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Post 14ᵗʰ GE: The Impact of Social Media on Malaysia's Political Landscape

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Abstract

This article discusses the Malaysian political uncertainty situation exacerbated by an ethnic and religious hatred mode on social media after the new Malaysian government coalition, Pakatan Harapan (PH), won the general elections in 2018 especially among young voters. This is based on a recent increase in Malaysians' political awareness. Malaysia is a parliamentary democracy that values freedom of choice, and the voice of people is still important for the survival of security. The Malaysian political landscape was significantly changed by a major tsunami in the 14th General Election, in which the Barisan Nasional (BN) party was defeated for the first time by another coalition party called Pakatan Harapan (PH). At the time, political participations among young voters increased in a form of voting across races, reflecting not only a specific race but also the macro participations of various races. This article aims to examine the dynamics of youth political perceptions that are affected by the exposure of media, the implications that are reflected on the political crisis arises when the collapse of PH, and the formation of a new coalition by several parties trying to form a new government. Incitement and hatred-based comments made online, whether by netizens, political parties, or politicians, to defeat their opponent party, have become one of the most influential factors affecting Malaysia's political stability and government effectiveness. As a result of those factors, Malaysians' perceptions of the PH government have shifted.

Keywords: Political Participation, Young Voters, Social Media, Uncertainty, Collapsed, Parliamentary Democracy.

Introduction

Studies were conducted to examine the relationship between the role of social media and political participations since the development of the global era across borders, known as globalisation. Today's society is no longer reliant on a single electronic medium to evolve and change; rather, it is reliant on several. Thus, Chadwick defined the use of these dual devices as all actions involving the occurrence of unification and exchange across and between the two, live broadcasts and social media, to create broader discussions on the link between media and politics (Vaccari et al., 2015). Chadwick's conception emphasised the role of media and politics themselves, as well as the interrelationships between the two, demonstrating that the media and democracy are also inseparable because the media is the primary backbone towards democratisation. The growth and expansion of global internet penetration, as well as

digital platforms, have been game-changers in Malaysian politics, with both allies and adversaries exploiting the situation to manipulate the political environment.

The results of Malaysia's 14th General Election (GE) in 2018 revealed that democracy is being nurtured. However, it is not an exaggeration to say that, as a result of changing voting patterns, people have begun to shift into a new political phase, a liberal democratic system that differs significantly from the Malaysia race-based politics previously practised. It is also clear that media plays an important role in shaping political changes, particularly in providing voters with information before the announcement of election results. In addition, media also acts as a balancing agent for change in political involvement, not just among certain races, but also across racial and age boundaries. Media is more popular among young adults and youth groups compared to other age groups (McLeod et al., 1999a).

When individuals are given the freedom to speak and express their opinions, media serves as a platform for translating the true meaning of democracy. The explosion of globalization has changed Malaysia's political landscape due to the role of social media that is more global and open. This includes Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Telegram, and blogger sites through the YouTube application that criticizes openly and debates political over racial and religious issues continue to divide political parties. Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook are considered essential because many of us use these apps for photo sharing and live event updates. Every netizen eagerly posts photos of their daily routines and express their opinions on political issues affecting the country, particularly after the GE-14 (Yusop & Sumari, 2013). It spreads so quickly because people share their ideas, cooperate and collaborate, and build several civilizations, not because of anything complicated, but solely because of 'us', the society (Mayfield, 2008).

Early involvement of young people in Malaysian politics dates back to before independence and continues to these days. Voting patterns are very different nowadays, influenced by information obtained through digital platforms such as the internet, that serves as a channel for political information (Rahim, 2015). Nevertheless, many studies show that the role of youth in politics is declining. This is because the process of political socialization is often marred by racial and religious issues that are often a concern and discussed on social media. According to Graber (2003), the coherence of putting media and democracy in a cohesive context is considered a mere shadow. This is because determining whether the achievement of a form of democracy is actually more dependent on an individual political culture and does not depend entirely on the media. Although the voting pattern in GE-14 indicates changes, due to the existence of acts such as the Universities and University Colleges Act (UUCA) that restricts the involvement among university students in politics, the number of votes in the ballot box received from groups are directly affected by social media, i.e. young people, are still at a low level.

The voting pattern before the GE-14 demonstrated that the tendency of youths to choose a desired party or leader is based on the widespread role of social media and their desire to see significant changes in the Malaysian political landscape to the new politics. The same scenario echoes in the results of the 12th GE until it was called the "tsunami of young people" when the results of young people's votes were determined by their belief in the information received from social media even though their contributions were still not considered the most significant (Rahim, 2010). The tendency of this factor at once has shown the collapse of the

Pakatan Harapan government. PH expectations were misinterpreted because they felt that, despite various issues involving members of the component parties, their opportunities were still wide, but with a strategy aimed at tarnishing the reputation of Tun Dr Mahathir, it led to failure. The BN's strategy was more on provoking the opposition party at that time, especially the leaders of the Pakatan Harapan, showed a lack of ideas by the BN's top leaders in gaining the support from people. However, only a few months after the new government took power, various issues and problems arose and were called into question. It indirectly contributed to the defeat of the Pakatan Harapan government, resulted in the Prime Minister Tun Dr. Mahathir Mahathir's resignation, the Chairman of Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (BERSATU), in addition to the uncertain situation in the country as a result of the occurrence of a new pandemic worldwide in early 2020.

Problem Statement
In today's era of globalization, the internet and digital media are no longer new to the emergence of a new policy, particularly when it comes to addressing any contemporary political issues (Savigny, 2002). New media, including social media, has become a significant medium that contributes to a revolution in political communication, either oral or written, thus it can be considered the most powerful and effective intermediary in conveying and expressing political views either from the government to citizens or vice-versa (Denton, et al, 1990: 11). However, social media is often exploited and abused by certain parties until there are misinterpretations of the messages conveyed in the media platforms involved (Lasswell, 2012). Some studies prove that media encourages people in a country to participate beyond the norms or habits, especially young people who easily move in groups to provoke (DeMartini, 1983). This is because the unlimited use of the internet and social media allows individuals to write and post all their opinions openly without hindrance. Thus, the political involvement of people in the election will not only be limited to voting alone, but it will also cover various aspects to form a new political culture among people. The new political landscape is reflected on the link between general elections and new media because YouTube, blogs, Facebook, and Twitter are the main platforms that are not only easy and cheap but also contemporary in line with the current thinking of generation Y, thus, it is not surprising if this new media began to be popular among the group earlier during the 13th GE (Lim, 2013).

Unfortunately, most social media still aims to defend the importance of commercial values as opposed to a positive professional ethics in writing to the point of sacrificing their code and professionalism process to achieve their interests (Nadchatram, 2007). The government's lack of concern for the issues and interests of young people, including generation Y, leads to a reduction in political participations especially in the voting process (Shiratuddin et. al, 2016), yet more likely to be expressed in a form of personal opinions and views. Participants have had numerous discussions about their political animosity towards politicians or political parties. There is a wealth of knowledge and ideas shared that can help to provide additional perspectives on incitement and hatred-based comments online on social networking sites. In the Malaysian political landscape, the mainstream media is more pro-government, while social media is more hateful and deceptive.

The results of the government selection process should not be based solely on the percentages of Malaysians who used social media excessively during the 14th General Election. This is because the implications provided by social media also focus on the political-

cultural aspects, particularly young people, who are seen to be more inclined to lies, hatred, and incitement culture due to netizens' digital role. Therefore, this study investigates and determines the impact of social media on the political participations of young Malaysians who are more likely to spread hate, deception, incitement, humiliation, and hatred. Furthermore, moral issues among political leaders, particularly in mid-2020, have undermined people's trust in politics and national leadership. The same scenario occurs following the unprecedented political turmoil amid Covid-19.

Methodology

This study used descriptive analysis and text analysis as the qualitative data including social media reports, as well as the literature review as the research instruments to collect data. This method is a method that aims to analyze the data by identifying themes through qualitative data collected either through media reports, interviews, news, or library studies (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method is very appropriate in the efforts of researchers who try to provide an explanation from their perspective, about the relationship between certain patterns of a particular phenomenon and the extent to which a phenomenon can be produced (Fereday & Muir, 2006).

The data collected through content analysis methods from the primary sources of various mass media sources such as books, journals, and especially online sources are used to collect information. The data of the GE-14 results and by-election results for Rantau DUN and Semenyih DUN in 2019 was also used. Therefore, to obtain the data that can be used as the material to analyze the Malaysian political phenomenon post-2018 General Election, selected social media sites including Facebook, and well-known Malaysian political blogs will be used. Recognizing Malaysians' proclivity to speak up and express their opinions after the general election will also provide a better indication of all political activities that take place, whether among candidates (leaders) or supporters.

New Media and Political Participation

Media has become one of the best mediums to convey political information to individuals whether it is conventional or new media. Media is the most effective tool in conducting political campaigns. In the political context in Malaysia, the use of new media has been widely used since the outbreak of the Reformation era in 1998 due to the rise of the young people's spirit in expressing dissatisfaction with the government (Oorjitham, 2000). Although the new media is gaining ground in the hearts of Malaysians, especially among the younger generation, the mainstream media including newspapers, radio, and television is still seen to play a role in producing individuals who participate in politics (Zhang & Chia, 2006). Television is still categorized as one of the media that facilitates individuals to obtain political information (Bystrom & Dimitrova, 2007). While political involvement aimed at campaigning is more likely to use new media especially when the times are close to elections, then there will be a cyber war among cyber troopers on social media.

To increase the involvement of young people in politics in a country, the use of media is very necessary whether in forms verbal or non-verbal. It is aimed more at ensuring the information or opinions of people are conveyed to their leaders, while all government policies are communicated to people. However, media issues exploited by certain parties are indeed an inevitable issue when communication becomes more complicated and the information

conveyed is misinterpreted (McQuail, 1994). According to Brooks (2015), political hatred is a common emotion among party supporters because they believe their party is superior than the others. It is also stated that in this internet age, people can just post anything and scales up the freedom to express political anger and hatred with astounding efficacy, as political hate is a demand-driven phenomenon and we are the ones creating a platform for it. Furthermore, because of political preferences, internet users cannot help but be biased in what they see on social media. As a result, political hatred will evolve in tandem with the ideologies of political parties or politicians (Chinnasamy & Abdul Manaf, 2018). In terms of participation, undergraduate students are more likely to engage in light political participation on Facebook and other platforms. The main reason why this happens is that as people share in an interconnected society or when people congregate online, they frequently discuss issues of public interests, and if the issues are discussed by many, more users tend to jump on the bandwagon to remain updated on what is going on (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2014).

The Impact of Social Media (Twitter/Fb) Pre and Post 15TH GE
The political tsunami that erupted in 2008 due to the rise of young people against the government on various issues. Malaysians' political participation in the 2018 election was impacted by the rising cost of living, the GST issue, and an increase in the unemployment rate, especially among youth. Based on those issues, the opposition had made the issues a manifesto of their party in the election that year and a factor that causes people's dissatisfaction (Ghazali et al., 2012). For months after winning the 2018 election, the Pakatan Harapan party had attempted to carry out its duties as the ruling government. During that time, the PH leadership line, which was still fragile in leading the government by relying on a multi-ethnic regime, failed to resolve various issues (Ufen, 2020, 171ff). Arguably, the collapse of the PH government might have been caused by the intense pressure from both within and outside the party.

Since social media has such a strong influence, any flaws or blisters that appear can almost certainly be used as a weapon to weaken a targeted party. Within 22 months the country was ruled by a new government (Pakatan Harapan), it was too early to assess any transformation efforts, especially when it comes to racial integration. It has frequently been manipulated for political purposes, that cannot be separated from racial-based politics. Therefore, any government must take immediate action to prevent racial and religious issues from being manipulated to undermine peace and harmony. The PH's government lacks a comprehensive policy framework (Tapsell, 2020), as well as its inability to work cohesively (Chin, 2020,; Wan Jan, 2020, 8ff).

Beginning with the PH's loss to BN in the Cameron Highlands by-election, PH was concerned about the existence of dissatisfaction among the new generation with exceptional political morale (Jaharudin, 2014). Racial politics have also played a role in the BN's success in winning the hearts of Malay voters, as well as the BN's victory in Cameron Highlands. Since PH took over the government, UMNO and PAS have been accused of fostering Malay-Islamic sentiments that have harmed racial relations (Mahmud, 2019). As a result of the loss of PH to BN in Tanjung Piai by-election on November 16, 2019, most Malaysians, particularly Malay, expressed the racial sentiment in the sense that PH is a party-dominated by DAP. Similarly, some Chinese citizens believed Tun Mahathir had manipulated the DAP party.

Among Malaysia's young citizens, several well-known blogs discuss a variety of political issues, for example, *amenoworld*, *dialograkyat.blogspot.com*, *taipingmall, GengNajib,* and *shahbudindot.com*. Most of these bloggers have their followers and many supporters, especially a group of netizens who like to express their views through their writing. The culture of bullying, insulting and provoking the public had grown increasingly hostile to Malaysian politics even before the 15th general election. It occurs among people who are not actively involved in politics, as well as among those who are staunch supporters of certain political parties. This is not a new phenomenon due to the rapid advancement of social media technology, which has made it popular among Malaysians to express their views and opinions. This trend is expected to continue until the new government, PH is elected. However, it is undeniable that the comments posted on social media have had an indirect impact on the country's electoral and democratic aspects, exposing the existence of freedom of speech among people in deciding on what is the next government? It would not be an exaggeration to describe this social media role as a significant factor in determining the course of a party or government and contributing to a political scenario described by Malaysians as a 'silent revolution'. For example, when the political tsunami metaphor was used in the PH's victory in the 2018 general election, it demonstrated a shift in support for a single-race party shifting to multi-ethnic voters (Ismail & Noor, 2018).

The abrupt change in Malaysian politics is expected to last only a short time because there is still significant social division at the grassroots level, and some researchers believe that Ketuanan Melayu Islam political ideology was the primary ideological catalyst for the PH government's collapse (Chin, 2020). Due to these weaknesses, the collapse of the Pakatan Harapan government coincides with an increase in the anti-DAP and anti-Chinese sentiment. A specific term of abuse has also been used to express a mix of negative racial and political sentiment on Twitter and Facebook that can be used as a proxy for such sentiment. Is it, however, a lack of experience in comparison to the previous BN coalition government that can be considered one of the primary factors contributing to the new PH government's demise? Malaysians, particularly young people aged 12 to 35, consider Facebook to be the most popular social media platform. It is evaluated based on the number of Malaysians who use Facebook as a platform to obtain information (Sham 2010).

Hateful Reactions: A Malaysian Culture?
Parliamentary Seat By-Election Semenyih N. 24 2/3/2021
The Semenyih DUN by-election, held in March 2021, was to replace the previous Semenyih ADUN, who had passed away. Bakhtiar Mohd Nor, a former assemblyman, was the Pakatan Harapan representative when he won the 14th General Election in May 2018. The strategy of combining the two dominant parties, UMNO and PAS, resulted in the BN candidate winning this by-election with a majority of 1,914 votes. Surprisingly, compared to the state constituencies of Sungai Kandis, Seri Setia, and Balakong, this by-election showed a higher turnout of voters (Abd. Rahim et al., 2019)

Many hateful and seditious comments circulated on social media, particularly Twitter, after PH came to power and before the Semenyih by-election. Social media, a platform that contains elements of hatred for individuals associated with a political party, was no exception. It was the most prevalent in Malaysian society in which humiliation and hatred had reached the point of challenging the Malay kings' sovereignty. When the party jump issue arose in the

PH's political leadership, many harsh words were uttered by staunch supporters from specific leaders or parties as a sign of rage and dissatisfaction with the actions of politicians. The hatred mode spread through social media was not only written by ordinary people, but there were also hateful comments that come from politicians, either from the government or opposition. The inefficiency of the PH government leaders in carrying out the trust and responsibility bestowed upon them was also a factor fueling the spread of negative comments on social media.

Parliamentary Seat By-Election Rantau 13/4/2019

During the Rantau State Legislative Assembly (DUN) by-election campaign in April 2019, many campaigns and people's points of view attempted to sway voters' minds. The Rantau by-election was held in April 2019 because Datuk Seri Mohamad Hassan's uncontested victory in the 14th GE was deemed invalid by the court. It is a follow-up to the issue of the EC's rejection of the pass for the PH candidate, Dr S. Streram. To ensure the validity of the ADUN's position, a Rantau DUN by-election (No. 27) was held. Mohamad's victory as a representative of the Barisan Nasional (BN) was not a surprise as it was the third victory for BN since the 14th General Election, following victories in Cameron Highlands and Semenyih by-elections. The findings of the study revealed that non-Malay voters played a role in the decision, as well as expressing their dissatisfaction with the PH government (Yusoff, 2019). Apart from the frustration of voters against the PH leaders who frequently blame BN in their election campaigns, all information that could be obtained through the development of technology, particularly the speed of information through social media, was a factor for Malaysians in the process of electing leaders in their respective areas (Abd. Muis, 2019).

After Mohamad Hassan's (Tok Mat) victory in the Rantau by-election, many statements were circulated on social media that appeared to blame the PH government for what was perceived to be a failure. It is undeniable that the role of social media, which was primarily accessed and used by young people, contributed to Tok Mat's victory because it also relied on the support of young people (Mohamed, 2019). A massive campaign has been launched to encourage Rantau DUN residents not to make rash decisions when electing leaders to represent their interests. The impact of the media on issues of integrity influences people's perceptions of the political landscape and current developments in the electorate. Social media has a significant influence on political behaviours. Furthermore, it influences decision-making based on disseminated political information (Besar et, al., 2014). As social media platforms such as Whatsapp and Facebook play an important role in providing voters with alternative information during the 14th general election (Chin & Welsh, 2018), both of these social media platforms are undeniably influential in voters' decisions about whether to support BN or PH during the by-election. Furthermore, the Sabah 2020 State Legislative Assembly (DUN) General Election (GE) demonstrated that voters' support for ethnic-based political parties is still growing, as voters are more confident and have a strong belief in ethnic leadership of their own to lead their fate for the long run (Besar et al., 2020). The hatred mode comments made by some people are meant to grab people's attention and at the same time make them feel like they aren't alone and isolated from Malaysian politics.

Comments of Hatred on Racial and Religious Issues VS Political Stability

As the PH begins its reign as the first multi-ethnic party after defeating the BN government, As PH began its reign as the first multi-ethnic party after defeating BN government, comments

on racial profiling on social media are on the rise. The victory was a direct indication that the new government had begun to govern the country despite the various challenges faced during the first year of its existence. This is because the PH government's alliance was not universally accepted, and the changes that PH made were also considered out of the ordinary by previous government administrations. It is not a surprise, then, that those with a political agenda used racial and religious issues as a tool. In addition, the four parties' policies were not well-coordinated. Each party had its political agenda, and ministers openly contradicted one another.

For example, DAP, the Chinese-based party, conflicted with PPBM, the Malay party on a variety of issues. Issues concerning the Malays' privilege and Islam, that DAP had highlighted, began to cause concern among Malay Muslim leaders. Hence, UMNO and PAS formed a political alliance known as Muafakat Nasional to unite Malay nationalists and Islamic voters in a single bloc to defeat PH in the next general election. The rise of the supremacy of Malay Islam is the result of this combination of ideologies. It stems from a sense of insecurity among a group of conservative Malays who believed that their supremacy was being challenged by other races.

At the level of the citizens in a country, especially during the technological transition process, people's dependence on the media to obtain information is very high. From an individual aspect, this theory is likely to weaken the definition of expectations of the mass media due to ambiguity or uncertainty in a country's political landscape that will contribute to extreme anxiety to its people. Since social media is more free and open, the culture of cursing, insulting, and hatred messages among netizens, social media users and, politicians have evolved into a culture to gain votes, popularity, support, and even defeat opponents. Thus, referring to Malaysia's racial-political background, it is unsurprising that issues of racial and religious sensitivity remain to serve as a platform for the formulation of various political agendas. Many videos of Malaysians insulting other races and religions have been recorded and uploaded for public viewing on 'Youtube'. The existence of race-based non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as LANGUAGE, ISMA, and HINDRAF exacerbates racial issues. In addition, to the rise of the power of the group that witnessed the supremacy of Malay Islam, DAP supporters are also attempting to "play with the fire" by raising racial and religious issues in social media, all of which contributed to the country's political uncertainty and exposed the fall of a government that could only last 22 months.

Conclusion

In line with the very sudden changes of time in acquiring something, people are more likely to get information from sources that can give them complete and clear information about a particular scenario. Most of the literature emphasizes the Media Dependency Theory proposing that people will be more inclined to rely on the mass media as the primary source of reliable information, particularly during times of political unrest. In such a situation, the probability of people being influenced by the media is very high. This theory leads us to some form of expectation or hypothesis that is diverse. However, what will be more emphasized is 2 types, namely people in a country and also at an individual level.

This contribution fills a knowledge gap because few studies were conducted on the online discourse of Malaysian political uncertainty after the 14th general election. There is currently

no research on the relationship between political uncertainty situation in Malaysia from the perspective of Malaysian netizens and politicians with the spreading messages or comments of hatred online. Even though there are many comments or postings on the internet, comments about racial and religious sensitivities have a significant impact. Comments or postings from various parties on social media have become one of the most influential factors affecting the political stability and government effectiveness of a country. As a result, this study is useful for new media studies because the researchers typically investigate or explore a specific issue when it has a conclusion. The media has an impact on political perceptions that changed people's political maturity when confronted with the challenges of a political crisis and a pandemic, and this can be used as a future study by researchers.

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