

**FACTORS DETERMINING ONLINE AND OFFLINE  
POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT IN MALAYSIA**

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**FACTORS DETERMINING ONLINE AND OFFLINE  
POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT IN MALAYSIA**

**by**

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BN	Barisan Nasional
CVM	Civic Voluntarism Model
F <sup>2</sup>	Effect Size
GE	General Election
UMNO	United Malays National Organisation
PLS-SEM	Partial Least Squares (Structural Equation Modeling)
Q <sup>2</sup>	Predictive Relevance
R <sup>2</sup>	Coefficient of Determination
SD	Standard Deviation
SE	Standard Error
SmartPLS	Smart Partial Least Squares

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# **FAKTOR-FAKTOR YANG MENENTUKAN PENGLIBATAN POLITIK SECARA DI DALAM DAN DI LUAR TALIAN DI MALAYSIA**

## **ABSTRAK**

Walaupun penyelidikan telah membuktikan faktor yang mempengaruhi penglibatan politik rakyat, akan tetapi sedikit yang diketahui tentang bagaimana peranan sukarela sivik mempengaruhi penglibatan rakyat dalam penglibatan politik. Bagi mengisi jurang ini, kajian ini mengkaji faktor-faktor yang menentukan kesukarelaan sivik dalam penglibatan politik di Malaysia. Memfokuskan kepada kesukarelawan sivik dalam mempengaruhi penglibatan politik, kajian ini menggunakan Model Kesukarelawan Sivik untuk menjelaskan faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi proses penglibatan politik. Kajian ini juga mengiktiraf ketidakpuasan hati dan keadilan dalam politik dan seterusnya menguji ketidakpuasan hati politik dan persepsi adil dalam meramalkan faktor penglibatan politik rakyat. Tambahan pula, sumber rakyat iaitu pendidikan dan kewangan memainkan peranan penting bagi setiap rakyat dalam banyak keadaan termasuk dalam proses penglibatan politik, justeru menguji peranan penyederhanaan pendidikan dan pendapatan dalam meramalkan penglibatan politik di Malaysia. Faktor kajian ialah peranan tingkah laku psikologi, rangkaian pengambilan dan motivasi sebagai faktor utama yang mempengaruhi hubungan antara penglibatan politik dalam talian dan penglibatan politik luar talian. Kajian ini ditinjau pada tahun 2020, untuk menentukan faktor dan hubungannya dalam penglibatan politik. Kajian ini mengambil sampel 542 responden, menggunakan teknik



persampelan bola salji dan kaedah persampelan kuota, dan menganalisis data yang ditinjau menggunakan PLS-SEM. Penemuan menunjukkan bahawa tingkah laku psikologi mempunyai pengaruh yang lebih besar, diikuti oleh motivasi, dan rasa adil dalam penglibatan politik mereka. Kajian itu juga mendapati bahawa rangkaian pengambilan (cth. partisan, dan galakan rakan ke rakan) tidak memainkan peranan penting dalam memupuk penglibatan politik mereka. Begitu juga, rasa tidak puas hati politik didapati tidak ketara dalam meningkatkan proses penglibatan politik. Dapatan juga menunjukkan bahawa kesan penyederhanaan sumber adalah lebih ketara kepada penglibatan politik dalam talian berbanding penglibatan politik luar talian. Wawasan teori daripada model voluntarisme sivik dan teori ekuiti mencadangkan bahawa faktor psikologi individu terus mempengaruhi penglibatan mereka dalam penglibatan politik. Kajian ini mempunyai implikasi dasar kepada kerajaan dan masyarakat sivil untuk mengamalkan kesukarelawanan bagi meningkatkan penglibatan politik produktif rakyat yang penting bagi setiap rakyat dalam sebuah negara demokrasi.

# **FACTORS DETERMINING ONLINE AND OFFLINE POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT IN MALAYSIA**

## **ABSTRACT**

While research has established the factors that influence citizens' political engagement, little is known about how civic voluntarism predictors influence citizen involvement in political engagement. To fill this gap, this study examines the factors determining civic voluntarism in political engagement in Malaysia. Focusing on civic voluntarism in influencing political engagement, this study applies Civic Voluntarism Model to elucidate the factors that influence the political engagement process. This study also acknowledges the dissatisfaction and fairness in politics and hence tests political dissatisfaction and perceived fairness in predicting citizens' political engagement factors. Furthermore, income play an important role for each citizen in many circumstances including in the political engagement process, hence testing the moderating role of education and income in predicting political engagement in Malaysia. Central to the study is the role of psychological behaviour, recruitment network, and motivations as the main factors that affect the relationship between online political engagement and offline political engagement. This study surveyed in the year 2020, to determine the factors and their relationships in political engagement. This study sampled 542 respondents, using the snowball sampling techniques and quota sampling method, and analysed the surveyed data using PLS-SEM. The findings suggest that psychological behaviour has greater influence, followed by motivations, and perceived fairness in their political engagement. The study also found that

recruitment networks (e.g. partisanship, and peer-to-peer encouragement) did not play a significant role in fostering their political engagement. Similarly, political dissatisfaction was found insignificant in heightening the political engagement process. Findings also show that the moderating effect of income is more significant to online political engagement compared to offline political engagement. Theoretical insights from the civic voluntarism model and equity theory suggest that individual psychological factors continue to influence their involvement in political engagement. This study has policy implications for the government and civil societies to embrace voluntarism to heightening the citizen's productive political engagement which is crucial for every citizen in a democratic country.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Political engagement and political participation concepts may appear to be similar, but they have different perspectives on the role that citizens should play. The primary distinction between participation and engagement is that citizen engagement necessitates an active, intentional dialogue between citizens and public decision makers, whereas citizen participation can come solely from citizens (Lodewijckx, 2020).

Political engagement is an important concept in the fields of communication and political science studies. The concept is mainly referred to the various ways in which people interested and engage in civic and political issues. However, the use of the term is perplexing and overlaps with political participation. In a broader sense, political engagement refers to contribution and participation in the community affairs, nation, or the world (Flanagan & Wray-Lake, 2011). If a democratic society is to survive, it must be based on citizens' political engagement. It is crucial to remember that political participation entails more than just voting. For example, protesting, organisational membership, and campaigning are ways to engage with politics (van Deth et al., 2014). However, it is capable of going beyond these active actions. Moreover, attention and interest are also elements of good citizenship (Dalton, 2008), providing individuals with the necessary tools to hold elites accountable.

In engagement process, it takes an immense collection of forms such as being dynamic in communities, volunteering, providing services, and promoting civil rights (Flanagan & Wray-Lake, 2011). Moreover, working with other citizens to foster

intergroup understanding, remaining informed about issues that affect the public, and voting for political candidates who represent one's policy preferences are all examples of civic engagement. Although the political engagement process looks similar to political participation, however, it distinguishes between perceptive and dynamic political engagement (Pontes, Henn, & Griffiths, 2018). The psychological link of a person to the political system, including whether they are politically interested, seeking political knowledge, and identifying with a specific political party, is referred to as cognitive political involvement (Pontes, Henn, & Griffiths, 2018). Citizens' ability to process complex arguments may decide how much they participate (Afromeeva et al., 2021).

Both concepts (e.g. civic engagement, political engagement) may appear to be similar, but they have different perspectives on the role that citizens should play. The primary distinction between civic engagement and political engagement is that civic engagement necessitates an active, intentional dialogue between citizens and public decision makers, whereas citizen participation can come solely from citizens. Political activism, environmentalism, and community and national service are all examples of civic engagement, which includes both paid and unpaid services (Flanagan & Wray-Lake, 2011).

Table 1.1 Similarities and Dissimilarities of Civic and Political Engagement

	Similarities	Dissimilarities
Civic Engagement	Any individual or group activity addressing issues of public concern is considered civic engagement. Civic and political engagement entails communities working together or individuals working alone to protect public values or effect change in a community through both political and non-political actions.	Civic engagement is any individual or group activity addressing issues of public concern.
Political Engagement		Political engagement is more on a cognitive process. It encompasses a wide range of activities in which people form and express their opinions about the world and how it is governed, as well as attempt to influence and shape decisions that affect their lives.

Civic engagement focuses on policy procedures that allow people to participate in civic and political life. More specifically, it is through sustainable communities or programs and services that a political dimension can be incorporated, and conversely (Brady et al., 2020). Political involvement, on the other hand, denotes explicit and deliberate acts (Ekman & Amn, 2012; Dahlgren, 2016). Civic engagement denotes passive activities or covert participation, whereas political engagement denotes explicit and purposeful acts (Ekman & Amn, 2012; Dahlgren, 2016). The importance of civic engagement in politics is it will increase the possibility of ordinary citizens' voices being heard in critical debates and also offer democratic institutions a degree of legitimacy (Wike & Castillo, 2018). Civic engagement is also referred to as 'citizen engagement', 'democratic engagement' (Hampton, 2011), and also as 'civic political engagement' (Koc-Michalska et al., 2014).

Criteria that reflect citizens' political engagement are based on individual motivations, skills, and attitudes at their different ages (Andersen et al., 2021). For example, generation Z appears to be more enthusiastic about supporting local crowdfunding and other forms of fundraising, as well as attending political events (Andersen et al., 2021). On the other hand, millennials engage in slightly more activities that indicate a longer-term commitment to the local community, such as creating initiatives through online platforms (Andersen et al., 2021). It shows young people have medium-level interest, but older generations have settled down and are hence more interested and motivated to participate in it. Such forms of engagement can prepare people at any stage of age for other types of participation because it educates people on how to communicate with other people and strengthens their political engagement level (Andersen et al., 2021).

The encouraging dimensions in political engagement are political interest, political knowledge, and political efficacy (Andersen et al., 2021). For example, if a person is politically interested, or knowledgeable, he or she will be more likely to lead to political participation in society (Andersen et al., 2021). Moreover, to behave politically, citizens do not need to target the political system or their local community. They can also do so by engaging in other politically driven acts, such as boycotting specific companies or expressing their views on online media platforms (Andersen et al., 2021). However, it depends on that person's decision who also has choices not to engage in politics (Andersen et al., 2021).

The political engagement approach also can be distinguished through active and passive participation (Andersen et al., 2021). Examples of active forms of political engagement are by contacting politicians, participating in public meetings, and joining political party assemblies (Pontes, Henn, & Griffiths, 2018). As such political

engagement is to politically focused practice aiming to have a direct influence on political topics, institutions, and structures (Pontes, Henn, & Griffiths, 2018). It's worth noting that offline political engagement focuses mostly on direct political activity, such as voting in elections, volunteering for a political candidate, making a donation to a candidate or organization, contacting officials, campaigning, protesting, and engaging with others on matters (Uhlener, 2001). The central objectives of civic and political engagement are associating with others to accomplish mutual objectives that favour the group or for the communities' common good (Flanagan & Wray-Lake, 2011). Political engagement is an interchangeable term with political participation because both concepts emphasise mainly voting (Park & You, 2015) but political engagement is an essential pioneer for political participation and vibrant civic culture (Afromeeva et al., 2021). Although much research combines engagement and participation, the cognitive elements (e.g., attitude, thoughts) are frequently restricted to processes that occur as a result of political identification or issue relevance (Afromeeva et al., 2021).

Loader et al. (2014) have distinguished between engagement pursued individually or as a group. Individual engagement encompasses personal activities such as boycotting products or influencing others to vote (Loader et al., 2014). On the other hand, collective engagement is by joining or working for political groups (Loader et al., 2014). Nevertheless, political engagement among citizens is not always similar. Effective engagement necessitates a variety of income, including money, time, and high levels of civic abilities (Brady et al., 1995). Researchers have often evaluated the socio-economic factors to evaluate citizens' political engagement. According to Brownlannuzzi et al. (2017), individual socioeconomic position, for example, can influence political attitudes toward economic policies, but individual sentiments may not be complimentary to their political behaviour. Variations in economic status may lead to



differences in ethics, equality, and fairness thoughts and values (Brown-lannuzzi et al., 2017). As such, greater economic inequality yields greater political inequality because each citizen has a different social-economic status (Solt, 2018).

A strong democracy is noticeable by an active citizenry. People with high levels of political and civic participation will be able to have their voices heard in crucial debates (Wike & Castillo, 2018). It will provide democratic institutions with a measure of legitimacy. A recent survey among 14 countries showed many people are disengaged from politics (Wike & Castillo, 2018). However, issues related to education, health care, and poverty seem to be important stimuli for political engagement among citizens (Wike & Castillo, 2018). A better understanding of what could be influencing factors in political engagement and current scenarios among Malaysians will be the main focus of this study.

### **1.1.1 Political Engagement Atmosphere in Malaysia: The Context**

The report by Freedom House (2021) showed that political rights and civil liberties in Malaysia are at a moderate level. The report shows Malaysia is currently partly free with 52% scores; where 21% for human political rights and 31% for civil liberties (Freedom House, 2021). The scores on global and internet freedom are also in a narrowing manner in Malaysia (Freedom House, 2021). The tightening factor for internet freedom is due to the 1950 Evidence Act which was amended in 2012. The Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) regulates websites and has the power to order the removal of anything deemed offensive or subversive (Freedom House, 2021). In the meantime, website owners and editors, web hosting service providers, and computer or mobile device owners are all held accountable for

the stories posted through their services or equipment (Freedom House, 2021). Political pluralism and participation in Malaysia are still unequal between the ruling government and opposition political parties (Freedom House, 2021). For example, political interference by the Registrar of Societies (ROS) such as stalling opposition political parties' registration approval is still ongoing (Freedom House, 2021). Some minority groups face societal and legal barriers to political involvement, and women's issues are substantially neglected in national politics (Freedom House, 2021). Media freedom is suppressed where criticism against the government is still unacceptable (Anand, 2020). Such nature in Malaysia leads to negative consequences such as the absence of political liberty, racial tension, ethnic discrimination, and one-party democracy in Malaysia (Anand, 2020).

Malaysia's political system is founded on a constitutional federal monarchy, with the King as the head of state and the Prime Minister as the head of government (Wonderful Malaysia, 2019). Altogether, Malaysia has had 14 general elections since its independence in 1957. From the beginning, traditional media are being used as the main political tool in influencing and engaging with the voters. However, the scenario has changed in the past decades. Internet usage started to become popular after the *Reformasi* (Reformation) movement ideology in Malaysia (Wok & Mohamed, 2017). It is to uphold justice for Anwar Ibrahim after his dismissal as Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim by Mahathir Mohammad in 1998 (Wok & Mohamed, 2017). The political chaos has been made accessible to the world through the internet (Salman & Hasim, 2011). The movement provided great exposure for Malaysians, who previously had little exposure through controlled mainstream media (Wok & Mohamed, 2017). Today, the current scenario in Malaysia shows that political events or political-related news attracted the interest of media consumers who sought information on heavily

debated matters such administration's interest and conflict during the Covid-19 pandemic enhancing the citizens' engagement with the country's current issues (Kasim & Zaman, 2021).

The Malaysian political contesting strategies have changed. The internet has become an important role in the political battleground. Although there are many ways for engagement to influence people, online technology plays a crucial role in extending the dissemination of information among voters. Since mainstream media face strict control, most people choose alternative ways, such as internet-based media in fostering their political engagement. The tactics of the government to secure support from the citizens, most of the media coverage of the opposition parties was always portrayed negatively (Wok & Mohamed, 2017). Since opposition political parties and dissenting voices have no access to mainstream news media, the opposition political parties have created alternative media to voice out their concerns (Wok & Mohamed, 2017). Professional online newspapers, non-governmental organisation websites, and journalistic blogs are examples of Malaysia's alternative media, which are usually used by politicians, oppositional, and radical inclinations (Wok & Mohamed, 2017). Even though the government's control of the opposition's alternative media remains tight, the advent of digital media has eased the political activists to deliver their messages effortlessly (Wok & Mohamed, 2017). However, many of the alternative media were stopped operating due to a lack of funds and hurdles in renewing licenses (Wok & Mohamed, 2017).

The media in Malaysia is controlled by the government authorities for Malaysia's social harmony, political stability, and economic development (Wok & Mohamed, 2017). The use of legal measures to hold the media from being critical and to avoid social or racial tensions among Malaysians (Mohd Sani, 2008). In Malaysia,

the media laws such as Broadcasting Act (1987) and Printing Press Act (1984) have created limited critical political discussions in their news media and any news that considered offensive or being serious by the government was highly prohibited from publishing (Wok & Mohamed, 2017). The amended Evidence Act 1950 in 2012 described that owners of websites, news outlets, blogs, online forums, internet service providers, and online users are fully responsible for seditious content and they can be held responsible for seditious content whether or not they are the author for the content (Wok & Mohamed, 2017). For example, over two dozen books were banned, including political cartoons that were seized under media law (Weiss, 2012). It clearly showed that freedom of speech and expression was oppressed through certain laws, where only selected issues can be discussed publicly (Wok & Mohamed, 2017). For example, while reporting on sensitive matters, journalists are shown to be more careful about what they write to avoid lawsuits, suspensions, and arrests as a result of the implementation of existing laws (Murudi & Ting, 2019). However, a study by Kasim and Zaman (2021) on political parties' online media issues and comments during the Covid-19 pandemic found that social media users have the freedom to express their views and feelings without government restrictions involved. Yet, the current situation in Malaysia showed the public still has limited space to engage in political discussions rigorously (The Freedom House, 2021; Waheed & Hellmueller, 2021; Wok & Mohamed, 2017).

The main agreement of the Bill of Guarantees in 1997 by Malaysia is it should not impose any censorship on the internet as reassurance for international investors (Wok & Mohamed, 2017). Alternatively, sedition acts are being used in controlling the usage of the internet and its freedom as mentioned earlier. Examples of the sedition and defamation laws are 1) Official Secrets Act (OSA); 2) Security Act (ISA) (Wok & Mohamed, 2017). The OSA and ISA laws allow authorities to hold anyone without

charge or trial in the name of upsetting the country's peace (Wok & Mohamed, 2017). Such acts have made many Malaysians believe that laws are just to restrict freedom of speech, and people's voices and also to protect certain political figures (Wok & Mohamed, 2017). Despite former Prime Minister Najib Razak's announcement in 2013 that his administration intended to repeal the Sedition Act, the act was toughened in 2014, with the premise that it was once again for security and national unity (Wok & Mohamed, 2017). As a consequence, respective authorities were granted to block any considered seditious content and also increased the penalty up to three until seven years in prison if proven guilty (Wok & Mohamed, 2017). Overall, restrictions by the government have made political engagement in Malaysia still at a moderate level.

Mainstream media were no longer popular among Malaysians after the emergence of new media and widespread internet use among Malaysians (Salman et al, 2011; Wok, 2017; Omar & Ahrari, 2020). Gomez (2014) stated that eroding trust is the reason for the decline in print media circulation. The reason was low press freedom rankings, and a fragmented broadcast base, combined with political ownership of certain media organisations (Gomez, 2014). The low credibility of mainstream media in an environment of tight political control may be evidence of the detrimental impact of government control over mainstream media in Malaysia, where state control creates scepticism of the mainstream and its message (Omar & Ahrari, 2020). The use of new media to communicate with the public, on the other hand, adds depth to the process (Alivi et al., 2018; Omar & Ahrari, 2020). The changing scenario can be seen starting from the Malaysian 12<sup>th</sup> General Election (GE12) in the year 2013. An extensive range from mainstream media to online media was seen for political news and election campaigns (Chan & Tang, 2016). This development clearly shows the increasing numbers of online information seeking and online media use among citizens. New

communication technologies have changed campaigning ways including receiving and sharing political information in unique and compelling ways (Selvanathan & Lickel, 2020). It also legitimised the cause for social change, as well as tools for the political divide in Malaysia (Selvanathan & Lickel, 2020). Malaysians have been influenced by online media to become more active participants in political dialogue rather than passive consumers of conventional media information (Tapsell, 2019). However, Omar and Ahrari (2020) be certain of if Malaysians believed the conventional media, they would not turn to alternative media. When individuals believe mainstream media is less trustworthy, they will turn to alternative media more frequently (Omar & Ahrari, 2020).

The political engagement scenario during 14<sup>th</sup> General Election (GE14) in 2018 showed 123% of mobile phone users participating in social media (Ho, 2018). The gaps in political coverage in controlled mainstream media in the mid-90s led to the upsurge of cyberspace as a platform to gather information and GE14 saw a mass usage of live streaming technology (Ho, 2018). Furthermore, online media use not only has minimized the users' consumption of traditional media such as print news, and broadcasting news channels on television but has also become a popular and considerable platform to gain political knowledge among Malaysians (Willnat et al., 2013). During the GE12 and GE13 elections, online media use was connected with greater levels of political involvement and was positively correlated with increased political engagement and impact among Malaysian voters (Willnat et al., 2013).

In this millennial era, social media is one of the major triggers for political engagement in Malaysia. It enhanced an individual's cognitive behaviour to boost political engagement among Malaysians. For example, political interest rises in youth online political involvement through Facebook and Twitter usage (Abdulrauf et al., 2017). Furthermore, social media use is connected to increased political awareness and

increased political engagement (Abdulrauf et al., 2017). Several studies have mentioned social media increases political knowledge and people's interest to involve in political discourse among Malaysians (e.g. Shah et al., 2015; Abdulrauf et al., 2017; Tapsell, 2019; Welsh, 2019). The usage of social media significantly relates to energetic political engagement, especially among Malaysian youth (Mohamad et al., 2018). Malaysian youth are keen on political activities and social media helps them to learn more about political activities and by doing so it develops their political interest and engagement in political discussions overall (Kyranakis & Nurvala, 2013). Malaysian youths were found to engage in daily contact through internet news, political chats with friends, instructors, lecturers, and parents, membership in organisations, and submitting letters to government offices (Ting & Wan Ahmad, 2021).

Moreover, social media was the main platform for debating political parties' manifestos and opinions throughout the election campaigns during GE14. Politicians and partisans use online platforms to communicate with their people and supporters (Wok & Mohamed, 2017). For example, politicians engaged with people through Facebook. Politicians use it strategically to maintain their positive image (Mohamed, Manan & Ghazhali, 2019). Since Facebook launched live streaming, it has changed the dynamic of political media into more productive communication as politicians utilised it to engage with voters virtually (Mohamed, Manan & Ghazhali, 2019). Despite the Facebook application, the WhatsApp application also highly influenced the citizens compared to other social media applications. WhatsApp users easily get political messages and videos on political campaigns daily and share them with their friends, family, and other chat groups (Mohd Nizah & Abu Bakar, 2019).

A productive engagement among Malaysians was seen during GE14. During GE14, broader societal shifts occurred to change the regime (Welsh, 2019). The citizens

wanted to reform the government due to the biggest corruption scandal (Welsh, 2019). The internal efficacy feelings among people have mobilised voters up to the day of the election (Hassim et al., 2020). The consistent exposure to news related to corruption and power misuse has enhanced individual belief and engagement in taking part in the democratic processes. Although exposure to mainstream media was associated with greater levels of political involvement, the usage of social media for political objectives was associated with significant levels of political engagement (Willnat et al., 2013). As a result, social media platforms played a significant role in shaping political debates among Malaysians by disseminating information regarding government corruption and nepotism (Tapsell, 2019). Online users, especially social media users have gained greater knowledge and awareness of political issues and led to political activism such as rallies and protests (Chan & Tang, 2016). Indeed, the individual knowledge seems to be increasingly based on online information on political and social issues compared to their level of knowledge during past elections (Chan & Tang, 2016). As such, online information exposure allows for greater thought, being politically aware, and exchange between citizens, journalists, and politicians (Nizah & Bakar, 2019; Chinnasamy & Manaf, 2018; Chan & Tang, 2016; Leong, 2015).

The political engagement among civil societies in Malaysia also increasing. The phrase "civil society" encompasses a wide range of non-governmental organisations and institutions, including volunteers, mass media, social, and religious groups (Khuo, 2018). In the last GE14, groups of civil societies played a prominent role by urging the involved officials in the 1MDB outrage to resign and commended independent investigations against them (BBC, 2016). Many civil societies aligned themselves with the new Malaysian government under Pakatan Harapan (PH) in 2018 to address the array of issues and injustices common in Malaysia (Lee, 2018). On the other hand,



*Bersih* “clean” group is the largest people's movement in Malaysia for a clean and fair election, along with other activist groups continued to demand governance reforms and freedom of speech because there was an increase of arrests on those who criticize the government on 1MDB issues (Human Right Watch, 2017). It is noteworthy, that platform switching is not only to engage in political debate but also to enhance grassroots activism and political actions (Johns & Cheong, 2019). The influence of the *Bersih* movement in GE14 was one of the factors that drove public support away from the past *Barisan Nasional* (BN) government and strengthened the opposition forces during GE14 (Chong, 2019). It was made possible through *Bersih* rallies held between 2011 and 2016. The main tool for the rallies was driven by the online media platforms to unite Malaysians to voice for justice (Johns & Cheong, 2019). As a consequence, organisers allies, and participants have agreed online platforms produced creative solutions for them as citizens and activists to evade “surveillance capitalism” (Johns & Cheong, 2019). Such demonstration showed similar outcomes for social revolutions during the 2011 Tunisian and Egyptian Revolutions known as ‘Arab Spring’. The success of the *Bersih* movement has inspired innumerable acts of citizenship and civic engagement in political affairs compared to the mere casting of ballot papers for the past elections in Malaysia (Khoo, 2018). As such, empowering citizens resulted in political revolutions and made society, the economy, and culture more democratic in Malaysia (Kasmani, 2019). Apart from the engagement process, volunteerism factors play another important role in political engagement.

Volunteerism offers great benefits to the citizens to upgrade the communities and be part of the solution among Malaysians (Galimberti, 2019). Malaysia needs to do more to leverage the power of volunteerism as a vehicle for social cohesion, local development, and skill development (Galimberti, 2019). The effort engaged by the

Malaysian government agencies, including Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) to embolden volunteerism (Shah et al., 2015). 'The Shared Prosperity Vision 2030' policy in Malaysia seeking active involvement and engagement among citizens to achieve the common good can be unifying factors in society (Galimberti, 2019). Although volunteering activities are increasing in Malaysia (Shah et al., 2015) but the volunteerism effort among Malaysians was low among Malaysians (Yeap, 2017) and university students (Normah & Lukman, 2020). The main reason was people's lack of exposure to types of volunteer work that were available in their respective areas (Yeap, 2017). Meanwhile, the decline in university students' engagement in volunteerism is primarily due to a tight schedule, financial issues, and the activity's location, which is too far away from school (Normah & Lukman, 2020). Furthermore, mobility issues, a lack of acceptable time, health issues, a lack of essential talent, and a sole focus on academic accomplishment are among the other causes (Normah & Lukman, 2020). However, the spirit of volunteerism among Malaysian has seen to rise during the Covid-19 pandemic (Ladisma, 2021). It has brought individuals from all walks of life together and the volunteers are assisting vulnerable individuals, groups, and communities (Ladisma, 2021). The normative belief among Malaysian youth is the key factor to engage in volunteerism (Shah et al., 2015). On the other hand, the motivating factors in volunteerism are relatively significant among Malaysian youth (Sahimi et al., 2018). Overall, individual values, career, social needs, understanding enhancement, and sense of security are factors in voluntarism among Malaysians (Sahimi et al., 2018).

Political engagement in Malaysia is also enhanced through civic education and national training. The Malaysian government has recognised the need for civic education in schools to expose learners to the customs of the country's diverse ethnic groups (Farouk & Azrina, 2011). By doing so, students who enrolled in the Nationality course (e.g. Civics

and Citizenship Education) had higher levels of political understanding and political values compared to students who did not take the course (Hed et al., 2020). For example, study was found students performance in the History course during the Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM) helped students understand this Nationhood course better (Hed et al., 2020). Similarly, Awanget et al. (2013) conclude in their article on students' attitudes and academic performance in Nationhood education that students' achievement in this subject is dependent on the lecturer's role in creating an appealing and enjoyable learning environment. The majority of the literature in this area is concerned with students' patriotism, attitudes toward that subject, and academic performance. Similar to nationhood courses, a program that enhanced civic engagement among Malaysians also was the National Service Training Program (*PLKN*) which was introduced in 2004 (Hed et al., 2020) to boost a sense of togetherness among the young but then it was abolished in 2018 after the regime changed. Therefore, the Nationhood course is found to be relevant to young people, but some improvements to its content, teaching, and learning strategies are required to produce a more politically knowledgeable and democratic citizen (Hed et al., 2020).

People's engagement is required for a democracy to thrive. Therefore, the citizens must strike a balance between their political engagement experience and their willingness to help others. Acknowledging the importance of citizen engagement and voluntarism in political engagement, this study aims to test the factors that influence their engagement process. According to Mohamad, Othman, and Ali (2020), to achieve better politics in a country like Malaysia must make every effort to properly comprehend and develop political psychology in its fullest sense. It is because if there is better politics, led by better leaders, will result in a better government that will better serve its people and contribute to the nation's overall development. The present study takes up the country of pluralism,

multi-cultural, religious freedom, and democracy, by examining the scenario of political engagement in Malaysia. Malaysia will be a unique case to examine political engagement because of its diversity with a constitution that protects the rights of everyone

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

The political engagement process is not always similar among people. There is active engagement among people, whereas some will be passive, and many are not even interested in political matters depending on various factors. The emergence of the internet has challenged the status quo and impacted the political landscape (Wok, 2017), however, it is important to consider other potential factors to evaluate individual political engagement. The scenario among Malaysians shows political cynicism gains much greater attention among the citizens than active political engagement (Taibi et al, 2017). Furthermore, under the restrictive boundaries of Malaysia's political landscape, many of the citizens have been involved in a political engagement to champion socio-political issues such as poverty, political corruption, and organizational abuse of power, but these issues sometimes have been manipulated, causing the people to be cautious of political involvement (Ting & Wan Ahmad, 2020). Many other manipulative political issues including conflicts, and complex arguments in alternative media gain greater attention over to what level they engage in collective political engagement.

Important to note that, although media has eased more citizens to participate in the democratic process but to conclude it is the absolute factor for political engagement is not convincing. Even though researchers have pointed out that socio-political, technologies and economic factors have increased political engagement among people, however, internal factors such as individual cognitive behaviour, motivations, and

external factors such as voluntarism, in determining political engagement must be studied consistently; albeit the given lack of conclusiveness of the data.

In Malaysia, there is a dearth of research on political engagement. Mostly, it is related to types of political participation (Abdullah et al., 2021; Ting & Wan Ahmad, 2021; Halim et al., 2020; Shaari, Besar & Jali, 2017; Hassan, Azmi, & Atek, 2015) meanwhile, factors on political engagement among Malaysians were merely studied. It is important to note if a person is involved in one type of political action, (e.g. attending a political rally), it will not grant the individual to be involved in other political actions in the future. As mentioned earlier, many citizens around the world started to disengage and were less motivated in politics (Wike & Castillo, 2018). Similarly, compared to other democratic Asian democratic countries such as India, Hong Kong, and Indonesia, Malaysia's political participation process among citizens seems modest (Freedom House, 2021). Apart from voting, only a small percentage of the population engages in other types of political and civic engagement (Wike & Castillo, 2018). Studies mentioned some forms of engagement are more mutual among educated young people, politically partisan, and social network users (Abdullah et al., 2021; Halim et al., 2020; Mohd Ngah & Mohamed, 2019; Gomez, 2014) but many Malaysians merely engaged in politics after the election. Such unproductive practices among Malaysians show: 1) people are only involved in political discussion when certain issues affect them by the government actions, 2) just voting to fulfill responsibilities as a citizen, 3) merely care about the political activities due to a lack of political interest and knowledge (Abdulrauf et al., 2017; Rahman & Mohd Razali, 2018; Jason, Rangel, & Yet, 2020). However, changes that have been seen in the last GE14 atmosphere show issues related to political dissatisfaction, social justice, and corruption played important factors to motivate

Malaysians to engage more in politics (Jason, Rangel, & Yet, 2020; Funston, 2018; Nadzri, 2018).

Political interference in Malaysia has challenged the core measure of democracy through representations, participation, and fairness (Brian, 2020). The culture of fear among citizens is one of the factors affecting political engagement and rights to civic responsibilities in civil society (Human Rights Watch, 2015). In Malaysia, laws restricting freedom of expression and assembly, such as the Communications and Multimedia Act (1998), and the Sedition Act (1969) allow related agencies to prosecute persons who engage in aggressive political dissent (John, 2019). The Malaysian political crisis in March 2020 has seen many social media users and rally organisers subjected to police intimidation (Walden, 2020). Malaysians' dissatisfaction raised against the politicians' betrayal due to the undemocratic power change of the government (News Strait Times, 2020). People's interest in political matters has waned as a result of their fear of speaking up, and when they do, they prefer closed-door meetings, even though their political potential is still unknown.

On the other hand, the government censorship and monitoring of more accessible social media channels have encouraged people to have a closed online discussion for a safe space for people to participate in political talk and activism (John, 2019). It had increased mistrust and decreased active engagement in open platforms for the activists and citizens (John, 2019). Nonetheless, it can be assumed that peoples' dissatisfaction can encourage further motivational mechanisms for political engagement and actions. The relationship between political dissatisfaction in the engagement process still needs further study. Academic debate on political dissatisfaction as a factor in political engagement was just focused on the types of modes used to convey their citizens' thoughts such as social media (Chinnasamy & Manaf, 2018); improving Malaysia's

administration performance (Lim, 2007); varied revenue sharing among Malaysians (Yeoh & Toroskainen, 2017); dominating party rule (lee, 2019). However, these studies merely miss the mark to give exclusive on other deep causes that might be present in different prospective of analysing citizens' political engagement in this multiracial country.

This study fills this gap in the research by taking political dissatisfaction and perceived fairness as a predictor of online and offline political engagement to find such effects among Malaysians. Different factors influence individuals' political engagement and their perceived behaviour would consequently affect their voting mindsets. The important question remains as to whether, their psychological behaviour of political awareness, political involvement, political awareness, and political efficacy has distinctions among the different social backgrounds of people to engage in discussions to stimulate civic engagement leading to political activism. Although current generations are more comfortable using online technologies for vibrant information exchange and as a source of political knowledge, many remained to believe the mainstream media as a source of information in Malaysia (Salman et al., 2018). Up till now, people in rural areas still lack internet connection and depend solely on mainstream media (Naveed, 2020), and their engagement in politics differs from people who have experience with technology skills. Such studies were conducted by Ong (2020) on the political attitudes of citizens in rural and urban areas; Esa and Hashim (2017) on influential factors in voting among youth in rural areas; Naveed (2020) on rural dwellers' political knowledge. Those studies mentioned that the main reason for the information gap between urban and rural people is due to different socio-demographic factors. Compared to urban people, their understanding of political issues is quite updated through provided and shared

information via mainstream media and online media. However, the question regarding the distinctions to political cognitive behaviour has hardly been answered.

Citizens must have a specific amount of enthusiasm and capacity to participate in politics to become politically active. Many people are politically aware, but unless they are affected by important circumstances, they may be reluctant to participate in the engagement process or even seek political knowledge (White, 2000). Conventional acts of political engagement, it has been argued, are primarily motivated by intrinsic reasons such as self-efficacy and empowerment, which can influence decision-makers (Lilleker & Koc-Michalska, 2016). Verba et al. (1995) stated capacity for active participation and motivation in politics have non-political roots, which contribute to their psychological behaviour. Little study has been done on how related motivations inspire participation in less traditional activities to build the environment for deeper democratic engagement in Malaysia. It is critical to comprehend what motivates citizens to engage in civically oriented activities, as well as the causal chain that connects involvement in non-political organisations to political activism (Verba, Schlozman, & Verba, 1995).

The existing literature on Malaysian political engagement has just scratched the surface. Example of studies that investigated the types of influences on political engagement is the impact of social media use (Salman, Yusoff, & Salleh, 2018; Willnat et al., 2013), impacts of nationhood program (Hed et al., 2020), age factors (Hed & Grasso, 2020), women's engagement in Islamic politics (Mohamad, 2004), digital politics (Postill, 2011), youth behaviour (Zainon, Hashim & Zulkifli, 2017), yet, a constructive determination to the collective factors related to political engagement among Malaysians is less studied compared to the types of engagement. Moreover, literature searches on how to do individual civic engagement influence their online and offline political engagement repertoires are still unclear and insufficient. Studies related to the



online and offline engagement process in Malaysia have reported contradicting findings and need further studies. For example, studies found online media have the most significant positive effects on leadership, and participation among Malaysian youths (Ekpe, 2017; Hamzah et al., 2016), however, it differs from the study found by Hed and Grasso (2020), Chang and Tang (2016), and Zainon, Hashim, and Zulkifli (2017). In Malaysia, it was discovered that young people are less likely than their elders to participate in traditional political activities. Even demographic factors such as educational qualifications, genders, and ethnicities do not appear to be related to the age gap in political activism between young people and elders (Hed & Grasso, 2020). When compared to educated elders, educated young people are slightly less politically involved in voting (Quintelier, 2007). Such findings showed that even if the person is highly educated, it does not bridge the gap between younger and older Malaysians in terms of political engagement (Hed & Grasso, 2020).

This study attempts to address another gap in communication research. An increasing interest in civic engagement showed many studies have found that civic voluntarism predictors have a favourable impact on engagement (e.g., Baber, 2020; Guo et al., 2020; Ostrander, Kindler, & Bryan, 2020; Kirbis et al., 2017, Strömblad & Bengtsson, 2017, Kim & Khang, 2014). As mentioned earlier critical factors such as intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, political dissatisfaction, and perceived fairness have been never integrated into explaining political engagement in the past. Amid the changing social and political landscape in the last decades in Malaysia, therefore, new connections need to be constructed that can show clearly the citizens' civic voluntarism involvement in political engagement in these multi-ethnic and digitally advanced societies. Past research depends on Civic Voluntarism Model (CVM) to explain individuals' civic behaviour; however, this study will look into multiple approaches to resulting political

engagement. The existing studies have largely measured civic participation using mainly the three sets of determinants, namely, psychological behaviour, recruitment network, and income of civic voluntarism in citizen participation in many areas (e.g., Baber, 2020; Guo et al., 2020; Ostrander, Kindler, & Bryan, 2020; Kirbis et al., 2017, Strömblad & Bengtsson, 2017, Kim & Khang, 2014). In the Malaysian context, the model was largely used to evaluate higher education (Ahrari et al., 2016; Amirfarhangi, Ishak, & Nikfard, 2017); healthcare volunteers, and industry (Veerasingam, Sambasivan, & Kumar, 2013; Jamaludin et al., 2013); political participation and activism (Samsuddin, Ching, & Hasan, 2019; Hed & Grasso, 2020); participation in urban agricultural (Tiraieyari & Krauss, 2018); digital engagement (Samsuddin, Hasan, & Ching, 2016; Zakiah, Razak, & Simpong, 2016; Abdulrauf, Abdul Hamid, & Ishak, 2017); nevertheless, the gaps and limitations established in this study offer a framework to take the CVM model to evaluate on the political engagement which hard to be found.

Summing it up, the present study fills different gaps in the political engagement research by looking into multiple approaches in the Malaysian context, firstly; it addresses important variable motivation (intrinsic, extrinsic) as another influencer in the political engagement process, which was overlooked in many of civic engagement studies. The study also proposes additional variables extracted from equity theory (e.g. political dissatisfaction, perceived fairness) to test its effects in the Malaysian context on political engagement in the framework of the civic voluntarism model. Next, income will be a moderator variable for this study. Considering the several dimensions of political engagement, the current study examined engagement on two different levels, namely, online political engagement and offline political engagement. The civic voluntarism model provides the conceptual framework for this research, and by undertaking eligible

voters as its study population. This study has focused on testing the influence of civic engagement affecting individuals' political behaviour in their political engagement.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

1. Does psychological behaviour affect individuals' online and offline political engagement?
2. Does recruitment network influence individuals' online and offline political engagement?
3. Does motivations influence individuals' online and offline political engagement?
4. Does political dissatisfaction affect individuals' online and offline political engagement?
5. Does perceived fairness affect individuals' online and offline political engagement?
6. To what extent, income influence the individuals' online and offline political engagement?

### **1.4 Research Objectives**

The goal of this research is to find out more about how people in Malaysia with different socioeconomic and demography become engaged in online and offline political activities, by evolving a civic voluntarism model that integrates a variety of psychological behaviour, recruitment networks; meanwhile, motivations, political dissatisfaction, and perceived fairness from the theory of equity also as main variables to explain citizens' online and offline political engagement along with important a moderator factor of income. The Civic Voluntarism Model (Verba et al., 1995) and