

## Scrolling to Believe: Evaluating the Link between Perceived Credibility of Social Media as a Source of Political Information and the Political Attitudes of Young Adults in Malaysia

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the dynamic interplay of the perceived credibility of social media as a source of political information and political attitudes among young adults in Malaysia, in the wake of the Undi-18 electoral policy. Conducted through a structured survey of 221 respondents aged 19 to 30, the respondents' levels of perceived credibility of social media, their levels of political efficacy, and their levels of political cynicism were quantitatively measured. From the analysis, it was found that the respondents exhibited a moderate level of trust in social media as a source of political information, suggesting a cautious approach to its use. However, the more social media is perceived as a credible source of political information, the higher the likelihood of respondents having high political efficacy. The perceived credibility of social media was found to have a negative correlation with political cynicism, suggesting that young adults place greater trust in the reliability of social media as a source of political information, they are less likely to experience feelings of distrust and apathy toward politics. The study also found that political efficacy was inversely correlated with political cynicism, indicating that enhancing political efficacy among the young adults could diminish their cynical attitudes towards politics. Enhancing the regulations and coordination of social media platforms to ensure the dissemination of accurate and balanced political information can therefore foster greater trust in these platforms, strengthen users' sense of political efficacy, and ultimately, reduce levels of political cynicism.

**Keywords:** *Social media credibility, political information, political efficacy, political cynicism, young adults.*

### INTRODUCTION

The amendment of Article 119(1) of the Malaysian Federal Constitution, reducing the minimum age for voting from 21 to 18, has profoundly changed the political landscape in this country. The enactment of this new policy in the electoral practices in Malaysia on December 15, 2021, has resulted in an estimated 5.8 million new voters (Siang Ling & Puyok, 2024). The introduction of this new policy elicited mixed responses from political observers, analysts, and the public. On one hand, this decision is regarded as a huge milestone in Malaysia's democratic practices, particularly through its strengthening of youth representation in the democratic process, while on the other, it invites scrutiny on the various concerns commonly associated with young voters (Tajudin, Joni, & Bahari, 2023).

The Malaysian political landscape is intricately defined by a range of various elements, one of which is the channel that Malaysians utilise to access and engage with political information. In the late 1990s, amid the political upheaval in Malaysia that resulted in the

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dismissal of Anwar Ibrahim (the then Deputy Prime Minister) from the government, internet and social media were utilised instrumentally by his supporters and sympathisers to distribute their political messages. In the aftermath of the 2008 general election which saw the voters delivering an unprecedented blow towards the ruling coalition (Barisan Nasional lost five out of thirteen state governments), the then Prime Minister, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, acknowledged that his party underestimated the impact of social media in political campaign – a serious misjudgement. Since then, social media has emerged progressively as an important platform for political information dissemination in Malaysia's political scene. This shift in the way political information is circulated and consumed has sparked new questions such as how Malaysians perceive political information on social media and how this influences their attitude on politics.

One important dimension in assessing the impact of social media in the context of political communication is how the political content affects the user's political efficacy. Political efficacy can be defined as a belief that one has of their influence on political processes and outcomes (Prats & Meunier, 2021). A study by Kitanova (2020) reported that young adults often exhibit lower levels of political engagement and participation in comparison to older demographic groups. Nevertheless, social media has been found to empower young adults' sense of political efficacy due to its easy accessibility and capacity to allow users to form groups or virtual community (Han, 2024).

While social media may offer an alternative means of accessing political information, it also raises concerns about the extent to which this information can be trusted. This introduces an additional layer in the relationship between social media use and political efficacy due to the level of perceived credibility and trust in the political information found on social media (Han, 2024). Another intriguing question is the extent to which perceived social media credibility for political information affects an individual's degree of political cynicism. When it comes to political engagement and efficacy, the magnitude of political cynicism, which is characterised by the distrust towards political system and leaders (Hanson et al., 2013), can have detrimental effects on both of these aspects.

Despite the significance of the voting age amendment to Malaysia's voting landscape, studies in this area remain scarce, particularly those that focus on understanding the role of social media as a transmitting tool for political information and how it shapes the political attitudes of young adults. Existing studies related to social media and politics tend to focus on campaign-related or electoral processes (Tan et al., 2024). Hence, this study seeks to address this gap by assessing the perceived credibility of social media as a source of political information, the level of political efficacy, and the level of political cynicism among young adults in Malaysia. In addition, this study also investigated the relationship between Malaysian young adults' perceived credibility of social media as a source of political information and their levels of political efficacy and political cynicism.

### *Political Information and Social Media*

Social media platforms are major vehicles for information dissemination. Compared to traditional or legacy media such as printed newspapers, and radio and television broadcasts, social media users can interact with one another, thus allowing a greater degree of communication, despite the difference in the platform affordances (Theocharis, Boulianne, Koc-Michalska, & Bimber,

2023). Facebook is particularly well-utilised due to its broad demographic influence; YouTube for its video format; X (formerly Twitter) for real-time discussions; Instagram for its visuals and reels. Due to their growing significance, social media platforms have become primary channels for disseminating political information.

The nature of social media allows direct communication between politicians and their followers. A study found that following political actors on social media increased young people's exposure to campaign news and enhanced their engagement in political campaigns (Marquart et al., 2020). Priowidodo et al. (2024) analysed six Indonesian politicians - each with a minimum number of 500,000 followers on Twitter (or X) - and reported that Twitter (or X) has been successfully utilised for social media campaigning.

This shift reflects a de-mediation of politics, where traditional news outlets lose influence as primary sources of political information for younger audiences. This capacity for direct interaction is powerful, so much so that almost all political parties in Pakistan have reformed their communication channels to include social media and social networking sites (Shafaq et al., 2022). This strategy has proven to be effective in conveying political agenda to the voters.

In addition to direct communication, the various social media platform affordances, i.e., the properties of the social media technologies that enable or constrain users' interactions and behaviours, allow access to diverse information and opportunities. Whilst this empowers users to create content, customise their environment, and engage actively, it also makes them "free" to use and spread political information as they see fit – perhaps amplifying specific viewpoints whilst diminishing exposure to opposing perspectives – thus creating cherry-picking scenario that entrench political divisions (Chan & Yi, 2024).

The properties of social media also give rise to the News Find Me (NFM) perception, where users do not actively pursue information but inadvertently receive political information and news from other social media users (Song, Zúñiga, & Boomgaarden, 2020). As these individuals increasingly receive political information and news without explicit effort, they may in time perceive themselves to be sufficiently well-informed about politics and are surrounded by peers who are well-versed in politics. Song et al. (2020) suggested that this passive mode of receiving news has more nuanced patterns and impacts, depending on the type of social network channels that the users depend on.

#### *Young Voters and Social Media Use for Political Information*

The reliance on social media for political information is particularly pronounced among younger voters, who are more tech-savvy and prefer the immediacy and accessibility of digital platforms. Young voters are heavily engaged with social media. For instance, a 2023 poll reported that three quarters of American Gen Z voters – those aged 18-24 years old – spent more than three hours on their phones daily. The same report also showed that when searching for news or information, 79% of young voters used YouTube, 70% turned to Instagram, and 62% chose Facebook as their source (Young Voters' Media Consumption, n.d.).

In Malaysia, the trend of turning to social media for political information has also been observed. In a study published in 2017, researchers reported that from 105 young voters, 76.2% chose to use Facebook as the preferred medium to seek political information rather than traditional media such as newspapers or television (Taibi et al., 2017). A similar finding revealed

that out of 200 young voters, 75.5% turned to social media as the source for political information (Salman & Salleh, 2020). More recently, TikTok appeared to be the current leading platform for political engagement amongst younger people (Tan, 2022). As of early 2022, TikTok had approximately 17 million users in Malaysia, most of whom were over 18 years old, effectively displacing Facebook as the major platform for political campaigning (Chang Yeow et al., 2024; Soon, 2022). Following this, political parties have started to shift their campaigns by prioritising social media platforms such as TikTok (Chang Yeow et al., 2024).

Despite the extensive usage, the trust relationship between young voters and social media as political information sources remains complex. There appears to be a degree of distrust of social media amongst young voters. For instance, over half (55%) of young voters viewed Twitter as a source of misinformation, with only 8% considering it credible (Young Voters' Media Consumption, n.d.). In a similar vein, a survey of 6,669 United States young voters revealed that whilst they utilised social media expansively to learn about political issues and events, young people did not fully trust what they found on social media (Koshiol, 2024).

### *Political Efficacy*

Political efficacy refers to the belief that one's actions can influence political processes. It normally encompasses two dimensions, namely internal efficacy, which is the individual's confidence in their ability to understand and engage with political systems, and external efficacy, which reflects the perception that the government responds to citizens' demands and input (Prats & Meunier, 2021). Political efficacy has been viewed as a crucial element in promoting active citizen engagement, fostering trust in government, ensuring democratic stability, and enhancing political knowledge (Oser, Grinson, Boulianne, & Halperin, 2022).

When citizens believe they can influence governmental actions, they are more likely to support the democratic system and comply with laws. The opposite also holds true. A 2014 Pew Research Center survey indicated that while political efficacy is relatively high in Asia, a significant portion of the population still feels disconnected from politics. In Malaysia and similar nations, many citizens believe that government officials do not care about their opinions, with 55% expressing this sentiment across the region. Whilst this percentage is lower compared to the Middle East (67%), Africa (65%), and Latin America (77%), this disconnect can still hinder political participation and engagement.

The level of political efficacy is influenced by various constructs, including the use of social media. Boulianne, Oser, and Hoffmann (2023) analysed the role of digital media (defined broadly as information and entertainment products and services that use the internet) use in relation to political efficacy. Through a systematic analysis of 193 empirical studies from 37 countries, they found that political efficacy, specifically internal political efficacy, was positively correlated with digital media use. The researchers also posited that the volume of information on digital media was not as overwhelming as initially thought and did not have many negative consequences. Internal political efficacy has also been shown to be influenced by the users' social media interaction, whereby the individual's social network, particularly the size and the persons involved, play a major role (Han, 2024).

A lack of belief in the political system may, over time, lead to disenchantment of the political processes, which in turn solidifies political cynicism. Whilst these two constructs are distinct, they have a context-dependent and complex relationship.

### *Political Cynicism*

Political cynicism is characterised by a profound distrust of political entities, including politicians and institutions. This complex sentiment extends beyond mere skepticism or distrust, as cynical individuals perceive the political landscape as fundamentally corrupt, driven by self-interest, and marked by incompetence and dishonesty (Hasell, Halversen, & Weeks, 2025). This perspective often leads to a generalised belief that political elites are selfish and that the entire political system fails to represent the interests of the citizens.

Social media usage has been linked to political cynicism, although the degree and nature of this relationship vary based on different contexts. Hanson et al. (2013) investigated the use of Facebook and political blogs as information sources and found that the usage of these platforms were correlated to lower levels of self-reported political cynicism. On the other hand, Yamamoto and Kushin (2014) compared young voters who paid attention to traditional internet sources versus social media and discovered that those who paid more attention to social media information reported higher levels of cynicism.

Mediating factors have been found to play a part. The exposure to misinformation through the use of social media, for example, was correlated with higher political cynicism (Lee & Jones-Jang, 2024). In a recent study by Hasell et al. (2025), it was found that exposure to political attacks on social media correlated with increased levels of political cynicism. This relationship is mediated by emotions such as anger and anxiety, suggesting that hostile political content can foster a sense of disillusionment with the political system.

Research has also explored how different pathways through which news is consumed on social media can lead to varying levels of political cynicism. The NFM perception, for instance, revealed contradictory results depending on its sub-dimensions. When analysed from the dimension of peer dependence, the NFM perception has been found to exacerbate feelings of cynicism as individuals may feel overwhelmed by negative portrayals of politics without context or balanced perspectives (Song et al., 2020). Despite that, the same research also found that the perception of being informed correlated with lower political cynicism.

Yet another construct that can contribute to political cynicism or even the admittance of being politically cynical is the individual's political maturity. Taibi et al. (2017) discovered that many Malaysian undergraduates choose to express neutrality in their trust towards political figures, a response that reflected indecisiveness and lack of ability to analyse political situations critically. The researchers speculated that superficial usage of social media may have contributed to this scenario.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a survey approach using an online questionnaire as the main tool for data collection. The questionnaire was developed by adapting and modifying items from established scales, resulting in a final instrument that consisted of 22 items. The questionnaire was organised into four sections. The first section comprised of seven questions designed to collect

demographic information, assess the respondent's level of interest in politics, and examine their utilisation of social media as a source of political information. Some questions are intentionally phrased in the opposite direction (either negatively or positively) to prevent response bias. The value assigned to those questions by the participants will then be reverse coded (1 = 5, 2 = 4, 3 = 3, 4 = 2, 5 = 1) in SPSS.

The second section evaluated how the respondents perceive the credibility of social media as a source of political information. Four items that were developed based on previous studies on perceived credibility of social media (Bashir et al., 2022; Mustapha et al., 2020; Johnson & Kaye, 2000) were utilised for the present study. The four items were "Social media provides accurate information about political issues", "I find political information on social media to be believable", "Social media provides fair coverage of political events and issues" and "Social media gives thorough information about political issues". For each statement, the respondents were required to indicate their level of agreement with 1 indicating 'Strongly Disagree' to 5 'Strongly Agree'.

The third section of the questionnaire concentrated on measuring the respondent's level of political efficacy by using four items that were modified from previous studies (Lai & Beh, 2025; Liu, 2017; Niemi et al., 1991). This section included statements such as "I have a good understanding of the important political issues facing our country", "I consider myself well qualified to participate in politics", "People like me don't have any say in what the government does" (reverse coding in SPSS), and "No matter whom I vote for, it won't make a difference" (reverse coded in SPSS). For each of the statements, the respondents were required to indicate their level of agreement with 1 indicating 'Strongly Disagree' to 5 'Strongly Agree'.

The subsequent section involved measuring the respondent's level of political cynicism. To measure this component, this study employed seven items that were modified from previous studies (Hong & Chang, 2019; Abts et al., 2024; Sweetser & Kaid, 2008). The statements in this section included "Whether I vote or not has no influence on politics", "One never knows what politicians think", "People like me don't have any say about what the government does", "Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on", "One can be confident that politicians always do the right thing" (reverse coded in SPSS), "Politicians often quickly forget their election promises after a campaign is over", and "One cannot always trust what politicians say". As with the previous sections, respondents were required to indicate their level of agreement with each statement, from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

All collected data were transferred to IBM SPSS Version 26 for further analysis. To address the first objective, descriptive analysis was conducted to calculate the means and standard deviations for each statement within the scales pertinent to this study (perceived credibility of social media as a source of political information, level of political efficacy, and level of political cynicism). Meanwhile, a correlation analysis was performed to determine the relationship between perceived credibility of social media as a source of political information and political efficacy and political cynicism among the young adults for this study.

## FINDINGS

### *Respondents' Profiles*

A total of 221 respondents participated in this study. In terms of age, the respondents were aged between 19 to 30 years old. Twenty four percent (24%) of the respondents were male and 76% were female. A majority (96.4%) indicated STPM as their highest educational level, while 3.6% reported that they held a Diploma.

Out of the 221 respondents, more than half claimed that they were interested in politics. Nine percent (9%) of the respondents reported they were very interested and 57.5% were somewhat interested. Only 14 (6.3%) of the respondents described themselves as having no interest in politics at all. In terms of using social media to seek political information, 27.6% of the respondents reported daily usage, 35.7% reported weekly usage, 14.9% reported using social media for this purpose on a monthly basis, and the remaining respondents (21.7%) reported that they rarely used social media as a source for political information. Table 1 provides a summary of these data:

Table 1: Profiles of the respondents

Variables	Percentage
<b><i>Gender</i></b>	
Male	24
Female	76
<b><i>Education levels</i></b>	
STPM	96.4
Diploma	3.6
<b><i>Interest in politics</i></b>	
Very interested	9
Somewhat interested	57.5
Not very interested	27.1
Not at all interested	6.3
<b><i>Frequency of social media use for political information</i></b>	
Daily	27.6
Once a week	35.7
Once a month	14.9
Rarely	21.7

### *Perceived Credibility of Social Media, Level of Political Efficacy, and Level of Political Cynicism*

A descriptive analysis was conducted to determine the mean and standard deviation for each item, i.e., perceived credibility of social media as a source of political information, the levels of political efficacy, and the levels of political cynicism among the respondents in this study. Table 2 shows the means and standard deviations for the participant's perceived credibility of social media as a source of political information.

Table 2: Means and standard deviations of perceived credibility of social media as a source of political information among young adults

Statement	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Social media provides accurate information about political issues.	3.22	.78
I find political information on social media to be believable.	3.14	.81
Social media provides fair coverage of political events and issues.	3.30	.92
Social media gives thorough information about political issues.	3.32	.88
<b>Overall</b>	<b>3.24</b>	<b>.65</b>

Our findings showed that the overall mean score was 3.24 ( $SD = .65$ ), indicating that the young adults in this study perceived social media as moderately credible as a source of political information. Statements such as “Social media provides accurate information about political issues” ( $M = 3.22$ ,  $SD = .78$ ) and “I find political information on social media to be believable” ( $M = 3.14$ ,  $SD = .81$ ), indicated a modest consensus on the reliability and believability of social media content. Meanwhile, statements such as “Social media gives thorough information about political issues” ( $M = 3.32$ ,  $SD = .88$ ) and “Social media provides fair coverage of political events and issues” ( $M = 3.30$ ,  $SD = .92$ ) yielded a marginally stronger perception of both the comprehensiveness and fairness of political contents on social media. Table 3 presents the means and standard deviations relating to the respondents’ level of political efficacy. This variable was measured using four items, as shown in the table.

Table 3: Means and standard deviations of the level of political efficacy among young adults

Statement	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
I have a good understanding of the important political issues facing our country.	3.37	.85
I consider myself well qualified to participate in politics.	2.58	1.12
*People like me don’t have any say in what the government does.	3.27	1.06
*No matter whom I vote for, it won’t make a difference.	3.27	1.27
<b>Overall</b>	<b>3.12</b>	<b>.66</b>

\* Reverse coded

As shown in Table 3, the statement “I have a good understanding of the important political issues facing our country” has a mean score of 3.37 ( $SD = .85$ ) indicating that the respondents moderately believed that they possessed the understanding of political issues. The second statement (“I consider myself well qualified to participate in politics”) yielded a mean score of 2.58 ( $SD = 1.12$ ) which suggests that the respondents predominantly did not feel confident in their qualifications for political engagement. The means for statements that were reverse-coded, such as “People like me don’t have any say in what the government does” ( $M = 3.27$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ) and “No matter whom I vote for, it won’t make a difference” ( $M = 3.27$ ,  $SD = 1.27$ ) indicated that the respondents rejected the feelings of complete political powerlessness and maintained moderate beliefs in their influence over political outcomes. Overall, our findings revealed that there was a modest level of political efficacy among the young adults in this study, with an overall mean score of 3.12 ( $SD = .66$ ). The means and standard deviations of the respondents’ level of political cynicism, which were measured using seven items, are provided in Table 4:



Table 4: Means and standard deviations of the level of political cynicism among young adults

Statement	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Whether I vote or not has no influence on politics.	2.44	1.16
One never knows what politicians think.	3.79	.99
People like me don't have any say about what the government does.	2.72	1.10
Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on.	3.57	1.06
*One can be confident that politicians always do the right thing.	3.37	1.09
Politicians often quickly forget their election promises after a campaign is over.	3.95	.94
One cannot always trust what politicians say.	3.94	.91
<b>Overall</b>	<b>3.40</b>	<b>.54</b>

\* Reverse coded

From the table, statements such as “One never knows what politicians think” ( $M = 3.79$ ,  $SD = .99$ ) and “One cannot always trust what politicians say” ( $M = 3.94$ ,  $SD = .91$ ) returned high mean scores, signifying strong scepticism towards politicians and their dependability. The statement “Politicians often quickly forget their election promises after a campaign is over” recorded the highest score with the mean score of 3.95 ( $SD = .94$ ). This score demonstrates the profound distrust that young adults have towards politicians. Meanwhile, results from the statements “Whether I vote or not has no influence on politics” ( $M = 2.44$ ,  $SD = 1.16$ ) and “People like me don't have any say about what the government does” ( $M = 2.72$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ) seem to suggest variability in the sense of disempowerment among the respondents with a portion of them rejecting the notion of extreme political cynicism. In general, the finding highlights the prevalence of political cynicism among the respondents in this study, reflecting a perceived lack in accountability and trustworthiness among the politicians, with an overall mean of 3.40 ( $SD = .54$ ).

#### *The Correlations between Perceived Credibility of Social Media, Political Efficacy, and Political Cynicism*

A correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between perceived credibility of social media as a source of political information (PCSM) with political efficacy (PE) and political cynicism (PC). The results are summarised in the correlation matrix shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Correlation analysis results

	PCSM	PE	PC
PCSM	1		
PE	.221**	1	
PC	-.191**	-.516**	1

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

From the analysis, PCSM was found to be positively correlated with PE ( $r = .221$ ,  $p < .01$ ). This indicates that young adults who perceive social media as a trustworthy source for political information tend to have stronger political efficacy and reduced sense of political cynicism. Thus, the more the users feel confident in the political information that they consume from social media, the more they are empowered with the sense of political competence and

comprehension, which may eventually motivate them to engage in political process more actively.

Meanwhile, PE and PC exhibited the strongest negative correlation ( $r = -.516, p < .01$ ). This can be interpreted as an indicator that the higher political efficacy that the young adults have, the less inclined they are to be cynical towards political matters and actors. Additionally, the finding also showed that there was a negative correlation between PCSM and PC ( $r = -.191, p < .01$ ), suggesting that the more the young adults perceived social media as a credible source for political information, the less likely it is for them to harbour cynical attitude towards politics. These findings imply that trust in social media as a provider of credible and trustworthy political content can potentially mitigate political cynicism among the young adults in Malaysia.

## DISCUSSION

The findings in this study revealed crucial insights into the way the young adults in Malaysia perceive political content from social media and how this perception influence their attitude towards political system, practices, and actors. When it comes to political attitudes, their levels of political efficacy and political cynicism are the two important dimensions that warrant attention.

The reliance on social media for political information is indeed a global trend among the younger generation. The findings from our study reflected this as well, with nearly 80% of our respondents stating that they utilised social media to gain political information (regardless of the frequency of use). Many political parties have acknowledged this trend, and over the years, have shifted their campaign efforts to emphasise online engagement (Shafaq et al., 2022). That said, political parties and figures need to maintain their credibility and practice transparency when using social media to disseminate political information, seeing as the frequency of use and the choice to use social media do not automatically signal trust (Koshiol, 2024). Our findings on this are similar: Our respondents exhibited a moderate level of trust in social media as a source of political information. The level of trust in social media found in the current study was higher compared to findings from previous surveys (e.g., Young Voters' Media Consumption, n.d.). However, respondents still demonstrated a cautious approach to its use.

Past studies showed that political efficacy and social media use have positive relationship (Boulianne et al., 2023). This study also revealed a significant positive correlation between political efficacy and perceived credibility of social media as a source of political information. We posit that social media users' political efficacy may be strengthened through their sense of confidence in the social media platform(s) that they use as political source(s). However, the low mean score for the statement "I consider myself well qualified to participate in politics" ( $M = 2.58, SD = 1.12$ ) shows that there are still some barriers especially in terms of political qualification among the young adults that hinder them from engaging meaningfully in politics. One possible explanation would be systemic barriers or cultural norms that are inherent in a particular society, hence dissuading the involvement of young adults in politics (Prats & Meunier, 2021). Likewise, the reverse coded item "People like me don't have any say in what the government does" ( $M = 3.27, SD = 1.06$ ) further illuminates the sense of disempowerment of the young adults in Malaysia despite their moderate level of political efficacy. These findings support the data from Pew Research Centre (2014), which reported that a significant number of Asians

felt disconnected from politics, even though in the global context, Asians scored relatively high for political efficacy. There is thus a need for action to encourage social media platforms not only to provide credible political content, but also as reliable vehicles to promote active political participation among young adults.

Apart from that, this study also highlighted the direction of the relationship between the perceived credibility of social media as a source of political information and political cynicism. The two components yielded negative correlation ( $r = -0.191$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), indicating that young adults who perceive social media as a reliable source for political information are more likely to exhibit lower sense of political cynicism. This finding aligned with Yamamoto and Kushin (2014), who observed that social media users relying on credible sources exhibited lower levels of political cynicism compared to those who are frequently exposed to misinformation or biased content online. The lower sense of cynicism may also stem from the perception of being politically informed (Song et al., 2019).

Although the overall level of political cynicism in the current study was moderate, corroborating Taibi et al.'s (2017) undergraduates' political neutrality, two specific statements exhibited very high scores of cynicisms. The statements "Politicians often quickly forget their election promises after a campaign is over" ( $M = 3.95$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ ) and "One cannot always trust what politicians say" ( $M = 3.94$ ,  $SD = 0.91$ ) recorded high mean scores, signalling a prevalence of distrust towards politics, and more specifically, towards politicians. This may be due to exposure to online misinformation (Lee & Jones-Jang, 2024), or unbalanced negative portrayals of political figures (Song et al., 2019). As social media platforms are by nature easily accessed and edited, they allow for the proliferation of misinformation and biased content, a recipe for exacerbation of political distrust and cynicism.

Worth noting is the strong inverse relationship between political efficacy and political cynicism ( $r = -0.516$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). In other words, the more capable young individuals feel about influencing political outcomes, the less likely they are to harbour cynical attitude towards politics and political actors. The positive link between perceived credibility of social media as a source of political information and political efficacy indicates the potential of social media as a platform to reduce political distrust and apathy among young adults by consistently delivering reliable and unbiased political information.

## CONCLUSION

Social media provides new avenues for accessing political information, but questions about the credibility and trustworthiness of such information complicate its relationship with political efficacy as well as political cynicism. Perceived credibility of social media may influence these constructs and can affect young adults' political attitude and engagement.

The overarching aim of this study is to determine how social media is viewed as a political information source and how this perception is related to the youth's political efficacy and cynicism. Overall, our analyses revealed that the respondents in this study perceived social media as a moderately credible political source and possessed a moderate level of political efficacy as well as a moderate level of political cynicism. We also found a significant positive correlation between political efficacy and the perceived credibility of social media as a source of political information. Additionally, our findings revealed a negative correlation between perceived social

media credibility and political cynicism, suggesting that young adults who view social media as a reliable political information source are less likely to exhibit political cynicism. Finally, a strong inverse relationship was also observed between political efficacy and political cynicism, indicating that individuals who feel more capable of influencing political outcomes are less likely to adopt a cynical attitude toward politics and political actors.

There is a need for improved regulations and coordination of social media platforms to ensure the dissemination of accurate and balanced political information. Hence, it is important to bring various parties together, especially the policy makers and educators, to develop new initiatives that could empower young adults with the necessary skills to navigate the digital realm, especially involving political information.

#### BIODATA

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