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The Relationship between the Perception of Social Media Credibility and Political Engagement in Social Media among Generation Z

Jaayne Jeevita a/p Ronald Alfred[1]*, Wong Siew Ping[1]

[1]Faculty of Applied Communication, Multimedia University, Cyberjaya, Selangor, Malaysia

*Corresponding author: jaayne776@gmail.com; ORCID iD: 0000-0002-4646-4092

ABSTRACT

The growing emphasis on the perception of social media credibility has been an important factor in transforming the way Generation Z natives engage on social media. Subsequently, many people now tend to put tremendous priority on whether the information they find on social media in the realm of politics is presumed as credible which then shapes the way they engage politically. The Generation Z despite being digital natives, are not immune to the repercussions in the process of evaluating the credibility of social media and the misuse of social media in political aspects. Therefore, this research aimed to study the credibility of political information on social media perceived by Generation Z, the political engagement in social media among Generation Z, and the relationship between the perception of social media credibility and political engagement in social media among Generation Z. Quantitative research was carried out on a sample of Generation Z young adults aged 15 to 25 years old residing within Klang Valley, Selangor. From the data analysis of 400 valid responses, it was found that the Generation Z cohort has a positive perception of social media credibility and they show high political engagement in social media. Additionally, the findings indicate that the perception of social media credibility has a significant relationship with political engagement in social media among Generation Z. This paper would be useful to future researchers in studies based on this communication area as well as social news site journalists who produce content and target Generation Z audience in particular.

Keywords: social media credibility, social media engagement, politics, Generation Z culture

Introduction

In a 21st century world where digital media reigns supreme, it is quite impossible to imagine what life would be like without the existence of social media which has proven itself to be an essential asset in everything. The online presence of traditional news organisations has begun to rapidly flourish, and new information brokers have become increasingly sought-after. Platforms like Twitter, Instagram and Facebook are now central to the news ecology, and personal messaging services like WhatsApp are also increasingly important for understanding the political information landscape (Andersen et al., 2020). People are utilising these mediums to not only share opinions and communicate with others, but also to exchange perceptions with one another. An increasing number of digital newspaper subscriptions in the past couple of years have indicated that these days, more people are opting for new media instead of traditional media in search of news. The way new media and technology applications are being accepted day by day among the younger generation is most definitely hard to not notice.

People often stumble upon a great deal of information daily and one of the main aspects to filter information is based on credibility, authenticity or believability. The degree to which one sees information to be plausible is defined as information credibility, and it is a significant predictor of an information consumer's subsequent perception (Li & Suh, 2015). Social media provides a vast array of information for users which is why some of the characteristics that have been commonly used to determine credibility, such as author identification and reputation, are harder to identify online, making it challenging to determine which sources are trustworthy. As a result of this problem, there has been an increase in interest in "fake news," which is incorrect information that uses the style and structure of journalism to deceive (Scott, 2017).

The usage rate of social media today among the younger generation has risen exponentially, driving it to become one of the easiest places to access up-to-date sources and engage about what is happening. With that, information systems developed by technology have enabled media service users to search as much data as possible in a short period of time (Nathalia & Kristiana, 2019). Developments like these have opened up new possibilities for the younger generation in Asia to connect with each other, express their opinions, as well as engage in politics (Chen et al., 2016). For instance, Malaysia going through the general election back in the year 2008 was one of the few examples that showcased the power of social media effectiveness. Back then the ruling party, Barisan Nasional, had taken a large number of seats from the opposition party, Pakatan Rakyat. Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Malaysia's Prime Minister at the time, confessed that his governing coalition made a blunder by underestimating the power of the Internet, which the opposition parties had used extensively to win a record number of seats in elections (Ahmad et al., 2012). In addition, social media was proven as a dominant medium of communication for people to engage with political parties in the 14th General Elections held in May 2018. According to Sani (2018), the Deputy Prime Minister, Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, confirmed that social media was absolutely essential in the election process since 80% of Malaysian voters were youths who are active social media users. Social media is where almost 92% of young first-time voters from the ages of 18-29 access their news (GE14: Big battle on social media, 2017).

New media is especially the most sensational form of communication for Generation Z since they have experienced the presence of technology and Internet from birth and have become accustomed to communicating with technological devices from anywhere and at any time (Delaviz & Ramsay, 2018). Generation Z is among those who are born after the year 1995 (Cilliers, 2017) or more specifically between the years 1995 to 2012 (Zorn, 2017). They are mostly the offspring of Generation X and some, the children of the millennials (Quigley, 2016). Some other names suggested for Generation Z included iGeneration, Gen Tech, Gen Wii, Net Gen, Digital Natives, Plurals, and Zoomers (Dobrowolski et al., 2022). Highly active internet users are indeed Generation Z cohorts (Cilliers, 2017). At least 75% of the generation Z cohort owns a digital smart gadget and utilises it several times every hour (Beall, 2016). Social media has the potential of promoting political engagement amongst Generation Z in ways like never before. For instance, they can form distinct political groups online, share political videos on their social networks and write and publish political issues through websites and blogs (Abdullah et al., 2021).

Generation Z is transforming civic participation and engaging with political issues online (Dookhoo & Dodd, 2019). With that in mind, their engagement on social media has also caused problems to arise and not just in social contexts like harassment or online gambling, but in political context as well (Garrett, 2019). One characteristic described for Gen Z members is slacktivism, the portmanteau of slacker and activism (Nieżurawska-Zając et al., 2016). Slacktivism is defined by the United Nations as when individuals advocate a political or non-political cause by taking basic actions but are not necessarily engaged or dedicated to creating a difference. Most scholarly journals focus on millennial motivations and engagement in slacktivism (Dookhoo & Dodd, 2019), but research on Generation Z in this aspect is very scarce. Although a certain study showed that Generation Z had the potential to reduce slacktivism through the method of motivation in order to change their actions (Sehijpaul, 2021), the issue is that slacktivism is not equivalent to the activism of present and aspiring organisers (Simonson, 2021) and should not even be practised. Signing internet petitions to express solidarity or sharing a political post to indicate that they care about the issue are some of the examples of slacktivism.

Despite Generation Z's familiarity with online media, it turns out that Gen Z has trouble differentiating fact from fiction (Kovacs, 2020). Fake news, which is defined as the creation of false content in order to persuade readers to believe in something that is not true, has piqued the interest of scholars all around the world (Parikh & Atrey, 2018). In fact, hoaxes or fake news have become renowned in the last few years with the evolving internet and appear mainly in the form of alleged news articles related to multiple areas such as politics and health (You et al., 2019) that spread via social media. The problem with the widespread emergence of falsified news is that people, and especially the younger generation are very much exposed to them.

Conroy et al., (2015) pointed out that automatically detecting fake news is a difficult topic to tackle since, nowadays, news stories often include photos and videos rather than just text, which is easier to falsify. Hence, the use of social media may pose more challenges in the information evaluation process due to its brief form of message, making credibility assessment difficult (Keshvarz, 2020). Firstly, political concerns such as misinformation and shifting political ideologies, as previously noted, may provide a platform for alternative viewpoints while also strengthening dissident tendencies (Bekmagambetova et al., 2018). Social media offers a structure for a flow of information that might stoke distrust in the government, jeopardise legitimacy, and spark protests. Government agencies and public services are some of the organisations that are continuously under attack. Unsolicited messages, such as opening files and hyperlinks, as well as issues with connecting with strangers and social engineering, are examples of related issues. Identity theft, malware, and harm to a public service's reputation are all risk considerations that are included as well (Senthil Kumar et al., 2016). With this, this study was done to study Generation Z's perception about the credibility of political information on social media. The study also aimed to identify the extent of political engagement in social media among Generation Z and the relationship between the perception of social media credibility and political engagement in social media among Generation Z.

Literature Review

Perception of Social Media Credibility

In today's generation, social media allows billions of people to stay up to date on news and happenings from across the world. Scholars from different fields have defined credibility differently, with some in terms of information believability, others in terms of how reliable the information itself is, and if the information originates from a reliable source (Mitra, 2017). Mitra (2017) denotes that credibility does not have an exact analytical definition as it is a socially constructed definition of information accuracy determined by the social media users using multiple social signals found on social media platforms. Mitra added that a receiver's perception of the content or information's quality on social media is made up of several dimensions, such as the message source, the message itself, including its structure and substance, and the means used to disseminate the message.

Content credibility, also known as message credibility, refers to informational quality and accuracy perceived by social media users (Diana et al., 2016). According to Fisher (2016), message credibility is defined as the conceptions of public trust in a particular type of news medium, such as television, newspapers, radio and also social media. Inclusively, the amount of exposure that the respondents had towards biased tweets also had an effect which changed the respondents' assessments towards the info (Munger et al., 2016). Besides this, high-quality pictures are also another type of media feature that contribute to making social media a credible form of source. Djafarova and Trofimenko's (2018) study showed that people tend to follow prominent figures on social media if their posted pictures are of higher quality. Shen et al., (2019) further claim that a company's published online articles, computer abilities, photo-editing experience, and social media usage were found to be significant predictors of image credibility judgment. Additionally, using a more personalised form of language signified a more positive effect on social media credibility (Yilmaz & Quintero Johnson, 2016). Overall, it was revealed that the impact of social media credibility on both local and international political news consumption was indeed positive (Zulqarnain & Hassan, 2016).

Political Engagement in Social Media

Engagement on social media is all about the series of interactions users have with the other social media users on social networking sites (Wai Lai & Liu, 2020). It is also often referred to the extent social media users connect themselves to social media by either assessing information or transacting with online platforms (Masrom, 2016). As the popularity of social media sites grows, so does scholarly interest in the influence of social media on political involvement (Bäck et al., 2020). With the plethora of information that social media offers, everyone is allowed to engage in political purposes on social media, for instance, political discussion and information sharing. Individuals are more willing to participate in political activities on social media when they discover their friends or extended network have participated too.

Social media has become an integral source of news and a forum for Generation Z to express their ideas and opinions on critical problems (Morris, 2020). Young people are redefining political engagement by utilising social media to express their political views in new ways (Keating & Melis, 2017). It was found that approximately 71 percent of Malaysian Generation Z obtains their news via social media, with instant messaging accounting for 43% (Tjiptono et al., 2020). It was revealed that Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter are the most popular social media platforms, with the majority of respondents having several social media accounts (Ahmed, 2020). Soedarsono et al., (2020) added that social media platforms like Twitter show a high rate of political engagement because it is one of the most popular mediums for channelling information and indulging in political discourses, widely used by politically interested individuals. According to Turner (2016), it was discovered that the high frequency of usage in social media particularly among generation Z is mainly due to the fact that these digital natives find a sense of belonging and escapism, in order to avoid the struggles in their offline lives. Their time spent on social media includes carrying out different activities related to politics.

Political engagement may both influence and be influenced by the exposure to political information (Andersen et al., 2020). There are three key dimensions of political engagement: political interest, political knowledge, and political efficacy. Being politically interested, knowledgeable, or efficacious is most likely to lead to political participation in society but does not necessarily do so. Thus, in contrast to political participation, political engagement is not defined by actual behaviour. Another study by Ekström and Shehata (2016) also denotes four modes of political engagement: political information (reading and searching for political information); political interaction (posting comments and discussing public matters, sharing, and linking news and clips on politics); public production (writing about politics on a blog or creating video clips); and collective actions (initiating and joining protests and activism). According to a study on civic engagement in the electronic age, it has been hypothesised that people who utilised the internet for political information as well as engaged in political discourse had better degrees of political knowledge, interest, and efficacy (Kirk & Schill, 2011). A study by Van Erkel and Van Aelst (2020) explains that political knowledge can be divided into two aspects which are knowledge about the political system often obtained through education and current political affairs knowledge that is knowledge about recent happenings in politics and society.

In addition, political interest is basically the extent to which politics piques a person's interest. As such, political interest is defined by an innate drive to pay attention to and engage in politics for personal enjoyment and the inherent gratification of doing so in itself, rather than by external constraints or as a way to accomplish certain objectives (Shehata & Amnå, 2017). Hence, the generation Z cohort who possesses high political interest is more likely to both seek out political information online and participate in contributing their viewpoints regarding politics. The last component to assess political engagement in social media is political efficacy. Political efficacy refers to having both an internal and an external dimension (Andersen et al., 2020). According to the research, the notion or self-perception that one can comprehend politics is referred to as internal efficacy and therefore, are capable enough to participate in politics while external efficacy is defined as a sense of political responsiveness that the government will respond to one's demands (Stanley, 2017). External political efficacy can be translated less directly into either media consumption or political participation (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2017).

Relationship between Perception of Social Media Credibility and Political Engagement in Social Media

According to Karlsen and Aalberg (2021), it is underscored that the more reputable a news source is, the more successful it will be in informing citizens about the important information for them to engage in civic matters. Social media's ability to deliver political content in a more relevant, diverse, and direct way for Gen Z to encounter political information may, in turn, affect their political engagement due to its appeal (Andersen et al., 2020). Even users who are unconcerned in politics may be exposed to political information by accident due to their exposure to shared political information (Knoll et al., 2018). According to Silverman and Alexander (2016), there were young individuals who were uninterested in politics that attempted to distribute false information about the American elections. Whether or not their lack of credibility assessment is due to their uninterest in civic matters, Tang and Lee (2013) suggested that direct social media exposure to shared political information increases political engagement.

Besides, it is underscored that there is a favourable link between the legitimacy of social networking sites and political engagement (Chan, 2016). It is noted that during the 2016 US presidential election, Twitter users were exposed to fake news, accounting for roughly 6% of all news consumption on the platform. The retweeting of bogus political articles was much more concentrated, with roughly 0.1 percent of all users accounting for 80 percent of all retweets (Grinberg et al., 2019).

Theoretical Foundation

The development of the framework of the study is rooted in the theory of Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) and social media engagement theory. ELM is a dual-processing model of information processing; it proposes how different kinds of messages can influence the change of consequent behaviour and attitude in a person. Two routes of influence are outlined: the central route and the peripheral route (Shi et al., 2018). Central-route persuasion requires the maximum effort (Hardy et al., 2018) of an individual to think deeply about the argument in a message, and then reflect on its relevance before forming a decision. For instance, arguments may allude to the message's reliability and honesty, relevance to themselves, possible dangers and advantages of sharing the message with followers when making, sharing or retweeting decisions on social media (Shi et al., 2018). According to the research, the central route requires a significant level of elaboration, concentration, reflection and assessment in evaluating content.

The peripheral route on the other hand, is the complete opposite and does not involve much cognitive effort (Hardy et al., 2018). It zeros in on information-irrelevant elements that online consumers generally use to evaluate the information (Li & Suh, 2015). According to Shi et al. (2018), instead of undertaking considerable cognitive effort, receivers depend on a set of cues that leads to making speedy judgments. For instance, such cues might allude to source trustworthiness, the number of times a particular tweet has been retweeted, or the number of times a post has been reshared. These cues apparently do not involve people in analysing a message, hence the lesser the cognitive effort one has to put in (Shi et al., 2018). The message presented in various contexts and situations will cause a varying perception within a recipient, thus cognitive effort devoted to that message will also vary (Hardy et al., 2018).

Social media engagement theory was originally built as a model of interaction between user and organisation (Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016). The research hypothesises that the user experiences from access to social resources, can be closely related to the type of political information, interaction, interest, public production and collective action which are some of the aspects that fall under Generation Z's social media engagement. Adopting both the dual process theories of cognition ELM and social media engagement theory in which the perception of social media credibility of source, media and content credibility become the cues that aid Generation Z user engagement on social media.

The conceptual framework of the study is shown in Figure 1. It was hypothesised that the perception of social media credibility is significantly correlated with political engagement in social media among Generation Z.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework of the Study
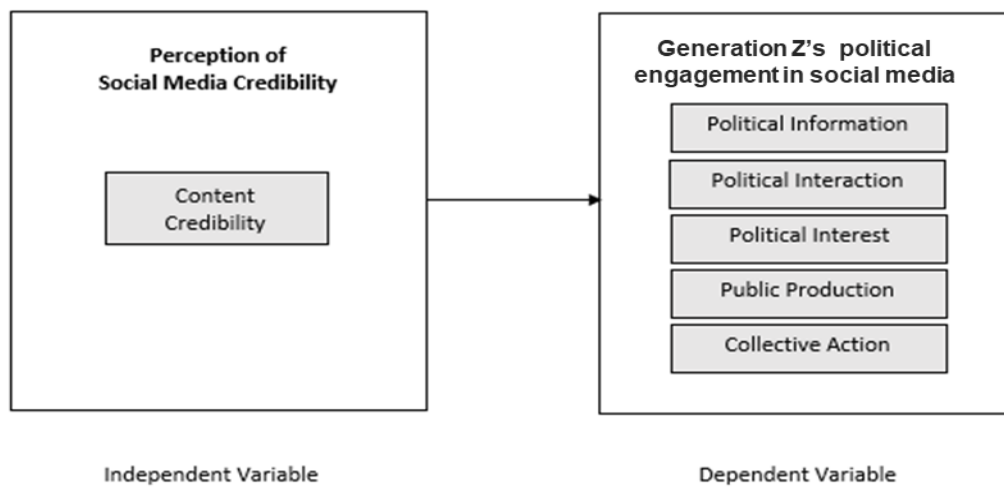
Methods

Research Design

The study utilised a quantitative and descriptive correlational research design. A quantitative research design was implemented as this approach was recommended to answer descriptive questions or opinions of a population (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Descriptive approach was taken to explore the two variables in the study: Generation Z's perception of social media credibility and political engagement in social media among Generation Z. In addition, the correlation of the two variables was explored. Online surveys were conducted as it has become a standard tool for empirical research nowadays. With the young and constantly evolving decade that we live in, online survey services make online survey research much easier and faster (Nayak & Narayan, 2019).

Sampling Procedures

The research focused on Generation Z in Malaysia. The Generation Z population is the largest age group in Malaysia representing 29% (9.45 million) of the overall population of 32.6 million people (Tjiptono et al., 2020). A purposive sampling method was used as the study intended to include only Generation Z in the Selangor state, Malaysia, and not the population of the other age ranges. As much as 78 percent of Generation Z live in urban areas (Tjiptono et al., 2020) and Selangor is in fact one of the most popular urban conurbations in Western Malaysia. The questionnaire was delivered only to the teenagers aged 15 to 25 in the Selangor state.

The Morgan and Krejcie Table (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970) is used to determine the required number of respondents for this research. The estimated population size of Generation Z residing in Selangor is around 2.97 million, hence the adequate sample size is 384. In order to achieve 384 valid responses, it was decided to collect 400 responses.

Instrumentation

A structured questionnaire was administered for data collection. The questionnaire consisted of 3 sections comprising Section A (Personal demographic Information), Section B (The perception of social media credibility), and Section C (Generation Z's political engagement in social media). The items for Section B were adopted from the questionnaire by Asri and Sualman (2019) regarding the perception of young adults on the credibility of Facebook. There were 5 items that used a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". As for Section C, the questionnaire by Ekström and Shehata (2016) was adopted to measure Generation Z's political engagement in social media. There were 15 items measuring political information, political interaction, public production and collective

action by using a response scale from 1 (No), 2 (Yes, but rarely), and 3 (Yes, several times), and 2 items measuring political interest with a scale from 1 (Not at all interested) to 5 (Very much interested) in Section C.

Pilot Test

A pilot study was conducted to explore the reliability of the instrument for the study. The instrument was distributed to 50 Generation Z individuals in the Selangor state. It was found that that the instrument was highly reliable for the sample with α=.93 for the independent variable (perception of social media credibility) and α=.94 for the dependant variable (political engagement in social media among Generation Z). No item was deleted nor revised before proceeding to data collection.

Data Collection

A well-known example of a commonly used online survey administration software for data collections and analysis is Google form (Raju & Harinarayana, 2016). Google form is inexpensive and self-administered, and it offers a minimal risk of data inaccuracies. Hence, the questionnaire was administered in a Google Form and then distributed via social media channels such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Telegram and Instagram to 400 Generation Z individuals within the age range of 15 to 25. It took each respondent 5 to 10 minutes to complete the questionnaire. All 400 responses received were completed by the targeted population, hence no response was excluded. The data collected underwent descriptive analysis to study the credibility of political information on social media perceived by Generation Z and political engagement in social media among Generation Z. The data was also analysed inferentially to explore the relationship between the perception of social media credibility and political engagement in social media among Generation Z.

Discussion

400 valid responses were obtained for data analysis. 82 percent of the respondents aged 20-25 years old while the other 18 percent aged 15-19 years old. 31.75 percent of the respondents are males while the remaining 68.25 percent are females. The respondents are of diverse ethnicities: Indian (57 percent), Malay (25 percent), Chinese (14.7 percent) and others (3.3 percent). Most of them are undergraduates or undergraduate students (83.5 percent) while the rest are secondary school graduates or students (15.5 percent) and post graduate students (1 percent). Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents' gender and ethnicity.

Table 1

Distribution of Respondents' Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Percentage
Malay	25.0
Chinese	14.7
Indian	57.0
Others	3.3

Table 2

Mean and Standard Deviation of Generation Z's Perception of Social Media Credibility

Political news/ content/ information on social media …	Mean (*M*)	Standard Deviation (*SD*)
… can be trusted	3.87	.96
… are fair	3.51	1.03
… are accurate	3.33	.94
… are balanced	2.87	.93
… tell the whole truth	2.84	1.01
Perception of social media credibility	3.23	.97

The first research objective was to study the credibility of political information on social media perceived by Generation Z. Table 2 shows the mean and standard deviation of Generation Z's perception of social media credibility. Overall, the respondents have a positive perception about the credibility of political information on social media (M=3.23, SD=.97). The respondents claimed that the political news, content and information on social media can be trusted (M=3.87, SD=.96). Meanwhile, the respondents believed that the political news, content and information on social media are fair (M=3.51, SD=1.03), accurate (M=3.33, SD=.94), and balanced (M=2.87, SD=.93). Most respondents are also certain that the political news, content and information on social media tell the whole truth (M=2.84, SD=1.01).

This research finding was consistent with the past research which found that young people are more likely to believe and pass on misinformation on social media if they feel a sense of common identity with the person who shared it in the first place (John, 2021). According to Click and Schwartz (2018), there were several instances where getting news from a particular platform affected the perceived bias of Generation Z individuals. Their study pointed out how Generation Z students relied on the same few news outlets although they were aware of the news outlets' biasness. Regardless of generation, it is explained that perceptions of political biases of news sources are manifested by getting news from a particular source, which affects the perceived bias for a different or same source. Therefore, in terms of different source bias, Generation Z receiving their news from one particular source will have the effect of influencing whether the source is perceived as fair.

Table 3

Mean and Standard Deviation of Generation Z's Political Engagement in Social Media

Constructs	Mean (*M*)	Standard Deviation (*SD*)
Political information	2.64	.60
Political interaction	2.10	.83
Political production	1.71	.78
Collective action	1.78	.89
Political interest	4.11	1.06
Political engagement in social media	2.08	.70

The second research objective was to identify the political engagement in social media among Generation Z. Table 3 shows the mean and standard deviation of the constructs of political engagement in social media. Overall, the respondents show a high level of political engagement in social media (M=2.08, SD=.70) and a high level of political interest (M=4.11, SD=1.06), as shown in Table 2. Most of the respondents reported that they are active in accessing political information (M=2.46, SD=.60). For the past 2 months, the respondents had watched video or clips about societal issues or politics, read about politics, searched for information about politics or societal issues, and visited a political page. In the meantime, within a span of 2 months, the respondents showed high levels of political interaction with the network they have on social media (M=2.10, SD=.83). They reported to have linked or shared political news or clips on social media to friends and discuss societal or political issues with friends online on social media. Besides, the respondents show a moderate level in collective action (M=1.78, SD=.89) where they reported to have participated in an online protest, or joined a Facebook group, or similar, devoted to societal issues that they thought were important. Lastly, the respondents show a moderate level in political production (M=1.71, SD=.78) by reporting to have written about politics or societal issues on social media, and/or their own blog or website, and contributed materials (texts, pictures, or information) to an online news site.

Political related information is easily accessible online from social news sites such as World of Buzz or SAYS. Many politicians have come to understand the importance of using social media as the main communication channel with the Generation Z cohort (Temir, 2020) hence it is proven that these digital natives may come across political news many times online. Watson (2022) also found that half of Generation Z use social networks daily as their news source and they show a more general preference for online news sources as compared to offline outlets. Besides, Generation Z's media consumption is

motivated by the need to stay relevant in order to express a viewpoint, either to be perceived as an influencer or to make a significant contribution to conversations with their friends (Ko, 2021). According to Bäck et al. (2020), individuals are more likely to engage in political activities on social media if they perceive their friends or extended network have done so. Prior research studies have found that social influence via social media is important for political activity. Political discourse among online friends assumes that social interchange exposes people to a social supply of knowledge that broadens their exposure to and comprehension of politics (McClurg, 2003).

Furthermore, the participation of the respondents in an online protest indicates how one's political interest moderates his or her political participation (Ahmad et al., 2019) and the involvement in activities related to politics, such as donating to a campaign or influencing others to vote (Uhlaner, 2015). The generation Z cohort who possesses high political interest is more likely to both seek political information online and participate not just in contributing their viewpoints regarding politics but also participating in political rallies. A poll conducted to observe how Gen Z feels about protests showed that almost 77% of respondents have already attended a protest (Davis, 2020). In fact, expressing political opinions online on Facebook groups is correlated with political action (Loader, 2017) and initiating and joining protests and activism is an example of collective action (Ekström & Shehata, 2016). The exposure to political information does not merely foster political engagement among people but also their political interest (Andersen et al., 2020). Various studies seem to support this finding as well. For instance, young people who utilise social media for social interaction would also be engaged in online politics, justifying their interest in the subject matter (Ekström & Shehata, 2016). Studies have underlined a strong politicisation among the generation aged 18 to 24, characterised by an increasing interest in politics (Loader, 2017).

The last research objective of the study was to identify the relationship between the perception of social media credibility and political engagement in social media among Generation Z. Pearson correlation analysis revealed that a significantly relationship was identified between the perception of social media credibility and political engagement in social media among the respondents (r=0.587, p<.01). Table 4 below shows the correlation between the perception of social media credibility and political engagement in social media among the respondents.

Table 4

Correlation between the perception of social media credibility and Generation Z's political engagement in social media

	Political engagement in social media among Generation Z	
	r	*p*
Perception of social media credibility	.587**	.000

Past research indicated that readers are more proactive and responsive to choosing their preferred channels of communication for topics they like to read about. Subsequently, when a medium is thought to be more trustworthy than others, people are more inclined to use it for information gathering and sharing. As a result, trustworthiness may be proposed as the most important aspect motivating people to use social media (Safori et al., 2016). According to Karlsen and Aalberg (2021), it is underscored that the more reputable a news source is, the more successful it will be in informing citizens about the important information for them to engage in civic matters. Social media's ability to deliver political content in a more relevant, diverse, and direct way for Generation Z to encounter political information may, in turn, affect their political engagement due to its appeal (Andersen et al., 2020). Tang and Lee (2013) suggested that direct social media exposure to shared political information increases one's political engagement.

Conclusion

It was reported that Generation Z, also called the digital natives, are transforming civic participation and engaging with political issues online. However, they could show characteristics of slacktivism. The current study intended to explore Generation Z's perception of content credibility and political engagement in social media. Overall, Generation Z perceives the political information on social media to be credible and they show a high political engagement in social media. Meanwhile, Generation Z's perception of social media credibility is found to be correlated with their political engagement in social media. All the research objectives were achieved with a quantitative research design and appropriate data analysis. Lastly, this study shows that the Elaboration likelihood model (ELM) of persuasion could be related to social media engagement theory.

Implications

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) focuses on the way humans process information differently and how this affects human attitudes, and behaviours. As for the social media engagement theory, it discusses the aspects that decide one's involvement in social media. There has been scarce research that relates the model with the theory, and the current research discovers a correlation between the two. This contributes to the knowledge in the communication field, more specifically with regard to the social media aspect.

In addition, it was found that how Generation Z perceives the social media content credibility decides their attitude and behaviours. In this case, Generation Z's perception of social media content credibility is correlated to their political engagement in social media. This finding may benefit Malaysian journalists, content creators and Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) in planning a more strategic course of action to prevent distrust in social media content and political disengagement among the young generation.

Limitation and Recommendation

A non-probability sampling method was applied in the current study due to the pandemic. The study focused only on the Generation Z in the Klang valley. Meanwhile, only Generation Z aged 15-25 were targeted for this study as they are the digital natives who utilise social networks the most as compared to the older generation. Thus, the findings describe only the perception of social media credibility and engagement in politics among Generation Z in Klang valley. The results could not be generalised to Generation Z throughout Malaysia and the population of other age ranges. For future research, it was suggested to expand the sample towards the other generations such as Millennials, Gen Y, Gen X, Baby Boomers and so forth to have a broader understanding of social media credibility and engagement in politics. A probability sampling method is also recommended to involve respondents throughout Malaysia, be it urban, suburban or rural areas.Lastly, more research correlating the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) and social media engagement theory was recommended to further test the relationship between these two theories. The dimensions of the variables can be replicated or added to contribute knowledge to the communication field. The testing of the theories may not be limited to the political aspect but any other aspects related to social media.The link between the independent and dependent variables is described in this conceptual framework. Cultural dimension constructs will be treated as independent variables, while intercultural communication style is dependent. The correlation between the two variables is shown with ethnicity as the moderator in this research framework. The observation and research gap of this study led to the development of the following research model.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) have declared that no competing interests exist.

Author Contribution Statement

All authors contributed to the conception, design, writing, and revision of the manuscript.

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