

# A REVIEW OF POLITICAL INTEREST AND MEDIA DEPENDENCY ON SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE AMONG THE YOUTH IN MALAYSIA

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## Abstract

*In the information age, social media has been the essential medium for getting information. However, as social media facilitates the spread of information, the tendency of youth to receive misinformation and fake news on social media gets higher. The problem arises as youth tend to be interested in and dependent on social media to get political information, but they are also exposed to false information on social media, which can affect their awareness of political information. The qualitative research method is employed by reviewing 10 journal articles from the Google Scholar journal and UiTM Online Database from the years 2019 to 2023 that are related to the topic area. The results show that youth in Malaysia are interested in getting political information on social media, especially during the general election, and tend to depend on gaining the information shared on social media platforms. The analysis is through a narrative review showing that high consumption of social media usage affects the level of media dependency and political interest among the youth in Malaysia. Based on the result, it is proven that youths are dependent on and interested in political information on social media based on current situations, such as the general election, as a preparation before casting their vote.*

**Keywords:** *Social Media Usage, Political Interest, Media Dependency, Youth, Malaysia*

## **Tinjauan terhadap Minat Politik dan Kebergantungan Media dalam Penggunaan Media Sosial dalam kalangan Belia di Malaysia**

### **Abstrak**

*Dalam era maklumat, media sosial telah menjadi medium penting untuk mendapatkan maklumat. Namun, apabila media sosial memudahkan penyebaran maklumat, kecenderungan belia untuk menerima maklumat salah dan berita palsu di media sosial semakin tinggi. Masalah timbul apabila belia cenderung berminat dan bergantung kepada media sosial untuk mendapatkan maklumat politik, tetapi mereka juga terdedah kepada maklumat palsu di media sosial, yang boleh menjejaskan kesedaran mereka terhadap maklumat politik. Kaedah penyelidikan kualitatif digunakan dengan menyemak 10 artikel jurnal daripada jurnal Google Scholar dan Pangkalan Data Dalam Talian UiTM dari tahun 2019 hingga 2023 yang berkaitan dengan bidang topik. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa belia di Malaysia berminat untuk mendapatkan maklumat politik di media sosial, terutamanya semasa pilihan raya umum, dan cenderung bergantung kepada mendapatkan maklumat yang dikongsi di platform media sosial. Analisis adalah melalui semakan naratif yang menunjukkan penggunaan media sosial yang tinggi mempengaruhi tahap kebergantungan media dan kepentingan politik dalam kalangan belia di Malaysia. Berdasarkan keputusan itu, terbukti golongan belia bergantung dan berminat dengan maklumat politik di media sosial berdasarkan situasi semasa seperti pilihan raya umum sebagai persediaan sebelum membuang undi.*

**Kata Kunci:** *Penggunaan media sosial, kepentingan politik, kebergantungan media, belia, Malaysia*

### **Introduction**

In today's world, social media has become essential to humans' lives, especially the youth, as we deal with the internet and media daily. Everyone in all age ranges uses social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, X, TikTok, and many more interactive social platforms. According to Wong (2023), as of August 2023, the data reported that 4.9 billion users globally are using social media platforms. Facebook was recorded as the most used application by 2.9 million users monthly, followed by YouTube with 2.5 active users. Based on the data, users are approximately active on social media for 2 hours and 7 minutes daily. Everyone can share their life statuses with their social network through social media platforms, and everyone is free to express

their feelings towards current news. Social media platforms have become a phenomenon that offers freedom of expression among users (Ramdzan & Muhammad, 2023). According to Nawi et al. (2020), new media usage, mainly social media platforms, has been an effective medium for shifting the thinking styles among users, especially the youth, in expressing their political ideas.

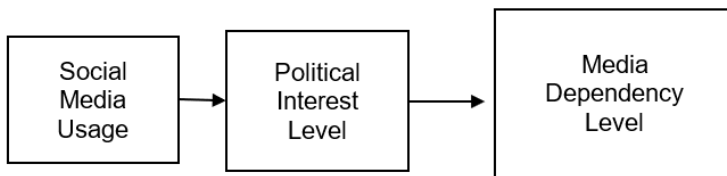
As the rapid growth of social media platforms increases political participation among youth, the features of social media itself allow users to engage with their online peers and get political information through shared news. Ahmed; Morales & Tully (2022) and Silver & Johnson (2018) stated that social media users learn about politics and participate through the platforms. In the previous era, people relied on traditional media such as newspapers, brochures, and radio to get political information and current news. However, with the emergence of new media and social media, youth seem to rely heavily on the platforms, and traditional media has distinguished itself from their options (Zhurafskaya; Petrova & Enokolopov, 2020) as it provides the newest update compared to scheduled traditional media. This has led to a dependency among youth on gathering information on social media. It seems like it can be helpful for youth in surviving the information age to engage and keep up to date with the political news they need, especially during the election.

In Malaysia, Ahmad & Zain (2021) stated that the Malaysian population in 2020 will be about 32.7 million people, with half of the population recorded within the youth age range of 15 to 35 years old. It is believed that the population will increase in 2023. Thus, it is important to have political participation among youth or political engagement among youth in social media, as stated by Syed Saddiq in an interview on how Malaysian youth are the kingmakers of the country. In the Malaysian context, Howe (2023) reported that of the 34.13 million people in Malaysia, 96.8% are social media users. Based on the statistics, it is impressive that most users are actively using Facebook, leaving Instagram, X, and TikTok behind. Therefore, the statistics of high Internet or social media usage among the youth, answer the decision of the new government to implement Undi-18. It is a new amendment to lower the voting age range from 21 years old to 18 years old.

General Election 13 shows the ruling government in which Barisan Nasional (BN), the longest political party that governs the country, has lost to Pakatan Harapan (PH). This was an unexpected result since most Malaysians did not expect that PH would succeed in forming the

government. After a few analyses, it revealed their effective strategies for gaining support from youth through social media approaches on all platforms. Knowing the active participation of the youth, the new government understands that the outcome of General Election 14 is contributed by the youth (Ahmad & Zaim, 2021). After the implementation of Undi-18, Malaysian political parties started to facilitate social media platforms by involving the youth in political discussions. The general election campaign clearly shows the high participation among the youth and the expression shown by the youth regarding the political news on social media. To gain support from the youth, most parties use the social media approach to promote the candidates, persuading the users, especially the youth, of their manifesto and the offers proposed if they win the elections. There are also political extremists in the youth age range, such as Fahmi Reza, who is actively criticising and persuading voters about the political landscape in Malaysia.

The active participation of youth in social media, especially during the general election campaigns, shows that they are interested in participating in the political landscape, gaining political knowledge, and being expressive in voicing their opinion on the political situation in Malaysia. It shows that political interests among youth in Malaysia are still at a good level. However, the concern is how much they are interested in getting political information on social media and how media literacy increases their dependency on social media usage to get the information. Thus, this study aims to explore the level of political interest and media dependency on social media usage among youth in Malaysia, according to the conceptual framework in Figure 1 below.



*Figure 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents*

## Literature Review

### *Social Media Dependency of Youth*

In defining today's technological era, social media has been an essential tool to maintain interaction among youth across all age ranges. It is so important as it can be accessed everywhere and anytime. This can be supported by Matthes (2022) that social media has been the centre of the lives of the young generation, as they just needed smartphones and internet connections to be on social media 24/7. In fact, Jun (2022) described that youth are the dominant users of social media, which has been part of their daily lives, showing how they heavily rely on social media. Youth are identified as the dominant users of social media because, according to Nawi et al. (2020), youth are a young generation that can adopt technology and the Internet quickly compared to the elders. This has answers to why youth are the majority of users of social media.

Social media functions well in youth's lives, it has led to social media dependency among youth. In politics, youth have identified using social media heavily for information gathering, especially during the election. Tan (2022) explained that youth heavily rely on social media to gather political information. Youth are active in dealing with platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, X, TikTok, and many more that they use for gathering important information quickly (Nawi et al., 2020). Hamutoglu et al. (2020) expressed how the continuous use of social media has brought addiction or dependency among the youth, which worst affects the symptom of 'Fear of Missing Out' (FOMO). This is supported by Mari et al. (2020) and Aygul et al. (2019) on how social media addiction can lead to FOMO among youth. Nawi et al. (2020) added that media dependency among youth can be something to be concerned about if they do not realise the effects they will encounter in the future. This is all due to the addiction to getting political information, especially during the general election. Kant (2020) explained that the reason why youth are addicted to or dependent on social media is to keep engaged with the latest information and to fulfil their need to get updated, which also seems to relate to FOMO.

In the Malaysian context, a study by Hassim et al. (2020) proved the media dependency among the youth on social media, stating that Malaysia is among the 10 countries that spend most of their time on video streaming on Facebook. The findings stated that 24.9% of users

tend to check their phones for new updates often. The behaviour of users constantly checking their phones, it can support the issue of how users tend to be involved in FOMO. The higher usage of social media among the youths in Malaysia is also proven, as according to Tan (2022), MCMC reported that 67% of social media users are youth aged 20 to 30. Social media has increased the dependency among youths on getting political information, as the liberalisation of the political landscape in Malaysia has increased the need for youths to use relevant political information they receive in the media (Abdullah et al., 2021; Ahmad, Alvi, & Ittefaq, 2019; Pepinsky, 2013). However, until now, there has been no specific characteristic to define media dependency or media addiction, as many researchers have stated that both are the same behaviour in which users heavily use the media for their benefit.

### *Political Interest in Social Media Among Youth*

Knowing the level of political interest among youth is not that difficult, especially on social media. Interesting in political information can be positive, as it links the expressed political interest with the reported political information. In other words, if there is an intention to engage in politics, then there should be an effort to understand politics. Therefore, according to Arafah & Hasyim (2022), the Internet itself has changed human interaction by enabling transparency in the information itself. Halim et al. (2021) suggested that participation among the youth should be diverse and crucial for future politics. This is pointed out by Ahmad & Zain (2021) on how youth's involvement can change the quality of administration, which embraces democratic government in the country. They also stated that youth participation is highly encouraged to increase their interest in the political field.

When defining political interest through online participation among the youth, few researchers have their views on political interest. Halim et al. (2021) define political interest as a motivation to spend their time and energy to be involved in political activities. Meanwhile, Khan et al. (2019), found that political participation among youth on social media is driven by their political interests. As supported by Ahmad et al. (2019), it enhances the trends of political participation among users, especially political communication. The changes in political communication on social media lead to political literacy, which, according to Abdullah (2021), is awareness and skills in finding the right political information sources that will affect their decision-making. While Mohamad et al. (2019) mention that youth have easily developed political interests as a result of their readiness to accept changes, They also mention that their

participation in social media, especially Facebook, can stimulate positive political information (Arshad & Khurram, 2020; Mohamad et al., 2019; Vissers & Stolle, 2014). Nevertheless, political participation on social media among the youth, according to Abdullah et al. (2021), is still low since they are stuck by uncertainties in expressing their political discussions. However, since political changes are happening in Malaysia, Abdullah et al. (2021) stated that youths must get political information through social media instead of focusing only on entertainment to avoid political ambiguity.

### *Facebook Usage in Getting First - Hand Information*

We know that social media platforms have existed widely since the rise of the information age. Ahmad et al. (2019) stated the Internet and social media have opened the doors for youth to participate in political discussions. Social media users have options in choosing which platforms are preferred for getting political information. Aside from social media platforms, youths also have other options for choosing other mediums, such as network sites. The rise of social media platforms has opened the opportunity for citizen journalists to spread their updates. This is due to a study implemented by Abdullatif and Pirus (2023) that found that Twitter, blogs, Instagram, and other social media platforms enable citizens to share their news while also allowing users to participate in the discussion. In their study Ahmad et al. (2019), found that Pakistani youths prefer Facebook as the social media platform for getting political information, compared to Twitter, now known as X.

According to Mohamed et al. (2019), in the Malaysian political landscape during the early Internet, opposition parties used websites and blogs to engage with readers. Before the social media platforms took over social network sites, Malaysian citizens facilitated blogs and formed cyber-troopers, paid by the political parties to spread propaganda or hatred towards their rival parties. Abdullah et al. (2023) asserted that the full usage of Facebook among youths is to meet their needs. Abdullah et al. (2023); She (2022); and Norhazlina et al. (2011) also mentioned that Facebook is a useful platform for gaining information, connecting with people, and initiating discussions. Halim et al. (2019) supported that by stating that Facebook has been recognised as a reliable platform for providing quality political information that motivates youths to participate in political discussion on social media.

Through the studies of previous researchers, most of them agreed that Facebook is the most popular platform for providing political information among youths. Mohamed et al. (2019) also agreed on how Facebook is mostly providing political information, as well as how most prominent politicians are active on Facebook compared to other platforms. However, Jun (2022) in the study found that MCMC reported that in 2020, Facebook usage has decreased 91.7% from 97.3% in 2018, though Facebook remains the highest platform of usage for information seeking. Meanwhile, Abdullatif & Pirus (2023) viewed that, due to the rise of citizen journalism since the emergence of social media platforms, Twitter seems to be the quickest platform to disseminate breaking news, and this can be supported by their citing Williams et al. (2018) on Twitter as the preferred platform to receive news. In Thailand, Sinpeng (2021) reported that Twitter was actively used among the youths in Thailand in 2019 as they expressed their political activism through hashtags since the features provide anonymity compared to Facebook.

## **Methodology**

The paper involves reviews based on past studies implemented by a few scholars in 2019–2023. The articles were selected from the past five years of research to ensure that the data and references are relevant to the study area. Aside, the area of social media usage is considered as the latest focus among the researchers, therefore it meets the relevancy of sources. The journals are sourced from Google Scholars, UiTM Online Database, and Forum Komunikasi sites, where the five keywords in this study abstract are searched to get the related journals. This search web is used since the researcher found that it is easier to get the data, especially in the Malaysian context as most of the studies in Forum Komunikasi focus on the Malaysian context.

In the narrative review process, a few steps are taken to gather the data. The first step is done by searching the keywords, which researcher decided to select certain web engines to search the keywords. To ensure the articles are related, the keywords typed as social media usage, political interest, media dependency, youth, and Malaysia. Below are a few criteria for selecting the related journals:

- Studies from 2019-2023
- Journals related to youth, social media, political participation and interest, and Malaysia
- Journals related to the social media platforms used in getting political information



After that, the related journals will be downloaded, and the researcher begin with the reading of the whole journal. While skimming the journals, related points will be recorded in a table to aid the process of analysing the relevant content. Through all the processes, the researcher succeeded in gathering 20 journals from the selected websites. However, only 10 journals were selected as the results indicate the most reliable and explain the political interest and media dependency on social media usage. On top of that, the studies also explain the Malaysian context.

## **Findings And Analysis**

Out of the 20 journals analysed, only 10 journals from various scholars were selected based on their reliability and relevance to the study area. The findings from 10 journals are about discovering social media usage among youths and how it has a relationship to their political participation in social media. The findings are as stated in Table 1 below.

Through the analysis, it is found that social media provide a crucial platform for youth to seek political information. The usage of social media platforms undoubtedly increases the dependencies among youth in gathering political information. It is also found that Fear Of Missing Out (FOMO) is possibly developed when online peers due to their political postings and sharing drive them to feel the need to be engaged. The finding stated that youth depend on social media to gather political information, and this is driven by the phenomenon situation, which only happened during the general election as stated by Ahmad & Zain (2021), which is interrelated to the finding by Tan (2022) that youth are only interested of election information, not political information.

The existence of citizen journalists on social media is considered a factor that attracts the youth to be engaged in political information. Due to the limitation in getting wider political information on mainstream media, citizen journalists can provide uncensored information despite the unethical action that led to hatred arguments among the supporters (Abdullah et al., 2021; Halim et al., 2021). The inability of politicians and bias to engage with online users makes youth depend on wider social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and X to engage with peers, as mentioned by Kamaruzzaman et al. (2019).

*Table 2: Findings on journal analysis*

<b>Authors (Year)</b>	<b>Journal</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Causes</b>	<b>Findings</b>
Tan (2022)	Socio-Political Characteristics of the Malaysian Net Generation Who Use Social Media For Political Information: An Exploratory Analysis	Quantitative	Political Information	The study found that the younger generation is engaged in political information through social media usage. However, it is also found that users are engaged in factual knowledge and unable to dig in depth the political information. Despite that, the young generation is aware of their capabilities in bringing changes to the country. The overall findings stated that most of young users are interested in election information, compared to political information.
Ahmad, Alvi & Ittefaq (2019)	The Use of Social Media on Political Participation Among University Students: An Analysis of Survey Results From Rural Pakistan	Quantitative	Political Participation	The results indicate the high usage of social media for political efficacy among university students. Users actively share political content with their friends and family and it creates engagement among the users. It also found that students in Pakistan have contact with the Government and it

				eases the process of transferring political efficacy among the students.
Kamaruzza man, Manan & Ghazhali (2019)	Facebook Use and Personalization among Malaysian Politicians during the 14th Malaysian General Election	Qualitative (Content Analysis)	Political Approach Social Media	The study found that Facebook is undoubtedly the prominent tool in engaging with the voters. Every politicians agree to uses the platform. However, the effectiveness of the platform is depending on the quality over quantity. The limitation is addressed as politician has to focus on their target audiences while having least engagement with the young audiences.
Abdullatif & Pirus (2023)	The Roles of Citizen Journalists in Malaysia's Political Landscape	Qualitative	Social Media Citizen Journalism	The phenomenon of citizen journalism on social media has given an opportunity for social media users to rely on social media information, especially youths. The roles of citizen journalists in spread fake news and breaching information is driven by time consuming in validating the news. Despite the unethical action, it

attract the youth to engaged in the postings and react toward the news. Besides, youth are able to understand the news shared by citizen journalists as it is uncensored and claimed that there is no bias in reporting, comparing to news reported by the mainstream media.

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Abdullah, Hassan, Ahmad, Hassan & Ismail (2021)	Social Media, Youths and Political Participation in Malaysia: A Review of Literature	Qualitative	Social Media Political Information	Most Malaysian youths who are using social media platforms are depending on social media platforms to get political information. It is due to the fact that social media provides them with unlimited sources. However, there should be stressed that social media, especially mainstream media are restricting potential news that youth should know. Even youth gather the information through social media, it is still surface which it makes a strong reason of why the citizen journalists decided to reveal uncensored information.
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Ahmad & Zain (2021)	Political Involvement among Youth in Malaysia: Lessons Learnt	Quantitative Method	Political Involvement Social Media	The majority of youth in the study area are depending on social media to gather political information. Youth found that social media is the best platform in gaining information they needed. The limitation is addressed as youth who tied to the university regulations are restricted to participate in any political campaigns, which resulting them to engaged through the postings in social media. However, it is also found that youth are engaged to the political postings only during the election as a preparation before voting, and they are not intended to be interested to political information afterwards.
Adnan & Ramly (2021)	Political Participation Through Social Media in Malaysia: A Review of Literature	Qualitative Method	Social Media Political Participation	Youth are now aware of the political landscape in Malaysia, and many researchers found that the political participation of youth in social media has increased. Exposure to political information on social media can

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				increase their level of involvement in political activity. However, the unefficient use of social media is worryingly worsen the information gathering in social media as it may occur hatred and violence contents.
Salman & Salleh (2020)	Examining Relationship Between Political Agenda on Social media and Political Support Among University Students	Quantitative Method	Political Support Political Agenda	With the various social media, youths are able to get political information widely, and it does not require them to rely on newspapers and television anymore. As media literacy in political involvement arises among youths, they are able to involve themselves and show support for the political agenda on social media.
Halim, Mohamad, Dauda, Azizan & Akanmu (2021)	Association of online political participation with social media usage, perceived information quality, political interest and political knowledge among Malaysian youth: Structural equation model analysis	Quantitative Method	Political Participation Political Interest	The study found that youths tend to be influenced by online political participation due to their political interests and political knowledge. Political knowledge they gain on social media has an opportunity to make them participate in political activities and discussions on social media platforms.

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Muhamad, Ahmad & Saputra (2021)	The Linkages between Social Media and Political Participation among Malaysian Youth	Quantitative Method	Online Activity Political Participation	The study found that Malaysian youths are less motivated to actively participate in political activity on social media or offline because they are worried about the government's punishment. However, political knowledge is gained through reading some news on social media.
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## Discussion and Conclusion

The swift expansion of social media platforms boost political involvement among young people. The inherent features of social media enable users to interact with their online peers and acquire political information by sharing news. It is vital to focus on raising political awareness among the youth, especially the young voters, as they are instrumental in shaping Malaysia's political landscape and determining its success. Referred to as the kingmakers, the youth play a crucial role in selecting a government that can guide the country towards democracy. In the era before technological advancements and widespread media access, the baby boomers heavily relied on television, newspapers, and direct discussions with elders for information. However, with the advent of the modern age, social media has become a facilitator, allowing users to access information conveniently. The youth now have the privilege to actively gather political information, expanding their knowledge, with the extent of their engagement depending on their willingness to commit to the process.

The studies made by past researchers proved the relationship between social media usage and the level of media dependency and political interest among the youth in Malaysia. Most scholars found that social media is important in boosting the motivation among the youth in political information seeking, to participate in the discussion, and to make decisions in choosing the right leader during the general election. Citizen

journalism on social media platforms has opened wider sources of political information, however, as they are not tied to the regulation of journalism as mainstream media, though it is a concern that the authorities should focus on in curbing fake news and misinformation among the youth. Nevertheless, media literacy is important in educating the youth on how to use social media platforms wisely, especially in getting political information from citizen journalism, and political participation in social media should be controlled.

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