

# Role of Social Media in the Political Landscape and Voting Decisions of Gen Zs in the Philippines

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines how the role of social media in the political landscape affects the voting decisions of Generation Z, with voting age (18-27), in the Philippines. 81% of Filipino Gen Zs use social media more than other platforms, this indicates their preference to social media as a means of communication. This study aims to understand how social media platforms work to provide unmediated access to political contents, influence the Gen Zs behavior, and serve as a space for them to be informed and involved in political discussion. This also identifies the gaps in the existing literature that tackled the effective strategies to enhance Gen Zs political participation while also examining the effects of authenticity and engagement in political discourse.

**Keywords:** Social Media, Political Campaigns, Internet, Generation Z

## INTRODUCTION

Social media is a set of internet applications that facilitate creating, organizing, and sharing user content. Scholars have distinguished and labeled several subsets of social media with an emphasis on Facebook, Dating Sites, YouTube, and Instagram. Another subcategory of social media consists of microblogging sites like Twitter, Weibo, and others that allow users to distribute short messages or blogs to a broad audience. (Davis, 2016). Politics, as defined by Collins Dictionary, are the “actions or activities concerned with achieving and using power in a country or society.” As we progressed, politics has also progressed in terms of how it is conducted, its regulations with politicians, and specifically, political campaigns. With the advancement of social media platforms, social media political campaigns have been an essential aspect of modern political communication. During the government lockdown and COVID-19 restrictions in the Philippines, the candidates found it difficult to hold in-person campaign events. Combined with 90% of Filipinos getting access to social media, political candidates also heavily rely on social media to grab the attention and votes of the people. The shift from traditional media to social media was accelerated, and although information may be free and accessible, it is not always accurate. (Grounds & Koff, 2022)

Generation Z, 12 to 27 years of age, is more active with social media than the previous generations. They spend time conversing with factors like Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram. According to Statista, 81% of Filipino Gen Zs use social media more than other platforms, which indicates their preference for social media as a means of communication. Further surveys found around 41 million Gen Zs in the Philippines, which accounts for 38% of the entire population, based on the latest 2020 census by the Philippine Statistics Authority. The voting-age Filipino Gen Z aged 18 to 27 had 13 million registered voters in the last election 2022, constituting 20% of the total registered population. (GMA News Research, 2022) Also, as expected in the 2025 midterm polls, 20 million Filipino Gen Zs are expected to vote. (Commission on Elections). Being active on social media would give this generation unmediated access to political content. As social media can serve as a space for activism and political community, it either empowers Gen Z to engage with political campaigns or be more susceptible to rampant misleading reports on social media platforms.

Everything in this generation is readily available on the internet. The election season was one of the most significant events in the world of the internet. Traditionally, people have always relied on what they see on

television. As time goes by, the media has developed. (Opeyemi, 2018), all social media platforms promote political information, especially during elections. Some studies talked about social media and its relation to politics, either as a tool for encouraging participation or as a way to manipulate, only focusing on forms of media like television and newspapers rather than modern media (Dunsmore, 2008). People have been able to learn more about the politicians they want to vote for through a variety of media sources. Everyone has an equal voice, thanks to social media. It can make any incident public, especially when politicians are involved. Verified and unverified information can spread quickly thanks to online content development and new distribution channels, mainly social media (Newman N., 2017). Youth participation has historically played an essential role in shaping the political landscape in the Philippines. Generation Z has primarily moved its participation from outside to the virtual world of various social media platforms due to its involvement in digital technology. By starting online socio-political movements, they promote causes and create political discourse through digital contacts. (J. C. Velasco, n.d.).

Despite the issue of the nation having slow internet speeds and insufficient digital infrastructure, the Philippines still consistently ranks the highest in the world for internet and social media users per capita and was able to earn the title "Social Media Capital of the World" (Mendoza M.E.H. 2023). Social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube have quickly become a vital platform for various forms of political activism, it offers fresh approach to encourage citizen involvement in political affairs, with the elections and campaigns playing a key role, especially in Generation Z which ages 12-27 years old (Tenhunen, S. & Karvelyte, V. 22 January 2015). The 2016's national election highlighted the significant influences of social media, as current candidate Rodrigo Duterte relied heavily on it to coordinate major aspects of Mr. Duterte's campaign instead of the old ways or traditional ways. Former President Duterte's campaign also deployed social media bots extensively to intimidate critics and increased pro-Duterte pages and hashtags, enhancing his public engagement (grounds, K. & Koff, M. 5 May 2022).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media platforms have drastically changed political communication in the Philippines as they direct connections between politicians and their audience while avoiding traditional media filters. "Social media usage positively predicts political participation" implies that these platforms enable direct communication, improving engagement. (Domino, et al. 2023). According to Yusingco, LL.M in the Griffith Asia Insights, the Philippines has surpassed social media usage worldwide over the past four years with an average of 10 hours of screen time daily. This highlights the possibility for these social media platforms to function as an effective and essential communication tool for political discussions.

A third of the 61 million Philippine electorate falls within the 18-35 bracket, according to Yusingco, 2020, whereas 81% of the Filipino Gen Zs use social media as their primary means of communication, according to Statista, 2023; this implies that voters aged 18-27 and their dependence on social media platforms to source, acquire information and interact make them a population with much electoral power to influence elections within the country. This is crucial because it has enabled politicians to reach out directly to most of the electorate. Quitzon (2021) highlighted that Duterte's presidential campaign as the former president "was the first to tap into social media virality in the Philippines," meaning that politicians have effectively leveraged social media platforms to spread propaganda and communicate with voters effectively. The rising use of social media outlets for news and political information was also noted, with research revealing that in the Philippines, roughly 58% are internet users, and more than 90% are using Facebook, implying that these users use this platform for news consumption and political participation. (David et al., 2019)

According to the study that was conducted around the 2022 elections of Sta. Barbara Pangasinan, Philippines, "Facebook played a huge role in how the respondents consume political content and engage with political campaigns online" (Donguiz et al. 2024). On the other hand, though the platform influenced it, it only caused a moderate shift in the voting decisions of the respondents, quoting Gil de Zuniga et al. (2012) that this neutrality revealed the multifaceted nature of political communication. (Donguiz, et al. 2024). This then portrays that social media allows politicians to communicate straightway and engage in real-time and hence measure the opinion of the masses, enabling them to respond accordingly.

As early as 1998, Filipino politicians started using social media for their campaigns, mainly to make websites for individual candidates. Since then, a lot has changed, with every election increasing the power of Internet use. The popular former president, Rodrigo Duterte, won the 2016 presidential election, regarded as the nation's "first social media election. "Unlike the previous leader, Benigno Aquino III's 2010 campaign, centered around television commercials and featuring several celebrities, Duterte's campaign was supported by regular, unpaid vloggers. However, because of the rise in political "content-creators" and paid "trolls" who gathered together to increase online support for Duterte, the Philippines has been identified as "patient zero" for internet disinformation since 2016.

Voter participation is a critical aspect of the Philippine electoral process. Citizens aged 18 and above are eligible to register and vote, with a strong emphasis on encouraging youth participation. The campaign period is typically vibrant and energetic, with candidates utilizing various methods to reach potential voters. Traditionally, these methods included rallies, door-to-door campaigning, and media advertisements. However, the landscape has been evolving rapidly with the integration of digital technologies, transforming how candidates connect with the electorate and how voters engage with political information. (Tazon-Corre, J. (2024, September 18).

Mobilization, by its nature, is one kind of political activity. Given the probable results of a massive political intervention, expenses paid towards reaching it, and the cost-effectiveness of other types of political influence investment, it is selected. Political parties can boost voter turnout using social media (Shachar and Nalebuff 1999). For example, they can use networks to facilitate rallies, plan pressure to raise the social cost of not voting (Cox GW et al., 2024) and choose candidates with a good chance of mobilizing those voters they know. Political politicians often utilize influencers to market their causes when they attempt to court certain groups of voters (Glazer & Wells, 2019; Wong, 2020). However, there is confusion about who is considered a political influencer. When journalists use social media to expound on political issues, for instance, there are discussions regarding them as political influencers. Others have referred to politicians who have become very good at social media as political influencers. Others, however, have demonstrated how some approaches of political politicians approach those social media influencers. Significantly, social media users without an institutional background whose known and fame are platform-built come under the category of political influencers. (Riedl, M. J et al., 2023)

Nowadays, most Filipino citizens, especially Generation Z, believe that social media platforms are the primary source of news and information. (Trusculescu et al., 2023) Politicians and news organizations use these platforms to share updates and information rapidly. They also leverage social media to enhance transparency by providing information on policy decisions, spending, and government actions. Platforms, especially Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, allow politicians to connect directly with their audiences. This direct communication bypasses traditional media like newspapers and tabloids, enabling politician candidates to share their messages instantly and without edits (Umkhonto weSizwe, 2024). A Political Science and public administrator, Professor Sean Freeder, in the College of Arts and Science at UNF, said that social media had become the primary source of political news; it significantly made the process easier for the politician candidates and their campaigns to engage directly with the masses. Also, he noted that Gen Z is more affected by social media than any previous generation, yet it's also most likely the most proficient at navigating social media. One example of this is when misinformation is widely spreading quickly online; this generation is much less likely to easily believe in misinformation or fake news compared to older individuals (Simonson, H. 9 March 2021)

Generation Z, whose age bracket is 12-27 years old, has become the most active age group on every social media platform, showing both technological skill and a positive commitment to using these platforms. It was said that GenZs, ages 18-27 years old, have historically been essential in influencing the political landscape of the Philippines. The rise of performative political actions among Generation Z has turned social media into a new platform for engagement, encouraging political and social discussions (Velasco. et al., 27 September 2024). In the last few years, hashtags have been used to voice opposition against the government's aggressiveness towards various societal sectors. Common examples of this include the #NoToExtraJudicial Killings, which was condemned in Oplan Tokhang; the #JunkAntiTerrorBil, which addresses the concerning provisions of the Anti-Terrorism Bill (Alawi et al., 202; Madarang, 2020; Macaraig & Hameleers, 2022), these

hashtags have somehow shaped voters', especially the first-time voters of the Generation Z's awareness and preferences.

A report revealed that youth ages 18-24 were the primary ones starting to discuss the topics for this election. The report shows that most of the population on these platforms are women 60% and voters 18-24 years old 59%, Showing a remarkable trend: Young females who are voters are increasingly influencing and participating in several political discussions on social media. In addition to this, according to Mr. Michael Rinaman, these young people have a high level of expectations and are very direct to the point about their expectations towards their outputs in social media, as 32% of reputation is influenced by social outputs, such as employee care, community impact, and environmental care, social media conversations emphasize this voice (FleishmanHillard, 2022).

### **Research gap**

While existing literature discusses the influence of social media on the political behavior of voting-age Filipino Gen Zs, there still needs to be a massive significant gap in understanding comprehensive strategies that work well for this population. There is a critical need to analyze which types of content resonate most with Filipino Gen Zs and how it can stimulate their political engagement. Moreover, research needs to be explored more in how users of this site perceive it, whether in terms of relatability and transparency. This would help formulate targeted approaches to improve political participation within this generation of Filipinos against the Philippine political landscape.

### **Aim of the Study**

This research focuses on the importance of the role of social media in influencing the political behavior of the Generation Z, voting age 18-27), in the Philippines. Their increasing reliance on social media as a platform for communication and engagement shows the need to study how social media can effectively influence them in the electoral process. Despite existing studies, there is a noticeable gap in the strategies to enhance political participation among the Gen Z in the Philippines. This paper aims to suggest additional effective strategies to engage this generation in the political landscape as they prepare to exercise their voting rights, identify content types that resonate with the Gen Zs and to understand how the perception of authenticity influences this generation's voting decisions.

### **Problem Statement**

The role of social media in the political landscape and voting decisions of voting-age Gen Zs is important for shaping the future elections in the Philippines. Given that most of this sector indicates preference for social media as a means of communication, there is a need to study effective strategies to better foster political participation among them on social media platforms.

This research aims to assess the following:

1. What strategies can effectively increase the political engagement of voting age Gen Zs in social media?
2. What type of social media content resonates most and encourages this generation to engage in political discussions and activities?
3. In what ways does the perception of authenticity influence the gen Zs voting decision?

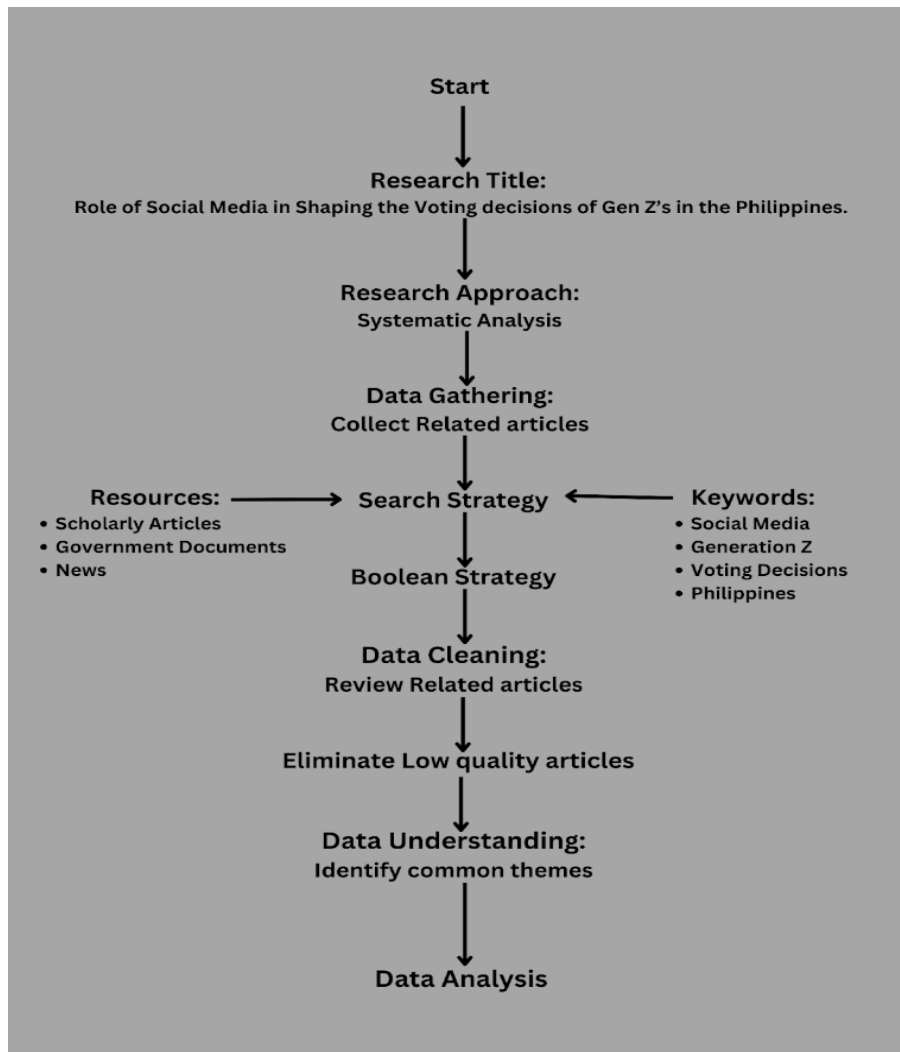
## **METHODS**

This research study will use the systematic review of existing literature to investigate the role of social media on political campaigns among Generation Z in the Philippines. Keywords such as social media, political landscape, Generation Z, and voting decisions will be used to gather data. They will focus on peer-reviewed articles, credible reports from news and government documents, and other relevant works published over the past years. The researchers will also be conducting a thematic analysis to identify patterns and trends,



specifically on how platforms like Facebook, Twitter or X, and Instagram and their contents enable direct communication, fostering real-time feedback and interactions between the politician candidates and voters. The data cleaning process will involve reviewing each article for relevance and methodological flexibility, eliminating articles that still need to meet the quality standards set by the researchers for lack of empirical evidence. Proper citations and acknowledgment of the potential biases of the sources and data gathered will be part of conducting the Ethical considerations. This paper seeks to strengthen the understanding on how social media is influencing the political discourse and voting behavior of Filipino Gen Z's, highlighting their vital role in the current and future electoral processes, by using this meticulous approach (Sataloff, r. T. et al 2021).

Figure 1. Data Gathering and Preparation



## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The role of social media in shaping the political landscape and voting decisions of voting-age Generation Z in the Philippines is significant for influencing future elections. A significant portion of this demographic indicates a preference for social media as their channel, so it becomes essential to study effective strategies to enhance their political participation on these platforms. Social media turned political engagement by facilitating direct interactions between voters and politicians, especially among the youth, during the 2016 presidential election, was seen when candidates like Rodrigo Duterte effectively utilized these platforms to connect with constituents (Domingo et al.,2023; Quitzon 2021). Moreover, the rapid spread of misinformation poses challenges, as young users often struggle to identify credible sources (Newman, 2017), highlighting the need for improved social media literacy to empower Filipino Gen Zs in navigating the digital landscape ( Simonson,2021). Generation Z towards relatable and authentic content that influences their political engagement; the study indicates that they are more likely to interact with content that resonates with their experiences and values (Velasco et al.,2024). This demographic activism is expressed through performative

acts on social media, advocating for political causes and fostering discourse (Alawi et al., 2020;) Therefore, understanding the dynamics of media usage among this generation is vital for developing targeted strategies that encourage meaningful political participation.

The following tables and discussions below contain the assessment of the related literatures and answers the study’s problem statement.

Table 1 Effective strategies that can increase political engagement among voting-age Gen Zs in the Philippines

Strategy	Description	Takeaways
Peer-to-Peer Discussion Groups	Establish groups within social media platforms that encourage voting-age Gen Zs in the Philippines to discuss political topics.	This is important because it creates a space for this demographic to have discussions that can empower them to learn and educate one another regarding political engagement and topics.
Interactive Political Maps	An interactive map with contents regarding local politics. It will show how policies affect the community and encourage local engagement.	This is a tool that can help voting-age Gen Zs understand the impact of politics and in turn would more likely encourage them to engage with local issues and participate in discussing the solutions.
Crowdsourced Policy Proposals	Using social media platforms to gather ideas from Gen Zs in the Philippines on policy proposals, allowing them to directly contribute to the political discourse.	This will empower the demographic by giving them a platform and voice in the policymaking processes and gives a sense of ownership with the political outcomes.

Political engagement strategies that can improve the voting-age population in the Philippines include creating peer-to-peer discussion forums on social media, interactive political maps, and crowdsourced policy proposals. Discussion groups encourage young people to share knowledge regarding the political issues presented, thus fostering critical thinking and civic awareness. As mentioned in a research paper, social media is an appropriate means for the current generation to express political engagement, which promotes an active role in the political world. (Velasco, et al. 2024). An interactive map visualizes how local policies affect the community so that Gen Z gets interested in approaching their local government and making demands. This is supported by research findings that show that youth participation in civic matters is necessary for achieving the tenets of democracy and good governance since they constitute 30% of the Philippine population (Ibardeloza et al. 2021). In contrast, with crowdsourcing policy recommendations, this age group will have a direct say in political discourse, increasing their interest in the political outputs. It engages and commits them to civic participation because it makes them feel valued and heard, among all the strategies that come together to form a more informed and active generation capable of influencing their political landscape.

Table 2: Social media contents that resonate the most with Filipino Gen Zs and encourages their political engagement.

Content Type	Description
Short-form Videos (TikTok)	Engaging, quick videos often addressing social issues and political events.  Impact on Political Engagement:  Highly influential in shaping political attitudes and motivating both online and traditional participation.
Visual Content (Instagram)	Images and stories that highlight social justice, climate change, and activism.

	<p>Impact on Political Engagement:</p> <p>Encourages sharing and discussion, fostering community engagement around political issues.</p>
Interactive Polls/Quizzes	<p>Engaging formats that allow users to express opinions on political matters.</p> <p>Impact on Political Engagement:</p> <p>Increases awareness and encourages participation in discussions, leading to higher engagement rates.</p>
Live Streams (YouTube)	<p>Real-time discussions or Q&amp;A sessions with activists or politicians.</p> <p>Impact on Political Engagement:</p> <p>Facilitates direct interaction and deeper understanding of political issues, enhancing engagement.</p>
Memes and Humor	<p>Relatable content that simplifies complex political topics.</p> <p>Impact on Political Engagement:</p> <p>Attracts attention and makes political discourse more accessible, particularly among younger audiences</p>

Comparative analysis of the impact of various types of non-political content across these platforms is necessary to reveal platform-specific dynamics.

Generation Z uses social media to engage politically and promote change because these platforms connect them with many content types. Social media, like Instagram, X, and TikTok, have defined how people function in society's political world and how one should have a political conversation. These are excellent political mobilization and manipulation tools because they can spread formation instantly and create viral movements. While they democratized access to political information and gave voices to underrepresented classes, these platforms advanced the spread of misinformation and the rise of political conflict. The challenge as these platforms grow will be finding out how to expand this excellent capability for good political participation without increasing the risks of using these platforms (Sugihartono, S. (2024, September 18).

Table 3: The influence of perception of authenticity in the Gen Zs voting decisions

Key Insight	Explanation
Ethical Alignment	Authenticity is more important to Gen Z voters than the conventional political discourse, also, they are more likely to support political candidates who share their ideals.
Translucency and Nobility	To gain the trust of Gen Z voters requires being sincere in communications, which also includes being open and honest about goals and objectives.
Social Media Effect	With the direct contacts and content, gen Z's can evaluate candidates' sincerity on social media platforms, which are essential for true involvement.
Declining of Performative Activism	Political candidates who have participated in performative activism without a sincere commitment to the causes they support are quickly identified and rejected by Gen Zs.
Peer pressure and	Gen Z's assessments of authenticity are greatly influenced by their peers' views on

Societal control	social media, which can also influence their voting behavior through group conversations and endorsements.
Focus on Actuality and Relatability	Gen Z voters are more inclined to listen to candidate who are open and can disclose their imperfections and shortcomings while presenting themselves as genuine and personable,
Effects of False Information	Authenticity is more important for the current generation because of the abundance of misinformation circulating through social media. Gen z voters are more likely to look for trustworthy sources and genuine voices among all of the noise.
Eagerness for Change	A genuine representation of a political candidate’s dedication and devotion to community impact and social change can highly inspire Gen Z voters to get involved in politics and cast a vote.

It clearly shows that Generation Z’s voting habits are greatly influenced by their sense of authenticity, especially when it comes to handling a political environment that places a growing emphasis on openness and sincere participation. According to the research entitled “Gen Z, Aware of its Power, wants to have Impact on a wide range of Issues”, Gen Z is highly conscious of their ability to impact a variety of issues and concerns, which motivates them to look for the politician candidates who is truly will uphold their professed beliefs. According to the results, young voters are more inclined to cast votes when they know that a certain candidate is sincere in representing their interests. This need for authenticity is further supported by the findings that young voters are highly motivated by social ties, those who think their peers would cast their votes are far more likely to do so themselves (Booth et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the research entitled “Young voters and colleges’ efforts to boost turnout: A research roundup with 5 story ideas”, emphasizes that young voters are a different group that frequently identifies as independent or progressive without fixed party connections rather than being a uniform group. Their preferences for politicians who share their lived experiences, and their comprehensive understanding of political problems are reflected in this variety. Since the majority of them are drawn to leaders who genuinely care about social justice and community impact, authenticity thus becomes a critical consideration in their decision-making process. (Ordway D., 2024).

In addition, the EY reports show that for Gen Z, authenticity is the most important personal objective, superior to even more conventional goals like fame or fortune. This generation is open and has welcomed the flaws and looks for candidates that share their values of changing the world and showing respect for others. People’s political inclinations are influenced by their preference for leaders who put social justice and communal well-being ahead of financial gain. Their expectations of how political leaders SHOULD address current and future societal concerns are shaped by this alignment with authenticity, which also influences how they vote. (EY, 2023).

## CONCLUSIONS

Among other existing literature, this paper shows how social media in the political landscape influence the voting decisions of the Filipino Gen Zs (voting age, 18-27). Research has shown how this generation is reliant and prefers social media as its means of discussion and engagement, which politicians from the past election have utilized to their advantage. Although these platforms can be a space for political education, it can also be a nest of misinformation and does not guarantee a sure outcome for the politicians. Understanding this is acknowledging that there is a need for more effective strategies to increase the political engagement of voting age Filipino Gen Zs, analyzing the different contents that resonate most with the generation and how their perception of authenticity influences their voting behavior.

## RECOMMENDATION

According to the findings, numerous opportunities for activity and engagement are revealed by examining how



social media influences Generation Z's political preferences and voting behavior in the Philippines. Candidates and political organizations should use social media to produce relatable, accurate content that appeals to young Filipinos or GenZ, as 81% of this group uses it regularly. At the top of the recommendations is creating focused campaigns that use influencers and user-generated material to promote community building and political engagement. Additionally, preventing the spread of false information or "fake news" using educational programs might enable young voters to assess the material they come across on the internet critically. Political organizations can successfully engage this significant age group and increase their participation in the election process by emphasizing openness and communication.

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