

THE POWER OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN POLITICAL CAMPAIGN: AN ANALYSIS OF MALAYSIA'S GE 15

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ABSTRACT. This research explores the transformative impact of social media on political campaigns, particularly in the context of Malaysia's 15th General Election (GE15). Social media platforms as a political campaigning tool highlight its influence on young voters and their perceptions of political figures. In addition, social media has revolutionized the dynamics of political engagement, it has also introduced challenges such as the spread of misinformation, hate speech, and unequal access among political parties. This research applied a qualitative method by comparing various literatures. Leveraging The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), this study aims to analyze how social media influences election outcomes and shape public opinion. The findings reveal that social media played a significant role in GE15, with candidates strategically utilizing platforms like Facebook and TikTok to engage voters, especially the youth demographic. Ultimately, social media not only serves as a battleground for public discourse but also shapes the political landscape by reaching out to digital natives and first-time voters who rely on social media for news and information. This research contributes to the understanding of digital campaign dynamics by demonstrating how the perceived ease of use and usefulness of social media influence political campaigning. It underscores the critical role of technological acceptance in the adoption of new media strategies by political actors. By applying TAM, this study provides valuable insights into the power of social media in modern political campaigns, offering practical recommendations for political strategists and parties aiming to enhance their digital engagement and campaign effectiveness in future elections.

Keywords: Social Media; Politics Campaign; General Election (GE15); Political Engagement; Misinformation

INTRODUCTION

Media's role in campaigns has grown in importance during recent elections, such as Malaysia's 15th General Election (GE15). The election changed how political parties used social media platforms to interact with voters and influence public sentiments. This study seeks to examine the influence of media in GE15, specifically looking at the tactics employed by parties and their effects on voter conduct.

Social networking sites such as TikTok, Facebook and WhatsApp have emerged as channels for politicians to connect with and involve voters, particularly the younger segment of new voters (Md Subre et al., 2023; Qin et al., 2023; Ting, 2023). Political parties and candidates have utilized the media to share their messages to rally supporters. Respond to conflicting viewpoints (Md Subre et al., 2023).

The increasing trend of politicians hiring account-based influencers to endorse their campaigns has created an area between political discussions and sponsored promotions. There are instances where these influencers fail to disclose their paid collaborations, which could lead voters to misconstrue the level of grassroots backing, for candidates.

Moreover, the quick dissemination of data, including information on social platforms, has sparked worries regarding its influence on the political awareness and choices of young voters (Qin et al., 2023; Ting, 2023). Concerns also exist about the manipulation of media to create discord and undermine confidence in the voting process, mirroring situations in different nations (Adli Rosli, 2023). They used the media to share their messages, rally their supporters and respond to conflicting narratives (Md Subre et al., 2023).

The increasing use of account-based influencers by politicians to endorse their campaigns has created an area between political discussions and sponsored promotions. These influencers sometimes fail to reveal their paid collaborations, which could mislead voters regarding the extent of grassroots backing, for candidates.

Despite facing these obstacles social media has also offered a space for perspectives and grassroots political initiatives to gather momentum, which could help foster a dynamic and open political conversation (Md Subre et al., 2023; Qin et al., 2023).

According to previous research, social media may affect misperceptions, boost campaign funds and votes, and change communication tactics. Political campaigns are greatly impacted by social

media, which affects several factors such as candidate visibility, voter involvement, campaign funding, and disinformation. Campaign contributions rise for politicians who use social media sites like Twitter, especially in areas where social media usage is high. Compared to seasoned politicians who see minimal benefits, new politicians gain more, with donations rising by 1% to 3.1% (Petrova, et al., 2020). With results similar to those of traditional campaign spending, social media campaigning, especially on Twitter, can aid in gaining votes. Nevertheless, the influence is typically little and mostly accomplished through broadcasting as opposed to personal interaction (Bright, et al., 2017). Presidential candidates' high social media involvement does not always result in more online conversation or public attention (Hong & Nadler, 2012). Preference votes can rise slightly but significantly for candidates who have a larger following on social media and are active users of these platforms (Spierings & Jacobs, 2014).

Voters' opinions might be influenced by the tone and content of social media posts. For example, posts that include images and videos typically receive more positive reviews and reactions (Lam, et al., 2021). Politicians have a variety of reasons for using various social media sites. For instance, politicians frequently prioritized subjects differently than the general public when using Facebook and Twitter to discuss various topics during the 2013 German federal election campaign (Stier, et al., 2018). Depending on their odds of winning, candidates modify their social media tactics. As their chances of victory grow, top candidates typically focus their communication efforts on prominent accounts and certain districts (Murayama, et al., 2023).

In addition, political misconceptions can be increased by social media. Social media use, for instance, contributed to a rise in negative opinions of President Obama during the 2012 U.S. Presidential election, particularly among ardent partisans. It did not, however, significantly alter the accuracy of beliefs about the Republican candidate (Garrett, 2019).

In political elections, social media has a variety of effects, including increasing campaign funds, affecting voter turnout, and influencing public opinion. Even though it can raise awareness and participation, it frequently has little effect on election results and public discourse. Furthermore, social media can aid in the dissemination of false information, emphasizing the necessity of exercising caution when it comes to online political communication.

Therefore, this study emphasizes the trend of politicians utilizing social media in political

campaigns. This study highlights how social media, especially for less well-off politicians, can affect political campaign outcomes by raising voter engagement, increasing vote shares, and increasing campaign contributions. We present evidence of that in the 15 Malaysian general elections. In summary, we argue that the use of social media in Malaysia's GE15 political campaign has proven that social media has advantages and challenges for the nation's political scene. Parties' involvement in social media can dictate the polls during the election and influence the outcome of elections. Policymakers, media organizations and citizens must be mindful of the risks involved while leveraging the benefits of media in campaigns.

METHOD

The method applied in this research is qualitative, using a library research technique. This paper delves into the analysis of sources, journal articles and recent research findings from the past five years. Secondary data analysis entails examining data collected by others for purposes. This method proves valuable as it optimizes time and resources through the utilization of existing data resulting in cost efficiency and effectiveness. The focus is on investigating "The Role of Social Media in Campaigns; A Study on Malaysia's GE15" through a review of literature. By amalgamating information from these studies, the aim is to pinpoint patterns, trends, and areas that require exploration within scholarly discussions on social media's influence, on public opinion and political landscapes.

We gathered data by examining secondary sources such as academic journals, books, conference papers, reports, and trustworthy online materials. Our criteria for selecting these sources were based on the following;

- External Variables: These include factors such as user characteristics, social influence, and organizational context, which can affect Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU).
- Perceived Usefulness (PU): Belief in social media's ability to enhance campaign performance.
- Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU): Belief in the social media's ease of use.
- Attitude Toward Using (ATU): Overall positive or negative feelings about using social media.
- Behavioral Intention to Use (BI): The likelihood of the user intending to use social media.

- Actual Use (AU): The actual usage behavior of social media.

Key databases and search engines used for sourcing literature included Google Scholar, JSTOR, SpringerLink, and institutional repositories. Data validation was conducted by evaluating literature sources, such as considering the credibility of authors and publishers. In addition, we also conducted cross-referencing as a way of comparing similar literature. Furthermore, this study utilizes various data analysis techniques, with comparative analysis being the predominant methodology. The primary objective is to identify the role of social media in political campaigns, examine the factors of social media among young voters during GE15, and analyze the impact of social media usage in political campaigns.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Social Media Plays a Multifaceted Role in Political Campaigns.

Social media platforms engagement and interaction like TikTok, Facebook, and WhatsApp have emerged as vital channels for politicians to connect with voters, particularly younger demographics. These platforms allow political parties and candidates to share their messages, rally supporters, and respond to conflicting viewpoints efficiently.

Politicians increasingly hire influencer collaborations to endorse their campaigns, which blurs the lines between organic political discussions and sponsored promotions. This practice can sometimes mislead voters regarding the grassroots support for candidates.

Social media has significantly impacted voter behavior engagement, especially among young voters who are more active on these platforms. It has transformed political engagement dynamics, making it easier for candidates to reach and mobilize support among this tech-savvy demographic.

The rapid spread of information on social media has raised concerns about its impact on the political awareness and choices of voters. Issues like misinformation, hate speech, and unequal access to social media platforms have been highlighted as significant challenges that need addressing.

There has been a notable trend towards more professionalization of campaigning and resource-intensive social media campaigns. This shift includes the use of sophisticated targeting techniques and creative content to engage and influence voters, which underscores the growing importance of social media in modern political strategies.

Social media has revolutionized political campaigning by enhancing engagement, enabling direct interaction, and facilitating the rapid dissemination of information. However, it also presents challenges such as the potential spread of misinformation and the unequal playing field it can create among different political parties.

Social media influences political contributions, mobilizes involvement, shapes communication techniques, and shapes public perception, among other aspects of political campaigns. By working closely with political staffers, companies such as Facebook, Twitter, and Google actively influence campaign communication by acting as quasi-digital consultants to create digital strategies, content, and execution (Kreiss & McGregor, 2018). Politicians have a variety of reasons for using various social media sites. As an illustration of the distinct qualities of each platform, Facebook and Twitter are utilized differently to discuss subjects that are significant to their respective audiences (Stier, et al., 2018).

Social media gives different actors more influence over the political agenda by weakening the gatekeeping power of traditional media. Political parties, individual politicians, and traditional media all have agendas that impact one another; social media occasionally takes the lead in discussions, particularly when it comes to topics like the environment (Gilardi, et al., 2021). However, political misconceptions can also be exacerbated by social media. While the overall effect is minor, it can considerably influence strong partisans' opinions and diminish misperceptions among select user groups, such as Facebook users (Garrett, 2019).

Policy preferences and perspectives can be reflected in social media campaigns, which can impact how political issues are framed and how campaigns communicate (Nulty, 2016). In addition, social media platforms facilitate political activism and communication, raising awareness of political events and inspiring group action. Participation in political movements and revolutions is encouraged by this prominence (Momeni, 2017). Moreover, using social media, especially Twitter, can boost political donations. Donations to politicians that create accounts in areas with a high Twitter penetration rate rise significantly, especially for new politicians who gain from the cheaper costs of information dissemination (Petrova, et al., 2020).

Social media plays a variety of roles in political campaigns, including influencing public opinion, influencing campaign funding, influencing communication techniques, and encouraging political engagement. Social media has become an essential

instrument in contemporary political campaigns by facilitating direct communication platforms, weakening the gatekeeping influence of traditional media, and opening up new avenues for political activity.

The Factors of Social Media Among Young Voters during Malaysia's 15th General Election (GE15).

Young voters were significantly more engaged on social media platforms such as TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram. Social media provides a space for political discussion, sharing views, and gathering support, which increases engagement and is highly effective in mobilizing young voters.

The professionalization of social media campaigning saw an increased and influential use of video content. Platforms like TikTok and Instagram became essential for political candidates to deliver dynamic and engaging messages that resonated with younger audiences. This shift towards video content helped simplify complex political messages and made them more accessible and appealing to young voters.

Young voters were influenced by their peers and by influencers who social proof hired by political candidates. The endorsement of candidates by popular social media figures helped shape perceptions and decisions among the youth. However, this also led to concerns about the authenticity of grassroots support due to undisclosed paid collaborations.

Social media facilitated the rapid dissemination of information, which played a crucial role in shaping the political awareness and choices of young voters. However, it also raised concerns about misinformation and the spread of divisive content, which could potentially mislead young voters (Hamid & Rahman, 2018).

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) was relevant in understanding young voters' adoption of social media for political engagement. Factors such as perceived usefulness and ease of use of social media platforms influenced their intention to use these technologies for political purposes. Trust and perceived risk also played a role in their attitudes towards adopting social media for political engagement.

These factors highlight how social media has transformed political engagement among young voters, making it a critical tool for political campaigns to connect with and mobilize this demographic.

Social media had a big impact on young voters in Malaysia's 15th General Election (GE15). This phenomenon was caused by several variables, such

as the impact of digital campaigning strategies, the involvement of influencers, and the use of social media platforms for political information.

Young voters primarily depended on social media sites like Twitter and TikTok for political information. This did not, however, necessarily make them more likely to cast a ballot. Rather, it frequently diverted their attention from their voting responsibilities (Tan, 2022). It was essential to have a sense of political effectiveness, both internal (thinking that one can affect politics) and external (thinking that the system is responsive). According to research, social media use increases political efficacy, which in turn affects how new voters cast their ballots (Hassan et al., 2021; Tan, 2022).

Livestreaming and video content became important campaign techniques in the 2022 election. The election campaign became more dynamic and participatory as a result of the widespread employment of these strategies to reach and engage young people (Tapsell, 2023). To influence young voters, political parties used cybertroopers and social media influencers. This frequently resulted in the dissemination of divisive material and misinformation, which could sway voters' opinions and arouse animosity (Tapsell, 2023; Zuliha & Hani, 2022).

Young voters' interactions with political content on social media were greatly influenced by elements like political self-efficacy, situational political involvement, and trust in the government. These viewpoints influenced their desire to learn about politics and take part in political debates (Azwar & Kho, 2022). The normalization of hate speech and radicalization of young voters were also consequences of political campaigns using platforms such as TikTok. This sparked worries about how social media would affect democracy and the possibility of electoral violence (Zuliha & Hani, 2022).

Thus, during Malaysia's GE15, social media had a variety of effects on young voters. Although it was an essential source of political engagement and knowledge, it also presented problems including extremism, disinformation spreading, and distraction from voting responsibilities. Social media's ability to influence voting behavior was strongly correlated with both political efficacy and the type of campaign strategies used.

The Impact of Social Media Usage in Political Campaigns during Malaysia's 15th General Election (GE15).

Following the historic 2018 elections, several government members of parliament (MPs) defected,

throwing Malaysia into political turmoil in early 2020. As a result, following the 14th general election, three prime ministers led three governments. The stakes for the 15th General Elections (GE15) in 2022 were high due to the political unrest, and social media unavoidably became a crucial platform for politicians and power brokers (Hamzah, et al., 2023).

Social media significantly increased voter engagement, especially among the youth. Platforms such as TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram became vital for political discourse, allowing candidates to reach a larger audience and engage with them directly. This heightened engagement translated into increased political participation and awareness among young voters.

The use of social media led to the professionalization of political campaigns, with an increased focus on producing high-quality video content and interactive posts. This shift made political messaging more dynamic and engaging, enhancing candidates' visibility and appeal. The professionalization also intensified competition among candidates on digital platforms, making social media a crucial battleground for electoral influence (Hamid & Rahman, 2018).

Social media significantly influenced the attitudes and actions of voters. Voter participation rose as a result of candidates' successful simplification and dissemination of their messages via these channels. But there were drawbacks as well, since the dissemination of false information and polarizing material increased, which might have misled voters and polarized public opinion. As a result, social media had a big impact on campaign tactics, voter behavior, and the political climate in general during Malaysia's 15th General Election (GE15).

Challenges of Misinformation and Hate Speech is the unregulated use of social media platforms allowing for the spread of misinformation, hate speech, and cyberbullying. This posed a considerable risk to the integrity of the election process, as misleading information could sway voter decisions and foster a hostile online environment. The document highlights the need for stronger regulatory frameworks to address these issues and ensure a fair and transparent political landscape.

Additionally, the professionalization of social media campaigns made it easier for inflammatory content, fake news, and misinformation to proliferate, especially about racial and religious problems (Tapsell, 2020; Tapsell, 2023). It was seen that social media was being used for hate speech and electoral terrorism, with political cyber-troopers significantly influencing young people who were voting for the

first time (Zuliha & Hani, 2022). A twin campaign strategy—one formal and one underground—based on identity politics and disinformation resulted from the use of social media to undermine the discourse of mainstream media (Zuliha & Hani, 2022).

The largest racial amplifiers were Hadi Awang, the president of PAS, and his party. For instance, Hadi's TikTok feed, which claimed the DAP was only utilizing Malay candidates to get support, had the highest engagement count of any social media platform at 2.5 million. It was also discovered that posts about race spread false information. Additionally, videos made by young TikTok users to incite fear went viral and had substantial cross-platform amplification following election day. Religious and racial content sometimes overlapped (Hamzah et al., 2023).

Due to its obvious intersection with race and use as the foundation for attacks on LGBTIQ individuals, religious narratives emerged as the primary divisive and polarizing tool during the monitoring period. High levels of cross-platform amplification were seen, notably through posts by influencers and key opinion leaders (KOLs). One was by well-known musician Jamal Abdillah, who urged people to vote against the DAP because, if elected, it would allegedly limit access to religious and azan (call to prayer) schools. Actor Zul Huzaimy Marzuki's urge to "slaughter infidels" was only stopped by the law, according to Hamzah et al. (2023).

There seems to be no organized political strategy behind the social media targeting of migrants and refugees. At Level 4, it was the most severe, though. Posts about these two communities included overt calls for death, injury, or bodily harm. The Immigration Department's request for social media users to file complaints and provide information about individuals they suspected of being undocumented further dehumanized these two marginalized groups. However, it should be mentioned that social media attacks against migrants and refugees have persisted since the elections (Hamzah et al., 2023).

On the other hand, hate speech directed at the LGBTIQ community was a political tactic. It was frequently used in conjunction with adjectives like "liberal" and "anti-Islam," and it was primarily used to disparage Anwar Ibrahim, the Democratic Action Party (DAP), and Pakatan Harapan (PH). Women from all political parties were targeted at the same time by body shaming and the policing of modesty (Hamzah et al., 2023).

When it became evident that the institution would play a significant role in choosing the new administration, posts on royalty, which had been low

for the majority of the monitoring period, increased following election day. The majority of posts under royalty were directed at other performers rather than the royal institution. As an illustration, Muhyiddin Yassin was attacked for “disloyalty” to the king for refusing to follow the royal counsel to establish a unity government (Hamzah et al., 2023).

During the monitoring period, CIBs were detected by the automated system and monitors. These, however, had no discernible effect on the narratives around the topics under observation. The largest amplifiers were user-generated comments (UGCs) from frequent social media users (Hamzah et al., 2023).

The crucial role that the state plays in preventing hate speech on social media has drawn attention and discussion as a result of the monitoring. The issue of social media accountability has also been raised by the popularity of simplistic and inaccurate TikTok content, such as the post-election videos from May 13 or Hadi’s video accusing the DAP of using Malay candidates. This is particularly true when it comes to the guidelines and procedures they use for content moderation. In our technologically advanced world, it is imperative to examine how social media is used as a major instrument to influence political and electoral discourse as well as what further guidelines and policies are required going forward (Hamzah et al., 2023).

Disparities in unequal access and resource allocation to social media resources among different political parties and candidates created an uneven playing field. Some candidates were better equipped to leverage social media effectively due to greater financial and technical resources, which could skew voter perceptions and election outcomes. This inequality underscored the challenges smaller or less resourceful candidates faced in engaging with voters on digital platforms.

The increased reliance on social media also brought cybersecurity concerns, such as hacking and cyberattacks on political campaign accounts. Protecting social media accounts and data became crucial to maintaining the campaigns’ integrity and preventing malicious interference.

In summary, social media had a profound impact on political campaigns during GE15, enhancing voter engagement and modernizing campaign strategies while also introducing challenges related to misinformation, unequal access, and cybersecurity.

Challenges and Concerns

The utilization of social media within the realm of political campaigns presents a myriad of

challenges that demand careful consideration and strategic responses:

One significant challenge arises from the proliferation of disinformation and polarizing content on social media platforms, which has been shown to detrimentally affect political discourse and voter engagement (Dimitrova & Matthes, 2018; Olaniran & Williams, 2020). Concurrently, the ability of campaigns to employ targeted messaging via social media facilitates a more personalized and localized approach to campaigning but also runs the risk of perpetuating echo chambers and reinforcing pre-existing biases within the electorate (Dimitrova & Matthes, 2018).

Moreover, the anonymity afforded by social media platforms can foster an environment conducive to cyberbullying and harassment directed toward political opponents and their supporters, thereby exacerbating tensions within the political sphere (Dimitrova & Matthes, 2018; Olaniran & Williams, 2020). Additionally, the sheer volume of information disseminated through social media channels can overwhelm voters, impeding their ability to discern fact from fiction and engage meaningfully with political content (Dimitrova & Matthes, 2018; Olaniran & Williams, 2020).

Furthermore, social media’s susceptibility to election interference, whether through the spread of disinformation or the manipulation of voter turnout and behavior, poses a grave threat to the integrity of electoral processes (Dimitrova & Matthes, 2018; Olaniran & Williams, 2020). Compounding these challenges is the absence of robust regulatory frameworks governing social media platforms, which hampers efforts to mitigate these risks and ensure a fair and transparent political landscape (Dimitrova & Matthes, 2018; Olaniran & Williams, 2020).

Moreover, political campaigns and parties must contend with cybersecurity concerns, necessitating vigilant efforts to safeguard their social media accounts and data from hacking and cyberattacks (Dimitrova & Matthes, 2018; Olaniran & Williams, 2020). Additionally, effectively leveraging social media platforms requires substantial resource allocation in terms of both time and financial investments, presenting a considerable challenge for campaigns (Dimitrova & Matthes, 2018; Olaniran & Williams, 2020).

Furthermore, campaigns must grapple with the task of engaging meaningfully with their target audience amidst the diverse and ever-evolving landscape of online communities

(Dimitrova & Matthes, 2018; Olaniran & Williams, 2020). Lastly, measuring the impact of social media campaigns on political outcomes poses a significant challenge, complicating efforts to evaluate their efficacy and refine strategies accordingly (Dimitrova & Matthes, 2018; Olaniran & Williams, 2020).

In light of these multifaceted challenges, political campaigns are compelled to navigate the complexities of social media with diligence and foresight, developing strategies that not only capitalize on its potential but also mitigate its inherent risks to uphold the integrity of democratic processes.

CONCLUSION

In the Malaysian General Election of 2022, there were shifts in the strategies used for political campaigning notably with a greater emphasis on social media. Although these social media campaigns were more polished and interactive they also sparked worries regarding misinformation and division among the populace. This shift influenced how voters behave amongst the younger demographic who were notably more engaged, on various social platforms.

The study of the impact of media on campaigns, especially about Malaysia's GE15 highlights the significant changes that digital platforms have brought to political communication. It shows how social media has become a tool for parties and candidates enabling them to connect with a wider audience, especially the younger generation. The professionalization of social media campaigning with an increased focus on video content and the emergence of platforms like TikTok and Instagram has led to dynamic and engaging messaging. This evolution has not only boosted the visibility of figures but also intensified competition on digital platforms turning social media into a new arena for electoral influence.

The impact of the media on voter behavior during the GE15 election was significant leading to increased voter involvement and a noticeable influence on perception and political priorities. Candidates effectively utilized the media to simplify and share their messages resulting in engagement and participation from voters. However, this digital interaction had negative consequences as it also enabled the spread of misinformation and divisive content. The research highlights that social media can enhance engagement and turnout.

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