

## **Youth Political Participation in The Digital Age: Preparing A New Society of Good and Smart Digital Citizens**

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**Abstract:** The aim of this research is to investigate the youth political participation in the digital public sphere and to understand their efficacy. The political participation of the younger generation is very important for the development of democracy in Indonesia given their significant numbers. The color of future democracy in this regard, is largely determined by their involvement in carrying out their roles as the pillar of democracy. This research used the method of survey to look at the trending themes for political engagement of university students in social media. This study revealed that the young generation involvement in political participation can take many different forms, including participating in social activities, fundraising, having talks about current events, reacting to government actions, etc. It also found that they prefer using Instagram and Twitter over other social media to express their political goals. The younger generation has shown good efficacy in political participation. However, skills in the use of citizenship technology are also a much-needed requirement to generate political participation in the era of digital age, that brings virtues to democracy.

**Keywords:** political participation, young generation, digital age, digital citizenship, political efficacy

### **1. Introduction**

The perpetrators—in this case, the younger generation, which currently makes up the majority of Indonesia's population—determine the country's democratic destiny. Millennials, or generations born between 1981 and 2000, make up 88 million individuals, or 33.75 percent of Indonesia's total population, according to the Susenas (National Socio-Economic Survey), indicating that Indonesia is currently experiencing a demographic dividend (BPS, 2018). It is this generation that will dominate in the current and future eras in a variety of occupations, including those of educators, academics, businessmen, economists, decision-makers, public servants, activists, journalists, and possibly even president. The fate and future of the country are in their hands. The youth generation engages in behaviors that have an impact on the survival, including the democratic life of the country, and exhibit specific qualities, attitudes, beliefs, and value systems.

How the populace participates in any political process determines the essence and quality of democracy. The nature of citizens' political participation has altered as a result of the internet's growing popularity (Bakker, 2011; Boulianne, 2009). Youth participation in politics has transitioned from

institutional to participatory politics through the digital public sphere as they are the primary users of digital media, particularly social media platforms. Due to the accessibility of the internet, political activism in the public sphere, particularly among the younger generation, has shifted to the digital public sphere and includes activities; like sharing public information, criticizing government policies, running campaigns, bringing attention to social issues, etc. Of course, it is still unclear what effect adolescent political engagement in this new public realm will have. In the past, when young people participated in politics, they would continue to do so until the desired outcome was reached.

To participate in this new digital public sphere, one needs new skills and expertise. To ensure that participation has a beneficial effect on democracy, civic technology skills must be combined with knowledge of citizenship and the ability to participate in traditional public places. Being a decent citizen in the modern world is no longer sufficient; rather, being a knowledgeable and competent digital citizen is now required. One way to prepare young people for active political participation is through citizenship education. Therefore, civics education must also cover civic technology in addition to the previously covered material. More than ever, civic learning must concentrate on the features of technology tools to prioritize the thinking and learning processes (Neiss, 2011) as well as the social practices of communicating, interacting, and cooperating with digital tools (Beach, Anson, Katsman, Breuch, & Reynolds, 2014). One way to empower citizens to create a civilized democracy is to enable young people to participate well and successfully utilizing civic technology in the digital public realm. This is the context in which this research was done. Therefore, the objectives of this study are to better understand the connection between media use and youth civic and political engagement, to investigate the preferences and contributions of the younger generation in Indonesia to political participation in the modern digital age, and to suggest changes to the citizenship learning process.

### *1.1. The involvement of youth in politics*

Change in Indonesia has traditionally depended heavily on the participation of young people in politics (Saud, et al., 2020). The political role of the youth has always been crucial along the history of this nation state, from the colonial era, the nation's awakening movement, ahead of independence, entering the reform era, and into the contemporary digital age (Tumenggung & Nugroho: 2005). From the colonial period to the declaration of independence, to the period of the revolution, to the reform movement to topple the New Order regime in 1998, a number of significant records in the history of the political journey of Indonesian youth have been written about their important role and involvement in changing the direction of history. Since the turn of the 20th century, young organizations from the archipelago have taken the lead in the campaign for liberation from Dutch colonialism. Then, the spirit of Indonesian nationalism formally began with the birth of the Boedi Oetomo organization, pioneered by youth, and the Youth Pledge in 1928, which could be simply understood to mean that at that time, the Indonesian nation was an imagined community planning the future (Anderson, 1991). This vow marked a significant turning point in Indonesian independence history and, at the same time, served as a catalyst for the nation's spirit to unite behind the creation of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. Young people continued to play a role in the creation of this nation as independence proclamation catalysts.

Indonesian youth continue to be there whenever the governing parties commit social injustices and arbitrary acts against their subjects. Every ruling regime appears to make mistakes from time to time, and it is at this point that the youthful generation has always loudly proclaimed truth and justice to revolt against the status quo in an effort to straighten out what is deemed to be crooked. The reform period that began in May 1998 is one example. The leadership of the New Order system, which was viewed as dictatorial, iron-fisted, and silencing democracy, was overthrown in Indonesia as a result of strong criticism from young intellectual groups from diverse regions of the country.

Prior to the widespread usage of the internet and social media, the younger generation participated in "institutional" and community-based activities (Allen, 2015; de Vreese 2007). In both formal and informal youth organizations, young people act and participate. They engage in political activity and perform a variety of other tasks as a group continuously until their objectives are met. One thing is for certain: throughout this country's history, it has been the youth who have determined change.

### *1.2. Youth participatory politics*

Scholars and politicians have been concerned about the trend of individuals seemingly withdrawing from democratic involvement across a spectrum of established democracies since the turn of the new millennium (Pontes, Henn, & Griffith: 2017). Young people have never been particularly passionate about politics, though. According to Kisby and Sloam (2014), they have their own opinions, are interested in "politics," broadly construed, and participate in ways that they believe are suitable for their daily lives. Involving young people in the institutions and decisions that have an impact on their life is known as youth participation (Checkoway & Gutierrez, 2006). The way people participate in politics has changed in the digital age. Social media and the internet are places where people may communicate and engage with one another, including in politics (Effing, Hillegersberg, & Huibers, 2017). The majority of online behaviors, including news intake, peer communication, and online service use, are positively associated with political engagement (de Vreese, 2007). Youth are rapidly using new digital technologies and social networks in the social media to express themselves, relate their political interests to culture, and protest or otherwise have an impact on topics including poverty, online censorship, campaigns, and petitions (Jenkins, et al., 2016). They are the main users of the social media, and in turns will be the dominant perpetrators of political participation. The term "participatory politics" refers to this type of political engagement. According to Kahne, Hodgin, and Eidman-Aahdal (2016), participatory politics are interactive, peer-based actions used by people and organizations to assert voice and influence over matters of public interest.

### *1.3. Political efficacy*

The ability to carry out political participation depends on the level of knowledge and skills of the participants. Then the desire to participate is also determined by the political efficacy of citizens. Political efficacy is the assumption and belief of the people that by participating they can make changes. The concept of political efficacy is an important concept in studying the political behavior of a country. The better the level of citizen political efficacy means that the people have more power in carrying out their role as democratic citizens and are increasingly convinced that they can make changes by participating because the state or government will listen to their requests. Therefore, this political efficacy must be transmitted to democratic actors from an early age to maturity in order to build a future of democracy. Political efficacy can be measured from two dimensions, namely internal and external dimensions. Internal efficacy is defined as an individual's belief in his own ability to understand politics and act politically, while external efficacy is an individual's belief in the responsiveness of the political system or government to their actions (Acock, Clarke and Stewart, 1985). The act of political participation of the younger generation reflects its political efficacy.



## 2. Method

This research used a quantitative approach with a descriptive method to examine three aspects, namely, the youth political activities in the digital public sphere, the platforms on which social media are used, and the level of participation. This research involved 258 research subjects who were students of the Institut Teknologi Bandung. Through this research, researchers want to identify the level of political participation of the younger generation by looking at political activities in cyberspace. Civic technology can be used as a medium for civic (values) learning, especially in relation to the importance of participating in political life, as can be seen in the framework of the research. According to Slovin in Sevilla, Consuelo G. et. al (2007), by using the formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

n = samples

N = Population of 15.000 ITB students

e = Toleration rate

the sample needed in this case is only 100 students. However, the sample chosen has exceeded this provision because in this case we want to see the impact of civic learning on student political participation.

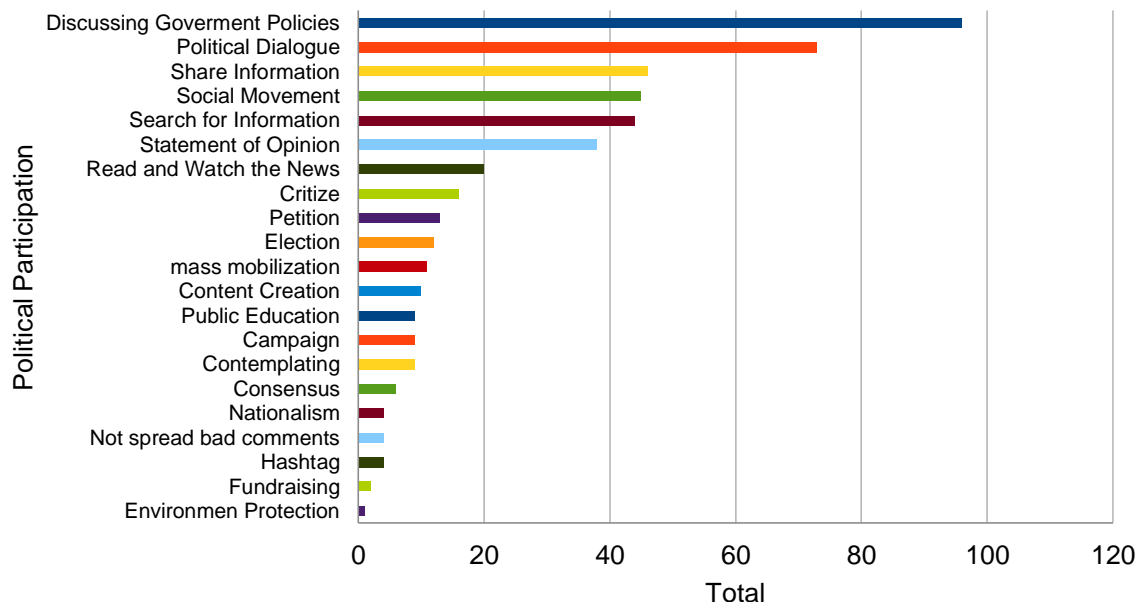


**Figure 1.** Framework of the research (adapted from Graeff, 2018)

### 3. Results and discussion

#### 3.1. Youth political activities in social media

Participatory politics are interactive, peer-based acts through which individuals and groups seek to exert both voice and influence on issues of public concern (Kahne, Hodgin, Eidman-Aahdal, 2016). The kinds of participatory politics namely; investigate issues through online search engines, start or join an online group to address a political issue, engage in dialogue with their peers and community via social networking platforms, produce and circulate compelling blogs and other content using a wide array of digital tools, and mobilize their networks around a common cause. Based on the results of research, several political participation activities in social media are carried out in various forms. Starting from discussing government policies, political dialogue, share information about politics, social movement, search for political information, statement of opinion, read and watch the news, public education, until several issues of environmental protection (figure 2).



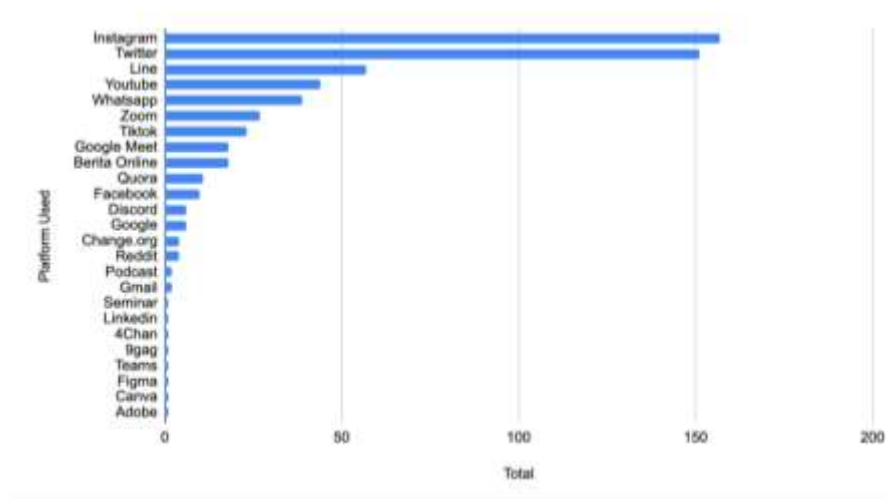
**Figure 2.** Youth Political Participation in Social Media

Based on the data (figure 2), most of the young people use social media for discussing government policies (93 respondent), political dialogue (73 respondent), and share information about politics (46 respondent). They also do other activities such as; social movement (45 respondent), search for political information (44 respondent), make statement of opinion (38 respondent), read and watch the news (20 respondent), criticize government policies (16 respondent), online petition (13 respondent), mass mobilization (11 respondent), until political education for the people (9 respondent).

By the data, respondents have started to be actively involved in political activities through social media. The participation of its residents reflects the achievement of democracy, which is characterized by the sovereignty of the people. This is possible if everyone has access to the public space, it is not taken over by the government, and citizens possess the necessary information, abilities, qualities, and competencies. A democratic society must have an open public area (Evans & Boyte, 1986: 18). There is a brand-new public sphere called the "digital public sphere" in the participatory democracy to which we currently adhere. The public sphere serves as a forum for citizen expression, a venue for interactions between citizens and the state, a way for both groups of citizens and the government to learn about politics, and a tool for limiting the possible overreach of the state's authority. The peculiarities of interactions and communication in this new public arena must be thoroughly understood by young people who are participating in politics online. Political participation via digital media is frequently referred to as "e-democracy" (Marianne Kneuer, & Datts, 2020). The functionality of the Internet will have an impact on civic and political participation; this impact may be positive or negative (Boulianne, 2009). Once more, everything hinges on how users interact in this new public area.

Related to this, there are several skills must be owned so that the younger generation can properly participate in social media, among others; empathy, how the internet works, understanding user data, practicing digital literacy, acknowledging the digital divide, practicing digital wellness, and securing digital device (Zook, 2019). The youth must have an understanding how people talk and behave online and know how to protect personal data (device and the account). The young people need to grasp how the internet functions and practice digital literacy by reading and comprehending the meaning of online material, where it came from, and whether it is correct. In addition, young people need to comprehend the differences between users and non-users of modern technology, as well as when to "take a break" from the screen, etc.

The results of research conducted by Hootsuite (2020) regarding frequently used social media in Indonesia show that most of the younger generation use YouTube, WhatsApp, and Facebook as platforms for communicating in cyberspace. This is different from the results of this research, which show that Instagram, Twitter, Line, and YouTube are platforms of social media that are widely used by the younger generation to participate in political activities (Figure 3). Ten other platforms of social media and news source are shown in Figure 4.



**Figure 3.** Platform of social media used by young generation

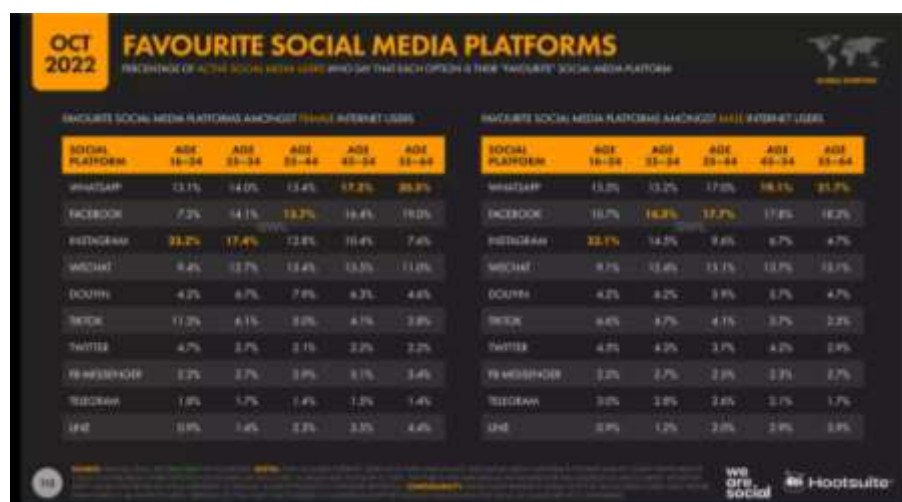


There are 10 platforms that are often used by the younger generation in their digital activities. Instagram as a social media platform that is widely used by the younger generation. The number of Instagram users in Indonesia in 2022 was 99.15 million people, from the previous which only reached 85 million people. As for the percentage of users, it is dominated by women who reach 52.3% of the total number of users (<https://andi.link/hootsuite-we-are-social-indonesian-digital-report-2022/>)

No	Platform Used	Total
1	Instagram	157
2	Twitter	151
3	Line	57
4	Youtube	44
5	Whatsapp	39
6	Zoom	27
7	Tiktok	23
8	Google Meet	18
9	Berita Online	18
10	Quora	11

**Figure 4.** Ten most popular platforms of social media used for political participation by the youth generation

In addition to Indonesia, Instagram is also a platform that is widely used by young people around the world. Hootsuite report (2022) shows that Instagram users are those aged 16-24 (23.2%), both men and women, while those aged 25-34 are dominated by women.



**Figure 5.** Favorite social media platforms

Source: <https://www.hootsuite.com/resources/digital-trends-q4-update>

### 3.2. Political Participation Intensity : To Be Good and Smart Citizens

The political participation of the younger generation in the digital public arena can be categorized as quite intensive. This research found that the younger generation's involvement in highlighting political issues was very high. Issues that are often of concern to the younger generation relate to highlighting government policies that have a direct impact on the quality of people's lives, for example with the issuance of the Omnibus law, the Sexual Harassment Law, etc. Subsequent participation is carried out in the form of political discussions on current issues, which show that the younger generation has awareness and concern about the development of the country's political repertoire. Another political activity that is appealing to the younger generation is carrying out social movements virtually through the use of hashtags (#) and often continuing in the real world.

No	Intensity of participation	Total
1	Very High	104
2	High	99
3	Moderate	28
4	Low	20
5	Very Low	7

**Figure 6.** The intensity of political participation of the youth

A good digital citizen is a person who uses the Internet regularly and effectively. A good digital citizen is one who knows what is right and wrong, and exhibits intelligent technology behavior, and makes good choices when using technology. To be a good digital citizen is to understand what kind of behavior is appropriate and responsible when using technology. Responsible digital citizenship means taking part in online community life safely, ethically and respectfully. Good digital citizens behave respectfully, protect their reputations and privacy, watch their tone, and are sceptical. Bad digital citizenship, on the other hand, entails cyberbullying, irresponsible social media usage, and a general lack of knowledge about how to safely use the Internet.

Among the positive characteristics of good digital citizens are: advocates for equal digital rights and access for all, treats others with respect in online spaces and never cyberbullies, does not steal or damage others' digital work, identity or property, and makes appropriate decisions when communicating through a variety of digital channels. In the context of political participation in the digital world, being a good digital citizen is a must. Good digital citizenship engages young people and shows them how to connect with one another, empathize with each other, and create lasting relationships through digital tools. All contents and competencies aforementioned should be the topics delivered within the current citizenship education. The students are encouraged to selectively share on social media. Teaching digital citizenship involves training students to look out for online scams and malware. This can include educating students about effective internet safety practices, such as creating strong passwords and not opening files from unknown senders. All these competencies are to prepare the younger generation before actually participating in politics in the digital world. The younger generation has shown good efficacy in political participation. However, in the



digital era, having knowledge and civic disposition alone is not enough. In this regards, skills in the use of citizenship technology is a much-needed requirement to generate political participation that brings virtues to democracy. Digital competence for 21st century must include instrumental knowledge and skills for tool and media usage, advanced skills and knowledge for communication and collaboration, information management, learning and problem-solving and meaningful participation. These must be supported by intercultural, critical, creative, responsible and autonomous attitudes (Mutka, 2011). Instrumental knowledge and skills are a precondition for developing or using more advanced skills. These must be ensured for all at an appropriate level. However, it is crucial to realize that these instrumental skills are not enough as such; digital competence must be considered as a higher level concept than simply being able to use digital tools and media. The development of safe and productive attitudes should be integrated in learning all levels of skills.

Good and smart citizens should be able to find and participate in digital activities, whether individually or in collaboration with others, for personally or socially relevant purpose. They should also be able to locate activities and participation opportunities which are not necessarily available in the local context but would benefit them. This requires skills to understand and create digital identities, in a way suitable for each activity and environment. Ultimately, everybody should be aware of and search for opportunities to integrate digital tools in a meaningful way for their work, learning and life activities so that digital activities become a natural productive part of everyday life as a means of having personal impact on society.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The quality of democracy in a country is determined by the quality of citizen participation. The involvement of citizens in participating is possible due to the availability of sufficient space to carry out participation guaranteed by the state, as well as the ability and skills of citizens to participate in various forms and various aspects. In this case, citizens launch initiatives for setting the public agenda, monitoring, evaluating, analyzing, and criticizing policies, to conducting consensus or deliberations. In the digital era, the use of social media is the most dominant channel for social and political participation. Social engagement and participation are fundamental aspects of modern digital life. Using social media, the younger generation is the primary participant in deliberative democracy. The political effectiveness and capabilities of young citizens in carrying out their tasks in a democratic state determine their confidence to participate. Citizens must possess and be proficient in three citizenship competencies, including sufficient civic knowledge, civic skills, and a positive civic disposition, in order to fulfill their obligations in a democracy. But in the digital age, where political engagement takes place in the online public domain, proficiency in citizenship technology is also a crucial need. All Indonesian students are required to take citizenship education, which can prepare young people to take on their responsibility as democratic citizens by being involved in politics. Consequently, young citizens require content, context, and competences as expected.

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