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To cite this article: Anter Venus, Drina Intyaswati, Fitria Ayuningtyas & Puji Lestari (2025) Political participation in the digital age: Impact of influencers and advertising on Generation Z, Cogent Arts & Humanities, 12:1, 2520063, DOI: [10.1080/23311983.2025.2520063](https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2025.2520063)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2025.2520063>



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Published online: 21 Jun 2025.



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Political participation in the digital age: Impact of influencers and advertising on Generation Z

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ABSTRACT

Various methods are used to foster political participation among young people, ensuring an active role in democratic life. Social media is a potential medium for distributing messages to Generation Z, effectively reaching and engaging young people. Therefore, this study aimed to examine the role of political influencers and advertising on political participation, mediated by political interest and efficacy. A survey was further conducted on young Indonesians (Generation Z) with purposive sampling, and the questionnaire was distributed online through social media networks ($N=559$). The analysis results with Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) showed that political interest mediated the influence of influencers and advertising on participation. Additionally, internal political efficacy mediated the effect of advertising on participation. Political interest further strengthened internal efficacy in mediating the impact of influencers and advertising on political participation. Implication: Influencers may help political socialization go more smoothly and effectively. The government should establish more stringent regulations and ethical guidelines to ensure influencers maintain an objective and professional approach.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 5 August 2024
Revised 6 June 2025
Accepted 11 June 2025

KEYWORDS

Political influencers;
political advertising;
participation; political
interest; efficacy

SUBJECTS



Mass Communication;
Persuasion; Political
Communication

Introduction

Political participation is a crucial indicator of democratic life. Political participation refers to individuals' efforts to influence governance and decision-making, including conventional and online activism (Verba et al., 1995). Several factors influence it, including political efficacy and information availability (Dalton, 2018). Political participation allows citizens to influence the policies that affect their lives, promoting accountability, inclusion, and social cohesion. Active participation in political processes strengthens democratic institutions and deters authoritarian inclinations. Besides, it develops a culture of transparency by incentivizing governments to disclose their acts openly to the public (Tarrow, 1998).

The advent of digital technologies has significantly transformed the landscape of political participation. The shift to online platforms has introduced new opportunities and challenges, reshaping how citizens engage with politics. Digital technologies have lowered the barriers to political participation, making it easier for individuals to access information, engage in discussions, and mobilize others. Social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook enable real-time communication and petitions to be signed, allowing users to organize protests and engage with policymakers (Loader et al., 2014). Velasquez and LaRose (2015) found that individuals who engage in digital participation are more likely to feel empowered and find it easier to make political decisions.

Political influencers have played an increasingly important role in political participation in recent years, particularly with the rise of digital platforms and social media. These influencers have a large internet following and use their platforms to affect public opinion, mobilize votes, and influence political discourse. They also play an important role in promoting public awareness of political topics, social movements, and elections. Studies have demonstrated that peer influence, including influencer influence, can considerably enhance voting turnout among younger populations (Boulianne, 2015).

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Generation Z (born between 1997 and 2012) is a digitally savvy generation that relies heavily on social media for information, making them an important target audience for innovative political campaigns. They largely consume most of their information online through Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. Political advertising is critical in engaging this demographic, which is becoming more important in elections. Political advertising emphasizing emotional connection and authenticity dominates Generation Z's attention and is distributed through social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok (Munsch, 2021).

Exposure to political news is more likely to influence political activity in younger generations than in older ones. Young citizens' attitudes toward politics are still developing, while older generations, on the other hand, are more committed to habits and rituals (Andersen et al., 2021). Furthermore, exposure to political news is more likely to influence engagement among younger citizens, who are more open and flexible.

Observed in Indonesia is currently categorized as a 'Flawed Democracy', showing sufficient participation but still scoring low in civil liberties and political culture (EIU, 2023). Enhancing participation through social media among Generation Z has become a key strategy for those aiming to gather voters. During the 2024 Indonesian presidential election campaign, the elected candidate leveraged influencers with substantial followings to attract young voters (Kurniawan, 2024). Influencers who are also celebrities help achieve public support and shape public opinion (Ilham et al., 2022). Young influencer Raffi Ahmad, who has the most followers in Indonesia (over 76 million), and other top influencers, became supporters of Prabowo's presidential victory (Nugroho & Rizal, 2024). Based on this evidence, Generation Z, with extensive social networks is particularly vulnerable to subtle messages delivered by influencers. In this period, political parties and candidates used both influencers and political advertisements to persuade voters. Political advertising through social media proved effective, specifically with Generation Z and Millennials comprising 55% of voters (KPU, 2023). The three presidential candidates invested in advertisements across various social media platforms, including Facebook and Instagram, and engaged potential voters on TikTok.

Awareness of the importance of engaging in the political process needs to be fostered among Generation Z. The belief that personal participation in politics can make an impact relates to political efficacy. Hadisoebroto and Akhrani (2023) stated that external political efficacy among novice voters negatively correlated with trust in presidential candidate Anies Baswedan. Furthermore, the perception that the government fails to meet public demands and expectations contributes to trust in Anies Baswedan. Second screening through social media among students in Jakarta has an impact on political efficacy (Intyaswati et al., 2023). Additionally, previous studies have found that political efficacy predicts participation (Intyaswati et al., 2024).

The importance of increasing Generation Z's involvement in the political process by utilizing the skills of political influencers needs to be studied. Moreover, quantitative empirical studies that examine the role of political influencers in influencing political participation have not been widely conducted, especially in Indonesia. This study seeks to fill this gap by evaluating the role of political influencers on social media in influencing Generation Z's political participation. Specifically, it investigates whether political interest and efficacy mediate the relationship between political participation and engagement with political influencers and advertisements. This study looks at the influence of influencers and political advertising simultaneously, whereas previous studies have done so individually.

Political participation predictors from influencers and advertising

Political influencers

Social Media Influencers (SMI) created and shared content with followers, including political messages, hereafter referred to as political influencers (Geyser, 2022; Suuronen et al., 2022). Political parties or candidates often use influencers to advance the organization's agendas. Influencers with many followers could exert influence through the closeness built with the audience, persuading the members through campaigns or other objectives (Goodwin et al., 2020).

According to credibility theory, a communicator's persuasiveness is determined by competence and trustworthiness. Political influencers use their apparent expertise of personal authenticity and political

systems to convince people. Influencers who skillfully use interactive platforms to discuss, clarify, and reinforce their points of view tend to have higher credibility. Referring to the framework agenda-setting theory, political influencers shape the problems that their followers consider essential. Influencers shape how audiences see political issues by framing them (Entman, 1993), frequently modifying narratives to match their perceived trustworthiness.

According to Carpinì (2000), in today's democracy, the more citizens know about current events, the performance of political leaders, and the guidelines they follow, the better off they are. Similarly, even democracies require 'information elites'—experts who are exceptionally knowledgeable about specific subjects and to whom the rest of the population looks for guidance or leadership. The more diverse these experts are, and the more significant the proportion of the general people who can fill these positions, the more democratic the flow of information will be.

The Uses and Gratification Theory is a sound theoretical framework for understanding how political influences shape audience participation and motivation. Influencers achieve this by reducing complex subjects into manageable narratives. Emotionally connected influencers can mobilize or reinforce audience sentiment. Influencers must retain their perceived authenticity and knowledge to continue meeting the requirements of their followers. The interactive dynamics between followers and political influencers emphasize viewers' active participation in creating political discourse.

The role of political influencers in distributing information to followers made the SMI gatekeepers, which was previously held by political and media elites (Navarro et al., 2020). By raising certain issues, political influencers could give voice to minority groups from sociopolitical backgrounds (Hockin-Boyers & Clifford-Astbury, 2021). The presence of influencers attracted young people who were apathetic to politics to become more engaged (Zimmermann et al., 2022). Dekoninck and Schmuck (2022) asserted that following political-related information from political influencers increased both online and offline political participation.

The Indonesian government recognized the benefits of influencers as an industry in 2017, issuing a special budget to use their services on social media. Since then, the government has spent over IDR 90.45 billion to engage influencers in various activities (ICW, 2020). Politicians and policymakers often use influencers as campaign models to persuade the public.

According to Khosravini (2017), social media has provided an ideal environment for the rise and expansion of populist politics. Lim's (2020) research on Indonesian social media users found that networks are maintained through repetitive emotive actions like commenting, sharing, and liking. Such broad networks increase the possibility that users may be exposed to various discussions and political information, including those that do not coincide with their political inclinations or ideologies. Understanding what consumers want is crucial for designing effective campaigns, especially in Indonesia, where the digital landscape is rapidly evolving (Miranti et al., 2024).

Advertising

Advertising is strategic communication that aims to sell a product or service as an element of the marketing mix. Similarly, political advertising is critical communication political actors use to promote their products and gain support for their policies. Political advertising is used in elections to help candidates win or retain power. Political advertising, like commercial advertising, reflects the cultural milieu and aims to persuade and entice its target audience (Holtz-Bacha, 2018).

Previous research on online advertisements suggests that campaigns use these ads to acquire volunteers and donations. Campaigns frequently link their ads to landing pages where users can register to volunteer, subscribe to a mailing list, or make donations (Fowler et al., 2021). Online ads enable people to take rapid action at the campaign's request. According to one study of the 2016 presidential campaign, fewer than half of the digital commercials examined had an objective of voter persuasion (Franz & Ridout, 2007).

On the concern agenda of advertising, audience expectations may influence the nature and amount of issue conversation. Bode et al. (2016) discovered that Twitter was far less likely to generate deliberation of issues than television advertising. However, the study acknowledged that the medium's character constraints may limit the ability to raise issues or policy assertions compared to other platforms.

Nonetheless, problem conversations occur on Twitter, and Kang et al. (2018) discovered increased issue convergence between advertising and Twitter throughout the 2014 U.S. campaign.

Political advertising was a communication tool where parties and candidates spent most of the campaign budget during elections (Hasrama, 2024). Zulfabri (2003) defined political advertising as a form of communication used to express support or rejection of a candidate aiming for office. Political advertising was used to attract the public to change from apathy to participation, with increased election participation compelling candidates to fulfill their campaign promises (Hasrama, 2024).

In this context, social media became a platform for politicians to spread work programs and communicate with the public (Munzir, 2019). In Medan, Indonesia, millennials viewed social media campaigns as crucial to Bobby Nasution's success as regional head, with Instagram interactions attracting voters (Arfan et al., 2023). Similarly, Instagram and Facebook platforms were found to determine the success of candidates by effectively communicating visions and missions that appealed to Indonesian voters (Badaru & Adu, 2020; Komariah & Kartini, 2019).

Political interest

Ohme (2019) discovered that the source of political posts that young citizens engage with varies, and social media politics diets are inconsistent. When we believe that peer networks affect each other reciprocally, political material is prioritized in the news stream based on resemblance to friends' political content preferences (Marquart et al., 2020; Kaiser et al., 2021). Following politicians is an active type of algorithmic content selection and content curation, and the social significance of messages encountered impacts how frequently users are exposed to political material (Messing & Westwood, 2014). Thus, 'individual behavior, directed by personal interest, frames how the algorithm classifies the interests of each user gradually' (Thorson et al., 2021).

Political interest was defined as the extent to which citizens were curious about politics (Van Deth, 1990). Furthermore, Koestner and Losier (2004) asserted that political interest was a predictor of affective behavior and would predict various political behaviors. Political interest and efficacy were both strong predictors of participation (Hadjar & Becker, 2007).

Rebenstorf (2004) showed that political interest characterized a democratic society. Previous studies also showed political interest as a key to maintaining contemporary democracy (Prior, 2019; Russo & Stattin, 2017). Adolescents whose tendencies were situational and easily influenced by surrounding factors developed political interest through repeated exposure to political issues (Prior, 2019; Russo & Stattin, 2017). Furthermore, students' interest in consuming political news online and awareness of politics' importance showed curiosity about politics and satisfaction with news from online media.

In this regard, Putri (2023) further showed that Indonesian students' satisfaction with online political news correlated with political interest. A study among college students in West Java, Indonesia, revealed that political interest motivates involvement in political fundraising, a form of political participation (Arumdapta & Pratamawati, 2020).

Political efficacy and participation

According to participatory democracy theorists (Mason, 1982), internal political efficacy is critical in influencing political conduct. As one's sense of self-competence grows, there is a greater likelihood of participating in political activities. In contrast, mobilization of support theorists (Wright, 1976) argues that political engagement is increased by 'encouraging citizens to feel that the government addresses their needs and desires' (Ginsberg, 1982, p. 182). People are more willing to engage in efforts to influence the government if they believe they will be successful (high external efficacy) (Karp & Banducci, 2008).

Political efficacy is defined as a person's belief in the ability to understand and influence the political process, as well as the potential to impact government decisions (Hassan & Ridzuan, 2021). This concept is comprised of two types of political efficacy, namely (a) internal and (b) external political efficacy. Internal political efficacy includes a person's perception of the capacity to understand the facts and processes as well as influence decisions (Almond & Verba, 1965). When a person gains knowledge about political issues regularly, it fosters confidence in the potential to participate in politics. On

the other hand, external political efficacy refers to the belief that one can influence the political process and system (Geurkink et al., 2020). This form of efficacy assumed that government officials were responsive to community concerns with certain mechanisms affecting government decisions (Priyanto et al., 2021). Another study found that social media use positively correlated with internal political efficacy (Park, 2019) and impacted attitudes toward government performance (Su et al., 2021).

An increase in various forms of participation could not occur when individuals lacked an understanding of politics. This is because possessing of external political efficacy often leads to various forms of political participation. External political efficacy reflected the belief that having a voice in government actions positively impacted traditional forms of participation, such as participation in political parties, but negatively affected digital (outside the system) (Meunier & Prats, 2021). Furthermore, low responsiveness from political institutions to public demands could shift participation from conventional to digital forms. An improved understanding of political attitudes could address democratic deficits and guide government strategies to enhance political effectiveness.

Dong and Ji (2018) stated that the effective use of social media could increase both internal and external political efficacy, subsequently impacting political participation. Furthermore, Ahmad et al. (2019) found that the majority of online media users became more familiar with political issues and obtained better political information, significantly affecting efficacy.

Political participation was further characterized as voluntary activity by citizens to engage in decision-making related to politics, government, or the state (Van Deth, 2014). Conventional participation, which was directly related to government and politics, typically occurred through formal mediums such as voting, campaigning, and joining political parties. Social media has impacted both online participation (Intyaswati et al., 2025) and conventional participation, specifically voting (Intyaswati et al., 2021). In contrast, unconventional participation affecting the political process outside election activities included participating in demonstrations, joining petitions, and writing political articles (Herdiansah, 2019). Greater opportunities to participate effectively can be obtained from non-conventional participation (Barret & Zani, 2015).

Young people increasingly realized that political engagement through individualized means was related to specific objectives or issues of personal interest (Nina & Lichterman, 2014; Sloam, 2016). Unconventional participation was driven by a growing distrust of political parties and representative institutions (Vassallo & Ding, 2016). Furthermore, young people tended to prefer modern political practices that addressed dissatisfaction with existing political system policies (Loader et al., 2014).

In this context, social media played a crucial role in increasing political participation among young Indonesians during the 2024 elections. It further allowed people to conduct various political activities easily and at any time. A challenge faced in previous elections was a reference for a more advanced electoral process. One medium to get the young people's vote in the 2024 democratic party was by using social media (Setneg, 2024). According to 2024, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, and Twitter are the most popular social media platforms among Indonesia's Generation Z (Ahdiat, 2024). The ability of social media to engage citizens in governance issues showed the value of e-government in promoting human development through enhanced communication, coordination, and engagement in governance processes (Mutanda, 2024). Based on the evidence, the following hypotheses were proposed in this study.

- H1:** An increase in political influencers will lead to an increase in political interest.
- H2:** An increase in political advertising will lead to an increase in political interest.
- H3:** An increase in political influencers will lead to an increase in (a) internal and (b) external political efficacy
- H4:** An increase in political advertising will lead to an increase in (a) internal and (b) external political efficacy.
- H5:** (a) Internal and (b) external political efficacy mediated the relationship between political influencers and participation.
- H6:** (a) Internal and (b) external political efficacy mediated the relationship between political advertising and participation.
- H7:** Political interest mediated the relationship between political influencers and participation.
- H8:** The relationship between political advertising and participation was mediated by political interest.

H9: Political interest with (a) internal and (b) external political efficacy mediated the relationship between political influencers and political participation.

H10: Political interest with (a) internal and (b) external political efficacy mediated the relationship between political advertising and political participation.

Method

The study used a survey method with a purposive sampling technique, targeting Generation Z as the population. Generation Z's birth range is 1997–2012 (Slepian et al., 2024). The chosen minimum age is 16, considering they should understand political interest and efficacy because, at the age of 17, they have the right to vote. Therefore, the sample age was set at 16–26 years old. Purposive sampling was used with the criteria that sample members follow at least one political influencer on social media. The sampling process included distributing questionnaires online through social media networks, which was conducted from 21 June to 21 July 2024. Participants in the study provided written informed consent. After conducting the sampling process, the total sample size comprised 559 Generation Z.

Table 1 showed the characteristics of the respondents where the number of females surpassed that of males with 60.1% compared to 39.9%. Furthermore, the average age of respondents was 20.24 years ($SD = 1.80$), and the majority had a Bachelor's degree (56.5%).

Measurement

In this study, the measurement of political advertising referred to Stach (2015), while the other five variables referred to the measurement of Wasike (2023). The questionnaire used a Likert scale with five answer options.

For Political advertising (PA), respondents' opinions were targeted regarding exposure to political advertisements on social media. The aspects considered included (a) informativeness, (b) assistance in voting decisions, (c) misleading information, (d) acceptability of information, (e) ignored information, (f) curiosity about candidates or issues, (g) acquisition of political knowledge, (h) trigger to find more information, and (i) viewing political advertisements from interested parties. Response options were further ranged from 'strongly disagree' (1) to 'strongly agree' (5).

For Political Influencers (PI), respondents were asked about the activities in following PIs. This included (a) reading shared political content, (b) following controversial topics, and (c) engaging in discussions about politics. Response options were further ranged from 'never' (1) to 'always' (5).

Regarding Political Interest (PI), respondents were asked when exposure to political advertisements or following influencers motivated political interest. This included (a) reading political topics, (b) watching political events, and (c) discussing politics. Respondents' answers were further categorized from 'strongly disagree' (1) to 'strongly agree' (5).

For Internal Political Efficacy (IPE), respondents' attitudes in understanding politics after exposure to political advertisements or following influencers were measured. This included (a) understanding politics, (b) engaging in politics, and (c) possessing political knowledge.

Concerning External Political Efficacy (EPE), respondents' attitudes were measured with an external perspective regarding political issues. Statements were given to respondents due to the exposure in following PIs or political advertisements. This included (a) awareness of public officials' concerns, (b) understanding public expectations, and (c) concern for government policies. The answer options for political efficacy variable ranged from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

Table 1. Respondent characteristics.

Identity	Criteria	
Sex	Male: 223 (39.9%)	
	Female: 336 (60.1%)	
Age	Mean = 20.24 years	Standard Deviation = 1.80
	Minimal = 16 years	Maximal = 26 years
Education	High School = 126 (22.5%)	Diploma = 104 (18.6%)
	Bachelor = 316 (56.5%)	Magister = 13 (2.3%)

$N = 559$.

For Political Participation (PP), respondents' political participation either online or offline in the past year due to exposure to political advertisements or following influencers was assessed. This included (a) contacting politicians via social media, (b) signing petitions, (c) posting political content, (d) expressing support for candidates, (e) volunteering, (f) participating in demonstrations, (g) boycotting products, (h) making donations to campaigns, and (i) voting in elections. Response options were graded from 1 = never to 5 = always.

Based on Table 2, the average number of Generation Z following political influencers was 2.88 while the consumption of political advertisements stood at 3.52. The analysis showed that Generation Z's external political efficacy level was 3.32 which were greater than the internal efficacy level of 3.20. Furthermore, the average level of political participation among Generation Z was 1.87.

Validity and reliability test

The validity of the instrument was tested using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) which included six variables. Measurement models were evaluated based on three criteria to determine the fulfillment of predetermined standards. The criteria included (1) parsimonious fits (Marsh & Hocevar, 1985), (2) incremental (Bollen, 1989; Hu & Bentler, 1999), and (3) absolute (Browne & Cudeck, 1993; Joreskog & Sorbom, 1984).

Table 3 showed the results of the study instrument validity test. After the validity test, two indicators of political advertising variables were declared invalid namely (1) the statement that political advertising on social media was misleading and (2) respondents ignored political advertising on social media. The indicators of the other variables were declared valid. Furthermore, the reliability of each variable was measured with SPSS 25 and the results met the standard Cronbach alpha criteria ($\alpha > .70$) as shown in Table 2.

Results

Figure 1 showed the indirect relationship model with standardized regression weights between political influencers, advertising, and participation. The mediating variables in the model included political interest, internal, and external efficacy. The results showed that political interest (0.295) in the model had a greater value than internal political efficacy (0.272).

The structural model used to analyze the results of the relationship between variables also met the standard criteria as presented in Table 4.

Table 2. Variable description.

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	α
Political Influencers	1	5	2.88	0.86	0.864
Political Advertising	1	5	3.52	0.59	0.827
Political Interest	1	5	2.96	0.74	0.816
Internal Pol. Efficacy	1	5	3.20	0.67	0.788
External Pol. Efficacy	1	5	3.32	0.59	0.701
Political Participation	1	5	1.87	0.87	0.929

N = 559.

Table 3. the fitness indexes of the measurement model.

Goodness fit of index (GFI)	Coefficient	Criteria
Parsimonious fit		
Chi-square/df	2.621	Good fit (<3)
Incremental fit		
Adjusted (GFI)	0.902	Good fit (>0.900)
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0.932	Good fit (>0.900)
Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)	0.923	Good fit (>0.900)
Absolute Fit		
GFI	0.905	Good fit (>0.900)
Root Mean square of Error Approximation (RMSEA)	0.054	Good fit (<0.080)

N = 559.

The structural model further met the Fit Model with GFI, TLI, CFI, and AGFI values each exceeding 0.90. The Chi-Square/df value also met the standard value of being less than 3, and the RMSEA value was lower than 0.08.

Table 5 showed that political influencers and advertising significantly positively influenced political interest with values of 0.515 and 0.267 respectively ($p < 0.05$), thereby accepting H1 and H2. Similarly, political advertising significantly positively influenced internal efficacy with a value of 0.275 ($p < 0.05$) and external efficacy with a value of 0.221 ($p < 0.05$) leading to the acceptance of H4a and H4b. The influence of political influencers on external efficacy was significant, with a negative value of -0.060 ($p < 0.05$), and did not affect internal efficacy (-0.051 , $p = 0.241$), leading to the rejection of H3a and H3b.

Table 6 showed that political interest significantly mediated the relationship between influencers and participation (0.183) and between political advertising and participation (0.095), with both having a significance of $p = 0.003$ ($p < 0.05$), supporting H7 and H8. Table 6 (iv) further suggested that external efficacy did not mediate the relationship between political advertising and participation (-0.109) with a significance value of $p = 0.091$ ($p > 0.05$), leading to the rejection of H6b. The table further showed that internal efficacy significantly mediated the relationship between political advertising and participation

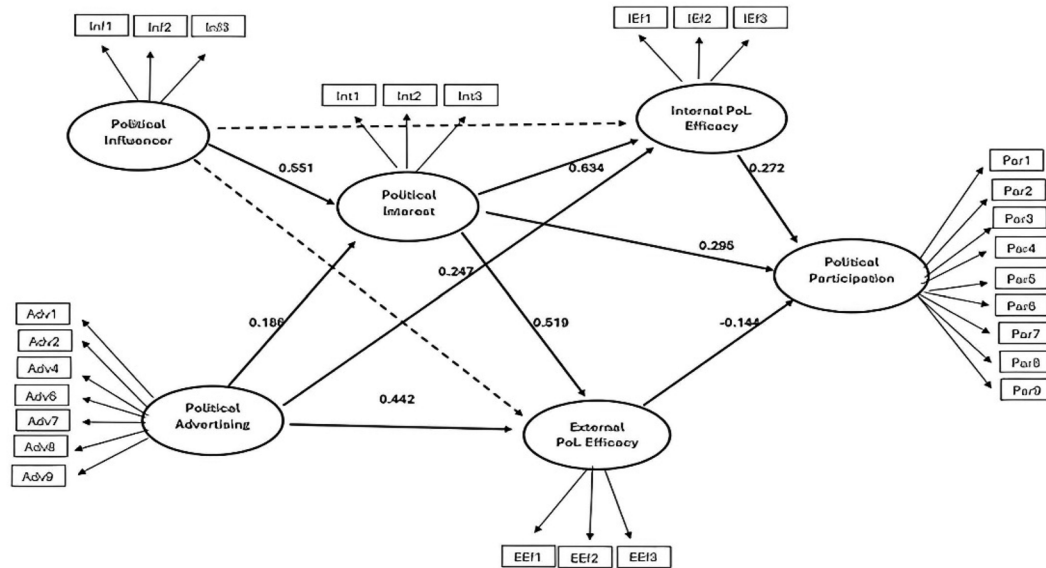


Figure 1. Structural Equation Model of Study. The model describes the effect of political influencers and advertising on political participation by mediating political interest and political efficacy.

Table 4. the fit indices of the study model.

Model	Chi-Square/df	GFI	TLI	CFI	AGFI	RMSEA
	2.261	0.917	0.940	0.950	0.901	0.048

N=559.

Table 5. Regression weights of study model.

Items	Estimate	SE	p
Advertising → Interest	0.267	0.070	***
Influencers → Interest	0.515	0.048	***
Advertising → Ext_Efficacy	0.221	0.049	***
Advertising → Int_Efficacy	0.275	0.059	***
Influencers → Int_Efficacy	-0.051	0.044	0.241
Influencers → Ext_Efficacy	-0.060	0.025	0.018
Interest → Int_Efficacy	0.494	0.055	***
Interest → Ext_Efficacy	0.181	0.039	***
Interest → Participation	0.355	0.095	***
Ext_Efficacy → Participation	-0.494	0.113	***
Int_Efficacy → Participation	0.419	0.246	0.044

N=559, *** $p < 0.05$.

Table 6. Indirect effect of variables.

Items	Estimate	Lower	Upper	<i>p</i>
i) Political advertising → political interest → political participation	0.095	0.026	0.184	0.003
ii) Political influencers → political interest → political participation	0.183	0.073	0.307	0.003
iii) Political advertising → internal efficacy → political participation	0.115	0.040	0.228	0.004
iv) Political advertising → external efficacy → political participation	−0.109	−0.315	0.019	0.091
v) Political influencers → external efficacy → political participation	0.029	−0.007	0.105	0.120
vi) Political influencers → political interest → internal efficacy → political participation	0.107	0.049	0.183	0.004
vii) Political influencers → political interest → external efficacy → political participation	−0.046	−0.131	0.010	0.090
viii) Political advertising → political interest → internal efficacy → political participation	0.055	0.014	0.112	0.004
ix) Political advertising → political interest → external efficacy → political participation	−0.024	−0.078	0.006	0.090

N = 559.

Table 7. Decision of hypothesis.

Hypothesis	Decision	Statement
H1	Supported	An increase in political influencers will lead to an increase in political interest.
H2	Supported	An increase in political advertising will lead to an increase in political interest.
H3a	Not Supported	An increase in political influencers will not lead to an increase in internal political efficacy
H3b	Not Supported	An increase in political influencers will not lead to an increase in external political efficacy
H4a	Supported	An increase in political advertising will lead to an increase in internal political efficacy.
H4b	Supported	An increase in political advertising will lead to an increase in external political efficacy.
H5a	Not Supported	Internal efficacy mediated the relationship between political influencers and political participation
H5b	Not Supported	External efficacy mediated the relationship between political influencers and political participation
H6a	Supported	Internal efficacy mediated the relationship between political advertising and political participation
H6b	Not Supported	External efficacy mediated the relationship between political advertising and political participation
H7	Supported	Political interest mediated the relationship between political influencers and political participation
H8	Supported	The relationship between political advertising and political participation was mediated by political interest
H9a	Supported	Political interest and internal efficacy mediated the relationship between political influencers and political participation
H9b	Not Supported	Political interest and external efficacy mediated the relationship between political influencers and political participation
H10a	Supported	Political interest and internal efficacy mediated the relationship between political advertising and political participation
H10b	Not Supported	Political interest and external efficacy mediated the relationship between political advertising and political participation

Source: Research hypothesis.

with a value of 0.115 ($p < 0.05$), supporting the acceptance of H6a. Additionally, external efficacy was found not to significantly mediate the relationship between political influencers and participation (0.029) with a significance of more than 0.05 ($p = 0.120$), resulting in the rejection of H5b. Since political influencers did not directly affect internal efficacy, internal efficacy did not mediate the relationship between the impact of political influencers, leading to the rejection of H5a.

Based on this calculation, Table 6 (vi) showed that political interest with internal efficacy significantly mediated the relationship between political influencers and participation (0.107) with a significance of $p = 0.004$ ($p < 0.05$), thereby accepting H9a. On the other hand, Table 6 (vii) suggested that political interest with external efficacy did not significantly function as a mediator (−0.046) with $p = 0.090$ ($p > 0.05$), thereby rejecting H9b. Internal efficacy alongside political interest significantly played a role as a mediator in the relationship between political advertising and participation with a value of 0.055 and $p = 0.004$ ($p < 0.05$), leading to the acceptance of H10a as shown in Table 6 (viii). Furthermore, Table 6 (ix) stated that external efficacy alongside political interest did not significantly play a role as a mediator (−0.024) with $p = 0.090$ ($p > 0.05$), leading to the basis of rejecting H10b.

Table 7 presented the decision for each hypothesis. From the direct relationship between variables, only the direct relationship of political influencers to internal political efficacy was found to be insignificant. Political interest and internal political efficacy were identified as mediating variables both together and individually.

Discussion

The average level of political participation of Generation Z is relatively low, prompting the need to identify predictors that can enhance political participation. Previous studies have shown that online political participation among young people in Jakarta was moderate (Intyaswati et al., 2024); while political

participation among women in Malang city was low in the 2024 election, this was due to the perception of having a primary role in domestic areas limiting political engagement (Kholifah, 2024). These results underscored the necessity for further studies to boost political participation among Indonesian youth.

Based on information obtained from following political influencers, the average Generation Z occasionally accessed content from those following. Ilham et al. (2022) showed that election organizers (KPU) leveraged influencers' reputations to increase voter participation, a strategy observed during regional head elections in several Indonesian regions. The existence of political influencers in fostering Generation Z's political interest is possible due to their perceived high credibility. Influencers effectively utilize social media platforms to engage in discussions, provide clarity, and reinforce their perspectives, strengthening the theoretical framework of source credibility. The finding, in line with Zimmermann et al. (2023), suggests that a news source's skill impacts how much people are interested in the news, which could result in intentions to engage with news.

Furthermore, Generation Z expressed a positive reception towards political advertising on social media. A study among college students showed that exposure to political advertising influenced voting decisions (Fadilah et al., 2023). A Kompas survey across 38 Indonesian provinces in May 2023 found that 42.3% out of 1,200 respondents frequently accessed social media for political advertising and information with political content on social media being richer in visualization (Kurnia, 2024).

Based on the evidence, this study examines the indirect impact of political information consumption from PIs and advertising. Political information from influencers and political advertising significantly increase political interest in Generation Z. Influencers can enhance political interest among the followers, though impact varies across social groups. It makes sense that influencers can be used as a tool to address the lack of political engagement among young people, specifically when considered comparable to their followers (Harff & Schmuck, 2023). According to the uses and gratifications theoretical framework, political influencers can serve as important sources of information for Generation Z. Prior work by Harff and Schmuck (2024) conducted among youth in Germany and Belgium reveals that this generation is engaged in politics and primarily relies on social media influencers for their political information.

Following political influencers has a direct impact on external political efficacy with a negative relationship. These results showed that information communicated by influencers could increase Generation Z's political understanding of government policies and what the public expects. However, this understanding raises a skeptical attitude regarding the government's policy bias towards the interest of society in general. Political efficacy can further increase among young people when political understanding can be communicated more straightforwardly by political influencers (Harff & Schmuck, 2023).

Placing political ads on social media quickly creates an engaging impression which motivates prolonged platform use (Tanusondjaja et al., 2023). Political advertising is further showed to have a direct effect on both internal and external political efficacy. Previous studies stated impact of consuming political information on social media in regards to political efficacy (Intyaswati et al., 2024; Intyaswati & Fairuzza, 2023; Zaiter et al., 2023).

The mediating role of political interest in political participation applies both to the relationship with following influencers and political advertising. Consumption of political information obtained from influencers strengthens interest in politics. Similarly, exposure to political advertising also increases political interest which will stimulate political participation. The outcome of the existence of political interest as a reinforcement of the effect of media use on political participation correlate with previous studies (Bimber et al., 2015) Michalski et al., 2023;

Internal political efficacy further strengthens the influence of political advertising on Generation Z's participation. Exposure to political advertising will also increase Generation Z's political knowledge, providing confidence in the abilities. A study among Indonesian West Javanese students found that the use of social media for political information would increase political efficacy and further encourage engagement in online participation (Intyaswati & Fairuzza, 2023). Meunier & Prats (2021) conducted a study in 30 European countries and stated that an individual's perception of the ability to understand political process has a positive effect on various forms of political participation.

Political interest and internal political efficacy enhance the influence of following influencers and political advertising on participation. When following political influencers, Generation Z's interest in content and influencers' appearance increases which enhances political knowledge and skills fostering political participation.

Exposure to political advertising generates interest and a sense of political skill ownership, eventually leading to political engagement. A study among Jakarta youth shows that social media serves as a persuasive tool based on viral content and the cognitive process of understanding messages (Venus et al., 2023).

The results showed that exposure to political advertising and following political influencers possessed a significant indirect effect on Generation Z's political participation. The source credibility theory further posits that the credibility of information influences recipient's perception and message acceptance levels. Therefore, this study suggests that political influencers in Indonesia should be recognized for the ability to persuade young people to engage in politics. Influencers with high credibility can boost positive perceptions of candidates by using subtle tactics, such as meeting with candidates or offering understated praise, thereby effectively gaining audience approval (Kurniawan, 2024).

Political contestants in Indonesia choose social media for advertising. As the owner of Facebook and Instagram, Meta has advertised social, election, and political topics in Indonesia worth IDR 70.95 billion from August 2020 to 24 October 2023, with 272,010 advertisements showed on both platforms. A large amount of this money has been spent on advertising by presidential candidates, political parties, NGOs, mass media, and public institutions (Putri, 2023). The strategy of advertising forms and materials is used to win political competitions with the main target of young voters, the majority of whom are millennials and Generation Z social media users. The level of political participation of Generation Z according to the study is relatively low, correlating with previous studies among young people (Ilmar et al., 2023; Intyaswati & Fairuzza, 2023). Real conditions in the field facing the 2024 election also show that several young people consisting of influencers and other groups have launched a movement called the 'Brave Indonesian Movement'. One of the missions is to motivate young people's participation to express diverse ideas and engage in public policy issues (Arifianto & Sjarif, 2023). Venus et al., (2024) further discovered that source credibility influenced political expression among YouTube users in Jakarta.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study aimed to evaluate the indirect effect of following political influencers and advertising on Generation Z's participation. Exposure to political advertising and following political influencers showed a significant indirect effect on Generation Z's participation in Indonesia. Each impact of influencers and political advertising increased political interest which then triggered Generation Z's political participation. Additionally, internal political efficacy strengthens impact of influencers to engage in politics, only when there is sufficient political interest. Internal political efficacy further mediates impact of political advertising on Generation Z's participation. The novelty of this study lies in the fact that having sufficient political interest is a prerequisite for the growth of internal efficacy in the context of the influence of political influencers.

The presence of influencers in politics further showed a significant impact as the political influencers reached a wide audience through social media, influencing public opinion and attitudes towards political issues. With the participation of influencers, political messages were communicated more easily and quickly, targeting and persuading potential audiences or voters. The increasing role of influencers in politics emphasized the need to improve basic literacy, which still had a gap in Indonesia. Basic literacy included reading and writing, digital, as well as civic literacy. Although social media made it easier to get information from credible sources, the ability to process all the information varied. Additionally, the risk of bias or personal support from influencers could affect the objectivity of political information communicated to the followers, leading to potential manipulation. Future studies were further recommended to consider the motivation and social networks of influencers.

Political advertising which served as a medium for disseminating messages aimed at directing the perspective of recipients based on the target audience proved extremely effective on social media. Furthermore, exposure to political advertising increased knowledge and built the self-confidence of Generation Z, fostering a better understanding of political attitudes. This assisted the government to anticipate democratic deficits and motivated participation. Furthermore, more thorough laws were required for campaign operations on social media as political advertising without regulations could alter public opinion in the same way as buzzers do.

Acknowledgments

We thank the LPPM Universitas Pembangunan Nasional Veteran Jakarta and the DPPM Kemdiktisaintek Indonesia.

Implications

Based on the results of this study, influencers could help political socialization work more efficiently and effectively. Influencers also played a crucial role in supporting social change because when an issue was being raised, the relevant authorities were more inclined to take action. Furthermore, the government should develop stricter laws and ethical standards to ensure that influencers continue to play an objective and professional role. Additionally, the use of funds for political advertising by the government, political parties, and candidates should be transparent with the public's accountability.

Ethical approval

This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Universitas Jenderal Soedirman No. 1496/EC/KEPK/VI/2024.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

The author(s) received financial support for the research by DPPM No. 007/UN.61.4/PD_PFR/2024.

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