

## ОБЩЕСТВО И ПОЛИТИКА SOCIETY AND POLITICS

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### **The Impact of International Political Events on Political Efficacy: an Empirical Study From the Perspective of the Generation Z**

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***Abstract.** Political efficacy is the feeling or belief that people believe their political actions can have an impact on the political process. By participating in online political commentary's is an important form of political participation for the generation Z, and an important way to express political efficacy. With the development of the Internet, the widespread use of social media platforms and easy access to information resources have made it possible for political information to be disseminated globally, and as loyal users of various social media, generation Z can readily receive reports of international political events disseminated on media platforms, which has an important impact on their own sense of political efficacy. In this study, more than 200 generation Z from across mainland China were selected as research subjects, with the aim of studying the factors that influence the generation Z ' political efficacy in their exposure to international political events and summarizing the patterns. The descriptive analysis in this study shows that political affiliation and educational background have a significant effect on the political efficacy of the generation Z. Based on the factual situation in mainland China, the Government considers the participation of new generation in order to increase political efficiency.*

**Keywords:** generation Z; social media platforms; public participation; political efficacy; international political events

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## Влияние международных политических событий на политическую эффективность: эмпирическое исследование с точки зрения «поколения Z»

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**Аннотация.** Политическая эффективность – это чувство или вера в то, что люди считают, что их политические действия могут повлиять на политический процесс. Участие в онлайн-политических комментариях является важной формой политического участия для поколения Z и важным способом выражения политической эффективности. С развитием интернета, широким распространением платформ социальных медиа и легким доступом к информационным ресурсам политическая информация стала распространяться по всему миру, и, будучи лояльными пользователями различных социальных медиа, поколение Z может легко получать сообщения о международных политических событиях, распространяемых на медиаплатформах, что оказывает важное влияние на их собственное чувство политической эффективности. В данном исследовании более 200 представителей поколения Z со всего материкового Китая были выбраны в качестве объектов исследования с целью изучения факторов, влияющих на политическую эффективность поколения Z в их знакомстве с международными политическими событиями, и обобщения полученных закономерностей. Описательный анализ этого исследования показывает, что политическая принадлежность и образование оказывают значительное влияние на политическую эффективность поколения Z. Основываясь на фактической ситуации в материковой части Китая, правительство учитывает фактор участия новой генерации в целях повышения политической эффективности.

**Ключевые слова:** «поколение Z»; платформы социальных сетей; участие общественности; политическая эффективность; международные политические события

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### Introduction

In mainland China, political efficacy is a psychological expression of the people's ownership and an indirect indicator of the quality and standard of its

socialist democratic system. Generation Z refers to the new generation born between 1995 and 2005, who had early access to the internet and technology and are highly dependent on it. At the same time, this group is also an active user of social media, and they wish to express their ideas and demands on the internet to exercise their civil rights. With the advancement of the times and the development of the Internet, generation Z can easily learn about anything in the world through the Internet and participate in it, and their sense of political efficacy is bound to change accordingly. Compared with traditional political participation, potential political participation represented by online likes, retweeted and comments is increasingly becoming the main way for contemporary youth to participate in political life [1]. Political efficacy may be stronger in cyberspace than in real life, which is full of rules and normative pressures. Generation Z will rate their ability to participate in political life higher online, which will drive them to share their political experiences, engage in political discussions and participate in political life.

The study of the political efficacy of the generation Z can help to gain a deeper understanding of the real situation of basic politics and political opinion building in China mainland, and to correctly guide and enhance the political efficacy and participation motivation of this kind of people, which can help them to engage in reasonable political participation and provide an important contribution to the promotion of social stability. The development of the Internet has brought easy information sharing and interaction to the public and has had a huge impact on all aspects of people's production, life and interaction, especially in the socio-political sphere. In addition, the open and global nature of the Internet has enabled international political events to be reported on social media platforms based on the Internet. In this paper, the international political events disseminated on the Internet are divided into three levels of events: international systems, countries and individual people, as the research events of this study, to explore how people in the generation Z make different participation behaviors and give their opinions on different types of international political events on the Internet.

### ***Literature Review and Hypothesis***

Political efficacy, as an important variable influencing people's political behavior, is subordinated to the study of politics. According to Campbell, political efficacy is “the feeling that individual action does have or can have an

impact upon the political process” [2]. Lane further subdivides the political efficacy into internal efficacy and external efficacy. Internal efficacy refers to the belief that one can understand politics and therefore participate in politics [3]. Since its inception, media has been involved in political activities and processes. Whether as a means of disseminating political information, political communication, or a channel through which political participation takes place, politics has been achieved to a large extent through the media. In recent years, the concept of media has gradually shifted from the early mass media to the social media of today.

As people's use of media platforms increases, it has been suggested that their use of media platforms affects their sense of intrinsic political efficacy. Some scholars have found that there is a significant correlation between the extent to which people use television content and their intrinsic political efficacy [4]. One of the key reasons why social media use promotes political participation and political efficacy is that social media can reduce the cost of access to political information. The public can use social media to express their political views, with increasing levels of political understanding and growing interest in politics. Rather than the mass media and the general public, this study is aimed at the generation Z, who use social media to a greater extent. This study argues that political information from social media is becoming a more important source of internal efficacy for the generation Z than in-person political participation experiences. The advantages of social media in terms of ease of access, diversity and richness of information are more likely to stimulate political cognition and emotions, which in turn leads to more political participation [5]. Therefore, this research proposes the hypothesis that:

H1. The social media usage positively affects the internal efficacy of generation Z.

However, some scholars have also found through their research that media dependence is not conducive to an increased sense of external efficacy [6]. External efficacy refers to the government will respond to one's demands [7]. According to the Lee, access to public intuition websites negatively affected university students' external efficacy [8]. Public participation in political events on social media platforms is an important way of non-institutionalized political participation, yet the internet is open, complex, mixed with truth and falsehood,

and spreads rapidly. The inability of official media to release authoritative news in a timely manner and the lack of supervision by relevant departments can lead to irrationality and rumors on the internet that cannot be effectively controlled. The public will feel negative political responsiveness when they are exposed to relevant negative information. Therefore, this research proposes the hypothesis that:

H2. The social media usage negatively affects the external efficacy of generation Z.

Attitude is a psychological construct that is a mental and emotional entity that inheres or characterizes a person, their personal view on it. It involves their mindset, outlook and feelings [9]. Ajzen states that the broad concept of attitude includes cognitive, affective and behavioral dispositions [10]. When applied to attitudes towards international political events, these refer to the public's perceptions and opinions of the event, the public's positive and negative or neutral feelings towards the event, the willingness to act in response to the event, respectively.

Internal efficacy focuses on the public's own perceptions, and attitudes towards international events have a more significant impact on internal efficacy than does the instability of external efficacy. There has study shown that internal efficacy has a positive predictive effect on political participation. In other words, the stronger the internal efficacy, the more motivated individuals are to participate in politics [11; 12].

Based on the level of awareness, feeling and depth of involvement of the generation Z in viewing international events, this research proposes the hypothesis that:

H3. Degree of awareness positively affects the internal efficacy of generation Z;

H4. Positive feelings about international events positively affects the internal efficacy of generation Z;

H5. Degree of participation positively affects the internal efficacy of generation Z.

### ***Methodology and Data Analysis***

This study divides international political events into three levels: the international system, countries and individual, selects the British "Brexit"[13],

Donald Trump's "Twitter rule" [14] and the Iranian anti-headscarf protest movement as the objects of the study respectively. Also examines the influence of the degree of participation of the *generation Z* on their political efficacy.

This study focuses on the political efficacy of the Z-era group and divides it into two dimensions: internal efficacy (IE) and external efficacy (EE), as dependent variables. internal efficacy refers to the belief that one can understand politics and therefore participate in politics; External efficacy refers to the government will respond to one's demands. There are four main independent variables: social media usage (SMU), degree of awareness (DA), positive feelings (PF) and degree of participation (DP). A five-point Likert scale was used to measure each variable, from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree", with values 1–5.

#### *Data Analysis*

This study was conducted by distributing an online questionnaire to the Z-era group nationwide, and 230 questionnaires were initially collected. 211 valid questionnaires were obtained after excluding invalid questionnaires. The reliability and validity analyses yielded a Cronbach Alpha coefficient value of  $.717 > .7$  and KMO value of  $.781 > .7$ , with a significance of  $.000$ , which is less than  $.05$ , reaching a significant level, from which it can be inferred that the reliability of this questionnaire and the correlation between the variables are good and can be studied in a follow-up study.

#### *Correlation Analysis*

Correlation analysis is a common statistical method to study how strongly two or more variables are related to each other, also is mainly described by correlation coefficients. In order to verify interrelationship between the variables in the research model, Pearson correlation analysis is usually used. When the value of  $r$  is 1 or -1, it is called perfectly linear correlation; when  $-1 < r < 1$ , there is a correlation; when  $r > 0$ , it is called positive correlation; when  $r$  is less than 0, it is called negative correlation. The sample correlation coefficient is calculated based on the sample observations, and the specific values may vary depending on the samples drawn. However, it can be proved that the sample correlation coefficient is a consistent estimate of the overall correlation coefficient.

The correlation analysis led to the following conclusions:

a) There was no significant correlation between the social media usage and the external efficacy ( $p\text{-value}=.091 > .05$ ). Therefore, H2 is not valid.

b) The significance of the correlations between the social media usage, degree of awareness, positive feelings and degree of participation are .000, .000, .030, .000 respectively, all less than 0.05, indicating that there is a significant correlation between them. The correlation coefficients are .293, .397, .150, .363 respectively, all greater than 0, indicating that they are positively correlated with internal efficacy.

### *Regression Analysis*

While correlation analysis merely determines whether there is a relationship between the factors and the closeness of the relationship, regression analysis further indicates the direction of the relationship and can further indicate whether there is a causal relationship between the factors. In this study, regression analysis was used to verify the causal relationships between the initial and outcome variables in the conceptual model. The regression analysis was carried out using the three parts of the regression model summary table, the model ANOVA table and the regression coefficient table of the model, leading to the following conclusions:

The social media usage ( $p=0.000 < 0.05$ ,  $\beta=0.726$ ), degree of awareness ( $p=0.000 < 0.05$ ,  $\beta=0.343$ ), positive feelings ( $p=0.030 < 0.05$ ,  $\beta=0.161$ ) and the degree of participation ( $p=0.000 < 0.05$ ,  $\beta=0.331$ ) both significantly influenced internal efficacy, indicating them had a positive effect on internal efficacy. Indicating that if all else conditions being equal, the higher of these four variables, the greater the internal efficacy of the generation Z.

The standard regression equation can be obtained:

- Internal Efficacy =  $0.571 + 0.726 * \text{SMU}$
- Internal Efficacy =  $5.27 + 0.343 * \text{DA}$
- Internal Efficacy =  $6.956 + 0.161 * \text{PF}$
- Internal Efficacy =  $5.5 + 0.331 * \text{DP}$

In summary, the hypotheses H1, H3, H4, H5 are valid in this study, H2 is not valid.

### *Conclusion and Discussion*

The descriptive analysis in this study shows that political affiliation and educational background have a significant effect on the political efficacy of the generation Z. According to the Ding and Wong, residents with higher levels of education and political status as party members have a higher sense of political efficacy [15]. In terms of political affiliation, party members have a higher sense of both internal and external political efficacy than non-party members. On the one hand, this reflects the political advancement and pioneering role of Party members, but on the other hand, it also means that Party members need to strengthen their work in motivating the public to establish healthy political concepts. In terms of education background, the higher of the qualifications, the more political knowledge one accumulates, the more one strengthens one's cognitive ability, the more likely one is to appreciate the meaning and value of political participation, and thus to gain a higher internal efficacy. At the same time, people with higher qualifications have an advantage over people with lower education levels in terms of access to information technology and more concerned about political events. Therefore, the higher the degree of awareness, the higher of the internal efficacy.

The findings of this study suggest that the social media usage in generation Z does not fully contribute to their political efficacy. More mediating factors are needed to exploit the advantages of new technologies. The result of this study show that the social media usage significantly affects generation Z internal efficacy, but not their external efficacy. Social media does not naturally produce government responses to the political concerns of the generation Z. On the other hand, political encounters on the internet and political dilemmas in real life may also reduce its internal efficacy. Government and other departments should respond to online public opinion in a timely manner, resolve incidents that people are concerned about and publish the results as soon as possible. Also need to build a fair and just political and cultural environment actively, with continuously improve and enhance governance, and strengthen the credibility.

Due to the current institutionalized participation procedures and norms in Chinese mainland are more restrictive and formalistic for the generation Z, as well as the state's inability to participate in internal affairs other country. All these reasons making the freedom preferring generation Z reluctant to be bound



to the inherent institutional framework, and their weak voice in institutionalized political participation, voicing opinions on political events on the Internet and participating in collective online rights advocacy actions will increase the generation Z internal efficacy. This kind of online political participation may also be a part of emotional catharsis, both in terms of expressing one's own and society's grievances in cyberspace with a critical, venting emotional orientation. The purpose of such political participation is not clearly perceived, nor is there any motivation to participate on themselves, but rather to express anger and discontent in cyberspace, without any intention of making institutional or systemic changes. In other words, it is an expression of the generation Z desire to prove its worthy existence.

Based on the actual situation in Chinese mainland, the government should combine consideration of the internal characteristics of political participation and the basic attributes of individuals in the generation Z and needs to be aware of the extent to which it can promote the orderly political participation of them, so as to enhance the political efficacy.

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