Online engagement: Comparing 2015 and 2020 General Election

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Overview

* Social media engagement during an election may be understood as three main types: expressive, informational and relational. Expressive and informational use have increased in 2020, and this increase is significant compared to 2015. Relational engagement has not increased significantly in 2020 compared to 2015.

* Trust in mass media has increased overall from 2015 in 2020, findings show that decreased trust in mass media, especially amongst younger voters, results in expressive engagement. This should be understood together with the finding that people who reported increased trust in personal communications were also more likely to use social media in an informational manner.

* Declines in political knowledge predicted expressive engagement in the 2020 General Election. This points to the need to encourage not just active citizenry, but informed citizenry. Political knowledge is not significant for informational nor relational engagement.

Three Types of Engagement

Expressive Engagement

- **Wrote a post or made a video expressing my opinions** on a candidate, political party, the election, and/or issue
- **Commented** on a page, post or video on a candidate, political party, the election, and/or issue
- **Started or participated in a discussion** on a candidate, political party, the election, and/or issue
- **Liked** a page or a post about a candidate, political party, the election, and/or issue

Informational Engagement

- **Shared relevant information and/or political commentary** related to a post/video/discussion thread
- **Followed a thread** discussing a candidate, political party, the election, and/or issue
- Shared information and/or political commentary with people
- **Sought/asked for information** about a candidate, political party, the election, and/or issue

Relational Engagement

- **Followed a blogger or YouTuber's postings** on a candidate, political party, the election, and/or issue
- **Followed someone in my social network's postings** about a candidate, political party, the election, and/or issue
- Used social networking sites to **learn more about my family members', friends', colleagues', fellow Singaporeans' views** on the election
- Used social networking sites to **connect with people** I already know or new people related to my interests in the election
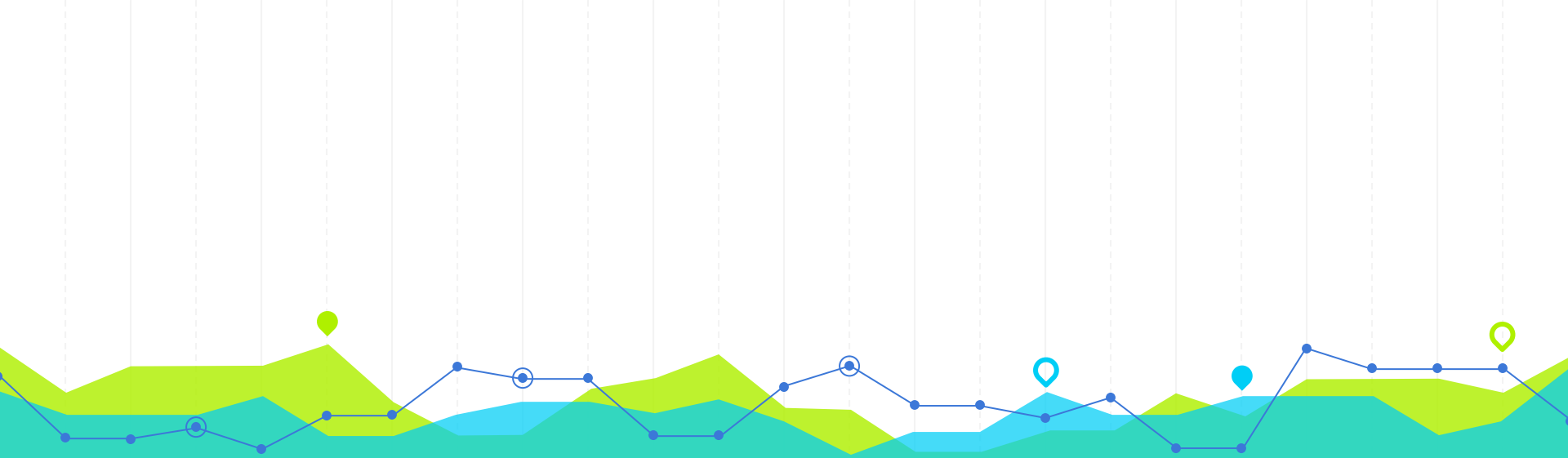
Data

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2015 ←→ 2020

Goal: Creating a pooled dataset from 2015 and 2020 by matching demographically similar participants in 2015 and 2020

1. Sort respondents in both datasets according to **age, gender and ethnicity**
2. Within each age-gender-ethnicity subgroup, order and match respondents according to their **monthly household income**

median income

Monthly Household Income in 2015

median income

Monthly Household Income in 2020
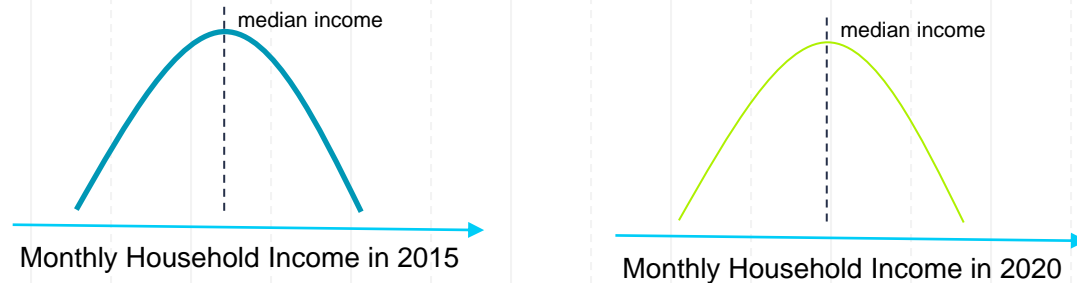
Measures/Variables

Demographics (N=1,390)

- **Gender** (49.6% males, 50.4% females), **age** (M_{2020} = 47.24 years old), **ethnicity** (78.5% Chinese, 13.1% Malay, 8.4% Indian/Others)[1]

- **Monthly household income**

- **Generation**
  - First-time voters (21-26 years old), would be second time-voters in 2020
  - Other youths (27-35 years old)
  - Sandwiched generation (36-55 years old)
  - Boomers (56+ years old)

[1]Dataset is weighted based on the 2015 General Household Survey

Measures/Variables

Expressive/Informational/Relational Engagement

- Composites of various items measuring engagement on different social media platforms (specifically YouTube, online forums, social networking sites, IM platforms)

Reliability of Composites (α)		
Type of engagement	2015	2020
Expressive	.93	.86
Informational	.91	.87
Relational	.90	.88

Measures/Variables

Predictors

- **Mass media usage** (α_{2015} = .74, α_{2020} = .75)
    - Frequency of accessing printed newspapers, television, radio, websites of Singaporean mass media (e.g. Straits Times, CNA) and foreign mass media (e.g. BBC, New York Times), and websites on Singapore-based news and information (e.g. Mothership, The Online Citizen)

- **Social media usage** (α_{2015} = .81, α_{2020} = .80)
    - Frequency of accessing YouTube, online discussion forums/portals (e.g. Hardwarezone, Reddit), social networking sites (e.g. Twitter, Facebook), and instant messaging platforms (e.g. WhatsApp, Telegram)

Measures/Variables

Predictors

- **Trust towards SG mass media** (α_{2015} = .96, α_{2020} = .96)
  - Perceived trustworthy of Singapore-based newspapers, TV and radio stations, and their websites and social media pages

- **Trust towards personal communication via IM**

Measures/Variables

Predictors

- **Political talk**
  - Frequency of engaging in election-related discussion with other people

- **Political knowledge**
  - Percentage of correct answers out of total number of questions
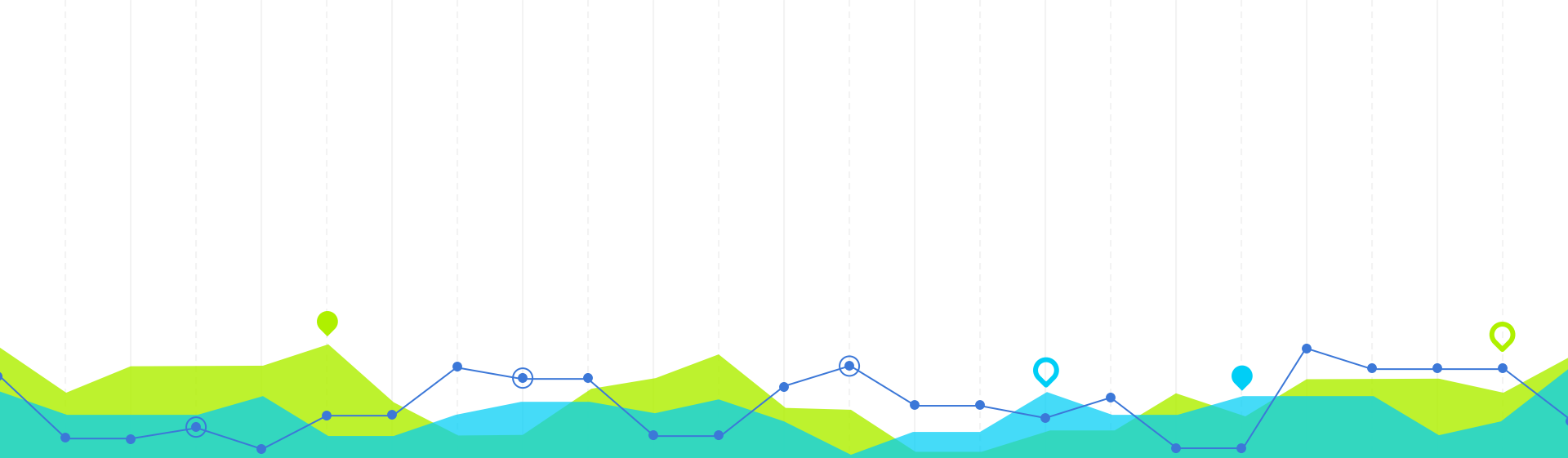
On Overall Engagement

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Overall Engagement in 2015 and 2020

Social Media Engagement in 2015 and 2020
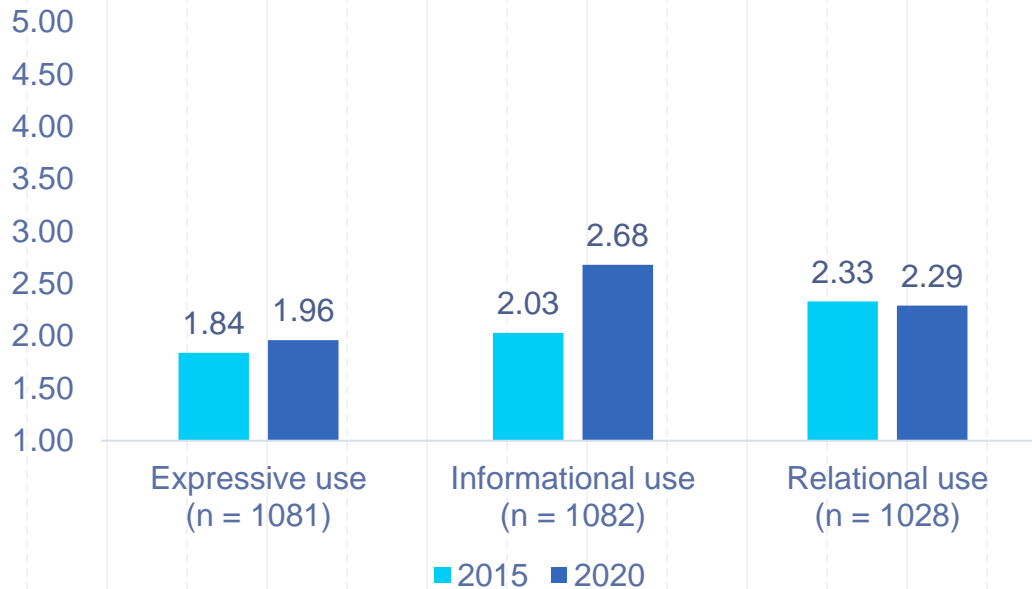
- Significant increases in **expressive use** and **informational use** from 2015 to 2020

- Difference for relational use not statistically significant

Expressive use (n = 1081): 2015 = 1.84, 2020 = 1.96

Informational use (n = 1082): 2015 = 2.03, 2020 = 2.68

Relational use (n = 1028): 2015 = 2.33, 2020 = 2.29

Legend: 2015, 2020
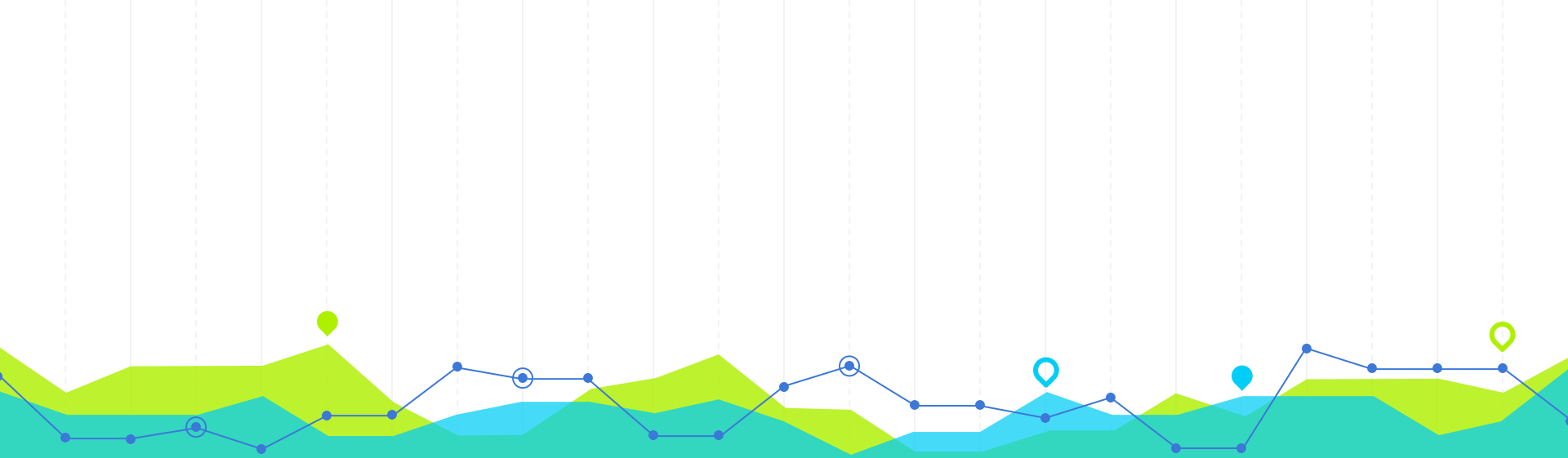
On Factors that Predict Engagement

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Perceived trustworthiness of various platforms differed across both year and platform
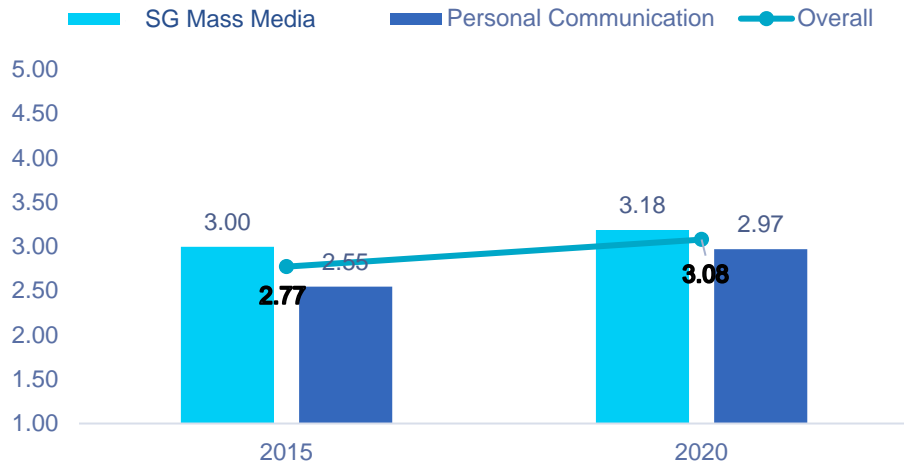
Perceived Trustworthiness of Different Platforms in 2015 and 2020

Legend: SG Mass Media · Personal Communication · Overall

Chart values:
- 2015: SG Mass Media = 3.00, Personal Communication = 2.55, Overall = 2.77
- 2020: SG Mass Media = 3.18, Personal Communication = 2.97, Overall = 3.08

Y-axis scale: 1.00, 1.50, 2.00, 2.50, 3.00, 3.50, 4.00, 4.50, 5.00
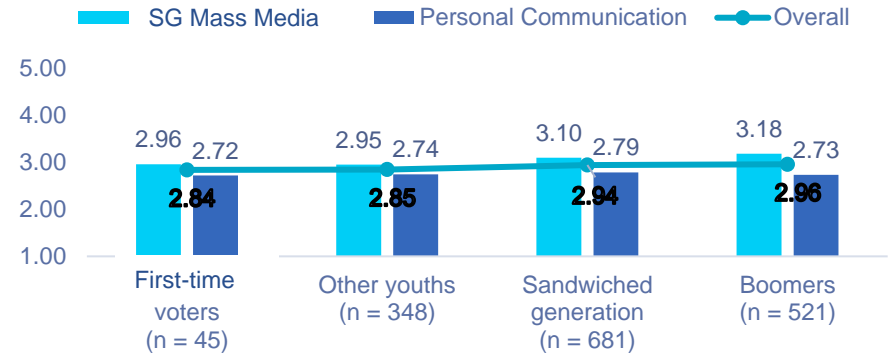
- Regardless of platform, increase in trust from **2015 to 2020**

- Regardless of year, **SG mass media** was more trusted than personal communication

- But, increase in trust from 2015 to 2020 was greater for **personal communications** than mass media

Also the effect of generation

Trust (Regardless of Platform) in 2015 and 2020

Legend: 2015 | 2020 | Overall

	First-time voters (n = 45)	Other youths (n = 348)	Sandwiched generation (n = 681)	Boomers (n = 521)
2015	2.72	2.75	2.79	2.76
2020	2.96	2.94	3.09	3.16
Overall	2.84	2.85	2.94	2.96
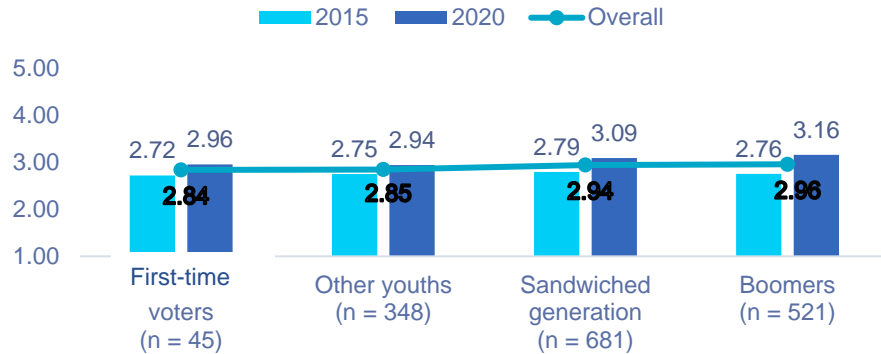
Trust (Regardless of Year) for Mass Media and Personal Communication

Legend: SG Mass Media | Personal Communication | Overall

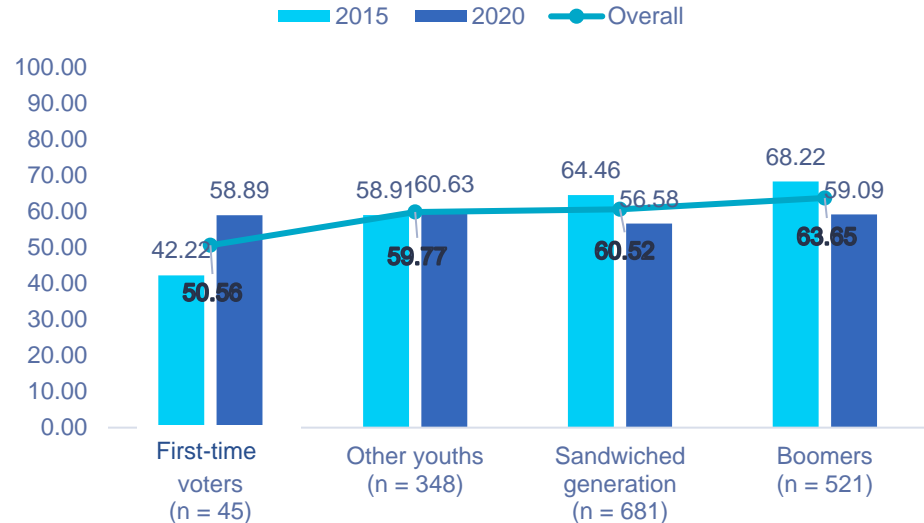|	First-time voters (n = 45)	Other youths (n = 348)	Sandwiched generation (n = 681)	Boomers (n = 521)
SG Mass Media	2.96	2.95	3.10	3.18
Personal Communication	2.72	2.74	2.79	2.73
Overall	2.84	2.85	2.94	2.96

- Regardless of year and platform, **other youths** reported lowest trust[1], significantly lower than the sandwiched generation and boomers

- Increase in trust from 2015 to 2020 was greater for **older respondents**

- Greater distrust for personal communication (compared to mass media) by **older respondents**

[1] Likely because of the small sample size, no significant difference was found between second-time voters and the other three generations

Overall, political knowledge decreased from 2015 to 2020, likely driven by generational differences
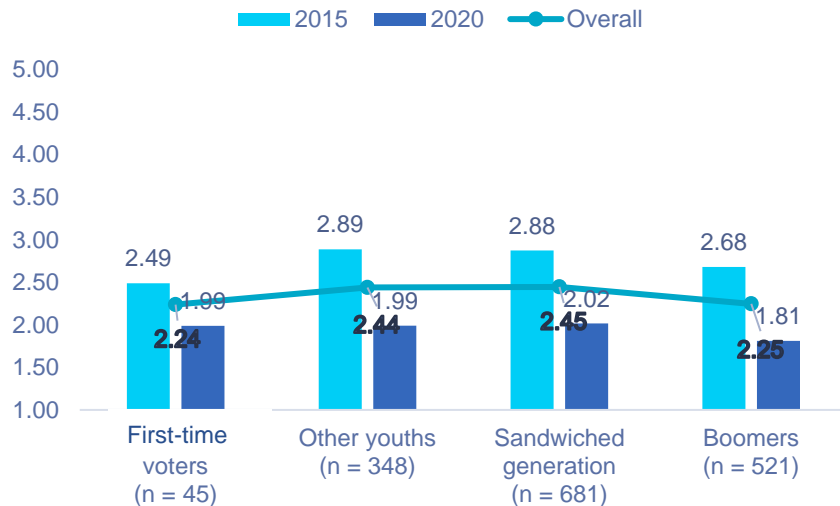
- **Boomers** had greatest political knowledge, significantly higher than all other generations
- But political knowledge for the youths (especially **second-time voters**) increased from 2015 to 2020, whereas it had decreased for the older respondents

Political Knowledge in 2015 and 2020

Legend: 2015 | 2020 | Overall

Category	2015	2020	Overall
First-time voters (n = 45)	42.22	58.89	50.56
Other youths (n = 348)	58.91	60.63	59.77
Sandwiched generation (n = 681)	64.46	56.58	60.52
Boomers (n = 521)	68.22	59.09	63.65

Y-axis values: 0.00, 10.00, 20.00, 30.00, 40.00, 50.00, 60.00, 70.00, 80.00, 90.00, 100.00

There was both an effect of year and effect of generation on the frequency of political talk

Political Talk in 2015 and 2020

Legend: ■ 2015 ■ 2020 ●— Overall

Value	First-time voters (n = 45)	Other youths (n = 348)	Sandwiched generation (n = 681)	Boomers (n = 521)
2015	2.49	2.89	2.88	2.68
2020	2.00	1.99	2.02	1.81
Overall	2.24	2.44	2.45	2.25

- Self-reported frequency of political talk significantly decreased from **2015 to 2020**

- **Boomers** reported the lowest frequency of political talk, significantly lower than other youths and the sandwiched generation[1]

[1] Likely because of the small sample size, no significant difference was found between first-time voters and the other three generations

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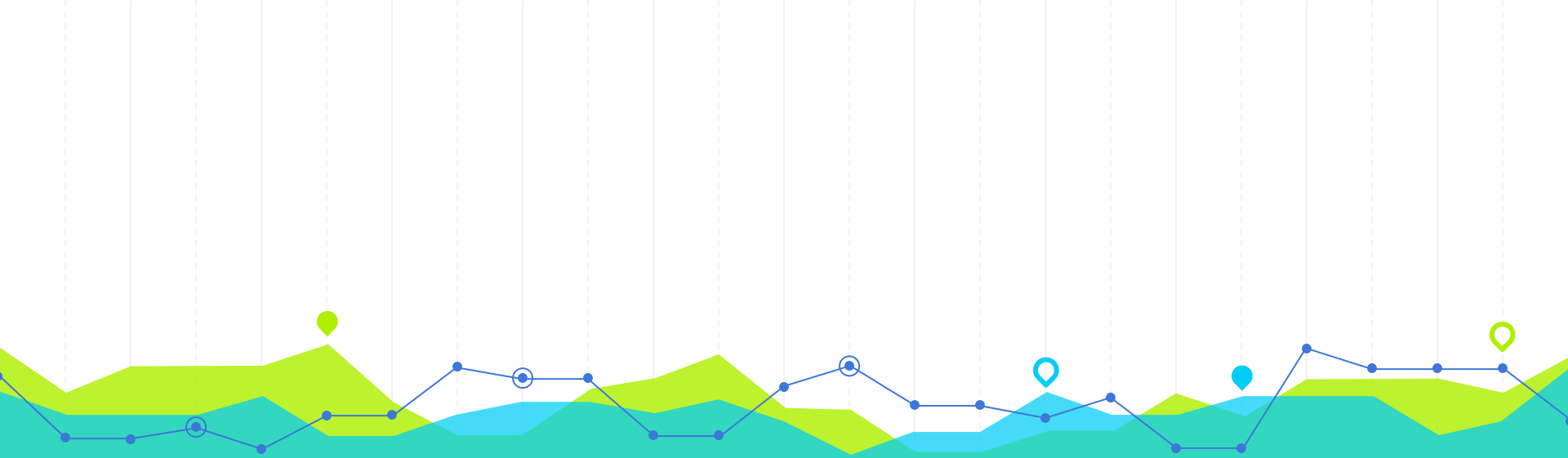
What drives engagement?

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Increase in Expressive Engagement from 2015 to 2020

Predictor	Overall	First-time voters	Other youths	Sandwiched generation	Boomers
Change in mass media usage	0.17**		0.34**	0.14**	
Change in social media usage	0.28**		0.24**	0.29**	0.34**
Change in knowledge score	-0.11**		-0.11*	-0.10*	
Change in trust towards SG mass media	-0.08**	-0.41*		-0.10*	
Change in trust towards personal communication	0.13**			0.14**	0.14*
Change in frequency of political talk	0.16**			0.19**	0.19**
R^2	0.26**	0.33*	0.29**	0.28**	0.27**

Increase in Informational Engagement from 2015 to 2020

Predictor	Overall	First-time voters	Other youths	Sandwiched generation	Boomers
Change in mass media usage	0.19**		0.27**	0.12*	0.21**
Change in social media usage	0.38**	0.44**	0.39**	0.37**	0.39**
Change in knowledge score					
Change in trust towards SG mass media					
Change in trust towards personal communication	0.09**	0.36**		0.10*	
Change in frequency of political talk	0.11**			0.17**	
R^2	0.33**	0.59**	0.37**	0.32**	0.31**

Increase in Relational Engagement from 2015 to 2020

Predictor	Overall	First-time voters	Other youths	Sandwiched generation	Boomers
Change in mass media usage	0.22**		0.33**	0.17**	0.19**
Change in social media usage	0.42**	0.51**	0.39**	0.45**	0.44**
Change in knowledge score					
Change in trust towards SG mass media					
Change in trust towards personal communication	0.14**		0.13*		0.21**
Change in frequency of political talk					
R^2	0.37**	0.45**	0.40**	0.35**	0.40**

Summary

- Was it an 'Internet election'?

- Findings signal that social media was significant in shaping how Singaporeans engaged with the election – especially in terms of expressive and informational behaviours.

- Such engagement is expected to become more pervasive, part of everyday life in Singapore

- Prioritise the development of active citizenship that is informed and inclusive

- Perceived trustworthiness is important to address as a whole