

# The Digital Behavioral Patterns and Preferences of Millennials within Indonesia's Political Digital Landscape: A Case Study

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the interaction dynamics between Indonesian millennials and digital media platforms, particularly within the political context. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, surveys were conducted among individuals aged 15 to 18, complemented by focus group discussions. The study examined their comprehension of digital media, content consumption preferences, and proficiency in digital literacy, with data analyzed using Excel 2021. The findings indicate that Indonesian millennials possess a profound understanding of digital media, exhibiting a strong preference for entertainment-oriented content such as movies, text messages, and digital videos. Concurrently, they continue to engage with political news via online media platforms and television broadcasts. The study also reveals a high level of awareness among millennials regarding the significance of digital literacy, reflecting their adeptness in critically evaluating and validating information sources. These outcomes provide significant insights into millennials' potential contributions to digital politics, underscoring their status as engaged citizens in the digital.

**Keywords:** Digital literacy; digital media; millennials; Indonesian political landscape

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Within a continuously evolving era, Indonesia's young generation, particularly high school students, is experiencing a significant transformation in their interaction with technology. As members of the millennial and Z generations, they have seamlessly integrated into the digital realm, with daily life inseparable from internet usage, social media, and other digital technologies. According to the [Digital Report Indonesia \(2023\)](#), Indonesia's total

population is 276.4 million; around 212.9 million, or 77.0%, are internet users, and 167.0 million, or 60.4%, actively use social media.

This fact carries significant positive and negative implications, especially in the context of the political year. On the one hand, widespread internet and social media access, with 212.9 million internet users and 167.0 million active social media users, offers considerable potential for fostering more inclusive and informed political engagement. Social media platforms serve as avenues for young people to engage in political dialogue, expand the reach of campaigns, and facilitate a more dynamic and direct exchange of ideas (Anshari, 2013; Ardha, 2014). The accessibility of information possibly increases political awareness among young people, enabling them to make more informed choices and engage actively in the democratic process.

However, the high prevalence and reliance on digital media also bring significant challenges. The risk of spreading false information or hoaxes (Jatmiko, 2019; Sosiawan & Wibowo, 2020), polarization of opinions (Annas et al., 2019; Gustomy, 2020; Syarwi, 2022), and digital campaign manipulation (Arianto, 2017) have become particular concerns in political years. The rapid dissemination of information facilitated by social media amplifies accurate and misleading content, often lacking sufficient filtration or verification mechanisms (Vosoughi et al., 2018). These influences shape public opinion, especially among younger generations who may lack adequate media literacy skills to navigate political information complexities. Therefore, despite its considerable positive potential, young people, educators, and policymakers need to recognize and address these negative aspects of digital interaction, especially in the political context.

Previous research on young people's digital preferences can be categorized into several key areas. First, some studies use social media and the internet to concentrate on youth behavior. Research conducted by Hack-Handa (2015) highlights generational differences in the use of social networking sites. It emphasizes that Internet users of different ages consider social networking sites important. Specific platforms are favored to different extents among distinct different age groups. Meanwhile, the study by Rathi et al. (2023) draws attention to the growing social media reliance among the younger generation, particularly in India. It emphasizes the need for interventions to address this addiction phenomenon. In addition, research conducted by Akkucuk & Turan (2016) in Turkey revealed millennials' widespread use of social media, emphasizing understanding the reasons for use and the platforms favored by this generation.

Second, there is research that examines the impact of digital media on the psychological welfare of adolescents. Bruggeman's (2019) research highlights that excessive digital media consumption by children aged 9-12 can decrease their psychological well-being, particularly noting a more significant negative impact on intensive use. Twenge & Campbell (2019), as well as Twenge & Martin (2020), found that heavy digital media use indicates decreasing psychological well-being among adolescents, especially in adolescent girls, and increases the risk of factors such as depression and suicide. Meanwhile, Chia-Chen Yang (2021) and Vannucci & Ohannessian (2021) point out the need to consider different dimensions of social media use, given the differences in their impact on adolescent psychosocial well-being, with some patterns of use showing more adverse outcomes than others.

While the research provides valuable insights, a significant research gap in the literature exists: an absence of studies specifically exploring the correlation between young people's digital preferences and their political literacy. It includes understanding how young people select and process political information in digital media and its implications for their political awareness and participation. More in-depth research is needed to understand digital media's role in shaping contemporary youth's political literacy.

The main objective of this study is to fill a gap in our understanding of how the digital preferences of millennials, particularly high school students in Indonesia, interact with their political literacy. This study aims to analyze digital media consumption patterns among adolescents and explore how these patterns affect their comprehension and participation in

political issues. This includes examining the types of content they access, the frequency and context of digital media use, and the impact of these exposures on their political awareness and critical behavior. Furthermore, the study aims to assess adolescents' digital literacy levels and proficiency in discerning and evaluating political information. Through these analyses, this research endeavors to provide deeper insights into the role of digital media in shaping political discourse among the younger generation and its contribution to developing a more informed and critically engaged society. Additionally, by identifying and understanding these behavioral patterns and preferences, the findings of this study hold significant potential implications for policymakers, political practitioners, and future research. Hence, policymakers can use these insights to develop targeted educational programs and policies that enhance youth's digital literacy and political engagement. Political practitioners may find the findings valuable for crafting more effective communication strategies to engage the millennial audience on digital platforms. Finally, this research aims to inspire future studies to delve deeper into the nuanced interactions between digital media consumption and political literacy, further enriching our understanding of millennials' engagement in the digital political landscape.

## 2. METHODS

This study used a combined approach of surveys and focus group discussion (FGD) to explore the use of digital media by high school students. The study participants consisted of one hundred and thirty students, including the Student Council President and the Head of IRMA (Mosque Youth Association) from thirty-nine schools at the High School level in Bandung Regency, West Java (Table 1), with purposive sample selection. Purposive sampling aligns with [Creswell's \(2015\)](#) recommendation, facilitating the selection of participants most likely to offer insights relevant to the study's focus. The survey was conducted using questionnaires tested for validity and reliability, developed following Fowler's guidelines ([Fowler, 2009](#)).

In addition to the survey, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted to obtain deeper insights into students' attitudes and behaviors regarding digital media within the specific context of political information. Adhering to the methodology outlined by [Krueger & Casey \(2014\)](#), the FGDs involved small group discussions facilitated by qualified moderators. These discussions were focused explicitly on exploring millennials' personal experiences and interactions with social media and the internet as platforms for accessing, sharing, and discussing political content. Additionally, discussions delved into the perceived impacts of these digital interactions on the students' psychological well-being and social dynamics. This targeted approach in the FGDs allowed for the collection of rich qualitative data, which was then analyzed to identify common themes and patterns, particularly in relation to digital media's role in shaping political awareness and engagement among the participants.

**Table 1.** Schools' participants

No	Name of School	Number of Respondent
1	SMA Cendikia Informatika	2
2	SMA Al-Hidayah	1
3	SMA Al-Masoem	1
4	SMA Banjar Asri Cimaung	2
5	SMA Bina Negara 1 Baleendah	1
6	SMA BPPI Baleendah	2
7	SMA Handayani 1 Pameungpeuk	2
8	SMA Handayani 2 Banjaran	2
9	SMA IT Nurul Wasilah	1
10	SMA Karya Budi	2
11	SMA KP 3 Paseh	1

No	Name of School	Number of Respondent
12	SMA Mardika Paseh	1
13	SMA Mathla'ul Anwar Margahayu	2
14	SMA Mekar Arum	1
15	SMA Muhammadiyah 2 Majalaya	1
16	SMAN 1 Majalaya	1
17	SMA Negeri 1 Ciparay	2
18	SMA Negeri 1 Kertasari	1
19	SMA Negeri 1 Rancaekek	2
20	SMA Negeri 2 Majalaya	3
21	SMA Pasundan Banjaran	1
22	SMA Pasundan Majalaya	1
23	SMA Pasundan Rancaekek	1
24	SMA PGRI Cicalengka	2
25	SMA Plus Tebar Ilmu	1
26	SMA Sapta Dharma Soreang	2
27	SMA Telkom Bandung	2
28	SMA Tunas Baru Ciparay	2
29	SMAK BPK Penabur	1
30	SMAN 1 Banjaran	2
31	SMAN 1 Bojongsoang	14
32	SMAN 1 Cicalengka	2
33	SMAN 1 Majalaya	1
34	SMAN 1 Margaasih	1
35	SMAN 1 Margahayu	2
36	SMAN 1 Nagreg	2
37	SMAN 1 Pangalengan	2
38	SMAN 1 Soreang	2
39	SMAN Cimanggung	2

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### *Results*

The millennial generation is a young generation that lives during the millennial change, marked by the digitization of all aspects of life. Millennials were born between 1980 and 2000, so they can be categorized as young people aged around 23 to 43. Digitalization is very close to the millennial generation. It makes a personal digital space for millennials to access, obtain, and share all information they encounter online (Roringkon & Sarjito, 2021; Sari, 2019).

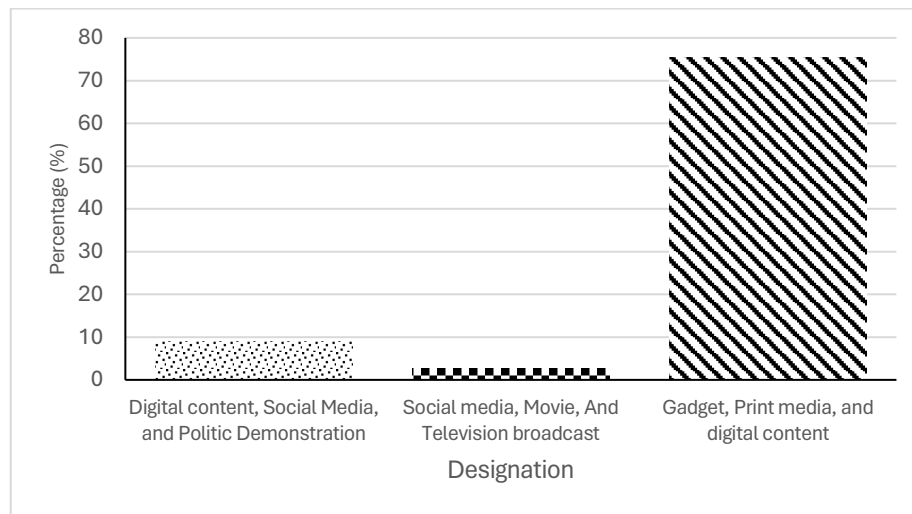
The characteristics of respondents in this study consisted of millennials who were studying secondary education either from high school or MA in Bandung Regency. The number of schools participating in the study was thirty-nine. An in-depth analysis related to the millennial generation and the digital world will be discussed in this section.

#### **Comprehension of Digital Media and the Millennials Generation**

Digital media relatively bridge distances and facilitate connectivity through technology. It allows the users to interact with anyone easily. The digital era was born because of the progress of the times and is accompanied by technological sophistication. Technology is gradually providing changes in various aspects of life (Soebagio, 2020; Turnip & Siahaan, 2021).

The millennial generation, which grew up with digital development, certainly has better skills and comprehension of digital media than the previous generation. According to the result in Figure 1, as many as 76.6% of millennial generation respondents know the components of digital media, including digital devices, social media, and digital content. This aligns with the understanding of digital media, which can refer to technical aspects of digital devices (e.g.,

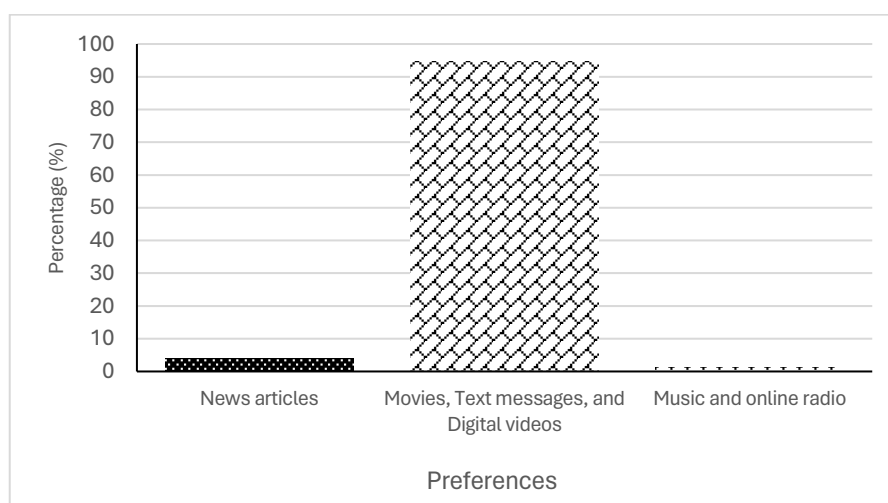
hard disks, laptops) and transmission aspects (e.g., networks for disseminating digital information and social media). It can also refer to its end product (digital content), such as digital video, digital audio, and others (Meilani, 2014).



**Figure 1.** The millennial generation's digital media comprehension

### Millennial Generation's Digital Content Preferences

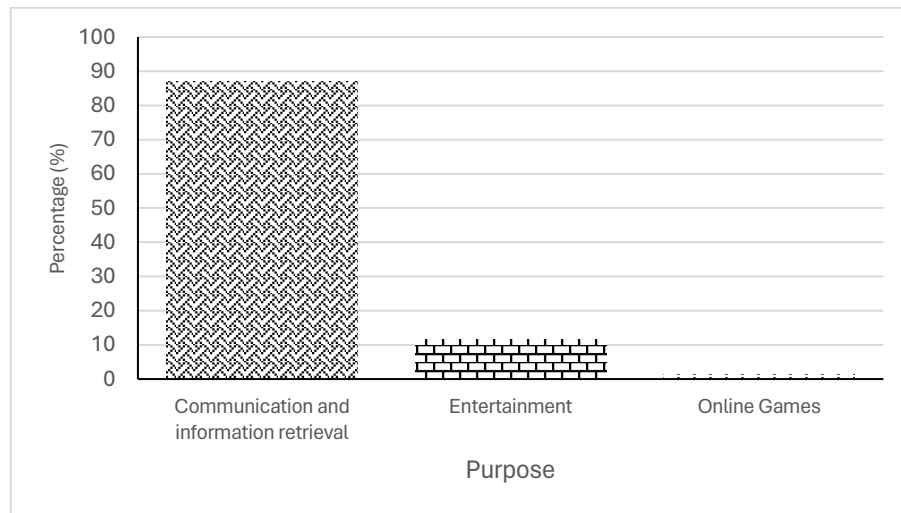
Content that can be accessed is characterized by considerable diversity. As illustrated in Figure 2, findings revealed that the most frequently accessed digital content is movies, text messages, and digital videos (94.8%). The figures show that online news, music, and radio content is notably infrequently accessed through digital media. These align with the research conducted by [Juditha & Darmawan \(2018\)](#), who mentioned similar things. Movies, text messages, and digital videos are the most frequently accessed digital content. Millennials consider political topics as mundane topics. However, respondents admitted to continue interested in political news that is widely accessed from online media and television.



**Figure 2.** The millennial generation's digital content preference

Although movies, text messages, and digital videos are commonly accessed by the millennial generation, accessing such content is for communication and information retrieval

(87%). However, the remaining portion is attributed to entertainment and online games (Figure 3). Communication and information searches carried out by the millennial generation are frequently sourced from digital media, notably social media platforms. These platforms serve as an avenue to socialize online, allowing humans to interact without being limited by space and time (Kurniasih, 2019; Meilani, 2014).

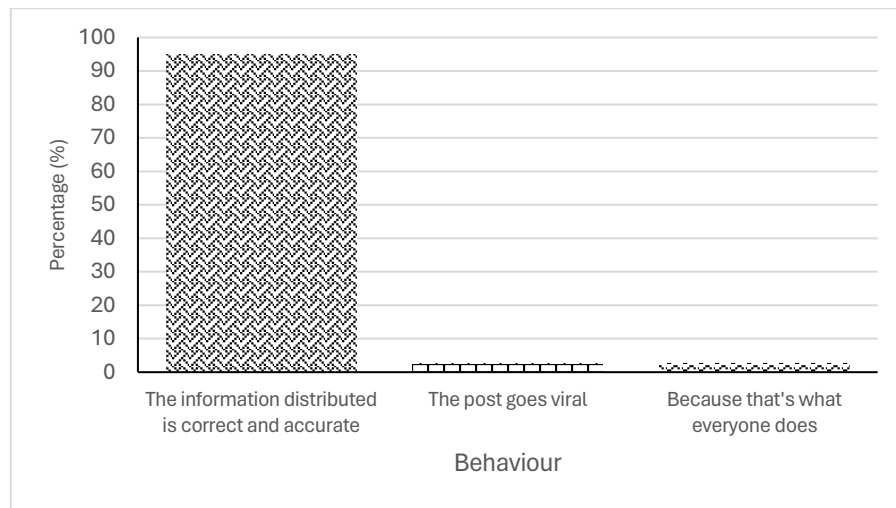


**Figure 3.** The millennial generation's digital content preferences

### Millennial Generation's Behavior in Social Media

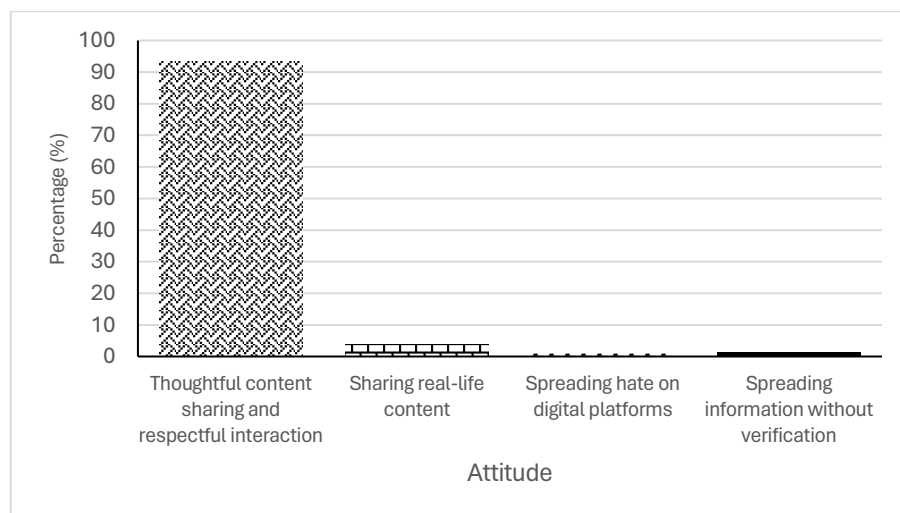
Currently, using social media platforms needs a lot of attention. The flow of information circulating seems to be uncontrollable. Given the way to digital access, content on social media is possibly disseminated without confirmation of the source of the content. Eventually, social media will also become a place for misinformation and hoaxes. Therefore, like most social media users today, the millennial generation needs knowledge and skills in processing digital information. Thus, it is called digital literacy.

Digital literacy can simply be interpreted as the capability of digital media users to obtain, analyze, and communicate information effectively. Through digital literacy, citizens are expected not to consume and disseminate information necessarily but also to sort and select factual and reliable information (Ardiansyah & Yulianti, 2022). As many as 94% of respondents also concurred on the importance of verification processes to ensure the information disseminated is true and accurate. This reflects that the awareness of digital literacy of the millennial generation is very high (Figure 4).



**Figure 4.** The millennial generation's behavior in using social media

Furthermore, 93.5% of respondents acknowledged that being wise on social media means careful thinking before sharing and treating people with respect on social media (Figure 5). They also concurred to block and report, if necessary, in response to malicious interactions on social media. Therefore, as users of digital devices, the millennial generation is compelled to attain literacy in the digital realm. Literacy incorporates comprehension, evaluation, and proficient engagement both as a producer and a consumer. Internet technology not only facilitates easier access for us to up-to-date information but also provides opportunities for us to be able to work (Fatmawati & Sholikin, 2019; Pradana, 2017; Sari, 2019).

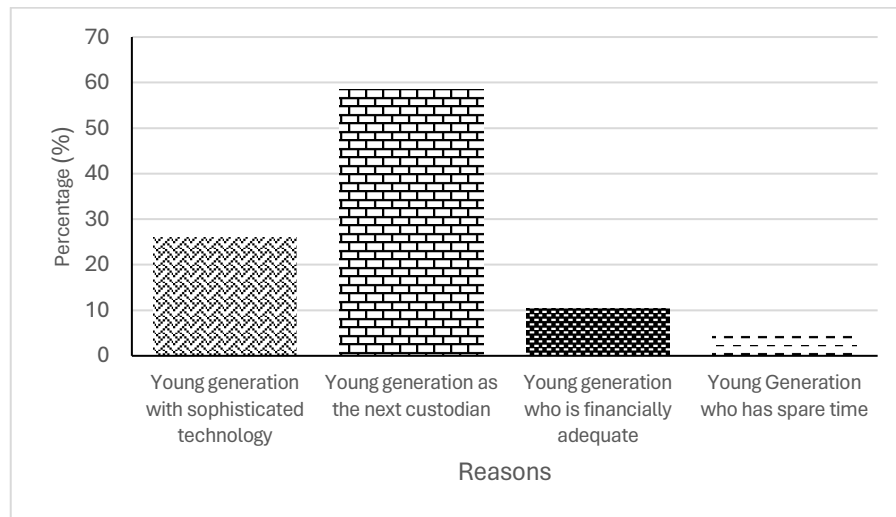


**Figure 5.** The millennial generation's behavior in using social media

### The Interconnection of Millennial and State Affairs

The millennial generation, aged 23-43, is one of the components of citizens who will be part of Indonesia's demographic bonus. The demographic bonus occurs when the population structure with productive ages (15-64 years) exceeds the non-productive age (infants and the elderly). This brings fresh air to Indonesia. Economically and politically, the millennial generation will greatly contribute (Falikhah, 2017).

Despite political engagement among the millennial generation tends to be low, especially in becoming a member or an active supporter of political parties, they participate in real rallies supporting/rejecting government policies and contacting governments/politicians/officials to fight for citizens' affairs. However, most millennials will still vote in the election (Meilani, 2014).



**Figure 6.** The interconnection of millennial and state affair

The survey findings expose citizens' high awareness of the millennial generation. 58.4% of respondents believe the younger generation is the custodian of the state's continuity (Figure 6). Hence, it highlights the pivotal role of their political engagement in shaping the state's future. Political parties can also take a role in encouraging millennial generation participation as much as 88.3% for the benefit of the nation. Consequently, millennials' proficiency in using digital media is needed to support all interests of the Indonesian state.

### **Discussion**

The findings of this study demonstrate millennials' deep understanding and distinctive inclination towards digital media, as evidenced by their intense engagement across various digital platforms. Their use of digital media is primarily for communication and information acquisition, with entertainment as an additional aspect of their utilization. However, more than that, this research reveals how these digital behaviors have the potential to influence the political landscape, especially in terms of political attitudes and participation among Indonesian millennials.

Digital literacy skills, especially in sorting information and interacting sensibly on social media, play an important role in shaping online political participation, as evidenced by studies that find a positive correlation between digital literacy and online political activity. Individuals with higher digital skills are more likely to engage in online political activities, such as emailing political representatives, participating in online consultations, and reading policy documents (Lilleker et al., 2021). The positive effect of digital literacy on online political participation is particularly pronounced for individuals who are interested in news and believe that their voices are heard by the government (Wang & Liu, 2024). While global research has recognized this relationship (Lilleker et al., 2021; Wang & Liu, 2024; Pirannejad & Janssen, 2017), our study highlights the unique influence of digital literacy on online political engagement among Indonesian millennials. We find that a focus on information sorting and thoughtful interactions on social media not only supports global findings on digital literacy as a tool for enhancing critical and informed political participation but also adds insights into how this phenomenon operates in Indonesia's specific socio-political context, demonstrating the importance of



adapting digital literacy strategies to support a more inclusive and participatory digital democracy.

Furthermore, these differences also highlight how certain socio-cultural contexts influenced younger generations' interactions with technology. In the Indonesian context, there is a significant emphasis on digital literacy education in response to growing challenges, such as misleading information and online hoaxes (Astuti et al., 2021; Nurcahyani et al., 2022; Raharjo & Winarko, 2021; Tsaniyah & Juliana, 2019), which have become a major concern in recent years. This aligns with a study by Desi (2020), which shows there are demanding efforts to integrate digital literacy education into school curricula and other learning programs. Thus, despite global trends in young people's digital engagement, local nuances and national policies are important in shaping young people to interact and respond to digital technology developments.

The findings of this study signify an important paradigm shift in political engagement, showing that digital literacy is not just a technical ability but a key tool for political empowerment in the digital age, especially among Indonesian millennials. In an increasingly connected yet fragmented global context, the ability to sift through accurate information and interact critically in online spaces is becoming increasingly vital. Particularly in Indonesia, where unique socio-political dynamics form the backdrop for digital interactions, millennials' engagement in online politics reflects changes in how young people access and process political information and their potential to shape political discourse and decisions. This suggests that digital literacy can serve as a bridge between civil society and the political sphere, facilitating new forms of democratic participation that are more responsive and inclusive. As such, improving digital literacy proves relevant to support more informed and critical political engagement among millennials and is essential in advocating for a more dynamic and participatory democracy in the information age.

The active involvement of Indonesian millennials in not only consuming but also producing and disseminating political content signifies a significant shift in political engagement dynamics. This participatory role aligns with Jenkins' participatory culture theory, highlighting how millennials can influence public opinion and socio-political narratives through their engagement with media (Jenkins, 2006). This dynamic shift challenges traditional media-user relationships, emphasizing the potential for millennials to shape political discourse and influence societal perspectives in Indonesia. Moreover, the research on Islamic political communication systems mapping the engagement of millennial Muslim populations on social media in the context of the 2024 presidential election underscores the pivotal role of digital platforms in shaping political conversations among millennials (Sazali et al., 2023). With a substantial portion of internet users in Indonesia being millennials, the impact of their engagement in political communication on social media platforms is significant (Sazali et al., 2023).

Therefore, their interaction with digital technologies may influence millennials' increased political participation and decision-making. This confirms the importance of understanding and integrating digital literacy into education and public policy, as suggested by Desi (2020), to facilitate more informed and critical political participation.

The findings of this study confirm that to respond to current political dynamics and increase political engagement among millennials, it is important for policymakers and political practitioners to prioritize the development of digital literacy. The implications of this study suggest that by strengthening millennials' digital understanding and skills, especially in the context of politics, we can help them become more critical and thoughtful in sorting out political information. This is important because millennials tend to use digital media as their main source of political information, yet are often faced with distinguishing between accurate information and misinformation. These research results emerge because millennials, who grew up in the digital age, have unprecedented access to and reliance on technology for information

and communication. However, this access is not always accompanied by the critical skills to navigate the complex and often confusing information landscape.

The findings of this study underscore the necessity for policymakers and political practitioners to prioritize enhancing digital literacy to address the current political dynamics and augment political engagement among millennials. The study's implications indicate that reinforcing millennials' comprehension and skills in digital literacy, particularly within the political context, could facilitate their ability to critically and judiciously discern political information. Given millennials' propensity to rely on digital media as their primary source of political information, this capability is crucial, coupled with the prevalent challenge of differentiating between accurate information and misinformation. The emergence of these findings can be attributed to millennials' unique position as the first generation to grow up in the digital age, characterized by their unprecedented access to and dependence on technology for information and communication. Despite this access, there is a noticeable deficiency in the critical skills necessary to navigate the intricate and oftentimes bewildering information landscape effectively.

In the context of digital literacy's importance in shaping informed and critical political participation, initiatives from policymakers to integrate digital literacy education into the education curriculum are becoming increasingly urgent. Similarly, political practitioners must design more interactive and participatory campaigns, capitalizing on millennials' propensity towards digital interaction. Effective campaigns should utilize digital platforms to facilitate wider dialogue and participation in the political process. Furthermore, coordinated efforts are needed to develop programs and initiatives that target improving millennials' digital skills, not limited to information consumption alone, but also the production and dissemination of critical and informed political content. Such measures can potentially increase political participation among millennials and contribute to developing a healthier and more inclusive digital democracy.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

The findings of this study highlight the importance of digital literacy in shaping informed and critical political participation among millennials. Compared to previous generations, millennials who grew up with the development of digital technology have different ways of accessing, processing, and interacting with political information. Moreover, identifying and assessing accurate information versus misinformation is essential in this era of often confusing information. This study provides strong evidence that digital literacy affects how individuals participate in online political activities and contribute to society's broader political discourse.

This study significantly enhances comprehension of how young people interact with digital media, particularly in the context of political literacy. Through analysis of digital media consumption patterns among adolescents, the study reveals how exposure to digital media affects their political awareness and critical behavior. The research also helps identify factors that influence adolescents' digital literacy levels and their impact on their ability to identify and assess political information. Hence, the study provides important insights into the role of digital media in shaping political discourse among the younger generation.

Although it provides valuable insights, the study has some limitations. First, the study sample was limited to a group of high school students in Indonesia who may not fully represent all youth groups. Second, this study focuses more on quantitative aspects and explores less qualitative aspects of the interaction of young people with digital media. Finally, this study focuses more on digital literacy and politics, so it may not cover all aspects of digital media use by the younger generation. Therefore, more research is needed to overcome these limitations and to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between young people and digital media.

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