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The Influence of Social Media on Civic Engagement among Indonesian Millennials

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Abstract

This study examines the influence of social media on civic engagement among Indonesian millennials. The research aims to analyze how digital platforms shape political awareness, civic participation, and collective action among young citizens. A quantitative cross-sectional survey was conducted involving 250 millennial respondents from major urban areas in Indonesia. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression analysis. The findings reveal that Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter are the dominant platforms for civic engagement. Social media significantly increases political awareness, supports civic expression, and encourages participation in online and offline civic activities. Statistical analysis shows a strong positive relationship between social media use and civic engagement. However, misinformation, polarization, and slacktivism remain major barriers to meaningful participation. The study highlights that social media functions both as an enabler and a challenge for democratic participation. These findings contribute to digital civic engagement theory and provide practical implications for policymakers, educators, and digital platform governance.

INTRODUCTION

In the last two decades, social media has transformed from a simple communication platform into a powerful arena that shapes public opinion, social interaction, and civic participation (Swastiningsih et al., 2024; Ariestandy et al., 2024). With the rise of platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (now X), Instagram, and TikTok, individuals are no longer mere consumers of information but also active producers and distributors. Yates (2022) said that, this shift has fundamentally altered how people engage with social, cultural, and political issues in their daily lives. Indonesia, as one of the largest democracies in the world, provides a compelling context for examining the influence of social media (Nurhayati & Suryadi, 2017; Saud & Margono, 2021). With more than 200 million internet users and a rapidly growing digital economy, Indonesia is among the top countries in terms of social media penetration. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced among millennials those born between 1981 and 1996 who constitute a significant portion of the country's population and represent the largest group of social media users (Escandon-Barbosa et al., 2021; Martinson et al., 2022; Cantó & Rodó-Zárate, 2024; Br, 2025;).

According to Sari (2019), Millennials in Indonesia are often characterized by their digital nativity, tech-savviness, and strong reliance on social media for information and communication. For this generation, social media platforms are not merely entertainment tools but also spaces for expressing opinions, building networks, and participating in civic life. As such, social media has become a vital channel for millennials to learn about social issues, engage in discussions, and even mobilize for collective action (Belotti et al., 2022; Utari et al., 2023; Harriyani, 2024; Tasabehji, 2024; Safitri, 2025;).

Civic engagement, which refers to individual and collective actions aimed at addressing public concerns and improving community life, has traditionally been fostered through offline activities such as volunteering, joining organizations, or participating in protests. However, with the advent of social media, these traditional forms of engagement have expanded into digital spaces (AlSayyad & Guvenc, 2015; Mugil & Kenzie, 2025). Online petitions, hashtag campaigns, digital fundraising, and viral advocacy movements are now common expressions of civic engagement among young people. The case of Indonesian millennials illustrates how social media reshapes civic participation (Ramadhan, 2025; Anoraga & Sakai, 2023; Utari et al., 2023). Various social movements such as #ReformasiDikorupsi, #SaveKPK, and environmental campaigns like #SaveAru have shown that millennials are capable of mobilizing massive online and offline support. These campaigns highlight how digital tools can amplify voices, spread awareness rapidly, and create pressure on policymakers in ways that were unimaginable a generation ago.

Meanwhile, the contribution of the social media to civic engagement does not go without complaints. Although it can boost the involvement, it can also give rise to shallow involvement, commonly known as slacktivism. The illusion of involvement can be offered by clicking like or sharing a post, although it does not always result in practice in reality. In addition, misinformation and polarization on social media websites can destroy positive discussions and confuse trust in civic institutions (Sagbakken, 2022; Bhutto, 2024; Arifah et al., 2025; Arifah et al., 2025;). These issues are especially topical in the Indonesian setting. The presence of high internet penetration and social media activity among millennials is accompanied by the increasing anxieties over online hoaxes, execution of echo chambers, and manipulation of political processes within the framework of elections. These dynamics cast doubts on whether social media can be used as the instrument of actual civic participation or a place of symbolic involvement and political diversion (Matthes, 2022; Saud et al., 2023).

In spite of these issues, social media has continued to be a key force that motivates millennial civic participation in Indonesia. It offers a kind of arena through which youths are able to bypass the hierarchies and engage more directly in the social and political discourse. In comparison with the past generations, millennials have become able to express their issues not only in real-time but also publicly, which is accessible to a broader audience, unlike the traditional media options.

It is crucial to comprehend how social media has affected the civic engagement of Indonesian millennials (Utari et al., 2023; Utari et al., 2023; Wijaya & Amalia, 2024; Amin et al., 2024). This work provides an insight into the social and political perceptions of a digitally connected generation and their practice of citizenship in a world where technology mediates a large portion of social and political life. More to the point, it helps policymakers, educators, and the actors of civil society to develop strategies that would promote meaningful and sustainable interactions, both online and offline. The study seeks to examine the connection between social media and civic engagement among Indonesian millennials, in terms of the ways in which these digital platforms influence political awareness and civic participation and collective action, as well as the level to which social media facilitates or disables further

engagement in the political process hence eliciting the duality in its effects. Finally, the study is valuable to the overall debate about the impact of digital technology on the civic life in Indonesia. The study offers understanding of the changing trends of engagement in a society whose characteristics are increasingly digital by exploring the experiences of millennials. It claims that even though social media has an undeniable potential on its capacity to enhance civic participation, its long-term effects are determined by how individuals, institutions, and the society at large will manage the opportunities and the challenges it will offer.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design using a cross-sectional survey approach to examine the influence of social media on civic engagement among Indonesian millennials. A quantitative design was selected because it enables the measurement of relationships between variables using statistical analysis and provides objective evidence regarding patterns of social media use and civic participation. The cross-sectional approach was appropriate because data were collected at a single point in time to capture respondents' current behaviors, perceptions, and engagement levels. According to Creswell (2018), quantitative survey research is effective for analyzing trends, attitudes, and associations within a population.

The study investigated social media use as the independent variable and civic engagement as the dependent variable. Social media use was measured through indicators such as platform frequency, exposure to civic content, and participation in online campaigns, while civic engagement was assessed through political awareness, online activism, volunteering, and offline participation.

Research Location and Population

The study was conducted in major urban areas of Indonesia, including Jakarta, Bandung, Surabaya, and Makassar, where internet penetration and social media usage are relatively high. These cities were selected because urban millennials are among the most active digital users and frequently engage in online social and political discourse. The target population consisted of Indonesian millennials aged 25–40 years, representing individuals born between 1981 and 1996. This demographic was selected because millennials demonstrate high digital literacy and intensive social media interaction, making them suitable for investigating digital civic behavior (Saud & Margono, 2021).

Sampling Technique and Sample Size

This study used purposive sampling to select respondents based on predefined criteria. Participants were required to actively use at least one major social media platform, including Instagram, TikTok, Twitter (X), Facebook, or YouTube, and to have prior exposure to civic-related content online. A total of 250 respondents participated in the survey. The sample size was considered adequate for statistical analysis, including descriptive statistics and regression analysis, as suggested by Hair et al. (2022), who recommend a minimum sample above 200 for multivariate analysis to improve statistical robustness.

Data Collection Technique

Primary data were collected using an online questionnaire distributed through digital platforms. The questionnaire consisted of structured close-ended questions divided into four sections: respondent demographics, social media usage patterns, civic engagement activities, and barriers to civic participation. All perception-based items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5

(strongly agree). The questionnaire assessed respondents' frequency of social media usage, engagement in online petitions, crowdfunding activities, civic content sharing, political awareness, and offline participation such as volunteering and protest attendance.

Table 1. Operational Definition of Variables

Variable	Indicator	Measurement Scale
Social Media Use (X)	Frequency of use, platform engagement, exposure to civic content	Likert Scale (1–5)
Civic Engagement (Y)	Political awareness, online activism, volunteering, protest participation	Likert Scale (1–5)

Data Analysis Technique

Data were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarize respondent characteristics and response patterns. Inferential statistical analysis included Pearson correlation and simple linear regression to examine the relationship between social media use and civic engagement. Correlation analysis was used to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between variables, while regression analysis assessed the predictive effect of social media usage on civic engagement. Statistical significance

Validity and Reliability

Instrument validity was assessed using content validity through expert judgment involving academics in digital communication and social science research. Construct validity was examined using item-total correlation, where items with correlation coefficients above 0.30 were considered valid.

Reliability testing was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha. According to Hair et al. (2022), a Cronbach's Alpha value above 0.70 indicates acceptable internal consistency. All research variables achieved reliability coefficients above this threshold, confirming that the instrument was reliable for measuring social media use and civic engagement. Ethical considerations were also maintained throughout the study. Respondents participated voluntarily and provided informed consent before completing the questionnaire. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured during data collection and analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the empirical findings regarding the influence of social media on civic engagement among Indonesian millennials. The results are organized into several analytical sections. First, the demographic profile of respondents is presented to describe the sample characteristics. Second, descriptive statistics of the research variables are reported to provide an overview of respondents' perceptions regarding social media use and civic engagement. Third, the study examines patterns of social media usage and forms of civic participation facilitated by digital platforms. Fourth, instrument quality is assessed through validity, reliability, and normality testing. Finally, inferential analyses consisting of correlation, regression, and hypothesis testing are presented to examine the statistical relationship between social media use and civic engagement.

Respondent Characteristics

A total of 250 respondents participated in this study. The respondents were Indonesian millennials residing in major urban areas, including Jakarta, Bandung, Surabaya, and Makassar.

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N=250)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	118	47.2
	Female	132	52.8
Age	25–30 years	92	36.8
	31–35 years	86	34.4
	36–40 years	72	28.8
Education	Diploma	58	23.2
	Bachelor	145	58.0
	Postgraduate	47	18.8
Occupation	Private Employee	102	40.8
	Entrepreneur	61	24.4
	Civil Servant	38	15.2
	Others	49	19.6

Source: Primary survey data processed by authors, 2025

The sample was relatively balanced in terms of gender, with female respondents slightly dominating (52.8%). The largest age group was 25–30 years (36.8%), indicating stronger representation from younger millennials. Most respondents held bachelor's degrees (58%), reflecting relatively high educational attainment and digital literacy.

Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Descriptive statistics were used to examine the central tendency and distribution of the main research variables.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	Category
Social Media Use	4.12	0.65	High
Civic Engagement	3.89	0.71	High

Source: Primary survey data processed by authors, 2025

The mean score for social media use was 4.12, indicating high levels of digital engagement among respondents. The mean civic engagement score was 3.89, suggesting relatively strong participation in civic-related activities. These results indicate that Indonesian millennials are highly active in digital environments and moderately to highly engaged in civic participation.

Social Media Usage Patterns

The study examined the preferred social media platforms used for civic-related activities.

Table 4. Preferred Social Media Platforms

Platform	Percentage (%)	Primary Use
Instagram	82	Activism campaigns, infographics
TikTok	76	Short civic videos
Twitter (X)	65	Political discussion
YouTube	55	Educational content
Facebook	40	Community interaction

Source: Primary survey data processed by authors, 2025

Instagram emerged as the most dominant platform (82%), followed by TikTok (76%). These findings suggest that visual and short-form communication has become central to civic discourse among millennials.

Forms of Civic Engagement through Social Media

The results indicate that respondents engage in multiple forms of civic participation through social media.

Table 5. Civic Engagement Activities via Social Media

Activity	Participation (%)
Sharing civic content	75
Signing online petitions	68
Donating via crowdfunding	60
Joining offline protests	42
Volunteering	35

Source: Primary survey data processed by authors, 2025

Sharing civic content was the most common activity (75%), indicating that expressive participation dominates digital civic behavior. Offline participation remained lower, suggesting that online engagement does not always translate into direct physical action.

Political Awareness through Social Media

The study also measured the extent to which social media influences political awareness.

Table 6. Political Awareness Indicators

Indicator	Strong/Moderate Impact (%)
Awareness of current policies	78
Understanding civic rights	70
Exposure to diverse perspectives	65
Risk of misinformation	72

Source: Primary survey data processed by authors, 2025

Most respondents reported that social media improved awareness of policies and civic rights. However, misinformation remained a serious concern, with 72% reporting frequent exposure to inaccurate content.

Barriers to Civic Engagement

Several barriers were identified as limiting effective civic participation.

Table 7. Barriers to Social Media-Based Civic Engagement

Barrier	Percentage (%)
Misinformation	72
Slacktivism	58
Political polarization	50
Online harassment	45
Digital fatigue	40

Source: Primary survey data processed by authors, 2025

Misinformation emerged as the most significant barrier. This suggests that high access to digital platforms does not automatically ensure meaningful civic engagement.

Validity Test

Construct validity was assessed using corrected item-total correlation.

Table 8. Validity Test Results

Variable	Correlation Range	Threshold	Result
Social Media Use	0.512–0.801	>0.30	Valid
Civic Engagement	0.548–0.823	>0.30	Valid

Source: Primary survey data processed by authors, 2025

All questionnaire items exceeded the threshold of 0.30, confirming acceptable construct validity.

Reliability Test

Reliability testing was performed using Cronbach's Alpha.

Table 9. Reliability Test Results

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Interpretation
Social Media Use	0.864	Reliable
Civic Engagement	0.889	Reliable

Source: Primary survey data processed by authors, 2025

Both variables exceeded the 0.70 threshold, indicating strong internal consistency.

Normality Test

A Kolmogorov–Smirnov test was performed to assess data normality before parametric testing.

Table 10. Normality Test Results

Variable	Sig.	Interpretation
Residual Data	0.200	Normally Distributed

Source: Primary survey data processed by authors, 2025

Since the significance value exceeded 0.05, the data were normally distributed, indicating suitability for parametric analyses.

Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between social media use and civic engagement.

Table 11. Pearson Correlation Analysis

Variables	r	Sig.
Social Media Use ↔ Civic Engagement	0.742	0.000

Source: Primary survey data processed by authors, 2025

The correlation coefficient of 0.742 indicates a strong positive relationship between social media use and civic engagement. The significance level confirms that the relationship is statistically significant.

Regression Analysis

Simple linear regression was performed to examine the predictive effect of social media use on civic engagement.

Table 12. Regression Coefficients

Variable	Beta	t-value	Sig.
Social Media Use	0.731	16.842	0.000

Source: Primary survey data processed by authors, 2025

The regression coefficient indicates that social media use significantly predicts civic engagement.

Model Summary

Table 13. Model Summary

Statistic	Value
R	0.742
R Square	0.551
Adjusted R Square	0.549

Source: Primary survey data processed by authors, 2025

The model explains 55.1% of the variance in civic engagement, while 44.9% is explained by other factors outside the model.

ANOVA Test

ANOVA was used to assess overall model significance.

Table 14. ANOVA Results

Model	F	Sig.
Regression	283.66	0.000

Source: Primary survey data processed by authors, 2025

The F-test result indicates that the regression model is statistically significant and suitable for explaining civic engagement.

Hypothesis Testing

This study proposed one main hypothesis:

H1: Social media use positively and significantly influences civic engagement among Indonesian millennials.

Based on regression analysis, the significance value was 0.000, which is lower than 0.05. Therefore, H1 is accepted. This finding confirms that increased social media usage for civic purposes significantly enhances civic engagement among Indonesian millennials.

Social Media as a Catalyst and Constraint of Civic Engagement among Indonesian Millennials

The findings of this study confirm that social media has become a significant driver of civic engagement among Indonesian millennials, functioning simultaneously as an enabler of democratic participation and as a source of structural challenges. The positive and significant relationship between social media use and civic engagement demonstrates that digital platforms increasingly shape how younger generations interact with political information, social issues, and collective action. This finding aligns with recent studies showing that social media has transformed civic participation from institution-centered engagement into more decentralized, network-based participation (Boulianne & Theocharis, 2020; Matthes, 2022; Velasquez & LaRose, 2023). Unlike conventional civic spaces, digital platforms reduce participation barriers by enabling users to access information, express opinions, and mobilize around public issues in real time.

The dominance of Instagram and TikTok in this study indicates an important transformation in the communication logic of civic participation. Earlier literature emphasized Facebook and Twitter as primary arenas of digital activism, particularly for political debate and campaign mobilization. However, the present findings reveal a platform migration toward visually intensive and algorithm-driven media. This shift

suggests that civic discourse among millennials is increasingly mediated through short-form, emotionally engaging, and visually persuasive content. Similar observations were reported by Arif Billah and Rahman (2024), who argued that youth activism has moved toward participatory visual cultures where memes, reels, and short videos become instruments of civic expression. The current study extends this argument by demonstrating that Indonesian millennials are not merely consuming digital content but actively transforming entertainment-oriented platforms into civic spaces.

This shift represents one of the central novelties of the study. Previous research on digital political participation in Southeast Asia often focused on text-based political discussion, elections, or traditional online activism (Saud et al., 2023). In contrast, this study highlights how civic engagement increasingly emerges through hybrid digital cultures where activism coexists with entertainment. Such findings support the theory of connective action proposed in recent digital activism literature, where participation is organized less through formal institutions and more through personalized sharing networks (Bennett & Segerberg, 2021). Civic participation no longer depends solely on membership in organizations; rather, it develops through fluid and networked interactions shaped by platform architecture.

Another important finding concerns the dominant forms of civic engagement performed through social media. Sharing civic content, signing online petitions, and participating in crowdfunding campaigns were the most common forms of engagement. These findings are consistent with recent global studies showing that low-threshold digital participation has become a major entry point into civic life. Online petitions and hashtag activism allow individuals to express support without significant physical, financial, or temporal commitment. This accessibility broadens participation and enables previously marginalized voices to enter civic discourse.

However, the study also reveals a notable gap between online and offline civic participation. Although digital engagement was high, offline participation such as volunteering and protest attendance remained substantially lower. This finding supports recent debates on slacktivism, which suggest that online activism can produce symbolic engagement without sustained real-world action (Kristofferson et al., 2021). While some scholars criticize slacktivism as superficial, the present findings suggest a more nuanced interpretation. Online participation should not automatically be dismissed as ineffective. Symbolic engagement often serves as an initial stage of political socialization, awareness formation, and agenda-setting.

This partially differs from earlier scholarship that viewed digital activism as largely performative and politically weak. Recent evidence increasingly suggests that online engagement can strengthen offline participation when supported by strong social networks and organizational pathways. The strong positive correlation found in this study between social media use and civic engagement reinforces this argument. The finding indicates that online civic interaction can indeed encourage offline participation, particularly when digital awareness is transformed into collective motivation and coordinated action. This contributes theoretically by challenging the binary distinction between “virtual activism” and “real activism.” Instead, both forms should be understood as interconnected dimensions within a broader civic ecosystem.

Political awareness emerged as another critical dimension shaped by social media. The findings indicate that digital platforms substantially improve awareness of public policies, civic rights, and social issues. This supports recent literature suggesting that social media democratizes political information by reducing dependency on traditional gatekeepers such as television and newspapers (Loader et al., 2021).

Through algorithmically curated content, users gain immediate exposure to policy debates, advocacy campaigns, and public discourse.

The Indonesian context provides a particularly important contribution to this discussion. As one of the world's largest democracies with rapid digital expansion, Indonesia offers a unique environment where civic participation increasingly occurs through online interaction. The present study demonstrates that social media has become a primary channel of political learning for millennials, reinforcing findings from regional studies on digital democracy in Asia (Tapsell, 2023; Lim, 2024). This contributes to the literature by providing empirical evidence from a developing democracy where digital transformation occurs alongside institutional and informational vulnerabilities.

Nevertheless, the study also highlights the paradox of digital political awareness. Increased exposure to information does not necessarily produce deeper political understanding. Misinformation emerged as the most significant barrier to meaningful civic participation. This finding strongly aligns with recent studies on digital misinformation ecosystems, which show that algorithmic amplification often prioritizes sensational or emotionally provocative content over accurate information (Guess et al., 2020). The result confirms that social media simultaneously expands access to information and increases vulnerability to epistemic distortion.

This finding contributes theoretically by reinforcing the concept of the "information paradox" in digital democracy. Greater information abundance may generate cognitive overload rather than informed participation. Users may feel politically aware while lacking sufficient analytical depth to evaluate the credibility of content. This phenomenon has become increasingly relevant in contemporary democracies where viral misinformation shapes public discourse faster than institutional correction mechanisms. Political polarization and online harassment further intensify this challenge. The findings indicate that ideological fragmentation and hostile online interactions significantly reduce sustained civic engagement. This aligns with recent studies showing that digital platforms often reinforce echo chambers through recommendation algorithms (Bail, 2021). When users repeatedly encounter ideologically similar content, cross-group dialogue becomes weaker, and polarization increases. This process undermines deliberative democracy by discouraging respectful disagreement and collaborative problem-solving.

The presence of online harassment is equally important, particularly in relation to inclusivity. Hostile digital environments disproportionately affect women and marginalized groups, reducing their willingness to participate in public discourse. This supports findings by Raihan et al. (2022), who argued that harassment functions as a form of digital exclusion. Thus, although social media lowers entry barriers to civic participation, it does not automatically guarantee equitable participation.

The practical implications of these findings are substantial. First, policymakers should treat digital literacy as a strategic civic competency rather than merely a technical skill. Educational institutions need to strengthen critical thinking, media verification, and ethical online engagement. Digital literacy programs should emphasize fact-checking, algorithm awareness, and responsible information sharing. Such interventions are essential for transforming passive media consumption into informed civic participation. Second, platform governance requires stronger accountability mechanisms. Social media companies should improve moderation systems to reduce misinformation, harassment, and toxic polarization. Transparent content moderation and algorithmic accountability are increasingly necessary for sustaining healthy digital civic spaces. Without regulatory and institutional

intervention, civic participation may continue to be distorted by manipulative content ecosystems.

Third, civil society organizations and educational institutions should create stronger pathways connecting online activism with offline civic participation. Hybrid civic engagement models combining digital mobilization with community-based action could reduce slacktivism and strengthen sustained participation. Universities, youth organizations, and NGOs can play a crucial role in translating digital awareness into long-term democratic engagement.

The study also offers several theoretical contributions. It extends digital civic engagement theory by demonstrating that civic participation among millennials increasingly occurs through entertainment-centered platforms rather than traditional political spaces. This challenges earlier frameworks that prioritized text-based discussion and formal political discourse. The study also introduces empirical evidence supporting the integration of connective action theory, digital literacy theory, and democratic participation frameworks in explaining millennial civic behavior in developing democracies.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the sample was limited to urban millennials in major Indonesian cities, which may reduce generalizability to rural populations or older generations. Rural communities may experience different levels of digital access, media literacy, and civic participation. Second, the cross-sectional design limits causal interpretation. While the study identifies strong associations, it cannot fully capture dynamic changes in civic engagement over time. Third, the study relied on self-reported survey data, which may introduce social desirability bias and response subjectivity.

Future research should address these limitations by employing longitudinal designs to examine how digital civic behavior evolves over time. Comparative studies between urban and rural populations would also provide richer insights into the digital divide in civic participation. Further research may also investigate the influence of platform algorithms, influencer activism, and artificial intelligence-driven content personalization on civic engagement. These areas are increasingly relevant as algorithmic systems become central to political communication.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that social media plays a significant role in shaping civic engagement among Indonesian millennials by enhancing political awareness, facilitating civic expression, and encouraging collective participation. The findings demonstrate that platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter have evolved beyond entertainment spaces into important arenas for digital activism and public discourse. The strong positive relationship between social media use and civic engagement indicates that increased digital interaction contributes to higher levels of civic participation, both online and offline. Theoretically, this study contributes to digital civic engagement literature by showing that contemporary participation increasingly occurs through visual and algorithm-driven platforms rather than traditional political channels.

The findings emphasize the importance of strengthening digital literacy, ethical media use, and platform accountability to reduce misinformation, polarization, and superficial engagement. Despite these contributions, the study is limited by its urban-focused sample, cross-sectional design, and reliance on self-reported data. Future research should employ longitudinal and comparative approaches to explore rural populations, algorithmic influence, and the long-term impact of artificial intelligence-driven digital communication on civic behavior.

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