



# The Role of Social Media in Shaping Political Engagement of Young Voters In Selangor During The 15th Malaysia General Election Campaigns

**Muhammad Fitri Bin Ab Hamid@Fauzi<sup>1</sup>, Munirah Binti Iias<sup>2</sup>  
Norherizan Binti Abd Moen<sup>3</sup>**  
[fit.fauzi@gmail.com](mailto:fit.fauzi@gmail.com)<sup>1</sup>, [munirah@unisel.edu.my](mailto:munirah@unisel.edu.my)<sup>2</sup>

Universiti Selangor<sup>1,2</sup>  
Tunku Abdul Rahman University of Management and  
Technology<sup>3</sup>

## Abstract

*This study examines the significant influence of social media on youth political engagement during the 15th Malaysian General Election, held on November 19, 2022. This election was notable for its unprecedented youth voter participation and a highly digitized campaign, particularly driven by a recent reduction in the voting age to 18 years old. This research investigates how digital interactions shaped electoral outcomes among Malaysian youth aged 18 to 33 in Selangor. A structured questionnaire was administered to 408 respondents via purposive sampling from December 2022 to February 2023, gathering data on social media usage and political perceptions. The study found that social media played a significant role in shaping political engagement among young voters in Selangor during GE15. TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter emerged as the most influential platforms, mainly due to their fast, visual, and interactive content formats. Young voters relied heavily on these platforms to obtain political information, evaluate party narratives, and follow campaign updates. Engagement was driven by factors such as peer influence, perceived credibility of information, and personal political interest. However, high levels of online exposure did not always translate into active participation, as some users remained skeptical about the accuracy of the content. Political parties that utilized short videos, influencer collaborations, and consistent messaging were more successful in capturing the attention of young people. Overall, social media enhanced political awareness but had varied effects on actual political participation.*

**Keywords:** *Malaysia GE-15, political engagement, social media strategies, Twitter dominance, young voters.*

## Introduction

This study investigates the role of social media in shaping political engagement among young voters in Selangor during Malaysia's 15th General Election (GE15) campaigns in 2022. The research focuses on the information and techniques consumed from political social media pages, examining the frequency of content uploads, patterns of social media usage, and strategies employed by political leaders and parties. This chapter outlines the study's background, problem statement, objectives, and research questions.

The rise of social media has significantly transformed political communication in Malaysia, influencing citizens, political candidates, and the electoral process. Increasing reliance on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok has created new arenas for political discourse, where incidental exposure to political content can motivate greater political engagement (Lee & Xenos, 2022). This transformation was particularly evident during the 2018 general elections, widely regarded as a watershed moment in Malaysian political history. Social media platforms became central to political mobilization, fundamentally altering traditional methods of disseminating political ideas and shaping public opinion (Hamid & Rahman, 2018).

In recent years, social media has dramatically transformed Malaysia's political landscape, particularly influencing young voters' engagement and participation. Platforms have become primary sources of political information, with studies showing that a significant proportion of first-time voters relied on social media for election-related knowledge (Hamedan et al., 2019). By GE15 in 2022, the proliferation of digital platforms had accelerated these changes. TikTok, in particular, emerged as a powerful battleground for political messaging, enabling parties to reach younger demographics through short-form video content (Nurul Azmira Abdullah, 2023; Tapsell, 2022). Studies highlight that social media not only facilitated political communication but also reshaped the landscape of electoral participation, especially among first-time voters (Yahaya, Adnan, & Hassan, 2025).

Despite widespread usage, the specific influence of social media on young voters during GE15 remains underexplored. The expansion of digital platforms shifted political communication away from traditional media, requiring political actors to reevaluate strategies to effectively engage youth (Ali Salman, Mohd Azul, Mohammad Agus, & Mohd Yusof, 2018; Knoll et al., 2020).

The central issue lies in identifying which platforms and content types most effectively appealed to young voters in Selangor, a state with a large, technologically adept electorate. While Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok were popular, evidence remains limited on which platforms most influenced political opinions and inspired voter engagement (Noorman et al., 2024).

Political parties also faced challenges in strategically employing social media to connect with young voters. Engagement tactics such as grassroots mobilization, influencer partnerships, interactive content, and targeted advertising were widely used, yet their



effectiveness varied (Saad, 2025). Without a comprehensive understanding, parties struggled to maximize youth participation.

Hence, this research aims to fill these gaps by examining how social media usage affected political engagement among young voters in Selangor during GE15. It investigates platform effectiveness, content resonance, and strategies employed by political parties. The findings will provide valuable insights for political communicators, strategists, and policymakers seeking to enhance youth participation and foster inclusive political communication practices.

## **Literature Review**

This literature review synthesizes insights to provide a comprehensive understanding of how social media has reshaped Malaysia's electoral landscape. It begins by conceptualizing social media, then examines usage patterns among young voters, campaign strategies, impacts on political engagement, and theoretical frameworks. The aim is to critically assess both the opportunities and challenges posed by digital platforms in Malaysia's democratic process. As outlined earlier, this concept paper presents a review of the following components;

### **The concept of social media**

The role of social media in shaping political engagement has become one of the most significant transformations in contemporary democratic practice. In Malaysia, this shift is particularly evident across the last four general elections, from GE12 in 2008 to GE15 in 2022. Each election cycle has demonstrated an increasing reliance on digital platforms, not only as channels of communication but as arenas where political identities are constructed, contested, and mobilized. Scholars have consistently highlighted that social media is no longer a supplementary medium but a central force in political discourse (Hamid & Rahman, 2018; Salman et al., 2018).

The Malaysian case is distinctive because of its youthful electorate and rapid digital adoption. With the implementation of Undi-18, lowering the voting age to 18, the proportion of young voters surged, making them a decisive bloc in GE15 (Ahmad Tajuddin et al., 2023). This demographic is deeply embedded in digital culture, consuming information primarily through platforms such as TikTok, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. Consequently, political parties have had to recalibrate their strategies, shifting from traditional rallies and print media to influencer collaborations, meme campaigns, and short-form video content (Jalli, 2023; Malay Mail, 2023).

Globally, similar transformations have been observed. The 2008 U.S. presidential campaign, often described as the first "social media election," demonstrated the power of platforms like Facebook in mobilizing grassroots support (Medvic, 2011; Al Deen & Hendricks, 2012). In Malaysia, GE13 in 2013 was widely recognized as the country's first social media election, with Facebook and Twitter dominating campaign strategies (Sern & Zanuddin, 2014). By GE14 in 2018, WhatsApp and Facebook were central to information dissemination, contributing to Pakatan Harapan's historic victory (Hamid & Rahman, 2018; Rahim, 2019). GE15 further extended this trajectory, with TikTok

emerging as the new battleground for youth engagement (Ling, 2023). Rahman, 2018; Rahim, 2019). GE15 further extended this trajectory, with TikTok emerging as the new battleground for youth engagement (Ling, 2023).

### **Social Media and Political Campaigns**

Research on youth political engagement and social media has expanded rapidly in recent years, especially as digital platforms reshape how information is accessed, shared, and interpreted. Scholars generally agree that social media no longer functions only as a tool for entertainment or interpersonal communication; it has become a central space for political learning and civic expression. This shift is particularly visible among young people, who tend to be early adopters of digital technologies and prefer fast, visually driven platforms such as Instagram, Twitter (now X), and TikTok. As a result, understanding how these platforms influence political attitudes and participation has become a key concern in contemporary political communication research.

A consistent theme in the literature is the relationship between social media usage and political engagement. Yahaya, Adnan, and Hassan (2025) found that youth political participation during Malaysia's 15th General Election (GE15) was strongly influenced by performance expectancy and social influence. Their study, grounded in UTAUT2, shows that young Malaysians are more likely to engage politically online when they perceive social media as useful, relevant, and endorsed by peers. This aligns with international literature, which suggests that peer validation plays a significant role in shaping political behaviour among youth, particularly in digital environments where social comparison is intensified.

Another major strand of research focuses on political information-seeking behaviour. Azwar and Kho (2022) highlighted that young Malaysians rely heavily on Twitter when seeking political updates, especially during election cycles. Their work shows that political self-efficacy, perceived information quality, trust in government, and situational political involvement influence why and how youth turn to social media for political content. The findings emphasise that digital political engagement is not random or passive; users actively evaluate the credibility and usefulness of the information they encounter. This perspective is further supported by studies that show how young citizens prefer platforms that provide quick, real-time political updates, strengthening their sense of awareness and involvement.

TikTok has recently emerged as a platform of interest within political communication research. According to Chang Yeow, Pandian, and Jamir Singh (2024), TikTok now plays a major role in shaping the political views of Malaysian undergraduates. The authors show that TikTok's short-form video format, combined with algorithm-driven exposure, contributes to higher engagement with political messages among first-time voters under Undi18. Their findings reflect a growing global trend in which TikTok has become an influential political tool due to its accessibility, entertainment value, and user-friendly editing features. This demonstrates how political actors must adapt to emerging digital patterns if they hope to connect effectively with younger demographics.

Despite growing reliance on social media, scholars caution that usage does not always guarantee action. Tan (2024) argues that while Malaysian youth actively consume

political information through social media, this does not necessarily increase their likelihood of voting. Tan's study reveals that traditional factors—such as political interest and party loyalty—remain more powerful predictors of voter turnout. This suggests that social media may enhance political awareness but not always political participation. The distinction between awareness and action is crucial, as it highlights the need for deeper engagement strategies rather than simply increasing the volume of digital content.

The issue of credibility and trust also appears frequently in the literature. Sanawi and Marzuki (2025) report that although young adults rely heavily on social media for political information, they do not always trust the content they encounter. Their study shows that perceived credibility influences how political attitudes are formed and how users evaluate competing narratives. This finding is important because it challenges the assumption that young users are easily persuaded by online content. Instead, the literature suggests that youth often navigate political information with caution, balancing exposure with critical evaluation. This aligns with global research that points to growing skepticism due to misinformation, biased algorithms, and the spread of unverified narratives.

From a theoretical standpoint, scholars have used various frameworks to explain the relationship between digital platforms and political behaviour. Social Exchange Theory (SET), as applied by Anyaogu et al. (2023), argues that youth engage politically online when they perceive meaningful “returns” such as social approval, shared identity, or increased political influence. This perspective highlights the relational nature of online political participation, where individuals respond not only to information but also to social cues from their networks. Similarly, studies using the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) show that perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness strongly shape how political actors adopt platforms like Facebook and TikTok for campaigning during elections (Anuar et al., 2023). These theoretical approaches are useful because they show that digital political engagement is both technologically driven and socially constructed.

Within the Malaysian context, the focus on Selangor adds valuable nuance to the literature. Selangor is economically advanced, politically competitive, and highly interconnected, making it a fertile environment for digital political communication. With high internet penetration and a diverse population, young voters in Selangor often serve as a microcosm for broader national trends. Their engagement patterns offer important insights into which platforms, messages, and strategies are most effective during elections such as GE15. Although growing research exists on youth engagement nationwide, detailed studies that concentrate on Selangor remain limited—highlighting a gap that this research seeks to address.

Overall, the literature shows that social media plays a significant role in shaping political engagement among Malaysian youth, but its effects are neither uniform nor straightforward. While platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter enhance access to political information, they also introduce challenges such as misinformation, low trust, and superficial engagement. The research suggests that youth engagement is influenced by multiple factors including self-efficacy, peer influence, platform design, political

interest, and credibility assessments. What remains underexplored is how these various factors interact within the specific context of a major election such as GE15, especially among young voters in urbanised states like Selangor. Addressing this gap can help offer a more comprehensive understanding of digital political participation and inform strategies for future engagement.

## Method

This study employed a cross-sectional quantitative survey design to examine the influence of social media on political engagement among young voters aged 18–33 in Selangor during the 15th Malaysian General Election (November 2022). The research instrument was a structured self-administered questionnaire comprising demographic items, 5-point Likert-scale questions, and multiple-choice items. Items measuring platform effectiveness and content engagement were adapted from Knoll et al. (2020) and Lee and Xenos (2022), whereas items on political campaign strategies were adapted from Salman et al. (2018) and Jalli (2023), with minor modifications for the Malaysian context. The questionnaire was pre-tested with 35 respondents in October 2022, and Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.81 to 0.92 across all constructs, indicating good to excellent reliability.

Data were collected from December 2022 to February 2023 exclusively via Google Forms. The questionnaire link was distributed through university networks (UNISEL, UiTM, and other public campuses), youth organisations, and relevant WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, and Telegram groups in Selangor. Purposive sampling was used to ensure participants were registered voters aged 18–33 who actively used social media during the GE-15 campaign period, resulting in 408 complete and valid responses.

Responses were analysed using IBM SPSS Version 27. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) were computed to identify dominant platforms, most engaging content types, and effective campaign strategies. Although the use of purposive sampling and post-election data collection limits generalisation beyond Selangor.

## Findings and Discussion

This section presents the core results gathered from the study examining how social media platforms influenced the political engagement of young voters (18–30 years old) in Selangor during the 15th Malaysian General Election. The findings highlight patterns of platform usage, content preferences, engagement behaviours, and the effectiveness of political communication strategies used by parties and candidates.

### Demography of respondents

A total of 408 young voters from Selangor participated in the study. The demographic distribution is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 408)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage(%)
Gender	Male	160	39.2
	Female	248	60.8
Age Group	18–21 years	184	45.1
	22–25 years	210	51.5
	26–29 years	11	2.7
	30–33 years	3	0.7
Education Level	Diploma/Certificate	110	27.0
	Bachelor’s Degree	295	72.3
	Master’s Degree	3	0.7
Occupation	Student	195	47.8
	Full-time employee	192	47.1
	Part-time employee	21	5.1
District (Selangor)	Petaling	259	63.5
	Klang	40	9.8
	Sepang	36	8.8
	Kuala Langat	26	6.4
	Hulu Selangor	16	3.9
	Gombak	11	2.7
	Hulu Langat	10	2.5
	Sabak Bernam	10	2.5

Most of the respondents were female (60.8%). Most were aged between 22–25 years (51.5%), followed by ages 18–21 (45.1%), indicating a sample dominated by early young adults. Educational levels were predominantly Bachelor’s degree holders (72.3%), reflecting a well-educated voter demographic. Nearly half were students (47.8%), while another 47.1% were employed full-time, showing a balanced representation of youth in education and employment sectors.

Geographically, most respondents came from Petaling district (63.5%), aligning with its high population density and strong digital connectivity. This demographic composition reflects a digitally active, educated, and politically aware youth population, suitable for a study focused on social media engagement.

### ***Social Media Usage***

The data reveal a high level of political engagement on social media, with 87.5% of respondents following political leaders, parties, or pages. This high engagement suggests that social media is a significant platform for political interaction among young voters in Selangor.

Table 2. Social Media Usage Among the voters

Response	Frequency	Percentages
Yes	357	87.5
No	51	12.5

### *Platforms Used to Obtain Political Information*

Table 3 shows that the most effective social media platform used by the young voters to obtain political information during the election campaigns. Twitter (77.2%) emerged as the most influential platform for political information among young voters. Its real-time nature, continuous updates, and wide circulation of political content made it central to political engagement during GE15. TikTok (75.2%) served as the second-most influential platform due to its algorithm-driven short videos, making political messages highly discoverable and engaging. YouTube and Instagram both recorded substantial political content use (68.2%), though Instagram was less preferred for in-depth political information. Facebook registered zero political use, confirming a generational shift away from older platforms. Overall, the data demonstrates that platforms offering immediacy, interactivity, and video-based communication are the most effective for influencing political engagement among young voters in Selangor.

Table 3. Platforms Used to Obtain Political Information

Platform	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Twitter (X)	315	77.2
TikTok	307	75.2
Instagram	279	68.2
YouTube	279	68.2
Other	3	0.7
Facebook	0	0.0

### *Types of Engaging Political Content*

The results showed that videos were the most consumed content (82.8%), indicating a strong preference for audiovisual narratives that simplify political messages. News articles (77.2%), podcasts (70.6%), and memes (69.6%) further highlight the youth's reliance on both informative and entertaining forms of political communication.

Engagement with infographics (60.5%) shows that concise, data-driven visuals remain effective. Meanwhile, only 18.4% engaged with long speeches and 12.5% with political advertisements, reflecting declining interest in traditional, one-way political

communication. Personal stories and testimonials (51.5%) demonstrate the importance of authenticity and reliability in influencing youth political perceptions.

Table 4. Types of Political Content Engaged with by Respondents (N = 408)

<b>Content Type</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentages</b>
Videos	338	82.8
News articles	315	77.2
Podcasts	288	70.6
Memes	284	69.6
Infographics	247	60.5
Personal stories/testimonials	210	51.5
Long political speeches	75	18.4
Political advertisements	51	12.5

### *Strategies for Effective Use of Social Media by Political Parties*

The most effective strategy identified was targeted messaging (65%), reflecting the growing importance of personalised, issue-focused political communication. Hashtag campaigns (39.4%) and influencer endorsements (36.8%) also gained traction, contributing to the visibility and virality of political messages.

Personal narratives from candidates (51.5%) were particularly impactful, reinforcing youth preference for authenticity and reliable political communication. Meanwhile, livestream sessions (21.6%) and paid advertising (12.5%) were significantly less noticed, showing the limited effectiveness of traditional campaign techniques among young digital audiences.

Table 5. Social Media Strategies Noticed by Respondents (N = 408)

<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Targeted messaging	265	65.0
Personal narratives from candidates	210	51.5
Influencer endorsements	150	36.8
Livestream sessions	88	21.6
Paid advertising	51	12.5

## **Conclusion**

This study has demonstrated that social media plays a decisive role in shaping the political engagement of young voters in Selangor during Malaysia's 15th General Election. The findings reveal that platforms such as Twitter, TikTok, and YouTube were

most influential, reflecting a generational shift away from Facebook and WhatsApp, which dominated earlier elections. Young voters were particularly responsive to visual and entertaining content—videos, memes, and podcasts—while personal stories and influencer endorsements fostered relatability and trust.

The evidence underscores that targeted messaging, grassroots mobilization, and influencer collaborations were the most effective strategies for engaging youth. These approaches leveraged parasocial relationships and algorithmic amplification to reach audiences in ways traditional campaigns could not. However, the study also highlighted significant challenges: the rapid spread of misinformation and disinformation, the risk of polarization along ethnic and linguistic lines, and the tendency toward superficial engagement, where exposure to political content did not always translate into voter turnout.

Taken together, the findings confirm that social media is not merely a supplementary tool but a central arena of political discourse in Malaysia. It empowers young voters by democratizing access to information and providing alternative spaces for political participation, yet it simultaneously exposes them to manipulation and instability. The implications are clear: political parties must adopt personalized, dynamic, and ethical communication strategies, while policymakers must strengthen digital literacy and regulatory frameworks to safeguard electoral integrity.

Ultimately, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how digital platforms are reshaping Malaysia's democratic process. By highlighting both the opportunities and risks of social media engagement, it provides valuable guidance for political communicators, strategists, and policymakers seeking to engage young voters more effectively. As Malaysia moves toward future elections, the challenge will be to harness the mobilizing power of social media while mitigating its vulnerabilities, ensuring that youth participation strengthens rather than destabilizes the democratic landscape.

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