EFFECT OF INTERNET USE ON RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CIVIC PARTICIPATION AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AMONG LOW-INCOME URBAN YOUTH IN MALAYSIA

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By

JAMALI BIN SAMSUDDIN

Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy

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DEDICATION

To

Allah the Almighty

for

His blessings

and

my mother, Halijah binti Ngah Mat Dani

my cousin, Rabiah binti Hussein

my family

my best friends, Mira, Izmie and Ina

my supervisor and committee members

my lecturers and teachers

for

everything

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December 2019

Chair: Assoc. Prof. Hamisah binti Hasan, PhD
Faculty: Modern Languages and Communication

The issue of youth civic and political participation has been a substantive area of interest in academic research because active citizenship is the bedrock of a healthy and functioning democracy. But democracies around the world are in poor health because their young citizens are no longer "active." Much evidence in this research area from the past decade has shown increasing detachment of young people from politics. Youth political apathy has become a global phenomenon that threatens to weaken democracies around the world, including Malaysia. The mobilization theory suggests that new communication technologies such as the Internet could increase participation, especially underprivileged group.

Many past studies on the effect of Internet on youth's democratic participation tend to treat young people as one homogeneous group, frequently sampled from the general youth population. However, not all youths have an equal access to opportunities to participate in nation-building activities. This study seeks new evidence in this area by focusing on youth living in low-income urban communities. It is important to focus on this particular segment of society as past studies have found that marginalization hindered their participation in social, political and economic processes.

This quantitative study surveyed low-income urban youth to examine: (i) the level of their Internet use; (ii) the level of their political and civic participation; and (iii) the confounding effect of Internet use on the relationship between civic participation and political participation. A set of questionnaires were used as the instrument for data collection. The study employed a multistage sampling method, a combination of stratified random sampling and purposive sampling techniques. A total of 3,412 youths aged 15 to 25 years old living in urban poor areas throughout Malaysia completed the self-administered questionnaires.

The results show that the level of their Internet use was low and still confined to basic activities. As anticipated, they rarely participated in political and civic activities; and there was a weak positive relationship between Internet use and participation. In addition, the observed relationship between civic participation and political participation was not merely due to the influence of Internet use.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

KESAN PENGGUNAAN INTERNET TERHADAP PERKAITAN ANTARA PENYERTAAN SIVIK DAN PENYERTAAN POLITIK DALAM KALANGAN BELIA GOLONGAN BERPENDAPATAN RENDAH DI KAWASAN BANDAR DI MALAYSIA

Oleh

JAMALI BIN SAMSUDDIN

Disember 2019

Pengerusi: Prof. Madya Hamisah binti Hasan, PhD
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Isu penyertaan sivik dan politik dalam kalangan belia telah mendapat banyak perhatian dalam kajian akademik kerana warganegara yang aktif merupakan intipati demokrasi yang sihat dan berfungsi. Namun, demokrasi di seluruh dunia berada dalam keadaan yang merisaukan kerana warga muda tidak lagi aktif. Kebanyakan hasil kajian lepas membuktikan golongan belia semakin mengasingkan diri daripada politik. Apati politik telah menjadi satu fenomena global yang mengancam dan melemahkan demokrasi di seluruh dunia, termasuklah Malaysia. Teori mobilisasi menekankan bahawa teknologi komunikasi seperti Internet boleh meningkatkan penyertaan, khususnya golongan terpinggir.

Banyak kajian mengenai kesan Internet terhadap penyertaan sivik dan politik belia berkecenderungan untuk mengenal pasti golongan muda sebagai satu kelompok homogen, dan pemilihan sampel adalah daripada populasi belia secara umumnya. Walau bagaimanapun, tidak semua belia mempunyai akses yang sama kepada peluang untuk turut serta dalam aktiviti pembangunan negara. Kajian ini mencari bukti baharu dalam bidang ini dengan memberi fokus kepada golongan belia daripada golongan berpendapatan rendah di kawasan bandar. Adalah penting untuk memberi fokus kepada segmen ini memandangkan kajian-kajian lampau telah membuktikan bahawa keterpinggiran menyekat penyertaan mereka dalam proses sosial, politik dan ekonomi.

Kajian kuantitatif ini meninjau belia golongan berpendapatan rendah di kawasan bandar untuk meneliti: (i) tahap penggunaan Internet mereka, (ii) tahap penyertaan politik dan sivik, dan (iii) *confounding effect* penggunaan Internet terhadap perkaitan antara penyertaan sivik dan penyertaan politik dalam kalangan belia golongan berpendapatan rendah di kawasan bandar. Borang soal selidik telah digunakan sebagai instrument untuk memungut data. Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah persampelan berperingkat yang menggabungkan teknik persampelan rawak berstrata dan persampelan purposif.

Sejumlah 3,412 orang belia berumur dari 15 hingga 25 tahun yang tinggal di kawasan miskin bandar di seluruh Malaysia telah melengkapkan borang soal selidik.

Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa tahap penggunaan Internet mereka adalah rendah dan masih terikat kepada penggunaan asas. Sebagaimana yang dijangkakan, belia golongan berpendapatan rendah di kawasan bandar tidak kerap menyertai aktiviti politik dan sivik, dan perkaitan antara penggunaan Internet dan penyertaan mereka adalah rendah. Selain itu, perkaitan antara penyertaan sivik dan penyertaan politik bukanlah hanya disebabkan oleh pengaruh penggunaan Internet.

iv

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Last but not least, I wish to acknowledge my family members and friends, whose love and support, have provided me with the fuel to go the distance.

This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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Date: 12 March 2020

Declaration by graduate student

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Declaration by Members of Supervisory Committee

This is to confirm that:
- the research conducted and the writing of this thesis was under our supervision;
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

xiv

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

This chapter presents the overall research scope and framework. It includes the background of the study, problem statement, research questions, research objectives, the significance and limitations of the study, as well as definitions of keywords used in the research.

1.2 Background of the Study

Youth's civic and political disengagement has been discussed and studied across time, space and cultures, with increasing importance. Past and present scholars have tried to offer numerous theories, hypotheses, and assumptions to explain this democracy-threatening problem. Many of these attempts focused on young people (Pasek, Kenski, Romer, & Jamieson, 2006). This was also the case for Malaysia, where young people remained indifferent to political inclusiveness and political socialization, demonstrating a continuous lack of engagement with the political process (IPPBM, 2011). Despite obvious cultural differences, similar observations were also reported by researchers in Western countries. Bakker and deVreese (2011) observed an increasing number of young people who became detached from politics over the last decade. In America, young people's political involvement was consistently lower than older Americans' (Pasek et al., 2006). Empirical evidence has provided us with an affirmation that youth disengagement is indeed a global phenomenon.

Evidence of youth disengagement was often measured in terms of registration, voter turnout, as well as party membership and these have been well documented in many parts of the world including the South East Asia region. In Malaysia for example, youth's political participation was ranked in the bottom five among the 51 Commonwealth countries as reported in the Commonwealth Youth Programme Report 2013 (Commonwealth, 2013). According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia, out of the 13.4 million youths in the country, 3.9 million (2007) and 2.9 million (2009) did not register as voters at the eligibility age of 21 years old. Election is part of the process to facilitate political socializaton among the younger generation. Unfortunately, political socialization among Malaysian youth was found to be low, as shown by the data published by the Ministry of Youth and Sports in 2013. The same report paints an equally bleak picture of civic participation. Young Malaysians were far more interested in indulging themselves in recreational activities such as watching VCD/DVD and using social media rather than becoming active citizens through volunteerism or club and association

1

membership. If nearly half of Malaysia's population remain apathetic, what future will it hold for our democracy?

In the last decade, heavy Internet use by the younger generation has often been linked to their political participation, particularly voting. In many parts of the world, Internet has shown unprecedented impact in recent elections. Most notably, the outcome of the U.S. 2018 presidential elections was often linked to the fact that President Obama had effectively used social media as a communication tool to gain support from younger voters, who were heavy users of Internet (Smith & Rainie, 2008).

Back home, the Internet also played a significant role in the Malaysian political tsunami of 8 March 2008. The outcome of the 12th General Election demonstrated the collective power of the Internet generation, who decided to participate in a political activity by exercising their right to vote. Similarly, the 1999 and 2004 elections also demonstrated the power of young people in determining the results of an election. In the Pengkalan Pasir by-election in 2005, nearly 40 percent of the voters in the area were youth, aged between 21 and 40 years old (Rahim, 2010). Given this evidence, it is therefore important to examine the potential of the Internet to mobilize apathetic young people into becoming more active citizens.

The power of young voters is increasingly felt in the local political scene, as demonstrated in the recent elections. Collectively, they can act as a force that decides on issues related to them and the nation and it is through election that Malaysians voice their opinion, a democratic legacy that has thrived since 1957 (Rahim, 2007). But, like any other countries in the world, Malaysia's democracy is far from perfect. For the time being, at least, election is still the means to determine the country's future direction. However, if members of the younger generation remain indifferent as per status quo, that future is looking rather grim now.

For a democratic country like Malaysia, declining youth participation is a very critical issue in relation to the nation's development agenda. The National Youth Development Action Plan, which was approved and launched in 2004 by the National Youth Consultative Council, outlined 11 core development focus areas; including social development, role of media and communication, as well as political awareness and national integration. The Plan formed the basis of consideration for the 9th Malaysia Plan to empower youth for the future. Despite the government's efforts to address the issue by establishing national policies, statistics showed that youth participation continues to decline.

1.3   Problem Statement

The issue of youth civic and political participation has been a substantive area of interest in academic research because active citizenship is the bedrock of a healthy and functioning democracy. This is a common denominator shared by many countries. However, democracies around the world are in poor health because their young citizens are no longer "active." Much evidence in this research area from the past decade has shown increasing detachment of youth from politics (Bakker & de Vreese, 2011; Pasek et al., 2006). Although the Internet generation has more resources to be active citizens, their political and civic participation are in a declining state. Despite on-going efforts by the government to reverse this trend, young Malaysians remain disengaged, thus posing a threat to our democracy in the long run.

Past studies have suggested that one of the ways to strengthen democracy is by increasing civic participation through the development of civil society (Seligson, 1999). For example, becoming members of community organizations or non-political civil society organizations increased the likelihood to participate in politics (Huntington & Nelson, 1976; Verba, Nie & Kim, 1978) because participating members are exposed to political stimuli and were equipped with the skills and attitudes that allow democracy to take root (Pateman, 1970). In other words, civic engagement is an important precursor to political action (Putnam, 1993, 2000). Thus, it is important to study the relationship between civic participation and political participation in gaining deeper understanding on youth's political apathy.

The problem of youth disengagement has generated many studies on the effects of Internet on civic and political participation because youths are heavy users of the medium. Numerous researchers have found a positive association between Internet use and youth's participation (Bakker & de Vreese, 2011). Based on the empirical evidence, it is reasonable to suspect that the relationship between civic participation and political participation may be influenced or confounded, to a certain extent, by the impact of Internet use.

Despite all the knowledge around the problem of declining youth participation, past scholars point out that there is much that we do not know. Firstly, the findings of past studies on the association between Internet use and participation have been inconclusive; and many scholars tend to focus on participation in relation to election. Secondly, contemporary reseachers are urging scholars to have a clearer definition of civic and poltical participation (Pontes, Henn & Griffits, 2018). Thirdly, the lack of consensus on what constitutes civic and political participation limits the number of studies that examine the relationship between the two concepts.

Based on the research background discussed in the previous section, the problem of declining youth participation anchors the entire research. The researcher frames

3

the study against the backdrop of civic participation, political participation, and Internet use in the context of low-income urban youth to answer the following research questions.

1.4   Research Questions

1.   What is the level of political participation among low-income urban youth?
2.   What is the level of civic participation among low-income urban youth?
3.   What is the level of Internet use among low-income urban youth?
4.   Are there differences in the levels of political and civic participation between males and females?
5.   Are there differences in the levels of political and civic participation across ethnicity, religion, and education groups?
6.   What is the relationship between civic participation and political participation?
7.   What is the relationship between Internet use and political participation?
8.   What is the relationship between Internet use and civic participation?
9.   Is there a confounding effect of Internet use on the relationship between civic participation and political participation among low-income urban youth?

1.5   Research Objectives

1.5.1   General Objective

The general aim of the study is to examine the Internet usage of the low-income urban youth in Malaysia, their political and civic participation, as well as to examine the confounding effect of Internet use on the relationship between civic participation and political participation.

1.5.2   Specific Objectives

The study has the following nine specific objectives in relation to the low-income urban youth in Malaysia:

1.   To determine the level of political participation
2.   To determine the level of civic participation
3.   To determine the level of Internet use
4.   To determine the differences in the levels of political and civic participation between males and females
5.   To determine the differences in political and civic participation across ethnicity, religion, and education groups

4

6. To determine the relationship between civic participation and political participation
7. To determine the relationship between Internet use and political participation
8. To determine the relationship between Internet use and civic participation
9. To determine the confounding effect of Internet use on the relationship between civic participation and political participation

1.6 Theoretical Discussion on Internet Use as a Confounding Variable

This study examines the association between civic and political participation as well as the confounding effect of Internet in this relationship. According to Baños (2017), a confounding variable is an extraneous variable, or a third variable, that obscures the true relation between two other variables. The influence of a confounding variable occurs when the relationship between two variables (A and B) is influenced, at least to a certain extent, by a third variable (Pallant, 2005). This relationship is illustrated as shown in Figure 1.1. It appears that A and B may be related but the supposed relationship is due to the influence of C. In the context of this study, A is civic participation, B is political participation, and C is Internet use.
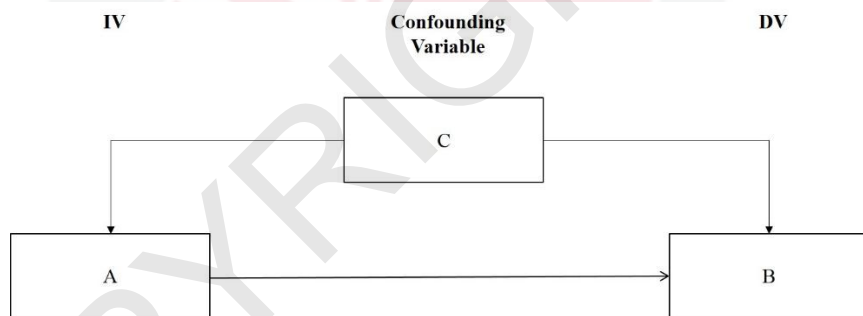
Figure 1.1: Influence of a confounding variable

Based on existing literature, we could say that maybe when young people use the Internet, it causes them to participate in more civic activities. Similarly, when they use the Internet, it also causes them to participate in more political activities. When a relationship between two variables is demonstrated, there is often a third or confounding variable (Gravetter & Forzano, 2011; Pallant, 2005). When something is confounded, it means that the variables are mixed up together in a way that we cannot disentangle them or see what is happening. A confounding variable is a co-varying extraneous variable. It is co-varying with the variables that we are studying. In this case, Internet use is co-varying with civic participation and co-varying with political participation. That means the effects of Internet use are con-founded.

While past studies have shown civic participation could lead to political participation, the correlation does not imply causation. In other words, participating in civic activities does not cause people to participate in political activities. What past scholars have shown is that civic participation and political participation change together or co-vary. However, there is not enough evidence to prove that civic participation causes political participation.

The mobilization theory (Norris, 2001; Norris & Inglehart 2009) has argued that new communication technologies such as the Internet could promote civic and political participation as the cost of accessing information, communicating, and coordinating activities has been reduced. Given the empirical evidence of positive association between Internet use and participation (Salman & Saad, 2015; Ekström & Östman, 2015; Willnat et al., 2013; Bakker & de Vreese, 2011) and drawing lessons from the mobilization theory, it is reasonable to suspect that the relationship between civic participation and political participation may be influenced, or confounded, to a certain extent by the impact of Internet use.

1.7   Scope of the Study

This study is conducted as part of a national research project entitled "Youth Living in Marginalized Communities: Towards Regenerating Youth Development" carried out under the Long-Term Research Grant Scheme (LRGS) Phase 2/2013 (2013-2016) funded by the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia. The scope of this study is framed against the backdrop of three main variables namely civic participation, political participation, and Internet use. Following the definitions used by the LRGS research, this study only focuses on:

(1) youth aged 15 to 25 years old in line with the United Nations' definition, and

(2) traditional or offline forms of civic and political participation.

In addition, within the 15 to 25 years old segment, this study focuses on youth from the low-income urban areas in Malaysia since not much is known about this group of Internet users. Despite being highly exposed to the media and information technology, not everyone in the country has an equal access to the Internet, especially youth from low-income urban areas such as the *Projek Perumahan Rakyat* (People's Housing Project) or better known as PPRs. The government, through the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC), has introduced an initiative called 1Malaysia Internet Centre in 2007 to bring positive social and economic impact to the community. As documented in the MCMC's website, from 2013 onwards, the initiative expanded its focus to include the poor and the underserved in urban areas, with the target of building 500 Internet centers in low-cost housing projects such as the PPRs. When examining the effect of Internet use on youth's participation, many scholars tend to overlook certain segments of the society such as the underserved community. Therefore, this study

focuses on low-income urban youth to offer new forms of empirical evidence on the effect of Internet use on their political and civic participation.

The problem of declining youth's participation is frequently discussed in the context of election, from party membership and voter registration to voting. However, the concept of participation goes far beyond these usual suspects. Past studies have examined a wide range of participatory behavior including contacting public officials or civil servants, participating in a rally, meeting politicians, and wearing a badge to protest (Rahim & Tsuey, 2019; Salman & Saad, 2015). To complement the existing data in political communications research, this study focuses on other forms of participation that are not directly related to election.

The mobilization theory serves as the blueprint of the study as not only it predicts the relationship between Internet use and participation; but it also identifies young people as an underrepresented group. The theory claims that not only Internet increases traditional forms of participation, but it also mobilizes underrepresented groups or people, who previously were not active citizens and did not have access to technology (Norris, 2001).

Considering that the mobilization theory was first developed in 2011, this study presents an innovative approach by examining new forms of online use. Twenty years ago, Internet was mainly used for browsing. Today however, online use has dramatically changed from information-based activities to communication-driven use spurred by the widespread use of social media. Therefore, to ensure online use is more relevant to the digital natives, this study examines Internet use, which also includes social media activities, that may provide precise estimates on how specifically online media use might affect civic and political participation.

This study is related to the communication field in several ways. Firstly, it examines the effect of Internet use on youth's participation. According to Katz (2001), communications research is about effect. Boyd-Barret (2002) also identifies 'effects research' as one of the fields under media and communication. Secondly, it studies the role of Internet in the everyday social and political lives of young people. Hansen and Machin (2019) emphasize the need "to study, understand and make sense of the context and role of media and communications in the social, political and cultural dynamics of society" (p. 1). Thirdly, by examining how online media use might affect youth's civic and political participation, this study takes into consideration one of the key influences on the development of the media and communication research field, which is technological changes. Every new medium brings forth a set of new possibilities, formats, challenges, and research questions concerning its social and political role in society (Hansen & Machin, 2019).

7

1.8   Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the existing literature in several significant ways. First, new media studies often focus on the direct influence of media use and less is known about what influences the relationship (Kim & Chen, 2015). This study narrows the theoretical gap by examining the influence of a third variable (Internet use) in the relationship between civic participation and political participation. The findings of this study will therefore offer a more accurate picture of the relationship between civic participation and political participation.

Second, this study broadens the hypothesis of a landmark study by Putnam (1993, 2000), who demonstrated that civic engagement is an important precursor to political action (Pasek et al., 2006). But Putnam's study had its limitations. First was location. It was a case study of two regions within a single country, which was Italy. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to other parts of the world, especially in much less developed nations, where compounding factors such as cultural inheritance and levels of economic development would need to be considered. Seligson (1999) refined Putnam's work by testing his hypothesis in Central America, a developing region in the Third World. Much in the same way that Seligson expanded Putnam's work, this study further tested the original hypothesis in the South East Asia. According to Hofstede's cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 2001), Malaysia is considered a low power distance but high collectivism society, unlike European countries like Italy. Therefore, this study broadened Putnam's work by testing the validity and replicability of Putnam's findings in a region that is very different from Europe and Central America.

Third, this study focuses on a niched segment, instead of the general youth population frequently sampled in Internet use studies. Mobilization theory argues that previously unavailable technologies are especially powerful in mobilizing members of underprivileged or underrepresented groups who lack socioeconomic or psychological resources (Norris, 1999). The underprivileged group in this study is the low-income urban youth. Being economically marginalized means they were also technologically marginalized and therefore, would have limited access to Internet. The findings of this study will attest if the mobilization theory's argument is relevant to the underprivileged group from a less advanced democracy to provide new empirical evidence on the effect of Internet use on young people.

1.9   Definitions of Key Terms

This study has four keywords that represent the theoretical framework, questions and objectives. The definitions of the four keywords are provided in this section.

8

1.9.1 Low-Income Urban Youth

The subjects of this research are young people aged from 15 to 25 years old living in the low-income urban areas. The United Nations defines youth as those between the ages of 15-24, which constitutes half of the world's population (Hassan et al., 2016). According to Othman et al. (2016), in Malaysia, families whose income is less than RM3,000 per month are considered as urban poor due to the high cost of living. Low-income areas include the low-cost flats built under the People's Housing Program (*Projek Perumahan Rakyat*), better known as PPR (Raja Kasim & Rahim, 2016). The low-income urban community is often left behind in terms of participation in mainstream economic, political, cultural and social activities (Othman et al., 2016).

PPR is the government's initiative to relocate squatters and meet the needs of low-income groups for housing. The Ministry of Housing and Local Government, through the National Housing Department, is the implementing agency for PPR Projects across the country. Currently, there are three types of PPR namely, multi-story flats, five-story "walk-up flats" and terrace houses.

The study focuses on low-income urban youth because of the low socio-economic status, which has a significant impact on their development. The Star Online, dated 24 December 2013, reported that funds were needed to address social problems among urban poor living in PPR flats (Sri Priya, 2013). Social ills such as substance abuse, illegal racing, unwed teen pregnancy, and loitering are often associated with PPR youths. According to Raja Kasim and Rahim (2016), understanding the issues and problems faced by these youths can provide important insights into managing their development more effectively and bridge the inequality that separates them from their mainstream peers. Othman et al. (2016)

1.9.2 Political Participation

Political participation has been defined as the activity of citizens to influence political decisions (Brady, 1999). Over time, the definition has grown in terms of activities (van Deth, 2001), creating a very broad, almost universal, spectrum. Past scholars have operationalized political participation to include activities such as attending a political meeting, rally, or speech, circulating a petition for a candidate or issue, and contacting a public official or a political party (McLeod, Scheufele & 1999; Milbrath & Goel, 1971; Xenos & Moy, 2007); distributing flyers with political messages, contacting a civil servant, writing political messages or painting graffiti on walls, wearing a badge or a T-shirt with political messages, participating in a legal demonstration or a strike, participating in an illegal action/demonstration, donating money to support a political group or an organization's work, writing an article (for example, in an associational paper), participating in concerts with political message (Ekström & Östman, 2015); donating/collecting money, signing a petition, boycotting and boycotting products, wearing a badge/sticker/T-shirt, attending a cultural show with political content, participating in a legal

demonstration, writing a political message, contacting a politician, and being a member of a political party (Quintelier & Vessers, 2008); and retrieving books or information about political or social issues, following newspapers and television in election times to learn about politics and political parties, sending letters to newspapers or magazines to comment on articles, protesting or complaining by mail or telephone about decisions taken by the government or public administration, participating in demonstrations, and actively engaging in discussions during debates or lectures (Bakker & de Vreese, 2011). Political participation is often measured in terms of how frequent respondents perform the activities mentioned above over a specified period.

Even though Internet has made it possible to engage in a wide range of political activities online such as signing electronic petitions, visiting political websites, following news and participating in online forums, Putnam (2000) emphasizes the importance of physical presence and reality in building social networks that are beneficial to participatory behavior (Bakker & de Vreese, 2011). Therefore, this research only focused on offline or traditional forms of political participation. In this study, political participation was operationalized into four activities that were common in the low-income urban community namely, meeting with government officials to solve a problem, meeting with elected representatives to solve a problem or give views, participating in activities organized by political party, and wearing buttons to protest.

1.9.3 Civic Participation

Civic participation refers to "formal group memberships and social participation" (Shah, 1998, p. 479). It fosters community building through collective action aimed at mutual benefit that builds up trust, leading to a healthy and functioning democracy (Shah, Cho, Eveland & Kwak, 2005; Ostrom, 1990).

Shah, Cho, Eveland and Kwak (2005) measured civic participation by how often respondents engaged in volunteering work, attending a club meeting, working on a community project, attending a community or neighborhood meeting, and working on behalf of a social group or cause. Other scholars operationalized civic participation in terms of the following activities: club memberships (Putnam, 2000); participation in any extracurricular activities (such as a drama or language club, sports program, or school band) on campus, volunteering activities in a student's neighborhood outside his or her school (Lin et al., 2010); recycling activities (Schudson, 2007) such as recycling newspapers, bottles and cans, batteries, or other home appliances; participating in community activities, working to improve community or societal problems, and addressing social injustices (Levine, 2007; Sherrod, Flanagan, Youniss, 2002; Thorson, 2012; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004; Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins & Delli Carpini, 2006); involvement in volunteer and community activities: doing volunteer work, working on a community project, contributing money to a social group or cause, going to a community or neighborhood meeting, and working on behalf of a social

10

group or cause (Kwak, Shah & Holbert, 2004; Putnam, 2000; Shah, 1998; Shah, McLeod & Yoon, 2001).

For the same reasons discussed above, this study only focused on offline or traditional forms of civic participation. Therefore, this study operationalized civic participation into seven activities that were found common in the low-income urban community namely, discussing current issues in the media with family or friends, participating in recycling activities, participating in charity and welfare work, volunteering to help the poor, the disabled or natural disaster victims, reporting neighborhood crimes to the police, lodging a complaint regarding a service, vandalism, or unsatisfactory government service, and contacting the mass media to express views on an issue, opinion or complaint; or to give acknowledgement or recommendation.

1.9.4   Internet Use

Internet use is often associated with youth's political and civic participation because they are heavy users of the medium. In the beginning, people use the Internet mainly for browsing websites. Early scholars view Internet use as a unidimensional concept and therefore tend to examine the effect of the medium on participatory behavior based on its overall or general use. However, recent scholars such as Bakker and de Vreese (2011) have recognized that Internet use is a multidimensional concept and "thus does not affect all groups in society similarly" (p. 452). Different people use the Internet for different purposes and therefore, the effect depends on various factors such as socioeconomic background, length of Internet experience, attitude towards the Internet, usage patterns, and content.

In this study, Internet use is conceptualized as the amount of time young people spent online and the various types of activities they engage in (Quintelier & Vissers, 2008). The more time people spend online, the more likely they are exposed to political information. Past studies have established the link between time spent online and participatory behavior among young people. Gibson, Howard, and Ward (2000) have found that online activities helped them build social capital that would lead to political participation. Krueger (2002) has observed that the Internet could potentially draw new people to traditional forms of political participation. In this study, time spent online is operationalized by asking respondents the number of hours they use the Internet in a day.

Young people use Internet for a variety of reasons, from entertainment and news consumption to shopping and networking. Most scholars conceptualize Internet use by using activity-based indicators (Ekström & Östman, 2015; Eynon & Malmberg, 2011). These online activities include chatting, playing games, listening to music, and reading news (Lin et al., 2010); staying in touch and talking with friends on social media on Facebook, MSN, MySpace, or similar, producing music or videos, sharing files containing music, film, or video clips, publishing a

11

personal blog, reading news, searching for information, playing games, watching movies, and downloading music or films (Ekström & Östman, 2015); and online banking, job searching, housing sites, product information, holiday bookings, online shopping, and visiting website of an organization or club as a member (Bakker & de Vreese, 2011). In this study, Internet use is also operationalized by asking the respondents how frequent they performed 13 online activities in a week.

In addition to time spent online, past scholars have also found a positive association between various online activities and participation. Much research focus on the usual suspects such as reading online news, signing e-petition. However, Pasek et al. (2006) found that both informational and recreational media use facilitates civic engagement. According to Quintelier and Vissers (2008), many studies have found positive effects of Internet use on political participation. For example, de Vreese (2007) discovered that different types of Internet use positively affect different dimensions of civic and political participation. Quintelier and Vissers (2008) found that "different forms of Internet use can have positive and/or negative effects on political participation" (p. 416).

1.10   Summary

Chapter 1 has provided an overview of the research background and problem statement. When discussing issues related to youth, two things come to mind: one, they are heavy users of the Internet, and two, their participation in the country's civic and political activities is still low. This is relevant to their development and the nation's growth since their participation is a critical factor in ensuring a healthy and functioning democracy for Malaysia. Given the lack of current studies on Internet use and participation particularly in the context of the low-income urban youth, this issue deserves utmost attention as it involves everyone in the country, from scholars to policy makers and to the public at large.

Chapter 1 has also discussed the contribution of this study to the field of communication and youth-related policy development. The next chapter presents review of past and contemporary literature related to the study and discusses the emerging patterns on the key constructs of the research.

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82

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