z engages in political activities, as well as how social media shapes their political behavior by expanding opportunities for political interaction. The use of social media has shown a positive impact on Generation Z's political participation. For instance, social media serves as an effective platform for political campaigns and civic engagement, offering cost-efficient means for Generation Z to participate in political activities. Furthermore, there are several factors that influence political participation through the use of social media, as outlined by Almond. These include modernization, which provides both direct and indirect incentives for political engagement; the influence of intellectuals and modern mass communication, which shapes political attitudes; and government involvement in social, economic, and cultural affairs, which encourages citizens to take part in the political process.

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