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Explaining the forms of generation Z's political engagement: A study on generation Z in Semarang, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to construct the form of political engagement and examine the differences in any political engagement in Generation Z based on age, gender, and scientific field. This study involved 600 Generation Z (300 male, 300 female) who were studying at Universitas Diponegoro, Semarang, Indonesia. This study uses a mixed method consisting of qualitative grounded theory and quantitative comparison. Data collection uses open-ended questions, in depth interview, and a political engagement scale (16 items; = 0.862). The results show that the form of political engagement of Generation Z includes the cognitive type such as understanding and analyzing political conditions, and the behavior type such as voting, expressing opinions, and habituating socio-political values in daily life as good citizens. Forms of political involvement vary from individual to collective. Generation Z's political perception cannot be separated from the results of social construction by online media and significant others. There are differences in the political engagement of Generation Z on age and scientific field. However, there is no difference in political engagement related to gender. This research has implications for the urgency of the functioning of social systems that ensure the exposure of reliable information and provide space for expression for Generation Z to be involved in the political arena.

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Introduction

Political engagement becomes the spirit of a country that adheres to a democratic system. Referring to the structural functionalism paradigm, the democratic system of a country can be analogous to a biological system where every group in it is integrated (Ormerod, 2019). Unfortunately, the role of youth is questioned because they tend to have a low level of political engagement and participation (Henn & Oldfield, 2016; Sears & Brown, 2013). McCartney et al. (2013) stated that political engagement is part of a person's civil engagement that focuses on the direct impact of political issues, systems, and structures.

Political engagement is an engagement of both cognitive and behavioral in a political context (Gibson & Cantijoch, 2013). In line with Carreras (2016), political engagement divided into cognitive and active. Cognitive political engagement refers to the attachment of one's attention and thoughts to the political system. For example, seeking some information on national issues and identifying their own self in a particular party. Active political engagement refers to a person's manifestation in behavior. For example, making contact with officials and participating in campaigns. Owen and Soule (2015) mention that six aspects build political engagement, there are contacting, campaign engagement, voting, community engagement, digital engagement, activism.

Some researchers agree that political engagement and political participation are not the same concepts (Barrett & Brunton-Smith, 2014; Sears & Brown, 2013). Pontes et al. (2018) stated that political engagement is closer to the cognitive and emotional aspects. Political engagement is different from political participation which emphasizes more behavioral aspects related to legal activities in general elections. Despite these differences of opinion, political engagement

in the younger generation has attracted the attention of researchers in the last decade (Henn & Oldfield, 2016; Malila & Oelofsen, 2016; Pontes et al., 2016).

The generation that currently has a youth population is Generation Z. Generation Z is the generation born between 1995 and 2010 (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). That is, now Generation Z is between 12 and 27 years old. According to Santrock (2017), the age range consists of adolescence and early adulthood. Some of generation Z are still attending junior high school and high school education, other are still pursuing a college education and even working. Generation Z is synonymous with mobility, inclusivity, pragmatism, and love dialogue (Francis & Hoefel, 2018).

Gibson and Cantijoch (2013) found that the activity of Generation Z shifted from offline to online and was more varied. Reading printed newspapers has become more varied than reading e-news, e-videos, and websites. E-news is an online newspaper portal that can be read via the internet. E-videos are videos that can be accessed with the help of an internet connection, such as YouTube. Websites refer to official websites, both governmental and non-governmental institutions. Traditional discussion activities have also turned more varied into e-discuss, which allows someone to post and forward political content. Online and joint activities with significant others such as peer groups and family also influence political behavior (Alfaruqy, 2022). Generation Z is now in its impressionable years, which is a time when political preferences are easy to change (Neundorf & Smets, 2017).

Political engagement when Generation Z is still adolescence has an effect on engagement throughout the life span. As stated by Chan et al. (2014) and Sears and Brown (2013), political engagement during adolescence determines engagement in adulthood. Political engagement is influenced by the structure and design of

state institutions, the design of elections, the economic and cultural conditions of a country, also population characteristics. Population characteristics that involve include age, gender, and education or knowledge field (Alfaruqy, 2022). Older people show stronger engagement than younger ones due to experience and time availability factors (Neundorf & Smets, 2017). Men tend to be more involved in activities related to politics than women (Cicognani et al., 2012). As well as in education, higher education tends to get higher engagement because tends to be more aware of the importance of contributing to the country. Scientific field in universities that expose more social and civic issues result in higher student engagement than academic clusters that rarely expose them (Donbavand & Hoskins, 2021).

Based on the description above, researchers are interested in examining the political engagement of Generation Z on Universitas Diponegoro students. We formulated two questions. First, what is the form of generation Z's political engagement? Second, what are the differences in the level of political engagement of Generation Z in terms of age, gender, and scientific field? This study aims to construct the form of political engagement and examine the differences in the political engagement of Generation Z in terms of gender, age, and scientific field.

Method

This research used a mixed-method approach. We applied a qualitative grounded theory method to construct what the form of political engagement fpr generation Z looks like. This approach was chosen to develop the theory of political engagement, especially for Generation Z in Semarang, Indonesia. The inductive approach started from specific data from the participants to general data or theory (Bryant & Charmaz,

2019). Second, we applied a comparative quantitative method to examine differences in political engagement by age, gender, and scientific field.

Participants who were involved in this study met the following inclusion criteria: 1) Generation Z born between 2000–2005; 2) students of Universitas Diponegoro; 3) willing to participate as participants. We used proportional stratified random sampling, to ensure that the sample represented the faculty strata of the Diponegoro University student population. The student population of Diponegoro University is 46.476 people. Based on the recommendations of Isaac and Michel (in Sugiyono, 2014) the minimum sample for this population is 348 people, with an error rate of 5%. In this study, researchers involved as many as 600 students (300 male, 300 female).

Collecting data using an online questionnaire during 17-24 August 2022. The questionnaire was completed with informed consent at the beginning to ensure participants' willingness. Participants who are willing to participate had to fill in their identities and answer all questions and scales. In the first part, we provided two open-ended questions, "Mention the form of your political engagement in the political conditions in Indonesia!" and "Describe in detail your engagement experience!". In the second part, we provided a political engagement scale (16 items; α = 0.862), which is compiled based on the aspects developed by Owen and Soule (2015). These aspects contacting, campaign engagement, voting, community engagement, digital engagement, and activism. We interviewed 10 out of 600 participants who had filled out the questionnaire. We interviewed during 1–8 September 2022. Data from participant number 001 is marked P001, data from participant number 002 is marked P002, and so on until data from participant number 600 is marked P600.

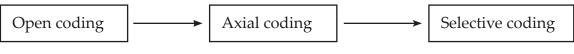


Figure 1. Data Analysis

Source: Bryant and Charmaz (2019)

Data analysis was carried out in two stages. The first stage is grounded theory analysis which refers to Stauss and Corbin (in Bryant & Charmaz, 2019). Grounded theory analysis techniques lead us to three coding stages, namely open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (see Figure 1). Open coding is the process of categorizing participants' answers based on the similarity of keywords. Axial coding is the process of categorizing the results of open coding based on the similarity of meaning/type. Selective coding is the process of looking for interrelationships between the categorization of axial coding results. The second stage is the comparative analysis technique using the Mann-Whitney U test on SPSS version 24.

Results and Discussion

This study involved 600 people (300 males, 300 females) of Generation *Z* who were students of Universitas Diponegoro. 600 students were randomly selected in proportion to the population in each faculty (see Table 1). Most of the participants came from the Faculty of Engineering (130 people or 21.67%) and the least participants came from the Faculty of Psychology (21 people or 3.50%). The participants were aged between 17 – 22 years.

Table 1. Study Participants

Escultur	Population*		Sample	
Faculty	N	%	N	%
Faculty of Social and Political Sciences	4390	9.45%	57	9.50%
Faculty of Law	3574	7.69%	46	7.67%
Faculty of Economics and Business	5482	11.80%	71	11.83%
Faculty of Humanities	4311	9.28%	56	9.33%
Faculty of Psychology	1601	3.44%	21	3.50%
Faculty of Public Health	1783	3.84%	23	3.83%
Faculty of Medicine	2887	6.21%	37	6.17%
Faculty of Animal and Agricultural Science	3369	7.25%	43	7.17%
Faculty of Science and Mathematics	5037	10.84%	65	10.83%
Faculty of Fisheries and Marine Science	3938	8.47%	51	8.50%
Faculty of Engineering	10104	21.74%	130	21.67%
Total	46476	100.00%	600	100.00%

^{*}Source: Data from academic year 2021/2022

The form of political engagement

The coding results show that there are five forms of political engagement of Generation Z which can be categorized into cognitive type and behavioral type (see Table 2). This engagement is understanding the political universe and analyzing politics (cognitive type) as well as using the right to vote, express opinions, and apply them in everyday life (behavioral type).

understanding First, political universe (41.30%). The most dominant form is understanding the political universe. This understanding is obtained by following developments on national issues, watching and reading to online news on websites or social media (e. g. Instagram, Twitter, and Youtube), and taking lectures/courses related to politics (e. g. political science courses or psychology courses). As stated by participant number 103 or P103 that he is actively seeking information about legislative institutions through trusted online news channels and avoiding provocations from buzzers:

"Following some news that covers the actual state of the domestic parliament, not being provoked by buzzers who bring down one party, keep looking for facts or actual news so as not to be misunderstood" (P103, female).

Second, analyzing political conditions (8.70%). In addition to understanding the politics of the news, some participants actively analyzed both individually and collectively. Social environments such as friendship, student organization, and family are needed by the participants in the analysis process. As stated by participant P067, he exchanged opinions with friends to analyze problems and solutions. He also hopes that the same problem will not repeat itself when he is in that position in the future:

"I do exchange opinions with my friends about political issues that are still hot, ranging from irregularities to how we think they are resolved, and give some lessons in the future if what is being done is wrong and when you go there, don't do it" (P067, male).

Third, voting (30.22%). Participants use their right to vote in the election (Pemilu) at various levels, from the regional to the national level, from the legislative to the executive election. Participants support direct, clean, honest, and fair elections to produce leaders who are trustworthy and able to improve the current state of the political system. Participant P290 said that one form of political engagement was to exercise the right to vote and to be involved in a general election committee. He considered that the general election was very important for Indonesia's condition for at least the next five years:

"The simplest example of my engagement as a citizen in politics is to participate in general election activities, either as a holder of voting rights (not abstaining from abstentions) or as an election committee, because the interests of the election are very crucial related to how is Indonesian political practice in the next period can run" (P290, female).

Fourth, expressing opinions (11.39%). Another form of behavioral engagement is expressing opinions, such as voicing aspirations, conveying criticism, participating in demonstrations, and making comments on social media. Several participants claimed to have voiced their opinions on government performance, public policies, environmental issues, and the ratification of the Sexual Violence Law, the Omnibus Law, and the KUHP. As stated by participant P089, after looking at political issues from various perspectives, he delivered suggestions and evaluations which he thought were more

appropriate:

"Looking at the circulating issues through the pros and cons point of view. Not only judging a policy but also participating in providing advice and evaluation related to the policies taken by the government" (P089, male).

Fifth, habituating in daily life (8.39%). The last form of political engagement is to be a good citizen by applying it in everyday life. Some participants better not only

criticize but also implement it on themselves. For example, discipline, honesty, and a democratic attitude. Getting involved in organizations and educating the community are other examples. As stated by participant P110 who always tries to comply with the laws in force in Indonesia:

"Follow and comply with applicable laws, and always be critical of things the government does" (P110, male).

Table 2. The Form of Political Engagement

No	Form	Perce	Percentage		
		Sub-Form	Form		
Cog	nitive Type				
1	Understanding The Political Universe a. Watching news online b. Keeping up with political developments c. Taking politics	24.21% 15.51% 1.58%	41.30%		
2	Analyzing Politics a. Doing collective analysis b. Perform individual analysis	7.28% 1.42%	8.70%		
Beh	avior Type				
3	Voting	30.22%	30.22%		
4	Expressing Opinion a. Voicing aspirations b. Follow the demonstration c. Submit a critique d. Make comments on social media	3.48% 2.85% 2.53% 2.53%	11.39%		
5	Habituating in Everyday a. Implement disciplined and honest behavior b. Follow organization c. Implementing democracy d. Educate the community	2.85% 2.37% 1.90% 1.27%	8.39%		
Tota	al	100.00%	100.00%		

Source: Field Research

Based on the discussion above, political engagement could be described in the following model (Figure 2). Political engagement consists of two types. They are the cognitive type and the behavioral type. Cognitive types tend to precede behavioral types. Someone understands political events

from various sources, especially social media. Previous in-depth analysis both individually and collectively with significant others, such as friends or family (analyzing). Armed with this understanding and analysis, a person manifests in voting, expressing opinions, and habituating every day. Voting is a form

of individual political involvement because it is under democratic principles, namely one man one vote. Expressing an opinion is a form of political involvement that is both individual and collective. For example, make comments on social media (individually) and demonstrate (collectively). Habituating every day is also a form of individual and collective political involvement. For example, implementing disciplined and honest behavior (individual) and following the organization, and implementing democracy (collectively).

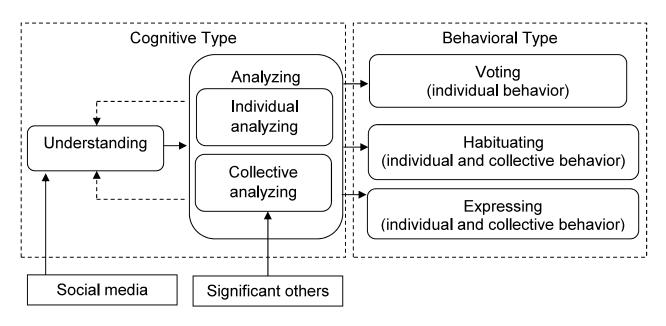


Figure 2. Political Engagement Model

Source: Field Research

Political engagement in terms of age, gender, and scientific field

In this section, we conduct a comparative analysis to test the following three hypotheses:

H1: There are differences in political engagement in terms of age

H2 : There are differences in political engagement in terms of gender

H3: There are differences in political engagement in terms of the scientific field

First, we examined differences in political engagement in terms of age (17-19 years/adolescence and 20-22 years/early adulthood). Mann-Whitney results show asymp. sig. (2-tailed) 0.039 (see Table 3). 0.039 < 0.05 means a significant difference between the age of 17-19 years (M = 44.68; SD = 5.637) and the age of 20-22 years (M = 45.73; SD = 6.532). That is, H1 is accepted. There are differences in political engagement in terms of age.

Second, we examine differences in political engagement in terms of gender (male and female). Mann-Whitney results show asymp. sig. (2-tailed) 0.447 (see Table 4).

Table 3. Political Engagement in Terms of Age

Political engagement

Mann-Whitney U	34887.500
Wilcoxon W	119142.500
Z	-2.060
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.039

a. Grouping Variable: Age

0.447 > 0.05 means that there is no significant difference between male (M = 44.79; SD = 6.270) and female (M = 45.24; SD = 5.613). That is, H2 is rejected. There is no difference in political engagement in terms of gender.

Table 4. Political Engagement in Terms of Gender

Political engagement

Mann-Whitney U	43388.000
Wilcoxon W	88538.000
Z	761
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.447

a. Grouping Variable: Gender

Third, we examine the differences in political engagement in terms of the scientific field (socio-humanities vs science and technology). Socio-humanities represent the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Faculty of Law, Faculty of Economics and Business, Faculty of Humanities, and Faculty of Psychology. Whereas science and technology represent the Faculty of Public Health, Faculty of Medicine, Faculty of Animal and Agricultural Science, Faculty of Science and Mathematics, Faculty of Fisheries and Marine Science, and Faculty of Engineering. Mann-Whitney results show asymp. sig. (2-tailed) 0.007 (see Table 5). 0.007 < 0.05 means a significant difference between the socio-humanities (M = 45.79; SD = 6,157) and science and technology (M = 44.46; SD = 5.741). That is, H3 is accepted. There are differences in political engagement in terms of the scientific field.

Table 5. Political Engagement in Terms of The Scientific Field

	Political engagement
Mann-Whitney U	38207.500
Wilcoxon W	99282.500
Z	-2.674
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.007

a. Grouping Variable: Scientific Field

Next, the researcher categorizes political engagement using descriptive statistics (see Table 6). The results show that most participants' political engagement is in high categorization (67.17%).

Table 6. Categorization of Political Engagement Variables

Very Low (16,00 < x ≤ 28,00)	Low (28,00 < x ≤ 40,00)	High (40,00 < x ≤ 52,00)	Very High (52,00 < x ≤ 64,00)
N = 1	N =126	N =403	N =70
0,17%	21,00%	67,17%	11,67%

Generation Z is the youngest Indonesian who has the right to vote today. Political engagement and participation Generation Z are needed now and in the future. This study found that the student engagement in Generation Z narrowed into two types with the same weight, called cognitive (50.00%) and behavioral (50.00%). The engagement of cognitive type is the engagement of a person in political attention, thought, evaluation, and attitude. Cognitive engagement includes activities to understand the political universe (understanding) and perform further analysis (analyzing). In line with Carreras (2016) who proposes political engagement that is cognitive in nature, namely the attachment of one's attention and thoughts to the political system. Some examples of this type of political engagement include listening to news through online media, following political issues, having political beliefs, understanding values, and having feelings and opinions about political

issues (Barrett & Brunton-Smith, 2014).

Generation Z's process of understanding the political universe via online news platforms shows that political engagement expands along with the development information technology. **Political** engagement tends to experience a shift from offline (outside the network) to online (within the network). This is in line with the findings of Gibson and Cantijoch (2013) which show that the political engagement of the younger generation shifts from offline to online which is more varied, ranging from reading news activities to discussions with other people.

From the description above, we also get the fact that online media plays an important role in the formation of cognitive type engagement (understanding and analyzing) related to the dynamics of Indonesian politics in the younger generation. From the perspective of one of the sociological theories, namely the Social Construction of Reality, Berger and Luckman (in Collins, 2016) state that social reality is the result of human construction. A person goes through the stages of externalization, objectivation, and internalization in understanding social reality, including politics in Indonesia. Generation Z's political perception cannot be separated from the construction of the owners, managers, and workers of online media. There are many political realities in a country ranging from positive to negative. However, through the agenda-setting mechanism, not all political realities are reported by online media (Gilardi et al., 2021). Only certain realities are internalized by the public. Thus, public attitudes and opinions are also affected by the media (Siregar, 2018). For example, Generation Z's perception of corruption, collusion, and nepotism.

The construction of social reality that affects political understanding for Generation Z will ultimately affect political behavior. As has been revealed in this study, there is a tendency for cognitive types to tend to precede behavioral types. Behavioral type engagement is the engagement of someone who emphasizes the expression of attitudes through overt behavior. The behavioral type of Generation Z includes the behavior of voting in elections, expressing opinions, and habituating socio-political values in everyday life.

The findings confirm the use of voting rights as the most traditional and visible form of engagement. The interest of the younger generation in election (Pemilu) is determined by the awareness of caring for the nation, psychological conditions (enthusiasm, responsibility), dynamics of competition, and perceptions of candidates (Syibulhuda et al., 2019). The interest of the younger generation in competition even to the point of making decisions to choose cannot be separated from the sharing of information that develops through social media (Jati, 2021). Alfaruqy (2019) found that the factors that influence political choice are candidate personal (49.57%), candidate bid (18.80%), voter personal (13.68%), voter social environment (6.84%), and candidate's social environment (5.98%).

Another finding shows that generation Z express their opinions through social media than by uploading, writing, and even working in cyberspace. This is certainly different from the political engagement several decades ago (Gibson & Cantijoch, 2013). These results are in line with Skoric et al. (2015) who found that the engagement of the younger generation is obtained and expressed through their social media. Young people are confident about emailing officials and signing online petitions (Dozier et al., 2016). Generation Z also implements sociopolitical values in everyday life. For example, applying discipline to rules, honesty, and democracy.

The behavior of using voting rights in elections which are classified as a

behavioral type is still an interesting study and discussion among researchers. Is voting behavior included in the realm of political engagement as well as the realm of political participation (Carreras, 2016; Owen & Soule, 2015) or is it no longer the realm of political engagement, but an exclusive realm of political participation only (Barrett & Brunton-Smith, 2014; Pontes et al, 2018).

The research findings also show that the overall political engagement of Generation Z is high and very high (78.84%). This finding is specific to Generation Z with well-educated undergraduate students, not to Generation Z as a whole. Studies show the relationship between education and political engagement (Burden et al., 2020; Gidengil et al., 2019) and the causality between education and political engagement (Perrin & Gillis, 2019; Yang & Hoskins, 2020). A study by Aars and Christensen (2018) states that individuals with high education and social status will be in an environment that encourages political engagement, whereas individuals with low education and social status will be in an environment that lacks attention to political engagement.

Furthermore, research in more detail differences in examines the political engagement in terms of age, gender, and scientific field. Research has found that there is a difference between the ages of 17-19 years (late adolescence) and 20-22 years (early adulthood). Generation Z who entered early adulthood showed higher engagement than Generation Z who was still in their late adolescence. The findings reinforce the view that older citizens show strong and real engagement than younger ones. The curvilinear theory states that the political engagement and participation of adolescence and late adulthood are not as strong as that of middle adulthood (Alfaruqy, 2022; Neundorf & Smets, 2017; Solevid & Gyllenspetz, 2022).

This study also found that there were differences between the socio-humanities and science-technology fields. Generation Z students who study in the socio-humanities faculty have higher political engagement, especially in the Faculty of Law and the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences. As stated by Donbavand and Hoskins (2021), individuals who are more often exposed to social issues and receive citizenship lectures show higher engagement than infrequent exposure. Political attention and attitudes are influenced by the intensity of political information, both through the central route and peripheral route (Baron & Branscombe, 2017).

This study found no gaps in the level of engagement of men and women. Bouvergard (2014) also found no gap in engagement by gender. One of the reasons is related to the general election system which is more open to all genders. Galligan (in Barrett & Brunton-Smith, 2014) states that there is a difference in engagement between men and women which needs to consider cultural, social, and religious norms. Men are more interested in political issues that affect the economy, while women are more interested in political issues that affect social and environmental issues. In our findings, based on open-ended questions, women's forms of engagement are more likely to reveal more engagement in accessing online news. Women are less involved in conducting studies and expressing opinions than men. In line with the research of Stefani et al (2021) men are stronger in the engagement of voicing opinions (activists).

Generation Z is an important group in Indonesian politics. From the perspective of *Structural Functionalism*, one of the main theories of sociology, society consists of groups that are structured and integrated (Parsons, 1991). Structural functionalism cannot be separated from Spencer's ideas

about the analogy of social organisms and biological organisms (Offer, 2019), also Durkheim's ideas about organic solidarity (Thilakarathna, 2019). The active role of Generation Z, both individually and in groups (sub-systems), is needed for a social system and even a state. In this study, political involvement is one form of the functioning of Generation Z.

According to structural functionalism, the key to the success of a social system is to ensure the optimization of adaptation, goal attainment, integration, and latency schemes for all individuals and sub-systems (Rusyidah & Rohman, 2020; Ormerod, 2019). In this study, generation Z, both individually and in groups, adapts to the role of being part of the citizens who make the administration of the state successful (goal attainment). For example, the right as well as the obligation to participate in voting during elections. Perhaps what still needs to be strengthened is how the state system provides clear rewards and sanctions (integration). This study found that family and peer groups as agents of socialization in increasing the political involvement of generation Z (latency).

Political engagement if part of younger generation's nationalism (Alfaruqy Masykur, 2014). Le and Nguyen, (2021) find that political engagement is not enough to predict political participation. So, it is important to pay attention to other variables. According to Levy and Akiya (2019), political engagement can be predicted by political interest, internal political efficacy, and external political efficacy. Generation Z's belief that their role is important in influencing the condition of a country needs to be nurtured. Generation Z is synonymous with mobility, inclusiveness, pragmatism, and likes dialogue (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). Politicians, political parties, and even the government need to attract political engagement in dialogical and inclusive ways

without divisive narratives. Conditions that are not ideal will certainly reduce the political engagement of Generation Z.

Conclusion

Generation Z is a sub-system needed for society and even a country. Political engagement is one of the functional forms of Generation Z. Political engagement in Generation Z has two forms, they are cognitive and behavioral. Cognitive types tend to precede behavioral types. Forms of political involvement vary from individual collective. Political perception Generation Z cannot be separated from the results of social construction from online media. Generation Z students who enter early adulthood (20-22 years) show higher political engagement than those who are still in their late teens (aged 17-19 years). The clusters show differences, where students in the socio-humanities science are higher than in the scientific clump. Nevertheless, there is no significant difference in political engagement in terms of the sexes of men and women.

The research has implications for the urgency of optimizing and providing space for the engagement of Generation Z in the Indonesian political arena. Further research needs to explore the factors that support or hinder political engagement with a wider population scale. Further research also needs to consider other variables that can predict generation Z's political engagement.

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Declaration of Ownership

This article is our original work.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest to declare in this article.

Ethical Clearance

This study was approved by the institution.

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