

Social media: A means of developing Generation Z's political participation in the digital era

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Abstract

This article examines how social media is utilised to enhance broader political participation among young people. The study employed a descriptive survey design using a Google Form, complemented by in-depth interviews conducted between September and December 2024. The participants consisted of 356 Generation Z individuals in Pekanbaru City, including first-time student voters and pre-voters. Data were analysed using descriptive techniques based on survey responses, expressed as percentages. The findings reveal three main typologies. First, social media functions as the primary source of political information due to its accessibility, practicality, up-to-date content, comprehensive coverage, and visually engaging format. Second, social media serves as a medium for political communication, where individuals engage by following political accounts, commenting on posts, or passively consuming content that still influences their daily discussions. Third, social media serves as a platform for political expression, as evidenced by reactions such as likes, dislikes, content sharing, and reporting. The study suggests that voter education actors should optimise their social media presence by producing engaging, accessible content aligned with current trends, such as podcasts, short videos, reels, and interactive Q&A formats. Collaboration with educational institutions and youth communities is also essential. Ultimately, these strategies aim to foster meaningful political participation among Generation Z, extending beyond electoral involvement to more active non-electoral engagement.

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Introduction

Voter education is an effort to educate the public, both voters and pre-voters, namely citizens who will vote soon, about democracy and elections (Manik & Budhiati, 2015). Voter education aims to help citizens understand the importance of elections, the technicalities of voting rights, and the knowledge needed to make political choices (Arceneaux & Vander Wielen, 2023; Keefer & Vlaicu, 2025; Schwanholz & Rakers, 2026). Voter education aims to develop political participation in society. One target of voter education is Generation Z.

Generation Z is a term for the younger generation that is identical with the digital world. Generation Z is a group of young citizens who have or will use their right to vote in elections. The classification of voters based on generation is based on the results of the 2020 Central Statistics Agency (BPS) population census (SP). This BPS data was released in January 2021. The results of the 2020 SP classified the Indonesian population according to the theory of William H. Frey, who divided the population into 4 generations: Generation Z, Millennials, Generation X, and the Baby Boomer generation (Frey, 2014). This grouping is also useful for analysing age-related characteristics in general. According to the 2020 Population Census, Gen Z is defined as those born between 1997 and 2012. The percentage of Gen Z reached 27.94%, or around 74.79 million people, out of a total population of 270.20 million as of September 2020 (BPS, 2021).

CSIS's research said the proportion of young voters is expected to approach 60% in the 2024 general election. Young voters are voters aged 17-39. They are included in the Generation Z and millennial generations, according to the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) classification. Generation Z is a voter closely tied to the digital world, and even as internet penetration rates and the increasing use of social media shift, young voters' direction and political preferences will change. Social media will also influence changes in behaviour, including voting for candidates (Fernandes et al., 2023).

In the context of elections, Generation Z consists of pre-voters and first-time voters, as well as voters with one election experience, if referring to the general election system in Indonesia, which is simultaneous. Pre-voters are individuals who will become voters in the next five years (Manik & Budhiati, 2015). They are still in school, at the junior high and high school levels. This means that in the next few years, this group will become a segment of new voters. Meanwhile, first-time voters are registered by the election organisers in the voter list, registered under the provisions of laws and regulations, have a minimum age of 17 years, or are/have been married, and are exercising their right to vote in an election for the first time. If it is assumed that new voters are aged 17-21, their status may include students in grade 3 of high school, university students, or young workers (Efriza, 2012).

The pre-voter and first-time voters groups categorised as Generation Z are a unique generation because they were born in an era of sophisticated globalisation. This affects the characteristics and ways to approach this voter segment. The characteristics of Generation Z, according to Santosa (2015), are as follows: (1) ambitious; (2) tends to behave instantly; (3) likes freedom; (4) needs recognition; (5) are familiar with the digital world and information technology. The plus points of Generation Z are a very high curiosity, when faced with technological issues and are also multitasking (Zeva et al., 2023); (6) Generation Z's information search patterns tend to use electronic media rather than print because it is easier and faster (Erlianti, 2020).

There are numerous previous studies on the influence of digital technology and social media on the political participation of the younger generation. The development of digital media technology has changed political participation, especially among the younger generation. Normative political participation, such as voting, attending town meetings, and participating in civic groups, is eroded by dare advocacy, social protest, "liking," and sharing messages via social

media. This online political participation gives rise to new ways of learning and teaching politics, thereby fostering citizen engagement in political life (Mihailidis & Thevenin, 2013).

A sample of 400 American high school students was used to explore the relationships among participation in a media literacy program, academic ability, frequency of Internet use, information-gathering motives, news and advertising analysis skills, and intentions toward civic engagement. Findings show that students in selective admissions media literacy programs have significantly higher levels of media knowledge and news and advertising analysis skills than other students. Additionally, information-seeking motives, media knowledge, and news analysis skills independently contribute to adolescents' intentions toward civic engagement (Martens & Hobbs, 2015).

Further research on Facebook, the primary social media platform for most Americans, this study investigates whether and how social expression and entertainment on the site are associated with political participation among a diverse sample of Americans. The research results show that using Facebook for social expression and entertainment is indirectly associated with political participation through interactive political expression on the site. Additionally, findings show that the use of social expressions is conducive to political participation through political conversations (Yu & Oh, 2018).

Regarding political participation, especially how younger generations seek political information, Fadhli's 2019 research found that Generation Z tends to use social media, online mass media, and Google as sources of political information (Fadhli et al., 2019). Furthermore, Widodo's 2022 research found that social media has a significant influence on the political orientation of Generation Z and shapes political preferences, especially among new voters. This is because social media is a source of political knowledge that shapes and influences the political literacy of Generation Z (Aziz & Widodo, 2022). Next, Beriansyah's 2023 research found that Generation Z obtains political information from social media accounts, as evidenced by their participation in following, liking, and commenting on the political accounts they follow (Beriansyah & Qibtiah, 2023). According to Erza (2020) research, sources of political information on social media include WhatsApp, TikTok, and Instagram

The massive use of social media by Generation Z has not been optimally utilised by election organisers or political parties in voter education. The social media content of the General Election Commission, as the election organiser, tends to feature more technical election information and updates on the election's activities and stages. Apart from that, other research results also cast doubt on the existence of social media and the political participation of the younger generation. The results suggest that voter engagement campaigns can strengthen young people's political engagement, but civics education and political events may be more important than social media communication (Ohme et al., 2020). Next, research analysing the role of schools in the various forms of political participation expected from 8th-grade students in Chile. The results show that students' civic and political backgrounds have the greatest influence on political participation, while school influences are mainly related to school governance and teacher practices (Treviño et al., 2019).

This article takes a different position from the research above, in which the researcher elaborates on social media as a means of voter education to develop political participation among Generation Z. Political participation is a way for citizens to convey their aspirations to political decision-makers. Political participation consists of two types: *first*, conventional, namely the act of influencing the outcome of the political process in accordance with legal regulations, such as campaigns and voting in elections. *Second*, non-conventional, namely, activities carried out to influence the result of the political process that are not related to legal regulations and customs that regulate political participation under a certain regime, such as demonstrations, strikes, boycotts, and signing petitions (Boulianne, 2020; Grasso & Giugni, 2022; Marien et al., 2010; van Deth, 2016). However, research in Indonesia tends to focus on voting activities as a form of political participation, as well as globally, which focuses more on

participation around political campaigns and efforts to encourage people to vote (Wibowo et al., 2020). In fact, political participation should refer to all forms of engagement in which citizens express their political opinions and/or convey those opinions to political decision makers (Vissers & Stolle, 2014).

This research takes a new approach to voter education, using social media to foster Generation Z's political participation. The political participation intended here is not just to provide awareness of using the right to vote but is broader than that, namely Political participation through social media can consist of actively searching for socio-political issues on certain accounts and posts, discussing online by commenting on certain posts, even participating, providing political enlightenment through uploads on personal accounts about the latest socio-political issues, protesting, signing online petitions on a social issue. Massive use of social media by Generation Z and election organisers to develop political participation. This is the gap for this research: how to strengthen voter education through social media to help Generation Z develop their political participation. The results of this research can be used by related parties, such as election organisers, government, political parties, and non-governmental organisations that care about electoral and democratic issues, as a strategy for engaging the Generation Z segment, and can be a good step toward sustainable voter education.

Method

The study used a descriptive survey design via a Google Form and was strengthened by several additional in-depth interviews. The Google Form survey contained 15 questions that explored the types, intensities, uses, and importance of social media among Generation Z. The survey was completed by 356 Generation Z individuals in Pekanbaru City. The researcher also interviewed 6 of these informants directly, using unstructured interviews, asking them further about their participation in social media, such as how they communicate with politicians there and what they do when they receive political information there.

They came from several universities in Pekanbaru City, including Riau University, UIN Syarif Kasim Hidayatullah, Riau Islamic University, and STMIK Pekanbaru, and were spread across departments. The sampling technique used in this study was purposive sampling, a nonprobability sampling method in which researchers deliberately select subjects or informants who are considered most relevant and possess the characteristics or criteria needed to address the research objectives, rather than selecting them at random. The selection criteria for informants were determined as follows: born between 1996 and 2021 (Gen Z classification according to William Frey's theory), owning a mobile phone, and status as a first-time voter or pre-voter. Informants consisted of 181 women and 175 men. The informant recruitment process began with the personal distribution of Google forms in campus organisations, identification through teacher assistance, and personal introductions.

Interviews were conducted with five voter education actors, including the Chairperson of the Riau Provincial Election Commission (KPU) for the period 2024-2029, the Head of the Community Participation Division of the KPU Riau, the Commissioner of the KPU Pekanbaru City for the Voter Education and Community Participation Division for the period 2019-2024, the Commissioner of KPU Pekanbaru City for the Voter Education and Community Participation Division for the period 2024-2029, and the Head of the Community Participation Division of KPU Pekanbaru City, to determine the KPU's strategies and efforts in approaching the Generation Z segment. The informant recruitment process for voter education actors was conducted by assessing the suitability of their main duties and functions to the research objectives. Data were collected between September and December 2024. Data were processed and analysed based on the percentages obtained from filling out the Google form.

Results and Discussion

The question in this research is: What is the intensity of social media use by Generation Z today? Then what is Generation Z's pattern of searching for political information via social

media? So, what about Generation Z's political participation through social media? Finally, what is the form of voter education through social media? A more complete description will be explained as follows.

Social Media and Generation Z

Social media has become a daily staple for Generation Z. They are a generation closely connected to the digital world, with all the conveniences it offers. Simply by holding a smartphone, you can hear, watch, comment on, and even disseminate anything, anywhere, anytime. Based on the results of the Google form completed by 356 Generation Z participants in this study, 99,7% of informants reported having social media. As for the types of social media they use, 65,7% reported having almost all social media accounts, including Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and WhatsApp. The intensity of their use of social media in their daily lives is also almost the same, namely 23,9% said they always (more than 25 times), access social media anywhere, 61.8% answered often (10-25 times), access social media and the remaining 14% admitted that they only sometimes (1-10 times) use social media. Based on interviews with several Generation Z members, they generally stated that they access social media anytime, anywhere, so they try to always have an internet quota or look for Wi-Fi.

The reasons for using social media range from seeking entertainment to looking for the latest viral news to simply uploading photos to seeking socio-political information that is currently being hotly discussed. The results of this study at least indicate several conditions, including (1) Generation Z is a technology-literate generation, as evidenced by the findings above that they have social media, where to be able to register and create various accounts, access and manage these social media accounts at least requires basic digital technology skills such as typing, managing internet networks, creating emails, and confirming notification emails; (2) Generation Z cannot be separated from social media, they tend to access social media anywhere and anytime; (3) Generation Z is a generation that is full of lightning-fast information and communication applications, where they can easily receive any information via gadgets and communicate it quickly via comments on social media posts, spreading news obtained via personal accounts or to other social media they have. This certainly poses a risk to the ease of spreading hoaxes if news is identified as fake, or to a decrease in face-to-face communication skills, because they are used to communicating through applications in cyberspace.

Generation Z grew up with massive exposure to digital technology, so that information technology equipment, such as gadgets, laptops, internet networks, and social media platforms, are everyday toys close to them (Hariyanti, 2023). It can even be said that, at times, it has reached a stage of dependency, where they cannot be separated from the equipment, which ultimately affects their mindset, behaviour patterns, and character formation. As a source of information, mass media, in this case, social media, not only tell what to think, but also influence the actions taken in response to those thoughts (Ngamo et al., 2023).

On the other hand, social media can also be a tool of propaganda and a source of misinformation, influencing the literacy and political participation of Generation Z (Reisach, 2021). Because not all information circulating on social media is valid, but also contains fake news or hoaxes. According to research by Maertens et al. (2025), the younger generation is more susceptible to being fooled by fake news/hoaxes because of the massive use of social media as a source of information, even though this platform is flooded with false information. This finding was obtained from a series of experiments on misinformation vulnerability tests developed by psychologists at the University of Cambridge. The study involved more than 8,000 participants over 2 years. In the first validated misinformation vulnerability test called MIST, researchers created a quick two-minute quiz to identify 20 articles as factual or fake news. To create false news that seems true and confusing, like the misinformation commonly circulated, the researchers used GPT chat. Then, misinformation experts selected which news was true and false. Then variations of the survey were tested extensively in experiments involving thousands

of participants in the UK and the United States. The results showed that 65% of adult Americans could classify factual and fake news. The survey also found that the younger generation is more vulnerable to becoming victims of hoaxes. Furthermore, the survey results indicated that, by age, only 11% of children aged 8-29 years scored high, while 36% scored low. Conversely, 36% of those aged 65 or older scored high; only 9% scored low. The more time someone spends on the internet, the greater their vulnerability to misinformation. About 30% of those who spend 0-2 hours surfing the internet scored high, compared with only 15% of those who spend 9 hours or more online. Social media users are the most vulnerable to misinformation. About 53% of them who get news from Snapchat received low scores, with only 4% scoring high. Truth social is in second place, followed by WhatsApp, TikTok and Instagram (Maertens et al., 2023).

The large number of hoaxes received by the younger generation, coupled with their low digital literacy, makes them vulnerable to mobilisation as voters. However, it must also be said that the younger generation with strong digital literacy will grow into critical voters because of the ease of access to political information, especially about the candidates who will be elected. Whether the younger generation becomes a victim of social media propaganda depends on their character when searching for information. In addition, because Generation Z grew up with high exposure to low digital literacy, they are vulnerable to mobilisation as voters. content, it led to FOMO, a mental state characterised by fear of missing out on the latest information (Pakpahan et al., 2024). This means that social media is described as a double-edged sword, where on one side it has a positive impact on generation Z because it can be a means of providing easy and fast information, a means of entertainment or a means of expressing oneself, but on the other hand it can cause addiction if users are unable to manage their emotions and divide their time well between interactions in cyberspace and in the real world and become a source of fake news that can reduce the quality of literacy and political participation of generation Z if it is not balanced with good digital literacy such as the habit of checking the truth of information before spreading it.

Generation Z Political Information Search Patterns

Specifically in the political field, Generation Z prefers using social media to find out information about politics. As many as 68,5% of informants stated that they use social media to find political information, while 25,3% answered that they prefer to use electronic information media, such as visiting news websites to access political issues, then 1% answered using YouTube channels, and another 1% answered that they search for political information via television. Using social media as a source of political information is motivated by various reasons, including (1) easy and fast access anytime and anywhere as long as you have sufficient internet quota; (2) easy to find and understand; (3) many political experts provide opinions/enlightenment so as to provide political literacy for users; (4) political news on social media is more up to date/latest; (5) has an attractive appearance, meaning that it does not contain too much writing like newspapers; (6) allows users to discuss, interact and even exchange opinions on certain posts so as to provide a lot of new information and new views.

Regarding the types of political information sought by Generation Z on social media, informants answered variously but generally stated they were looking for political news that was currently widely discussed, often called 'viral'. The political information that Generation Z usually seeks includes general elections, regional elections, corruption, the latest political conflicts, dynasty politics, illegal skincare, *fufufafa* accounts, sexual harassment cases, bullying cases, the Palestine-Israel conflict, news about the National Capital (IKN), issues surrounding the presidential and vice presidential nominations, news about public housing savings (TAPERA) and even about inflation. The above findings are reinforced by Perangin-angin & Zainal's (2018) research, which found that social media has become Generation Z's favourite platform because it is easy to access anytime, anywhere and allows interaction and communication without physical preparation (Perangin-angin & Zainal, 2018). Also, according to Fadhli's 2019 research, Generation Z tends to use social media, online mass media, and the

Google search engine as sources of political information (Fadhli et al., 2019). The findings of this study indicate at least several things, including (1) generation Z is a generation that is always up to date with the latest news developments because of the fairly high access to social media in their daily lives; (2) searching for political information through social media allows generation Z to gain many new perspectives outside their daily social circles even though they do not come from a family of politicians, a college major related to politics or an environment related to practical politics.

Social Media and Generation Z Political Participation

Joining a political party and becoming a member, or even sitting in a political office, whether within the party or in government, is the highest level of the pyramid of political participation. Political participation is the active involvement in political life or the influence on government policies (public policy). Generation Z's political participation in the digital era is carried out through social media, such as following certain politicians' accounts, actively commenting on and participating in online discussions about political news, posting personal opinions on their own accounts, or disseminating political news on their accounts. In this study, 57.9% of informants stated that they did not follow politicians' social media accounts but did get political news from posts they happened upon, either because they were viral or because they searched for current viral political content on social media, such as Instagram. In comparison, 42.1% reported following several politicians' social media accounts, such as Instagram and TikTok. Generation Z, who use social media, can communicate with politicians through it, but this is rarely done, as illustrated by the study's results: 32,3% of informants left comments/opinions, while 63,8% answered others.

When interviewed directly, one of the informants (informant initials P) stated that communicating with politicians on social media can be done by sending messages via direct message (DM) on Instagram, tagging the politician's account in a particular post related to him or known as tagging the politician's account. Some informants initials S, T, V even answered that they did not communicate at all with politicians on social media or provide comments on accounts that post political news other than politicians such as news station accounts. When asked further about Generation Z (informants' initials: P, A, D), who like to leave comments on political news posts on Instagram, they answered that they gave rational, polite comments; harsh, critical comments; and positive comments. Meanwhile, for generation Z who did not leave any comments at all, when asked further what they did when reading and watching political news on social media posts, they answered variously, such as only commenting in their hearts and making it part of their personal information to make political choices, making it a topic of discussion in everyday life with friends and family, giving likes and dislikes on the post, making a status/repost of the post on a personal account, and even reporting the account by pressing the "report account" menu on social media. When interviewed further the reasons why informants did not participate digitally through social media in communicating and discussing, several reasons arise, including (1) not being used to expressing opinions either offline or online; (2) fear of being attacked by other social media users for differing opinions; (3) fear of having their accounts reported, or (4) even not commenting due to limited literacy regarding the political content being discussed.

Political participation refers to the broad spectrum of activities undertaken by citizens to influence the selection of political leaders and the actions of government officials. These activities encompass both electoral forms, such as voting and campaign involvement, and non-electoral forms, including communal engagement and direct contact with public officials regarding specific issues (Hooghe & Oser, 2018; Oser & Hooghe, 2018; Theocharis & van Deth, 2017; Whiteley, 2012). This action requires initiative, is usually free of conflict, and conveys a lot of information about

preferences. The difference from the other actions is that it is the only one that can affect a narrow outcome and is relevant only to the respondent or perhaps their family.

While non-conventional political participation is all activities carried out by ordinary citizens to influence the final political outcome that are not related to legal norms and customs that regulate political participation under a particular regime, such as demonstrations, boycotts, and signing petitions. In addition, there are also five basic types of political action (a) Inactive, no more than reading political news and signing petitions if asked even from those who do not do so; (b) Conformist, progressively, involving themselves in good governance, attending meetings, being friendly with officials and even campaigning for candidates but they will not participate in protest actions at all; (c) Reformists, have the same level of political involvement as conformists but they engage in moderate protests, namely demonstrations and boycotts that are in accordance with the law); (d) Activists, are people who are active in politics, doing many things in political action; (e) Protesters, their choice of political action is limited to protest methods, avoiding conventional political involvement.

Referring to the theory of political participation classification, it appears that the political participation observed, based on the survey results above, falls within the non-electoral stage, carried out by digital citizens in the form of actively seeking political information, leaving comments, and responding with approval or rejection via "like" and "dislike" emoticons. All of this occurs outside the election process and is unrelated to it. However, it can also be noted that this visible digital political participation tends to be more passive, as most informants chose not to actively respond by providing personal views, input, suggestions for improvement, or criticism. They limited themselves to "like" and "dislike" responses, reading/watching political content, or sharing it on other social media platforms.

This type of passive political participation is in line with El Qudsi & Syamtar (2020) research that there are 4 tendencies of generation Z in using Instagram social media as a communication medium and source of information, namely *first*, passive citizens, referring to people who do not participate and do not even have any interest at all in political issues; *second*, referring to citizens who do not use Instagram as a source of information and communication but participate through other platforms such as online blogs, other types of social media, discussion clubs, news portals, etc.; *third*, referring to people who use Instagram only as a source of political information, but do not participate in embedding opinions in the comments column, forwarding political content, creating, or modifying political content; *fourth*, referring to active Instagram users as a source of political information and actively participating in providing comments, re-uploading, creating, or modifying political content. This means that social media is not only a source of political information but also a space for online participation.

Other research on social media and Generation Z participation is also illustrated by the results of research by Anggraeni & Sunarso (2022), which stated that political campaigns through social media have an influence of 46.9% on new voters, while 53.1% are influenced by other factors such as encouragement from family, trends in the surrounding environment, self-awareness and peer influence. The influences in the study include participation in voting in elections. The same was also revealed in Saputro's(2022) research, which found that the political participation of the younger generation is influenced by social media campaigns.

In addition, social media also forms a positive image of a candidate (Meifilina, 2021). Research by Adina et al. states that TikTok's effectiveness has an impact of 74.7% on the personal branding of candidate Ganjar Pranowo (Lestari et al., 2022). Even the latest research regarding the 2024 presidential election, the research by Ginasari et al. (2024)stated that the use of social media and innovative communication strategies, such as creating gimmicks and a gay image, has proven to be effective in attracting attention, increasing the popularity and participation of Generation Z. The same thing happened in Malaysia, where the use of online media was positively associated with higher levels of political participation among young

Malaysian voters. The use of online media was strongly associated with political activism, such as actively commenting on current political issues (Willnat et al., 2013). This means that social media is not only a source of political information and a communication space but also plays an important role in political campaigns. Social media has become a medium for political communication, not only for candidates to promote themselves to Generation Z, but also for Generation Z to discuss current political issues, as evidenced by comments posted on social media.

The development of social media in various forms and the increasing frequency with which young people access it have transformed it into a new avenue for political participation. Today, people can express their opinions, provide input and criticism, and even protest through online boycotts and petition signings. The impact of social media is widespread and massive. Information that captures public attention goes viral and is widely discussed, forcing the parties involved to react, whether through clarification or evaluation. If left unattended, it can become a wildfire that spreads widely and negatively impacts all parties involved. Social media is filled not only with valid news but also with hoaxes and slander, which can easily mislead anyone unaware, especially given the extraordinary developments in augmented reality technology that can transform edited images or videos into realistic forms.

This means that physical participation has shifted toward digital participation, especially among Generation Z, through social media. However, what is interesting about this study, which could also enrich participation theory, is the finding that digital participation tends to be passive, despite their active role as social media users, as evidenced by the intensity of their daily social media access. Participation is the act and practice of involvement. Political participation is a series of actions carried out by people in their role as private citizens. (Brady et al., 2010; Van Deth, 2014). Political participation refers to the actions through which an individual or collective actor expresses their political goals and intentions on issues relevant to society, either directly or indirectly (Pitti, 2018)

The findings of this study enrich the theory of participation, as digital participation, which has not been specifically mentioned in the theory, can be included under non-electoral participation, as the community participates in influencing government policies outside the election stage and even beyond the context of elections. Even in the theory of participation according to Kaase and Marsh, it can be said that digital participation can be included in the conventional and non-conventional categories because ordinary people participate in influencing policies through searching for political content information such as reading newspapers, commenting and expressing it also through social media but on the other hand it can also be included in the non-conventional classification because not a few informants participate in digital politics through online boycott calls and even submitting online petitions to voice an issue.

The findings of this study indicate that social media and Generation Z have become inseparable. Social media has evolved into a new channel for indirectly engaging the public in voter education through the search for political information and subsequent reactions. Based on the research findings, political participation appears to be both active and passive. According to Brady et al. (2010), Voter political participation includes four basic concepts: activities or actions carried out by ordinary citizens about politics and their influence. Verba et al. (1995) emphasise voter political participation as a voluntary act, meaning that citizens are not forced to do so. Political participation can take various forms. It means that passive digital political participation generally favours liking and disliking posts by politicians or certain political accounts, reading political content without leaving comments, and using it simply as personal political literacy.

Passive digital political participation is also a form of political action that can shape public opinion in the digital world, reflecting how the public responds to issues and policies. However, this response is not followed by other actions, thus still not providing a significant contribution

to improving or providing input to government policy. Yet, social media currently holds a strategic position in influencing government policies and programs due to its power to mobilise through issues that can go viral, attracting the attention of other users. Therefore, a voter education design is needed that views social media as an opportunity to reach the voter and pre-voter segments.

Generation Z Voter Education Through Social Media

Voter education forms active citizens, not only in matters of voting but also in participating in the broader political process. Therefore, voter education is aimed at efforts to (1) prepare active and critical citizens to strengthen the democratic system; (2) foster an understanding of the importance of voting in elections, which is carried out intensively and massively so that political participation can increase; (3) advance the quality of political participation (Kahne & Bowyer, 2018; Theocharis & van Deth, 2017; van Deth, 2016). The score of election implementation problems, such as black campaign practices and political hoaxes, can be minimised with quality voter education; (4) support stakeholders in organising elections. If the majority of voters have understood the election process and democracy, it can loosen the work of election organisers because all parties have understood how voters should play a role; (5) voter education can form critical citizens in determining political choices based on common sense measures; (6) present an anti-rotten politics and anti-corrupt politicians movement.

Voter education plays a role in strengthening citizens' political literacy, which in turn strengthens democracy; therefore, it needs to be institutionalised, implemented sustainably, and planned, as it is an important part of strengthening citizen politics and substantive democracy. Voter education must be ongoing, not tied solely to elections, and conducted throughout the electoral cycle. This misunderstanding will impact the implementation of voter education policies.

Voter education aims not only to promote participation but also literacy. Democracy and political literacy are inseparable and mutually reinforcing. Voter education shapes the political choices of critical and independent voters. Not just an object of vote gathering. Voter education is a process that has a strategic role in the implementation of general elections. This activity is not only aimed at providing knowledge of election techniques, such as voting procedures, but must also convey the values of the importance of general elections to society. In the end, it is certainly expected that the community's mindset will change, so that general elections are no longer seen merely as a routine every five years. In the social order, smart voters occupy a strategic position and play a role in democratisation. The climate of democratisation built during this reform era should be a moment when smart voters act as guardians of the process. Voter education is important for the following reasons: (1) supporting parties who organise elections well; (2) increasing voter participation; (3) advancing the quality of voter participation; and (4) strengthening the democratic political system.

Voter education for Generation Z must use a digital approach to attract their interest and attention, leveraging platforms they commonly use, such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok. Social media is a trusted platform for Generation Z to get political information. Regarding research informants, 99% reported using social media to access political news. This indicates that Generation Z places great trust in social media in providing political literacy. However, social media can reach young voters. This was revealed in several research findings, including those by Ike Atikah et al. in Bogor Regency, which showed that social media users are increasingly prevalent among students and first-time voters seeking election information. However, the political campaign content of politicians on social media is low and less interesting (Ratnamulyani & Maksudi, 2018).

Likewise, in the city of Makassar, politicians have not been able to utilise the potential of new voters among students, the majority of whom already have social media accounts for

election campaigns. The use of media communication account facilities has not been considered urgent, and, in general, the content of campaign messages published in media communication has less appeal (Nur, 2020). This is supported by the research results of Abdul Aziz et al., who found that social media has an influence of 64.1% as a source of political knowledge for Generation Z, but has not been utilised by election organisers and candidate pairs, as indicated by the lack of activity in the social media accounts of each candidate and organiser (Aziz & Widodo, 2022).

Based on the results of an interview with one of the commissioners of the KPU Pekanbaru City with the initials YN, she said that voter education through social media has its own challenges, including having to have human resources who are literate in technology because it will be related to the skills of making and editing videos/content that will be uploaded on social media, creativity in making memes about political education, to the ability to manage social media so that it always looks attractive and easy to understand. Another informant from the commissioner of KPU Pekanbaru City, with the initials RA, added that the challenge lies in time management for providing education in cyberspace and in the real world (face-to-face socialisation). Informant, initial RA as the head of the community participation division of the KPU Pekanbaru City, said that the KPU must have a team to manage social media, and this also requires a strong will, as not everyone wants to learn or learn quickly about the development of information technology. Therefore, the appearance of social media for each General Election Commission organiser in each region varies depending on the team's work.

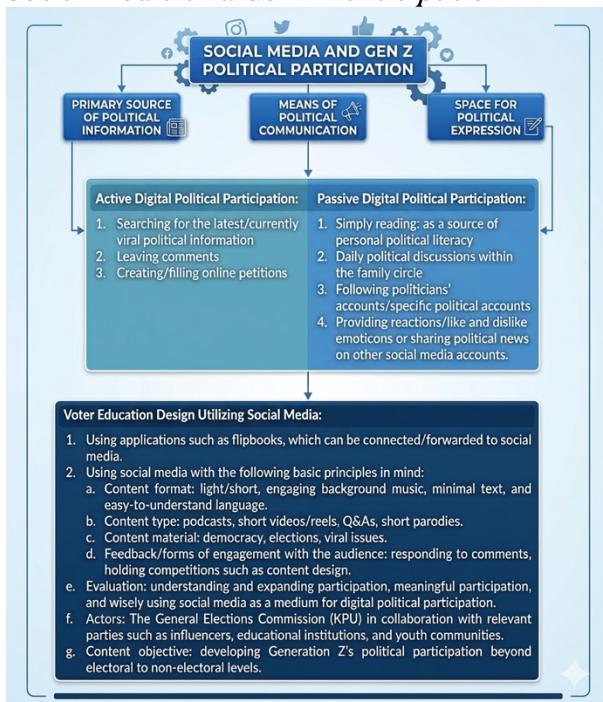
The Pekanbaru City General Election Commission currently appears quite active in updating information on Instagram, TikTok, and its YouTube channel. Showing the activities of the commissioners and the General Election Commission team to political education to the community, such as invitations to vote, how to check whether they are on the voter list, and how to reject money politics. While on the YouTube account, there is a Voter Education podcast. Podcasts are digital broadcasts that are already familiar to Generation Z. Podcasts can be listened to anytime and anywhere and are also easy to access, simply through a smartphone that is generally owned by Generation Z. Seeing the opportunities from podcasts, podcasts are currently widely used as a means of approaching information to the community in addition to other print and electronic mass media.

As one of the digital-based voter education media targeting Generation Z voters, podcasts are identified as having several advantages as follows, namely (1) easy to access; (2) can reach a wide audience in disseminating election information; (3) more efficient in terms of funds and workforce; (4) considered suitable for the Generation Z and Millennial voter segments who are closely associated with digital world access in their daily lives; (5) virtual voter education is a form of adaptation to the increasingly rapid development of globalization in various fields of information through various means today. This means following the times so it is well-received. However, besides that, there are also weaknesses in podcasts as a means of voter education, namely (1) if it is not properly socialised to the public, the Pekanbaru General Election Commission's YouTube account will not be known or accessed. This means that promotion is needed; (2) Interesting themes and sources are needed to get Generation Z interested in watching election podcasts, amidst the many artist podcasts being produced now.

The case differs from the KPU Riau Province case. According to NN, the commissioner of the voter education division, the KPU has not so far focused on conducting voter education via social media because it is felt that the public still needs direct voter education. Apart from that, it was also due to the team's limitations in managing social media amidst busy preparations for the general election stages. Voter education through social media can be a new way to inform the public, but it must be acknowledged that it has not been implemented optimally to date. In the future, we hope there will be relevant parties with whom the KPU can collaborate to carry out voter education via social media to reach the youth segment. Therefore, a new approach to

voter education is needed through social media. Based on the results of the research above, the researchers present a conceptual design for voter education in Figure 1.

Figure 1.
Social Media and Gen Z Participation



Source: Generated by Gemini, 2026.

<https://gemini.google.com/app/ed874200e2f1d0c7>

Social media, as the most frequently used platform by the generation, can be utilised as a new channel for voter education. However, it is clear from field research findings, based on interviews with voter education actors, that this has not been utilised optimally due to several challenges and weaknesses within the organisation. Therefore, the simple design above can serve as a conceptual input for creating a simple voter education program through social media posts. This conceptual design is relatively simple, consisting of general instructions for creating content that appeals to Generation Z, based on survey data presented in the research findings.

At least this conceptual design has several advantages including (1) it can reduce the voter education budget, because it is sufficient to use social media without spending additional funds for accommodation, consumption and transportation as in the implementation of face-to-face voter education; (2) it can reach more segments without being hindered by distance, time and place in a single post; (3) it allows for continuous voter education outside the election stage. This is the main problem after the election: voter education actors, such as the KPU, stop going down and connecting with voters and pre-voter segments for several reasons, including the absence of a post-election voter education budget. However, this design also presents challenges, including the need for human resources within the organisation who are digitally skilled, at least in terms of finding content ideas, capturing emerging trends, taking photos, editing them, and uploading them to social media. Human resources in organisations generally come from the older generation, who are less familiar with digital technology.

The success of voter education for generation z through social media can be achieved if a solid collaboration is built between voter education actors in this case the KPU with related parties such as educational institutions, social media activists and youth communities because based on research results it can be seen that passive digital political participation that tends to occur currently is caused by generally generation z experiencing limited literacy due to a lack of reading culture or the habit of finding out something in depth to gain understanding, plus the high intensity of accessing social media causes them to become FOMO (fear of not feeling up to

date with something viral) so that they follow something just because it is viral or becomes a trend rather than because of their desire, concern and independent awareness. Therefore, collaboration is needed to ensure that Generation Z is accustomed to a reading culture and has strong digital literacy skills.

Conclusion

Social media and generation Z are two things that cannot be separated so that in approaching generation Z, a digital approach/touch is needed, meaning that social media can be a means of developing political participation of generation Z including seeking political information through social media, actively providing comments and exchanging ideas, disseminating political information through personal accounts as an expression of political attitudes, conducting online protests/petitions until social media can be a means of appeal for the General Election Commission to generation Z to participate in the use of voting rights and other political information. However, it is recommended that in the future the General Election Commission maximize voter education through social media such as collaborating with teachers in schools and lecturers in universities to socialize the General Election Commission's social media accounts related to seeking election information to avoid political hoaxes and the General Election Commission must be more creative in creating political education content to attract more interest from generation Z. The weakness of this research is that it has not translated the conceptual design into an operational design in utilizing social media as a new channel in implementing voter education, especially for Generation Z. In the future, further research will likely develop an operational model for digital-based voter education.

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