



## The Role of TikTok and Instagram Social Media in Strengthening Gen Z Citizenship Identity

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received: 09 Jan 2026

Revised: 10 March 2026

Accepted: 14 April 2026

Published online: 21 April 2026

#### Keywords:

Generation Z,  
Citizenship Identity,  
Instagram,  
Social Media,  
TikTok

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#### Article Doi:

<https://doi.org/10.31258/jes.10.4.p.965-976>

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### ABSTRACT

TikTok and Instagram social media have become interactive spaces in the lives of Generation Z. Platform use influences how communicate, obtain information, and learn non-formally, there impact's digital citizenship identity. This study aims to analyze the level of TikTok and Instagram usage, measure relationship between social media usage and digital citizenship identity, and strengthen the role of digital citizenship identity in students. The study used mixed-methods approach with sequential explanation strategy. Quantitative data were obtained through questionnaires distributed to 120 students, while qualitative data were collected through interviews to deepen the results. The findings indicate that TikTok and Instagram usage are in the high category. Spearman's correlation test showed a significant relationship between social media usage and students' digital citizenship identity ( $r = 0.433$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). Qualitative findings confirm that TikTok and Instagram social media content plays a role in increasing civic literacy, tolerance, and national awareness. The study's conclusions indicate that TikTok and Instagram have an important role in strengthening Generation Z's digital citizenship identity, especially when used positively and selectively, and when they support national values. This study also encourages the development of educational content on social media for civic learning.

## 1. Introduction

Generation Z thrives in a digital ecosystem that is integrated with daily activities, where social media plays a role as the main space for interaction and exchange of information. Advances in information and communication technology allow the flow of global information to flow rapidly, influencing the way the younger generation interacts, responds to social issues, and understands national values through social media (Ibrahim et al., 2025). The complexity of citizenship identity in the digital era is increasing along with visual, interactive, and real-time content

consumption patterns (Ghegut-Babii et al., 2025). This phenomenon shows that social media is becoming the main place for Gen Z to communicate, express themselves, and build their social identity. However, the high use of social media also has negative impacts, such as digital addiction, social pressure, and the possibility of spreading misinformation (Nafisah & Jannah, 2024). In this context, citizenship identity refers to students' digital citizenship identity formed through interaction and participation in digital spaces.

One of the main theories in social media studies is *Media Dependency Theory* which was developed by Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur in 1976. This theory states that the greater a person's dependence on the media for informational needs, the greater the influence of the media on attitudes and behaviors. In line with this, Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning National Education stipulates that the purpose of education is to form students to become active, intelligent, and responsible citizens (Indonesia, 2003). This juridical framework is an important guideline in strengthening the national character of the younger generation in the midst of digital dynamics. In Indonesia, this strengthening is supported by character education as a mandatory part of the national education system that instills religious values, nationalism, integrity, independence, and mutual cooperation. Along with the development of digital technology, character education now extends to the social media space which acts as a new environment in the formation of the attitude and digital citizenship identity of the younger generation (Amaliyah et al., 2025).

TikTok and Instagram are the most intensely used social media platforms by Generation Z and have a significant influence on communication patterns, information consumption, and the formation of their digital identity. The characteristics of visual, interactive, and algorithm-based content make TikTok a space for creative expression as well as a medium for conveying social messages that have an impact on the attitudes and values of the younger generation (Laor & Galily, 2025). On the other hand, Instagram continues to play a strategic role as a visual space for Generation Z to build self-image, establish social relationships, and negotiate citizenship values and views through the practice of self-expression and digital interaction (Haq et al., 2025). Instagram also plays an important role in the process of forming young people's identity because it allows them to express themselves through visual content and digital interaction (Ramadhani, 2024).

A number of studies show that social media plays a role in shaping the citizenship identity of the younger generation through different patterns of interaction and information consumption on each platform (Putri et al., 2024). TikTok and Instagram are developing as digital social spaces that allow for self-expression, social participation, and contextual internalization of national values (Manik et al., 2024). However, previous studies have tended to examine one platform or discuss identity in general without looking at the simultaneous influence of the two (Assidiq et al., 2023). Therefore, this study focuses on the role of TikTok and Instagram in strengthening Generation Z's digital citizenship identity in the high school environment (Afifah & Kuntari, 2025).

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In the lives of Generation Z, social media has evolved into a social space that facilitates interaction, information exchange, and the formation of social meaning in a sustainable manner. Social media is used not only as a means of entertainment, but also as a medium for the younger generation to express their views, build social relationships, and respond to issues that develop in the digital public space. Previous studies have shown that the active involvement of young people on social media contributes to the formation of attitudes and values of digital citizenship (Ilmita et al., 2025). Thus, social media has an important position in the process of forming Generation Z's digital citizenship identity.

The increasing intensity of social media use among Generation Z places digital literacy as an important competency in 21st century citizenship. Digital literacy is not only related to mastering technology, but also includes critical thinking skills, ethical awareness, and social responsibility in utilizing digital information. The digital environment contributes to shaping students' social awareness and citizenship attitudes through the experience of interaction and content consumption (Wahyun et al., 2025). In addition, social media serves as a digital social space that allows the younger generation to develop citizenship values, attitudes, and orientations through active involvement in various social and national issues (Yudistira et al., 2025). Thus, TikTok and Instagram can be understood as relevant digital citizenship practice spaces in the process of forming Generation Z's citizenship identity.

The novelty of this research lies in the study of two main social media platforms, namely TikTok and Instagram simultaneously in the context of the formation of digital citizenship identity of high school students. Unlike previous research that tended to examine social media partially or focus on social identity in general, this study integrates quantitative and qualitative approaches to uncover the patterns of use, meaning processes, and pedagogical implications of social media on strengthening the citizenship identity of Generation Z.

## 2. Methodology

This study uses a mixed methods approach with a *sequential explanatory design* (Khabibullah et al., 2024), which begins with a quantitative stage to obtain numerical data on the level of social media use of TikTok and Instagram and their relationship with strengthening digital citizenship identity. Then it is followed by a qualitative stage to explore in depth the experiences, perceptions, and meanings of students' social media activities. This approach was chosen to gain a comprehensive understanding of the role of social media in shaping the digital citizenship identity of Generation Z students.

The research was conducted at SMAN 1 Dampit in November 2025. The research subjects at the quantitative stage involved 120 students in grades X, XI, and XII who actively used TikTok and Instagram. Meanwhile, the qualitative stage involved a total of 5 students and 1 teacher of Pancasila and Citizenship Education (PPKn) so that the data obtained was contextual and in-depth. The sampling technique used

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purposive sampling with the criteria of active students using TikTok and Instagram. The questionnaire instrument was prepared based on indicators of frequency of use, intensity of interaction, and forms of digital participation, as well as indicators of digital citizenship identity which include understanding of citizenship values, attitudes towards national issues, citizenship participation, and responsibilities as digital citizens. The use of structured instruments in educational research is considered effective for systematically measuring students' attitudes and understanding, especially when supported by a clear process of instrument development and validation (Maisaroh et al., 2025).

Qualitative data collection was carried out through semi-structured interviews, observations, and documentation studies. These techniques were used to obtain a contextual picture of how students use social media and how these activities are interpreted in relation to digital citizenship identity. Quantitative analysis was carried out using descriptive statistics and Spearman correlation tests to see patterns and trends in social media use, while qualitative analysis was carried out through *thematic analysis*, including data reduction, categorization, presentation, and drawing conclusions to understand the meaning and experience of students. Data integration is carried out at the interpretation stage, where quantitative results become the basis for qualitative exploration, and qualitative results provide contextual explanations of statistically found patterns.

The validity of quantitative data is guaranteed through the implementation of instrument validity and reliability tests. The results of the reliability test showed a Cronbach's Alpha value of  $> 0.70$ , which indicates that the research instrument has a good level of reliability. Meanwhile, the validity of qualitative data is maintained through source triangulation and member checking. All respondents participated voluntarily with a guarantee of identity confidentiality, and the study had obtained ethical approval from the research institute of the university to which the researcher was affiliated.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

This study involved SMAN 1 Dampit students as respondents with the aim of obtaining an empirical picture of the level of social media use of TikTok and Instagram and its relationship with strengthening the digital citizenship identity of Generation Z students. Each level is represented by 40 students, so the composition of respondents in this study is proportional and evenly distributed between grade levels. The descriptive analysis in this study aims to provide an overview of the level of social media use of TikTok and Instagram among students of SMAN 1 Dampit. The analysis was carried out on all respondents totaling 120 students, regardless of class level, so that the data presented reflected the general conditions of social media use of Generation Z students in the school. Based on the results of data processing, the level of social media usage of TikTok and Instagram can be classified into four categories, namely low, medium, high, and very high. The distribution of students' overall social media usage levels is presented in Table 1.

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Table 1. Distribution of Students' Social Media Use Levels at SMAN 1 Dampit

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Low	2	1.7	1.7	1.7
	Medium	17	14.2	14.2	15.9
	High	81	67.5	67.5	83.4
	Very high	20	16.6	16.6	100.0
	Total	120	100.0	100.0	

Based on table 1, it can be seen that the majority of SMAN 1 Dampit students are in the high category in the use of social media TikTok and Instagram. The data shows the dominance of the high to very high category, which confirms the intensity of social media use among students. In addition, 20 students (16.6%) were in the very high category, which indicates that some students have a very strong intensity of social media use. Meanwhile, students in the medium category amounted to 17 people (14.2%). This number shows that there are still some students who use social media with a relatively moderate intensity. The low category was only occupied by 2 students (1.7%), which indicates that the use of low-intensity social media is relatively rare among respondents. To clarify Table 1, which shows the distribution of digital citizenship identity levels among students at SMAN 1 Dampit through their use of TikTok and Instagram, the data is presented visually. This presentation aims to facilitate readers' understanding of social media usage levels more clearly and comprehensively. Thus, this visualization helps reinforce the understanding of the data presented previously. Therefore, the results are presented graphically in Figure 1.

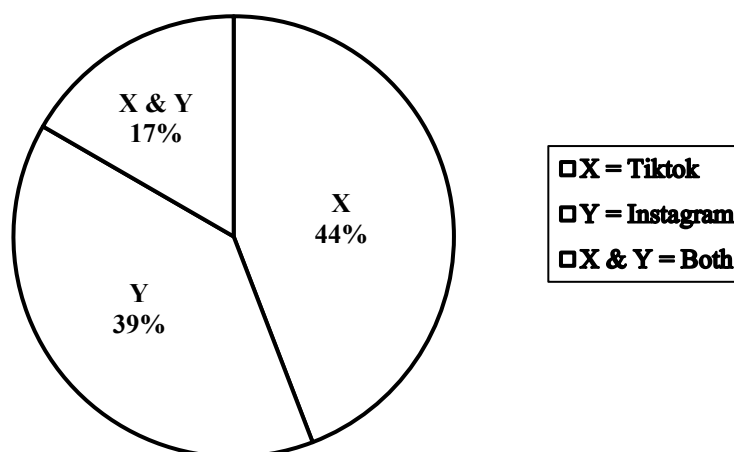


Figure 1. Social Media User Level of SMAN 1 Dampit Students

In general, the results of the descriptive analysis show that the use of TikTok and Instagram social media among SMAN 1 Dampit students is dominated by the high to very high category. These findings indicate that social media has become a fairly intense part of students' daily activities. Nonetheless, variations in usage rates were still found, which was reflected in the presence of students in the medium and low categories. These variations indicate differences in social media usage patterns

among individual students. Spearman correlation is a non-parametric statistical method used to assess the monotone relationship between two variables. In contrast to parametric correlation which requires the data to be linear and normally distributed, this correlation is suitable for data that does not meet the assumption of normality or that is ordinal-scale. The Spearman coefficient, denoted by the Greek letter "rho" ( $\rho$ ), was first introduced by Charles Spearman in 1904 (Alfansuri et al., 2025). To see the relationship between variables, Spearman correlation analysis is used. The results are shown in table 2.

Table 2. Spearman Rank Correlation Test

<b>MS_TT_IG_ Total</b>	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.433**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	120	120
<b>Identity _ Total</b>	Correlation Coefficient	.433**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	120	120

The results of Spearman's correlation test showed a positive relationship between the use of TikTok and Instagram social media and the digital citizenship identity of students at SMAN 1 Dampit. A correlation coefficient value of 0.433 with a significance level of 0.000 ( $p < 0.05$ ) indicates that the relationship is statistically significant. These findings suggest that an increase in the intensity of TikTok and Instagram use tends to be followed by a strengthening of students' digital citizenship identity. A correlation coefficient of 0.433 indicates moderate relationship strength which indicates that social media contributes significantly but is not the only factor shaping students' digital citizenship identity.

The results of this study are strengthened by previous findings that emphasize the role of social media in the formation of the citizenship identity of the younger generation. This shows that Instagram functions as a digital social space that allows the internalization of Pancasila values through content consumption patterns and engagement in online communities (Idaman & Kencana, 2021). These findings are consistent with the results of current research that shows a positive relationship between Instagram use and strengthening students' digital citizenship identity. Meanwhile, social media encourages an understanding of national values and involvement in public issues. TikTok and Instagram shape Gen Z's social identity and self-image through online interaction if inappropriate use can cause social pressure (Alruthaya et al., 2021).

To explain more concretely the relationship between TikTok and Instagram use and students' digital citizenship identity ( $r = 0.433$ ), interview data were analyzed through a thematic coding process. The results of the analysis produced three main themes, namely: (1) strengthening citizenship literacy, (2) forming tolerance attitudes, and (3) digital citizenship participation. The first theme is strengthening citizenship literacy. The results of the interviews showed that exposure to content on TikTok and Instagram helped students understand national issues more actually and contextually. One of the students with the initials SL said:

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*"I have become more aware and understanding of the current political and social conditions in Indonesia. I also understand that differences in political choices are natural as long as they respect the rules and unity of the nation" (SL/08122025).*

The quote shows that the more intensely students access social media, the greater their chances of acquiring citizenship knowledge that is relevant to the current context. This finding explains the positive relationship between social media use and the cognitive dimension of digital citizenship identity, as reflected in the correlation value of 0.433. The second theme is related to the formation of attitudes of tolerance and social empathy. Interview data shows that content that features differences in backgrounds, cultures, and views encourages students to be more open to diversity. A student with the initials VA revealed:

*"The amount of content about differences makes me appreciate diversity more and be more careful in responding to differences of opinion" (VA/08122025).*

The statement shows that the use of TikTok and Instagram contributes to strengthening the affective aspect of digital citizenship identity, especially in forming tolerant and empathetic attitudes. This change in attitude is one of the explanations for the positive relationship between the use of social media and digital citizenship identity. The third theme is digital citizenship participation. The results of the interviews show that students are not only consumers of information, but also actively involved in citizenship activities in the digital space. A student with the initials RP stated:

*"I quite often express my opinions in the comment column, and sometimes I get a positive response from other users. If I find a hoax or hate speech, I usually report it, block the account, or provide clarification" (RP/08122025).*

This finding is strengthened by the statement of a PPKn teacher with the initials LD which states:

*"Students have shown positive digital participation, such as participating in social campaigns, promoting school activities, and creating educational content" (LD/09122025).*

The findings indicate that social media use also strengthens the behavioral dimension of students' digital citizenship identity. The moderate correlation (0.433) can be explained by increased citizenship understanding, the development of tolerance, and participatory behavior in digital spaces. Thus, the qualitative findings not only support the quantitative results but also provide a clearer empirical explanation of the relationship between TikTok and Instagram use and students' digital citizenship identity. This is in line with previous research that states that social media can be a means of learning citizenship values as well as a forum for digital expression, and adds a new perspective on TikTok's role as a platform that dynamically shapes digital citizenship identity in the digital era (Hakim, 2022). To strengthen the previous quantitative findings, semi-structured interviews were

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conducted with several grade XI students of SMAN 1 Dampit. Qualitative findings show that students' experiences on social media do not stop at content consumption activities, but continue on the formation of citizenship attitudes and behaviors in real life. Students' involvement in public issues, participation in social actions, and the habit of sharing information that is considered useful reflect the development of participatory orientation as digital citizens. Selective attitudes towards content, including the tendency to reject inaccurate or negative information, show a growing critical awareness in responding to the flow of information in the digital space.

The students' emphasis on the importance of digital ethics, such as commenting politely, accounting for opinions, and managing information carefully, indicates the formation of normative awareness in interacting in the digital public space. In the era *Society 5.0*, students are required to have digital competencies that include critical thinking skills, information literacy, and ethical awareness in utilizing digital technology as part of their citizenship identity (Wicaksono & Prasetyo, 2023). Thus, activities on TikTok and Instagram for students are not only a means of entertainment, but also a learning medium that provides hands-on experience in understanding citizenship issues and fostering awareness to act critically and responsibly.

Based on quantitative and qualitative data analysis, social media TikTok and Instagram contribute to strengthening the digital citizenship identity of Generation Z students at SMAN 1 Dampit. These findings align with the Media Dependency Theory, which explains that greater dependence on media increases its influence on attitudes and behavior (Wijaya et al., 2025). For students, TikTok and Instagram function as primary channels for understanding social and citizenship issues through activities such as watching, liking, commenting, and sharing content. This interaction process is also consistent with the ideas of Erik Erikson, who stated that adolescence is a crucial stage of identity exploration shaped by social experiences and interactions. Qualitative findings further show that students develop values of tolerance, diversity, and social awareness through educational content and discussions on social media. Thus, digital citizenship identity is formed not only through formal education but also through social experiences in the digital environment (Kamilla et al., 2022).

Modern citizenship develops through social practices and citizen participation in public spaces, including digital spaces. Thus, student activities on TikTok and Instagram can be understood as a form of digital citizenship practice. The results of the study show that the use of social media also encourages the growth of students' awareness of the importance of digital literacy (Hendaryan et al., 2022). These findings are in line with the concept of civic engagement, where citizenship involvement is manifested through active and responsible participation, both in the real world and in digital spaces (Astuti, 2021). Social media in this case functions as a means that allows students to participate in citizenship life contextually in accordance with the characteristics of Generation Z. The digital environment in the context of education is also understood as a social learning space that shapes attitudes, value orientation, and patterns of student participation (Yenita &

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Andriani, 2025). These findings reinforce the view that social media is neutral and its impact is highly dependent on the patterns of use and assistance provided.

Digital-based learning helps shape students' skills and attitudes in actively and responsibly utilizing technology (Handayani et al., 2023). The experience of interacting with digital media also influences the formation of students' attitudes and character, thus impacting their value orientation and social behavior (Rahmandani et al., 2018). Therefore, students' experiences in digital spaces need to be guided educationally to support the formation of citizenship values and character, in line with the objectives of citizenship education in fostering ethical attitudes, responsibility, and a sense of national values. (Zuriah & Sunaryo, 2022). In line with the focus of the research, this discussion shows that TikTok and Instagram are digital spaces that play a role in the process of strengthening the citizenship identity of Generation Z students at SMAN 1 Dampit. Through student engagement on social media-based content, interactions, and activities, both platforms present a citizenship experience that is contextual to the lives of adolescents. In this case, social media does not replace the role of citizenship education in schools.

The relationship between TikTok and Instagram use and students' digital citizenship identity can be understood through social learning processes in digital spaces. Exposure to public issues, interaction with other users, and reflection on content encourage students to connect information with citizenship values. In this context, digital literacy and the quality of social media experiences function as mediating factors that link social media use to the strengthening of digital citizenship identity. Although the correlation was moderate ( $r = 0.433$ ), the findings indicate that social media contributes partially and does not act as an independent determinant.

The development of digital citizenship identity is also influenced by other factors, including the school learning climate, the implementation of the Pancasila and Citizenship Education curriculum, and teachers' guidance in fostering critical digital engagement. The findings should therefore be interpreted cautiously, considering potential self-report bias and the limited measurement of content variety and depth of interaction. Consistent with previous research, the impact of digital media on adolescents' citizenship attitudes depends on the quality of interaction and learning context. Thus, the strengthening of digital citizenship identity cannot be explained solely by the intensity of social media use but must be understood alongside other supporting factors within school and family environments.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The use of social media TikTok and Instagram among SMAN 1 Dampit students is relatively high and has become an integral part of the daily lives of Generation Z. Both platforms are not only used as means of entertainment and communication, but also as sources of information and spaces for social interaction that contributes

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to the formation of students' digital citizenship identity. The findings indicate a positive association between the intensity of TikTok and Instagram use and the strengthening of students' digital citizenship identity. The higher the intensity of social media use, the stronger the tendency of students to show digital citizenship attitudes, such as concern for public issues, tolerance, national awareness, and the ability to respond to information critically and responsibly. These findings confirm that social media can serve as a supporting medium for citizenship learning outside the context of formal education. Based on the results of the interviews, the use of TikTok and Instagram by students is not solely consumptive, but also shapes their understanding of their roles as citizens in the digital era. Exposure to educational content, online discussions, and social interaction on social media encourages the development of digital literacy, the strengthening of national values, and ethical responsibility in digital behavior. Thus, social media serves as a contextual social learning space for the development of Generation Z students' digital citizenship identity. This study has limitations, including the focus on a single school and the use of self-report-based instruments which may lead to subjective bias. Therefore, further research is recommended to involve more diverse school contexts and use longitudinal or experimental research designs to examine the influence of social media on digital citizenship identity in more depth.

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How to cite this article:

Sari, I., Zuriah, N., & Lutfiana, R. F. (2026). The Role of TikTok and Instagram Social Media in Strengthening Gen Z Citizenship Identity. *Journal of Educational Sciences*, 10(4), 965-976.