Political Influencers in Online Political Participation: Strategies and Challenges on Social Media Platforms

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Abstract

This research explores the role of political influencers in online political participation in the digital era, with a focus on the strategies used and the challenges faced. Political influencers have become important actors in moving public opinion and mobilizing political support through social media platforms. This study uses qualitative methods with descriptive methods. The results of this research show that the political influencer strategy in increasing online political participation in the digital era through the social media platform other influencers, use of various social media platforms, raising support and online petitions, as well as holding discussions and webinars. However, they are also faced with challenges such as polarization of opinion, the spread of disinformation and hoaxes, the impact of platform algorithm changes, limited time and resources, and online intimidation and attacks. To overcome this challenge, political influencers need to raise awareness of the importance of constructive dialogue, maintain integrity in conveying political messages, and collaborate with followers to combat disinformation.

Keywords: *Political Influencers, Online Political Participation, Social Media Platform X, Challenges, Strategy*

INTRODUCTION

The development of social media has revolutionized people's communication patterns in interacting, seeking information and expressing opinions (Acharoui et al., 2020). This platform supports the advancement of digital democracy by providing equal opportunities for every individual to participate in political discussions at low cost and high accessibility (Borge Bravo & Esteve Del Valle, 2017). Social media has become a significant arena for political communication, but it cannot be ignored that the freedom offered by social media also opens up opportunities for negative impacts on political attitudes (Alsolami et al., 2021). As a result, social media has become a double-edged sword in the political context, offering benefits in expanding political participation while also creating challenges that must be faced, such as the spread of misinformation and polarization of opinion (Indrawan, 2018).

Of the various social media platforms, X (formerly known as Twitter) stands out as one of the most relevant for researching political communication in the digital era (Fahruji, 2023) . X provides a space for communication and connection that allows for non-reciprocal relationships, so that individuals can contribute, share and disseminate information similar to mass media. This makes X an effective platform in reflecting public opinion and societal power (Alsolami et al., 2021). As stated by Huszár et al. (2022), the majority of conversations on X focus on politics. X has become an important tool for political parties and politicians to reach audiences that were previously difficult to reach. Political candidates can use X to carry out campaigns and mobilize the masses in a more personal style without being bound by the hierarchical structure of political parties (Curiel, 2020). Currently, X has become one of the favorite platforms not only for politicians and political parties but also for individuals and groups who care about political issues.

Political influencers are individuals who are able to influence other people through conventional media or social media based on their knowledge, experience, credibility and commitment (Curiel, 2020). They are considered authentic digital opinion leaders (Riedl et al., 2021) due to their deep involvement in political issues, attracting the interest of the younger generation in the content they share on social media. As a result, political influencers

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play an important role in influencing, persuading, and changing individual attitudes and behavior, thereby encouraging increased political participation (Alsolami et al., 2021; Harff & Schmuck, 2023).

The main goal of these influencers is to influence and direct their audience's opinions based on the information they have (Athaya, 2021). These influencers often have a large number of followers, which reflects their strong influence and the expertise they have in a particular field, such as political influencers in the political realm. The way an influencer works involves a consistent appearance with character and abilities that are relevant to the field they are working in, and in accordance with the needs of their audience (Alvin & Kom, 2022). For example, a political influencer will often share political analysis, views on policies, and the latest news that influences the political environment.

They build trust through expertise and authenticity, which keeps their audience engaged and interested in the content they present. The success indicator for an influencer is measured by the extent to which the information they convey can provide positive value or new knowledge for their audience (Ilham & Renyaan, 2022). This influence can be seen from various metrics such as the number of interactions (likes, retweets, and comments), increase in the number of followers, and real impact on audience opinions or actions. For example, if a post is able to trigger wide discussion or influence the political views of their followers, this shows success in influencing and swaying public opinion (Sulkhan, 2020).

Political participation includes the ability to express political opinions and exert political influence, both in the real world and in cyberspace. Political participation is divided into two types, namely conventional and online political participation. Online political participation is defined similarly to conventional political participation, but occurs in an online context with different behaviors and activities (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2014). With the increasing use of social media, online political participation has also experienced a significant increase. According to Bayreuth (2020), there are four main factors that encourage online political participation, one of which is political efficacy. Political efficacy refers to individuals' beliefs that their political actions can influence political processes and outcomes. Individuals who believe in their political capabilities tend to be more active in participating in politics (Reichert, 2016).

The majority of X users in Indonesia is youth. In general elections, it is first-time voters whose political participation is important. As explained by Angela et al. (2019) the political participation of novice voters is important to determine the direction of national political development. It is important for youth to have the ability and confidence to be involved in politics. Thus, they are encouraged to participate.
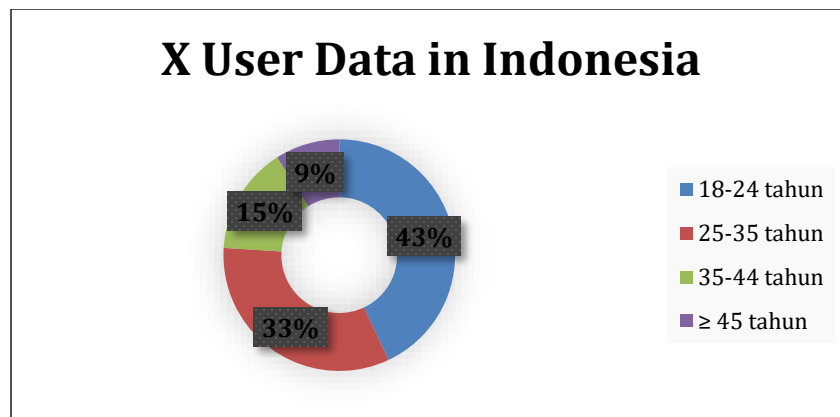

Figure 1.3 Data on X Users in Indonesia Based on Age

This data is in line with information released by General Elections Commission which confirmed that the vote owners in the 2024 election is Generation Z (8-23 years) and Generation Y or millennials (24-37 years) with a total of 115.6 million votes or 56.5% from registered voter. This situation has made social media a place for politicians and stakeholders, including related stakeholders such political influencers, to fight and achieve their political goals.

The aim of this research is to understand the role of political influencers in increasing online political participation in the digital era, by examining the strategies used and the challenges faced. It is expected that this research will provide benefits by providing in-depth insight into how political influencers influence opinion and political mobilization on social media, as well as providing recommendations for increasing the effectiveness of online political communication. Additionally, the findings of this research help policymakers in designing policies that support more inclusive and effective political participation through digital platforms, as well as assist political influencers in developing better strategies for interacting with their audiences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Political Influencers

Harff & Schmuck (2023) consider political influencers to be ordinary individuals who have gained a large follower base through social media and occasionally discuss political topics with their audience. Curiel (2020) defines political influencers as individuals who have the power to influence other people through social or conventional media because of their knowledge, experience, credibility and commitment. As presented by Riedl et al. (2021) that the important factor for political influencers is not only political content, but also the way that content is represented. Political influencers are required to pay attention to their appearance and humble attitude so that their credibility in the eyes of their followers is maintained (Silaban et al, 2019). The channels used by political influencers are usually managed individually, the content is created independently and without official affiliation with mass media organizations or political parties (Fischer et al., 2022). Political influencers are currently considered as one of the political socialization agents who provide information to the public so that they can inform or complement political information circulating in society (Banfield, 2017). Its role in simplifying political information makes it easier for audiences, especially young people, to understand political issues. Political influencers are not only considered to contribute as providers of political information but also in political education (Harff & Schmuck, 2023; Riedl et al., 2021).

Online Political Participation

Dauda Abdu et al. (2017) narrate online participation as the act of creating and sharing content on the Internet aimed at a specific audience and driven by social goals, one of which is to influence government action (Huberman et al., 2009). There are various forms of online political participation, Zhong et al., (2022) in their research stated that online political participation is part of civic engagement, and its main behavior, such as passing on political information, is aimed at influencing government actions and policy making. Kwon (2020) describes online political participation as consuming political information, expressing political opinions, and political mobilization. Meanwhile, other research results state that online political participation takes the form of forwarding political emails, uploading political comments on blogs, social media or websites, and following candidates online, signing petitions on the internet, gathering political knowledge and information on social media, sending messages to political candidates. or government officials, seeking donations for political parties or sharing political information on Facebook.

Social Media

X is considered as the best media for accommodating political activities. Ausserhofer & Maireder (2013) explain that X is a means of building and encouraging transparency in the political system. X creates networking conversation opportunities that are unaffected by social boundaries or the physical limitations of time and space. X as a networked public space is very interesting considering its popularity and characteristics that offer, develop and determine a closer and more direct relationship between voters and politicians, connecting ordinary people with the popular, powerful and influential (Alsolami et al., 2021). Borge Bravo & Esteve Del Valle (2017) describe that X has become a political tool to disseminate information, mobilize voters, interact with the public and individualize and personalize the campaign style of political candidates (Curiel, 2020).

METHOD

The basis of this research uses a qualitative methodology with a descriptive analysis approach, namely a method used to measure certain social phenomena carefully (Yulianah, 2022). In this research, the type of research used

is descriptive, which aims to describe in depth the topic being studied. The focus of this research is the search for online documents and data related to the role of Political Influencers in Online Political Participation, especially the strategies and challenges faced on the social media platform X. This research includes a review of various relevant libraries, printed documents and online sources, selected selectively according to the research topic. The data analysis technique used involves three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1994) .

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Political Influencer Strategy in Increasing Online Political Participation in the Digital Era

In a world that is increasingly connected through social media, influencers have an increasingly important role in designing the image and political messages of presidential and legislative candidates during general elections. Influencers, with millions of loyal followers, are able to spread political messages quickly and effectively, reaching various demographics, especially the younger generation who are active on social media platforms (Syaifudin, 2022). They leverage platforms like X, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and TikTok to create engaging and accessible content. Through posts, stories and videos, influencers can build narratives that support presidential and legislative candidates, depicting them as leaders who are modern, responsive and close to the people. The use of personal and authentic narrative strategies by influencers allows presidential and legislative candidates to connect emotionally with voters, build trust, and increase the candidate's appeal to the public (Fischer et al., 2022).

Additionally, influencers have the ability to simplify complex political messages into more understandable and engaging content. The effective use of hashtags can help organize support and create a relatable issue (Maulana & Hastuti, 2022). Influencers can also take advantage of direct interactions with followers through comments, and Q&A sessions, which increase engagement and make audiences feel more involved in the political process. In this context, influencers is one of an important actors in shaping public opinion, mobilizing voters, and influencing general election results through a more dynamic and interactive approach compared to traditional strategies (Erlina & Aribowo, 2023).

X has become an important tool for political parties and politicians to reach audiences that were previously difficult to reach. This platform allows candidates to campaign and mobilize the masses in a more personal way and in accordance with their own image, without having to be bound by the hierarchical structure of political parties (Curiel, 2020). This gives politicians the freedom to interact directly with voters, convey their message authentically, and build closer relationships with their audiences. Currently, X is not only a favorite platform for politicians and political parties, but also for individuals and groups who care about political issues. This platform is widely used by various parties to discuss, share information, and advocate for various political issues (El Qudsi & Syamtar, 2020). The strategies used by political influencers to increase online political participation in the digital era on the Social Media X platform include:

Informative and Educative Content

Political influencers have an important role in providing educational and informative content about current political issues, public policy, and the election process. By having wide access and loyal followers on social media platforms, they have an ideal platform to disseminate political information quickly and effectively. These influencers often use their ability to summarize complex information into material that is easier for their audience to understand. By explaining political issues in a simpler and more relevant way, they help increase political understanding among the general public, especially the younger generation who tend to be active on social media. Through a creative and interactive approach, political influencers can break down the complexities of politics into chunks that can be easily digested by their followers, helping people form their own views on complex political issues.

Additionally, political influencers also help fill information gaps by providing a better understanding of public policy and the electoral process. By summarizing different perspectives and analyzes on political issues, they help audiences understand the implications of proposed policies and understand how important participation

in the political process is. This allows their followers to make more informed decisions and be actively involved in the formation of political opinions and decisions. In this way, political influencers are not only sources of information, but also catalysts for increasing political literacy and political participation in the digital era.

Personal and Authentic Narrative

Political influencers often use personal stories and their own experiences as a tool to build strong emotional connections with their audiences. By sharing personal stories and deep experiences, they create a closer connection with their followers. These authentic narratives allow political influencers to showcase their human side, revealing their personal vulnerabilities and successes in the face of political challenges. In this way, they become not only public figures who seem distant, but also individuals who can be understood and felt by their audiences.

Furthermore, this use of personal stories helps in building trust among political influencers' followers. When audiences see influencers share their life experiences honestly and openly, it creates a sense of authenticity and integrity that can increase self-confidence. Influencers' openness in sharing personal stories also opens the door to more open and meaningful dialogue between them and their followers. By feeling emotionally connected to political influencers, followers are more likely to accept and internalize the political messages conveyed by them. Thus, authentic personal narratives not only strengthen the bond between influencers and audiences, but also strengthen their influence in shaping political opinions and behavior.

Direct Interaction with Audience

Political influencers make careful use of interactive features on social media to deepen relationships with their followers. It allows for in-depth two-way interaction with a more direct and personal way. In the comments section, political influencers actively participate in discussions with their followers, providing relevant responses and opinions on current political issues. All of this not only increases follower engagement, but also creates a stronger sense of connectedness between political influencers and their audiences.

By leveraging these interactive features, political influencers can create a welcoming and inclusive environment on social media platforms. Prompt and engaged responses to followers' questions and comments make them feel heard and appreciated. Additionally, these direct interactions also provide an opportunity for followers to feel closer to the political influencer, forming a more personal and intimate relationship. This not only increases the sense of connectedness between influencers and their followers, but also strengthens a solid and engaged online political community. Thus, interactive features on social media become an effective means for political influencers to deepen engagement and relationships with their audiences, as well as strengthen their influence in increasing online political participation.

Viral Issues and Hashtags

Political influencers combine viral issues and clever use of hashtags to mobilize support and expand the impact of their political messages on social media platforms. By starting an engaging and memorable narration, they managed to build momentum among their followers and inspire active participation. Hashtags used wisely not only help in organizing political discussions, but also increase the visibility of the issues raised. Through trending hashtags, political influencers can bring together thoughts and views from different perspectives, creating space for broader and more inclusive dialogue on important emerging issues.

Viral issues and the use of hashtags have proven to be effective tools for political influencers to mobilize support and expand the impact of their political messages. When a issues or hashtag goes viral, the political message conveyed becomes more easily spread across social media platforms. This helps influencers to reach a wider audience, including those who may not have previously been actively involved in politics. Thus, viral issues and the use of hashtags not only strengthen the identity and political messages of political influencers, but also increase people's participation and involvement in the online political process.

Collaboration with Other Influencers

Collaboration between political influencers and fellow influencers who have different but related audiences is a smart strategy in expanding the reach and impact of their political messages in the digital era. By collaborating with other influencers who represent different segments of society or have expertise in different fields, political influencers can reach a wider and more diverse audience. This kind of collaboration allows them to penetrate geographic, demographic and interest filters that may exist among their own audiences, so that political messages can be conveyed to a wider and more diverse audience effectively. Through collaboration with other influencers, both from different political backgrounds and areas of expertise, political influencers can reach audiences who may not have previously been exposed to their political messages. This kind of collaboration also allows political influencers to bring a broader and more diverse perspective on current political issues, which can enrich discussions and public understanding of important issues. Thus, collaboration between political influencers opens the door to powerful synergies in increasing the impact of their political messages, while expanding and enriching the reach of their audiences on social media.

Using Different Platforms

Political influencers are not stuck to just one social media platform, instead they take smart steps by utilizing various platforms to reach a wider audience. In developing their strategy, they realized that each platform had unique demographics and advantages that they could optimally exploit to convey their political message. For example, Instagram is usually better suited for attention-grabbing visual content, while Twitter is often used for fast-paced discussions and breaking news. YouTube can be used for more in-depth, long-form content, while TikTok is suitable for short-form content that appeals to the younger generation.

By utilizing multiple platforms, political influencers can expand the scope of their political messages and reach various demographic groups. This allows them to interact with a wider and more diverse audience, who may have different preferences in social media content consumption. By optimizing the advantages of each platform, political influencers can maximize the impact of their political messages and strengthen engagement with their audiences across the social media spectrum.

Raising Support and Online Petitions

Political influencers have utilized social media platforms as an effective tool to mobilize support through various initiatives, including online petitions and digital campaigns. By designing and promoting online petitions, they enable their followers to express their support for certain political issues in an organized and measurable way. These petitions are not only a means of gathering votes and highlighting relevant issues, but also an instrument for strengthening political pressure on policymakers. Through digital campaigns, political influencers can mobilize direct action from their followers, such as making calls to representatives' offices, attending demonstrations, or participating in volunteer activities related to political issues.

Both initiatives play an important role in connecting audiences with concrete political action, helping turn awareness into real change. By providing a platform for political expression and empowering direct action, political influencers can mobilize positive political energy among their followers. Additionally, this initiative strengthens the bond between political influencers and their followers, creating a community that is engaged and committed to fighting for social and political change. Thus, the use of social media platforms to mobilize support through online petitions and digital campaigns is an effective strategy in mobilizing political power from below and strengthening political participation in the digital era.

Hold Discussions and Webinars

Political influencers are increasingly adopting formats such as online discussions, webinars, and podcasts as tools for in-depth discussion of relevant political issues. In organizing online discussions, they create a space for their followers to participate actively, exchange views, and ask questions about various political issues. With webinars, political influencers can invite experts, pundits, or other political figures to provide in-depth insight on a particular topic, providing a more structured approach to understanding complex issues. Meanwhile, podcasts have become a popular platform for presenting political content in a more casual and intimate way, allowing political influencers to convey their views in a more personal and easy-to-digest style.

By using these formats, political influencers can facilitate in-depth discussion of political issues, increasing political understanding and awareness among their audiences. Online discussions, webinars and podcasts create an open and inclusive environment where multiple perspectives can be explored and discussed. Additionally, through active audience participation, they also encourage greater political engagement, strengthen relationships between political influencers and their followers, and strengthen solid online political communities. Thus, the organization of online discussions, webinars and podcasts on political issues is an effective strategy in deepening political understanding and increasing active participation in the political process.

Challenges of Political Influencers in Online Political Participation via X Social Media Platforms

Despite having a significant role in online political participation via social media platform X, political influencers also face several challenges that need to be overcome:

Opinion Polarization

Increasing political polarization on social media platforms is often a major challenge for political influencers. In a divided political environment, political influencers may face pressure to side with one particular political side or amplify narratives that exacerbate polarization. However, they are also faced with the responsibility to maintain constructive dialogue and open space for diverse political views. This can be a difficult dilemma, as attempts to remain neutral or discuss controversial issues carefully can lead to criticism from both sides.

In facing this challenge, political influencers need to raise awareness of the impact of political polarization and the importance of maintaining healthy dialogue on social media platforms. They can create an environment that is inclusive and open to diverse views by avoiding rhetoric that provokes or intensifies conflict. Additionally, they can also use their presence on social media platforms to educate followers about the importance of tolerance, empathy and constructive dialogue in overcoming political differences.

It is also important for political influencers to commit to integrity and honesty in conveying their political messages. By building a reputation as a trustworthy and neutral source, they can serve as an example to their followers of how to maintain civil and productive dialogue in a digital age often filled with hostile rhetoric. Through a thoughtful and responsible approach, political influencers can play a more constructive role in balancing political polarization and strengthening the quality of political discussions on social media platforms.

Disinformation and Hoaxes

The spread of disinformation and hoaxes on social media has become one of the main challenges for political influencers in maintaining their credibility and reputation. False information can easily spread on social media platforms, disrupting the political messages conveyed by influencers and undermining the trust of their followers. Therefore, political influencers need to remain vigilant and critical of the information they convey, and ensure that the content they share is accurately verified before sharing it with their followers.

Combating disinformation requires collaborative efforts between political influencers and their followers. Influencers can provide education about the importance of fact verification and digital literacy to their followers, helping them identify and understand misinformation. This can be done through providing educational resources, using labels or warning signs for questionable content, and providing clear information about the source and reliability of the information being shared.

In addition, political influencers can also use their presence to emphasize the importance of critical thinking and checking the veracity of information before spreading or believing it. By setting a good example and practicing the principles of honesty and accuracy in conveying political messages, they can help build a healthier and more trustworthy social media environment. Thus, joint efforts between political influencers and their followers in fighting disinformation could be an important step in maintaining political integrity and credibility in a digital era filled with misinformation and harm.

Platform Algorithm

The challenges faced by political influencers regarding social media-platform X algorithms are something worth noting. Social media-platform algorithms, such as those in X, play a key role in determining the reach and visibility of political content. Periodic algorithm changes can have a significant impact on the performance of political content, both in terms of follower growth and the level of engagement with followers. For example, changes in how algorithms assess the relevance or quality of content may cause political content to become less visible in followers' feeds, which in turn may hinder the growth and influence of political influencers.

In facing these challenges, political influencers must remain flexible and adaptive to algorithm changes. They need to continuously monitor changes in social-media platform X's algorithm and make timely adjustments to their strategy. This may involve adjustments in the type of content posted, posting frequency, or even audience targeting to maximize potential visibility and engagement. Additionally, influencers can also seek support from professionals or experts in the digital marketing field who can help them understand and overcome the impact of algorithm changes.

Additionally, it is important for political influencers to build strong relationships with their followers outside of X's social media platforms. By building a solid follower base outside of those platforms, influencers can reduce their dependence on algorithms and increase flexibility in reaching their audiences. This can be done through building active communities on other platforms or through marketing strategies that focus on developing personal relationships with followers. Thus, with an adaptive attitude, smart strategies, and building strong relationships with followers, political influencers can overcome the challenges posed by algorithm changes in reaching and influencing their audiences on social media-platform X.

Time and Resource Limitations

Managing online political activities does require a significant commitment of time and resources from political influencers. The main challenge they face is maintaining consistency in conveying their political messages amidst their busy lives and other demands. As individuals who often have busy schedules and may be involved in multiple projects and activities, political influencers need to manage their time wisely in order to give adequate attention to their online political activities. This requires effective time management, the ability to identify priorities, and a willingness to invest the time and effort necessary to maintain consistency in their political messaging.

Apart from that, resource management is also an important key in keeping political influencers' online political activities sustainable. Resources include not only time, but also energy, finances, and support from the team or other members. Challenges may arise when political influencers experience burnout or lack the resources to continue maintaining desired levels of activity. Therefore, it is important for them to carry out continuous evaluation of the use of their resources, ensuring that they are used efficiently and effectively to achieve their political goals.

Amid these challenges, political influencers need to prioritize time and resource management as an integral part of their political strategy. This involves developing good habits in planning and executing online political activities, as well as the ability to identify and overcome obstacles that may arise in the process. With effective management and an organized approach, political influencers can maintain consistency in conveying their political messages, maintain follower engagement, and maximize the impact of their online political activities.

Online Intimidation and Attacks

Online intimidation or attacks on political influencers are a serious problem in this digital era. As figures who openly voice their political views, they are vulnerable to various forms of online harassment, threats or abuse. This can create an uncomfortable environment and even be detrimental to their mental and emotional well-being. In many cases, these attacks can also affect political influencers' confidence in participating in online political discussions. Fear of negative reactions or even security threats can hinder their ability to voice opinions or engage in open political dialogue.

To overcome these challenges, it is important for social media-platform X to provide adequate protection for the security and privacy of political influencers. This can include features such as user blocks, comment filters,

or easily accessible and effective violation reports. In addition, the platform can also work with security and law enforcement agencies to handle serious cases of intimidation or threats against political influencers. By providing strong protections, social media platforms can help create a safe and supportive environment for political influencers to participate in online political discussions without fear of adverse consequences.

In addition to direct protection, it is also important for social media-platform X to promote healthy behavioral norms among users. This could include awareness campaigns about the importance of respecting differences of opinion, avoiding online harassment or threats, and building an inclusive and supportive community culture. By encouraging positive attitudes and mutual respect among users, social media platforms can help reduce incidents of intimidation or attacks against political influencers, creating an environment more conducive to insightful and productive political discussions.

By overcoming the challenges faced, political influencers have great potential to play a more effective role in shaping public opinion and facilitating online political participation through social media platforms X. By maintaining credibility, consistency and integrity in conveying political messages, they can building strong relationships with their followers and expanding the reach of the political messages conveyed. By paying attention to security and privacy, and promoting healthy norms of behavior on X, they can create a supportive environment for productive and insightful political discussions through collaboration between political influencers in various social media- platform

CONCLUSION

Political influencer strategies in increasing online political participation in the digital era on social media platform, raising support and online petitions, as well as holding discussions and webinars. By leveraging the power of social media platforms and direct engagement with followers, political influencers succeed in deepening political understanding, increasing active participation in the political process, and strengthening solid and engaged online political communities. Through these strategies, political influencers are able to build strong relationships with their audiences, expand the reach of political messages, and influence election outcomes with a dynamic and interactive approach. There are various challenges faced by political influencers in online political participation through social media platform. To face this challenge, political influencers need to raise awareness of the importance of constructive dialogue, maintain integrity in conveying political messages, and collaborate with followers to combat disinformation. Additionally, they need to be flexible in the face of algorithm changes, manage time and resources efficiently, and protect themselves from online bullying and attacks. By addressing these challenges, political influencers play a more effective role in shaping public opinion and facilitating online political participation that leads to a positive impact in this digital era.

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