

## **Political Participation Through Social Media in Malaysia: A Review of Literature**

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### **Abstract**

The advancement of technologies nowadays is becoming important in political participation. As the game changer in political participation nowadays are impacted from new technologies generally and social media specifically. Social media application has significantly played a significant role in government decision. Changing of trend in debating and making decision on any political participation has now aggressively been done through social media. The usage of cyberspace relating to political participation in Malaysia has been increasing since 1990's. Therefore, the present study will proceed with an overview of social media impact towards political participation in Malaysia. Series of literature review conducted to identify the impacts and trends in Malaysia. In addition, related policy pertaining to social media and politics also will be further elaborate for better understanding on policy matters. The increase of political participation through social media in Malaysia witnessed the trend of more integrated social media tools usage which need to be taken as an important tool in monitoring and winning the society in Malaysia politics game plan. In addition, there are some distinguishable in the development of social media use in politics participations among Malaysian. This evolutionary seems to be useful to understand very different social and political participation using very different levels of technological sophistication that can deliver faster information at almost real time.

**Keywords:** *Social Media, Political participation, public Malaysia*

### **1.0 Introduction**

The advent of social media has demonstrated a modern wave of Internet-based application as it turned out to be a medium for user to interact with the application in a simple and quick way. Ever since the rise of social media, the debate of how and to what extent they transformed the approach people participated in politics has been enthusiastically reviewed. In the context of Malaysia, parliamentary democracy with a constitutional monarchy is being practiced. Even though Malaysia is constitutionally a democratic nation, the level of political and public freedoms is minimal. The practice in Malaysia has been that individuals have the ability to choose their representatives through the election, once in four- or five-years' time [1]. Involvement of the public may have effects on the process of making decision during general election and enactment of policy. The easiest type of public involvement is casting a ballot and the main type of participation is the organization of troops for active service during general election [2].

The usage of social media is not something new for the people in Malaysia. In the viewpoint of Malaysian political landscape, social media was being used dynamically in 1998 after Anwar Ibrahim was dismissed from the government [3]. The cyberspace was exploited to distribute information between Anwar's supporters and the wider society [4]. Citizens decide to dodge traditional media by utilizing the world wide web to gain information promptly pertaining to political, social and economic life [5]. Formerly, mass media comprised of newspapers, radio and television. As soon as the Internet become known widely, these developed to be identified as traditional media in compared to the new media. The new media are not the same as the traditional media as the previous functioned on a

consolidated model. Since the new media structure is a not centralized, governments find it challenging to monitor online news and information movement, which gives a great impact to the political power of authoritarian governments. New media especially social media allow the citizens to get better and great accessibility to political news, evading the traditional obstacles and gatekeeping restrictions of publishers, editors and journalists in traditional media [6]. Thus, the objective of this paper is to explore the social media impact on political participation in Malaysia.

## 2.0 The Evolution of Social Media

Social media is an interactive computer-mediated technology that enable the establishment or distribution of information, concepts, profession interests, and other types of communication through virtual societies and networks [7]. Over ten years prior, data and communication advancements drastically transformed the world. It is not just being utilized for political reasons, yet as well as for business, financial, diversion and others. Initially, Internet was utilized as a single direction communication instrument for ideological groups such as political parties to disseminate information to the general society through their social network sites. Nonetheless, social media and innovation have altered communication designs in two-way communication [8].

Afendi, Mohamed & Haslinda [1] indicated that the acceptance of social media shows that virtual news sharing between the communities has come into a new stage as it has diffused to the societal and personal levels. Individuals are nearly capable to distribute the information in any ways immediately as in files, pictures, and videos. The increase of Web 2.0 is strongly associated with the escalating acceptance of social media around the world and everybody recognizes the significance of social media. Internet and social media practice in Malaysia have increase rapidly and Malaysians are enthusiastically accepting the social media. According to Worldometer [9] as of November 2020, the total population of Malaysia is 32.52 million. From the total population, 26.69 million are Internet users. Facebook subscribers in Malaysia account for 89 percent or 24.85 people.

Conferring to Kemp [10], 99 percent of Internet users in Malaysia have access to social media sites. Malaysians in online environment are deemed as very amiable as they have the highest average number of friends on social networks in the world. Malaysian Facebook users have an average of 233 friends which makes it the country whose Facebook users have the highest number of friends [11]. The citizens in Malaysia also have a preference to browse the Internet than to watch television, and they are consuming twice as much time on their online activities [12]. With the recognition of social media rising gradually in Malaysia, it is estimated that one third of the nation's Internet traffic is due to social networking sites. Kemp [10] also revealed that the most active Internet users fall in the age group of 20-34 years where nearly 57% of them often use the Internet and consume around 7.57 hours online daily.

## 3.0 Political Participation in Malaysia

Political participation is a wide range of activities involvement in which individuals create and express their thoughts on the world and how it is regulated and try to involve in and influence the choices that change their lives [13]. Political participation is extremely crucial in order to improve the function of a democratic system. Without citizens' involvement, it is challenging for a nation to be labelled as democratic [14]. The list of political parties in Malaysia are *Pakatan Harapan*, *Pakatan Nasional*, *Barisan Nasional*, *Gabungan Parti Sarawak* and others. A few scholars have referenced that Malaysia does not generally practice absolute democracy, but more to a type of semi-democracy. There are numerous types of political involvement, going from casting a ballot to individual contact with the representatives and campaigning or opposing for public office [2].

Furthermore, Verba & Nie [15] asserted that efficient participation leads to crucial connection between all other social and political objectives. Corresponding to Tang & Lee [29] participating in political group, getting engaged with politicians, casting ballots during the elections, giving support to petitions and getting involved during the campaign day may also be counted as political participation. Campaigns are essential to offer voters basic information and chances to make political decisions. Participation is more than just engagement of citizens in politics. Conferring to Verba & Nie [15],

political participation can be described as the activities by people that are clearly intended to sway citizens to decide the government and their actions.

The study by Palmer [16] stressed that political participation inside the polling process is under the two major headings of electing and campaign activity. In the context of Malaysia, numerous studies have debated the reasons of people's participation in politics. Based on Rogers [17], the Malaysians that are not participated in politics did not have much interest to join, especially among villagers. Nevertheless, referring to Nurul & Maheran [4], now the environment has changed progressively during the course of the years as a result of reasons such as mounting communal concerns, intensifying levels of education and exposure to mass media, formation of the branch political parties in the community and good relationships between village leaders and political party officials. In addition, subsidies provided by the government for the rural development program and expanding political awareness and concern at the time of the election campaigns are also one of the contributors to the growing of political participant among citizens [18]. Intriguingly, in the 13th General Election, citizen's participation in politics in Malaysia totally improved as voters, especially the youth, favored social media as the alternative platform of communication and information on topics linked to politics. Ultimately, this situation led to active participation of politics among Malaysians [19].

#### 4.0 Social Media and Its Impact

As the world is moving into an age of unique interrelation, it can be seen that the movement of information is able to go at uniformly extraordinary speeds among huge populations. This has caused serious consequences on the political progression and social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp among others have a function to ensure that formal processes as in the general election is improved and not interrupted. Due to that, new media especially social media plays an important part in distributing information and involvement of the public.

Leong [20] stated that democratization in Malaysia has improved significantly as citizens bypassed challenging forms of political organization and review of government authorities via social media. The age group that depends strongly on social media for information and news are young voters between the age of 18 to 29, whereas the older citizens remain to favor traditional media [21]. Nurul & Maheran [4] also emphasized that social media is able to sustain the level of democratization in Malaysia by offering citizen the opportunities to practice their liberty in the social media to voice out their thoughts and opinions freely in Facebook and Instagram. Nevertheless, they highlighted that, democratization would take times as a result of the political culture in Malaysia.

According to Shiratudin [19], the young voters which is also described as Generation Y, devoted most of their young lives growing up with technological advancement and have a deep-rooted relationship with technology and recognized its various functions. Masiha, Habiba, Abbas, Saud & Ariadi [22] revealed the fact that the access of internet alone does not define people's political participation, but exposure to political information on social media may expand the people's political involvement. Furthermore, Masiha, Habiba, Abbas, Saud & Ariadi [22] examined how social media platforms such as Facebook can promote political engagement as they lower the barriers for free expression of ideas.

Additionally, these types of social media also enable its users to engage in any movement without consuming much time and energy as in with just 'liking', 'joining', or 'reposting' numerous political information. As stated by Zheng [23] political institute believe that the active engagement in political communication by utilizing social media is important, especially at the time of the campaign period. Numerous politicians make use of social media to communicate with their voters and have dialogue with their possible [24]. Not Long Ago, Facebook, Twitter and Instant Messaging (IM) apps as in WhatsApp are also act as an essential role in political involvement [14]. It should be remarked that mediums such as Twitter and Facebook provide the power to not only publicize common information but also shaped political ideas via their networks.

The research by Zeng [23] explains that all adopted the value of continuous collecting, observing, analyzing, summarizing, and visualizing political material in the world of social media with the goals of enhancing relations for politicians and voters. As an example, a crucial element is to recognize political opinion leaders, who are also described as influencers and sustain the stream of the

discussion taking place among their followers, particularly in times of election campaigns. Possible matters of interest or inclination among voters can be discovered by tracing developing issues and trends. This would eventually lead to the expansion of a structure that is capable to provide direct and comprehensive reviews which covers all social networking sites by combining and imagining the outcomes either via regular and steady journalism that offers the information in real-time [12].

Focusing at the benefits of new media on political progression, social media permits people to interact with their leaders in a means that was not occurred in the past, for example by delivering a direct line of communication with their leaders on a public online platform. Voters can raise their opinions and their problems as well as can push their representatives to watch over public demand and interest [20]. Moreover, citizens or voters have the access to a broad range of information and knowledge permitting them to make reasonable judgments on candidates and policies [18]. Hence, social media performed a main role in the life of Malaysian people, as well as in the facets of politics. The political landscape improved in Malaysia as a result of the robust existence of social media.

## 5.0 Media Law and Limitation in Malaysia

Any activities pertaining to the media are regulated and controlled by media law. It is in numerous different laws but interconnected, such as the Printing Presses and Publications Act 1984, and the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998. It contains issues of censorship, copyright, defamation, and broadcast law. In essence, media law as defined by Chandler & Munday [8] is regulation through which governments regulate the mass media. Seemingly, it turned out to be that responsibility and power of the mass media is not just to entertain but also to spread information and to educate society. Additionally, it can also function as the morality-keeper of community by showing wrong-doing in the public and private sectors [25]. Generally, media law draws the attention of public to comprehend their individual rights, public and the state rights as it overlaps with human rights as in freedom of speech and expression.

### 5.1 Printing Presses and Publication Act 1984 (PPPA)

The Printing Presses and Publication Act 1984 (PPPA 1984) that was formerly based on Printing Presses Ordinance 1948 is a Malaysian law that regulate the publication and the use of printing presses in Malaysia. It is under the observation of Ministry of Home Affairs of Malaysia which is accountable for issues related to national security and public order. Traditionally, the colonial authority of Straits Settlements in Singapore had endorsed the terms for certified printing presses in 1920 and 1924 for the Federated Malay States. It was known formerly as Printing Presses Ordinance 1948 that was applied during Emergency period as the result of communist insurgency [26].

In 1972 this law was amended due to 13 May 1969's riot that offers the authority to withdraw the licenses of newspapers that worsened national sensitivities or were damaging to national growth and objectives. The major purpose of PPPA 1984, as asserted in its preliminary statement is to control any activities concerning printing presses to include usage of printing, the production and reproduction of publications. Evidently, PPPA 1984 has been applied to reinforce and strengthen the rule with regard to scrutinizing the ownership of printing presses and the creation of printed materials such as books, magazines and papers. It also seeks to regulate the publication circulation, and importation of publication from overseas and sets restriction on these activities. Any action that opposed to the regulation will be punished with a strong penalty, which include jail sentences.

In 1987, a revision was made to encompass an infringement of publishing false news. Any publication that is destructively publishing any false news is banned under Section 8A. Under this division, any writer, publisher, printer and editor shall be responsible of an assault and legally responsible to imprisonment for a period not surpassing three years or to a penalty not more than twenty thousand ringgit or both. Two major factors why PPPA was established in Malaysia and to limit freedom of press are, primarily, to safeguard racial order and also to restrict the capability of foreign presses in shaping people's mindsets and thoughts alongside the government and nation all together. For these justifications, the government utilize its authority to reinforce the media laws especially the PPPA and regulate almost all local media outlets either directly or indirectly.

Some examples of cases involve the PPPA 1984 is the case of Zulkiflee SM Anwar Ulhaque vs Zunar. One of Malaysia's most controversial political cartoonists, picking apart the government in a country with drawing editorial cartoons for the past 20 years in Malaysia. The Malaysian government detaining him, confiscating his books and raiding his printer's offices. His cartoons, published on the independent news site as well as through his own books and social media, regularly satirize the legitimacy of the ruling United Malays National Organization.

## 5.2 The Communications and Multimedia Act 1998

After a decade on administration, the Broadcasting Act 1984 was substituted by the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998 (CMA) which happened on the first of April 1999. The new CMA does not just offer authority to government to manage all kinds of broadcasting but in addition gives a regulatory structure to accommodate for the merging of the telecommunications, broadcasting and computing industries that comprises the Internet. Its goals, among others, is to make Malaysia a center point for communications and multimedia information and content services and to be a main global center. In achieving the objectives, Malaysian government had established a commission known as the Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission (MCMC). The commission was appointed on the 1st November 1998 as the single regulator of the new monitoring regime. Its key responsibility is to stimulate the government's national policy and regulate the communications and multimedia division in Malaysia. Its social regulation roles include the area of content development as well as content regulation. The latter includes the prohibition of offensive content as well as public education on content-related issues (Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission 2004). The Section 211 of the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998 in Malaysia provides: 'No content applications service provider, or other person using a content applications service, shall provide content which is indecent, obscene, false, menacing, or offensive in character with intent to annoy, abuse, threaten or harass any person' [2].

In order to implement these responsibilities, the MCMC is offered sole authority to ratify, amend, or revoke broadcasting and other licenses [27]. Even though legislative in the form of licensing is given for, among the principles of the new regulatory structure is self-regulation by the numerous industries, which includes the ICT and multimedia content industries. Despite the fact there was no significant and conclusive word to define self-regulation, a broad array of self-regulatory instrument have demonstrated accomplishment as replacements for government regulation [28]. The current situation's issues related with MCMC is Fauzi Nawawi story telling about the rape scene between him and Raja Farah. The MCMC plays an important role in this kind of issues as the actor vividly explained the situation whereby the shows being watched by all ages.

The content regulation comprises the exclusion of offensive content as visibly specified in Section 211 of the CMA 1998, in which "No content applications service provider, or other person using a content applications service, shall provide content which is indecent, obscene, false, menacing, or offensive in character with intent to annoy, abuse, threaten or harass any person". By all accounts, CMA has been employed by the government to monitor the coverage of news, which was defamatory in nature, particularly those circulated by online websites. Section 233 (1) further stated that it turns out to be a crime to the usage of network facilities or network services by an individuals to convey any communication that is considered to be insulting and could results to irritation to another person. In 2015 itself, a bunch of lawsuits had been reported involving Section 233(1)(a).

## 6.0 Conclusion

In general, using and administering social media as a participatory instrument is not the same thing. The actual challenge is in what manner to make use of social media to appropriately participating in the process of making decisions. It is undeniably that the world needs various voices and with the aid of social media, everybody is given the authority to have the right to say. Social media did not simply develop a means in hands for those who enthusiastically want to voice their opinion, they also attach the societies which were not requested to take actions in the past. Social media has a big potential to allow a better democracy and toughen the democratization process in Malaysia and being a very

influential medium for transmitting and spreading information, media itself should serve the public with attentiveness and truthful information to assist the citizens to develop knowledgeable opinions and make good choices. It is challenging for the government to limit the growth of internet amongst users even though the government endorsed regulatory restrictions by employing certain acts and establishing licenses for the media to operate.

Nevertheless, it is uniformly important to pay attention that the social media, with its rule of open cyberspace can be counter-productive if proper methods are not appropriately constructed and efficiently applied. It is intolerable in a democratic nation for media to be manipulated to propagate hatred, conflict, and animosity which could jeopardized the harmonization of the nation under the mask of freedom of speech. Overall, with the upsurge of Internet and social media, the accessibility of democratic media practices has transformed the Malaysian political scene and its consequent impacts on the experiences of being Malaysians.

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