Social Media: The Major Trigger of Online and Offline Political Activism

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Abstract—With the viral factor on social media, the sense of persuasion is generated by repetition and popularity. When users' interest is captured, political awareness increases to spark political enthusiasm, but, the level of user's political participation and political attitude of those active users is still questionable. An online survey on 250 youth and in-depth interview on two politicians are conducted to answer the main question in this paper. The result shows that Facebook significantly increases political awareness among youths. Social media may not be the major trigger to political activism among youths as most respondents opined that they would still vote without Facebook. Other factors could be political campaigning, political climate, age, peer pressure or others. Finding also shows that majority of respondents did not participate in online political debates or political groups. Many also wondered if the social media was the main power switch that triggers the political influx among young voters. The research finding is significant to understand how the new media, Facebook, has reshaped the political landscape in Malaysia, creating the Social Media Election that changed the rules of the political game. However, research finding does not support the ideal notion that the social media is the major trigger to youth's political activism. This research outcome has exposed the flaws of the Social Media Election. It has revealed the less optimistic side of youth political activism. Unfortunately, results fall short of the idealistic belief that the social media have given rise to political activism among youths in the 13th General Election in Malaysia. The research outcome also highlights an important lesson for the democratic discourse of Malaysia which is making informed and educated decisions takes more commitment, proactive and objective attitude.

Keywords—Social media, political participation, political activism, democracy, political communication.

I. INTRODUCTION

YOUTH are becoming more and more adaptable to politics as they have easy access to the new media with technology alongside which encourage them in doing so. According to [1], there are a lot of communities that members have joined in an online political debate. Due to the adaptability to politics, youth are the main agenda or target for those political parties as they are the key to the future of the nation. Increasingly new political campaigns are done online to attract and gain interactivity or support of the youths. Nevertheless, citizen participation towards politics is solely due to their own freedom of choice to participate anonymously active or in public. However, a digital gap still exists between the technology literate and illiterate, the accessible and deprived, and the urban and rural. It was no

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surprise that the Malaysian General Election 13 was swept by an urban tsunami from the information-rich segment of the country. This expressed skepticism at the same high choice environment, apathetic users could shut out political information they deem undesirable.

Many have given credit to the new media for the dramatic change of rules in the political game and the General Election outcome [2]. The role that the new media played in Malaysian politics is diverse and complex. Against the claim that the online media was the major "culprit", many academic scholars have raised a doubtful eye. They called it a "slacktivist" activity where little societal benefit can substantiate merely online [3]. Users could be multi-tasking in front of the computer screen, giving little time and effort to their political learning. However, it was difficult for Malaysians to evade political news on social media in the past General Election. Exposure to political information was no longer a deficiency.

Another pessimistic perspective about the use of online media is synonymous with scholarly views of time displacement hypothesis whereby time spent with media supposedly privatizes leisure time and hence displaces other activities that build the community [4]. In other words, users' active online presence may not be at par as their offline action to help the political process. Moreover, the patterns of use vary dramatically from one user to another. This prompts a question as to whether Malaysian youths have only voted for a change of political history while the social media merely played a supplementary role. This problem determines the origin of young Malaysians' political activism.

II. DEFINING ONLINE AND OFFLINE POLITICAL ACTIVISM AMONG YOUTHS

Many Malaysians heralded the social media as a stepping stone towards a democratic political discourse, users' online behaviors with regards to politics are often complex and multidimensional. Political participation is the ability to express political opinions and exert political influence in both offline and online worlds [5].

Offline actions are politically significant to nation-building and constructive to the democratic discourse; these include attending rallies, donating to a candidate, meeting politicians, researching on political knowledge, public discussions and others. Online political attitudes vary by how much priority a user is willing to offer in the topic of Malaysian politics and the General Election. Youths are often associated with the new media and social networking sites. The United Nations defined 'youth' as people between the ages of 15 to 24. In the Malaysian context, youth is defined as those between 15-40 years of age [6]. Study [7] shows that Malaysian youths use the

new media as a news source. On a note of exposure to news, up to 60.7% of 18-year-olds and 65.4% of 24-year-olds reported that they read online news regularly.

Former Deputy Higher Education Minister of Malaysia, Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah [8] said that the traditional media has lost credibility among the youths. Youth preferred to obtain their news from social media despite the unverified sources. He mentioned that 96% of youths is a key demographic that forms close to half of Malaysia's 13 million registered voters. Youth are no longer passive and ignorant but the potential demographic factor which will affect the electoral outcome. The demographic factor is an important unit in developing the research direction and methodology. The online and offline behaviors of youths in terms of political behaviors will be evaluated inclusively.

III. POLITICS IN SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES

Gary and Francis [9] suggest that Facebook must not be conceptualized as "a single entity" or unidimensional [10]. There are many varying dimensions in the patterns of usage. Some scholars [10] suggest that political learning among young users may occur as "incidental by-product" or in the form of soft news. Political news come in as a combination of entertainment and news to interest the young generation. It is particularly memorable to see some politicians make videos to capture voters' interests in the form of entertainment. To their wish, the videos easily went viral. For instance, the popular hit "Love is in the Air" music video by Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) was arguably the most memorable described by Australian primetime TV as the "worst political karaoke video of 2013" [11]. This video went viral on the wrong track, even crossing national borders, only to backfire at the party. As such, we give credit to the social media which provide more interactive and expressive sites to heighten political participation [5], driving online attitudes to offline action.

The social media kicked in since 2008 General Election, some politicians already began to create blogs and Facebook pages which yielded potential electoral outcome, too. Furthermore, Bersih Rally 2.0 also took a giant leap towards challenging the democratic fabric by solely relying on Facebook to disseminate information [12]. Opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim also managed to mobilize thousands of supporters via Facebook and Twitter for the infamous Black Out Rally to protest against the alleged electoral fraud [13]. In this case, the social media could mobilize offline action and summon thousands for a political cause even among the youths. This discussion shed light on the potential of the social media and how politicians have attempted to utilize it. The characteristics of the social media have allowed political message to take up different forms to approach young voters. Social media seems to be a big trigger to the youth's political activism since 2008 Election.

IV. POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN NEW MEDIA

Finding of Willnat et al. [14] indicated that the increase in new media usage was positively associated with higher levels of political participation among Malaysian voters. The high exposure to social networking sites, political blogs, political videos and even political advertisements showed strong associations with political activism. Even with the high exposure, there has been little systematic study on how the Internet is literally used for political purposes as some scholars argue that the Internet has changed the political participation and communication globally [15]. According to Leticia et al. [16], Internet is used as a source of political information and public expression where the new media acts as a platform allowing each individual to expose themselves to a like-minded discussion and embedding oneself in a forum of homogeneous discussion that shows further encouragement of participation politically. Finding of Homero, et al. [17] provided evidence that online interaction boots interpersonal relations, following the increased voluntary association of membership and political participation.

In Malaysia, Bersih rally is seen as an impactful example of how powerful new media can assimilate and gather the nation. Weiss [12] agrees that the popularity and policy impacts that Bersih 2.0 brought, confirms the rise of new media has furthered a growth in both politicization of young voters and of critical, informed discourse to the general public. New media has indeed shifted the demographics of political participation significantly. According to [18], there is a clear impact that can be seen from the electoral results that the generation Y was more engaged in the policy debates as this young generation has a different relationship with the appearance of new media and that they prefer to relate to it more interactively. Besides, [19] agrees that new media was devised as an effective media used as an alternative vehicle for information capital among the youths during the weeks of the 2008 election campaign.

The nature of participation is always transforming, where from traditional political participation evolves to Internet activism, political consumerism and political lifestyle [15]. Liow and Pasuni [20] argues that the communal narrative remains as a factor in Malaysian politics despite the growth of a multi-ethnic opposition coalition and the emergence of the new media as an equalizing factor that eroded the power of traditional hegemonic control over information. According to [21], Malaysian youths are better equipped intellectually and technologically to employ new media for both political expression and also individual interest. She found that due to the growing numbers of Malaysian activist bloggers, there seems to be a minority group of sophisticated youths that uses the new media to examine political alternatives despite the attempts of the ruling government to control the content.

Past researchers has come up with great understandings on how new media acts as a platform for the public to participate politically and with the help of new media, news and information about politics can be easily transmitted to the general populace. With the help of these past researchers, this research will be able to find out to what extent the youth has

changed or maintained in participating politically on new media.

V. POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF YOUTHS IN MALAYSIA

According to a news article in themalaymailonline.com [22], the participation of Malaysian youth in politics is among the lowest amongst the Commonwealth countries where Malaysian youths were ranked 47th out of the 51 nations surveyed. In [23], 73% of the youths of voting age have registered to vote but the voter registration amongst the 21 and 22 year olds were the lowest. Through their research, it is found that the top two reasons youth do not register to vote is because they do not have time to register and they dislike politics. Many of these students not only have lost interest in politics because of self behavior but because the government themselves are partially to be blamed for they enacted the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 where the Act bans students from participating or holding any political office in organizations outside the university [24]. These students were tailored to be ignorant of politics since the early stage of adulthood where they should be more educated to be more sensitive towards politics in Malaysia.

Most of the political parties in Malaysia were formed based on ethnic groups. This is because that efforts to unite the citizens as multiracial nations are far from being successful. As Malaysia has been governed under the National Front for more than 50 years, they soon realized that there is a need to engage with the younger generations to actively court the young and new voters to participate in politics because the future of Malaysia and their stand in the government is in the youth's hands. According to [25], these young voters will play a decisive role in coming general elections, just as they did in the 2008 general election by displacing the ruling coalition its power of a two-third majority in the parliament. Comparing to previous researches, there is a certain gap between the participation of young generations and the older generations. This research is then conducted to understand why is there a change in pace of participating politically among the youth namely generation Y.

VI. THE DECREASE IN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AMONG YOUTH

There is a growing concern about the declining participation in politics and traditional forms of offline political participation activism among young people [25]. The possible reason for a decrease in political participation is because the cross-cutting networks creates the need to be responsible to a conflicting party where the problem is not that the individual is internally conflicted over who to support but rather the individual feels uncomfortable taking sides in the face of numerous competing parties. The need for social accountability creates doubt because interpersonal disagreement terrorizes social relationships, as there is no way to please everyone to ensure a social harmony [26]. Chang [27] presented that unlike older generation who has been socially active that accumulated resources throughout their life, younger generations are continuously being politically apathetic, lacking interest and desiring no connections with politics.

Hamzah and Yassin [6] revealed that Malaysian youth is of the mentality that the government decisions have huge impact on their daily lives but in terms of voting behavior, they believe that there was little that they could do to influence the government. As youth are diverted away from their involvement in politics, such scenario portrays a disturbing image of the future which is based on increase level of apathy, cynicism and alienation. Even [28] shows that the openness to experience is somehow related to the willingness to engage in online participation. Towner's [5] analysis found that television is also associated with the individual level change in intention to vote especially among young adults who watched television news. Bakker and Claes [29] suggested that the decline in participation is not so much the levels of interest or participation that is being challenged but rather the attitudes of the younger generations toward politics that is changing as they are thought to be more skeptical and tend to show more political apathy.

The decrease in political participation among youth is clearly seen among the past research done by other scholars where most have agreed that youths are apathetic towards politics in their country. In [30], individuals may choose not to participate politically because they cannot, because they do not want to, or because nobody asked them to do so. However, in a democratic country, youth should be fed with knowledge of democratic principles, rules of overseeing the political process, and how the actual operation of political institutions should be [31].

VII. POLITICAL HISTORY AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

When more and more Facebook friends "share" and "like" political news, albeit in the form of mere soft news, it gives the information significance and news' worthiness. New study [32] showed that when users see their friends have voted, they are far more likely to go vote as a result of peer pressure. Therefore, awareness about politics and history hiked up among youths through viral sharing, driving protests and activism against unjust matters. Question is, without this knowledge about the history of Malaysian politics, youths would not find such urgency to make a "change". Fox News [33] described GE 13 as Malaysia's most hotly contested General Elections ever. It claimed that some of Southeast Asian nation's 13.3 million voters believe the National Front must be ousted to cleanse the government. McCoy [34] in his comment on Malaysiakini expressed concerns of the long-reeking corruption, abuse of power, judicial crisis and many injustices in the ruling government, he aptly entitled his article as "Time to vote for democratic change". It was not about voting for a particular politician or party, but simply for a change. This scenario challenges the notion that the social media was a major trigger of political activism among youths. Instead, the social media was a mere supplementary technology to aid activism.

VIII. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A. Users and Gratification Theory

The social media is a highly diversified, segmented and complex public sphere. Users can customize their profiles and redesign the setting to manipulate the flow of information. User and Gratification Theory suggests that users play an active role in choosing and using the media for their own satisfaction. "The audience is characterized as active, discerning, and motivated in their media use. The focus of the theory is on what people do with the media rather than the influence or impact of the media on the individual" [35]. More importantly, Facebook users are able to enjoy the ability to control production and distribution of information. This also triggers a series of viral sharing among like-minded friends. Social networking sites build a public sphere to interact and reconnect with friends on common topics. Against past beliefs, politics became a heated topic among Malaysian youths in the social media. Boyd [36] defines privacy in social networking site context as "control over the flow of one's personal information, including the transfer and exchange of that information". This provides a sense of authority and manipulation to gratify users' needs. However, it is just as easy for users to avoid content they deem undesirable. The uninterested are able to choose to stay further away from politics, resulting in participation gaps in the political sphere. As such, the flow of political information may be imbalanced and inadequate [10]. Boyd [36] highlighted that SNSes (Social Networking Sites) are explicitly designed to be about "me and my friends". Users are exposed to only what their friends share on Facebook. Nonetheless, other research [9] also points out on the phenomenon of accidental and unintentional exposure to public affairs because this information is often "pushed" to the user.

In Malaysian context, traditional media are no longer the only source for political news. Youths are exposed to political news online and in the social media. U&G theory applies to how young voters can choose the new media over the traditional media which is deemed as biased and less credible. They decide which medium is more credible than the other. In Facebook and Twitter, there may be "incidental by-product" where political news are shared in as short, pictorial and provoking "soft news" that can interest young users more.

In the decentralized structure of the digital social network, youths can choose which political candidate to "follow" on Twitter and which party to "like" on Facebook. Users enjoy also the freedom to criticize political leaders without fear of legal oppression. The social media have brought reform to the political landscape in its entirety.

Slacktivism [3] is a term made from the words slacker and activism. Political activism is hereby viewed as a "lazy man's activism" to imply the lack of commitment and real-time participation in the political discourse. Critics are not convinced that the very convenient nature of online activism or political participation holds enough substance. Compared to traditional political participation that consumes large sums of time, transaction costs and energy, clicking a Like button on Facebook simply cannot compare.

The information diffusion process was so easily delegated and distributed to multitudes of thousands via the social media. Signing petition on the Internet no longer requires the trouble to walk through Kuala Lumpur city in a sunny day. Moreover, even random users can become producers of such professional duties and mobilize many at low cost. This was subsequently criticized as "low-quality, redundant and generally insubstantial commenting by the public". Despite such opposing views against online activism, Malaysian politics seemed to have experienced a different story. Malaysian Chronicles [37] illustrated how an "online generation" and "Gen Y" in Malaysia are a different force altogether, spawning the rise of the Black 505 Movement in bold defiance. Thousands of people from all walks of life were mobilized in unity in Kelana Jaya. This was all done through Twitter and Facebook. It was as though times have changed, perhaps politics could be manipulated under a click on the computer mouse.

This research will produce new evidence to either validate or deny the claims of this theory in Malaysian context, on the ground that the constructive offline action could also be generated from online behavior in social media, as to suffice our second research objective.

IX. METHODOLOGY

Survey questionnaires are distributed among 250 people between the ages 18 and 55 years old, among whom are active or regular users of the social media. Interviews will be conducted with two politicians (one from ruling party and another one from opposition party) in order to gain perspectives as a player in the political game.

The survey questionnaires are designed to test the hypotheses as stated below: 1) The more interactive the media, the more responsive the users are to a political message. 2) Social media offers high selectivity but low in focus and offline participation. 3) Political activism in the social media is driven by emotions more than political knowledge. On the other hand, interview questions with politicians are structured to fulfill research objectives as follow: 1) To determine whether or not the new media (social media) was the major trigger of political activism among youths in GE13. 2) To investigate the degree of how much online political activism, particularly in the social media would lead to constructive offline action.

X. RESULT

A. Voting Behavior of Respondents in General Election 13 (GE13)

Among the 250 respondents, 76% who did not vote for GE13, while 24% voted. This may be a result of the age factor of the respondents. Table I dissects the age factor.

Table I shows the highest frequency of respondents who did not vote for GE13 falls to age group 18-21. This result can be due to the eligible age for voting in Malaysia is at the age of 21 years and above. With that said, respondents of ages 18-20 who are non-voters also fall to this category. However, 80% of

respondents within age group 22-25 did not vote for GE13 despite their eligible age for voting.

TABLE I
CROSS TABULATION OF PERCENTAGE AND COUNT OF RESPONDENTS WHO DID OR DID NOT VOTE FOR GE13 AND AGE GROUPS OF RESPONDENTS

			Yes	No	Total
Age	18 – 21	Count	2	82	84
		Percent	2.4%	97.6%	100%
	22 – 25	Count	23	92	115
		Percent	20%	80%	100%
	26 – 35	Count	24	11	35
		Percent	68.57%	31.43%	100%
	36 - 40 and above	Count	10	6	16
		Percent	62.5%	37.5%	100%

Age group 26-35 shows a majority of 68.57% of voters who voted for GE13, while age group 36 and above also claimed a majority of 62.5% of GE13 voters. In comparison, more respondents aged above 26 years are voters of GE13 while more respondents aged 25 years and below did not. This data also shows that the age factor is significant in voting behaviors among respondents.
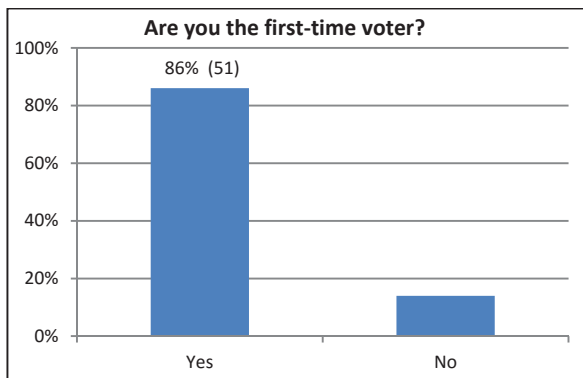

Fig. 1 Percentage and Frequency of First-time Voters of the Latest General Election (GE13)

Fig. 1 shows respondents' answers to "Are you a first time voter?" Among the voters (59 respondents), 86% of them (51 respondents) were first time voters while 14% (8 respondents) were not first time voters. This figure helps us speculate the rate of first-time voters in the latest GE13 if the Social Media Election helped spur a massive change in the 13th General Election outcome.

The above data presentation challenges the first hypothesis *The more interactive the media, the more responsive the users are to a political message.* Provided that social media are highly interactive in transmitting and sharing political messages among youths, youth respondents below the age of 26 years old did not perform the action of voting. On the other hand, this result supports the second hypothesis that *social media offers high selectivity but low in focus and offline participation.* Perhaps youth respondents can manipulate their social media profile and news feeds of political information, their political decisions may stay only in cyberspace and not out in their real-life political behaviors.

B. Respondents' Usage of Facebook or Twitter

Out of 250 respondents, 99% own a Facebook or Twitter account. This shows the pervasiveness of the social networking sites in Malaysian lifestyles across different age groups. Since 99% of respondents own a social media account, majority of them are likely to have been exposed to relevant political information that influenced their political knowledge, behaviors, decisions and actions.

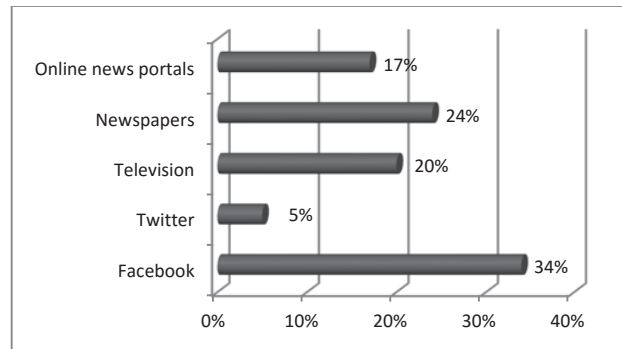### C. Respondents' Consumption of Various Media

Fig. 2 The Media on Which Respondents Have Watched and Read Political News

TABLE II
CROSS TABULATION OF RESPONDENTS' AGE GROUPS AND IF THEY HAVE EVER WATCHED OR READ POLITICAL NEWS ON FACEBOOK

			No	Yes	Total
Age	18 - 21	Count	7	77	84
		% of Total	8.33%	91.67%	100%
	22 - 25	Count	8	107	115
		% of Total	6.96%	93.04%	100%
	26 - 35	Count	2	33	35
		% of Total	5.71%	94.29%	100%
	36 - 40 and above	Count	5	11	16
		% of Total	31.25%	68.75%	100%

Fig. 2 shows that Facebook claimed the highest percentage of 34% on which respondents watch and read political news. Followed by newspapers at 24% and television at 20%, closely behind is online news portals such as Malaysiakini.com, at 17%, and Twitter has the lowest percentage of 5%. However, the age factor should play a part in the consumption of various media for political news as shown in Table II. This result shows that Facebook (FB) is pervasive among majority of respondents, breaking down age barriers. In the interview, politician from ruling party has opined that the social media has a significant role in passing info to the public. Politician from opposition party has also agreed, stating that social media has been instrumental, especially in the urban areas, in increasing the political awareness of those who are online, including the youth. This influence started after 2008, especially with the growing importance of FB and to a lesser extent, Twitter.

Surprisingly, Facebook has also pervaded older age groups as shown in Table II that more than half of age group 36 years old and above have consumed political news on Facebook.

TABLE III
CROSS TABULATION OF RESPONDENTS' AGE GROUPS AND IF THEY HAVE EVER WATCHED OR READ POLITICAL NEWS ON TELEVISION

			No	**Yes**	Total
Age	18 – 21	Count	39	45	84
		% of Total	46.43%	53.57%	100%
	22 – 25	Count	54	61	115
		% of Total	46.96%	53.04%	100%
	26 – 35	Count	14	21	35
		% of Total	40%	60%	100%
	36 - 40 and above	Count	12	4	16
		% of Total	75%	25%	100%

On a more significant note, age group 26-35 has a slightly higher rate of "yes" for political news consumption on television. On the other hand, older respondents above the age of 36 years old have a significantly higher percentage of "no" to television consumption of political news (75%).

TABLE IV
CROSS TABULATION OF RESPONDENTS' AGE GROUPS AND IF THEY HAVE EVER READ POLITICAL NEWS ON NEWSPAPERS

			No	**Yes**	Total
Age	18 - 21	Count	34	50	84
		% of Total	40.48%	59.52%	100%
	22 - 25	Count	37	78	115
		% of Total	32.17%	67.83%	100%
	26 - 35	Count	9	26	35
		% of Total	25.71%	72.29%	100%
	36 - 40 and above	Count	5	11	16
		% of Total	31.25%	68.75%	100%

Majority of respondents across all age groups have read political news on newspaper. Notably, responses from this age group of 26-35 have been consistent over the previous figures on their consumption on Facebook and television. Data shows that respondents within the age group 26-35 are regular consumers of at least the above three media for political news.

Table V shows respondents' consumption of political news on online news portals. Majority across all age groups have answered "No". This can help us speculate that more than half of respondents do not habitually consume political news on online news portals. It can be presumed that majority of respondents prefer soft news over hard news from official political news sites in their online consumption behaviors. As mentioned in theoretical framework, the Slackivism theory suggests that online activism is a form of "lazy activism". Results support the second hypothesis that *social media offers high selectivity but low in focus and offline participation.*

Table VI shows cross tabulation of respondents' age and if the social media make them more aware about politics than other media. The highest percentage of "Agree" votes falls to age group 26 -5 while, understandably, the lowest goes to the oldest age group 36-40 and above.

Although majority of respondents across all age groups agreed to the above statement, but the older category may find SNS a newer medium compared to traditional media. They may have more confidence and are more used to traditional media.

Age group 26-35 remained an outstanding age category in political awareness in various media.

TABLE V
CROSS TABULATION OF RESPONDENTS' AGE GROUPS AND IF THEY HAVE EVER WATCHED OR READ POLITICAL NEWS ON ONLINE NEWS PORTAL

			No	**Yes**	Total
Age	18 - 21	Count	52	32	84
		% of Total	61.9%	38.1%	100%
	22 - 25	Count	59	56	115
		% of Total	51.3%	48.7%	100%
	26 - 35	Count	18	17	35
		% of Total	51.43%	48.57%	100%
	36 - 40 and above	Count	9	7	16
		% of Total	56.25%	43.75%	100%

TABLE VI
CROSS TABULATION OF AGE AND IF SNS MAKE RESPONDENTS MORE AWARE ABOUT POLITICS

			Agree	Disagree	Total
Age	18 - 21	Count	74	10	84
		% of Total	88.1%	11.9%	100%
	22 - 25	Count	99	16	115
		% of Total	86.1%	13.9%	100%
	26 - 35	Count	33	2	35
		% of Total	94.29%	5.71%	100%
	36 - 40 and above	Count	10	6	16
		% of Total	62.5%	37.5%	100%

D. Political Behavior

TABLE VII
RESPONDENTS' RESPONSE TO STATEMENT "I ALWAYS DOUBLE CHECK A FACEBOOK POLITICAL NEWS"

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	60	24.0	24.0
Agree	134	53.6	77.6
Disagree	50	20.0	97.6
Strongly Disagree	6	2.4	100.0
Total	250	100.0	

Table VII shows if respondents are proactive citizens in the realm of social media. Slightly more than half of respondents, 53.6% have agreed, followed by 24% who strongly agreed. Hence, it can be speculated that most respondents are proactive and will confirm if political news are truly believable. Politician from ruling party has remarked that young voters would easily receive more fake information and believe it to satisfy their emotional need instead of facts. He advocated that this is why we need more training in terms of doing research to differentiate what is true and false. Nonetheless, Politician from opposition party believed that the social media opens an equal platform where users' views and opinions are somewhat 'moderated' by the views of others within their own circle of friends.

Table VIII is significant because it shows the respondents' perception of Facebook's news trustworthiness despite its usefulness in GE13. However, only a minor difference is found between "agree" and "disagree" votes. 48.8% majority of respondents agreed to the statement while 41.6% disagreed. It is apparent that more than half of all respondents hold opposing

views with only a slim majority who agreed that Facebook news are believable. This also goes to project that more respondents believe and accept political news reported in Facebook.

TABLE VIII
CROSS TABULATION OF AGE AND IF FACEBOOK IS BELIEVABLE

			Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Age	18 - 21	Count	2	37	36	9	84
		% within Age	2.4%	44.0%	42.9%	10.7%	100.0%
		% within I think political news on Facebook is believable	33.3%	30.3%	34.6%	50.0%	33.6%
		% of Total	.8%	14.8%	14.4%	3.6%	33.6%
	22 - 25	Count	3	60	45	7	115
		% within Age	2.6%	52.2%	39.1%	6.1%	100.0%
		% within I think political news on Facebook is believable	50.0%	49.2%	43.3%	38.9%	46.0%
		% of Total	1.2%	24.0%	18.0%	2.8%	46.0%
	26 - 35	Count	1	16	16	2	35
		% within Age	2.9%	45.7%	45.7%	5.7%	100.0%
		% within I think political news on Facebook is believable	16.7%	13.1%	15.4%	11.1%	14.0%
		% of Total	.4%	6.4%	6.4%	.8%	14.0%
	36 - 40 and above	Count	0	9	7	0	16
		% within Age	.0%	56.3%	43.8%	.0%	100.0%
		% within I think political news on Facebook is believable	.0%	7.4%	6.7%	.0%	6.4%
		% of Total	.0%	3.6%	2.8%	.0%	6.4%
Total		Count	6	122	104	18	250
		% within Age	2.4%	48.8%	41.6%	7.2%	100.0%
		% within I think political news on Facebook is believable	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	2.4%	48.8%	41.6%	7.2%	100.0%

TABLE IX
CROSS TABULATION OF AGE AND IF RESPONDENTS HAVE HAD BELIEVED FALSE NEWS

			Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Age	18 - 21	Count	7	50	22	5	84
		% of Total	2.8%	20.0%	8.8%	2.0%	33.6%
	22 - 25	Count	13	73	28	1	115
		% of Total	5.2%	29.2%	11.2%	.4%	46.0%
	26 - 35	Count	3	20	12	0	35
		% of Total	1.2%	8.0%	4.8%	.0%	14.0%
	36 - 40 and above	Count	0	6	8	2	16
		% of Total	.0%	2.4%	3.2%	.8%	6.4%
Total		Count	23	149	70	8	250
		% of Total	9.2%	59.6%	28.0%	3.2%	100.0%

Majority of all respondents (59.6%) have agreed that they actually believed some false political news in FB. The younger age groups 18-21 and 22-25 have contributed an outstanding portion, at 20% and 29.2% respectively. Older age group 36

years and above have the least percentage and more respondents in this age group have disagreed. This result shows that younger respondents who are more SNS-savvy are more likely to have believed some false political news. This highlights the importance of learning to differentiate what is true and false as advocated by politician from ruling party. This shows that younger users below the age of 26 have shared false political news before. This may imply that younger users are more emotional with political information. While politician from opposition opined that young voters are mobilized by both knowledge and emotions. However, politician from ruling party showed concern with regard to this, saying that emotions can induce immoral perception which can be imparted by social media. He further expressed that every individual is entitled to prerogative rights to believe and promote his preference, but preferences based on the information received from social media must be scrutinized to avoid unfairness.

TABLE X
RESPONSE TO STATEMENT "I HAVE "SHARED" POLITICAL NEWS ON FACEBOOK"

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	26	10.4	10.4
Agree	111	44.4	54.8
Disagree	74	29.6	84.4
Strongly Disagree	39	15.6	100.0
Total	250	100.0	

Result shows that majority of respondents (44.4%) agreed to having shared political news on Facebook and 10.4% strongly agreed, indicating an active behavior politically.

TABLE XI
RESPONSE TO STATEMENT "ON FACEBOOK, I ONLY SPENT LITTLE TIME FOR POLITICAL POSTS"

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	51	20.4	20.4
Agree	138	55.2	75.6
Disagree	45	18.0	93.6
Strongly Disagree	16	6.4	100.0
Total	250	100.0	

Table XI shows respondents' views to statement "On Facebook, I only spent little time for political posts." 55.2% have agreed and 20.4% strongly agreed that they only spent little time for political posts while 18% and 6.4% have disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively. This result shows that users spend only little time for politically-related behaviors. This begs the question if the short time spent is enough for constructive participation. While some is skeptical of this form of "easy activism" where politics is only one click away, politician from opposition party disagreed. He expressed that the social media allows for different levels of activism from just a click to active sharing of views to running your own groups as an admin to using social media activism to increase 'on the ground' activities. Perhaps one click on the Internet can really reshape "on the ground" activities in the real world, politician from ruling party agreed that easy activism is induced

from technology advancement such as emergence of smart phones and "we must be in that way" since it is inevitable.

E. Medium of Preference for Political News and Information

TABLE XII
CHOOSE ONLY ONE MEDIUM FOR POLITICAL NEWS AND INFO

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Newspapers	44	17.6	17.6
Television	32	12.8	30.4
Social Networking Sites	174	69.6	100.0
Total	250	100.0	

Table XII shows respondents' choice of medium for political news and info. Majority of respondents (69.6%), when asked to only choose one medium, opted for social networking sites. However, 17.6% still opted for newspapers and 12.8% for television. This result can help researcher deduce that, despite the rapid pervasiveness of the use of social media in the political context, newspapers and television still play an important role in the lesser sense.

TABLE XIII
CROSS-TABULATION OF AGE AND MEDIUM OF PREFERENCE

			Newspapers	Television	Social Networking Sites	Total
Age	18 - 21	Count	18	14	52	84
		% of Total	7.2%	5.6%	20.8%	33.6%
	22 - 25	Count	19	14	82	115
		% of Total	7.6%	5.6%	32.8%	46.0%
	26 - 35	Count	1	1	33	35
		% of Total	.4%	.4%	13.2%	14.0%
	36 - 40 and above	Count	6	3	7	16
		% of Total	2.4%	1.2%	2.8%	6.4%
Total		Count	44	32	174	250
		% of Total	17.6%	12.8%	69.6%	100.0%

Table XIII elaborates with a cross tabulation of age group and only one medium of preference for political news. Age groups 18-21, 22-25 and 26-35 have opted for social networking sites with 20.8%, 32.8% and 13.2% of votes respectively. It can be deduced that the younger age classes are more dependent on social media for political news if they were to choose only one. It could imply that they prefer less pro-government news and more equal and fair perspectives.

F. Degree of Political Action

Majority of respondents (89.6%) across all age groups have agreed that Facebook helps youths to be politically active. Facebook helped increase political awareness, knowledge and arguably, action.

Table XV shows that slightly more than half of all respondents did not join political groups on Facebook. It is possible that among the disagreeing 53.6% respondents, political awareness was penetrative solely by the sharing of information in Facebook Newsfeeds among own circle of added friends.

TABLE XIV
CROSS- TABULATION OF AGE AND IF FACEBOOK HELPS YOUTHS TO BE POLITICALLY ACTIVE

			Agree	Disagree	Total
Age	18 – 21	Count	77	7	84
		% of Total	30.8%	2.8%	33.6%
	22 – 25	Count	100	15	115
		% of Total	40.0%	6.0%	46.0%
	26 – 35	Count	33	2	35
		% of Total	13.2%	.8%	14.0%
	36 - 40 and above	Count	14	2	16
		% of Total	5.6%	.8%	6.4%
Total		Count	224	26	250
		% of Total	89.6%	10.4%	100.0%

TABLE XV
RESPONDENTS' RESPONSE ON STATEMENT "I HAVE JOINED FACEBOOK POLITICAL GROUPS FOR UPDATES AND ACTIVITIES"

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Agree	116	46.4	46.4
Disagree	134	53.6	100.0
Total	250	100.0	

TABLE XVI
CROSS- TABULATION OF AGE AND STATEMENT "I SHARED POLITICAL ACTIVITIES (E.G.: RALLY, PROTEST OR OTHERS.) ON FACEBOOK OR TWITTER"

			Agree	Disagree	Total
Age	18 - 21	Count	33	51	84
		% of Total	13.2%	20.4%	33.6%
	22 - 25	Count	48	67	115
		% of Total	19.2%	26.8%	46.0%
	26 - 35	Count	14	21	35
		% of Total	5.6%	8.4%	14.0%
	36 - 40 and above	Count	4	12	16
		% of Total	1.6%	4.8%	6.4%
Total		Count	99	151	250
		% of Total	39.6%	60.4%	100.0%

Table XVI shows cross tabulation of age and the statement "I shared political activities (e.g.: rally, protest or others) on Facebook or Twitter". 60.4% of respondents have disagreed while 39.6% have agreed.

TABLE XVII
RESPONSE TO STATEMENT "I "UN-FRIENDED" PEOPLE WHO TALK BAD ABOUT THE POLITICAL PARTY I SUPPORT"

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Agree	24	9.6	9.6
Disagree	226	90.4	100.0
Total	250	100.0	

Table XVII shows respondents' response to statement "I 'un-friended' people who talk bad about the political party I support". 90.4% of majority disagreed. Only 9.6% agreed to having done so.

Table XVIII shows respondents' response to statement "most of my Facebook friends support the same party". 64.8% of respondents agreed while 35.2% disagreed to the statement. This helps to test if respondents' political behaviors would be limited to only like-minded circle of friends. Result shows that

majority of respondents have more like-minded friends in social media.

TABLE XVIII
RESPONSE TO STATEMENT "MOST OF MY FACEBOOK FRIENDS SUPPORT THE SAME PARTY AS ME"

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Agree	162	64.8	64.8
Disagree	88	35.2	100.0
Total	250	100.0	

TABLE XIX
RESPONSE TO STATEMENT "POLITICIANS ON FACEBOOK OR TWITTER HAVE RESPONDED TO MY COMMENTS BEFORE."

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Agree	39	15.6	15.6
Disagree	211	84.4	100.0
Total	250	100.0	

Only 15.6% of respondents have received response from politicians in the social media. However, 84.4% of respondents disagreed. There could be other reasons such as they did not attempt to interact with politicians in SNS and thus were not given the opportunity to communicate with politicians. This is significant to show that the so-called interactive medium of social network does not positively prove that there is interaction between politicians and voters. It can be argued that Facebook remains a one-way and top-down communication between political candidates and voters. There is a critically low index of two-way interaction.

TABLE XX
CROSS TABULATION OF AGE AND STATEMENT "FACEBOOK POLITICAL NEWS/INFO MADE ME WANT TO VOTE!"

			Agree	Disagree	Total
Age	18 - 21	Count	54	30	84
		% of Total	21.6%	12.0%	33.6%
	22 - 25	Count	67	48	115
		% of Total	26.8%	19.2%	46.0%
	26 - 35	Count	24	11	35
		% of Total	9.6%	4.4%	14.0%
	36 - 40 and above	Count	5	11	16
		% of Total	2.0%	4.4%	6.4%
	Total	Count	150	100	250
		% of Total	60.0%	40.0%	100.0%

60%, the majority of all respondents agreed and 40% disagreed. The younger age classes from 18 to 35 have more "agree" votes than "disagree" votes. However, the oldest age group has 11 respondents who disagreed, with only 5 who agreed. Respondents in age class 36-40 and above who disagreed could be due to their rare usage of the social media or less dependency on social media.

G. Political Knowledge

Table XXI shows respondents' views on the statement "Knowing political info helped me to understand it is important to vote." Majority of respondents have agreed (60%) and strongly agreed (34.8%). Political knowledge is vital in the decision-making process throughout political participation and voting. Politician from opposition party argued that young voters are driven by both emotions and knowledge-based reasoning while politician from ruling party opined that they are driven by emotions.

TABLE XXI
KNOWING POLITICAL INFORMATION HELPED ME TO UNDERSTAND IT IS IMPORTANT TO VOTE.

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	87	34.8	34.8
Agree	150	60.0	94.8
Disagree	6	2.4	97.2
Strongly Disagree	7	2.8	100.0
Total	250	100.0	

XI. DISCUSSION

Facebook remains the top medium of preference for political information and news among youths. With the added interactive feature on Facebook, youths may find it more appealing a communication channel. From finding, Facebook is highly credited as the most popularly consumed medium as the source for first-hand and "believable" political news. This prompts a question: Will the General Election outcome be different if Facebook did not come into the Malaysian political scene? Results indicated that voters would still vote if there was no Facebook. However, result also showed a passive response from youths eligible for voting who did not vote for GE13 despite the heated political campaigning on Facebook. On a contradictory note, results shows that Facebook political news or information have made respondents want to vote.

Finding has proven age remains as an important factor in users' preference of media. However, results have indicated that while Facebook has gained the top spot for preferred medium, other media such as newspapers and television are not dispensable. Finding can prove that Facebook has potentially raised political awareness and exposure among young users, for instance, information such as rallies and protests. However, to measure whether or not Facebook is the major driver of youth activism, the subsequent reaction and offline action must be evidenced. From the results, majority did not join political groups, did not share political activities such as rallies or protests, did not invite friends for rallies or protests and did not comment to fight back opposing political posts. These finding indicated that youths are still passive in their cognitive pursuit for political interests despite the highly-charged political campaigning online. Most accept information but do not take proactive and substantial reaction in the discourse of a democratic society.

In argument, Facebook is undeniably a big player in this political game but it has served exceptionally well only as an awareness raiser. The subsequent reaction both online and offline may not meet the required ideals to be constructive. Other driving forces in the political climate are still indispensable. Political history, strategies, peer pressure, family influence and other factors may play significant roles. However, political history may be the backbone for the youth activism, thus the major driving force for political change among youths.

In fact, to a considerable extent, Facebook opened an easy way to political participation. Few will make the effort to explore more, delve deeper, reaffirm information and facts, rationally compare political interests and candidates or even to make a significant stand by defending for political parties. Facebook being the new media has gained an edge to new worthy alternative. Instead, it may bring one side or bias to another extreme end. However, open criticisms and interactive discussions are accessible to users.

Offline action can be measured substantially with their participation in rallies, talks, signing of petitions, sharing of political knowledge, debating on politics, meeting politicians, donating to politicians or other nation-building actions. Results showed that many opined that Facebook political news and information are believable but majority have had believed in false news before. The quality of valid and objective facts in Facebook political news may leave much to be desired. Results showed that Facebook is the most often consumed medium among all other media. It is inaccurate to argue that the emergence of the Internet has fuelled political activism because results have indicated that online news portals were the second least consumed medium for political news despite its interactive benefits compared to traditional newspapers. Question is, will emotion-stirring serve as a stepping stone or stumbling block to truly constructive political reaction?

Furthermore in the finding, the highly acclaimed interactive feature unique to social networking sites did not live up to its name as it is hardly interactive between political candidates and voters. Many have never had personal or communication with the political candidates. It is a top-down model and very often, one-way communication. Results further elaborated that most youths did not participate in Facebook political groups and updates, indicating a passive attitude among youths that may not even attempt to want to interact with politicians.

Finding also shows that youths only spend little time for political news on Facebook. Users may simply browse through and click a "like" as they please. Time spent may not necessarily be equivalent to the degree of constructive political reaction but it does reflect a slacker's act. If users are slacking in spending more time on political participation online, what more in spending more time on participation offline?

XII. CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that the social media, namely Facebook has been a useful, fairly trustworthy and popular medium for political news. Facebook has served as an informing agent which distributes important news and information. Majority of respondents have gained greater knowledge and awareness of political news such as rallies and protests, first-hand from Facebook. In short, Facebook significantly increases political awareness among youths compared to previous Elections. To a lesser extent, it increases also political knowledge among youths. Emotions are higher among young voters in Facebook, rather than knowledge of political candidates or parties. Social media may not be the major trigger to political activism among youths in GE13 as most respondents opined that they would still vote without Facebook. Other factors could be political

campaigning, Malaysia's political climate, age, peer pressure or others. Furthermore, the interactive feature that Facebook boasts about is negatively supported by research finding in terms of interaction between political candidates and voters.

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