

# THE EFFECT OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM USE INTENSITY ON STUDENTS' DIGITAL POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

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**Abstract.** The advancement of information technology has shifted student interactions from traditional communication toward digital engagement, particularly through social media. Although student use of social media is relatively high, their activity is still dominated by entertainment consumption, raising concerns about its impact on digital political participation. This study examines the effect of social media use intensity on active and passive forms of digital political participation among students at University Muhammadiyah of Ponorogo. A quantitative approach was employed using a survey of 305 students. Data were collected with a Likert-scale questionnaire measuring social media intensity and forms of digital political participation. Simple linear regression was applied to test the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable. The results show that social media use intensity has a positive and significant effect on digital political participation ( $B = 0.717$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ;  $R = 0.289$ ;  $R^2 = 0.083$ ). Passive participation dominates, especially News Attention (76%) and Discussion (65.2%). For active participation, collective actions such as Protest Activities (65.9%) and Consumerism (58.7%) are relatively high, while direct actions like Contacting (28.5%) and Communal Actions (48.2%) appear less frequent. This study highlights the need to strengthen digital political literacy so that student participation is not only quantitatively high but also qualitatively meaningful. Future research should explore internal factors such as political motivation, digital literacy, and the social environment to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how social media intensity relates to digital political participation.

**Keywords:** Social Media, Digital Political Participations, Students, Use Intensity

## I. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of information and communication technology has transformed the internet into the primary hub for various contemporary communication activities. This development has driven a shift from traditional forms of communication toward more dynamic interactions through digital platforms. Social media platforms serve as a concrete manifestation of this transformation. At present, social media plays a crucial role in society and significantly influences how individuals interact and build relationships within the digital sphere [1]. This shift is particularly evident among university students, who, as part of the younger generation, represent the most active users of various social media platforms.

University students, as part of the younger generation, occupy a dominant position and demonstrate a strong preference for certain social media platforms. According to data from APJII [2], Instagram is the most frequently used platform among young people, with a usage rate of 51.90%, followed by Facebook at 51.64%, TikTok at 46.84%, and YouTube at 38.63%. In contrast, other platforms such as X/Twitter account for only 1.98%, LinkedIn 0.08%, and other social media platforms range between 0.67% and 1.22%. Furthermore, a report by the IDN Research Institute [3], highlights that the majority of young people spend between 1

and 6 hours per day on social media. The high intensity enables social media, in addition to functioning as a means of communication, to also serve as a medium of engagement in social and political dynamics.

Nevertheless, students' activities on social media remain largely focused on entertainment and personal interaction. According to data from the IDN Research Institute [4], 74% of young people prefer entertainment-related content when using social media, while 65% also access informational content. This is supported by the findings of Hermila et al. [5], which reveal that 58% of university students spend more than two hours per day on social media, primarily to seek entertainment such as watching humorous videos, following viral news, engaging in long-distance communication, and viewing friends' posts or stories. In addition, Widari et al. [6] found that students spend an average of 3–6 hours per day on social media for socializing and building relationships in online settings.

The dominance of entertainment content on social media cannot be separated from the influence of algorithms that prioritize highly engaging content, which is predominantly entertainment-oriented [7]. Moreover, students also utilize social media as a means to relieve stress caused by academic pressures [8], as well as a medium to reduce feelings of

loneliness and to gain emotional support [9]. This condition raises the question of whether the intensity and patterns of social media use also affect students' political participation, given their strategic role in driving social and political change within a country.

Political participation refers to the involvement of individuals as citizens in various political activities, either directly or indirectly, with the aim of influencing public decision-making processes [10]. At present, students' political engagement is no longer limited to physical activities such as demonstrations or general elections but has also expanded into the digital sphere through social media, which is more accessible and participatory in nature. According to Carr and Hayes [11], features such as "like," "comment," and "share" on social media enable users to build connections, express opinions, and actively participate in digital public spaces. This expansion has subsequently given rise to a new form of engagement, commonly referred to as digital political participation.

Digital political participation refers to citizens' engagement in political processes through the use of digital technologies, such as signing online petitions, participating in online forums, engaging in activism via social media, and taking part in electronic voting. This form of participation enables broader, more accessible, and interactive involvement [12]. Over time, digital political participation has also been understood as a shift from traditional political practices to the online sphere, providing greater opportunities for citizens to express opinions, interact, and contribute to political processes [13]. Thus, digital political participation can be regarded as a new form of political engagement that adapts to technological advancements and the dynamics of modern communication.

Research conducted by Rahmat et al. [14] found that the use of social media had a positive influence on the political participation of Civic Education students at State University of Padang during the 2024 Presidential Election. Social media was considered capable of encouraging student involvement in political activities, although the analysis of political participation was still understood in general terms, without distinguishing between active and passive forms of digital participation. Similarly, Achmad and Dwimawanti [15], demonstrated a relationship between social media use and the political participation of Generation Z in Central Java during the 2024 Election. These findings affirm that social media serves as an important medium for young people to channel their political participation, however, the studies remain aggregate in nature and do not provide detailed explanations regarding the intensity of social media use. Meanwhile, Sihite et al. [16], examined the influence of political communication through social media on the political participation of Civic Education students at State University of Medan during the 2019 Election. The results revealed that social media could encourage student participation, yet the indicators employed were more oriented toward conventional or offline political activities, leaving the aspects of digital political participation insufficiently explored.

Evidence from previous studies demonstrates that social media plays a significant role in encouraging students' political participation. However, these studies generally have not examined the intensity of social media use in depth by considering its various dimensions. In addition, most of the research still measures political participation in a general sense or conflates digital activities with conventional ones. Therefore, a research gap exists that needs to be addressed in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between the intensity of social media platform use and the forms of digital political participation.

This study seeks to address this gap by focusing its analysis on the influence of social media platform usage intensity on the forms of students' digital political participation. The intensity of social media platform use is measured through four dimensions proposed by Sartika & Sugiharsono [17], namely attention, absorption, duration, and frequency. Meanwhile, digital political participation is categorized into active and passive forms, following the classification of Gibson and Cantijoch, [18]. Active participation includes activities such as: (1) Voting, participation in elections; (2) Party/Campaign Activities, involvement in political party or campaign activities; (3) Protest Activities, participation in protests or demonstrations; (4) Contacting, reaching out to public officials or government institutions; (5) Communal Actions, engagement in politically oriented community activities; and (6) Consumerism, boycotting products on political grounds. Passive participation, on the other hand, comprises (7) News Attention, paying attention to political news; (8) Discussion, engaging in discussions on political issues; and (9) Expressive Mode, expressing political opinions.

This approach is important as it enables a deeper analysis of how students not only consume political information but also express themselves and participate within digital spaces. Such a perspective provides a more detailed picture compared to previous studies, which have tended to view political participation in general terms without distinguishing between active and passive forms. Therefore, this research not only enriches the study of digital political participation in Indonesia but also offers both theoretical and practical contributions to understanding students' political behavior in the era of social media dominance.

University Muhammadiyah of Ponorogo was selected as the research site because it is considered to reflect the dynamics of student political participation in the digital era. The university has an active student population from various study programs who are not only engaged in academic activities but also participate in social and political initiatives, such as discussion forums, national seminars, social actions, and student organizations that address public issues. Given the high intensity of social media use among students, it is important to explore how their forms of political participation are shifting into the digital sphere. The choice University Muhammadiyah of Ponorogo is deemed appropriate since the campus environment provides adequate digital access and fosters a conducive climate for students' social and political expression.

The purpose of this study is to examine the effect of social media platform usage intensity on the forms of digital political participation among students. The findings are expected to contribute as a reference for various stakeholders, including educational institutions, policymakers, and student organizations, in designing more effective digital political literacy programs while also providing a healthy public discussion space for students. Such programs are anticipated to encourage healthy, active, and responsible digital political participation. The hypotheses formulated in this study are as follows:

- a. Alternative Hypothesis ( $H_1$ ): There is a significant influence between the intensity of social media platform use and students' forms of digital political participation.
- b. Null Hypothesis ( $H_0$ ): There is no significant influence between the intensity of social media platform use and students' forms of digital political participation.
- c.

## II. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a quantitative approach using the survey method. As explained by Sugiyono [19], the quantitative approach is grounded in positivist philosophy, applied to investigate a defined population or sample through research instruments, and the collected data are analyzed statistically or numerically to test predetermined hypotheses. The choice of this method is aligned with the objectives of the study, namely to examine the measurable influence of social media platform usage intensity on students' digital political participation and to generate findings that accurately reflect real conditions in the field.

This research was carried out systematically through several stages. First, the researcher determined the type of study by adopting a quantitative approach, combined with a descriptive method to illustrate the phenomenon and an associative method to examine the relationships among variables. Second, data were collected using a closed-ended questionnaire distributed via Google Forms as the primary source, complemented by secondary sources such as books, scholarly journals, national surveys, and other academic publications. Third, the research population consisted of all sixth-semester active students at University Muhammadiyah of Ponorogo. The sample size was calculated using the Slovin formula with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, resulting in 305 respondents.

Subsequently, the research instrument was designed in the form of a questionnaire using a Likert scale, which included items on respondents' demographic information, the types of social media platforms used, the frequency of use, and forms of digital political participation. The collected data were analyzed with SPSS version 18 employing a simple linear regression technique to test the proposed hypotheses. The results of the analysis are presented in tables, graphs, and interpretative explanations to provide an empirical overview of the relationship between social media usage intensity and students' digital political participation. Through these stages, the study aims to produce findings that are valid, reliable, and consistent with the research objectives.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1) Respondent Characteristics

All respondents in this study were sixth-semester active students from various study programs at University Muhammadiyah of Ponorogo. In terms of age distribution, the majority were 22 years old (42.62%) and 21 years old (42.62%), while (7.54%) were 23 years old and (0.33%) were 24 years old. These findings indicate that the respondents' ages are consistent with the typical age range of sixth-semester university students.

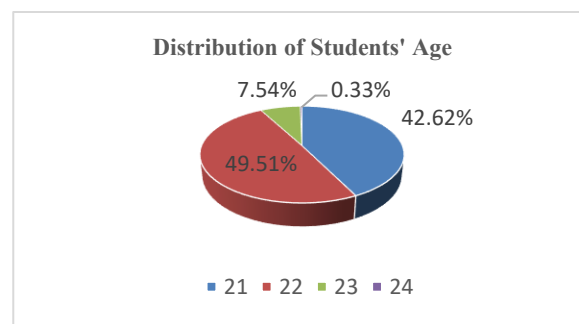


Figure. 1 Distribution of Students' Age

### 2) Analysis of Social Media Platform Usage Levels

Based on the frequency analysis, most students were more active on TikTok (72.4%), YouTube (70.4%), Instagram (67.1%), and Twitter (61.7%). In contrast, only 13.9% of respondents reported using Facebook, a relatively low figure that reflects a shift in youth preferences. These findings suggest that students tend to favor social media platforms emphasizing visual content, interactivity, and current trends, while older platforms have experienced a decline in popularity.

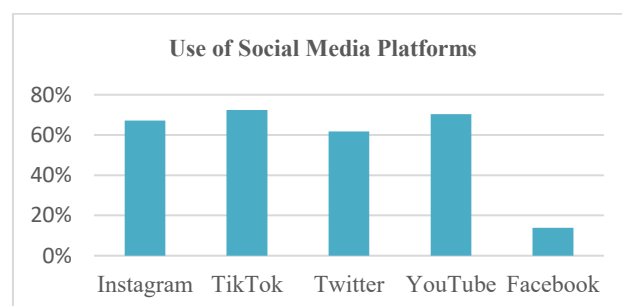


Figure. 2 Students' Use of Social Media Platforms

### 3) Analysis of the Independent Variable

The findings indicate that the intensity of students' social media use falls within the high category across all indicators. **Attention** accounted for (80.3%), **Absorption** for (87.2%), **Duration** for (77.4%), and **Frequency** for (93.4%). These results suggest that students not only access social media frequently but also pay close attention to the content, engage with it emotionally, and often spend more time on these platforms than initially intended.

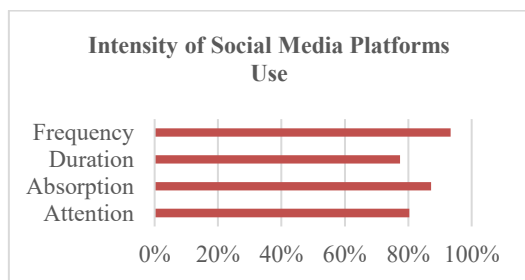


Figure. 3 Students' Intensity of Social Media Platform Use

#### 4) Average Time Spent on Social Media

Based on the data obtained, the majority of students spent between 3 to 6 hours per day on social media, with the highest proportions falling in the categories of 3–4 hours (38.69%) and 5–6 hours (24.59%). This indicates that most students engage with social media for a relatively long duration each day.

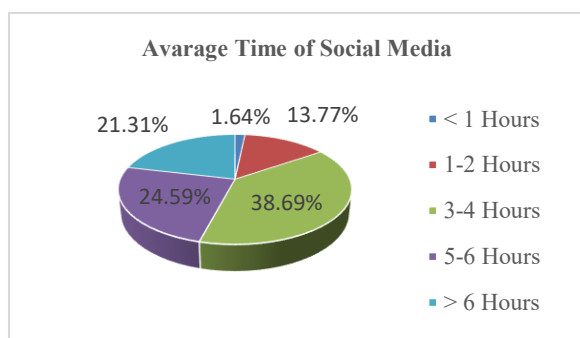


Figure. 4 Average Time of Students' Social Media Use

#### 5) Analysis of the Dependent Variable

The findings reveal that students' digital political participation varies depending on the form of engagement. Within active participation, the highest percentage was recorded in **Protest Activities** (65.9%), followed by **Consumerism** (58.7%). Meanwhile, **Voting** (53.4%), **Party/Campaign Activities** (53.1%), and **Communal Actions** (48.2%) were categorized at a moderate level. In contrast, **Contacting** activities ranked the lowest, with only (28.5%).

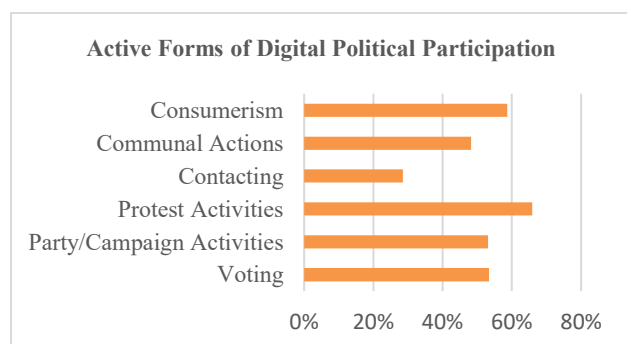


Figure. 5 Students' Active Forms Digital Political Participation

Meanwhile, in terms of passive digital political participation, the analysis showed that the indicators of **News Attention** (76%) and **Discussion** (65.2%) were categorized as high, whereas the **Expressive Mode** indicator (53.8%) was classified at a moderate level.

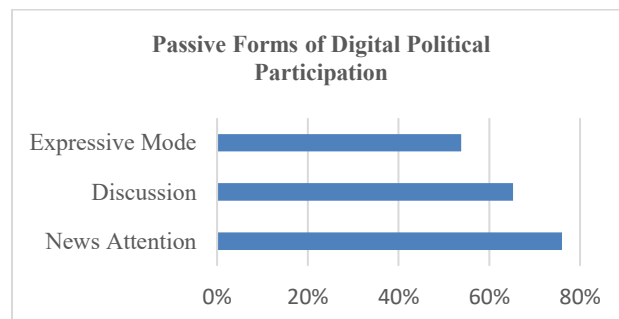


Figure. 6 Students' Passive Forms of Digital Political Participation

#### 6) Validity Test

Based on the results of the validity test, all indicators of variable X (Intensity of Social Media Platform Usage) and variable Y (Digital Political Participation) were declared valid since the calculated r-value exceeded the r-table value (0.113). This indicates that each questionnaire item accurately represents the aspect being measured.

#### 7) Reliability Test

Based on the results of the reliability test, the Cronbach's Alpha values for variables X and Y exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.60. Therefore, the research instrument is considered reliable.

#### 3) Normality Test

The normality test using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov method produced a significance value (Asymp. Sig. 2-tailed) greater than the threshold of 0.05. Therefore, the data are considered to be normally distributed.

#### 4) Correlation and Determination Coefficient Test

The correlation coefficient (R) in Table 1 was 0.289, indicating a positive relationship between social media platform usage intensity and digital political participation, although the strength of the relationship is relatively weak. Furthermore, the R Square value of 0.083 suggests that social media platform usage intensity explains only 8.3% of the variance in digital political participation, while the remaining variance is influenced by other factors outside the research model.

TABLE 1  
MODEL SUMMARY

Model		R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
dimension0	1	.289 <sup>a</sup>	.083	.080	12.649

### 5) F-Test (Simultaneous)

Based on the ANOVA test results presented in Table 2, the calculated F value was 27.532 with a significance level of 0.000 ( $p < 0.05$ ). These results confirm that the regression model is statistically significant. Accordingly, the intensity of social media platform use has a significant influence on students' digital political participation and contributes to explaining the variation in their digital political behavior.

TABLE 2  
ANOVA<sup>b</sup>

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	4404.869	1	4404.869	27.532	.000 <sup>a</sup>
	Residual	48477.381	303	159.991		
	Total	52882.249	304			

### 6) T-Test (Partial)

The T-test results in Table 3 demonstrate that the intensity of social media platform use has a significant effect on students' digital political participation. The regression coefficient (B) was 0.717 with a significance level of 0.000 ( $p < 0.05$ ), and the calculated t value of 5.247 exceeded the critical t value at the 5% significance level, confirming the statistical significance of this effect. The positive relationship is further reflected in the standardized beta coefficient of 0.289, indicating a positive direction of influence, although its strength is relatively weak, approaching a moderate level.

TABLE 3  
COEFFICIENTS<sup>a</sup>

Model		Unstandardize		Standardized	t	Sig.
		d Coefficients		Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	20.619	6.914		2.982	.003
	Intensity of Social Media Platform Use	.717	.137	.289	5.247	.000

The results of this study reveal a relationship between the intensity of social media platform use and the forms of students' digital political participation, as reflected in the correlation coefficient presented in Table 1 ( $R = 0.289$ ). Although the strength of the correlation is relatively low, the positive direction suggests that higher levels of social media usage are associated with a greater tendency among students to engage in digital political activities. Social media has proven to serve an important function as a space that can encourage political engagement among students, even though it was initially used primarily for entertainment and personal interaction. These findings align with the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which asserts that individuals actively use media to fulfill needs for information, personal identity, social integration, and entertainment [20] [21]. This is also in

line with Duru, Rinmak, and Ononiwu [22], who highlight that social media functions as a digital public sphere for students to engage in political discourse.

The coefficient of determination presented in Table 1 shows that the intensity of social media platform use explains only 8.3% of the variance in students' digital political participation. This implies that, while social media use contributes to facilitating access to information, political expression, and online interaction, its overall influence is relatively limited and not the dominant factor, with the remaining 91.7% accounted for by other factors. These findings are consistent with Ziv & Yavetz [23], who noted that structural barriers and social networks affect students' political engagement. This is further supported by Verba, Scholzman, and Brady [24], who argue that resources, political attachment or motivation, and mobilization from the social environment are key factors in promoting more meaningful political participation.

Students' forms of digital political participation tend to be more oriented toward passive digital participation, particularly through News Attention (activities such as accessing and following political news on social media or online news portals) and Discussion (engagement in discussions or comments related to political issues in digital forums and groups). In addition, one form of active digital political participation, namely Protest Activities, is also (evident, including symbolic actions such as hashtag campaigns, profile picture changes, dissemination of digital posters, and online petitions).

Conversely, forms of active political participation that require more personal interaction, such as Contacting (directly conveying aspirations to public officials) and Communal Actions (engagement in online political communities, advocacy forums, or webinars), are relatively infrequent. This pattern suggests that students tend to prefer forms of digital political participation that are safe, collective, and symbolic, as they are perceived to be easier to carry out and do not entail direct political risks or personal confrontation with public officials.

Theoretically, these findings enrich the understanding that social media can serve as an entry point for student political engagement. Practically, this study highlights the importance of enhancing political literacy, providing healthy public discussion spaces, and strengthening digital political education. Sunarto, Sulton, and Mahardhani [25], emphasize that political education is crucial in fostering rational political awareness. Through these efforts, students' digital political participation is expected not only to increase in quantity but also to develop into more meaningful engagement that contributes significantly to the strengthening of democracy.

## IV. CONCLUSIONS

The intensity of social media platform use was found to have a positive influence on students' forms of digital political participation, although the effect remains relatively weak ( $R = 0.289$ ;  $R^2 = 0.083$ ). Higher levels of social media use tend to increase engagement in political activities,

particularly in passive forms such as news attention (76%) and discussion (65.2%), as well as in collective symbolic actions like protest activities (65.9%). Meanwhile, more direct and personal forms of participation, including contacting public officials (28.5%) and engaging in communal actions (48.2%), remain limited. This pattern indicates that social media functions more as a platform for political information consumption and symbolic expression than as a means of substantive political engagement. To address this, strategic initiatives are necessary, such as fostering interactive forums, providing digital advocacy training, and strengthening integrated political literacy programs. These efforts are expected to encourage students to participate more critically and substantively, thereby contributing meaningfully to democratic consolidation. Future studies are advised to broaden the scope of analysis by incorporating factors such as political motivation, digital literacy, and social networks, and by adopting mixed-methods approaches to capture the complexities of digital political participation more comprehensively.

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