Social Media As The Arena Of Contemporary Politics: A Literature Review Of Gen Z And Millennial Candidate Strategies For The 2024 Elections

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Abstract

The development of digital technology, particularly social media, has brought significant changes to Indonesia's political landscape. The 2024 election is a pivotal moment where Generation Z and Millennials are increasingly dominating the political space, with social media as the main arena for their campaigns. This research aims to analyze the strategies used by legislative candidates from both generations in utilizing social media to attract voters' attention. Through a literature review approach, this research identifies various methods and tactics applied by young candidates, including content personalization, visual storytelling, as well as the use of issues relevant to the interests of young voters, such as climate change, gender equality, and education. Social media allows candidates to engage more directly and interactively with voters, reducing reliance on more formal, traditional campaign channels. However, challenges such as disinformation, opinion manipulation, and unequal digital access have also emerged as issues in these digital campaigns. In addition, this research also highlights the importance of digital literacy for candidates and voters, in order to optimize the potential of social media wisely and effectively. In addition, this research also highlights the importance of digital literacy for candidates and voters, in order to optimize the potential of social media wisely and effectively. Overall, social media serves as a tool that strengthens the political engagement of young voters, but also requires regulation and supervision to avoid negative impacts that can undermine the quality of democracy.

Keywords: *Social Media, Gen Z Candidates, Political campaigns*

INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has brought major changes in various aspects of life, including politics. Social media is now the main space for public communication, where interactions between political figures and the public are no longer exclusively mediated by traditional mass media. In Indonesia, with more than 200 million internet users and the majority active on social media, platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Twitter (now X), Facebook, and YouTube have become new arenas for political battles [1]. The utilization of social media is not only carried out by senior political figures, but also increasingly dominates the campaign strategies of legislative candidates

from young people, especially from Generation Z and Millennials. This group is not only the largest voter in the 2024 elections, but also an active participant in legislative candidacy. The phenomenon of young candidates' involvement in digital politics is important to study, considering that this generation has unique characteristics that differ from previous generations. Millennials (born between 1981-1996) and Generation Z (born after 1997) grew up in a digital ecosystem that

shaped their communication styles, perceptions of politics, and expectations of public leaders[2]. They are accustomed to instant, visual and interactive communication, which makes social media the most effective channel for delivering political messages quickly and widely. In this context, social media is not only a tool for disseminating information, but also a space for shaping self-image, building emotional closeness with voters, and presenting personal and authentic political narratives.

Various studies have shown that political communication is currently experiencing a shift from formal and institutional approaches to personal approaches that are horizontal in nature. The concept of personalized political communication introduced by [3] explains how politicians - including young candidates - highlight their personalities and lifestyles rather than emphasizing the party's ideological platform. In the Indonesian context, this strategy is evident in the campaigns of young candidates who display their daily activities through short videos, live streaming sessions, and interactive content such as polls and questions and answers on social media. They position themselves not just as politicians, but as part of a community of

young people who care about social issues and want to make a change. One of the hallmarks of Gen Z and Millennial candidates' strategies is their creative and strategic use of social media. They do not simply publish digital posters, but utilize viral content trends to wrap political messages. TikTok, for example, has become an important arena in the 2024 General Election campaign because of its visual appeal and algorithm that allows messages to spread quickly without the need for a large budget. Research by notes that many young candidates create educational content in a light and entertaining format, so that political messages can be received without appearing patronizing. This strategy is considered effective in reaching young voters who have short attention spans and tend to be skeptical of conventional political communication.

Other literature also highlights the use of micro-targeting in digital campaigns, which is a strategy of targeting specific groups of voters based on their demographic data, location or interests. In developed countries, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, micro-targeting has become a standard in digital political campaigns. In Indonesia, although its use is not yet massive, a number of young candidates have begun to utilize paid advertising features in Meta Ads or Google Ads to reach specific voter segments. This shows that there is a shift in understanding from simply being present on social media to being able to optimize algorithms and data to build a more targeted support base. In practice, many young candidates form small digital campaign teams consisting of peers or volunteers who understand social media trends and dynamics. They are not only tasked with producing content, but also with monitoring sentiment, interactions and analyzing campaign performance in real-time. Studies [4]VV show that such digital teams are becoming a new force in electoral politics, especially for candidates who do not have large capital or strong party support. With a flexible and community-based approach, this strategy allows young politicians to compete effectively with senior candidates who rely on traditional party structures.

However, the use of social media in politics is also not free from challenges. The emergence of disinformation, hoaxes, and manipulation of public opinion pose a serious threat to the quality of democracy. Social media algorithms that tend to create echo chambers and information bubbles can exacerbate political polarization. In this context, digital literacy is important, both for candidates and voters, so that the digital political space does not just become a place for propaganda, but really encourages healthy and critical public engagement. In academic studies, the transformation of digital political strategies by the younger generation has become a global concern. [5] in his research revealed that young politicians rely more on "performative politics" - that is, politics displayed through symbols, expressions and visual actions in the digital space - rather than just verbal rhetoric. This strategy shows that social media has blurred the lines between image and substance, between activism and campaigning, and between public and private in the political sphere. This suggests an urgency to better understand how young candidates frame their political identities on social media and how this influences voter behavior.

By considering various literatures and current political realities, it can be concluded that social media is no longer just a complement to campaign strategies, but has become the main arena for political contestation. Candidates from Generation Z and Millennials utilize this digital space not only as a communication tool, but also as a medium of expression, identity negotiation, and the formation of political communities. This study aims to comprehensively examine these strategies through a literature review approach, in order to provide a more complete understanding of the dynamics of digital politics in the post-pandemic era and the 2024 simultaneous elections. This study is not only academically important, but also practically relevant in designing campaign strategies that are more inclusive, ethical and participatory. By focusing on the experiences of young candidates in Indonesia, this study is expected to contribute to the development of digital political communication literature and become a reference for young politicians, researchers, and policy makers in understanding the challenges and opportunities of politics in the era of social media.

METHODS

This research uses a literature review method with a qualitative approach to analyze the digital campaign strategies of Gen Z and Millennial candidates in the 2024 elections. Data was collected through structured searches in databases such as Google Scholar and Garuda, with a focus on 2015-2024 publications. The analysis was conducted using a thematic approach [6] and digital political communication theory (Enli & Moe, 2020). This method was chosen to critically synthesize the findings, without primary data collection, to understand the trends of youth digital politics in Indonesia (Snyder, 2019; Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2015).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Research result

The results of the literature review show that social media has become the main medium in the political campaign strategy of legislative candidates from Generation Z and Millennials in the 2024 elections. This phenomenon reflects a shift in the political communication landscape from a vertical model centered on party institutions to a horizontal model that emphasizes direct interaction between candidates and voters through digital platforms. Young candidates utilize social media not only as a means of self-promotion, but also as a platform to build political identity, strengthen voter engagement, and spread a narrative of social change in line with the aspirations of their generation.

1. Visual and Interactive Platform Domination

    One important finding is the dominant use of visual and interactive platforms such as TikTok, Instagram and YouTube. TikTok, for example, is a favorite platform because it allows candidates to deliver political messages in a short video format that is easily accessible and shareable. Gen Z candidates utilize this format to display content that is light, entertaining, yet still inserts campaign messages effectively. As noted by [7] this strategy shows a shift from formal political communication to more personalized and humanistic communication. Instagram is used to build self-image through photos of social activities, infographics of policy issues, and Instagram Stories that give the impression of being "close" to the audience. Meanwhile, YouTube is used for longer content, such as campaign vlogs, interviews, or discussions on public issues. This approach shows young candidates' understanding of the content formats that suit the characteristics of each platform.

2. Personalization and Emotional Poitics

    Personalization strategy is the dominant pattern in young candidates' communication on social media. In line with the theory of personalized political communication (Enli & Moe, 2013), candidates present their personal lives, youth experiences, and values as a way to build trust and emotional connections with voters. Instead of highlighting party platforms or ideological jargon, they choose to present authentic narratives such as personal struggles, involvement in social activities, or awareness of local issues. A clear example of this personalization is the use of personal stories in captions or videos that explain their reasons for running, aspirations for change, and hopes for the younger generation. These narratives create a sense of belonging between candidates and young voters, who tend to be more moved by stories than traditional political rhetoric.

3. Digital Activism and Issue Mobilization

    Gen Z and Millennial candidates also use social media as a means of digital activism. They raise specific issues such as the environment, education, women's rights, and village digitization as part of their political brand. This is in line with research [8] which states that young people tend to engage politically through issues that are close to their lives, not through party membership. This strategy shows that digital campaigning is not just about self-promotion, but also building issue communities. Some young candidates even set up online discussion spaces through

Twitter Space or Instagram Live to engage young voters in dialogue, thus building a sense of participation and openness. This approach strengthens their social legitimacy as representatives of young people, not just as participants in political contestation.

4. Algorithm Optimization and Micro-Targeting

Young candidates have also begun to utilize social media algorithms and micro-targeting features to increase their campaign reach. Through paid advertising on Meta Ads or YouTube, they target groups of voters based on age, geographic location and interests. While this practice is not yet as sophisticated as it is in the United States or the United Kingdom [9], this trend shows that young candidates are starting to think strategically and data-driven in building a support base. However, some studies show that there are still gaps in campaign digital literacy, especially in understanding how algorithms work and measuring digital campaign performance. This is a challenge for young candidates who do not have a professional team or adequate campaign resources [10].

5. Ethical Challenges and Disinformation

One of the main challenges in digital campaigning is the prevalence of disinformation and manipulation of public opinion. Social media enables the massive and rapid spread of hoaxes, which can be exploited by irresponsible political actors.[11] notes that the digital landscape in Indonesia is **highly** vulnerable to identity politicization and personalized digital attacks. Young candidates who appear progressive and different from the mainstream are often targets of cyber bullying or negative framing. In addition, excessive digital campaigning practices also risk creating surface politics - the tendency to judge candidates only by their appearance or content popularity, rather than the substance of their vision and capabilities. This phenomenon requires a critical approach from both voters and election administrators so that the digital space remains a healthy means of democratization.

6. Collaboration and New Political Communities

Interestingly, many young candidates build political networks that are collaborative rather than competitive. They form value-based political communities or common interests outside the party structure, and support each other's content promotion on social media. This marks the emergence of networked politics as discussed by [12]. In this network, digital solidarity and collaboration become the main values that replace the dominance of old political hierarchical structures.

DISCUSSION

Social media has become the main political arena utilized by Generation Z and Millennial candidates in the 2024 elections. The shift in communication patterns from vertical and centralized to horizontal and personal is evident in the way young candidates reach out to voters. They no longer rely on party channels as the main tool for political socialization, but instead build direct two-way communication through platforms such as TikTok, Instagram and YouTube. Their campaign content tends to be personal, visual and emotional, creating a psychological closeness with young voters. This approach shows a deep understanding of the characteristics of the digital generation who tend to want authenticity, accessibility, and down-to-earth narratives. The political personalization strategies they use, such as sharing life stories, social activities, and responses to popular issues, show that politics today is no longer just about policy, but also about emotional connection with the public. Furthermore, young candidates show a tendency to build issue-based campaigns. They raise topics such as the environment, education, social inequality, women's rights and the creative economy as their political identity, not just party slogans. This approach reflects an issue-based politics model rooted in digital activism. Young candidates make social media a space for public discussion by utilizing live streaming, polling and interactive forums. On the other hand,

limitations in digital literacy and content strategy remain a challenge, especially for those without professional campaign teams. In addition, the risk of surface politics also arises when image and popularity are more dominant than the depth of vision and competence of the candidates themselves.

Disinformation and hate speech are major challenges faced by young candidates in the digital space. Some of them are targets of personal attacks, hoaxes, and even online bullying. This situation shows the need for a protection system for young political actors and an increase in digital literacy among voters. Amidst these challenges, an interesting new political culture has also emerged, namely collaborative politics. Many young candidates support each other across parties and form solidarity networks based on shared values. This marks a shift from a competitive political model to participatory and collective politics, where social media is not only a campaign tool, but also a platform for building political communities. The implications for political parties are significant. Parties that are unable to adapt to new campaign styles risk being left behind and losing support from young voters. Young candidates indirectly encourage renewal within the party to be more open, inclusive and digitally oriented. Thus, social media serves not only as a tool, but also as a catalyst for change in Indonesia's political culture. This phenomenon shows that Generation Z and Millennials are not only political objects, but also active subjects who bring a new paradigm in Indonesia's digital democracy.

CONCLUSION

From the results of this study, it can be concluded that social media has fundamentally changed the way Generation Z and Millennial candidates communicate with voters in the 2024 elections. Digital platforms are now the main political arena that emphasizes direct, personal, and issue-based communication, in contrast to traditional political approaches that tend to be formal and hierarchical. Young candidates utilize social media to build an authentic image and create emotional closeness with voters through visual content and personal narratives. In addition, they raise issues relevant to the younger generation, such as climate change, education and gender equality, creating digital activism-based campaigns. However, the use of social media also brings significant challenges, such as the risk of disinformation, opinion manipulation and inequality of digital access. Nonetheless, social media opens up new opportunities for a more inclusive, participatory and collaborative politics, where young candidates build cross-party solidarity networks based on shared values. These implications suggest that social media is not only a campaign tool, but also acts as a catalyst for change in political practice in Indonesia.

Going forward, it is important for young candidates to improve their digital literacy, understand the dynamics of algorithms, and manage content more carefully to avoid the negative impact of disinformation. On the other hand, political parties need to be more flexible in addressing this new campaign style and provide greater space for the younger generation to actively participate in the formulation of political strategies. Overall, the 2024 elections could be a turning point in the evolution of Indonesian politics, with social media as the main arena for young candidates to compete and interact with voters.

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