Selangor Young Voters Awareness and Motivation during GE14

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ABSTRACT

The Malaysian 14th General Election (GE14) in 2018 was an exciting general election which saw high participation from the 'millennials'. Made up 41% from the total Malaysian voters, participation from young voters played a vital role in the changes of Malaysia's political landscape by contributing to the downfall of Barisan Nasional's 60 years administration. Guided by Michael Foucault's theory on power, this paper aimed to assess young voters' awareness towards election issue based on their voting knowledge and dependency on online media platform for information, understanding their voting motivation that led to their participation during the election. Being an urban state in Malaysia with the highest number of voters, Selangor was an ideal selection for the purpose of this paper. Three focus group discussions were conducted amongst twelve (12) Selangor young voters to assess their awareness, motivation and their determination to participate during

the election. During discussions, it was found that economic impact issues such as 1 Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB), Goods and Services Tax (GST), high cost of living, and the National Higher Education Fund Corporation (PTPTN) issue had caught their attention. In addition, their heavy reliance on social media as their source of information had influenced their apolitical decision and the voters were motivated by their desire for a change in a new administration which had led them to cast their votes.

Keywords: *Selangor, General Election, Young Voters, Online Media Platform, Awareness, Motivation*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Voting is a responsibility that needs to be fulfilled by each citizen when it comes to maintaining the democracy of a country [1]. An effective democratic process was reflected through the expression of the public will, their acceptance or rejection towards a political agenda, choices of candidates and even the political party [2]. Up to date, Malaysia has experienced fourteen General Elections since its independence in 1957, with the previous general election carried out on 9th May 2018. During the general election, the nation saw a major power transition from the Barisan Nasional to Pakatan Harapan, a group of political alliance made up of Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR), Parti Bersatu Pribumi (PPBM), Parti Amanah Rakyat (PAN) and Democratic Action Party (DAP).

Research conducted by scholars [3][4][5][6] amongst youths in Western countries found that poor political knowledge has an association with low election participation amongst young voters as they tend to distance themselves from politics which indirectly link voters' political participation with their political knowledge. A study [7] had proven that throughout the years, participation gradually declines as the voters felt distance due to the lack of attention received from the policymakers. However, the scenario was quite the opposite for the Malaysian young voters. These 'Generation Y' or better known as the 'Millennials' are referring to those born between 1980 -2000 that was well versed in the latest technological advancement and had a high dependency on the internet for information [8].

To grasp the young voters' attention particularly the first-time voters', various awareness campaigns were carried out during the campaigning period via social media platform and electronic media as an effort to encourage their voting participation. An estimated amount of RM500 million [9] was spent for political campaigning purposes in the 2018 election to attract the young and first-time voters to carry out their responsibilities compared to the previous 2013 General Election of RM400 million [10]. Political campaigning and advertising during the general election was not a new thing in Malaysia as it had been practiced since 1999 as a means to disseminate political agenda to the public. Through technological advancement, social media were fully utilized during the previous General Election as a communication medium as it was faster, cheaper, time efficient and had wider audience coverage [11]. As a result of aggressive campaigning, the recent General Election saw 83% of the 278,590 registered voters had fulfilled their voting obligations [12]. Out of this number, 41% consisted of young voters making them the dominant age group. With this finding, we noted that Malaysian young voters were eager to cast their votes during the 14th General Election, possibly as the results of their awareness towards issues that arose during the election and their findings through social media.

1.1 Malaysia's 14th General Election

Malaysian General Election 2018 or 'GE14' was held on Wednesday, 9 May 2018. The electoral system was vital for Malaysia political system [13] as it exerted an essential and independent effect on electoral outcomes. Adopting a Westminster parliamentary model upon its independence in 1957, the Malaysian government was elected through a 'first-past-the-post' or simple majority system [14]. In total, there were 55 registered political parties in Malaysia [15] according to Suruhanjaya Pilihan Raya which later formed a coalition into three (3) major political parties namely: Barisan Nasional (BN), Pakatan Harapan (PH) and Parti Islam Se Malaysia (PAS). History was created whereby for the first time ever, four (4) political parties formed an alliance called 'Pakatan Harapan' consist of Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR), Parti Bersatu Pribumi (PPBM), Parti Amanah Rakyat (PAN)

and Democratic Action Party (DAP), in which they had competed under the ticket of Parti Keadilan Rakyat [16]. Upon the dissolvent of the 13th Parliament on 7 April 2018, 222 Dewan Rakyat seats and 505 seats from 12 State Legislative Assemblies of Malaysia are at stake. The election must be conducted within 60 days after the dissolvent of Parliament. The Election Commission of Malaysia (EC) were given the sole mandate to conduct elections. In accordance with Federal Constitution (Article 114), the body has three (3) main functions such as conducting studies and delineations of Parliamentary and State Election Divisions within a period of not less than eight (8) years, carrying out voters' registration and review apart from organizing general elections and by-elections in the event of a vacancy. The ongoing effort by Election Commission in creating a more conducive voting environment apart from attracting and educating the public on the importance of voting through various online media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and even Youtube was noticeable during the previous GE14 as shown in Figure 1.1 below.

Figure 1.1: SPR Social Media Campaign

1.1.1 Engaging Young Voters

Voting was perceived as a gateway to youth engagement. Individuals who had participated in electoral activities from young are most likely to continue their political participation which eventually became a 'habitual process' [17]. Voting was importance amongst youth as their opinion on political situation matters, plus their thoughts and participation allowed the possibility of electoral impact. The findings above were explained by Reddy and Smith [18] whereby youngsters who participated voluntarily were aware of their civic obligation which led them to actively seek information. Sprabary [19] explained that parents have a major influence over their children's political involvement whereby should the parents have less interest in politics, it was most likely that their children would also pay less attention to political-related issues. Young voters' engagement in politics according to Lochocki [20] had significantly evolved from merely forming interest group or voting to participating in a protest, boycotting and even persuading others to sign a petition. Therefore, attracting these youngster's attention towards politics requires their awareness of the ongoing political issues surrounding them apart from having at least basic political knowledge.

Awareness is synonym with knowledge and understanding that something is happening or exists. Political awareness [21] sparked the political consciousness of the public on various political phenomena and it was an important tool for democracy to be successful. Professor Tan Sri Ibrahim Abu Shah in his statement [22] commented on the importance of voter education and its meaning in a democratic society. Political understanding according to him was important, especially for those who had reached the eligible age to register as voters. The public should be aware that the act of voting was apolitical in nature whereby educating the public using campaign drive was a suitable approach to encourage youngsters to participate during an election. However, this act should not fall on the responsibility of the government. Instead, civil societies and non-governmental organizations had a part to play in inculcating awareness about the system.

According to 'New Media Political Engagement and Participation in Malaysia' by Sara Chinnasamy [23], the public had actively created a new political culture ever since the twelve (12) general elections by participating online to discuss their political woes on issues such as slow economic progress, fluctuation of inflation rate, racial and religious tensions, high statistics of violent crime, academic standard downwards, and long list of corruption charges [24] which then led them to engaged with others who shared the same view, persuading them to join rallies that were organized by Coalition for Free & Fair Elections (BERSIH). Online media platform such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram played an extensive role as a medium that disseminated information to the public. These communication sites became a main source of information for the young voters apart from referring to traditional media such as television, radio or newspaper. During the 2013 general election, Malaysian young voters had shifted their focus to topics such as peace promotion, nation stability, and racial unity apart from plaguing issues such as, kleptocracy, cronyism, economic concerns, and unemployment [10]. Despite the shift of their political preference, young voters still highly depend on social media as their source of information.

1.1.2 Influence of the Young Voters

The decisive role of the younger generation continued to reshape the future direction of Malaysian politics as the turnout of young voters during general elections indicated a new political awakening [25] [26]. The domination of young voters during the general election displayed their desire for freedom of speech, open interaction and demands for up-to-date information[27]. Known for 'fence sitting', these young voters' support were usually short-term in nature as they tend to evaluate the performance of the political party in overcoming any issues or honoring the promises made during the election [10] .This statement was supported by [28] whereby young voters would consider the party policies, leaders' attitudes, and current issues that were debated before the election prior to decision making.

Scholars [29][28][30] have continuously debated if these youngsters were the decision-makers during the election. According to a survey [8], youngsters today were less reserved in their political opinions. Instead, they were more critical and cynical in expressing their democratic opinion and most importantly, they would search for information from various sources instead of trusting and relying on information transmitted by the mainstream media. The Generation Y was concluded as difficult to persuade, cynical and skeptical compared to older voters [31]. The significant role played by the young voters in changing the course of a nation had been proven during the 2008 US Presidential [30] and also during Malaysia's 14th General Election.

1.2 *Political Campaigning in Malaysia*

In an election especially during the campaigning period, competing political parties will tend to draw voters' attention using various tactics and techniques. Lucrative amount of money was spent on 'emotional content' which aimed to educate and draw public attention towards a certain political agenda. Political campaigns have the potential in influencing voting behavior and electoral outcomes [32] as these campaigns allow a systematic and organized diffusion of information, penetration, and outcome instead of focusing on a certain issue [33]. Hence, these will stir voters' interest in the election process [10]. Malaysian politicians had utilized online communication method such as blogging to approach the public even before social media became an important communication medium. The public was offered a direct insight from the politicians themselves which allows them to weight every information themselves. During the twelve General Election, the effectiveness of social media as a political campaign platform was underestimated by the Barisan Nasional (BN) government, doubting its behavioral influential effect towards voters [34]. Therefore, BN campaigns were usually covered by mainstream media whilst less coverage were given to the opposition at that time. To compete, Pakatan Harapan (PH) have to carry out their campaign through the social media platform and roadshows to spread their political policy to the public

since they didn't receive fair coverage from the mainstream media at that time. As a result, Barisan Nasional lost their popular votes whilst Pakatan Harapan managed to attract the public attention who are looking for another alternative for their political consideration [34]. Learning from their mistake in the previous election, the thirteenth General Election marked the beginning of Malaysia's 'first social media election' [35]. The usage of social media to spread information during general election campaigns according to [36] became increasingly important as it is faster, cheaper, time efficient and has wider audience coverage especially those in the rural areas [11].

In addition, another method of political campaigning conducted by political parties in Malaysia during each election was the road tour and stump speech as part of their effort to approach the public especially those in the rural area. Through the availability of the internet, a wider audience coverage to disseminate political views were made possible. For example, Pakatan Harapan (PH) streamed their 'Jelajah Pakatan Harapan' through social media such as Facebook, Instagram and Youtube which allowed Malaysians, especially those who are living abroad to follow the campaign closely as reported by few independent news portals [37].

1.3 Reliance on Social Media for Information

Social media was an important socializing agent in keeping and maintaining interactive political communication. The motivation and the dependency towards a medium were determined by the importance of the information [38]. Scholars [39] had recognized media roles in political knowledge acquisition and its association with political awareness. With the emerged of the internet, the audience relied on information from social media platforms for decision making [40] whilst political parties and the Election Commission used them to disseminate information. As adapted from Chang [41], the relationship between the information received from media usage which led to their political participation were as illustrated in Figure 1.3.
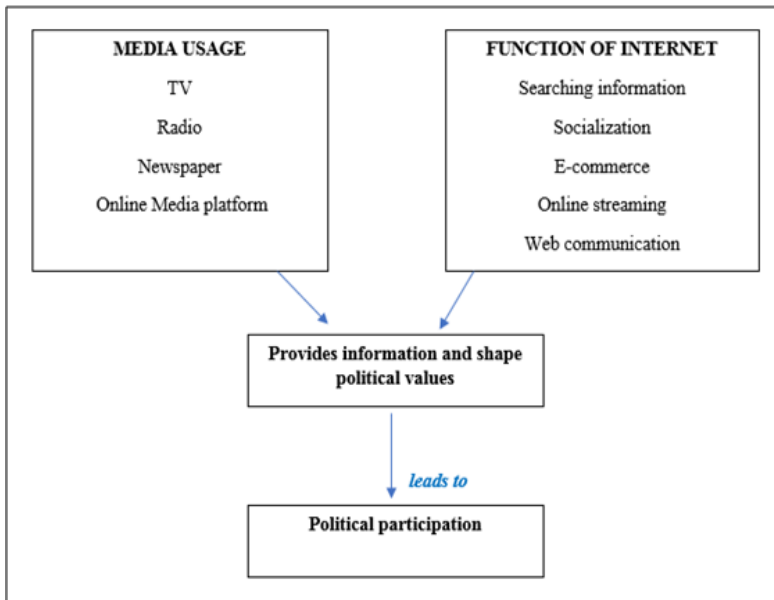
Figure 1.3: The Structural Relationship between Media Usage, Function and Political Participation

To fulfill their curiosity and needs [2], people depended on media for information. For the illiterates staying in the rural area, they would rely on television and radio broadcast for information whilst those who prefer reading will opt for the newspaper. With the availability of the Internet, people relied on social media as a platform that provided information which suited all their needs. By using a smartphone, they can choose to watch, listen and even read the 'information'. Therefore, Malaysian voters were flooded with choice of information sources.

The emergence of independent news portal (INP) such as Malaysiakini. com [23] showed that voters preferred and relied on online media due to the lack of credibility of the traditional media apart from being offered with alternative news sources. The evolution of INP since the twelve (12) general elections had changed the landscape of newsgathering in Malaysia whereby the public was able to evaluate the information they received as INP tended to publish their news without favoring any sides unlike the mainstream media nor the political owned newspaper such as Suara Keadilan and

Roket Kini. In addition, the social media platform were heavily utilized during information seeking and with millions of Facebook, Instagram and Twitter users, the social media presence in Malaysia's political scene is prominent [42].

Political knowledge is an essential democracy tool that allows voters to form a stable and consistent opinion which enables them to translate their opinions into meaningful forms of political participation [39]. The advancement of internet and communication technology has allowed voters to become well-educated with information [31]. A well-informed voter is a crucial democracy element which allows them to express their preferences and elect their representatives. This increased the propensity of citizens to vote whereby education have a vast impact on political knowledge apart from the important role that media coverage played in increasing voters' knowledge [43].

1.4 Young Voters Awareness, Motivation and Participation during Election

In making a political decision, it is important for a voter to be politically aware. An individual awareness [44] began with a slow build-up of information about their surroundings and before engaging in actual communication, the person who wishes to convey the message must feel that the receiver is capable of receiving information and responding. Their state of awareness was influenced by information obtained from various sources such as access to political information, exposure to media and political education apart from the ability to retained and organized the encountered information. Political awareness [45] is significant in explaining variation in political participation, whereby voters must have a basic political understanding.

A person awareness towards an issue may motivate them to act. Motivation to vote for example was influenced by many factors. It could either come from the believed that a person who votes is a responsible citizen or the pressure received from their family or acquaintance. Harder and Krosnick psychological analysis amongst young voters [46] found that the voting ability of a person was related to their capacity to understand the political scenario which was guided by their awareness and knowledge.

This finding had strengthened the present researchers' statement that Malaysian's young voters participated through the guidance of their awareness and voting knowledge. Other factors that had influenced the young voters' decision were their social class position and social capital. As an example, the declining voter's turnout amongst British youngsters [4] was caused by disconnection from the political class despite initiatives by the government to re-engage with the citizens, including revising the electoral procedures and an increasing allocation in the postal voting. In the Malaysian context, their focus was more on economic issues such as unemployment issues among youth, the need for a better life. They also wanted a nation that is free from corruption, misinformation and racial politics [26].

Participation was an action or state of taking part in something. The rate of electoral participation depends on factors such as the type of electoral system, voters' social group, their personalities and credence, the place they lived in, and other distinctive reasons [47]. The number of turnouts is a crucial indicator of citizens' participation. A higher voter turnout indicates the vitality of democracy while low turnout is associated with voter apathy and mistrust of the political process [48]. Through political campaigns, voters obtained the information needed to make their political decision [33]. Therefore, to channel the information which can grab voters' attention, political parties will design their campaigns based on their political objective apart from educating voters on the party's political policy. Political knowledge also has a significant impact on the likelihood of voting [43]. This knowledge is contributed not only by the education that the voters received but also the information that the audience received from media.

The availability of internet has made political participation possible. With the usage of internet, the expected turnout increased which led to a better representation [49]. Even though Malaysian youngsters were excited to participate during election, there were a small number of youngsters who were uninterested with the local political scene due to aggressive political advertisement and campaigns as they felt that such campaign was harassing their privacy which had forced them to digest political

manifestos [50]. This statement was supported by reports from online news portal [51] and independent news portal [52] whereby youngsters were less interested in the political quarrel between the competing political parties and believed that their votes will not make any difference. The determination of youngster in election participation was visible during the 14th General Election. Mainstream media reported [53] on efforts made such as crowdfunding and sponsorship for overseas voters to travel back to Malaysia whilst local voters initiated campaigns such as #PulangMengundi and #CarPoolGE14 to assist those who wished to return to their hometown during the election [54]. According to the statistics of voters turn out based on their age category obtained from a live telecast by Astro TV Awani as per Figure 1.4, 40.94% of GE14 voters were between the ages of 21 to 39 years old and Selangor had the highest number of 2,415,074 voters who were eligible to vote [55].
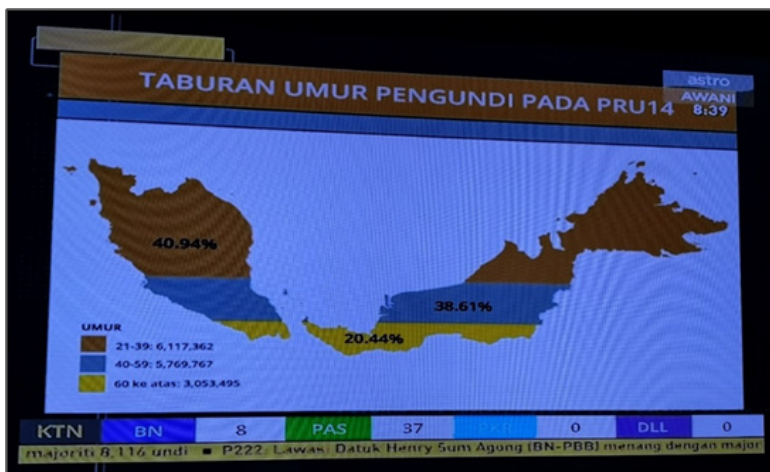

Figure 1.4: Percentage of Voters Turnout Based on Age Taken During Live Update from Astro Awani during the Election Day

1.5 Problem Statement

With the history of voters' participation throughout previous General Elections, it was noted on the aggressive efforts made to attract voters registration with the increasing participation during 14th General Election

[56]. Realizing the heavy reliance and dependency that young voters had over online technology, the awareness campaigns were expanded to social media platform apart from using the electronic and printed media. As a result of this aggressive campaigning, GE14 recorded as the highest voter turnout in Malaysia whereby 41% of them were among young voters [57]. With the evidence of high young voters turn up during GE14, this paper investigated on these young voters' participation during the polling day by analyzing their awareness towards issues that arose during GE14 such as political manifesto's or economic concerns which they obtained from their preferred sources of information i.e. television, newspapers, radio, social media etc. apart from understanding their motivation. Upon identifying voters' awareness and motivation towards the election campaign, this study had concluded the possibility if these two factors had driven young voters' participation during the election.

1.6 Research Objectives

This study paper examines the level of voters' awareness and their knowledge of voting; whether it affects their participation during the election. The objectives are as below:

I: To assess young voters' awareness of arising political issues during the GE14.

II: To investigate the young voters' motives which led to participation during the GE14.

1.7 Conceptual Framework

For guidance, this paper refers to Michael Foucault's work on power. Foucault characterized power as activation of political technologies which relates to the social body [58]. Both power and knowledge according to Foucault were intertwined entities whereby knowledge was always an exercise of power and power was a function of knowledge. Adequate knowledge when making a political decision was required so the voters can determine the best choice for them. As explained by Foucault, power required strategies that were produced through the integration of the power relations, which existed throughout society interaction. Hence, when the public communicated amongst themselves, either verbally amongst their

friends or online through social media, it could be deemed that these voters were strategizing power relation. Even the act to influence other people were also considered as 'power'. Therefore, power in the context of this study refers to the young voters who were making their decision by exercising their civil rights to determine the course of this nation along with the power held by the media itself – as a tool used by the government to manipulate the political scene or used by the public to voice their opinion [59].

In addition, the term 'technology' which occurred frequently in Foucault's work was also highlighted in this paper, referring to the governing of the people in modern social and political systems [60]. For young voters, possessing political awareness and knowledge have an implication over their action. Power was expressed through participation in the political sphere whereby leaders were pressured to make policies that suited public interests [34]. Driven by their motivation, online technology was being used to search for information to satisfy their curiosity before exercising their votes as a means to rebuke the previous Barisan Nasional (BN) administration. Through this theory, this paper aimed to prove that having exposure to issues and knowledge allowed voters to exercise their power through voting as they had the opportunity to decide and even change the government.

The argument of voters' awareness, motivation and participation will be available through the conceptual framework in Figure 1.7 which described the intended flow of the young voters' participation. Depending on the participants' awareness level, their curiosity towards an issue that spikes their interest will get them to rely on the usage of technology to source for information that suited their beliefs. As for their voting motivation, it will depend on the information that they have sought and how it drives them to take action. Based on these two elements, we are trying to determine if the voters will implement the power that they had by voting.
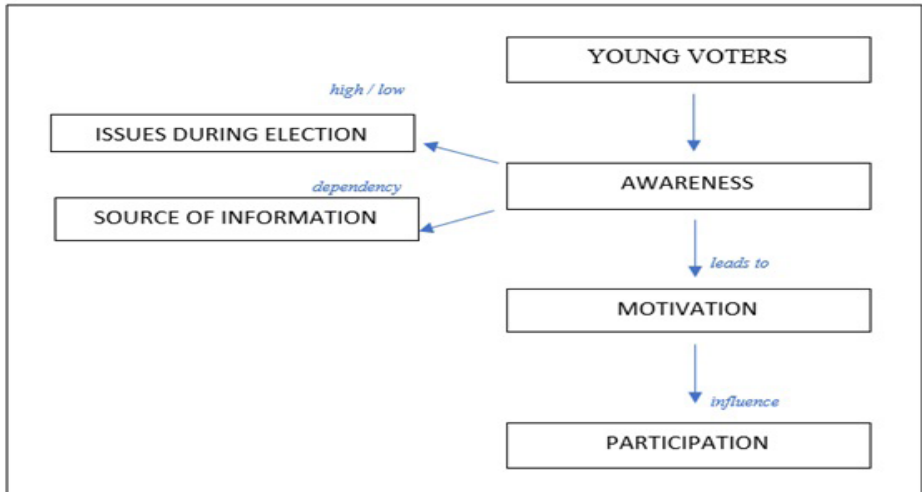
Figure 1.7: Conceptual Framework

1.8 Methodology

Focus group discussion was used to gather data from Selangor young voters that have participated during the previous GE14. The usage of focus group discussion allows the respondents to express their political thoughts towards the questions concerning to the 14th general election [26] in which they were required to share their opinion and thoughts by elaborating and explained their answers in detail based on the questions asked. Focus group discussion was conducted to gather information for this paper as it was easy to organize and it requires inexpensive technique [61]. Well-designed focus groups usually take at least 1 to 2 hours to conduct with participation between 6 and 12 respondents [62]. For this study, the researcher had selected twelve informants (N1 –N12) which consisted of all ethnics such as Malays, Chinese and Indian voters aged between 21 to 39 years old for data collection purposes. Another requirement needed for this study is, they must be a voter in the Selangor state. Selangor was selected as a focus of this paper as the electorate were well informed [63]. As an exploratory study, other characteristics were not taken into consideration, as the researcher's objective was to understand what drives

the youth to participate during the polling day and not to compare the informants' respond.

1.9 Findings

The findings from the focus group discussions were divided into two parts based on the research objectives. The feedbacks were categorized in accordance with the respondents' awareness and their motivation to participate. The data collection was gathered from 3 focus group discussions which were conducted from 11th November 2018 until 17th November 2018. Apart from being selected based on the required criteria i.e. young voters and voted in Selangor, the candidates above were selected based on their willingness to share their voting experience and also suggested constructive feedback [64]. They commonly shared their opinion which derived the following category and theme based on the focus group discussion on their awareness, motivation and participation. In answering the research objective one, which is to assess the issues that the voters were aware off during election, the informants had explained the election issues that they were aware off and their preferred source information. As for answering the research objective two, which is to investigate the voters' motive for participating during the general election, the informants have explained what motivates them to vote.

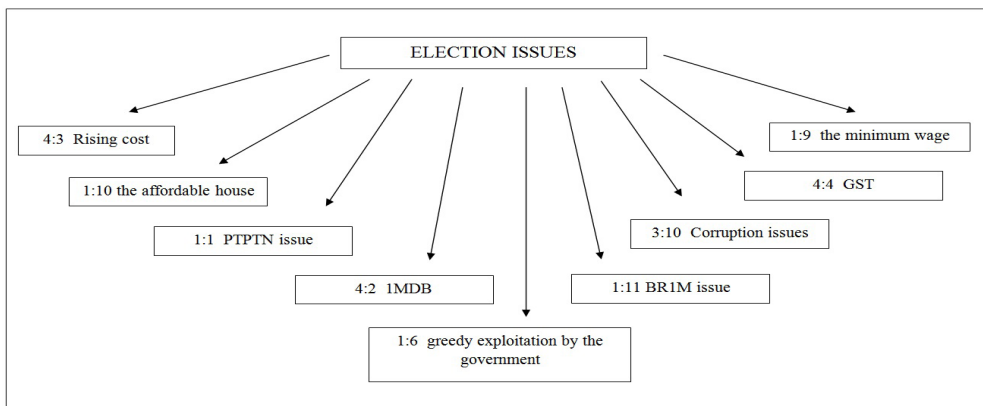### 1.9.1 Voters' Awareness on General Election's Issues

Figure 1.9.1: Awareness of General Election Issues

There were many issues during the general election which had become a concern for the respondents and influenced their voting decision. Based on the feedback received from the focus group discussions, below are the issues highlighted by the informants, which were a concern for them.

1 Malaysian Development Berhad (1MDB)

During its initial set up, 1 Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) was intended as a foreign investment attraction. Information about this organization was limited to the public, except that it was a government investment company that purchased privately owned power plants and construct Kuala Lumpur new financial district [65]. The Sarawak Report was the first to expose the scandal in which US General Attorney Jeff Sessions described it as 'kleptocracy at its worst' [66]. As the previous Barisan Nasional administration failed to provide their justification towards the said allegation, the unrest amongst the public began to stir. In addition, the public became more curious as the 'whistleblower' in the scandal were either arrested or charged in court.

Through the focus group discussion, informants N1, N8, N10 and N12 had agreed that the 1MDB scandal was one of the issues that have grabbed their attention. According to informant N1, the scandal of 1MDB has made her questioned the leadership of the previous government as she felt that the current high cost of living was contributed by this scandal. For informant N7, the inefficiency of the previous BN government in curbing the 1MDB scandal has spiked the curiosity amongst the public. From the discussions, the informants in general agreed that the 1MDB scandal made them lost faith in the previous government especially on how things were administrated. They felt that the previous administration was trying to cover up the truth about 1MDB and the authority corruption issues, especially when the previous BN government had announced that the audit report was classified as an official secret [67] and the public was left in the dark, which have made them further dissatisfied and demanded to know more. The biases of the mainstream media coverage during the previous administration has led them to search for other sources such as social media platform and independent news portal such as Malaysiakini.com. The researcher noted that the informants paid more interest towards the

issue that has an economic impact on their lives and the 1MDB scandal was blamed as the reason for their hardship. Despite lacking solid information regarding the organization, the informants made their justification based on unfounded claims that were viral through online media apart from their own view towards the issue.

Goods and Service Tax (GST)

The second issue that the informants were concerned of was on Goods and Service Tax (GST). Upon the implementation of GST in 2015, Malaysian's including the lower income earner (B40) were required to bear the tax costs in their daily items which have led to the increase of price for the household goods [68]. Despite being an important resource to fund Malaysia's growth, many were unhappy with how the GST proceeds were managed and began to demand how the funds were being managed although the previous government assured that it was being used for the betterment of the nation. During the discussions, Participant N1 had questioned on Malaysia's financial woes and high debts even though the introduction of GST had brought an increase of RM40 billion on its gross domestic products (GDP). The implementation of GST had made the informant questioned on how the tax revenue was being managed by the previous government. According to her despite high tax collection, Malaysia was still facing economic turbulence and high in debt. For participant N3, the implementation of GST had added extra cost on her spending. According to her, the implementation of GST had required her to limit her spending. Plus, she was dissatisfied that despite paying for GST, the price of goods kept hiking up which led her to spend over her budget. Therefore, when the issue was made as part of political manifesto, the informants saw it as an alternative to a to lower the high cost of living. The same view was also shared with participant N11 who felt that GST had contributed to the high price of goods. Respondents were dissatisfied that they are required to pay GST but have no idea what their taxes were used on. Thus, when Pakatan Harapan (PH) announced the abolishment of GST in their manifesto if they were given the mandate to govern Malaysia [63], it had attracted the attention of young voters as they believed that there was an option to solve their concerns. From the discussions, the respondents felt that

the mismanagement by the previous administration had caused a burden on them by requiring them to pay a high price for their basic household necessities although during the early stage of the implementation, they were assured that GST will lower the price of goods [69] and necessity household such as was even excluded from GST[70]. To conclude from the discussions, the researcher noted that the lack of policy education by the former government had influenced the public uproar. This is because, although the informants were aware of GST implementation benefit for the country's productivity, they were still burdened by the high price for basic goods and the lack of proactive measures taken to address the public concern was amongst the reason for the people's tsunami in which they demanded a new government.

Improvement on Living Condition

The need for a better living improvement was another concern highlighted by the informants during the discussions. According to [71], the high living standard and lifestyle were the dominant factor which contributed to the increasing cost of living. As explained by informant N2, she was interested in the promises of setting the minimum wage at RM1500 and the affordable housing scheme offered to the low and middle-income earners. Low-cost housing development has not met their target since the Third Malaysia Plan and the hike in the housing price in Malaysia made it difficult for youngsters who have just graduated and started their career to afford a house [72]. For informant N6, the weekly fluctuation of the petrol prices has made it difficult for her to budget her travelling expenses especially when the previous administration decided to remove the petrol subsidy and float the petrol price since 2014 [73]. Knowing the concern of the public, it was not a surprised when Pakatan Harapan had included the petrol price issue into their manifesto [74] despite still determining the best mechanism of the implementation [75]. As for improving the living condition, informant N2 suggested that the handing out of Bantuan Rakyat 1 Malaysia (BR1M) should be maintained by the new Pakatan Harapan (PH) government towards the elderly and the disabled as they did not have any source of income and the give out will help to them to live a better life. Upon taking over the government, the PH government has decided

to maintain the handout to the B40 group and it has been re-branded to Bantuan Sara Hidup (BSH) [76]. For informant N12, he believed that improvement in the current education and health care benefits is necessary to be implemented. Based on the discussions, the researcher noted that the informants wished for a better living condition for themselves and their family. It was also believed that the informants were motivated as they believed that they could obtain such lifestyle by voting.

PTPTN

National Higher Education Fund Corporation or PTPTN is an authority entrusted for giving out educational loans to Malaysian students who were pursuing their higher education. Upon completion of their studies, these students were required to arrange for their study loans repayment within the period of six months' time after graduating. However, with the slow economy and the rose of unemployment, many graduates were still struggling in finding jobs with decent salaries to make their ends met [77] and felt that PTPTN had become a burden for them. Ever since the previous general election, the PTPTN loan repayment has become part of the political issue brought up by the competing political parties [78]. According to the informant N1, the pledge made by PH towards the issue of PTPTN in their manifesto had influenced her voting decision as the issue will economically benefit her despite she was not very keen on paying attention towards other political issues lingering during the general election. She explained that previously, she was not keen towards any political issues. However, the promise of abolishing PTPTN by Pakatan Harapan [79] has driven her to cast their vote. As for informant N12, he suggested that instead of abolishing PTPTN, the current government could initiate an affordable education scheme for the younger generation that wouldn't burden them upon graduating. From the discussions, the researcher noted that the informants were observance towards the PTPTN issue as they were bound to the repayment of their PTPTN loan. For now, it is unlikely that the new administration will abolish PTPTN as there were still demands from students who are pursuing their tertiary education. Nevertheless, the new government could consider a new initiative for an affordable yet quality education.

1.9.2 Online Media as Source of Information

With technological advancement, the public was exposed to various sources of information which allows them to determine their preference in receiving information i.e. by watching, listening or reading the information, all through their smartphones. To understand the informants' source of information, the researcher has asked the informants to explain their preferred for information in order to make their decision. Figure 1.9.2 below explained the informant's source of information that the researcher has gathered during the focus group discussion. In general, it was noted that the informants have a high reliance to online media such as Facebook and independent news portal (INP) for their source of information apart from relying on other media sources such as television and radio.
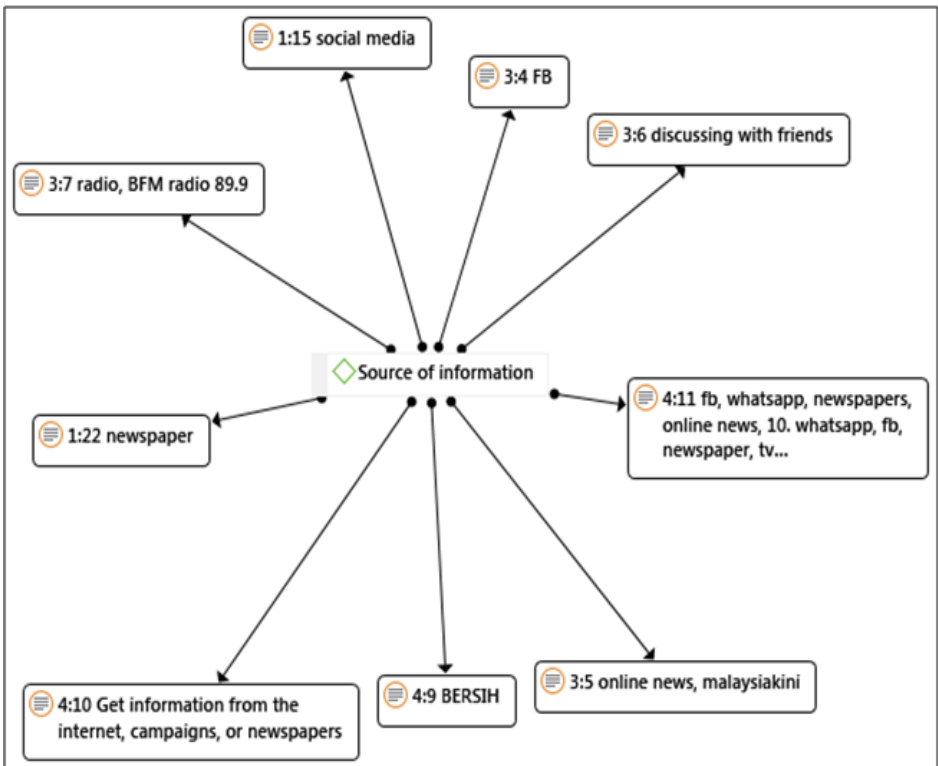

Figure 1.9.2: Informants' Source of Information

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7 out of 12 informants explained that they rely on Facebook to search and gather more details about the issues that they were concern off. Participant N1 and N7 admitted their reliance towards online media platform as a source for information as it was easily assessable through phone based on their preference and it suits their busy working schedule. For informant N3, her dependency on online news portal for information requires her to read the information thoroughly before absorbing and considering the information. It also requires the individual's own judgement to determine what is best for them upon receiving the information. Apart from Facebook, other communication platforms were also being considered by the respondents. Informant N7 for example explained that he will get his information from listening to the radio before having discussions with his friends about issues that he finds interesting. For informant N9, N10 and N11, newspaper and online news platform were amongst their preferred source of information. They further added that they also rely on information that they received from WhatsApp application. Informant N2 added that she also received her information from political pamphlets that were handed out to her whereas informant N12 claimed he received his information from campaigns by BERSIH.

In the era of technology, online media had become the most preferred source for young voters to search for information in making their decision. The reliance on social media as a source of information is not something new in Malaysian politics [80]. Plus, social media has been proven as an effective medium to reach the public especially in the spreading of political campaign [35] along with other resources such independent news portal (INP), cross-platform messaging such as WhatsApp application and even electronic media such as radio and television. In the context of Foucault's power theory, the exercise of power through online media as a tool was visible. The availability of smartphones and accessibility of the Internet even in the rural area has made it easier for the public to search for issues that concern them. Social media platforms were utilized for online discussions, debates and dissemination of political opinion. For those who are searching for information, the knowledge that they had gained during their search had turned into 'power' before being transformed into action.

Based on the focus group responses, it was noted that the informants relied heavily on online media for information. The convenience of obtaining information from social media has benefited the young voters in their political decision-making process which was displayed by informant N1 whereby she will verify her curiosity towards an issue by referring to a few sources. With the knowledge gained, it was realized into the action taken during the election. During the observation, the researcher also noted that the respondents will also refer to mainstream media such as printed newspaper and radio to cross-check their facts. Discussion about election issues amongst friends was also conducted as mentioned by informant N7 to clarify any doubts that they had. Despite the convenience in searching for information, we need to put in mind that we are responsible for our own decision. As there are many sources to choose, it is up to our own judgement to evaluate the information that we received.

1.9.3 Power of Motivation

People participate politically due to their self-interest [81] and before doing so, they must first be motivated to vote and share their opinion. To determine what drives voters to participate during the election, the researcher had asked the respondents to explain their voting motivation. Informant N1 stated that she was motivated to vote as she felt that her rights as a citizen were violated due to the poor leadership of the previous administration. Her views are also agreed by informant N2 and N3, who felt that voters need to exercise their voting rights in choosing a government that will take care of the needs of the public. For informant N4, N6 and N9, their responsibility to exercise the voting rights were their main motivation factor. For informants N5, N7, N8, N10, N11 and N12, their motivation was to elect a new government as they have lost faith in the previous administration. During the discussions, all the informants agreed with that 'one vote can make a difference'. Informant N7 added that previously, the public has been mocked with the statement that nothing will change in Malaysia's government which had led the previous administration to be too complacent. However, the previous GE14 has proved otherwise. In addition, informants N1, N2, N3, N4, N7, N8, and N10 have suggested few ideas which could be considered in the attempt to draw the young

voters to be more politically involved such as conducting casual debate or political forum, so the youngsters could voice out their constructive feedback or argument. The suggestion was supported by N6 who believed that youngsters nowadays were more politically informed. Informant N3 and N4 suggested introducing political education to secondary and university students so they would have an early exposure which can spark their interest in politics and educate them on the importance of voting.

Based on the informants' feedbacks, the respondent's determination for a new government was one of the reasons that motivated their participation. Lack of confidence in the previous administration has driven them to utilize their right as a citizen by voting. Therefore, we may conclude that they were motivated to participate in the election due to their desire for a new government. Election according to informant N3 served as a 'trial and error', and should the voters dissatisfied with the performance of the new government, there is an opportunity to change by electing a new government in the next election. Another reason which had motivated them was the realization of their duty as a citizen. Most of the informants were aware that by voting, they are exercising an important obligation as a citizen of Malaysia. The informants are aware of the 'power' that they possessed upon casting their votes. This is proven when they have all agreed that one vote can make a difference which we may relate to the high Selangor young voter turnout during GE14 [55].

1.10   Conclusion

Despite the level of awareness; there will be an influence over the young voters' motivation in political participation. Young voters were able to determine their preference on receiving information based on their convenience i.e. by reading, watching or even listening to information through their smartphones thanks to technological advancement. Information that they have sought becomes a knowledge for them which was associated with 'power' which were utilized in making political decision. However, the public is required to have a better judgement over the information that they received. Based from the feedbacks gathered, we may conclude that the public was motivated to vote as they were hoping for

necessary action to be taken to continuously improve their living condition apart from combating issues such as corruption and abuse of power which needed to be overcome to instill the trust of the people. Hence, with this new given mandate, the new government chosen by the people has a lot to realize what was expected of them should they wish to ensure continuous support during the next GE15.

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