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SOCIAL MEDIA USE AND CREDIBILITY WITH THE MALAYSIAN DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the relationship between social media use and credibility and trust in the democratic system. Malaysia is a democratic country. Democratic system means citizens have equal opportunities to be part of the decision-making process involving a country's interests. Facebook and Internet, as indicators of social media, their use and credibility were measured to correlate them with trust in democracy. The underlying assumption was that social media as an equalizer of information would promote information and inevitably increase trust in the democratic system. The study measured the three concepts of media use, credibility and trust in the democratic system in a nationwide face-to-face interview in March 2021. A questionnaire was used as the instrument to solicit the opinion of 818 Malaysian citizens. A quota-based sample used for this study obtained the socio-demographic population characteristics, with respondents giving answers to the questions asked on the democratic system. Results showed that Malaysian citizens were moderate users of Facebook and the Internet, spending 6-7 days per week on the platforms. In terms of the credibility of the Internet and Facebook, the results showed their low credibility of the media. Only 33 per cent of respondents believed the Internet, and 29 per cent of respondents agreed that Facebook and Internet were considered moderate in credibility. Three items measured trust in the democratic system. A total of 61 per cent of respondents had trust in the current democratic system practised by the government. Pearson correlation measured the relationship between Facebook and Internet Use and Credibility and Trust in the Democratic System.

Keywords: Democracy, Credibility, Facebook, Social media, Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is a democratic country. Scholars define a democratic system as citizens' engagement in the decision-making process when information exchange allows individuals to exercise their inherent rights (Mustafa, 2014). Elections give citizens equal rights to choose their representatives in the government system. They select acceptable leaders and hold them accountable for their performance during their term in office (Idid & Kee, 2012). Since 1957, Malaysia has held multiple general elections, the majority of which have been fought by political parties and a small number of non-party affiliated candidates. These elections have occurred at regular intervals. The electoral system in Malaysia is built on three principles: majority votes using the first-past-the-post method, single-member territorial representation, and a multi-party electoral system (Suhamee, Ismail & Mohd Adnan, 2017).

The growing media environment of the Internet has resulted in the emergence of new technologies, with social media being one of the most important. Today, social media platforms have evolved into the primary communication channels and information resources, allowing users to share and interact with one another from any location (Hong, 2015). The

introduction of social media has boosted people's ability to generate and share information among people of various lifestyles.

With the existence of the Internet, editorial and information quality controls have resulted in assessing and verifying information in the hands of the consumers (Metzger et al., 2013). The invention of social media has brought significant impacts to people's lives, not only in changing how people stay connected but also by posing challenges in creating trust in government information or news (Fedeli, 2020). Social media messages may often be short, which could generate misunderstanding and thus lead to credibility assessment issues. Moreover, misinformation and rumours can move more quickly through social media channels and networks (Nahon and Hensley, 2013). When users receive inaccurate information from different sources, users might misjudge the information as credible based on the repetition (Dechene et al. 2020).

Consumers of news currently live in a hybrid media environment, in which traditional media outlets coexist alongside new storytelling mediums (Chadwick, 2013). According to recent data, people are shifting toward a speedier, more mobile news environment that is easier and more pleasant to read (Mitchell and Holcomb, 2016). The growth of new media distribution systems has resulted in significant changes in what people consume and how they receive new stories. According to a poll conducted by Gottfried and Shearer (2016), 63 per cent of Instagram users, 62 per cent of Facebook users, and 58 per cent of YouTube users report hearing news articles when casually surfing the Internet rather than hunting for it.

This study will use the Source Credibility theory. Aristotle developed the concept of source credibility in one of his works called *The Rhetoric* (Umeogu, 2012). Source credibility theory (Hovland, Janis and Kelly (1953) stated that receivers are more likely to be persuaded when the source presents itself as credible. Later, Hovland and Weiss studied the influence of sources in persuasion.

Trust in the democratic system is a long-standing topic of discussion among scholars. Government leaders have been increasingly concerned about the decline of citizen trust and satisfaction over the past few years (Alawneh et al., 2013), resulting in losing citizens' trust and confidence in governments. The issue of how to engender citizens' trust with the government in social media, especially Facebook, remains a challenge today (Gutierrez et al., 2019).

Internet and Facebook are social media indicators. Credibility is measured in the relationship to trust in the democratic system. The findings of this research will contribute to media credibility, especially social media, and help the government develop policymaking, especially on creating trust among social media users.

Thus, the present study sought to answer the following questions and objectives:

Research questions

RQ1: What is the perception of Malaysian citizens on Internet and Facebook credibility?

RQ2: What is the level of trust in the government democracy system?

RQ3: What is the relationship between the Internet and Facebook credibility and trust in the democratic system?

Research objectives

RO1: To investigate the perception of Malaysian citizens on Internet and Facebook credibility.

RO2: To test the level of trust in the government democracy system.

RO3: To determine the relationship between the Internet and Facebook credibility and trust in the democratic system.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORY

Credibility

Credibility evaluation is so critical to the communication process, according to Dunbar et al. (2015), that the notion of credibility has a prominent place in the communication discipline. Due to diverse sources integrated into various layers of online content dissemination, determining trustworthiness is significantly more difficult in the online environment than in traditional media (Sundar, 2008). According to a few experts, unsourced elements like the medium/channel of delivery and the message influence the credibility of a media message. The source of a message has an impact on its credibility in general. According to Metzger et al. (2003), semantic-differential measures, which focus on operationalizing one or more general dimensions of credibility, are frequently used to gauge message credibility. Believed messengers are more likely to be thought of as experts, trustworthy, and active. Message structure, language intensity, and message attractiveness are characteristics of communication credibility.

Source Credibility Theory

According to Appelman and Sundar (2016), two factors determine information credibility: message credibility and source credibility. The term "message credibility" refers to one's assessment of the content's veracity, whereas "source credibility" assesses the source's credibility.

Source credibility has undergone many studies to define the relevant construct to its dimensions. Source credibility is the favourable attributes of the message's source that influence how a receiver reacts to the announcement (Ohanian (1990)

According to the literature, source credibility is a multidimensional construct around a source's trustworthiness, skill, and attractiveness (Eisend, 2006).

Aristotle's ethos was the construct and measurement of source credibility, according to McCroskey and Young in 1981

Intelligence, character, and goodwill are the three dimensions of ethos. These three dimensions, according to Aristotle, are the three perceptual sources of impact on a receiver. Source credibility is reputation and competence equivalent to Aristotle's character and intelligence (Haiman, 1948).

Source credibility is a receiver's perception. The study aims to find dimensions of source credibility by creating scales for this study. The findings demonstrate that source credibility has eight dimensions: sociability, size, extroversion, composure, competence, time, weight, and character.

The receiver believes that the source's abilities, knowledge, skills, or training equal competence, authoritativeness, or qualification (Ohanian, 1990). Some scholars suggest another notion to convey source credibility as trustworthiness. The message, in some circumstances, was not viewed as an expert but as trustworthy (McGinnies and Ward, 1980). Finally, attractiveness refers to the receiver's perception of the source as attractive, vibrant, expressive, and exciting (Eisend, 2006).

According to Llamero (2014), Source credibility is a set of attitudes toward a source that determine how receivers behave. These attitudes or perceptions were more prevalent when driven by specific incentives. Academics describe source credibility in various ways, including prestige, charisma, ethos, credibility, source credibility, and message source credibility. According to Berlo et al. (1969), the most used label is source credibility.

In 1951, Hovland and Weise recognized two elements of source credibility: trustworthiness and expertise. They stated that the source's function would be more effective if it initiates communication and demonstrates trustworthiness, objectives, and affiliations. However, for social media content, identifying trustworthiness and competence as indicators of source credibility is insufficient. Gender, self-esteem, and environmental factors, according to Smith and Seitz (2019), may influence attitudes and persuasive outcomes. In this study, source credibility refers to Internet and Facebook credibility.

Internet and Facebook credibility

In the 1950s, as professionals grew more interested in the legitimacy of television and newspapers, the question of media credibility became more relevant. Media credibility is important because if the public does not trust the information received from the source, they will ignore it (Johnson and Kaye, 1998). The introduction of the Internet in the 1990s sparked the interest of scholars who wanted to explore its reliability. They began their research out of concern that the Internet might become a more viable source of information than traditional media. Parody sites and frauds got so convincing on the Internet over time that even journalists were duped (Gomda Web, 1998). Online news outlets operate on a 24-hour news cycle and are more likely to publish news than traditional news outlets, failing to assess its correctness.

Even though the Internet is less trustworthy, researchers and polling companies have discovered that Internet users regard online news sources as being at least as reliable as traditional news sites (Pew Research, 2000). Between 1996 and 2000, the credibility of the Internet grew steadily (Abdulla et al., 2005). Kiousis (2001) discovered that some respondents were distrustful of information, whether it originated from traditional or Internet sources. According to the Center for the Digital Future (2010), Internet credibility decreased from 58 per cent in 2001 to 48.8 per cent in 2005.

As for research on Facebook, Smith and Anderson (2018) mentioned that roughly two-thirds (68%) of adults in the United States use Facebook, which is now the most popular social networking site. Individuals from Generation Y and Generation Z have been users of social media networks since the sites' inception in the early 2000s (Fietkiewicz, 2017). These people were born between 1977 and 1993 (Generation Y), while those born after 1993 (Generation Z) are the primary users of social media sites (Pew Research Centre, 2018). These folks, also known as digital natives, have been observed using social media platforms to interact with others institutions, contribute to causes, share, and seek material (Anderson and Jiang, 2018). Tandoc Jr (2017) researched social media users' opinions of news credibility. Today's audiences participate in news distribution by emailing articles to friends, influencing the ranks of popular stories, and sharing them on social media. This research aims to see how the source affects news credibility on social media. Because Facebook, the most popular social media site, with over 1.37 billion daily active users as of September 2017, is used as a social media indicator (Facebook, 2017). In the United States, around 44% of the population gets their news through Facebook. The study was done in Singapore and used a mixed experimental design methodology. We recruited the participants in two stages from a prominent institution in Singapore. Six students, recruited as confederates, agreed to have their Facebook profiles utilized in the experiment. Second, their friends instructed associates to recommend a minimum of 15 university friends who are Facebook friends to be actual participants in the online experiment. Still, they were not permitted to divulge the study's nature. The study's second stage yielded a total of 82 participants. According to the findings, Facebook is a

reliable source of information, and news stories posted by friends on Facebook are similarly reliable.

Compared to traditional media, the credibility of social media is more complicated (Elhadidi, 2019), resulting in a faster and more diverse flow of news on social media and new media platforms. As a result, there was some skepticism and confusion over the adoption of social media credibility. Elhadidi (2019) researched how Egyptian adult Facebook users rate their credibility and the political and non-political elements that influence it. There are two ways to explain Facebook source credibility. The first is information and news from news organizations or government officials shared or uploaded on Facebook. The second is user-generated content, in which the user is the message's source. Readers are viewed with suspicion because they do not always believe this source to be reputable. However, other indicators establish a person as more trustworthy, such as having too many friends or having more likes, shares, and comments on their articles. The survey delivered questionnaires randomly to 590 Egyptian adults who used the Facebook site. We visited Egypt and Greater Cairo for interviews. The findings demonstrate that both the use of Facebook's political content and reliance on it for political information are only marginal predictors of Facebook credibility in several categories. Users' perceptions of Facebook's effectiveness and positive contribution to the community and their active participation in political content revealed four Facebook categories: timeliness, transparency, social impact, and independence.

Trust in democracy system

According to Financial Trust (2021), trust in the democratic system is at an all-time low among eight out of ten Cypriots who do not trust the political system and believe that democracy is suffering in Cyprus. The findings were on the most recent opinion poll conducted following the legislative elections. People on the island believe that democracy is eroding, shattering their faith in institutions, political parties, and other representative groups. Democracy recorded a 50 per cent distrust in 1996, 63 per cent in 2016, and currently 77 per cent. Australians no longer trust their democratic system, according to a study done by The Museum of Australian Democracy and the Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis at the University of Canberra (The Guardian, 2018). Voters complained that politicians were violating promises and disliked the federal parliament's conflict-driven politics; thus, they demanded a new system. The satisfaction with the way Australia's democratic system works has decreased over the previous decade, according to a national study of 1021 people.

Another survey on confidence in democracy and the political system in Canada, done by Environics Institute for Survey Research (2019), found the opposite. Over the last decade, the report looked at how public support for democracy, democratic institutions, and the political system has changed in Canada. The results of public opinion trends reveal that Canadians have more faith in democracy than people in many other Western countries. The poll included 35 countries from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Canada's most important benchmark. Some 1009 Canadians aged 15 and up joined the study. In addition, 75 per cent of Canadians believe that democracy is better than any other form of government.

Many Americans now utilize social media sites like Facebook and Twitter (Smith and Anderson, 2018). Most Americans say they get political news through social media sites; therefore, their use of these networks isn't apolitical. One politically significant concern is that social media exposure to political information could negatively affect democratic politics. The

political content published on social media is frequently divisive, emotive, and moralized (Kim et al., 2018).

The widespread availability of communication tools such as social media has given young people more significant opportunities to learn about, discuss, and participate in politics (Xueqing Li and Michael Chan, 2017). Research on the impact of the Internet on political engagement among the younger population for more than two decades; a work spurred in part by a drop in political interest and electoral participation among young people across mature democracies (Bakker and de Vreese, 2011). Xueqing Li and Michael Chan (2017) used the O-S-R-O-R (orientation- stimulus- reasoning- orientation- response) model to evaluate the function of media in political involvement with audiences. The study used samples from four of Beijing's eight 985 project universities and two public universities in Hong Kong. The study placed Questionnaires in the two most prominent public locations. Some 756 students from Beijing and 355 students from Hong Kong completed the study. The data demonstrate that the patterns of effects for Chinese and Hong Kong are comparable.

Klein and Robinson's (2020) research focuses on the interplay between social media use, partisanship, and government trust. Trust in government is a crucial indicator of democratic health because it allows governments to handle challenging policy issues. They started by looking at data from the ANES Time Series from 2012 and 2016 and discovered that using social media is linked to a polarization of trust. Respondents with a positive attitude toward the Democratic Party say they have more trust as their use of social media grows. The researchers next looked at the 2018 American Institutional Confidence Poll and discovered an inverse trend that could indicate the transition from a Democrat to a Republican presidency. Both social media use and polarization of trust in government are linked, according to the findings.

The study developed the following hypotheses to test the relationship between Facebook and Internet credibility on trust in government:

- H1: The higher Internet and Facebook credibility, the higher trust in the democratic system.
- H2: The higher Internet and Facebook credibility, the more increased believability of the democratic system can solve the country's problem.
- H3: The higher the Internet and Facebook credibility, the more believable that the democratic system effectively strengthens the community.
- H4: The higher the Internet and Facebook credibility, the more likely the democratic system effectively enables participation in the country's development.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

The current study explores Internet and Facebook credibility and their effectiveness in creating trust toward the democratic system. The study measured the three concepts in a nationwide face-to-face interview with Malaysians in March 2021.

This study employs a quantitative method. The questionnaire has three sections: demographic information, credibility, and trust in the democratic system. Following is the summary of items included in the questionnaire.

Table 1: Categories and items of the questionnaire

Categories	Items
Demographic	Gender Race Age
Credibility	Internet credibility Facebook credibility
Trust in the democratic system	Democracy system can solve a country's problem Democracy system is effective in strengthening the community Democracy system is effective in enabling the people to participate in the development of the country

Population and sampling size

The current study explores Internet and Facebook use and credibility in creating trust toward the democratic system. The study measured the relationship of the three concepts in a nationwide face-to-face interview with Malaysians in March 2021. The premise was on the greater use of the Internet and Facebook that would be closely related to the trust in the country's democratic system. In this study, quota sampling selected 818 Malaysian voters aged 21 and above.

Measurement

In a study by Mahabubur (2014), 23% of respondents spent more than one hour on Facebook on weekdays, whereas 28% of respondents spent the same time on weekends. The results indicate that a significant portion of respondents used Facebook for more than two, three or four hours in a typical day and weekend. Still, the percentage is more during weekends than on a specific day. These respondents are considered heavy users.

In another study on measuring Facebook usage, Wells and Link (2014) categorized three types of users: heavy, medium, and light users. In terms of spending time on Facebook, heavy users spend 44.3 minutes per day, medium users spend 16.8 minutes per day, while light users spend 4.8 minutes per day. This current study will adopt Wells & Link's measurement on time spent surfing on the Internet and Facebook (Table 2) as below:

Table 2: measurement on time spent surfing on the Internet and Facebook

Category of users	Spending time per day	Spending time per week	The measurement used in the current study
Heavy users	44.4 min/ day x 7 days	310.1 min/ week = 5.1 days	6-7 days
Medium users	16.8 min/ day x 7 days	117.6 min/ week = 1.96 days/ week	3-5 days
Light/ nonusers	4.8 min/ day x 7 days	33.6 min/ week = 0.56 days/ week	0-2 days

Data analysis

Descriptive statistics and Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 will analyze the findings, while Pearson correlation will measure the relationship between Facebook credibility and trust in government.

FINDINGS

The present study had 822 participants, all of whom were Malaysians. Four respondents, who did not respond, were removed from the data. The number of valid respondents was 818 people.

Table 3: Demographics Information (N=818)

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	416	50.9
Female	402	49.1
Race		
Malay	473	57.8
Chinese	241	29.5
Indian	104	12.7
Age		
21-35	323	39.5
36-50	349	42.7
51 and above	146	17.8

The demographic profile is in Table 3. As shown, the number of males (50.9%) and female (49.1%) respondents are equal. The majority of respondents are Malays (57.8%), followed by Chinese (29.5%) and Indians (12.7%). Most of the respondents are between 21-50 years old (82.2%), while only 17.8% were in the category of 51 and above.

Table 4: Surfing of Internet & Facebook (N=818)

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Surfing of Internet		
None	71	8.6
Once a week	12	1.5
Twice a week	25	3
3 days a week	53	6.4
4 days a week	66	8
5 days a week	104	12.7
6 days a week	113	13.7
7 days a week	375	45.6
Accessing Facebook		
None	110	13.4
Once a week	6	.7
Twice a week	24	2.9
3 days a week	60	7.3
4 days a week	68	8.3
5 days a week	122	14.8
6 days a week	91	11.1
7 days a week	337	41

Table 4 analyzed on time spent by respondents on the use of the Internet and Facebook. The measurements are from Wells and Link (2014), which categorized three categories of users: heavy users (spend 6-7 days), medium users (spend 3-5 days) and light/ non-users (spend 0-

2 days). For surfing of the Internet, 488 (59.3%) respondents are heavy users, 223 (27.1%) respondents are medium users, and 108 (13.1%) respondents are light users.

As for accessing Facebook, more than half of respondents (428, 52.1%) are heavy users, 250 (30.4%) are medium users, and 140 (17%) are light users. The results demonstrate that most of the respondents are heavy users of surfing the Internet, accessing Facebook.

Table 5: Internet & Facebook Credibility (N=818)

	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	SD
Internet (%)	10.5	15.6	40.2	24.4	8.9	3.21	3.67
Facebook (%)	9.8	19.3	41.6	19.9	9.2	3.22	4.86

Table 5 presents the respondents' perceptions of Internet and Facebook credibility. The scales are: 1- Totally can't be trusted 2- Can't be trusted 3- Somewhat can be trusted 4-Can be trusted, and 5- Totally can be trusted. For the Internet credibility, almost half of the respondents (40.2%) mentioned only somewhat can be trusted, and 33.3% of respondents believe that Internet can be trusted and totally can be trusted.

The result is similar for Facebook credibility. Almost half of the respondents (41.6%) stated that they only somewhat trusted the credibility of Facebook, and only 29.1% of the respondents mentioned that they trust Facebook's credibility. The results show that almost half of respondents partly believe in the credibility of the Internet and Facebook in delivering information or content.

On average, respondents' Internet credibility perceptions are 3.21 (SD= 3.67) while Facebook's credibility means 3.22 (SD= 4.86).

Table 6: Trust in democracy system (N=818)

	F	%
Low (3-6)	97	11.9
Medium (7-10)	222	27.1
High (11-15)	499	61.0

Table 6 describes the levels of trust in the democratic system. The results show more than half of respondents trusted the democratic system highly (61%). This finding proves that the respondents believe that the current government can solve the country's problem, effectively strengthening the community and enabling the citizens to participate in the country's development.

Table 7: Correlation analysis between Internet and Facebook credibility with trust in democracy system

	Trust in the democratic system	
	r	p
Internet & FB credibility	-.028	0.417

Table 7 shows the Pearson correlation coefficient to assess the relationship between the Internet and Facebook credibility and the three concepts of trust in the democratic system. The result was a negative and negligible correlation and statistically insignificant between the variables ($r = -0.28$, $n = 818$, $p = .417$). Hence, the study rejected all the hypotheses. The rejection could be due because respondents used Facebook and the Internet for social purposes rather than gathering information. Hence the credibility is low.

DISCUSSION

This study sought to examine the credibility of the Internet and Facebook and trust in the democratic system among Malaysians. As shown in table 7, there is no relationship between the Internet and Facebook credibility and trust in the democratic system; thus, the study rejected all hypotheses. This result is inconsistent with previous studies that show Facebook is credible as a source of information. The findings in Table 5 showed the respondents believed moderately in Internet and Facebook credibility.

Research objective one is developed to investigate the perception of Malaysian citizens on the Internet and Facebook credibility. Based on the findings, 59.3% of Malaysians are Internet and Facebook heavy users, similar to research done by Smith and Anderson (2018), whereby they mentioned adults in the United States use Facebook as it is the most popular social networking site. Average Malaysian spend time using the Internet for 8 hours and 5 minutes a day, with an average daily time of using social media being 2 hours and 58 minutes (We are Social, 2019). Malaysians use a wide variety of Social Media sites, with Facebook being the most popular with 97.3%, followed by Instagram by 56.1%. (MCMC Internet Survey, 2017).

Research objective two is to answer the level of trust in the democratic system among Malaysians. In Malaysia, the election is conducted every five years through the general elections. Every Malaysian aged 21 years and above is eligible to elect. This current research shows that 61% of respondents trust the democratic system. A survey done by The Straits Time (2019) indicated that Malaysians are now showing trust in the government in contrast to 2018. The Malaysian government is currently at a 'trusted' level with a 60-point score compared to the 'distrust' level with 46 points last year.

However, as for research objective three, the study showed that the Internet and Facebook platforms are incapable of mobilizing Malaysian citizens to trust the democratic system. This finding contrasts with Klein and Robinson's (2020) research as they found their respondents have a positive attitude towards the government as the use of social media grows.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the high dependency on the Internet and Facebook is due to source credibility, particularly related to specific issues and topics related to this platform. The results provide an instructive field for the government to investigate the situation further. They must build sufficient interactivity with users, especially young adults, on the platform. This interactivity also requires the creation of content that audiences feel credible, reliable, and valuable to them. For future research, the researchers follow up by looking at the traditional media as they would be inclined to provide information more than social media.

The study applied source credibility theory to related to trust. The Internet and Facebook were not credible sources to nurture trust in a democratic system based on the results. Even though respondents are heavy users of the Internet and Facebook, they have less confidence in the two sources' credibility. Future studies could investigate why the Internet and Facebook are not credible sources for the voters.

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