

SOCIAL MEDIA AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

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ABSTRACT

High percentage of political participation among young people discuss among scholars in political science reported that Malaysian young people have greater interest in political participation compared to before. How does it happen? What drives young people to participate in political activities? Social Science scholars' believe that impact of this phenomenon toward young people leads by social media use. Objective of this study is to examine social media uses among undergraduate students. Besides, to measure relationship between social media use and political knowledge, this research conducted to study relationship between social media use and political participation among university students (n=132). Our results showed that there is a greater social media use among respondents and use to choose Facebook to get political updates, especially about opposition party (PR). They also have greater political knowledge gain from social media and highly expose toward negative news (political scandals) and it is really affect level of online political participation. Contribution of this study toward knowledge on social media and political participation among young people are; 1) young people use social media to get political update, basically for opinion expression and political expression, 2) exposure toward negative news has moderate relationship toward political participation, even though sometime political participants search or demand for negative stories, 3) greater political knowledge cause by greater political interest (effort for searching political updates) in social media.

Keywords: *Social Media, Political Participation, Political Information Efficacy Theory, Political News, Political Knowledge*

MEDIA SOSIAL DAN PARTISIPASI POLITIK DI KALANGAN GOLONGAN MUDA

ABSTRAK

Peratusan partisipasi politik yang tinggi di kalangan golongan muda dibincangkan oleh para pengkaji dalam bidang sains politik melaporkan bahawa golongan muda Malaysia mempunyai minat yang lebih besar dalam penyertaan politik berbanding sebelum ini. Bagaimana ia berlaku? Apa yang mendorong golongan muda untuk mengambil bahagian dalam aktiviti politik? Pakar Sains sosial percaya kesan penggunaan media sosial telah membawa kepada fenomena ini. Objektif kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji penggunaan media sosial di kalangan pelajar pra siswazah. Selain mengukur hubungan antara penggunaan media sosial dan pengetahuan politik, kajian ini juga dijalankan untuk mengkaji hubungan antara penggunaan media sosial dan partisipasi politik di kalangan pelajar universiti ($n = 132$). Dapatan menunjukkan bahawa terdapat penggunaan media sosial yang lebih tinggi di kalangan responden dan pemilihan Facebook sebagai medium untuk mendapatkan maklumat terkini politik, terutamanya mengenai parti pembangkang (PR). Mereka juga mendapat banyak pengetahuan politik daripada media sosial dan sangat terdedah dengan berita negatif (skandal politik) dan ianya benar-benar memberi kesan kepada tahap partisipasi politik dalam talian. Sumbangan kajian ini ke arah pengetahuan mengenai media sosial dan partisipasi politik di kalangan golongan muda adalah; 1) golongan muda menggunakan media sosial untuk mendapatkan maklumat politik, pada dasarnya untuk luahan pendapat dan politik, 2) pendedahan kepada berita negatif mempunyai hubungan yang sederhana ke arah partisipasi politik, walaupun kadang-kadang peserta politik mencari berita-berita negatif, 3) pengetahuan politik yang lebih tinggi disebabkan oleh kepentingan politik yang lebih tinggi (usaha untuk mencari maklumat politik terkini) dalam media sosial.

Kata kunci: Media Sosial, Partisipasi Politik, Teori Efikasi Maklumat Politik, Berita Politik, Pengetahuan Politik

INTRODUCTION

High percentage of political participation among young people discuss among scholars in political science reported that Malaysian young people have greater interest in political participation during General Election 12 and this scenario reported by scholars as 'political tsunami.' Since then, it totally change political sphere in Malaysia and scholars claim this sphere as 'urban political tsunami' during General Election 13 (Junaidi Awang Besar 2014).

How does it happen? What drives young people to participate in political activities? Why our young involve in extreme political activities? Media and policy scholars' believe that this is impact of social media on political participation among young people.

The role of conventional media (offline media use) and the Internet (online media use) in relation to young people's political participation has attracted a great deal of scholarly attention and found that there is strong positive effects over political participation and media use (Ingrid Bachmann 2013). The main idea of discussion is media can influence political participation where by using different news media lead to different impact of political engagement (Geral Jordan 2015).

Scholars in social science believe that Malaysians especially young people are turning to the Internet to get political updates, which has led to politicians setting up Facebook and Twitter accounts to reach out to voters. Online interactivity leads to greater willingness to political participation among young people (Sandy Schumann 2012).

It is also reported by many scholars that daily newspapers have greater impact and positive relationship with political participation among young people. According to (Judith Moeller 2014) newspaper reading has the strongest effects to increase political knowledge and political interest among young people. This scenario is applicable to explain internal efficacy theory where news sources lead to greater political knowledge and political participation among young people where newspapers' news on politics has great extent for political information (Noman Yaser 2011) (Kristoffer Holt 2013) (Geral Jordan 2015).

The root of political information efficacy theory is political efficacy where the concept of political efficacy where the feeling that individuals political action does have an impact on the political process (Rebecca 2010). The political information efficacy theory was developed with a goal to study voter's confidence in his or her own political knowledge (gain from social media news) and its sufficiency to engage in the political process such as being register voters or turn-out during election (Pollock 1983). Variables tested efficacy selected in this study; social media exposure, political news exposure and political knowledge exposure which claimed have great potential to influence political participation among young people.

New media scholars believe that young people are not really interested in reading newspaper (Lee and Wei 2008) and searching political news through newspaper rather than social media which provide online communication and online political participation (Tom P. Bakker 2011). In addition, social media is the best medium to examine young people trends on searching political information because they are identified as technology savvy way before the old citizens. Besides that, digital media use is positively associated with political discourse for those lower in political interest (Bruce Bimber 2014).

There are various study to find the correlation between social media and political participation. A study conducted in social network and political content reported that social networks does not drive active political participation among young people (Gustafsson 2012). Besides, (Najin, 2012) who conducted survey on Internet news exposure among young voters urged that Internet exposure has no direct relationship with political participation. According to Juliet E. Carlisle (2013), examines the political activity of Facebook users found that facebook individuals in general engaged in limited political activity, limited overall engagement and low political interest because most probably young people sign up Facebook for online communication, gather new friends and chatting.

However, exposure on political social media most often employed higher level of political participation (Gary Tang 2013) (Louisa S. Ha 2013) (Alcides Velasquez 2014) and survey on university students found that social media related to greater engage political participation from the news consumption as political knowledge (Geral Jordan 2015).

Political participation can be divided into two; 1) offline participation and 2) online participation. Influence of social media toward offline participation such as being a register voter, turning out during election, involving in political forum and joining political demonstration is undeniable (Tom P. Bakker 2011) (Kristoffer Holt 2013) (Boulianne 2015). Though, young people especially Gen-Y more keen to participate in online participation such as involve in online political forum, reply on political post in social media, update political issues as social media status, communicate with political leaders through online and joining political discourse in social media (Theocharis 2011). Items to examine online political participation extracted in Activism Online Survey (AOS).

Survey conducted on political facebook and political knowledge slightly correlate with many media scholars where participation in online political group is strongly correlated with offline political participation. However, it is failed to confirm relationship between political knowledge and online political participation (Conroy M.& Feezel Q 2012).

How effective of social media use can increase political knowledge and directly increase political interest that lead to online political participation among young people? This parameter of study has little attention by new media scholars to explore. As a result, this study conducted to examine whether social media can develop political knowledge among young people. Does political knowledge gained in social media can increase political inclination among young people?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The study comprises both general and specific objectives. The general objective of this study is to investigate on how social media can affect political participation among undergraduate students. Specifically, the objectives of this

study are; 1) to examine social media uses exist among undergraduate students from part 3 to 6 in Kolej Universiti Islam Melaka, 2) to measure relationship between social media use and political knowledge among undergraduate students from part 3 to 6 in Kolej Universiti Islam Melaka and 3) to study relationship between social media use and political participation among undergraduate students from part 3 to 6 in Kolej Universiti Islam Melaka.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

In order to achieve research objectives, the following hypotheses are formulated:

- H1: There is a social media uses exist among undergraduate students from part 3 to 6 in Kolej Universiti Islam Melaka.
- H2: There is a relationship between social media use and political knowledge among undergraduate students from part 3 to 6 in Kolej Universiti Islam Melaka.
- H3: There is relationship between social media use and political participation among undergraduate students from part 3 to 6 in Kolej Universiti Islam Melaka.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Instruments

This study manages to combine media and political study inventory. Part B (social media exposure) and Part C (news media exposure) questions in this study are adapted from European Social Survey (ESS). However, there are some questions may not suitable for undergraduate to respond. In order, to ensure questions constructed answerable by respondents, researcher took another instruments structured by Merdeka Center who the bodies conducted National Youth Survey in Malaysia. Part D (political knowledge) and Part E (Political Participation), questions, basically, duplicated from National Youth Survey inventory taken from MerdekaCenter.com. The National Youth Survey focuses on seven areas such as media consumption, young people lifestyle and issues that concerned among young people, social values, political efficacy, political participation and young people aspirations.

Research Framework

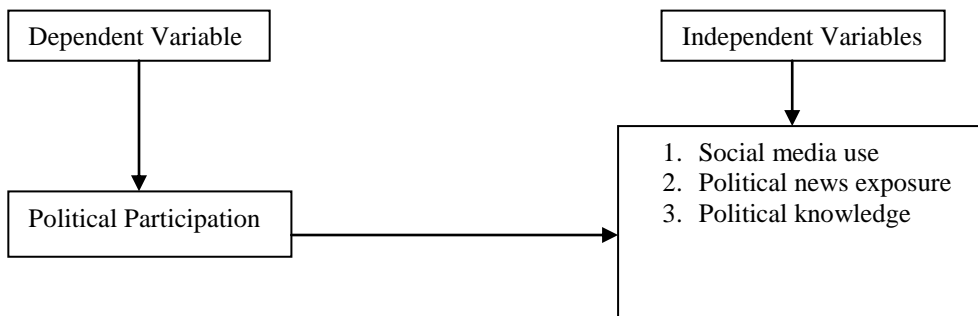


Figure 1: Research framework on social media and political participation among young people

Stimuli

Most of researchers who conduct political participation study which aim at the voters' turnout during election will outline stimulation in research questionnaire. The purpose of stimulation is to arouse respondents feeling and emotions on national political issues. In this study, some statement that related to Post GE 13 such as numbers of political parties and total seats won by Barisan Nasional (BN) and Pakatan Rakyat (PR) contain as an introduction of questionnaire.

RESULTS

SOCIAL MEDIA EXPOSURE AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

H1: There is a social media use that exists among undergraduate students from part 3 to 6 in Kolej Universiti Islam Melaka.

As predicted before, young people group reported gain greater exposure to social media use (Table 1.2) where 126 respondents (95.5%) are social media users. The features of social media are more interactive and attractive have become a main factor why young people use to choose social media as communication medium. Surprisingly, students are interested to use Facebook rather than Twitter to get political updates. Findings on social media exposure among undergraduate students reported that undergraduate students are well exposed to social media because they have social media account and greater time spent to login and update social media account. As a result, this study manages to accept research hypothesis 1 (H1) where there is a social media use

exists among undergraduate students from part 3 to 6 in Kolej Universiti Islam Melaka.

POLITICAL NEWS EXPOSURE AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

As predicted, young people are attracted to browse social media in order to get news which lack of transparency reporting in conventional media (newspaper, television or radio). As shown in Table 1.6, politicians' scandals lead response of political news exposure where browsing social media to get news about political scandal is greater than browsing about government update. Undergraduate students agree to get political news from social media but are not really interested to search about new cabinet members or information about Government Transformation Program (GTP). In short, respondents who represent young people are more interested to browse social media in order to get political scandals updates rather than government update.

POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE EXPOSURE AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

Significant result to political news exposure Table 1.7, undergraduate students was reported to have greater political knowledge gain from online news. They use to choose social media to get news about opposition party (PR), political scandal and political issues. However, printed newspapers lead the survey as a medium to get government policy or program updates by respondents.

H2: There is relationship between social media use and political knowledge among undergraduate students from part 3 to 6 in Kolej Universiti Islam Melaka.

Variables	Social Media Exposure	
	<i>r</i>	Significant value (P)
1. Political Knowledge	0.587	0.01

Figure 2: 'Pearson's product moment' Correlation Coefficient between social media use and political knowledge (n=132)

As can be seen in Figure 2, there is a strong positive correlation between social media exposure and political knowledge among undergraduate students (Pearsons' $r = .587$, $P < 0.01$) where a positive correlation coefficient indicates that an increase in the first variable would correspond to an increase in the second variable, thus implying a direct relationship between the variables.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

This study sought to examine political participation among young people that may be influenced by social media. Results Table 1.8 found that undergraduate students listed that frequently involve young people are posting and replying political issues in social media followed by communicating with political leaders through virtual media. Being registered voters as predicted can influence by social media exposure reported less popular than joining political discourse but greater than joining street demonstration. From this study, researcher can conclude that there is a moderate positive relationship between political participation and social media use experienced among undergraduate students as stated in Figure 3.

H3: There is relationship between social media use and political participation among undergraduate students from part 3 to 6 in Kolej Universiti Islam Melaka.

Variables	Social Media Use	
	<i>r</i>	Significant value (P)
1. Political Participation	0.48	0.01

Figure 3: 'Pearson's product moment' Correlation Coefficient between social media use and political participation (n=132)

The value of r (n132) = 0.48, $P > 0.01$) in Figure 3 show the result that political participation among respondents is apparently increased by the frequency of social media use as even though the relationship is a moderate.

DISCUSSIONS

Young people are generally enthusiastic adopters of the Internet for communication, entertainment and education. Young people regard the Internet as a flexible medium for information seeking (Kyung-Sun Kim 2013) (Dana Rosengard 2014), get political news update (Ingrid Bachmann 2013), online political messaging for opinion expression (Valenzuela 2013) and political expression (Masahiro Yamamoto 2014) enhance through mobile political application.

As predicted, young people sign-up Twitter for daily communication and Facebook website for searching political news. Malaysia with population near to 30 million has 18 million of internet users and 14 million of Facebook

subscribers. As social media general applications, Facebook provides users interactive platform to communicate besides uploading pictures and videos (Conroy & Feezel, 2012).

Facebook is useful to search political news? Users can join political groups, download candidate applications, and share their political opinions through the many communication tools on the site (Vitak, Zube, Smock, et al, 2010). Users can view their friends' activities by scrolling through the News Feed on their homepage, and they can comment on friends' posts, thus engaging in active conversation about political issues. Directly, applications premises in Facebook open an opportunity to develop civic engagement skills (Vissers & Stolle, 2012).

In Malaysia, freedom of media is still not fully implemented even though Malaysia exercised democracy system. The 'government supported' mainstream media is perceived as not providing a balanced coverage in comparison to social media which the young urban educated Malaysians seek out to gratify their interest for political information and freedom in discussing issues deemed too sensitive in the mainstream media (Faridah & Safar, 2005).

Supported study by Dunne, Lawlor & Rowley (2010) who employed qualitative approach found those younger peoples, those who perceived online news to be a credible source of information and those who were involved with their communities and are politically engaged as strongest predictor of political engagement due to the fact that social media news provide interactive features which allow the audience to express their views, it seems reasonable that those who are socially active would also be active online participants. There is correlation of current study to previous findings that young people highly depending social media to get political updates and young people keen to search about opposition news rather than government news.

According to Rajaratnam (2009), lack of transparency caused voters especially, young generation looking for alternative media especially social media, which had already been discussed, utilized by opponent group. Continuous efforts by opposition party through more sophisticated ways campaigning, high-tech especially via Internet have been maximized. This is because the monopoly on mainstream media by the government which is not transparent, especially on opposition news has caused young voters browsing opposition information through websites or social media.

Political knowledge and political participation in politics are at the core of democratic process. The quality of democracy people is measure by level political knowledge gained from political participation (Ingrid Bachmann 2013) and associate by previous research, this study found that young people have greater political knowledge expose by social media (Kristoffer Holt 2013).

Political scientists have long been interested in developing ways to assess just how much political knowledge among young people. Young people who eligible to vote in their first or second election, are often criticized as being well informed about political updates (Judith Moeller 2014).

Correlation between social media and political knowledge found that there is a positive correlation coefficient indicates that an increase in the first variable would correspond to an increase in the second variable, thus implying a direct relationship between the variables. It can be concluded that greater exposure on social media, necessarily increased their political knowledge (Gerald Jordan 2015) (C. d. Judith Moeller 2015).

However, effect of negative news media exposure may lead to different level of political participation either participate or not to participate. Findings stated in this study shows that undergraduate students have greater exposure on negative news. According to Bruce E. Pinkleton (2012) greater exposure on negative political issues or dissatisfaction with media can affect participants' cynicism and political apathy that lead to lower political participation among young people.

Political scientist believes that hot news or controversial news, politically interested or demanded by participants that more likely to select negative (Marc Trussle 2014). Basically, contributes to greater political knowledge among young people and this is the true color of democracy process where unlimited information accessed (Rebecca 2010). Applicable to political information efficacy model believed that greater political knowledge correlate to greater political participation among young people (Pollock 1983). It shows that there is an idea on greater negative may lead to greater political knowledge and greater or lower political participation among young people.

In order to measure political participation among young people, there are ten types of political participation listed which commonly involved by young people such as joining political forum, reply on political status, communicate with political leaders, joining street demonstration, turning out during election, being a registered voter, wearing political gadget, joining political discussion and political discourse (Boulianne 2015). From the numbers of political participation, surprisingly, our young people prominently choose to reply on political issues post in social media and communicate with political leaders rather than joining political discourse, forum or discussion.

Individuals join online communities, some of which allow the individuals to create public profiles and share information with other community members, such as social content, photos, and links to sites of perceived community interest (Pew Research Center, 2013). Social media community building is a process that occurs in community information exchange forums where members receive and share information with other community members.

Supported in Computer Human Behavior Study, social media refer to Internet-based services that allow individuals to create, share and seek content, as well as to communicate and collaborate with each other (Sian Lee, 2012, Kim, Jeong, & Lee, 2010; Lerman, 2007). One of the more attractive features of social media is its support for user-generated content (Ashraf, Nergis & Mahdy, 2011) and social media fully beneficial toward introvert voters those who quiet creatures to express their ideas, feelings and informations (Hutson M., 2010).

STRENGTH AND CONTRIBUTION

This study reveals new outcomes on how common predictors of political participation influence by social media use can develop political knowledge among young people. Little study has examined how social media use can influence online political participation among young people rather than offline political participation. This is relevant within political information efficacy theory have resulted young people highly expose to social media use and login Facebook to get political updates, especially about opposition party (Pakatan Rakyat) rather than government news. As reported in this study, young people has greater political knowledge gain from social media but highly exposure on negative news and lead to moderate positive relationship with online political participation. Moderate level leads to non-extreme political participation such as replying political issues posted by others, communicating with political leaders through online and joining political discourse in social media. Contribution of this study toward knowledge on social media and political participation among young people are; 1) young people use social media to get political update, basically for opinion expression and political expression, 2) exposure toward negative news has moderate relationship toward political participation, even though sometime political participants search or demand for negative stories, 3) greater political knowledge cause by greater political interest (effort for searching political updates) in social media.

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APPENDIX A

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age		
21-23	75	56.8
24-26	40	30.3
27-29	17	12.9
Gender		
Male	50	37.9
Female	82	62.1
Marital Status		
Single	121	91.7
Married	9	6.8
Others	2	1.5
Religion		
Muslim	119	90.2
Non-muslim	13	9.8
Ethnicity		
Malay	119	90.2
Chinese	5	3.8
Indian	6	4.5
Others	2	1.5
Previous Higher Education		
Matriculation	19	14.4
Diploma	96	72.7
STPM	17	12.9

TABLE 1.1 Demographic profiles

Do you use any online social media?	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	126	95.5
No	6	4.5

TABLE 1.2 Social media users among undergraduate students

Social media that you use the MOST for searching political news	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Facebook	44	33.4
Twitter	25	18.9
Blogs	26	19.7
Youtube	37	28.0

TABLE 1.3 Social media and searching political news

How frequent times do you log-in your social media account per day	Frequency	Percentage (%)
0-2 times	28	21.2
3-5 times	8	6.1
6-10 times	54	40.9
more than 11 times	42	31.8

TABLE 1.4: Frequent times log-in social media

How much time do you spend to update your social media account?	Frequency	Percentage (%)
0-30 minutes	35	26.5
31 minutes – 1 hour	44	33.3
1 to 2 hours	16	12.1
More than 3 hours	37	28.0

TABLE 1.5 Frequency spending to update social media account

Political News Exposure	Percentage (%)				
	1	2	3	4	5
1. I browse Social Media to get latest political news	11.4	7.6	18.9	25.1	37.0
2. I browse Social Media to get news about Pakatan Rakyat update	7.6	18.9	11.4	22.7	39.4
3. I browse Social Media to get news about GTP	22.9	40.0	6.8	16.0	14.3
4. I browse Social Media to get list of new cabinet members	19.7	37.1	15.2	17.4	10.6
5. I browse Social Media to get news about political scandal	9.8	3.0	3.0	19.0	65.2

TABLE 1.6 political news exposures among undergraduate students

Political Knowledge Exposure		Percentage (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
1.	I know Pulau Pinang, Selangor and Kelantan ruled by Opposition Party from Social Media	4.5	4.5	9.8	43.2	38.0
2.	I know Datuk Seri Mohd Najib Tun Razak as Prime Minister from Social Media	5.5	13.8	6.2	27.5	47.0
3.	I know General Election of Malaysia held every 5 years from Social Media	6.4	18.1	6.1	30.0	39.4
4.	I understand two-thirds majority is required to form government	3.8	16.7	7.5	26.5	45.5
5.	I know opposition party in Malaysia is Pakatan Rakyat (DAP, PKR and PAS)	4.5	28.0	6.1	27.3	34.1
6.	I know Government Transformation Programme (GTP) from Social Media	10.8	31.8	18.8	26.5	12.1
7.	I know qualified voter is Malaysian age 21 years old	5.3	10.6	12.2	33.6	38.3
8.	I know Malaysia is a democracy country	2.2	7.5	6.8	37.6	45.9

TABLE 1.7 Political knowledge exposure among undergraduate students

Political Participation		Percentage (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
1.	I'm involved political forum manage in social media	27.4	23.4	6.4	18.0	24.8
2.	I'm interested to reply on political issues post in social media	3.0	15.2	3.0	22.0	56.8
3.	I'm interested to update my status on political issues in social media	11.4	22.7	1.5	36.4	28.0
4.	I'm interested to communicate with political leaders through social media	5.3	12.9	10.6	25.0	46.2
5.	Social media encourage me to join street demonstration to voice out my rights.	1.5	21.2	22.0	20.6	34.7
6.	Searching political new or information from social media encourages me turn-out during election.	4.5	4.5	9.1	45.5	36.4
7.	Social media encourage me to be a register voter	4.5	4.5	25.0	25.0	41.0
8.	Social media encourage me to wear button badge, t-shirt, caps or any political merchandise.	3.0	14.4	17.4	31.1	34.1
9.	Social media encourage me to discuss political issue in Malaysia with friends	5.8	8.6	6.3	43.5	35.8
10.	Social media encourage me to join political discourse.	-	-	11.3	43.2	45.5

TABLE 1.8 Political participation among undergraduate students

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