



INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIOR AS A MEDIATOR: THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA DEPENDENCE ON THE VOTING BEHAVIOR OF MIGRANT STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This Study examines the mediating role of information-seeking behavior (ISB) in the relationship between social media dependence and voting behavior among migrant students in the 2024 election in Salatiga City. While previous research has established the influence of social media on political participation, the underlying mechanism of how active information-seeking activity shapes electoral decisions particularly among young migrant voters facing geographical and informational displacement remains underexplored. Employing a quantitative approach, data were collected through an online questionnaire from 209 migrant student respondents at two major universities in Salatiga and analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling- Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS). The results reveal that social media dependence has a positive and significant effect on voting behavior, both directly through the mediation of ISB. Key findings indicate that ISB acts as a strong partial mediator, suggesting that the influence of social media on electoral decisions is largely channeled through an active and critical information search process, as conceptualized by Ellis's model. This study contributes theoretically by integrating Media Dependency Theory and Ellis's Model of Information Seeking Behavior to explain the dual mechanism which is direct mobilization and cognitive behavioral mediation through which social media dependence shapes voting behavior, revealing that the quality of active information seeking is the key differentiator in transforming passive media exposure into informed electoral participation among digitally native migrant students facing information gaps. Practically, it offers insights for election commissions and universities to design political communication strategies and digital literacy programs that not only disseminate information but actively stimulate critical verification, source differentiation, and policy-based evaluation to foster resilient and informed first-time migrant voters.

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INTRODUCTION

Global political communication has changed as a result of the digital age, which is marked by widespread connections and vast information distribution, especially in Indonesia. Social media has become a prominent medium for accessing

political information, interacting with others, and forming ideas, especially among younger people. (Boulianne, 2020; Santoso, 2024). The role of social media is becoming increasingly crucial in the context of general elections, where digital platforms are not only a campaign tool but also a primary arena for voters to seek and process information before making electoral decisions (Fujiwara et al., 2024; Lam et al., 2021).

In Indonesia, this phenomenon has unique dynamics, given the high internet penetration and social media activity among the population. According to data from the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII), 77.02% of the population, or approximately 210 million people, are connected to the internet (Kenza Radhya Ersa Atmawijaya et al., 2023). Since most internet users are active on social media, these platforms often take the place of conventional media as the main information source. Social media has become an unparalleled source of political information and a campaign tactic in the 2024 elections. There is a paradigm shift from top-down to more participatory and horizontal political communication as candidates, including those running for president and vice president, heavily use social media sites like Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube to create narratives, create images, and rally support. This reliance on digital media raises critical questions regarding its impact on voter behavior, particularly among groups with distinct characteristics and vulnerabilities.

One such group is migrant voters, specifically university students residing outside their home regions. These individuals face unique challenges stemming from geographic separation from their hometowns, which often creates an "information gap" regarding local and national political dynamics. To navigate this uncertainty, migrant students heavily depend on social media and digital networks not merely as passive consumers but as active agents engaging in complex information-seeking behavior (ISB) to reduce ambiguity and shape their political preferences before voting. As Hillygus & Shields (2008) argue, increased social media usage correlates with more active information-seeking about candidates and parties, reflecting a shift toward more critical and selective voters analogous to consumer behavior in commercial markets (Lees-Marshment, 2014). Vössing & Weber (2019) further demonstrate that voters who actively seek information through social media develop more informed political preferences compared to passive recipients.

As the use of social media grows, voters are becoming more active in seeking information about candidates or political parties and evaluating the campaign messages they receive (Hillygus & Shields, 2008). This reflects a shift from passive voters to more critical and selective voters in choosing political information, similar to consumer behavior in commercial markets (Lees-Marshment, 2001). Research by Vössing & Weber (2019) shows that voters who actively seek information through social media have more informed political preferences than those who passively receive information. This is in line with research by Kim & Kim (2022), which found that internet and social media use influences political behavior in many countries, including developing countries. According to the viewpoint of Media Dependency Theory (MDT), as described by BALL-ROKEACH (1985), the literature review examined the direct impact of social media reliance on student voting behavior. A comprehensive review and meta-analysis of 16 research (N=33,257), most of which were indexed in Web of Science and Scopus, was carried out by Kurniawan et al. (2024). The findings demonstrated that social media use significantly and favorably increases voting and political engagement. Additionally, consistent connections between platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp were discovered in a number of countries, including Indonesia. For several measures of voting and political engagement, the r values ranged from 0.07 to 0.91 (Kurniawan et al., 2024).

The Media Dependency Theory (MDT), pioneered by Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur (1976a), provides a robust theoretical foundation for understanding this dynamic. The theory posits that the more individuals depend on a medium to fulfill their needs particularly for political information the greater that medium's influence on their beliefs and subsequent behavior. In situations of social uncertainty and change, such as those experienced by migrant students disconnected from their original political environment, individuals increasingly turn to the most accessible media to comprehend social reality and guide their actions (BALL-ROKEACH, 1985). This dependency can produce active behavioral effects, where media exposure motivates concrete actions that might not occur otherwise.

Complementing this macro-level perspective, Ellis's (1993) Information Seeking Behavior model offers a granular micro-level framework for understanding the cognitive-behavioral stages individuals navigate during information searches. Ellis identifies eight characteristic activities: starting, chaining, browsing, differentiating, monitoring, extracting, verifying, and ending. These stages are not strictly linear but represent adaptive strategies individuals employ to locate, evaluate, and utilize information effectively. In electoral contexts, voters engaged in diverse behaviors particularly browsing,

differentiating, and verifying are more likely to make informed choices based on substantive issues rather than superficial heuristics (Heiss et al., 2020).

Despite extensive research on social media's influence on young voters' political participation (Intyaswati et al., 2021; Kurniawan et al., 2024), significant gaps remain. Most existing studies treat young voters as homogeneous populations, failing to distinguish between students residing in their home regions and those who have migrated. Furthermore, while research has established correlations between social media use and voting behavior, the underlying mechanisms particularly the mediating role of information-seeking behavior remain underexplored. As Nurlina et al. (2024) note, the effects of media dependency on actual behavior often require prior information processing, especially among groups with high information uncertainty. This suggests that ISB may function as a critical cognitive pathway transforming passive media exposure into informed electoral participation, yet empirical testing of this mediation remains scarce.

The city of Salatiga, nicknamed "Mini Indonesia," provides an ideal context for investigating these dynamics. As a prominent educational hub, Salatiga hosts thousands of migrant students from across the archipelago. Data from two major universities Satya Wacana Christian University (UKSW) and the State Islamic University (UIN) Salatiga indicate approximately 8,700 students originate from outside Central Java Province (Bagian Akademik UIN Salatiga & Biro Administrasi Akademik UKSW, 2024). In the 2024 election, 5,356 voters were recorded as moving their voting location to Salatiga, with the majority being students utilizing the A5 form mechanism for transferring voting rights (KPU Kota Salatiga, 2024). Voter turnout in Salatiga reached exceptionally high levels, exceeding 87% across all election types, reflecting strong political enthusiasm among both resident and migrant populations.

Migrant students in Salatiga exhibit distinctive characteristics that differentiate them from general young voters. They experience physical separation from traditional political information sources in their home regions, including local campaigns, community discussions, and family political socialization. Simultaneously, they encounter new political environments with distinct dynamics and issues. This dual displacement creates heightened uncertainty and greater reliance on accessible digital platforms for political information. Previous research indicates that migrant populations often depend on personal networks like family, friends, and fellow migrant as credible information sources, yet this can lead to "small-world clustering" that limits exposure to diverse perspectives (Fisher et al., 2004; Grad et al., 2020). Social media potentially mitigates this limitation by enabling broader, more varied information access while simultaneously posing risks of misinformation and algorithmic echo chambers.

Given these considerations, this study addresses the following research questions: (1) Does social media dependence directly influence voting behavior among migrant students? (2) Does information-seeking behavior directly affect voting behavior? (3) Does social media dependence influence information-seeking behavior? (4) Does information-seeking behavior mediate the relationship between social media dependence and voting behavior? By examining these questions through path analysis using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), this research aims to elucidate both direct and indirect mechanisms linking digital media engagement with electoral participation.

This study contributes theoretically by integrating Media Dependency Theory and Ellis's Information Seeking Behavior model to explain the dual mechanism, direct mobilization and cognitive-behavioral mediation through which social media dependence shapes voting behavior. Practically, it offers insights for election commissions, political parties, and educational institutions in designing political communication strategies and digital literacy programs that foster informed, critical, and resilient participation among young migrant voters in Indonesia's evolving digital democracy.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative explanatory design to examine the causal relationships between social media dependence, information-seeking behavior (ISB), and voting behavior among migrant students in the 2024 Election in Salatiga City. The population comprised migrant students from two major universities in Salatiga Satya Wacana Christian University (UKSW) and the State Islamic University (UIN) Salatiga with approximately 8,700 students originating from outside Central Java Province. Using a purposive sampling technique, 209 respondents were selected based on three inclusion criteria: (1) active enrollment as a student at UKSW or UIN Salatiga, (2) origin from outside Central Java, and (3) registration as a voter using the A5 form mechanism for transferring voting rights. This sample size met the minimum requirements for Structural

Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) analysis as recommended by Hair et al. (2019). Data were collected through an online questionnaire administered via Google Forms from February to March 2025. The instrument was developed based on established theoretical frameworks and adapted to the Indonesian context: social media dependence (4 items) was adapted from Ball-Rokeach (1985) and Jun & Firdaus (2023); information-seeking behavior (8 items) followed Ellis's (1993) model covering starting, chaining, browsing, differentiating, monitoring, extracting, verifying, and ending; voting behavior (4 items) was adapted from Falcão et al. (2023). All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

To ensure the instrument's appropriateness for the Indonesian context, several validation procedures were undertaken. First, content validity was established through expert review by three Indonesian scholars in political science and communication studies, who evaluated the items for cultural relevance, conceptual equivalence, and clarity of translation (Epstein et al., 2015; Sousa & Rojjanasrirat, 2011). Second, a pilot study was conducted with 30 migrant students who met the same criteria as the target population to assess item comprehension and identify potential ambiguities in the Indonesian-language questionnaire; minor wording adjustments were made based on their feedback. Third, construct validity and reliability were statistically tested using the final sample data. Confirmatory factor analysis confirmed that all loading factors exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values were above 0.50 for all constructs, and composite reliability scores exceeded 0.70, indicating that the measurement model was valid and reliable for the Indonesian migrant student population.

Data were analyzed using SEM-PLS with SmartPLS 4 software. The analysis proceeded in two stages: measurement model evaluation to confirm validity and reliability, followed by structural model assessment to test hypothesized relationships through bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples. Mediation analysis followed Hair et al.'s (2021) guidelines, with significance determined by t-values > 1.96 and p-values < 0.05. This approach is anticipated to yield empirical data on the ways in which social media influence and information-seeking behavior impact migrant students' election choices, as well as useful insights for creating more inclusive political communication campaigns and election regulations for young migrant voters.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Characteristics of Migrant Voters in Salatiga City

In this study, respondents were asked to provide personal information, including their name, region of origin, and university of origin. This data was collected to identify patterns relevant to the research focus. The study involved 200 respondents, who were voters from abroad participating in the 2024 Simultaneous Elections in Salatiga City, using a purposive sampling technique.

Based on PKPU Number 11 of 2018 Article 37, to be included in the DPTb, voters must show an e-KTP or Certificate and a copy of proof of being registered as a voter in the DPT in their place of origin to the PPS or KPU of the Regency/City of origin to obtain a notification letter of change of voting using the KPU A5 model form which will be used to vote at another TPS no later than 30 (thirty) days before the voting. The number of Voter Lists for Stages 1-3 of the 2024 General Election at the Salatiga City Level is shown in the table:

Table 1. Number of Voters in the 2024 Election DPTb for Salatiga City

No.	District Name	Voters Move In			Voters Move Out		
		Number of Villages/ Sub-Districts	Number of TPS	Number of Voters	Number of Villages/S ub-Districts	Number of TPS	Number of Voters
1	Sidomukti	4	142	980	4	132	459
2	Sidorejo	6	187	2628	6	164	708

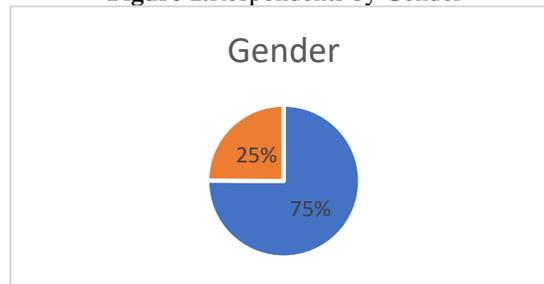


3	Tingkir	7	131	787	7	134	495
4	Argomulyo	6	153	961	6	138	476
Total		23	613	5356	23	568	2138

Source : Data Processed by Researchers from the Salatiga City Election Commission (KPU) in 2024

Based on the data in the table above, in the 2024 simultaneous elections, out of 613 total polling stations in Salatiga City, which are included in 2% of the DPT, there are 7,494 voters, when compared to the total number of DPTb in the 2019 simultaneous elections, there was an increase in the number of voters by 4,394 voters. This reflects an increase in enthusiasm and public sensitivity regarding information on moving to vote using the A5 form. Based on data from the General Election Commission; Salatiga City has the highest participation rate in Central Java with a participation rate for the president of 87.91%; DPR RI 87.85%; DPD 87.81%; Provincial DPRD 87.51%, and Salatiga City DPRD 87.40%.

Figure 1. Respondents by Gender



Based on the distribution of questionnaires administered to respondents, namely students from out-of-town students in Salatiga City, it was found that of the 209 respondents, 52, or 25%, were male. Meanwhile, 257 respondents, or 75% of the total responses, were female. From the 209 responses, it can be concluded that the number of female respondents outnumbers that of male respondents.

Table 2. Respondent Characteristics Based on Region of Origin

No.	Region of Origin	Amount	Percentage
1	Bali	14	7%
2	Nias	13	6%
3	Papua	11	5%
4	Samosir	11	5%
5	Other
6	Total	209	100%

Source: Primary data, processed, 2025

As can be seen, respondents from Bali Province dominated the study, with 14 respondents representing 7%. Second place came from Nias, with 13 respondents representing 6%. Third place was occupied by respondents from West Papua and Samosir, with 11 respondents representing 5% each.

1. Assessing the Outer Model or Measurement Model (Validity Test)

a. *Convergent Validity*

If the average variance extracted (AVE) value is 0.5 or above, the variation of flexibility measurements might be deemed beneficial. An analysis was carried out by looking at the correlation between items or component



scores generated using PLS software in order to assess the measurement model's convergent validity. Table 2 below shows the outcomes of this outer model test.

Table 3. Outer Model Test (Loading Factor)

No.	Item	Loading Factor	Information
1	KMS 1	0.787	Valid
2	KMS 2	0.837	Valid
3	KMS 3	0.808	Valid
4	KMS 4	0.819	Valid
5	ISB 1	0.797	Valid
6	ISB 2	0.8	Valid
7	ISB 3	0.755	Valid
8	ISB 4	0.766	Valid
9	ISB 5	0.767	Valid
10	ISB 6	0.779	Valid
11	ISB 7	0.736	Valid
12	ISB 8	0.756	Valid
13	PM 1	0.825	Valid
14	PM 2	0.822	Valid
15	PM3	0.807	Valid
16	PM4	0.834	Valid

Source: Primary data, processed, 2025

As advised, an indicator must have an estimated loading factor value of at least 0.7 in order to be deemed genuine. All indicators had loading factor values greater than 0.7, according to the data displayed in Table 4.1. Every indicator has loading factors more than 0.7, meaning that every item accurately reflects the construct being measured. The indicators that best characterize their respective conceptions are PM4 (0.834) and KMS 2 (Loading Factor = 0.837). More than half of the variance in these indicators can be explained by their latent constructions, according to AVE values that are all over 0.5 (and even near or above 0.6). This is strong evidence that the measurement model being employed is accurate and trustworthy.

b. *Composite reliability* and average variance validity (AVE)

A minimum AVE value of ≥ 0.50 is utilized to assess the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) results. Results for Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability will be evaluated using a minimum value of ≥ 0.70 for acceptability and a value of ≥ 0.80 for very satisfactory. Table 3 below displays the findings of the Composite Reliability and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) tests.

Table 4. Outer Model Test (Composite Reliability and AVE)

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	rho.A	Composite Reliability	Average Variation Extracted (AVE)	Note:
KMS	0.829	0.83	0.886	0.661	Reliable



ISB	0.902	0.902	0.921	0.593	Reliable
PM	0.84	0.84	0.893	0.676	Reliable

Source: Primary data, processed, 2025

Table 4 presents the composite reliability and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values. All constructs achieved composite reliability scores above 0.70, ranging from 0.886 to 0.921. AVE values exceeded the 0.50 criterion: social media dependence (0.661), information-seeking behavior (0.593), and voting behavior (0.676), confirming convergent validity.

c. *Discriminant Validity (Cross Loading)*

To evaluate the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) root, we need to observe the Fornel-Lacker or Cross-Loading results. These findings suggest that, in comparison to variables from other indicator blocks, all indicators should have a better correlation with their respective variables. The Cross-Loading findings are displayed in Table 4 below.

Table 5. Cross Loading

	KMS	ISB	PM
KMS 1	0.787	0.564	0.485
KMS 2	0.837	0.571	0.564
KMS 3	0.808	0.568	0.577
KMS 4	0.819	0.576	0.556
ISB 1	0.52	0.797	0.541
ISB 2	0.534	0.8	0.605
ISB 3	0.56	0.755	0.584
ISB 4	0.51	0.766	0.497
ISB 5	0.563	0.767	0.557
ISB 6	0.521	0.779	0.578
ISB 7	0.581	0.736	0.45
ISB 8	0.524	0.756	0.573
PM 1	0.543	0.625	0.825
PM 2	0.562	0.579	0.822
PM3	0.599	0.559	0.807
PM4	0.503	0.586	0.834

Source: Primary data, processed, 2025

Table 5 shows the cross-loadings for discriminant validity assessment. Each indicator loaded highest on its own construct compared to other constructs, establishing discriminant validity. For example, KMS indicators loaded between 0.787-0.837 on the KMS construct but only 0.485-0.577 on other constructs, confirming that the three variables represent distinct concepts.

2. Structural Model Testing (Inner Model)

The correlations between constructs, significant values, and R-square of the study model were examined using inner model or structural model testing. The significance of the structural path parameter coefficients and the R-square for the dependent construct t-test were used to assess the structural model.

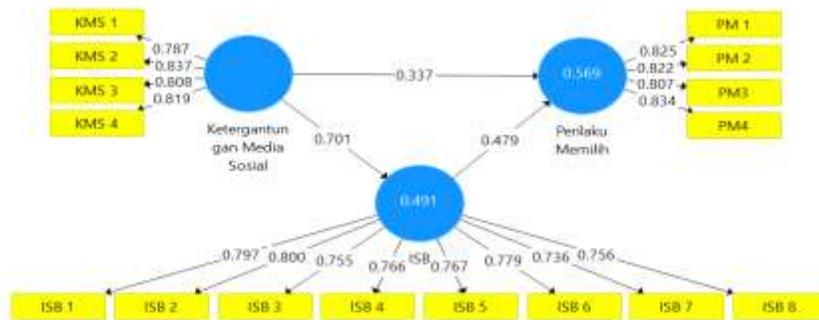


Figure 2. Structural Model

The first step in evaluating a model using PLS is to examine the R-square for each dependent latent variable. Table 5 below displays the R-square estimation results using SmartPLS.

Table 6. R Table

	R Square	Adjusted R Square
ISB	0.491	0.488
PM	0.569	0.564

Source: Primary data, processed, 2025

The structural model was evaluated for explanatory power and model fit. Table 6 presents the R-square values. Social media dependence explained 49.1% of the variance in information-seeking behavior ($R^2 = 0.491$), categorized as moderate. The combined model explained 56.9% of the variance in voting behavior ($R^2 = 0.569$), categorized as strong.

Table 7. Fit Model

	Saturated model	Estimated model
SRMR	0.059	0.059

Source: Primary data, processed, 2025

Table 7 shows the model fit indices. The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) value was 0.059 for both saturated and estimated models, below the recommended threshold of 0.08, indicating excellent model fit.

3. Hypothesis Testing

Very helpful information about the link between the study variables is provided by the significance of the calculated parameters. Direct and indirect effects are the two types of hypothesis tests.

a. Direct Effect Hypothesis Test

The results of the analysis for the value of the direct influence relationship between variables can be seen in table 7 below.

Table 8. Direct Effect Hypothesis Test

Variables	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics ((O/STDEV))	P Values
KMS -> PM	0.337	0.33	0.105	3,194	0.001
KMS -> ISB	0.701	0.69	0.078	8,935	0.000
ISB -> PM	0.479	0.484	0.123	3.89	0.000

Table 8 presents the results of direct effect hypothesis testing. Social media dependence had a positive and significant effect on voting behavior ($\beta = 0.337$, $t = 3.194$, $p = 0.001$), supporting H1. Social media dependence exhibited a strong positive



effect on information-seeking behavior ($\beta = 0.701$, $t = 8.935$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H2. Information-seeking behavior significantly influenced voting behavior ($\beta = 0.479$, $t = 3.890$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H3.

1. The influence of KMS on PM

With a T-statistic over 1.96 of 2.521 and a p-value < 0.05 of 0.001, the table above indicates that there is a significant link between KMS and PM. The link between KMS and PM is unidirectional, as indicated by the initial sample estimate value of 0.337, which is positive. According to this study, KMS has a substantial impact on PM. According to the test results, H1, which claims that reliance on social media significantly and favorably influences voting behavior, is acknowledged.

2. The influence of KMS on ISB

With a T-statistic over 1.96 of 8.395 and a p-value < 0.05 of 0.000, the table above indicates that the association between KMS and ISB is significant. KMS and ISB have a unidirectional connection, as indicated by the initial sample estimate, which is positive at 0.701. According to this study, KMS has a considerable impact on ISB. According to the test results, H2, which claims that reliance on social media has a favorable and substantial impact on information-seeking behavior, is acknowledged. This suggests that social media is now the main force behind the promotion of political information-seeking behavior. Feed algorithms, notifications, and personalized information environments on social media make individuals actively or passively continuously exposed and encouraged to seek further information. This dependence on social media can directly translate into more intensive information-seeking activities.

3. The influence of ISB on PM

The table above indicates that there is a significant association between X2 and Y, with a p-value < 0.05 of 0.000 and a T-statistic over 1.96 of 3.890. The link between ISB and PM is unidirectional, as indicated by the initial sample estimate value of 0.479, which is positive. According to this study, ISB is important to PM. According to the test results, H3 which holds that information-seeking activity significantly and favorably influences voting behavior is approved.

b. Indirect Effect Hypothesis Test

The results of the mediation test in this study can be seen in the SmartPLS output in the Bootstrapping section of the Specific Indirect Effect. Mediation analysis was used to test the mediating variable as a link between the independent variables. The results of the mediation analysis are shown in Table 8.

Table 9. Indirect Effect Hypothesis Test

Variables	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
X1 -> Z -> Y	0.336	0.336	0.101	3,315	0.001

Source: Primary data, processed, 2025

Table 9 displays the results of indirect effect testing. The indirect effect of social media dependence on voting behavior through information-seeking behavior was positive and significant ($\beta = 0.336$, $t = 3.315$, $p = 0.001$). The indirect effect (0.336) was nearly equivalent to the direct effect (0.337), indicating that ISB functions as a strong partial mediator. This supports H4, confirming the mediating role of information-seeking behavior in the relationship between social media dependence and voting behavior.

The Influence of KMS on PM Through ISB

The test revealed a t-statistic value of $3.315 > 1.96$, p-values of $0.001 < 0.05$, and an original sample value of 0.336 for the indirect impact of KMS on PM through ISB. P-values less than 0.05 show that there is a substantial and mediated association between KMS and PM through ISB. As a result, H4, which claims that information-seeking behavior mediates the impact of social media dependency on voting behavior, is accepted in this study. This suggests that ISB performs a partial mediation role that is almost flawless. This indicates that the primary way that social media dependency influences voting behavior is by motivating people to look for information first.

The Influence of Dependence on Social Media on Voting Behavior



With a route coefficient (β) of 0.337 and a T-statistic value of 3.194 ($p < 0.01$), the path analysis results demonstrate that Social Media Dependence (SMD) has a positive and substantial direct influence on Voting Behavior (PM). The positive coefficient value suggests that migrant students' propensity to vote actively increases with their degree of reliance on social media for political information. This provides empirical support for the central tenet of Ball-Rockeach & DeFleur's (1976) Media Dependency Theory, which holds that in circumstances of social upheaval and uncertainty, such as those faced by migrating students who are cut off from their home political context individuals will increasingly rely on the most easily accessible media to understand social reality and guide their behavior. This theory predicts the existence of active behavioral effects, where media exposure encourages real actions that might not have been taken without such exposure.

The acceptance of Hypothesis 1 (H1) with a statistically significant path coefficient of 0.337 (p -value + 0.001) is a direct empirical confirmation of the MDT proposition. In the context of migrant students in Salatiga, uncertainty due to separation from the political environment of their hometown and the need to understand local political dynamics create ideal conditions for the operation of media dependency mechanisms. The primary information focus is the characteristics of respondents who are mostly members of Generation Z and who use social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp on an average of three to five hours per day.

It is clear from respondents' answers that Generation Z members who use social media make up the majority of the survey sample. Up to 68% of respondents said that their main source of political information is social media. Students who live away from home are constantly exposed to and involved with political information due to the high intensity of social media use, which averages more than three hours per day. Voters' attitudes are shaped by this exposure, which also directly motivates people to turn their political preferences into tangible actions, such as using the A5 form to go to the polls on election day. This result supports the MDT hypothesis that people will depend more on easily accessible media to influence their behavior under uncertain circumstances, such as when casting a ballot while traveling.

This research is also in line with research Kurniawan et al. (2024) and Intyaswati et al. (2021) which also found a positive correlation between the intensity of social media use and electoral participation among young voters. In the context of out-of-town students in Salatiga, reliance on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp to monitor campaign developments, candidate profiles, and current issues has become a catalyst for their political participation, even though they are far from their home election.

The Influence of Dependence on Social Media on Information Seeking Behavior

With a highly significant path coefficient ($\beta = 0.701$; T-statistic = 8.935; $p < 0.000$), the association between Social Media Dependency (SMD) and Information Seeking Behavior (ISB) is shown to be the largest in this model, supporting hypothesis 2 (H2). This relationship's strength demonstrates that reliance on social media is not the end of the process but rather the main factor promoting more sophisticated and active information-seeking behavior. The Media Dependency Theory (MDT) paradigm is substantively elaborated by empirical findings that support Social Media Dependency (SMD) as the main driver of Information Seeking Behavior (ISB). The findings of this study show that, contrary to traditional MDT's emphasis on a linear link between media dependency and behavioral impacts, in the modern digital ecosystem, dependence functions as a complex catalyst for a series of hierarchical cognitive-behavioral processes according to Ellis's model. This mechanism displays a paradigmatic transformation from passive information consumption to active cognitive agency, where structural dependence on social media platforms actually triggers the dynamics of systematic and self-directed information-seeking behavior.

In this study, Ellis's Information Seeking Behavior model (1993) provides an appropriate framework for mapping this process. High dependency triggers a cycle of information seeking behavior that includes :

1. Starting & Browsing: Social media serves as a starting point for identifying issues and sources of information, while facilitating semi-structured browsing across platforms.
2. Chaining & Differentiating: Looking at links from one content to another (chaining) and then filtering sources based on credibility and bias (differentiating).
3. Monitoring & Extracting: Monitoring information developments periodically (monitoring) and extracting important points from the candidate's program (extracting).



4. Verifying: Verifying circulating political claims is crucial amidst the rise of misinformation.

Based on respondent data, it can be seen that the indicator "ease of access to political information on social media" (KMS3) received the highest percentage of agreement, at 74.5%. This indicates that social media functions as a starting point and also a gateway that triggers a cycle of further information searches. The characteristics of students who are away from home as digital natives who are skilled at navigating various platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and online news sites enable them not only to passively consume information, but also actively engage in chaining (following links), browsing, and monitoring the latest developments. Thus, dependence on social media does not end with consumption, but instead encourages the start of a more in-depth and multidimensional search process. Ellis's eight-stage model provides a clear map for visualizing the cognitive and behavioral processes triggered by this media dependence.

This phenomenon can be further explained through the concept of goal-oriented motivation in MDT. The need to understand the new political environment in their new place and reduce uncertainty in political decision-making encourages students to rely not only on social media but also to use it as a launching pad for more in-depth, multi-source information exploration. These findings strongly support and deepen this research. Jun & Firdaus (2023) on Social Media Political Information Dependency (SMPID), which states that dependence on social media to meet political information needs directly increases the intensity and depth of political information searches. What is being done? Jun & Firdaus (2023) In the Malaysian context, this study confirms the Indonesian context by adding the dimensions of the Ellis model which provides higher granularity in the Information Seeking process.

The Influence of Information Seeking Behavior on Voting Behavior

The results of the third hypothesis test (H3) confirm that Information Seeking Behavior (ISB) has a positive and significant effect on Voting Behavior (PM). This is evidenced by a p-value of 0.000 and a T-statistic of 3.890, thus accepting Hypothesis 3. The strong influence of ISB on PM confirms the central proposition of the theory of rational voting behavior. Intensive information seeking activities such as comparing candidates' visions and missions, track records, and verifying facts have enabled migrant students to conduct informed voting. They do not only rely on simple heuristics such as popularity or identity ties, they have a tendency to form more stable preferences based on substantive considerations. This ISB process indirectly increases political efficacy, namely individuals' belief that they have the capacity to understand and influence politics, which ultimately encourages more meaningful participation.

The results of respondents' responses, the ISB indicator "I verify the truth of political information before deciding on a choice" obtained a high agreement score (70.2%) related to verifying (verifying political claims) and extracting (extracting candidate policy information) indicating a high level of agreement. This indicates that students who are away from home are not only seeking information, but also conducting a critical evaluation process (differentiating) and confirmation. This high and comprehensive ISB activity allows them to do what in voter behavior theory is called informed voting or policy-based voting. This in-depth cognitive process builds stronger political efficacy, namely the belief that they have sufficient knowledge and capacity to make rational political decisions that ultimately encourage participation at the polling station with higher confidence and commitment. This is reflected in the R-square value of Voting Behavior (PM) of 0.569, which means that the model consisting of KMS and ISB is able to explain 56.9% of the variance in Voting Behavior.

These findings empirically support the research Zhang & Gao (2024) which confirms that intensive and meaningful information-seeking behavior shapes informed voting preferences, making voting behavior more reflective and participatory. These results are also in line with the findings of Levy & Razin (2015) in the American Economic Review which concluded that high information-seeking behavior encourages better aggregation of political knowledge, resulting in information-based voting behavior.

The influence of Information Seeking Behavior mediation on Dependence on Social Media on voting behavior

In this study, an integration between Media Dependency Theory, which explains why media is influential, and the Ellis Model, which explains how cognitive-behavioral processes work as a result of this dependence, is proposed. The results of the fourth hypothesis test (H4) regarding the mediation effect indicate that Information Seeking Behavior (ISB) significantly mediates the influence of Social Media Dependency (SMD) on Voting Behavior (PM). This is evidenced by the p-value for the indirect effect of 0.001 and T-statistic of 3.315. The magnitude of the indirect effect coefficient (0.336), which

is almost equal to the direct effect (0.337), indicates that ISB acts as a very strong and almost perfect partial mediation. This finding reveals a dual mechanism, namely:

a) Direct Mechanism (KMS)→ (PM)

Represents the direct mobilization effect of MDT, where exposure to and reliance on political content on social media directly stimulates voting intentions and actions.

b) Indirect Mechanism (KMS)→ (ISB)→ (PM) :

Representing a more complex cognitive-behavioral pathway, this pathway explains that media dependence first drives individuals into an active information search (ISB) cycle. This cognitive process, involving filtering, verification, and in-depth analysis, then forms the knowledge base for rational and informed electoral decision-making (PM).

Contrary to passive consumption models that assume direct linear effects of media exposure on electoral behavior, these findings reveal a more complex mechanism whereby social media dependence operates through both direct and indirect pathways. The strong direct effect of social media dependence on voting behavior ($\beta = 0.337$, $p = 0.001$) empirically validates the core proposition of Media Dependency Theory (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976b) in the context of migrant students. In situations of uncertainty created by geographic separation from home political environments, individuals increasingly rely on accessible media to understand social reality and guide their actions. The high intensity of social media use among respondents averaging 3-5 hours daily creates continuous exposure to political content, transforming preferences into tangible voting actions through the A5 mechanism. This finding aligns with previous research demonstrating positive correlations between social media use and electoral participation among young voters (Intyaswati et al., 2021; Kurniawan et al., 2024).

This finding extends Media Dependency Theory by incorporating Ellis's (1993) Information Seeking Behavior model as a cognitive-behavioral pathway. The exceptionally strong relationship between social media dependence and ISB ($\beta = 0.701$, $p < 0.001$) the strongest path in the model demonstrates that dependency functions not as an endpoint but as a catalyst activating systematic information-seeking processes. Migrant students, as digital natives, navigate platforms through Ellis's stages: starting with social media as initial access points, browsing across platforms, chaining through links, differentiating sources based on credibility, monitoring developments, extracting policy information, and verifying political claims. The high agreement (74.5%) on "ease of access to political information on social media" confirms social media's role as both starting point and gateway triggering deeper search cycles. This granular elaboration of MDT's behavioral effects addresses the "how" question missing from classical formulations, revealing that structural dependence transforms passive consumption into active cognitive agency.

The near-equivalence of direct and indirect effects (0.337 vs. 0.336) implies that information-seeking behavior is not merely an additional pathway but a mechanism of comparable importance to direct mobilization. This finding challenges assumptions that media effects operate primarily through exposure alone. The significant effect of ISB on voting behavior ($\beta = 0.479$, $p < 0.001$) confirms that intensive information-seeking comparing candidate visions, verifying facts, evaluating track records enables informed voting beyond simple heuristics. The high agreement (70.2%) on "I verify political information before deciding" indicates that migrant students engage in critical evaluation, building political efficacy and more stable, substantive preferences. This supports research demonstrating that active information-seeking produces more reflective, participatory voting behavior (Levy & Razin, 2015; Zhang & Gao, 2024).

The partial mediation finding provides a theoretical contribution by integrating MDT's macro-level explanation of why media matters with Ellis's micro-level account of how cognitive-behavioral processes unfold. For migrant students facing information gaps due to separation from traditional political sources, social media triggers active seeking to reduce uncertainty. The differentiating and verifying stages function as "cognitive shortcuts" transforming passive dependence into quality participation. This explains variance among individuals with similar media exposure: the depth of ISB processes determines electoral outcomes. The 56.9% explained variance in voting behavior ($R^2 = 0.569$) confirms that combining media dependence with ISB provides robust prediction, though other factors political advertising, peer influence, ideology account for remaining variance, suggesting directions for future research incorporating moderating variables such as digital literacy and political efficacy.

CONCLUSION



This study confirms that voting behavior among migrant students in the 2024 Election in Salatiga City is significantly shaped by social media dependence and information-seeking behavior (ISB), with ISB functioning as a strong partial mediator (indirect effect = 0.336, $p < 0.001$). This finding reveals a dual mechanism direct mobilization and cognitive-behavioral mediation whereby social media dependence is optimally translated into electoral participation through active and critical information search, explaining why individuals with similar media exposure may exhibit different voting behaviors based on the depth and quality of their information-seeking processes. Theoretically, this research integrates Media Dependency Theory and Ellis's Information Seeking Behavior model, demonstrating that macro-level media dependence activates micro-level cognitive-behavioral stages—starting, browsing, differentiating, verifying, and extracting—before manifesting as voting decisions, thereby advancing scholarly understanding of digital political behavior in contexts of information uncertainty. From a policy perspective, these findings imply that the General Elections Commission (KPU) should redesign campaign content with embedded links to primary sources, establish dedicated information service units at universities to assist with A5 procedures and verified information access, and collaborate with social media platforms to promote credible sources. Universities must integrate political digital literacy modules addressing source differentiation, verification techniques, and policy-based evaluation into curricula, while organizing specialized workshops and peer-support networks for migrant students. Political parties and candidates should prioritize substantive policy information over image-based messaging, develop interactive platforms for direct candidate engagement, and tailor content to issues relevant to migrant populations such as inter-regional connectivity and youth employment. Collaborative initiatives among KPU, universities, and student organizations should develop a one-stop information hub integrating A5 procedures, candidate comparisons, fact-checking resources, and moderated discussion forums adopting inclusive approaches that acknowledge Salatiga's multicultural student demographics. This study's limitations including its confinement to two universities and cross-sectional design and suggest future research should expand to other educational cities, employ longitudinal methods to capture real-time dynamics, and examine moderating variables such as digital literacy, political efficacy, and cultural identity through mixed-method approaches. Ultimately, electoral participation in the digital era must be understood as the outcome of interaction between structural dependence on digital platforms and individuals' cognitive capacities to manage, filter, and verify political information, requiring coordinated, sustained efforts from election commissions, educational institutions, political actors, and civil society to strengthen Indonesia's digital democracy.

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