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Association of online political participation with social media usage, perceived information quality, political interest and political knowledge among Malaysian youth: Structural equation model analysis

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Abstract: Although, many researches have described the younger generation to be diverse and active in politics of today, this segment of the population has not been well-acknowledged in the decision-making of politics. This involvement in politics is crucial as it helps in building confidence and skill acquisition that are relevant such as teamwork and effective communication. Hence, the study aims to further investigate their participation in politics and to construct a structural model that displays the associations between perceived information quality (PIQ), online political participation (OPP), political interest (PI), political knowledge (PK) and social media usage (SMU) among Malaysia’s

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT
Although, many researchers have described the younger generation to be active and resourceful. Nevertheless, this segment of the population has not been well-acknowledged on their participation and involvement in politics of today. This study reveals that, the level of online political participation among the younger generation is determined by political knowledge, political interest and quality information. This explains the important determining factors among youth that could facilitate online political participation, such as utilizing Facebook as a tool for political involvement. Convincingly, it would be wise for politicians to consider and recognize youth exuberance in connection with social media obsession, particularly Facebook in their search for political knowledge and participation. Today’s youth often rely on Facebook as a platform to obtain political knowledge before making decisions regarding politicking. In conclusion, moulding and targeting a political message to youth via social media, especially Facebook should be considered as a paramount approach in strategizing future political campaigns.
youth. In doing this, the study identified various youth groups in Malaysia and from there, 476 respondents aged between 18 and 35 years responded to the online questionnaire survey. The path analysis of the structural model indicates positive significant statistical relationship between PIQ, PI with PK and OPP. The SMU also reveals a significant relation with PK but indicates no association with OPP. Nevertheless, PK has a significant relationship with OPP. This explains the importance of PIQ, PI and PK among the youth and the findings could enhance their OPP, especially in utilizing Facebook as tool for political involvement.

Subjects: Political Research Methods; Politics & the Media; Political Communication

Keywords: Online political participation; Political knowledge; Perceived information quality; Social media usage; Political interest

1. Introduction

Youth participating in politics has continued to be the major area of study around the world (Kitanova, 2019; Skoric & Poor, 2013). Their political involvement displays psychological inclination, power and outlook towards supporting and embracing new ideas; this enables the youth to be a target group with significance among political parties and politicians (Fjerza et al., 2014). Therefore, the participation of youth from the onset is vital in determining whether individuals will participate in future politics (Vissers et al., 2012), as their participation would illustrate their involvement later on as adults (Earl et al., 2017). Furthermore, youth in particular represents the driving force of change in the society (Azis et al., 2020), and their current participation is predictive of their participation in the future. By having participation from this target group, the present political undertakings may shape the policy processes to be more open and responsible towards the younger generation, thus, encouraging a sense of citizenship among youth (EACEA, 2013; Mohamad et al., 2018).

The youth have not been fully recognized and involved in politics and decision-making to help in skill acquisition and self-confidence that are relevant such as teamwork and effective communication, despite the fact that some past studies have reported the youth to be dynamic in accepting new ideas, diverse and active (Diemer & Li, 2011; Harris et al., 2010). Similarly, despite the youth having diverse initiatives, perception and capacity on how to influence the political system, concern has been raised on the decrease in the participation tendencies among the youth from political participation, electoral turnout and party membership. Their participation in political activities has seriously decreased in the last twenty years in the world (Theocharis & Quintelier, 2016; Zainon & Hashim, 2017). This indicates that, the youth are becoming disappointed further with the status quo of the governmental structures. This could be observed in the reality as the youth are denied to participation in the electoral process thereby leading to low rate of turnout during election and lackadaisical attitudes towards politics (Putnam, 2000; Wattenberg, 2015).

Currently over 11 million Malaysians are on Facebook, trailing only Philippine, India and Indonesia (much-larger) within Asia. Social networking tools such as Facebook and Twitter are both used extensively in Malaysia, taking the interactive, real-time nature of blogs a step further (Gruzd et al., 2011). In the political history of Malaysia, the Barisan Nasional (National Front) made effective use of these tools as opposition supporters and politicians. Weiss (2012) reported that nearly one million people have “liked” the primary Facebook page of Najib close to three times the number who have “liked” that of the opposition icon, Anwar Ibrahim. The most prominent recent episode of social mobilization of Malaysia centre its strategy on the application, using it to build a plan for on-the-ground mobilization and a sense of pan-religious or pan-racial collective identity. This advancement in social interaction had transformed information with potentially significant effects on mobilization and civicness. Although Facebook as social networking site has eroded the
anonymity of online interaction, it has the potential to bridge social cleavages. Therefore, Facebook has increasingly functions in Malaysia as elsewhere, not just for communication but also for social settings, lend it potential power to open debate across ever more decentralized networks and redistribute power (Gong, 2011).

While it is acknowledged that studies on youth political participation is one of the most researched areas across cultures, including Malaysia, further research needs to be conducted to further enhance our understanding of youth behavior, especially from the cultural perspective (Abu Bakar et al., 2018; Bakar et al., 2016; Raza et al., 2018). As suggested by Zainon et al. (2017), there is a declining trend of youth political participation in Malaysia; hence, there is a need to further investigate youth participation by looking beyond the factors such as social media usage (SMU). To date, research that has been conducted in Malaysian context mainly focused on the general impacts of SMU by the younger generation such as political campaign, election process and electoral turnout (Salman et al., 2017; Shiratuddin et al., 2016; Zainon et al., 2017). These studies however, have not clearly examined youth behavior and motivation towards online political participation (OPP).

Interestingly, political knowledge (PK), political interest (PI), perceived information quality (PIQ) beside SMU are likely to influence political participation (EACEA, 2013; Halim et al., 2020; Muntean, 2015; Uzochukwu et al., 2014). However, only a few researches have actually been conducted to examine how PK, PI, PIQ and SMU relate to youth participation in political activities (Ksiazek et al., 2016; Lee & Cho, 2011; Whiteley, 2005; Yang & DeHart, 2016). Thus far, the existing literature in Malaysia has not examined the relationship between PK, PI, PIQ and SMU among youth, especially youth of voting age as samples but concepts, ideas and practices need to be advanced and well-researched. This will ensure a better understanding of youth motivation to discuss politics online especially via social media (Mohamad et al., 2018).

Given the argument presented above, it is therefore crucial that, a study is conducted to further understand youth behaviour and their participation in politics in order to shed some light on the reasons why Malaysian youth political participation is declining, as claimed by Hed (2017) and Rauf et al. (2016). This study specifically focused on examining the relationship between OPP, PI, PIQ, PK and specifically SMU of Facebook by the younger generation of Malaysia. The findings significantly contribute towards new literature on the cultural perspective of youth political participation. It also creates awareness among leaders, policy makers and government on the needs of the younger generation who is the most important asset of the country. This study intends to offer an integrated structural model, discuss its implication and suggest a way forward for future studies. It is posited that a broader view of OPP is needed for the development of an empirical structural model. Therefore, this paper attempts to: (1) establish the relationship between the constructs, particularly in political, information and communication research; and (2) develop a structural model of online Malaysia’s youth political participation.

The paper is organised into three main parts: the first part comprises the definition of terms and the associations between variables; the second part focuses on the methods and findings and final part of the paper makes conclusion with a number of incisive implications and recommendations.

2. Literature review

2.1. Online political participation

Political participation is the process of sharing and gathering political information, taking part in voting exercise, interacting with politicians, disseminating political information, involving in political campaign, influencing others to vote and participation in the selection of official representatives (Zuniga et al., 2012). The present study used online and offline participations to characterize political participation. The offline political participation involves activities that occur in practical world such as attending political events, organizing fundraising to support a political candidate’s
campaign, voting or working for a candidate or party. On the other hand, OPP includes political activities such as signing petition on the internet, gathering PK and information on social media, sending message on twitter or Facebook to a political candidate or government officials and making comment on candidate’s website (Jennings et al., 2020; Zuniga et al., 2012). These activities take place on the social platforms such as Facebook. By examining the OPP, the study obtained and provided an in-depth explanation and knowledge of OPP for a complete understanding of the concept. For instance, voting alone cannot explain the magnitude to which youth participate in politics because their political participations have been demonstrated in both offline and online activities.

2.2. Social media usage

The first set of antecedents in this study is pertained to SMU in the context of OPP. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) stated that social media is a group of internet-based applications that are built on technological and ideological foundation of Web 2.0 which enables the exchange and creation of user-generated content. Beyond voting, youth participate in mobilization and campaign, seeking for donation for political party or candidate, interaction with political actors, tagging, post update, sharing and making comment online. Similarly, a new form of youth political participation such as SMU has been utilized to engage youth involvement in political activities and it has started to reinvigorate youth to participate because they utilize the medium more than other age groups (Smyth & Best, 2013). Therefore, by examining online modes, youth political participation can be closely and holistically investigated and understood especially with the new form of social media (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) activities that increase and shape political behavior among youth (Miller et al., 2015).

To further investigate the association between SMU and OPP, this study focuses on the evaluation of social media roles in enhancing youth involvement in political issues. As discussed, social media provides to the youth, accessibility and low-cost method to politically participate in digital online applications (Steinberg, 2015). More importantly, a substantial number of youth have exploited Facebook for OPP because it helps in raising awareness about political issues, and also assists in solving or changing national or local problems (Abdu et al., 2016; Babac & Podobnik, 2018; Sveningsson, 2014). Scholars posit that there is positive and strong relationship between political participation and SMU (see for example, Valenzuela et al., 2019; Yamamoto et al., 2015). In relation to political participation, other studies have also suggested that SMU is important for offline political participation (Kim et al., 2017; Mohamad et al., 2018; Vitak et al., 2011). Using social media as OPP positively plays roles in the political lives of the young people, but specifically at different developmental stages. The influence from OPP facilitates the agitation of the youth to demand for more rights, benefits and involvement in the political appointment.

The popularity of social media has generated series of discussions regarding the potentiality of the site to increase youth participation in politics (Zuniga et al., 2017). Some studies (e.g., Coran et al., 2017; Effing et al., 2011; Elhadidi, 2019) indicate that reliance on Facebook, YouTube and Twitter increases civic participation, while Facebook usage increases political participation (Abdu et al., 2016; Elhadidi, 2019). However, some scholars have pointed out that, Facebook features such as diversity in the Facebook friend networking, usage patterns and interaction with the public figures should be further investigated (Abdu et al., 2016). Thus far, researchers have concentrated on the roles of Facebook as a medium that can facilitate OPP among youth (Abdu et al., 2016; Conroy et al., 2012; Masiha et al., 2018; Vissers & Stolle, 2014). Studies suggest that Facebook usage is often used as a space for engaging different forms of political participations particularly among the youth that are already frustrated in traditional political spaces (Batourski & Grzywinska, 2018).

Similarly, there are concerns about the association between SMU and youth political participation. Although, youth are now seriously engaging in online activities, it is imperative that researchers look at the factors that hinder their participation in political activities and the factors that equally influence use of social media. Researchers have also emphasized that participation via
Social media is not that important, nor significantly related to political participation (Vitak et al., 2011; Zuniga et al., 2014). However, this argument does not completely demonstrate the ability of social media to influence youth political participation, but it rather focuses on other factors such as type of usage and the nature of the network (Yamamoto et al., 2015).

Social media has also been identified as the antecedent to PK apart from political participation. It has a positive relationship with knowledge levels by helping youth on seeking information on political activities (Adamu & Mohamad, 2019; Andersen et al., 2017; Gottfried et al., 2017; Ohme, 2020; Schafer, 2020; Weeks et al., 2017). The association between PK and media consumption also is found in online platforms (Lee & Xenos, 2019) which suggests the feasibility of this relationship on the social channels. However, as posited by Bode and Dalrymple (2016), information from social media does come from the users of the same social media platforms rather than the journalists thereby leading to the question on the credibility of the information source (Bode & Vrago, 2015; Halim & Azizan, 2017; Mohamad et al., 2016; Shin et al., 2018). For example, the information appeared on Facebook time line usually traced to one of the users on the friend list. This information does make it to the users’ feed and is often conveyed from a trusted and known source (Bode & Dalrymple, 2016) which affects the way one pays attention to the information. These features with lack of significant studies in this area make it difficult to evaluate the particular effect that SMU has on the level of PK.

Some of the findings that support how social media contributes towards the increasing PK also come from censorship research (Ceron et al., 2014). These research explain that the personal universe that builds around the online social networks eventually narrows down what one knows because of the unique information that aligns with their views. This can hinder learning by reducing the varieties of new information available to the audience (Stoud, 2011). Additionally, people are less likely to make review; therefore, they process relevant information systematically than inappropriate information (Huang, 2018; Schmitt et al., 2018). Consequently, the information that is not processed systematically is less likely to be remembered and may lead to low level of understanding and retention. By the fact that many users cannot be motivated by the desire to learn more about politics or stay relevant when they spend time on social media, the negative side effects of the filtered media environment can also be compounded (Bode & Dalrymple, 2016; Kim, Russo & Amma, 2017). Similarly, Feezell (2018) reported that hard news not likely to be clicked or selected in social media environment with audiences when given a choice often choosing entertainment news. If an audience avoid news that is confidential, there is no reason to believe that the use of social media has positive effect on PK.

Besides, there is also a possibility for unwanted exposure to information from social media news. Accidental disclosure occurs when viewers accidentally find information when they do not search for the content specifically (Feezell, 2018; Goyanes, 2019; Thorson et al., 2019). Works in this area have linked incidental findings to knowledge gained on public affairs issues in an online environment showing possible effects of the remaining knowledge on the frequent use of social media (Valeriani & Vaccari, 2016). Therefore, while audiences navigate via Facebook mainly for social reasons, they may be expected to find information on trending events on politics. Usual exposure to such information may lead to incidental learning, although gaining knowledge is not the main purpose of using social media. Therefore, SMU can be concluded to have significant relationship with PK from the above discussion.

2.3. Perceived information quality
Beside SMU, empirical studies have shown positive relationships between PIQ and OPP. The PIQ refers to the quality of information available on Facebook which focuses specifically on youth, who are the majority users of the medium (Skoric & Kwan, 2011). It can be measured by the accuracy of the information, which comprises its recency, speed, reliability of the information, completeness of the information as well as information presentation plan. Jung et al. (2011) asserts that Facebook information quality is an important key factor that determines online interaction success. The
information obtained from Facebook could potentially instigate youth political participation because this segment of the population in particular, has been denied an avenue to involve in politics by the traditional media. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, information quality is defined as the speed, accuracy, quality and authenticity of information provided by Facebook.

In addition to that, studies have also revealed that quality of information is determined by the characteristics of the communication channel such as the strength and quality of information, sources’ credibility, accessibility, timeliness, completeness and reliability of the information (Sundar et al., 2016). These factors will contribute to the likelihood of people’s engagement in political issues (Bakshy et al., 2015) and can ultimately influence people’s knowledge. With regard to that, Facebook has been recognized as one of the communication channels that provide quality information to youth to participate in online political discussions. This can be supported by Diemer and Li (2011) with the fact that Facebook may satisfy their political information needs and desires. For example, Tang and Lee (2013) reported that the theory of uses and gratification recently has focused on motivational factors that have influence on social networks such as Facebook which has moved to participation in political activities and active expression from simple information searching. Therefore, as quality information on Facebook provides current, organized, complete, accurate and well-arranged information, it is now becoming an attractive predictor of OPP increasingly (Young & Quan-Haase, 2009).

Meanwhile, the relationship between PIQ and OPP can be explained in four different perspectives. First, youth in particular have been denied an avenue by the traditional media to participate in politics. Therefore, it is believed that Facebook is the best platform to provide them with quality information and stimulate their needs to actively participate in online political discussion (Jung et al., 2011). Similarly, the social media information quality such as accuracy, speed, timeliness and thoroughness of information may be a significant factor that contributes towards the utilization of Facebook by youth, especially in fulfilling their social and political needs (Ksiazek et al., 2016). However, this suggests further that, quality of information is an important determinant and positively correlated to OPP (Abdu et al., 2016). Also, previous research has also reported that, factors related to OPP can be influenced by Facebook information quality such as intention to participate in offline activities of politics (like involving in community and civic services) and individual interactivity (Abdu et al., 2017; Ahmad et al., 2019; Houston et al., 2015) as youth political involvement is often regarded as a significant element to a healthy democracy (Cammaerts et al., 2016; Gaby, 2017).

This reveals that political participation of youth is an important field of research proven to be useful to academics and political stakeholders. As Facebook is also found to facilitate efficient information sharing and democratic organization of communication more between youth and politicians; its capacity to succeed in an online campaign has been proposed as a new faster winning card in electoral process. Dumitrica (2014) added that the relationship gap between youth and political figures often bridged through Facebook as the medium become positioned as universally available, accessible with quality and speed. This implies that the capacity and quality of information reduce the social and political problem. Additionally, the decision to use Facebook by the youth for political activities is determined by the Facebook information quality (Mohamed, 2018). This study supports how the youth explore political, informational and educational potential of online network sites such as content deemed political on Facebook.

On the same note, Flynn et al. (2017) explicates the association between quality information and PK, and explains that, the more political information offered to the public, the more it is difficult to make sense out of it. A more current information on politics gives opportunities for those seeking for knowledge more on politics while increasing the likelihood of choosing preferred media content to enable people especially the younger generation who are not interested to tune out completely. The quality of information being provided determines the PK of the youngsters which ultimately affects their political participation.
In reference to the argument presented above, it can be deduced that the more a high-quality information is disseminated or received, the more it will enhance the knowledge about political issues. The arguments clearly explain how PIQ influences OPP among youth. The following section will further elaborate youth political participation by discussing how PI influences youth OPP.

2.4. Political interest

The third antecedent of youth, OPP related to PI, is defined as motivation needed to provide sufficient energy and time to involve in online and offline political activities (Whiteley, 2005). This motivation ignites and inspires youth specifically, to seek for political information that can help in assessing political alternatives before they vote for their choice. In simple terms, PI relates to youth’s willingness to be politically informed. The increase and rapid growth of Facebook usage explains how youth are often exposed to volume and abundance of information every day. However, there are few empirical studies that have actually discussed the influence such exposure has on PI and OPP (Dubois & Blank, 2018; Vitak et al., 2011). In this case, Facebook has provided a vast amount of political information ranging from news on politics to political campaign targeting at youth as they are the active users and the most exposed to Facebook (Himelboim et al., 2013).

Studies have shown that psychosocial variables such as PI has been operationalized and considered a strong predictor of OPP (see for example, Bimber et al., 2015; Otieno & Mukhongo, 2015). Therefore, youth interest in political activities is the consequences of recent proliferation of Facebook as a platform for political participation (Miller et al., 2015; Russo & Stattn, 2017; Valenzuela et al., 2018). Youth that remain more politically engrossed are like to focus on political content more in media which may eventually turn to participation in political activity (Theocharis & Lowe, 2016). Ideally, youth are expected to develop PI because of their nature as active and easy to accept new changes in the society but their withdrawal from political activities can be characterized as lack of interest, motivation and access to new media (Earl et al., 2017). One of the necessities of participating in politics is PI as it measures the OPP of the youth; it is important in political participation as it influences getting PK, information and skill which is relevant towards the assessment of political alternatives (Zuniga & Diehl, 2019). Thus, the variable has been identified to be positively related to OPP (Pap et al., 2017; Vissers & Stolle, 2014).

Likewise, it is found that youth declining interest in politics is due to lack of participation in offline politics (Holtz et al., 2013). This shows that the youth think not of a well-known approach for political participation such as participating in election; hence, the frequent disregard. Alternatively, Facebook now serves as platform for PI and expression; it appears to be related to offline/OPP significantly among the youth (Yamamoto & Kushin, 2014; Yang & DeHart, 2016). Political activities on Facebook such as discussion of politics with friends, interacting with politicians and posting or reading opinions on politics are likely to stimulate knowledge and interest on positive political and social issues which later facilitates OPP and more demanding offline political activities (Vissers & Stolle, 2014).

Additionally, studies have also acknowledged the increase in PI will lead to significant increase in PK. Citizens, especially youngsters who show PI are likely more to engage in the information processing and follow current trends (Reichert, 2016; Shehata & Amnà, 2019; Zuniga & Diehl, 2019), display higher level of PK and awareness (Yamamoto et al., 2015) and involve in political activities (Kim et al., 2013). People who are interested in politics are knowledgeable more in politics and are likely more to vote and participate in other ways (Shehata & Amnà, 2019). By having a PI, it enables youth to seek political information that enhances their knowledge of politics, and thus helps them to evaluate political parties before they make their choice (Whiteley, 2005). PI also triggers youth motivation to participate in government activities and understand policies (Whiteley, 2005). Thus, PI provides the necessary motivation for young voters to devote sufficient energy and time to participate in political activities. These arguments reveal that, PI has a significant and positive relationship with political participation.
2.5. Political knowledge
PK encompasses information about government, what it does and its leaders, rules of game, political parties, history and issues (Fraile, 2011). It can be gained through interpersonal interaction such as social network and family interaction (Ohme et al., 2018), from traditional news media consumption and internet (Bode & Dalrymple, 2016; Lee & Xenos, 2019) or contact with political information on social media (Kenski & Stroud, 2006; Khan et al., 2019). However, in this study, PK is described as the information regarding the political and government activities. This includes information on what the elected political official or the government do and what leaders and political parties do to run the affairs of their offices through the media as in this area of digital world, political information can be acquired within social network (Fraile, 2011). Therefore, media plays critical roles on how the youth acquire PK that finally results to political participation (Halpern et al., 2017).

Besides looking at the relationship between political participation and PI, a vast number of research have also focused on the association between political participation and PK. For example, studies in political sciences have shown a positive link between political participation and level of PK (Christensen, 2018; Dimitrova et al., 2014; Jung et al., 2011; Zuniga & Diehl, 2019). Also, the study of Pontes et al. (2019) is related to the earlier findings where they found that, the lack of political participation among college students is attributed to lack of PK. Knowledge of politics reduces the level of political participation in two different ways. First, individuals need political information which is based on various participatory actions and decision (Wang, 2015). Additionally, when it comes to politics, knowledge also can reflect psychological adjustment (Barabas et al., 2014; Lizotte & Sidman, 2009). An individual is less likely to involve in politics, when he or she has no positive adjustment to politics which in turn reduces PK. This study emphasizes on explaining the effects of PK on voting behavior (Reichert, 2016; Zuniga & Diehl, 2019).

Moreover, Banducci et al. (2017) argue that individuals who are knowledgeable about issues concerning political parties are more likely than individuals who are less knowledgeable to support parties representing their own positions on those issues. Bechtel et al. (2015) explain that, policy issues play an important role among the politically knowledgeable voters in influencing their votes. Partheymuller and Faas (2015) reported that, some citizens will change their votes by simulating hypothetical voters under different assumptions on the PK distribution if they are knowledgeable more.

Previous researches have also reached similar conclusions that, higher level of PK is proportional to higher level of voters. In other words, the more information voters have about politics, the more likely they are going to vote. Additionally, it is likely that political participation is positively related to PK. Thus, political participation is likely more to occur among people of higher PK. Hence, this study illustrates the positive relationship between political participation and PK.

2.6. Research hypotheses and models
The model of this study is developed to evaluate the relationship between SMU, PIQ, PI, PK and PP. The casual relationships among the three variable (SMU, PIQ and PI) are illustrated in this study in a context Malaysian youth political participation. In this causative relationship, SMU, PIQ and PI are all assumed to influence positive PK and PP. In addition, PK is assumed to have direct effect with OPP.

Estimates for the structural model of youth political online participation were based on seven hypotheses: H1—there is a significant relationship between social media and online PK; H2—there is a significant relationship between SMU and OPP; H3—there is a significant relationship between PIQ and PK; H4—there is a significant relationship between PIQ and OPP; H5—there is a significant relationship between PI and PK; H6—there is a significant relationship between PI and OPP and H7—there is a significant relationship between PK and OPP.
3. Material and method

3.1. Design and participants
This study was carried out within a larger context research project examining the youth perception on political participation in Malaysia. Data collection involved Malaysian youth with the age range between 18 and 35, from the different parts of the country (i.e., northern, southern, eastern and western regions). This segment of population was chosen as they fit the voting age and was the most active social media users. It was anticipated that the demographic and cultural factors affect the ways of thinking, thus, influence their acceptance or rejection towards messages and information that would yield to the different behaviours and motivation towards political participation. For the purpose of this research and following UNESCO definition of youth anyone between the age of 18 and 35 is selected as respondent.

A simple random sampling technique is employed in this study. This type of sampling method is chosen due to the fact that it was the simplest and quickest means of selecting a sample (Akanmu et al., 2020; Keyton, 2014). The target population of this study is defined and the existing sampling frame and the sample size of the target population is identified.

The Department of Statistics Malaysia (2020) estimated that the population in Malaysia was 32.7 million. Based on the latest statistics from Youth Association in Malaysia as at January 2020, the population of the youth comprised larger segment with 43 percent of Malaysian total population. Therefore, when expressed in percentage, the total number of youth in Malaysia was about 14,061,000. The identification of sample size for this study is in accordance with the sampling table of Krejcie and Morgan (1970). For such a large population, the minimum number of sample size required by this study was 384 respondents. The rule of thumb by Roscoe (1975) is employed to select the appropriate sample size of this study with the assertion that most research sample size greater than 30 and less than 500 is appropriate. Therefore, 384 is adequate based on the rule of thumb.

3.2. Measures
The OPP for youth created by Jung et al. (2011) is the first scale used for the data collection. There are eight items in this scale rated by a likert scale of 5 point (e.g., Making contributions to a political campaign on Facebook), ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. This instrument obtained a reliability of $\alpha = .923$, which is acceptable. Meanwhile, PK is measured using the scale developed by Delli (2005). The instrument comprises nine items which is rated with 5-point likert scale (i.e., $1 = I Don't Know to 5 = I Know$) (e.g., Knowledge about politics influence my decision to vote on general election). The internal consistency of the instrument is $\alpha = .848$.

The measure of SMU is taken from research in political participation, and the scale is validated by Ellison et al. (2007). This scale enabled the measuring of the usage of social platform to get information on politics (e.g., Facebook has become part of my life). It is made up of 10 items, which were rated with five likert scale options. The scale has a reliability of $\alpha = .914$, which is the same as the value showed in the original research ($\alpha = .848$).

For the PIQ, the study adapted a measure created by Lim (2009) to assess the political information quality. This scale is made up of eight items with 5-point likert scale (e.g., the information from the virtual community is always up to date). The reliability value for the present research was $\alpha = .900$.

Finally, the measurement for PI is adopted from Whiteley (2005). The items measured youth interest in political issues and is made up of 10 items (e.g., I am very interested in politics), rated with five point likert scale ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (2). The internal consistency of the instrument is $\alpha = 892$. The adhoc questionnaire is also used in gathering the socio-demographic variables including the gender, age, and ethnicity of respondents.
3.3. Procedure
The questionnaires were distributed to Malaysian youth aged between 18 and 35 years of main races in Malaysia including Malay, Chinese, Indian, Bumiputra Sabah and Sarawak. The data collection was done online due to the current lockdown situation across the country. The targeted group are selected based on their interest in politics and knowledge of how to engage in politics through Facebook. Therefore, the respondents were aware to be self-enlightened about the use of Facebook for political participation before they filled out the survey. The researchers received a total of 525 questionnaires. The quality and completeness of the questionnaires through eye screening was the first method deployed while entering the raw data into the SPSS file. The dataset still remains useable 525 questionnaires after the eye screening process.

3.4. Data analysis
IBM AMOS 23.0 and IBM SPSS are the two statistical software used for the data analysis. The structural model is developed in order to make verification on the relationship between the variables that are involved in the structural equation on the Malaysian youth political participation. Therefore, five observable variables are used to create the path modelling with the aim of establishing indicators.

4. Results
4.1. Data analysis
A correlation matrix in Amos 23.0 with the maximum-likelihood is used to simultaneously estimate the measurement model and structural model. How the latent variables (SMU, PIQ, PI, PK and OPP) are measured for the observed indicators (X and Y variables) is assessed by the measurement model. The reliability between items is established by the Cronbach alpha. The causal relationships between these latent variables are displayed by the structural model in order to test the hypothesis. Chi-square ($\chi^2$) is used to assess the overall fit of the model, the root mean squared residual, adjusted goodness of fit index and goodness of fit index (GFI).

4.2. Structural and measurement models
Amos 22.0 is used to simultaneously estimate the measurement and structural models. The causative relationship is tested using the proposed model between the five latent variables. The figure presents the structural model consisting of three exogenous variables—SMU ($\xi_1$), PIQ ($\xi_2$), and PI ($\xi_3$)—and two endogenous variables—PK ($\eta_1$) and OPP ($\eta_2$). The model consists of nine observed exogenous indicators (X variables) for SMU, PIQ and PI; and nine observed endogenous indicators (Y variables) for PK and OPP.

4.3. Measurement model
By standardizing the endogenous and exogenous latent variable, all observed indicators were set free in assessing the measurement model. The approach employed is based on the magnitude of the coefficient matrix (Bs or ys) for latent variables on one observed indicator that was arbitrarily selected as a referent for the latent variables (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1996). The Table 1 and 2 presents the estimated measurement model of the three observed X variables (X1—X3) for SMU, three observed X variables for PIQ (X4—X6) and three observed X variables for PI (X7—X9). There are five observed Y variables for PK (Y1—Y5) and four observed Y variables for OPP (Y6—Y9). The reliabilities of the latent variables range from 0.90 and 0.94; this indicates the validity and reliability of the measurement model as shown in Table 1. Also, the coefficient of the factor loading ($\lambda_0$) of the latent constructs range from 0.77 to 0.93 ($p < 0.001$).

4.4. Structural model
A number of 18 items belonging to the five factors defines the model. To test the model, a covariance is adopted among the variables. The model is said to be satisfactorily fit through the illustration of the GFI. The results of the goodness-of-fit statistics and hypotheses paths are shown in the Figure 1. The Figure shows overall acceptability of the structural model. Comparative
fit index (CFI) obtains a value of 0.91; Tucker–Lewis index is 0.96; and GFI is 0.90. The values are all acceptable within the threshold, indicating a good fit (Hair et al., 2010).

Similarly, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) shows a value of 0.078 which is an acceptable value. Adding to the uniqueness of this study, the requirements set by Marsh and Hocevar (1985) and McIver and Carmines (1981) are met as the value of Chi-square index is 1.74. In addition, all the path coefficients are significant ($p < 0.05$) except in one case. The Figure 1 above represents the final model which is deemed fit for the hypotheses testing:

### 4.5. Hypotheses testing
This study performs the analyses with the purpose of unveiling the relationship between SMU, PIQ, PI, PK and OPP among Malaysian youth.

#### 4.5.1. H1
SMU displayed a positive causal effect on PK ($\gamma = 0.28$, $t$-value = 6.08). Youth with high SMU were more likely to have a good PK. The finding supports H1 and suggested that SMU can increase PK in
Figure 1. The structural modeling and the path coefficient results.

youth OPP. This confirmed the findings from previous studies (i.e., Adamu & Mohamad, 2019; Andersen et al., 2016; Gottfried et al., 2017; Ohme, 2020; Schafer, 2020; Weeks et al., 2017) which found that SMU is an antecedent of PK. For example, the incidental exposure to political news in social media may lead to incident learning, although gaining knowledge is not the main purpose of using social media platforms (Valeriani & Vaccari, 2016). This study therefore concludes that, SMU is a functional instrument in creating a better PK among youth. Its role can help youth to increase their knowledge on political related issues on Facebook.

4.5.2. H2
For this hypothesis, SMU revealed no significant effect on OPP ($\beta = -0.59$, t-value = 2.95). The findings confirmed that SMU is not a direct antecedent of OPP as suggested by many past research (e.g., Vitak et al., 2011; Zuniga et al., 2014). The relationship is not significant as it is not consistent with the past studies. In other words, H2 is rejected. The finding is in contrary to the expectation as it only contextually relates with the issues. Some parts of SMU have been found to improve OPP in a context but not effective in another context (Vitak et al., 2011; Zuniga et al., 2014). Furthermore, Yamamoto et al. (2015) found other factors such as type of usage and the nature of the network that contributed to the adverse effects on youth participation.

4.5.3. H3
The analysis on the relationship between PIQ and PK revealed that PIQ has a direct significant effect on PK ($\beta = 0.16$, t-value = 2.65). Youth who are eager towards getting quality information are more likely to know about current political issue. The H3 is supported by this finding and reveals that PIQ motivates PK among the Malaysian youth. This is consistent with other research (see for example, Bakshy et al., 2015) which focuses on people’s engagement in political issues and how it could ultimately influence people’s knowledge. Likewise, Flynn et al. (2017) argue that the quality and nature of information is positively correlated with the amount of information received by an individual. A more current information on politics proffers opportunities to those seeking to be knowledgeable more about politics while increasing the likelihood of choosing one’s preferred content from multiple sources of media to enable people especially young generations who are not interested to turn out completely. Therefore, PIQ is found to influence PK especially among young generations.
4.5.4. H4
Meanwhile, the PIQ is found to be significantly correlated to OPP ($\gamma = 0.21$, $t$-value $= 3.67$). The respondents expressed that the quality of information they obtained has helped them to participate in OPP. This finding supports the involvement of PIQ in satisfying the emotional need of youth to participate in political activities. These findings are consistent with the past studies of Abdu et al. (2016), Ahmad et al. (2019) and Jung et al. (2014) which suggested information quality as an important factor that contributes towards the success of an online interaction, which consequently leads to their participation in politics. This was especially relevant to youth who have been deprived of participation in politics by traditional media. In the same vein, past studies found that, factors related to OPP such as interaction with individual and intent for online participation (i.e. engaging in community or civic services) is influenced by Facebook information quality (Abdu et al., 2016; Ahmad et al., 2019; Houston et al., 2015).

4.5.5. H5
The analysis on the relationship between PI and PK, revealed that the findings did support the notion that PK among the youth is essential in cultivating their PI. Thus, H5 was supported as the parameter estimates are significant ($t$-value $= 2.23; \gamma = 0.18$). Citizens especially the younger generation, who are interested politically are likely more to follow current trends and engage in the motivated information processing (Reichert, 2016; Shehata & Amnà, 2019; Zuniga & Diehl, 2019), and thus, displaying higher level of PK and awareness (Yamamoto et al., 2015). People are more likely to vote and participate in politics when they are more knowledgeable and interested in politics (Shehata & Amnà, 2019). By having a PI, it enables youth to seek political information that enhances their knowledge of politics, and thus helps them to evaluate political parties before they make their choice (Whiteley, 2005).

4.5.6. H6
The analysis also revealed that high PI has a positive effect on OPP among youth ($\gamma = 0.10$, $t$-value $= 0.81$). This is in accordance with the past studies of Pop et al. (2017) and Vissers and Stolle (2014) which suggest PI as a factor that influences political participation. Thus, youth are expected to develop PI because of their nature of being active and open to accept new changes from the society as well as the role model they emulate. The increase and rapid growth of Facebook explains that youth in particular are often exposed to volume and abundance of information every day, but there are few empirical studies on the influence that such exposure has on PI and participation (Dubois & Blank, 2018; Vitak et al., 2011). Youth that remain more politically engrossed are more likely to pay attention to the political content on media which may eventually turn to participation in political activity (Theocharis & Lowe, 2016). In political participation, PI is significant as it provides the motivations to seek PK, skill and information which are relevant to assessing political alternative (Zuniga & Diehl, 2019).

4.5.7. H7
Finally, the study found a significant effect of PK on youth OPP ($\gamma = -0.26$, $t$-value $= -1.74$). This is in accordance with the past findings (i.e., Christensen, 2018; Dimitrova et al., 2014; Jung et al., 2011; Pontes et al., 2019; Zuniga & Diehl, 2019) which found positive correlation between the levels of political participation and PK. The connection can be seen when the youth need PK on their various participatory decisions and actions (Wang, 2015). The present research has also reached similar conclusion that, high level of political participation is influenced by high level of PK. In other words, the more likely a voter participates in politics, the more information the voter has about politics. Thus, political participation is common more among people with higher knowledge of politics.

5. Discussion and implication
This study proposed a structural model that examines the relationship between OPP and SMU, PIQ, PI and PK among Malaysian youth. The researchers and political leaders are provided insights for further understanding of the structural relationship between the constructs. The theoretical model has proven useful to the political party as it demonstrates robustness. The study suggests that the
PIQ, PI and PK are factors that directly influence OPP, while the SMU has no effect on OPP. Meanwhile, SMU, PIQ, PI reveal a positive relationship with PK.

A significant growing body of scholarships such as Jenkins (2009) suggests potential benefits from youth participatory culture in politics through social media. This includes opportunities to peer-to-peer learning, attitude change and diversification of cultural expression towards politics. Notably, youth are being shaped by the political, legal, social, economic and cultural institutions, protocols and practices present in the media system and also by the communication technologies. Hence, it is sufficient to argue that PK and political related activities contain opportunities for economic advancement, political empowerment, learning, creative expression and civic engagement. By showing PI, the younger generation acquires skills that prepare them for the future especially in participating in community activities, civic debates, and becoming political leaders. Jenkins (2009) buttresses that making meaningful decision within the civic context leads to empowerment and by becoming political actors, the skills of citizenship are learnt.

The outcome of this study can be confirmed from the study of Masiha et al. (2018) on the relationship between the use of Facebook and political participation among youth in Pakistan. The use of Facebook has significantly promoted political participation through posting of comments and sharing of views on political issues. The study reported a similar view that there is significant correlation among the sharing of political views on Facebook from different perspectives and its impacts on motivating youth to participate in politics. Similarly, Chan (2016) agreed that Facebook network size and connections of public figures and political actors has potential impact on the spread of news, opinion expression and engendering political engagement in a semi-democratic city where close to half of the citizens use Facebook. Therefore, through Facebook news, expression and efficacy, Facebook network sizes and connections with public political actors exhibit direct and indirect effect on participation of the youth.

The main output of this study is a framework of a highly graded Malaysian Youth Political Participation (MYPY) that will benefit the society, political parties, policy makers and the government. Understanding the youth behaviour and political responsiveness, regardless of ethnic backgrounds, towards political participation will help the government to design appropriate policies, trainings and programs to engage youth involvement, and increase their participation in Malaysian politics. In general, the voice of the youth and their involvement in government programs will certainly help to elevate the nation towards achieving its vision in line with the social impact of Industrial Revolution 4.0 agenda on society foresights.

Although this study significantly contributes to the theoretical and practical knowledge, it also has its limitations. First, as mentioned earlier, the measurement scales are adapted from the previous researches. This led to some items being deleted during the refinement process of the items as those items measured not the domain of the construct as expected. The context in which the study is conducted might perhaps means that different items are needed to measure the construct. Due to this, a number of items were deleted during data cleaning process before CFA was run and the significant items to the overall model fit are retained.

Also, an online survey was carried out using a sample of youth between 18 and 35 years in Malaysia. The attitude and behaviour were different between ethnic, location and level of education, and thus disabled for data generalization for voters beyond 35 years old and the geographical area of their home. However, the sample of this study is limited to respondents from Malaysia only. These findings therefore cannot be generalized to be applicable in other countries.

6. Conclusion
As specified earlier, the present research is a part of a bigger research project involving a multiple approach towards data collection. In the present study, the researchers seek to further investigate youth political participation through the utilization of a survey method.
Besides contributing towards the literature in the areas of political communication and youth development and studies, the outcomes of the present research is expected to benefit leaders, policy makers, government and non-government organizations in formulating and designing policies related to SMU especially the ones involving youth, and subsequently, on how to effectively use them to mobilize the youth.

In conclusion, it would be wise for politicians to consider the youth and recognize that youth are now seriously using social media, particularly Facebook in their search for PK and participation. Today’s youth are often relying on Facebook as their platform to obtain PK before they make decision on politics. Moulding and targeting political message to youth via social media especially Facebook should be considered as a key factor in strategizing future campaigns. By familiarizing youth with the use of Facebook for expression and discussion of opinions, political efficacy among youth for democratic process can be improved by the government.

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