

## SOCIAL MEDIA, POLITICS AND YOUTHS

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In Malaysia, youths are generally defined as people of ages between 13 and 40 years old. However, when this term is brought to the political scene, this group commonly refers to people of ages from 21 to 40 years old. Malaysian youths are often said to be familiar with and sustained users of information technology and communications (Mohd Safar Hasim & Ali Salman, 2010). Therefore, in a political context, they always prefer to access political information, discuss on political issues and show the political leanings through the medium of technology. This phenomenon is evident after the existence of social media that has fueled the Malaysian political arena. What is social media? What is so interesting about social media that makes politicians 'worried' about it? How and why do people use it as one of the tools in political activities? Are there any implications of social media on politics and youths in Malaysia? These are some questions that arise with the emergence of the new Internet application called social media.

Social media plays an increasing role in today's modern living. It is such a common scenario today to see people browsing or updating their statuses on social networking sites, reading blogs or chatting by using laptops, smart phones, tablets or other sophisticated devices anywhere and at any time. Some people are even addicted to certain applications. Undoubtedly, social media is one of the fastest growing segments on the web (Jansen, Sobel & Cook, 2011). Among the most popular applications of social media are weblogs or blogs (Blogger and WordPress), social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter and Myspace), photos and videos (Flickr and YouTube), online encyclopedia (Wikipedia), online bookmarking (Delicious), virtual social worlds (Second Life) and virtual game worlds (World of Craft). The social media platforms nowadays support User-Generated Content (UGC) in

which users are able to create, share, search, collaborate and organize contents amongst them, while at the same time allowing virtual self-presentation and self-disclosure of oneself.

The main objective of this paper is to share the empirical findings from two studies conducted in Malaysia. Hence, this paper discusses the link between social media, politics and youths from two aspects. First, the discussion is based on the findings from a political sensitivity study among youths in Malaysia. Second, this paper discusses the exploration of social media usage in relation to political leaders in Malaysia.

## **A PANEL SURVEY**

In May 2012, the Institute of Ethnic Studies (KITA), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, conducted a political sensitivity study utilizing a first round panel method to a group of respondents. This study was conducted throughout Malaysia with the cooperation of several teams of researchers from other universities in Malaysia. There were 745 respondents from 13 states and three federal territories, including a minority group and a political group. They were of ages between 21 and 65 years old. The reliability of each construct in the study was more than 0.7 and the margin of error in the sample size was between 3% and 4%.

From this study, a resampling approach is conducted to obtain samples of youth groups by categorizing them based on two criteria. First, age is set to be between 21-40 years old, and second, they obtained information from social media such as blogs, Facebook, and Twitter. As a result, a total of 100 respondents were obtained to represent these two categories. Further, analysis was then carried out to determine their sensitivity to the national politics. Among the focal issues discussed in this paper are their perception on mainstream media and alternative media, sources and people that influence their political views, their perception on economic prospects and the government's performance, issues faced by the voters, their views on selected political leaders in