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## ONLINE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN MALAYSIA (2022-2024): A STRUCTURED REVIEW

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### Abstract:

This systematic literature review examines online political participation in Malaysia from 2022 to 2024, focusing on the growing influence of digital platforms on civic engagement among Malaysian youth. The need for an updated and structured overview of this phenomenon drives the research. An extensive search was conducted across reputable databases such as Scopus and Web of Science, utilizing the PRISMA framework, resulting in the inclusion of 26 primary studies. The findings are categorized into three themes: (1) Youth Political Participation and Engagement, (2) Social Media and Political Discourse, and (3) Impact of Digital Media on Society and Policy. Key insights include a significant rise in political discussions on platforms like Twitter and TikTok, along with a strong correlation between digital engagement and political knowledge. Nonetheless, challenges persist, including misinformation, media literacy deficits, and disillusionment with traditional political structures, which hinder the transition from online engagement to offline political action. The results highlight the necessity for enhanced educational initiatives aimed at improving media literacy and fostering critical engagement among young Malaysians. In conclusion, this review provides a structured overview of current trends and challenges in online political participation in Malaysia, contributing to the understanding of its implications for future research and policy development. Ultimately, it seeks to promote a more engaged and informed electorate in an evolving digital landscape.

### Keywords:

Online Political Participation, Civic Engagement, Youth, Digital Platforms

## Introduction

Over the past decade, political participation in Malaysia has been increasingly shifted online (Abbott, 2013); (Tapsell, 2018). Historically, limited political information in traditional media led citizens to seek alternative sources online (Gainous et al., 2019; Steele, 2009). This shift gained momentum around the 2008 national election, with studies showing that online media use is linked to higher political participation among Malaysians, though not necessarily to voting likelihood (Abdullah et al., 2021; Nadiah & Mohamed, 2019; Willnat et al., 2013). Social networking sites, political blogs, and other digital content have enabled more active political engagement (Ekström & Shehata, 2018; Halim et al., 2021; Leong, 2015). Comparative research highlights that online political participation among Malaysian youth is influenced by accessible political content, political interest, and satisfaction with policies (Khan et al., 2019). Cognitive engagement theory indicates that political knowledge moderates the depth of online political engagement in Malaysia. Social media enables citizens to voice support or opposition more democratically (Mohd Sani et al., 2016).

During the 2018 general election, digital platforms played a critical role in mobilizing youth (Ahmad & Mohd Zain, 2021; Nadzri, 2018; Seman et al., 2019). The “digital rhizomorph” concept illustrates how Malaysian youth navigate online spaces for experimental, collaborative political engagement (Mohamad Razali & Ilham Hussin, 2021; Yin & Fei, 2022) while movements like Bersih exemplify social media’s role in political activism (Lim, 2017). However, challenges persist; studies show that while social media is linked to political interest and knowledge, it does not always lead to political action (Halim et al., 2021). Additionally, laws such as the Anti-Fake News Act 2018 affect netizen behavior and online political interactions (Seman et al., 2019). These factors underscore the complex relationship between online platforms, regulatory frameworks, and political participation in Malaysia. To address this complexity, this paper provides a systematic literature review of online political participation in Malaysia from 2022 to 2024, emphasizing the influence of digital platforms on youth civic engagement. The review aims to offer an updated and structured perspective on current trends and challenges, contributing to a clearer understanding of this evolving phenomenon.

## Literature Review

Online political participation in Malaysia has surged with the rise of social media, which has become a key tool for political communication and mobilization. S.-H. Ting & Wan Ahmad (2022) show that social media enhances political participation by mediating factors like perceived usefulness and enjoyment, especially among Malaysian youth. However, despite increased engagement, political knowledge has minimal impact on participation levels, suggesting limitations in social media’s role in promoting informed discourse. Ahmed & Masood (2024) similarly found that while social media facilitates political discussions, privacy concerns discourage active participation, particularly in conservative contexts like Malaysia. Ahmed & Masood (2024) and M. F. Kasmani (2023) found that privacy concerns negatively impact political participation, as individuals with strong privacy worries avoid online discourse, often due to restrictive cultural and regulatory influences. Kasmani noted that young voters, particularly those in the Undi-18 category, favor Facebook and Twitter for political discussions, perceiving them as more credible, though TikTok has recently gained traction among first-time voters for its informal and engaging content (Veerappan et al., 2023).

Zainon et al. (2017) found that platforms like Facebook and Twitter significantly boost political engagement among Malaysian university students due to their accessibility and reach, reflecting a shift from traditional to digital political engagement, especially among youth. Similarly, Rauf et al. (2016) observed that social media access enhances political interest, contributing to greater online participation. Media framing also plays a role in shaping political engagement in Malaysia. Rajaratnam et al. (2020) and Mohamed & Iddid (2019) reported that biased portrayals of women leaders during the 14th General Election limited their visibility by emphasizing superficial traits over leadership, which could deter wider participation. Online news on platforms like Facebook also engages readers interactively, allowing users to shape public opinion through comments, which underscores the dual role of media as both a facilitator and a barrier to engagement. Government restrictions on online political expression affect participation as well. Johns & Cheong (2019) observed that censorship and tactics like astroturfing influenced youth involvement in Malaysia's Bersih movement, with state interventions reducing online engagement and expression. These findings suggest that supportive policies could better align digital engagement with democratic principles.

In a different study, Chan et al. (2019) found that both like-minded and cross-cutting networks on social media foster political engagement in Malaysia, though they may also create echo chambers, underscoring the need for balanced interactions to support a more deliberative democratic culture among netizens. Current literature underscores certain knowledge gaps, notably regarding socio-economic diversity in online political participation and the long-term effects of digital engagement. While studies by Zainon et al. (2017) and Rauf et al. (2016) focus primarily on university students, more comprehensive research is needed to assess how socio-economic factors influence political engagement across different demographics. Moreover, future research could explore the longitudinal impact of online political participation on real-world actions, as most studies concentrate on short-term engagement patterns. Addressing these gaps would provide a more holistic view of the role of online political participation in Malaysia's democratic development.

### Research Question

Defining research questions (RQs) is essential in the planning phase and forms the foundation of an SLR, guiding the review process (Kitchenham, 2007). Clear questions support a structured literature search, helping to include key studies, reduce bias, and focus the analysis. They also aid in organizing findings, making the review clearer and more actionable. Additionally, well-defined questions enhance transparency and reproducibility, aligning the review with its main objectives, whether identifying gaps, evaluating effectiveness, or analyzing trends. This SLR aims to assess the current state of the field, using the PICO framework, a qualitative research tool suggested by (Lockwood et al., 2015), to structure these questions. PICO stands for Population, Interest, and Context:

1. Population (P): Refers to the target group or participants in the study, specifying who the research focuses on, such as a particular demographic, or community.
2. Interest (I): Denotes the main phenomenon or focus of interest, which could be a specific experience, behavior, intervention, or issue the research aims to explore.
3. Context (Co): Defines the setting or environment in which the population and interest are situated, such as a geographical location, cultural background, or any other relevant context.

Thus, using the PICO framework, this study identified three research questions:

1. How does online political participation influence youth engagement in political processes in Malaysia?
2. In what ways does social media shape political discourse among Malaysian users?
3. How does digital media impact policy-making processes and societal views on political issues in Malaysia?

## Material and Methods

The PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) approach is a widely accepted standard for systematic reviews, ensuring transparency and consistency (Page et al., 2021). Following PRISMA guidelines improves accuracy and rigor by detailing how to locate, screen, and include studies systematically, especially randomized studies that reduce bias. This review used Web of Science and Scopus for their comprehensive coverage. PRISMA has four stages: identification (searching databases), screening (applying criteria to exclude irrelevant studies), eligibility (confirming inclusion criteria), and data abstraction (extracting and synthesizing data). This structured method ensures reliable findings that support future research and practice.

### Identification

This study used a structured systematic review approach to select papers. Keywords related to online political participation in Malaysia were identified, with similar terms gathered from dictionaries, thesauri, encyclopaedias, and prior research. These were then organized into search strings for comprehensive searches in Web of Science and Scopus, databases known for high-quality, interdisciplinary research (see Table 1). This method generated 3,142 papers, providing a broad foundation of studies on online political engagement in Malaysia, essential for the study’s literature base.

**Table 1: Search Strings for Online Political Participation in Malaysia**

Databases	Search Strings	Date of Access
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY ( ( ( "new media" OR eparticipation OR online OR digital OR internet OR "social media" OR "ICT" OR "digital communication" ) AND ( democracy OR political OR civic OR social OR governance OR public ) AND ( participation OR engagement OR discourse OR activism OR interaction ) AND ( malaysia ) ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( SRCTYPE , "j" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( PUBSTAGE , "final" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( AFFILCOUNTRY , "Malaysia" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( DOCTYPE , "ar" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( SUBJAREA , "SOCI" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( PUBYEAR , 2022 ) OR LIMIT-TO ( PUBYEAR , 2023 ) OR LIMIT-TO ( PUBYEAR , 2024 ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( LANGUAGE , "English" ) )	October 2024
Web of Science	( "new media" OR eparticipation OR online OR digital OR internet OR "social media" OR "ICT" OR "digital communication" ) AND ( democracy OR political OR civic OR social OR governance OR public ) AND (	October 2024

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participation OR engagement OR discourse OR activism OR interaction ) AND malaysia ) (All Fields) and Article (Document Types) and English (Languages) and Article (Document Types) and MALAYSIA (Countries/Regions) and Social Sciences Other Topics (Research Areas) and 2024 or 2023 or 2022 (Publication Years)

Source: Scopus and Web of Science (2024)

Screening

In the screening phase, collected research items were evaluated for relevance to the study’s research questions, focusing on online political participation in Malaysia. Duplicates were removed to streamline the list. The first screening excluded 2,932 publications, and the second round examined 210 items based on specific inclusion criteria (see Table 2). Peer-reviewed articles were prioritized, while reviews, books, and conference proceedings were excluded unless directly relevant. The review was limited to English publications from 2022–2024 to ensure current data. After removing duplicates, 11 more items were excluded, resulting in a refined dataset for analysis.

Table 2: The Selection Criterion

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Language	English	Non-English
Timeline	2024	< 2023
Literature type	Journal (Article)	Conference, Book, Review
Research Area	Social Science	Besides Social Science
Publication Stage	Final	In Press
Country	Malaysia	Besides Malaysia

Eligibility

In the eligibility stage, the full texts of 199 articles were reviewed to ensure they met the study's objectives. Articles were evaluated on relevance, significance, and accessibility, with exclusions based on topic alignment, title relevance, and abstract focus. Non-aligned studies, titles lacking relevance, and abstracts diverging from the study’s focus on online political participation in Malaysia were excluded. Additionally, articles without full-text access were removed. This process excluded 172 items, leaving 26 core articles closely aligned with the study’s objectives, ensuring a focused, accessible, and high-quality dataset for analysis.

### *Data Abstraction and Analysis*

This study used integrative analysis to assess quantitative research on online political participation in Malaysia. The goal was to identify key themes across the selected studies. In the data collection phase, 26 selected studies were analysed for their methodologies and findings, and relevant points were extracted. Based on this data, themes were collaboratively developed, and a log documented insights and questions for reliability. Two experts—one in democracy and one in digital engagement—validated the themes, ensuring clarity and relevance. Any discrepancies were resolved through discussion, strengthening the findings on online political participation in Malaysia (See Table 3).

**Table 3: Number and Details of Primary Studies Database**

No	Authors	Title	Year	Journal	Database
1	Yin J.L.B.; Fei T.S. (Yin & Fei, 2022)	The Digital Rhizomorph: Understanding Online Youth Political Participation Post Malaysia's Ge14	2022	Sojourn	Scopus
2	Sazan D.; Al-Smadi O.A.; Rahman N.A. (Sazan et al., 2024)	Visual Representation Of Malaysian Candidates In Coalition Parties: A Visual Survey On Social Media	2024	Theory and Practice in Language Studies	Scopus
3	Chinnasamy S.; Volkmer I. (Chinnasamy & Volkmer, 2023)	Public Actors In New Spaces A Case Study Of Digital Malaysia In Transnational Public Deliberation	2023	Pacific Journalism Review	Scopus
4	Azwar A.I.; Nie K.S. (Azwar & Nie, 2022; Fathir et al., 2023)	Factors Influencing Young Malaysians' Political Information Seeking Behaviour On Twitter	2022	Jurnal Komunikasi: Malaysian Journal of Communication	Scopus
5	Fathir M.F.M et al. (Fathir et al., 2023)	Social Media Visual Framing Towards Political Participation: An Analysis On BERSIH 2.0	2022	Jurnal Komunikasi: Malaysian Journal of Communication	Scopus
6	Hassan M.S. et al. (Hassan et al., 2022)	Media Literacy And Young People's Integrity In Political Participation: A Structural Equation Modelling Approach	2022	Jurnal Komunikasi: Malaysian Journal of Communication	Scopus
7	Veerappan M.; Maraya R.; Dass Ramasamy M. (Veerappan et al., 2023)	Influence Of Tik Tok Among the Malaysian First Time Voters And Undi-18 Voters In The 15th General Election (GE-15)	2023	International Journal of Electronic Governance	Scopus



8	Kasmani M.F. (M. F. Kasmani, 2023)	Undi 18: Understanding the Political Participation Of First-Time Malay Voters Through Social Media	2023	SEARCH Journal of Media and Communication Research	Scopus
9	Kasmani F. (F. Kasmani, 2022)	Persuasive Political Humour on Social Media: A Study Of Najib Razak's Facebook Posts	2022	SEARCH Journal of Media and Communication Research	Scopus
10	Mustafa M.Z.; Ariffin M.Y.M.; Sofian M.R.M. (Mustafa et al., 2022)	Exploring Practice and Engagement of Instagram By Malaysia Ministries During Covid-19	2022	Jurnal Komunikasi: Malaysian Journal of Communication	Scopus
11	Wu Y.Q.; Gong J. (Wu & Gong, 2023)	Mobile Social Media As A Vehicle Of Health Communication: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis Of Wechat Official Account Posts During The COVID-19 Crisis	2023	Humanities and Social Sciences Communications	Scopus
12	Rahman N.A et al (Rahman et al., 2024)	Visual Representation of Selected Malaysian Political Trolling On Social Media: Disclose The Ideology And Power	2024	Journal of Language Teaching and Research	Scopus
13	Zulkifli Z.I. (Zulkifli, 2024)	Understanding Colourism In Malaysia Through Discursive Constructions Of Skin Colour On Social Media	2024	Kajian Malaysia	Scopus
14	Sofian M.R.M. et al. (Sofian et al., 2023)	"Beer Is Haram!" Representation Of Islam By Online Newspapers In Malaysia On The Issue Of Better Beer Festival & Oktoberfest	2023	Jurnal Komunikasi: Malaysian Journal of Communication	Scopus
15	Rashid N.Z.; Saidin M.I.S. (Rashid & Saidin, 2023)	'#Saynotorohingya': A Critical Study On Malaysians' Amplified Resentment Towards Rohingya Refugees On Twitter During The 2020 COVID-19 Crisis	2023	Round Table	Scopus
16	Ting S.-H.; Wan Ahmad S.S. (S.-H. Ting & Wan Ahmad, 2022)	Everyday Interactions And Political Participation Of Malaysian Youth	2022	Journal of Youth Studies	Scopus

17	Ting T.T. et al. (T. T. Ting et al., 2024)	Digital Government: Social Media As A Mediator In Technology Acceptance With Political Knowledge, Interest, And Participation	2024	Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies	Scopus
18	Tahir N.S.M.; Mohamed S.; Aziz A.A. (Tahir et al., 2022)	The Importance Of Social Media Usage In Influencing Government Policy Implementation: An Analysis Of Malaysia's Employees Provident Fund's I-Sinar Scheme	2022	SEARCH Journal of Media and Communication Research	Scopus
19	Jalli N.; Joharry S.A.; Salleh S.M. (Jalli et al., 2022)	ICERD In Malaysian Online News Reports: Analysis Of Rhetoric And Public Opinion	2022	Social Sciences and Humanities Open	Scopus
20	Jamil S.N.M. (Jamil, 2023)	Negotiating Racism In Online Apologia: A Critical Discourse Analysis Of Comments On 'Locked Up In Malaysia's Lockdown' Al-Jazeera's (2020, July 3) Documentary	2023	3L: Language, Linguistics, Literature	Scopus
21	Fathir M.F.M.; Lokman A.M.; Kadir S.A.; Sualman I. (Fathir et al., 2023)	Social Media Usage And Interactions: An In-Depth Interview On BERSIH 2.0 Social Media Visual Framing	2023	Jurnal Komunikasi: Malaysian Journal of Communication	Scopus
22	Naim H.M.; Sani M.A.M. (Naim & Sani, 2024)	Social Media Discourse In Sarawak: An Analysis Of Popular Issues And Their Correlation With The Gabungan Parti Sarawak Manifesto In 2021	2024	Kajian Malaysia	Scopus
23	Watimin N.H.; Zauddin H.; Rahamad M.S. (Watimin et al., 2023)	Religious And Racial Tension Breakout: An Online Pre-Crisis Detection Strategy Via Sentiment Analysis For Riot Crime Prevention	2023	Social Network Analysis and Mining	Scopus
24	Zain M.I.M.; Adnan Z.H.; Rahman Z.A.; Arshad M.M.; Razak R.R.A.; Adam A.A. (Zain et al., 2023)	Views On Student Political Freedom Post-Uuca Amendment And Implementation Of Undi18: A Case Study Of Public Universities In Southern Malaysia	2023	Journal of Sustainability Science and Management	Scopus



25	Seyfi, S; Hall, CM; Tan, VT; Zaman, M (Seyfi et al., 2023)	How does digital media engagement influence sustainability-driven political consumerism among Gen Z tourists?	2023	Journal Of Sustainable Tourism	Web of Science
26	Ibrahim, SS; Ahmad, M; Hassan, WAW; Noor, AM; Ramli, AH (Ibrahim et al., 2022)	Social Media Influence Towards Understanding, Awareness and Perception on Royal Institutions: Empirical Study on Young Millennials	2022	Pertanika Journal Of Social Science And Humanities	Web of Science

Following Kitchenham and Charters' guidelines (Kitchenham, 2007), the selected studies were then assessed for quality using criteria from Abouzahra et al. (2020), which include six quality metrics. Each metric was scored as "Yes" (1 point), "Partly" (0.5 points), or "No" (0 points).

QA1. Is the purpose of the study clearly stated?

QA2. Is the interest and the usefulness of the work clearly presented?

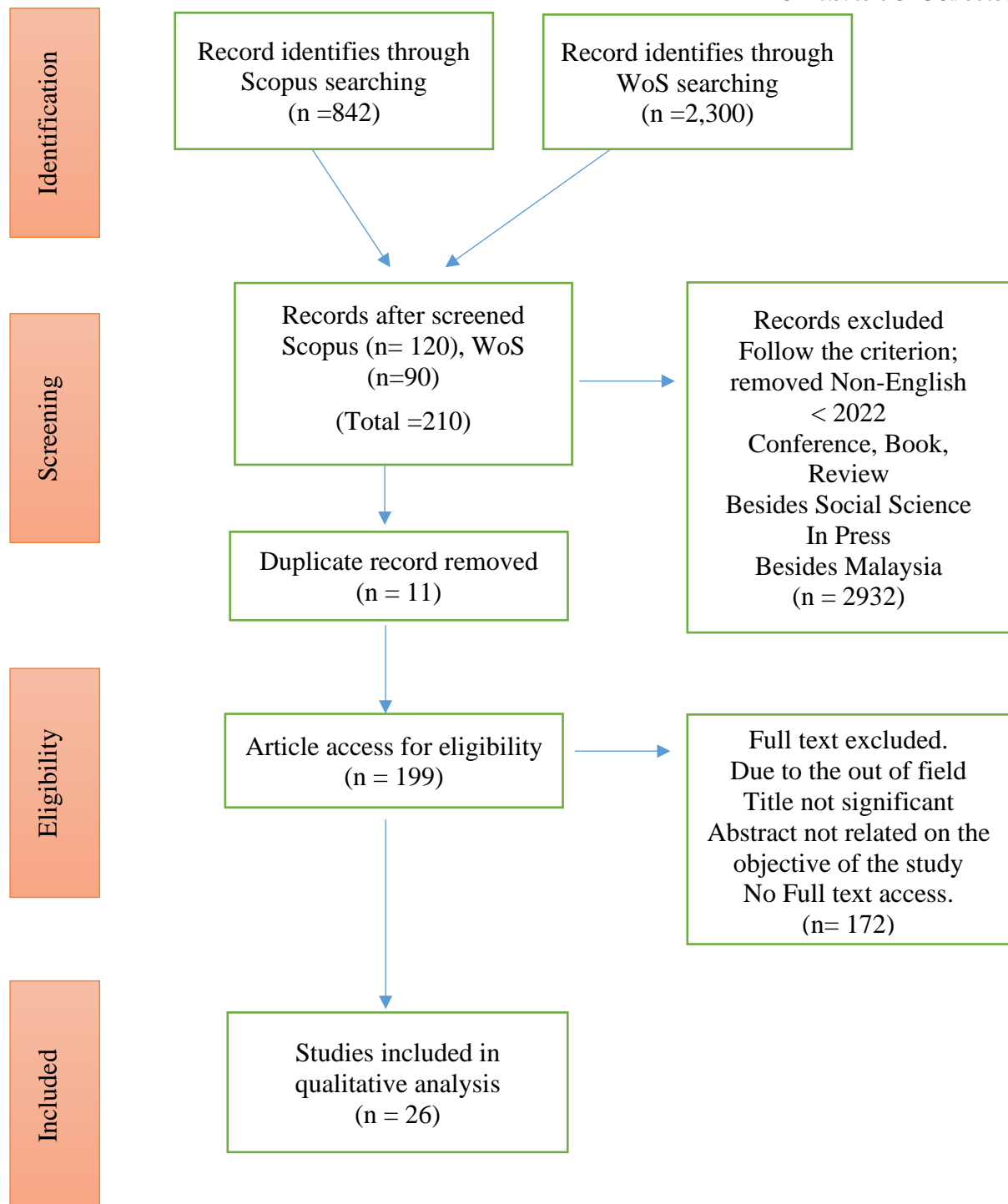
QA3. Is the study methodology clearly established?

QA4. Are the concepts of the approach clearly defined?

QA5. Is the work compared and measured with other similar work?

QA6. Are the limitations of the work clearly mentioned?

Two experts independently scored each study, with only those scoring above 3.0 advancing, ensuring that only studies meeting quality standards were included.



**Figure 2: Flow Diagram of The Proposed Searching Study (Moher D, Liberati A, Tetzlaff J, 2009)**

**Result and Finding**

Here is the quality assessment table for the selected papers:

**Table 4: Quality Assessment for Selected Studies**

Data	QA1	QA2	QA3	QA4	QA5	QA6	Total Mark	%
<i>PS1</i>	1	0.5	0.5	1	0	0	3	50
<i>PS2</i>	1	1	0.5	1	0	0	3.5	58.3
<i>PS3</i>	1	1	1	1	0.5	0	4.5	75
<i>PS4</i>	1	1	1	1	0.5	0	4.5	75
<i>PS5</i>	1	1	1	1	0.5	0	4.5	75
<i>PS6</i>	1	1	1	1	0.5	0	4.5	75
<i>PS7</i>	1	1	1	1	1	0.5	5	83.3
<i>PS8</i>	1	1	1	1	0.5	0	4.5	75
<i>PS9</i>	1	1	1	1	0.5	0	4.5	75
<i>PS10</i>	1	1	1	0.5	0	0	3.5	58.3
<i>PS11</i>	1	1	1	1	0.5	0	4.5	75
<i>PS12</i>	1	1	1	1	0.5	0	4.5	75
<i>PS13</i>	1	1	1	1	1	1	6	100
<i>PS14</i>	1	1	1	0.5	1	0	4.5	75
<i>PS15</i>	1	1	1	1	0.5	0	4.5	75
<i>PS16</i>	1	1	1	1	0	0	4	66.67
<i>PS17</i>	1	1	1	1	1	1	6	100
<i>PS18</i>	1	1	1	1	0.5	1	5.5	91.67
<i>PS19</i>	1	1	1	0.5	0	0.5	4.5	75
<i>PS20</i>	1	1	1	1	0.5	1	5.5	91.67
<i>PS21</i>	1	1	1	1	1	0.5	5.5	91.67
<i>PS22</i>	1	1	1	1	0	0.5	4.5	75
<i>PS23</i>	1	1	1	1	1	0	5	83.3
<i>PS24</i>	1	1	1	1	0.5	1	5.5	91.67
<i>PS25</i>	1	1	1	1	1	1	6	100
<i>PS26</i>	1	1	1	1	1	0.5	5.5	91.67

**Highest Score:** PS13 and PS17 achieved full marks (100%) due to clear articulation of purpose, practical relevance, well-defined methodology, clearly outlined concepts, comparison with other studies, and stated limitations.

**Lowest Score:** PS1 received the lowest score (50%) as it only partly met the criteria for interest, usefulness, and methodology, with no comparison to other work or mention of limitations.

**Theme 1: Youth Political Participation and Engagement**

Youth political engagement in Malaysia has evolved notably, especially after the Undi18 amendment, which lowered the voting age to 18. This change has spurred greater youth involvement in political discourse, particularly via digital platforms, where social media enables decentralized, non-hierarchical political activism (J L B Yin and Fei 2022; Azwar and Nie 2022). Platforms like Twitter and TikTok now play crucial roles in shaping youth political behaviors. Azwar and Nie (2022) found that political self-efficacy influences young people's information-seeking on Twitter, while Kasmani (2023) observed first-time voters engaging with political content despite feeling underinformed. Similarly, Veerappan et al. (2023)

identified TikTok as a key platform for Undi18 voters in the 15th General Election. Despite increased digital engagement, many young Malaysians remain less active in traditional political participation, such as voting. Ting and Wan Ahmad (2022) noted that while youth show interest in politics, their participation in elections is minimal, often due to disillusionment with politics. This indicates that while online engagement encourages discussion, it may not lead to active participation, highlighting a need to address barriers to full engagement. The post-UUCA (Universities and University Colleges Act) amendment era has also revived student political activism, allowing greater freedom of political expression within universities. Zain et al. (2023) found that students are now more engaged, with social media supporting diverse forms of activism. This freedom could strengthen youth contributions to democratic culture. In summary, youth political engagement in Malaysia has shifted, driven by social media and legal changes, though challenges remain in converting online participation into direct political action. Future research should explore the motivations, barriers, and impacts of youth political involvement to foster a more inclusive democratic society.

### ***Theme 2: Social Media and Political Discourse***

Social media has become central to political discourse in Malaysia, influencing engagement through visual strategies, framing, and public sentiment. Sazan et al. (2024) found that coalition parties use visual elements effectively in election campaigns, employing positive imagery and slogans that resonate with voters and reinforce party ideologies. Similarly, Fathir et al. (2023) showed how BERSIH movement visuals, especially protest images, fostered solidarity and urgency among supporters, facilitating increased engagement. However, the impact of social media is not solely positive. Hassan et al. (2022) highlights that low media literacy among young Malaysians allows misinformation to spread easily, which can lead to unethical political behavior and sensationalism overshadowing factual discourse. Rashid and Saidin (2023) further reveal that, during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, social media amplified prejudices against Rohingya refugees, showing the risk of social media as an echo chamber for harmful sentiments. In Sarawak, social media reflects local political dynamics, aligning with public sentiment on key issues such as constitutional rights and regional identity, as shown by Naim and Sani (2024) during the 2021 State Election. Moreover, Kasmani (2022) examines the use of humor by politicians like former Prime Minister Najib Razak, noting that while it may not shift opinions, humor can create a favorable image and connect with younger audiences. In conclusion, social media shapes political discourse in Malaysia through visuals, media literacy, societal biases, and communication styles like humor. While it offers a powerful platform for engagement, misinformation and societal biases pose challenges, highlighting the need for stronger media literacy for constructive dialogue.

### ***Theme 3: Impact of Digital Media on Society and Policy***

Digital media, especially social media, has reshaped political engagement and policy influence in Malaysia. Chinnasamy and Volkmer (2023) note that digital news portals provide diverse perspectives, linking national conversations to global issues like human rights, which is essential given state-controlled traditional media. Ting et al. (2024) emphasizes social media's role in engaging youth in political processes, enhancing participatory democracy. Digital media also influences policy. Tahir et al. (2022) demonstrates this through the i-Sinar scheme, where public pressure on social media led the government to allow early withdrawals from the Employees Provident Fund during COVID-19. Watimin et al. (2023) highlight social media's use for pre-crisis detection, where sentiment analysis on sensitive topics can prevent crises, showing digital platforms as spaces where policy and public sentiment intersect. Social media

has also influenced political consumerism, especially among Gen Z. Seyfi et al. (2023) find that digital engagement fosters sustainability-driven choices, with young Malaysians using boycotts and buycotts to express political values. Ibrahim et al. (2022) note that social media shapes public views on Malaysia's Royal Institution, illustrating digital platforms' role in fostering both support and critique of traditional institutions. Overall, these studies reveal that digital media has transformed political participation, policy influence, and public discourse in Malaysia, providing a platform for civic expression and a tool for shaping policy and ethical consumer behavior in an evolving political landscape.

## Discussion

Youth political engagement in Malaysia has evolved considerably, driven by legislative changes like the Undi18 amendment, which lowered the voting age to 18, and the expanding role of social media as a political tool. This shift has enabled broader participation among young Malaysians, who increasingly use digital platforms to express opinions, access information, and engage with political leaders. Social media, especially platforms like Twitter and TikTok, has fostered a decentralized, grassroots style of engagement where political discussions and activism thrive beyond traditional hierarchies. Research indicates that Malaysian youth are influenced in their political behaviors on these platforms by factors such as political self-confidence and situational interest, with first-time voters using social media despite perceived gaps in political knowledge. TikTok, in particular, has proven influential for younger voters during elections, serving as a main source of information and decision-making. Despite high digital engagement, conventional political participation among youth, such as voting and attending political rallies, remains low. Although young people show interest in political matters, many feel disillusioned by perceptions of corruption and lack of appeal in mainstream politics, which discourages them from active involvement. This gap between online and offline engagement suggests that while social media enables political dialogue, it does not necessarily encourage increased participation in the electoral process. In the context of student activism, amendments to the Universities and University Colleges Act (UUCA) have revitalized political expression and organization within public universities. These changes offer students more freedom to participate in political matters without previous restrictions, fostering a diverse range of political activities supported by social media. Such developments are crucial in empowering students to contribute to political life and promoting a more vibrant democratic culture within educational institutions.

Social media has fundamentally transformed political engagement in Malaysia, offering a dynamic platform for discourse, especially during key events like General Elections and social movements. Visual strategies employed by political parties play a crucial role in conveying ideologies and shaping public perception, as seen through the use of positive imagery and slogans. Visual framing has similarly amplified solidarity in movements like BERSIH, demonstrating how visual content combined with political messaging fosters participation and advocacy. However, the rise of social media also brings challenges, particularly related to media literacy among youth. A lack of critical media skills has left many susceptible to misinformation, impacting political integrity as sensationalist content often overshadows factual information. This concern underscores the necessity of media literacy to promote informed engagement. Social media's role as a conduit for societal tensions is also evident, with discussions on platforms sometimes reflecting and amplifying biases, such as anti-refugee sentiments observed during the COVID-19 pandemic. In regional politics, social media aligns with local narratives, as seen in Sarawak's 2021 State Election, where discourse on Facebook

mirrored themes from Gabungan Parti Sarawak's (GPS) manifesto, highlighting how social media serves as both a reflection of and influence on political sentiment. The use of humor and satire, as demonstrated by former Prime Minister Najib Razak's Facebook posts, further illustrates social media's capacity to engage younger audiences and potentially improve public image, showing humor as a strategic element within political communication.

Digital media, especially social media, has fundamentally altered the landscape of political engagement and policy influence in Malaysia. Digital news portals are emerging as crucial platforms for diverse voices, fostering civic discourse and connecting local issues to global conversations, particularly on human rights, amid the constraints of state-controlled traditional media. This shift is particularly significant for Malaysian youth, as social media facilitates greater political knowledge, interest, and participation, enhancing engagement with government and promoting participatory democracy. Social media also plays a vital role in influencing government policy. An illustrative case is the i-Sinar initiative, where public pressure on social media led to the government's decision to allow early withdrawals from the Employees Provident Fund during the COVID-19 pandemic. This demonstrates how social media can amplify public sentiment and compel policymakers to act on real-time demands. Additionally, social media serves as a potential tool for crisis detection, particularly in monitoring racial or religious tensions through sentiment analysis, thus functioning as an early warning system. Moreover, social media fosters a new form of political consumerism among younger generations, where engagement in boycotts and buycotts reflects a blending of political values with consumption choices. This trend showcases a broader shift toward ethical consumption as a means of political participation. Furthermore, digital media shapes narratives surrounding traditional institutions, such as the Royal Institution, influencing public perception and encouraging critical discourse.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, Malaysian youth political participation now centers on digital engagement and expanded freedoms in educational settings. Social media remains essential for fostering dialogue and engagement; however, significant barriers exist to converting this digital interaction into concrete political action. Online political participation is shaped by a combination of visual approaches, media literacy levels, societal biases, and innovative communication techniques. While social media offers substantial potential for political engagement, challenges such as misinformation, prejudice, and inadequate media literacy must be addressed to create a more informed and constructive political environment. Further research is needed to understand the motivations and obstacles faced by young Malaysians in political participation, with the goal of nurturing a more inclusive and active democratic society. As digital engagement continues to grow, developing frameworks to encourage responsible and informed participation will be crucial for maximizing its positive impact. Overall, digital media has emerged as a transformative force in Malaysia, enhancing political participation, influencing policy, and reshaping public discourse, illustrating the dynamic interplay between social media and the evolving political landscape in the country.

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