



**Asia Pacific Journal of Educational Technologies,
Psychology, and Social Sciences**

Journal Homepage: <https://ijmshe.com/index.php/apjetps>



Research Article

Hashtags And Politics: A Mixed-Methods Study On Generation Z's Influence Of Social Media On Political Participation In Makilala, Cotabato

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Article Info

Article history:

Received: 18 September 2025

Revised: 29 November 2025

Accepted: 05 September 2025

Keywords:

generation Z, political participation,
social media, civic engagement,
mixed methods

Abstract

This study examines the role of social media in shaping the political engagement of Generation Z in Makilala, Cotabato, through a convergent parallel mixed-methods design. Seventy-five senior high school students, all registered voters with active social media accounts, completed surveys, and seven participated in in-depth interviews. Results show that most respondents were female (70.7%), maintained one to two social media accounts, and favored Facebook for political information. Quantitative findings indicate a moderate influence of social media on political knowledge and a slight increase in online discussion engagement, with a significant moderate positive correlation between information exposure and participatory behavior. Qualitative themes highlight selective exposure to content, critical evaluation, and motivation-driven civic participation. Findings contribute to the understanding of digital civic engagement among Filipino youth, offering insights for educators and policymakers. The study provides evidence-based insights to guide local policymakers, educators, and political actors in promoting informed and responsible youth participation, aligning with *Sustainable Development Goal 16*.

Cite as: Osumo, L. G., Aguilar, A., Ceniza, A. L., & Javines, J. (2025). *Hashtags And Politics: A Mixed-Methods Study On Generation Z's Influence Of Social Media On Political Participation In Makilala, Cotabato*. *Asia Pacific Journal of Educational Technologies, Psychology, and Social Sciences*, 1(2). <https://doi.org/10.70847.660413>

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1. Introduction

Social media has become a central tool for political engagement among young people, transforming simple online actions such as liking, sharing, and using hashtags into meaningful civic behaviors. Generation Z, the first cohort to grow up entirely in digital environments, plays a pivotal role in shaping contemporary political discourse (Maev, 2024). Globally, 68% of Generation Z obtain political information through social media, yet only 34% participate in civic discussions or activities (Andersen *et al.*, 2021). A UNESCO report similarly notes that while 72% of youth follow political news online, fewer than 30% take concrete political action (Bwire, 2024). These patterns emphasize the widening gap between political awareness and actual participation. Classic political science literature defines political participation as activities intended to influence governmental action and decision-making (Verba *et al.*, 1995), highlighting the need to examine how digital behaviors fit within this framework.

Media serves as an important channel for disseminating information, ideas, and public discourse (Joyce, 2020), with social media emerging as a dominant platform alongside traditional channels. Ali (2024) explains that social media enables politicians to communicate directly with citizens, creating more immediate and interactive campaigns. In the Philippine context, Generation Z demonstrates strong digital proficiency and the ability to navigate platforms critically, including the ability to identify misinformation (Cadayday *et al.*, 2024). Their online visibility suggests a potential influence on electoral outcomes.

In Cotabato's second district, Generation Z is notably active across various platforms, using them to express opinions, share information, and participate in political discussions. However, this activity also poses challenges, including the circulation of unverified content, polarized discourse, and increased susceptibility to

influence, all of which may affect local governance and election dynamics (Supriyanto, 2024). Although Filipino youth are expressive on political issues, their engagement patterns across platforms remain relatively stable (Battocchio *et al.*, 2023), and local studies show that platform preference shapes the nature of political interaction (Ines & Tolentino, 2024).

The current literature establishes that social media is widely used for political information, that youth exhibit high levels of digital literacy, and that political engagement varies across platforms. However, what remains unclear is the extent to which platform-specific use contributes to political knowledge, the depth of civic participation, and the mechanisms that translate online exposure into actual engagement, especially in localized Philippine settings.

The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) helps explain how attitudes and subjective norms influence Generation Z's political behaviors online, shaping variables such as intention to participate, platform use, and engagement patterns. Generational Cohorts Theory further clarifies why Generation Z's digital upbringing produces political practices distinct from those of older groups, thereby informing variables related to platform preferences and information consumption.

Despite global interest in youth political participation, limited empirical research examines the knowledge gap among Filipino Generation Z users and how specific platforms shape their political understanding (Yusoph, 2024). This gap necessitates a localized investigation that integrates both behavioral patterns and informational dimensions.

This study, therefore, examines how social media influences the political engagement of Generation Z using a mixed-methods design. It analyzes platform preferences, engagement behaviors, and information exposure to

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determine their effects on political awareness and civic participation. Addressing this gap supports *Sustainable Development Goal 16*, which promotes inclusive, participatory, and accountable decision-making. The findings aim

to guide policymakers, local governments, and civil society in strengthening youth political literacy and engagement, with dissemination through publications, policy briefs, workshops, and seminars in public administration.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

This study seeks to explore the role of social media in shaping political involvement among Generation Z. Specifically, it aims to address the following research problems:

1. What is the socio-demographic profile of the respondents in terms of gender, number of social media accounts, preferred social media sites, and their responses to politically related posts?
2. To what extent does social media influence the acquisition and perception of political information among Generation Z?
3. What is the level of engagement of Generation Z in political discussions on social media platforms?
4. Is there a significant relationship between the influence of social media on political information and the level of engagement in political discussions?
5. What are the lived experiences of Generation Z regarding the influence of social media on their political involvement?
6. To what extent do the qualitative and quantitative findings corroborate each other in explaining the impact of social media on political participation among Generation Z?

Hypothesis

H_a , there is a significant positive relationship between the extent of social media usage and the level of political engagement among Generation Z.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

This study primarily relies on the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) and the Generational Cohorts Theory (Mannheim, 1952) to explain how social media influences the political involvement of Generation Z.

First, the Theory of Reasoned Action asserts that an individual's behavioral intention strongly predicts actual behavior. In the context of social media, individuals are more likely to share political information or participate in online discussions when they have a firm intention to engage. Moreover, social media and internet platforms significantly shape social life and

political participation, providing spaces where politicians, candidates, and government officials communicate, influence public opinion, and disseminate political information (Malinen et al., 2020; Safiullah et al., 2022; Newman, 2012). Therefore, TRA provides a framework for understanding how Generation Z's intentions translate into actual engagement in political activities through social media.

In addition, the Generational Cohorts Theory defines a cohort as a group of individuals born during the same period who experience similar social, economic, and technological events during formative years

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(Remmling, 2020). Generation Z, born between 1995 and 2009, as per the McCrindle and Fell (2019) study, represents the first true digital natives.

As a result, this generation grows up in an era dominated by social media, smartphones, and instant access to information. Consequently, technology plays a central role in daily life, shaping how they acquire political knowledge, form opinions, and engage in political discourse. Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube, serve as

avenues for Generation Z to express their political views, evaluate politicians, and participate in civic activities.

Finally, integrating TRA and Generational Cohorts Theory allows this study to examine how intentions, behaviors, and generational characteristics collectively explain Generation Z's political involvement through social media. Thus, the framework provides a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between digital engagement and civic participation, highlighting both behavioral and generational dimensions.

1.3 Conceptual Framework

This study's conceptual framework was adopted from Gempes and Obenza, (2025) which illustrates the simultaneous collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data to

examine the influence of social media on the political involvement of Generation Z, with an emphasis on corroborating findings for a comprehensive understanding.

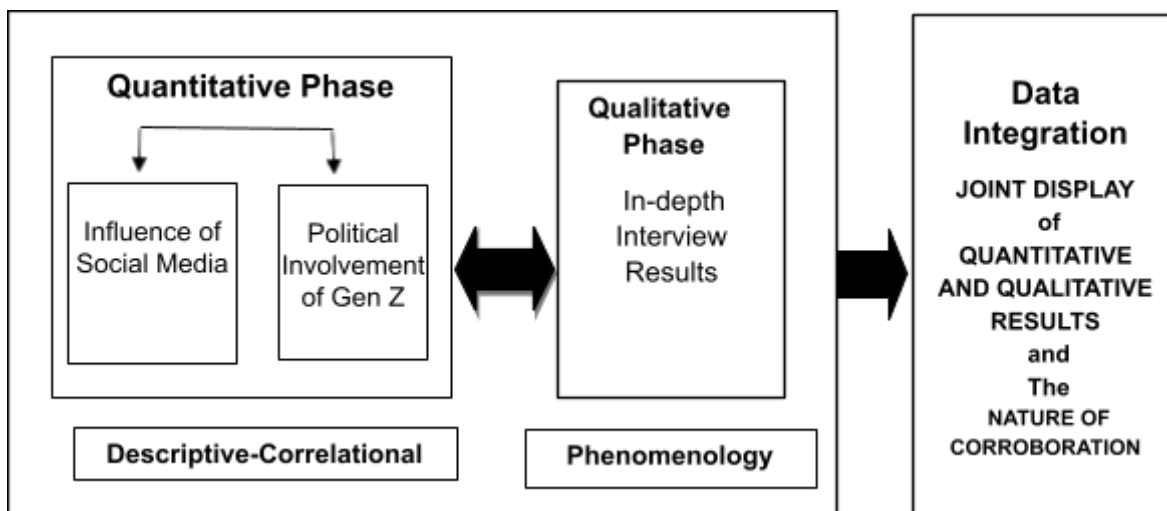


Figure 1. Schematic Diagram of the Study

In the quantitative phase, a descriptive-correlational design measures the independent variable, social media influence, and the dependent variable, political involvement of Generation Z. This phase examines the socio-demographic profile of respondents, including gender, number of social media accounts, preferred platforms, and responses to politically related posts. It also investigates the extent to which social media

affects the acquisition and perception of political information, the level of engagement in political discussions, and the relationship between social media influence and participation in online political discourse.

In the qualitative phase, a phenomenological approach is used to explore the lived experiences of Generation Z regarding the impact of social media on political involvement. This phase

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captures how youths interpret, react to, and act upon political content, providing insights that quantitative analysis alone cannot reveal.

Corroboration occurs after both phases, with quantitative results validating and supporting qualitative findings, and qualitative insights complementing quantitative data. This approach provides a more comprehensive understanding of social media's role in shaping political participation. It examines the extent to which

both datasets reinforce each other in explaining Generation Z's engagement with political content.

Overall, the framework presents a clear roadmap that collectively explains the socio-demographic characteristics, social media influence, engagement patterns, and lived experiences of Generation Z, providing actionable insights for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research Design

This study employs a convergent parallel research design. The study by Demir and Pismek (2018) uses a convergent parallel design, in which quantitative and qualitative components are conducted simultaneously, giving equal importance to both strands, analyzing each element independently, and interpreting the results together to produce comprehensive conclusions. In the quantitative component, the researchers collect, analyze, and interpret numerical data to examine patterns, relationships, and trends regarding the influence of social media on the political involvement of Generation Z. Moreover, this phase systematically measures variables and provides statistically supported findings that reflect general behavioral tendencies.

In the qualitative component, the researchers gather descriptive data through field notes, audio recordings, and transcripts from selected participants. In addition, this phase focuses on lived experiences, perceptions, and behaviors related to political engagement through social media, thereby offering more profound insight into underlying motivations and attitudes. Consequently, the convergent parallel design strengthens the study, since it captures both measurable trends and experiential narratives (Wick, 2024). Furthermore, corroborating quantitative findings with qualitative insights ensures a more holistic understanding of how social media influences political participation among Generation Z.

2.2. Study Locale

The research was conducted in selected public schools within the province of Cotabato, specifically in District 2, Region 12, specifically in the municipality of Makilala. These schools integrate global educational standards with local

traditions, providing a unique learning environment that addresses both international and community needs. This setting enhances the relevance and applicability of the study's findings to the local context.

2.2. Respondents and Sampling

This study involved seventy-five (75) respondents drawn from a selected public school in the municipality of Makilala, North Cotabato. From this group, seven (7) individuals were purposively selected to participate in in-depth

interviews for the generation of qualitative data. The inclusion criteria specified that participants must meet the following conditions: (1) they must have been born between 1995 and 2009, placing them within the 12 to 27 age range and

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categorizing them as members of Generation Z; (2) they must be registered voters, which ensures legal capacity for political involvement; and (3) they must maintain active social media accounts, a requirement aligned with the study's focus on digital influence and political participation. In contrast, individuals who did not fall within the specified age range, were not registered voters, or did not have active social media accounts were excluded from the study. These criteria ensured that only respondents with the necessary demographic and behavioral characteristics were included.

To obtain the required data, the researchers applied simple random sampling for the quantitative component and homogeneous purposive sampling for the qualitative component. This clarification corrects the previously inconsistent phrasing and ensures methodological transparency. Simple random sampling ensured that each eligible member of

the population had an equal chance of being selected for the survey, thereby supporting the generalizability of the quantitative results (Guest, 2014). Meanwhile, homogeneous purposive sampling, as described by Campbell et al. (2020), is used to select individuals who share key characteristics, enabling the collection of coherent and comparable perspectives within a specific subgroup. In this study, the qualitative participants shared common attributes related to generational identity, voter eligibility, and active engagement on social media platforms.

Through this combined sampling strategy, the study achieved both breadth and depth. The larger, randomly selected group yielded measurable trends in digital influence and political participation, while the smaller, purposively selected group offered rich, nuanced experiential insights essential to understanding the complexity of Generation Z's sociopolitical behavior.

2.4. Procedure

The researchers utilized an adapted survey questionnaire to gather quantitative data and a self-developed interview guide to collect qualitative data, focusing on the influence of social media on the political involvement of Generation Z. The study was conducted in one of the selected public schools in Makilala, North Cotabato.

Before administering the instruments, the questionnaires underwent content validation by three experts to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study's objectives. A preliminary dry run was conducted to assess the instruments' reliability. Based on the comments and suggested corrections, the researcher revised and finalized the questionnaires to achieve higher accuracy and appropriateness.

Subsequently, a formal letter requesting permission to conduct the study was secured from the research director of the chosen institution. Upon approval, the researcher

personally oriented the respondents and explained the purpose of the study and the instructions for completing the questionnaires. Screening and selection were conducted to ensure that participants met the inclusion criteria: being members of Generation Z, registered voters, and active users of social media platforms.

In terms of research design, a convergent parallel approach guided the data collection process. Quantitative and qualitative data were simultaneously gathered, analyzed independently, and corroborated to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. The use of guided responses ensured that the information collected was appropriate and reliable for computation, analysis, and interpretation. Ultimately, the results served as the basis for drawing implications relevant to the influence of social media on political involvement among Generation Z.

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2.5 Data Gathering Tools

This study utilized two primary research instruments to generate the required data. For the quantitative phase, an adapted survey questionnaire was employed. The tool was originally developed in the published dissertation of ProQuest LLC (2016), titled “The Impact of Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube on Millennials’ Political Behavior,” authored by Nicholas M. Njegomir. For the qualitative phase, a self-developed interview guide was created to elicit comprehensive insights consistent with the study’s objectives.

The quantitative questionnaire consisted of four major sections. The first section collected respondents' socio-demographic characteristics, including gender, number of social media accounts, preferred platforms for political information, political affiliation, and typical reactions to political posts. The second section measured the perceived influence of social media on the dissemination of political information. The third section examined the level of political engagement among Generation Z using social media. The final section determined the extent to which social media shapes respondents’ political involvement.

Prior to administration, the instrument underwent several validation procedures. Content validation was conducted with the assistance of three academic experts to ensure alignment, clarity, and relevance of the items. The tool also underwent face and

construct validity checks through a reviewer evaluation, in which experts assessed whether each item accurately represented the theoretical concepts measured by the study. Additionally, criterion-related validity was assessed by comparing selected items with similar validated measures used in previous studies on political participation and social media influence, ensuring conceptual consistency.

A pretest was conducted with 10 respondents to further assess the clarity and comprehensibility of the items. The results from the pilot test were used to compute Cronbach’s alpha for internal consistency. The reliability analysis of the 21-item adapted questionnaire yielded a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of 0.890, indicating high reliability. Item analysis further showed that most questions were suitable for retention, as removing any item would have lowered the overall reliability coefficient.

For the qualitative phase, the researcher developed a semi-structured interview guide anchored on the primary research objectives. The guide contained open-ended questions designed to capture respondents’ experiences and perspectives regarding the influence of social media on their political involvement. The guide's flexible structure allowed participants to share their insights freely while ensuring discussions remained focused on the study's central themes.

2.6. Statistical Treatment

The study employed both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques to analyze the data. Descriptive statistics were utilized to summarize and present the findings derived from the phenomenological approach. These included frequency counts and percentage distributions that highlighted recurring themes, providing a clear illustration of how social media shapes the political involvement of

Generation Z. This analytical process systematically organized, interpreted, and aligned the emerging patterns from the qualitative responses with the study’s objectives.

For the quantitative phase, inferential statistics were used to examine the relationships among the identified variables. The Spearman Rank-Order Correlation was applied

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through SPSS v.29 to assess whether a significant association existed between social media influence and the respondents' level of political involvement. Nickolas (2024) explains that this correlation coefficient measures the strength and direction of the relationship between two variables, producing results that may indicate a positive, negative, or no correlation. The use of this statistical tool enabled the study to examine how variations in

one variable corresponded to changes in the other.

The integration of descriptive and inferential procedures enabled the study to identify meaningful trends and statistically significant relationships, essential for understanding respondents' perceptions of the extent to which social media influences the political involvement of Generation Z.

2.7. Data Analysis

The study's qualitative findings were analyzed using the Colaizzi method, a systematic approach for extracting, organizing, and interpreting essential meanings from participants' lived experiences (Morrow et al., 2015) with an interpretivist approach. This method involves several steps, including familiarization with the data, extraction of significant statements, formulation of meanings, clustering of themes, and validation of the results with participants. In this research, the Colaizzi method was employed to carefully examine narratives gathered from respondents regarding their perceptions of social media's

influence on political involvement. Through repeated reading and the identification of significant statements, meaningful insights were drawn, and these were subsequently clustered into emerging themes that reflected common patterns. These themes provided a structured understanding of how Generation Z perceives and experiences social media's role in shaping their political participation. The use of this method ensured that the analysis remained rigorous, transparent, and faithful to the respondents' perspectives, thereby reinforcing the credibility and depth of the study's qualitative findings.

2.8. Ethical Procedures

Ethical clearance was obtained from the institutional review board, and participants provided informed consent prior to their participation in the study. The consent process ensured that each respondent fully understood the study's purpose, procedures, voluntary nature, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Confidentiality was rigorously maintained through the use of anonymized response codes, ensuring that no identifying information was linked to any dataset. Data management adhered to strict security protocols, including encrypted digital storage and restricted access, in full compliance with the *Data Privacy Act of 2012*, ensuring lawful, transparent, and responsible handling of all personal information.

The study's ethical framework emphasized its social value, particularly its contribution to advancing public and academic understanding of how social media shapes the political engagement of Generation Z. Potential risks were minimal and primarily associated with sharing personal political opinions. These were mitigated through voluntary participation, secure response environments, and strict confidentiality measures. Anticipated benefits for educational institutions, policymakers, and community stakeholders include empirically grounded insights that can inform civic education and enhance digital literacy initiatives. Safety protocols were consistently applied to protect participants from any physical, psychological, or social harm.

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All research activities adhered to the integrity standards of the *Makilala Institute of Science and Technology*, ensuring transparency, intellectual honesty, and respect for human dignity. This commitment to ethical rigor reinforced the credibility of the findings and upheld principles of responsible and accountable research practice suitable for international scholarly dissemination.

The combination of descriptive and inferential analyses enabled the study to identify meaningful trends and statistically supported relationships essential for understanding respondents' perceptions of the extent to which social media influences Generation Z's political involvement.

3. Results and Discussions

This segment presents the results, analysis, and interpretation of data collected from field-distributed questionnaires. The data were

presented in tabular form in accordance with the specific questions posed in the study's objectives

3.1 Socio-demographic Profile

The first objective of this study is to determine the socio-demographic profile of the respondents. As shown in Table 1, the socio-demographic profile, including gender,

number of social media accounts, and preferred social media sites, is presented as frequencies and percentages across different ranges. In this study, seventy-five (75) respondents participated

Table 1.1 Gender of the Respondents.

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	53	70.7
Male	19	25.3
LGBT+	3	4.0
Total	75	100

Research findings indicate that among the survey respondents, 70.7% were female, 25.3% were male, and 4.0% identified as LGBT+. This distribution shows that females constituted the majority of the participants. According to the 2023 DATAREPORTAL Statistics in the Philippines, there are 84.45 million social media users, comprising 46.5% males and 53.5%

females (Kemp, 2023). This data suggests that a higher proportion of female users are active on social media platforms. It is noted that women frequently use social media to share personal information and express their opinions, aligning with the observation that social networking behaviors are often more pronounced among females (Habito *et al.*, 2022).

Table 1.2 Number of Social Media Accounts.

Number	Frequency	Percentage
1-2	45	60.0
3-4	20	26.7
5-6	9	12.0

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10	1	1.3
Total	75	100

Table 1.2 presents the distribution of social media accounts among the respondents. The data reveals that 60% of participants maintain 1-2 social media accounts, while 26.7% have 3-4 accounts. Additionally, 12% of respondents possess 5-6 social media accounts, and a small fraction, 1.3%, manage up to 10 accounts. Consequently, the majority of respondents have

between one and two social media accounts. These findings, as cited in Avalle *et al.*'s (2023) study, suggest that the majority of respondents prefer to limit their social media presence to a few accounts, indicating a tendency towards selective engagement and a focused approach to online interactions.

Table 1.3 Preferred Social Media Sites.

Social Media Sites	Frequency	Percentage
Facebook	50	66.7
Facebook/Tiktok	5	6.7
Facebook/Tiktok/ Youtube	5	6.7
Twitter or X	4	5.3
Facebook/Youtube	3	4.0
Facebook/Tiktok/ Twitter/Instagram	3	4.0
Facebook/Instagram	2	2.7
Facebook/Tiktok/ Youtube/Instagram	2	2.7
Facebook/Tiktok/ Youtube/Twitter or X	1	1.3
Total	75	100

Table 1.3 presents the respondents' preferred social media sites. The data indicates that 66.7% of participants favor Facebook as their primary social media platform. This finding suggests that

Facebook remains the most popular choice for social media users (Labudová, 2024) in this group, potentially reflecting its widespread appeal and user-friendly features.

Table 1.4 Response to Politically Related Post.

Response to Politically Related Post	Frequency	Percentage
Reactions	46	61.3
Comment	14	18.7
Sharing	10	13.3
Comments/Sharing	2	2.7
Comments/ Reaction/Sharing	2	2.7
Reactions/ Comments	1	1.3
Total	75	100

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The table illustrates respondents' interactions with politically related posts. The results show that 61.3% of participants respond to such posts, 18.7% engage through comments, and 13.3% share them. According to mobilization theory, social media platforms offer tools that facilitate communication and idea sharing, encouraging political engagement and fostering a sense of community and common purpose. Features like liking, sharing, and commenting on Facebook posts, for instance, enable users to express

support or opposition to political issues or figures (Alodat *et al.*, 2023). Interestingly, the majority of social media users tend to react to political content, signaling their approval or disapproval and indicating their stance on public matters (Huh, 2025). This suggests that while most users engage passively through reactions, the available social media tools still play a significant role in expressing political opinions and fostering collective political participation.

Table 2.1 Level of Influence of Social Media on Political Information.

Variable	Mean ± SD:	Description
Level of Influence	2.80 ± 0.42	Moderately influenced on social media on Political Information

Legend:

1.00 – 1.74	Strongly Disagree
1.75 – 2.49	Disagree
2.50 – 3.24	Agree
3.25 – 4.00	Strongly Agree

Table 2.1 indicates that respondents moderately agree that social media influences political information. This suggests that social media has a significant impact on the political perspectives of Generation Z. Because it offers digital information that is often more accessible and timely than traditional print media, it has become a preferred source for news updates and political insights. Magnusson (2023) highlights that social media serves as a daily source of

political information for Generation Z, who perceive it as a credible platform for obtaining news and updates. Trust in social media as an information source hinges on the accuracy, relevance, sustainability, and consistency of its content. These findings suggest that social media plays a substantial role in shaping Generation Z's political viewpoints, underscoring its importance as a reliable information source.

Table 2.2 Descriptive Statistics on the Responses to the Influence of Social Media on Political Information.

Descriptive Statistics		
Statements	Mode	% (N= 75)
1. I read more about politics than on television, radio, and newspaper	Agree	46.7
2. I get political information from Facebook and any other social media platforms	Agree	57.3

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3. I had great interest in politics when published in social media	Agree	49.3
4. I obtain politically related information and knowledge while browsing online	Agree	58.7
5. I get to be updated in new trends and content about political issues when I browse in online platforms	Agree	42.7
6. I prefer reading news and update related to politics through social media than printed materials	Agree	33.3
7. I enjoy reading politically related posts online	Agree	40.0
8. I find political related debates on YouTube interesting	Disagree	38.7
9. I see a lot of political messages on Facebook, Twitter/ X, Instagram, etc.	Agree	45.3
10. I see political related content in Facebook from my friends and family	Agree	38.7
11. I value the political messages that my friends post on social media than sponsored contents	Agree	40.0

Table 2.2 presents data on the extent of social media's influence on political information. The fourth statement recorded the highest agreement, with 58.7% of respondents affirming that they obtain politically related information while browsing online. Following this, 57.3% of respondents reported receiving political information from Facebook and other social media platforms. Additionally, 49.3% of participants expressed a strong interest in politics when it is featured on social media. Approximately 46.7% preferred reading about politics online rather than through traditional media such as television, radio, and newspapers.

Furthermore, 45.3% noticed a substantial amount of political messages on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter/X, and Instagram. Meanwhile, 42.7% agreed that they stay updated on political trends and content via online platforms. Around 40% valued politically related posts from friends more than sponsored content. Interestingly, 38.7% of respondents

noted seeing political content from friends and family on Facebook, yet the same percentage did not find political debates on YouTube engaging. Lastly, the lowest value was observed for the sixth statement, where 33.3% preferred reading political news online rather than in printed materials.

The literature suggests that social media has become a crucial source of political news and information, with many individuals utilizing social networking sites to stay informed about global events (Bello, 2024). According to the Digital Media Trends report, Generation Z predominantly uses social media for news consumption, with only 5% relying on newspapers or offline sources (Kelly, 2024).

These findings suggest that social media has a significant impact on the political information landscape for Generation Z, underscoring its role as a primary news source, surpassing traditional media.

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Table 3.1 Level of Engagement on Political Discussion.

Variable	Mean $\pm$ SD:	Description
Level of Engagement	2.26 $\pm$ 0.56	Slightly engaged on political discussion on social media

Legend:

1.00 - 1.74	Strongly Disagree
1.75 - 2.49	Disagree
2.50 - 3.24	Agree
3.25 - 4.00	Strongly Agree

Table 3.1 indicates that respondents exhibit a slight level of engagement in political discussions on social media. This observation aligns with Kim's (2023) findings, which suggest that individuals who engage in political activities, whether through social media or other online and offline channels, are more likely to participate in various forms of political engagement. Moreover, social media platforms have emerged as significant tools for political

engagement among Generation Z (Ofei *et al.*, 2024). These platforms enable users to express their views, mobilize support, and amplify their voices globally through diverse political conversations. These findings suggest that while Generation Z may exhibit moderate engagement in political discussions on social media, the platforms serve as vital avenues for broadening their political participation and influence.

Table 3.2 Responses to Engagement on Political Discussions.

Engagement on Political Discussion (N = 75)		
Statements	Mode	% (N= 75)
1. I like or promote material related to political or social issues that other has posted.	Agree	44.0
2. I like to post my own thoughts on political or social issues in the social media platform.	Disagree	46.7
3. I share links of political stories and articles for others to read.	Disagree	37.3
4. I comment on what is hot or new about politics.	Disagree	41.3
5. I share information about my chosen candidate in order to encourage others to vote the same candidate.	Disagree	32.0
6. I read comments and posts about certain candidate as a political reference.	Agree	48.0
7. I respond and participate to survey polls online.	Disagree	44.0

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8. I engage into online political rallies.	Disagree	40.0
9. I watch online political debates.	Disagree	42.7
10. I react to negative comments involving my preferred candidate.	Disagree	38.7

Table 3.2 reveals respondents' levels of engagement in political discussions. The highest value was recorded for the sixth statement, with 48.0% of respondents agreeing that they engage in political discussions by reading comments and posts about specific candidates as a form of political references. Additionally, 46.7% disagreed with posting their own thoughts on political or social issues. Meanwhile, 44.0% agreed that they like or promote materials related to political or social issues posted by others, and the same percentage also agreed that they participate in online survey polls. Conversely, 42.7% disagreed with watching online political debates, and 41.3% disagreed with commenting on trending political topics.

Furthermore, 40.0% of respondents disagreed with engaging in online political rallies, while

38.7% disagreed with reacting to negative comments about their preferred candidate. About 37.3% of respondents both agreed and disagreed with sharing links to political stories and articles. Notably, the lowest value was observed for the fifth statement, where 32.0% of respondents disagreed with the notion that they share information about their chosen candidate to encourage others to vote for the same candidate.

These findings suggest moderate engagement among respondents across various forms of political discourse on social media. The implications suggest that while some individuals actively participate in political discussions and promote related content, others are reluctant to publicly express or share their political preferences, reflecting a nuanced, selective approach to online political engagement.

Table 4. Test of Significance Between the Level of Influence on Political Information and the Level of Engagement in Political Discussion.

Variables	N	df	rs	p-value	Interpretation
Influence and Engagement	75	73	.457*	.000	Moderate Positive correlation

* significant at .05 level of significance

The fourth objective of this study examines the relationship between social media's influence on political information and on political discussion engagement. Table 4 presents the test of significance between these two variables using Spearman's correlation. The analysis employed a two-tailed test at a 0.05 significance level, with a sample of 75 respondents. A preliminary normality test indicated that the data were normally distributed; however, because the survey measures were ordinal, Spearman's

correlation was used to assess the strength and direction of the relationship between the level of social media influence on political information and the level of engagement in political discussion.

The results of the *Spearman's* correlation test revealed a statistically significant positive correlation ($rs = 0.457, p < 0.001$), indicating a moderate positive relationship between social media influence and political discussion

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engagement. The p -value being below the 0.05 threshold led to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This finding suggests that higher exposure to political content on social media is associated with greater engagement in political discussions. In practice, a moderate correlation implies that while social media has a meaningful impact on civic participation, it is not the sole determinant; other factors, such as personal interest, offline discussions, and educational background, also contribute to engagement. For instance, individuals moderately influenced by social media may actively participate in discussions, share content, or seek additional political information, yet their participation may not reach the intensity or consistency of highly engaged users.

This result reinforces the notion that social media shapes political engagement. Ahmed and Gil-Lopez (2024) note that individuals who consume political content on social media tend to exhibit higher levels of political participation. Similarly, Lewis (2024) and Dizon (2025) argue that political knowledge and interest strongly influence civic involvement. Interactive platforms, such as blogs and social networks, appear to promote more active participation

compared with static online spaces. In this context, social media use for political content is closely linked to how individuals engage in civic discussions and democratic practices.

Table 5 indicates that the phenomenological phase of this study explored the lived experiences of Generation Z regarding the influence of social media on their political involvement through in-depth interviews. The researchers organized the findings into themes and core ideas, revealing patterns in how participants interact with political content online and engage in civic discussions. Conducting these interviews provided a deeper understanding of how social media influences awareness, interest, and participation in political activities, capturing perspectives that quantitative surveys alone could not reveal.

In line with Wamsler *et al.* (2022) and Vromen *et al.* (2022), the narratives reveal that personal meaning and social context have a significant impact on political engagement. The emerging themes suggest that Generation Z navigates political information and discussions in ways that reflect both individual interpretation and the interactive nature of online platforms, highlighting the interplay between social media use and active civic participation.

Table 5. Lived Experiences of Generation Z regarding the Influence of Social Media on their Political Involvement.

Themes	Core Ideas
<i>Selective Exposure to Political Content</i>	- Generation Z chooses political content on social media based on personal preferences and trusted sources. - Participants assess the credibility of political information before accepting or engaging with it. - Engagement in political discussions is driven by the desire to gain knowledge and increase awareness. - Social media provides an accessible space for Generation Z to discuss and share political perspectives.
<i>Critical Evaluation and Verification</i>	
<i>Motivation Through Learning and Awareness</i>	
<i>Social Media as a Platform for Civic Engagement</i>	

Selective Exposure to Political Content

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Social media platforms, particularly Facebook, serve as primary sources of political content for Generation Z (Tandon et al., 2022). Users encounter frequent political content, and the platform encourages peer-to-peer discussions. As of January 2023, the Philippines had 84.45 million social media users, representing 72.5% of the population, with 45.9% using Facebook as a primary source for current events and global information. Other platforms, including Instagram, Twitter/X, YouTube, and TikTok, play distinct roles in how this generation consumes and engages with content (Ji, 2023). Generation Z curates content according to personal interests, reflecting selective exposure patterns:

“Mostly, I check posts from friends and family first, unya I also scroll sa news feeds. I like to pick articles nga relevant sa akong interests.”

— Participant 3

This pattern illustrates how social media shapes both the acquisition of political knowledge and participation in discussions and observation of political developments (Samala et al., 2024; Lim, 2024).

Critical Evaluation and Verification

The quality and credibility of social media content significantly influence trust and engagement among young users (Ngov, 2024). Participants highlighted the importance of verifying posts before forming opinions:

“I trust political posts sa social media gamay ra, pero I always check kung tinuod ba. Kung credible ang source, willing ko mo-consider sa bagong perspective.”

— Participant 4

This demonstrates that Generation Z actively evaluates content rather than passively consuming it, cross-checking information and relying on credible sources (Collins, 2019; Egala et al., 2022). Selective engagement thus reflects a conditional trust, shaped by content quality and source reliability.

Motivation Through Learning and Awareness

Exposure to political news motivates Generation Z to engage in civic discussions and actions (Wallace, 2025). Social media, rather than traditional media, serves as the primary platform for learning and interaction:

“I engage sa political discussions kay I want to learn new things about what’s happening sa politics. Makabalo jud ko sa mga issues.”

— Participant 6

Frequent interaction with political content fosters curiosity, reflection, and informed participation, highlighting the role of social media in promoting political consciousness (Andersen et al., 2021; Ofei et al., 2024).

Social Media as a Platform for Civic Engagement

In the Philippines, Generation Z heavily relies on social media for political information and civic engagement (Flores et al., 2022; Lee, 2025). Platforms provide immediate access to news, opinions, and peer discussions, facilitating interaction beyond what traditional media allows (Luttrell, 2025):

“Through social media, dali ra kaayo to join discussions ug makita unsa gibati sa uban. Makapadayon ko sa akong involvement in politics.”

— Participant 7

Frequent exposure strengthens political awareness and encourages participation in both online and local community initiatives (Seyfi et al., 2023; Lewis, 2024). Social media thus plays a critical role in shaping political engagement among youth in Cotabato province, Region 12.

Corroborated Analysis of Findings

In Makilala, Cotabato Province, Gen Z participants consistently reported that social media, particularly Facebook, is their primary source of political and civic information. Traditional media such as television and newspapers are perceived as less accessible or engaging for younger audiences. Instead, these participants rely on posts from news pages, local groups, and even family or friends to remain informed. In a community where daily life is

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centered on school, community events, and family responsibilities, social media platforms provide rapid access to national and local political developments. For these youth, scrolling through feeds that blend current events, entertainment, and social connections offers a convenient way to stay updated.

Participants further indicated that exposure to political content online increased their awareness of issues affecting both their barangays and the broader Makilala community. Some actively follow discussions on local development projects, disaster response, or policies impacting farming households, while others engage with national debates. Participants acknowledged the challenge of misinformation

and described efforts to verify content through credible sources. Although not all participants actively post or debate online, their continuous engagement shapes their perceptions of leadership, governance, and civic responsibility.

Overall, for Gen Z in Makilala, social media functions beyond entertainment; it operates as a tool that gradually fosters political awareness, engagement, and a sense of civic belonging. To enhance clarity and impact, a joint display table or diagram could be used to integrate quantitative survey results with qualitative insights, illustrating how social media usage correlates with civic awareness and political attitudes among participants.

Table 6. Joint Display of Social Media Use and Political Awareness among Gen Z in Makilala.

Theme/Variable	Quantitative Findings (Survey / Likert Scale Means)	Qualitative Findings (Participant Narratives)	Interpretation/ Integration
Preferred Social Media Platforms	66.7% of respondents primarily use Facebook; smaller percentages use combinations with TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, and X.	Participants report Facebook as their main source for political content; they follow pages, news feeds, and posts from friends/family.	Both strands confirm Facebook as the dominant platform for political engagement, highlighting accessibility and widespread appeal among Gen Z.
Number of Social Media Accounts	60% have 1-2 accounts; 26.7% have 3-4; 12% have 5-6; 1.3% have 10 accounts.	Participants select content from trusted sources and curate feeds according to personal interests.	Limited account ownership reflects selective exposure and focused engagement with preferred sources, aligning with the theme of curated political content.
Influence on Political Knowledge	Mean $\pm$ SD = 2.80 $\pm$ 0.42 (Moderately influenced); 57.3% obtain political information from Facebook; 58.7% gain knowledge while browsing online.	Participants report increased awareness of local and national issues and actively seek information for learning and reflection.	Integration shows that social media moderately shapes political knowledge and awareness, corroborating the quantitative agreement with qualitative narratives.

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Engagement in Political Discussions	Mean $\pm$ SD = 2.26 $\pm$ 0.56 (Slightly engaged); 44% like/promote political content, 48% read comments/posts about candidates, but majority avoid posting or sharing opinions publicly.	Participants describe selective engagement—reading and observing more than actively posting—motivated by learning and awareness rather than public display.	Quantitative and qualitative data indicate moderate, cautious engagement; users prefer observation and reflection, supporting selective participation themes.
Verification and Critical Evaluation	60% report actively verifying information; patterns of selective attention to credible sources.	Participants highlight fact-checking, comparing sources, and assessing content credibility before engagement.	Both strands show conditional trust in social media; Generation Z evaluates content critically, influencing how they interact with political posts.
Correlation Between Influence and Engagement	Spearman's r_s = 0.457*, p = 0.000 (Moderate positive correlation)	Participants indicate that exposure to political content increases awareness, motivation, and civic interest, even if active posting is limited.	Integration confirms that higher exposure to political content is associated with increased engagement, supporting the relationship between information consumption and political participation.
Motivation Through Civic Awareness	Descriptive statistics: 46.7–58.7% agree social media updates their knowledge and keeps them aware of political trends.	Participants report using social media to learn, discuss, and raise awareness among peers and family.	Both quantitative and qualitative data demonstrate that social media motivates political learning and promotes civic consciousness, extending influence beyond passive consumption.

4. Conclusion

The study revealed that most respondents were female, accounting for 70.7 percent, and the majority maintained one to two social media accounts. Facebook emerged as the most preferred platform among participants, reflecting its role as the dominant site for accessing political content. The results further indicated

that Generation Z respondents were moderately influenced by political information shared on social media and demonstrated only limited engagement in online political discussions.

Statistical analysis confirmed a significant relationship between social media influence and

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Generation Z's political involvement, particularly in terms of information exposure and engagement. This moderate positive correlation led to the rejection of the null hypothesis, highlighting the meaningful impact of social media on this cohort's political behavior. From a qualitative perspective, participants reported relying on social media for political updates while exercising caution and selectivity in their engagement. They often balance exposure with verification and participate primarily when information is relevant to their personal or community context.

These findings align with the Theory of Reasoned Action, which emphasizes the influence of attitudes and perceived social norms on behavioral intentions, and with the Generational Cohorts Theory, which accounts for the unique socialization experiences of Generation Z that shape their patterns of information consumption and civic participation. Overall, the results suggest that social media functions as both an accessible source of political information and a constrained yet emerging space for civic engagement among Generation Z in Makilala, Cotabato.

5. Recommendations

The researchers suggest the following recommendations based on the results and findings, which is significant.

For Policymakers and Political Practitioners

- Politicians and campaign teams should strategically utilize social media to engage younger generations by creating content and interactive activities that foster informed political participation and civic involvement.
- Future research could explore how political parties can leverage social media to enhance communication, mobilize members, and coordinate volunteers, ultimately promoting more effective and meaningful interactions within the party and the wider community.

- Researchers are encouraged to establish more targeted criteria for Generation Z respondents, ensuring that survey instruments capture nuanced insights into the relationship between social media use and political engagement.
- To better understand trends and patterns, future research may adopt longitudinal or cross-sectional designs, enabling analysis of changes in political engagement over time or across demographic groups.

For Researchers

- Future studies should include larger, more diverse populations to capture a broader range of perspectives. Self-developed or structured questionnaires may be designed to yield globalized findings that reflect both local and global contexts.

For Educators and Civic Organizations

- Findings from this study may inform educational initiatives and civic programs to increase political awareness and engagement among younger populations, highlighting the role of social media as a tool for learning and participation.

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Supplementary Details

1. Supplementary Materials & Data Availability Statement

Our study does not include supplementary files such as additional figures, tables, videos, or datasets. All data generated and analyzed are fully presented within the manuscript and are available upon reasonable request from the corresponding author.

2. Author Contributions (CRediT Taxonomy)

All authors contributed to the conceptualization, data collection, formal analysis, and interpretation of results. Writing—original draft preparation and writing—all authors collaboratively completed review and editing. All authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

3. Funding Information

This research received no external funding. The authors personally supported all costs related to the study.

4. Institutional Review Board (IRB) Statement

This study received ethical approval from the Institutional Review Board of the Makilala Institute of Science and Technology. The research was reviewed and approved before data collection in accordance with institutional ethical standards.

5. Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study. Participants were briefed about the research purpose, voluntary participation, and confidentiality procedures.

6. Acknowledgments (Optional)

We extend our sincere appreciation to the participating school in Makilala, North Cotabato, and to the administrators who facilitated the data-gathering process. We also thank the experts who validated the research instruments and the student participants who shared their valuable insights.

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7. Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

8. Disclosure Statement (Use of AI Tools)

AI tools were used only for minor grammar refinement and formatting assistance during manuscript preparation. All AI-assisted content was thoroughly reviewed and validated by the authors to ensure accuracy and integrity.



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