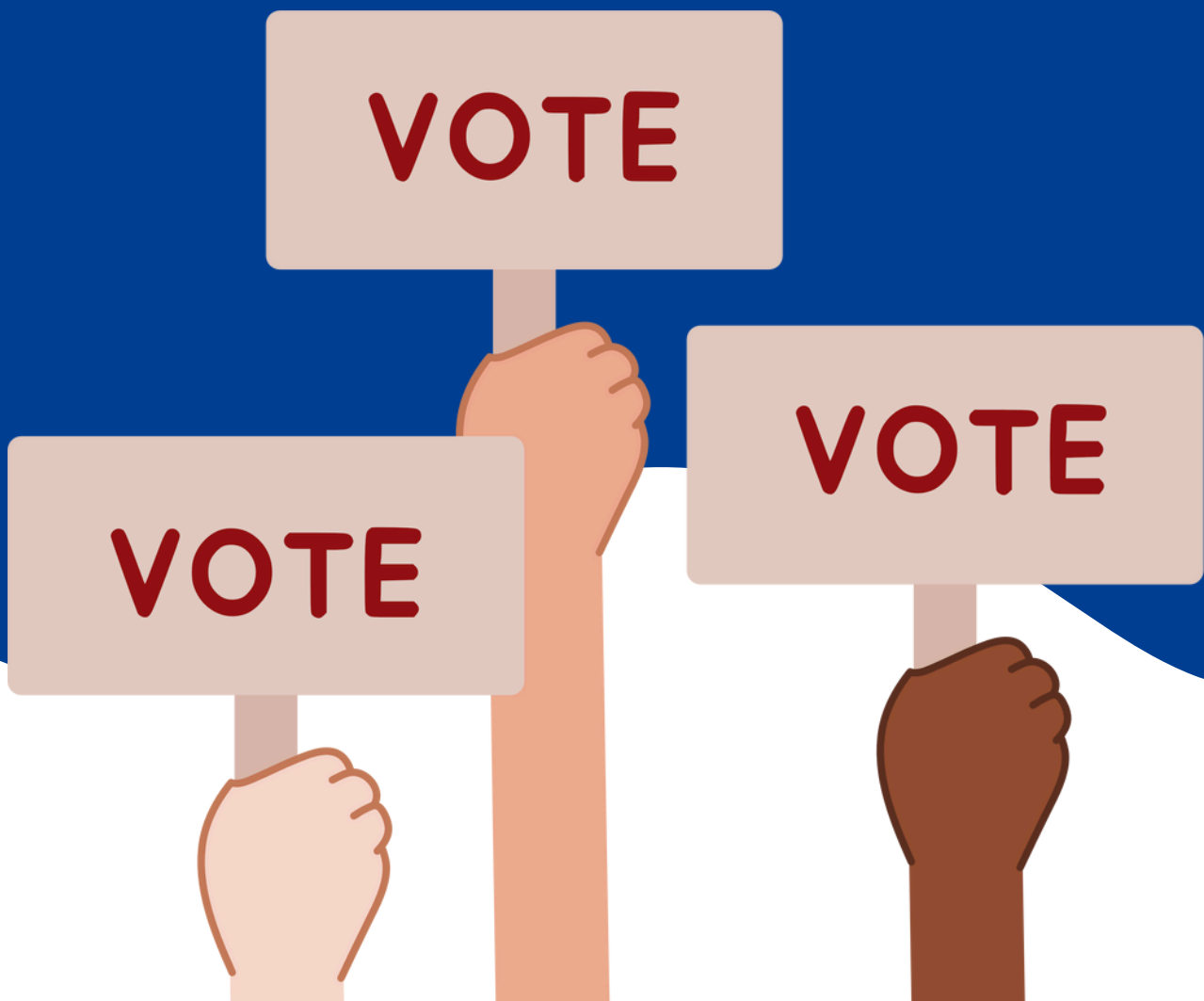




2024



Negativity, Activism, Division, and Fatigue: Gen Z Social Media and the 2024 Election



Researchers



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Election By Dr. Yi Luo, Dr. Jin-A Choi, & Dr. Bond Benton

Introduction

The impact of young voters, especially Gen Z, on shaping political discourse and outcome in the 2024 U.S. presidential election appeared to be pivotal (Balevic, 2024; Sherman, 2024). Notably, the election revealed sharp contrasts in gendered political engagement. Young female voters emerged as a dominant force to advocate progressive issues like reproductive rights, healthcare, and gender equity, whereas their male counterparts prioritized economic concerns such as inflation and employment. Although young voters participated actively on social media in election-related discussions, their offline engagement, as reflected in voter turnout, showed a decline compared to the 2020 election, implying the daunting challenge of translating online advocacy into tangible political outcomes.

This study seeks to examine how young voters on social media reacted to the 2024 election with a focus on their social media activity, gender dynamics in issue priorities, emotional reactions, and political engagement. Particularly, this study examines the gendered dimensions of political sentiment, revealing how young women overwhelmingly supported Kamala Harris and used social platforms to advocate for democratic values and civil liberties. In contrast, young men exhibited a more divided stance, with a notable increase in support for Donald Trump driven by his tailored outreach through alternative media platforms and a focus on economic messaging. This study also underscores a rising trend of political consumerism among Gen Z, who resort to their economic choices as a form of political activism. In sum, findings of this study offer a nuanced understanding of the interplay between digital activism, Internet pop culture, and voting behavior, emphasizing the need for political campaign strategies to bridge the gap between online participation and tangible political impact.

Method

To explore young voters' reactions on social media toward the 2024 U.S. Presidential Election, this study employed *Brandwatch*, an artificial intelligence (AI)-drive social media analytics tool, to collect and analyze social conversations. Our primary focus targeted specifically on the population of Gen-Z. *Brandwatch* allowed us to search through the world's largest pool of online conversations for target groups to identify unique trends and patterns among specific groups with distinct social and/or demographic attributes (e.g., gender, location, interests, etc.). It is important to note that the data collected by *Brandwatch* may not exclusively represent the Gen Z population. This limitation may stem from the daunting obstacle of confirming social media users' demographic information (e.g., age, gender, etc.) and the open-access nature of online conversations. As a result, some posts from outside the targeted Gen-Z group may have been included in the data.

Two separate search queries were created on *Brandwatch* to collect social conversations related to the 2024 election contributed by young male and female voters, respectively, from October 30 to November 13 (i.e., 7 days before and 7 days after the November 6 Election Day). Both queries

included the same key terms (such as “2024 election,” “2024 voting,” “2024 U.S. presidential election,” etc.). The only difference between the queries was the target group with one focusing on Gen Z males and the other on Gen Z females. Despite requesting *Brandwatch* to harvest social conversations across multiple social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, X, Instagram, YouTube, Reddit, blogs, etc.), only social posts from X (formerly Twitter) were retrieved. Such an outcome could be due to the sheer large volume of data generated by each query, over 6 million social posts (see Figure 1 and Figure 2 below) were collected in a span of merely 15 days, which likely overwhelmed the tool’s ability to collect data from other platforms.

Based on the [NBC’s Exit Poll \(2024\)](#) and the initial analysis of the data, a noticeable decline in support for the [Democratic Party](#) emerged among Gen Z males. To further explore this gender gap in voting preferences, a third search query was built to specifically focus on social media discussions from Gen Z males regarding Donald Trump in the same period (i.e., October 30 – November 13) including keywords such as “bro vote,” “bro culture,” “Trump,” “#youngmenfortrump,” “Trump” AND “young voters,” “bro vote” AND “2024 election,” etc. The third query yielded a total of 427k social posts from various social media platforms, such as X (i.e., 69%), Reddit (i.e., 21%), and YouTube (3%).

Findings

Enthusiastic Social Engagement Among Young Female Voters

Female Gen Z voters demonstrated a strikingly higher level of engagement in social discussions on X surrounding the 2024 presidential election compared to their male counterparts. During the observation period from October 30 to November 13, young women generated seven million social media posts on X related to the election, reflecting a 52% increase from the previous period’s five million posts. Male young voters contributed six million social posts during the same period, marking an 77% increase from their earlier total of three million posts. Notably, the peak in social media activity for young female voters reached 1.4 million posts on the election day (i.e., November 6), surpassing the 1.2 million posts from their male peers. However, both groups experienced a significant decline in activity starting on November 7, with a continuing downward trend.

Young female voters expressed strong and visible support for Kamala Harris in their social media conversations on X, a sentiment less pronounced among their male counterparts. This gender gap in sentiment aligns with broader voting trends. According to CNN's [Exit Polls \(2024\)](#), 53% female voters supported Harris compared to 45% for Trump. Among voters between 18–29 years old, Harris gained an 11-point lead over Trump (54% to 43%), according to the [NBC exit polls](#). This lead reflects the highest level of support that Harris received from any age group according to [Tufts’ Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement \(CIRCLE\)](#), attesting the effectiveness of her campaign in resonating with young female voters. Furthermore, other polls suggest that young women have become the most progressive demographic in U.S. history, with greater alignment with the Democratic Party compared to previous generations (Saad, Jones, & Fioroni, 2024; Sherman, 2024).

Despite this enthusiastic online support, young female voters' backing for Harris fell short of the 25-point lead President Biden achieved over Trump in 2020 (CIRCLE, 2024). Moreover, the overall turnout among young voters dropped to 42% (CIRCLE, 2024) compared to the 2020 election. Particularly, 61% of young female voters aged 18-29 voted for Harris, in contrast to 48% of young male voters in the same age group (NBC exit polls, 2024). These findings illuminate a major challenge for the Democratic Party on how to transform robust online political engagement into tangible offline voter turnout. Mitigating this gap and converting digital advocacy into active offline participation will be critical for future electoral success.

Figure 1: Volume of Posts on X by Gen Zs: Female

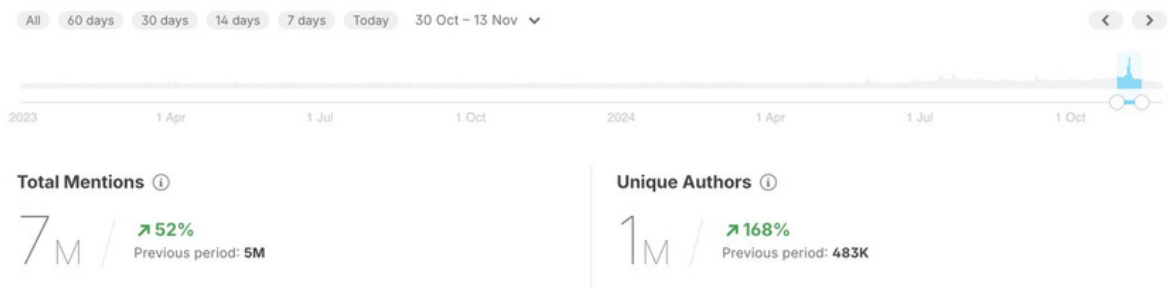


Figure 2: Volume of Posts on X by Gen Zs: Male

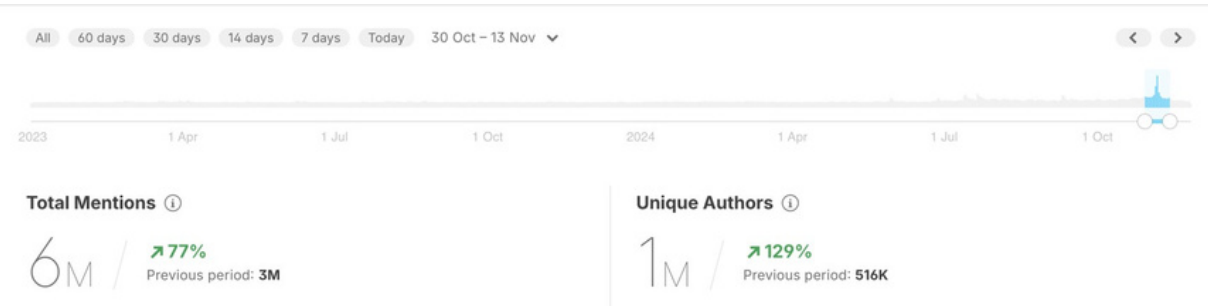
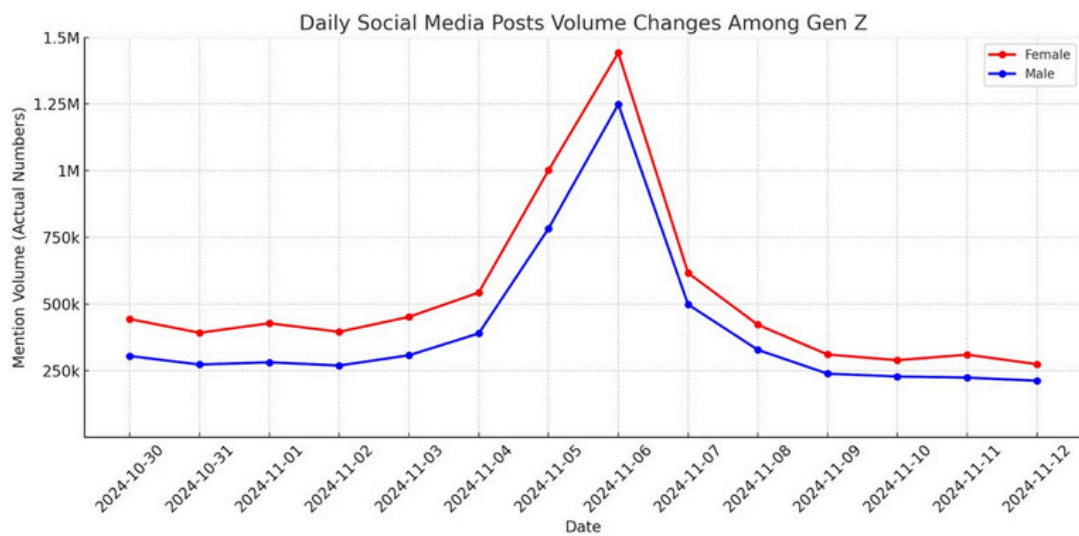


Figure 3: Daily Social Media Posts Volume Changes Among Gen Z on X



Participation in the election-related discussion on social media dropped sharply for both genders immediately after election day. This sharp decline in social discourse may reflect "political exhaustion," a phenomenon worth deeper exploration. The starkness of this drop may imply that the intense pre-election engagement among Gen Z voters, particularly young women, might not translate into sustained political interest or activism in the post-election period. This raises critical questions about the long-term impact of such fatigue on political engagement and how campaigns or media can foster more enduring political involvement by young voters.

Erosion of Support from Young Male Voters

The 2024 election marked a significant shift in support among young voters, particularly within the 18 to 29 age group, where Gen Z men showed increased preference for Donald Trump (49%) over Kamala Harris (47%) (NBC, 2024). This represented a staggering gain for a Republican presidential candidate among Gen Z voters, resulting in a tangible impact on the overall election outcome. Understanding the factors that contributed to this shift is crucial for future campaigns aiming to engage diverse voter demographics. Our analysis highlights several key factors that likely influenced the movement of young male voters toward Trump.

#1. Engaging Young Male Voters through Their Preferred Media Platforms

One of the most significant factors in this shift was Trump’s strategic use of digital media platforms that are particularly popular with young men. Gen Z voters, especially young men, have demonstrated distinct media consumption patterns compared to women. According to a [2024 Pew Research Center report](#), young men are more likely to get their news from social media platforms such as YouTube, X (formerly Twitter), and blogs like Reddit. Men accounted for 57%, 64%, and 68% of users on these platforms, respectively, for news consumption. This stark divide in news sources between young men and women underscores the importance of engaging with the right channels to reach this demographic.

A viral social media post from our sample highlighted this divide: “While most women get their news from TikTok, most young men get their news from YouTube, X, and Reddit.” Another tweet pointed out, “Exactly—these are young men who think that listening to podcasts is a significant 'activity'...” This shows how young male voters are deeply engaged with alternative media, particularly podcasts and video platforms, where they consume news and political discourse.

To capture the attention of this audience, Trump tailored his outreach to align with the media habits of young men. He made targeted appearances on podcasts and platforms that resonate with them, such as *The Joe Rogan Experience*, Theo Von’s *This Past Weekend*, the Nelk Boys’ *Full Send*, Logan Paul’s *Impaulsive*, and the Twitch stream of Adin Ross. Trump’s appearance on Joe Rogan’s podcast, for example, garnered nearly 38 million views on YouTube within hours of its release, with millions more tuning in through Spotify, Apple Music, and other audio platforms (Mastrangelo, 2024). Rogan’s show, which is particularly popular among young men, became a key venue for Trump to directly connect with this demographic.



Trump’s Interviews on Alternative Media

Contrast with Harris's Media Strategy

While Trump aggressively reached out to young male voters through platforms like YouTube and podcasts, Harris's media strategy appeared less aligned with the preferences of this group. Despite receiving an invitation to appear on Joe Rogan's podcast, Harris declined, opting instead to appear on the *Call Her Daddy* podcast, which focuses on topics like relationships and advice, generally appealing to young women. While this appearance may have resonated with women, it did little to capture the attention of young male voters who were more engaged with the types of podcasts and shows that Trump frequented. This stark contrast in media outreach likely contributed to a sense among young male voters that their concerns were better understood by Trump, especially when it came to economic issues, which were central to his campaign.



Trump's Appeal to Young Men Without College Degrees

Trump's media strategy also aligned with his broader appeal to young men, particularly those without college degrees, a key demographic that has felt left behind by traditional political establishments. Many of these voters are not deeply entrenched in political ideology but are drawn to messages that speak to their economic frustrations, cultural values, and media preferences. By leveraging the power of popular culture and alternative media, Trump was able to broaden his reach among young men, creating a connection that Harris's campaign did not fully capitalize on.

The intersection of politics and popular culture—through appearances on high-profile podcasts, engagement with internet personalities, and messaging that resonates with young men's lived experiences—became a central component of Trump's campaign. Appearing on shows like Joe Rogan's allowed Trump to communicate directly with an audience that feels disconnected from traditional political discourse. These platforms also offer a more informal, unfiltered style of communication that appeals to young men under 30 who are increasingly skeptical of mainstream media ([Pew Research Center, 2024](#)).

#2. Capitalizing on Youth Masculinity through "Bro Culture"

Bro culture, a term that initially refers to the close-knit camaraderie between men, has evolved into a broader social phenomenon associated with particular masculine ideals: toughness, competitiveness, physicality, and bonding through shared activities (Keith, 2020). Trump's campaign has adeptly tapped into this culture, specifically targeting young men through the strategic use of social media, podcasts, and a broader appeal to male-dominated subcultures like sports, crypto, and tech.

Trump's direct engagement with younger male voters—often referred to as the “bro vote”—has been marked by his appearances on influential podcasts such as *This Past Weekend* with Theo Von, *Flagrant* with Andrew Schulz, *Impulsive* with Logan Paul, and *the Full Send* podcast by the Nelk Boys. These shows are known for promoting an unfiltered, hyper-masculine brand of humor and dialogue, resonating with what's often described as “disaffected young men” (Kang, 2024). By aligning himself with these media personalities, Trump has been able to connect with a demographic that traditionally felt alienated by mainstream politics, which can be evidenced from the following exemplary social posts by young male voters:

“Joe Rogan fans aren't the only bros out there. Nice to see another model of masculinity being presented to young men.”

“The young men of america can only be convinced by a podcast host who could make it through 3 episodes of survivor and this is, frankly, where joe rogan has us beat”

“A lot of young men said the reason they voted for Trump was because of Joe Rogan's Podcast.”

“Throwback to [@TheRealDiceClay](#) shoutout to my books on [@joeroganhq](#) podcast!

Trump's appearance showcased his street smarts in connecting with Gen Z.”

“During the acceptance speech, they shouted out the Nelk boys, Theo Von, Joe Rogan...

It's going to be incumbent on Democrats to figure out how to talk to these people...

Democrats have a message for young men, but a lot of times they weren't really trying to offer one.”

Bro Culture in the Digital Age

The influence of podcasts, social media, and digital culture in shaping the political preferences of young men cannot be understated. Trump's appearances on these shows helped position him as a relatable figure in a space dominated by non-traditional, anti-establishment voices. This was not just about political rhetoric; it was about embodying a certain *macho* energy. As a telling social media post puts it: “A lot of young men said the reason they voted for Trump was because of Joe Rogan's podcast.” Such endorsements speak to the way Trump's brand of masculinity—tough, direct, and unapologetically bold—aligns with the values of many young men, especially those influenced by the “bro culture” of podcasts, fitness, and internet personalities.

Social posts show how these young men view Trump as a leader who represents a return to what they perceive as “authentic masculinity.” For example, one viral social media post reads, “Jake Paul endorses Trump for President—This is how we win the Gen Z vote. Props to Jake for taking a stand!” Another states, “Democrats are losing young men massively. How does an MSNBC

panelist think Dems can fix it? They need a feminist male version of Joe Rogan to appeal to young men.” This framing emphasizes how the right kind of masculinity, as embodied by figures like Rogan, Paul, and Trump, has the power to sway votes in a way traditional political campaigns struggle to replicate.

Musk: The Ultimate Tech Bro Ally

The appeal of Trump among young men has been further strengthened by his alignment with tech mogul Elon Musk, a figure who embodies the fusion of entrepreneurial success, internet culture, and hyper-masculine ideals. Musk’s support for Trump, both publicly and through his media influence, has amplified Trump’s appeal to the “bro vote.” A recent poll by the [Young Men Research Initiative](#) found that 70% of young men favor Musk, who is seen as a tech bro hero—someone who represents a model of rugged individualism and disruptor energy that appeals to Gen Z.

Musk’s super PAC created targeted ads promoting Trump as an “American badass,” tapping into the aesthetic of masculinity that resonates with this demographic. One ad, for instance, opens with a shot of a bearded young man slumped on a couch, captioned, “If you sit this election, Kamala and the crazies will win” (Balevic, 2024). These ads play on the fears and frustrations of young men who feel disconnected from traditional political discourse, positioning Trump as their ally in the fight for the future. Musk’s influence is also evident in the way he shares content on X (formerly Twitter), often framing Trump as the kind of “alpha male” who is uniquely capable of leading the nation.

The blend of Trump’s brash masculinity, his crypto and sports bros, and Musk’s high-profile endorsement has created a potent formula for engaging young male voters. In one notable post, a Gen Z social media user proclaims, “I prefer the old version of masculinity and I prefer a president who is strong and knows how to fight. Vote Trump and get ten friends to vote Trump too.” This sentiment encapsulates the values being sold to young men: a return to strength, decisiveness, and a rejection of what they see as a politically correct, feminized culture.

The New Model of Masculinity

Trump’s campaign has successfully rebranded traditional masculine traits—physical strength, dominance, and confidence—through the lens of youth culture, making them relevant to a generation that prizes authenticity, directness, and defiance of norms. For many young men, Trump is not just a politician but a symbol of their version of masculinity. As Tina Brown (2024), former editor of *The New Yorker*, observed, “For Trump’s base of red-meat male voters, the transgressive, disruptive, superstar rocket man [Musk] is even more exciting than Trump himself.”

In essence, Trump has crafted a political identity that leverages “bro culture” as a means of appealing to a generation of young men who feel disconnected from the mainstream. Through podcasts, endorsements, and strategic partnerships with bro figures like Elon Musk, Trump has reshaped masculinity as a political tool—one that not only rallies young men to his cause but also influences the broader cultural conversation.

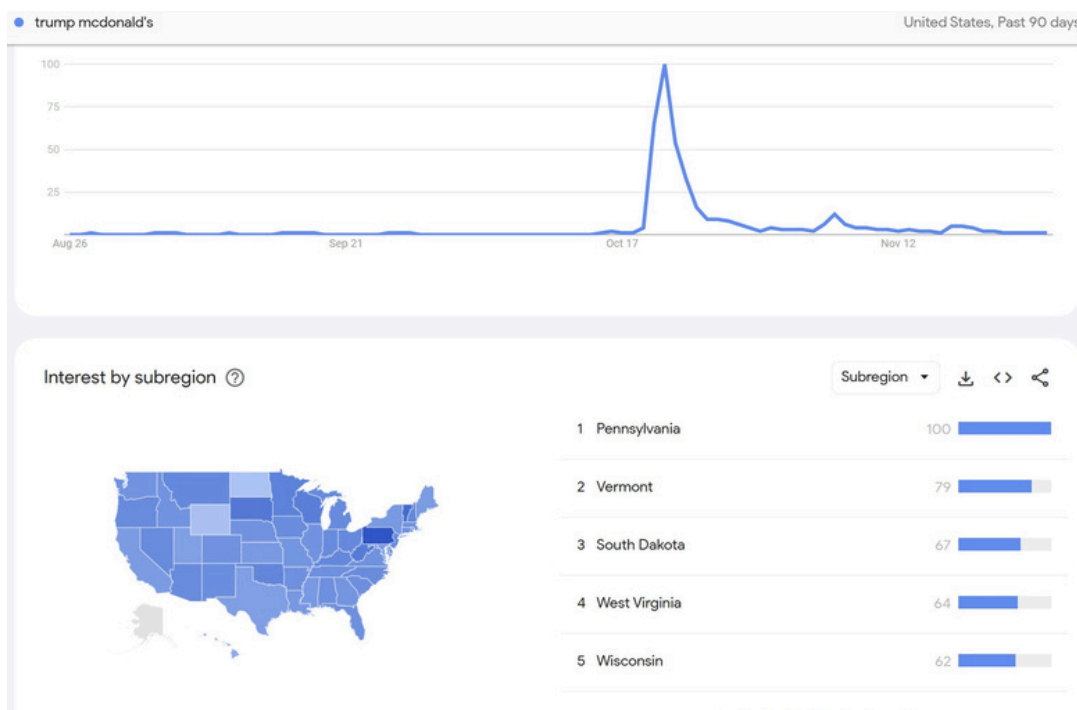
#3. Leveraging Gen Z Favored Meme-Culture

Also noteworthy was the strategic use of earned media coverage that lends itself to social media sharing. For example, on October 20, Donald Trump staged a brief appearance working a shift at a McDonald's. This calculated event served two purposes, aiming to position Trump as more relatable to working-class Americans and simultaneously functioning as a pointed "troll" against Vice President Kamala Harris, who had worked at McDonald's during her youth. The dual purpose of presenting Trump as more connected to working people and as a "troll" against Harris working at McDonald's as a teen. The publicity stunt's absurdity quickly fueled a wave of memetic mixes, amplifying the event's visibility across social media platforms.



Trump's Strategic Use of Earned Media via Memes

For very little cost/effort, Trump's "McDonald's" appearance amplified discussion of his campaign. Google Trends Analysis suggests that "Trump McDonald's" produced an immediate spike in internet search behavior. Particularly significant was that the spike was concentrated in Pennsylvania- a state that was an important part of his electoral success in swing states.



While there was mockery in many of the social media shares associated with “Trump McDonald’s,” online discussion (positive OR negative) ensured that visibility for the event would be very high (as reflected in search activity). Increasingly, it appears that meme-based activity strategically targeted at social media can have an amplifying effect on messaging; particularly relevant for future political campaigns, public relations, and advertising.

#4. Centering the Economy in the 2024 Election

The 2024 election results highlighted a significant shift in voter demographics, with young voters—particularly young men—emerging as a key influence in the election outcome. A central concern driving voting patterns across various groups was the economy, a theme that played a pivotal role in reshaping the political landscape. Trump's focus on economic issues, especially policies aimed at younger, working-class voters, stood in contrast to Kamala Harris's campaign, which centered more on women's issues like reproductive rights, healthcare access, and gender equality. As the election unfolded, it became clear that economic concerns, particularly those affecting young men and other key demographics, were crucial to the electoral outcome. According to a poll by [AP VoteCast](#), two in five voters identified the economy as the nation's most pressing issue. This focus on economic policies was evident in both candidates' campaigns, but Trump's team took a more direct approach by addressing issues that resonated with younger voters—particularly those in their 20s and early 30s, who are often most affected by economic insecurity. Trump's proposals, such as eliminating taxes on tips and overtime pay, directly targeted younger workers ([PBS News, 2024](#)), many of whom rely on tips as a primary source of income. By contrast, Harris's economic proposals, including a plan to ban grocery price surges and offer \$25,000 down payments for first-time homebuyers (Brown & Seminera, 2024), failed

to address the immediate concerns of young voters grappling with the realities of high housing prices and rising mortgage rates.

The Disconnect Between Harris’s Economic Proposals and Young Voters

For many young voters, especially those in Generation Z, the offer of a \$25,000 down payment for a home did little to alleviate the financial challenges they faced. With home prices and mortgage rates at record highs, this proposal seemed insufficient to address the core issue of affordability. In social media posts, young voters expressed frustration with the state of the economy and their sense of being left behind, as exemplified by this viral post: “I’m 19 years old. Donald Trump has been running for or serving as President for half of my entire life. Gen Z is ready for change—we are not going back!”

Many young male voters felt similarly alienated by Harris’s focus on issues such as abortion, which they perceived as less relevant to their own immediate concerns. One post succinctly captured this frustration: “Harris made this election about abortion, she basically turned it into something men can’t relate to, whereas Trump talked about the economy—something young men who are desperately trying to find jobs in this economy can relate to.”

Trump’s approach, which focused on the everyday financial struggles of young men, resonated more with this demographic. Social media posts such as, “There are 2 economies. There is the stock market and capitalist assholes. And there is the everyday economy where we reside. The stock market is doing fine, but our economy is messy due to inflation and the lasting effects of global warfare,” reflect how many young men saw themselves as being ignored by policies that didn’t address their immediate concerns.

Trump’s Economic Message and Young Male Voters

Trump’s economic messaging was particularly effective in engaging young men who felt the impact of inflation, job insecurity, and rising costs of living. By focusing on policies that directly affected their day-to-day lives—like tips, overtime pay, and tax relief—Trump was able to appeal to the practical concerns of this demographic. His ability to tap into economic frustrations, especially with issues like inflation and job scarcity, resonated deeply with young men who were struggling to navigate an economy that seemed increasingly stacked against them.

In contrast, Harris’s economic policies, though geared toward broader economic reforms, didn’t speak as directly to young men’s concerns about immediate economic hardships. Messaging that centered on women’s issues, while vital, left many young men feeling excluded from the broader economic conversation. As a result, their economic concerns—such as the high cost of housing, the challenges of entering the job market, and inflation—were not adequately addressed by Harris’s campaign.

The Broader Implications for Future Campaigns

The 2024 election highlighted the critical importance of addressing economic concerns in a way that resonates with younger voters, particularly young men. As the election results showed, messaging that focuses on tangible economic issues—such as job security, housing affordability, and tax relief—can be a powerful tool for engaging this demographic. Trump’s success in centering the economy in his campaign, in contrast to Harris’s emphasis on women’s issues,

demonstrated that young men, who are often seen as an overlooked group in political discourse, are highly attuned to the economic realities that shape their lives.

The election outcome underscored the need for future campaigns to more effectively communicate economic policies that address the concerns of young voters, especially those in demographic groups that feel disenfranchised or ignored by the traditional political establishment. In this context, the failure to engage young men on their economic concerns—such as housing, inflation, and employment—may have been a significant factor influencing their voting behavior and ultimately shaping the results of the 2024 election.

Intense Negative Sentiments Among Young Voters Post-Election

The 2024 presidential election results sparked a wave of intense negative emotions among Gen Z voters, reflecting a deeply polarized and tumultuous political environment. Across both genders, sentiments were overwhelmingly negative, characterized by feelings of sadness, disgust, and fear. Female Gen Z voters exhibited notably stronger emotional reactions compared to their male counterparts, as evidenced by a higher volume of emotionally charged social media posts. Themes of shock, disbelief, and disappointment were pervasive, with many young voters expressing uncertainty about the nation's future under the Trump administration.

The election's divisive nature strained personal relationships, affecting family dynamics, friendships, and social connections as political disagreements came to the forefront. Gen Z voters were particularly vocal about systemic issues such as misogyny, racism, sexism, and the entrenched political polarization in the U.S., highlighting a growing erosion of trust in political institutions. Concerns over the fragility of democracy, civil rights, and the country's trajectory fueled widespread fear and anxiety among this demographic.

Despite these profound feelings of despondency and vulnerability, many young voters channeled their frustration into calls for resistance and collective actions. Social media platforms have become hubs of rallying such cries (e.g., Hutchinson, 2021; Jost et al., 2018), young voters from our data set urged peers and leaders to protect vulnerable communities and defend democratic values. Emotional appeals included statements such as, "Resistance should start now. Take the time to grieve this election, celebrate our silver linings, and work on thinking about how you can help us hold Republicans accountable," and "I have absolutely no fear of Trump... This narrative that his opponents are intimidated is what MAGA wants to believe. No, we are REINVIGORATED." These responses underscore the resilience and determination of Gen Z voters to transform their disappointment into proactive efforts to safeguard rights and freedoms, illustrating the power of emotional engagement in driving political activism.

Figure 4: Emotions from Gen Zs: Female – Post Election

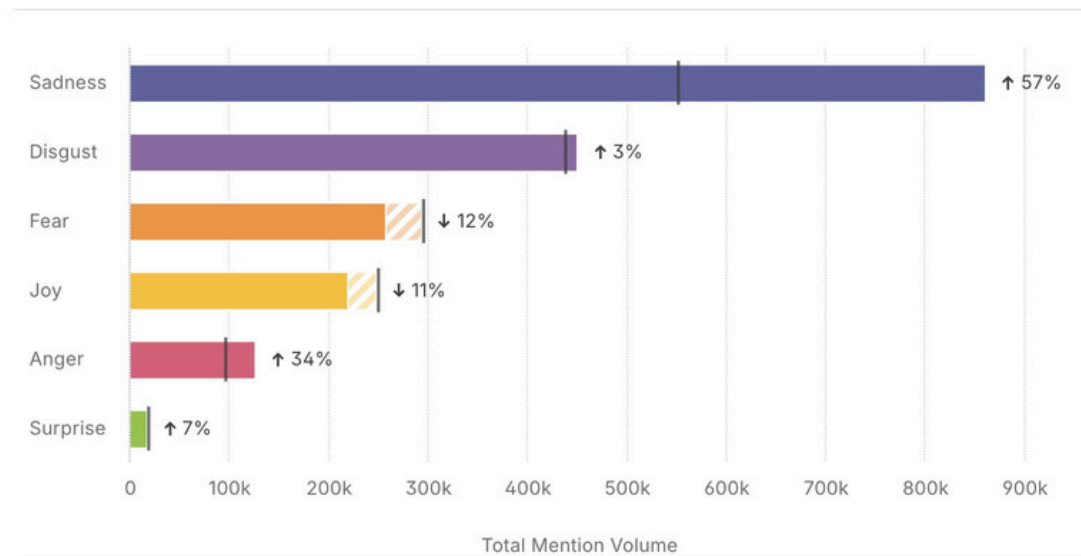
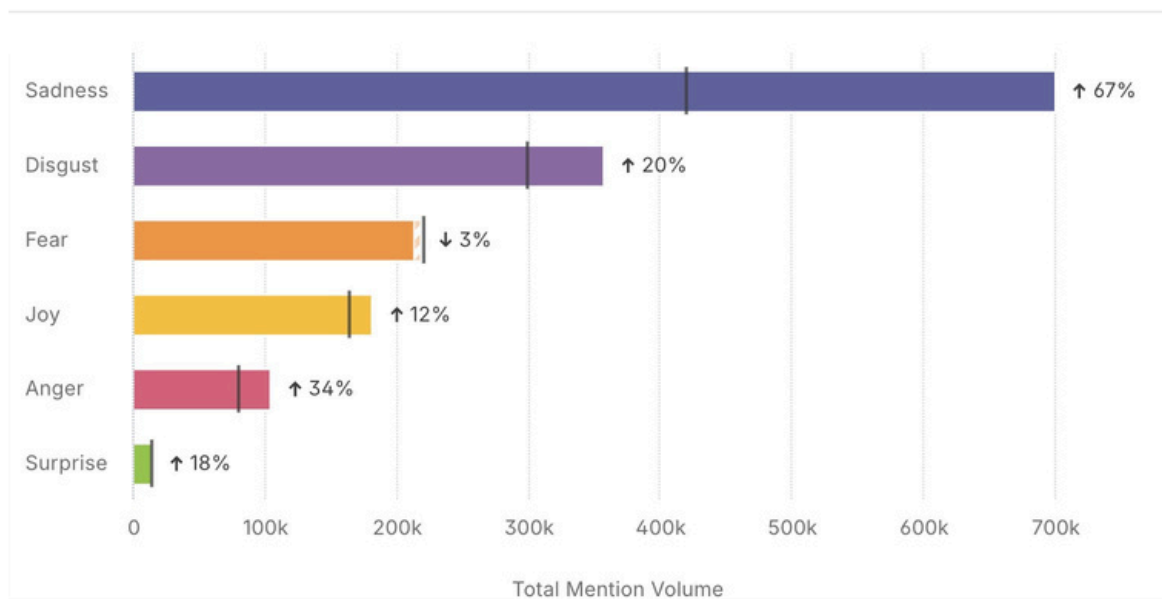


Figure 5: Emotions from Gen Zs: Male – Post Election



Gender Difference in Gen Z Voter Priorities

A striking gender gap among Gen Z voters emerged in the social conversations, with male and female voters prioritizing distinct sets of issues. Young male voters were likely to focus on economy-driven concerns, such as the economy, jobs, inflation, and the housing market. These male voters often framed their support for their preferred candidates through the lens of financial stability and growth. In comparison, female Gen Z voters prioritized issues pertaining to reproductive rights, healthcare, gender equality, inclusiveness, and climate change. Especially, reproductive rights and healthcare access emerged as urgent concerns amid ongoing abortion bans and restrictive healthcare policies.

Kamala Harris seemed to have earned firm support from young female voters who embraced the Vice President's advocacy to empower women. Many young female voters on social media seemed to view Harris as a protector of women's autonomy and civil rights, which posed stark contrast with Donald Trump's contentious stances on reproductive rights and healthcare. Unsurprisingly, Harris's campaign has generated significant social media engagement among young women who enthusiastically shared personal stories, endorsements, and reasons for their support for Harris on social media. Such enthusiasm may reflect a broader trend of political empowerment and growing activism among female Gen Z voters. Although social media discussions revealed young female voters' ardent support for Harris, mixed views emerged related to her policies and leadership, with some questioning her ability to deliver on her promises.

Male Gen Z voters expressed polarizing views on the two candidates. Trump supporters praised his perceived economic achievements and an image of a strong leader, whereas Harris supporters condemned his divisive rhetoric, erratic behavior, and alleged misconduct. Notably, young male supporters for Harris acknowledged her advocacy for gender equality, women's rights, healthcare, and social security, with many encouraging other men to challenge traditional stereotypes and vote for Harris. Despite this support, skepticism remained among some young male voters, who cited concerns about Harris's policy clarity, alleged misinformation, and perceived weaknesses in leadership.

The social narratives surrounding the election reflect a deeply divided political landscape, with passionate endorsements and criticisms on both sides. For female Gen Z voters, the election has become a rallying point for women's rights and inclusiveness, while male Gen Z voters exhibited a complex interplay of economic priorities, ideological divides, and evolving attitudes toward gender equality and political representation. Together, these dynamics underscore the generational and gendered shifts shaping the political discourse in 2024.

Political Consumerism Among Young Voters

A fascinating trend has emerged among young voters who actively acknowledged and reacted to brands based on their political affiliations—or lack thereof. Data indicates a significant surge in mentions of major retail brands like Target, Nordstrom, Ulta, Whole Foods, and Costco, which experienced a 100% increase during the observation period. These brands, noted for their decision not to donate to Donald Trump's presidential campaign, have garnered widespread approval from Gen Z voters. This response highlights the growing phenomenon of *political consumerism* (Copeland & Boulliance, 2022), where consumers make deliberate choices to support (e.g., buycott) or avoid (e.g., boycott) products or brands based on their alignment with personal political and social values. This trend carries two key implications for both politics and businesses.

#1. Political Consumerism as Empowerment:

The widespread approval of brands staying neutral or distancing themselves from Donald Trump reflects Gen Z's belief in using consumer behavior as a tool for political influence. As the largest generational consumer group (Seyfi, Sharifi-Tehrani, Hall, & Vo-Thanh, 2023), Gen Z exerts

significant purchasing power. Their deliberate actions to support or reject brands that align or conflict with their political views suggest a growing sense of empowerment. In the context of the 2024 election, the discourse surrounding brand affiliations with presidential candidates signals a shift in how young voters perceive their political agency. By choosing where and how to spend, they amplify their voices on broader societal issues, such as inclusiveness, equality, and corporate accountability.



#2. The Tension Between Neutrality and Activism:

The praise for brands avoiding their involvement in Trump's campaign highlights the potential advantages of political neutrality in a polarized environment. However, this neutrality often clashes with the growing demand from Gen Z voters for corporations to take explicit stances on political and social issues. This duality reflects a broader shift in consumer expectations, where brands are increasingly seen as political and social actors (Kim, Overton, Alharbi, Carter, & Bhalla, 2023), not just purveyors of products. While neutrality may shield brands from backlash, it risks alienating younger consumers who expect businesses to actively engage in societal debates.

For corporations, this creates a delicate balancing act. Brands must navigate the conflicting pressures of maintaining business interests and relevance in a marketplace dominated by politically engaged Gen Z consumers. The challenge lies in achieving a balance between staying neutral to appeal to a broad audience and complying to the expectations of younger consumers for bold corporate activism. As Gen Z continues to shape both political discourse and the consumer landscape, companies will need to carefully consider how their actions or inaction align with the evolving values of this influential generation.

Conclusion

The 2024 election underlined the significant role of young voters in shaping political discourse. Female Gen Z voters dominated social media discussions, focusing on rights-related issues such as reproductive rights, healthcare, and gender equity, while male voters prioritized economic concerns. Kamala Harris resonated strongly with young female voters, who not only amplified her policies but also advocated for protecting democracy and civil rights. However, despite their vocal online presence, translating digital activism into higher voter turnout remains a critical challenge, as turnout among Gen Z voters declined compared to the 2020 election.

Data collected from our study also revealed sharp emotional divides, with Gen Z expressing intense feelings of fear, disappointment, and anger. These emotions, especially strong among young women, spurred calls for resistance and collective action, emphasizing the urgency of protecting rights and freedoms. This resilience must be leveraged to maintain momentum and transform frustration into long-term political engagement. Moreover, the rise of political consumerism among Gen Z underscores their unique approach to activism, as they use economic choices to express political preferences and demand corporate accountability.

A significant finding was the erosion of support for Harris among young male voters, attributed to differing media strategies and economic messaging. While Trump capitalized on platforms and narratives resonating with young men, Harris's campaign struggled to engage with this demographic effectively, particularly on issues like economic insecurity and job creation. This disparity emphasizes the need for campaigns to tailor their strategies to address the diverse priorities of younger voters.

Moving forward, campaigns and political organizations must focus on bridging the gap between online engagement and actionable outcomes such as voting. Strategies that resonate emotionally while addressing gender-specific priorities can mobilize young voters effectively. Additionally, fostering dialogue across divides and harnessing the unique energy of Gen Z will be vital to shaping a more inclusive and engaged electorate in future elections. By addressing their concerns and leveraging their passion, Gen Z's influence can be transformed into meaningful political change.

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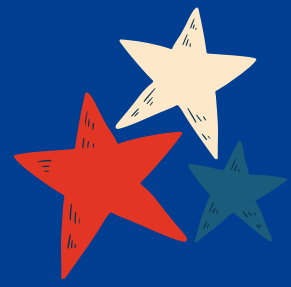


2024



Thank You!

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