Social Media Engagement's Impact on Gen Z's Political and Civic Participation and Activism

Mohammad Tamzid Hossain [1*]**, Sanjida Afroze** [2]**, Tasfia Mehanaz Authithi** [3]

[1,3]Department of Human Resource Management, University of Chittagong, Bangladesh
[2]Department of Accounting, Daffodil International University, Dhaka.
[*]Corresponding auhor, email: tamzid@cu.ac.bd

Abstract

This study examines the relationship between the social media engagement of Generation Z (Gen Z) and their political engagement, civic participation, and activism. A convenience sample of 296 Gen Z, was used in Bangladesh to investigate the impact of their social media on their political engagement, civic engagement, and civic activism in a quantitative research study. We used SPSS 29 to perform the analyses in the study to test the hypotheses. The research found that there is a strong and positive relationship between the social media use among Gen Z and their political participation, civic engagement, and activism. The findings can offer interesting information on the manner in which digital platforms, especially social media, influence political and civic involvement among Gen Z. In addition, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on digital citizenship and provides analysis on how virtual spaces could help future generations negotiate political and civic issues.

Keywords: Generation Z, social media engagement, political involvement, civic participation and activism, and digital citizenship.

Introduction

Gen Z, also known as Generation Z, comprises individuals born between 1997 and 2012, and they are the first generation to know a world full of technology, or at least, social media. As any other generation, they are not just simple consumers of technology so that they can communicate or be entertained, but they are embedded at the socio-political level. This participation is done by directly taking part in the sociopolitical processes (Twinomurinzi, 2024). Social media has created new avenues of political action, civic participation, and mobilization. These forms of interaction create opportunities to have increased political activism and civic engagement. Gen Z, as digital natives, can not only have their opinions influenced as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Twitter become one of the main sources through which Gen Z makes their own opinions, but also become an alternative way to take

political discussion, protests, and movements part (Zyad, 2023; Karimi & Fox, 2023; Król & Zdonek, 2021). Bearing in mind the specifics of this generation, their social media consumption, and technological connection, it is interesting and significant to see how political activities of this generation and state, political participation, and social action vary with use of social media.

The impact of social media on political engagement, particularly on young people, is on the increase and has been more and more recorded over the past couple of years. It has been revealed that social media has been used as an important platform for sharing information that enhances the awareness of the people as well as the participation of the youth in political activities (Suhariyanto & Rozak, 2025). Adding on, whereas social media offers a rare chance to communicate with like-minded people, be present in politics, and enhance the number of opportunities concerning political focus, there are also concerns about some of these issues, such as the dissemination of fake news, echo chambers, and radical perspectives that might deteriorate the quality of interactions (Mulyadi et al., 2024). Therefore, it is valuable to understand the influence of social media on political participation and civic engagement to develop methods that can be used to promote positive political participation and civic engagement among Gen Z. Although some previous research has addressed the connection between social media and Gen Z political involvement & civic engagement, there are still major gaps and areas that have not yet been addressed. Most importantly, the connection between online activism and ultimately offline political and civic activism is little explored in the past, and it remains unclear what degree of impact digital activism has on the real world. Otherwise stated, the authors highlighted the fact that the majority of the population has an idea of the resistant population (Vaccari et al., 2016; Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006).

This research aims to examine social media and its connection with the political and civic behavior of Gen Z. More specifically, it examines the relationship between the volume and the nature of use of social media and political participation and civic engagement and action. The proposed research will also make important contributions to the body of theory on digital citizenship, as it will involve carrying out a study of the role that online settings have in the formation of political identity and political behavior. As the recent movement towards the pace of social media adoption is in the circles of Gen Z, the study will analyze the dualistic nature of politics on social media in order to introduce each one as a provider of information and more as a mobilization community. In accordance with our investigation, we have

discovered that through social media, Gen Z political engagement and civil activism are powerful drivers that occur through the lenses of knowledge and mobilization. Although platforms are inspiring record levels of youth vote, demonstration, and social movement turnout, in tandem, we discovered that there seem to be severe dangers, including misinformation and a larger necessity to translate online-to-offline transformation. These findings highlight the creative forces of digital platforms when considering democracy and the need to protect them to ensure balanced digital civic space.

This study examines how the use of social media can influence the political participation, civic participation, and activism of Gen Z, using the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT). The structure was conceptualized in the early 1970s by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch. They described the topic in the pioneering article issued in the year 1973, which was known as Uses and Gratifications Research (Katz et al. 1973). According to Katz and his colleagues, individuals choose media in the effort to fulfill certain psychological and social requirements. The dimensions are learning, social engagement, search for pleasure, and development of the character of the individual. The specified theory describes why Gen Z finds the sources of political knowledge, develops into active community members, and manifests themselves with the help of activism in social media. The hypothesis gives a significant implication of why individuals like to utilize what type of media source and how the actions and their perception are built on the basis of the interaction. Growing up with digital technology, social media has been a source of information to this generation, as illustrated in media trends of the Gen Z generation. This research explores Gen Z's usage of the different forms of social media presence and how these modes of social media presence influence Gen Z in their political engagement, their engagement with community, and activism.

Social Media Engagement of Gen Z

The concept of social media is labeled as a group of internet-oriented tools through which user-generated content can be created and distributed (Kumar et al., 2018). Numerous social media genres fall under this category, such as Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, Twitter, Google Plus, WhatsApp, and YouTube. Social media engagement is a broad phenomenon, including enabling its users to communicate with other users in their supposed social network (Loiacono & McCoy, 2018), empowering its users (Tajurahim et al., 2020), and coexisting with the problems related to the dark sides of social media use (Boer et al., 2021; Coyne et al., 2020; Dhir et al., 2021).

Gen Z, who commonly are referred to as digital natives, have always had access to the internet and mobile devices, and that is why social media plays a very mainstreamed role in their everyday lives. This is a group born after 1997 or so and also called the iGeneration, Gen Tech, and the always-clicking generation because this group is so attached to technology and online platforms (Bassiouni & Hackley, 2014; Turner, 2015). Social media like Facebook, Instagram, or TikTok enables their users to create either public or semi-public profiles, meet other people, and maneuver inside those platforms (Nguyen et al., 2020). The platforms can be used in different ways: to communicate socially, to express political opinions, and to communicate by seeking information, entertainment, and self-understanding (Whiting & Williams, 2013). Gen Z is increasingly turning to these platforms to get news, political perspectives, and civic discussions (Pempek et al., 2009; Roengtam et al., 2017).

Political Involvement

Political involvement is the affective and cognitive engagement in political issues, including political awareness, political interests, opinions, or attitudes; and it also comprises the activities of citizens in order to affect the decisions of the authorities, including electoral participation of the citizens, protesting, or membership in politics (Brunton-Smith & Barrett, 2014). Political involvement has globally reached a critical point, particularly among the youth, and this is already a significant concern of our democracies nowadays (Farthing 2010; Furlong and Cartmel 2012; Henn and Foard 2012). Although the strategies of politicians on social media have been thoroughly explored in a growing body of research (Kruschinski et al., 2025; Marquart et al., 2020), little is known about the implications of following political actors online on the political participation of citizens (Ahmed et al., 2023).

The current generation is more involved in politics differently as compared to the preceding generations. Recently, there has been evidence of a weaker political participation in younger groups (Grasso, 2014; Fox, 2015). But this generational change is also marked by the shift of the protest towards the informal, decentralized forms of protests, the impact of the digital platforms in politics (Kalogeraki & Kousis, 2022), and concern with the issues about identity, climate change, and social justice (Boldt et al., 2021). Students in general engage in varied matters of politics; some students vote and join government, and some engage in activism and protests. These findings are in favor of the promise of social media as a channel of engaging the youth in the political procedures, particularly in an informal or expressive manner (Colby et al., 2010; Finlay et al., 2010).

Civic Participation and Activism

Civic engagement can be regarded as those activities in which people have to make positive contributions to the common good, such as volunteering, community service, and social activism. Over the last several years, researchers have explored the impact of social media on civic engagement in the local as well as an online setting (Kim et al., 2013; Bode et al., 2014). Historically, civic engagement concerned community-oriented action to have some impact on governmental policies or to solve the problems in the society (Gil de Zuniga et al., 2012). However, in the age of digitalization, civic activism can consist of online activity such as e-signing petitions, liking political parties/groups, or fundraising (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010; Vicente & Novo, 2014). Although they are less demanding than the traditional forms, they are critical to the process of mobilizing opinion and engagement on many activities.

The recent global events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, brought into focus the role of local civic engagement, including community-based assistance and solidarity movements on social media (Colasanti et al., 2025). With Gen Z, digital spaces are becoming a mediator of activism efforts. Hashtag campaigns, virtual protests, youth mobilization on social media, and the spots created to speak on behalf of others and represent the voices pointing out the need for change. Gen Z in Bangladesh portrays a strong urge for social justice and change even though they are politically indifferent due to a lack of confidence in the system (Samrin, 2024).

Social Media Engagement of Gen Z and Political Involvement

The generation born approximately between 1997 and 2012, better known as Generation Z, is commonly considered to be the first genuine digital natives who were acculturated into social media environments (Glendening, 2024). Social media has increasingly become one of the major sources of political knowledge and discussion among young people. Through such social media as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, and YouTube, Gen Z can see real-time political reports, debates, campaign communications, and user-generated content regarding individual political views. The introduction of social media is therefore an effective tool that has helped Gen Z to shape their political interests and engage with the political process by providing a platform that is broad, interactive, and instantaneous with which communication can be made. UGT is optimistic that everyone is actively seeking information that fulfills his or her needs of information, identity, and advice on belonging to the community. Social media serves the needs of Gen Z and thus boosts their political participation (Septian & Wulandari, 2024; Intyaswati & Fairuzza, 2023). It gives them a convenient way of political education and

participation, maybe the interest in voting, discussing political issues, and engagement in political discussions. According to empirical research, higher rates of social media engagement correlate positively with the degree of political participation (voting intentions, political discussions, and awareness of political or other issues) (Suhariyanto & Rozak, 2025; Solihat, 2024; Abraham, 2023; Gürel & Eyüboğlu, 2023; Alfred & Wong, 2022; Carbone, 2021). Gen Z political socialization on social media has opened political participation to a wide range of individuals and contributed to a feeling of political efficacy (Alfaruqy & Padmonurcahyo, 2023). On this theoretical and empirical evidence, this research proposes the following hypothesis:

H₁: Social media engagement of Gen Z is positively associated with their political involvement.

Social Media Engagement of Gen Z and Civic Participation and Activism

In addition to politics, social media can be regarded as a valuable means of promoting civic involvement and activism. Civic participation refers to efforts in the development of the community and social welfare, whereas activism means efforts that have a forward-moving purpose in the social or political aspect (Petrone et al., 2021). Digital spaces create opportunities to engage in civil discourse, mobilization of volunteers, political campaigning, and collective social action in the case of Gen Z (Battocchio et al., 2023; Kamau, 2017).

Studies have established that the use of social media can be empowering to young people due to the availability of more information, exposure to like-minded individuals, and the possibility of coming together to pursue causes within a relatively short span of time (Shaher, 2025; Krishnan et al., 2023). Previous studies showed that an increased usage of social media translates into the positive relationship with increased rates of civic participation and civic activism (Wijaya & Amalia, 2024; Battocchio et al., 2023; Zyad, 2023; Andersen et al., 2021). Because social media now is a core factor in shaping civil awareness and providing the means of engagement, it could be reasonable to assume that the extent of civil engagement and activism within Gen Z is extremely dependent on their interaction with social media. Accordingly, this study takes the following hypothesis:

H₂: Social media engagement of Gen Z is positively associated with their civic participation and activism.

According to the literature review and offered hypotheses, the research model of the study can be formulated as follows:
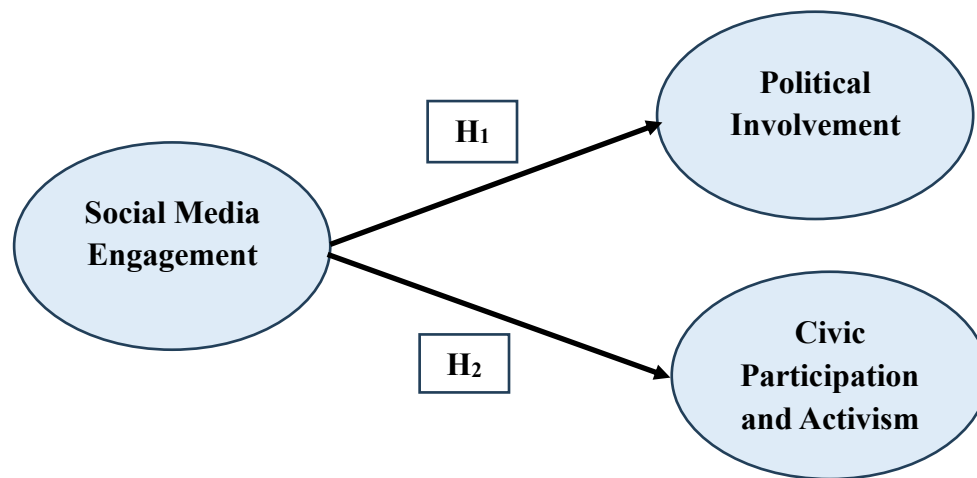

Figure 1: Proposed Research Model

Method

Research Design and Sampling

A quantitative research design was used in this study to understand the correlation between social media usage and political interest, civic engagement, and activism amongst Gen Z in Bangladesh. The quantitative methods are appropriate when testing the hypothetical connections and determining the intensity of the links between the variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The sample size was 296 people aged 18-24 years, based on the 53 percent males and 47 percent females of Gen Z. Convenient sampling was used to recruit participants based on a target group of young people using social media. Convenience sampling, though it cannot offer broad generalizability, can be used as a means of accessing digital populations where random sampling is not possible or desirable (Etikan et al., 2016).

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection tool was an online survey distributed across social media websites used locally by Gen Z, which include Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp groups. The approach chosen was an excellent means of reaching out to the youths who had digital lives, and it cost less time and money in research to collect data. The survey has been conducted on

a voluntary basis, and the identity of the surveyed was kept in the form of anonymity, and all the participants gave informed consent before the survey. The questionnaire contained both demographic and standardized questions to evaluate the level of social media use, political indulging, and civic and activism. Actually, the survey was taken within a 08-10 minute duration, and the answers were automatically listed to simplify the analysis.

Measurement Scales

Social media engagement was measured with the help of a thirteen-item scale developed by Ni et al. (2020). It was marked by questions about the frequency of such platform users as TikTok or Instagram or the question about the time within which he/she can spend it and the frequency of exposure to political messages. Political involvement was measured by a 10-item scale, modified by Fischer and Kohr (2002), that listed such items as voting, reading political news, talking with friends about politics, and doing online campaigns. To measure the Civic Participation and Activism scale, 14 questions were used to assess the conceptualization applied by Doolittle and Faul (2013) based on the participation in protests, community initiatives, and online or offline support of social causes. Each of the items was measured using a five-point Likert scale between 1 (strongly disagree) and 5 (strongly agree). The scales used in the study were fairly reliable, as they surpassed the cut-off criterion set by Nunnally & Bernstein (1994) with 0.84, 0.73, and 0.94 Cronbach's alpha, respectively, in social media engagement, political involvement, and civic participation and activism scales.

Analytical Tools

The data that was gathered was analyzed with the most recent version of SPSS (SPSS 29), which is a most popular tool in social science research (Field, 2022). We first conducted descriptive statistics to obtain the picture of our respondents and their responses. We also ensured the reliability of our scales of measurement using Cronbach's alpha. We employed correlation analysis in order to understand the connection between the main variables: social media engagement, political involvement, and civic participation and activism. We used regression analysis thereafter to determine the level of accuracy of the use of social media as a measure of the political participation of Gen Z, as well as civic participation and activism.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Social Media Engagement	296	3.849	0.790
Political Involvement	296	3.900	0.703
Civic Participation and Activism	296	4.019	0.763

Table 1 describes the mean statistics of the study variables, and the study variables were measured on a 5-point Likert scale where the maximum average of points of the study variables was with civic participation and activism, which was measured as (M = 4.02, SD = 0.76), followed by political involvement, which was measured as (M = 3.90, SD = 0.70), and the social media engagement mean was 3.85 (SD = 0.79), and therefore it is indicating a generally positive response across variables.

Correlations among Social Media Engagement of Gen Z, Political Involvement, and their Civic Participation and Activism

Table 2. Results of Correlations

	Social Media Engagement	Political Involvement	Civic Participation and Activism
Social Media Engagement	1		
Political Involvement	.410**	1	
Civic Participation and Activism	.244**	.315**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation analysis showed high positive ties between social media use and political involvement (r = 0.41) and civic participation and activism (r = 0.24). These findings imply that the more Gen Z consumes social media, the more the younger generation stands chances of engaging in political involvement and civic participation. Their results correspond

to the existing research on the mobilizing power of social media in regard to, specifically, youth politics (Alfred and Wong, 2022; Matthes, 2022). Their use of social media matched civic participation and activism (e.g., protesting and signing online petitions) in that even after adjusting for several factors such as internet usage, younger respondents who frequently used their social media to access political material (e.g., on Instagram or Twitter) were more likely to have engaged in the civic sphere.

Predictive Power of Social Media Engagement

Table 3. Results of Regressions

Dependent Variables	B	Std. Error	β	t	R Square	Adjusted R Square	p
Political Involvement	0.364	0.047	0.410	7.702	0.168	0.165	0.00
Civic Participation and Activism	0.235	0.055	0.244	4.306	0.059	0.056	0.00

Multiple regression analyses were performed to identify the predictive relationship between social media engagement with political engagement and civic participation and activity. The significance of the model of predicting political involvement was statistically significant ($\beta = .41$, $p = .000$) when the engagement with social media predicts 16.8 percent of variance in political involvement. Social media use has been shown to be a critical positive predictor of political engagement that includes voting and discussion of political topics. Similarly, the regression model estimated the civil participation was also significant ($\beta = .24$, $p = .000$); yet, they had less variation clarification, estimating 5.9% of the variance in civic activism. The respondents with high social media engagement indicated greater offline activism, such as protests and participation in social causes as volunteers. These findings are definite pointers that social media may most probably be a major determinant in socializing political and civic engagement among Gen Z.

Discussion

The findings of the study revealed that there is a positive and statistically significant influence of the use of social media on the political engagement and civic activism among the Gen Z members. It is in line with the results of previous researchers who have emphasized the

role of digital platforms in the political drive (Suhariyanto & Rozak, 2025; Septian & Wulandari, 2024; Solihat, 2024; Wijaya & Amalia, 2024; Abraham, 2023; Alfaruqy & Padmonurcahyo, 2023; Battocchio et al., 2023; Gürel & Eyüboğlu, 2023; Intyaswati & Fairuzza, 2023; Zyad, 2023; Alfred & Wong, 2022; Andersen et al., 2021; Carbone, 2021; Kamau, 2017). To a more significant extent, active participation in political and social discussions through social media sites by Gen Z is actually providing the development of a new system of activism, as social media can be considered a potent platform of information dissemination, mobilization, and crowdsourcing moving into action.

The study fits into what this study and its reflection contend: that, despite being a predominantly entertainment platform, social media has emerged as a political and civic-level engagement machine among Gen Z. This means that the longer Gen Z uses various apps such as Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter, the higher the chances of them discussing more about politics and participating in a movement and civic processes such as protest or community mobilization. This reflects on the increasing number of studies revealing that the digital space is transforming the political participation of younger generations (Suhariyanto & Rozak, 2025; Vromen et al., 2016). This study reconfirms the conceptualization of digital citizenship as a key framework in comprehending youth behavior amid the digital age owing to its discovery of crucial positive relations between the use of social media, political participation, and civic action.

Conclusion

This paper shows how Gen Z uses social media to enhance their political activity, serve the community, and be activists. Since the introduction of social media, political discussion, mobilization, and activism have taken a new form, with the youth having a new platform that undergoes political and social aspects in a new manner. Although the problem of misinformation and disinformation discussions is observable, the work also underlines that social media facilitates the development of favorable political activism and the promotion of positive change in society. The impact of digital platforms on political and civic life will always remain relevant since new platforms will have to be tracked in order to make sure that new generations are engaged, educated, and empowered to take part in civic affairs democratically.

Implications of the Study

There are a number of theoretical, practical, and policy implications in the present study. Theoretically speaking, the study fills in the knowledge gaps in existence in the sphere of digital political socialization by providing empirical findings of the significance of social media elements as dynamic surroundings that establish political awareness and civic involvement as being embedded in the context of the Generation Z constituents. It establishes the use of theories like digital citizenship and participatory culture to explain how this generation of youths find their way through the political and civic space as they engage in the virtual space.

Practically, the results also suggest that the pedagogical practices and strategies, which are currently being applied by teachers, civil societies, youth movements, and political campaigners such as sports players, must include elements that instill civic awareness and engage young citizens in democratic processes carried out by governments. With accepting social media as an interactive element, interested groups can plan on organizing events that enable it to develop trustworthy online political communication and political participation.

In addition, the study is critical towards informing policy aspects that should not be ignored by policymakers, namely in Bangladesh and other developing contexts. It emphasizes the importance of the establishment of a safe, free, and fair online environment that is youth-friendly. It also, at the same time, puts overcoming the challenge of bringing media and digital literacy to the status of national educational systems at large so that they can face the challenge of misinformation successfully and have the capacity to read and write political images resourcefully and fruitfully.

Limitations and Directions for Future Study

Although the attempt to uphold the role of social media in the formation of both political and civic activities is striking and informative, a list of limitations has to be mentioned. First, it is a cross-sectional study that limits the inferences as far as causality is concerned. The longitudinal research, which can be utilized in the future to research the effect of using social media on long-term political action, would also be beneficial in researching the issue. Second, the sample of the study is limited to one geographical region; that explains why the findings cannot be generalized. Another aspect of a potential future investigation is to incorporate

individuals with other political backgrounds and cultures alongside determining the effect of social media on political engagement worldwide.

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