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The political potential of the digital generation

Abstract. The purpose of this study was to identify the specific features of young people's political activity in the context of digital transformation and to assess the potential of digital tools to overcome the crisis of trust in democratic institutions. The study employed a case study method to analyse digital "revolutions", a comparative analysis of the levels of political activity of young people in different countries, and a content analysis of social media to investigate new forms of political participation. The findings of the study revealed substantial differences in young people's political engagement between developed and developing democracies. Developed countries show a declining trend in conventional forms of political participation, while the role of digital platforms in political mobilisation is growing. In developing countries, digital technologies are often used as a tool for protest and struggle against authoritarian regimes. The study revealed a tendency towards individualisation of political participation and globalisation of the political consciousness of young people, which is manifested in a focus on concrete issues and participation in transnational movements. The analysis showed that digital platforms are creating new opportunities for political participation, including through online petitions, crowdfunding of political campaigns, and digital platforms for participatory democracy. At the same time, the risks associated with digital inequality, manipulation, and disinformation in the online space were identified. The study demonstrated the potential of digital tools to increase transparency and accountability of the authorities, which can help restore young people's trust in democratic institutions. Specifically, the study covered the effectiveness of such tools as open data portals, e-government platforms, and e-voting systems. The analysis of new vectors in the development of digital democracy, such as the integration of artificial intelligence and blockchain technologies, has revealed considerable potential for transforming political processes, but also highlighted the need to accommodate the ethical aspects and potential risks of their implementation. The findings of this study are significant for developing strategies to engage young people in political processes and modernise democratic institutions in the digital age

Keywords: open data; online activism; e-government; social media; participatory democracy; civic engagement; media literacy

Introduction

In modern world, where digital technologies are rapidly transforming all spheres of life, young people's political engagement is of particular significance for the development of democratic processes. Generation Z, born in the era of the Internet and social media, demonstrates unique patterns of political behaviour that differ substantially from previous generations. This necessitates an in-depth analysis of the political potential of the digital generation and its impact on the future of democratic institutions.

The problematic of the study lies in a paradoxical situation: on the one hand, young people have unprecedented access to information and communication tools, which should theoretically facilitate their active engagement in political life. On the other hand, there is a tendency for

young people to lose trust in conventional democratic institutions and processes. As M. Manu (2022) noted in the study published in October 2022, 52% of young people believe that democracy is under threat or has already failed. Only 25% of young adults trust the government, and 34% trust elected officials. These indicators point to a deep crisis of trust that could have far-reaching consequences for the future of democratic systems.

At the same time, digital technologies open new opportunities for political mobilisation and civic engagement. The phenomenon of Facebook revolutions around the world has demonstrated the powerful potential of social media as a tool for political change. However, the impact of digital platforms on political processes is

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ambivalent and requires careful investigation and theoretical understanding.

The degree of development of the topic is characterised by the presence of numerous studies on the political behaviour of young people and the impact of digital technologies on democratic processes. Specifically, an essential element of young people's political participation is the level of digital literacy. In this context, A.M. Guess & K. Munger (2023) focused on the relationship between digital literacy and online political behaviour. Researchers have found that a higher level of digital competence correlates with more active political participation in the online space. However, the question persists how this online activity translates into real political action.

Continuing the topic of digital threats to democracy, it is worth paying attention to the study by M.L. Miller & C. Vaccari (2020). The researchers conducted a comparative analysis of digital challenges to democratic processes in different countries and suggested potential ways to overcome them. However, their study does not accommodate the specifics of the political behaviour of the digital generation, which is a substantial gap in understanding modern democratic processes. Turning to the issue of political participation in the digital age, one cannot ignore the findings of J. Tiemann-Kollipost (2020). The researcher performed a detailed analysis of the transformation of political activity under the influence of digital technologies. At the same time, the study does not sufficiently highlight the potential of new forms of digital democracy that may be particularly attractive to the younger generation.

R.M. Perloff (2021) offered a comprehensive look at the dynamics of political communication in the digital age. His study covers a wide range of issues, from the impact of social media on political behaviour to the transformation of the media landscape. However, the researcher does not pay sufficient attention to the specifics of political communication of the digital generation, which is a substantial limitation in the context of this study. Particularly noteworthy is the study by A. Jungherr *et al.* (2020), which offers a comprehensive analysis of the impact of digital media on democratic processes. The researchers consider both positive and negative aspects of the digitalisation of politics, but do not focus on the specifics of the political potential of young people.

Developing the theme of digital democracy, C. Fuchs (2021) addressed the concepts of digital communities and the digital public sphere. His study offers interesting theoretical approaches to understanding contemporary democratic processes but does not fully cover the role of young people in shaping these new digital spaces of political participation. B. Cammaerts & R. Mansell (2020) considered an important aspect of the regulation of digital platforms. Their study proposes a radical democratic turn in the policy of digital platforms. However, the researchers do not pay sufficient attention to how such regulatory changes may affect the political activity of young people. Finally, L. Hagen *et al.* (2022) addressed the problem of the influence of social bots on political discussions online. This study raised a significant question about the authenticity of online political activism but did not address how young people can resist manipulative technologies in the digital space.

To summarise the literature review, the available findings provide a solid basis for understanding the relationship between digital technologies and political processes. The purpose of this study was to determine the political potential of the digital generation in the context of global democratic processes and to assess the impact of digital technologies on young people's political activity. To fulfil this purpose, the following objectives were set: to analyse the level of young people's political involvement in different countries, considering socio-economic, cultural, and technological factors; to investigate the impact of digital technologies, namely social media, on forms of political participation and civic engagement of young people; to assess the potential of digital tools to overcome the crisis of young people's trust in democratic institutions and processes.

Materials and Methods

The study was based on scientific publications, statistical data, reports of international organisations and think tanks, as well as regulatory documents. These sources provided a comprehensive and multidimensional analysis of the political potential of the digital generation, providing both quantitative indicators and qualitative assessments of the phenomena under study. Specifically, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2023) report on young people's participation in national parliaments was analysed, which provided detailed information on the representation of young people in legislatures around the world. These reports contain not only statistical data, but also an analysis of the factors that influence the political participation of young people, as well as recommendations for increasing their engagement in political processes.

An important source of information was the Global Youth Development (2024), developed by the Commonwealth Secretariat. This comprehensive indicator covers various aspects of young people's life, including education, employment, health, civic engagement, and political participation. The analysis of the Index data revealed the relationship between a range of factors of young people's development and their impact on political engagement. Particular attention was paid to the component of political participation, which includes such indicators as the level of young people's involvement in electoral processes, participation in public organisations and volunteering. These sources provided up-to-date and comprehensive information on the level of young people's political engagement in different countries and helped to identify global trends in this area. They provided a reliable empirical basis for comparative analysis and informed conclusions on the political potential of the digital generation in different socio-political contexts.

To understand the specifics of the political behaviour of the digital generation, the data of sociological studies were analysed, specifically, a survey conducted by M. Manu (2022), which revealed a low level of young people's trust in democratic institutions. This study became the starting point for further analysis of the causes of the crisis of trust and the search for ways to overcome it. Academic publications on various aspects of young people's political activism in the digital age have become a significant source of information. These sources helped to form the theoretical framework of this study and identify key

concepts and approaches to investigating the political potential of the digital generation.

The study was based on the application of a set of methods of scientific cognition. The systematic approach helped to consider the political potential of the digital generation as a complex, multidimensional phenomenon that is shaped by several factors. This made it possible to identify the interconnections between the technological, socio-economic, cultural, and political aspects of the problem under study.

The study compared the levels of young people's political participation in developed democracies and developing countries. This helped to identify specific features of young people's political behaviour in different contexts and to determine the factors that influence these differences. The case study method was employed to analyse the transformation of political participation forms under the influence of digital technologies. Specifically, the cases of the Arab Spring (2010-2012), the Black Lives Matter movement (2020), and the Fridays for Future climate movement (2018-2023) were considered. The analysis of these cases helped to identify new forms of digital activism and assess their effectiveness in achieving political goals.

Results

Analysis of the level of young people's involvement in politics in different countries. Young people's political engagement differs considerably between developed and developing democracies. In developed democracies, there is a declining trend in conventional forms of youth political participation, such as membership in political parties or participation in elections. For instance, in the United States, the turnout of young voters (18-29 years old) in the 2020 presidential election was 50%, which, while an increase compared to previous years, is still lower than in older age groups (Stockemer & Sundström, 2023). According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union in 2023, only 2.6% of parliamentarians in the world are under 30 years old (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2023), which suggests a substantial underrepresentation of young people in the legislature.

In developing countries, the situation is more heterogeneous. On the one hand, in some countries, young people are politically active, especially in the context of protest movements and demands for democratic change. An example is the active involvement of young people in the Arab Spring protests of 2011. On the other hand, in many developing countries, young people face greater obstacles to political participation, including limited access to education, economic instability, and authoritarian political regimes. The Global Youth Development (2024), devised by the Commonwealth Secretariat, shows that countries with higher levels of young people's political participation perform better in education, employment, and healthcare. Interestingly, D.S. Lane *et al.* (2023) found that young people's political behaviour on social media is less stratified by socioeconomic status than voting or offline campaign participation. This suggests that digital platforms can reduce political inequality among young people.

Socio-economic factors play a key role in shaping young people's political engagement. Studies show that education, economic status, and employment exert a considerable influence on political participation. Higher

education correlates with greater political engagement. Young people with higher education are more likely to take part in elections, civil society organisations, and political discussions (Blyznyiuk & Maistrenko, 2023). Economic instability and unemployment can both stimulate political activity due to dissatisfaction with the current situation and suppress it due to a focus on survival. Countries with elevated levels of young people's unemployment often experience increased political tensions (Uchechukwu *et al.*, 2023). The nature of employment affects political activity. Young people who work in precarious, temporary, or low-paid jobs often have fewer resources (time, energy, money) and opportunities for political participation. Socio-economic status affects young people's political behaviour on social media, although this influence is less than for conventional forms of participation (Lane *et al.*, 2023). This highlights the significance of considering digital platforms as a potential tool for overcoming socio-economic barriers to young people's political participation.

Cultural factors play a decisive role in shaping the political consciousness and behaviour of the digital generation, creating a unique landscape of political socialisation of young people in the 21st century. This transformation is manifested in three key trends that are interconnected and reinforce each other. There is a clear individualisation of political participation. Young people of the digital age are gradually departing from conventional forms of political engagement, such as party membership or participation in mass movements, and opting instead for more personalised ways of engagement. They tend to focus on concrete issues that resonate with their personal values and experiences, rather than aligning themselves with broad ideological platforms. This can take the form of online activism, participation in thematic campaigns or support for particular initiatives through social media.

This individualisation is intricately linked to the second trend, the globalisation of political consciousness. Thanks to unprecedented access to global information flows via the Internet and social media, young people are developing a more cosmopolitan outlook. They easily identify with global movements and issues, such as fighting climate change, protecting human rights, or tackling global inequality. This global orientation often overrides national or local political contexts, creating a new form of transnational political identity.

These changes are accompanied by a fundamental transformation of values, especially among young people in developed countries. According to I. Revak & R. Gren (2022), there is a gradual shift from materialistic to post-materialistic values. The younger generation is increasingly focusing on issues such as quality of life, self-expression, environmental sustainability, and social justice, as opposed to the purely economic or security priorities of previous generations. This change in value orientations substantially affects the political priorities of young people, shaping their expectations of political leaders and institutions.

Together, these trends are creating a new landscape of political socialisation, where young people are not just passive recipients of political ideas, but active creators of new forms of political participation and identity. They are shaping a political culture that is both more individualised

and globally oriented, with an emphasis on post-materialist values. This creates both new opportunities for political mobilisation and innovation, and challenges for conventional political institutions, which must adapt to these changes to stay relevant to a new generation of citizens. T. Blyznyuk & O. Maistrenko (2023) identified the dynamics in the development of values of Ukrainian generations X and Y. Specifically, Generation Y (born after 1987) demonstrates a greater inclination towards materialistic values, which may be a consequence of socio-political changes in Ukraine. This underlines the significance of accommodating the national context when analysing the political socialisation of young people.

The technological revolution of the early 21st century has radically changed the landscape of political participation, especially for the younger generation. Digital technologies, rapidly integrating into all spheres of life, have created unprecedented opportunities for young people's political engagement, transforming conventional forms of civic engagement and creating new ones. First of all, the Internet and social media have radically democratised access to information. Whereas political knowledge used to be the prerogative of a limited circle of experts and activists, now massive amounts of political information are available to anyone with a smartphone and a network connection. This information revolution can raise the political awareness of young people, giving them the tools to better understand political processes and formulate their own positions.

Alongside the expansion of access to information, digital platforms have become powerful platforms for expressing political views. Social networks, blogs, and online forums have become virtual town squares where young people can freely express their opinions, engage in political discussions, and mobilise like-minded people. Most importantly, these platforms give a voice to groups of young people who have traditionally been marginalised in political discourse due to their socioeconomic status or other factors (Lane *et al.*, 2023).

Furthermore, the development of e-governance and specialised digital platforms for public participation has opened new channels for direct interaction between young people and the authorities. This creates opportunities for more active engagement of young citizens in decision-making processes, from the local to the national level. Tools such as e-petitions, online consultations, or participatory budgets allow young people to influence policy beyond conventional forms of representative democracy (Revak & Gren, 2022).

The proliferation of smartphones and mobile applications has given young people's political activism a new dynamic and efficiency. Now, young activists can instantly respond to political events, coordinate their actions, and organise mass events with unprecedented speed and efficiency. This is especially pronounced in the context of protest movements and civic campaigns, where mobile technologies are becoming a key tool for mobilisation and organisation.

These technological changes are creating a new ecosystem of political participation that is more accessible, inclusive, and dynamic. They pave the way for more active engagement of young people in political processes,

potentially helping to overcome conventional barriers to political participation and strengthening the voice of the younger generation in democratic discourse. However, along with new opportunities, digital transformation also carries certain risks. I. Revak & R. Gren (2022) addressed threats such as cybersecurity, manipulation of public opinion through social media, and the potential exacerbation of the digital divide between different social groups.

Notably, the technological prerequisites for transforming young people's political engagement are not the same in all countries. The level of Internet access, the prevalence of smartphones, and the development of digital infrastructure – all these factors vary considerably between developed and developing countries. This creates an additional dimension of inequality in young people's political participation at the global level.

Despite the potential of digital technologies to increase young people's political participation, conventional forms of political representation are still important. The researchers note that young people are still significantly underrepresented in parliaments and other decision-making bodies around the world. This creates a situation where young people have more opportunities to express their political views online, but fewer opportunities to directly influence political decisions through traditional institutions (Stockemer & Sundström, 2023).

In their study of the conflict between Generations X and Y in Ukraine, T. Blyznyuk & O. Maistrenko (2023) addressed the influence of digital transformation on the development of political values and behaviour of different generations. They note that Generation Y, which grew up in the digital age, has different patterns of political behaviour compared to previous generations. This can create both new opportunities for political participation and potential intergenerational conflicts in the political space.

It is also important to consider how digital transformation affects the development of young people's political identity. On the one hand, global information flows contribute to the development of a more cosmopolitan worldview. On the other hand, social media algorithms can create "information bubbles" that increase the polarisation of society. This creates a complex dynamic where young people can be both more globally oriented and more insular in their political views.

The political behaviour of young people on social media may be less stratified by socio-economic status than traditional forms of political participation. This opens prospects for research on how digital platforms can potentially reduce inequality in political participation. However, D.S. Lane *et al.* (2023) also warn against over-optimism, noting that the digital divide still exists and may create new forms of inequality.

In the context of the rapid digital transformation of society, the development of digital literacy is becoming critical for effective political participation of young people. The ability to critically evaluate information in the digital environment is becoming a fundamental skill needed to form informed political opinions and make informed decisions. It is equally important to understand the mechanisms of digital platforms to enable young citizens to effectively use these tools for political communication and mobilisation. Moreover, the ability to effectively use

various digital tools for political participation – from on-line petitions to open data analysis – is becoming a key competence that determines the level of young people’s engagement in democratic processes. Thus, digital literacy is transforming into an essential skill for full citizenship in the era of digital democracy.

Young people’s political engagement in the modern world is arguably characterised by significant variability depending on the context – be it developed democracies, developing countries, or the digital environment. Each of these contexts has its unique characteristics

that influence the forms of political participation, barriers, socioeconomic factors, cultural characteristics, and technological prerequisites for young people’s political engagement. To better understand these differences and commonalities, a comparative analysis of key aspects of young people’s political engagement in different contexts is presented below. The table 1 not only summarises the key findings of this study, but also identifies potential areas for further research and development of strategies for engaging young people in political processes, considering the specifics of each context.

Table 1. Comparative analysis of young people’s political engagement in different contexts

Aspect	Developed democracies	Developing countries	Digital environment
Forms of participation	Decline in conventional forms (party membership, voting)	Prominent level of participation in protest movements	New forms of online activism, digital petitions
Barriers	Low turnout of young people in elections	Limited access to education, economic instability	Digital divide, lack of digital literacy
Socio-economic factors	Higher education correlates with greater participation	Economic instability can both stimulate and discourage participation	Lesser stratification by socio-economic status in online participation
Cultural characteristics	Individualisation of participation, post-materialist values	Strong influence of conventional values, collectivism	Globalisation of political consciousness
Technological factors	High level of access to digital technologies	Unequal access to digital technologies	The key role of social media and mobile applications
Key challenges	Overcoming of political apathy	Overcoming of authoritarian tendencies	Combating disinformation and manipulation
Potential for change	Innovative forms of engagement through digital platforms	Mobilisation through social media for democratic change	Potential to overcome traditional barriers to participation

Source: created by the author of this study

In summary, the technological prerequisites for transforming young people’s political engagement create a complex and multidimensional picture. On the one hand, digital technologies open new opportunities for political participation, potentially reducing barriers related to socioeconomic status. On the other hand, they pose new challenges related to digital inequality, information manipulation, and potential polarisation of society. A key challenge for researchers and policy makers is to develop strategies that maximise the positive potential of digital technologies for young people’s political participation while minimising the risks associated with them.

The impact of digital technologies on the forms of political participation and civic engagement of young people. Over the past decade (2014-2024), social media has become a key tool for political communication and young people’s mobilisation. Studies show that a significant number of young people receive information about politics and current events through social platforms. About 48% of young people aged 18-29 receive news about politics and current events through social media (Kaskazi & Kitzie, 2023). This demonstrates the growing role of digital platforms in shaping the political views of young people.

Social networks create a unique environment for the political socialisation of young people, which differs substantially from conventional channels. On the one hand, they provide unprecedented access to diverse information and opinions, which can contribute to more critical and independent political thinking. On the other hand, social media algorithms often create so-called “echo chambers”

where young people are exposed to information that confirms their existing views. This phenomenon, known as the “information bubble”, can lead to polarisation of opinion and restricted access to alternative points of view.

Notably, social media not only informs but also actively engages young people in political processes. Platforms such as X (formerly Twitter) and Facebook have played a key role in mobilising young people to take part in protest movements around the world. For instance, during the Arab Spring of 2010-2012 and the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States in 2020, social media became a major tool for organising and coordinating protests. Social media allows young people to respond quickly to political events and organise collective action with unprecedented speed and efficiency (Zyad, 2023).

However, the impact of social media on young people’s political engagement is ambiguous. On the one hand, they facilitate the rapid dissemination of information and mobilisation. On the other hand, there is a risk of superficial “activist” participation that does not translate into real political action. S. Suherlan (2023) emphasises that while digital technologies open new opportunities for political participation, it is important to develop critical thinking and digital literacy among young people to use these tools effectively.

Digital technologies have given rise to new forms of political participation that are particularly attractive to young people. These forms are characterised by greater flexibility, accessibility, and the ability to scale quickly. Let us consider a few key forms of online activism and digital

democracy that gained popularity among young people in 2018-2023: crowdfunding of political campaigns, hacktivism, and digital participation platforms. Young politicians and activists are increasingly using crowdfunding platforms to finance their campaigns. This allows them to be less dependent on conventional sources of funding and be more accountable to their supporters. The use of hacking and programming skills for political purposes has become a new form of activism, especially popular among tech-savvy young people. Although this form of activism often teeters on the edge of the law, it demonstrates the potential of technology to influence political processes. The development of e-democracy platforms, such as Decidim in Barcelona or in Taiwan, is creating new opportunities for direct citizen involvement in decision-making. These platforms allow young people to take part in policy discussions and formulation at the local and national levels.

A. Kaskazi & V. Kitzie (2023) emphasise that these new forms of online activism enable young people to exercise agency in the political sphere, especially for groups that have conventionally been marginalised in political discourse. They allow young people to express their views, rally support, and influence political processes in ways that were previously unavailable. However, the effectiveness of these new forms of activism often depends on their ability to translate into real political action and change.

Digital technologies not only create new forms of political participation, but also transform the conventional ones. This transformation is particularly noticeable in 2018-2023, when digital tools became an integral part of political processes. Let us consider a few key aspects of this transformation: e-voting, digital campaigns, hybrid forms of activism, and digital diplomacy. The introduction of electronic voting systems in some countries (e.g., Estonia) facilitates young people's participation in elections. This is especially significant for younger voters who may be more mobile or have limited time to take part in conventional voting. Political parties and candidates are increasingly relying on digital communication channels to attract young voters. For instance, the successful use of social media in Barack Obama's presidential campaigns in 2008 and 2012 was a turning point in political marketing. H. Ziad (2023) notes that digital campaigns allow politicians to target their messages more effectively and engage with younger audiences. A combination of online and offline activities where digital technologies are used to organise and coordinate physical protests or actions. This allows young people to mobilise effectively to take part in conventional forms of political activism, such as demonstrations or pickets. S. Suherlan (2023) emphasises that this transformation of conventional forms of political participation creates new opportunities for young people's engagement in democratic processes. However, the researcher also warns that the digitalisation of political participation can create new forms of inequality, especially for those with limited access to digital technologies.

The period from 2018 to 2024 was marked by the rapid development of digital technologies and their deep penetration into the sphere of young people's political activism. However, along with new opportunities for participation and expression, this era has also brought a series of serious challenges that have considerably complicated the

landscape of digital political activism. At the beginning of this period, the problem of disinformation and fake news was particularly acute. Social media, which have become the main source of information for young people, have proven to be vulnerable to the massive spread of misinformation. This phenomenon has become so widespread that the ability to critically evaluate information has become not just a useful skill, but a key competence for effective political participation (Kaskazi & Kitzie, 2023).

In parallel, social media algorithms aimed at personalising content have begun to create so-called "information bubbles", which has led to an increase in the polarisation of society. Users have increasingly found themselves in closed information spaces where their views are only confirmed, while alternative points of view are filtered out. This phenomenon has substantially exacerbated political divisions and made it difficult to engage in constructive dialogue between different groups.

As digital technologies have become an increasingly integral part of political life, they have also become a powerful tool of control and repression, especially in authoritarian regimes. Opportunities for digital surveillance and tracking of young people's political activity have created new challenges for the protection of freedom of expression and privacy. This trend was accompanied by an increase in cases of cyberbullying and online harassment of politically active young people. H. Ziad (2023) emphasised that these phenomena have become so widespread that they have begun to lead to self-censorship and disengagement among young activists, which has put the issue of creating safe online spaces for political discussion on the agenda. At the same time, concerns about the effectiveness of online activism have grown. The notion of "clicktivism" has emerged, a superficial form of online participation that often does not lead to real political change. S. Suherlan (2023) emphasises the need to develop skills that would allow online activism to be transformed into concrete political action. Finally, by the end of this period, increasing attention was being paid to the problem of manipulating public opinion through digital technologies. Targeted advertising, bots, and other tools of influence have created new opportunities for manipulating the political views of young people, which has threatened the integrity of democratic processes. Thus, the period of 2018-2023 was a time when digital political activity of young people faced a set of serious challenges that required new approaches to the development of digital literacy, information security, and the protection of democratic values in the digital age.

To overcome these risks, comprehensive measures are needed, including developing digital literacy, improving data protection and privacy legislation, creating mechanisms to combat disinformation, and ensuring the safety of online spaces for political discussion.

For a deeper understanding of the evolution of digital young people's activism and its impact on political processes, it is useful to consider several key "digital revolutions" that have taken place over the past decade. These developments not only demonstrate the growing role of digital technologies in political mobilisation, but also illustrate changes in the strategies, tools, and scope of young people's activism. Comparative table 2 below analyses three

significant movements: Arab Spring (2010-2012), Black Lives Matter (2020), and Fridays for Future (2018-2023). This table shows how the forms of digital political participation of young people have changed, what platforms have been used, what challenges activists have faced, and what long-term consequences these movements have had. An analysis of these “revolutions” will help to better understand the potential and limitations of digital activism

in the context of contemporary political processes. This table demonstrates the evolution of digital young people’s activism over the past decade, highlighting both changes in the technologies used and in the forms and scale of political participation. Each of these movements had its own unique characteristics, but they all illustrate the growing role of digital technologies in young people’s political mobilisation and activism.

Table 2. Comparison of digital “revolutions” in young people’s political participation

Aspect	The Arab Spring (2010-2012)	Black Lives Matter (2020)	Fridays for Future (2018-2023)
Key digital platforms	Facebook, Twitter	Twitter, Instagram	Instagram, TikTok
Key goals of the movement	Overthrowing authoritarian regimes	Combating racial inequality and police violence	Fighting climate change
Role of social media	Key tool for coordinating and disseminating information	Key tool for documenting incidents of violence and mobilisation	Platform for global mobilisation and education
Forms of online activism	Coordination of protests, dissemination of information	Hashtag activism, streaming protests	Virtual strikes, online petitions
Online/offline interaction	Strong: online coordination led to mass protests	Intense: online activity supported street protests	Hybrid: a combination of online activity and physical strikes
Global impact	Regional with global implications	Global movement with local manifestations	Global movement with a strong influence on international politics
Key challenges	Censorship, internet disconnection	Disinformation, polarisation of discourse	Scepticism about the effectiveness of online activism
Long-term implications	Regime changes in some countries, increased digital censorship	Awareness raising, legislative changes in some regions	Influencing global climate policy, changing the discourse

Source: created by the author of this study

In summary, digital technologies have radically changed the landscape of young people’s political participation over the past decade. They created new opportunities for mobilisation, self-expression, and influence on political processes. However, with these opportunities came new challenges and risks. A key challenge for society is to develop digital literacy among young people, create safe digital spaces for political discussion, and ensure that digital activism translates into real political change.

Assessment of the potential of digital tools to overcome the crisis of young people’s trust in democratic institutions. Over the past decade (2014-2024), there has been a steady downward trend in young people’s trust in conventional democratic institutions in many countries. This phenomenon is a cause for critical concern among researchers and policymakers alike, as it can have far-reaching implications for the stability and viability of democratic systems.

Storozhenko *et al.* (2023) found that only 25% of young adults trust the government and 34% trust elected officials. These figures are significantly lower than among older age groups. The researchers note that “such low young people’s trust in key democratic institutions creates a risk of alienating an entire generation from political processes”. According to the OECD study “Innovative Citizen Engagement and New Democratic Institutions”, the use of digital platforms for public consultations can considerably increase the trust young people have in government institutions. While concrete percentages may vary by context, the study highlighted the potential of digital tools to bridge the gap between young people and conventional democratic institutions (OECD, 2022). The reasons for this crisis of confidence are complex and multifaceted.

On the one hand, young people often perceive conventional political institutions as outdated, bureaucratic, and unable to respond effectively to modern challenges. The younger generation that grew up in the digital age expects more flexibility, transparency, and responsiveness from government agencies (Chukwudi *et al.*, 2023).

On the other hand, objective factors such as economic instability, rising inequality, corruption scandals, and the inability of political elites to address pressing social problems also contribute to the low level of trust. Corruption and lack of transparency in government are among the key factors that undermine young people’s trust in democratic institutions (Ponti *et al.*, 2022). Notably, a low level of trust does not necessarily mean that young people are completely disengaged from political processes. On the contrary, research shows that young people often look for alternative channels to express their political opinions and influence social processes. Young people are increasingly turning to digital platforms and social media as tools for political participation, bypassing conventional institutional channels (Storozhenko *et al.*, 2023). This trend poses both challenges and opportunities for democratic systems. On the one hand, it may lead to further fragmentation of the political space and weakening of the legitimacy of conventional institutions. On the other hand, it opens new perspectives for updating and modernising democratic processes using digital tools.

In the context of a crisis of trust in traditional democratic institutions, digital platforms have considerable potential to increase transparency and accountability of the authorities, which can help restore young people’s trust in political processes. One of the key mechanisms that has become widespread in 2018-2024 is the creation of open

data portals. These portals provide citizens with access to large amounts of government information in a machine-readable format. Open data is becoming a powerful tool for public scrutiny, allowing activists and journalists to analyse the activities of the authorities and identify potential abuses (Ponti *et al.*, 2022).

For instance, in Ukraine, the open data portal data.gov.ua, launched in 2015, contains over 35,000 datasets from various authorities as of 2023. This enabled the creation of a series of analytical tools for monitoring the use of budget funds, public procurement, officials' declarations, etc (Storozhenko *et al.*, 2023). Another major area is the introduction of e-government systems that allow citizens to receive administrative services online and interact with the authorities through digital channels.

Platforms for public consultations and electronic petitions also have considerable potential. They allow citizens to directly express their position on critical issues and initiate discussions on problems that concern them. Such platforms are particularly attractive to young people, as they meet their expectations of quick and direct communication with the authorities (Storozhenko *et al.*, 2023). However, the mere introduction of digital tools does not automatically guarantee increased transparency and accountability. The effectiveness of digital platforms depends on a series of factors, including the political will for real openness, the quality and relevance of the data published, and the ability of civil society to use this data to hold the authorities accountable.

Furthermore, there are risks associated with digital inequality and the possible exclusion of certain groups from e-democracy. Therefore, the introduction of digital tools should be accompanied by measures to bridge the digital divide and increase the digital literacy of citizens. Digital technologies open new opportunities to increase the influence of young people on political decision-making. These opportunities are especially significant in the context of declining trust in conventional democratic institutions and the search for new forms of political participation.

One of the most promising areas is the development of participatory democracy platforms. These platforms allow citizens to take part in budgeting, local policy-making, and decision-making on the development of cities and communities. Digital platforms for participatory democracy allow young people to experience the real influence on decision-making processes, which can substantially increase their trust in democratic institutions (Chukwudi *et al.*, 2023).

An example of a successful implementation of this approach is the Decidim platform, which is used in Barcelona and other European cities. As of 2023, over 40,000 citizen proposals were implemented through this platform, while the number of active users exceeded 400,000 (Zyad, 2023). Another valuable tool is crowdsourcing platforms for drafting laws and policy initiatives. They enable the involvement of a wide range of experts and interested citizens in discussing and improving legislative proposals. Crowdsourcing in lawmaking not only improves the quality of draft laws, but also contributes to the legitimacy of decisions.

Social media also has considerable potential as a tool for political mobilisation and influence on the agenda.

The events of the Arab Spring in 2010-2012 and the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020 demonstrated the ability of social media to quickly mobilise large numbers of people around important social and political issues. Social media are becoming an alternative channel for shaping public opinion, often bypassing conventional media and political institutions. This creates new opportunities for young people to influence the public discourse and address issues of concern to them. However, the effective use of these tools requires not only technological solutions, but also suitable institutional and legal mechanisms. For digital tools to become a real mechanism for young people to influence political decisions, it is necessary to ensure that they are integrated into formal decision-making procedures and that the results of online discussions are considered (Chukwudi *et al.*, 2023).

Furthermore, there are risks of manipulation and disinformation in the digital space that can undermine the quality of democratic processes. Therefore, the development of digital tools for political participation should be accompanied by measures to improve media literacy and critical thinking among young people. The development of digital democracy in the early 2020s gained a new impetus due to rapid advances in information technology. The first and perhaps the most revolutionary trend was the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies into political decision-making. AI has opened unprecedented opportunities for analysing massive amounts of data, which allows modelling the consequences of various policy decisions and identifying potential problems before they arise. According to L. Storozhenko *et al.* (2023), the use of AI can improve the quality and validity of policy decisions but requires the development of clear ethical standards and control mechanisms. This emphasises not only the technological but also the ethical dimension of introducing AI into the sphere of state governance.

Along with the development of AI, blockchain technologies are gaining in significance, especially in the context of ensuring the transparency and security of electronic voting. Blockchain offers a solution to long-standing problems related to the security and reliability of online voting results, which is critical to the legitimacy of democratic processes in the digital age. The introduction of this technology could be a turning point in the development of e-democracy, ensuring a prominent level of trust in digital forms of expression.

At the local level, there is a tendency to create integrated smart city platforms. These platforms are a kind of symbiosis of different functions – from providing administrative services to conducting public consultations and managing urban infrastructure. This comprehensive approach not only increases the effectiveness of local self-government, but also substantially enhances the involvement of citizens in solving local problems, creating a new model of participatory democracy at the city level.

Finally, an important trend is the development of personalised public service delivery systems based on data analysis. This approach allows the state to meet the needs of individual citizens more accurately and efficiently, improving the quality of interaction between state institutions and society. Personalisation of services not only improves the quality of service, but also creates a sense

of closer connection between the citizen and the state, which can help restore trust in democratic institutions. Thus, the development of digital democracy in the 2020s is characterised by a comprehensive approach that covers various aspects of interaction between the state and society – from high-level decision-making to the provision of services to individual citizens. These areas of development not only transform conventional democratic processes, but also create new forms of civic participation adapted to the realities of the digital age.

In summary, the development of digital democracy and e-government opens significant prospects for modernising democratic systems and overcoming the crisis of young people's trust in political institutions. However, fulfilling this potential requires a comprehensive approach that accommodates the technological, legal, institutional, and social aspects of this transformation.

Discussion

The study of the political potential of the digital generation revealed a series of key trends. Specifically, substantial differences in the levels of young people's political activity between developed democracies and developing countries were found. The study revealed a significant influence of socio-economic factors on the political participation of young people, as well as trends towards individualisation of political participation and globalisation of political consciousness. The analysis showed the transformation of traditional forms of political activism under the influence of digital technologies and the potential of digital tools to overcome the crisis of trust in democratic institutions.

The findings of K. Andersen *et al.* (2021) confirm the decline in conventional forms of young people's political participation in developed democracies identified in the present study. However, the present study offers a more comprehensive view of the problem, taking a look beyond the analysis of media consumption. Consideration of a wide range of socio-economic and cultural factors has helped to identify the underlying causes of this trend. Specifically, it was found that the level of education, economic status, and nature of employment have a decisive influence on the political activity of young people. This multifactorial nature underlines the complexity of the phenomenon of political participation in the digital age and the need for a comprehensive analysis. Consideration of these factors may be the key to developing effective strategies for engaging young people in political processes in developed democracies.

The prominent level of political engagement of young people in developing countries, especially in the context of protest movements, to some extent confirms S. Feldstein's (2021) observations on the growth of digital activism in authoritarian regimes. However, in contrast to the focus on repressive aspects, the present study reveals a more nuanced picture. Specifically, it was found that digital platforms play a dual role: on the one hand, they can truly be a tool of control, but on the other hand, they create unprecedented opportunities for political mobilisation and self-organisation of young people. This duality highlights the complexity of the interaction between technology and political processes in different contexts. Understanding this complexity is crucial for developing effective

strategies to support democratic processes in developing countries, considering the specifics of their political systems and cultural characteristics.

B. Erkut (2020) focused on the transformation from digital government to digital governance, emphasising the significance of this transition for the effective functioning of public institutions in the digital age. The present study extends this perspective by considering the impact of this transformation on young people's political participation. It was found that the transition to digital governance creates new opportunities for engaging young people in political processes, but also requires the development of new competencies and approaches. Specifically, it was found that effective digital governance involves not only the implementation of technological solutions, but also a paradigm shift in the interaction between the state and citizens. This includes the development of participatory mechanisms, increased transparency, and accountability of the authorities, and the creation of new channels for public influence on decision-making. This approach opens new perspectives for the political participation of young people, who are often more adapted to the digital environment. At the same time, the study emphasises that a successful transition to digital governance requires not only technological innovation but also the development of digital literacy among the population, including young people. This has significant implications for educational policies and civic education programmes that need to adapt to the new realities of digital governance. Furthermore, the need to develop new models of democratic participation that would effectively combine online and offline forms of civic engagement was identified.

The aspect of globalisation of political consciousness and individualisation of political participation of young people in the digital age is gaining new significance in the context of modern forms of political struggle. T. Patterson & L. Hanley (2020) focused on the latest methods of political confrontation in the digital space, including cyber-subversion, information operations, and the use of deep fakes. These phenomena pose substantial challenges for the development of political awareness and participation of young people.

The analysis suggests that the globalisation of the information space, on the one hand, expands opportunities for young people to take part in transnational political processes, and on the other hand, increases their vulnerability to global disinformation campaigns. Specifically, the use of deep fakes and other advanced manipulation technologies creates serious obstacles to the formation of an objective political stance, which is especially critical for young people, who often form their political views in the digital environment.

At the same time, the study shows that the individualisation of political participation in the digital age creates new opportunities to counter these threats. Young people, with their proficient digital literacy and personalised approach to information consumption, are not just targets of information operations, but can also be active participants in identifying and countering disinformation. This underlines the significance of developing critical thinking and digital literacy as key competences for effective political participation in the modern world.

The aspect of the transformation of conventional forms of political activism under the influence of digital technologies is gaining a new dimension in the context of the struggle for digital sovereignty. L. Floridi (2020) covered the essence and significance of digital sovereignty, especially for the European Union, which has profound implications for understanding the political potential of the digital generation. The researcher argues that digital sovereignty is becoming a key issue for states and supra-national entities in the 21st century. This concept encompasses control over digital infrastructure, citizen data, and the ability to regulate the activities of tech giants. In the context of young people's political activism, this concept is of particular significance, as it defines the framework within which digital activism takes place. The struggle for digital sovereignty creates new challenges and opportunities for young people's political participation. On the one hand, increased state control over the digital space may restrict freedom of expression and organisation online. On the other hand, ensuring digital sovereignty can protect citizens' rights to privacy and control over their own data, which is critical for free political expression. Young people, as the most active group of digital technology users, are becoming a key factor in shaping approaches to digital sovereignty. Their technological awareness and innovation can contribute to the development of new models of digital governance that balance national security needs with the principles of an open Internet.

The use of digital tools to overcome the crisis of young people's trust in democratic institutions is particularly relevant in the context of the development of digital democracy and the spread of disinformation. P. Iosifidis & N. Nicoli (2020) offered a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between digital democracy, social media, and disinformation, which is critical to understanding the political potential of the digital generation. The researchers argue that social media and digital platforms create new opportunities for democratic participation, but also pose serious challenges to democratic processes. On the one hand, these platforms provide young people with unprecedented opportunities to express their political views, mobilise, and take part in public debate. This can increase the transparency and accountability of the authorities, which is key to restoring young people's trust in democratic institutions.

However, the cited study also revealed that these same platforms are becoming tools for spreading disinformation and manipulating public opinion. P. Iosifidis and N. Nicoli emphasise that the phenomenon of "fake news" and algorithmic "echo chambers" in social media can undermine the foundations of democratic discourse, creating fragmented information spaces and exacerbating the polarisation of society. Young people, as the most active group of social media users, are particularly vulnerable to these challenges. On the one hand, digital literacy among young people can contribute to a more critical consumption of information. On the other hand, the intensity of the information flow and the sophistication of modern methods of manipulation create serious obstacles to the formation of an objective political position.

The role of digital platforms in strengthening the influence of young people in political decision-making, as identified in the study, resonates to some extent with the

findings of U. Oral (2023). However, the present study goes beyond analysing the use of media as a source of information, focusing on active forms of political participation. Specifically, it was found that participatory democracy platforms and crowdsourcing tools create new opportunities for direct involvement of young people in policy and decision-making processes. This has significant implications for understanding the transformation of democratic processes in the digital age. It was found that these tools can help overcome traditional barriers to political participation, such as geographical distance or limited time resources. At the same time, the study highlights the need to develop mechanisms that would ensure that these forms of participation have a real impact on political decisions, and not just create the illusion of involvement. This requires not only technological solutions, but also institutional changes and the development of a political culture focused on the active participation of citizens in governance processes.

The challenges associated with the development of digital democracy, including the problems of disinformation and manipulation of public opinion, identified in the present study, are echoed in the study by T.A. Neyazi (2020). However, while the researcher focuses on the specific context of India, this study considers these challenges from a global perspective. It was established that the problems of disinformation and manipulation are relevant for different political systems and cultural contexts, although their concrete manifestations may differ. This underscores the need to develop such global strategies to counter these challenges that would be sensitive to both universal mechanisms of disinformation and specific cultural and political contexts. Specifically, it was found that effective strategies should include not only technological solutions (such as algorithms for detecting fake news), but also educational initiatives aimed at increasing media literacy and critical thinking among young people. Furthermore, the study highlights the significance of international cooperation in countering transnational disinformation campaigns, which often have political goals.

The impact of social media on political participation in Western democracies is of particular significance in the context of analysing the political potential of the digital generation. C. Vaccari & A. Valeriani (2021) offered an in-depth analysis of the role of social media in shaping the political behaviour of citizens outside the so-called "information bubble". The researchers argue that the impact of social media on political participation is more complex and nuanced than is often assumed. They refute the common perception that social media only increase polarisation and create echo chambers. The study finds that social media can help expand the political horizons of users, especially young people.

C. Vaccari & A. Valeriani (2021) demonstrate that social media often act as platforms for incidental exposure to a variety of political information. This is crucial for younger users who may be exposed to political views and ideas that differ from their own or those that dominate their immediate environment. Such casual exposure to a variety of political information can stimulate political participation. The study found that social media users are more likely to take part in political discussions, both

online and offline, and are more likely to engage in various forms of political activity.

At the same time, the researchers emphasise that the impact of social media on political participation is not unambiguously positive. They addressed the risks of superficial “victimisation”, which can create the illusion of political activism without any real impact on political processes. An important aspect of the study is the analysis of the interaction between online and offline forms of political participation. C. Vaccari & A. Valeriani (2021) argue that these forms do not compete, but rather complement each other, creating new hybrid forms of political activism.

The impact of digitalisation on sustainable development and young people’s political engagement in the context of global challenges identified in the study finds certain parallels with the findings of R. Bohnsack *et al.* (2022). However, this study offers a broader perspective on the political implications of digitalisation for the younger generation. Specifically, it was found that digital technologies create new opportunities for young people to take part in solving global problems such as climate change and social inequality. It was found that digital platforms facilitate the development of transnational networks of activists, the exchange of information, and coordination of actions at the global level. This has significant implications for understanding the role of young people in global governance and international policy making. At the same time, the study highlights the need to critically reflect on the impact of digitalisation on sustainable development, considering both positive aspects (e.g., increased resource efficiency) and potential negative consequences (e.g., digital inequality and the environmental impact of the production and disposal of electronic devices). These findings highlight the need to integrate sustainable development issues into the analysis of the political potential of the digital generation and the development of strategies to engage young people in solving global problems.

Overall, the findings of the study demonstrate that the political potential of the digital generation is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that requires a comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach to analysis. The identified trends and specific features of young people’s political activity in the digital era suggest the need to re-think conventional concepts of political participation and democratic processes.

In contrast to previous studies that have often focused on particular aspects of digital political participation, the present study offered a more holistic view of the issue, considering the interplay of technological, socio-economic, cultural and political factors. This helped to identify the complex interrelationships between different aspects of the political potential of the digital generation and offer a more nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities that digitalisation creates for democratic processes.

Conclusions

A study of the political potential of the digital generation has revealed a complex and multifaceted picture of young people’s interaction with political processes in the digital age. Analysis of the level of young people’s political engagement in different countries showed considerable differences between developed and developing democracies.

Developed countries are experiencing a downward trend in conventional forms of young people’s political participation, such as membership in political parties or participation in elections. In contrast, in developing countries, young people often demonstrate a prominent level of political engagement, especially in the context of protest movements and demands for democratic change.

Socio-economic factors, such as education level, economic status, and type of employment, have proven to be key determinants of young people’s political engagement. At the same time, specific cultural features, such as individualisation of political participation and globalisation of political consciousness, form a unique landscape of political socialisation of the digital generation. These trends are manifested in the focus of young people on concrete issues and participation in transnational movements, reflecting a shift in value orientations from materialistic to post-materialistic.

The study of the impact of digital technologies on the forms of political participation and civic engagement of young people revealed their transformative role. Social media has become a key tool for political communication and mobilisation, creating new opportunities for expressing political opinions and organising collective action. However, with new opportunities come new challenges, such as the spread of disinformation, the formation of information bubbles, and the risks of superficial “clicktivist” participation.

Digital technologies have given rise to new forms of political activism, such as online petitions, crowdfunding of political campaigns, and digital platforms for participatory democracy. These tools demonstrate significant potential to overcome conventional barriers to political participation and create new channels for young people to influence political processes. At the same time, they require the development of new competencies, including digital literacy and critical thinking.

An assessment of the potential of digital tools to overcome the crisis of young people’s trust in democratic institutions has revealed both significant opportunities and serious challenges. Digital platforms, such as open data portals and e-government systems, can increase transparency and accountability of the authorities. This can help restore young people’s trust in democratic processes. However, the effectiveness of these tools depends on a series of factors, including the political will for real openness and the ability of civil society to use this data effectively to hold the authorities accountable.

The study found that successful realisation of the political potential of the digital generation requires a comprehensive approach that factors in the technological, social, cultural, and institutional aspects. It is necessary not only to introduce innovative digital tools, but also to develop digital literacy among young people, create safe online spaces for political discussion, and ensure the integration of these new forms of participation into official decision-making procedures.

The limitations of the presented study are related to the rapid pace of technological change and the diversity of political contexts in different countries, which makes it difficult to draw universal conclusions. Prospects for further research include examining the long-term effects of

digital activism on political systems, analysing the impact of innovative technologies (such as artificial intelligence and blockchain) on democratic processes, and exploring ways to overcome digital inequality to ensure inclusive political participation of young people.

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Conflict of Interest

The author of this study declares no conflict of interest.

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