

## SOCIAL MEDIA'S EFFECT ON YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN MALAYSIA'S GENERAL ELECTION 15th.

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### ABSTRACT

Social media sites are now vital resources for political activism and engagement. Social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok are essential for encouraging political engagement and awareness among users because they enable the real-time sharing of news, viewpoints, and conversations. These observations highlight the changing nature of media consumption and political participation, highlighting the increasing significance of digital platforms and user-generated material in addition to conventional news sources. This study, titled explores the significant role of social media in shaping the political engagement of Malaysian youth during the 15th General Election (GE15). Utilizing the Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) as theoretical frameworks, this research delves into the motivations behind social media use and the factors influencing its acceptance among young voters. By integrating these frameworks, the study seeks to understand why Malaysian youth used social media during GE15 to engage in politics. This research synthesizing data from several sources, such as the papers, reports, and public opinion on social media. This research contributes to the understanding of digital political behavior by demonstrating how social media functions as a vital tool for youth political engagement in Malaysia's General Election (GE) 15<sup>th</sup>. It underscores the importance of considering both psychological gratifications and technological acceptance when analyzing the impact of social media on political involvement.

**Keywords:** Social Media; Political involvement; Youth; Malaysia; General Election.

### INTRODUCTION

In the rapidly evolving digital landscape of the 21st century, social media platforms have become essential tools for political engagement and mobilization. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok allow for the real-time sharing of news, opinions, and discussions, making them vital for fostering political interaction and awareness among users. These insights illustrate the evolving dynamics of political engagement and media consumption, emphasizing the growing role of digital platforms and user-generated content alongside traditional news sources (An, 2024).

This study highlights the significant implications of social media platforms on Malaysia's political landscape by examining their role in political discourse, campaigning, and voter mobilization among the youth. Real-time updates on social media enabled young voters to stay informed about General Election (GE) 15<sup>th</sup> events, enhancing political discourse and discussions across platforms through hashtags, shares, and interactions. According to The Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ), since the 2008 elections, there has been a notable increase in the use of social media by politicians, political parties, and their supporters to engage with the public.

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Furthermore, the findings indicate that political candidates with an effective social media presence communicated more efficiently with voters, potentially influencing their perceptions and election outcomes. Social media may help presidential candidates reach a larger audience and engage young people in the political process (Zamora, 2024). Active engagement on social media platforms revealed a need for politicians to interact honestly and offer genuine solutions, reflecting a larger demand for meaningful political participation. This trend underscores the necessity of digital literacy and media proficiency among politicians, as the ability to navigate these channels significantly impacts voter engagement.

Additionally, the rise of social media has made politics more accessible, letting more people share their views and participate in discussions. According to Data Reportal in 2024, Malaysia had 33.59 million internet users in January 2024 (Kemp, 2024). By 2024, 28.68 million Malaysians – 83% of the population – are active social media users. In contrast, only 49.9% of Indonesians are social media users, even beating Singapore's penetration rate of 85% in the same period (Farid, 2024).

TikTok was the most popular social media platform, with 28.68 million users aged 18 and above. Politicians frequently used TikTok to engage with young voters. Politicians utilized TikTok in hopes of engaging with 6 million new voters, about 1.4 million of whom are young digital natives aged 18 to 20, who are now first-time voters after the voting age was lowered from 21 to 18 (Ismail, 2022). This approach helps politicians engage with voters and gain attention from society, thereby broadening their reach to young voters.

According to Timothy Macafee (2014), connecting with others and sharing knowledge enhances the likelihood of participation in civic and political activities (Macafee, 2014). In summary, social media platforms played a significant part in GE15 by promoting political discourse, altering public opinion, and engaging the public, all of which influenced election results and candidate perception. This study emphasizes the essential role of social media in modern political processes.

Research on the use of social media in political activities has been studied by several researchers, they saw how social media is used to encourage political influence and participation in Malaysia (Abdullah et al., 2021; Chin & Leong,

2024; Ramdzan@Raaban & Muhammad, 2023). Other research analyze how How United States election results are impacted by social media, especially Twitter (Fujiwara et al., 2024). However, these studies have not yet examined social media's effect on youth participation in Malaysia's general election (GE) 15th.

## METHOD

This conceptual paper employs a secondary sources analysis approach, concentrating on journal articles and related research published. To explore the topic "Social media's effect on youth participation in Malaysia's General Election (GE) 15<sup>th</sup>" a comprehensive literature review is essential. By synthesizing data from these studies, the paper identifies patterns, trends, and gaps in the existing literature.

This method ensures a thorough understanding of current scholarly insights into social media's impact on public opinion and political agendas. The data validation process was carried out by using triangulation techniques from secondary data sources used in this study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### The Definition of Political Involvement

Engaging in activities encompasses a range of actions where members of a community seek to influence government decisions and shape policies. This involvement typically starts with the act of voting in elections to elect representatives and make policy choices. Active forms of participation include protesting to voice dissent advocating for causes and signing petitions to drive reforms. The extent and manner of engagement primarily centered around voting, as a duty reflects individual perspectives and community commitments. The concept of participation is closely tied to principles emphasizing active citizen involvement as integral. Democratic theory underscores the importance of citizens engaging in activities like voting, protesting, advocacy efforts and petitioning to uphold the accountability of elected officials and steer the direction of their nation. Historically individuals often engaged in politics through participation and

involvement in community organizations. In today's age political engagement has expanded to include activities, on platforms like TikTok, Instagram, Facebook and Twitter, where young individuals express their views on matters. This shift towards participation is particularly significant for youth who use social media to discuss and participate in political discourse.

The changing landscape of youth involvement reflects shifts in how information is consumed communication occurs, and political spaces are navigated. Social media enables interaction and swift sharing of ideas allowing for diverse and immediate engagement in politics. Therefore, understanding involvement requires a focus not only on traditional methods but also on the impact of digital tools on the political participation of younger generations. Research indicates that political engagement encompasses activities including ones like voting, participating in protests advocating for policy changes and signing petitions. These activities play a role in upholding democracy by enabling citizens to hold their leaders accountable and have a say in the governance of their country. In times due to the rise of advancements especially through social media the dynamics of political engagement have undergone significant changes. Among the generation in Malaysia, who are increasingly expressing their views, online participation in politics now extends to platforms like TikTok and Instagram.

According to Nurul Azmira (2023), social media's accessibility in creating and sharing news, combined with its viral nature, enables the rapid and widespread distribution of political and other information. Political engagement covers a spectrum of activities such as voting, protesting and interacting on media platforms. This plays a role in upholding a democratic system by enabling citizens to engage in decision making processes and holding leaders accountable for their actions. Social media has become an arena for discourse in the digital era especially among Malaysian youth. To grasp the essence of involvement today requires an exploration not of traditional forms of participation but also how digital tools have reshaped how young people engage with politics. The literature suggests that political engagement involves a variety of activities, both traditional ones such as voting in elections, participating in protests, advocacy for policy change, and signing petitions. These

activities are critical for a functioning democracy because they allow citizens to ensure that their leaders are carrying out their duties and to have a voice in how their nation is administered.

In recent years, with the advancement of digital technologies and specifically social media, the nature of political engagement has significantly evolved. For the youths in Malaysia, whose mode of political expression is increasingly leaning towards online platforms, political involvement extends to these digital spaces in the form of Twitter.

### **The Roles of Social Media on Political Involvement in Malaysia**

Social media platforms played a significant role in increasing youth political involvement in Malaysia during General Election 15 (GE15) by providing immediate election information, facilitating political conversations, and serving as a platform for news, interaction, and political entertainment. The ease of use and potential of the site to encourage political engagement were emphasized, as young Malaysians saw Tiktok and Instagram as an essential tool for political engagement, news consumption, social media interaction with peers and influencers, and consumption of political information. All political parties and coalitions had access to a diverse variety of conventional and internet media to spread information, while new platforms such as TikTok emerged as powerful conduits for campaign themes (Tapsell, 2023). Every social media such as TikTok, Twitter and Instagram had a noticeable effect on political behavior despite certain obstacles with digital literacy, technology access, and youth's varied political interests. This highlights the significance of incorporating social media into political campaigns and civic education programmes in order to successfully engage younger demographics. Social media has already heavily influenced the 2018 GE14, with campaigning on Facebook and Twitter (Ismail, 2022).

However, while Twitter and Facebook had a significant impact on youth political involvement in Malaysia's GE15, it was not the sole platform influencing the

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political landscape. Other social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram were also mentioned as key platforms for engaging young voters during the election of GE15, with a shift towards visually engaging platforms like TikTok observed. This change suggested that Twitter's and Facebook's influence on young people's political participation in Malaysia's GE15 may have been less than that of other social media sites, as political parties and young voters may not have used it as frequently or effectively as they might have on more recent platforms like TikTok.

According to Mamat, et.al. (2022) the media, particularly the internet, provides a democratic platform for society to obtain information and express views or criticism (Mamat et al., 2022). Even so, throughout GE15, TikTok emerged as a platform with higher engagement compared to others, significantly shaping public opinion and promoting a lively political discourse. Nonetheless, many users still turned to Facebook and Twitter to access political content and join in discussions. Understanding the unique roles of these social media platforms, including TikTok, Facebook, and Twitter, is crucial for fostering meaningful engagement in electoral processes and maintaining a robust democratic conversation.

### **The Impact of Political Involvement Among Malaysian Youth**

Social media has revolutionized the way young people interact with politics and had a significant impact on youth political involvement in Malaysia. Social media sites such as TikTok, Twitter, and Instagram have emerged as crucial instruments for political participation, offering instant access to election-related data, fostering political dialogues, and functioning as central locations for political news and entertainment. Social media's user-friendliness and interactive qualities have inspired young Malaysians to actively engage in political discourse, express their opinions, and rally support for a range of issues. The youth political scene has changed as a result of this move to digital media, which provide new forums for activism and speech. Social media has given political campaigns a wider audience while also democratizing the political discourse by enabling young Malaysians to express their thoughts and engage with like-minded people around the world.

Political parties have used innovative tactics, like influencer partnerships and user-

generated content competitions, on platforms like TikTok to effectively reach younger voters and spread their views. The tech-savvy youth population has responded favourably to this novel approach to political communication, which has raised interest and participation in political matters.

Social media has developed into an effective instrument for political mobilization, giving young Malaysians the ability to plan events, spread the word about social concerns, and push for community change. But relying too much on social media to get political information also makes one wonder how reliable and accurate the information being ingested is.

The integrity of political discourse is seriously threatened by the propagation of false information and fake news on these platforms, which may also have an impact on voter behavior and undermine democratic processes. To solve this problem, young Malaysians need to be taught digital literacy so they can assess the material they come across online critically. Education and politicians can equip young people to appropriately navigate the digital world and discern between reliable and false information by fostering media literacy and critical thinking abilities.

To sum up, social media has completely changed the way that young people in Malaysia are involved in politics by providing them with new platforms for speech, participation, and mobilization. These platforms have increased outreach and promoted political dialogues, but they also bring up issues with the veracity and validity of material provided online. Stakeholders can strengthen Malaysia's democratic framework, encourage informed decision-making, and increase youth participation in political processes by leveraging the potential of social media platforms and supporting digital literacy efforts. Acknowledging the growing influence of social media on the political dialogue among young people is crucial in encouraging civic engagement and guaranteeing a dynamic and diverse democracy in Malaysia.

### **The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)**

Technology Acceptance Model is a widely used framework in the field of information systems and technology management to understand how users accept and use new technologies. It was initially proposed by Fred Davis in the late 1980s and has since been refined and extended by various researchers. TAM suggests that if users perceive a technology as both useful and easy to use, they are more inclined to accept and adopt it. Furthermore, TAM acknowledges the influence of external variables, such as subjective norms, individual experience, and facilitating conditions, which may moderate the relationship between perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and actual technology adoption (Su & Li, 2021). This model provides valuable insights for researchers, designers, and practitioners alike, enabling them to identify critical impacts that influence technology acceptance and guide strategies for successful implementation and adoption initiatives.

Embracing TAM professionally empowers stakeholders to make informed decisions, enhance user experience, and drive innovation within organizations. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) can help us understand why and how individuals embraced social media as platform for political engagement during GE15. TAM posits that users' intention to adopt and use technology is influenced by perceived usefulness and ease of use. In the context of social media's role in political involvement, people may have perceived these platforms as valuable tools for staying informed about election developments and as easy-to-use spaces for sharing opinions and engaging in political discourse. Their positive perceptions of the usefulness and ease of use of social media likely contributed to their active participation on these platforms.

### **Uses and Gratification Theory**

This theory proposes that people use media for various purposes, such as entertainment, information, social interaction, or personal identity expression. Each time you scroll through social media to connect with friends or watch a tutorial video to learn a new skill, you're fulfilling a specific need or desire (Whiting & Williams, 2013). UGT also emphasizes that individuals have different preferences and motivations for media consumption based on factors like personality, social background, and situational context. For example, you might use social media

to stay connected with friends, while someone else might use it primarily for news updates or entertainment. Now, let's tie in the Uses and Gratification Theory. This theory suggests that individuals actively seek out media to fulfil specific needs or gratifications.

In the case of social media during GE15, individuals may have turned to these platforms to satisfy various gratifications such as information seeking, social interaction, and entertainment. Social media provides a means for people to access real-time news updates, engage in discussions with peers and influencers, and even find entertainment through political memes and humorous commentary.

By satisfying these gratifications, social media became an indispensable tool for political involvement during GE15. Furthermore, the role of influencers and opinion leaders on social media aligns with both the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Uses and Gratification Theory. Influencers and opinion leaders likely influenced perceptions of social media's usefulness and ease of use through their endorsements and engaging content. Additionally, they fulfilled the public's need for social interaction and information seeking by providing credible insights and facilitating discussions on political issues.

### **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the study highlights how social media significantly increased youth political engagement in Malaysia during General Election 15 (GE15) by providing instant election information and facilitating political conversations.

Despite some issues related to technology access, digital literacy, and varying political interest among young Malaysians, Twitter's user-friendliness and role as a hub for news, interaction, and political entertainment underscored its importance in modern political activism. Theoretical implications point to the Uses and Gratification Theory and Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) as useful frameworks for understanding social media's impact on political behavior.

Practically, the findings suggest that political campaigns and civic education initiatives can effectively use social media such as TikTok, Instagram and Twitter to engage younger demographics. Policymakers should consider integrating social media platforms into their strategies to foster informed and active youth participation. Future recommendations include enhancing digital literacy programs and promoting engaging political content across social media to sustain youth involvement and strengthen Malaysia's democratic process.

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