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SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCE ON FIRST-TIME VOTERS' PARTICIPATION IN DIGITAL DEMOCRACY

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Abstract:

This study aims to investigate the influence of social media on political participation among first-time voters, focusing on students from the Faculty of Communication at a private university in East Java during the 2024 Presidential Election. Utilizing a quantitative descriptive method, the research involved 143 respondents selected through purposive sampling based on specific criteria. Data was collected via a structured questionnaire and analyzed using a simple linear regression model. The findings revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between social media usage and political participation, expressed through the regression equation $Y = 3.011 + 0.290X$. The R^2 value of 0.097 indicates that social media contributes to 9.7% of the variation in political participation. These results support the stimulus-organism response (SOR) theory, suggesting that social media acts as an effective stimulus that shapes young voters' political attitudes and behaviors. The study emphasizes the strategic role of social media in fostering civic engagement among youth and suggests further research on content types and platform dynamics that drive participation.

Keywords: Social media, political participation, first-time voters, digital communication

INTRODUCTION

The presidential election in Indonesia is a crucial political moment that not only determines the direction of national governance but also serves as a medium for public participation in the democratic process, particularly among the younger generation. In the 2024 General Election, first-time voters are projected to dominate the electorate, comprising around 60% of total voters (Admin Lampung, 2023). Data from the General Election Commission (KPU) reinforces this, indicating that voters aged 17 to 37 years form the largest voting demographic with considerable potential to influence election outcomes (Astreawan, 2022). This condition has driven various stakeholders to focus their communication efforts on this group, particularly through social media platforms, which in recent years have rapidly grown as primary channels for political communication (Manning, 2014).

According to the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII, 2024), internet users in Indonesia have reached 221.5 million people, with a penetration rate of 79.5% of the total population. This trend has led to a significant shift in the pattern of political information consumption. A survey by Kompas Research and Development division showed that 29.4% of respondents regularly accessed political information via social media several times a week, while 11% did so daily (Sakti, 2023). This phenomenon confirms that social media has become the leading medium for political information dissemination in Indonesia, gradually replacing the dominance of conventional media (Sari & Basit, 2020).

Among those most affected by this phenomenon are university students, particularly communication studies at private universities in Surabaya. In addition to being active social media users, these students possess an academic background closely related to political communication



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and digital media literacy (Surabaya Tribun News, 2023). They not only use social media for information but also actively participate in discussions, campaigns, and public opinion formation (Nasrullah, 2015).

Previous studies have demonstrated the significant influence of social media on the political participation of first-time voters. Nurcholis and Rizki Putra (2020) found that social media played a role in shaping the voting behavior of students during the 2019 presidential election. Similar findings were reported by Anggraini et al. (2022), who examined the role of Instagram in increasing political participation among first-time voters in Jakarta. Raudhah (2023) confirmed the significance of social media in encouraging political engagement among students in Banda Aceh, while Tranggana Ulung (2023) emphasized that easy access to political information on social media shapes voter behavior toward political parties.

This study adopts the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) theory, developed by Hovland and adopted in communication studies (Nurcholis & Rizki Putra, 2020; Mulyana, 2017). The theory explains how stimuli in the form of political messages on social media are processed by individuals as organisms, eventually generating responses in the form of behavioral or attitudinal changes. Messages that are engaging, emotionally charged, and relevant tend to elicit quicker responses and greater political involvement (Nurcholis & Rizki Putra, 2020).

Furthermore, the characteristics of social media described by Kotler & Keller (2016), Van Dijck & Poell (2013), and Nasrullah (2016) serve as an important conceptual foundation for this study. Social media functions not only as a distribution channel but also as a social interaction space, political discussion forum, and public opinion builder through user-generated content and interactive features. Elements such as networks, information, archiving, interactivity, social simulation, and unrestricted content dissemination play a crucial role in influencing the political participation of students in digital platforms (Tjandra & Wono, n.d.; Wono et al., 2023).

Thus, this study is highly relevant to fill the research gap in specifically examining the influence of social media on political participation among communication studies students at private universities in Surabaya during the lead-up to the 2024 presidential election. Theoretically, this research contributes to expanding the application of the SOR theory in the context of digital political communication while practically providing insights and recommendations for students, academics, and political communication practitioners in designing effective digital communication strategies for enhancing youth political participation in the digital era.

METHODS

This study employs a quantitative descriptive research design based on a positivist paradigm, systematically, rationally, objectively, and empirically testing the relationship between social media (independent variable) and first-time voters' political participation (dependent variable) (Sugiyono, 2019). The research population comprises 222 students from the Faculty of Communication Science at a private university in Surabaya who participated in the 2024 Presidential Election. The sample was selected using a non-probability purposive sampling technique with specific criteria for first-time voters aged 17-22 years who had not previously participated in an election and were active social media users. The sample size was determined using the Slovin formula at a 5% margin of error, resulting in 143 respondents (Sugiyono, 2017). Data collection was conducted through a closed-ended questionnaire using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) (Sugiyono, 2019). To test data validity and reliability, this study employed validity tests (with a significance value < 0.05) and reliability tests using Cronbach's Alpha, where values above 0.6 indicate reliability (Ghozali, 2018). The data were analyzed using simple linear regression analysis



to measure the influence of social media on political participation, supported by F-tests and T-tests to evaluate simultaneous and partial effects, respectively, with a 5% significance level (Sugiyono, 2019a). The analysis process included calculating the coefficient of determination (R^2) to determine the contribution of the independent variable in explaining the dependent variable's variance (Sugiyono, 2019a).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study investigates the influence of social media on political participation among first-time voters, specifically students of communication studies at private universities in Surabaya, during the 2024 Presidential Election. The use of social media as the independent variable in this study is grounded in data from the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII, 2024), which reported an internet penetration rate of 79.5% among the Indonesian population, dominated by the youth demographic. Manning (2014) likewise emphasized the crucial role of social media as an interactive medium in contemporary political communication.

Two variables were measured in this study: social media (abbreviated as MS), comprising 19 indicators labeled MS2 to MS21, and political participation (abbreviated as PP), consisting of 12 indicators labeled PP1 to PP12. Each indicator was assessed using a 5-point Likert scale, and the responses were analyzed to capture students' perceptions toward political participation influenced by social media exposure.

Descriptive analysis revealed a grand mean of 4.01 for the MS variable and 4.06 for the PP variable, both categorized as "agree" according to Likert's scale interpretation. The highest-rated indicator within MS was MS6 (4.32), signifying that social media effectively helps students understand current political issues. This finding is consistent with Sari & Basit (2020) and Nasrullah (2016), who argued that social media not only serves as an information channel but also as a platform for developing political awareness among youth. In contrast, MS16 (3.53), which relates to students' habits of sharing political content, received the lowest score. This supports Raudhah's (2023) findings, indicating that young voters tend to consume rather than actively disseminate political content.

For the PP variable, the highest indicator was PP1 (4.30), suggesting that direct information from political candidates significantly shapes student voter preferences, in line with Nasrullah's (2016) emphasis on social media as a two-way communication medium in political campaigns. Meanwhile, PP6 (3.95), addressing the relevance of political information to daily life, received the lowest mean score, reflecting Febriantanto's (2019) observation that many young voters perceive politics as somewhat disconnected from their everyday experiences.

Table 1. Summary of Mean Values for MS and PP Variables

Variable	Highest Indicator	Mean	Lowest Indicator	Mean	Grand Mean
Social Media (MS)	MS6	4.32	MS16	3.53	4.01
Political Participation (PP)	PP1	4.30	PP6	3.95	4.06

Source: Data Processed 2025

The validity test results showed that all indicators for both variables were valid, with significant values of 0.00 (<0.05). The reliability test results using Cronbach's Alpha yielded values of 0.942 for MS and 0.943 for PP, both exceeding the minimum threshold of 0.6, thereby confirming strong instrument reliability (Ghozali, 2018).



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Inferential analysis through the F-test produced a significant value of 0.000, indicating that social media has a significant simultaneous effect on political participation (Sugiyono, 2019a). This relationship was further supported by the T-test, which yielded a significant value of 0.000, confirming that social media independently influences students' political participation. The simple linear regression analysis resulted in the following equation: $Y = 3.011 + 0.290X$

This equation implies that for every one-unit increase in social media usage, political participation increases by 0.290 units. The regression's t-value was 3.887 with a significance level of 0.000, further affirming the significance of this relationship (Sugiyono, 2017). Additionally, the model's R Square value of 0.097 indicates that social media accounts for 9.7% of the variance in political participation, while other factors explain the remaining variance.

These findings reaffirm the applicability of the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) theory (Mulyana, 2017) in explaining how digital political messages serve as stimuli, which are cognitively processed by individuals and translated into behavioral responses such as political engagement. This aligns with the arguments presented by Nurcholis and Rizki Putra (2020) and Manning (2014) on the role of media stimuli in shaping political perceptions.

Further, this study's results echo those of Anggraini et al. (2022), who reported that social media—particularly Instagram—plays a considerable role in boosting young voters' political participation. The findings also resonate with Tranggana Ulung (2023), who emphasized that the immediacy and accessibility of political information via social media influence digital political behaviors among youth.

From a practical perspective, the results highlight the strategic importance of digital political communication aimed at young voters. Social media platforms, with their interactive, participatory, and networked nature (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Van Dijck & Poell, 2013; Nasrullah, 2016), serve not only as channels for information dissemination but also as effective tools for political mobilization and public discourse. Electoral candidates and institutions should capitalize on this to enhance voter awareness and democratic participation within this demographic.

In conclusion, this study confirms that social media exerts a positive and significant influence on political participation among first-time voters, especially communication students at private universities in Surabaya. The study underscores the dual role of social media as both an information source and a participatory public space that shapes political engagement in the digital era.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine the influence of social media on the political participation of novice voters, particularly among students from the Faculty of Communication at a private university in East Java, within the context of the 2024 Presidential Election. Based on the results of a simple linear regression analysis, the regression equation was found to be $Y = 3.011 + 0.290X$. This indicates that for every one-unit increase in social media usage, political participation increases by 0.290 points, assuming other variables remain constant. The significance value obtained was 0.000, which is below the threshold of 0.05, indicating a statistically significant effect. Furthermore, the R square value of 0.097 suggests that social media usage accounts for 9.7% of the variance in political participation among novice voters.

The findings demonstrate that social media has a positive and significant influence on the political participation of first-time voters. Social media not only serves as an information source but also provides a space for interaction and discourse, thereby enhancing political awareness, critical thinking, and engagement among young voters.

These results align with the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) theory, where stimuli in the form of social media content are cognitively and affectively processed by individuals, leading to responsive behaviors such as increased political involvement.

Future research is encouraged to explore further dimensions, such as the types of political content that have the greatest impact, the most influential platforms for young voters, and a deeper qualitative exploration of the motivations and lived experiences behind their political engagement.

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