

TWO GENERATIONS, ONE DEMOCRACY: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF MEDIA CONSUMPTION AND POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT AMONG MILLENNIALS AND DIGITAL NATIVES IN PAKISTAN

Lubna Zaheer^{1*}, Sofia Mubbsher²

¹Department of Film and Broadcasting, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan

²University of Gujrat, Gujrat, Punjab, Pakistan

Abstract. A generation gap in the way political media are consumed is also important in the digital era, where rapid technological change and generational replacement make it increasingly important to understand how different generations are using media for political purposes. The present study examines the generational differences in media and political engagements of Millennials and Digital Natives in Pakistan. Although much has been done in research on the relationship between digital media and civic participation, there has been limited literature about the interaction of the algorithmic design features and generational digital literacies in non-Western democratic situations. In order to fill this gap, the study conducted a cross-sectional survey of an equal sample of Millennials and Digital Natives using a validated scale of media consumption patterns, news-finds-me attitudes, political efficacy, perceived digital design affordances and political engagement. The findings show that Millennials enjoy a mixed trend of using both old and new media and Digital Natives mostly utilize social media and feeds built around algorithms. The news-finds-me attitudes are positive predictors of political engagement in the two cohorts. Political efficacy mediates the connection between the media usage and political participation- especially by Millennials- and the perceived digital design features (i.e., interactivity, algorithmic recommendation, participatory affordances) mediate the media-engagement association, particularly among Digital Natives. These results imply that the generational identity and platform design have come together to transform civic participation during the digital age. The significance of design-conscious, participatory infrastructure in political communication strategy coupled with implications on media literacy programs.

Keywords: Millennials, Digital Natives, media consumption, political engagement, digital design.

Corresponding Author: Lubna Zaheer, Department of Film and Broadcasting, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan, e-mail: lubnazaheer2003@yahoo.com

Received: 27 October 2025;

Accepted: 17 December 2025;

Published: 3 February 2026.

1. Introduction

The distinct media use and political engagement strategies of these generations are essential to unraveling the modern political environments (Boulianne & Shehata, 2021). In this paper, delineate the nature of Millennials and Digital Natives, their overall media consumption and then narrows down to practical aspects of their media consumption in relation to political participation. Digital space plays important role in political discourse, political engagement and political attitudes development in these demographically relevant groups (Kadir, 2022). This discussion is especially relevant in the context of the changing digital environment, in which the conventional channels of political engagement and information distribution have changed and require reconsideration of the most effective engagement frameworks (Samalis *et al.*, 2023).

Moreover, because of the singular response of these generations to media involving digital media and their tendency to believe in news-finds-me attitudes and incidental news coverage, political communication and civic education are faced with new challenges and opportunities (Blum, 2024). This generational analysis goes down the point of demographic classification and into the specifics of how the exposure to digital technologies both early and continuous influences how information processing is oriented, how political socialization is structured and finally into the constructs of political action (Leyva, 2016). This holistic analysis draws a distinction between the two generations and that different levels of digital immergence during childhood lead to the differing trends of media consumption and political effectiveness (Vozab, 2019). The role of the social media platforms as one of the main channels of political information is also examined in such an investigation, its influence on political interest and effectiveness with younger demographics (Venus *et al.*, 2025).

The Millennials born in the early 1980s to mid-1990s as the first and Digital Natives born after the mid-1990s as the second generation, whose development process with digital technology is different. This difference is critical because it shows differences in the level of immersion in digital and the following effect on their media consumption patterns and political processes of socialization (Blum, 2024). Digital Natives, in particular, Generation Z, are defined by the fact that they were born after 1996 and 2010, thus being raised in a fully digitalized world that has a significant impact on their political attitudes and participation (Arnu *et al.*, 2024; Solihat, 2024). On the other hand, millennials are the first generation that underwent a serious technological shift, having grown up with the internet and social media instead of entering the world in a fully digitalized form (Wandhe, 2024). This difference has its root in the perception and relationship to political information among each generation, where Digital Natives tend to have a news-finds-me attitude to information, meaning that it is discovered by accident through the social feeds but is not consciously sought out (Blum, 2024).

This ubiquitous digital upheaval has led to a kind of digital citizenship behavior of the Generation Z, in which technology and social media have become the central aspects of determining their civic identity and political consciousness (Choi, 2016). The political socialization of this digital inclusion differs significantly by changing the hierarchy of agents determining their political opinions to hybrid and increasing the influence of digital media personalities (Morozova *et al.*, 2021). To Generation Z, digital media and especially social platforms play a significant role in their political identity and choices as it is one of the main sources of political information and a place where they can share their opinion and discuss it (Solihat, 2024). This is because political actors have focused on platforms such as Instagram, Youtube or Tik Tok as an important target audience due to their reliance on these platforms to get information about political events and activities, which frequently aim to influence them through the use of emotional appeal and authenticity (Venus *et al.*, 2025).

In addition, their familiarity with online technologies makes them accessible to different types of online activism, such as posting political memes and viral campaigns and an extension of political discourse beyond conventional boundaries (Wicks *et al.*, 2024). Such online behavioral tendencies are also evident in how Generation Z prefers to receive political news content through online news outlets and social networks which they consider to be more trustworthy than traditional media. This tendency shows an important change in information search and confirmation according to the generation gap, as older generations could be oriented to traditional media (Solihat, 2024). It is a digital nativism

that creates a perception of the strength of networked participation in politics and civic engagement (Andersen *et al.*, 2020). Their frequent application of social media to political consumerism is another indicator of this constant online presence, as they use the social media to boycott or buycotts due to ethical or social reasons (Wicks *et al.*, 2024). That is why their ubiquitous digital presence can be converted into physical political behaviors and manifestations of their values (Ohme *et al.*, 2022).

Millennials, on the contrary, are more likely to have the more balanced media diet, with the inclusion of traditional news sources with the active use of digital platforms to engage in the political process. Such media consumption is a hybrid characteristic of Millennials that is driven by their adjustment to the changing technological environments that is shaping their political socialization as a result of adopting both the traditional and digital communication systems. This modulation means that political information becomes more critical and discriminating, since they will have to deal not only with existing journalistic organizations but with new digital stories. The experience in both online and offline media space enables them to analyze information presented by different sources critically, which leads to a more subtle perception of political problems (Blum, 2024). The nature of their political effectiveness is also influenced by this hybrid model of consumption as they are better equipped to understand what information to believe and what information to disbelieve depending on the platform, making civic discourse smarter (Syamsudin *et al.*, 2025).

This difference between Millennials and Digital Natives in media consumption and political participation highlights the need to find specific methods of communication by political participants to mobilize these generational cohorts (Ohme *et al.*, 2022). These generational divides are the most important to comprehend in order to achieve success in political outreach and make sense of the changing environment of democratic engagement in the digital era (Erubami *et al.*, 2021). Moreover, as younger generations, such as Millennials and Generation Z, are becoming more politically active with age, their styles tend to differ with the older generations, giving more preference to online activism and other types of civic engagement (Wicks *et al.*, 2024; Dookhoo, 2015). In particular, Generation Z, though the youngest generation, shows uneven political engagement depending on social media exposure, especially in those activities aimed at the political system but not on the interactions on a local level (Andersen *et al.*, 2020).

Nevertheless, even with a substantial body of work on the media consumption and political participation of Millennials and Digital Natives, there has not been a definite comparative insight into how they both consume the digital content and access political matters despite the fact that in new media settings, where algorithmic curation and interface design greatly shape the exposure to political information. This paper covers this research gap through the evaluation of the impact of the varying levels of digital immersion on information processing, civic engagement and political efficacy among these two generations.

This paper seeks to explore how different media use habits of Millennials and Digital Natives are driving their political activism and their views of political efficacy.

1. To compare the dominant media platforms and content preferences of Millennials and Digital Natives.
2. To examine the relationship between incidental news exposure (“news-finds-me” attitudes) and political participation within both cohorts.

3. To explore how digital design features - such as interface interactivity, algorithmic recommendation and participatory affordances - affect users' civic and political engagement.

4. To identify implications for the design of digital communication platforms that foster meaningful political participation among younger generations.

This emphasis does not only enhance the insight into generational political conduct within the broader context of digital media design and its sociopolitical effects but also the larger mission of New Design Ideas, namely exploring creative intersections of technology, design and human experience. The work includes both communication research and consideration of digital design to focus on the influence of the architecture of media environments on civic identity and participatory culture among Millennials and Digital Natives.

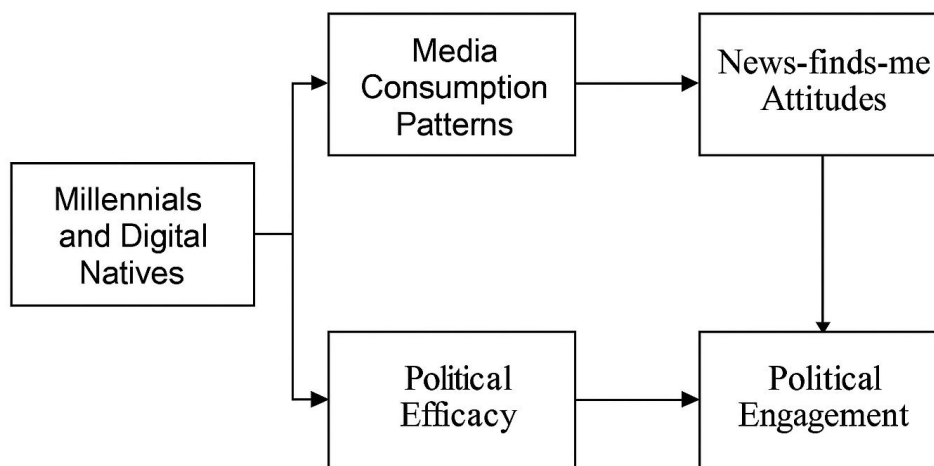
2. Literature review

The difference in media consumption across the generations shows the impact of exposure to technology on political participation to cohorts. Millennials, growing up with the emergence of the internet, are more likely to choose a hybrid media, combining conventional journalism with online sources and this quality enables them to make informed civic practices (Siddique *et al.*, 2024). On the other hand, Digital Natives, people born after the middle of the 1990s, have their unique habits that are deemed as constant online connection, platform liquidity and engagement (Hu *et al.*, 2022). The latest world surveys prove that Generation Z favors short-form visual and interactive content more than any other platforms especially on Tik Tok, YouTube Shorts and Instagram Reels and this content should be more immediate, personal and entertaining. It is a change in media diets in which consumption of more traditional forms of political news is replaced with more algorithmically mediated and peer-mediated content that indirectly affects civic consciousness (Boulianne & Shehata, 2021). Research also shows that Millennials have been using legacy media to verify the facts about politics, but Digital Natives prefer content based on relatability and emotional connection shared by the digital communities (Arnu *et al.*, 2024). This generational gap highlights the necessity of design paradigms, which consider the difference in platform preference and how interface design impacts the process of political information.

An emerging literature emphasizes the role of the news-finds-me (NFM) perceptions in influencing the civic engagement by the different generations. Digital Natives tend to be exposed to political information not by choice when seeking news, but by social media algorithms (Gil de Zúñiga *et al.*, 2022). Such passive exposure heightens the risk of interaction on political memes or viral matters but could diminish the level of in-depth knowledge (Nanz *et al.*, 2022). The semi-purposeful interaction of the Millennials, in contrast, where they mix the news offered by the old media with the social feed, promotes greater political effectiveness and deliberation (Gottfried & Barthel, 2015). Likewise, recent design-based research demonstrates that incidental exposure-promoting algorithms can improve engagement and distort it at the same time based on the level of personalization (Dreston & Neubaum, 2023). By doing so, the political activity of these cohorts is not a leader-member interaction but a mediating process technological - a phenomenon that must be designed with design ethics that value balanced recommendation systems and transparency (Stray *et al.*, 2024).

Contemporary literature attributes the dynamics of civic engagement to the structure of digital environments, including algorithms, affordances and interactivity. The use of algorithms in designing also impacts exposure, as well as emotional resonance and perceived agency in political engagement (Scharlach & Hallinan, 2023). Machiavellian participatory affordances, including the comment sections and reaction buttons and remixing apps, generate points of entry-level participation in political discourse, especially for Gen Z participants (Jung *et al.*, 2024). Nevertheless, there is empirical data that point to the fact that the existence of algorithmic backdrop can guide ideological back chambers, affecting selective political participation (Paraschiv *et al.*, 2024). Design oriented communication research underlines that participatory interfaces are intended to be concerned with civic transparency and feedback mechanisms by which user agency is facilitated (Molina & Sundar, 2022). Millennials prefer more flexible design (between information depth and interactivity) to keep trust and engagement; Digital Natives more emotional interactivity and game-like elements of interaction can help their attention and mobilization (Hu *et al.*, 2022).

The issues of generational differences suggest the inclusion of design thinking into the study of political communication. Researchers suggest that to encourage younger generations to engage in civic activities, interfaces should be user-centric, i.e. dialogic, participatory and community-led storytelling and curation (Venus *et al.*, 2025). The gap between intentional exposure and incidental exposure can be closed with the help of cross-platform civic design to include adaptive recommendation systems that would match the user autonomy with civic information objectives. The interface as a political actor in the context is the interface itself which determines the way to participate, form civic identities and mobilize collectively. The creation of democratic space in digital media means, therefore, redesigning that allows active engagement and not passive consumption of affordances (Paraschiv *et al.*, 2024). This does not merely present generational engagement as a behavior phenomenon but rather as an outcome of the changing media design eco-systems.



H1: The patterns of dominant use of media are significantly different in millennials and Digital Natives.

H2: News-finds-me attitudes have a positive influence on the political engagement of both generations.

H3: The political efficacy is between a media consumption and political engagement.

H4: Perceived features of digital design, including algorithmic recommendation, interactivity and participatory affordances, mediate the relationship between media use and political engagement and an increased perception of appealing design features increases this relationship.

3. Methods and materials

The research design applied in the study is the quantitative, cross-sectional survey to test how the differences in the generational trends in media consumption influence political participation, the attitudes towards the digital media design characteristics between the Pakistani Millennials and Digital Natives. The paper is a design-based one because it aims at the contribution of the digital features, i.e. algorithmic recommendation, interactive interfaces and participatory affordance to or restricting the political participation. The study by performing a quantitative analysis of these design perceptions, targets the development of empirical figures on the impacts of new media settings on how users are exposed to information and their civic intentions.

The target group of this study consists of the Millennials doctors aged between 1981-1996 and Digital Natives aged between 1997-2010 in Pakistan who are avid consumers of digital and social media platforms to access news and other information about the country. Both are distinct digital generations where the Millennials are the initial generation to embrace technology and the Digital Natives are the ones who have been exposed to the networked communication since their teens. These cohorts provide an ideal scenario when it comes to investigating how the media design affects their engagement in politics because these groups have much engagement with the hybrid media space and discuss civic issues online.

The two generations sampled in a stratified way to render the representation of the two generations equal. The sample chooses with the focus on universities, organizations and online communities that are located in Lahore which is an urban center and has high rates of digital connectivity. The 400 respondents half of whom are the members of the two generations. The age of respondents must be 18 years or above and they use social media sites and platforms actively and have some exposure to the political or civic information in the internet.

The data on Google Forms collected using a self-administered structured questionnaire of the online type. The questionnaire consisted of five large segments, to compute the variables of demographics, media consumption behavior, incidental news exposure, political efficacy and engagement and perceived design attributes of the digital platform.

The demographics, including age, gender, education, occupation, most preferred platforms to obtain news or political information, collected in the former part. The next section could venture into the trends of media usage with regards to content that defines the frequency and diversity of media usage in the traditional and digital version. The respondents asked to evaluate the extent to which such statements agree with them as both traditional and digital media to learn about the latest affairs used. The research integrated to the attitude of news-finds-me that is conceptualized as incident news exposure based on algorithmic feeds and social sharing. The items are supported by Gil de Zuniga et al. (2022) and measure passive intake of news, expressed through the

following statements: I am likely to read about political issues without necessarily feeling like reading it out of curiosity about it. This construct bridges the unintentional delivery of political information to the users and the response or engagement, particularly on an algorithmically-driven environment. Political efficacy and political engagement where the scales are established as valid in Ohme et al. (2022) and Zaheer (2016). The internal efficacy is assessed with the help of the following statements: I feel competent with my abilities in understanding political issues; external efficacy is estimated in terms of the perception of the impact on the politics process outcomes. Operationalization of political engagement is through sharing of political content, commenting on political posts or participating in online conversations.

The final section of the study is concerned with the perceived digital design characteristics on the basis of the items developed within this research that is based on theoretical implications of Karahanna et al. (2018) and Moran (2020). The respondents assisted with such statements to rate the perceptions of the algorithmic personalization, interactivity and the participatory affordances: “The algorithm suggestions make me susceptible to various political opinions, the design of digital platforms makes me desire to participate in civic discourse”.

Each of them is scaled with a five-point Likert scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The data is going to be coded and statistically processed with the assistance of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 26. The contribution made by the study is expected to be by providing useful information on the dynamism of political participation in the Pakistani digital space through bridging the perception of platform architecture by the users with the generational differences in the media consumption and civic performance.

4. Results and analysis

This section presents the descriptive, inferential and model-based analyses conducted to test the four hypotheses of the study. The analyses examined how media consumption patterns, news-finds-me (NFM) attitudes, political efficacy and perceived digital design features contribute to political engagement among Millennials and Digital Natives.

In order to test first hypothesis, an independent samples t-test was performed comparing the mean scores of media consumption frequency and diversity across the two generational cohorts.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and independent samples t-test for media consumption (H1)

Variable	Generation	N	Mean	SD	t(df)	P	Cohen's d
Media Consumption Index	Millennials	210	3.20	0.80	-7.20 (428)	<.001	0.65
	Digital Natives	220	3.80	0.70			

Digital Natives ($M = 3.80$, $SD = 0.70$) demonstrated significantly higher levels of media consumption compared to Millennials ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 0.80$), $t(428) = -7.20$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.65$. This medium-to-large effect suggests that Digital Natives' habitual and immersive digital practices lead to more diverse and frequent media exposure. The result supports **H1** and highlights the design implication that interactive,

visually rich and algorithmically curated interfaces resonate more strongly with younger, digitally native users (Table 1).

A simple linear regression examined whether NFM attitudes predicted political engagement (Table 2). The regression model was significant ($F(1, 428) = 60.12, p < .001$), explaining 22% of the variance in political engagement. NFM attitudes significantly predicted political engagement ($\beta = .47, p < .001$), indicating that individuals who rely on social media for incidental exposure to political news are more likely to participate in political discussions and online activism.

This supports H2 and aligns with studies showing that algorithmic curation increases passive exposure to political content. In design terms, this implies that platform affordances that make political information discoverable (e.g., algorithmic recommendations, trending hashtags) can indirectly stimulate civic curiosity and participation.

Table 2. Linear Regression of NFM on Political Engagement (H2)

Predictor	B	SE	B	t	P
Constant	0.40	0.08	—	5.00	<.001
News-Finds-Me (NFM)	0.35	0.05	0.47	7.00	<.001

Model Summary: $R^2 = .22, F(1, 428) = 60.12, p < .001$

In order to test mediation of Political efficacy and the relationship between media consumption and political engagement, PROCESS Model 4 was applied with media consumption as the independent variable, political efficacy as the mediator and political engagement as the dependent variable (Table 3).

Political efficacy partially mediated the relationship between media consumption and political engagement. Media consumption significantly increased perceived political efficacy ($a = .25, p < .001$), which in turn enhanced engagement ($b = .40, p < .001$). The indirect effect was significant ($ab = .10, 95\% \text{ CI } [.06, .15]$), while the direct effect remained marginally significant ($p = .046$).

This supports H3 and indicates that individuals who consume more political content feel more confident in their ability to influence political processes, leading to higher participation levels. The mediation effect underscores the importance of designing participatory affordances (e.g., polls, comment sections and user-generated content tools) that foster a sense of political efficacy among users.

Table 3. Mediation analysis (H3)

Path	Relationship	B	SE	t	p	95% CI
A	Media Consumption → Political Efficacy	0.25	0.04	6.25	<.001	[0.17, 0.33]
B	Political Efficacy → Political Engagement	0.40	0.05	8.00	<.001	[0.30, 0.50]
c'	Direct (Media Consumption → Engagement)	0.10	0.05	2.00	.046	[0.00, 0.20]
Indirect	$a \times b$	0.10	—	—	<.001	[0.06, 0.15]

In order to test the hypothesis i.e. perceived digital design features (algorithmic recommendation, interactivity, participatory affordances) moderate the relationship between media use and political engagement, such that higher perception of engaging design features strengthens this relationship. Moderation was examined using PROCESS

Model 1, with design features as the moderator of the relationship between media use and political engagement (Table 4). The interaction between media use and perceived design features was significant ($B = .18, p < .001$). Conditional effects show that media use predicts political engagement at mean and high levels of perceived design features but not at low levels. This supports H4, suggesting that interface design and platform interactivity amplify users' engagement levels. The more users perceive digital spaces as participatory and interactive (e.g., customizable feeds, live discussions, algorithmic suggestions), the stronger their political engagement becomes.

Design-wise, this highlights the role of human-computer interaction (HCI) principles in enhancing civic participation through immersive digital architecture.

Table 4. Moderation analysis (H4)

Predictor	B	SE	β	T	p
Constant	0.30	0.07	—	4.29	<.001
Media Use	0.22	0.04	0.30	5.50	<.001
Design Features	0.28	0.05	0.35	5.60	<.001
Media Use $\times$ Design Features	0.18	0.05	0.20	3.60	<.001

Table 5. Conditional effects of media use on engagement

Level of Design Features	Effect (B)	SE	T	P
Low (−1 SD)	0.04	0.07	0.57	.57
Mean	0.22	0.05	4.40	<.001
High (+1 SD)	0.40	0.06	6.67	<.001

The results collectively demonstrate that digital media design not only mediates access to political information but also shapes user motivation and civic identity formation. Digital Natives exhibit stronger online consumption habits, higher incidental exposure and greater sensitivity to platform affordances. Millennials, though less immersed, display a more balanced and critical media approach, reflecting their hybrid analog-digital background.

The findings reinforce emerging scholarship in *new media design* emphasizing the design-politics nexus how interface structure, algorithmic logic and participatory features influence users' civic engagement. Design innovations that promote transparency, interactivity and community participation could thus foster informed, active and digitally literate citizens.

5. Discussion

The present study examined the nature of Millennials and Digital Natives, their general consumption of media and further simplifies to the practicalities of their media consumption in regard to political participation. The first hypothesis, millennials and digital natives differ in their preferred patterns of consuming media in a significant way, findings found that there were significant generational differences in how Millennials and Digital Natives preferred to consume media. The legacy and hybrid news media were more equally used by the millennials and Digital Natives consumed mostly social media, streaming services and algorithm-generated feeds. This is in line with Boulianne (2015)

and Loader et al. (2014), who state that younger generations prefer to use such platforms that include sociality and information flow in a way of networked politics. The Digital Natives, who have been raised in the digital ecosystem in their entirety, are what Prensky (2001) referred to as the digital immersion stage, in which news consumption is an incidental event and embedded in entertainment streams. On the other hand, the digitally savvy Millennials retain a hybrid habit between the traditional journalism and social news feeds - an aspect of the transitional generation argument featured by Davis and Jivraj (2020). The political communication strategies are affected by this differentiation, conventional outreach can be more appealing to Millennials, whereas participatory and interactive visual can be more effective with Digital Natives. The noted variation highlights the criticism by Fuchs (2017) that media systems need to change in accordance with variscite digital literacies and political socialization trajectories.

The hypothesis was proved by the findings of second, news-finds-me attitudes positively predict political engagement across both generations, which identified that news-finds-me (NFM) attitudes had a positive and significant relationship between political engagement and news-finds-me attitudes among both Millennials and Digital Natives. In their online political engagement, including posting, commenting or taking part in online campaigns, participants with greater beliefs that news is delivered to them via social networks, algorithms or peer sharing had increased online political participation. This observation narrows down previous arguments. The initial description of NFM attitudes was that it may result in reduced information accuracy and civic knowledge, but recent literature (Casero-Ripolles, 2020) argues that NFM attitudes, combined with social media exposure, can lead to a stronger engagement by lowering the informational barrier. The existing research confirms the later stance, which means that under algorithmic conditions, passive exposure to news is still able to generate political engagement, particularly in emotionally or identity-oriented conditions.

Considering the perspective of uses and gratifications, this reinforced the idea that convenience-oriented consumption does not necessarily reduce engagement, but on the contrary, it re-defines it. In the case of Digital Natives, reaching the target audience via social networks may be a substitute of active search, but it yields affective/expressive forms of participation - which is what Kahne and Bowyer (2018) describe as part of participatory politics. To determine the third Political Efficacy Mediates the Relationship between Media Consumption and Political Engagement. The mediation analysis proved political efficacy to be a very important intermediary between media consumption and political participation. This indicates that the more people are exposed to digital content, especially on socially connective and interactive platforms, the more the people would feel politically competent and agency, which subsequently drives them to participate. This result agrees with Bandura (1997) social cognitive theory and coincided with the works of De Vreese and Boomgaarden (2006) who discovered that mediated political information bias leads to increased internal efficacy through improved comprehension and faith. Zhang et al. (2010) also found that efficacy is reinforced within the digital domain through the application of social validation and perceived empowerment through online discussions and networked communication environments.

It is noteworthy that the mediation effect was more pronounced among Millennials, which means that the political socialization that is age-related remains a factor. The digital political communication exposed to by millennials who have undergone a pre-digital period also has the possibility of being internalized in a more traditional way, as exposure is converted into long-term effectiveness. Digital Natives, in turn, are characterized by

less habitual or systematic efficacy gains, as they tend to reflect Bennett and Segerberg (2012) notion of connective action - in which participation in politics is tailored and incidental instead of being formalized.

The results of fourth hypothesis Perceived Digital Design Features Moderate Relationship between Media Use and Political Engagement. The moderation analysis showed that the perceived digital design affordances such as algorithmic recommendations, interactivity and participatory functionality were important in enhancing the relationship between the media use and the political participation. Those who felt that the platforms were very engaging, responsive and personalized tended to convert media exposure to action.

This is in line with the rising literature that is focused on the technological mediation of civic behavior. Zaheer (2025) suggested that modality, agency, interactivity and navigability that are affordances will create a sense of control and participation which increases engagement. Helmond (2015) and Couldry and Hepp (2017) also highlight that phantomization of users by personalizing them through data and being careful of their algorithmic curation resembles the results of this research that suggest that phantomization is changing how people interact with political content.

Besides that, the study empirically confirms the theory of networked public sphere (Benkler, 2006) revealing that technological affordances are not neutral; quite the contrary, they dynamically structure participation. The process of political mobilization, however, showed the greatest moderation effects in Digital Natives who are more sensitive to design features and gamified interactions, which implies that the political mobilization strategies can take advantage of such features to gain more engagement. The combination of findings between generational political communication hypotheses creates a subtle portrayal of the algorithmic era of generational politics. Each generation is politically engaged, albeit in different directions, Millennials through informed deliberation and participation motivated by efficacy and Digital Natives through design-mediated engagement, which is expressive. Equally, this conforms to the concept of participatory culture that Jenkins (2006) describes because participation is not solely informational but performative that is determined by joint content production and social confirmation. The paper also highlights the network society model presented by Castells (2012) to indicate that political identity and action are now formed by interconnectivity of digital networks and not the hierarchy of institutions.

The results point out that digital design and algorithmic systems are becoming important intermediaries of civic life. Politics can thus no longer afford to rely solely on content-based approaches to communication but must adopt infrastructural-conscious approaches that incorporate personalization and co-creation and community participation as a way of maintaining interest. On the whole, the findings indicate that the new media affordances, the generational identity and political psychology all intersect to transform the nature of political participation in the digital age. The use of media alone is no longer a predictive of civic behavior; instead, its influence is determined by the perceived control, the design engagement and efficacy among the users. This underlines the need to implement the media literacy programs that focus on the essential role of critical interaction with algorithmic content and the importance of design, agency and democracy.

6. Conclusion

This paper has investigated the overlaps between the generational media use, political effectiveness and online design capabilities in Pakistani Millennials and Digital Natives. It not only offered empirical data regarding the role of algorithmic environments in mediating political participation but also emphasized that platform architecture, i.e., interactivity, personalization, recommendation systems, etc., is a characterizing factor in the digitized civic life. The results supported the evidence that Millennials and Digital Natives differ greatly on the most prevalent media consumption habits. Millennials are oriented towards a hybrid approach, which combines the principles of conventional journalism with the interactivity of the digital environment, whereas Digital Natives operate in the boundaries of the algorithmically edited and fragmented media. Such differences between generations can be discussed as the transition between the exposure of the information to the experience-based and design-driven political communication.

The study also concluded that news-finds-me attitudes have a positive influence on the prediction of political engagement in both generations. Instead of the decline in civic awareness, incidental exposure to news on social media and algorithmic feeds seems to excite expressive and participatory types of engagement. Political involvement in the present is less of a deliberate information-seeking process and more of an algorithmic exposure process that links people in social settings where civic expression becomes normal and commonplace.

Political efficacy came out as a key mediating variable between political use of media and political participation. Regular exposure to political information raised the feeling of competence and influence in people, demonstrating that the sense of efficacy is now co-created via online social validation. The sense of efficacy of the Millennials is most likely to be deliberative and knowledge based whereas the engagement of the Digital Natives is more affective and event-based which are usually influenced by a viral or trending topic. So that this particular research also found out that the relationship between media use and political engagement is moderated by digital design. The platforms which are more interactive and participatory and those which give a sense of personalization, will create stronger correlations between media exposure and civic action. The discovery highlights that digital design is not a politically neutral variable, but it instead actively affects the experiences and interactions of people with politics. Participatory and gamified design features serve as powerful incentive in expressive activism and online mobilization especially among the Digital Natives. Collectively, these results make a picture of the political engagement, which is mediated more and more by technology, emotion and connection. The differences in political behavior among generations should not be explained only by age and are predetermined by the different technological conditions of each generation. These are the lessons that are necessary to reconstructions of digital democracy, the improvement of media literacy and civic technologies participatory design.

Nonetheless, some limitations are also recognized in the study. The survey design does not permit making causal assertions and self-reported data can be influenced by the social desirability and recall bias. This is a useful non-Western view that is limited in generalizability due to the focus on Pakistan. Also, the perceived and not actual design engagement was measured in the study and no intragenerational differences were discussed.

In order to determine which features of design are the most effective to promote civic engagement, future research should experiment with particular design features. The longitudinal and comparative research can also track how changes in the structures of the platforms influence the patterns of engagement across cultures and time. A combination of the method of mixed methods, incorporating surveys and digital ethnography or focus groups, would bring an extra layer to the research, as it would involve emotional and experiential aspects of participation. Lastly, it is necessary to incorporate digital literacy and other critical design education into the curricula in order to make younger generations more mindful and responsible of navigating the political consequences of the algorithmic environment. The study gives a detailed context in the way the generations can use digital media and how design-based affordances can change political behavior. In the ever-changing context of digital technologies, the key to promoting meaningful and informed engagement in networked societies lies in the opportunity to comprehend the complicated nature of the interaction between psychology and culture and media design.

References

- Andersen, K., Ohme, J., Bjarnøe, C., Bordacconi, M.J., Albæk, E. & De Vreese, C.H. (2020). *Generational Gaps in Political Media Use and Civic Engagement: From Baby Boomers to Generation Z*, 1st edition, 216. London, Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003111498>
- Arnu, A.P., Santoso, B. & Sobandi, A. (2024). The influence of agile leadership and innovative behavior on MSMEs performance in Karawang. *Moneter: Journal of Finance and Banking*, 12(2), 268-279. <file:///C:/Users/user/Downloads/734-Article%20Text-2878-1-10-20240703.pdf>
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control*. W.H. Freeman.
- Benkler, Y. (2006). *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*. Yale University Press.
- Bennett, W.L., Segerberg, A. (2012). The logic of connective action: Digital media and the personalization of contentious politics. *Information, Communication & Society*, 15(5), 739-768. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2012.670661>
- Blum, I. (2024). Facebook is a bit like a lost cause: Social movement actors' perspectives on social media affordances. In *ECREA 2024: Electronic Book of Abstracts*, 133-134.
- Boulianne, S. (2015). Social media use and participation: A meta-analysis of current research. *Information, Communication & Society*, 18(5), 524-538. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2015.1008542>
- Boulianne, S., Shehata, A. (2022). Age differences in online news consumption and online political expression in the United States, United Kingdom and France. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 27(3), 763-783. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19401612211060271>
- Casero-Ripollés, A. (2020). Impact of COVID-19 on the media system: Communicative and democratic consequences of news consumption during the outbreak. *El Profesional de la Información*, 29(2), e290223. <https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2020.mar.23>
- Castells, M. (2012). *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age*. Polity Press.
- Choi, M. (2016). A concept analysis of digital citizenship for democratic citizenship education in the internet age. *Theory & Research in Social Education*, 44(4), 565-607. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00933104.2016.1210549>
- Couldry, N., Hepp, A. (2017). *The Mediated Construction of Reality*. Polity Press.
- Davis, M., Jivraj, S. (2020). Generations, digital media and political participation. *Media and Communication*, 8(3), 6-16. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v8i3.3161>

- De Vreese, C.H., Boomgaarden, H.G. (2006). Media effects on public opinion about the enlargement of the European Union. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 44(2), 419-436. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5965.2006.00629.x>
- Dookhoo, S. (2015). *How Millennials Engage in Social Media Activism: A Uses and Gratifications Approach*. University of Central Florida, 85. <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2363&context=etd>
- Dreston, J.H., Neubaum, G. (2023). How incidental and intentional news exposure in social media relate to political knowledge and voting intentions. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14, 1250051.
- Erubami, J.A., Ufuophu-Biri, E., Anorue, L.I., Nwabunze, U.O. & Orekyeh, E.S.S. (2021). Generational dichotomies in public perception of social media coverage of the Nigerian #EndSARS protests: Implication for networked communication. *Cogent Arts and Humanities*, 8(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2021.1988192>
- Fuchs, C. (2017). *Social Media: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd edition. Sage.
- Gil de Zúñiga, H., Cheng, Z. & González-González, P. (2022). Effects of the news-finds-me perception on algorithmic news attitudes and social media political homophily. *Journal of Communication*, 72(5), 578-591. <https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqac025>
- Gottfried, J., Barthel, M. (2015). How Millennials' political news habits differ from those of Gen Xers and Baby Boomers. Pew Research Center, 1.
- Helmond, A. (2015). The platformization of the web: Making web data platform ready. *Social Media + Society*, 1(2), 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305115603080>
- Hu, Q., Hu, X. & Hou, P. (2022). Generation Z's social media uses and gratifications and their political engagement: Evidence from China. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 939128. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.939128>
- Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York University Press.
- Jung, H., Dai, W. & Albarracín, D. (2024). How social media algorithms shape offline civic participation: A framework of social-psychological processes. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 19(5), 767-780.
- Kadir, N. (2022). Social media and participatory politics: A study of public space, democracy for Millennials and Gen Z. *RESIPROKAL*, 4(2), 180. <https://doi.org/10.29303/resiprokal.v4i2.225> (In Indonesian).
- Kahne, J., Bowyer, B. (2018). The political significance of social media activity and social networks. *Political Communication*, 35(3), 470-493. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2018.1426662>
- Karahanna, E., Xu, S.X., Xu, Y. & Zhang, N. (2018). The needs-affordances-features perspective for the use of social media. *MIS Quarterly*, 42(3), 737-A23.
- Lasser, J., Poehhacker, N. (2025). Designing social media content recommendation algorithms for societal good. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1548(1), 20-28. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nyas.15359>
- Leyva, R. (2016). Exploring UK Millennials' social media consumption patterns and participation in elections, activism and slacktivism. *Social Science Computer Review*, 35(4), 462. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0894439316655738>
- Loader, B.D., Vromen, A. & Xenos, M.A. (2014). The networked young citizen: Social media, political participation and civic engagement. *Information, Communication & Society*, 17(2), 143-150. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2013.871571>
- Molina, M.D., Sundar, S.S. (2022). When AI moderates online content: Effects of human collaboration and interactive transparency on user trust. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 27(4), zmac010.
- Moran, G., Muzellec, L. & Johnson, D. (2020). Message content features and social media engagement: Evidence from the media industry. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 29(5), 533-545.

- Morozova, E.V., Miroshnichenko, I.V. & Shpiro, L.A. (2021). Digital inclusion as a factor of political socialization of high school students. *Social and Humanitarian Knowledge*, 7(4), 378-391. <https://doi.org/10.18255/2412-6519-2021-4-378-391> (In Russian).
- Nanz, A., Heiss, R. & Matthes, J. (2022). Antecedents of intentional and incidental exposure modes on social media and consequences for political participation: A panel study. *Acta Politica*, 57(2), 235-253.
- Ohme, J., Andersen, K.V., Albæk, E. & De Vreese, C.H. (2022). Anything goes? Youth, news and democratic engagement in the roaring 2020s. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 27(3), 557. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19401612221093008>
- Papakyriakopoulos, O., Engelmann, S. & Winecoff, A. (2023). Upvotes? Downvotes? No votes? Understanding the relationship between reaction mechanisms and political discourse on Reddit. *arXiv:2302.09540*. <https://arxiv.org/abs/2302.09540>
- Paraschiv, D.M., Atif, M., Petrariu, I.R., Gheorghe, M., Dieaconescu, R.I. & Istudor, M. (2024). Shaping Europe's digital and sustainable future: Analysis of the digital economy and society index in the pre-and post-pandemic period. *Amfiteatru Economic*, 26, 19.
- Parker, K., Igielnik, R. (2020). On the cusp of adulthood and facing an uncertain future: What we know about Gen Z so far. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/05/14/on-the-cusp-of-adulthood/>
- Prensky, M. (2001). Digital natives, digital immigrants. *On the Horizon*, 9(5), 1-6. <https://doi.org/10.1108/10748120110424816>
- Ray, R. (2023). Online news platforms still matter: Generational news consumption patterns during the 2020 presidential election. *Journal of Online Media & Global Communication*, 2(3), 329-350. <https://doi.org/10.1515/omgc-2023-0012>
- Safdar, M., Abbasi, A.B., Abbasi, U. & Gharbi, K. (2025). Role of social media in fostering youth activism in Pakistan's general election 2024. *Malaysian Journal of Communication*, 41(3), 292-312. <https://doi.org/10.17576/JKMJC-2025-4103-16>
- Samalis, A., Spyropoulos, A.Z., Makris, G.C., Bratsas, C., Veglis, A., Tsiantos, V., ... & Ventouris, A. (2023). Data journalism and network theory: A study of political communication through X (formerly Twitter) interactions. *Journalism and Media*, 4(4), 1141. <https://doi.org/10.3390/journalmedia4040073>
- Scharlach, R., Hallinan, B. (2023). The value affordances of social media engagement features. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 28(6), zmad040.
- Scott, W.C., Hawkins, I. (2025). Social (media) psychology of the news-finds-me perception: Habits, mindsets and beliefs. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 30(5). <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcmc/zmaf010>
- Siddique, A., Iqbal, Q. & Anwar, M.N. (2024). News trust and engagement on Facebook: A comparative study of Millennials and Digital Natives in urban Pakistan. *Journal of Media Horizons*, 5(4), 535-545.
- Solihat, M. (2024). Gen Z communication and political participation in digital media. In *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, 186. https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-269-9_17
- Stray, J., Halevy, A., Assar, P., Hadfield-Menell, D., Boutilier, C., Ashar, A., ... & Vasan, N. (2024). Building human values into recommender systems: An interdisciplinary synthesis. *ACM Transactions on Recommender Systems*, 2(3), 1-57.
- Syamsudin, A., Sabirin, S. & Elliyana, E. (2025). Generational differences in online shopping: Millennials VS. Generation Z. *Journal of Production Operations Management and Economics*, 51. <https://doi.org/10.55529/jpome.51.51.62>
- Venus, A., Intyaswati, D., Ayuningtyas, F. & Lestari, P. (2025). Political participation in the digital age: Impact of influencers and advertising on Generation Z. *Cogent Arts and Humanities*, 12(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2025.2520063>
- Vozab, D. (2019). Generational patterns of digital news consumption: From traditionalists to millennial minimalists. *Media Studies*, 10(20), 107-126. <https://doi.org/10.20901/ms.10.20.6> (In Croatian).

- Wandhe, P. (2024). The new generation: Understanding Millennials and Gen Z. *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 17. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4716585>
- Wicks, R.H., Morimoto, S.A. & Wicks, J.L. (2024). *From Legacy Media to Going Viral*. London, Routledge, 192. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003390206>
- Zaheer, L. (2016). Effects of watching political talk shows on political efficacy and political participation. *Journal of Political Studies*, 23, 357.
- Zaheer, L. (2025). Political incivility of leaders: Public perception, political trust and civic participation. *Media and Communication Review*, 5(1), 127-145.
- Zhang, W., Johnson, T.J., Seltzer, T. & Bichard, S L. (2010). The revolution will be networked: The influence of social networking sites on political attitudes and behavior. *Social Science Computer Review*, 28(1), 75-92. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0894439309335162>