

Political Voice of Young Malaysian: Online Political Participation among University Students

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Introduction

This study focuses on the online political participation of young Malaysians, specifically, among students of Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Shah Alam. This chapter discuss further on the factors that influence these students in online political participation by exploring the revolution of students in e-politics by using the Internet as the enabler.

Young people are future leaders of the nation and can contribute towards the development and political stability of the nation. Nevertheless, there are countless of criticism over the participation of young Malaysians especially university students in politics. The low level of participation of university students is related to the chronicle of Malaysian students' participation in politics in the past. By looking into the historical state of social and politics among university students, the enactment of Universities and University Colleges Act (UUCA) in 1971 has limit students' right to assembly, freedom to associate with political groups and student gatherings and whereby public speeches were monitored and controlled by the university authorities (Mei, Galea & Ngee, 2014). Apart from that, there is a declining of traditional forms of political participation among young people in voting and enrolling as partisan membership. In Malaysia, only 43 per cent of 18 to 29 year olds Malaysians had voted as compared to 87 per cent of those who age range from 50 years old and older (Carle, 2014).

Nevertheless, In the era of information, Internet becomes the most powerful channel for young people to seek information, communicate and socialize. However, it is the Internet that helps to encourage young Malaysian to participate in politics and to what extent does the use of Internet indirectly leads to online political participation among Malaysian youths. In the context of Malaysian politics, young people are more likely to use the internet as a platform for them to be involved in political activities. They post links to political articles, comment and express opinions about politics, search for political information and issues, and also listen to other views via online. In Malaysia, the political arena was knocked through the online political participation by young people. Series of street protests in Malaysia have been participated by young Malaysian concerning social justice and political changes called Bersih 1.0, Bersih 2.0

and Bersih 3.0 through online invitation to join the street protest, call for abolition of a decades-old law restricting their political activities movement and #KitaLawan rallies in support of the jailed Opposition Leader, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim that went viral via Internet (Rajasakran & Sinnappan, 2013; Teh, 2015). Apart from that, social and political issues including Aisyah Tajuddin's hudud criticism video, Tun Mahathir's criticism over Prime Minister, Dato' Seri Mohd Najib on 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) and Altantuya murder scandals and also the statement by the Deputy Finance Minister, Datuk Ahmad Maslan during a forum on goods and services tax (GST) at UiTM Shah Alam which received overwhelming criticisms and responses by young Malaysian recently. The Malaysian political phenomenon nowadays illustrated that young people are actively involved in politics online. Even though young Malaysian is seemly aggressive in politics through online instead of the conventional forms of politics but then, what are the major factors that influence them to use Internet in involving in political activities. Thus the purpose of this study is to find out further the level of participation of young people particularly students of UiTM Shah Alam in politics via online and also the factors that influence them to use the Internet in involving in the political activities.

Method

The basis of this study is to evaluate the online political participation among students of UiTM Shah Alam and also the factors that influence the students (the units of analysis) to be involved in online political activities. The study is guided by Van Deth's theory of political participation where four constructs were identified; political interest, internet skills, communication and online political participation (the dependent variable). Therefore, the cross-sectional survey design was used by researcher as the research design for the purpose of study in order to answer research questions and research objectives. The sample size for this study is 500 students at the Shah Alam campus of Universiti Teknologi MARA. The instrument used for the survey is a questionnaire which were administered to the students through convenience sampling. Prior to the actual data collection, a pilot study was undertaken to ascertain reliability and validity of the instrument.

Findings

As previously noted, the returned response was 78% (390 from 500), from which the summary of the demographic profiles of the respondents are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of Demographic Profile of Respondents

| Category | Type/Group | No. of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|--|-------------------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Gender | Male | 39 | 10 |
| | Female | 351 | 90.0 |
| Age (Years) | 18-21 | 101 | 25.9 |
| | 22-25 | 253 | 64.9 |
| | 26-29 | 29 | 7.4 |
| | 30-33 | 7 | 1.8 |
| Programme Taken at University | Science and Technology | 230 | 59.0 |
| | Social Science and Humanities | 146 | 37.4 |
| | Business and Management | 14 | 3.6 |
| Hours Spend for Surfing Internet Daily | Less than 1 hour | 17 | 4.4 |
| | 1-2 hours | 96 | 24.6 |
| | 3-4 hours | 141 | 36.2 |
| | 5-6 hours | 58 | 14.9 |
| | More than 6 hours | 78 | 20.0 |
| Purpose of Internet use | Business | 9 | 2.3 |
| | Education | 153 | 39.2 |
| | Entertainment | 66 | 16.9 |
| | Games | 11 | 2.8 |
| | Politics | 36 | 7.7 |
| | Social Networking | 105 | 26.9 |
| | Others | 16 | 4.1 |

Based on Table 1, the 90% of the respondents are female students while the male students make up only 10% of the overall return responses. In terms of age, four age categories were delineated where 64.9% are in the range of 22 to 25 years old, followed by 25.9% in the age range of 18-21 years old, 7.4% are aged between 26-29 years old and 1.8% in the age group of 30 to 33 years old. On programs taken by respondents at UiTM Shah Alam, 59% are from Science and Technology (S&T) such as engineering, applied science, computer science and mathematics, dentistry, sport science and architecture programme. Another 37.4% of the respondents are from the Social Science and Humanities programs, for example, administrative science and policy studies, law, applied language, art and design, mass communication, education and also from applied language studies while the remaining 13.6% are from Business and Management programs including Muamalat and business administration. From the demographic information obtained, most of the respondents, 141 (36.2 per cent) spend 3 to 4 hours daily for surfing the Internet and only 17 (4.4 per cent) of respondents that spend less than 1 hour. Therefore, this finding indicated that UiTM Shah Alam students are active Internet

users through the time spend daily for surfing the Internet. In term of the purpose of Internet use, respondents are mainly used Internet for education purpose as the respondents are students in which the total numbers are 153 (39.2 per cent) respondents. Apart from that, there are about 105 (26.9 per cent) of respondents that use Internet to go online for social networking; entertainment 66 (16.9 per cent); politics, 36 (7.7 per cent); others, 16 (4.1 per cent); games, 11 (2.8 per cent) and for business about 9 (2.3 per cent).

Discussions and Recommendations

Based on the findings, social media such as Facebook and Twitter and Web 2.0 become the main platform for Malaysian youth to perform online politics activities such as to discuss and share their views over public and political issue. Nevertheless, how far their voices noticed by government and interrelated to national policy agenda. Youth need an official online channel that may help them to exercise their civil and political rights thus can contribute towards decision making processes. For that reason, one of recommendations to enhance political participation of youth through online politics is with establishment of social media as youth online political channel. This channel will become the platform for youth to have direct communication with government to discuss and voice out their concern on public and political issues and also matters that related to youth. Youth online political channel operates by providing and keeping youth updated with information on national issues and government policy that related to youth development and then soliciting and recording youth responses respectively to be viewed by government. This will resulted to better two ways communication between government and youth since this channel become the enabler that provide insights for government to understand on needs of youth and their real situation and youth will receive updated about the nation socio-political scenario. Apart from that, this channel also provides opportunities for youth to demonstrates and share their views on politics with other members of this channel through online forum and discussion.

Conclusion

In conclusion, youth online activities include read about politics online, comment on politics, share political video and article online, and discuss about politics online, follow politics and politician blog and webpage and other activities indirectly leads towards political participation. Internet become the powerful platform for youth to voice out and raises their concern on public and political issues and youth related issue. Young people become popular over Internet and

also known as “keyboard warrior” due to their quick comments and status update on political and public issues. This shows that young Malaysian alert and keeps update on nation current political situation. However, in voice out their political voice, youth have to come with intellectual, sound and positive view and ideas in order to give contribution towards better development of youth in future. Government then should recognize Internet as one of the platform that suit the participation of youth in politics. Internet also serves to help government to have better understanding on the needs of youth and get to the bottom of real situation of youth. Even though online political participation may sound not powerful as the political participation through the formal platform however if government notice and count the political voice of youth through online hence this new form of political participation will become meaningful towards development of youth in term of politics. There is a need for a strong support and commitment from all stakeholders towards the development of youth participation in politics online especially from those government agencies that directly responsible in Information Communications Technology (ICT), politics and youth development. From viewpoint of researcher, the fundamental thing that needs to be addressed on young political participation is in term of issue on trust towards government and also politicians. Today’s generation distrust government due to disappointment with political structures of government and corruption issues. Young Malaysian becomes uninterested to join political party due to the political scene of Malaysia that practices partisan politics. Therefore, government should take action over these issues at the first place in order to regain trust from young Malaysian hence the empowerment of young participation in politics can be achieved in future.

References