



RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Challenges of Social Media Usage in Developing Youth Political Behaviour towards Malaysian Political Stability

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ABSTRACT

Social media is the main source of political information for youth in democratic countries, with Malaysia ranking among the top ten globally in terms of social media usage rate. Social media shapes the political understanding and behaviours of youth voters through online political discussions, following politicians and political influencers, and accessing diverse online platforms, without taking into account the veracity of the political information they receive. The dissemination of political information that is not trustworthy and touches on sensitive issues related to race, religion, and royal institutions can to some extent undermine the political stability of the country whether through traditional media or social media. Traditional media involving only one-way communication used to be congested by the Malaysian government to prevent more capabilities that caused disagreement between races after the May 13, 1969, incidents. The presence of social media today causes youth to be more careful with the political knowledge they obtain because, despite the multi-directional communication it possesses, it is also capable of sharing, commenting, and broadcasting political content directly and cost-effectively. Therefore, this study aims to examine the challenges that youth voters have to face when accessing political information through social media that can influence their political behaviour. In order to answer the objective of this study, textual analysis was done, and among the challenges include the credibility of political information, content filtering, which often leads to a limited and biased point of view, and limited fact-checking tools. The Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) can implement the implications of this study to protect the youth in the digital environment as well as educate the responsible digital community to ensure the continuation of Malaysian political stability.

INTRODUCTION

Social media is categorized as new media, which is an interactive medium that is free from restrictions on the transmission of information that transcends distance and time. The advantages possessed by social media make it one of the forms of technology that is most often used in their lives as a medium to interact with other people. Social media serves as a versatile educational tool, facilitating the transmission of both domestic and foreign news, economic, political, educational, and entertainment information (Ma'dan et al., 2023). With the help of the government to ensure

widespread internet network facilities, the use of social media is now comprehensive and is used by every age group, including the youth, adults, and the elderly, resulting in an increase in its use every year. The existence and usage of this new media have yielded numerous positive outcomes. For example, social media had been significantly used across many Malaysian general elections, including the 13th General Election, which gained recognition as a social media election due to the extensive use of social media platforms for information distribution. Following the 14th Malaysian General Election, Facebook had become the dominant platform for the election campaign, and it earned the nickname of Facebook Election. However, the rapid creation of social media platforms led social media analysts to describe the 15th Malaysian General Election as the widespread use of TikTok, a platform known for its short video format across all political parties (Soon, 2022), especially the Alliance of Hope and Coalition of Hope parties (Basri, 2022), to tackle youth political participation, particularly after the implementation of Vote18. However, social media abuse issues such as unrestricted freedom of speech, spreading false information, defamation, provocation, religious issues, and so on have to some extent become a challenge for the youth to filter fake news. For instance, in 2009, individuals wrote and posted insulting and offensive comments about His Royal Highness Sultan Azlan Shah on websites during the political crisis. Such actions clearly degrade the values of faith and morality as part of a civilized Malaysian society, resulting from the misuse of social media (Hamizi, 2023).

The utilization of social media in elections aimed at enhancing youth political socialization and participation has been observed across the globe. During elections, political candidates, such as Barack Obama, who is known as the first president of social media, used social media platforms to engage in online political discussions with their youth voters. The Obama campaign reached 5 million supporters on 15 different social networks during the campaign season, with approximately 2.5 million followers on Facebook, 115,000 followers on Twitter, and 50 million viewers of his YouTube channel (Qasja, 2022). The success of being tech-savvy and implementing a youth-oriented strategy significantly contributed to Obama's campaign (Miller, 2013), as evidenced by the fact that in the 2008 election, approximately 66% of voters aged 18-29 supported him in his victory and this enhance political stability by ensuring that diverse age groups feel that their voices matter (Qasja, 2022). Furthermore, social media platforms like Facebook are influencing Somali youth's political awareness by promoting ideas of a multi-party system and encouraging more democratic political competition (Muse, 2019; Felbab-Brown, 2023). The access to a wide range of political information in social media enables them to advocate for unconventional reformation led by youths that move away from clan-based politics to challenge the status quo and contribute to Somalia's political evolution (Muse, 2019). Despite the availability of online political discussions and a variety of political information sources, 46.9% of Danish youth aged between 15 and 25 actively follow at least one politician or party on social media to engage in politics and publicly express their opinions (Marquart et al., 2020). By providing information about politics, social media invites youths political mobilization and plays a vital role in youth political education.

Malaysian implementation of Vote18 policy has opened a wider opportunity for youths to get involved in national politics. Although there are a few opinions that say the youths are still raw in making decisions, not to mention managing themselves is still uncertain, but their voices and views can be decisive for the future of the country. The implementation of this new vote policy serves as a reminder to political parties to be more careful and sensitive to issues relevant to youths, given that these generations contribute significantly to the election's voter base (Ma'dan et al., 2023). Political parties must also implement effective mechanisms to capture the interest of youth voters, particularly in the areas of representation and party struggle. The introduction of new faces into the party and the dissemination of information on social media can transform the political landscape by harnessing the power of social media to assist youth in making political decisions (Ma'dan et al., 2023). Political parties should use alternative media platforms to provide the best input, especially young influencers, to help this youth group understand the issues the party is fighting for.

Nevertheless, the existing political leaders and politicians who continue to drift with old political order patterns will miss opportunities to shape their influence, as social media is an important channel for them to spread their agenda and gain the trust of the community, especially the young generation across the country. The 14th and 15th General Elections clearly demonstrated this. During the 15th General Election in November 2022, the percentage of youth voters increased by 2.4 million compared to the previous elections. This shows that youths nowadays are more willing to get involved and participate in national politics. In fact, this was proven when the election campaigns at that time were mostly done through social media platforms.

Past research analyses various advantages offered by social media usage for political purposes including enable politicians to communicate directly with the youths, offering cost-effective ways to reach large audiences through targeted advertisements, viral content, and interactive posts and has become instruments in the rise of political movement with hashtags, viral videos, and online petitions can galvanize support and organize protests or events (Wesizwe, 2022). However, the youth voters also faced challenges as the political facts obtain from the social media mediums are difficult to control and monitor compared to traditional media since anyone are free to give their political opinions (Wahab et al., 2013). Although social media has the potential to spread information quickly and benefited the youth users, its content can raise doubts and be difficult for users to trust (Salman et al., 2018). The exposed to the publication of information which is unprocessed, unfiltered and tends to provide views which is not professional were the issues youths should be aware of (Wahab et al., 2013). For example, during the 2016 United States (US) presidential election, a significant amount of fake news was highly biased with majority of youth supporting Donald Trump and attacking Hillary Clinton with a fake news falsely claiming that Clinton had sold weapons to the terrorist group Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) which became one of the top 20 fake news stories of that election period (Mihala, 2017). Furthermore, during the 15th Malaysian General Elections, the fake news on the false candidate lists was circulated through the popular messaging platform WhatsApp create distrust and likely undermined the credibility of the Malaysian political process and candidates (Alyasa, 2020). Therefore, this study will focus on the challenges associated with social media usage among Malaysian youth through a qualitative research design to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences, perceptions, and behaviours of youths regarding social media and political behaviour through textual analysis. This study focused on youth since Malaysia had implemented the Vote18 approach since 2022 to provide greater youth representation in the political process.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Background and Related Work

Traditional media and social media effect on political stability

Traditional media encompasses various forms of mass communication, including print media like printed newspapers, magazines, and books, as well as broadcast media like television and radio. These forms remain more popular than social media when it comes to political news consumption among the older generation (Fotopoulos et al., 2023). The credibility of traditional media in publishing political news has attracted many recipients as it employs specialists and journalists to transmit information accurately and from reliable sources (Marwan, 2022). Moreover, official authorities control and monitor the political information in traditional media, particularly government-owned outlets like Radio Television of Malaysia (RTM), Malaysian National News Agency (Bernama), and the News Straits Times (NST) (BBC News, 2023). In addition, traditional media adhere to laws and regulations, undergo strict editorial standards and fact-checking procedures, and consider public morality. In other words, traditional media disseminates all information through multiple layers of fact-checking (Marwan, 2022), with only authorized journalists or reporters producing the information. Therefore, this type of media shares only true and reliable information. However, the aftermath of the 1969 general election and the subsequent

May 13 riots illustrate a period of political instability in Malaysia due to the influence of media (Zuan, 2021). This serious conflict, however, did not stop university students from continuing to be critical of and confrontational against the establishment, and they quickly targeted Tunku Abdul Rahman and his administration. Syed Hamid Ali led the University Malaya Student Union (UMSU), while Anwar Ibrahim led the PBMUM, culminating in a series of demonstrations on the University of Malaya campus (Zuan, 2021). Though both leaders had different political rationales, they were united in their opposition to Tunku Abdul Rahman and played important roles in the campaign against him (Weiss 2005). The media statement across ethnic-based mass media such as *Utusan Melayu*, *Mingguan Islam*, *Nanyang Siang Pau*, and *Sin Chew Jit Poh* newspaper was key in escalating tensions (Tiung et al., 2016). In effect, the work of the committee paved the way for a major shift in thinking about the use of Malay as the national language and the pressing need for a standardized national education policy that widened racial divides both on and off campus. In this case, traditional media served as both a platform for government statements and a source of tension, showing that while it can support stability by controlling the flow of reliable information, it can also contribute to conflict depending on how information is framed.

As digital technologies evolve, new media commonly referred to as social media, have emerged. These methods are generally considered to have better technical capabilities and deliver better results than traditional media (Marwan, 2022). Traditional media forms, such as the printing newspaper have undergone significant transformations as new technologies have been applied to social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and others (Turner, 2022). The term social media refers to an internet-based service that allow users create profiles, connect with others, and explore their contacts, allowing them to build relationships and interact with people, including in the context of politics (Boyd et al., 2007). Social media, built on Web 2.0 technology, includes various platforms like social networking sites, blogs, forums, wikis, and microblogging tools to create and share content in a timely manner (Osatuyi, 2013). Politicians often use social media to influence voter behaviour, regardless of whether they are running for office or already in office (Kaplan et al., 2010). This leads them to engage in alternative forms of political activism, characteristic as a new political movement, which often operate outside of formal political channels and use more accessible, less resource-dependent methods, such as social media. Old social movements are associated with radical actions, such as street protests, which are more direct forms of political engagement. In contrast, new movements, especially those appealing to youth, use less confrontational forms of advocacy, like art, music, films, and theatre, which are seen as less radical but still powerful in conveying political messages (Zuan, 2021). Youths, who are the main consumers of new technology like smartphones and livestreaming, become natural participants in these movements, as social media becomes a tool for political activism. The results of the 14th General Election witnessed National Front which holds the reins of government since early in the establishment of the Federation of Malaysia lost to a new alliance. Cybertroopers are believed to once again play a role important to determine the result of the 14th General Elections and this figure was also contributed by return to online vote campaign through hashtags *PulangMengundi*, *UndiRabu*, and GE-14 (Tiung, 2016).

As a matter of fact, the contemporary political campaigns in Malaysia have evolved from mainly relying on the use of video tapes, banners, and flyers to advertise their agenda to using mainstream media (Marwan, 2022). Before the advent of social media, during the 1999 general elections, the National Front, as the ruling party and the owner of the leading mainstream television channels and newspapers, seized the opportunity to fully utilize these media channels to promote their party and aggressively criticize the opposition parties and their candidates. This is not surprising, as the National Front has been using the mainstream media as their campaign tool since the existence of these traditional media in Malaysia (Marwan, 2022). In the general elections held in 2013, where political advertising was utilized to the fullest, contesting parties spent millions of ringgits to reach their potential voters. The National Front spent millions on print advertisements, television and radio spots, billboards, and other outdoor advertisements, as well as social media channels, to reclaim

some lost seats in 12th General Elections. This high increase in expenditure on the marketing and advertising activities of the political campaigns could justify the attention political communication scholars gave to the study of political advertising. Following the emergence of social media platforms, Syed Saddiq Syed Abdul Rahman, a youth politician, emerged as the sole Malaysian United Democratic Alliance (MUDA) politician to secure victory in the 15th General Election (Chinnasamy, 2020). Social media offers a new approach to campaigning, which involves posting images of political parties or politicians on the user profile page to express political views, following these parties or politicians, and initiating political debates (Ganduri et al., 2020). The development and technological advancements have changed not only the methods of political campaigns but also the way youths communicate with one another and the sources of information they seek. Social media not only offers significant cost savings, but it also facilitates two-way communication. Unlike traditional media, which only transmits information from the sender to the recipient without any feedback, social media allows the recipient to provide feedback to the sender (Valencia, 2022). Despite the pressure from the internet and social media, which has made the traditional media less dominant than it once was, it continues to be a relevant source of information for society, especially as youths increasingly seek the credibility and reliability of news circulated on social media.

The influence of social media usage on youth political behaviour

The influence of social media on political behaviour is still debated because the youth tend to use social media for entertainment rather than political participation because social media platforms were initially designed to function as instruments for entertainment and social networking (Matthes, 2022). However, a study found that Malaysian youth are comfortable using social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram as a source of information about political news (Zulkifli et al., 2021) because youth are the fastest group to absorb the changes brought by technology and apply information technology facilities. Even with the implementation of Vote18 and the presence of social media platforms, approximately 4.2 million Malaysian citizens aged 21 and above have not yet registered as voters (Zulkifli et al., 2021). Malaysian youth, although having a high level of political information structure since Malaysia ranks among the tenth countries in terms of the social media usage rate, with approximately 57.4% of youth users. The youth voters in Malaysia are knowledgeable about democratic, electoral, and political party information however, the level of voter awareness and readiness to vote among young voters in Malaysia is low (Allam et al., 2023). Exposure to political information on social media also exposes youth voters to information disorders such as fake information and misinformation, or even more concerning, the intentional spread of misinformation on social media such as leaked information and provocative content. Nevertheless, social media had enables youth supporters to engage in the 1998 reformation providing a platform for alternative voices and bypassing the restrictions imposed by the government on mainstream media. The accessibility of platforms like YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram allowed supporters to mobilize, share information, and challenge the political status quo, significantly influencing the reform movement to show protest towards the dismissal of a politicians from the cabinet (Matthes, 2022).

The social media usage also occurred among the Indian youth whom spending significant time on social networking sites with 65% of users viewing it as an important source for staying updated (Krishnan, 2019). In the 2009 national election, social media played a role in political engagement, marking the first use of Twitter for diplomatic purposes by the Indian Foreign Ministry. The significance of social media in Indian politics surged further with Anna Hazare's anti-corruption movement, which transformed into a mass movement through platforms like Facebook and Twitter (Kattakayam, 2011). Social media, particularly Twitter, also served as a platform for women to raise their voices against sexual harassers during the MeToo movement, which gained momentum in India, and played a pivotal role in mobilizing citizens to protest the Delhi gang rape case, commonly known as the Nirbhaya case (Padhiyar, 2019). Recently, politicians in India have become more tech-savvy, recognizing social media as an effective tool to reach voters. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s adept

use of social media during the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections prompted other political parties to incorporate online platforms into their campaigns. Beyond India, following politicians on social media platforms such as Twitter has also influenced youth political behaviour globally. For instance, in the United Kingdom (UK), exposure to political tweets during the 2015 general election campaign was linked to increased political knowledge and shifts in beliefs, demonstrating the significant role of social media in shaping youth political behaviour (Halpern et al., 2017; Munger et al., 2020). Politicians use platforms like Twitter to communicate directly with the public, share information, and engage with citizens on key political issues.

However, the influence of social media on voter turnout among youth appears to be inconsistent. While social media use among the youth in Germany has rushed from nearly zero in the early 2000s to over 80% by the 2017 National Parliamentary Elections, this increase has not translated into higher voter turnout. In fact, voter turnout among youths aged 18–24 has significantly declined over the years. In 1983, voter turnout was 84.30% for those aged 18–20 and 81.50% for those aged 21–24. However, by 2017, these numbers had dropped to 69.90% and 67.00%, respectively (Matthes, 2022). In Japan, the turnout for young adults aged 20–24 decreased from 35.3% in 2012 to 30.69% in 2017, while turnout for older age groups remained significantly higher, demonstrating a substantial generational gap. These data suggest that while there may be slight increases in youth turnout in some cases, a significant generational gap in voter participation persists across these countries. This indicates that social media and other factors have not yet bridged this gap effectively. This suggests that, despite the dramatic rise in social media use, it has not led to increased political participation among young voters. Instead, the data points to a growing generational gap in voter turnout, indicating that social media's impact on political engagement may not be as transformative as once theorized.

The findings from the 2016 Edelman Trust Barometer study reveal a decline in trust in social media as a reliable source of information among the Malaysian youth. Trust in media overall also decreased slightly from 46% in 2015 to 45% in 2016 (Sualman, 2016). While trust in social media was high at 58% in 2013, it has been steadily declining in subsequent years. The study also highlights a decrease in trust across different media platforms, with traditional media trust dropping by 8 points to 49% and social media by 7 points to 42%. This occurred even in terms of usage period on the other hand, a report submitted by the Malaysian Youth Development Research Institute (2020) found that the rate of Internet usage showed an increase of almost 43 percent, with youth allocated use for 3-4 hours a day in 2015 to 6-7 hours a day in 2019. This decline is due to growing awareness that social media is not the most reliable source of information. Despite the decline in trust, social media, along with search engines and television, remains one of the top three sources for news in Malaysia, with 81% of the general population relying on social media for news several times a week or more. Even with the decline of trust in social media, Facebook has been instrumental in rally organization, enabling activists to create events, share information, and engage participants in real time. One interviewee, a former student youth activist with expertise in rally participation mobilization, highlighted his experience in using Facebook to recruit participants for significant events like the BERSIH 4.0 rally in 2015, illustrating how social media facilitates recruitment through targeted messaging and event promotion (Tye et al. 2018).

RESEARCH METHODS

Qualitative research is a type of investigation that focuses on understanding phenomena through in-depth analysis of textual and narrative data. Combining qualitative research methods with secondary data provides a robust approach to exploring how social media influences youth political behaviour and the credibility of political information. Textual analysis, as a qualitative method, involves examining content from social media posts, news articles, and public statements to identify patterns. This analysis reveals how political information is presented and its potential impact on youth perceptions highlighting any biases. This analysis exposes the presentation of political information,

its potential influence on youth perceptions, and any biases present in the content. n the content. Complementing this with secondary data, which includes both qualitative and quantitative sources from previous studies, surveys, and reports, offers additional context and validation. For example, qualitative secondary data might come from interviews or focus groups discussing political attitudes, while quantitative data could include survey results on social media usage and political engagement. Integrating these methods allows for cross-verifying findings, identifying trends, and enhancing the robustness of the research, providing a comprehensive understanding of how social media affects youth political behaviour and the reliability of political information.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study focuses on the challenges associated with social media usage among Malaysian youth. Through a qualitative research design, the study found a few challenges which are the credibility of political information, content filtering which often leads to a limited and biased point of view, and limited fact-checking tools.

Credibility of the political information

The most important challenges associated with the usage of social media is the credibility of both the information shared and that of the information source, which is referred to as the dual information credibility problem. Information credibility is conceptualized in this study as the ability to verify or confirm pieces of information shared on social media sites. Information shared on social media sites face the dual information credibility problem, which downgrades the benefits of sharing information on those sites (Osatuyi, 2013). A recent study reported that about 85% of journalists indicated that information on social media sites was much less or slightly less credible than traditional media due in part to the lack of fact-checking, verification, and other reporting standards. Besides, information on social media is often generated and disseminated by users. Therefore, the reliability in terms of truthfulness is uncertain. It can be true and it can be false. Spreading rumours and mocked pictures are common on social media nowadays (NIMCJ, 2020).

The credibility of social media political information is a critical determinant of trust, particularly among youth, who are more inclined to rely on media they perceive as credible for political news (Knight Foundation, 2018). However, a decline in trust in social media has been observed with only 41% of Americans expressing trust in the media in 2017, down from 54% in 2003, according to long-term Gallup trend data. This erosion of trust is compounded by the perception among most American youths that fake news poses a significant threat to democracy, with 56% viewing it as very serious. Consequently, the challenge of ensuring credible political information on social media becomes increasingly vital, as it directly influences youth engagement and trust in democratic processes. Furthermore, the dynamics of incidental and selective exposure to political information on social media added complicate the issue of credibility of political news (Basri, 2022). Stronger partisans, deeply invested in the political landscape, often encounter attitude-challenging information incidentally, prompting them to seek out like-minded content to reaffirm their political beliefs. This tendency can skew perceptions of news credibility and foster an environment where misinformation thrives, as youths are primarily influenced by shared content on social media. The increased reliance on shared news heightens the perceived credibility of sources, leading to a reinforcement of existing biases and a challenge in discerning credible political information amidst a sea of partisan news.

In the Malaysian context illustrates social media can undermine trust in political information, as seen during the 14th General Elections. The circulation of images showcasing the opulent lifestyles of National Front leaders in Sabah, juxtaposed against the living conditions of local farmers, sparked public dissatisfaction and outrage (Ting et al., 2021). The rapid spread of such content, whether accurate or not, fuelled public dissatisfaction and led to a loss of trust in the ruling party. This shows how credibility issues in social media can destabilize the political landscape by influencing voters'

perceptions and increasing distrust in political leaders, leading to significant consequences like the National Front's defeat in Sabah. The incident underscores the critical challenge of credibility in social media, where the rapid dissemination of potentially misleading information can have immediate and profound political consequences, particularly among youth who engage with these narratives. The relationship between social media credibility and subsequent media usage is closely related with political participation when the youths has been aware of function of media as a tool. The positive effects of democratic channel use relationships new things such as the diversity of social media platforms led to the exposure to various media channels influence the participation of opinion in the youth especially in making election decisions (Wahab et al., 2013). Social media can potentially undermine trust and political stability through the spread of unverified information, it also has the capacity to enhance stability by engaging youth in the political process through informed participation. The key to ensuring political stability lies in improving the credibility of information on social media and encouraging media literacy to build trust in the political system.

Content filtering which often leads to a limited and biased point of view

Filter content on social media platforms significantly impact youth political behaviour and societal perceptions. By curating content based on youth's past interactions and interests, filter content reinforces existing beliefs and intensify views, potentially leading to a more polarized society. This manipulation can distort perceptions by amplifying content that aligns with youth's biases, often at the expense of accuracy. As algorithms prioritize engagement, sensational or controversial content is promoted, fostering fanaticism, and making popularity a misleading measure of credibility (Ramli, 2022). This dynamic can undermine democratic processes by distorting public opinion and reducing openness to alternative perspectives. Furthermore, reliance on these algorithms can erode critical thinking skills, making users more susceptible to manipulation. The creation of echo chambers and false realities blurs the line between fact and fiction, complicating the discernment of truth and highlighting the need for cautious and informed engagement with digital media.

Through algorithms design, youths interested in non-political contents may curate their newsfeed on SNS platforms in ways which exposes them to high degrees of entertainment-oriented content with low likelihood of exposure to political contents. This may lead to low-effort, feel-good types of engagement at best, making high-effort, offline political participation less likely (Matthes, 2022). Conversely, algorithms assess the importance and relevance of posts based on active signals such as comments, shares, likes, and so on, before placing the most popular posts at the top of users' feeds (Paidi et al., 2021). Due to the fact that people see only what corresponds to their own opinion and the absence of dialogue with counter statements do not allow youths to see alternative sources of information. Thus, youths increasing reinforce their views without considering the arguments of the opposing side. Therefore, when youths encounter distorted and fake news, conforming their already established opinion, they accept them as truth, the so-called confirmation bias without questioning it at all. This, in turn, leads to a polarization of society and enables manipulation.

Social sorting, which drives emotional polarization, is significantly influenced by social media platforms and unilateral media sharing. Partisan identification where a youth's political affiliation intertwines with their broader social identity becomes more pronounced in the digital age. As political and social identities become more integrated, youths are increasingly exposed to homogenous and mutually exclusive groups. This leads to greater emotional polarization, as people are more likely to engage with content that reflects their views and confirms their biases. In Malaysia, social media plays a significant role in social sorting, where youths are exposed to homogenous content that reflects and reinforces their political and social identities. This selective exposure contributes to emotional polarization, as youths increasingly engage with content that aligns with their views and confirms their biases (Ahmad et al., 2023). In a multicultural nation, such polarization can deepen ethnic divides, as individuals become less likely to encounter perspectives from different communities. This challenge has serious implications for Malaysia's political stability, as political leaders may exploit these divisions by using polarizing rhetoric, further entrenching societal divides and diminishing the possibility of cohesive, cross-community political engagement.

Limited fact-check political information tools

In the challenge of social media where information is fast, but at the same time, the validity of its content is questionable, mass media and mainstream journalists are still relevant as current news generators. The spread of inaccurate information and fake news is seen as a serious problem that risks threatening the peace and security of the country. For example, when the world was fighting the pandemic in 2020, the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) received 1,837 complaints of fake news about the government's efforts to deal with the crisis at that time. The spread of fake news online will not only cause panic but can also disrupt the stability and security of the country. The fact-checkers need to move in step with artificial intelligence (AI) technology to help identify patterns in the spread of false information through AI specific applications rigorously (The Star, 2023). Many academics argue that the spread of false news constitutes a form of media psychological warfare and this phenomenon can be observed globally, especially during election campaigns. During the 2016 United States presidential election between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton, Facebook estimated that around 126 million social media users were exposed to fake articles shared as part of Russian propaganda. On Twitter, approximately 2,752 Russian-created accounts shared around 1.4 million tweets to disrupt the United States election campaign (Jalli, 2019).

In Southeast Asia, for instance, during Indonesia's recent Presidential Election (PILPRES), the use of buzzers who was paid to spread false news had severe consequences. This was evident when the announcement of President Jokowi victory led to uncontrollable dissemination of false news, causing supporters of the opposing candidate, Prabowo Subianto, to riot in the streets, resulting in casualties in Jakarta. Extreme sentiments played by irresponsible parties, likely among those less adept at processing news, ended in a dark chapter for Indonesia's security. Besides, the Malaysian parliament enacted the Anti-Fake News Act in April 2018 in an apparent attempt to quell reports about the 1 Malaysian Development Berhad (1MDB) corruption scandal. Besides provisions enabling courts to order the removal of content from the internet, the Act criminalised the malicious creation and distribution of any fake news or publication containing fake news. The Act thus adopted a broad scope as it did not require proof that such fake news had an impact on any public interest. In December 2019, however, the Anti-Fake News Act was repealed, delivering on a campaign promise of the Coalition of Hope led by Mahathir Mohamad. Nonetheless, functional equivalents such as section 8A (1) of the Printing Presses and Publications Act 1984, section 211(1) and 233(1)(a) of the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998, and section 505(b) of the Penal Code remained in place (Schuldt, 2021).

Minister of Communications and Digital has emphasized the Malaysian governments commitment to addressing misinformation and enhancing media literacy among the public. There are two key platforms for fact-checking: SEBENARNYA.MY, managed by the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC), which focuses on clarifying and correcting false information, and MyCheck.my, operated by Bernama, which verifies the accuracy of information circulating in Malaysia (Bernama, 2023). The government is actively encouraging the public, including Members of Parliament, to use these platforms to verify information before sharing it. This initiative is part of a broader effort to increase public awareness and understanding of democratic processes. The overarching goal is to foster a well-informed and vigilant public that is better equipped to handle and disseminate accurate information especially among the youth. However, different social media platforms offer varying levels of support for fact-checking. For example, fact-checking tools are less effective or deemed irrelevant in non-English-speaking contexts. Platforms like YouTube also face criticism for their inadequate measures in managing misinformation, with some fact-checkers pointing out that YouTube's lack of effective mechanisms for addressing and debunking disinformation limits their ability to perform fact-checking on video content.

CONCLUSION

Having discussed the three challenges of the social media usage for accessing political information arise trustworthiness and uncertainties towards social media. Questioning the credibility of political information, content filtering which often leads to a limited and biased point of view, and limited fact-

checking tools are evident that youth face significant challenges due to their limited experience and difficulty in distinguishing between true and false information. The random and sporadic nature of how they consume news further exacerbates this issue, blurring the lines between news, entertainment, and social information.

To address the spread of disinformation among youth, several strategies can be employed. First, enhancing media literacy and promoting critical thinking from an early age is crucial. Educating youths to question the authorship, interests, and value of the information they encounter can empower them to better discern credible sources. Second, adjusting social media algorithms to ensure a more balanced information flow could help mitigate polarization and reduce the prevalence of one-sided opinions. Lastly, journalists should commit to ethical principles by prioritizing truth-seeking and high-quality investigative reporting, while explicitly labelling misinformation as false.

In addition to these approaches, government efforts are also essential in combating disinformation. The Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC), play a significant role by investigating, arresting, and prosecuting individuals involved in spreading false information under Section 233 of the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998 (CMA) and under Section 233(1)(a) of the CMA, which includes fines up to RM50,000 or imprisonment for up to one year, or both, can further curb the dissemination of false content.

In conclusion, while social media platforms have the potential to positively impact the political landscape, they also pose risks to democratic principles. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort from both citizens and the government to foster greater awareness and implement effective solutions.

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