

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The influence of digital competence on generation z's political participation in the city of Jayapura

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Abstract

This study explores the impact of digital competence on political participation among Generation Z in Jayapura City. Using a quantitative approach, the research surveyed 250 Gen Z respondents aged 17–28, selected through purposive sampling. Data collection was conducted via surveys and analyzed using correlation and regression methods. The findings reveal significant effects of three core aspects of digital competence on political participation: digital knowledge ($R^2 = 0.228$, $p < 0.05$), digital ability ($R^2 = 0.658$, $p < 0.05$), and digital behavior ($R^2 = 0.396$, $p < 0.05$). Despite exhibiting high levels of digital competence, Generation Z's political participation remains low. This indicates a noticeable gap between their advanced digital proficiency and their limited active engagement in political activities. The study concludes that while digital competence significantly influences political participation, it does not necessarily translate into increased active involvement among Generation Z in Jayapura City. These findings highlight the challenges in leveraging digital potential to enhance political engagement among young voters and emphasize the need for strategies that bridge this gap.

Keywords

Digital competence, Political participation, Generation Z, Digital media, Jayapura city, Indonesia

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1 | INTRODUCTION

Technological advancements have surged in recent years, profoundly transforming human activities in the digital era. This transformation affects nearly every sector, from politics, economics, and socio-culture to defense, security, and information technology (Moeller et al., 2018). With the digital revolution comes the necessity for individuals to adapt and develop their digital skills. Digital competence—the ability to utilize digital media safely, effectively, and responsibly (Hur & Kwon, 2014)—is now a critical skill for navigating today’s interconnected world. It enables individuals to engage securely and meaningfully in the digital realm, providing the tools needed to address the growing complexities of modern life. This competence is vital not only for personal and professional activities but also for fostering political awareness and democratic engagement in an era where much of civic life occurs online.

In politics, digital media has become indispensable. The digital age has altered how political campaigns are conducted, how public officials interact with citizens, and how individuals participate in governance. Political actors and parties frequently use digital platforms to promote their agendas, reach broader audiences, and enhance their visibility (Hirzalla et al., 2010; Moeller et al., 2018). Digital media facilitates open communication and fosters increased political participation by offering interactive spaces where political entities and the public can engage (C.-J. Lee, 2014). Political participation—defined as the active involvement of individuals or groups in activities like voting and shaping policies (Nah & Yamamoto, 2018)—is significantly influenced by the accessibility of digital tools. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter) are especially effective in bridging gaps between politicians and the electorate, enabling real-time information sharing and fostering dialogue on public concerns (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2010)

The unique characteristics of Generation Z (Gen Z) amplify the importance of digital competence in politics. Gen Z, comprising individuals born between 1997 and 2012, represents a generation that has grown up immersed in advanced information technology (Putra et al., 2024). In 2024, Gen Z solidified its role as a substantial force in Indonesia’s political landscape, constituting 22.85% of registered voters—or 46,800,161 individuals in total (Moeller et al., 2014). The impact of this demographic is particularly evident in Jayapura City, where nearly 25% of the population belongs to Gen Z. As of 2020, 92,827 residents in a population of 398,478 were classified as Gen Z, underscoring their significant potential to shape Papua’s political policies and directions. Despite their size and influence, research suggests that political participation among Gen Z in Jayapura remains low, with many exhibiting apathy toward political activities (Setyanto et al., 2020).

Given this context, it is imperative to examine how digital competence influences political engagement, particularly within a demographic that has grown up alongside rapid technological innovation (Bakker & de Vreese, 2011; Yamamoto et al., 2018). Developing digital skills is essential not only for accessing online political content but also for understanding how to responsibly navigate the digital landscape in ways that support democratic ideals. Engaged citizens must possess the necessary competencies to discern credible information, participate in informed discourse, and use digital tools effectively for civic activities like advocacy and activism (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2010).

This study, therefore, aims to explore the role of digital competence in political participation, focusing on the specific context of Jayapura City. The research adopts a human resource management perspective, investigating three key dimensions of digital competence: skills, knowledge, and behavior. Skills refer to the technical abilities needed to use digital media effectively, such as navigating platforms and creating content. Knowledge encompasses understanding the functions and potential implications of digital media use, including recognizing misinformation and appreciating ethical considerations. Behavior relates to the ways individuals utilize these skills and knowledge to participate in political activities, whether through direct engagement like voting or more passive forms of support, such as sharing political information.

The digital transformation in Jayapura provides a compelling backdrop for this research, offering an opportunity to understand how individuals adapt to rapidly changing technological environments. The findings are

expected to shed light on how Gen Z, in particular, harnesses digital tools to engage in the political process and how their participation—or lack thereof—shapes the broader political landscape. Moreover, the study seeks to address gaps in understanding the interplay between digital competence and political involvement, contributing valuable insights into fostering effective digital engagement for democratic development in digitally emerging regions like Jayapura. By examining these dynamics, the research underscores the growing importance of equipping individuals with the necessary tools to participate meaningfully in an increasingly digitized world. Understanding the impact of digital competence on political activities has the potential to guide policymakers, educators, and stakeholders in crafting strategies that encourage active and informed political participation across generations and regions.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 | Digital Competence

Digital competencies have become a cornerstone of effective engagement in contemporary society, spanning education, governance, and political participation. Defined as the set of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors required to navigate and operate digital environments effectively (Shah, 2016), digital competence goes beyond technical proficiency. It encompasses critical aspects such as data management, ethical use of technology, information literacy, and the ability to communicate and collaborate in digital contexts. These dimensions ensure that individuals can interact responsibly and adapt to evolving technological advancements (Carretero et al., 2017)

Scholars have highlighted the multifaceted nature of digital competence, categorizing it into technical, cognitive, and socio-emotional domains. Technical skills include basic computer operations and the use of digital tools, while cognitive skills focus on critical thinking and problem-solving within digital environments. Socio-emotional skills address online ethics, digital well-being, and effective interpersonal communication in virtual spaces (Brečko & Ferrari, 2016). Collectively, these competencies enable individuals to leverage digital technologies to enhance personal and professional outcomes, contributing to broader societal progress.

In the context of politics, digital competencies are critical for fostering active citizenship and democratic participation. Research by Van Deursen and Helsper (2018) underscores that digital skills impact the depth and quality of political engagement, influencing how citizens access, analyze, and disseminate political information. For instance, high digital literacy enables individuals to identify credible sources, participate in digital campaigns, and engage in online advocacy, whereas low literacy risks reinforcing misinformation and reducing meaningful participation (Ikeda et al., 2013; Y. Kim et al., 2016)

The European Union's Digital Competence Framework (DigComp) serves as a benchmark for understanding the competencies needed to thrive in the digital age. DigComp outlines five core areas: information and data literacy, communication and collaboration, digital content creation, safety, and problem-solving (Kluzer & Rissola, 2020). This framework is increasingly adopted by educators and policymakers to design interventions that improve citizens' digital capacities, including initiatives targeting young demographics such as Generation Z. In the Indonesian context, efforts to enhance digital competence are particularly significant given the country's rapidly expanding digital infrastructure. The Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture emphasizes the integration of digital literacy into educational curricula to prepare individuals for the demands of the digital era (S. H. Lee, 2017; Mohamad et al., 2018). Moreover, studies indicate that digital skills are essential for addressing the challenges of misinformation, which poses threats to democratic processes (Lim, 2022)

Despite these advancements, digital competence gaps persist across regions and demographics, affecting the inclusivity of digital transformation initiatives. In less urbanized areas like Jayapura, limited access to technology and digital education exacerbates these challenges, particularly among Generation Z. Addressing these disparities requires targeted strategies that bridge the digital divide and empower individuals to participate actively in political processes (Östman, 2013)

Through examining digital competencies, this study contributes to understanding their role in shaping political engagement, particularly in emerging urban settings. By analyzing dimensions such as skills, knowledge, and behavior, the research aims to uncover the mechanisms through which digital competencies influence political participation, ultimately supporting the creation of more inclusive and informed democratic practices.

2.2 | Participation Political

Political participation is a fundamental pillar of democratic systems, reflecting citizens' active engagement in shaping governance and policy-making processes. It encompasses a wide range of activities, including voting, attending political rallies, joining interest groups, engaging in policy discussions, and contributing to political campaigns (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2010; Hur & Kwon, 2014; Theocharis & Lowe, 2016). In contemporary society, political participation also involves digital activities such as signing online petitions, engaging in political discussions on social media, and using digital tools for advocacy (Boulianne, 2020). These evolving forms of engagement signify a shift toward more accessible and interactive political environments facilitated by technological advancements.

Scholars often categorize political participation into conventional and unconventional types. Conventional participation includes institutionalized activities such as voting and contacting representatives, while unconventional participation involves protests, boycotts, and other forms of civil disobedience (Dalton, 2017). Digital media has blurred the lines between these categories, as platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter) provide spaces for both formal political actions and grassroots movements, enabling a more hybridized form of engagement (Theocharis & Van Deth, 2018).

Political participation is closely tied to political efficacy, defined as individuals' beliefs about their capacity to influence political processes. High levels of political efficacy often result in greater involvement in political activities (Shahzad & Omar, 2021). The digital era has amplified opportunities for fostering political efficacy by providing accessible platforms where citizens can learn about issues, express opinions, and connect with like-minded communities (Gibson & Cantijoch, 2013). However, these advantages are not distributed evenly. Digital participation is often influenced by factors such as digital literacy, socio-economic status, and access to technology, creating disparities in engagement across different population groups (van Laar et al., 2019).

Generation Z, in particular, exhibits unique patterns of political participation. As a demographic raised in the digital era, Gen Z engages heavily with political content online, using social media platforms to express opinions, share information, and mobilize collective actions (A. Kim et al., 2020). However, while this generation displays a strong inclination toward advocacy and activism, traditional forms of participation, such as voting, often see lower levels of engagement due to political apathy and disillusionment (Manning et al., 2023). These tendencies underscore the importance of understanding the factors that motivate or hinder political participation within this cohort.

In the Indonesian context, political participation is undergoing transformation in response to digitalization. Social media platforms have become critical for political mobilization, particularly among younger demographics. Studies indicate that platforms like Instagram and WhatsApp are widely used for political campaigns, providing avenues for candidates to engage voters and disseminate campaign messages (Saud et al., 2020). Despite this increased digital activity, challenges such as low political literacy and the spread of misinformation persist, complicating efforts to foster meaningful participation (S. H. Lee, 2017)

Political participation in regions like Jayapura City is particularly significant given its unique socio-political dynamics. While the city has a growing young population, including a substantial proportion of Generation Z, participation rates remain low. This issue is attributed to limited political awareness, low levels of civic education, and a general sense of political apathy (Setyanto et al., 2020). Addressing these challenges requires targeted

interventions that not only build political literacy but also enhance digital skills, enabling young citizens to participate effectively in political processes.

2.3 | Generation Z

Generation Z (Gen Z), comprising individuals born between 1997 and 2012, represents a cohort deeply intertwined with the evolution of digital technology. This generation is often characterized by its familiarity with digital tools and platforms, as well as its ability to adapt quickly to technological advancements (Dimock, 2019). Unlike previous generations, Gen Z has grown up in an era where access to the internet and digital devices is ubiquitous, shaping their behavior, communication patterns, and approach to problem-solving (Francis & Hoefel, 2018).

Research indicates that Gen Z displays unique characteristics in terms of their values and engagement with society. Members of this generation are socially conscious, value inclusivity, and are often active participants in social and political issues (Seemiller & Grace, 2017). Their reliance on social media platforms, such as Instagram, TikTok, and X, allows them to connect with diverse audiences, amplify causes, and mobilize for advocacy. This digital engagement aligns with their preference for visual and interactive content, which has transformed how they consume information and engage with the world around them (Mohamad et al., 2018).

In the context of political participation, Gen Z exhibits a dual tendency. On one hand, they are highly informed about global and local issues, often utilizing digital platforms to access political information and express their opinions (Rice & Moffett, 2021). On the other hand, studies have noted a degree of apathy or skepticism towards traditional political structures, as Gen Z prioritizes issues-based activism over formal political engagement (Twenge, 2017). This dynamic underscores the importance of examining the factors that influence their participation in political processes, including their digital competence and access to technology.

Furthermore, Gen Z's integration into the workforce and their emerging role as a significant voting bloc position them as key drivers of social and political change. Their digital nativity not only enhances their ability to navigate complex technological environments but also enables them to advocate for transparency, accountability, and innovation in governance (Twenge, 2017). However, disparities in digital access and competence, particularly in regions with limited infrastructure, may hinder their full potential for civic engagement (Setyawati et al., 2022).

3 | METHODS

This study adopted a quantitative research approach, employing a survey method to assess and analyze the relationship between Generation Z's digital competence and their political participation in Jayapura City. The research design incorporated both descriptive and explanatory elements. The descriptive component aimed to provide an overview of the digital competence and political participation levels among Generation Z in the city, while the explanatory component sought to explore the influence of digital competence on political participation.

The study population consisted of Generation Z individuals, defined as those born between 1997 and 2012, residing in Jayapura City. A purposive sampling technique was applied to select participants aged 17 to 28 years, qualifying them as eligible voters in the electoral process. Additional inclusion criteria required participants to have lived in Jayapura City for a minimum of one year and to have access to digital devices, such as smartphones, computers, or tablets. A total of 250 respondents meeting these criteria were included in the sample, ensuring a representative and contextually relevant dataset.

Data analysis was conducted using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive analysis was employed to illustrate the distribution of digital competence and political participation among the respondents. To investigate the relationship and potential influence of digital competence on political participation, correlation and regression analyses were utilized. These methods provided a robust framework for examining the interplay between the variables under study.

4 | RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 | The Influence of Digital Knowledge on Political Participation

In terms of digital knowledge, Generation Z in Jayapura City demonstrates a relatively good understanding of digital technology. They are familiar with various digital tools and platforms, and their ability to distinguish between accurate and false information is commendable. However, this adequate level of digital knowledge does not directly translate into active political participation. The findings indicate that while Generation Z possesses the knowledge needed to engage in the digital sphere, they often remain passive observers rather than active participants in political activities. This disconnect suggests that digital knowledge alone is not enough to drive meaningful engagement in political processes.

The data from this study were analyzed using statistical methods. The results show that the digital knowledge variable has an R-square value of 0.228 with a significance level of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$). These findings indicate a significant influence of digital knowledge on political participation. Generation Z tends to utilize digital technology in their daily lives to support various activities (Setyawati et al., 2022). Adequate digital knowledge is a crucial factor in using digital technology effectively in today's era. In the context of political participation, Generation Z can leverage digital technology, such as social media and the internet, to gain insights into governmental and political issues (Seemiller & Grace, 2017). However, Generation Z needs to have strong digital knowledge, including critical thinking skills and digital safety awareness, to utilize technology optimally and responsibly (Hidayat et al., 2023).

This study reveals that Generation Z in Jayapura City possesses a fair level of knowledge in using digital media, including distinguishing between accurate and inaccurate information (59.4%). Despite their adequate digital knowledge, Generation Z in Jayapura City is not yet very active in participating in political activities. Only 39% of respondents reported being slightly influenced, and 31.2% were moderately influenced by political information on digital media. This aligns with Rice and Moffett (2021) findings, which indicate that while digital knowledge can encourage political discussions both online and offline, Generation Z's role often remains limited to being readers and observers of information.

Digital knowledge can serve as a tool to accelerate the political participation of Generation Z (Chen et al., 2016). The theory of digital citizenship supports this by stating that information technology can expand political access and foster political discussions involving young people (Holt et al., 2013). This study also shows that 34.8% of Generation Z in Jayapura City find it easy to understand local political issues by leveraging their digital knowledge. Overall, the findings of this study indicate that while Generation Z in Jayapura City has the knowledge to use digital media for political activities, they primarily use it for monitoring and seeking information and have yet to actively engage in political activities (Qibtiyah & Beriansyah, 2019).

4.2 | Digital Skills and Political Participation

Regarding digital skills, the study highlights the high level of activity among Generation Z in utilizing digital devices. They actively use digital platforms for various purposes, including communication, education, and entertainment. However, their use of digital technology does not correlate with a corresponding increase in seeking political information. While they may spend considerable time online, the focus of their activity is often unrelated to political engagement. For instance, social media platforms, which could serve as tools for political discourse and awareness, are instead frequently used for personal and recreational purposes. This suggests that while digital skills are essential, they must be coupled with an intentional effort to connect these skills to political participation.

The data from this study were tested using statistical methods, revealing that for the digital skills variable, the R-square value is 0.658 with a significance value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$). These results indicate a strong influence of digital skills on political participation. Digital skills refer to an individual's ability to understand, use, and navigate technological devices, including hardware, software, and digital operating systems. There are specific indicators or

parameters to measure an individual's digital skills, such as basic knowledge of the internet, understanding of search engines and their utilization, knowledge of software for communication and social media, as well as familiarity with digital transactions. The findings show that Generation Z uses hardware to access the internet for more than 5 hours daily, with 44.8% of respondents falling into this category. The devices used include PCs/laptops, smartphones, or both. Gen Z is known as a digital-native generation with high levels of technological literacy, quick access to information, and a tendency to consume the latest issues in society (Chung et al., 2022).

Despite spending over 5 hours a day using digital technology, this has not translated into a desire to actively participate in politics. The research indicates that 34% of Gen Z respondents seek political information very rarely, sometimes only once a month. The low frequency of political information-seeking is attributed to a lack of understanding of political conditions and unreliable information, which leads to low levels of active political participation. One indicator of digital skills is the utilization of software, including social media, for political participation. Social media was also used as an instrument in this study. The findings reveal that 35.2% of Gen Z respondents never use social media to actively engage in political activities. This is concerning, as social media plays a crucial role in building public awareness and encouraging political participation (Saud et al., 2020).

Based on the discussed findings, it can be concluded that Generation Z in Jayapura City possesses good digital skills and spends more than 5 hours a day using various digital media such as PCs/laptops, smartphones, or both. However, these skills have not been utilized for active participation in political activities. This may be due to a lack of understanding of political conditions and the prevalence of unreliable information.

4.3 | Digital Behavior and Political Participation

In terms of digital behavior, the research reveals that, despite being deeply integrated into the digital world, Generation Z tends to remain passive in political activities. Their interaction with political content is often limited to passive consumption rather than active engagement. This passivity is evident in their limited participation in online political discussions, minimal efforts to seek out political information, and a general reluctance to use digital platforms for political advocacy or activism. These findings align with previous studies that suggest a gap between the potential of digital natives to engage in politics and their actual involvement.

The data from this study were analyzed using statistical methods, revealing that for the digital behaviour variable, the R-square value is 0.396 with a significance value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$). These results indicate a significant influence of digital behaviour on political participation. Generation Z is a generation that cannot be separated from the development of the internet, which has become increasingly established. This generation engages in greater digital or online activities, sometimes giving the impression of a disconnect from the real world. The character of this generation is shaped by the digital world, supported by digital platforms that facilitate self-expression, foster connections among users, and provide access to locate Gen Z individuals (Riniolo & Ortensi, 2021).

The findings of this study show that Gen Z tends to avoid involvement in political activities. This is evident from the limited political information-seeking behavior of Gen Z respondents on digital platforms. The percentage of Gen Z who never seek political information is 30%. However, there are also Gen Z individuals who occasionally or rarely seek political information, accounting for 24%.

Other instruments also reveal that the majority of Gen Z in Jayapura City are not actively involved in political activities. This aligns with Setyanto et al. (2020) statement that Gen Z in Jayapura City tends to be passive in political activities due to inadequate political socialization and the suboptimal role of mass media in providing understanding and information to Gen Z and the general public.

5 | LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Although digital competence significantly influences political participation, there remains a clear gap between Generation Z's digital potential and their active political engagement. To address this issue, a more strategic approach is needed to maximize the utilization of digital competence in fostering active political participation. Governments and political institutions need to develop political education and outreach programs that are more engaging and tailored to the characteristics of Generation Z. These programs should capitalize on the digital nature of this generation by leveraging social media and other digital platforms to deliver interactive and educational political content. For instance, creating visually appealing and easy-to-digest infographics, videos, and interactive posts could help capture their attention and encourage engagement.

Furthermore, educational institutions and organizations should collaborate to enhance digital literacy programs that emphasize the importance of political awareness and participation. These programs should aim to build critical thinking skills, foster discussions about political issues, and encourage active participation in democratic processes. By addressing the barriers that prevent Generation Z from fully utilizing their digital competence for political purposes, these initiatives could help bridge the gap between their potential and actual involvement.

Future researchers are encouraged to expand the scope and depth of this study by incorporating additional variables that may influence political participation. Factors such as socioeconomic status, cultural influences, and access to reliable political information could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the issue. Additionally, conducting similar studies in other regions could offer comparative insights and highlight regional differences in the relationship between digital competence and political participation.

Moreover, employing a mixed-method approach that combines quantitative and qualitative techniques could yield richer and more nuanced results. For example, focus group discussions or in-depth interviews could uncover the underlying motivations and barriers faced by Generation Z in engaging with politics. By exploring these dimensions, future research could contribute valuable insights into designing more effective strategies to promote active political participation among digital natives.

6 | CONCLUSION

This study highlights the intricate relationship between digital competence and political participation among Generation Z in Jayapura City. Despite possessing substantial digital knowledge and skills, this demographic predominantly demonstrates passive engagement with political content. While Generation Z excels in utilizing digital tools for daily activities and social interactions, these competencies are not fully harnessed for political participation, reflecting a gap between their digital potential and active involvement in democratic processes.

The findings emphasize the need for targeted interventions to bridge this gap. Enhanced political education, tailored to the digital preferences of Generation Z, could foster critical thinking, improve digital literacy, and promote active engagement with political issues. Additionally, leveraging social media and other digital platforms to deliver compelling and accessible political content could motivate this demographic to move beyond passive observation to active participation. Addressing these challenges is essential for empowering Generation Z to fulfill their potential as informed and engaged citizens, capable of contributing meaningfully to the democratic development of their region.

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Data Availability Statement

The data generated and analyzed of the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions

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