Demographic Profile of University Youth Engaged in Political-Related Activities on Social Media in Southern Malaysia

Fazurah Mustaffa[1*],Muhammad Khalil Tarmizi Abdul Shukor[2] ,Mohd Sufiean Hassan[3] ,Maizatul Haizan Mahbob[4] ,Siti Nurshahidah Sah Allam[5] ,Fatimah Yazmin Yahya[6]

[1,2]Faculty Of Social Science, Universiti Islam Melaka, Melaka, Malaysia

[3,5,6]Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Malaysia

[4]Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Malaysia

***Corresponding Author**

ABSTRACT

This study presents a descriptive demographic profile of university youth engaged in political-related activities on social media within selected Public Higher Education Institutions (IPTA) in the Southern Zone of Malaysia. Using a quantitative descriptive research design, data were collected from 420 students across six public universities. The demographic variables examined include gender, age, ethnicity, religion and educational attainment. The findings describe a respondent cohort that is predominantly female (59.8%), largely within the 21–25 age group (59.3%) and characterized by a high concentration of Malay (95.5%) and Muslim (97.4%) respondents. In terms of educational attainment, more than half of the respondents are pursuing or have completed bachelor's degree programmes (56.0%). This study establishes baseline demographic data that contextualize youth populations involved in political-related social media activities within specific institutional and regional settings. As a descriptive analysis, the study does not examine behavioural outcomes, media literacy levels or political competence and no causal or inferential claims are advanced.

Keywords: Youth; Demographic Profile; Social Media; Public Higher Education Institutions; Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

In the Malaysian context, youth political participation following the implementation of Undi18 has attracted scholarly and policy attention, particularly in relation to voter turnout patterns and participation readiness among first-time voters [23], [24]. Institutional reports and policy analyses further indicate that youth political participation in Malaysia varies across demographic and educational contexts, reinforcing the importance of documenting respondent characteristics in university-based studies [25].

Since 2020, the political communication landscape has undergone a profound transformation driven by the rapid expansion of social media platforms. For Malaysian youth particularly university students, social media has become the primary gateway for political information, discussion and mobilization [2]. Platforms such as *TikTok*, Instagram, Twitter and Facebook increasingly function as alternative public spheres where political identities are formed, contested and reinforced. This shift was further institutionalized through the implementation of *Undi18* and Automatic Voter Registration (AVR), which significantly expanded the youth electorate by lowering the voting age from 21 to 18 and automatically registering eligible voters [11].

The increasing use of social media among youth has positioned digital platforms as a prominent space for political-related communication and information exchange. In recent years, research focusing on youth and social media has expanded across disciplines such as communication studies, political science and sociology with particular attention given to university-aged populations [1], [2]. Within this body of research,

demographic profiling plays a crucial role in contextualizing study samples and clarifying the structural characteristics of youth populations involved in political-related activities online.

In quantitative descriptive studies, demographic variables such as gender, age, ethnicity, religion and educational attainment are commonly examined to establish a clear overview of respondent composition [3]. These variables are essential in defining the scope of a study, particularly when research is conducted within specific institutional or geographical settings. Rather than explaining behaviour or predicting outcomes, demographic analysis provides baseline information that supports transparency and comparability across studies [4]. In the Malaysian context, public higher education institutions represent a significant setting for youth focused research due to their large student populations and structured academic environments. Previous studies conducted within Malaysian universities have demonstrated that demographic compositions may vary according to region, institutional type and sampling approach [5], [6]. As a result, reporting demographic characteristics is necessary to situate findings within appropriate contextual boundaries and to avoid generalization beyond the sampled population.

The Southern Zone of Malaysia, which includes several major public higher education institutions, offers a relevant context for examining youth demographics within a university setting. Studies conducted in this region have indicated the presence of distinct demographic patterns, particularly in terms of ethnicity, religion and educational level [7]. However, despite the growing volume of research on youth and social media usage, there remains a need for clearly documented demographic profiles that describe the characteristics of respondents involved in political-related activities on digital platforms.

Therefore, this study aims to provide a descriptive demographic overview of youth populations engaged in political-related activities on social media within selected Public Higher Education Institutions (IPTA) in the Southern Zone of Malaysia. By employing a quantitative descriptive research design, the study focuses on reporting the gender, age, ethnicity, religion and educational attainment of respondents. The demographic data presented in this study serve as baseline information that may support future empirical research examining youth participation in political, social or media-related contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Youth Political Participation in the Digital Era

Youth political participation has increasingly shifted from conventional offline activities to digitally mediated forms of engagement, particularly through social media platforms. Since 2020, scholars have observed that social media has become a central site for political information dissemination, opinion formation and mobilization among young citizens [2], [11]. In Malaysia, this transformation has been further intensified by the implementation of *Undi18* and Automatic Voter Registration, which formally integrated youth into the electoral system at an unprecedented scale [11].

While digital platforms have lowered barriers to participation, researchers caution that increased accessibility does not necessarily translate into meaningful or informed political engagement. Bennett and Livingston [2] describe the current media environment as a "disinformation order," where democratic participation is increasingly shaped by emotionally charged, misleading or strategically manipulated content. Studies focusing on Malaysian youth similarly highlight that political engagement on social media is often driven by trends, influencers and viral narratives rather than critical engagement with policy issues [12], [26].

Demographic Characteristics of Youth in Social Media-Based Political Studies

Demographic profiling constitutes a foundational element in youth-oriented political and communication research. Variables such as gender, age, ethnicity, religion, and educational attainment are routinely employed to describe respondent composition and to contextualize research findings within clearly defined population boundaries [1], [2]. In studies examining youth engagement with political content on social media, demographic variables are primarily used to establish sample characteristics rather than to infer behavioural tendencies or causal relationships [3]. Within descriptive quantitative research designs, demographic analysis serves as a baseline framework that enhances transparency and interpretability of findings [4]. This approach is particularly relevant in university-based studies, where respondent populations are often drawn from relatively homogeneous institutional environments [5]. By reporting demographic characteristics, researchers can situate their findings within specific social and educational contexts while maintaining methodological neutrality.

Gender as a Demographic Indicator

Gender remains one of the most frequently reported demographic variables in youth political and social media research. Prior studies have consistently documented a higher proportion of female respondents in university based surveys, reflecting broader enrollment trends in higher education institutions [6], [7]. In Malaysia, official statistics indicate that female students constitute a significant share of undergraduate populations in public universities [8].

The inclusion of gender distribution in demographic reporting enables researchers to provide contextual clarity regarding sample composition without extending interpretations beyond descriptive scope. As emphasized in earlier methodological literature, gender-based demographic data should be presented as structural characteristics rather than explanatory factors in descriptive studies [9].

Age Distribution among University Youth

Age is another core demographic variable commonly used to categorize youth populations in political and media studies. Research involving higher education students typically focuses on individuals within the 18–25 age range, corresponding to the dominant cohort in tertiary education settings [10], [11]. This age group is frequently associated with high levels of digital media exposure, making it a standard demographic classification in studies examining social media usage [12].

Reporting age distribution allows researchers to situate respondents within recognised youth categories and facilitates comparability across studies. In descriptive research designs, age data are presented to outline sample structure rather than to predict engagement intensity or political behaviour [13].

Ethnicity and Religion in the Malaysian Context

Ethnicity and religion are particularly salient demographic variables in Malaysian social research due to the country's multicultural composition. Numerous studies have highlighted that samples drawn from public higher education institutions may reflect regional demographic concentrations, especially when data collection is confined to specific geographical zones [14], [15].   Previous research has shown that studies conducted in certain regions may exhibit a predominance of Malay and Muslim respondents, reflecting institutional and regional demographics rather than national population diversity [16]. Documenting ethnic and religious composition is therefore essential to ensure transparency regarding sample representativeness and research scope. In descriptive studies, such reporting provides contextual background without implying inclusivity or exclusivity of political perspectives [17].

Educational Attainment as a Structural Characteristic

Educational attainment is commonly reported in youth studies to classify respondents according to academic level. University-based research typically categorizes respondents into diploma, bachelor's and postgraduate levels to reflect progression within the higher education system [18]. In Malaysia, bachelor's degree programmes represent the largest proportion of enrollments in public universities, making this category a dominant demographic characteristic in student surveys [19].   Within descriptive research, educational attainment functions as a structural indicator that situates respondents within academic contexts. As noted in methodological discussions, educational level should be reported descriptively and not conflated with assumptions regarding cognitive ability or political sophistication [20].

Demographic Profiling in Descriptive Research

Overall, existing literature demonstrates that demographic profiling plays a critical role in establishing the contextual boundaries of youth-focused research. Gender, age, ethnicity, religion and educational attainment are consistently employed to describe sample composition, particularly in quantitative descriptive studies involving university students and social media usage [21]. By limiting analysis to demographic characteristics, researchers can provide foundational data that support future investigations while maintaining alignment with descriptive research objectives.

Research Gap

Despite the extensive body of research on youth political participation and social media, demographic data are frequently treated as auxiliary variables rather than as analytically significant findings in their own right. Many studies incorporate demographic information merely as background descriptors or statistical controls, without systematically examining the demographic structure of the research population itself.

This practice has resulted in a methodological gap whereby the demographic composition of youth samples remains under-theorized and insufficiently documented, particularly in region-specific and institution-based studies. Without a clear descriptive demographic baseline, subsequent analyses, whether quantitative or qualitative, The risk being interpreted without adequate contextual grounding. This limitation is especially evident in studies conducted within higher education settings where institutional and regional characteristics may shape sample composition in ways that are not visible when demographic data are reported superficially.

Consequently, there is a need for research that explicitly employs demographic data as the primary unit of descriptive analysis. Such an approach allows researchers to establish structural context, clarify the boundaries of representatives, enhance the transparency and interpret ability of findings. Addressing this gap strengthens the methodological foundation of youth political communication research by ensuring that demographic characteristics are not assumed but empirically documented and analytically acknowledged.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative descriptive research design using a structured questionnaire. The objective was to establish a demographic baseline of youth engaged in social media environments. A total of 420 respondents were selected from six Public Higher Education Institutions (IPTA) in Southern Malaysia: UiTM Alor Gajah, Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka (UTeM), Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM) Pagoh, UiTM Kuala Pilah and Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM). Descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to summarize gender, age, religion, ethnicity, educational attainment and institutional distribution.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study presents the descriptive analysis of the respondents' demographic profiles, covering gender, age, religion, race, academic qualifications and institutional location. Table 1 below summarizes the demographic distribution of the respondents.

Table 1: Respondent Demographic Profile

Demographic Type	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	169	40.2
	Female	251	59.8
Age	18 - 20 years	137	32.6
	21 - 25 years	249	59.3
	26 - 30 years	29	6.9
	31 years and above	5	1.2
Religion	Islam	409	97.4
	Non-Islam	11	2.6
Race	Malay	401	95.5

	Chinese	6	1.4
	Indian	5	1.2
	Others	8	1.9
Education	Diploma	169	40.2
	Bachelor's Degree	235	56.0
	Master/PhD	16	3.8

The demographic analysis indicates that out of 420 respondents, 251 were female (59.8%) and 169 were male (40.2%).

In terms of age distribution, the majority of respondents were within the 21–25 age group (59.3%), followed by those aged 18–20 years (32.6%). Respondents aged 26–30 years constituted 6.9% of the sample, while those aged 31 years and above represented 1.2%.

With regard to religious affiliation, most respondents were Muslim (97.4%), while non-Muslim respondents accounted for 2.6% of the sample. The ethnic composition of the respondents was predominantly Malay (95.5%) with smaller proportions of Chinese (1.4%), Indian (1.2%) and other ethnic groups (1.9%). These distributions describe the demographic composition of the sampled population within the selected institutions in the Southern Zone of Malaysia.

In terms of educational attainment, more than half of the respondents were pursuing or had completed bachelor's degree programmes (56.0%), followed by diploma-level respondents (40.2%) and postgraduate respondents (3.8%). The institutional distribution of respondents was evenly balanced with each participating institution contributing an equal number of respondents (16.7%), reflecting the defined sampling frame.

DISCUSSION

This study presents a descriptive demographic profile of university youth engaged in political-related activities on social media within selected Public Higher Education Institutions (IPTA) in the Southern Zone of Malaysia. The findings indicate that the respondent population is predominantly female, largely within the 21–25 age group and characterized by a high concentration of Malay and Muslim respondents. In terms of educational attainment, more than half of the respondents are pursuing or have completed bachelor's degree programmes. These results provide a structural overview of the sampled population without extending interpretation beyond descriptive evidence.

The demographic composition observed in this study is consistent with patterns reported in previous university based research conducted within specific regional and institutional contexts in Malaysia. Studies focusing on public higher education institutions have similarly documented demographic homogeneity influenced by geographical location, institutional enrolment patterns, and sampling boundaries. As such, the findings should be understood as reflective of the sampled institutions rather than representative of Malaysian youth at the national level.

It is important to emphasize that this study does not examine behavioural outcomes, levels of media literacy, or political competence. Discussions related to algorithmic exposure, media literacy, or political integrity are therefore framed as theoretically inferred considerations based on existing literature, rather than empirically demonstrated outcomes derived from the present data. The descriptive nature of this study limits interpretation to structural and demographic conditions and no causal or relational claims are advanced. Consequently, the findings serve primarily as contextual baseline data that may inform the design and interpretation of future empirical research.

CONCLUSION

This study provides a descriptive demographic overview of youth engaged in political-related activities on social media within selected Public Higher Education Institutions in the Southern Zone of Malaysia. By reporting key demographic characteristics are namely gender, age, ethnicity, religion and educational attainment the study establishes a clear profile of the sampled population within its defined institutional and regional scope.

The primary contribution of this study lies in its provision of empirically grounded demographic data that enhance transparency and contextual clarity in youth political communication research. As a descriptive analysis, the study does not test relationships, assess influence, or evaluate behavioural outcomes related to media literacy or political engagement. Instead, it offers a structural foundation upon which future quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method studies may build.

Future research may extend this work by incorporating validated measures of media literacy, digital political competence or political engagement, as well as by adopting more inclusive sampling strategies to capture greater demographic diversity. Such methodological expansions would enable empirical examination of relationships that remain beyond the scope of the present descriptive study.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

REFERENCES

1. Ali, M., & Hassan, H. (2023). Youth political participation in Malaysia after Undi18: Digital engagement and democratic challenges. Malaysian Journal of Communication, 39(1), 1–15.
2. Bennett, W. L., & Livingston, S. (2018). The disinformation order: Disruptive communication and the decline of democratic institutions. European Journal of Communication, 33(2), 122–139.
3. Buckingham, D. (2021). Media education and the challenges of digital politics. Learning, Media and Technology, 46(1), 5–17.
4. Bryman, A. (2021). Social research methods (6th ed.). Oxford University Press.
5. Farkas, J., & Schou, J. (2020). Post-truth, fake news and democracy: Mapping the politics of falsehood. Digital Journalism, 8(3), 295–312.
6. Ghazali, A. H. (2021). Identity politics and digital mobilization in Malaysia. Kajian Malaysia, 39(2), 23–41.
7. Guess, A. M., Nyhan, B., & Reifler, J. (2020). Exposure to untrustworthy websites in the 2016 U.S. election. Nature Human Behaviour, 4(5), 472–480.
8. Harun, M., Ismail, R., & Zainal, N. (2025). Developing digital citizenship education in higher education institutions. Journal of Social Science Education, 24(1), 67–82.
9. Kahne, J., & Bowyer, B. (2020). Educating for democracy in a partisan age: Confronting the challenges of motivated reasoning. American Educational Research Journal, 57(2), 550–587.
10. Lim, S. S. (2024). Artificial intelligence, deep fakes and political trust in digital democracies. New Media & Society, 26(3), 889–905.
11. Bernama. (2021, December 1). Undi18, automatic voter registration to take effect Dec 15. Bernama.
12. Mustafa, F., & Yusof, N. (2022). Media literacy competencies among Malaysian university students. Jurnal Komunikasi, 38(4), 102–118.
13. Rahman, A., & Ahmad, M. (2024). Echo chambers, 3R narratives and political polarisation in Malaysia. Asian Journal of Political Science, 32(1), 77–94.
14. Rahman, N., Salleh, M., & Karim, S. (2024). Political misinformation and youth engagement on social media. Journal of Media Studies, 18(2), 55–71.
15. Razak, M. A., & Othman, Z. (2023). Filter bubbles and political polarisation among Malaysian youth. Journal of Asian Public Policy, 16(3), 341–356.

16. Sunstein, C. R. (2020). Republic: Divided democracy in the age of social media. Princeton University Press.
17. Wardle, C., & Derakhshan, H. (2020). Information disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework. Journalism Studies, 21(2), 173–190.
18. Wong, L. Y., & Tan, J. (2023). Information overload and political cynicism among youth voters. Journal of Youth Studies, 26(4), 512–528.
19. Yusof, S., & Ibrahim, F. (2022). Social media use and political attitudes among Malaysian youth. Media Asia, 49(1), 12–25.
20. Yusof, N., & Ariffin, A. (2024). Gendered risks in online political participation: Evidence from Malaysian youth. Feminist Media Studies, 24(2), 189–204.
21. Zuboff, S. (2021). Surveillance capitalism and democratic erosion. Journal of Democracy, 32(1), 5–58.
22. Bernama. (2023). Young voters helped 'green wave' at GE15 but will they show up again? Bernama.
23. Kasmani, M. F. (2023). Undi18: Understanding the political participation of first-time Malay voters through social media. SEARCH Journal of Media and Communication Research.
24. Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia. (2022). GE15: Low political literacy and indecisiveness limit youth votes. ISIS Malaysia.
25. Azizuddin, M. S. (2023). Youth political behaviour and influencer-driven engagement in Malaysia. Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, 54(2), 215–230.