



Nurturing Political Engagement: Political Communication Strategies for Generation Z in the Lead-up to the 2024 Election in West Java

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Abstract

President Joko Widodo stated that in 2045, Generation Z (gen-Z) will change the face of Indonesian politics. The demographics of Generation Z in significant numbers will influence the direction of Indonesian politics due to their ability to control election votes. Gen-Z, which has grown up with the development of technology and is vulnerable to the impact of misinformation, disinformation, and misinformation, must be strengthened through political education. For this goal, parties and KPU need to devise new strategies for younger generations. Data was collected from political party leaders and KPU commissioners in West Java through questionnaires and in-depth interviews. The results show that Gen-Z West Java is an active social media user, the time spent every day is on average above four hours (46.2%), with the choice of the top four platforms, WhatsApp (94.2%), Instagram (89.7%), Youtube (69.9%), Tiktok (66.7%) and Facebook (44.8%). Gen-Z prefers research, podcasts, memes, and political humor for political communication. However, regional KPU staff and political parties struggle to meet their needs for voter education media. Approximately 80% of Gen-Z in West Java plan to vote in the 2024 elections. KPU and political parties need skilled Content Creators to engage Gen-Z and encourage their participation in elections.

Keywords: gen-z, political communication, strategy, election 2024.

Paper type: Research paper

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INTRODUCTION

Data from the Central Statistics Agency (Badan Pusat Statistik [BPS]) (Statistics Indonesia, 2021) shows that the population of West Java reached 48.27 million people in the 2020 population census. Of this number, the Gen Z and

millennial groups dominate. BPS said that the proportion of Gen Z in West Java reached 26.86% of the total population. While millennials reach 26.21%. Borrowing a classification from William H. Frey (2020), BPS said that Gen Z is children born between 1997-2012. At the same time, millennials were born in 1981-1996. Below the two generations is Gen X, with the proportion of the population reaching 21.07%. This group was born in 1965-1980. Then followed by post-gen Z, which reached 12.87%. This gang was born from 2013 to the present. The smallest groups are baby boomers and pre-boomers, with 11.6% and 1.39%, respectively. Baby boomers are people born between 1946 and 1964, while pre-boomers were born before 1945. (Santika, 2022)

This demographic backdrop aligns with President Joko Widodo's proclamation of Generation Z's transformative impact on Indonesian politics. As has been proven by (Arafat et al., 2020), the political participation of the millennial generation on social networks shows that most Twitter users who actively talk about the politics of the 2019 Presidential and Vice Presidential Elections are women with the millennial age category or aged 25-39 years. Likewise, generation Z has now become the people who control the votes in the upcoming parliamentary elections and the intelligent people who see and evaluate Indonesian politics (Saputro et al., 2023)

According to Fisher (2020), demographically, politically, economically, socially, and technologically, the current generations are more different from each other than previous generations. This generation grew up in the rapid development of digital technology, and it is the generation that will be productive until the next decade. (Susanti & Natalia, 2018) The transition to a new level of civilizational development not only contributes to the transformation of the economic, political, and social spheres under the influence of digital technology but also plays an essential role in the formation of Generation Z (Bresler et al., 2020)

Consequently, the utilization of Generation Z's potential for fostering a better future for Indonesia mandates the proactive establishment of a communication and voter education model. This model should be attuned to the distinctive attributes of Generation Z. Constitutionally, beyond formal political entities such as political parties vested with the primary responsibility of political

education, the KPU, as the orchestrator of elections, assumes the pivotal role of nurturing political awareness among voters. In the context of general elections, active and astute participation of Generation Z is essential. (Fauzi et al., 2019)

From the previous literature, the aspects explored from Generation Z's potential concerning politics tend to be gender issues (such as (Kosar et al., 2023); (Tun, 2023); (Deckman & McDonald, 2023); (Saltis et al., 2023), exploring Generation Z's preference for politician personalization (Parmelee et al., 2023), Generation Z's political tolerance (McBeth, 2022) and education about political polarization (McBeth et al., 2021). Few focus on effective communication for Generation Z through exploring their political information preferences, which will be useful for strategic efforts for political parties and election organizers to improve their political education and participation.

There are relevant empirical studies related to Generation Z's political participation through the efforts of political party strategies (see (Saputro et al., 2023). However, the study does not touch the perspective of Generation Z directly. On the other hand, some studies touch on the perspective of Generation Z, but they are more directed at revealing the driving factors of boycott behavior (Seyfi et al., 2023). This study aims to fill this gap by presenting several variations of research methods to obtain comprehensive research results, both from the perspective of Generation Z, political parties, election organizers, and election activists. The result of this research is to encourage the participation of Generation Z through government communication strategies in the form of political education.

A cornerstone of the electoral process is education and training, wherein the KPU imparts training and citizenship-oriented electoral instruction to voters. This phase is imperative, facilitating voters' comprehensive understanding of the rationale and objectives of their voting choices. The success of the concurrent general and regional elections in 2024 is intrinsically tied to the efficacy of voter education, influencing participation levels.

However, the research uncovers a disparity between West Java's considerable potential for Generation Z voters and the KPU's capacity to furnish an education model that adequately serves Generation Z's requirements. Observations and interviews with KPU representatives in West Java elucidate that despite recognition of this incongruity, substantial strides toward voter education for the 2024 elections are yet to be taken.

An informant in this research affirms that socialization and voter education activities for the 2024 elections are centralized within the jurisdiction of the KPU, encompassing budget allocation and dissemination materials. Consequently, the Regional KPU awaits directives from the central body.

Given this, the researcher posits that the pertinent issue of budgetary constraints and the intermission for central directives warrants comprehensive examination. This pertinence derives from its nexus with the KPU's dedication to cultivating an informed voter body.

Voter education's objectives transcend mere augmentation of voter participation, encompassing the provision of political enlightenment. The curriculum may encompass election procedures, voting methodologies, ballot comprehension, and pivotal facets of electoral engagement. Given the KPU's pivotal role in implementing voter education, it becomes essential to develop an intricate communication and voter education model tailored for Generation Z in West Java.

This study assumes a targeted focus on Generation Z's political literacy vis-à-vis elections and their proclivities in the context of the impending 2024 elections. Furthermore, it elucidates the optimal implementation of a communication model by the government, fostering political involvement and facilitating voter education in the lead-up to the 2024 elections.

In summary, this research centers on answering the research question, "How does the communication model designed by the government for Generation Z impact voter education related to political participation in the upcoming 2024 elections?". This big question is divided into two focus questions: first, to explore the profile of Generation Z in West Java in terms of their political inclination, and second, to explore the efforts of the West Java KPU in encouraging voter education for Generation Z.

METHODS

The research focuses on scrutinizing the event of preparing for the 2024 elections, along with the involvement of both the Electoral Commission (KPU) and Generation Z in voter education initiatives. The study's subject matter revolves

around governmental political communication, specifically within the context of voter education preceding the 2024 elections.

Due to its in-depth nature, case study research allows researchers to use various data collection methods that suit the research objectives. Several techniques were used to ensure a comprehensive and unbiased exploration of the phenomenon under study. These techniques include surveys, in-depth interviews, participant/non-participant observation, and document analysis (such as books, archival materials, and audio-visual recordings).

The survey was conducted using an online questionnaire, namely the Google Forms application, which was distributed through access to the West Java KPU informant network, including the School Students Organization [Organisasi Siswa Intra Sekolah (OSIS)] network, the Student Executive Board [Badan Eksekutif Mahasiswa (BEM)] network and the election activist network. The sample selection was based on convenience sampling techniques aimed at Generation Z from high school students, university students, and the general public covering 18 regencies and nine cities in West Java Province. Before the questionnaire was distributed, a preliminary test was conducted on 30 respondents to ensure the credibility and consistency of the instruments used.

The distribution of this questionnaire lasted for two weeks, from July 12 to July 26, 2023. The main objective of this questionnaire was to describe the profile of Generation Z individuals in West Java regarding their understanding of the electoral process and their political leanings. Over the two weeks, 2,376 respondents were confirmed to have responded. After careful data cleaning, the final dataset of 1905 valid responses was retained for further analysis. Subsequently, the data collected through the questionnaire was processed and analyzed using the SPSS application. The results were presented in graphical form or tabulated format, followed by descriptive analysis.

In conjunction with the questionnaire distribution, data collection also included additional methodologies. A comprehensive literature review was conducted to support various field findings that aligned with the research problem. In addition, direct observation was conducted to gain insights into the field regarding the strategies formulated by the General Election Commission (KPU) as an election organizer and political parties as election participants. This strategy aims to harmonize with the different attributes of Generation Z. This observation

stage was conducted in several selected locations, namely Karawang Regency, Tasikmalaya City, and Bandung City.

To complement the data obtained from the questionnaire, in-depth interviews were conducted systematically. These interviews aimed to gain critical insights from the research subjects regarding the political leanings of Generation Z in West Java. The interviewees included vital figures, including the Chairpersons of the General Election Commission (KPU) of Bandung City, Karawang Regency, and Tasikmalaya City. In addition, interviews were also conducted with prominent figures from across the political spectrum, including the Chairman of the PKS Party in Tasikmalaya City, the Secretary of the Golkar Party in Karawang Regency, and the Chairman of Golkar in Bandung City.

In addition, the validity of the interview data obtained from the three regional KPUs was strengthened through discussions with members of the West Java KPU in charge of socialization and voter education. This approach aims to improve and triangulate the information that has been collected.

To further enrich the data collection process, interviews were conducted with election observers affiliated with two non-governmental organizations (NGOs), namely KIPP and DEEP. This multi-dimensional approach ensures a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of Generation Z's political behavior and the strategies employed by key stakeholders.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

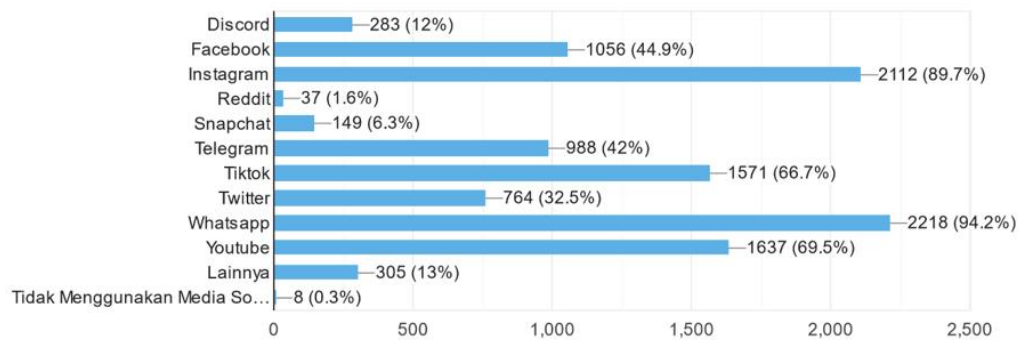
The nexus between digital media and the millennial generation is an inseparable facet of the contemporary digital era. Millennials and Gen-Z are renowned for their extensive utilization of the internet in their daily routines. Nonetheless, research conducted in prominent countries such as the US and the UK indicates that millennials exhibit relatively diminished enthusiasm for active involvement in volunteer organizations, coupled with decreased levels of social and political engagement (Sloam, 2016). However, this scenario raises a pertinent query: does the same paradigm hold true for the Indonesian Millennial cohort, specifically within the province of West Java?

In the Indonesian context, specifically within West Java, where Generation Z constitutes nearly 28% of the province's population, undertaking research on their political preferences in anticipation of the 2024 elections emerges as a compelling imperative. This empirical investigation seeks to discern the inclinations and attitudes of Generation Z towards political engagement, providing valuable insights for the development of tailored strategies aimed at fostering meaningful political participation and informed decision-making. With Generation Z's significant demographic presence, elucidating their perceptions holds paramount importance in shaping effective political communication initiatives that resonate with their unique characteristics and aspirations. As such, this study contributes to the broader discourse on youth involvement in politics, offering nuanced insights relevant not only to West Java but also to the broader landscape of Indonesian democratic participation. Below are the key research findings that need to be discussed.

Social Media Used

Among Generation Z individuals in West Java, WhatsApp emerges as the predominant social media platform, with a significant adoption rate of 94.2%. Following closely, Instagram garners an adoption rate of 89.7%, while YouTube maintains a substantial 69.6% usage rate. TikTok, known for its visual content, is embraced by 66.7% of Gen-Z individuals, while Facebook exhibits a usage rate of 44.8%. Beyond these, Telegram records an adoption rate of 42%, Twitter stands at 32.5%, and Discord is utilized by 12% of respondents. Snapchat and Reddit register usage rates of 6.3% and 1.6%, respectively. A minority, accounting for 0.3%, professes non-usage of social media platforms, while 12.9% acknowledge employing other platforms not explicitly listed, as shown in the following pie chart.

Figure 1.
Types of Social Media Used by Gen-Z West Java



This dataset affirms the intrinsic integration of social media into the daily lives of both Millennials and Generation Z. This observation aligns seamlessly with the assertion made by (Anderson et al., 2018), who posited, "The affinity between Generation Z and digital media is widely acknowledged. Research has consistently shown that platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube are dominant among this demographic." This convergence between empirical evidence and scholarly endorsement underscores the significant role that digital media, particularly platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube, play in shaping the communication landscape of these generational cohorts.

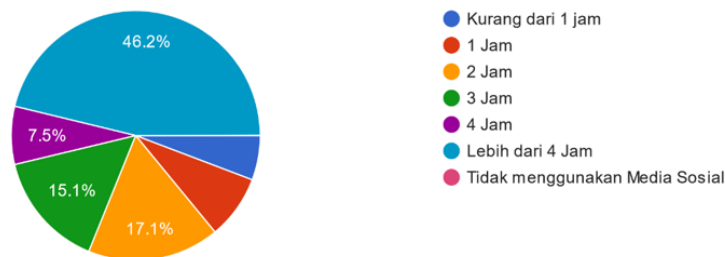
Related to the use of WhatsApp in Indonesia Context, other research shows that, ironically, the progress of Web Technology 4.0 in the form of the internet and social media has been hacked and pushed into the private sphere. (hacked) and herded into the private sphere. Privatization of social media, such as WhatsApp, closed political discussions that come from various perspectives in assessing political actors and activities. And political activities. WhatsApp has become a propaganda medium to judge political actors who are contesting the political actors who contested the regional head elections (Pilkada). Through WhatsApp, personal messages are conveyed from person to person who is considered 'one political stream' from their political patrons. That comes from his political patron. Each person or member of the WhatsApp group comments on each other and transmits their political views to other members of their group. (Damanik, 2018)

In the context of West Java, Gen-Z significantly devotes considerable time to engaging with social media platforms. As evidenced by the data, 46.1% of respondents invest over four hours daily, 17.1% allocate two hours, 15.1% set aside

three hours, 8.2% dedicate one hour, 7.6% allot four hours, and 5.7% expend less than one hour on these platforms. "These findings align with contemporary research that underscores the multifaceted role of social media within the lives of Generation Z, which extends beyond mere social interaction to encompass various practical and entrepreneurial endeavors(Anderson et al., 2018)(Livingstone et al., 2023). This multifunctional usage pattern has implications for political communication strategies that seek to effectively engage and mobilize Generation Z in the context of elections."

Figure 2.

Time Spent on Social Media



Generation Z demonstrates a profound engagement with social media across diverse facets of their lives. The majority, 88.5%, exploit these platforms to connect with friends, highlighting the central role of virtual socialization. Similarly, 85% leverage social media for access to current and relevant information, indicative of their recognition of these platforms as informative resources. Moreover, 57.1% dedicate time to leisure and entertainment in these digital spaces.

The datasets presented in Figures 1 and 2 show that Generation Z grew up in a rapidly evolving digital world, with social media becoming an important part of their lives. Almost half of the respondents confirmed that they interact for more than four hours daily on social media to connect with their friends, access current and relevant information, and do routine activities such as school, study, and extracurricular activities. This condition aligns with(Asmiyanto et al., 2021) findings that Instagram and Twitter are the most preferred social media platforms for finding election information. Political party websites, candidates' websites, and radio are not their main choices for getting information about elections. Using celebrities in various candidate campaign media also does not influence their political decisions.

In a utilitarian context, social media serves a range of pragmatic purposes. A significant 44.2% employ these platforms for shopping endeavors, showcasing the evolving landscape of e-commerce integration. A noteworthy 28.4% undertake job searches through these platforms, acknowledging their potential for professional networking. Additionally, 25.8% join virtual communities that cater to shared interests, exemplifying their engagement in specialized online groups. Furthermore, 21.4% utilize social media as a platform to express their viewpoints, indicating a desire for self-assertion.

Generation Z's relationship with social media is not limited to personal endeavors. A considerable 18.7% engage in business-related activities through these platforms, indicating their entrepreneurial inclinations. Furthermore, 7.8% explore social media for potential romantic relationships, highlighting their diverse engagements. Interestingly, 16% attribute various other uses to social media, exemplifying their multifaceted digital interactions.

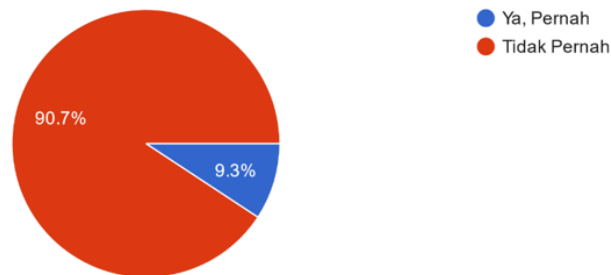
This multifunctional engagement resonates with contemporary research, which emphasizes that Generation Z seamlessly integrates social media into various aspects of their lives (Anderson et al., 2018). Additionally, other studies have echoed these findings, suggesting that this generation is highly adept at leveraging digital platforms for an array of purposes (Jones et al., 2020;) (Krasodomski-Jones, 2016), Brown & Green, 2019 (Kenski & Jamieson, n.d.) Such a nuanced understanding of Generation Z's engagement with social media is essential for crafting effective political communication strategies that align with their dynamic digital interactions.

Voter Education

A notable 90.8% of respondents hailing from West Java indicated that they had not received voter education from the West Java KPU, in stark contrast to the 9.2% who affirmed having undergone such education. For those who had engaged in voter education facilitated by the regional KPU, the curriculum predominantly centered on foundational topics. Voting procedures constituted a substantial component, accounting for 75% of the coverage, followed closely by insights into the pivotal role that voters play in the electoral process, capturing 68.8% of

respondents' attention. Moreover, there was a considerable focus on imparting knowledge about voter rights and responsibilities, comprising 64.8% of the educational content.

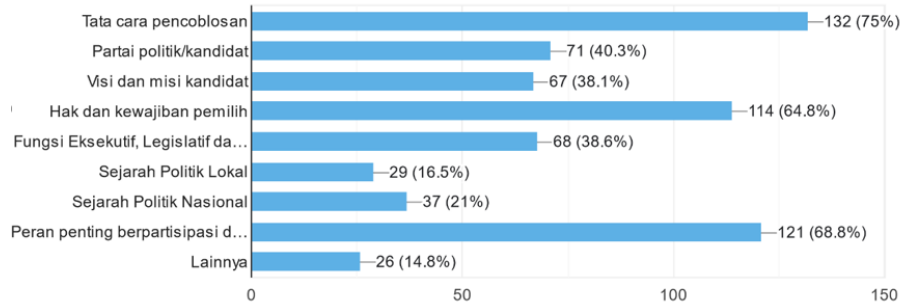
Figure 3.
Have Or Have Not Received Training or Voter Education from The West Java KPU



The educational discourse extended to familiarizing respondents with pertinent aspects of the political landscape. Information concerning political parties and candidates garnered the attention of 40.3% of those surveyed. This endeavor was complemented by insights into the tripartite functions of governance: the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, which collectively amounted to 38.6% of the curriculum. Furthermore, inquisitiveness about the vision and mission of candidates resonated with 38.1% of respondents, reflecting their concern for the aspirations driving political figures.

Notably, a more profound comprehension of the political sphere was facilitated through the inclusion of broader contextual information. National political history was embraced by 21% of participants, reflecting a curiosity about the historical trajectory that has shaped Indonesia's political landscape. A parallel curiosity was observed in the engagement with local political history, with 16.5% of respondents expressing an interest in understanding the political evolution at the regional level.

Figure 4.
Required Voter Education Materials



The educational content exhibited a distinct emphasis on foundational and procedural aspects, indicating a clear preference for technical dimensions of electoral participation. This inclination was particularly evident in the substantial attention given to voting procedures (75%) and the recognition of voters' central role in elections (68.8%). However, a comparatively limited emphasis was placed on exploring nuanced dimensions that could potentially shape political preferences, such as affiliations with political parties and candidates. This underscores the need for a more comprehensive educational approach that bridges the gap between procedural knowledge and substantive political insights.

This phenomenon aligns with the findings of Milner (2002), who emphasizes the importance of comprehensive political education that encompasses both practical and substantive content. Moreover, the work of Chaffee & Frank (2017) highlights the significance of effective voter education strategies to address gaps in political knowledge and engagement among young voters.

Of the 90.8% who never received voter education, when queried about their interest in political learning, 41.6% expressed moderate interest, 22.1% indicated interest, and 14% conveyed substantial interest. In contrast, 19.2% exhibited limited interest and 3% disinterest. In combination, these percentages amount to 77.7%, underscoring Generation Z's active political curiosity. This prompts a crucial query about how existing political institutions can optimally cater to this interest. Political institutions encompass political parties, the KPU, and the government. These statistics reveal a glaring gap between voter demands and the performance of political institutions. While Generation Z displays an inclination toward political information, political institutions have yet to comprehensively satisfy this inclination.

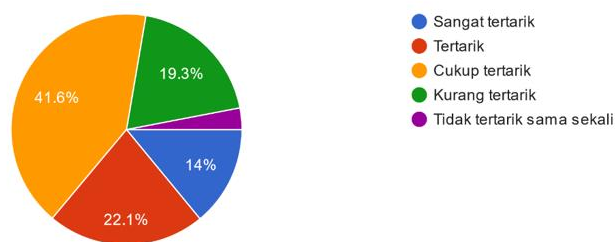
The substantial interest shown by Generation Z in political learning aligns with the findings of (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012) who emphasize the potential for increased political engagement among youth.

"The interest of Gen-Z in politics and their inclination towards political learning resonates with studies that emphasize the potential for political engagement among youth". (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012)

Additionally, the work of Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) highlights the significance of informed citizenry in a democratic society. The current data underscores a pronounced yearning for political education, as evidenced by the 98.8% who regard it as important.

Figure 5.

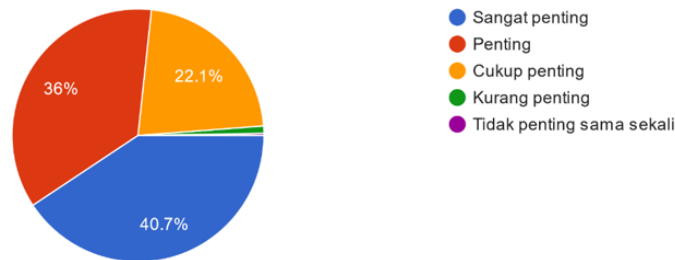
How Interested In Political Education For Gen Z



Another pivotal dataset highlights Generation Z's recognition of the significance of political education. An impressive 98.8% regarded political education as important, with 40.7% deeming it very important, 36% viewing it as important, and 22.1% classifying it as moderately important. This collective endorsement illustrates the resonance between political education and their inherent needs, posing an authentic challenge for political parties, the KPU, and the government to optimize their efforts to accommodate Generation Z's pronounced yearning for voter education.

Figure 6.

How Important Is Political Education For Gen Z



The overwhelming recognition of the importance of political education by Generation Z resonates with the assertions of Chaffee and Frank (2017) that effective voter education strategies are necessary to bridge the gap between voter needs and the performance of political institutions. Their research emphasizes the critical role of such education in promoting active citizen participation.

"Balancing technical topics with broader political discussions aligns with the recommendation of scholars advocating for comprehensive political education that includes both practical and substantive content (Milner, 2002)."

Additionally, concerning preferred content for political education initiatives, 67.9% of respondents sought materials pertinent to current issues, while 54.9% advocated for the provision of transparent and objective political information. Around 49% wished for easily accessible political courses or education, and 43% yearned for content relating to Generation Z's active participation in political processes. Importantly, respondents prioritized current concerns in political agendas, with employment (30.5%) and education (23.5%) topping the list, followed by law enforcement (14.7%), freedom of speech (8.1%), and the cost of basic necessities (6.6%). Security and national defense (4.3%), environment (3.6%), health (2%), freedom of religion (0.7%), and other issues (6.1%) rounded out the spectrum.

"The importance of political education, as recognized by Gen-Z, echoes the sentiment echoed by political scholars who highlight the role of an informed citizenry in a democratic society (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996)."(Kenski & Jamieson, n.d.)

Exercise of Voting Rights

As previously discussed, the absence of formal voter education among the majority of respondents does not undermine the evident awareness within Gen-Z West Java regarding the significance of political education. This awareness is underscored by their keen interest in obtaining voter education from political parties, the KPU, and the government. This emerging trend is further corroborated by the fact that a substantial majority (79.9%) expressed their intention to participate in the 2024 general election by exercising their right to vote. Conversely, a mere 2.4% indicated their intention not to vote, a group that can be assumed to align with the "abstention" or "Golput" category, a phenomenon worthy of attention in its own right. Additionally, 17.7% of respondents remained undecided, possibly categorizing them as "swing voters."

Given access to proper voter education, this group may potentially alter their stance, thus manifesting their interest in engaging with the democratic process. The analysis underscores the gap between political interest and education, aligning with scholars who advocate for effective voter education strategies to bridge such gaps (Chaffee & Frank, 2017). Providing relevant and objective political content aligns with the recommendation to ensure political communication is transparent and resonates with the concerns of the target audience (Loader et al., 2014)

CONCLUSION

Generation Z in West Java, Indonesia, strongly engages with digital media, especially through WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube platforms. Digital media dominates their daily lives, being the primary means of communication, information, and entertainment. However, a significant gap exists between their interest in politics and existing political education. While they support the importance of relevant political education, the content of formal voter education tends not to match their political interests. Therefore, there is an urgent need to adjust political education strategies and capitalize on the digital platforms they actively use. Thus, cooperation between political parties, the General Election Commission (KPU), and the government is important to ensure that Generation Z can actively participate in political and democratic processes in West Java and beyond. Based on the findings and analysis presented in this study, several suggestions can be put forward to improve political communication strategies and encourage effective voter education among Generation Z in West Java, namely (1)

Customized Voter Education Content, given Generation Z's interest in current issues and their preference for objective content, political parties, KPU, and the government should create materials that address contemporary issues, bridging the gap between technical and substantive education; (2) Utilize Digital Platforms by leveraging Generation Z's use of social media such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube to share educational content in an engaging format; (3) Comprehensive Education by expanding the curriculum beyond procedures to include ideology, candidate vision, and political history, to improve their decision-making ability; (4) Collaborative Efforts of joint initiatives among different agencies can streamline resources, ensure consistent messaging and wider reach; (5) Interactive Learning, i.e. by holding workshops, webinars, and town halls for direct engagement and open discussions; (6) Engaging designated Youth Ambassadors from Generation Z to bridge the gap and make political information easier to understand; (7) Inclusive Policy Formulation by including Generation Z perspectives on issues such as employment, education, and free speech in the political agenda; (8) Holistic Civic Education by promoting broader civic engagement to empower Generation Z to make positive social contributions; (9) Long-term Engagement by maintaining ongoing education beyond elections, keeping Generation Z informed about political developments; and (10) Evaluation and Adaptation by regularly assessing and adapting educational strategies based on feedback from Generation Z and changing needs.

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