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(IJLGC)**www.gaexcellence.com/ijlgc**YOUTH, POLITICS, AND CIVIC READINESS:
EVALUATING POLITICAL LITERACY AMONG FIRST-
YEAR DIPLOMA STUDENTS IN PUBLIC
ADMINISTRATION**

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Abstract:

Political literacy is essential for empowering youth to participate meaningfully in a country's political processes and to understand their roles as active citizens. This study assesses youth political literacy, with particular focus on their political knowledge, understanding, and participation. Specifically, the research examines key dimensions of political literacy. It explores the factors that shape young people's political awareness and engagement, including educational background, access to information, social media exposure, and the influence of family and peers. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining questionnaire surveys and semi-structured interviews with youths aged 18 to 19. In identifying the factors that support or constrain youth political engagement, this study sheds light on young people's level of political literacy. The findings further reveal gaps in civic education and offer practical directions for enhancing political awareness and understanding among youth. By looking at what encourages or prevents young people from engaging in politics, this study provides a better understanding of their level of political literacy. The findings also point to gaps in civic education and suggest practical ways to improve young people's political awareness and understanding.

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Political Literacy, Youth Involvement, Civic Preparedness, Undi18, Higher Education, Malaysia.



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Introduction

Political literacy among the youth implies a holistic understanding of governance and political systems, enabling them to make informed choices and play an active role in a democratic society. It contains a diverse set of skills, including structural knowledge of political frameworks, an awareness of civic rights, and the cognitive capacity to critically evaluate contemporary political issues (Alivi et.al., 2018). Rather than merely memorizing institutional facts, political literacy integrates democratic values and practical life skills necessary for sustained civic engagement (Ljubojevic, 2024). Empirical evidence shows that political literacy is directly related to youth political participation because young people focus on developing comprehensive political knowledge and increasing their likelihood of engaging in democratic processes (Milner, 2002). Given that the youth constitute a major demographic segment globally, their active involvement is important to fostering representative, responsive, and stable political systems (Jisan & Sadia, 2024).

However, a critical gap exists in the Malaysian context, political literacy among young people remains relatively low, and it's limiting their capacity to influence the domestic political environment through direct participation (Jisan & Sadia, 2024). Young people may not fully understand the importance of their wider civic responsibilities because they lack basic knowledge of how political institutions work. This is reflected in low voter turnout, limited involvement in political parties, and low participation in meaningful public discussions about politics. In addition, Jisan and Sadia (2024) argues that when youth show consistent ambivalence toward party-based political processes, they develop a stronger affinity for particular social movements. This shows that models of political literacy need to be reconceptualized to be more consistent with the interests of today's youth, and that they need to create new pathways for youth to become politically active.

Youth political literacy is developed through three primary socializing agents: formal educational institutions, digital media, and immediate family or peer environments. Although UNDI18 has been implemented, there is still a lack of political literacy among Malaysian youth, especially at the diploma level, and the rate of politically literate young people is still relatively low. Educational institutions serve as the primary structural pillars, helping students cultivate civic skills by integrating current political affairs and civic subjects into formal education by integrating current political affairs and civic subjects into formal curricula (Torney-Purta, 2002). This academic foundation is continually supplemented by informal

socialization within family and peer circles, where daily environmental observations shape initial political beliefs and attitudes. Furthermore, contemporary youth gain much of their political knowledge through exposure to digital news platforms (Velasco et al., (2024)).

Modern political discourse is predominantly digitized, the critical capacity of younger generations to decode digital material heavily dictates their political learning. Navigating diverse digital streams requires media literacy to identify objective facts, discover deliberate misinformation, and evaluate alternative viewpoints before forming a well-balanced political opinion (Velasco et al., (2024)). As Kahne and Sporte (2008) emphasize, it is vital to train youth to verify the accuracy of online content to prevent the internalization of biased or fabricated digital material. Without critical thinking skills, youth risk acquiring highly skewed perceptions of public policy problems.

Societies must establish multi-generational educational programs that help youth enhance their political understanding. Schools and grassroots community organizations can also foster these skills by organizing structured debate platforms and encouraging active civic projects (Alivi et.al., 2018). Experiential learning opportunities, such as community service projects and simulated government activities, provide effective environments for practical political education (Levine, 2007). Democratic societies and political institutions can transform the younger generation into knowledgeable citizens and active agents of democracy when universities and schools offer programs and opportunities for political learning and experiential participation (Kahne & Sporte, 2008).

The political literacy of these students is critically important and warrants evaluation, including their levels of knowledge, the influence of social media, and their grasp of the basic functions of government, to guide the development of targeted civic education programs. According to Saidin and Azrun (2025), in the Malaysian context, research shows that university students may have high general knowledge but little understanding of constitutional rights and local government structures, and this varies across faculties and demographic groups.

This issue is particularly important for first-year Diploma in Public Administration students at UiTM Seremban 3, as they are being prepared for future careers in public service but may still have limited knowledge of government structures and civic responsibilities. Many young people get political information from social media, but what they see is not always accurate. This can affect how they understand and interpret political issues (Abdullah et al., 2021). Therefore, this study aims to assess these students' political literacy by examining their political knowledge, the role of social media, and their understanding of the basic functions of government. The findings may also help in developing more suitable civic education programs to strengthen students' political awareness and understanding.

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

Political literacy is a foundational competency for active citizenship, encompassing not only knowledge of political systems but also the skills to analyze information and engage critically in civic life. For public administration students, this literacy is especially critical because they are being groomed for future roles in governance. The conceptual framework presented identifies four key independent variables—Demographics, Types of social media, Government Structure, and Political Topics—as predictors of Political Literacy Among Youth. This review synthesizes current literature on these variables to establish the study's theoretical basis.

Demographic Factors and Political Literacy

Demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, socioeconomic status, and educational background, are known predictors of political engagement and literacy, and research indicates that higher levels of education correlate with higher levels of political knowledge and efficacy (Galston, 2001), although among youth, particularly tertiary education students, the variation is often related to family background and prior civic education exposure. For example, research in Malaysia has shown that although tertiary education students tend to have high general knowledge, they tend to lack a deeper understanding of constitutional rights and local government structures (Saidin & Azrun, 2025). For public administration diploma students, who start higher education at a younger age than degree students, factors such as age and rural or urban background may have a stronger influence on their early political views. These experiences can shape their understanding of politics before they are exposed to formal professional training.

The Influence of Social Media Types

The growth of social media has changed how young people access and understand political information. In this study, different types of social media are considered important because each platform may influence political literacy in different ways. For example, platforms such as Twitter/X and Facebook allow users to discuss and debate political issues, while platforms such as TikTok and Instagram mainly use short videos and visual content. These platforms can make political information more engaging and easier to access, although it may sometimes prioritize emotional appeal over detailed political facts.

While social media may increase access to information, it also spreads misinformation and creates echo chambers, which may reduce the quality of political literacy (Abdullah et al., 2021). Research by Lim (2025) in Southeast Asia shows that youth may be “digitally native” but lack the media literacy skills to verify sources, meaning high information consumption does not necessarily translate into high political literacy. The social media public administration students consume may reinforce what they learn in the classroom or present narratives that challenge how they understand governance.

Understanding Government Structure

Knowledge of government structure—comprising the separation of powers, the role of the executive, legislature, and judiciary, and the federal-state relationship—is the cognitive core of political literacy. Without this structural knowledge, citizens cannot hold institutions accountable effectively. The federal system's complexity in Malaysia, especially the distinct status of Sabah and Sarawak under the Malaysia Agreement 1963 (MA63), adds another layer of difficulty to this variable. Research shows that young voters are not very aware of these structural nuances; many do not know which powers are devolved to state governments and which remain at the center of the federal structure (Saidin & Azrun, 2025). One might expect that students in a public administration program have a higher baseline of this structural knowledge. Still, if their curriculum focuses on bureaucratic procedure instead of constitutional theory, they may graduate with operational knowledge but without the structural literacy that would help them maneuver the larger political landscape. Additionally, a study by Md Shah et al., (2012) found that...discovered that even educators may have different levels of comprehension of the complex interplay of bureaucracy within a representative government,

reinforcing the importance of education to ensure that those who will serve in government roles have an in-depth and practical knowledge of the structure and operation of government.

The Role of Political Topics

The variable “Political Topics” refers to the specific issues that engage youth attention, such as economic policy, social justice, environmental sustainability, or electoral reform. Zainurin et al., (2024) argue that political literacy is often topic-specific: a youth may be highly literate in climate change policy because they are personally passionate about it, but may not be literate in fiscal budgeting or foreign policy. Information seeking is sparked by the topic relevance to the individual’s daily life; for example, topics like the cost of living, the implementation of UNDI18, and anti-corruption measures were cited as reasons for youth engagement in recent Malaysian elections, but not necessarily systemic understanding: students may know a specific political scandal (topic) without understanding the institutional checks and balances (structure) that failed to prevent it. Thus, the connection between topic interest and overall literacy is mediated by the depth of inquiry the topic elicits.

Synthesis and Gap Analysis

The interplay of these four variables forms a complex ecosystem of political literacy, with demographics setting the baseline capacity, social media being the primary information conduit, and knowledge of government structures and political topics flowing through this information conduit. Extensive research has been devoted to these variables in isolation, especially in Western contexts, but little research has been conducted on diploma-level public administration students in Malaysia, who represent a unique group: young enough to be digital natives but specialized enough to be expected to have higher-than-average structural knowledge. Current studies often lump all “youth” together, masking the specific dynamics within vocational and diploma streams. Furthermore, the specific impact of types of social media on the structural understanding of Malaysian governance remains underexplored. This study aims to fill these gaps by evaluating how these specific independent variables collectively predict the political literacy of this critical future workforce.

Conceptual Framework

In contemporary democratic societies, fostering civic readiness among the youth is crucial for maintaining an informed and active electorate. While digital platforms have fundamentally changed how young people access information, varying levels of critical engagement highlight a pressing need to evaluate foundational political knowledge. This study examined the level of political literacy among first-year Diploma in Public Administration students at the Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies, UiTM Negeri Sembilan branch, who are future public administrators and should be among the most informed and active members of the electorate in democratic societies.

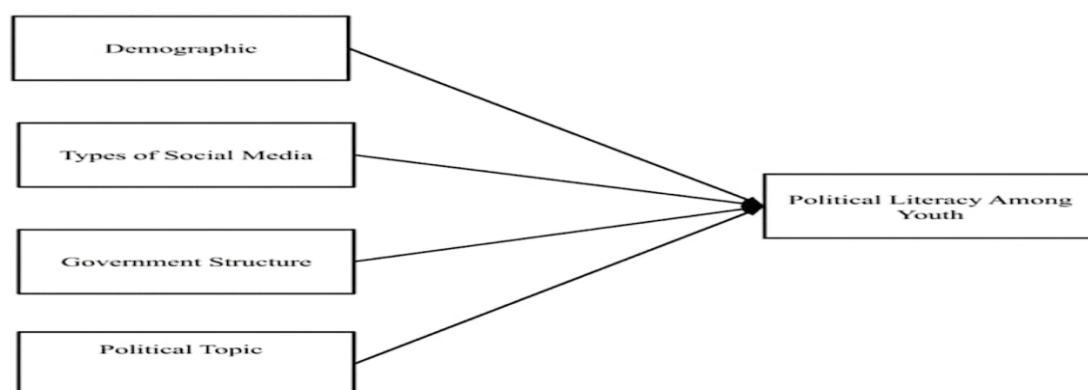


Figure 1: Socio-Cognitive Framework of Political Literacy

(Sources: Zainurin et al., 2024; Saidin & Azrun, 2025; Md Shah et al. (2012))

This study proposes an adapted Socio-Cognitive Framework of Political Literacy (Figure 1). Whereas traditional models tend to separate environmental influences from structural political knowledge, this framework argues that young people's political literacy grows from the interplay between social and cognitive dimensions. As shown in Figure 1, the social dimension covers environmental factors, namely student demographics and the social media platforms they use. The cognitive dimension, meanwhile, focuses on institutional knowledge, including students' understanding of government structures and various political topics. By examining these four outcomes of political literacy, the framework can show where today's political education falls short. It can also guide targeted academic programs that build civic literacy and prepare future public servants to take a real part in democratic life.

Methodology

Hussey & Collis (2014) discussed that the unit of analysis is the primary entity examined in a research study. For this research, the cohort comprises students enrolled in the AM110 program (Diploma in Public Administration) at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Kampus Seremban 3 during the 2024 academic year. This study specifically examines the levels of youth political literacy among these individuals, who are primarily aged 18 to 19. According to data obtained from the university administration, the total population consists of 245 enrolled students.

This study uses a mixed-methods approach, combining a questionnaire survey with semi-structured interviews to better understand youth political literacy (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For the quantitative phase, the study used a census approach rather than sampling because the target population was relatively small and easily accessible ($N = 245$). A census means collecting data from all members of the target population (Byrne, 2022). Since all 245 students were included in the study, there was no need to use conventional sample size tables such as Krejcie and Morgan (1970).

This mixed-methods census approach eliminates quantitative sampling error and selection bias, ensuring the final data provide an exceptionally accurate and depth-rich measure of political literacy among these future public administrators.

Findings and Analysis

This chapter presents and discusses the study's empirical findings. It begins with a demographic overview of the participants to baseline the sample, followed by a sequential data analysis addressing the four research objectives. Specifically, it measures the baseline political literacy of first-year Diploma in Public Administration students at UiTM Seremban 3 (RO1), before assessing how their political literacy relates to three key factors: their understanding of government structure (RO2), the influence of social media (RO3), and their engagement with specific political topics (RO4). Finally, these results are cross-examined with existing literature to provide a contextualized understanding of student political literacy

The quantitative phase targeted a total population of 245 enrolled first-year Diploma in Public Administration students at UiTM Seremban 3 campus. From this population, 206 students were invited to participate, and data were successfully collected via a structured questionnaire from all 206 respondents, yielding an 83.7% response rate among the invited sample.

The demographic variables analyzed encompass age, gender, academic standing, socioeconomic background, and geographic origin as shown in Table 1. These variables provide a comprehensive context for understanding the respondents' background and their potential involvement in local governance, serving as the foundational layer for the subsequent qualitative inquiry.

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Study Sample (N=206)

Demographic	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age		
18 years old	50	24.3
19 years old	51	24.8
20 years old	51	24.8
21 years old	54	26.2
Gender		
Male	105	51.0
Female	101	49.0
Current Semester		
First Semester	102	49.5
Second Semester	104	50.5
Residential Area		
Rural	46	22.3
Semi-Rural	92	44.7
Urban	68	33.0
State		
Johor	14	6.8
Kedah	9	4.4
Kelantan	20	9.7

Malacca	18	8.7
Negeri Sembilan	16	7.8
Pahang	13	6.3
Penang	18	8.7
Perak	12	5.8
Perlis	17	8.3
Selangor	19	9.2
Terengganu	10	4.9
Sabah	14	6.8
Sarawak	8	3.9
Kuala Lumpur	18	8.7

Father Education Level

No Formal Education	7	3.4
Primary School	7	3.4
Secondary School	65	31.6
Diploma @ Certificate	114	55.3
Degree @ Higher	13	6.3

Mother Education Level

No Formal Education	9	4.4
Primary School	10	4.9
Secondary School	86	41.7
Diploma @ Certificate	87	42.2
Degree @ Higher	14	6.8

Household Income

Less than RM1,500	19	9.2
RM1,501 - RM3,000	81	39.3
RM3,001 - RM5,000	72	35.0
More than RM5,000	34	16.5

Baseline Political Literacy: Bridging Cognitive Awareness and Behavioral Participation

The first research objective measured the political literacy of first-year Diploma in Public Administration students at UiTM Seremban 3. The mean scores of the ten operationalized items were interpreted using the evaluation matrix adapted from Krejciea and Morgan (1970), which classifies mean ranges as follows. 1.00–1.80 (very low), 1.81–2.60 (low), 2.61–3.20 (medium), 3.21–4.20 (high), and 4.21–5.00 (very high).

Table 2: Political Literacy Characteristics of the Study Sample (N=206)

Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Min	Max	Level
PL1. I believe students need basic political knowledge to understand how governments operate.	206	4.4417	0.50751	3.00	5.00	Very High

PL2. I believe students need basic political knowledge to understand how governments operate.	206	4.4515	0.62864	2.00	5.00	Very High
PL3. I believe UiTM can increase students' political awareness through more campus activities and forums.	206	4.4757	0.61438	3.00	5.00	Very High
PL4 I am aware that youth participation in politics is important for the future of Malaysia.	206	4.4903	0.52952	3.00	5.00	Very High
PL5. I have been involved in civic or political activities on campus (e.g. forums, debates, student elections).	206	3.9612	1.02574	2.00	5.00	High
PL6. I think that UiTM provides a space for students to openly discuss political and administration issues.	206	4.0097	0.86103	2.00	5.00	High
PL7. I believe the knowledge gained at UiTM can be used to contribute to the development of national public policy.	206	4.4466	0.57132	3.00	5.00	Very High
PL8. I believe it is important for university students to be involved in democratic processes such as campus activities.	206	4.5631	0.55295	3.00	5.00	Very High
PL9. I have expressed my views on political or administrative issues in class or during campus activities.	206	4.0194	1.04046	1.00	5.00	High
PL10. The courses I take in the public administration program help me to understand current political and administrative issues.	206	4.5728	0.53378	3.00	5.00	Very High

The empirical findings clearly indicate that first-year Public Administration students maintain a remarkably high level of cognitive awareness and structural validation regarding political processes. This is most evident in the highest-scoring item in the study, PL10, which states that the courses taken in the public administration program help students understand current political and administrative issues ($M = 4.5728$, $SD = 0.53378$). This exceptional score shows that formal higher education curricula strongly drive student literacy. This aligns with recent scholarship by Alharahsheh and Pius (2020) in Malaysia, which argues that tertiary academic institutions are among the most important media of formal political socialization, preparing young students with structural governance knowledge of the wider civic system.

Furthermore, students showed a strong baseline awareness of democratic value systems and their role within them. This is supported by very high scores for items indicating that it is important for university students to be involved in democratic processes like campus activities (PL8: $M=4.5631$, $SD=0.55295$) and a widespread awareness that youth participation in politics is crucial for the future of Malaysia (PL4: $M=4.4903$, $SD=0.52952$). Additionally, students strongly believed that UiTM can increase political awareness through more campus activities and forums (PL3: $M=4.4757$, $SD=0.61438$). Asia Centre (2022) argues that the collective

recognition of the importance of youth participation directly reflects the ongoing ideological shift in the country following the implementation of the Undi18 policy, which fundamentally catalysed youth political awareness nationwide.

This structural validation is further supported by items that assess students' basic cognitive expectations. Students overwhelmingly agreed that basic political knowledge is essential for understanding how governments operate, as reflected in both items PL2 ($M=4.4515$, $SD=0.62864$) and PL1 ($M=4.4417$, $SD=0.50751$). They also strongly believed that the knowledge gained during their studies at UiTM could contribute directly to national public policy development (PL7: $M=4.4466$, $SD=0.57132$).

However, a noticeable and critical divergence appears when comparing students' behavioral participation with their cognitive beliefs. While students strongly agree that political knowledge and democratic systems are vital, their actual execution scores drop into the lower "high" range, with much wider standard deviations. For instance, expressing personal views on political or administrative issues in class or during campus activities scored lower (PL9: $M=4.0194$, $SD=1.04046$), as did their perception of whether UiTM provides an open space to discuss these issues (PL6: $M=4.0097$, $SD=0.86103$) and 10). The lowest-scoring item across the entire variable was their actual physical involvement in civic or political activities on campus, such as forums, debates, or student elections (PL5: $M=3.9612$, $SD=1.02574$).

The wider standard deviations ($SD > 1.00$) for these behavioral items indicate greater variance among respondents, meaning that while some students are active, a significant subset remains hesitant. This gap between knowledge and behavior is consistent with a broader issue identified in recent qualitative studies of Malaysian higher education institutions. According to Alivi (2023), young people may understand political and civic issues well, but concerns about their institutions and a lack of safe, open spaces to talk can stop them from acting on what they know. Therefore, while the findings confirm that first-year students have a strong level of basic political literacy, their written responses also point to an important gap between knowing about democracy and actively participating in it. In other words, students appear to have the knowledge, but they may not yet feel confident or comfortable putting that knowledge into practice through active democratic engagement.

Government Structure and Political Literacy

Research Objective 2 (RO2) examined the relationship between understanding of government structure and political literacy among first-year Diploma in Public Administration students at UiTM Seremban 3. To test this relationship, the following null (H_{02}) and alternative (H_{a2}) hypotheses were examined:

H_{02} : There is no significant relationship between government structure and political literacy among first-year diploma students in public administration at UiTM Seremban 3.

H_{a2} : There is a significant relationship between government structure and political literacy among first-year diploma students in public administration at UiTM Seremban 3.

The relationship between government structure and political literacy among first-year diploma students in public administration at UiTM Seremban 3: $r = 0.662$, $p = 0.000$. $P < 0.05$ (sig.). The relationship is significant and moderate.

Table 3: Pearson Correlation Matrix Between Government Structure and Political Literacy

Variables	r-value	p-value	Results
The relationship between government structure and political literacy among first-year diploma students in public administration at UiTM Seremban 3.	0.662	0.009 $P < 0.5$ (sig)	There is a significant and moderate relationship Accept Ha2, Reject Ho2

Based on the statistical output in Table 3, the results show a significant, positive, moderate-to-strong relationship between students' understanding of government structure and their overall level of political literacy ($r = 0.662$, $p < 0.005$). Since the p-value (0.009) falls well below the standard alpha threshold of 0.5, empirical evidence strongly supports the alternative hypothesis. Consequently, the researchers accepted Ha2 and rejected Ho2. This correlation implies that as a student's foundational grasp of constitutional design, institutional roles, and administrative frameworks improves, their broader political literacy scales upward simultaneously.

This finding aligns with previous research on civic education, which shows that understanding how political institutions work is important for developing political literacy (Galston, 2001). This is especially relevant for Public Administration students because their studies expose them to government structures, public institutions, and how government processes work.

To better understand the quantitative correlation ($r = 0.662$), the semi-structured interview data were examined to explore how students' knowledge of government structures shapes their political perspectives. Thematic analysis of the interviews identified a prominent theme, "Curriculum-Induced Civic Decoding."

The interviews suggest that, before entering the AM110 program, many students viewed the Malaysian government and its institutions in relatively abstract terms. This limited understanding sometimes made it difficult for them to connect political news and current affairs to how government actually functions. Exposure to public administration courses gradually provided students with concepts and knowledge that helped them make sense of these issues. In this sense, the curriculum served as a lens through which students could better understand and interpret real-world governance. This was reflected in the experience shared by Informant 3, an 18-year-old female student, who stated:

"Before this, when I watched the news or saw things on TikTok about parliament or federal budgets, I didn't really care because I didn't understand who did what. But after learning about the separation of powers and civil service structures in class, the news actually makes sense to me now. It makes me feel more confident to form an opinion."

Informant 7 made a similar point, saying that learning about how government is structured helped them connect politics to everyday life. Knowing what local councils and federal ministries do make it easier to see how policies shape people's daily lives. Through this, the informant came to see politics as more than arguments between politicians. It is also about how institutions work, how decisions get made, and how policies are carried out.

“Learning how local councils and federal ministries operate made me realize how policies affect my daily life. It changed my view of politics from just being about politicians’ arguments to support the system”

By integrating these mixed-method strands, the qualitative narratives perfectly explain the quantitative baseline. The quantitative r-value (0.662) proves a strong statistical bond, but the qualitative data reveals the underlying mechanism: formal structural knowledge reduces the cognitive burden of processing complex political events. When students understand the "rules of the game" (government structure), they become significantly more capable of critically consuming political topics, thereby directly accelerating their overall political literacy. This dual-layered finding supports the proposed framework, demonstrating that cognitive structural pillars are indispensable to youth political socialization in professional academic tracks.

The Influence of Social Media and Political Literacy

Research Objective 3 (RO3) aimed to identify the relationship between social media influence and political literacy among first-year Diploma in Public Administration students at UiTM Seremban 3. The corresponding hypotheses were Ho3 (There is no significant relationship between the influence of social media and political literacy) and Ha3 (There is a significant relationship between the influence of social media and political literacy). As presented in Table 4.8, the Pearson Correlation analysis revealed a significant, positive, and exceptionally strong relationship between the two variables ($r = 0.812$, $p = 0.000$). Because the p-value is well below the standard statistical alpha threshold of 0.05, empirical evidence strongly supports the alternative hypothesis; therefore, the researchers accepted Ha3 and rejected Ho3. The high r value shows that social media use is closely related to young people's political literacy. This finding is similar to Kasmani (2023), who found that following the introduction of Undi18, young Malaysians increasingly use digital platforms to get political information and understand current political issues.

Table 4: Pearson Correlation Matrix Between Social Media Influence and Political Literacy

Variables	r-value	p-value	Results
The relationship between the influence of social media and political literacy among first-year diploma students in public administration at UiTM Seremban 3.	0.812	0.000 $P < 0.05$ (sig)	There is a significant and high relationship Accept Ha3, Reject Ho3

*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The relationship between social media influence and political literacy among first-year diploma students in public administration at UiTM Seremban 3: $r = 0.812$, $p = 0.000$. $P < 0.05$ (sig.). The relationship is significant and strong.

To better understand the strong relationship found in the quantitative analysis ($r = 0.812$), the interview findings were examined together with the survey results. The interviews revealed a common theme of “Algorithmic Political Socialization.” Students explained that platforms such as TikTok and X (formerly Twitter) had become important sources of political information because short videos and visual content made complex political issues easier to understand.

For example, Informant 5, a 19-year-old male student, said that he rarely reads long news articles. Instead, he often gets information about current political issues from his TikTok and others social media platform. He explained that short videos about parliamentary debates helped him understand what was happening in national politics without reading lengthy articles. This shows that social media can make political information easier for young people to access and understand.

This finding aligns with Alivi (2018), who found that short-form digital content can make complex government policies easier for young people to understand. The interviews also showed that students used their Public Administration knowledge to evaluate the information they found online. They did not simply accept everything they saw on social media but compared and questioned the information. This supports Lim (2025), who argued that civic education can improve young people's ability to identify and evaluate misleading information. Overall, the findings suggest that social media plays an important role in students' political understanding, while their academic knowledge helps them assess the information they encounter online.

Political Topics and Political Literacy

Research Objective 4 (RO4) looked at whether students who engaged more with different political topics also had higher political literacy. The study focused on first-year Diploma in Public Administration students at UiTM Seremban 3. To test this, the null hypothesis (Ho4) stated that no significant relationship existed between the two, while the alternative hypothesis (Ha4) stated that one did.

The Pearson correlation analysis showed a significant, positive, and strong relationship between students' engagement with political topics and their overall political literacy ($r = 0.736$, $p < 0.001$). Since the p-value was below the 0.05 significance level, the null hypothesis was rejected.

This strong correlation indicates that the specific political themes students encounter—from national governance to local socio-economic policies—serve as powerful cognitive drivers that actively scale up their civic intelligence.

The strong relationship found in this study ($r = 0.736$) fits with recent research in Malaysia showing that keeping up with current political issues helps young people build their civic understanding. Asia Centre (2022) for example, found that young people who are more exposed to relevant political issues tend to feel more confident about politics and better understand

political ideas. This backs up the present finding that students who engage more with political topics usually have higher political literacy.

To further illuminate this quantitative finding, we integrated qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews, which revealed a dominant theme of “Thematic Relevancy and Civic Resonance.” Interviewed students noted that they are far more likely to develop deep political literacy when political topics directly intersect with their immediate socio-economic futures. For instance, Informant 2 (an 18-year-old male student) shared:

“I used to find general political debates boring, but when the topics touch on things like youth employment policies, university student welfare, or national education budgets, I pay close attention. It forces me to read up on how policies are actually passed in Malaysia.”

This finding is also consistent with Azmi (2021), who noted that young people in the post-Undi18 era tend to be selective and pragmatic in the political information they consume. Their political interest and understanding are more likely to develop when political content goes beyond party politics and addresses substantive issues that directly affect their daily lives and future. Similarly, the interview findings suggest that students are more engaged when political topics are relevant to their experiences and concerns. Taken together, the quantitative and qualitative findings indicate that exposure to relevant political issues can contribute to greater political literacy among students. For Public Administration students in particular, engaging with policy-related issues may help them better understand how political decisions affect society and public service.

Recommendations and Future Research

Based on the strong correlations between social media influence ($r = 0.812$), structural knowledge ($r = 0.662$), and political literacy, higher education institutions should reform traditional civic education frameworks. Academic administrators at UiTM and other higher education institutions could work with political communication specialists to develop interactive, accessible digital learning materials that connect public administration concepts with the media platforms students commonly use. Short videos and other bite-sized learning content could work alongside regular classroom teaching, making complex administrative and political issues more engaging and easier to follow. Platforms like TikTok and X could be useful places to share well-chosen educational content, especially for students who already get much of their information online.

The findings suggest that while students understand political issues well, this doesn't always lead them to take part in politics. Universities can help close this gap by offering safe, inclusive, non-partisan spaces where students feel comfortable discussing political and policy issues. Activities like mock parliamentary debates, policy discussions, and digital policy projects give students a chance to put their learning into practice outside the classroom. They can also help students grow more confident in sharing their views and engage with public policy in a more informed and constructive way.

While this study offers pioneering empirical insights through a unique mixed-methods census of first-year Public Administration diploma students, several promising avenues for future research emerge. First, because this study focused entirely on a localized cohort of public

administration students who naturally possess an academic predisposition toward governance, future researchers should expand the geographical and disciplinary scope. Replicating this Socio-Cognitive Framework of Political Literacy across private universities, non-humanities faculties (such as engineering or medicine), and working youth segments would provide a more robust, cross-comparative map of national civic readiness. Additionally, future longitudinal investigations could track this cohort over a three-to-five-year period to see whether their high baseline literacy translates into concrete voting behavior and sustained public-sector engagement as they transition from university to the workforce.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study successfully validates the utility of the proposed Socio-Cognitive Framework of Political Literacy in assessing the state of civic readiness among modern youth. The findings show that first-year Public Administration students have a very strong understanding of politics, shaped largely by their course content ($r = 0.662$) and by what social media algorithms show them ($r = 0.812$). However, this knowledge doesn't fully carry over into action, as many students are still less involved in civic activities. This confirms that political literacy in the post-Undi18 era is no longer hindered by a lack of information, but rather by the student's need for real-world relevance ($r = 0.736$) and secure spaces for participation. Overall, this study highlights the importance of combining social and cognitive factors in helping young people develop political knowledge and awareness. The findings can help educators and policymakers create better ways to prepare future public administrators to understand and support democratic governance in Malaysia.

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