

Factors Influencing *Tabayyun* in Political Information among Gen Z: A Preliminary Study

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Abstract

In Malaysia, internet usage increase every year and is largely dominated by Gen Z. The youth group has easy access to the internet and they use new media most often. New media is also more independent, offering more extensive and open discussion when compared to traditional media. However, if the dissemination of information is not well controlled, then it will lead to negative conduct. In Islam, those who receive any news or information should analyze and verify the accuracy of the information first which is *tabayyun*. Therefore, this preliminary study was carried out to analyse the factors that influence Generation Z in Malaysia ages from 12 to 30 to practice *tabayyun* when they receive political information and news through social media. This study involved 190 students from Universiti Sultan Azlan Shah (USAS) using a quantitative method by distributing questionnaires online. Factor analysis has been conducted for independent variables and produced four constructs namely responsibility, authority, self-awareness, and understanding. Then, correlation and multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine the relationship between *Tabayyun* practice and various potential predictors (independent variables). It was found that these variables statistically significantly predicted *Tabayyun* practice, $F(4,185) = 98.324, p < 0.005, R^2 = 0.68$. All four variables added statistically significantly to the prediction, $p < 0.05$. This finding shows that the responsibility, authority, self-awareness, and understanding factors are the main predictor that causes Generation Z to practice *Tabayyun* when they receive political information through social media. It is recommended that future studies can be conducted to identify other demographic factors that might influence *Tabayyun* practice.

Keywords: Tabayyun, Political Information, Social Media, Generation Z, Political News

Introduction

The development of communication technology allows people from every corner of the world to connect and share various information through virtual social networks known as social media. Social media became the most popular platform after Facebook was founded in February 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg, Eduardo Saverin, Dustin Moskovitz, and Chris Hughes, all of whom were students at Harvard University. It was followed by the emergence of many other social media platforms such as YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp and so on.

Internet usage among Malaysians has increased every year. As of January 2022, the Digital 2020 report revealed that there were 30.25 million social media users in Malaysia. The number of social media users in Malaysia at the start of 2022 was equivalent to 91.7 percent of the total population and increased by 2.3 million (8.0 percent) between 2021 and 2022.

The increase in social media users is due to the interactive features that allow users to share various types of information whether text, audio, video, photo, or animation. Various interesting features available on social media have attracted the interest of the younger generation to use it and convey information more effectively and quickly. This makes social media a very important tool for disseminating information. However, if the dissemination of information is not well controlled, then it will lead to negative and false information that will result in society feeling anxious, worried, dissatisfied, angry, and will eventually blame certain groups based on false assumptions.

More worrying is that people easily believe the news they get from social media without first verifying the truth of the source. The increase of Internet users every day, gives them space to express their opinions and views on social media. Whereas according to Islam, every individual needs to have an attitude of inquiry (Tabayyun) first when receiving and before disseminating information. This is because the spread of fake news is considered a very bad slander in Islam.

Islam prohibits its people from spreading unauthentic and false information. It is to prevent defamation that can bring down a person's image and dignity. Therefore, Islam has educated its people to check first when receiving any information based on reliable and trusted reference sources due to jealousy and hatred. Any news or information received should first be analysed and verified regarding the truthfulness and accuracy of the information.

Problem Statement

During the past decade, social media have become powerful political tools in campaigns and governing. The advent of the Internet has generated enormous interest in whether and how digital platforms, including social media, have any impact on the political sphere. Some people have misused social media by doing useless and unethical things by spreading the news about politics without verifying and validating them first.

According to a study done by Ayob (2018), a person needs to verify the news before disseminating it to the public. Among the factors that affect a person's level of thoroughness are educational background, level of thinking, communication experience, and ways of thinking.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many social media users spread false information. According to Fazlinda (2021), this happens due to several factors; fake internet traffic to gain income from advertising and personal factors such as threatening the reputation of certain individuals or businesses. To other people, they may propagate the material they get from social media to their social networks through deliberate sharing. The activity of 'liking', also triggers the algorithms of social media platforms to display it to other users.

Apart from that, the propaganda carried out by Cybertroopers in Malaysia is becoming more active from time to time, especially in the run-up to the election (Nuurrianti, 2019). Cybertrooper is an information technology group funded by a political party to discredit another political party to gain support and followers. The activities of those who actively spread sensitive issues and also those involving racism can cause misunderstandings and conflicts between races. Most of them are keyboard warriors hiding behind fake accounts.

Statistics in 2021 show that the number of cyber-crime complaints received by The Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) in 2020 increased by 99.5 percent to 20,805 complaints with the highest increase being the element of spreading fake news which is 117.6 percent (Ika & Hafiz, 2022). On the other hand, MCMC also received a total of 3,285 complaints about content considered to be fake news for the period 2020 to 31 May 2022 (Bernama, 2022). Based on the report, clearly shows the lack of awareness among users to check information even though the right channel has been provided by the government. In this regard, this article believe that we must instil the culture of *Tabayyun*, which is to check and verify news and information before accepting them as true. Therefore, this study will analyses the factors that influence *Tabayyun* practice among Generation Z when they receive political information and news on social media.

Literature Review

Spreading of Political Fake News

The massive use of social media has its impact that the spread of fake news within society, mostly so in the dissemination of borderless and unrestricted information. Today's society virtually interacts to obtain and disseminate information by way of countless platforms. The lack of time in searching, obtaining, and researching information affects wrong views and perceptions. As a result, they may make wrong decisions and understandings based on insufficient and inaccurate information and cause a negative impact on individuals and society. This is because news that is spread and is not clear can influence the attitude of a society (Chinnasamy, 2017).

Nowadays, disrepute in political participation such as provocation, organizing demonstrations, spreading petitions demanding government attention, the spread of false information, defamation, incitement, political parody videos, deep fakes against the politician and spreading superimposed images is an act of misconduct that leads to perpetrators of criminal behavior (Sufiean et al., 2020). Since the 10th general election in Malaysia, the use

of the internet among Gen Z is seen as the most numerous internet users compared to other groups. They can learn new techniques and applications in social media easily and fast. A study that is conducted among 126 respondents who were students of Public Institutions of Higher Learning (IPTA) aged between 18 to 23 years show that youths are active in using new media for the purpose of interacting with each other and also youths are active in online political involvement.

In Malaysia, internet usage increase every year and is largely dominated by the Gen Z. The youth group has easy access to the internet and this group is the group that uses new media most often. New media is also more independent, offering more extensive and open discussion when compared to traditional media. That is why, when implementing *tabayyun*, the information to be conveyed and disseminated needs to go through verification from its primary source or any other sources which are valid. *Tabayyun* itself is an attribute of a good Muslim who always strives to seek clarity or truth in the news or information by consulting experts or credible sources (Musfirah & Husna, 2022). This means not accepting information from a wicked person and unauthorized news sources.

Factors Influencing the Spreading of Fake News

Social media becomes the main source of retrieving health information during COVID-19 pandemic. According to research done by (Apuke & Omar, 2020; Thanh et al., 2021), they identify five factors that influence the spread of fake news about COVID 19 on social networks. There are altruism, entertainment, socialization, self-promotion, and instant news sharing. Other than that, Goyanes and Lavin (2018) found the predictor variables affecting sharing political fake news online such as demographics (age, gender, political orientation and income), and situational factors (perception of frequency of political fake news online, previous unconsciously fake news sharing and perception of responsibility [of different agents]).

A study by Bryanov and Vziatysheva (2021) identifies three broad groups of factors contributing to individuals' belief in fake news which is message characteristics, susceptibility to fake news (people's cognitive styles, predispositions, and differences in news, and information literacy) and accuracy-promoting interventions.

Practice of *Tabayyun*

The practice of *Tabayyun* is very crucial for a person in receiving and spreading information through social media. Not to mention, the youth are the largest group of social media users, so the awareness of *tabayyun* practice should be nurtured from the beginning (Izyandiyana et al., 2022). In addition to that, Futihatul and Apriyadi (2020) discuss the concept that can be applied in social media which is SMarT (Salam, Ma'ruf, Tabayyun), According to that concept, the Muslims should first spread peace among fellow social media users (*salam*), say kind words (*ma'ruf*), and always verifying incoming information (*tabayyun*).

Islam has also provided specific and accurate guidance to be applied in the lives of the universal people in receiving and disseminating information through social media. Among them is the first, to observe, which is to investigate the information beforehand without rushing to convey the news heard. Second, check the information, that is, by investigating the validity of the information received. Third, credible sources of information which is to

examine the difference between right and wrong information through trusted sources before disseminating it to others. Fourth, be responsible for what is conveyed, i.e. not arbitrarily issuing misleading statements and causing suspicion among others. Fifth, taking care of other people's shame by not easily accepting and spreading something that definitely gives a bad impression to other people when there is no legitimacy from any related parties. If these five things become the core of a Muslim's life practice, it is certain that there is no intention of spreading fake news and information.

Methodology

This study uses a quantitative approach with the distribution of a set of questionnaires. Questionnaires were distributed using Google Form among students aged 20 and above who met the criteria of generation z. The questionnaire used is adapted from an existing instrument that has gone through the process of validity and reliability. There are 17 items with 5-point Likert scale to analyze factors influencing tabayyun among Gen Z respondents when receiving political information through social media. Factor analysis has been conducted for these variables and produced four constructs namely responsibility, authority, self-awareness and understanding.

Bartlett's test of Sphericity showed significance for all variables. Variables are considered significant if the *sig. (p)* value shows less than 0.05 ($p < 0.05$). While KMO can measure items with a good value if it exceeds the value of 0.8. In this study, the result that has been obtained is 0.902. This shows that factor analysis can be carried out.

Table 1

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.902
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	2452.726
	Df	171
	Sig.	.000

Findings

Demographic Characteristics

This study involved a total of 66 male students and 124 female students who were 20 years old and above. Referring to Table 1, the majority of students are in the final semester which is semester 5 & 6 (57.8%) followed by semester 3 & 4 (25.7%), semester 7 & 8 (12.6%) and semester 1 & 2 (3.6%).

Table 2

Demographic Characteristics (N = 190)

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	66	34.7
Female	124	65.3
Age		
20 – 23	107	56.3
24 and above	83	43.7
Semester		

Sem 1&2	7	3.6
Sem 3&4	49	25.7
Sem 5&6	110	57.8
Sem 7&8	24	12.6
Total	190	100%

The next discussion is on the sources of political information that Gen Z receives or obtains. Television and social media became the main sources of political information (76.3%), followed by newspaper (61.1%), word of mouth (30.5%), poster (28.9%), pamphlet (21.1%), magazine (17.4%) and politician (1%).

Sources of Political Information

Table 3

Sources of Political Information

Source	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Television	145	76.3
Social Media	145	76.3
Newspaper	117	61.1
Word of mouth	58	30.5
Poster	55	28.9
Pamphlet	40	21.1
Magazine	33	17.4
Politician	2	1

Correlation between *Tabayyun* practices, understanding, authority, and responsibility.

A correlation test is done to identify the relationship between *Tabayyun* (IV) and (DV) namely understanding, authority, self-awareness and responsibility. As we can see in Table 3, it was found that there is a significant strong relationship between *Tabayyun* practices and understanding of *Tabayyun* ($r = 0.78, p < 0.05$), self-awareness ($r = 0.605, p < 0.05$) and responsibility ($r = 0.65, p < 0.05$). It was also found that there is a moderate relationship between *tabayyun* practices and authority $r = 0.581, p < 0.05$.

Understanding of *Tabayyun*

Table 3

Correlations between *Tabayyun*, understanding, self-awareness, authority and responsibility

		Understanding	Self awareness	Authority	Responsibility
Tabayyun	Pearson Correlation	.780**	.605**	.581**	.765**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	190			

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

Factors Influencing *Tabayyun* in Political Information among Gen Z

The following discussion is the analysis to determine the factors influencing *tabayyun* practice in political information among Gen Z. The four factors extracted from Factor Analysis are responsibility, understanding, self-awareness, and authority

Table 4

ANOVA test for Regression analysis

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	378.866	4	94.717	98.324	.000 ^b
	Residual	178.213	185	.963		
	Total	557.079	189			

a. Dependent Variable: *tabayyun*

b. Predictors: (Constant), Responsibility, Authority, Self_awareness, Understanding

Table 4.0 displays the results of the ANOVA test for Regression analysis showing a significant relationship between independent and dependent variables at a 0.05 significance level. The analysis shows that all factors namely Responsibility, Authority, Self-awareness and Understanding (Model 1) contribute to *Tabayyun* practice with a value of $F = 98.324$, $p < 0.05$.

The results of the regression (Table 5) indicated that the model explained 68.0% of the variance and that the model was a significant predictor of *tabayyun* practice, $F(4,185) = 98.32$, $p = .000$.

While Authority contributed significantly to the model ($B = 0.136$, $p < 0.05$), Understanding ($B = 0.223$, $p < 0.05$), Self-awareness ($B = 0.091$, $p < 0.05$) and Responsibility ($B = 0.160$, $p < 0.05$).

Table 5

Multiple Regression Analysis for dependent and independent variables

Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized		Standardized		Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	
1	(Constant)	.739	.643		1.150	.252
	Authority	.136	.048	.152	2.857	.005
	Understanding	.223	.051	.357	4.342	.000
	Self_awareness	.091	.041	.124	2.205	.029
	Responsibility	.160	.041	.312	3.934	.000
		R		R Square	Adjusted R Square	R
1			.825 ^a	.680	.673	

The final predictive model was

$$\text{Tabayyun Practice} = 0.739 + (.136 * \text{Authority}) + (.223 * \text{Understanding}) + (.091 * \text{Self-awareness}) + (.160 * \text{Responsibility})$$

Based on the above discussion, the results of this study can be concluded as shown in Figure 1.0

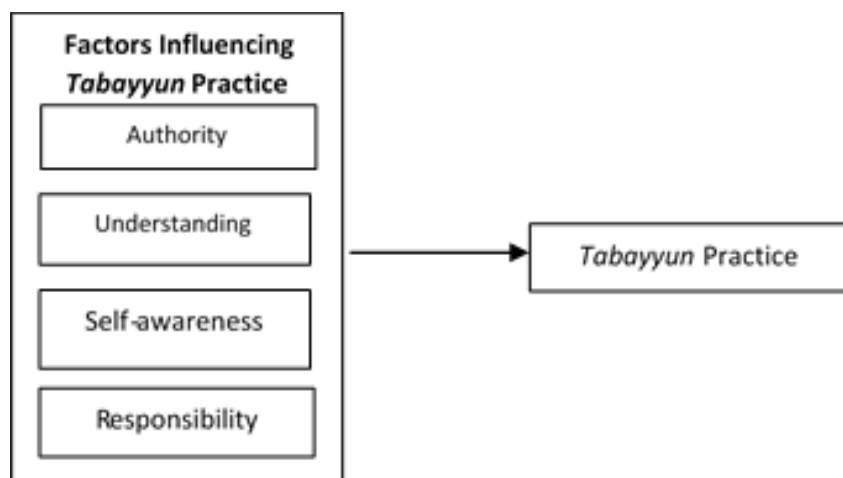


Figure 1: Factors Influencing Tabayyun Practice in Political Information among Gen Z

Conclusion

This study examines the factors that predict *Tabayyun* practice among Generation Z. This study found that responsibility, authority, self-awareness, and understanding factors are the main predictor that causes Generation Z to practice *Tabayyun* when they receive political information through social media. Those who have the responsibility will not spread unverified political news because it might bring negative impacts on society. They also seek news from credible and authorized sources if there is ambiguity in political information they get from social media (authority). They also (understand) that only news that has been verified can be disseminated and are aware that accurate information can make them a person who complies with the requirements of Shari'ah (self-awareness).

Islam emphasizes the practice of *tabayyun* in the process of accepting and delivering transparent information to society. We are all should aware that the importance of *tabayyun* cannot be taken lightly by all individuals. The government should also be more proactive to curb the viral culture of false information in society. They need to act faster so that the public can get accurate information whenever and wherever they need it.

Media literacy education programs should always be organized for the youth to give them an understanding of how to manage and analyze information received through social media. They also need to be aware of their limitations when interacting through social media so that they do not issue radical, racist views and so on that can destroy the harmony of the country and even damage their own future.

This study was conducted on respondents regardless of their academic background, family income, and other demographic backgrounds. Therefore, it is recommended that future studies can be conducted to identify other demographic factors that might influence *Tabayyun* practice. In addition, future research should also study the political literacy among Generation Z since there is a lack of articles that help to address political knowledge that will affect their participation in politics.

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