

# Bridging social media news use and democratic tendencies: the mediating role of fact-checking practices

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** The widespread penetration of social media has markedly shaped democratic tendencies. In particular, news consumption via Facebook and X, political discussion, and political efficacy influence democratic tendencies through fact-checking practices. This study examined the direct associations of these factors with fact-checking practices, as well as their indirect effects on democratic tendencies through the mediating role of fact-checking practices among the Malaysian population. **Methodology:** This quantitative study employed a respondent-driven sampling (RDS) strategy with chain referrals, through which 434 respondents were recruited from the Malaysian population. The questionnaire was validated, and partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was applied to examine the direct and indirect relationships among the study variables, ensuring reliability and compliance with ethical standards. **Results:** Fact-checking practices exerted the strongest influence on democratic tendencies, while political discussion emerged as the most significant predictor of fact-checking practices. Moreover, fact-checking practices served as the most

robust mediator in the relationship between political discussion and democratic tendencies. **Discussion:** The study confirms most of the hypothesized relationships and highlights the importance of expanding the reach of fact-checking platforms to ensure their widespread adoption among the public. It further underscores the need to test this model in other democratic contexts to enhance its generalizability. **Conclusions:** These findings underscore the relevance of strengthening fact-checking practices, potentially through the wider availability and integration of fact-checking mechanisms on social media platforms, which may, in turn, contribute to enhancing democratic tendencies among citizens.

**Keywords:** Democratic tendencies; fact-checking practices; social media platforms; online users; Malaysia.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The advancement of digital technologies plays a central role in accelerating new digital trends amid the continuous rise of global Internet usage. As of July 2025, the worldwide population is 8.23 billion, and approximately 5.65 billion individuals are Internet users, while social media users consist of 5.41 billion (DataReportal, 2025). This evolution is also reflected in Malaysia with the high level of Internet adoption. In Malaysia, the online penetration reached 97.7 per cent, corresponding to nearly 34.9 million Internet users. Of these, 25.1 million are active social media users, underscoring the central role of social networking platforms in Malaysia's digital ecosystem (Kemp, 2025). Other than accessing social media platforms, online users also engage themselves through various forms of activities such as gaming, downloading films and music (Govindan & Hussin, 2024); online shopping (Wang et al., 2024); online learning (Muniisvaran et al., 2025); and consuming online news, indicating that digital participation is mounting among online users.

The widespread digital participation has also altered the ways in which online users consume information via social media platforms, such as Facebook and X (formerly known as Twitter). Online platforms, including social media platforms, are among the primary sources of news, surpassing newspapers, television, and radio in Malaysia. According to the Digital News Report 2025 by Reuters Institute, online users now prefer to access news via online platforms. Across all the online platforms, Malaysiakini ranked as the highest usage platform, followed by Astro Awani online, Berita Harian online, Harian Metro online, and Siakap Keli (Nain, 2025). Moreover, these platforms facilitate user participation, as online audiences are no longer passive recipients of information but engage with news through commenting, sharing, and discussion. When these users engage with information using the built-in algorithmic recommendation systems on the news content (Khambatta et al., 2023), they tend to participate actively, allowing them to shift and consume news more effectively (Omar et al., 2023) via online platforms.

The aforementioned shifted access to diverse news is essential for strengthening democratic citizenship. Exposure to a variety of viewpoints through online platforms encourages users to become more informed about opposing perspectives, fostering greater tolerance towards them (Heitz et al., 2022). Besides, the introduction of news recommendation systems allows online users to be more exposed to information related to their search terms (Meng et al., 2023), thus identifying how far they are interested and engage with the news. However, it is crucial to note that whether digital technologies have narrowed or widened news consumption, they foster debates that digital news sources might be leading to more fragmented online users and echo chambers.

The expression of democratic tendencies in Malaysia appears to be relatively limited, suggesting challenges in translating democratic principles into participatory practice. This limitation is further reflected by the fact that the voting turnout in the by-elections of the 15th General Election (GE-15) across Johor, Malacca, and Sarawak was comparatively low (Md Khalid et al., 2023). In addition, Saidin and Azrun (2025) raised their concern about the barriers to political participation among youth. Both scholars also concluded that the young voters had

limited access to credible information and inadequate political education, thus leading to gaps in democratic citizenship skills. As a result, young voters may feel disconnected and thereby reduce their engagement and participation in the democratic principles in practice.

Other than that, fact-checking practices are weak among online users, indicating that news literacy is rather low in Malaysia. Fact-checking practices are essentially crucial to be practiced among online users, regardless of health or politically related information. This is especially evident when fake news spreads on social media platforms like WhatsApp, X, or Telegram (Kamarulbaid et al., 2022), and yet online users continue to forward it to their friends without validating the information. The practice of fact-checking becomes especially valuable when online users apply fact-checking tools integrated with artificial intelligence platforms (Goyanes et al., 2025). These innovative tools enhance the accuracy of information and provide lightning-fast verification, enabling users to effortlessly discern credible sources from misinformation and disinformation (Hopp, 2024). This scenario is where news literacy plays its significant role to ensure that online users are engaging with online information, identify misinformation, critically assess information sources, and meaningfully participate in public discourse effectively (Vraga & Tully, 2021).

In addition, this study also offers practical significance to society, both at the macro (institutional) and micro (individual) levels of impact. For macro-level impacts, this study provides valuable insights to the media organizations and policymakers on the importance of strengthening democratic practices in Malaysia, while micro-level impacts emphasize the need to encourage online users to adopt fact-checking behaviors. With the continuous practice of fact-checking, it strengthens critical evaluation skills but also serves as a safeguard against the spread of misinformation (Musi et al., 2022), which can undermine informed decision-making in a country with a democratic setting. When online users are more skilled at differentiating and verifying actual and fake news, for instance, health-related information, it signifies that they are becoming news-literate by applying fact-checking behaviors (Kožuh & Čakš, 2023). By encouraging the online users to perform fact-checking practices, it thus reinforces a sense of political accountability and fosters democratic tendencies in our country.

## **2. OBJECTIVES**

To address the aforementioned existing research gaps in literature, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on social media news consumption, fact-checking, and the practice of democratic tendencies in the digital era. This research study aims:

- a. To examine the influencing factors (Facebook and X news use, political efficacy, and political discussion) leading to the practice of fact-checking and the democratic tendencies in Malaysia.
- b. To test the mediating effect of fact-checking practices on the relationship between social media (Facebook and X) news use, political efficacy, and political discussion towards the democratic tendencies in Malaysia.

By examining the factors such as Facebook news use (Kluknavská et al., 2025; Sundar et al., 2025), X news use (Sharifpoor et al., 2025), political efficacy (York et al., 2020), and political discussion (Kyriakidou et al., 2023), it enables us to scholarly understand how social media and the political communication efforts intersect to gain fact-checking practices. In particular, fact-checking practices boost online users to evaluate and verify the news information that they encounter, which transforms them into a more informed, responsible, and active democratic engagement. Unlike past studies (Morosoli et al., 2025; Ozcelik et al., 2025) that focus on misinformation via social media, this research can be perceived as a proactive approach by undertaking actions and practices to boost democratic tendencies.

### **3. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT**

#### **3.1. The evolution of the media landscape in Malaysia**

The media industry in Malaysia has undergone a significant transformation over the years, particularly in mass media. The print newspapers were brought in by the Westerners, and yet the accessibility to newspapers was rather low. Next, the radio broadcast was first initiated by RTM (Radio Televisyen Malaysia) as the primary source of information back in 1946. It was then followed by the introduction of television broadcasts that offer both audio and visual forms of information (Rosmani et al., 2020). It begins by offering a broad overview of information at the macro level before narrowing down to more specific details at the micro level. In other words, news audiences have transformed their traditional passive roles into more active participants in seeking out news information (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2017). Online users today are actively seeking out and engaging with a variety of sources through social media platforms, rather than just consuming information as traditional media platforms typically offer. This shift reflects a strong desire for a more personalized and comprehensive understanding of current issues.

The shift from traditional forms of media, including newspapers, radio, and television, to contemporary digital platforms such as social media, online news outlets, and mobile applications has no doubt brought numerous changes to the contemporary news industry. However, the increasing use of online news has led to controversial debates among media practitioners. There are two opposing views that question whether online news media are working to “supplement” (Zhang & Li, 2020) or “supplant” (Gaskins & Jerit, 2012) the existing forms of traditional media. In accordance with the latter viewpoint, online media is being regarded as a threat to traditional media, causing print media to be the source referred to by the fewest number of newsreaders. As a result, the media landscape in Malaysia is now led by digital media, where social media remains the most important source of news providers; thus, it follows the broader global trends in news media consumption (Nain, 2025). For instance, Facebook is ranked as the most widely used social media platform, comprising approximately 83.56% of users, followed by X, Instagram, Pinterest, YouTube, LinkedIn, and others. (Statcounter GlobalStats, 2025). Among these, Facebook performs as the main gateway for information sharing and discussion, while X provides real-time, immediate news updates to online users.

#### **3.2. The democratic practices and tendencies in Malaysia**

Ideally, a democratic country should encourage dynamic participation among citizens and engage the public in decision-making practices (Anuar, 2013). The term “democracy” can be conceptualized as “the freedom of citizens to articulate their views in the public domain” (Anuar, 2000, p. 183). Although Malaysia is declared to be a country that rules in a semi-democracy setting (Case, 1993), where it combines both democratic and autocratic practices (Mohd Hed, 2025). As traditional media are more restricted by such strict media control through censorship and legal constraints (Abbott & Givens, 2015), online news platforms were perceived as providing less stringent control than traditional media platforms. The overwhelming discussions, particularly during the elections in 2008 (Alivi et al., 2018; Subramaniam, 2012), 2013 (Gomez & Chang, 2014), 2018 (Salman et al., 2018), and 2022 (Kasmani, 2024), make it clear that the effects of such freedom are evident.

Democracy tendencies can be described as “the possession of attitudes and beliefs that motivate individuals to think and behave accordant with democratic values and principles” (Zencirci, 2003). The impact of social media platforms on shaping public opinion is substantial, especially during the GE 15 in Malaysia (Tapsell, 2023). These platforms serve as effective tools for dominating the political messages spread across the Internet. With the utilization of social media platforms such as Facebook, X, and TikTok, it allows online users to be exposed to news freely and engage themselves in political discussions or dialogues, and soon they gain tendencies to follow the principles of democracy (Tugtekin & Koc, 2020).

### **3.3. Fact-checking practices**

Earlier studies perceived fact-checking practices as “an attempt to check statements that are not facts and cannot be verified as true or false” (Uscinski & Butler, 2013, p. 163), or it can be treated as a method used to compare and uncover inaccurate and false information (Vizoso & Vázquez-Herrero, 2019). It was first usually assigned to fact-checkers by professional journalists (Mena, 2019) or fact-checking organizations (Vizoso & Vázquez-Herrero, 2019) to handle fact-checking tasks. Due to the emergence of online platforms, including social media platforms that offer plenty of opportunities to spread information among online users, it has led to the spread of fake news, causing the need to debunk and combat the massive spread of disinformation (Humprecht, 2020).

The practices of fact-checkers are widely acknowledged and practised across various fields and countries. The government-backed fact-checker, *sebenarnya.my*, was first launched in Malaysia back in 2017 and operated by the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC). It serves as an initiative, a so-called one-stop platform to verify the authenticity of the news, allowing the public to report any fake news encountered or circulated via online platforms (Ahmad Apandi et al., 2021), including social media, instant messaging applications, blogs or any other online platforms. It empowers online users to engage with the news from diverse perspectives and become an informed society. It is important to note that different countries use various fact-checking services to combat misinformation and disinformation in the news. For example, Politifact and Snopes are widely utilized fact-checkers in the United States (Micallef et al., 2022), while Full Fact serves a similar purpose as a fact-checker in the United Kingdom (Westlund et al., 2022).

### **3.4. Affordance theory**

Affordance Theory was originally coined by James J. Gibson (1977), an American psychologist, to explain the relationship between organisms and their environments. Later, it was further expanded by Donald Norman, Mike Tucker and Rob Ellis, as well as Daniel Bub and Michael Masson. The notion of “affordance” is also applicable in other specializations, such as architectural design, social interactions, and, more recently, to artificial intelligence.

Affordances refer to the properties of an object that indicate the potential actions users can take (Chong & Proctor, 2020). Therefore, affordances emerge especially when active individuals interact with the environment, and they can be shifted when individuals change the activities that they are involved in (Blin, 2016), for instance, the political participation and engagement in social media platforms (Neubaum & Weeks, 2023).

With the advent of technology and later the emergence of social media platforms, the notion of “affordance” is now applicable to social media research and identifying how new media affects contemporary society. Out of the 357 articles as analyzed by Ronzhyn et al. (2023), they identified that political participation is one of the predominant thematic areas in associated with the theory of affordance. The application of the affordance theory, particularly in political participation suggests the interplay between cognitive and social cues in shaping democratic tendencies. Hence, this research study is grounded in the Affordance Theory and applies both cognitive (usage of news on Facebook and X) and social affordances (political efficacy and political discussions) of online users, thus enhancing fact-checking practices and promoting democratic tendencies.

### **3.5. Hypotheses development**

Social media platforms have become major sources of online news consumption. In particular, Facebook (Kluknavská et al., 2025; Sundar et al., 2025) and X (Shearer et al., 2024) play their central role to allow online users to create and share news content, known as user-generated content. Unlike user-generated content, the

mainstream media platforms have established online channels to share their news simultaneously on both traditional and digital media (Baharin et al., 2017). Past studies (DeVerna et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2020) also indicate that Facebook and X provide users not only professional news but also expose them to misinformation and disinformation. It signifies that the coexistence of professional journalism with misleading content creates a crucial need for online users to verify what they read. Thus, the exposure to news on social media can therefore stimulate fact-checking behaviors (Zhou et al., 2025), such as cross-referencing with other news outlets, or using third-party fact-checking sites (Cucinelli & Farhan, 2022).

Hence, the following hypotheses are proposed in this study:

- H1: Facebook news use positively influences the fact-checking practices.
- H2: X news use positively influences the fact-checking practices.

Political efficacy refers to the belief that an individual's own political actions exert on the political process (Craig & Maggionto, 1982). In other words, it indicates an individual's internal beliefs about possessing the abilities and knowledge related to political issues (Robertson et al., 2020). High political efficacy significantly influences voting behavior (Bernardi et al., 2023), thus exercising their right to vote. This heightened sense of political efficacy also encourages the chances to practice fact-checking behavior. Online platforms, including social media, provide a variety of content, but they often blend accurate and inaccurate information. Online users tend to find the significance of practicing fact-checking to determine the credibility of news (Liu et al., 2025).

Hence, the following hypotheses are proposed in this study:

- H3: Political efficacy positively influences fact-checking practices.

Political discussion involves communication between two or more parties about political issues. It permits users to acquire political knowledge while interacting with others via interpersonal communication (Larrosa-Fuentes, 2020). Through the political discussion, online users can explore different viewpoints, share experiences, and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of political dynamics through dialogue and conversation. As the public sphere is an important indicator of a democratic setting, every individual in Malaysia is allowed to express different opinions (Pooi Yin Leong, 2019). This diversity of perspectives ultimately helps to strengthen the democratic system in the country. Previous studies (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2025; Robertson et al., 2020) demonstrated that political discussion fosters the creation of positive attitudes, particularly regarding fact-checking practices among online users.

Hence, the following hypotheses are proposed in this study:

- H4: Political discussion positively influences fact-checking practices.

Fact-checking practices play a crucial role not only for professional journalists but also among online users. It is essential to acknowledge that the practice of fact-checking can be implemented by checking the source of the information (Himma-Kadakas & Ojamets, 2022) and the reputation of the source provider (Liu et al., 2025) to ensure that the news information is accurate and factual. The lack of effective fact-checking results in online users encountering misinformation and disinformation, which can have lasting impacts on society (Liu et al., 2025) and further undermines the principles of democratic tendencies (Wang et al., 2025). In other words, the fact-checking practices encourage democratic tendencies among online users. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed in this study:

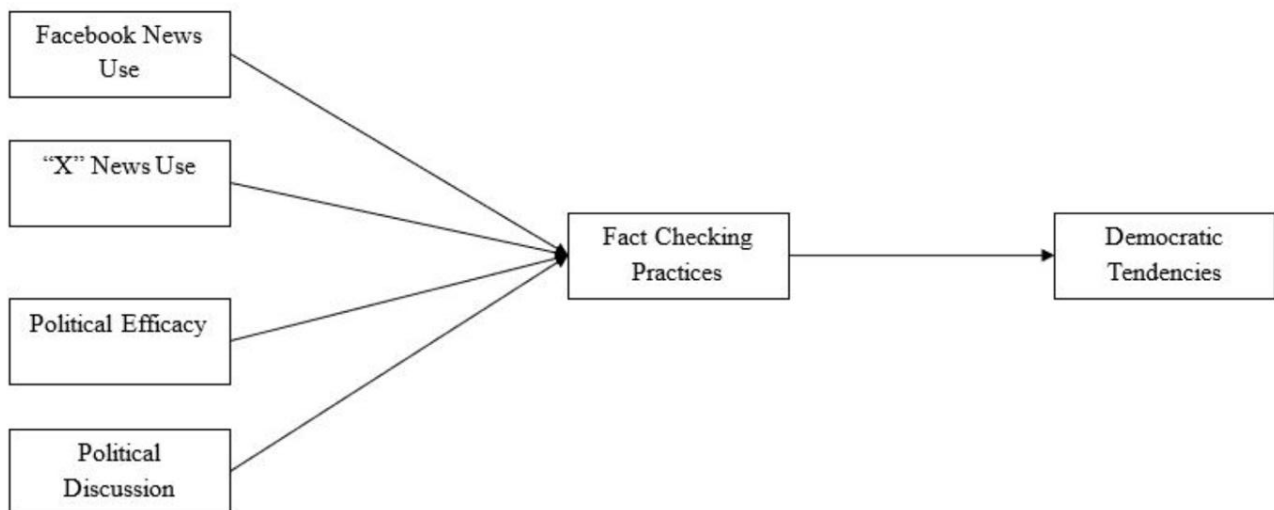
- H5: Fact-checking practices positively influence democratic tendencies.

Other than that, this research study also takes into consideration the mediation role of fact-checking practices. Fact-checking practices are crucial to being perceived as an effective tool to combat misinformation and disinformation in news, especially on social media platforms. Recent studies suggest that social media usage (Goyanes et al., 2025), political efficacy, and political discussion (Robertson et al., 2020) boost fact-checking practices, as online users often rely on the cross-reference method to verify the news accuracy. In turn, fact-checking practices have been shown to be an effective method to strengthen democratic tendencies (Rodríguez-Pérez et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2025), thus laying a solid foundation for a vibrant democracy.

- H6: Fact-checking practices mediate the relationship between Facebook news use and democratic tendencies.
- H7: Fact-checking practices mediate the relationship between X news use and democratic tendencies.
- H8: Fact-checking practices mediate the relationship between political efficacy and democratic tendencies.
- H9: Fact-checking practices mediate the relationship between political discussion and democratic tendencies.

All in all, this research study establishes a conceptual framework (see Figure 1) that aims to examine the factors that contribute to fact-check practices and democratic tendencies among online users in the context of Malaysia. It incorporates Facebook news use, X news use, political efficacy, and political discussion as the contributing factors.

**Figure 1.** *Conceptual framework*



**Source:** Own elaboration.

#### **4. METHODOLOGY**

The data for the present study were collected through an online survey administered via Google Forms. A total of 434 valid responses were collected from across Malaysia with proportional presentation ensured by drawing an equal number of participants from each state. This approach enhanced the geographical balance of the sample. The recruitment of respondents followed a respondent-driven sampling (RDS) strategy using chain referrals. To ensure relevance a screening filter was applied such that only respondents who actively used Facebook and “X” and aged 18 and above were eligible to participate in the study. Additionally, to ensure the

adequacy of the sample size, a power analysis was conducted using G\*power software. With five predictor variables assuming a medium effect size ( $f^2 = 0.15$ ), a significance level of 0.05, and a statistical power of 0.80, the minimum required sample size was calculated to be 92 respondents. The obtained sample of 434 respondents, producing power above 0.90, confirmed the robustness of the data set for hypotheses testing. This research strictly adhered to ethical research standards. All participants were presented with an informed consent statement, outlining the objectives of the research, the voluntary nature of participation, and assurance of confidentiality and anonymity. Data was collected over a three-month period from May 2, 2025, to July 31, 2025.

#### **4.1. Measurement**

The measurement items for the study variables were adapted from the previous studies (See Appendix 1).

Facebook news use was assessed using five items adapted from Kim (2018). The construct reflects different ways of engagement with news content on Facebook. These ways include getting news, receiving news links from mainstream media, receiving news links from other individuals, posting news, and sharing news links with online friends. All items were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Never to 5 = Very Often, where a higher score reflects a greater frequency of Facebook news use.

Given the increasing role of X (former Twitter) as a news source (Park et al., 2024), we examined how individuals utilize "X" to access and share news. Items adapted from Kim (2018) were employed to capture different forms of engagement. Respondents reported how often they use X to access news, receive links from mainstream media and other users, post news content and share news links. All responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Never to 5 = Very Often.

In line with Robertson et al. (2020), political efficacy was assessed by asking respondents to indicate their level of agreement with five items. Specifically, respondents were presented with statements including "I have a good understanding of the important political issues facing our country" and "People like me have a say in what the government does". Items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree.

Political discussion was measured using items adapted from Wang et al. (2025). The scale captured the extent to which respondents engage in political conversation with people holding both similar and divergent views. Respondents rated their response on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "1 = Never" to "5 = Very Often".

To capture how respondents critically engage with the information online, fact-checking practices were measured using items adapted from Goyanes et al. (2025). Respondents were asked to report the extent to which they engage in practices such as consulting fact-checking websites when uncertain, tracing the original source of information, and cross-verifying content etc. Responses were captured on a five-point Likert scale "1 = Strongly Disagree" to "5 = Strongly Agree".

Democratic tendencies were measured using items adapted from Tugtekin and Koc (2020). The scale reflected a broad spectrum of behavior, attitudes, and values that characterize democratic individuals. It assessed active involvement of respondents in civic and political activities, awareness of fundamental rights, support for freedom of expression and tolerance towards different perspectives. All items were assessed on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "1 = Strongly Disagree" to "5 = Strongly Agree".

## 5. RESULTS

We obtained data from a single source, therefore, to address potential common method bias (CMB), both Harman's single factor test and full collinearity assessment through variance inflation factor (VIF) were performed. Results of Harman's single factor test revealed that the first factor accounted for 30.10% which is well below the 50% threshold. Hence, the results indicate that our data did not encounter CMB. The VIF values in our study ranged from 1.313 to 1.949, which is below the conservative threshold of 3.3 (Hair et al., 2024). Our findings indicate that CMB does not pose a threat to the validity of the study. After the CMB assessment, we proceed with the analysis of respondents' demographic characteristics. The demographic profiles of the respondents is presented in Table 1. Out of 434 participants 235 (54.15%) were male and 199 (45.85%) were female indicating a nearly balanced gender distribution that is nearly consistent with Malaysian population's male female ratio (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2025). In the terms of age, respondents were distributed across five categories. The largest group was in the 18-28 category (27.65%), reflecting Malaysia's youthful population and the increasing importance of young voters following the Undi18 constitutional amendment (Tirtayana, 2021). With respect to marital status the majority of respondents were married (50%), followed by single individuals (41.24%), while smaller proportion were divorced (5.30%) or widowed (3.46%). Ethnically, the sample reflects Malaysia's multicultural society, with Malays as majority (47.24%), followed by Chinese (27.65%), Indians (21.66%), and other groups (3.45%), aligning with Malaysia's plural social fabric. Incomes were distributed according to Malaysia's official income classifications, namely Below 40% (B40) (13.60%), Middle 40% income (M40) (67.74%) and Top 20% (T20) (18.66%) households. Participants were drawn from multiple states, with an almost equal number from each state, thereby enhancing the geographical balance of the sample.

**Table 1.** *Demographic profiles of the respondents*

Variables	Description	Frequency	Percentage
Age	18-28	120	27.65
	29-38	89	20.51
	39-48	99	22.81
	49-59	67	15.44
	60 and above	59	13.59
Gender	Male	235	54.15
	Female	199	45.85
Marital status	Single	179	41.24
	Married	217	50
	Widowed	15	3.46
	Divorced	23	5.30
Ethnicity	Malay	205	47.24
	Chinese	120	27.65
	Indian	94	21.66
	Others	15	3.45
Education	Primary	41	9.45
	Secondary	79	18.20
	Diploma or equivalent	65	14.98
	Bachelor's	109	25.11
	Master's	112	25.81
	PhD	28	6.45
Employment status	Employed	173	39.86
	Unemployed	25	5.76
	Self-employed	87	20.05
	Student	90	20.74
	Retired	59	13.59

Monthly Income	Household	Bottom 40 % (B 40)	Up to RM 5249	59	13.60
		Middle 40 % (M40)	RM 5250 – 11819	294	67.74
		Top 20% (T20)	RM11820 and above	81	18.66

(N= 434)

Source: Own elaboration.

### 5.1. Measurement Model Assessment

Before proceeding to the structural model, the reliability and validity of the constructs were evaluated (see Table 2). Indicator reliability was assessed through the item loadings, with most indicators exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2024). A few items loaded slightly below were retained as the constructs still achieved AVE values above 0.50, meeting the required criterion for convergent validity (Cheung et al., 2024). Internal consistency was confirmed using Cronbach’s alpha, rho\_A, and composite reliability. All constructs exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2024). Convergent validity was further confirmed as all average variance extracted (AVE) values exceeded 0.50, indicating that the construct explained more than half of the variance in the indicators. Discriminant validity was also established through the Fornell-Larcker criterion (see Table 4) and HTMT ratios, with all HTMT values (see Table 3) falling below the conservative threshold of 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2015). The aforementioned results confirmed that the measurement model demonstrated satisfactory reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity, ensuring its suitability for further structural model evaluation.

Table 2. Measurement model assessment

Variables	Items	Loadings	CA	Rho_A	CR	AVE
Facebook News Use	FNU1	0.710	0.768	0.770	0.843	0.519
	FNU2	0.740				
	FNU3	0.755				
	FNU4	0.664				
	FNU5	0.729				
X News Use	XNU1	0.841	0.851	0.852	0.894	0.628
	XNU2	0.787				
	XNU3	0.829				
	XNU4	0.715				
	XNU5	0.785				
Political Efficacy	PEF1	0.737	0.842	0.843	0.888	0.614
	PEF2	0.811				
	PEF3	0.786				
	PEF4	0.777				
	PEF5	0.804				
Political Discussion	POD1	0.823	0.791	0.813	0.863	0.612
	POD2	0.806				
	POD3	0.748				
	POD4	0.749				
Fact Checking Practices	FCP1	0.768	0.864	0.865	0.895	0.551
	FCP2	0.788				
	FCP3	0.713				
	FCP4	0.710				
	FCP5	0.788				
	FCP6	0.759				
	FCP7	0.662				
Democratic Tendencies	DT1	0.561	0.891	0.893	0.911	0.509
	DT2	0.684				

DT3	0.767
DT4	0.750
DT5	0.784
DT6	0.719
DT7	0.695
DT8	0.675
DT9	0.664
DT10	0.802

Source: Own elaboration.

**Table 3.** Discriminant validity assessment- Heterotrait Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio

	DTS	FCP	FNU	PEF	POD	XNU
DTS						
FCP	0.621					
FNU	0.474	0.429				
PEF	0.586	0.478	0.507			
POD	0.822	0.583	0.398	0.543		
XNU	0.498	0.459	0.726	0.68	0.484	

Notes: DT = Democratic Tendencies; FCP = Fact-checking Practices; FNU = Facebook News Use; PEF = Political Efficacy; POD = Political Discussion; XNU = X News Use

Source: Own elaboration.

**Table 4.** Fornell-Larcker criterion

	DTS	FCP	FNU	PEF	POD	XNU
DTS	0.713					
FCP	0.558	0.742				
FNU	0.396	0.352	0.720			
PEF	0.510	0.411	0.412	0.783		
POD	0.699	0.503	0.324	0.445	0.782	
XNU	0.434	0.399	0.586	0.573	0.407	0.793

Notes: DT = Democratic Tendencies; FCP = Fact-checking Practices; FNU = Facebook News Use; PEF = Political Efficacy; POD = Political Discussion; XNU = X News Use

Source: Own elaboration

## 5.2. Structural Model Assessment

The structural model was assessed to examine the hypothesized relationships among the constructs (see Table 5). For this purpose, the model was run using SmartPLS with 5000 bootstrap resamples. The results revealed that Facebook news use had a positive and significant influence on fact-checking practices ( $\beta = 0.116$ ;  $p = 0.026$ ), supporting its hypothesized relationship. In contrast the effect of X news use on fact checking practices was positive but statistically insignificant ( $\beta = 0.102$ ;  $p = 0.062$ ), and therefore the hypothesis was rejected. Political efficacy showed a significant positive effect on fact checking practices ( $\beta = 0.144$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ) confirming its role in encouraging verification behaviors. Among the antecedent's political discussion exerted the strongest effect on fact checking practices ( $\beta = 0.360$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ), highlighting the key role of interpersonal engagement in promoting fact checking behavior. Furthermore, fact checking practices significantly influenced democratic tendencies ( $\beta = 0.558$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ), underscoring its importance in shaping democratic orientation.

**Table 5. Structural model assessment (Direct effects)**

Relationship	β - Value	SD	T-Statistics	Confidence Interval		Effect Size (f <sup>2</sup> )	Result
				2.5%	97.5%		
FNU -> FCP	0.116	0.052	2.227	0.015	0.222	0.013	Accepted
XNU -> FCP	0.102	0.055	1.867	-0.007	0.206	0.008	Rejected
PEF -> FCP	0.144	0.045	3.193	0.056	0.235	0.019	Accepted
POD -> FCP	0.360	0.041	8.731	0.281	0.442	0.145	Accepted
FCP -> DTS	0.558	0.032	17.621	0.499	0.623	0.453	Accepted

**Notes:** DT = Democratic Tendencies; FCP = Fact-checking Practices; FNU = Facebook News Use; PEF = Political Efficacy; POD = Political Discussion; XNU = X News Use

**Source:** Own elaboration.

The mediation analysis (see Table 6) further indicated that fact-checking practices mediated several key relationships. The indirect path from Facebook news use to democratic tendencies through fact-checking practices was significant ( $\beta = 0.065$ ;  $p = 0.028$ ), as was the indirect effect of political efficacy on Democratic Tendencies ( $\beta = 0.081$ ;  $p = 0.002$ ). Likewise, political discussion showed a strong and significant indirect effect on Democratic Tendencies via fact-checking practices ( $\beta = 0.201$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). Conversely, the indirect effect of X news use on democratic tendencies was not significant ( $\beta = 0.057$ ;  $p = 0.068$ ), suggesting that reliance on X news consumption alone does not foster democratic tendencies through fact-checking.

**Table 6. Structural model assessment (Indirect effects)**

Relationship	Beta Value	SD	T-Statistics	Confidence Interval		Result
				2.5%	97.5%	
FNU -> FCP -> DTS	0.065	0.03	2.192	0.003	0.12	Accepted
XNU -> FCP -> DTS	0.057	0.031	1.823	-0.002	0.118	Rejected
PEF -> FCP -> DTS	0.081	0.026	3.08	0.027	0.129	Accepted
POD -> FCP-> DTS	0.201	0.029	7.033	0.144	0.255	Accepted

**Note:** DT = Democratic Tendencies; FCP = Fact-checking Practices; FNU = Facebook News Use; PEF = Political Efficacy; POD = Political Discussion; XNU = X News Use

**Source:** Own elaboration.

After having structural model assessment, we evaluated predictive relevance ( $Q^2$ ), the standardised root mean square residual (SRMR) for overall fit, and effect size ( $f^2$ ). The Stone and Geisser's  $Q^2$  values were above zero, ranging from 0.121 to 0.203. It indicates satisfactory predictive relevance (Hair et al., 2022). The SRMR value (0.069) was below 0.08, suggesting good model fit (Dash & Paul, 2021). Our findings further revealed that the path from FCP to DTS showed a large effect size ( $f^2 = 0.453$ ), whereas the path from XNU to FCP had a negligible effect size ( $f^2 = 0.008$ ). In addition, the model explained 32.2% and 31.2% of variance in fact-checking practices ( $R^2 = 0.322$ ) and democratic tendencies ( $R^2 = 0.312$ ), indicating a moderate level of explanatory power.

## 6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the relationships between social media news use, specifically on Facebook and X, political orientations such as political discussion and political efficacy, fact-checking practices, and democratic tendencies among Malaysians. Affordance theory provided the theoretical ground for this study. The findings highlight key aspects of how digital engagement translates into democratic values, and convincing evidence of fact-checking practices' vital significance in the Malaysian context. The findings are particularly relevant considering Malaysia's continuous democratic transformation and the increased political participation of youth after the Undi18 constitutional amendment. This study extends the work of Goyanes et al. (2025) by incorporating the suggestion to examine platform-specific effects, focusing on individual platforms to better understand their unique influence on fact-checking practices. In doing so, we included Facebook news use and

X news use as key platforms.

The findings of the present study support the results of Zhou et al. (2025) by yielding similar outcomes. The results demonstrate that Facebook news use has a significant positive impact on fact-checking practices. It means Malaysians who consume news on Facebook are more inclined to verify, cross-check, and question information before accepting or sharing it. This is an encouraging finding in a context where misinformation has been a growing global concern. The results point to the positive outcomes of the Malaysian government's efforts to curb the spread of fake news and promote fact-checking practices. Notably, the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) launched the *Sebenarnya.com* portal (MCMC, 2025), which serves as an official platform designed to facilitate public access to fact-checking resources and verified information. On the other hand, news use on X, formerly Twitter, did not show a significant effect on fact-checking practices. This may reflect differences in platform culture and penetration. While Twitter is important among politicians, journalists, and urban elites in Malaysia, its overall user base of 5.10 million is far lower than Facebook's 23.1 million users (DataReportal, 2025).

The positive relationship between political efficacy and fact-checking practices underscore the importance of citizens' confidence in their political influence. These findings corroborate the work of Liu et al. (2025) as both studies report comparable results. Malaysians who believe that their participation matters are more motivated to verify information before forming opinions or making political choices. This scenario emphasizes that efficacy drives political learning, informed decision-making, and participation. Actually, government initiatives have significantly enhanced political efficacy among youth. The passage of Undi18 bill in 2019 (Tirtayana, 2021), introduction of automatic voter registration, and civic education program such as "Digital Parliament" (Abdullah, 2024) provided Malaysians with simulated parliamentary experiences. Such programs demonstrate Malaysia's recognition of the need to cultivate efficacy early, thereby indirectly strengthening fact-checking practices and democratic culture.

The findings also confirm the significant contribution of political discussion to fact-checking. This reflects that Malaysians while discussing politics with friends, family, or colleagues, are more likely to verify claims in order to support or challenge viewpoints. These findings illustrate the fruitful outcomes of the Malaysian government's efforts to encourage democratic dialogue through initiatives such as National Unity Blueprint 2021-2030 (The Star, 2025). Such policies also underscore the importance of fact-checking, as citizens engage in cross-cultural discussion often feel compelled to verify information before forming or expressing opinions.

A particularly significant finding of this study is the strong positive relationship between fact-checking practices and democratic tendencies. This outcome supports the result of Rodríguez-Pérez et al. (2021) and Wang et al. (2025). It implies that Malaysians who actively verify news are also more likely to support democratic ideals such as equal rights, human rights, voting, respect to others' opinion. Fact-checking therefore serves as grassroots mechanism for strengthening democracy, as it nurtures accountability and trust in political processes. Furthermore, mediating role of fact-checking practices offers deeper insight by serving as a bridge that connects Facebook news use, political discussion and political efficacy with democratic tendencies. This confirms that fact-checking is not just an isolated behavior but a mechanism that channels engagement into democratic outcomes. For instance, Malaysians who consume news via Facebook are encouraged to fact-check, which in turn strengthens their democratic attitudes. In a similar way, those who believe in their political efficacy and engage in discussion are more likely to fact-check, reinforcing democratic values in the process. This finding suggests that investment in promoting fact checking, through media literacy campaigns, education, and institutional initiatives will have broader democratic payoffs.

Along with its valuable empirical contributions this study is subject to certain limitations. First, this study was limited to a Malaysian sample, therefore, the findings can be interpreted only within the Malaysian context. To

evaluate the applicability of the model across different political systems, future research is encouraged to test it in diverse democratic settings categorized by The Economist Intelligence Unit (2024) as full democracies, flawed democracies, and hybrid regimes, using multigroup analysis. Moreover, given the growing influence of artificial intelligence (AI) on public opinion and political engagement, future studies should incorporate constructs such as AI literacy and AI efficacy to examine their potential role in shaping democratic tendencies. Second, we recruited respondents aged 18 and above across Malaysia, it may not fully capture the perspective of rural communities and population with limited internet access. Future studies could address this gap by adopting targeted field surveys to ensure better representation of these groups. Third, our study focused specifically on Facebook and X. However, other platforms such as TikTok and Instagram are increasingly influential in shaping political discussion and information sharing. Future research should expand its scope to include multiple platforms in order to capture the full spectrum of digital political engagement. Finally, while polarization poses a recognized challenge to democratic systems, this study did not account for the broader political environment, such as extremity or polarization. Future research should therefore incorporate variables such as partisanship and political identity to better capture the polarized nature of respondents and assess its potential impact on democratic tendencies.

This study provides empirical evidence on the role of Facebook news use, X news use, political efficacy, and political discussion in shaping democratic tendencies in Malaysia, with fact-checking practices serving as a critical mechanism in this process. The findings confirm that most of the hypothesized direct and indirect relationships are supported, except for the direct effect of X news use on fact-checking practices and its subsequent indirect impact on democratic tendencies. Importantly, fact-checking practices emerge as a significant mediator, amplifying the influence of political discussion, Facebook news use, and political efficacy on democratic tendencies. These results underscore the necessity of fostering robust fact-checking practices and ensuring their visibility across all social media platforms in Malaysia. Such efforts could enhance citizens' ability to critically evaluate information, thereby reinforcing democratic engagement. Furthermore, extending this model to other democratic contexts would enrich its applicability and contribute to a broader understanding of the interplay between social media use, fact-checking, and democratic development. Addition of AI-related concepts such as algorithmic awareness may provide deeper insights into how emerging technologies shape information verification and democratic participation.

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