




# Digital government: Social media as a mediator in technology acceptance with political knowledge, interest, and participation

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## ABSTRACT

Social media is an essential tool for governments to spread political information in the digital era. However, the influence of social media on political participation is significant but not well recognised in developing countries such as Malaysia. The main problem is the lack of clarity surrounding the factors that influence citizen adoption of political social networks and how this influences political interest, knowledge, and participation. The purpose of this study is to explore factors and social media as mediator in political dynamics. The study sampled 338 young people from the University Malaysia Sabah using convenient sampling. The online questionnaire is distributed through Google Form and the hypotheses are analysed using SPSS Process macro and AMOS. The results highlighted that perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, perceived enjoyment, political participation, and political interest are significantly related to government-political related social media usage. Social media usage mediated the relationship between all predictors and dependent variables (except for political knowledge). This study offers evidence-based suggestions within a theoretical framework to improve the government's use of social media for civil engagement.

**Keywords:** political decision-making, digital government, social media, perceived usefulness, political knowledge, political participation, perceived ease of use, R&D investment

## INTRODUCTION

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Social media has become an essential platform for people to stay connected with the network and the world. For example, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok allow people to learn and share the latest information. According to social media usage statistics, the main purpose of Malaysians adopting social networks is to keep in touch with friends and family (54.6%) followed by free time (52.7%) and to read news stories (42.6%) (Howe, 2023). Furthermore, a study has shown that 71% of respondents use WhatsApp in their daily lives, followed by Facebook (51%) and TikTok (49%) among the randomly selected sample of 1082 respondents in Malaysia (Bernama, 2023). Among 1,207 adults, 44% of them use Facebook to get political news and information (Statista, 2022). Undoubtedly, social media plays an important role in information dissemination (Ting et al., 2023). People who are concerned about government political social media can easily comprehend the perspective and working style of the present administration (Husnal 'Az' Hari, 2022). At the same time, they can have some interesting reactions with the government via political social media.

Following the growing trend of influence of social media on political discourse among Malaysian youth, who are the most active social media users, Malaysian government has implemented various initiatives for political participation and empowerment on social media among this demographic. In 2021, the government set up Vote18 (Undi18), a civil society organisation (CSO), after realising that social networks play a crucial role in exposing political content (Hassan et al., 2024; Siang Ling & Puyok, 2024). Vote18 aims to develop political empowerment among Malaysia's youth. Hence they are calling for the constitutional amendment to decrease the minimum voting age from 21 to 18 years old (Kasmani, 2023). This step is being taken to ensure that young people can actively engage in strengthening democratic government listening to their concerns about governance and policy. According to Kasmani (2023), there was an increase of 1.3 million registered voters between the ages of 18 to 21, representing a significant increase during the 2022 general election. This surge has demonstrated the effectiveness of Vote18 initiatives in empowering young voters via social media, diversifying, and expanding the electorate.

Research has previously been done to explore the factors or impact of social media, but government-political related social media adoption studies is sparse in this developing country, Malaysia (Chan et al., 2024; Choi & Lee, 2015; Feezell et al., 2021; Khan et al., 2019; Shehata & Strömbäck, 2021). This poses a challenge in determining the number of citizens who are using government-political related social media for political purposes and, subsequently, to improve the bonds between the government and the citizens. The role of government social media as mediator between technology acceptance and political participation is crucial to establish evidence of the importance of social media in this domain. Therefore, this study aims to fill the research gap in exploring the relationship between the factors of perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and perceived enjoyment that affect the adoption of government-political related social media and its impact on political knowledge, interest, and participation in the developing country – East Malaysia, particularly Sabah State.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

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### Perceived Usefulness and Government-Political Related Social Media Usage

A study of social media adoption in government contexts found that the perceived usefulness of social media significantly influences citizens' adoption behaviours (Khan et al., 2021; Nguyen et al., 2024). Perceived usefulness in the technology acceptance model (TAM) is defined as "the prospective user's subjective probability that using a specific application system will increase his or her job performance within an organisational context" (Davis et al., 1989). Numerous scholars have conducted extensive research in the field, exploring the role of social media in political communication and citizen engagement (Kim et al., 2020; Marquart et al., 2020). However, these studies are mainly focused on the general use of social media and lack a specific emphasis on government-political platforms. This review critically evaluates the existing literature to address the gap in understanding the perceived usefulness of government-political related social media in Sabah. Much of the current literature on social media adoption pays particular attention to factors such as perceived usefulness and ease of use. However, another finding indicates that media richness, dialogic loop, content type, and relevant information can affect citizens' adoption of government social media (Chen et al.,

2020). In fact, a study has shown that citizens are more inclined to engage with such platforms when they perceive them as valuable tools for accessing political information, participating in public discourse, and holding authorities accountable (Khan et al., 2021; Nguyen et al., 2024). In general, these studies highlight the need for more research specifically focused on the perceived usefulness of social media platforms to better understand their impact on citizen participation.

### **Perceived Ease of Use and Government-Political Related Social Media Use**

Perceived ease of use is defined as “the degree to which the prospective user expects the target system to be free of effort” (Davis et al., 1989). Recent evidence suggests that the perceived ease of use of social media platforms significantly influences citizens’ adoption of such platforms. For example, many studies found a strong positive correlation between perceived ease of use and adoption rates of social networks among citizens in a similar context (Gavino et al., 2019; Khan et al., 2020; Nguyen et al., 2024). A study by Khan et al. (2021) also found that the more user-friendly and accessible the platform, the more likely citizens are to trust and use these services. Therefore, ease of use is crucial to building trust in social media platforms used for government services in electronic form. Similarly, a study suggests that ease of use is a critical factor that can lead to increased adoption and usage of e-filing services (Tahar et al., 2020). On the contrary, a study such as Nawi et al. (2019) indicates that other factors such as performance expectancy, perceived trust, and perceived risk also play a significant role in the adoption of social media. Overall, while the existing literature offers information on the general dynamics of social media for other purposes, further research is needed to uncover the specific factors driving the adoption of social media related to government politics for political purposes within the unique context of Sabah, Malaysia.

### **Perceived Enjoyment and Government-Political Related Social Media Usage**

Intrinsic motivation strengthens the enjoyment concept and is considered a hedonic motivation conceptualisation (Choi & Lee, 2015; Ramírez-Correa et al., 2019). Perceived enjoyment is a measure of how an individual has fun and pleasure in using a particular technology that can be defined as the extent to which “the activity of using a specific system is perceived as enjoyable in its own right, aside from any performance consequences resulting from system use” (Khurshid et al., 2022). Prior research has shown that perceived enjoyment plays a crucial role in influencing the intention of citizens to adopt government-political related social media platforms (Afieroho et al., 2023). For example, Choi and Lee (2015) examined that enjoyment has a significant factor in adopting this platform due to relaxing features. Furthermore, past literature highlighted that people who enjoy this platform are more willing to adopt it (Chen, 2013). Similarly, the research highlighted that when people find a platform pleasant to use, they may underestimate the complexity of adopting it. However, other findings indicate that the adoption of government-political related social media use by citizens depends greatly on how they perceive the security measures implemented to protect their personal information (Yuan et al., 2023). Similarly, Islm et al. (2021) argued that the trust of citizens guarantees the acceptance of the use of government-political related social media. This study argued that individuals are more likely to engage with government-political related social media platforms when they perceive that these agencies prioritise their best interest and address their concerns.

### **Political Knowledge and Government-Political Related Social Media Usage**

Political knowledge consists of information on government, laws and regulations, political parties, history, and issues (Halim et al., 2021). Political practitioners, political parties, and community leaders can transmit political knowledge to individuals through political social media (Agus et al., 2020). Previous research has primarily focused on the relationship between political news and political knowledge. Based on current studies, we found that users who consume political news in news media and social media often tend to acquire greater political knowledge acquisition (Suk et al., 2022). However, a study in Nigeria that examines the relationship between media access and political knowledge found that Nigerian students increase their political knowledge through radio and television instead of social media (Oluwatosin et al., 2020). This shows that the relationship between political knowledge and the use of social media may vary according to the area of usage. In addition, Shehata and Strömbäck (2021) research results in a negative correlation relationship between political knowledge and the use of social media. Therefore, they argued that the effects of the media

depend on the type of knowledge studied and mentioned that the measuring method for the political knowledge may affect the result of the study. In existing research, there is only a limited number of studies on the usage of governmental-political related social media, and we have much more studies on the usage of general social media and political knowledge. Therefore, there is a research gap to understand the relationship between political knowledge and the use of government-political related social media.

### **Political Participation and Government-Political Related Social Media Usage**

Political participation involves sharing and gaining political information, voting, communicating with politicians, sharing political content, participating in campaigns, and contributing to the election of official representatives. Social networks comprise applications based on the Internet built on the technological and ideological foundation of Web 2.0. It is a platform that facilitates the creation and exchange of content. Social media users can actively participate in political content by liking, commenting, and sharing it. It promotes easy participation within their network (Halim et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2021). Thus, the use of social media is becoming increasingly popular among young people (Khan et al., 2019). There is no doubt that there are many scholars studying political participation on social media such as Facebook. For example, Halim et al. (2021) have done research on Facebook usage and political participation that reveals the transformation of political participation driven by technology distinct from traditional forms. This transformation led to a positive and significant impact on online political participation, which was affected by the availability of political content online. However, several scholars have stated that social media is a highly personalised space. The impact of social media use varies significantly based on individual usage behaviour; people can avoid or actively participate in the search for political information through social media (Knoll et al., 2020). In a nutshell, scholarly concentration has come over to the government's growing reliance on social media platforms for information dissemination and citizen participation. This has inspired an examination of the ongoing impact on Sabah inhabitants' political participation to overcome the research gap in understanding Sabahan's political participation behaviour upon government-political related social media.

### **Political Interest and Government-Political Related Social Media Usage**

The adoption of social media significantly affects political engagement, as indicated by various research findings. Social media plays a crucial role in delivering political news to individuals, thereby sustaining their interest and potentially increasing their involvement in political activities (Feezell et al., 2021). This connection is vitally important for democracies, as political engagement serves as the basis for civic participation and democratic outcomes (Pap et al., 2018). Although exposure to mainstream media has historically been associated with increased political interest, the influence of alternative digital media remains uncertain, lacking longitudinal studies (Reiter & Matthes, 2023). However, investigations from Pap et al. (2018) seek to address this gap, particularly focusing on the influence of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter on the political interest and participation of young people. Recognising the essential role of political interest in democracy's vitality, efforts to enhance youth participation in politics and utilise social media as catalysts for political interest are imperative. Research suggests that active participation in political discussions on platforms like Facebook is associated with increased political interest among young people, highlighting the potential of social media in shaping political participation. Furthermore, it is suggested that algorithmic interest classification on platforms such as Facebook mediates the relationship between self-reported political interest and exposure to political content, indicating a complex interplay between user behaviour and algorithmic interpretations (Thorson et al., 2021). Therefore, the integration of social networks not only impacts political interest, but also emphasises the need for a nuanced understanding of its mechanisms to cultivate informed and engaged citizenship. Additionally, while considerable research has delved into the correlation between social media usage and political interest globally, there exists a noticeable research gap concerning how these dynamics operate within Sabah's distinct socio-political environment. Given the unique cultural and political identity of the region, more research is needed to clarify whether social media platforms impact political interest among Sabahan residents. This investigation could illuminate the significance of localised content, community dynamics, and the amplification of regional issues in influencing political engagement through social media platforms. Gaining insight into these are essential for policy

makers and stakeholders in Sabah to make effective use of social networks to promote political participation and foster a more politically aware populace.

### Social Media as a Mediator in Politic Dynamics

People increasingly use social networks to obtain political news or to interact with political actors. These activities include posting or liking comments on political issues, responding to content of other users, joining political groups, changing their profile picture to support political causes, and following politicians. Research by Starke et al. (2020) shows that the mediation effect (leadership, responsiveness, benevolence and likeability), interacting with politicians on social media positively affects citizens' evaluation of the likeability of politicians, which further increases trust in government. This is facilitated by personalised communication between politicians and users, such as replying to citizen messages on Twitter, which foster a higher perceived intimacy with citizens and enhance trust in government. Responding to user-submitted comments signals that politicians signal that they are willing to listen to citizens, which also has a positive effect on their reputation. Choi and Lee (2015) research shows that political interest will moderate the relationship between news externalisation on social media and network heterogeneity. This happens because the level of interest in a particular political issue influences how individuals select and process related news messages. Thus, when political interest is coupled with frequent news consumption, these two tend to work interactively in determining the kinds and scope of perspectives and people to which an individual is exposed. Porumbescu (2016) also reveals that greater use of public sector social media accounts is more positively related to levels of satisfaction than frequency of use of government websites. This is because public sector agencies are taking to social media as a means of communicating with citizens and fostering stronger relationships, such as providing updates to residents of a particular area on the availability of free flu shots at their local public health clinic and directing them to the clinic's website for more detailed information. Although e-government websites are conducive to publicly transmitting short and general messages, such as the schedule of available flu shots. Therefore, public sector social media that direct participation and citizen feedback foster a sense of community and responsiveness that enhances satisfaction levels. However, the study identifies a research gap on how government-related social media use affects people's political attitudes and actions. Although previous studies have looked at how general social media interactions influence political trust, information sharing, and satisfaction, there is limited research on the specific impact of government-related social media on political knowledge, participation, and interest. By exploring how individuals perceive the usefulness, ease of use, and enjoyment of government-related social media platforms and how these perceptions affect political participation, the study aims to fill the gap. Understanding these relationships can provide valuable information to policy makers and scholars interested in using social networks to improve political participation and governance effectiveness. **Table 1** concludes previous studies with the detailed variables involved in the investigation.

Based on the reviews conducted in the previous sections, this study constructed a conceptual framework as shown in **Figure 1**. This study includes factors in adopting technology (social media) using TAM (perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use) with an additional factor – perceived enjoyment. The purpose of placing social media usage as a mediator is to measure the effects of the component on the causal pathway between technology acceptance and the results of youth's involvement in politics. This will result in a complete view of the causal chain linking the independent variables and the dependent variables.

The hypotheses for this study are as follows:

- H1** There is a positive relationship between perceived usefulness and government-political related social media use.
- H2** There is a positive relationship between perceived ease of use and government-political related social media use.
- H3** There is a positive relationship between perceived enjoyment and government-political related social media use.

**Table 1.** Previous studies with detailed variables

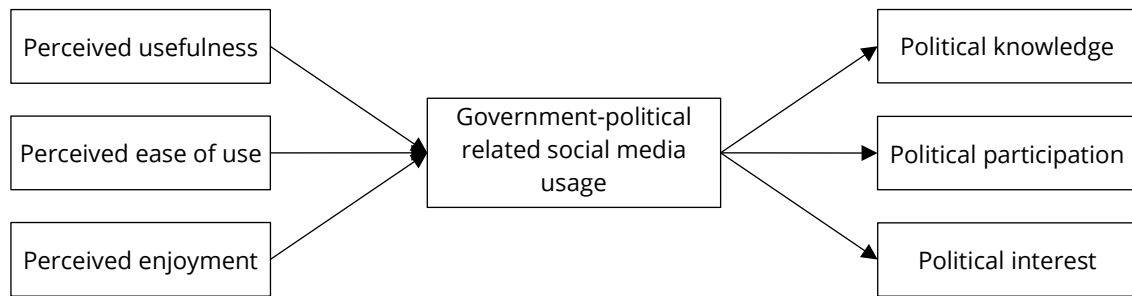
| Factor                                 | Detail variables   | Previous studies             |
|--|--|------------------------------|
| Perceived usefulness                   | Antecedents of trust; citizens trust; government social media; trust factors; e-government   | Khan et al. (2021)           |
|  | E-government services; social media; good governance theory; perceived responsiveness; perceived security; TAM                               | Nguyen et al. (2024)         |
|  | User acceptance; intention models  | Davis et al. (1989)          |
|  | Social media; political participation; social cognitive theory; political knowledge  | Kim et al. (2020)            |
|  | Political actors; social media use; youth participation  | Marquart et al. (2020)       |
| Perceived ease of use                  | Government social media; citizen engagement; emotional valence; crisis management  | Chen et al. (2020)           |
|  | User acceptance; intention models  | Davis et al. (1989)          |
|  | Facebook; social media adoption; TAM; perceived ease of use; perceived usefulness  | Gavino et al. (2019)         |
|  | Antecedents of trust; citizens trust; government social media; trust factors; e-government   | Khan et al. (2020)           |
|  | E-government services; social media; TAM   | Nguyen et al. (2024)         |
| Perceived enjoyment                    | Perceived usefulness; perceived security; e-filing   | Tahar et al. (2020)          |
|  | Adoption; social media; business platform; student entrepreneur  | Nawi et al. (2019)           |
|  | Citizens participatory; behaviour on GSMAs; extrinsic factor; intrinsic factor; online civic behaviour; trust in government                  | Islm et al. (2021)           |
|  | Digital participation; government digital initiatives; culture of government social media  | Yuan et al. (2023)           |
|  | Social networking  | Chen (2013)                  |
| Political knowledge                    | Mobile data service  | Choi et al. (2011)           |
|  | E-government; unified theory of acceptance and use of technology   | Aferoho et al. (2023)        |
|  | Enjoyment; Metaverse; personal innovativeness; self-efficacy; TAM  | Al-Adwan et al. (2023)       |
|  | Adoption; open government data   | Khurshid et al. (2022)       |
|  | Political knowledge  | Halim et al. (2021)          |
| Political participation                | Partisipasi apatis   | Agus et al. (2020)           |
|  | Results  | Suk et al. (2022)            |
|  | Discussion of findings   | Oluwatosin et al. (2020)     |
|  | Conclusions and discussion   | Shehata and Strömbäck (2021) |
|  | Online political participation; social media use   | Halim et al. (2021)          |
| Political interest                     | Political learning on social media; typology of political expression on Facebook   | Kim et al. (2021)            |
|  | Online political participation; results and discussion   | Khan et al. (2019)           |
|  | Social media and political participation   | Knoll et al. (2020)          |
| Social media as a mediator in politics | User-driven algorithmic news   | Feezell et al. (2021)        |
|  | Facebook and Twitter in the context of politics; political interest among youth  | Pap et al. (2018)            |
|  | Mainstream media, alternative digital media, and democratic outcomes   | Reiter and Matthes (2023)    |
| Social media as a mediator in politics | Complicating the pathway from (political) interest to content exposure   | Thorson et al. (2021)        |
|  | Interaction with politicians; mediation effect; personalization; political trust; quantitative survey; networking sites; trust in government | Starke et al. (2020)         |
|  | Networking heterogeneity; news sharing; political interest; social networking services (SNS)   | Choi and Lee (2015)          |
|  | Citizen satisfaction; e-government; ICT; public management; public sector social media; trust in government                                  | Porumbescu (2016)            |

**H4** There is a positive relationship between government-political related social media use and political knowledge.

**H5** There is a positive relationship between government-political related social media use and political participation.

**H6** There is a positive relationship between government-political related social media use and political interest.

**H7** There is a significant mediating effect of government-political related social media use in the relationship between perceived usefulness and political knowledge.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual framework constructed for this study based on the literature review (Source: Authors)

- H8** There is a significant mediating effect of government-political related social media use in the relationship between perceived usefulness and political participation.
- H9** There is a significant mediating effect of government-political related social media use in the relationship between perceived usefulness and political interest.
- H10** There is a significant mediating effect of government-political related social media use in the relationship between perceived ease of use and political knowledge.
- H11** There is a significant mediating effect of government-political related social media use in the relationship between perceived ease of use and political participation.
- H12** There is a significant mediating effect of government-political related social media use in the relationship between perceived ease of use and political interest.
- H13** There is a significant mediating effect of government-political related social media use in the relationship between perceived enjoyment and political knowledge.
- H14** There is a significant mediating effect of government-political related social media use in the relationship between perceived enjoyment and political participation.
- H15** There is a significant mediating effect of government-political related social media use in the relationship between perceived enjoyment and political interest.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this research, the target population comprises approximately 20,000 students enrolled at the University of Malaysia Sabah (UMS) (UMS, 2024; UniRank, 2024). The reason for choosing this population is that university students are highly engaged in social media platforms. They are the pillar of socialist construction of the state. Therefore, university students are the future and hope of the country. In this research, we employ convenient sampling method as our sampling plan, since the research project and the authors are based in UMS. The response was acquired using an online Google Forms and distributed to UMS students in UMS during lecture classes and through WhatsApp for one month. The sample size is calculated based on 95% confidence level, 20,000 population size, response distribution 50% as recommended, which produced a suggested result of 377 sample size. 338 samples are collected with a 5.29% margin of error (Raosoft, 2004). The questionnaire consists of eight sections and the type of scale used are shown in [Table 2](#).

Cronbach's alpha and exploratory factor analysis are used to measure the reliability and validity of the questionnaire items. The Pearson correlation method and mediating analysis are used to explore direct and indirect relationships between perceived usefulness, ease of use, and enjoyment of government social media use and its impact on political literacy, participation, and interest. For direct relationships, we utilise the Pearson correlation method with SPSS software to assess the strength and direction of these variables' linear relationships. For indirect relationships, which involve mediating effects, the Process macro tool in SPSS software will be used.

**Table 2.** Details of the item of the questionnaire and its resources

|   | Questionnaire item  | Scale   | Resources                        |
|---|---|---|----------------------------------|
| Section A:<br>Demographic                 | What gender do you identify as?   | Male, female  | NA                               |
|   | What is your age?   | Free text   |                                  |
|   | What is your level of study?  | Foundation, diploma, bachelor's degree, master, PhD or higher                 |                                  |
| Section B:<br>Perceived usefulness        | PU_Q1. I believe that using social media related to government politics is a useful learning tool.  | Strongly disagree to strongly agree (5 linear scale)                          | Mugaheed Al-Rahimi et al. (2013) |
|   | PU_Q2. I think using social networks related to politics will help me learn more about politics.  |   |                                  |
|   | PU_Q3. Government politics-related social media will enable me to connect with all my friends who are interested in politics.   | Strongly disagree to strongly agree (5 linear scale)                          | Dhume et al. (2012)              |
|   | PU_Q4. Social media related to politics of government allow me to make new friends who are interested in politics.  |   |                                  |
|   | PU_Q5. Government-political related social networks will allow me to share my political thoughts and ideas with my friends and other people.                                |   |                                  |
|   | PU_Q6. Social media related to politics will improve my political social skills.  |   |                                  |
| Section C:<br>Perceived ease of use       | PEOU_Q1. Interacting with these government-political related social media is clear and understandable.  | Strongly disagree to strongly agree (5 linear scale)                          | Lane and Coleman (2012)          |
|   | PEOU_Q2. Learning to use government-political related social networks is easy.  |   |                                  |
|   | PEOU_Q3. It is easy to navigate government-political related social media on mobile phone.  | Strongly disagree to strongly agree (5 linear scale)                          | Dhume et al. (2012)              |
|   | PEOU_Q4. It is easy to post my profile on the Internet with social networks related to government politics.   |   |                                  |
| Section D:<br>Perceived enjoyment         | PE_Q1. E-government social media makes me feel good.  | Strongly disagree to strongly agree (5 linear scale)                          | Shyu and Huang (2011)            |
|   | PE_Q2. E-government social media is interesting.  |   |                                  |
|   | PE_Q3. I have fun using e-government social media.  |   |                                  |
|   | PE_Q4. I forget about time when using e-government social media.  |   |                                  |
|   | PE_Q5. E-government social media will improve my enjoyment of my leisure time.  | Strongly disagree to strongly agree (5 linear scale)                          | Al-Adwan (2024)                  |
| Section E:<br>Government social media use | Q16. How much time you spend on government politic related social media in one day?   | None, less than 1 hour, 1-2 hours, 2-3 hours                                  | Sesli and Güven (2024)           |
|   | Q17. Choose the engaging political content types on government politic related social media.  | Political news, political jokes, political talk/idea, political advertisement | Gottfried and Shearer (2016)     |
|   | Q18. State the frequency of using government politic related social media to acquire information about political topics: Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, YouTube, Instagram.     | Never, rarely, sometimes, often, always                                       | N/A                              |
| Section F:<br>Political interest          | PL_Q1. I am highly interested in politics, so I will search and look for political contents on government politic related social media.                                     | Strongly disagree to strongly agree (5 linear scale)                          | Sze Huey (2023)                  |
|   | PL_Q2. My friends and I will share and discuss the political content from government politic related social media with each other.  |   |                                  |
|   | PL_Q3. I pay close attention to political content on social media because it has an impact on my daily life.  |   |                                  |
|   | PL_Q4. I only watch the political activity related to the political party and political leaders in which I am interested.   |   |                                  |
|   | PL_Q5. I occasionally watch political contents on government politic related social media.  |   |                                  |
| Section G:<br>Political knowledge         | PK_Q1. Who is the current prime minister of Malaysia?   | Specific answer   | Guess and Munger (2023)          |
|   | PK_EQ1. Which of the parties is a component of the Gabungan Rakyat Sabah (GRS)?   |   |                                  |
|   | PK_Q2. What is the minimum voting age in Malaysia?  | Specific answer   | N/A                              |
|   | PK_Q3. Who is the current director of Kementerian Kewangan Sabah?   |   |                                  |
| Section H:<br>Political participation     | PK_Q4. Datuk Seri Panglima Haji Hajiji bin Haji Noor is the ___ chief minister of Sabah.  |   |                                  |
|   | PP_Q1. I joined the political discourse because of government politic related social media political content.   | Strongly disagree to strongly agree (5 linear scale)                          | Sze Huey (2023)                  |
|   | PP_Q2. Government politic related social media content encouraged me to voice out my rights.  |   |                                  |
|   | PP_Q3. Government politic related social media content encouraged me to turn out during the coming GE16 at Sabah.   |   |                                  |
|   | PP_Q4. I am interested to communicate with the political leader through government politic related social media.  |   |                                  |
|   | PP_Q5. I am interested in updating my status on political issues on social media.   |   |                                  |
|   | PP_Q6. Searching for political information from government politic related social media was the leading cause that prompted me how to vote during the coming GE16 at Sabah. |   |                                  |



**Table 3.** Exploratory factor analysis of questionnaire items

|         | Component |       |       | Dimension             |
|---------|-----------|-------|-------|-----------------------|
|         | 1         | 2     | 3     |                       |
| PU_Q4   | 0.815     |       |       | Perceived usefulness  |
| PU_Q3   | 0.808     |       |       |                       |
| PU_Q5   | 0.758     |       |       |                       |
| PU_Q6   | 0.722     |       |       |                       |
| PU_Q2   | 0.666     |       |       |                       |
| PE_Q5   |           | 0.854 |       | Perceived enjoyment   |
| PE_Q4   |           | 0.832 |       |                       |
| PE_Q3   |           | 0.729 |       |                       |
| PE_Q1   |           | 0.708 |       |                       |
| PEOU_Q2 |           |       | 0.813 | Perceived ease of use |
| PEOU_Q3 |           |       | 0.763 |                       |
| PEOU_Q4 |           |       | 0.689 |                       |
| PEOU_Q1 |           |       | 0.589 |                       |

Note. Principal component analysis; extraction method; varimax rotation; correlation matrix; maximum iterations for convergence = 25; loadings larger than .50 are recorded

**Table 4.** Reliability level of questionnaire items

| Questionnaire item sections          | Cronbach's alpha based on standardised items | Number of items |
|--------------------------------------|--|-----------------|
| Perceived usefulness                 | 0.879  | 5               |
| Perceived ease of use                | 0.801  | 4               |
| Perceived enjoyment                  | 0.859  | 4               |
| Government social services media use | 0.605  | 7               |
| Political interest                   | 0.838  | 5               |
| Political knowledge                  | 0.502  | 4               |
| Political participation              | 0.882  | 6               |
| Overall                              | 0.927  | 35              |

## RESULTS

### Validity Analysis

Exploratory factor analysis is carried out on the questionnaire items (predictors variables: perceived usefulness, perceived enjoyment, and perceived ease of use). The result is shown in **Table 3**. To ensure the model validity, PU\_Q1 and PE\_Q2 are removed from the factor list.

### Reliability Analysis

Based on **Table 4**, Cronbach's alpha reliability scores, high reliability is evident in "perceived usefulness" (0.879), "perceived ease of use" (0.801), "perceived enjoyment" (0.859), "political interest" (0.838), and "political participation" (0.882). "Government social media usage" and "political knowledge" items are reliable with 0.605 and 0.502, respectively. The questionnaire items are adjusted by deleting some items (PU\_Q1, PE\_Q2, and PK\_Q2) to increase reliability and validity (**Table 3**). Overall, the reliability of the questionnaire items is high, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.927 for the entire set of 35 items.

### Demographics

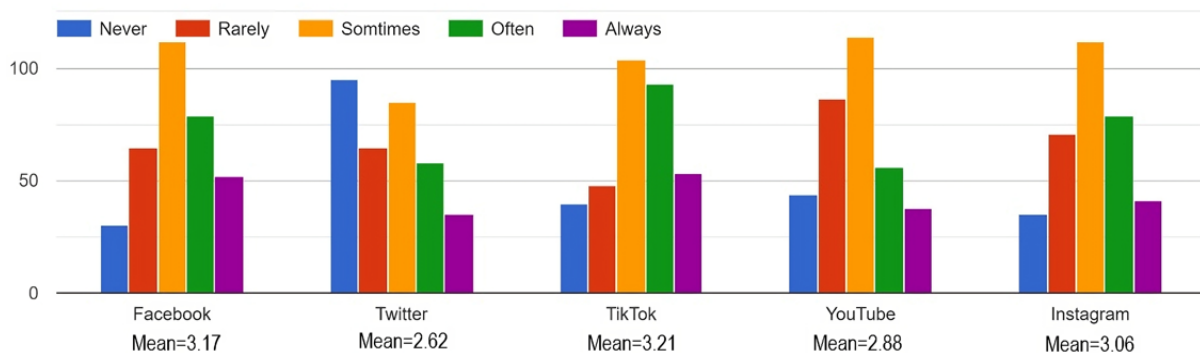
A total of 338 valid responses were derived after data cleansing and transformation according to **Table 5**. The proportion of gender shows that 36.1% of the responses emanated from males, while 63.9% of the responses were from females. Most of the respondents are age 22 years old (36.4%) and bachelor's degree students (91.7%).

In terms of the government-political related social media usage pattern, **Figure 2** shows that among five platforms (Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, YouTube and Instagram), TikTok shows the highest usage (mean = 3.21), followed by Facebook (mean = 3.17), Instagram (mean = 3.06), YouTube (mean = 2.88) and lastly Twitter (mean = 2.62). 95 students (28%) never use Twitter for political-related contents. The result provides an insight to the government on the next investment that should look at TikTok and Instagram other than Facebook.

**Table 5.** Demographic information of the participants

| Characteristics |                   | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------|-------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Age             | 18                | 2             | 0.6            |
|                 | 19                | 1             | 0.3            |
|                 | 20                | 7             | 2.1            |
|                 | 21                | 63            | 18.6           |
|                 | 22                | 123           | 36.4           |
|                 | 23                | 66            | 19.5           |
|                 | 24                | 44            | 13.0           |
|                 | 25                | 9             | 2.7            |
|                 | 26                | 6             | 1.8            |
|                 | 27                | 6             | 1.8            |
|                 | 28                | 4             | 1.2            |
|                 | 29                | 2             | 0.6            |
|                 | 32                | 1             | 0.3            |
|                 | 35                | 1             | 0.3            |
|                 | 37                | 1             | 0.3            |
| 38              | 1                 | 0.3           |                |
| 45              | 1                 | 0.3           |                |
| Gender          | Male              | 122           | 36.1           |
|                 | Female            | 216           | 63.9           |
| Level of study  | Foundation        | 2             | 0.6            |
|                 | Diploma           | 9             | 2.7            |
|                 | Bachelor's degree | 310           | 91.7           |
|                 | Master            | 16            | 4.7            |
|                 | PhD or higher     | 1             | 0.3            |
| Total           | Total             | 338           | 100            |

State the frequency of using government politic related social media to acquire information about political topics.



**Figure 2.** Politically related social media usage pattern among students in UMS according to this study (Source: Authors)

### Preliminary Analysis

Covariates (PU, PEOU, and PE) are calculated by summing the related items into PU\_Sum, PEOU\_Sum, and PE\_Sum, while items related to government-political related social media use are summed up into U\_Sum. Bivariate analysis is conducted to test the correlations between covariates and dependent variable (DV) – government-political related social media use (U). Based on the result in **Table 6**, it is revealed that the direct relationship between all covariates and DV (U) is significant. Therefore, H1-H3 are supported. This means that the perceived usefulness, ease of use, and enjoyment of students on government political-related social media significantly affect their use.

Based on the result in **Table 7**, PK\_Sum, PP\_Sum, and PI\_Sum is calculated by summing up the related items into respective category of dependent variable (DV). It was found that there is a significant positive relationship between the use of government political social media with both political participation and political

**Table 6.** Pearson correlation, mean and standard deviation of covariates and DV (U\_Sum)

| Independent variable | Correlations with U_Sum (r) | Mean  | Standard deviation | Hypotheses   |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|-------|--------------------|--------------|
| PU_Sum               | 0.314***                    | 19.41 | 3.82               | H1-supported |
| PEOU_Sum             | 0.327***                    | 14.89 | 2.94               | H2-supported |
| PE_Sum               | 0.391***                    | 13.91 | 3.50               | H3-supported |

Note. \*\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed)

**Table 7.** Pearson correlation of political-related social media usage (U\_Sum) and DV, with mean and standard deviation of DV

| Dependent variable | Correlation with U_Sum (r) | Mean  | Standard deviation | Hypotheses   |
|--------------------|----------------------------|-------|--------------------|--------------|
| PK_Sum             | 0.063                      | 2.92  | 1.00               | H4-rejected  |
| PP_Sum             | 0.402***                   | 19.94 | 4.70               | H5-supported |
| PI_Sum             | 0.703***                   | 16.91 | 4.05               | H6-supported |

Note. \*\*\*Correlation is significant at 0.001 level (2-tailed)

**Table 8.** Mediating analysis results with direct and indirect effect

| Predictor | Mediator | Dependent variable | Direct effect | Indirect effect (95% CI) (BootLLCI & BootULCI) | Hypothesis    |
|-----------|----------|--------------------|---------------|--|---------------|
| PU_Sum    | U_Sum    | PK_Sum             | 0.0272        | 0.0025 (-0.0074, 0.0121)                       | H7-rejected   |
| PU_Sum    | U_Sum    | PP_Sum             | 0.5387***     | 0.1031*** (0.0539, 0.1619)                     | H8-supported  |
| PU_Sum    | U_Sum    | PI_Sum             | 0.4959***     | 0.0895*** (0.0494, 0.1391)                     | H9-supported  |
| PEOU_Sum  | U_Sum    | PK_Sum             | -0.0094       | 0.0080 (-0.0049, 0.0206)                       | H10-rejected  |
| PEOU_Sum  | U_Sum    | PP_Sum             | 0.6392***     | 0.1435*** (0.0735, 0.2295)                     | H11-supported |
| PEOU_Sum  | U_Sum    | PI_Sum             | 0.5786***     | 0.1254*** (0.0696, 0.1980)                     | H12-supported |
| PE_Sum    | U_Sum    | PK_Sum             | -0.0148       | 0.0093 (-0.0043, 0.0225)                       | H13-rejected  |
| PE_Sum    | U_Sum    | PP_Sum             | 0.7727***     | 0.0932*** (0.0401, 0.1550)                     | H14-supported |
| PE_Sum    | U_Sum    | PI_Sum             | 0.7166***     | 0.0786*** (0.0380, 0.1279)                     | H15-supported |

Note. Results based on 5,000 bootstrap samples; ci-bias corrected 95% confidence interval for the indirect effects; \*p < 0.05; \*\*p < 0.01

interest (r = 0.402\*\*\* and r = 0.703\*\*\*, respectively). Therefore, H4 and H6 are supported. Meanwhile, the result also revealed that the direct relationship between the use of political social media related to political knowledge is not significant. Therefore, H5 is rejected.

### Mediation Analysis

The mediation analysis presented in **Table 8** investigates the role of social media use related to government policies in the relationship between various perceptions (usefulness, ease of use, enjoyment) and political variables (knowledge, participation, interest). Direct effects (DE) and indirect effects (IE) with a bootstrap 95% confidence interval (CI) are reported, providing information on which hypotheses are supported by the data.

For the mediating effect between perceived usefulness and political knowledge, the analysis revealed a non-significant indirect effect (IE = 0.0025 [-0.0074, 0.0121]) and a non-significant direct effect (DE = 0.0272), leading to rejection of H7. On the contrary, government-political related social media use demonstrated a significant mediating effect on perceived usefulness with political participation (IE = 0.1031\*\*\* [0.0539, 0.1619]) and political interest (IE = 0.0895\*\*\* [0.0494, 0.1391]), with significant direct effects (DE = 0.5387\*\*\* and DE = 0.4959\*\*\*), respectively, resulting in the acceptance of H8 and H9. When examining the influence of perceived ease of use, the government-political related social media use did not show a significant mediating effect on political knowledge (IE = 0.0080 [-0.0049, 0.0206]), which led to the rejection of H10. However, significant mediating effects were found on political participation (IE = 0.1435\*\*\* [0.0735, 0.2295]) and political interest (IE = 0.1254\*\*\* [0.0696, 0.1980]), with respective direct effects (DE = 0.6392\*\*\* and DE = 0.5786\*\*\*), supporting H11 and H12. Finally, the influence of government-political related social media use on perceived enjoyment with political knowledge showed a non-significant mediating effect (IE = 0.0093 [-0.0043, 0.0225]), resulting in the rejection of H13. However, it had a significant mediating impact on political participation (IE = 0.0932\*\*\* [0.0401, 0.1550]) and political interest (IE = 0.0786\*\*\* [0.0380, 0.1279]), with direct effects (DE = 0.7727\*\*\* and DE = 0.7166\*\*\*), leading to acceptance of H14 and H15.

## DISCUSSION

Social media have emerged as influential channels for disseminating political news, exerting considerable impact not only on the content of messages but also on the landscape of political corruption, values, and the dynamics of conflict within politics. Thus, perceived usefulness, ease of use, and enjoyment play an important role in affecting the government's political related social media usage in facilitating the political knowledge, participation, and knowledge of citizens in Sabah. The result of this study shows a significant relationship between perceived usefulness and the use of government-political related social media use (H1). This result is consistent with the previous study (Khan et al., 2019; Nguyen et al., 2024; Thi et al., 2023). Furthermore, people are more likely to adopt a technology if they believe it to be useful according to the Davis technology acceptance model (TAM). Social networks are a valuable opportunity for governments to improve the gap between Sabah University students by generating more relevant and valuable information through social media related to government politics. However, it is critical to address issues like echo chambers and information quality to guarantee the efficiency of government-political related social media. Meanwhile, perceived ease of use was indicated to be significantly correlated with the use of government-political related social media (H2). This result is consistent with the research by Thi et al. (2023). Therefore, it is important for government and application developers to focus on designing user-friendly interfaces to encourage greater participation of citizens of Sabah in seeking political information through government-political related social media. An additional factor, the result of perceived enjoyment (H3) supported that this factor affects the use of government-political related social media, which is consistent with the result of Ramirez-Correa et al. (2019). This indicates that university students in Sabah are more likely to engage in political content when they find it interesting to do so. Policymakers are suggested to manage their political-related social networks with factors like entertaining content, applying interactive features, and sharing personalised experiences to increase interest in using government political related social media.

The finding of H4 demonstrates a non-significant correlation between the use of social media related to government politics and political knowledge. This indicates that Sabah University students are gaining political knowledge from other media instead of social media. This result is not consistent with Halim et al. (2021), which showed an association between social media use and political knowledge. Political-related government social media allows news and information updates to be quickly (Devgan & Das, 2022). This may increase exposure to political news and lead to a better understanding of university students in Sabah. Another research on political leaning on Facebook was done by Kim et al. (2021) mentioned that political expression may be the fundamental to increasing political knowledge on social media. However, these practices are not significant in UMS. Therefore, Sabah government should invest in other media to educate or disseminate political knowledge to university students.

H5 results in a significant relationship between government-political related social media use and political participation, which is in line with the outcome of Halim et al. (2021). This is consistent with most studies that suggest that social media platforms improve citizens' political participation (Abdullah et al., 2021; Gil de Ziga, 2012; Mohamad et al., 2018). The government can manage its social media by interaction with people other than prioritising image management. This could attract university students as they feel more likely being heard and thus being motivated to participate in politics.

The result of H6 indicates a significant relationship between government-political related social media use and political interest. This result is consistent with the study by Johnson and Kaye (2014). According to a study that examines how exposure to social media news can influence political participation, political interest could increase when using social media because social media platforms provide bidirectional communication. This enables Sabah University students to find interest in browsing government-related social networks, as they can choose to read only or to participate in political discussion (Nurshahidah Sah Allam et al., 2015).

H7 indicates that the mediating effect of government-political related social media use is not significant in the relationship between perceived usefulness and political knowledge. This is because the perceived usefulness of political-related social media does not translate directly to increase political knowledge, as the respondents may primarily engage government political-related social media for entertainment or socialising rather than acquiring political knowledge. The way in which information may differ depending on factors like cognitive biases, thinking skills, or even the motivation to engage it and translate it into acquisition of political

knowledge. In addition to that, most people still prefer to gain political knowledge from the traditional channel instead of social media news (Van Erkel & Van Aelst, 2021).

H8, which is a significant mediating effect of the use of social media usage in the relationship between perceived usefulness and political participation. According to Thi et al. (2023), it states that social media of the government aid in increasing participation. Government politic related social media serve as an easy access to the political information, news, updates, or discussion and include feedback mechanisms such as like, comment, share, which increase the opportunity for participating in sharing of ideas in discussion, sharing political contents, as well as interacting with the public politicians.

H9 also shows a significant mediating effect of government-political related social media use in the relationship between perceived usefulness and political interest. Dzandu et al. (2016) indicate that perceived usefulness is capable of significantly predicting the usage of social media. The perceived usefulness of government-political related social media has increased the exposure to political content, hence raising interest in political matters. It also enhances the sense of participation and connection, leading to a greater political interest in exploring additional political topics and developments. The influential roles of the government-political related social networks have shaped the political interest and the curiosity about the political matters.

H10 shows a not significant mediating effect of the use of social media use in the relationship between perceived ease of use and political knowledge. According to Al-Marroof et al. (2021), the acquisition of knowledge depends on the richness of the content of the learning resource. Despite social networks being easy to use, low-quality content can hinder the growth of political knowledge. Moreover, the government-politic related social networks might be personalised as it depends on the preferences and the past interactions of interest, limiting the exposure to the diverse political standpoint and affecting the negotiation of political knowledge acquisition, where it is passively consumed for political content by just browsing or scrolling through the political information without translating it into meaningful political knowledge acquisition.

H11, a significant mediating effect of government-political related social media use in the relationship between perceived ease of use and political participation. Based on research from (Rossini et al., 2021), it indicates that using the governmental political related social networks to search for political content is always associated with political participation. When using the government-political related social media, which only require a small effort without high technical expertise, it will contribute with a high political participation, as it does not raise any hesitations and actively participates with it.

A significant mediating effect of government-political related social media use in the relationship between perceived ease of use and political interest indicated by H12. Ohme et al. (2020) has stated that the political interest can be increased after interacting with the political candidates, hence the factor of ease of use of government-political related social media enables the algorithm to personalise content based on the preference and interaction in increasing their satisfaction on using experience and connection to the political contents. With ease of use, it encourages the process of fostering conversations that can raise their political interest.

H13 states that there is no significant mediating effect of social media use related to government politics in the relationship between perceived enjoyment and political knowledge. Social networks aid in updating political related content to gain knowledge about political knowledge (Kim et al., 2020). However, the government-political related social media might constantly update with a stream of news, opinions, or political events that cause overwhelming and exhausting and hard to enjoy with it. Additionally, university students in Sabah may not actively engage with the content and deep enough and cause the political knowledge not to be acquired significantly.

H14 shows a significant mediating effect of social media usage related to government politics in the relationship between perceived enjoyment and political participation. The user will continue to use social media if they find that it is enjoyable while experiencing it and are willing to use it for the next time (Wang & Lee, 2020). Government-political related social networks might contain some interactive features that the university student of Sabah might enjoy while using them, such as polls, question and answer sessions with

the politicians or live streaming of political events, which fosters the interaction and participation. It can also be a platform for people who are interested in politics to voice their views and have a discussion among users.

There is a significant mediating effect of government-political related social media usage in the relationship between perceived enjoyment and political interest stated by H15. The social media platform can recommend users with content that matches their political interest (Arshad & Khurram, 2020). As social networks related to government politics will show relevant political information of interest, university students in Sabah enjoy using it and imperceptibly strengthen their political interest.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this investigation, the objective was to explore how various factors: perceived usefulness, ease of use, and enjoyment influence an individual's participation with government political related social media and its impact on political knowledge, participation, and interest in Sabah. Our analysis revealed that individuals who perceive these platforms as useful, easy to use and enjoyable are more likely to engage with government political related social media. Although the usage of these platforms does not impact political knowledge, it can still be suggested that political-related social networks of government serve as important tools for political engagement, providing individuals with access to information, opportunities for interaction, and a place for expressing their political views and interests with a positive correlation with political participation and interest. However, it is crucial to recognise the limitations of this research. One limitation of this study is the potential for sampling bias due to the use of a single university sample and the distribution of online questionnaires. This approach allows efficient data collection and analysis; however, the student population of the University of Malaysia Sabah (UMS) may not fully represent the diversity of the broader population of Sabah in terms of demographic, socioeconomic status, and political connection. Moreover, focusing solely on university students may overlook perspectives and behaviours of other demographic groups such as older adults or individuals from rural areas, who may have different levels of access to and engagement with government political-related social media. Therefore, although the results provide valuable information, caution should be taken when generalising them beyond the specific university context. Additionally, the method used in this study is also limited to Pearson's correlation and mediation analysis, which may not be able to reveal the nuance relationship between variables. To further advance the understanding of the relationships explored in this study, future research efforts could broaden the scope by replicating the investigation across various universities or regions to ensure the generalisability of the findings. For example, conducting similar research in universities located in different states of Malaysia or other Southeast Asian countries could provide information on how cultural and regional differences influence the participation of individuals in political-related social media. Different methodologies and machine learning algorithms shall be considered to further discover the relationship between variables.

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**Declaration of interest:** The authors declare no competing interest.

**Data availability:** Data generated or analysed during this study are available from the corresponding author on request.

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