

The Effects of Social Media towards Teenagers' Political Views During General Election (GE-15) Campaign in Malaysia

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Abstract

Social media that is accessible online is a form of communication. Teenagers frequently use social media in both their artistic and social lives. With social media tools, politicians and their supporters can immediately communicate. Social media is being used in political action around the world. Political hatred may swiftly develop on social media because false and misleading information shapes public opinion, which is harmful to society in many ways. This study aimed to identify the most frequent function of social media usage during the GE-15 campaign among teenagers and to investigate the most frequent effects of social media usage towards teenagers' political views during the GE-15 campaign. This study also sought to identify the level of political involvement among teenagers during the GE-15 campaign. The questionnaire for this study comprises 12 items. Samples involved in this quantitative study were university students who are studying in private and government universities in Malaysia and voted during GE-15 recently. According to the data collected, the most frequent function of social media usage during the GE-15 campaign among teenagers is social media use as a communication platform for them to engage with politicians and the most frequent effects of social media usage towards teenagers' political views during GE-15 campaign is teenagers can make comparison between political parties based on their observation via social media posts by politicians. This study also highlighted findings whereby teenagers had a high level of political involvement in social media during the GE-15 campaign.

Keywords: *General Election, Social Media, Political Views, Political Parties, Political News*

1.0 Introduction

Social media is a channel of communication that uses the internet. Users can engage in conversations, share information, and produce content for the web via social media platforms (Berryman et al., 2018). Social media can take many different forms, including blogs, microblogs, discussion forums, social networking sites, photo and video-sharing websites, text messaging, podcasts, gadgets, virtual reality, and more (Auxier and Anderson, 2021).

Teenagers' social and artistic lives include significant social media use (Anderson and Jiang, 2018). Teenagers use social media for pleasure, to form and maintain connections, to share and discover hobbies, to discover personalities, and to grow family connections. It enhances their in-person and offline interactions. It frequently plays a significant role in how older teenagers engage with companions (Primack et al., 2017).

The way people monitor and respond to social and political advancement in their surroundings has undergone a revolutionary change as a result of the digitisation of communication methods. This exploratory study piece on the usage of social networking sites by politicians to forge warm and solid relationships with everyday folks was motivated by the fast-expanding importance of social media (Jost et al., 2018).

On social media, political figures and organisations are more engaged than ever. Politicians' remarks are uploaded minutes after the events; occasionally, they are televised live. Videos of visits by politicians or potential candidates are uploaded for the voter to view, much like other messages. Supporters also contact those on their contacts list with messages and videos. Social media will be more important than ever in spreading information about candidates and political parties as well as motivating voters. Additionally, it will spread the opinions of people we know, others in our group, and even anonymous regular voters (Stier et al., 2018).

Social media tools enable politicians and their constituents to interact directly. Constituents can readily engage in political discussion, impact political outcomes, and have their views heard, while politicians can easily communicate their policy recommendations, run advertisements, launch fundraising efforts, and so forth (Stroud and Muddiman, 2019).

Social media is being used in political action at the current stage of technological development, with politicians or political parties using this platform to engage with their constituents all over the world (Zhuravskaya et al., 2020). Political resentment may spread swiftly through social networking sites, where programmers constantly improve the tools that let users exchange information, images, videos, and other content. Giving programmes easier and more practical features is a fantastic concept, but they have no control over user-posted information once other users alert them to it. Given how quickly information spreads on social media, constituents or users should be sophisticated enough to evaluate the problems brought on by political enmity (Tucker et al., 2018).

Nowadays, online information almost always contains aspects that tamper with the truth. False and misleading information shapes public opinion, endangering society in a number of ways. False information can damage the reputations of individuals and organisations, influence the outcome of elections, have a detrimental financial impact on businesses, and ignite or intensify racial and religious conflicts that could result in violence (Yatid, 2019).

This study aims to identify the function of social media usage during the GE-15 campaign among teenagers, the most frequent effects of social media usage towards teenagers' political views during the GE-15 campaign and to investigate teenagers' political involvement in social media during the GE-15 campaign. This study also contributed to politicians, political parties and teenagers for future preparations for upcoming elections. The following sections of the study are presented: literature review, methodology, results, discussion, and conclusion.

2.0 Literature review

2.1 Social Media Usage among Teenagers

Social media is used to disseminate a variety of viewpoints, including those of individuals as well as information, statistics, movies, and other media. One of the primary indicators of the digital realm, social networking sites attract people of all ages. Meanwhile, the applications it offers allow the digital world to transcend the confines of the physical world. Particularly young people show considerable interest in social media, an Internet technology advancement (Orben, 2020).

Numerous platforms use social media for various purposes. Social media is frequently referred to as software that may be used on computers, tablets, or mobile devices. Because of its user-friendly features, this programme is currently top-rated. Due to its ability to make communication simple and cross boundaries, it has become an essential aspect of people's lives of all ages. Social media unquestionably has a significant impact on our culture, business, and worldview in the modern world (Beyens et al., 2020).

Teenagers can develop social networks, engage with others, and construct online personas through social media. These networks can be a great resource for youth, especially those struggling with marginalisation, impairments, or chronic diseases (Martin et al., 2018).

Teenagers also utilise social media for self-expression and entertainment. Additionally, the platforms can inform teenagers about current events, enable cross-border communication, and impart knowledge on a range of topics, including good habits (Twenge et al., 2019). According to Bányái et al. (2017), teenagers may even benefit from using social media that is amusing, entertaining, or that offers friendship and a large social network.

Social media is a form of media or website that makes it easy for users to share and find material fast. Over the past ten years, social networking websites and software have sharply expanded in

popularity (Valenzuela et al., 2018). As mentioned by Alhabash and Ma (2017), teenagers, college students, and university students frequently use social media programmes to acquire global access, which is the main cause of this rapid growth. These social media platforms, including Facebook and Twitter, are now widely used by everyone in our society. Students these days depend more and more on knowledge and material that is readily available online and on social networking sites. According to the study by Perman (2021), teenagers have noted how easily their peers can be swayed by the information they find on social media. Teenagers demonstrated how social media enabled them to connect and share information.

2.2 Social Media Use among Teenagers During General Election in Malaysia

Social media significantly influences how political efficacy develops, changes, and shifts, as well as educated youth's propensity to vote. Since young people make up the majority of social media users and using social media has penetrated their daily lives, it is critical to comprehend how these politically active youth utilise social media platforms to educate themselves about voting and politics (Fadillah et al., 2019).

Social media offers a forum for young people to interact with various political figures and a "place" to express their opinions on various subjects while also learning about politics. Due to their strength, expectations, and propensity to accept and embrace new ideas, young people have become a target for politicians and political parties due to their increased interest in politics (Salman et al., 2018). Teenagers have experienced most technological advancements, including the Internet and computers. They are familiar with technology and are well-versed in its many applications (Alivi et al., 2018).

Blogs play a significant role in the distribution of politically independent information throughout the various social media platforms, with the majority of these articles criticising the government (Wok and Mohamed, 2017). They are also used as interactive and customised platforms for voters to debate politics with friends and family were social networking sites and online forums. Without much or any access to government-controlled main-stream television broadcasting, video-sharing websites like YouTube were fully utilised to publicise the opposition's events and speeches and to be used as propaganda tools to criticise the government by showing videos of alleged wrongdoings by the members of the ruling coalition (Lim, 2017).

With 200 million users, Instagram is a platform for sharing photos and is becoming more and more well-known. Most Instagram users are less inclined to interact with contentious or political photographs. Since many individuals use Instagram as a haven to escape their problems and worries, they feel awful liking a tragedy post and instead turn to other outlets for sombre news (Mohamed, 2019).

On the other hand, because political tweets from politicians must be more expressive than factual, Twitter is a useful venue for political communication. Political players have used Twitter as a battlefield and platform to spread rumours about other politicians or the political climate. It

makes immediate, unfiltered global communication possible. Twitter has served as a significant motivator for connecting directly with constituents and other interested audiences while eluding traditional media (Khairulnissa et al., 2021).

Through Facebook groups and pages, political organisations actively engage in direct dialogues with people and advance the political discourse. They said that, in some aspects, the conversation seemed to be successful in reversing the previously challenging polarisation of online discourse. The best forum for a discussion on political issues is Facebook (Radzi, 2018).

2.3 Teenagers' Political Views in Malaysia

Compared to earlier times, Malaysian youths are now more politically conscious. They are now more curious about current events and how they might participate as much as possible. The Malaysian parliament passed the Automatic Voter Registration (AVR), which was scheduled to go into effect this year, and a law in 2019 that would have lowered the voting age for general elections from 21 to 18 years old. Young people, many of whom were first-time voters, had the chance to cast ballots in the 15th General Election of 2023 (Chai, 2022). According to Johns and Cheong (2019), social change movements within and between groups are connected by social media, as well as digital technology and the affective conflicts between states.

Teenagers in Malaysia feel that the government did not adequately address their concerns. Teenagers have numerous difficulties that call for the government to implement certain measures, laws, and initiatives to prevent their marginalisation (Mohamad et al., 2018). As mentioned by Ali et al. (2017), every youth issue calls for young involvement in the decision-making process. The public and the government must be informed via the media on the importance of tackling these issues. The media can work with young people to address these issues through media intervention programmes run by the youth. The government should show that it is dedicated to collaborating with the youth to either resolve or, at the very least, lessen their problems.

By using social media as their primary platform for engagement and bringing with them a more sceptical view of politics, teens have unquestionably changed society. All political parties must overcome this challenge. To win the election, they must involve the young people. Two general elections in 2008 and 2013 showed the power and capacity of teens to change society (Zainon et al., 2017).

3.0 Research Method

Samples that were involved in this quantitative study were university students who are studying in private and government universities in Malaysia. The subject of study is the effects of social media usage on teenagers' recent political views during GE-15. Students who voted during GE-15 were responsible for assuring the credibility of replies in this study. The researchers chose

individuals who meet these criteria as the target sample due to their involvement with social media usage during the GE-15 campaign.

A specially designed questionnaire was created to obtain significant data. The questionnaire for this study comprised 10 items on the frequency of social media used during the GE-15 campaign and the role of social media during the GE-15 campaign among teenagers. Data collection used in this study was questionnaire distribution using a Google Form link. The respondents were given a questionnaire to fill out to acquire important data and background information. Multiple choice and Likert-scale items were included in this questionnaire. For this research, questionnaires were distributed to 100 university students who voted during GE-15. This research used a quantitative approach to obtain numerical data which is more reliable and consistent. An online questionnaire was distributed and 100 responses were obtained, which were then analysed using SPSS (version 26).

4.0 Findings

4.1 Demographic Background

In this study, there are 47 (47%) male respondents. Meanwhile, there are 53 (53%) female respondents involved in this study. Meanwhile, for their educational background, there are four education levels involved in this study. 20 (20%) of the respondents are Diploma holders, 40 (40%) of them are Degree holders and 25 (25%) of them are Master holders. Meanwhile, 15 (15%) of them are PhD holders. On the other hand, in terms of race aspect, there are 63 (63%) respondents are Malay, 14 (14%) of them are Indian, 14 (14%) of them are Chinese and 9 (9%) of the respondents are belong to Others whereby other races.

4.2 Function of Social Media Usage during GE-15 Campaign among Teenagers

According to Table 1, there are four items to measure the function of social media usage during the GE-15 campaign among teenagers. The function of social media usage is measured with a Likert scale of 5 points; a scale of 1 (Strongly disagree) to a scale of 5 (Strongly agree). Higher scores indicate the most preferred function among respondents.

Higher mean values for most of the items imply that the majority of teenagers use social media as a communication platform to engage with politicians ($M=3.73$, $SD=1.459$). This was followed by the teenagers who use social media as an approach to gain knowledge about political party practices ($M=3.45$, $SD=1.325$). Next, teenagers use social media as a platform where they can communicate with other voters ($M=2.38$, $SD=.557$).

Table 1: Most Function of Social Media Usage during the GE-15 Campaign among Teenagers

Function of Social Media	Mean	Standard Deviation
Social media is the communication platform for me to get	3.73	1.459

engage with politicians		
Social media is the approach for me to gain knowledge about political party practices	3.45	1.325
Social media is the platform where I can communicate with other voters	2.38	.557
Social media is the tool where I can search information about GE-15	2.12	.436

4.3 Effects of Social Media Usage towards Teenagers' Political Views during GE-15 Campaign

According to Table 2, there are six items to measure the effects of social media usage towards teenagers' political views during the GE-15 campaign among teenagers. The function of social media usage was assessed with a Likert scale of 5 points; a scale of 1 (Strongly disagree) to a scale of 5 (Strongly agree). Higher scores indicate the most frequent effect among respondents.

Higher mean values for most of the items imply that the majority of the teenagers can make comparisons between political parties based on their observation via social media posts by politicians (M=3.87, SD=1.807). This is followed by teenagers who can voice out their political views using social media (M=3.64, SD=1.235). Next, teenagers receive special space in social media to join the political campaign for GE-15 (M=3.21, SD=.649).

Table 2: Most Frequent Effects of Social Media Usage towards Teenagers' Political Views during GE-15 Campaign

Effects of Social Media	Mean	Standard Deviation
I can make comparison between political parties based on my observation via social media posts by politicians	3.87	1.807
I can voice out my political views using social media	3.64	1.235
I receive special space in social media to join political campaign for GE-15	3.21	.649
I obtained sufficient knowledge about GE-15 from social media	2.89	.537
I get more reliable source regarding GE-15 compared to traditional media	2.73	.458
I can get new knowledge and information from other voters easily	2.12	.374

4.4 Level of Teenagers' Political Involvement in Social Media during GE-15 Campaign

According to Table 3, most of the teenagers (65%) have a high level of political involvement in social media. Meanwhile, 27% of teenagers have a moderate level of political involvement in

social media and lastly, 8% of teenagers have a low level of political involvement in social media.

Table 3: Teenagers’ Political Involvement in Social Media during GE-15 Campaign

Level of Political Involvement in Social Media	Frequency	Percentage (%)
High	65	65
Moderate	27	27
Low	8	8

5.0 Discussion

Most teenagers choose social media as their communication platform for them to get engage with politicians. According to the study done by Farkas and Bene (2021), social media is an excellent platform for politicians to connect with people, launch campaigns, spread awareness of causes, and is a crucial part of crisis communication. This is also supported by Yarchi et al. (2021) whereby social media will perpetually be a reliable resource for informing and updating the public on significant problems and connecting with an audience more deeply. Gilardi et al. (2022) also highlighted by delivering pertinent and engaging content, politicians may increase audience engagement and trust. As a result, people will naturally turn to them as reliable sources of knowledge and information. As mentioned by Ittefaq (2019), the ability to communicate and converse with potential voters is the most encouraging part of using social media during an election since it has the potential to change politics by forging new connections between the public and elected officials.

The result shown in this study is that the most frequent effect of social media usage towards teenagers’ political views during the GE-15 campaign is that teenagers can make comparisons between political parties based on their observations via social media posts by politicians. According to the prior research done by Kalsnes and Ihlebæk (2021), to increase their prospects of winning national and local elections, political parties have always adapted to new communication technologies and shifting electoral settings. Politicians are increasingly using social networking sites as a routine form of communication, even outside of election seasons. Hence, social media users can view the different politicians’ credibility and approaches through their posts on social networking sites such as Facebook. In the study done by Bello et al. (2019), parties may benefit from the strategic use of social media during election campaigns. Political communication frequently serves a strategic or intentional aim, whether it is conducted face-to-face, through editorial or social media, or other channels. Citizens assess the political parties’ practices through their political communication via social media because they need to know the political parties’ viewpoints. Based on the study done by Abid et al. (2021), politicians' use of social media for communication with the public can be seen by the public as contradictory to how they behave during campaigns. To connect with the public, some politicians utilize live

streaming and some share posts on social media. Citizens can compare political parties' techniques through this approach.

According to findings, teenagers had high political involvement in social media during the GE-15 campaign. According to prior research done by Boulianne and Theocharis (2020), teenagers tend to make friends with politicians in representative bodies, government officials, and well-known community leaders using social media, which also offers them vital opportunities to communicate with politicians and different stockholders. According to Literat and Kligler-Vilenchik (2019), a huge number of teenagers can readily access, read, and view online activities, particularly on social media due to the excellent connectivity; as a result, it has a good possibility of reaching and motivating them to engage. Teenagers are using social media to participate in political activities because they see it as a platform that would allow them to have their voices heard. Rampersad and Althiyabi (2020), political involvement is dynamic and ever-evolving, and new kinds of communication systems have made teenagers' participation in politics more prevalent at the expense of more established types of participation.

6.0 Conclusion

As a conclusion, this study managed to achieve all the research objectives through data collected from the teenagers as respondents. This study highlighted that social media plays a vital role as a communication platform for teenagers to get engage with politicians during the GE-15 campaign. Teenagers are synonymous with social media. Hence, the use of social media is important for them to keep connecting with politicians. On the other hand, this study also outlined that social media affects teenagers by allowing them to make comparisons between political parties based on their observations via social media posts by politicians during the GE-15 campaign. Finally, the study also shows that teenagers show a high level of political involvement during the GE-15 campaign. This is because GE-15 is the first general election for teenagers aged between 18 to 20 years old entitled to vote.

This study and the result can assist teenagers in assessing their political communication through social media. This study also can help teenagers make their evaluations on how to use social media wisely during the general election campaign. Other than that, this study also can lead them to decide their political views according to the political parties' social media approaches either through social media posts or types of social media used by the political parties. On the other hand, this study also benefits the policymakers such as political parties. The results of this study may benefit the political parties to prepare themselves with prior knowledge whereby they can extend their approaches to social media users.

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