

The Mediating Effect of Interpersonal Influence between Mass Media Influence and University Student's Voting Intention

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Abstract

The role of media and the mediating influence of interpersonal communication has been a major concern in election studies; especially with regard to the voting intention of youth. The audience derives their knowledge of current news and information from the mass media, which could be the starting point for interpersonal discussion. If we divert to the use of media among university students, the objectives of this study would be to investigate the factors influencing voting intention among them. Adding on, we would pose the question whether university students are keen in election participation? The study would investigate the relationships between media use, attention, trust and the mediating effect of the interpersonal influence on the voting status and habit of the university students.

Data were collected from 9036 respondents from 20 IPTA and 8 IPTS; using questionnaire as the research instrument from March through May 2011. Data were analyzed using SPSS Win 16 for both descriptive and inferential statistics. The respondents were 61% female, 61% Malays, from all states. Only 51% were registered voters.

Keywords: Mass media influence, interpersonal influence, limited effects theory, university students, voting

INTRODUCTION

The limited effect theory (Lazarsfeld & Katz, 1954) of the mass media still holds true when comes to election; while the interpersonal influence relates to the persuasion, decision-making procession and voting behavior. The main role of the mass media is to create awareness of current news and information, the starting point for the interpersonal discussion. As such, the agenda setting of the media is normally followed by the discussion and in turn the interpersonal influence on the voting behavior.

The Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the paper are:

- (1) To find out the level of use, attention to, trust on, and influence of the mass media and the interpersonal sources by university students;
- (2) To determine the types of sources used of getting political information and current information;
- (3) To ascertain the voting status and habit of the university students;
- (4) To test the relationships between media use, attention, trust and influence with the party voting intention; and
- (5) To test the mediating effect of the interpersonal influence on the voting intention of the university students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

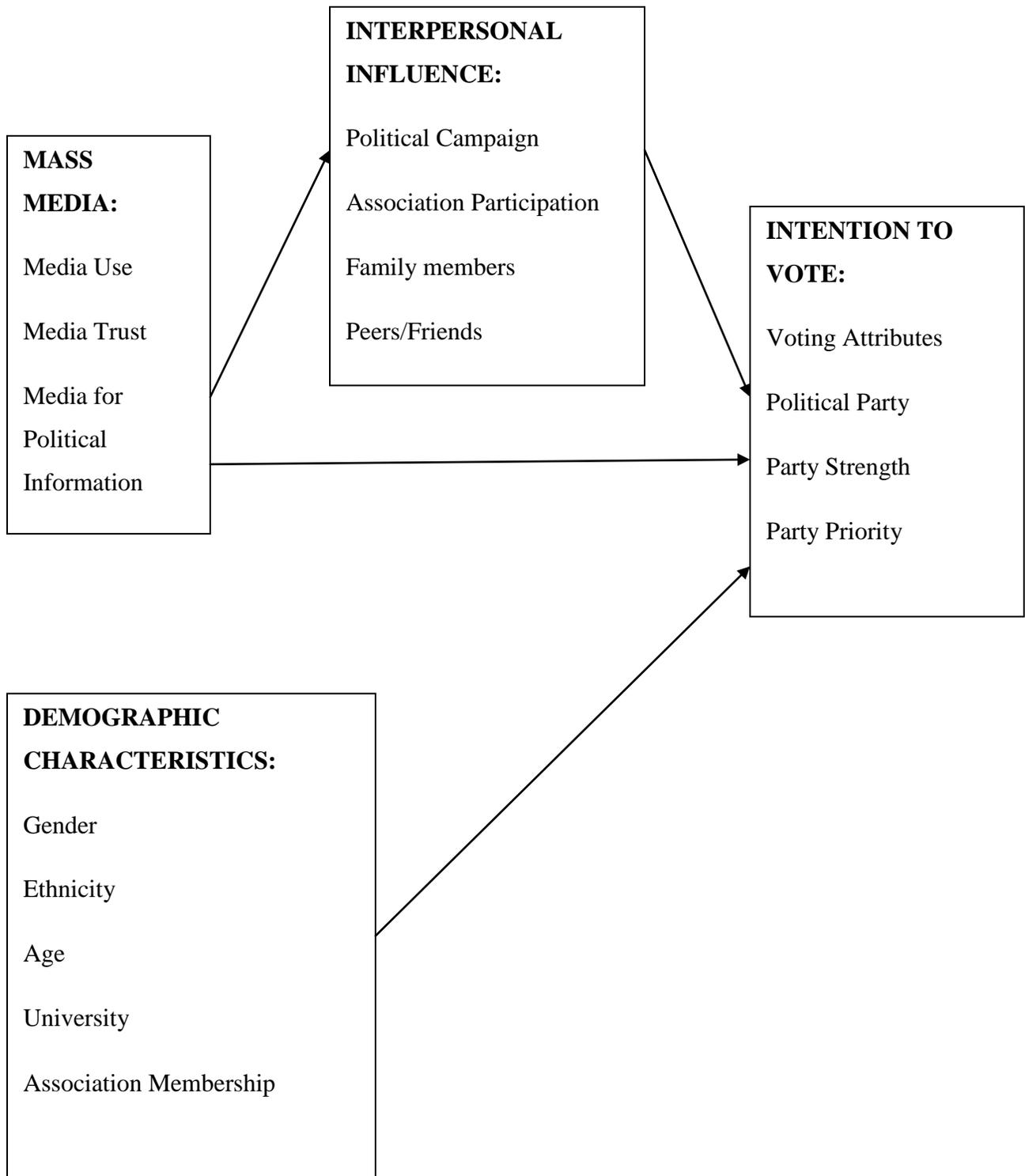


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study used quantitative research design. It specifically used the cross-sectional survey to tap

Sampling Procedure

Research Instrument

Measurement

Validity and Reliability

Pilot Study

Data Collection

Data were collected from 20 IPTA and 8 IPTS students, giving a total of 9036 respondents; using questionnaire as the research instrument in collecting data from March through May 2011. Data will be analyzed using SPSS Win 16 for both descriptive and inferential statistics. The

respondents of the students are 61.3% female, 60.9% Malays, from all states with more coming from Terengganu (18.1%) and Johor (13.0%), were involved in society, and only 50.9% were registered voters.

Data Analysis

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section first describes the characteristics of the respondents prior to answering the research objectives and testing the research hypotheses.

Respondents of the Study

The respondents of the study consist of 61.5% female students compared to 38.5% male (Table 1). This composition reflects the population of the higher institutions of the nation. Another interesting feature of the respondents is its representativeness according to the Malaysian population racial distribution, that is, 60.9% Malay, 27.8% Chinese and 6.0% Indian. Since the respondents are university students, the age group of 21-25 years old bracket (66.9%) represents them. A total of 70.9% of the sample is from IPTA while the rest are from the IPTS (31.3%). Many of the respondents (63.9%) claimed that they are not a member of any association. However, those who were members of the association belong to sports and games clubs, art and culture and/or youth association.

Mass Media Influence Attributes

Table 2 presents the mass media attributes according to TV, newspaper, radio and the Internet. Surprisingly, many university students neither watch TV (36.6%) nor listen to radio (32.2%). However, many do read newspaper, but not on a regular basis as many read it two-three days in a week (38.1%). About two-thirds of the students believe in TV (76.1%), newspaper (65.2%), radio (68.9%) and the Internet (61.6%). The students admitted that they moderate-much extent get political and Federal Government information from TV (68.3%) and newspaper (68.5%). On the other hand, the students tended to moderately (35.9%) get such information from the radio

and some of them (34.1%) get much the information from the Internet. When asked the extent of media influence on supporting political party, 32.2% of the students said that they were moderately influenced by TV, newspaper (32.3%) and the Internet (31.0%). Radio, on the other hand, is not medium for political party (32.3%) at all.

Table 1: Respondent's attributes

Respondent's Attributes	Frequency	Percentage
Gender:		
Male	3463	38.5
Female	5539	61.5
Total	9003	100.0
Ethnicity:		
Malay	5500	60.9
Chinese	2512	27.8
Indian	544	6.0
Others (specify:	480	5.3
Total	9036	100.0
Age (years old):		
20 and less	2812	31.3
21-25	6008	66.9
26 and above	161	1.8
Total	8981	100.0
University:		
IPTA	6408	70.9
IPTS	2628	29.1
Total	9036	100.0
Association Membership:		
Yes	3230	36.1
No	5725	63.9
Total	8955	100.0
Type of Association (N=3230)* :		
Political Affiliation	183	5.5
Sports and Games	943	28.3
Cadet and Uniform	663	19.9
Arts and Culture	841	25.2
Volunteerism	782	23.5
Youth Association	826	24.8
School Debating Association	136	4.1
Martial Arts	352	10.6
Other club/society/association	843	25.3
* Multiple responses	*	*

Table 2: Mass media influence attributes

Mass Media Attributes	Television (%)	Newspaper (%)	Radio (%)	Internet (%)
Media Use (Days):				
0	3180 (36.6)	1318 (15.1)	2798 (32.2)	74 (0.8)
1	1310 (15.1)	1192 (13.6)	992 (11.4)	106 (1.2)
2	1305 (15.0)	1631 (18.7)	1065 (12.3)	188 (2.1)
3	1064 (12.2)	1698 (19.4)	1093 (12.6)	472 (5.3)
4	520 (6.0)	1056 (12.1)	790 (9.1)	584 (6.5)
5	351 (4.0)	695 (8.0)	672 (7.7)	948 (10.6)
6	361 (4.2)	508 (5.8)	600 (6.9)	2812 (31.4)
7	597 (6.9)	636 (7.3)	670 (7.7)	3781 (42.2)
Total	8688 (100.0)	8734 (100.0)	8680 (100.0)	8965 (100.0)
Mean (SD)	1.99 (2.17)	2.83 (2.05)	2.44 (2.33)	5.84 (1.47)
Media Trust:				
1 (Do not believe at all)	523 (5.9)	376 (4.2)	365 (4.2)	313 (3.5)
2 (Do not believe)	1382 (15.6)	1346 (15.1)	1681 (19.1)	2060 (23.2)
3 (Believed)	5959 (67.1)	5799 (65.2)	6053 (68.9)	5471 (61.6)
4 (Believe very much)	1013 (11.4)	1368 (15.4)	690 (7.9)	1042 (11.7)
Total	8877 (100.0)	8889 (100.0)	8789 (100.0)	8886 (100.0)
Mean (SD)	2.84 (0.69)	2.92 (0.68)	2.80 (0.63)	2.81 (0.68)
Extent of Getting Political and Federal Government Information:				
1 (None)	422 (4.8)	420 (4.8)	1432 (16.5)	410 (4.7)
2 (A little)	1259 (14.3)	996 (11.3)	2300 (26.4)	873 (10.0)
3 (Moderate)	3059 (34.7)	277 (31.7)	2128 (35.9)	2151 (24.7)
4 (Much)	2957 (33.6)	3231 (36.8)	1472 (16.9)	2966 (34.1)
5 (Very much)	1115 (12.7)	1350 (15.4)	369 (4.2)	2303(26.5)
Total	8812 (100.0)	8776 (100.0)	8701 (100.0)	8703 (100.0)
Mean (SD)	3.35 (1.03)	3.47 (1.04)	2.66 (1.07)	3.68 (1.11)
Extent of Media Influence on Supporting Political Party:				
1 (No influence)	1984 (22.4)	1994 (22.6)	2835 (32.3)	1718 (19.7)
2 (A little influence)	2242 (25.3)	2178 (24.7)	2623 (29.9)	1802 (20.7)
3 (Moderate influence)	2851 (32.2)	2854 (32.3)	2508 (28.5)	2698 (31.0)
4 (Much influence)	1396 (15.8)	1385 (15.7)	699 (8.0)	1697 (19.5)
5 (Very much influence)	386 (4.4)	414 (4.7)	120 (1.4)	800 (9.2)
Total	8859 (100.0)	8825 (100.0)	8785 (100.0)	8715 (100.0)
Mean (SD)	2.53 (1.14)	2.54 (1.15)	2.15 (1.02)	2.76 (1.25)

Interpersonal Influence Attributes

The interpersonal influence was also asked in the study. The interpersonal influence was tapped from campaign, association, family, and friends. Table 3 presents the results revealing a parallel trend between extent of getting political and Federal Government information and the extent of interpersonal influence on supporting political party. It is found that campaign (28.3%) and association (33.4%) are not the students' source for getting political and Federal Government information. In addition, campaign (32.1%) and association (36.6%), too, are not influencing the students in supporting any political party at all. On the other hand, family (34.6%) and friends (35.3%) are sought moderately for getting political and Federal Government information. Family (29.1%) and friends (30.2%), too, are two major interpersonal influencing sources on supporting political party.

Table 3: Interpersonal influence attributes

Interpersonal Attributes	Campaign	Association	Family	Friends
Extent of Getting Political and Federal Government Information:				
1 (None)	2448 (28.3)	2888 (33.4)	1019 (11.7)	879 (10.0)
2 (A little)	1837 (21.2)	2088 (24.1)	1886 (21.6)	1930 (22.0)
3 (Moderate)	2313 (26.7)	2453 (28.4)	3022 (34.6)	3104 (35.3)
4 (Much)	1404(16.2)	952 (11.0)	1976 (22.6)	2124 (24.2)
5 (Very much)	652(7.5)	271 (3.1)	840 (9.6)	754 (8.6)
Total	8654 (100.0)	8652 (100.0)	8743 (100.0)	8791 (100.0)
Mean (SD)	2.31 (1.16)	2.15 (1.10)	2.84 (1.24)	2.59 (1.18)
Extent of Interpersonal Influence on Supporting Political Party:				
1 (No influence)	2802 (32.1)	3183 (36.6)	1617 (18.4)	2001 (22.8)
2 (A little influence)	2193 (25.1)	2267 (26.1)	1867 (21.2)	2115 (24.1)
3 (Moderate influence)	2300 (26.3)	2222 (25.5)	22564 (29.1)	2653 (30.2)
4 (Much influence)	1072 (12.3)	802 (9.2)	1854 (21.0)	1484 (16.9)
5 (Very much influence)	368 (4.2)	225 (2.6)	906 (10.3)	534 (6.1)
Total	8735 (100.0)	8699 (100.0)	8808 (100.0)	8787 (100.0)
Mean (SD)	2.53 (1.26)	2.26 (1.13)	2.97 (1.14)	2.99 (1.10)

The students were also asked the extent of new attention given to current news and political news (Table 4). The students claimed that they pay attention to current news more than to political news. Specifically, 42.5% of the students indicated that they pay much attention to current news while for political news; they only moderately (36.4%) pay attention to it.

Table 4: Extent of news attention

Extent of News Attention:	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	SD	%
Current news (N=8919)	196 (2.2)	384 (4.3)	2197 (24.6)	3790 (42.5)	2352 (26.4)	3.87	0.93	77.4
Political news (N=8894)	1330 (15.0)	2346 (26.4)	3240 (36.4)	1301 (14.6)	677 (7.6)	2.74	1.12	54.8

*1=none (1-20%), 2=a little (21-40%), 3=moderate (41-60%), 4=much (61-80%), 5=very much (81-100)

Students' Voting Status and Voting Habits

The study also explores the voting status of the students (Table 5). It is found that only half of the students (50.9%) had already registered to vote for the coming election while many still have not done so (49.1%); probably because they are not qualified (38.5%) yet due to age requirement of 21 years old. Meaning that, there are 10.6% students who are qualified but have not registered as voters yet. Their sources of influence as a voter are many, but mainly self-decision (73.7%), family influence (26.8%), and friends influence (11.3%). The sources of influence students' interest in politics are friends (49.9%), parents (48.3%) and/or other family members (44.9%). Others, politicians (28.0%) and teacher/lecturer (24.4%) are minimal.

Table 5: Voting status

Voting Attributes	Frequency	Percentage
Registered Voter:		
No	4392	49.1
Yes	4546	50.9
Total	8938	100.0
Sources Influencing as a Voter *(N=8938):		
Self decision	6589	73.7
Family influence	2398	26.8
Friend influence	1009	11.3
Political party influence	504	5.6
Association influence	194	2.2
Mass media influence	922	10.3
Total	*	*
Sources Influencing Interest in Politic* (N=4546):		
Parents	2197	48.3
Family	2041	44.9
Friend	2228	49.0
Teacher/Lecturer	1111	24.4
Politician	1275	28.0
Total	*	*

Voting Intention

In terms of voting intention, a few questions were asked (Table 6). They are the most important matter for voting, potential party to vote for, and party characteristics that is given priority in voting. It is found that issues raised (21.9%) and political ideology (21.7%), followed by the candidate (14.5%) play important role in decision whom to vote for. However, the students are still not sure of voting in coming election (53.3%). Nonetheless, some have already decision based on party, that is, *Barisan National* (BN) with 22.5% and *Party Alternatif* (PA) with slight more responses of 24.2%. The reasons for selecting certain are based on “To maintain Islam as Malaysian national religion” (42.2%), “To give priority to moral development” (37.6%), “To fight for all ethnicity rights” (36.9%), and “To uphold democratic way of life” (34.5”).

Table 6a: Voting intention

Most Important Matter for Voting:	Frequency	Percentage
Political party	793	9.5
Candidate	1220	14.5
Issues raised	1834	21.9
Political ideology	1819	21.7
Basic amenities	1101	13.1
Ethnicity	190	2.3
Personality	1057	12.6
Candidate wealth	74	0.9
Other (specify:)	302	3.6
Total	8390	100.0
Potential Party to Vote for:		
BN (UMNO, MCA, MIC, Gerakan, etc.)	1955	22.5
PA (PAS, DAP, PKR, etc.)	2102	24.2
Not sure yet	4630	53.3
Total	8687	100.0
Party Characteristics Given Priority (N=8687):		
To fight for own race/ethnicity	2314	26.6
To fight for all ethnicity rights	3208	36.9
To give priority national physical development	2420	27.9
To give priority to moral development	3263	37.6
To help strengthen national understanding	1734	20.0
To defend national security	2537	29.2
To maintain Islam as Malaysian national religion	3666	42.2
To fight for the women rights in the nation	1077	12.4
To encourage progressive community using science and modern technologies	2130	24.5
To uphold democratic way of life	2999	34.5
Total	*	*

Additional analysis was carried out to find the profile potential voters among students for the two parties, that is, BN and BA (Table 6b).

Table 6b: Voting Intention by Student Profile

IPT	Race	Gender	Voting Intention			Total	
			BN	BA	NS		
IPTA	Malay	Male	375 (22.6)	501 (31.7)	723 (45.7)	1581 (100.0)	
		Female	825 (27.5)	522 (17.4)	1654 (55.1)	3001 (100.0)	
		Total	1182 (25.8)	1023 (22.3)	2377 (51.9)	4582 (100.0)	
	Chinese	Male	64 (15.8)	110 (27.2)	231 (57.0)	405 (100.0)	
		Female	80 (13.9)	102 (17.7)	395 (68.5)	577 (100.0)	
		Total	144 (14.7)	212 (21.6)	626 (63.7)	982 (100.0)	
	Indian	Male	24 (27.3)	24 (27.3)	40 (45.5)	88 (100.0)	
		Female	35 (32.7)	19 (17.8)	53 (49.5)	107 (100.0)	
		Total	59 (30.3)	43 (22.1)	93 (47.7)	195 (100.0)	
	Others	Male	41 (31.1)	25 (18.9)	66 (50.0)	132 (100.0)	
		Female	89 (33.8)	22 (8.4)	152 (57.8)	263 (100.0)	
		Total	130 (32.9)	47 (11.9)	218 (55.2)	395 (100.0)	
	IPTS	Malay	Male	81 (26.6)	82 (26.9)	142 (46.6)	305 (100.0)
			Female	107 (26.6)	96 (23.8)	200 (49.6)	403 (100.0)
			Total	188 (26.6)	178 (25.1)	342 (48.3)	708 (100.0)
Chinese		Male	68 (10.7)	298 (46.9)	270 (42.5)	636 (100.0)	
		Female	86 (11.1)	201 (26.0)	485 (62.8)	772 (100.0)	
		Total	154 (10.9)	499 (35.4)	755 (53.6)	1408 (100.0)	
Indian		Male	27 (18.1)	47 (31.5)	75 (50.3)	149 (100.0)	
		Female	50 (28.7)	39 (22.4)	85 (48.9)	174 (100.0)	
		Total	77 (23.8)	86 (26.6)	160 (49.5)	323 (100.0)	
Others		Male	8 (22.2)	2 (5.6)	26 (72.2)	36 (100.0)	
		Female	6 (21.4)	3 (10.7)	19 (67.9)	28 (100.0)	
		Total	14 (21.9)	5 (7.8)	45 (70.3)	64 (100.0)	

Further question was asked to elucidate the perception of students pertaining to the acceptance of the political party, that is, BN (mean=3.11) and PA (mean=3.35). Results should that PA is perceived to be well received by its voters, despite the unveiling of the negative side of the party (Table 7).

Table 7: Perception on voters' acceptance of political party and voting intention

Perceived Acceptance towards Political Party:	BN	PR
Lost acceptance	940 (10.9)	465 (5.5)
Receiving less acceptance	1420 (16.4)	710 (8.3)
Not sure	2926 (33.9)	3879 (45.5)
Still receiving acceptance	2457 (28.4)	2307 (27.1)
Maintaining strong acceptance	899 (10.4)	1156 (13.6)
Total	8642 (100.0)	8517 (100.0)
Mean (SD)	3.11 (1.14)	3.35 (1.00)
Intention to Vote:		
Strongly disagree	71 (3.7)	78 (3.8)
Disagree	62 (3.3)	101 (4.9)
Not sure	693 (36.4)	579 (28.3)
Agree	698 (36.7)	597 (29.2)
Strongly agree	380 (20.0)	689 (33.7)
Total	1904 (100.0)	2044 (100.0)
Mean (SD)	3.66 (0.956)	3.84 (1.066)

Relationship between Voting Intention and Selected Media-Related Variables

Media-related variables that are tested for the voting intention among the youth are media use, media trust, media attention (current and political news), and media influence. Media considered for this study is TV, newspaper, radio, and the Internet. The variables were the average of the media. Table 8 presents the correlation values for voting intention and the media-related variables for both BN and BA. It is found that for BN potential youth voters there are positive relationships between their intention to vote for BN and the media use ($r=.114$, $p=.000$), media trust ($r=.103$, $p=.000$), media attention ($r=.326$, $p=.000$), media influence ($r=.263$, $p=.000$). All relationships are rather weak.

As for BA potential youth voters, it is found that media trust ($r=-.146$, $p=.000$) and media influence ($r=-.005$, $p=.421$) are negatively related to voting intention. Media trust is significantly but negatively related to voting intention; however, media influence is not significantly related to

voting intention at all. On the other hand, media use ($r=.055$, $p=.010$) and media attention ($r=.304$, $p=.000$) are positively related to voting intention. Therefore, media use and media attention are significantly related to voting intention.

Table 8: Relationships voting intention and selected media-related variables

Variables	Voting Intention					
	Barisan Nasional (BN)			Barisan Alternatif (BA)		
	N	r	p	N	r	p
Media use	1718	.114	.000	1822	.055	.010
Media trust	1718	.103	.000	1822	-.146	.000
Media attention	1718	.326	.000	1822	.304	.000
Media influence	1718	.263	.000	1822	-.005	.421

When regress to determine the predictors for the potential BN youth voters, it is found that media attention are media influence are able to predict for BN (Table 9). The best predictor for BA potential youth voters is media attention. Unfortunately, the potential BA youth voters do not trust the media. This is because only the mainstream newspapers were included in the calculation of the mean media-related variables. The party newspapers were excluded in the study, although asked in the questionnaire. This means that media attention is a predictor regardless of party-affiliation.

Table 9: Simple multiple regression for party voting intention with selected variables

Model	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized	t	p
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
BN					
Constant	1.895	.169		11.210	.000
Media use	0.008	.017	.011	0.479	.632
Media trust	0.103	.052	.046	1.994	.046
Media attention	0.300	.029	.259	10.226	.000
Media influence	0.147	.026	.142	5.599	.000
F=62.919; df=4,1713; Adj. R square=.126					
BA					
Constant	3.190	.164		19.500	.000
Media use	0.024	.019	.029	1.300	.194
Media trust	-0.210	.045	-.108	-4.650	.000
Media attention	0.364	.028	.301	13.006	.000
Media influence	-0.057	.028	-.048	-2.022	.043
F=55.569; df=4,1817; Adj. R square=.107					

Mediating Effect of Interpersonal Influence between Media Influence and Voting Intention

Further analysis was carried out to test whether interpersonal influence is able to mediate the relationship between media influence and the voting intention (Table 10). It is found that for BN the four steps requirements for performing mediating effect of interpersonal influence between media influence and voting intention are being satisfied. Results show that the Beta weight for media influence and voting intention has been reduced from Beta of .262 ($p=.000$) to .212 ($p=.000$). The amount is minimal and the relationship between media influence and voting intention has not been reduced totally. Therefore, the hypothesis is partially supported.

As for the BA, the first requirement is not fulfilled. Further analyses show that beta weight for between media influence and voting intention has been reduces from no relationship (Beta=.001) to negative relationship (Beta=-.140) which is significant ($p=.000$), in the opposite direction. In addition, Beta between impersonal influence and voting intention has been increase from Beta of .204 ($p=.000$) to .277 ($p=.000$). Therefore, the hypothesis is also partially supported.

Table 10: Beta weight for mediating effect of the interpersonal influence on voting intention

Variable	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
Predictor for BN	Voting Intention	Interpersonal Influence	Voting Intention	Voting Intention
Media influence	.262 (p=.000)	.683 (p=.000)		.212 (p=.000)
Mediator for BN				
Interpersonal influence			.212 (p=.000)	.074 (p=.018)
Predictor for BA				
Media influence	.001 (p=.992)	.519 (p=.000)		-.140 (p=.000)
Mediator for BA				
Interpersonal influence			.204 (p=.000)	.277 (p=.000)

CONCLUSIONS

REFERENCES