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# THE ROLE OF INFLUENCERS IN INCREASING GEN Z'S POLITICAL EXPRESSION

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## Abstract

This study aims to analyze the strategic role of social media influencers in enhancing the political expression of Generation Z (Gen Z). As digital natives, Gen Z tends to avoid conventional political bureaucracy and turn to digital platforms to voice their views. The research method used was a qualitative descriptive. The results reveal five crucial roles of influencers in the digital political ecosystem: 1) as interpreters of complex issues, simplifying policies through creative visuals; 2) facilitators of interactive discussion spaces that democratize opinion; 3) shapers of opinions and trends that validate political attitudes; 4) drivers of participation in action, mobilizing movements from online to offline; and 5) builders of community and social solidarity based on digital philanthropy. This study concludes that influencers have emerged as new, effective agents of political socialization, transforming traditional apathy into active and critical political expression, strengthening social cohesion among the younger generation in modern democracies.

**Keywords:** *Influencer, Political Expression, Generation Z, Social Media, Social Solidarity.*

## A. INTRODUCTION

The development of information and communication technology has dramatically transformed the global sociopolitical landscape. Social media is no longer simply a means of entertainment, but has transformed into a primary digital public space where political discourse is produced and consumed (Alim & Dharma, 2021). This phenomenon has shifted conventional political communication patterns, which were previously unidirectional and dominated by mainstream media, to become more interactive and decentralized. This change opens up significant opportunities for all levels of society to directly engage in the political arena without geographical barriers (Habermas, 2014).

Amidst this massive digitalization, Generation Z (Gen Z) has emerged as the most dominant domestic actor in cyberspace. Born during the rapid development of the internet, this generation possesses unique characteristics as digital natives who rely on digital platforms to seek information, build identities, and interact (Fitriyadi et al., 2023). Their information consumption style differs significantly from previous generations. Gen Z tends to prefer visual, instant, and personal content. These characteristics shape their perspectives on various issues around them, including government and state issues (Seyfi et al., 2024).

Although Gen Z has a close relationship with technology, they are often labeled apolitical by some observers due to their low participation in formal political institutions such as political parties or conventional elections (Rakhman & Haryadi, 2019). However, this stigma is beginning to be refuted by the emergence of digital political expression. Gen Z tends to avoid rigid political bureaucracy and shift to alternative, more fluid, creative, and independent forms of participation through social media. Their political expression is no longer measured by attendance at public meetings, but rather by digital activities such as liking, commenting, creating online petitions, and sharing critical content (Iswardhana et al., 2023).

In this dynamic digital ecosystem, traditional agents of political socialization such as families, schools, and political parties are beginning to be replaced by the presence of

influencers or content creators (Artamonova, 2023). Social media influencers now play a crucial role as modern opinion leaders with an organic and loyal mass base. They possess persuasive and adaptive communication skills, bridging the gap that has traditionally separated young people from the rigid world of politics. Through a casual approach, influencers are able to repackage public messages into engaging content that engages their followers (Alvin, 2022).

One of influencers' key strengths lies in their ability to simplify complex and theoretical political issues. Complex public policies, draft laws, and even corruption cases are deconstructed into short narratives that are easily understood by laypeople through features like short videos or infographics (Harff & Schmuck, 2023). This information translation process is crucial because it successfully reduces the psychological barriers faced by Gen Z, who were initially reluctant or afraid to learn about politics. As a result, national issues, once considered boring, have now transformed into popular daily topics of conversation among young people (El Qudsi & Syamtar, 2020).

Influencers' success in communicating public issues directly impacts Gen Z's critical awareness. Interactive content sparks curiosity and encourages two-way discussions in the comments section (Widya, 2021). This digital space acts as an incubator, fostering civic courage for Gen Z to voice their own opinions. Modeling the courageous actions exemplified by influencers provides social validation for young people that their voices and political expression are valuable and capable of bringing about change (Schmuck et al., 2022).

Based on the background presented, the research problem formulation in this study centers on the dynamic relationship between influencer content and the political responses of the younger generation. Specifically, the research questions to be answered are: What is the role and communication strategy of influencers in influencing Gen Z's political understanding? And, to what extent is this content capable of stimulating and enhancing forms of digital political expression among Gen Z? These questions will be explored and answered through a comprehensive analysis in this study.

This study aims to analyze and describe the strategic role of social media influencers in encouraging and enhancing Gen Z's political expression in the digital space. Theoretically, the results of this study are expected to enrich the body of political communication knowledge, particularly regarding the two-stage communication theory in the modern era. Practically, this study is expected to contribute ideas for academics, communication practitioners, and policymakers on how to positively utilize the digital ecosystem and internet public figures to build a healthy and inclusive democratic climate among the younger generation.

## **B. METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive to deeply understand the mechanisms of influencer content's influence on Generation Z (Gen Z) political expression (Anggito & Setiawan, 2018). Subjects were selected using a purposive sampling technique, consisting of social media influencers with a large Gen Z base and Gen Z individuals aged 17–28 who actively consume content on public issues. Primary data was obtained through digital observation of posting patterns and interactions in cyberspace, as well as semi-structured in-depth interviews with informants. Secondary data was collected through documentation studies in the form of previous journal articles, related regulations, and relevant digital ecosystem statistics.

All collected data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which includes data reduction, data presentation in descriptive narrative form, and conclusion drawing. To ensure the validity and credibility of the findings, the researchers applied source and technical triangulation techniques, namely by comparing interview results between informants and matching informants' verbal statements with the actual political expression behavior they exhibited in social media comment sections. Through this

combination of methods, the research was able to systematically, objectively, and accurately analyze the dynamics of digital political communication without manipulating the variables studied.

### C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Influencers act as key catalysts for Gen Z by translating complex political information into understandable, engaging, and relevant content. They bridge the gap between young voters and formal institutions, encouraging active participation through authentic, two-way discussions on social media.

#### 1. Translators of Complex Issues (Political Education)

Conventional political language produced by formal institutions, party elites, and mainstream media is often perceived as rigid, laden with complex legal terms, and boring for the younger generation. This formal, one-way format creates a psychological distance, where Generation Z (Gen Z) perceives political discourse as an exclusive and elitist domain. As a result, sectoral apathy arises not because they lack concern for the nation's fate, but because of the language barrier that makes political material feel tedious and difficult to digest in everyday life (Bischof & Senninger, 2018).

Amidst this communication gap, influencers emerge to play a crucial role as cultural translators and information bridges. They possess a competitive advantage in the form of a deep understanding of the characteristics, visual preferences, and communication styles of young audiences. Influencers are able to deconstruct theoretical public policy texts, complex draft laws, and even tense election dynamics, then repackage them into light yet substantive material without losing the essence of the issues being discussed.

The main strategy used by influencers in political education is the use of creative visual elements and interactive infographics. Rather than presenting data in long, monotonous text, they transform it into short video formats (such as TikTok or Instagram Reels) that combine moving text, animation, and trending music. This dynamic visual approach effectively captures the short attention span of Gen Z, allowing for quick, concise, and engaging political information to be conveyed within seconds.

Beyond the visual aspect, the use of casual and relaxed everyday language is key to influencers' success in breaking down the rigidity of political issues. By avoiding bureaucratic jargon and replacing it with simple analogies that resonate with young people's realities, macro-state issues are transformed into relevant micro-topics. This personalized content makes Gen Z feel emotionally engaged, as the narratives crafted by influencers no longer sound like doctrine or one-way lectures, but rather like lively conversations between peers.

This transformation in information packaging ultimately has significant implications for Gen Z's political literacy and awareness. Young people are now much more politically literate because they are able to understand how policy decisions or legal regulations directly impact their daily lives, futures, and well-being. Influencers' ability to simplify complex issues has successfully sparked a deeper curiosity, shifting Gen Z from mere passive consumers of information to critical individuals aware of their political rights in the digital space (Harff & Schmuck, 2023; Schmuck et al., 2022)

#### 2. Interactive Discussion Spaces

The presence of contemporary social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and X (Twitter) has redefined the boundaries of the public sphere in a sociopolitical context. While in the past the public sphere was understood as a physical space or conventional media that tended to be exclusive, these platforms have now transformed into an inclusive and decentralized digital public sphere. In this new ecosystem, influencers no longer merely act as one-way content producers, but have evolved into key facilitators guiding the course of political discourse and social issues in cyberspace.

As facilitators, influencers provide the digital infrastructure that enables the democratization of direct discussions through interactive features. The presence of comment columns, polling features, and interactive visual-based posts are utilized by Generation Z (Gen Z) as an independent platform to express their political views. Gen Z's critical tendencies find a platform here; they can freely provide responses, voice opposition, and collectively verify information against narratives put forward by influencers and fellow users in real time (Yamatomo, et al., 2015).

In addition to static text and visual features, the use of live streaming and interactive audio spaces (such as X Spaces) creates a highly fluid and egalitarian model of political communication. Through these spaces, Gen Z can ask critical questions directly and debate openly without having to navigate bureaucratic barriers, party protocols, or the institutional formalities that typically constrain the conventional political elite. This absence of structural barriers fosters greater confidence among the younger generation to engage in macro-level discourse, as they perceive themselves as equals to other speakers.

Ultimately, the high level of interactivity facilitated by influencers serves as an incubator for the maturation of digital citizenship. These discussion spaces not only train Gen Z's rhetorical skills and critical argumentation, but also familiarize them with a culture of open dissent. The interactive experiences gained daily through these devices are slowly eroding traditional political apathy and replacing it with a dynamic civic consciousness, where expressing opinions and debating state policies feels like a normal, intimate, and meaningful activity.

### 3. Opinion Shapers and Trends

The crisis of trust in formal political figures and traditional institutions has pushed Generation Z (Gen Z) to seek alternative sources of reference that are perceived as more honest and transparent. In this landscape, relatability has become a key factor in determining who young people place their trust in. Gen Z tends to listen more to and adopt the views of digital figures perceived as sharing similar values, concerns, and lifestyles. This sense of emotional closeness breaks down communication barriers, so that preferences expressed by influencers are no longer viewed as rigid political instructions, but rather as advice from a close friend.

Through the social capital of trust and closeness, influencers have a tremendous capacity to direct and shape public opinion en masse. When influencers express a stance or provide an assessment on a national policy issue, it acts as a form of social validation for their followers. Gen Z, psychologically still in the phase of identity discovery and ideological maturation, often internalizes these opinions to strengthen their own political positions. This opinion adoption process occurs organically, packaged through a daily routine of aesthetic, casual, and persuasive content.

The power of influencers as trendsetters goes beyond changing individual opinions; it also creates a multiplier effect in cyberspace. When a political viewpoint is successfully transformed into a digital trend—whether through the use of a hashtag, the adoption of a specific soundbite, or participation in a content challenge—Gen Z will flock to participate to remain relevant within their social group. Political narratives that initially seem local or sectoral can quickly expand exponentially into national trending topics thanks to the mobilization of algorithms and the mass replication of content by the younger generation (Peter & Muth, 2023).

The most concrete impact of influencers' ability to shape public opinion is their ability to catalyze real social movements and digital activism campaigns. Contemporary history has seen numerous solidarity actions, humanitarian fundraisers, and even online petitions against controversial policies sparked by posts from one or two influential influencer accounts. By voicing a clear call to action, influencers are able to transform Gen Z's passive digital sympathy into tangible, solid, and organized collective action on digital platforms.

Ultimately, this phenomenon underscores the decentralization of information power, with influencers now holding significant sway in determining what society, particularly the younger generation, deems important (agenda-setting). Their ability to shape opinions and drive digital political trends demonstrates that Gen Z's political expression is heavily influenced by the pop culture ecosystem they consume daily. The role of influencers as trendsetters has successfully transformed Gen Z's critical energy from mere personal anxieties into a digital political force with a strong bargaining position in overseeing government processes.

#### 4. Driving Participation in Action (Mobilization)

The biggest challenge in digital political communication has been the phenomenon of slacktivism, where public support is limited to clicks on a device screen without any tangible impact in the real world. However, the presence of social media influencers has successfully narrowed the gap between digital activism (online activism) and real movements on the ground (offline mobilization). Beyond simply sparking online conversations, influencers possess digital leadership capabilities capable of transforming visual concerns on timelines into concrete actions that directly impact social and political structures.

One concrete manifestation of this mobilization role is clearly visible in efforts to increase electoral participation among first-time voters. Through creative campaigns and persuasive calls to action, influencers actively encourage Generation Z (Gen Z) to check their voting status, register, and attend polling stations (TPS). By framing the election not as a rigid bureaucratic ritual, but as a cool and crucial moment for the future of young people, influencers successfully mobilized the votes of millions of young people who were previously vulnerable to abstaining from voting.

In addition to formal election spaces, influencers also serve as a driving force for Gen Z's involvement in public discussion forums, sociopolitical seminars, and town hall meetings. Through their organic publicity, influencers are able to attract young people to attend interactive dialogue spaces, both hybrid and in-person. Involvement in these forums provides opportunities for Gen Z to interact directly with policymakers, academics, and fellow activists, thereby deepening their practical understanding of the dynamics of governance (Dekoninck & Schmuck, 2022).

The most significant mobilization impact occurs when influencers voice collective concerns about public policies or legal regulations deemed unfavorable to the people, which then triggers peaceful street demonstrations. Through rapid coordination of information regarding gathering points, security guidelines, and online logistics mobilization, influencers act as network nodes that unite the organic masses of Gen Z. This mobilization ability proves that under the influence of influencers, Gen Z's political expression is no longer passive behind the scenes, but has evolved into a real, solid pressure group that is taken into account in the modern democratic climate.

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#### D. CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis and discussion presented, it can be concluded that social media influencers play a very significant role in changing the landscape of participation and increasing political expression for Generation Z (Gen Z) in the digital space. Influencers have successfully broken down the rigidity of conventional political language by acting as translators of complex issues, packaging public policies through creative visual elements, infographics, and relatable everyday language. By providing interactive discussion spaces, influencers democratize public discourse, allowing Gen Z to express their opinions freely without bureaucratic constraints. As shapers of opinions and trends, they are able to transform local issues into national movements based on digital algorithms. Furthermore, this role goes beyond the screen of devices; it has proven to be a driving force for action participation, mobilizing the organic mass of Gen Z in real ways, both in electoral agendas and policy oversight actions. Finally, influencers have successfully formed digital communities and social solidarity that strengthen social cohesion and provide collective political capital for the younger generation. This phenomenon confirms that influencers have become new, effective agents of political socialization in transforming youth apathy into active, critical digital political expression that has a real impact on the modern democratic climate.

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