YOUTH, THE INTERNET AND POLITICS: DISCOVERING NEW FORMS OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

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Introduction

In the 21st century, citizens around the world tend to be moving away from traditional forms of participation to a new method of participation, including the youth. The rapid developments in information and communication technologies (ICT) are offering them new platforms for discussing politics and engaging with political issues. There are an increasing concern over youth political participation that has created an ongoing academic debate among scholars. The Internet is supposed to encourage youth to participate in politics as they are regarded as the 'Internet Generation', highlighting that youth have grown up with the Internet. However, there are a gap about how youth use the Internet for political purpose and to what extent. The objectives of the study therefore are to find out the kinds of political activities on the Internet among youth, and also to examine the relationship between demographic factors and political activities.

Methods

This study used surveys as a method of data collection. A questionnaire was designed to measure use of the Internet in politics and its relationship with the demographic background of Malaysian youth. The sample consisted of 600 respondents, between the ages of 18-40, stratified using gender, education and rural/urban area. Samples were randomly selected in three selected states to represent the three regions in Peninsular Malaysia: northern (Perak), central (Selangor) and southern (Johor). The data was analyzed using SPSS.

Out of the 600 respondents, the highest respondents were from the urban area, with 308 respondents (51.3%). It is followed by the small town area with 172 respondents (28.7%); and respondents from the rural area were 120 (20%). In terms of gender, the respondents were distributed equally, 300 males and females. In terms of educational background, the majority of respondents completed their STPM/Certificate/Diploma level, with 243 respondents (40.5%), followed by those who completed their SPM level with 173 respondents (28.8%), and those with Degree and above with 153 respondents (25.5%). There was only a small number of respondents with SRP/PMR with 25 respondents (4.2%); and those with no formal education/primary school with 6 respondents (1%).

Table 1. Demography

Demography		Frequency (N=600)	Percent (%)
Area	Urban	308	51.3
	Small town	172	28.7
	Rural	120	20
Gender	Male	300	50
	Female	300	50
Education	No formal education/ primary school	6	1
	SRP/PMR	25	4.2
	SPM	173	28.8
	STPM/Certificate/Diploma	243	40.5
	Degree and above	153	25.5

3 Findings and Discussion

This section discusses on the findings of the study. We discusses use of the Internet for political purposes among youth in Malaysia and examines the relationship between use of the Internet and demographic background.

3.1 Use of the Internet for Political Purpose among Malaysian Youth

Findings showed that majority of the respondents use the Internet (3.76) to seek the political news. It is followed by use of the Internet to surf political web sites (3.60), reading/commenting on political blogs (3.16) and watching political videos online (3.16). On the other hand, the lowest percentage is belongs to the respondents use the Internet to discuss political issues via online forum (2.5).

Table 2. Use of the Internet for Political Purpose (by percentage)

Use of the Internet for political purpose	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	More or Less Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)	Mean
Frequently using the Internet to seek political news	5.0	7.7	21.7	37.2	28.5	3.76
Frequently using the Internet to surf political web sites	5.3	13.2	22.3	34.5	24.7	3.60
Frequently discuss politics via social networking sites	10.5	17.5	27.7	27.0	17.3	3.23
Frequently read/comment on political blogs	10.8	21.7	27.3	23.2	17.0	3.16
Frequently discuss political issues via chat room	15.8	24.5	25.8	20.7	13.2	2.91
Frequently send emails with political information	24.7	26.8	23.0	14.5	11.0	2.60
Frequently discuss political issues via online forum	24.3	30.5	21.7	17.5	6.0	2.50
Frequently watch political videos online	14.3	17.5	24.3	25.5	18.3	3.16

3.2 The Relationship between Use of the Internet for Political Purposes and Demographic Background

This study examines the relationship between respondents' demographic factors and use of the Internet for political purposes. Respondents' gender, area of residence and level of education were selected for demographic factors to determine if they related to use of the Internet for political purposes in Malaysia.

3.2.1 The Relationship between Use of the Internet and Gender

Studies have shown that there are significant gender differences in terms of use of the Internet. Results typically showing that males use the Internet more than females. In this study, a Mann-Whitney U test was conducted to compare males' and females' different usages of the Internet. Generally, male respondents were found to be more frequent users of the Internet for political purposes than female respondents. There is a statistically significant difference between males' and females' use of the Internet for political purposes ($U = 40833$, $p = .05$).

3.2.2 The Relationship between Use of the Internet and Area of Residence

Area of residence in this study was divided into three categories: urban, small town and rural areas. A Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to compare the relationship between residential area and use of the Internet for this purpose. The results of the analysis indicate that there is a significant difference across different residential areas, χ^2 (2, $N = 600$) = 17.20, $p = .00$. An inspection of the mean ranks for the groups suggests that those residing in urban areas are the most fruitful users of the Internet for political purposes, and those in rural areas reporting the lowest levels.

3.2.3 The Relationship between Use of the Internet and Level of Education

Results of the analysis indicate that there is a significant difference across educational levels for use of the Internet in politics, χ^2 (4, N = 600) = 15.85, p = .00. Further examination showed that those with an

informal or primary school education are the highest users of the Internet for political purposes. This is followed by those with a degree-level education and above, SPM and STPM/Certificate/Diploma. However, SRP/PMR school leavers were found to make least use of the Internet for political purpose.

4   Conclusion

This study has shown that the Internet is widely used as a mean to foster political participation. This study has also found that the respondents seek the political information from the Internet, and prefer to seek political information via this new medium. Therefore, this study indicates that the youth in Malaysia do participate in politics in new forms, via the digital way corresponds with the changing environment today.

5   Recommendation

It is recommended that further research might explore use of the social networking sites, websites and blogs for political purposes in details. It would therefore be interesting if future studies could be conducted to examine this phenomenon in Malaysia as these mediums are widely used nowadays. This is important as the Internet influences the citizens' attitude and perceptions towards politics.

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