

The Impact of Social Media on Youth Political Engagement

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ABSTRACT

Social media has emerged as a powerful catalyst for enhancing political engagement among youth, reshaping how young individuals connect with political issues and participate in civic life. This research explores the impact of social media on youth political engagement, focusing on the ways these platforms facilitate information sharing, mobilization, and community building. Through surveys and qualitative interviews, the study reveals that social media not only provides young people with immediate access to political news and discussions but also empowers them to express their views and organize around causes they care about. Additionally, social media campaigns and movements have proven effective in mobilizing youth participation in elections, protests, and advocacy efforts. However, the research also identifies challenges, including the prevalence of misinformation, online harassment, and the risk of superficial engagement that may not translate into meaningful political action. By highlighting both the opportunities and drawbacks of social media in fostering youth political engagement, the study emphasizes the need for enhanced digital literacy and critical thinking skills among young users. Ultimately, this research contributes to understanding the role of social media in shaping a politically active and informed generation.

Keywords: social media, youth engagement, political participation, civic life, digital literacy, misinformation, activism, community building

1. Introduction

In this digital era, our means of communication are largely influenced by technology. Today, more than billions of people all over the world use social networking sites which also means people get news updates about the country and world through the internet. The trend in use of media by the youth is increasing further. Studies have proven the increased use of media by people to communicate with others, and of media to communicate with people, further enhancing the capability of media to actively contribute in political issues. Social media plays an important role in constructing new platform of communication. The main aim of social networking sites is to connect with the whole world at any time. Social networking sites are the fastest way of communication around the whole world. This development also increases the attraction of interest groups to make use of social networking sites, because it answers many criteria as a communication vehicle. It is for these reasons that the use of this social media as a media of political resistance is considered able to make a large segment of society interested to participate in politics (Adebisi Abdulrauf et al., 2016).

It is greatly important to study and understand how such platforms motivate and also hinder in essence political participation among young people. This is especially critical when today young people's media environment is changing rapidly with the rise of social media. Thus, understanding Twitter use and its consequences can have fruits in unveiling the black box between new media trends and young people's political participation. On the side of social media, although many today believe this makes sense to do so, studying these new media and youth political participation nexus cannot solely involve an examination of political activities on such sites, as this would imply the exclusion of other potential interaction between new media and civic and political behaviours of young people. Instead, it requires the systematic study of the relationship between new media use and various forms of involuntary and

voluntary forms of engagement with political and civic matters internal and external to these sites.

1.1. Background and Significance

The broader view of social media is historically rooted in the advent of Friendster in 2002, which was the first modern SNS in the sense of today's applications. The rise of social media has become universal since then and youths have been in the vanguard of this development. It then opened a whole new landscape in terms of identity, societal roles, attitudes and practices. Some indicators of this evolution may include the rise of the term "digital native", the emergence of novel forms of sociability, such as networked individualism, and coining political concepts such as "clicktivism". Also, along this transition, one of the realms where the most noticeable changes are observed is political engagement among youths. Where the term engagement refers to a more general approach to politically related issues, in this work, it will be focused more on its participatory side. In an online sense, political engagement pertains to all forms of online expression of political views, such as activism, criticism, advocacy, etc. Social media on that aspect is vital for two reasons; a) Youth are observed to be the principal generators and distributors of online content, b) Social media significantly offers advantages for mobilizing and disseminating information. Broadly, the rise of social media has changed the political culture among the youth. The shift from traditional forms of engagement has caused a different re-definition of the political among young users, embodied in the change from "I am doing" to 'I am feeling, expressing' political. On the one hand, the necessity of physical involvement has been defeated by online practices, and online practices have been adopted for defining the political identity among the youth. Part of this re-definition can be seen on the virtual political communities. It's observed that these groups mostly work on reinforcing their values on political subjects, and this becomes determinant on which of the issues 'others' have a say. On the other hand, these communities have been the

instruments for the identification of the self in a political sense. The rise of political identity as a young is observed to be significantly highlighted by the articulation or acting together with the members of the opposing communities. On a broader sense,

online platforms are perceived to be the principal domain where political issues are dealt with, valued, and exchanged. Thus, the frame for the political discourse is predominantly shaped over the domain of the online platforms. Often users tend to be strictly following their peers, not only on the content, but also rather importantly on how to value and how to make sense of a specific issue. There is consistent evidence that the passive content consumption habit on political subjects may lead to a more critical attitude, or, in a broader sense can be articulated as 'political intelligence'. There is some work showing there may be concerns for a failure to form a well-formed political culture among the youth. But on the other hand, the remainers suggest that online content may be used as the instrument for the initiation in the political way. The frame is not only important in a sense of how to make sense but also on dissemination. It's observed there exists some biased behavior of how the content is treated on the online platforms. A phenomenon referred to as echo-chambers causes different understanding of reality where the user gets trapped in the network where only peers are followed, having the effect of polarization. This is observed to be particularly evident on political subjects. There is some evidence showing that a variety of content consumption habits different from the peer-consistency on political subjects may lead to the rise of political intelligence.

2. Literature Review

Introduction Social media has tremendously revolutionized both political knowledge and civic participations in democratic nations. Thus, the utilization of social media as a platform for political discussion and involvement transforms news consumption in youth cohorts . Recent studies have provided empirical evidence of the persuasive

impact of social media on youth political engagement, shedding light on underlying civic participation. Social media bridged the gap in information accessibility and encouraged more youth to take part in civic engagement. Youth populations have now engaged with political news and civic information vastly and rapidly. Although information itself cannot guarantee informed opinions, civic participation has been enhanced among youth due to increased exposure to the news and political campaigns on social media.

Quantitative studies have debated that social media platforms, such as Twitter, do affect political knowledge and attitudes. An analysis of Twitter during campaigns uncovered the causative outcome of tweets on political knowledge throughout the political interactions. Though, qualitatively oriented explorations have discovered that social media platforms have different persuasive effects, where Twitter can promote political understanding and engagement, while Facebook does not. Studies have revealed Facebook offers a sort of trendy construction of political data, while Twitter presents more competitive messages and hence enhances the understanding of political subjects. However, limitations are still evident in the existing study. Several demographic aspects have not been addressed, such as the effect of gender and the range of political and electoral knowledge on other sectors. The complex nature of the interactions of youth with social media in political contexts has also not been well addressed, suggesting the need for a wider and deeper examination into this area. Socio-cognitive frameworks have been employed as a point of departure to analyze the youth participation in politics on the internet, especially paying attention to the involvement, mobilization, and engagement in political matters through social media. The literature also reviews when youth conveys their political attitude and responses to governmental or public bodies online, and critically evaluates policy and curative actions to such juvenile participation, including framing theory and the echo (filter) chamber hypothesis. (Zagidullin et al., 2021)

2.1. Social Media and Political Engagement

Adolescents and youths are among the most active users of social media platforms globally with an increasing number using social media as a means to engage in

political discussions and to receive political information. The growth of social media has shaped a number of trends in political engagement, with some studies indicating a decline and others suggesting a rise in political interests among youths. Social media platforms provide a distinct means to facilitate engagement in civic activities through the updating of statuses to reflect political opinions, joining discussions, attending and planning events and rallies, and signing petitions. At the same time, these platforms have been found to obstruct participation such as by spreading misinformation and perpetuating a cynical view of politics (Adebisi Abdulrauf et al., 2016).

Among the factors facilitating or inhibiting the propensity to engage in political activities through social media are access to mobile phones and the Internet, the frequency of updating social media platforms, having and using more social media accounts, posting issues of common interest, peer influence, consumptions of content that are predominantly political and continuously posted by other users, and having a smartphone device. Amidst the rapid spread of political campaigns on social media platforms, there have been questions as to whether these campaigns succeed in mobilizing political activities. Successful mobilization, in this sense, points towards either positive contributions towards the factualization of an idea or turning an idea into a realization, and detrimental effects inflicted by misinformation that results in apathy from its participants (Kamau, 2017). With the increased dependency on social media for political information, politicians and political parties found certain individuals influential. These individuals are often referred to as influencers of social media as they shape political conversations and discussions. Past work has indicated the potential capability of these influencers in shaping beliefs on political issues. In addition, the discovery of a vast of commissioned public opinion work has been done by influencers. These commissioned works are subsequently used by candidates and public officials to form their decisions on public policies or political acts. As such, the act of influencers to shape beliefs on political issues carries relevant implications for democracy.

3. Methodology

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the impact of social media in youth political engagement under the context of the 2019 Indonesian general elections. Because social media is a complicated phenomenon, this paper is aimed at discerning how the perception of youth, aged 18-29, towards political parties and politicians affects their political participation on social media. Systematic and multilayered data were examined: focus group sessions with participants, a survey of youth, and structured interviews with young candidates running in the 2019 elections. The survey was analyzed using regression analysis. The results showed that the more critical and trustful youth were toward political parties and politicians, the higher political participation they showed through social media.

It should be noted that the manifestation of youth political participation on social media is quite varied, including, but not limited to, sharing news, uploading photos/videos of daily activities or campaigns, joining political groups become voters. A total of social media platforms were found used by youth participants of this research. In the context of youth political engagement, their involvement in public discourse is important and will be the focus of the discussion of these findings. In addition, even though there are many controversial news and hoaxes in social media, youth do not just believe it, instead they try to confirm it by checking the news to the mainstream media. There is no guarantee that all news in mainstream media is correct, but youth tend to believe that most are verified. As a result, they can spread the verified news confidently. These results suggest ways in which the perception of youth on political parties and politicians could be altered to enhance youth political engagement in general elections, in both a particular and the broader sense. (Abdullah et al.2021)

3.1. Research Design

To effectively explore how social media affects the political engagement of Malaysian youths, a mixed-method approach of three folds was employed. Firstly, a survey questionnaire was used to capture the breadth of youth political engagement on

social media. This allowed an in-depth examination across a range of political activities, from passive to interactive, and their motivations and effects. Secondly, focus group discussions were conducted to deepen insights gained from the survey. In particular, the high levels of passive attention to politics were probed further through group interviews.

Thus social media public pages could be found on significant issues. Content analysis through conducting an FGD after an online-survey was employed. This allowed a more targeted search of pages reflecting what a group of youths is concerned with, including those not inclined to political issues. A case study concerning the controversial revocation of petrol subsidy in Malaysia was conducted. In sum, this strategy could provide a more observant understanding of the complexities of how youths engage with politics in a young democracy transitioning in the digital era. (Peters et al., 2022)

4. Findings

The purpose of this research is to analyze a level and patterns of youth online political engagement regarding social media. It begins by theorizing the impact of young individuals' online and offline political engagement on social media. Also, it specifies possible moderators in this relationship. A national survey was conducted in Indonesia involving youth aged 17-23 years living in various regions. The critical findings are that discussions with others and leaving comments were the most common political engagement among youth on social media; both were significantly different across gender and supporting-voting behavior. Behaviors of youth engagement in political activities on social media can be placed into three categories. Firstly, Receiving End include viewing a video, news, photos, or articles that are shared by other accounts and forwarded other accounts. Secondly, the Interacting End group is engaging in political contents that are discussed with others; interacting with accounts that are followed; giving a comment, filling in the petition, attending a group, website, page facilitating discussions / expressing opinions about a political issue; writing comments or testimonials on accounts participating in organizing political

campaigns. Thirdly: Operate Own Account, being active in managing personal social media accounts to disseminate or promote information, descriptive content, or updates containing actual or simulated political figures / public figures' activities; participating in writing articles, creating images, video clips, or making advertising agreements of a political nature that are published in the status, video, news, photos, articles, or captions of personal or community accounts being handled; sharing addresses that contain political campaigns. Other findings will also be broken down gradually according to the division. (Gil et al.2021)

4.1. Youth Political Engagement on Social Media

Political behaviour patterns vary among individuals and age groups. Particularly, youth has shown dissimilar behaviour compared to older cohorts. Regarding the topic, political behaviour of Turkish youth on social media is assessed by user behaviour perspectives. Six different patterns in political user behaviour have been revealed: non-user, observer, active follower, random active, political, and responder (Adebisi Abdulrauf et al., 2016). The probability of the users being in one of these segments increases with age, female gender and socioeconomic status. Specialised data analyses screen the reasons behind why a number of socially owned media campaigns resonate positively with the youth, whereas some other campaigns on the same topic can lead to disengagement (Kamau, 2017). The conducted interviews are analysed utilizing user generated texts with quantitative methods. This strategy allows examining a large number of youth sharing an experience and then describing it. Besides, detailed case studies including archive footage, lay the foundation to explain the reasoning of various focussed socially owned media strategies that are accomplished successfully in campaigning regarding the same topic. To increase reappraisal, or tailor successful strategies the received feedback is scrutinized concerning a selected case study. One observing is that the most successful of campaigns include a high portion of interactive forms, such as responds and re-posts. Generally, it is possible to claim that the presented evidences offer an opportunity to bridge the theoretical understandings with concrete youth experiences. Consequently, a detailed observation with user

behaviour lenses on politically active youth politically exploring via social media is feeded in. (Döm & Bingöl, 2021)

5. Conclusion

How does social media shape the political engagement of youth today? This work attempt to answer this pivotal question by investigating the benefits and drawbacks of social media use for political engagement among youth. The analysis is rooted in multiple theories towards the internet usage of social activism styles, deliberative democratic society's requirements, and the advantages and disadvantages related to social media use for political activities. Several recommendations are developed for educationalists, social media platform developers, and political decision makers on how to respond positively to the rapidly evolving social media landscape (Adebisi Abdulrauf et al., 2016). Furthermore, the current effects of social media on youth political involvement have been cribsheeted, and concerns that deserve further study are examined through social media. The opinions of a new generation towards the political involvement of youth are increasingly among the primary reckonings to constrain a democratic government's policy shape and practice formulation. In conventional politics, the ambition to affect government policies is frequently channeled through standard forms of political contribution, ranging from voting to demonstrations.

5.1. Implications for Future Research

Adolescent and young adulthood have long been linked to growing political awareness and engagement, as well as to personal development of political self. Recently, with ramified research on cognitive engagement theory, scholars have reverted to the cognitive engagements as alternatives for public behaviors to examine the phenomenon of youth online political participation on social media. Therefore, the use of social media makes the involvement in politics easier and provides an extra boost to cognitive engagement, as there is a positive relationship between political interest and use of media for acquiring political information. Youths get political information through online networks of friends which may lead to political interest.

Moreover, social media users tend to promote political interest and make people in their network more likely to participate in politics. Several recommendations are given below for future research, including the need for longitudinal studies to track changes in youth political engagement trends over time beginning from a very young age. They should also take into consideration the transition from childhood to youth and/or to adulthood statuses, account for the diversities of young people and contexts, explore the impact of emerging social media platforms and tools, consider adapting current methodologies to the large-scale and encompassing observations of offline- and online-based group activities, consider technology-based manipulations such that it could be done without interrupting the overall objective of youth activities in existing programs, as well as encourage the use of interdisciplinary approaches. Given the rapid evolution of social media and other ICT technologies, wide-ranging interdisciplinary studies will help meditation between methodologically advanced practices and innovative approaches or ideas that have the potential to reconceptualize the fundamental features of how various spaces and times shape the social construction of youth and political engagement.

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