



Politics in the Digital Age: The Impact of Social Media on Online Political Participation

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: The purpose of this study is to determine the influence between the use of social media and online political participation.

Methodology: This study uses a quantitative approach with an associative research type to analyze the influence of social media on online political participation. Data were collected through questionnaires, analyzed using SmartPLS to evaluate the measurement model, relationships between variables, and hypothesis testing, involving political science students in University of Dar es Salaam as samples.

Main Findings: From the statistical results of the Analysis using Smart PLS, it was found that the intensity of social media use through political expression has a significant influence on online political participation. From the results of this study it is also known that the moderating variables that influence the relationship are media usage time, political knowledge, political affiliation and government performance.

Novelty/Originality of this study: This study examines how social media has become a catalyst that expands the space for online political participation, while also offering a new perspective on the influence of algorithms and digital interaction patterns on the intensity and quality of users' political engagement.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The development of information and communication technology has brought about major changes in various aspects of life, including in the way humans communicate and participate in social activities [1]-[3]. The Internet, as one of the results of technological advances, has become an important part of everyday life [4]-[6]. One form of internet utilization that is increasingly dominant is social media, which is now used for various purposes, from socializing to political activities [7]-[9].

Social media has become a significant platform in shaping the behavior of modern society [10]-[12]. Not only functioning as a tool for sharing information and entertainment, social media is also a medium for conveying opinions, discussing, and building collective awareness of important issues [13], [14]. The popularity of social media is increasing along with the high internet penetration and the increasing number of users, especially among the younger generation who tend to be active users of this platform [15]-[17].

In the context of politics, social media acts as a new space that allows people to engage in various political activities [18]-[20]. From political campaigns to public discussions, social media provides space for anyone to participate without geographical or physical limitations [21]-[23]. This form of participation, known as online

political participation, has become a new model in modern democracy [24]-[26]. This activity includes various things, from sharing political information, signing online petitions, to conveying criticism or support through social media.

The advantages of social media compared to conventional media lie in its interactive, real-time, and easily accessible nature. Social media allows for the rapid and widespread dissemination of information, making it an effective tool for mobilizing public opinion [27]-[29]. In addition, social media provides a space for people to express their political views freely, which is often not possible through traditional media [30]-[32].

Online political participation has become one way for people to contribute to the political decision-making process [33]-[35]. Unlike conventional political participation that requires physical presence, online participation utilizes cyberspace to convey aspirations and opinions [36]. This activity not only offers efficiency of time and energy, but also expands the reach of political participation to groups that may not have previously been actively involved in politics.

Research shows that the intensity of social media use has a significant relationship with the level of online political participation. The more often someone uses social media for political purposes, the more likely they are to engage in online political activities [37]-[39]. However, not all uses of social media have a positive effect on political participation; the purpose and method of use play an important role in determining its impact [40]-[42].

Kubin and Von Sikorski's [43] study highlights the role of social media in exacerbating political polarization, focusing on how interactions on social media platforms influence opinion formation and ideological fragmentation. Meanwhile, Gilardi et al. [44] examine the influence of social media on the political agenda, identifying how these platforms serve as strategic tools for political actors to influence public discourse and policy priorities. Both studies provide insights into different dimensions of social media interactions and politics, but they lack a deep dive into the aspect of online political participation, particularly how social media encourages individuals' active engagement in political activities such as campaigning, petitioning, or public discussions. The current study, fills this gap by exploring the direct relationship between social media use and levels of online political participation, providing a more practical perspective on how social media not only shapes opinions or agendas but also mobilizes political action.

This study offers novelty by exploring in depth how social media not only facilitates political communication but also directly influences online political participation in the digital era. Amid the increasing use of social media as a space for political discussion, this study explores aspects such as the motivations, mechanisms, and impacts of political participation through digital platforms. The urgency of this study lies in its relevance to the modern political context, where social media has become a primary tool for individuals and groups to engage in political issues, mobilize the masses, and influence policy. With the increasing risk of polarization and the spread of misinformation, understanding how social media can be used to foster constructive and inclusive political participation becomes increasingly important to create a more participatory and healthy democracy.

This study aims to examine the effect of social media use on the level of online political participation. Focusing on the younger generation who are active users of social media, this study attempts to uncover the extent to which social media can be an effective tool to increase political participation in the digital era. The results of this study are expected to contribute to the understanding of the role of social media in building political awareness and public involvement in democracy.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

2.1. Research Design

This study uses a quantitative approach because this study attempts to explain the influence of social media use on the level of online political participation. Basically, quantitative is an approach to testing objective theories by examining the relationship between variables [45], [46]. These variables, in turn, can be measured, usually on an instrument, so that the data is in the form of numbers and can be analyzed using statistical procedures [47].

While the type of research used is associative research, where researchers try to find out the relationship between two or more variables and find out their influence. With this research method, a theory can be built that can function to explain, predict, and control a symptom. Quantitative with the type of associative research was chosen because it coincides with the objectives of researchers who want to see the extent to which the influence of social media use on the level of online political participation will be reduced to dimensions and indicators that are finally measured numerically so that they show results [48], [49].

2.2. Analysis Framework

In this study there are 4 variables, 2 independent variables, 1 intervening variable and 1 dependent variable, moderating variable. This independent variable influences or causes changes or the emergence of the dependent variable [50], [51]. This variable stands alone without being influenced by other variables or bound to any variables, this variable is selected and deliberately manipulated by the researcher so that its effect on other

variables can be observed and measured. In this variable, the independent variable is the use of social media (use of relationships and information).

While the intervening variable is the intermediary between the independent variable and the dependent variable. The intervening variable theoretically influences the relationship between the independent and dependent variables but cannot be observed and measured [52], [53]. The measurement pattern is that the independent variable influences this variable and then this variable influences the dependent variable [54]. In this case, the dependent variable is the use of social media in this case political expression. While the dependent variable is the variable that is influenced or that is the result, because of the independent variable. This variable is very much tied to the previous (independent) variable to determine the magnitude of its effect on other variables [55]. The magnitude of the effect is observed from the presence or absence, the emergence of disappearance, the magnitude of the decrease, or the change in the variation that appears as a result of changes in the other variables.

Moderating variables are variables that strengthen or weaken the relationship between independent and dependent variables. The moderating variables in this study are political interest, political knowledge and government performance. This study sees that the use of information and relationships as independent variables affects the use of political expression as an intervening variable. The intervening variable will affect the level of online political participation as a dependent variable. The moderating variable will try to measure its influence from each of the existing path analyses with the dimensions mentioned.

2.3. Population and Sample

In this study, the population is students of political sciences in University of Dar es Salaam. The sample is part of the number and characteristics possessed by the population [56], [57]. In this study, the sample is students of social sciences and political sciences, using the Slovin formula using a margin of error of 5%.

2.4. Data Collection Techniques

Researchers use data collection techniques in the form of questionnaires or often referred to as questionnaires. Questionnaires are data collection techniques carried out by giving a set of questions or written statements to respondents to answer [58]. In this study, researchers provided closed questionnaires, meaning that respondents only answered between very often and never. In distributing the questionnaire, respondents will communicate to the selected respondents and then be given a time limit of about two days to fill out the questionnaire and confirmed after completing it. Researchers also give respondents the opportunity to ask questions if there are questions that cannot be understood [59]. Indeed, one of the weaknesses of this technique is that researchers cannot supervise the filling out of the questionnaire if they fill it out at their respective homes and are purely the results of the respondents' answers.

2.5. Statistical Test

In this study, researchers will analyze data using SmartPLS software, the steps to be taken are divided into several parts, namely model measurement (Outer Model) then there is a structural evaluation of the model (Inner Model) after which the hypothesis testing will be continued and finally the analysis for each hypothesis using moderating variables.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Descriptive Analysis

3.1.1. Social Media Usage Analysis

The measurement of social media usage intensity asked how often participants used social media in 2 categories, namely use for information purposes and use for relational purposes with a rating range of Never (1) - Rarely (2) - Sometimes (3) - Often (4) - Very Often (5). The results of the measurement of the intensity of social media usage in law students at the University of Dar es Salaam for the category of use for information purposes showed that the most frequent activity was using social media to search for general information (average 4.09, SD 0.50), and the least used to find out about the campaign activities of politicians they liked (average 3.1, SD 1.1).

Then the results of measuring the intensity of social media use among law students at the University of Dar es Salaam for the category of use for relationship purposes show that the most frequent activity is using social media to maintain relationships with family or relatives who are rarely met in person (average 4.1, SD 0.89), and the least used to give congratulations (wedding, birthday, achievement, etc.) to friends (average 3.64, SD 1).

Table 1. Strength of Social Media Usage Based on Mean

Variable	Mean	Stdev	Category
Information	3.6	1	Middle
Relationship	3.9	1.139	High
Social Media Usage	3.75	1.0695	High

From the measurement results of the usage category in table 1, the highest mean was obtained, namely the use of social media for relationship purposes of 3.9 and finally using social media for information purposes of 3.6. From the results of the standard deviation (SD) calculation in the four categories, it can be seen that the standard deviation value for both purposes of using social media is relatively small, so it can be interpreted that the intensity of social media use by research participants for both purposes of use is also relatively the same or similar.

3.1.2. Analysis of Political Expression

The measurement of the level of online political participation was conducted by asking participants to report how often they had carried out 7 online political expression activities in the past year with a rating range of Never (1) – Rarely (2) – Sometimes (3) – Often (4) – Very Often (5). The measurement results obtained an average (mean) level of political expression of 2.62 with an SD of 1.13. These results generally indicate that the level of political expression of law students at the University of Dar es Salaam is in the middle category.

Table 2. Strength of Political Expression Based on Mean

Variables	N	Min	Max	Mean	Stdev
Political Expression	292	1	5	2.6	1.13

The results of measuring the level of political expression in law students at the University of Dar es Salaam showed that of the 7 types of political expression asked, the most frequently expressed political expression was following social media accounts of people (public figures, politicians, etc.) who often discuss political issues. (average 3.2, SD 1.23). The least frequently expressed political expression by participants was replying to people's comments about politics (average 2.13, SD 1.07).

3.1.3. Analysis of Online Political Participation

Measurement of the level of online political participation was conducted by asking participants to report how often they carried out 11 online political participation activities with a rating range of Never (1) – Rarely (2) – Sometimes (3) – Often (4) – Very Often (5). The measurement results obtained an average (mean) level of online political participation of 1.9 with an SD of 1.03. These results generally indicate that the level of online political participation of law students at the University of Dar es Salaam is in the low category.

Table 3. Strength of Online Political Participation Based on Mean

Variable	N	Min	Max	Mean	Stdev
PPO	292	1	5	1.9	1.03

The results of measuring the level of online political participation in law students at the University of Dar es Salaam showed that of the 8 types of online political participation asked, the most frequent online political participation carried out by participants was discussing political issues in conversation groups (average 2.84, SD 1.14). Meanwhile, the least frequent online political participation carried out by participants was donating money for a campaign to one of the candidates online/via mobile phone (E-banking, I-banking, etc.) (average 1.2, SD 0.58).

3.1.4 Social Media Interaction, Online Politics and Moderation

Descriptive analysis provides a rough picture of the low level of online political participation of law students at the University of Dar es Salaam. Law students tend to use social media only as a medium for entertainment. This is manifested in the high intensity of social media use for relationships compared to information, even for political expression it has an intensity close to low. The use of social media that tends to be for entertainment will affect the level of online politics which will tend to be low. The use of social media for relationships is not entirely bad for online politics. Social media for relationships has an influence on online politics although it is less strong than social media for information and political expression.

Another thing that will affect the low level of online politics is low satisfaction with the government and high political interest. Government performance that is considered lacking will eliminate the spirit of change in society. The government that is considered hopeful but instead gives disappointment with its performance. Disappointed people will tend not to care about the future condition of the country which will affect their involvement in the form of participation. Conversely, trust in government performance will foster a spirit of change and encourage political participation.

High political interest is a predictor in seeing the low purpose of law students at the University of Dar es Salaam accessing the internet for socio-politics and low frequency of online political participation. In online politics, political interest is a disadvantage in seeing its influence. Political interest has a negative effect on the

search for political information. This can be seen from the use of social media information that has the lowest frequency is finding out about politicians' campaign activities compared to general information searches.

Descriptive analysis provides an inverse picture. High political knowledge of law students but have a low frequency in online political participation. High political interest makes the relationship between political information and online politics negative. This is because low political interest will encourage someone to seek information about politics. Political knowledge of law students is the result of their surrounding environment. Lecture activities that often involve political values make law students' knowledge high, not because of searching for information on social media. High political knowledge will have an influence on online politics such as discussing politics in groups. This is evidenced by the frequency of the highest indicator of law students in online politics, which is discussing political issues in groups.

3.2. PLS-SEM Analysis

The stages of PLS-SEM analysis are as follows:

3.2.1. Outer Model Evaluation

Evaluation of measurement models is used to evaluate the relationship between constructs and their indicators, divided into two, namely convergent validity and discriminant validity. Convergent validity can be evaluated through three (3) stages, namely: validity indicators, construct reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE) values. While discriminant validity can be passed through two (2) stages, namely looking at the cross loading value by having a minimum cross loading value of 0.7.

A. Convergent Validity

Assessed based on loading factor (correlation between item score or component score with construct score). Indicator is considered valid if it has AVE (Average Variance Extranced) value above 0.5 or shows all outer loading of variable dimension has loading value > 0.5 so it can be concluded that the measurement meets convergent validity criteria. AVE value is the average percentage of variance score extracted from a set of latent variables estimated through the Standardized loading of its indicators in the algorithm iteration process in PLS:

Table 4. Outer Loading Values

Variable	Ekspol	Information	PPO	Relation
Ekspol_01	0.804			
Ekspol_03	0.84			
Ekspol_04	0.761			
Ekspol_05	0.65			
Ekspol_06	0.728			
Ekspol_07	0.795			
Ekspol_02	0.859			
Inform_03		0.707		
Inform_04		0.672		
Inform_06		0.816		
Ppo_02			0.707	
Ppo_03			0.75	
Ppo_04			0.817	
Ppo_05			0.688	
Ppo_07			0.667	
Ppo_08			0.654	
Relation_04				0.901
Relation_05				0.867

The results of the table above have shown that the outer loading has met the above figure > 0.5 , then for the research variables it has also met the minimum limit of the AVE value > 0.5 , this can be seen from the table below.

Table 5. Based on AVE Value

	AVE
Ekspol	0.608
Information	0.539
PPO	0.513
Relations	0.782

In addition to looking at the outer loading and AVE values, researchers will also look at the value of construct reliability and its Cronbach alpha. A construct or variable is said to be reliable if it provides a Cronbach's

Alpha value > 0.6 and Composite reliability > 0.7. This is considered important because the reliability test is the basis for whether these variables are appropriate or related to each other and are considered representative of all variables. These variables have been met as explained in the table below.

Table 6. based on Alpha and Reliability

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability
Ekspol	0.891	0.895	0.915
Information	0.608	0.814	0.777
PPO	0.809	0.652	0.863
Relation	0.722	0.731	0.878

Thus, it can be concluded that the variables in this study, by looking at the outer loading value, construct reliability and AVE, have met the requirements for convergent validity.

B. Discriminant Validity

For discriminant validity, it can be said to meet this indicator if the indicator's cross loading value is the largest for its variable compared to other variables. This has been met when seen from the table below.

Table 7. Based on Cross Loading Value

Indicator	Ekspol	Information	PPO	Relation
Ekspol_01	0.804	0.512	0.559	0.241
Ekspol_03	0.84	0.461	0.587	0.178
Ekspol_04	0.761	0.345	0.531	0.128
Ekspol_05	0.65	0.482	0.44	0.14
Ekspol_06	0.728	0.524	0.481	0.193
Ekspol_07	0.795	0.416	0.529	0.259
Ekspol_02	0.859	0.481	0.58	0.212
Inform_03	0.316	0.707	0.179	0.172
Inform_04	0.325	0.672	0.233	0.142
Inform_06	0.582	0.816	0.417	0.205
Ppo_02	0.461	0.318	0.707	0.088
Ppo_03	0.471	0.258	0.75	0.161
Ppo_04	0.529	0.226	0.817	0.191
Ppo_05	0.44	0.25	0.688	0.022
Ppo_07	0.387	0.199	0.667	-0.01
Ppo_08	0.587	0.454	0.654	0.302
Relation_04	0.236	0.18	0.177	0.901
Relation_05	0.206	0.249	0.167	0.867

3.2.2. Inner Model Evaluation

The purpose of evaluating the model structure or Inner Model is to find out and see the direct or indirect influence between variables on each other. Evaluation of the Model Structure (Inner Model) is a structural model for predicting causal relationships between latent variables. In evaluating the model structure in this study, it begins by looking at the R-Square value. The value can be seen in the table below.

Table 8. Based on R-Square Value

Variable	R-Square
Ekspol	0.364
PPO	0.465

The table above shows a value of 0.364 (moderate) for the ekspol variable, which can be interpreted as the percentage value of the influence of X1 (use for information) and X2 (use for relations) on X3 (political expression) of 36.4% and can be explained by other factors of 63.6%. Furthermore, for the PPO variable with a percentage value of 0.465 (moderate), it means that the percentage of the influence of the social media variable for information, relations through political expression on online political participation is around 46.5% and the remaining 53.5% is explained by other factors. According to (Ghazali, 2008) the R-square value is 0.67 (strong), 0.33 (moderate) and 0.19 (weak).

Next, the researcher will see the goodness of fit value by looking at Q2, which analysis used has similarities with R-square, the higher the value, the more influential or has a relationship/predictive relevance. The calculation results above show that the value of Q2 can be interpreted that the diversity of data obtained from this study can be explained by a structural model of 32%. The calculation results show a Q square value of more than

0 (zero), so the model is worthy of being said to have a relevant predictive value. Next, the researcher will look at the path diagram that will show how much influence the independent variables have on the dependent in this study. This is shown in the graph below.

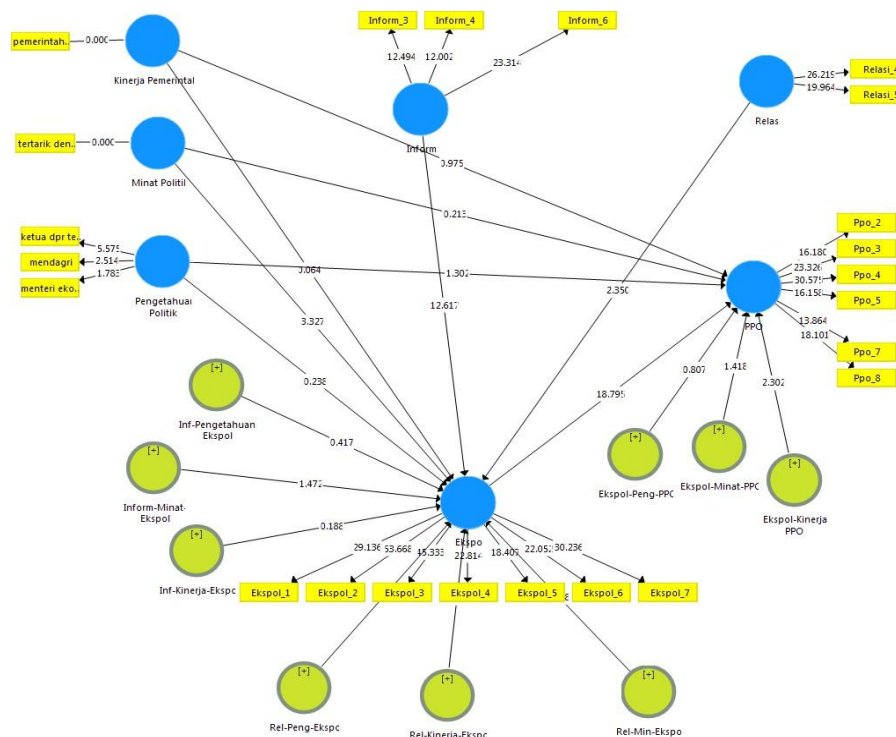


Figure 1. Graph Based on Variable Relationships

3.3. Hypothesis Testing

After the data measurement is complete and has met the requirements, it can be continued by using the bootstrapping method. Hypothesis testing of the significance of the hypothesis support can be done by comparing the T-table and T-statistic values. If the T statistic is higher than the T-table value, it means that the hypothesis is supported or accepted. In this study for a 95% confidence level (alpha 95 percent), the T-table value for the two-tailed hypothesis with a sample of 292 respondents is > 1.96 .

This test will be carried out by comparing the T count and T table. The hypothesis (H_a) will be accepted if the T count is greater than or equal to the T-table ($T \text{ count} \geq T\text{-table}$) and the hypothesis (H_a) will be rejected if the T count is smaller than the T-table ($T \text{ count} < T\text{-table}$). The following are the results of the T-statistic test. In addition to the proposed research hypothesis, there is also an indirect effect that occurs, namely the relationship between the use of social media for information and relations with online political participation. The T-statistic value of this indirect relationship exceeds 1.96, so it can be said that it can be accepted if it is included in the research hypothesis.

Table 9. Based on T-Statistic Value

Hypothesis	Influence	T Statistics	P Values	Remarks
H1	Information -> Expol	15.517	0	Received
H2	Relation -> Expol	2.322	0.021	Received
H3	Expol -> PPO	23.019	0	Received
-	Information -> PPO	11.061	0	Received
-	Relation -> PPO	2.248	0.025	Received

From the path analysis in the table above, all T-statistics show numbers greater than 1.96 than the T-table value, meaning that it can be concluded that the hypotheses in this study are all accepted (H1, H2, H3) and also the indirect influence.

3.4. Moderation Analysis

Next, this study will test the hypothesis in this study using moderation analysis. There are several variables used for moderation, namely political interest, political knowledge and government performance. The results of the moderation test can be seen in the table below.

Table 10. Moderation Analysis

Variable	Influence	Path Coefficient	T Statistics	P Values	Description
Effective government	expol - effective -> Ppo	0.088	2.54	0.011	Accepted
	inform - effective -> Expol	-0.02	0.362	0.717	Rejected
	relation - effective -> Expol	0.036	0.604	0.546	Rejected
Political Interest	expol - political interest -> Ppo	0.038	0.835	0.404	Rejected
	inform - political interest -> Expol	-0.067	1.425	0.155	Rejected
	relation - political interest -> Expol	0.027	0.389	0.697	Rejected
Political Knowledge	expol - knowledge -> Ppo	-0.061	1.339	0.181	Rejected
	inform - knowledge -> Expol	0.082	1.276	0.203	Rejected
	relation - knowledge -> Expol	0.117	2.21	0.028	Rejected

From the table above shows several variables that have an influence as moderating variables. The government performance variable has succeeded in becoming a moderating variable between the relationship between the use of political expression media and online political participation. The analysis above shows a P-Value of 0.011 which is more than 0.05 and the T-Statistics value is 2.54 and the path coefficient number shows 0.088 which means that the trust variable strengthens the relationship between the political expression variable and online political participation.

The political knowledge variable has succeeded in becoming a moderator variable between the relationship between media use for relations and political expression. The analysis above shows a P-Value of 0.028 which is smaller than 0.05 and the T-Statistics value is 2.210 and the path coefficient number shows 0.117 which means that the knowledge variable strengthens the relationship between the media use variable for relations and political expression.

From the path analysis in the table above, it can be concluded that the variables that successfully became moderators were trust in government and political knowledge. These variables provide a strengthening path coefficient. Trust in government and political knowledge become moderating variables that strengthen the relationship between information variables with political expression, political expression with online political participation and relations with political expression.

In addition to looking at the analysis of variables as moderation, this study also looks at the direct influence of respondent data with its influence on the variables in this study. The result is that political interest has a direct influence on political expression with P-Values and T-Statistics of 0.001 and 3.419. Furthermore, further moderation testing is carried out by dividing into sub-groups rather than the moderating variables that have been carried out. This analysis is called Partial Least Square Multiple Group Analysis (PLS-MGA). An analysis that allows each group to test whether it has a significant difference in the form of specific group parameters with a minimum requirement of 30 samples. In the study, the moderating variables will be broken down into each part and their influence on the existing hypothesis will be seen by looking at the P-Values if <0.05 then it is considered to have a relationship.

3.4.1. Groups Based on Government Effectiveness

Table 11. Moderation Based on Government Performance

Government Effectiveness		No		Yes	
Relationship	t-Values	p-Values	p-Values	t-Values	
Ekspol -> Ppo	15.401	0	0	18.742	
Information -> Ekspol	10.365	0	0	10.541	
Relation -> Ekspol	2.316	0.021	0.209	1.258	

The results of the PLS-MGA analysis in the table above show that the relationship between information and political expression and political expression to online politics is influenced by government performance, whether effective or not. However, for the relationship with political expression, effective government performance does not affect the relationship. This is indicated by the P-Values <0.05, which indicates that there is an influence from these groups. The conclusion obtained is that political activities carried out in the online realm tend to be influenced by effective government performance except for the use of media for relations to political expression.

3.4.2. Groups Based on Political Interests

Table 12. Moderation Based on Political Interest

Political Interest	No		Yes	
Relationship	t-Values	p-Values	t-Values	p-Values
Ekspol -> Ppo	12.52	0	20.407	0
Information -> Ekspol	12.976	0	8.614	0
Relation -> Ekspol	1.381	0.168	2.161	0.031

The results of the PLS-MGA analysis in the table above show that the relationship between information and political expression and political expression to online politics is influenced by political interest, whether they have it or not. However, for the relationship with political expression, only respondents who have political interest influence their relationship.

This is indicated by the P-Values <0.05 which indicates that there is an influence from these groups. The conclusion from the analysis above is that ownership of political interest has more influence in the relationship between the use of social media for relations to political expression and political expression to online politics. While the relationship between the use of social media for information to political expression, ownership of political interest has less influence on the relationship.

3.4.3. Groups Based on Political Knowledge

Table 13. Moderation Based on Political Knowledge

Political Knowledge	Low		Currently		High	
Relationship	t-Values	p-Values	t-Values	p-Values	t-Values	p-Values
Ekspol -> Ppo	13.434	0	14.077	0	13.256	0
Information -> Ekspol	10.4	0	8.775	0	6.298	0
Relation -> Ekspol	0.481	0.631	2.122	0.034	2.681	0.008

The knowledge group is only divided into three parts (P1, P2 and P3) this is because to become a sub-group requires a minimum of 30 samples, only these three sub-groups meet the requirements. The results of the PLS-MGA analysis in the table above show that the relationship between information and political expression and political expression to online politics is influenced by political knowledge factors, both low and high. However, for the relationship to political expression, only respondents with moderate and high political knowledge influence the relationship. This is indicated by the P-Values <0.05 which indicates that there is an influence from these groups.

The conclusion of the analysis above is that for the relationship between the use of social media for information and political expression, respondents who have low political knowledge are stronger in influencing the relationship. However, for the relationship between political expression and online political participation, respondents who have a moderate level of political knowledge are stronger in influencing the relationship. Finally, for the relationship between relations and political expression, the group that has the most influence is those with high political knowledge.

The results of the analysis show that social media significantly influences online political participation patterns. This participation can be seen from the high level of individual involvement in political campaigns, online petitions, and public discussions facilitated by social media platforms. This finding is in line with research by Gilardi et al [44], which highlights the strategic role of social media in shaping the political agenda. However, this study goes further by showing that political engagement is not only limited to passive influence (information consumption), but also encourages active actions, such as participation in digital petitions or donations to campaigns.

From a theoretical perspective, this study strengthens the theoretical framework of digital political engagement by adding a new dimension to how social media can be a catalyst for active political action. In the context of political mobilization theory, these results suggest that social media is not only a means of distributing information, but also a mobilization platform that can reach various groups of people more inclusively. In addition, these findings are also relevant to social network theory, where social relationships in digital media are shown to be a major driver in influencing users' political behavior.

Practically, this study suggests the importance for political actors, civil society organizations, and policymakers to use social media more effectively to increase political participation. Social media platforms can be designed to promote healthy and collaborative political discussions, for example by providing features to

counter misinformation or building more inclusive algorithms to avoid the echo chamber effect. Furthermore, civil society organizations can use social media to reach groups that have been underrepresented in political discourse.

The results of this study fill the gap identified in Kubin and Von Sikorski's [43] study which focused on political polarization, by showing that social media can also play a positive role in mobilizing political participation. In addition, this study provides additional perspectives to the findings of Gilardi et al [44] by highlighting aspects of direct action, such as digital campaigns and petitions, which have not been widely discussed in their study. Thus, this study enriches the literature on the relationship between social media and politics with a more comprehensive and applicable approach.

This study makes a significant contribution to the understanding of the role of social media in encouraging online political participation, especially in the digital era that is increasingly integrated with information technology [23], [60]. Its impacts include enriching the theory of digital political engagement by showing that social media not only functions as a medium of communication, but also as an effective mobilization tool to increase political awareness and collective action. Practically, this study offers insights for policymakers and civil society organizations to utilize social media as an inclusive platform in expanding political participation, especially for groups that have been underrepresented.

However, this study also has several limitations. First, the focus on online political participation may limit the generalization of the findings to offline forms of political participation. Second, this study uses data collected from a specific sample, which may not fully represent the global population. Third, the factors of social media algorithms that influence user engagement patterns are not explored in depth, so further studies are needed to understand how content personalization affects the dynamics of political participation. Nevertheless, these limitations open up opportunities for further research to explore the relationship between social media, algorithms, and political participation in a broader context.

4. CONCLUSION

This study provides results that the level of online participation of law students at the University of Dar es Salaam is relatively moderate, the intensity of social media use is classified as high, but has a medium political expression identity. From the results of statistical analysis using Smart PLS, it was found that the intensity of social media use through political expression has a significant influence on online political participation. From the results of this study it is also known that the moderating variables that influence this relationship are media use time, political knowledge, political affiliation and government performance.

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