

Digital Media, Political Knowledge, Awareness, and Participation Among Indonesian Students

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Abstract: *This study examines effects of political information sources (digital media, electronic mass media, political actors' postings, and interpersonal networks) on political knowledge, awareness, and participation among West Java university students during the 2024 Indonesian election, using PLS-SEM with 597 respondents. Findings reveal that political actors' postings affect political knowledge, while digital media uniquely predicted both knowledge and awareness. Political knowledge subsequently strengthened awareness and both online and offline participation, with online participation significantly driving offline engagement. Traditional media and interpersonal networks showed no significant effects. Results highlight the importance of contextualizing digital media's political influence within Indonesia's contested democratic environment.*

Keywords: *political awareness, political knowledge, political participation, university students, 2024 Indonesian election*

Abstrak: *Penelitian ini mengkaji pengaruh sumber informasi politik (media digital, media massa elektronik, postingan aktor politik, dan jaringan interpersonal) pada pengetahuan, kesadaran, dan partisipasi politik mahasiswa di Jawa Barat selama Pemilu Indonesia 2024 dengan penggunaan PLS-SEM terhadap 597 responden. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa postingan aktor politik berpengaruh terhadap pengetahuan politik, media digital secara unik memprediksi baik pengetahuan maupun kesadaran politik. Pengetahuan politik memperkuat kesadaran serta partisipasi politik daring dan luring, dengan partisipasi daring yang secara signifikan mendorong keterlibatan luring. Media tradisional dan jaringan interpersonal tidak menunjukkan pengaruh signifikan. Hasil ini menegaskan pentingnya mengontekstualisasikan pengaruh media digital dalam lingkungan demokrasi Indonesia yang dinamis.*

Kata Kunci: *kesadaran politik, pengetahuan politik, partisipasi politik, mahasiswa, pemilu Indonesia 2024*

Indonesia's 2024 simultaneous elections for the president, vice president, and legislative representatives at national, provincial, and district levels constituted the largest single-day democratic exercise in the nation's history. Young Indonesians represented a structurally decisive cohort. The General Elections Commission (Komisi Pemilihan Umum) reported that 56 percent of eligible

voters in 2024 belonged to the millennial and Generation Z categories (Muhamad, 2023). This demographic weight, combined with exceptionally high rates of social media adoption among Indonesian youth, positioned political communication via digital platforms as a priority domain for empirical inquiry.

The 2024 election also took place within a contested political environment.

Constitutional Court Decision No. 90/PUU-XXI/2023 concerned the judicial review of the minimum age requirement for presidential and vice presidential candidates regulated in Law No. 7 of 2017 on General Elections. The decision allowed candidates under 40 years of age to run as long as they held or had held an elected public office, and it modified the requirement in a manner that directly benefited Gibran Rakabuming Raka, son of the incumbent president. Constitutional scholars widely characterised the decision as procedurally irregular (Mietzner, 2024, p. 200). Research showed that concerns were raised about state apparatus neutrality, deployment of village fund networks as campaign instruments, and the role of social protection programmes in electoral mobilisation (Pepinsky, 2024; Warburton, 2024). This context is analytically significant. It means that whether increased political participation reflects autonomous democratic engagement or mobilisation serving incumbency interests is a genuinely open empirical and normative question that this study explicitly acknowledges rather than assumes away.

The dominant theoretical lens for studying media and political behaviour is media effects theory, which distinguishes cognitive effects (knowledge), affective effects (awareness), and behavioural effects (participation) (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009, p. 624). Classical formulations, including agenda setting, framing, and the two-step flow of communication (Hepp, 2019, p. 295), assumed media institutions

as primary gatekeepers and audiences as relatively passive recipients. Later traditions, including uses and gratifications theory (Sichach, 2024, p. 5), repositioned audiences as active selectors. However, all of these frameworks were developed in broadcast or early digital contexts and are ill-suited to the 2024 platform-mediated environment for three reasons.

First, contemporary platforms are not neutral conduits of information. Research shows that Instagram, TikTok, and X are architecturally distinct systems governed by proprietary engagement-optimisation algorithms that determine content exposure without editorial oversight (Pariser, 2011; Sunstein, 2018). TikTok's For You Page (FYP) algorithm is interest-graph rather than social-graph-based, exposing users to content from accounts they do not follow based on behavioural engagement signals. It is a design that privileges emotionally resonant content over informationally accurate content. The X operates as a text-based elite-discourse arena and has been documented as a primary vector for disinformation cascades during electoral periods (Vosoughi, Roy, & Aral, 2018, p. 1148). Instagram's visual-algorithmic logic favours aesthetically engaging campaign imagery and infographics. Treating these platforms as interchangeable within a composite 'digital media' variable risks obscuring platform-specific effects. This study retains a composite construct for analytical consistency with its instrument design but treats platform heterogeneity as a central theoretical concern and primary direction for future research.

Second, the concept of political knowledge requires explicit specification. Carpini and Keeter (1993) distinguish among factual knowledge (knowledge of candidates and officeholders), structural knowledge (understanding of institutions and governance processes), and critical knowledge (the capacity to evaluate political claims and identify source interests) (Carpini & Keeter, 1993, p. 1203). In a high-disinformation environment, these dimensions are not equivalent. The high factual knowledge derived from algorithmically-curated social media feeds may coexist with systematic belief distortion. This study operationalises political knowledge along factual and structural dimensions using instruments adapted from the research of Zetra, Khalid, Yanuar, and Marisa (2022). The absence of a critical knowledge dimension is explicitly acknowledged as a measurement limitation.

Third, political awareness refers to a person's level of interest in political matters and their emotional connection to political life (Lee, 2017, p. 395; Zetra, Khalid, Yanuar, & Marisa, 2022, p. 47) political participation could be considered community control over a government. Therefore, modeling the factors of political participation becomes essential. This cross-sectional study investigates the relationship between political awareness, political knowledge, and political participation of individuals living in Padang, Indonesia, and participating in the general election of 2020. This study employs the structural equation modeling (SEM). It functions as a

mediating construct between information exposure and participation. Despite high digital media engagement, young people still have a negative political sentiment. As 51.6 percent young people said that characterising politics as bad (Katadata Insight Center, 2023, p. 11). This disconnect between information exposure and political affect complicates techno-optimist narratives about social media's civic benefits.

Prior studies in Indonesia have examined associations between social media use and political participation (Kholisoh, Yuliawati, Suci, & Suharman, 2019; Mashud, Ida, & Saud, 2023; Saud, Ida, Abbas, Ashfaq, & Ahmad, 2020; Tarsidi, Suryadi, Budimansyah, & Rahmat, 2023) the internet, as their political communication channel. For young people, the internet serves as a dominant public space. Since young voters as millennial generation have great potential to increase votes, many political parties convey their political messages through new media used by millennial generation. This research is intended to see and study the influence of political messages in new media on political awareness and its impact on political participants of millennial generation. This research uses Stimulus Organism Response (S-O-R and between media exposure and political knowledge or awareness (Jayawinangun & Valdiani, 2020; Syaipuloh, Jayawinangun, & Nugraha, 2021; Zetra, Khalid, Yanuar, & Marisa, 2022) the community political participation has slightly changed as a result

of technological development. In 2018, our regional election had failed to achieve minimum target of political participation level that had been given by the Indonesian government. The government was targeting 77.5 percent but in the reality the society participation level only reached 73.24 percent due to the low level of participation from male voters. This research is conducted in order to identify male voters typology in Bogor Regency based on their utilization of political information sources or media. Quantitative method was used as methodological approach, 200 male voters were taken as research sampel by using quota sampling based on their electoral district, and Chi-Square Automatic Interaction Detector (CHAID). However, this body of literature exhibits three recurrent limitations. First, it aggregates heterogeneous platforms into undifferentiated social media or digital media variables, losing the architectural distinctions documented above. Second, it tends to treat young voters as a homogeneous population, even though the samples actually consist of university students. They include a subset that is educationally and socioeconomically unrepresentative of Indonesian youth as a whole. Third, it implicitly supports a linear causal chain in which information leads to knowledge, knowledge leads to participation, and participation strengthens democracy. However, it does not critically examine whether this chain holds up in a context with a lot of false information, algorithms, or contested democracy.

This study examines four sources of political information: (1) digital media (internet and social media), (2) electronic mass media (television), (3) interpersonal networks (family and friends), and (4) political actors' social media postings, and their effects on political knowledge, political awareness, and online and offline political participation among university students in West Java during Indonesia's 2024 election. The research model in Figure 1 draws on prior instrument designs (Jayawinangun & Valdiani, 2020; Yang & DeHart, 2016) the community political participation has slightly changed as a result of technological development. In 2018, our regional election had failed to achieve minimum target of political participation level that had been given by the Indonesian government. The government was targeting 77.5 percent but in the reality the society participation level only reached 73.24 percent due to the low level of participation from male voters. This research is conducted in order to identify male voters typology in Bogor Regency based on their utilization of political information sources or media. Quantitative method was used as methodological approach, 200 male voters were taken as research sampel by using quota sampling based on their electoral district, and Chi-Square Automatic Interaction Detector (CHAID and extends them by (1) situating the analysis within the contested political context of the 2024 election, (2) explicitly differentiating the sample from the broader young voter population, and (3) critically examining the information, knowledge, and participation causal chain.

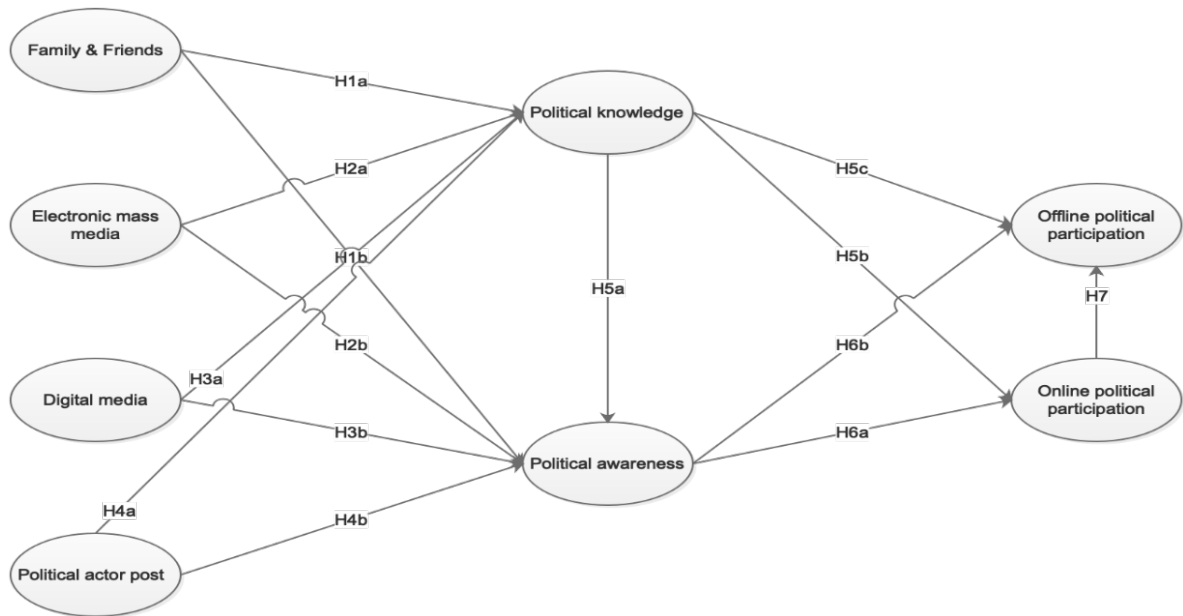


Figure 1 Conceptual and Hypothetical Models

Source: Jayawinangun and Valdiani (2020); Yang and DeHart (2016)

The hypotheses of this study are (1) H1a: Family and friends influences political knowledge; (2) H1b: Family and friends influences political awareness; (3) H2a: Electronic mass media influences political knowledge; (4) H2b: Electronic mass media influences political awareness; (5) H3a: Digital media influences political knowledge; (6) H3b: Digital media influences political awareness; (7) H4a: Political actors posting influences political knowledge; (8) H4b: Political actors posting influences political awareness; (9) H5a: Political knowledge influences political awareness; (10) H5b: Political knowledge influences online political participation; (11) H5c: Political knowledge influences offline political participation; (12) H6a: Political awareness influences online political participation; (13) H6b: political awareness influences offline political participation; and (14) H7: Online political participation influences offline political participation.

METHOD

This study employs a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design with explanatory objectives. The survey instrument used a Likert-scale format (1–4 for information source variables; 1–5 for participation variables) and was administered online during the 2024 election campaign period. Data analysis was conducted using variance-based partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS 4 (Ringle, Wende, & Becker, 2024), appropriate for testing complex theoretical models with multiple latent constructs (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt, & Ringle, 2019).

This study's sample consists exclusively of university students enrolled at public and private universities located in West Java Province. Respondents were included if they met three criteria: (1) being actively enrolled as a student at a public or private university in West Java at the time of data collection, (2) being at least 17

years old and eligible to vote in the 2024 election, and (3) owning at least one active social media account. The participating institutions covered both public universities (19.9 percent of respondents) and private universities (80.1 percent of respondents) spread across West Java. Although the broader category of young voters encompasses all eligible voters aged 17 to 40 years in Indonesia, university students constitute a specific and non-representative subset of this population. As shown in Table 1, the predominance of private university students skews the sample toward higher socioeconomic status (SES) urban youth. University students are, on average, more highly educated than the broader youth voter population, more likely to reside in urban or peri-urban settings, and more likely to have consistent internet access and digital media fluency.

This difference has important effects on generalisation. This sample does not include working-class youth, rural youth, vocational students, or young people who only have a high school diploma. These groups make up most of the young voters in Indonesia. Consequently, the results of this study delineate the political information-processing behaviour of a relatively privileged subset of young voters, rather than representing Indonesian youth as a whole. The authors consistently refer to the university students as the sample throughout the manuscript and limit generalisations accordingly. Future research should utilise stratified probability sampling across educational and geographic strata to yield

findings that are representative of the entire young voter demographic.

Respondents were recruited using both convenience and snowball sampling methods (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). Snowball sampling expanded the reach beyond the research team's immediate networks, alleviating some, although not all, limitations associated with convenience-based recruitment (Jager, Putnick, & Bornstein, 2017; Noy, 2008). The achieved sample of $N = 597$ exceeds the minimum recommended observations for PLS-SEM (Memon et al., 2020, p. xiv)

Political information sources were measured using adapted instruments from Jayawinangun and Valdiani (2020, p. 33) and Yang and DeHart (2016, p. 12). Political awareness was operationalised using the scale from Alqaraleh and Khedr (2022) and Zetra, Khalid, Yanuar, and Marisa (2022), capturing attentiveness to political affairs, recognition of political actors, and affective political orientation. Political knowledge was operationalised using items from Zetra, Khalid, Yanuar, and Marisa (2022) targeting factual knowledge (knowledge of candidates and officeholders) and structural knowledge (understanding of electoral processes and institutional roles). Critically, the researchers acknowledge that critical political knowledge, as the capacity to evaluate the credibility and source interests of political information, is not captured by the current instrument and represents a meaningful gap in the measurement model.

Political participation in online and offline was measured using instruments

from Hoffmann, Aeschlimann, and Lutz (2014) and Spaiser (2012). Hoffmann, Aeschlimann, and Lutz (2014) conceptualise online political participation as internet based political activities that require relatively low cost and effort, such as expressing political opinions on social media, sharing or forwarding political content, commenting on political issues, signing online petitions, and joining online groups that discuss politics. In contrast, offline political participation covers conventional activities that require physical presence or direct contact, such as attending campaign events or political meetings, joining demonstrations, contacting politicians or public officials, and being involved in campaign or volunteer activities.

Data collection was conducted during the 2024 simultaneous general and regional elections. These elections occurred amid significant democratic stress, including concerns about constitutional norm erosion, state resource mobilisation, and incumbency-aligned digital campaigning (Mietzner, 2024, p. 200; Pepinsky, 2024). These contextual factors directly affect the interpretation of the participation outcomes reported in this study and are discussed further in the results and discussion sections.

FINDINGS

Respondent Characteristics

The sample of 597 university students in West Java was approximately gender-balanced (49.6 percent males and 50.4 percent females). As noted above, 80.1

percent attended private universities, reflecting the predominance of private tertiary institutions in West Java. Campus organisational participation was relatively high, with 57.0 percent being active members of campus organisations, 38.4 percent being registered but passive, and 4.7 percent having no organisational involvement. Prior electoral participation was reported by 54.9 percent of respondents.

Social media ownership data illustrate the platform differentiated media environment in which this sample operates, such as Instagram (95.5 percent), YouTube (85.9 percent), TikTok (83.2 percent), X (72.2 percent), and Facebook (62.8 percent). The high adoption rates across multiple platforms underline the importance of specific platform analyses in future research. These platforms exhibit fundamentally different architectures: (1) Instagram's visual algorithmic design, (2) TikTok's interest graph recommendation system, and (3) X text-based elite discourse network. However, the current study's composite digital media measure does not capture these distinctions. In addition, Table 1 shows that social media represents account ownership, but not primary use. Multiple platform ownership is common, and social media percentages sum to more than 100 percent.

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for all research variables. In this study, each variable is identified by an abbreviation code derived from the Indonesian labels of the research instrument: (1) AP refers to political actors' postings on social media,

Table 1 Characteristics of Respondents

Characteristics	Details	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Gender</i>	Male	296	49.6 %
	Female	301	50.4 %
College status	Public university	119	19.9 %
	Private university	478	80.1 %
Campus organization	Not following	28	4.7 %
	Passive	229	38.4 %
	Active	340	57.0 %
Experience participating in the election	No	269	45.1 %
	Yes	328	54.9 %
Social media ownership	Facebook	375	62.8 %
	X	431	72.2 %
	Instagram	570	95.5 %
	TikTok	497	83.2 %
	YouTube	513	85.9 %
Total		597	100 %

Source: Primary Data (2024)

(2) KT refers to family and friends, (3) MD refers to digital media, (4) MME refers to electronic mass media, (5) PP refers to political knowledge, (6) KP refers to political awareness, (7) P Pon refers to online political participation, and (8) P Pof to offline political participation. Descriptive statistics are reported as the mean (M) and the standard deviation (SD). Digital media (MD: M = 3.45, SD = 0.68) was the highest rated information source, consistent with national patterns of internet penetration (69 percent) and high social media adoption among Indonesian youth (Okulovsky, 2024). Family and friends (KT: M = 2.70, SD = 0.74) ranked second, while electronic mass media (MME: M = 2.58, SD = 0.74) showed declining relevance partly attributable to perceptions of television partisanship during the campaign period (Martono & Annurdi, 2019). Political actors' social media posting (AP) had a modal value of 1, indicating that

most respondents follow between 1 and 5 political actor accounts.

Political awareness (KP) scores were relatively low (M = 2.42, SD = 0.71), corroborating national survey data showing that a majority of Indonesian young people hold negative views of politics (Katadata Insight Center, 2023). The findings challenge techno-optimist narratives that high digital media engagement did not correspond to high political affect. Political knowledge (PP: M = 2.51, SD = 0.80) was somewhat higher, though the measure captures primarily factual and structural dimensions rather than critical analytical capacity. Online political participation (P Pon: M = 1.73, SD = 1.02), measured with eight indicators of internet based political activity adapted from Hoffmann, Aeschlimann, and Lutz (2014), and offline political participation (P Pof: M = 1.79, SD = 1.05), measured with eleven indicators of direct political activity adapted from Hoffmann, Aeschlimann, and Lutz

Table 2 Descriptive statistics of research variables

Variabels	Central Tendency (Mode)	Min.	Max.	Standard deviation
Political actors on social media (AP)	1.00	0.00	4.00	0.98
Family and friends (KT)	2.70	1.00	4.00	0.74
Media digital (MD)	3.45	1.00	4.00	0.68
Electronic mass media (MME)	2.58	1.00	4.00	0.74
Political awareness (KP)	2.42	1.00	4.00	0.71
Political knowledge (PP)	2.51	1.00	4.00	0.80
Online political participation (PPon)	1.73	1.00	5.00	1.02
Offline political participation (PPof)	1.79	1.00	5.00	1.05

Source: Primary Data (2024)

(2014) and Spaiser (2012), were both in the low range. These low scores are consistent with the characterisation of Indonesian youth as high information consumers but relatively low active participants, a gap that may partly reflect the contested nature of the 2024 electoral environment.

Measurement Model Evaluation

The model used in this study is reflective. A validity and reliability test is conducted on the model to evaluate its measurement properties. To test the validity of the model, the values of the loading indicator were used, convergent validity using average variance extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity using

Fornell and Larcker, while reliability was assessed using composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt, & Ringle, 2019, p. 2).yet concise, overview of the considerations and metrics required for partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM Table 3 shows the results of testing the measurement model using the loading factor obtained that almost all indicators had a value of more than 0.7. Only one indicator with a lower value was the mass media variable with a radio indicator (0.582), so it was removed from the model. In the measurement of AVE, a good score of more than 0.5 was obtained, so that in this study it can meet

Table 3 Descriptive statistics of research variables

Variabel	Number of items	Loading factor	Composite reliability	Cronbach's alpha	AVE
Political actors on social media	5	0.844-0.910	0.950	0.928	0.774
Family and friends	2	0.823-0.913	0.733	0.683	0.755
Media digital	2	0.924-0.944	0.879	0.879	0.892
Electronic mass media	2	0.528-0.983	-	-	-
Political awareness	3	0.761-0.859	0.754	0.753	0.671
Political knowledge	6	0.717-0.821	0.841	0.836	0.605
Online political participation	8	0.739-0.852	0.922	0.920	0.642
Offline political participation	11	0.707-0.837	0.918	0.917	0.602

Source: Primary Data (2024)

Table 4 Discriminant Validity

	AP	KT	KP	MD	MME	PPon	PPof	PP
AP	0.880							
KT	0.052	0.869						
KP	0.223	0.090	0.819					
MD	0.007	0.335	0.247	0.944				
MME	0.034	0.310	0.100	0.366	1.000			
PPon	0.456	0.044	0.261	0.027	0.014	0.802		
PPof	0.462	0.085	0.313	0.064	0.000	0.726	0.776	
PP	0.287	0.148	0.644	0.204	0.114	0.313	0.344	0.778

Source: Primary Data (2024)

the requirements of convergent validity. Composite reliability measurements and also alpha Cronbach showed good results, where the value was greater than 0.7. As additional notes given to Table 3, the electronic mass media (MME) retained a single indicator (television) following removal of the radio item (loading = 0.582 < 0.70). Reliability statistics are not applicable for single indicator constructs.

In Table 4, the validity of the discrimination is judged to be good, as indicated by the double correlation of squares between the variables in the diagonal elements. The diagonal values (in each row and column intersection of the same construct) are the square roots of the AVE. The diagonal values ranged from 0.776 to 0.944, which indicates that the diagonal variable is larger than the other AVE values, which means a high degree of discriminatory validity for all constructions.

Structural Model Evaluation

The evaluation of the structural model used in this study includes the determination coefficient (R²), Q² measurement, as well as the statistical significance and relevance of the path coefficient (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt, & Ringle, 2019, p. 2).yet concise, overview

of the considerations and metrics required for partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM The results of this study obtained the value of R², which refers to the number of variances in the criterion variables that are explained together by the independent variables in the hypothesis model. As shown in Table 5, the developed model can account for 10.4 percent of the variance of online political participation and 54.7 percent of the variance of offline participation. These values are considered moderate and substantial when compared to the threshold values reported in the multivariate literature (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2017).”source”:”Library of Congress ISBN”,”title”:”A primer on partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM The results of the study also showed that political information sources could explain 12.8 percent of the variance of political knowledge and 43.3 percent of the variance of political awareness. In addition to R², the quality of the model can be assessed by checking the cross-validated redundancy (Q²) of the endogenous variables. Table 5 shows that the resulting redundancy values range from 0.050 to 0.289, and all Q² values exceed zero, thus indicating satisfactory predictive relevance of the model.

Table 5 Coefficient of Determination (R²) and Predictive Relevance (Q²)

Variabel Endogen	R squared (R ²)	Cross-validated redundancy (Q ²)
Political knowledge	0.128	0.077
Political awareness	0.433	0.270
Online political participation	0.104	0.050
Offline Political participation	0.547	0.289

Source: Primary Data (2024)

The structural model explained 12.8 percent of the variance in political knowledge, 43.3 percent in political awareness, 10.4 percent in online political participation, and 54.7 percent in offline political participation. The high explanatory power for offline participation (R² = 0.547) reflects the strong predictive pathway from online to offline participation ($\beta = 0.680, p < .001$), suggesting that online engagement is a strong antecedent of offline civic activity among this sample.

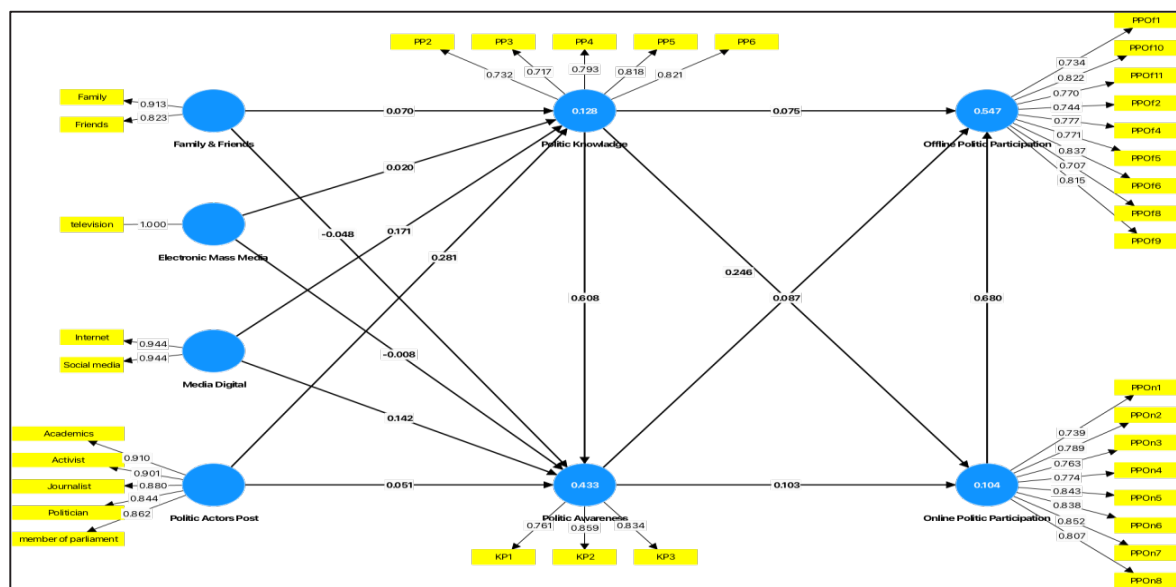


Figure 2 Research Structural Model
Source: Primary Data (2024)

Table 6 Hypothesis Test

Hypothesis	Path	Standardised Path Coefficient (β)	T statistics	P values	Results
H _{1a}	KT → PP	0.070	1.626	0.104	Rejected
H _{1b}	KT → KP	-0.048	1.395	0.163	Rejected
H _{2a}	MME → PP	0.020	0.464	0.642	Rejected
H _{2b}	MME → KP	-0.008	0.216	0.829	Rejected
H _{3a}	MD → PP	0.171	3.584	0.000	Accepted
H _{3b}	MD → KP	0.142	3.615	0.000	Accepted
H _{4a}	AP → PP	0.281	6.977	0.000	Accepted
H _{4b}	AP → KP	0.051	1.645	0.100	Rejected
H _{5a}	PP → KP	0.608	18.960	0.000	Accepted
H _{5b}	PP → PPon	0.246	4.981	0.000	Accepted
H _{5c}	PP → PPOf	0.075	2.210	0.027	Accepted
H _{6a}	KP → PPon	0.103	2.126	0.034	Accepted
H _{6b}	KP → PPOf	0.087	2.484	0.013	Accepted
H ₇	PPon → Pof	0.680	16.799	0.000	Accepted

Source: Primary Data (2024)

DISCUSSION

Platform Effects and Algorithmic Caveats in Digital Media

The finding that digital media significantly predicts both political knowledge ($\beta = 0.171$, $p < .001$) and political awareness ($\beta = 0.142$, $p < .001$) among university students in West Java is consistent with the broader literature on social media and political learning (Kholisoh, Yuliawati, Suci, & Suharman, 2019; Marquart, Ohme, & Möller, 2020) the internet, as their political communication channel. For young people, the internet serves as a dominant public space. Since young voters as millennial generation have great potential to increase votes, many political parties convey their political messages through new media used by millennial generation. This research is intended to see and study the influence of political messages in new media on political awareness and its impact on political participants of millennial generation. This research uses Stimulus Organism Response (S-O-R). However, the meaning of this finding requires careful qualification in light of the platform-mediated environment in which the study was conducted.

Digital media in the 2024 Indonesian context were not neutral information conduits. Instagram, TikTok, and X, which are the dominant platforms in this sample, employ proprietary algorithmic systems designed to maximise engagement. On TikTok, where 83.2 percent of respondents held accounts, the For You Page (FYP) algorithm determines content exposure

based on behavioural signals (completion rates, shares, re-watches) rather than social network proximity or editorial judgement. This architecture privileges emotionally engaging content over informationally accurate or analytically rigorous content. X, while more text-dense and more closely linked to elite political discourse, has been documented as a primary vector for viral disinformation cascades during electoral periods (Vosoughi Roy, & Aral, 2018, p. 1148).

This means the positive relationship between digital media use and political knowledge does not necessarily reflect democratic learning. The knowledge acquired through algorithmically curated political content may include misinformation, propaganda, or persuasion designed to reinforce rather than inform. The political knowledge construct in this study captures factual and structural dimensions but does not assess the accuracy or quality of that knowledge. Future research should incorporate information quality assessments alongside knowledge quantity measures, for example by testing respondents' ability to distinguish legitimate political information from disinformation items, or by assessing awareness of algorithmic curation processes. The differentiation among platforms also has implications for the composite digital media construct. The strong predictive relationship found here (particularly the dominant effect of political actors' postings on political knowledge, $\beta = 0.281$) may reflect the characteristics of political content on specific platforms rather

than digital media in general. Political actors in the 2024 campaign invested heavily in TikTok content production, creating highly polished short-form videos targeting youth audiences. Exposure to this content would register as political knowledge acquisition in the current measurement instrument while potentially representing exposure to strategic political communication rather than civic information.

The Strongest Predictor and Its Implications of Political Actors' Postings

The finding that political actors' social media postings constitute the strongest predictor of political knowledge in this sample ($\beta = 0.281$, $p < .001$) is theoretically significant and requires critical interpretation. Political actors' postings represent a direct political communication channel in which source interests are unambiguous, as the content is produced to promote candidates, mobilise supporters, and shape voter perceptions. Exposure to such content can indeed increase knowledge in the sense of familiarity with candidates, their policy positions, and their campaign messages. However, this input is qualitatively different from information produced by independent journalism or civic education materials, because content from political actors is created primarily to persuade, whereas independent journalism is bound by professional norms of verification and balance. Knowledge gained mainly from campaign content, therefore, cannot simply be equated with knowledge gained from independent and verified sources.

This finding also intersects with the context of the 2024 election. Political actors and their support networks, including incumbency-aligned digital armies, were documented as major producers of content on Indonesian social media during the campaign (Mietzner, 2024, p. 192). The sample's modal pattern of following 1–5 political actor accounts on social media places respondents within information environments substantially shaped by strategic political communication. The positive knowledge effect of this exposure should therefore be interpreted as evidence of the effectiveness of political communication rather than of democratic information provision.

The Causal Chain from Information to Participation via Knowledge and Awareness

The study's structural model supports the broad shape of the causal chain that runs from information to knowledge and awareness, and then from knowledge and awareness to participation. Digital media positively predict knowledge and awareness; knowledge strongly predicts awareness ($\beta = 0.608$), and both online and offline participation; awareness predicts both forms of participation; and online participation is a strong predictor of offline participation ($\beta = 0.680$). However, this chain requires critical examination at every stage.

In the first stage, from information exposure to political knowledge, political information on social media is epistemologically heterogeneous. The assumption that exposure to digital political

content produces learning equivalent to exposure to independent political journalism overstates the informational quality of the digital media environment. In the second stage, from political knowledge to participation, the strong positive effect of political knowledge on participation, particularly online participation ($\beta = 0.246$), suggests that higher knowledge students are more behaviourally engaged. However, participation in the 2024 election context cannot be straightforwardly equated with democratic engagement. The high predictive power of online participation for offline participation ($\beta = 0.680$) may partly reflect the mobilisation of students through digital channels by political organisations (Wahyuningroem, Sirait, Uljanatunnisa, & Heryadi, 2023), alongside authentic civic motivation. In the third stage, from participation to democratic quality, this study does not test the assumption that participation enhances democratic quality, but notes that this assumption is not warranted in contested democratic contexts. Scholars of democratic backsliding have consistently noted that participation metrics can remain high in competitive authoritarian regimes where elections serve legitimisation rather than representation functions (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2019).

The Non-Significance of Traditional Media and Interpersonal Sources

The failure of family and friends (H1a, H1b rejected) and electronic mass media (H2a, H2b rejected) to significantly predict political knowledge or awareness

among this sample is consistent with prior Indonesian research documenting the declining salience of traditional information sources among university-age digital natives (Istiyaswati, 2021; Nofiard, 2022). The declining relevance of television is particularly notable given documented perceptions of television partisanship during the 2024 campaign (Martono & Annurdi, 2019).

The negative (though nonsignificant) direction of the path from family and friends to political awareness ($\beta = -0.048$) is intriguing. One plausible interpretation is that intergenerational political discussions in some households are characterised by partisan conflict or political cynicism that suppresses rather than cultivates political awareness, consistent with the findings Iqbal and Shabir (2019) on the declining influence of interpersonal and family sources on the political behaviour of young voters. However, the non-significance of this path counsels caution in interpretation.

Limitations and Boundaries of Inference

This study has several limitations that must be explicitly acknowledged. First and most significantly, the sample consists exclusively of university students in West Java, an educationally privileged, predominantly urban, and socioeconomically advantaged subset of Indonesian young voters. The overrepresentation of private university students (80.1 percent) further concentrates the sample toward higher SES profiles. Findings cannot be generalised to working-class, rural, vocational, or non-tertiary

youth, who constitute the majority of Indonesian young voters.

Second, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference. The observed associations between information sources, knowledge, awareness, and participation are correlational; longitudinal or experimental designs are required to establish directionality and rule out reverse causation (e.g., participation motivated information seeking). Third, the composite digital media construct aggregates across platforms with fundamentally different architectures. Platform-disaggregated measurement, with separate variables for Instagram, TikTok, and X, is a priority for future research. Fourth, the political knowledge instrument only captures factual and structural dimensions. The critical knowledge (the capacity to evaluate information credibility and identify sources' interests) is absent from the measurement model, a significant omission in a high-disinformation electoral environment. Fifth, the contested nature of the 2024 election means that observed participation behaviour cannot be unambiguously interpreted as autonomous democratic engagement without qualitative follow-up research.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the effects of political information sources on the political knowledge, political awareness, and political participation of university students in West Java during Indonesia's 2024 simultaneous elections. Using PLS-SEM on a sample of 597 university students, the

study found that digital media and political actors' social media postings were the primary predictors of political knowledge, while digital media also predicted political awareness. Political knowledge, in turn, strongly predicted political awareness and both online and offline participation, with online participation functioning as a strong predictor of offline engagement.

Three contributions distinguish this study from prior work in the Indonesian political communication literature. First, it situates the analysis of digital media effects within the politically contested context of the 2024 election, acknowledging that findings about political participation cannot be straightforwardly interpreted as evidence of democratic deepening. Second, it provides an explicit critical account of the causal chain from information to knowledge to participation, identifying the epistemological heterogeneity of social media political content as a constraint on optimistic interpretations of digital media's democratic benefits. Third, it makes a methodological contribution by clearly delineating the boundaries of inference, consistently using the term university students rather than the broader category young voters, and explicitly articulating the non-representative character of the sample.

The study's findings have implications for election organisers, political communicators, and media literacy educators in Indonesia. Election organising institutions, namely the General Elections Commission (Komisi Pemilihan Umum) and the General Election Supervisory

Agency (Badan Pengawas Pemilihan Umum), should design platform-specific communication strategies recognising the distinct architectures of Instagram, TikTok, and X, rather than treating digital media as a homogeneous channel. Media literacy programmes targeting university students should incorporate critical knowledge components, particularly the ability to identify algorithmic curation, recognise source interests in political content, and distinguish civic information from strategic political communication. Political scientists and communication scholars should resist techno-optimist frameworks that treat increased digital political engagement as equivalent to democratic deepening, particularly in contexts of democratic stress.

Future research should prioritise some aspects: (1) stratified probability sampling encompassing non-university youth, rural youth, and vocational students to produce nationally generalisable findings; (2) platform-disaggregated measurement of Instagram, TikTok, and X effects; (3) instruments capturing critical political knowledge alongside factual and structural dimensions; (4) longitudinal designs capable of establishing causal directionality; and (5) mixed methods approaches that can distinguish autonomous political engagement from mobilised participation in algorithmically mediated environments.

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