

Insta-Engaged Youth: Exploring GenZ's Political Engagement on Instagram during the 2024 Indonesian Presidential Election

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

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This study examines how Generation Z (GenZ) became politically engaged on Instagram, with the main focus on how this platform influenced their political awareness, activism, perceptions, and opinions, especially during the 2024 Indonesian Presidential Election. GenZ, otherwise called as postmillennials, or Zoomers, is a generational label for those who were born after 1995. GenZ, alongside Millennials, became the largest voter groups during the 2024 Indonesian Presidential Election, which makes 56,45% from the total voter population. This research attempts to examine social media impacts on political engagement among GenZ that are currently studying in universities, and following Prabowo Subianto's official Instagram account, to see how he engaged with GenZ and won the election, where collected data thus be scrutinized using qualitative approach that combined Media Impact Theory and Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT). Data collected for this study also include semi-structured interviews to the participants. There are three findings of the research, first, the candidates who used Instagram during the presidential elections gained massive supports from youth, thanks to their appealing contents which accommodate said demographic's taste, second, Indonesian GenZ are much more likely to give like, comments, or even share a post from the candidates where they also shared their own point of views, especially when the candidates were asking about their opinions on specific issues, and lastly, GenZ, who currently studying in universities, love to take actions by sharing or reposting political issues from third party, usually from politicians, professionals, or reputable media.

INTRODUCTION

Generation Z (GenZ), or also known as *Zoomers* or *postmillenials*, is a generational label created for those who were born around 1995 – 2012 (Katz et al., 2021; Twenge, 2023). Born and raised with technologies during tumultuous period, GenZ in Indonesia became the largest voter group during the 2024 Presidential Election, which made 56,45% from the total voter population (Ramadhan, 2023). Contrary to popular belief that GenZ doesn't care about politics, a report by IDN Times Institute on 2022, Indonesia GenZ Report 2022, found that 71% respondents were ready to participate in the General Election, and around 53% respondents stated that they seek political news or information through digital media and television (Utomo et al., 2022). Known for their love and habit in engaging themselves in information-seeking as digital native, this tech-savvy generation has the potential to shape Indonesia's political landscape in digital era. And because of that, each and every participants of the 2024 Indonesian Presidential Election: Anies Baswedan – Muhaimin Iskandar, Prabowo Subianto – Gibran Rakabumingraka, and Ganjar Pranowo – Mahfud MD, tried to win these younger generations' vote by creating contents in their social media that are appealing to them. It's because new media acts as a positive actor that determined political participations in Indonesia, where social media helps youth in shaping their political opinion, sense of belonging in society, and practicing their political rights (Mashud et al., 2023).

In Indonesia, the use of Social Media as a campaign tool has been practised since Indonesian Presidential Election 2014, where candidates from previous presidential election, Joko Widodo (Jokowi) and Prabowo Subianto, both utilized a series of social media campaigns throughout the election period. The election campaign itself were designed specifically to cater youth, who made almost 50% of the electorate in presidential elections (Nowak, 2021). Social media are being chosen because of their unique ability to accommodate youth's preferences. Political candidates and their campaign teams utilizes this and make appealing contents in their social media accounts. This strong social media presence and the desire to interact directly on the platforms tend to draw attentions from younger voters (Abid & Harrigan, 2020).

Therefore, the research attempts to investigate How did Generation Z (GenZ) became politically engaged on Prabowo Subianto's official Instagram account (@prabowo), and how said platform influenced their political awareness, activism, perceptions, and opinions during the 2024 Indonesian Presidential Election. Prabowo Subianto's official Instagram account, @prabowo, is being chosen in this study due to various reasons: First, it's because of his role as the Ministry of Defense, Republic Indonesia, where he shared his recent work-related activities to his followers. Second, he has been participating in the previous General Elections, making the latest as his third times, where he emerged as the victor. Third, his massive fanbase/supporter, especially youth,

because of his appealing campaign strategies (Kuipers et al., 2024; Nadeak & Nabila, 2024), and lastly, the account is being studied in this research because it happened just recently. For this scenario, a qualitative methodology using semi-structured interviews was conducted to the research participants – Gen Z college students who live in Surakarta, Central Java, Indonesia. The city is being chosen because of its rich historical roots in Indonesian political landscape. Surakarta, alongside Mangkunegaran, Yogyakarta, and Pakualaman was once a sultanate named Mataram Islam. And Keraton Surakarta became the first ever Indonesian keraton (kingdom) which acknowledge Republic of Indonesia's independence and joined the budding country. Surakarta's preserved Javanese culture, its strategic geographical location, and the Dutch's colonial ethical policy to educate the nobility made Surakarta to be a vocal point in Indonesia's early political movement, especially during Masa Kebangkitan Nasional. Present-day Surakarta also played an important part in it, since it still become the spotlight of Indonesia's politics. As for the instagram posts from Prabowo Subianto's official account (@prabowo), posts with highest engagements from likes and/or comments during the presidential election campaign (November 28th 2023 – February 10th 2024) will be selected as samples. This research, focusing on political engagement on @prabowo's instagram account posed this research question: How did Generation Z (GenZ) became politically engaged on Prabowo Subianto's official Instagram account (@prabowo), and how said platform influenced their political awareness, activism, perceptions, and opinions during the 2024 Indonesian Presidential Election?

This study is important for a number of reasons: First, it adds new insights on the role of social media in shaping political involvement, especially for the digitally-savvy Gen Z. Secondly, the findings of this study helped in shaping effective media literacy activities and digital citizenship activities that helps Gen Z to be critical in navigating political scene and make decisions. And finally, this research can help politicians, policy makers, and campaign strategist to understand patterns and preferences of this young voters' demographic.

LITERATURE REVIEW

GenZ, Social Media, and Political Engagement

Youth who were born around 1995 – 2012 are classified as Generation Z (GenZ). Contrary to Pew Research Center's statement which stated that said generation is referred to those who were born *after* 1996, the year 1995 is much more suitable for the starting period, because of major events and the rapid technological developments during the dawn of 20th century (Twenge, 2023).

Growing up with technology and its rapid developments, GenZ became the first generation that have access to wider digital communication technologies, ranging from mobile phone,

computer games, and Wi-Fi (Bassiouni & Hackley, 2014). This generations are digital natives, where they use said technologies in their everyday life, especially to collect informations. Contrary to popular belief sixteen years ago about the fear on how younger generations will be lacking in civic engagements, researchers found that many young people these days were actively organizing things online, acting outside of traditional institutions (Davis, 2023).

Digital media act as facilitator agent in strengthening democracy and also becoming a new arena for civics' political participation, in which younger generations became attracted to learn from political dialogue (Saud & Margono, 2021). The high usage of social media accounts by youth in Indonesia enforces and supports them to participate in the virtual democracy (Lim, 2017). It's because GenZ use social media as a channel to gather information and increase political literacy, especially during election campaigns.

And with this basis, Prabowo Subianto and his campaign strategist teams changed his personal branding. Prabowo, a former general and current Minister of Defense of Republic Indonesia, shifted his branding into a fatherly and gentle figure, using the word *gemoy* (endearing) as his campaign's slogan (Fitri et al., 2023).

According to CSIS Commentaries "Strategi Perolehan Suara Lintas Generasi Prabowo – Gibran pada Pemilihan Umum 2024" by Dwiastuti & Ratnaningrum (2024), Prabowo gained 63,22% votes from GenZ and 54,36% votes from Millenials during the February 14th Indonesian Presidential Election. His popularity among youth voters is a product from three campaign strategies: first, by using unique audio visual, by implementing sky blue color to his campaigns, the hit application of AI for his campaign banners, trending TikTok song "Oke Gas Prabowo Gibran Paling Pas", and making collaborations with influencers and celebrities to capture youth's attentions while they scroll through social media, especially the one which mainly to share audio visual contents, like Instagram and TikTok. The report also found out that both GenZ and Millenials are future-oriented generations, where political actors' history and track records do not become their main focus, since they are more attracted to their innovative leadership visions to solve current and future problems.

Media Impact Theory: Framing Theory

The first theory used in this research is framing theory, the latest form of discourse analysis (Sobur, 2006). Rooted from Sociology and Psychology, this theory has constructive approach, where reality that are being presented is not scientifically created, and not something that is being gifted by God, but rather, as something that is made and constructed (Eriyanto, 2012). The framing model that will be used is the Entman model, where framing, being involved by selection and salience, selected aspects from perceived reality to make them much more salient in order to

communicate texts, in certain way, to promote problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation from the given media text (Entman, 1993).

The Framing theory and model used in this research attempts to investigate on how @prabowo framed current political issue(s) and how the research participants resonated with said issue. The frame itself is not only limited on political issue, but also how Prabowo represented himself in his Instagram account to his electorates.

Social Cognitive Theory

Developed by American Psychologist Albert Bandura in 20th century, this theory imply how human behavior is extensively motivated and regulated by ongoing exercise of self-influence, where major self-regulative mechanism operates through three principal subfunctions (Bandura, 1991). Bandura stated that there are several aspects that affected learning process, namely cognitive, behavioral, and environmental factors, which emphasized that learning process occurred when someone observes other people's behavior. And this learning process is governed by four aspects: *attention* (a condition where people – or his followers/audiences observe and collect informations about the election in his instagram account), *retention* (a process where said audiences do the cognitive part in the form of rules and conceptions), *reproduction* (the process of copying the behavior that has been observed before), and *motivation* (to drive the followers as learner to give attention, retention, and practice) (Bandura, 1986).

This theory thus used to see how Gen Z uses Instagram to collect information and learn from the audio-visual platform. This learning process created engagements between Gen Z as voters and @prabowo as the presidential candidate.

METHOD

This study used explorative qualitative approach, which is used to explore and understand the meaning of individuals or groups in responding to social or human problems. Creswell outlined that it emphasized one's understanding of a certain phenomenon through research participants' personal experiences and interpretations (Malagon-Maldonado, 2014). The method used in this study is phenomenology, which aimed to understand a person or a group of people's subjective experience against a certain phenomenon. Research participants of this study are GenZ college students who are currently studying in universities and actively used Instagram and followed @prabowo in their instagram. As for the interview process, it was conducted in semi-structured interviews, where researchers can inquire the participants new questions as a mean to gather in-depth informations.

The primary data of this research are @prabowo's post during the campaigns period with highest engagements (through likes or comments), and the secondary data of this research are previous researches or studies, articles on news media, books, and websites.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Knowing the younger demographics really well, @prabowo and his campaign strategist team used an approach where he depicts himself as a humanist, nationalist, hardworking, commanding yet friendly father figure and leader, albeit his status as the former General of the Kopassus and Minister of Defense of Republic Indonesia.











He also presents his contents with easy-to-understand language. Cute and hip campaigns like *Joget Gemoy* and TikTok's trending music, "Oke Gas", added the fun and festive atmosphere to the democratic party. His campaigns went viral on audio visual oriented platforms like TikTok and Instagram, which piqued these younger voters' interest and curiosity. This campaigns then lead the curious GenZ to learn more about him and following him in his Instagram or other socials, which leads to his massive success in winning the Presidential Election.

GenZ who are not only adapt at using technology but also love to engage themselves in things that are considered hip and fun, perceived that the last Presidential Election was a fun experience, the literal democratic party, where they took part and gave their votes for the future elected President and Vice President.

By being presented with Instagram contents that are catering their preferences, these younger voters demographic thus engaged themselves, either passively (by liking the posts) or actively, whether by giving comments or took part in discussions or talks in the comment sections, sharing the post and adding their own personal opinion, or just share just for the fun and festivity of the democratic party's atmosphere.

With his dominant sky-blue campaign color, massive supporters from all over Indonesia, his active program in aiding Palestine's humanitarian crisis by sending KRI dr. Radjiman Wedyodiningrat, and how he dances together with his supporters, showed how he is a leader who is not only caring, dependable, active, and close with his people, but also a fun and hardworking leader. Being formerly known as a military man, present-election Prabowo appears to be more gentle, fatherly, loving, and kind. This is being emphasized on how he adores his cat, Bobby, his frequent visits to grassroot communities and aid in water crises, and how he garnered supportys from previous Indonesian president, especially Jokowi (which also emphasized on his checkered-patterned sky blue campaign shirt). Prabowo surely win GenZ's hearts, a generation who are also known for their strong sense of justice, by showing his commitment, care, and hardwork in aiding the people of Palestine as the Minister of Defense. The campaign that was being presented in a fun, heartwarming, and youthful tone engaged the youth, especially GenZ, in following and learning more about him, and also contribute in making posts in their own social media accounts, either by reposting news from reputable media, or simply by making posts using the AI cartoon character or making instagram/TikTok dance or post using Oke Gas music provided by the campaign startegist team.

**Table 1. @prabowo's most liked posts during campaign election period
(Prabowo Subianto, 2023 - 2024)**

 A photograph of Prabowo Subianto, his wife Irena, and their young child. They are standing in a well-lit, ornate interior space, possibly a museum or a formal hall. The text "AULA BHINNEKA TUNGGAL IKA" is visible on the wall behind them.	 A photograph of Prabowo Subianto sitting in a chair, looking towards the camera. He is wearing a blue shirt.
 A close-up photograph of Prabowo Subianto pointing his right index finger towards the viewer. He is wearing a blue shirt. Above him is a blue banner with the text "BERSAMA INDONESIA MAJU" and a red and white logo.	 A photograph of Prabowo Subianto walking away from the camera down a narrow, outdoor alleyway. He is wearing a light-colored shirt and a blue cap.
 A formal portrait of two men standing side-by-side. On the left is Prabowo Subianto wearing a black cap and a dark suit with a red tie. On the right is Ganjar Pranowo wearing a dark suit with a red tie.	 A photograph of Prabowo Subianto sitting at a table in a restaurant or cafe. He is wearing a light-colored shirt. There are other people and tables visible in the background.
 A photograph of a white Indonesian Navy ship, likely a hospital ship, with the number "992" on its side. The ship has red crosses on its hull and is sailing on the water.	 A photograph of Prabowo Subianto and his wife Irena sitting on a stage. They are both wearing red and white patterned traditional Indonesian clothing. They appear to be at a formal event or ceremony.
 A formal portrait of Prabowo Subianto wearing a light blue button-down shirt.	 A photograph of Prabowo Subianto and Ganjar Pranowo standing together on a stage. They are both wearing light blue shirts and dark trousers. They appear to be at a public event or campaign stop.

CONCLUSION

GenZ, a digital native generation, born and raised with the developments of digital technologies in the age of information, is well known for their information-seeking habit in Internet and their up-to-date insights on current events. The Indonesian democratic party which also being held during Valentine's day became a festive occasion for them, thanks to the youth-appealing campaigns designed by each candidates.

The euphoria of a fun, festive, and peaceful democratic party can be used as an example for the upcoming presidential and regional elections in the future. And elected officials too, are expected to fulfil their promises and carry out their mandates for Indonesia's better future.

The peaceful democratic campaigns and its appeal from the Presidential Election thus can also be implemented by fellow politicians in the upcoming Regional Elections. By making a positive personal branding, giving good examples for the youth as a leader with integrity, and gathering their aspirations by interacting through social media, the positive, fun, peaceful and entertaining local democratic parties can be achieved.

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