



Youth Political Engagement and Democratic Communicative Action in the Digital Public Sphere

Khoiriah Nasution*

Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara

Email: khairiyahnasution@fisip.uisu.ac.id

Abstract

Digital media have expanded opportunities for young people to participate in political life; however, increased participation does not automatically lead to higher-quality democracy. This study analyzes how Jürgen Habermas's theory of communicative action can be used to assess young people's political engagement in Indonesia's digital public sphere. The study employs a qualitative literature review design based on library research sources. The findings indicate that the democratic quality of young people's digital political participation can be understood through three interrelated dimensions: epistemic responsibility in producing and disseminating political information; inclusive dialogue grounded in equality, reason-giving, and openness to criticism; and communicative ethics that protect human dignity while constraining domination, intimidation, and personal attacks. These three dimensions confront platform logic driven by virality, echo chambers, filter bubbles, misinformation, identity polarization, and low-cost symbolic participation. The article therefore shifts the analysis of young people's political participation from the intensity of engagement toward the quality of communicative action. Its principal contribution is a three-dimensional framework for explaining when digital political participation strengthens deliberative democracy and when it becomes distorted by strategic forms of communication.

Keywords: *Political Youth; Communicative Action; Digital Public Sphere.*

Abstrak: Media digital memperluas peluang generasi muda untuk berpartisipasi dalam kehidupan politik, tetapi peningkatan partisipasi tidak secara otomatis menghasilkan demokrasi yang lebih berkualitas. Penelitian ini menganalisis bagaimana teori tindakan komunikatif Jürgen Habermas dapat digunakan untuk menilai keterlibatan politik generasi muda dalam ruang publik digital Indonesia. Penelitian menggunakan desain kajian literatur kualitatif terhadap sumber library reasearch. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa kualitas demokratis partisipasi politik digital generasi muda dapat dibaca melalui tiga dimensi yang saling berhubungan: tanggung jawab epistemik dalam memproduksi dan menyebarkan informasi politik; dialog inklusif yang bertumpu pada kesetaraan, pertukaran alasan, dan keterbukaan terhadap kritik; serta etika komunikatif yang melindungi martabat manusia dan membatasi dominasi, intimidasi, serta serangan personal. Ketiga dimensi tersebut berhadapan dengan logika platform yang berorientasi pada viralitas, echo chamber, filter bubble, misinformasi, polarisasi identitas, dan partisipasi simbolik berbiaya rendah. Artikel ini dengan demikian menggeser pembacaan partisipasi politik generasi muda dari persoalan intensitas keterlibatan menuju kualitas tindakan komunikatif. Kontribusi utamanya adalah kerangka tiga dimensi untuk menjelaskan kapan partisipasi politik digital mendukung demokrasi deliberatif dan kapan ia mengalami distorsi strategis.

Kata Kunci: *Politik Anak Muda; Tindakan Komunikatif; Ruang Digital.*

INTRODUCTION

Indonesian democracy currently faces a range of complex challenges, including the widespread dissemination of misinformation, hate speech, political polarization, and the weakening of a healthy culture of dialogue. These phenomena are particularly evident on social media platforms, which have increasingly transformed into new forms of public space and are largely dominated by younger generations. Within academic discourse, the role of youth in digital spaces has generated considerable debate among scholars. On the one hand, techno-optimist scholars argue that social media democratizes information access and expands public political participation. Young people are perceived as possessing significant agency to mobilize social movements, advocate for civil rights, and monitor government performance in real time. The accessibility of political information is considered capable of substantially enhancing the political literacy of younger generations (Ida et al., 2020).

On the other hand, techno-pessimist scholars view this phenomenon with considerable concern. The post-truth era has intensified political polarization, as social media algorithms generate echo chambers that isolate individuals within ideologically homogeneous communities. The massive flow of digital communication often prioritizes emotional reactions over substantive deliberation and critical engagement. Consequently, Indonesia's digital sphere has increasingly become characterized by the spread of misinformation, hate speech, and character assassination, all of which undermine the cultural foundations of deliberative democracy. Criticism has also been directed toward the declining ethical standards of communication among young netizens, who are frequently involved in cyberbullying practices driven by political interests or superficial forms of online participation known as slacktivism (Noviana, 2026). In this context, the concept of humanistic communication, rooted in empathy, equality, and respect for human dignity, has gained attention as an alternative framework to counteract the toxicity of digital interactions. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of implementing humanistic communication among young people within Indonesia's highly polarized political landscape remains a subject of debate among political sociologists.

Based on this academic debate, the central problem addressed in this study lies in the contradiction between the enormous potential of younger generations as democratic actors and the reality of their digital communication practices, which remain vulnerable to polarization, misinformation, and social fragmentation. Social media, which should function as a constructive public sphere, has instead frequently transformed into a space of verbal conflict that distances democratic practices from their substantive values (Hariyanti et al., 2026). Therefore, this study aims to analyze and describe how Indonesian youth internalize and implement the principles of humanistic communication as an instrument for mitigating

political polarization and strengthening an inclusive and healthy democratic culture. This research offers a new perspective that strengthening Indonesian democracy should not rely solely on legal regulation or access restrictions, but also on repositioning youth from passive consumers of digital content into communication agents who promote empathy, inclusive dialogue, and universal humanistic values within digital public spaces.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a library research design. This approach was selected because it enables the researcher to explore, interpret, and synthesize various concepts and theoretical perspectives relevant to the research topic. The data utilized in this study consist entirely of secondary sources obtained through a systematic review of scholarly literature, including reputable national and international journal articles, academic books, conference proceedings, web-based magazines, and news sources related to the research focus. The literature search was conducted systematically through accessible online academic databases. The selected literature was limited to publications written in Indonesian and English, published within the last ten years, and directly relevant to the research theme.

Data analysis was conducted using qualitative content analysis techniques, which involved identifying, categorizing, comparing, and interpreting information derived from various literature sources to uncover patterns, themes, and conceptual relationships. The analytical process followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Through these stages, the collected literature was critically and comparatively examined to develop a comprehensive conceptual synthesis regarding the role of humanistic communication in strengthening youth political participation and democratic consolidation in the digital era.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Youth Political Behavior

The political behavior of Indonesia's younger generation in digital spaces has become increasingly complex alongside the growing penetration of social media into public life. Digital platforms no longer function merely as channels for information exchange but have evolved into arenas for opinion formation, ideological contestation, political mobilization, and the articulation of diverse social interests (Suwana, 2020). For many young people, political engagement now takes place within a faster, more open, and participatory digital communication environment compared to conventional political spaces (Saud & Margono, 2021). Discussions concerning public policies, political campaigns, social advocacy issues, collective support-building, and criticism

toward government institutions have become part of everyday practices conducted through various social media platforms. This transformation indicates that digital spaces have reshaped patterns of youth political participation from physically oriented forms of engagement toward technology-mediated political involvement (Saud et al., 2020).

However, these developments reveal that digital democracy does not necessarily move in a single direction. On the one hand, social media expands opportunities for young people to access political information, strengthen civic awareness, develop socio-political networks, and participate in various public agendas without spatial and temporal limitations (Duche-Pérez et al., 2025). The openness of digital communication enables the emergence of collective initiatives that promote transparency, accountability, and public oversight of political processes. In this context, digital spaces serve as a medium that strengthens citizens' capacity to express aspirations, advocate public interests, and consolidate social movements in a more inclusive manner (Turahmi et al., 2025).

On the other hand, the openness of digital spaces also generates contrasting tendencies. The competition for public attention increasingly encourages political communication to be shaped by the logic of virality rather than by the quality of arguments. Political debates frequently evolve into identity-based polarization, the reproduction of misinformation, the simplification of complex public issues, and the circulation of narratives driven by emotional sentiments (Latupeirissa & Cistadewi, 2025). Many forms of political participation remain limited to symbolic expressions, such as hashtag activism, liking, or sharing political content, without being followed by more substantive engagement in democratic deliberation processes (Al-Ra'zie et al., 2025). This condition demonstrates that the high intensity of political activities on social media does not necessarily correspond with an improvement in the quality of democratic participation (Kwak et al., 2018).

These contradictory configurations have generated two major perspectives within digital politics scholarship. The first perspective views social media as a democratic force that expands political participation, facilitates more open information distribution, and creates new civic spaces for younger generations (Turahmi et al., 2025). Conversely, the second perspective argues that digital technologies may intensify fragmentation within the public sphere through platform algorithms, the formation of echo chambers, political polarization, and the commercialization of attention, which shifts public communication away from rational deliberation toward emotionally driven competition (Barberá, 2020). These two tendencies should not necessarily be understood as mutually exclusive positions; rather, they illustrate that digital spaces simultaneously provide democratic opportunities while presenting challenges to the quality of democracy itself.

Therefore, the central issue concerning youth political behavior is no longer merely the extent of young people's participation in digital spaces, but rather how such participation is manifested through everyday practices of political communication. The quality of digital democracy ultimately depends on young citizens' ability to engage in rational dialogue, respect differences (Pfetsch, 2024), evaluate arguments based on publicly justifiable reasons, and prioritize collective interests. Accordingly, discussions of youth political behavior require a perspective that not only examines the intensity of digital participation but also analyzes the quality of communicative action that sustains democratic life within digital public spheres (Indira Nazwa Fazrina et al., 2025).

Political Dynamics on Social Media

Social media has fundamentally transformed the landscape of political participation among young people in Indonesia. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, X, YouTube, and various other digital communication applications have evolved beyond mere spaces for information exchange; they have become arenas for shaping public opinion, mobilizing social movements, advocating policy issues, and monitoring government performance. The boundaries between private and public spheres have become increasingly blurred, meaning that everyday digital activities simultaneously function as forms of political engagement. Within this context, young people are no longer positioned merely as recipients of political communication but have emerged as producers of information, constructors of narratives, and active agents capable of influencing public discourse through the production and circulation of digital content (Sosial et al., n.d.).

This phenomenon reflects the growing tendency emphasized by techno-optimist perspectives, which argue that advances in digital communication technologies can expand democratic capacity by increasing citizens' opportunities for political participation. Various forms of digital activism have developed organically and are driven by collective initiatives among young people without relying heavily on formal political structures. Politically educational content presented through creative formats, public discussions conducted via live streaming, democratic literacy campaigns, online petitions, humanitarian fundraising initiatives, and solidarity movements supporting vulnerable groups demonstrate that social media has become an effective instrument for fostering public awareness and organizing collective action. The rapid circulation of information enables issues that were previously confined to local contexts to gain national attention within a relatively short period, while the interactive nature of social media provides citizens with greater opportunities to directly monitor government policies and communicate their aspirations to decision-makers (Irmayani, 2022).

These forms of participation not only demonstrate the increasing intensity of young people's political engagement but also indicate the development of a more inclusive orientation of political communication. Digital interactions are increasingly directed toward building solidarity across identities, expanding access to public information, and creating more open spaces for dialogue compared to conventional political channels (Zainal & Megasari, 2019). In this context, technology functions as a medium that connects diverse social groups to discuss shared concerns without being constrained by differences in ethnicity, religion, or political affiliation. Such communication practices reflect the fundamental values of humanistic communication, which emphasize equality, respect for human dignity, empathy, and recognition of every individual's right to express opinions as the foundation of democratic interaction. Therefore, digital democracy should not be measured solely by the extent of citizen participation, but also by the quality of communicative relationships developed within it (Saidaturrahmah & Kholil, 2023).

However, these developments have occurred alongside another tendency that reveals the paradoxical nature of the digital sphere. The increasing intensity of political communication does not necessarily lead to the formation of a deliberative public sphere. The rapid flow of information is often accompanied by the widespread circulation of hoaxes, misinformation, disinformation, hate speech, political defamation, cyberbullying, and character assassination practices targeting individuals or groups with different political views (Nadhifa et al., 2026). Political differences, which should ideally function as a healthy component of democratic competition, have increasingly transformed into identity-based conflicts that intensify antagonism among social groups. Consequently, social media, which was initially expected to serve as a space for public deliberation, has frequently evolved into a symbolic battlefield characterized by antagonistic narratives, political delegitimization, and the normalization of verbal aggression (Ramlan et al., 2025).

This tendency demonstrates that young people's political participation in digital spaces remains largely dominated by reactive and superficial forms of engagement. Activities such as liking political content, sharing posts, following specific hashtags, or expressing emotional opinions through comments are often perceived as forms of political participation, despite the absence of deeper reflection, rational argumentation, or substantive involvement in addressing public issues. The phenomenon of *slacktivism* illustrates that the accessibility of digital technologies enables political participation with minimal effort and cost; however, it may simultaneously reduce the depth of commitment to democratic values. As a result, political participation increasingly becomes oriented toward identity expression and social recognition rather than toward building consensus or generating meaningful solutions to collective problems (Sarinah & Sultrayansa, 2025).

The emergence of increasingly confrontational political communication cannot be separated from the structural characteristics of social media itself. The architecture of contemporary digital platforms is largely shaped by the logic of the attention economy, in which platform success is determined by the extent of user engagement. Within this mechanism, algorithms tend to prioritize content that generates emotional responses, controversy, anger, or conflict because such content produces higher levels of interaction compared to informative and deliberative communication. As a consequence, provocative narratives often receive broader visibility, whereas calm, evidence-based, and argumentative discussions are frequently overshadowed by the rapid circulation of information (Fajarini et al., 2025).

This algorithmic logic subsequently contributes to the formation of echo chambers and filter bubbles that limit the diversity of perspectives encountered by users. Young people increasingly interact with information that aligns with their existing political preferences, while opposing viewpoints become less visible within their everyday communication environments (Armanda et al., 2025). Such conditions reinforce confirmation bias, strengthen group attachment, and gradually reduce the willingness to understand alternative arguments. When communication occurs within homogeneous spaces, differences are no longer perceived as opportunities for dialogue but rather as threats to group identity that must be resisted. Under these circumstances, the quality of public deliberation declines because communication shifts from the pursuit of mutual understanding toward the reinforcement and justification of one's own political position (Manuputty et al., 2025).

Cultural dimensions also contribute to strengthening these dynamics. Indonesia's digital public sphere has developed within a post-truth political environment, in which emotions, personal beliefs, and group affiliations often exert greater influence than factual validity in shaping public opinion. Information is no longer evaluated primarily based on its truthfulness but rather on its compatibility with the political identities already held by users. This communication culture intensifies social polarization while encouraging excessive group loyalty (Farida Anis, Jahriyah Viita, 2025). Among younger generations, the pressure to demonstrate political allegiance often creates the perception that moderate, dialogical, or empathetic attitudes represent political weakness. Conversely, aggressive, sarcastic, and confrontational communication is frequently interpreted as a manifestation of courage and loyalty toward one's group. Consequently, practices such as cyberbullying, stigmatization, and verbal aggression gradually become normalized as elements of political competition within digital spaces (Rahman, 2025).

These realities demonstrate that the primary challenge of digital democracy is not merely expanding access to political participation but also improving the quality of public communication in ways that preserve human

dignity amid political differences. Within this context, Humanistic Communication Theory becomes increasingly relevant. This approach argues that political communication should be grounded in empathy, recognition of individual equality, respect for diversity, and a commitment to achieving mutual understanding through rational dialogue. These values are not merely ethical expectations but essential prerequisites for establishing a healthy democratic public sphere.

When young people adopt empathy as the foundation of their communication practices, perceive political opponents as fellow citizens who possess equal rights to be heard, and prioritize arguments over personal attacks, social media can regain its fundamental function as a deliberative public sphere that strengthens social cohesion and democratic consolidation. Therefore, humanistic communication does not merely serve as a critique of toxicity in digital politics; rather, it provides a practical framework for transforming young people's political participation from reactive forms of engagement into democratic, reflective, and collectively oriented communicative action (Muhammad Ersyad Muttaqien & Muhammad Ersyad Muttaqien, 2023).

Political Communicative Action of Youth in Digital Spaces

Political communicative action within digital spaces cannot be measured merely by the intensity of youth political participation, but rather by the communicative orientation underlying each form of public interaction. The perspective of communicative action positions communication as a process aimed at achieving mutual understanding rather than merely serving as an instrument for winning debates or gaining political dominance. Within the context of digital spaces, communicative action becomes an important indicator for distinguishing between political participation that strengthens democracy and participation that instead reproduces social conflict. Therefore, the quality of digital democracy depends on young people's ability to construct communication that is rational, open, and respectful of others as equal subjects possessing the same rights within the public sphere (Sufri Eka Bhakti, 2020).

The first dimension of communicative action is reflected in the transformation of youth political agency from information consumers into responsible producers of public knowledge. The development of digital technology has shifted political communication from a previously one-way model toward a more participatory and multidirectional communication pattern. While political information production in conventional political spaces was largely dominated by the state, mass media, and political elites, social media has redistributed this capacity to individuals. Young people now have equal opportunities to produce political narratives, interpret public events, construct opinions, and influence public perceptions through the

content they create and disseminate. This transformation demonstrates that youth are no longer positioned merely as audiences who passively receive political messages; rather, they have become communicative actors who actively shape the dynamics of the digital public sphere (Kadir, 2022).

This transformation of agency not only expands the scope of political participation but also changes the meaning of participation itself. Political participation is no longer understood solely as involvement in elections, campaign activities, or formal political organizations; instead, it encompasses everyday communicative practices conducted through digital content production, opinion expression, public policy discussions, and information dissemination across broader social networks. Every social media post, comment, short video, discussion thread, or infographic published online has the potential to become part of the process of public opinion formation. In this context, digital communication represents a form of digital citizenship because every communicative act carries social and political consequences that may influence how society understands public issues (Buru et al., 2025).

However, this expanded capacity also creates increasingly complex epistemic responsibilities. The freedom to produce and distribute information cannot be separated from the obligation to maintain the validity and reliability of knowledge circulating within the public sphere. Every piece of political information published online has the potential to be rapidly reproduced, modified by other users, and disseminated to millions of people within a short period. Therefore, the quality of digital democracy is strongly influenced by the quality of knowledge produced by communicative actors in digital spaces. Accurate information strengthens public rationality, whereas inaccurate, manipulative, or misleading information may generate collective misunderstandings of political realities. In this context, the ability to verify facts, evaluate the credibility of information sources, and distinguish between opinions, interpretations, and empirical facts becomes an essential component of democratic communicative action.

From Jürgen Habermas's perspective, democratic communication is not constructed through the success of one actor in influencing others, but through the ability to present validity claims that can be openly examined within the public sphere. Every statement contains claims regarding truth, normative rightness, and sincerity or truthfulness (Paongan et al., 2026). Therefore, political information production should not merely aim to attract public attention or achieve high levels of engagement; rather, it must be supported by rational arguments, sufficient evidence, and openness to criticism. Communicative rationality places the exchange of reasons at the center of political communication, allowing citizens to accept, evaluate, or reject arguments based on the quality of reasoning behind them, rather than on the identity, popularity, or political power of those delivering them.

This orientation becomes increasingly significant as digital spaces are increasingly shaped by algorithmic logic, which tends to prioritize virality over validity. Social media algorithms operate by promoting content that generates high levels of emotional engagement, causing provocative information to often receive wider exposure than factual and argumentative content. As a result, the success of political communication is frequently measured by the number of views, comments, likes, or shares rather than by the substantive quality of the ideas being conveyed. This condition creates a paradox of digital democracy because spaces that should function as arenas for rational exchange and public deliberation are often transformed into competitive environments where actors struggle primarily to capture public attention rather than to develop meaningful political understanding (Hilyatunisa et al., 2025).

Therefore, the transformation of youth political agency cannot be understood merely as an increase in their ability to utilize digital technologies, but rather as a fundamental shift in their position as democratic subjects. Young people are no longer merely consumers of political information; they have increasingly become producers of public knowledge who shape the quality of democratic discourse within digital spaces. The stronger their commitment to information accuracy, rational argumentation, openness to dialogue, and respect for the validity of knowledge claims, the greater the potential for social media to develop into a deliberative public sphere that strengthens democracy. Conversely, when information production is driven primarily by sensationalism, manipulation, or partisan interests that disregard validity claims, digital spaces risk losing their deliberative function and transforming into arenas for reproducing political polarization that obstruct the emergence of democratic communicative action.

The second dimension of communicative action is manifested through the establishment of inclusive dialogical spaces as a prerequisite for democratic deliberation in digital environments. From the perspective of communicative action theory, democracy is not determined solely by citizens' freedom to express their opinions, but also by the availability of public spaces that enable diverse perspectives to be exchanged on an equal basis through rational dialogue. Social media essentially provides such opportunities by removing many geographical, social, and institutional barriers that have historically constrained political participation. Individuals are granted relatively equal opportunities to articulate ideas, criticize public policies, respond to opposing arguments, and participate in the formation of public opinion. This open and interactive character of digital communication positions online spaces as a contemporary manifestation of the public sphere, where democracy can be practiced through more participatory processes of communication.

The democratic significance of the digital public sphere does not lie merely in the quantity of conversations taking place, but rather in the quality of communicative relationships established within it. Equality represents a fundamental principle because every participant in communication is positioned as a subject with equal rights to speak, be heard, and present arguments without being restricted by social status, political affiliation, religious identity, or economic background. Accordingly, the legitimacy of an opinion is not determined by the identity or position of the speaker, but by the strength of the argument and its capacity to be justified through rational reasoning. This principle distinguishes communicative action from instrumental communication, which is oriented toward domination, manipulation, or political victory alone. When every actor has an equal opportunity to present reasons and critically examine the arguments of others, digital spaces can fulfill their deliberative function as arenas for the formation of public will.

In the context of youth political communication, inclusive dialogical spaces allow differences of opinion to be understood as natural consequences of democratic life rather than as threats to collective identity. Differences in political preferences, ideological orientations, or electoral choices should not serve as grounds for stigmatization, delegitimization, or exclusion of other groups; instead, they should become starting points for mutual learning through the exchange of arguments. Dialogue is not intended to defeat opponents or preserve political positions rigidly, but rather to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of public issues. Within this framework, political communication acquires an epistemic function because each participant in the dialogue has the opportunity to revise their initial perspectives when confronted with arguments that are more rational, persuasive, and collectively acceptable.

This deliberative orientation becomes increasingly important amid the growing fragmentation of digital public spaces. The personalization mechanisms embedded within social media algorithms continuously provide users with information that corresponds to their existing preferences, causing interactions to occur predominantly among individuals who share similar viewpoints. This condition generates echo chambers and filter bubbles that limit exposure to alternative perspectives (Armanda et al., 2025). Consequently, political communication develops within increasingly homogeneous environments, while opportunities for cross-group dialogue become more restricted. When individuals interact primarily with opinions that reinforce their existing beliefs, deliberative processes lose one of their most essential elements: openness to criticism and the willingness to revise positions based on stronger arguments.

This fragmentation ultimately strengthens political polarization in digital spaces. Differences in perspectives are no longer treated as normal

variations within democratic societies but are transformed into identity boundaries separating “us” and “them.” Under such conditions, communication is increasingly directed toward strengthening internal group solidarity rather than building mutual understanding with opposing groups. Political language becomes increasingly confrontational, digital discussions are filled with personal attacks and delegitimization, while rational argumentation is displaced by emotional and identity-centered narratives. As a result, the digital public sphere loses its deliberative function and increasingly resembles a symbolic battlefield that intensifies social conflict rather than facilitating democratic consensus-building (Dryzek et al., 2019).

From the perspective of Habermas’s theory of communicative action, this condition reflects the emergence of systematically distorted communication, in which communication is no longer oriented toward achieving mutual understanding (*Verständigung*), but instead becomes dominated by strategic interests, power relations, and the logic of political victory. Such distortion prevents the formation of consensus based on rational argumentation because communication has lost its dialogical orientation. When communication is controlled by strategic calculations, actors no longer engage in dialogue to understand one another but seek primarily to influence, persuade, or defeat others.

Furthermore, an inclusive dialogical space represents an essential dimension of young people’s political communicative action within the digital sphere. Its existence enables social media to transform from merely a medium of information exchange into a public deliberative space where diverse perspectives can encounter one another on an equal basis. The more opportunities available for cross-identity dialogue, the greater the potential for fostering mutual understanding, social trust, and democratic consensus, which serve as fundamental foundations for strengthening social cohesion within pluralistic societies (Setiawan et al., 2024).

The third dimension of communicative action lies in the ethical foundation underlying every practice of political communication within digital spaces. From Jürgen Habermas’s perspective, communication is not merely a process of exchanging information but also a form of social interaction based on recognition of the dignity and equality of every individual. Communicative rationality is not sufficiently realized through logical arguments and fact-based reasoning alone; it also requires an ethical commitment that enables every participant in communication to be treated as an equal subject with the same rights to speak, be heard, and be respected. Therefore, the success of democratic communication is not determined solely by whether consensus is achieved, but also by the manner in which such consensus is constructed through dialogue free from intimidation, manipulation, discrimination, and symbolic domination (Soekarba, 2024).

Within the context of digital politics, the ethical dimension has become increasingly significant because communication on social media occurs beyond spatial and temporal boundaries and involves millions of users from diverse social, cultural, religious, and political backgrounds. Such plurality transforms digital spaces into arenas where various identities encounter one another, each carrying different experiences, interests, and interpretations of public issues. This diversity represents an essential democratic resource because it enables richer exchanges of ideas and perspectives. However, without a strong ethical foundation for communication, such differences can easily become sources of conflict that intensify social polarization. In this context, ethical principles function as mechanisms that ensure freedom of expression operates alongside respect for the rights and dignity of others

Digital communication ethics is reflected in the use of respectful language, recognition of diverse perspectives, willingness to listen to opposing arguments, the ability to regulate emotional expressions, and the commitment to distinguish criticism of ideas from attacks against individuals. Such communication practices demonstrate that political disagreement is an inherent component of democratic life rather than a justification for humiliation, stigmatization, or the degradation of other groups. Therefore, the quality of political communication should not be measured by the intensity of criticism or the level of confrontation generated, but by the ability of actors to defend their arguments while maintaining respect for the humanity of those who hold different positions (Imran et al., 2026).

Conversely, the weakening of ethical dimensions makes digital spaces vulnerable to various forms of communicative distortion. Hate speech, cyberbullying, humiliation, doxing, and character assassination are increasingly normalized as elements of political competition rather than recognized as violations of democratic communication. These phenomena demonstrate a shift in the orientation of communication from the pursuit of mutual understanding toward attempts to discredit political opponents through psychological pressure, symbolic violence, and the manipulation of public perception. When communication is directed toward undermining the dignity of others, the public sphere loses its deliberative character because arguments are no longer evaluated based on the strength of reasoning but rather on their ability to generate fear, hostility, or delegitimization toward opposing groups (Amri & Yandri, 2025).

Such conditions indicate that the primary challenge of digital democracy is not merely the spread of inaccurate information, but also the deterioration of social relations among citizens. Public trust, which constitutes a fundamental foundation of democracy, can only develop when communication takes place within an environment that guarantees psychological security, respect for freedom of expression, and recognition of the equality of all participants in dialogue. Conversely, when digital spaces are

saturated with verbal aggression, stereotypes, and continuously reproduced hostility, social relations become shaped by suspicion and antagonism. Consequently, democracy loses one of its essential prerequisites: the ability of citizens to build cooperation through communication grounded in mutual trust (Gumelar et al., 2025).

Within Habermas's framework of discourse ethics, every norm regulating collective life gains legitimacy only when it emerges through communicative processes that provide equal opportunities for all participants to present reasons, raise objections, and evaluate arguments freely. This principle positions respect for human dignity not merely as an individual moral value, but as a procedural requirement for democratic communication. Therefore, communication ethics should not be understood merely as a matter of linguistic politeness; rather, it represents a mechanism that ensures communication processes occur fairly, inclusively, and without domination. The stronger the commitment to these ethical principles, the greater the possibility of creating a digital public sphere capable of generating social trust, strengthening social cohesion, and producing sustainable democratic consensus (Soekarba, 2024).

Accordingly, the ethical dimension constitutes an inseparable element of youth political communicative action in digital spaces. Rationality, dialogue, and respect for human dignity form an integrated foundation that determines the quality of democratic communication. When young people practice communication based on recognition and respect for fellow citizens, social media can evolve beyond a mere platform for political information exchange and become a civilized public sphere where differences are managed through dialogue, conflicts are addressed through argumentation, and consensus is developed through acknowledgment of universal human values (Sari et al., 2025).

The three dimensions discussed above demonstrate that youth communicative action in digital spaces extends beyond technological competence or the ability to participate through digital platforms. Rather, it concerns the capacity to construct a political communication culture oriented toward mutual understanding, recognition of equal citizenship, and the pursuit of consensus through rational argumentation. From this perspective, social media should not be viewed merely as a communication instrument, but as a democratic public sphere in which civic values are continuously produced, exchanged, and negotiated through ongoing interactions among citizens.

CONCLUSIONS

Young people's political behavior in the digital space unfolds within a paradoxical dynamic. On the one hand, social media expands opportunities for younger generations to participate in political life through information production, public discussions, and social movement mobilization. On the other hand, it has also become a space where political polarization,

disinformation, hate speech, and dominance-oriented political communication are reproduced. From the perspective of Jürgen Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action, the quality of digital democracy is not determined merely by the intensity of political participation, but rather by the quality of communicative action that is developed within digital spaces. Young people's political communicative action is manifested through three primary dimensions: the transformation of agency into responsible producers of public knowledge, the establishment of inclusive dialogical spaces through rational and equal exchanges of arguments, and the reinforcement of ethical communication practices that uphold respect for human dignity. These three dimensions constitute essential prerequisites for the realization of a deliberative and democratic digital public sphere.

The strengthening of digital democracy should not be directed solely toward expanding technological access or increasing political participation; rather, it must focus on cultivating a communication culture that is rational, dialogical, and ethically grounded within digital environments. Theoretically, this article contributes to digital politics scholarship by positioning Communicative Action Theory as an analytical framework for examining the quality of young people's political communication, thereby moving beyond the dichotomy of techno-optimism and techno-pessimism that has dominated much of the existing literature. Practically, the findings provide a foundation for developing digital literacy policies, civic education initiatives, and public communication strategies that position young people as key actors in constructing a more inclusive, deliberative, and ethically responsible digital public sphere.

REFERENCES

- Al-Ra'zie, Z. H., Shirazi, S. M., & Prayuda, F. (2025). Aktivisme Digital : Gaya Politik Baru Kaum Muda. *Prosiding Seminar Nasional Ilmu Pendidikan*, 2(1), 170–187. <https://prosiding.aripi.or.id/index.php/PROSEMNASIPI/article/view/137>
- Amri, Y., & Yandri, L. I. (2025). Algoritma Media Sosial Dan Polarisasi Politik Dalam Demokrasi Digital Di Indonesia. *Jurnal Suara Politik*, 4(1), 78–84.
- Armanda, D. M., Afaf, D., & Krisdahyanto, R. (2025). Filter Bubble dan Echo Chamber: Pengaruh Algoritma Media Sosial terhadap Pola Konsumsi Informasi Mahasiswa Universitas Lampung. *Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi Dan Sosial Politik*, 02(04), 1124–1129. <https://jurnal.ittc.web.id/index.php/jiksp/index>
- Barberá, P. (2020). Social media, echo chambers, and political polarization. *Social Media and Democracy: The State of the Field, Prospects for Reform*, 34–55. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108890960.004>
- Buru, C., Balzano Japa, H., Patriano Vano, M., Musi, R., & Edison, V. (2025). Kaum Muda sebagai Agen Demokrasi Digital: Analisis Peran Teknologi dalam Partisipasi Politik Generasi Digital Menurut Christian Fuchs. *Seri Filsafat Teologi*, 35(34), 190–218. <https://doi.org/10.35312/serifilsafat.v35i34.274>
- Dryzek, J. S., Bächtiger, A., Chambers, S., Cohen, J., Druckman, J. N., Felicetti, A.,

- Fishkin, J. S., Farrell, D. M., Fung, A., Gutmann, A., Landemore, H., Mansbridge, J., Marien, S., & Warren, M. E. (2019). The crisis of democracy and the science of deliberation. *Science*, 363(6432), 1144–1146.
- Duche-Pérez, A. B., Chávez-Urquizo, E. N. A., & Camargo- Riega, A. V. (2025). Digital Democracy and Social Media: Between Participation, Disinformation, and Accountability in the 21st Century. *Journal of Cultural Analysis and Social Change*, 10(2), 3700–3708. <https://doi.org/10.64753/jcasc.v10i2.2177>
- Fajarini, S. D., Yuliani, F., & Kurniawati, J. (2025). Peran Algoritma Media Sosial Dalam Membentuk Filter Bubble Dan Echo Chamber Di Kalangan Milenial Dan Gen Z Kota Bengkulu. *Jurnal Sarjana Ilmu Komunikasi (J-SIKOM)*, 6(1), 205–226. <https://doi.org/10.36085/jsikom.v6i1.8456>
- Farida Anis, Jahriyah Viita, Q. (2025). *Berpendapat Pada Masyarakat Digital : Implikasi Yuridis Ujaran Kebencian Pada Platform Media*. 5.
- Gumelar, R. G., Mukhroman, I., & Ahmad, I. (2025). *Media Sosial dan Demokrasi Digital : Opini Publik atau Polarisasi Pasca Pemilu 2024 ? Studi Ilmu Komunikasi , Jurnal Civics: Media Kajian Kewarganegaraan*, 23(1), 80–95. <https://doi.org/10.21831/jc.v23i1.90231>
- Hariyanti, H., Darmawan, C., Rahmat, R., Anggraeni, L., Rafni, A., Radini, R., & Hasibuan, H. A. (2026). Social media: A means of developing generation z's political participation in the digital era. *Jurnal Civics: Media Kajian Kewarganegaraan*, 23(1), 80–95. <https://doi.org/10.21831/jc.v23i1.90231>
- Hilyatunisa, N., Korespondensi, P., & Kunci, K. (2025). Algorithms of Social Media as Agents of Social Dynamics: Polarization, Popularity, and Public Participation in Indonesia Algoritma Media Sosial sebagai Agen Dinamika Sosial: Polarisasi, Popularitas, dan Partisipasi Publik di Indonesia for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY SA) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>). *Journal of Media Communication and Social Dynamics (JMCS D)*, 1(1), 23–41.
- Imran, M., Cindrakasih, R. R., Wahyuni, S., Rico, W., Santoso, A. B., Sugiarti, S., Firman, M. K., & Iskandar, H. M. (2026). *Komunikasi Publik di Era Digital*. 1, 1–17.
- Indira Nazwa Fazrina, Desy Safitri, & Sujarwo Sujarwo. (2025). Persepsi Generasi Z terhadap Efektivitas Aktivisme Digital sebagai Bentuk Partisipasi Sosial. *RISOMA : Jurnal Riset Sosial Humaniora Dan Pendidikan*, 3(3), 53–62. <https://doi.org/10.62383/risoma.v3i3.746>
- Irmayani, T. (2022). Partisipasi Milenial Dalam Dinamika Politik. *Jurnal Sintesa*, 2(1), 15–24.
- Kadir, N. (2022). Social Media and Participatory Politics: A Public Sphere Study, Democracy for Millennials and Gen Z. *Resiprokal*, 4(2), 198–211. <https://resiprokal.unram.ac.id/index.php/RESIPROKAL/article/view/225/65>
- Latupeirissa, J. J. P., & Cistadewi, N. M. W. (2025). A systematic review on social media echo chambers and political persuasion. *Jurnal Studi Komunikasi (Indonesian Journal of Communications Studies)*, 9(2), 562–576. <https://doi.org/10.25139/jsk.v9i2.10041>
- Manuputty, C. R., Hanita, M., & Ritonga, R. (2025). Fenomena Bias Politik Media

- Sosial dalam Polarisasi selama Pemilihan Umum Presiden 2024. *Warta ISKI*, 8(1), 206–221. <https://doi.org/10.25008/wartaiski.v8i1.371>
- Muhammad Ersyad Muttaqien, & Muhammad Ersyad Muttaqien. (2023). Konsep Komunikasi Jürgen Habermas Dalam Ide Demokrasi Deliberatif Dan Tindakan Komunikatif. *Linimasa: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi*, 4(1), 51–64.
- Nadhifa, A. P., Azizan, A. A., & Nabila, A. F. (2026). *Fenomena Ujaran Kebencian Politik Di Instagram Dan Tinjauannya Dalam Ajaran Islam*. 7425–7442.
- Noviana, V. L. (2026). Dampak Polarisasi Media Sosial terhadap Partisipasi Politik Pemilih Muda di Indonesia. *Maliki Interdisciplinary Journal*, 4(6), 702–709. <https://urj.uin-malang.ac.id/index.php/mij/article/view/25924>
- Paongan, S., Tinggi, S., Teologi, F., & Sasana, W. (2026). *Tindakan Komunikatif Jürgen Habermas: Relevansinya terhadap Pembentukan Ilmu Pengetahuan dalam Ruang Publik Digital*. 32, 841–852. <https://doi.org/10.33503/paradigma.v32i1.3328>
- Pfetsch, B. (2024). The Decline of Deliberative Democracy in the Age of Digital Capitalism: Revisiting Habermas's New Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. *International Journal of Communication*, 18, 4670–4673. <http://ijoc.org>.
- Rahman, F. (2025). Demokrasi Digital dan Ujaran Kebencian: Antara Kebebasan Berekspresi dan Represi Politik. *MEDIASI Jurnal Kajian Dan Terapan Media, Bahasa, Komunikasi*, 6(3), 259–272. <https://ojs2.polimedia.ac.id/index.php/mediasi/article/view/1777>
- Ramlan, A. F., Mustofa, M. U., Suhaini, Z. I., Azizi, N. Q. S., Mohd Norizam, W. A. H., & Solihah, R. (2025). Meninjau Kembali Ruang Publik: Tinjauan Literatur Tentang Media Sosial Dan Pembentukan Agenda Politik Melalui Lensa Habermas. *Sosioglobal : Jurnal Pemikiran Dan Penelitian Sosiologi*, 9(2), 201–210. <https://doi.org/10.24198/jsg.v9i2.62982>
- Saidaturrahmah, S., & Kholil, S. (2023). Dinamika Ruang Publik dan Demokrasi di Era New Media. *Ameena Journal*, 1(4), 350–358. <https://doi.org/10.63732/aij.v1i4.39>
- Sari, R., Choirunnisa, Ananda, M. F. S., & Dewi, R. U. (2025). *Arus Jurnal Sosial dan Humaniora (AJSH) Peran Literasi Media dalam Membentuk Etika dan Komunikasi Digital Generasi Muda*. 5(3). <http://jurnal.ardenjaya.com/index.php/ajsh><https://jurnal.ardenjaya.com/index.php/ajsh>
- Sarinah, S., & Sultrayansa, S. (2025). Citizen 2.0: Transformasi Dan Tantangan Partisipasi Politik Warga Di Era Dominasi Media Sosial. *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial, Humaniora Dan Seni*, 3(6), 1035–1039. <https://doi.org/10.62379/jishs.v3i6.3112>
- Saud, M., Ida, R., Abbas, A., Ashfaq, A., & Ahmad, A. R. (2020). Media Sosial dan Digitalisasi Partisipasi Politik Pada Generasi Muda: Perspektif Indonesia. *Jurnal Society*, 8(1), 87.
- Setiawan, A. P., Alby, J. D. A. H., & Azhar, S. R. A. (2024). Mitigasi Ekosistem Politik Destruktif: Upaya Generasi Muda dalam Mengatasi Polarisasi Politik Berbasis Media Digital. *Indonesian Journal of Political Studies (IJPS)*, 4(2), 117–132. <https://doi.org/10.15642/ijps.2024.4.2.117-132>
- Suwana, F. (2020). Apa yang memotivasi aktivisme digital? Studi kasus gerakan Selamatkan KPK di Indonesia. *Informasi, Komunikasi & Masyarakat*, 23 (9), 1295–1310.

- Soekarba, S. R. (2024). *Belajar dari Pemikiran Jürgen Habermas*. 29(01).
Sosial, M., Sosial, P., & Kalangan, D. (n.d.). *Morissan: Media Sosial dan Partisipasi Sosial Di Kalangan...* 13(01).
- Sufri Eka Bhakti. (2020). Ruang publik dan media sosial: partisipasi politik mahasiswa indonesia. *Jurnal Kajian Media*, 4(1), 2–3.
- Turahmi, H., Azizah, Z., & Mutia, C. E. (2025). Peran Pemuda dalam Mewujudkan Demokrasi Digital: Analisis Praktik Komunikasi Politik di Media Sosial. *Sagita Academia Journal*, 3(4), 106–113. <https://doi.org/10.61579/sagita.v3i4.703>
- Zainal, F., & Megasari, N. F. (2019). Mempolitisasi Ruang Virtual: Posisi Warga-Net dalam Praktik Demokrasi Digital di Indonesia. *Jurnal Ilmiah Manajemen Publik Dan Kebijakan Sosial*, 306(1), 306–326.