

Catholic Youth and Political Engagement: The Need for a Hybrid Model of Mobilization

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Abstract

Purpose: This study investigates the relationship between social media use, political information-seeking, political attentiveness, political awareness, and political participation among Catholic youth in the Archdiocese of Semarang. It asks whether digital engagement leads to active civic involvement or remains confined to passive consumption.

Methods: A quantitative survey was conducted among Catholic youth, chosen for their civic engagement and digital activity shaped by Church-based political education. Correlation tests examined the links between social media use, political awareness, and participation, focusing on attentiveness, information-seeking, and involvement in electoral and non-electoral activities.

Findings: Although Catholic youth are highly active on social media, political engagement is selective and often passive. Political awareness is relatively high but does not translate into broad participation beyond elections. Political attentiveness strongly correlates with information-seeking, while awareness shows only a weak connection to actual participation. Barriers such as selective exposure, algorithmic curation, polarization, and the absence of sustained mobilization limit meaningful engagement.

Originality: This study contributes theoretically by situating digital political engagement within a faith-based context, demonstrating how religious identity intersects with media effects and political behavior. It offers a novel conceptual integration of political attentiveness, information-seeking, and faith-based civic identity into digital participation models. Unlike prior research that generalizes youth behavior, this study provides a culturally grounded analysis of Catholic youth, emphasizing the Church's dual role as both enabler and constraint of political agency. A hybrid mobilization model is proposed, bridging institutional support with community-driven digital activism to enrich theories of youth civic engagement.

Keywords: Social Media Engagement, Political Participation, Catholic Youth, Political Awareness, Archdiocese of Semarang.

Introduction

The political involvement of Catholic youth is a complex and evolving phenomenon shaped by historical contexts, institutional influences, and the digital revolution. While traditional forms of political participation--such as protests, campaigning, or affiliation with political groups--remain relevant, the emergence of digital media has significantly expanded the avenues for civic engagement (Liang, 2024; Morrison et al., 2021). Social media, in particular, now functions as a crucial arena where Catholic youth access political information, express their views, and mobilize for social causes (Yamamoto & Kushin, 2014). These platforms not only facilitate political expression but also enable

young Catholics to explore and articulate the relationship between their faith and democratic engagement in innovative and previously unavailable ways.

In Indonesia, Catholic youth engage in political and civic life through diverse organizational structures that cater to different aspects of youth development and participation. *Orang Muda Katolik* (Catholic youth) serves as a broad identity encompassing Catholic youth aged 13 to 35, uniting them within parish-based or special-interest groups, known as *Mudika* (Catholic Youth Fellowship). While not a formal institution, Catholic youth fosters community cohesion, faith enrichment, and collective involvement in church and social initiatives (Harsanto, 2012). More structured engagement is found in *Pemuda Katolik* (Indonesian Catholic Youth Association), a national socio-political organization founded in 1945 that focuses on leadership development and civic participation, emphasizing community service and nation-building (Djokopranoto, 2010). Meanwhile, Indonesian Catholic Students Association (*PMKRI*), established in 1947, provides a platform for Catholic and non-Catholic university students to engage in intellectual and spiritual growth, shaping them into socially responsible individuals committed to democratic values (Samosir, 2022). Together, these organizations offer Catholic youth multiple avenues for civic engagement, from grassroots activism to institutional leadership.

Understanding Catholic youth engagement requires recognizing youth as a fluid and evolving social category shaped by cultural and institutional definitions. Scholars define youth either through shared social norms (A. Bennett, 2011; Sutopo, 2022) or as a distinct generational cohort with unique experiences and knowledge (Mannheim, 2013; Naafs & White, 2012). A particularly useful framework is the transitional perspective, which sees youth as a phase of development marked by shifts in education, employment, and civic participation. This perspective explains how Catholic youth navigate their political identities while balancing religious and civic responsibilities. Institutional definitions further influence youth engagement. While Indonesia's Youth Law (No. 40 of 2009) defines youth as those aged 16 to 30, the Catholic Church extends this to 35, reflecting varying institutional expectations (Utami & Tse, 2018). These overlapping perspectives create a complex space where Catholic youth must reconcile their roles within both faith-based communities and broader civic life.

Historically, Indonesian youth political engagement has been framed by institutional and generational hierarchies. During the New Order, young people were viewed as politically immature and controlled through state and familial structures (Shiraishi, 2019). Religious institutions similarly positioned youth as needing moral and intellectual guidance from authority figures (Sumilat et al., 2022). However, contemporary shifts show a growing assertion of youth agency, with young people increasingly shaping their own political identities and activism (Sutopo, 2022). This transformation is particularly evident among Catholic youth, as they navigate both religious and civic spheres with greater autonomy in an era where social media has become central to youth political discourse and activism.

At the intersection of faith and politics, Catholic youth engagement is shaped by historical legacies and contemporary societal shifts. Historically, Catholic youth in Indonesia have played significant roles in political movements, from student-led activism in the final years of the New Order to more recent alliances with progressive Islamic groups advocating for democratic values (Nilan & Wibawanto, 2023; Wardaya, 2016). However, the nature of engagement has evolved in the digital era, where participation is increasingly mediated through online platforms rather than traditional political

organizations. This shift raises critical questions about the ways in which Catholic youth today construct their political identities and engage with civic issues in a rapidly changing media environment (Rogan, 2023).

The political engagement of Catholic youth reflects a growing tension between institutional authority and individual agency. While the Church provides moral and ethical guidance, young Catholics increasingly shape their political perspectives through digital exposure to diverse viewpoints. Social media grants access to both official Church positions and grassroots activism, decentralizing political discourse and challenging traditional hierarchies. As Catholic youth navigate these evolving spaces, their engagement not only influences Indonesia's democratic landscape but also redefines the role of religious identity in political participation (Jiang, 2018).

Catholic education and institutions play a significant role in fostering civic awareness and political engagement. In Argentina, Catholic institutions have shaped young activists, while Catholic student organizations in the Netherlands have historically challenged religious-political structures, promoting independent political thought (Beentjes, 2019; Grandinetti, 2019). However, Catholic youth remain ideologically diverse. In France, *Sens Commun* (SC) aligns with conservative Catholicism, while *Comunità di Conessioni* (CdC) in Italy embodies a progressive, social Catholicism (Bolzonar, 2023). Similar patterns of ideological diversity are emerging in Indonesia, where Catholic youth engage in issue-based movements such as environmental advocacy and social justice while others align with broader political organizations reflecting their religious and moral convictions. The evolving intersection of faith and politics in digital spaces highlights how historical contexts, institutional influence, and online discourse continue to shape Catholic youth activism.

Despite the Church's historical influence in guiding political attitudes, its presence in digital political discourse remains limited (Nduka & McGuire, 2017). While Catholic clergy shape the political behaviors of parishioners, structured political education for Catholic youth remains inadequate, particularly in the digital realm (Smith et al., 2014). Some young Catholic leaders are adopting new mobilization strategies, including digital activism and public performances, yet the Church's broader role in shaping these efforts remains ambiguous (García Martín et al., 2023). Beyond institutional influence, Catholic youth face societal challenges such as political apathy, misinformation, and declining trust in democratic institutions (Majumdar, 2023). While faith-driven messaging has been found to increase youth participation in political protests and activism (Sperber et al., 2022), effective engagement depends on access to credible information and strong digital literacy skills to navigate misinformation and polarization.

Political engagement and political participation, while closely linked, represent distinct dimensions of civic involvement. Engagement encompasses cognitive, emotional, and behavioral interactions with political issues, including interest, awareness, and discussion. In contrast, participation involves tangible actions such as voting, protesting, or lobbying (Barrett & Brunton-Smith, 2014; Ekman & Amnå, 2012). While engagement fosters political awareness and ideological positioning, it does not always translate into participation, as structural barriers such as institutional distrust and socio-economic constraints may limit direct involvement (Gastil & Xenos, 2010b; O. Heath, 2022). Nevertheless, engagement and participation operate in a reciprocal cycle, where active involvement strengthens democratic commitment, reinforcing the necessity for frameworks that integrate both traditional and digital activism (Teorell & Torcal, 2007).

Several factors shape both engagement and participation, including demographic, psychological, and social variables. Age, education, and socio-economic status influence political behavior, with younger individuals exhibiting high engagement but lower formal participation rates (Bozogáňová & Výrost, 2019; Grasso & Giugni, 2022). Older individuals, especially those who are well-educated and financially secure, tend to be more active in formal political activities like voting and party membership. Their participation is also shaped by psychological dimensions, particularly political efficacy. Internal political efficacy--confidence in one's capacity to impact political outcomes--serves as a motivating force for involvement. Meanwhile, external political efficacy--the belief that political institutions are responsive to citizen input--affects whether that motivation translates into concrete action (Francisco & Jiménez, 2022). The evolution of political engagement and participation underscores the necessity of adaptive frameworks that account for both traditional and digital activism. As political participation moves beyond formal electoral activities to include grassroots movements, social media-driven activism, and digital advocacy, institutions must recognize these new pathways of political expression (Teorell & Torcal, 2007).

The rise of digital media has transformed this relationship, particularly among youth. Social media platforms facilitate mobilization and discourse but also introduce challenges such as algorithmic biases, selective exposure, and misinformation (Storsul, 2014; Zhu et al., 2019). Unlike traditional media, digital platforms decentralize information flows, shaping public opinion through interactive and participatory mechanisms (Thorson & Wells, 2016). However, media exposure alone does not guarantee meaningful engagement. Individuals who passively consume political content do not necessarily translate their awareness into civic action (Prior, 2007). This complexity necessitates a reevaluation of how digital political participation is conceptualized, particularly in contexts where religious and institutional influences intersect with media-driven activism (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013b).

The relationship between internet use and media exposure adds further complexity to the picture. According to uses and gratifications theory, how individuals use the internet--both in terms of how long they engage and the specific ways they interact--significantly shapes the extent and character of their media exposure (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000). Duration refers to the time spent voluntarily accessing digital content, while type of use depends on user motivations, such as interpersonal communication, information-seeking, entertainment, and civic engagement. (Papacharissi, 2002) argues that Internet use is more than passive media consumption; it entails active participation in information-sharing, deliberation, and self-expression, making it a critical factor in shaping political exposure.

The distinction between passive media exposure and active Internet use becomes particularly relevant in the digital age. While some users deliberately seek out information, many are passively exposed to algorithmically curated content that influences their political awareness and engagement (Mashud et al., 2023). Political attention and information-seeking behavior have been shown to influence political awareness, with researchers linking political attentiveness to an individual's exposure to diverse perspectives (Görtz, 2021; Kristensen et al., 2021). Unlike traditional linear models of media consumption, digital media engagement is iterative, dynamic, and shaped by cognitive and affective dimensions, including uncertainty, anxiety, and selective attention (Durrance & Kuhlthau, 1994).

The reciprocal relationship between Internet use and media exposure underscores the complexity of digital engagement. Users not only actively seek out content but are also influenced by the content that is algorithmically pushed onto their feeds. (Gottlieb et al., 2013) contend that information-seeking behavior is shaped by a combination of internal motivations and external influences, positioning it as a vital focus in digital media studies. Individuals actively turn to the internet to satisfy particular informational needs, yet at the same time, algorithmic systems embedded within digital platforms guide what users see, steer their attention, and impact their future media consumption habits. This is particularly evident in digital political campaigns, where exposure to content does not always lead to active participation, particularly when exposure occurs in passive or low-engagement contexts (Lim, 2017).

This shift has led scholars to reconsider media exposure not merely as the frequency or duration of content consumption but as an interactive, user-driven process shaped by algorithmic recommendations and behavioral patterns. According to selective exposure theory, people tend to seek out information that reinforces their preexisting views. This tendency has become even more evident in the digital era, where online environments often foster echo chambers that influence and polarize political discussions (Stroud, 2008). As a result, media exposure is not just about how often users encounter political content but also about the relevance, diversity, and level of engagement associated with it. While digital platforms provide opportunities for broader participation, they also reinforce fragmented public discourse, where users remain within ideologically homogenous spaces rather than encountering a plurality of perspectives.

These dynamics carry important consequences for political engagement. Exposure to political content on social media has been shown to boost involvement in online discourse, stimulate political mobilization, and encourage various forms of activism (W. L. Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). However, exposure alone does not necessarily translate into meaningful civic action. (Prior, 2011) differentiates between passive exposure and active engagement, emphasizing that merely encountering political content does not guarantee political participation. This aligns with the Differential Susceptibility to Media Effects Model (DSMM), which explains how cognitive, emotional, and social predispositions shape the extent to which media exposure influences political behavior (Maheux et al., 2024; Persily & Tucker, 2020; Valkenburg & Peter, 2013). Individuals who are already politically engaged are more likely to seek and act on political content, whereas those passively exposed may experience limited shifts in political attitudes or behaviors.

Although media exposure and Internet use remain distinct concepts, they increasingly overlap in the context of digital engagement (Nesi et al., 2020). Internet use captures the breadth of digital interaction, while media exposure reflects the depth of engagement with specific content. High levels of Internet use do not necessarily equate to diverse media exposure, as algorithmic personalization and selective consumption can limit users' informational diversity (Su & Li, 2023). Conversely, individuals who selectively use the internet for political engagement may experience heightened exposure to multiple perspectives, leading to greater political awareness and participation. This complex relationship necessitates an integrated research approach, considering both Internet use and media exposure as interconnected variables influencing political behavior, public opinion, and digital activism.

To better understand this relationship, scholars have identified key variables for measuring Internet use and media exposure. Variables used to assess Internet use typically

include time spent online, frequency of access, types of digital activities, engagement with social media, and user motivations (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000). Media exposure, on the other hand, is often measured through the diversity of news sources accessed, the depth of political engagement, the influence of algorithmic recommendations, and the distinction between active and passive content consumption (Pariser, 2011). Integrating these variables into digital media research offers a comprehensive framework for examining how youth engagement with online political content influences democratic participation and public discourse.

The study of media effects has long explored how media exposure shapes perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors. In the digital age, where algorithmic curation and participatory engagement dominate, traditional frameworks require re-evaluation. Mediatization theory highlights how media have become embedded in all aspects of social and political life (Rogan, 2023), influencing institutions and cultural practices (Thorson & Wells, 2016). Unlike traditional mass media, where gatekeeping was centralized, social media have decentralized information flows, allowing user-generated content, influencers, and algorithms to shape political discourse (Su & Li, 2023). This transformation has intensified political polarization through selective exposure and echo chambers, as individuals increasingly consume content that reinforces pre-existing beliefs (Pariser, 2011). Although extensive internet use provides opportunities to encounter a wide range of political content, algorithm-driven curation frequently limits this diversity, making the link between media exposure and political awareness more complex (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000; Su & Li, 2023).

Media effects theory explores how media exposure shapes political engagement, social attitudes, and civic participation through three key dimensions: cognitive, affective, and conative effects (Potter, 2012). The cognitive dimension influences awareness and perception of political issues through agenda-setting, framing, and priming (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The affective dimension shapes emotional and attitudinal responses, often reinforcing trust, cynicism, or partisan attachments (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Entman, 1993). The conative dimension examines how media exposure translates into political behavior, particularly through digital participation and activism (Ajzen, 2012; W. L. Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). In the digital era, media exposure has evolved from a passive process to an interactive engagement, where algorithmic curation and social media personalization shape the content users consume. This shift amplifies selective exposure, creating echo chambers and filter bubbles that reinforce ideological divides (Pariser, 2011).

The interplay between media exposure, Internet use, and political awareness is central to civic engagement. While digital platforms provide access to diverse political content, algorithmic biases and selective consumption often narrow the range of perspectives encountered (Su & Li, 2023). Political awareness, as described by agenda-setting and cultivation theories, is shaped by media exposure, influencing how individuals interpret political realities and trust institutions (Gerbner, 1998; Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). However, exposure alone does not guarantee civic engagement. Selective exposure theory suggests that individuals primarily consume content aligned with their beliefs, reinforcing polarization rather than fostering balanced awareness (Stroud, 2008). The affective dimension of media effects, particularly framing and priming, further strengthens partisan identities by emphasizing conflict and crisis narratives (Entman, 1993; Iyengar & Kinder, 2010). The conative dimension links media exposure to political

participation, where attitudes, social norms, and self-efficacy influence whether individuals take political action (Ajzen, 2012).

Political participation has traditionally been categorized into institutionalized and non-institutionalized engagement (García-Albacete, 2014). While institutionalized participation involves voting, party membership, and direct engagement with policymakers, non-institutionalized participation includes protests, digital activism, and consumer-driven political actions (Weiss, 2020). The emergence of social media has led to a shift in youth political participation toward more informal, non-institutionalized forms, signaling a move away from traditional political structures and embracing alternative avenues of engagement (Teorell & Torcal, 2007). While digital platforms provide spaces for activism, the question remains whether online engagement translates into real-world political change. Several studies indicate that although social media broadens access to political conversations, it doesn't always result in changes in political ideology or long-term engagement (Kamau, 2017). As digital technology continues to reshape political engagement, understanding how media exposure influences civic participation remains essential to evaluating the future of democratic involvement.

Political engagement is shaped by cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of media effects. Agenda-setting and cultivation theories explain how media shape public awareness and perceptions of political reality (Gerbner, 1998; R. L. Heath & O'Hair, 2020; McCombs, 2014). Framing and priming theories highlight how media narratives influence political attitudes and reinforce ideological attachments (Entman, 1993; Iyengar & Kinder, 2010). The conative dimension examines how media exposure drives political behavior, with digital platforms lowering barriers to activism and participation (Ajzen, 2012). Although traditional forms of participation like voting and joining political parties remain important, young people are increasingly turning to non-institutionalized activism, especially through digital channels (García-Albacete, 2014; Weiss, 2020). However, whether online engagement translates into meaningful political action remains contested, as exposure to political content does not always lead to ideological shifts or sustained civic participation (Kamau, 2017).

Political participation has expanded significantly with social media, moving beyond traditional electoral engagement to include digital activism, online petitions, and viral campaigns (Teorell & Torcal, 2007). By lowering barriers to entry, digital platforms have made participation more accessible, amplifying grassroots movements and elevating marginalized voices. However, while social media use correlates with higher levels of political participation, the extent of engagement is shaped by media control, political context, and information access (Kamau, 2017). Despite the potential for increased engagement, challenges such as ideological echo chambers and digital surveillance persist. The first-person perception effect (Chung, 2019) posits that people tend to assume media has a greater influence on others than on themselves, which can impact their own behavioral intentions. Although encountering political content on social media can boost feelings of political efficacy, concerns over privacy and fears of surveillance--especially in authoritarian settings--may discourage individuals from participating (Ahmed & Masood, 2025).

While media effects theory provides valuable insights into social media's role in political engagement, it has limitations, particularly in overemphasizing media logic while underestimating structural influences on political behavior (Fourie, 2018). Critics argue that weaker versions of mediatization theory lack the explanatory depth needed to differentiate between media-driven political change and broader structural shifts (Ampuja

et al., 2014). Despite the transformative impact of social media on political engagement, its ability to sustain long-term participation remains contested. Understanding how Catholic youth navigate digital political spaces is essential to assessing their role in Indonesia's evolving democracy.

This research offers a significant novelty by investigating the intersection of religious identity and digital political engagement among Catholic youth in Indonesia--a domain that remains underexplored in both media studies and political communication scholarship. While previous studies have addressed political participation and media use separately, this study innovatively bridges them by focusing on how Catholic youth in the Archdiocese of Semarang construct their political awareness through digital media, particularly social media platforms. The study contributes new insights by integrating concepts of political attentiveness, information-seeking behavior, and faith-based civic identity within the framework of media effects and digital participation. It critically examines how exposure to political content in online spaces--shaped by both algorithmic structures and religious influences--impacts the cognitive and behavioral dimensions of political engagement. Unlike existing literature that tends to generalize youth behavior in digital politics, this research contextualizes digital engagement within a specific religious and institutional setting, offering a culturally grounded perspective on youth civic activism in the digital era. Moreover, it calls attention to the role of the Catholic Church as both a facilitator and a constraint in the development of political agency among young believers navigating modern democratic and digital environments.

This research explores how social media influences the political engagement of Catholic youth in the Archdiocese of Semarang, focusing on their political attentiveness, information-seeking behavior, and awareness. As digital spaces increasingly shape political discourse, understanding how religious youth navigate these platforms is essential for scholars, policymakers, and religious institutions seeking to cultivate politically literate and engaged citizens. With digital technologies reshaping access to political content, the interplay between engagement, information-seeking, and attentiveness has become more significant than ever (Eckstein et al., 2024; Yamamoto & Nah, 2018). This research highlights how Catholic youth move beyond passive consumption toward active political participation on social media, addressing both opportunities and challenges in faith-based civic engagement (Bunquin, 2019).

A key aspect of this study is the Catholic Church's role in shaping political engagement through digital platforms. The Church's engagement with media has evolved since the Second Vatican Council, which emphasized media's role in shaping public opinion and societal values (Arriola, 2024). However, unlike some religious groups that actively mobilize political participation online, the Catholic Church in Indonesia has traditionally taken a more reserved approach (Nilan & Wibawanto, 2023). This raises critical questions about how Catholic youth engage with political discourse in digital spaces and whether the Church should adopt a more proactive role in fostering digital civic education. As social media continues to redefine political participation, this study provides insights into how religious identity intersects with digital activism and the potential for Catholic youth to become more engaged contributors to Indonesia's democratic landscape.

The selection of Catholic youth in the Archdiocese of Semarang (KAS) as the object of the research is grounded in theological, sociological, and political communication considerations. While the Catholic Church prohibits clergy from participating in partisan politics, it encourages laypeople--including youth--to engage in public life. The Second

Vatican Council's *Gaudium et Spes* underscores the Church's moral duty to promote justice, peace, and human dignity in society (Jehaut, 2021; Maryono, 2012; Wijayanti, 2019). As laypersons, Catholic youth are encouraged to participate in politics in ways that reflect Christian ethics. KAS plays a strategic role in fostering such engagement through leadership development, faith-based education, and social formation. The archdiocese has a strong tradition of involving youth in sociopolitical initiatives through institutions like the Commission for Justice and Peace and the Commission for Youth. Its OMK networks span urban and semi-urban areas in Yogyakarta and Central Java--regions that reflect the social diversity of Indonesia--making KAS an ideal context for studying faith-based political awareness among youth. Sociologically, OMK in KAS demonstrate strong social capital through their community networks rooted in shared values and trust. This aligns with (Putnam, 2001) theory that civic engagement thrives in such environments. Digitally, Catholic youth in KAS are highly active in using social media not only for religious expression but also for civic initiatives like voter education and advocacy campaigns. This makes them an ideal case for studying how religious identity intersects with digital political engagement (Loader et al., 2014).

Methods

This study employed a quantitative survey method to examine the relationship between social media use, political awareness, and political participation among Catholic youth in the Archdiocese of Semarang (*Keuskupan Agung Semarang (KAS)*). The method was selected to provide a comprehensive, measurable understanding of political behavior among a religiously and socially active youth population. Catholic youth in the Archdiocese of Semarang were chosen based on their strong sociocultural networks, active digital presence, and the Church's consistent efforts in fostering civic engagement rooted in Christian ethics. Their context, shaped by both theological and sociopolitical influences, offers a relevant case for studying the intersection of faith and digital political behavior.

A multistage cluster random sampling technique was applied to select 447 respondents from five parishes with the largest youth populations across the KAS region--Semarang, Kedu, Surakarta, West Yogyakarta, and East Yogyakarta. Data were collected electronically from August to October 2023 using a structured questionnaire via Google Forms. Variables measured included internet usage, political information-seeking, attentiveness, awareness, and participation. No major modifications were made to the survey method, but the application was contextually tailored to reflect local parish demographics. Responses were coded and analyzed using SPSS for both descriptive and exploratory purposes, allowing for systematic classification of engagement levels among respondents.

Results

The demographic data offer insight into the characteristics of Catholic youth in the Archdiocese of Semarang (*KAS*) who took part in the study. The gender composition is fairly even, consisting of 48.3% male and 51.7% female respondents. In terms of age, the majority belong to the 15-19 age group (49.9%), followed by 20-24 years (37.4%), while the 25-35 age group constitutes the smallest proportion (12.8%). Regarding educational background, most respondents have completed high school (53.7%) or hold a diploma/junior degree (42.7%), while only a small percentage (0.9%) have pursued postgraduate education. In terms of occupation, over 70% of respondents are students,

both at the secondary and higher education levels, while the remainder consists of employees (16.3%), entrepreneurs/self-employed individuals (7.2%), and those in other occupations (3.4%). These demographic findings suggest that the majority of Catholic youth in KAS are still in their formative years, actively engaged in education, and have varying degrees of exposure to political discourse based on their academic and professional backgrounds.

This study examines three primary variables: internet usage, which includes political information-seeking and political attentiveness; political awareness; and political participation. The data analysis provides insights into how young Catholics in the Archdiocese of Semarang (KAS) engage with digital platforms, their levels of political awareness, and their participation in civic activities.

The findings indicate that Catholic youth in KAS spend an average of 10.5 hours per day on the internet, with a standard deviation of 5.5 hours. Based on this, internet usage intensity was categorized into three levels: low (less than five hours per day), medium (between 5.5 and 16 hours per day), and high (more than 16 hours per day). The majority of respondents fall into the medium-intensity category, using the internet between 5.5 and 16 hours per day. A smaller proportion, categorized as low-intensity users, access the internet for less than five hours per day, while the high-intensity category, consisting of individuals who spend over 16 hours daily online, forms the smallest group.

Table 1. Frequency statistics

No.	Variables	Dimension	Frequency	%
1.	Internet Use	Intensity		
		High (>16 hours)	55	12.3
		Medium (5.5 - 16 hours)	321	71.8
		Low (\geq 5 hours)	71	15.9
		Motives		
		Interpersonal Utility	211	47.2
		Information Seeking	67	15.0
		Entertainment	66	14.8
		Comfort	62	13.9
		Passed Time	41	9.2
2.	Political Information Seeking	Level		
		Often	52	11.6
		Sometimes	112	25.1
3.	Political Attentiveness	Level		
		Rare	283	63.3
		High	133	29.8
4.	Political Awareness	Level		
		Medium	138	30.9
		Low	176	39.4
4.	Political Awareness	Level		
		High	65	14.5
		Medium	331	74.0
		Low	51	11.4
		Elements		
	Overall		81.0	
	Public Policy		84.4	
	Political Figure		87.6	

No.	Variables	Dimension	Frequency	%
		Political Issues		70.9
5.	Political Participation	Level		
		High	51	11.4
		Medium	338	75.6
		Low	58	13.0
		Elements		
		Overall		19.9
		Elections		73.8
		Protest		21.1
		Consumer		17.0
		Contact		12.3
		Party		4.8

Note: Data are based on a quantitative survey of 447 Catholic youth in the Archdiocese of Semarang, Indonesia. Categories of internet use intensity were defined as low (<5 hours/day), medium (5.5–16 hours/day), and high (>16 hours/day). Political variables (information-seeking, attentiveness, awareness, participation) were classified into low, medium, and high using mean and standard deviation distribution. Percentages are calculated from the total respondents (n=447)

The descriptive results in [Table 1](#) illustrate the distribution of Catholic youth's internet use, political information-seeking, attentiveness, awareness, and participation. The data show that the majority of respondents (71.8%) fall into the medium-intensity category of internet use, spending between 5.5 and 16 hours online per day, with interpersonal communication (47.2%) dominating as the primary motive. Political information-seeking, however, is relatively low, with more than 63% of respondents rarely seeking political content online. Political attentiveness is distributed almost evenly across low (39.4%), medium (30.9%), and high (29.8%) categories, indicating that even youth who rarely seek political information may still display moderate or high attentiveness. Political awareness is generally high, particularly regarding political figures (87.6%) and public policy (84.4%), but participation remains limited, with most respondents engaged only in electoral activities (73.8%). These findings confirm the substantial gap between political awareness and broader political participation.

Regarding the purpose of internet use, interpersonal communication dominates, with nearly half of respondents indicating that their primary motivation for internet use is social interaction. Political information-seeking ranks second, with a significantly lower percentage. Other motivations include entertainment, convenience, and passing time, which collectively account for a substantial portion of internet usage. These findings suggest that while Catholic youth in KAS are highly engaged online, their primary focus remains on social interaction and entertainment rather than active political engagement.

In terms of political information-seeking behavior, the study reveals that more than half of the respondents rarely seek political information online. A smaller proportion occasionally seeks political content, while an even smaller percentage actively and frequently engages with political news or discussions. This indicates that political information-seeking is not a primary focus of internet use, reinforcing the notion that exposure to political content does not necessarily translate into deliberate information-seeking behavior. The findings suggest that while social media provides access to political information, youth engagement remains largely passive, with only a fraction of respondents actively searching for political news or analysis.

Alongside the political information-seeking variable, respondents were also asked to indicate their level of political attentiveness, with the results presented in [Table 1](#). The distribution of political attentiveness levels is relatively balanced, with 39.4% categorized as having low political attention, 30.9% classified as having moderate political attention, and 29.8% as having high political attention. The gaps between these categories are relatively small compared to political information-seeking, particularly between moderate and high attentiveness, which differ by only 1.1%. This suggests that while the majority of respondents spend a significant amount of time online for interpersonal communication, they do not necessarily engage in active political information-seeking. However, low political information-seeking does not always indicate a lack of political attention, meaning that some individuals who rarely seek political information may still demonstrate moderate or high levels of attentiveness. A more detailed analysis of the relationship between these two variables will be explored in the following section.

Political awareness in this study is conceptualized as political knowledge across three dimensions: public policy, political figures, and public issues. The data indicates that Catholic youth in the Archdiocese of Semarang generally exhibit a high level of political awareness, with an overall average score of 81 out of 100. While among the three dimensions, awareness of political figures ranks highest at 87.6%, suggesting that respondents are more familiar with political actors than they are with public policies (84.4%) and public issues (70.9%).

Categorizing respondents based on cumulative means and standard deviations reveals that 74% fall within the moderate political awareness category, 14.5% exhibit high political awareness, and 11.4% demonstrate low political awareness. These findings suggest that while Catholic youth in KAS are relatively knowledgeable about political actors and policies, their awareness of broader public issues is comparatively lower, which may have implications for their level of civic engagement and political participation.

Regarding the political participation, the findings indicate that the overall level of political participation among Catholic youth in the Archdiocese of Semarang is significantly lower than their political awareness. The average political participation score is 19.9, which is far below the political awareness score of 81.0. This suggests a considerable gap between knowledge of political issues and actual involvement in political activities.

A more detailed analysis reveals that electoral participation is the most prominent form of engagement, with an average score of 73.8. However, other forms of political participation lag far behind. Participation in protests scores 21.1, political consumerism 17.0, contact with political representatives 12.3, and involvement in political parties is the lowest at 4.8.

When categorized based on mean and standard deviation, most respondents (75.6%) fall within the medium participation category, while 13.0% have low participation, and only 11.4% are classified as highly engaged. These findings highlight that while young Catholics in KAS participate in electoral processes, their involvement in other forms of political activism remains minimal, indicating that political engagement is largely event-driven rather than sustained.

To explore the strength of variables relationships, a correlation test was conducted to measure the degree of association between these variables. The results of this correlation analysis are presented in [Table 2](#) below, providing deeper insight into how these factors influence each other within the context of political engagement.

Table 2. Correlation Test

		Political Attention	Political Information Seeking	Political Awareness	Political Participation
Political Attention	Pearson Correlation	1	.740	.188	.221
	Sig (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
Political Information Seeking	Pearson Correlation	.740	1	.154	.270
	Sig (2-tailed)	.000		.001	.000
Political Awareness	Pearson Correlation	.188	.154	1	.127
	Sig (2-tailed)	.000	.001		.007
Political Participation	Pearson Correlation	.221	.270	.127	1
	Sig (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.007	

Note: Pearson correlation analysis was conducted among four main variables: political attention, political information-seeking, political awareness, and political participation.

Significance was tested at the 0.01 level (two-tailed). Correlation strength follows Cohen’s (1988) guidelines: 0.800–1.000=very strong, 0.600–0.799=strong, 0.400–0.599=medium, 0.200–0.399=weak, and 0.000–0.199=very weak. Results indicate associations, not causal relationships (n=447)

Based on the coefficient intervals presented in Table 3, political attention demonstrates a strong correlation with political information-seeking (r=0.740, p=0.000), suggesting that individuals who actively pay attention to political matters are also more likely to seek political information. However, political attention exhibits only a very weak correlation with political awareness (r=0.188, p=0.000) and a weak correlation with political participation (r=0.221, p=0.000), indicating that attentiveness alone does not necessarily translate into greater awareness or increased participation in political activities.

Table 3. Relationship Level Table

Coefficient Interval	Relationship Level
0.800 - 1.000	Very Strong
0.600 - 0.799	Strong
0.400 - 0.599	Medium
0.200 - 0.399	Weak
0.000 - 0.199	Very Weak

Note: The correlation strength classifications are based on Cohen’s (1988) guidelines for interpreting correlation coefficients

Similarly, political information-seeking shows a very weak correlation with political awareness (r=0.154, p=0.001) and a weak correlation with political participation (r=0.270, p=0.000). This suggests that while individuals who actively seek political information may have slightly higher levels of political participation, the impact remains limited. Meanwhile, political awareness has the weakest correlation with political participation (r=0.127, p=0.007), reinforcing the notion that simply being politically aware does not strongly predict active involvement in political activities. These findings highlight the complex and indirect relationship between digital political engagement and real-world political participation.

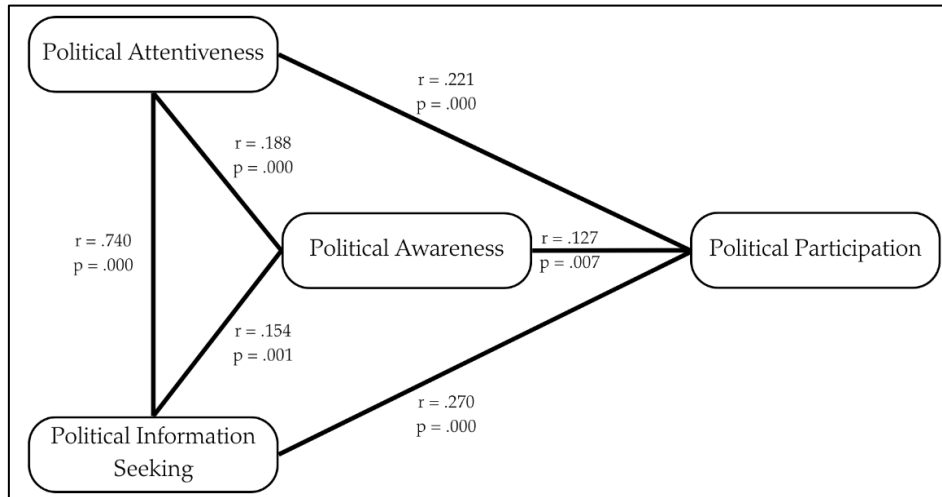


Figure 1. Correlation analysis model (source: Data processed by researchers)

The relationship among variables is further visualized in Figure 1, which depicts the correlation analysis model. Political attentiveness shows the strongest positive correlation with political information-seeking ($r=0.740$, $p<0.001$), indicating that attentive youth are significantly more inclined to seek political content. However, both variables show only weak associations with political participation ($r=0.221$ and $r=0.270$, respectively). Political awareness demonstrates the weakest relationship with participation ($r=0.127$, $p<0.01$), underscoring that knowledge of politics does not automatically translate into civic action. Taken together, these results highlight a paradox of Catholic youth engagement: high levels of awareness and online activity coexist with low levels of sustained political participation.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal a complex interplay between internet use, political information-seeking, political attentiveness, political awareness, and political participation among Catholic youth in the Archdiocese of Semarang. While digital platforms provide unprecedented access to political information, high levels of internet use do not necessarily translate into increased political engagement or active civic participation. This reinforces the growing concern that digital political engagement remains largely superficial, with political content being encountered passively rather than actively sought (Barrett & Zani, 2014; Boulianne, 2015; Gil De Zúñiga et al., 2017).

Catholic youth in Archdiocese of Semarang exhibit high internet usage, averaging 10.5 hours per day, yet their primary motivation for being online is social communication and entertainment rather than political information-seeking (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000). The study finds that only 15% of respondents actively seek political information, suggesting that political engagement is not an automatic consequence of digital connectivity but rather depends on specific motivational factors that drive individuals toward civic and political knowledge (Prior, 2007). This aligns with uses and gratifications theory (UGT), which posits that media consumption is shaped by individual motivations rather than passive exposure alone (Katz et al., 1973). The findings also support the displacement hypothesis, which suggests that entertainment-driven media consumption often replaces substantive engagement with political content, potentially reducing civic awareness and participation (Putnam, 2001).

A notable finding is the strong correlation between political attentiveness and political information-seeking ($r=0.740$, $p=0.000$), demonstrating that politically attentive

individuals are far more likely to seek out political content, whereas those who are politically indifferent remain disengaged despite their digital access to information (Carpini & Keeter, 1996). This aligns with selective exposure theory (Maheux et al., 2024) which suggests that individuals gravitate toward content that aligns with their existing interests while avoiding politically incongruent information (Stroud, 2008). Even though digital platforms provide abundant access to political information, only those already inclined toward politics actively engage with it, reinforcing existing knowledge disparities and limiting the potential for broad-based political participation (Prior, 2013).

Despite relatively low levels of political information-seeking, the study finds that political awareness among Catholics youth in Archdiocese of Semarang remains high, with an average score of 81.0 out of 100. Political awareness is strongest in the category of political figures (87.6%), followed by public policies (84.4%), while awareness of public issues (70.9%) is significantly lower. This suggests that political awareness is shaped more by mainstream political narratives and high-profile events rather than active civic engagement. The results support the agenda-setting theory, which suggests that media shape public awareness by highlighting specific political issues, guiding what people consider important. However, this influence does not always translate into deeper political understanding or active participation (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

However, the weak correlation between political awareness and political participation ($r=0.127$, $p=0.007$) highlights a knowledge-action paradox, where individuals may be politically informed but remain passive due to institutional distrust, low political efficacy, or perceived barriers to participation (Abdo-Katsipis, 2017; Zukin et al., 2006). Research on political efficacy suggests that individuals must not only understand political issues but also believe that their actions can make a meaningful impact (Brady et al., 1995; Liang, 2024). Without a sense of efficacy, even well-informed individuals may refrain from civic engagement, limiting their role in shaping democratic processes (Dalton & Welzel, 2014).

Political participation among Catholic youth in Archdiocese of Semarang is significantly lower than political awareness, with an average score of 19.9 out of 100. The findings indicate that voting in elections (73.8%) remains the most dominant form of participation, while engagement in protests (21.1%), political consumerism (17.0%), contacting political representatives (12.3%), and party involvement (4.8%) remain limited. This suggests that Catholic youth primarily engage in institutionalized forms of participation, such as voting (Inguanzo et al., 2024), but are reluctant to participate in continuous civic activism beyond electoral cycles.

The findings indicate that while Catholic youth in the Archdiocese of Semarang exhibit high political awareness, their participation remains largely confined to electoral engagement, with limited involvement in broader civic activities such as activism and grassroots movements. This suggests a lack of accessible pathways for sustained political engagement beyond elections. This pattern reflects the distinction between institutionalized and non-institutionalized participation (Huttunen & Christensen, 2020), where the former involves formal electoral and party-based engagement, while the latter includes protests and social activism (García-Albacete, 2014). These results align with the framework proposed by Teorell & Torcal which highlights the structural differences between these two forms of participation (Teorell & Torcal, 2007).

A particularly revealing insight is that 75.6% of respondents reported medium levels of participation, while only 11.4% demonstrated high participation, suggesting that sporadic or indirect engagement dominates political behavior. This indicates that non-

traditional forms of political activism, such as digital engagement, may be replacing conventional participation patterns (Loader et al., 2014). However, while social media engagement can facilitate political involvement, it does not automatically lead to sustained activism unless coupled with institutional or community-based mobilization efforts (W. L. Bennett & Segerberg, 2012).

The strong correlation between political attention and political information-seeking ($r=0.740$, $p=0.000$) highlights the importance of political attentiveness in shaping engagement behaviors. However, the weaker correlation between information-seeking and participation ($r=0.270$, $p=0.000$) reinforces the notion that access to political information does not necessarily result in civic action (Brady et al., 1995).

The finding that political attention is more strongly correlated with participation ($r=0.221$, $p=0.000$) than political awareness ($r=0.127$, $p=0.007$) suggests that being engaged with political discussions and current events is a stronger predictor of civic participation than merely possessing political knowledge (Gastil & Xenos, 2010a). This supports the dual-pathway model of political participation, which argues that both knowledge and attention are essential, but attention is the more active driver of engagement (Dalton & Welzel, 2014).

The findings of this study highlight a paradox in youth political engagement in the digital era. While Catholic youth in the Archdiocese of Semarang demonstrate high levels of internet use, their engagement with political content remains selective and limited. Despite high political awareness, there is little correlation between knowledge and participation, suggesting that awareness alone is insufficient for fostering sustained civic action. This support concerns that digital political engagement is often passive, with individuals consuming political content without actively participating in democratic processes (Casemajor et al., 2015; Christensen, 2012).

Social media plays a multifaceted role in influencing political participation. While digital platforms provide access to political content, the presence of algorithmic curation and selective exposure may limit the diversity of perspectives encountered. This phenomenon reinforces partisan engagement rather than fostering deliberative democracy (W. L. Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Easy access to political content does not necessarily lead to active participation, as people often prefer information that reinforces their existing views, thereby restricting their exposure to diverse perspectives. This selective engagement contributes to ideological polarization and hinders meaningful political discourse.

Bridging the gap between awareness and participation requires institutional support. The Catholic Church could play a critical role in encouraging active engagement with political issues, and promoting long-term civic involvement. Without structured interventions, digital political engagement among Catholic youth in the Archdiocese of Semarang may remain fragmented, episodic, and largely confined to electoral cycles rather than sustained democratic participation.

This research reveals a gap between political awareness, digital activity, and ongoing political involvement among Catholic youth in the Archdiocese of Semarang. Although social media offers exposure to political content, it does not automatically lead to civic action. One of the main reasons for this disconnect is the lack of institutional and community-driven efforts to mobilize youth, which are essential for converting online engagement into lasting participation (W. L. Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Institutional mobilization, driven by political parties, religious organizations, and advocacy groups, provides structured engagement through voter education, leadership development, and

policy advocacy (Brady et al., 1995). In contrast, community-based mobilization relies on decentralized, peer-driven activism, leveraging digital platforms for rapid engagement but often struggling to maintain long-term momentum.

There are two models of mobilization: organizationally-enabled collective action, which fosters structured and sustained participation, and personalized collective action networks, which drive viral but short-lived activism. While formal institutions provide stability and policy influence (Dalton & Welzel, 2014), Catholic youth in Semarang remain largely disengaged from structured organizations, relying instead on digital activism without direct institutional support. Although digital platforms enable grassroots mobilization and short-term advocacy, they lack the long-term sustainability of institutional efforts. To bridge this gap, integrating structured institutional engagement with dynamic community-driven activism is essential in fostering sustained political participation.

Catholic youth in the Archdiocese of Semarang exhibit high political awareness but minimal participation beyond elections. While institutional mobilization provides long-term engagement and community-based activism offers immediate involvement, neither alone is sufficient to address digital-age political disengagement. A hybrid model integrating institutional support with grassroots digital activism is essential for fostering sustained civic participation. Religious and civic institutions must leverage digital platforms to bridge the gap between structured political engagement and youth-driven activism. Interactive online campaigns, peer-led mobilization, and cross-ideological dialogues can enhance participation while mitigating selective exposure and polarization (Sinpeng, 2017). However, digital activism must be complemented by offline civic initiatives, such as advocacy training and voter mobilization, to ensure meaningful impact. Without strategic institutional and community-based efforts, political engagement will remain fragmented and episodic. Moving forward, collaboration between religious institutions, civic organizations, and digital advocacy groups is crucial to transforming political awareness into sustained participation, empowering Catholic youth to become active contributors to Indonesia's democratic future.

While this study offers valuable insights into the political engagement of Catholic youth in the Archdiocese of Semarang, several limitations must be considered. The focus on a specific religious and regional group restricts the broader applicability of the findings to other contexts within Indonesia. Moreover, the exclusive use of quantitative survey methods limits the depth of understanding regarding personal motivations, lived experiences, and potential obstacles to participation--dimensions that qualitative approaches could have enriched. Finally, the study's dependence on self-reported data raises the possibility of social desirability bias, as respondents may have exaggerated or downplayed their levels of political involvement. The study also does not account for the evolving nature of digital algorithms and online political discourse, which continuously shape how young people interact with political content. Finally, while the study identifies a gap between political awareness and participation, it does not extensively explore the impact of external factors such as government policies, media regulations, or socio-economic conditions, which could further influence political engagement among Catholic youth. To gain a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of youth political participation in Indonesia, future research should adopt a comparative approach that examines diverse religious communities. Such an approach would illuminate how varying faith traditions intersect with political engagement. Additionally, integrating qualitative methods would offer deeper insight into the personal narratives, motivations, and

challenges that shape young people's involvement in civic life--elements that often remain hidden in purely quantitative studies.

Conclusion

This study reveals a paradox in the political engagement of Catholic youth in the Archdiocese of Semarang: while they are highly active on social media, their interaction with political content remains selective and largely passive, limiting its impact on active civic participation. Despite relatively high political awareness, engagement beyond electoral participation remains low, suggesting that political knowledge alone does not drive action. Instead, political attentiveness--rather than awareness--emerges as a stronger predictor of participation, reinforcing the notion that being actively engaged in political discussions and events is more influential than simply possessing political information. However, social media's role in fostering sustained political participation is constrained by algorithmic curation, selective exposure, and ideological polarization, which often reinforce fragmented and episodic engagement. Without institutional or community-driven mobilization efforts, digital activism remains reactionary rather than strategic, failing to translate awareness into sustained civic action. To address this gap, this study advocates for a hybrid model of mobilization, integrating institutional support with grassroots digital activism to cultivate long-term political involvement. Religious institutions, civic organizations, and educational institutions must play a more proactive role in fostering critical political engagement beyond electoral cycles. As digital platforms continue to shape political discourse, the future of Catholic youth engagement in Indonesia's democracy will depend on whether they remain passive consumers of political content or evolve into active participants driving meaningful change.

Conflict of Interest

We affirm that there are no conflicts of interest--financial, personal, or otherwise--with any individuals or organizations in relation to the content presented in this manuscript.

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