การใช้สื่อสังคมในการสื่อสารประเด็นทางสังคม
โดยเยาวชนมาเลเซียรุ่นใหม่
The Usage of Social Media to Communicate Social Issues by Young Generation in Malaysia

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บทคัดย่อ

ในโลกยุคปัจจุบันเราได้เห็นการเปลี่ยนแปลงทางสังคมที่ถูกขับเคลื่อนด้วยภาคประชาสังคมผ่านการใช้ประโยชน์ของเทคโนโลยีการสื่อสาร การวิจัยนี้มีจุดประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาพฤติกรรมการใช้สื่อสังคมออนไลน์ของคนรุ่นใหม่ในมาเลเซียในกิจกรรมทางสังคม รวมถึงบทบาทของสื่อสังคมในการสื่อสารประเด็นทางสังคมโดยเฉพาะการเมืองและกิจกรรมจิตอาสาโดยเยาวชนมาเลเซียรุ่นใหม่และรูปแบบของการสื่อสารดังกล่าว งานวิจัยใช้ระเบียบวิธีวิจัยแบบผสมผสานทั้งเชิงปริมาณและเชิงคุณภาพโดยใช้แบบสอบถามเชิงสำรวจเพื่อสอบถามเยาวชนมาเลเซียในด้านข้อมูลเบื้องต้นเกี่ยวกับการเปิดรับและการใช้งานสื่อสังคมในประเด็นทางสังคม การเมือง และกิจกรรมจิตอาสาว่าเป็นไปในลักษณะใด ผู้ตอบแบบสอบถามอายุ 18-30 ปี ในช่วงเดือนสิงหาคม 2561 ในส่วนการวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพใช้การสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึกกับผู้ให้ข้อมูลสำคัญ 3 ตัวอย่าง ในเดือนกันยายน 2561 หลังการเลือกตั้งทั่วไปครั้งที่ 14 ของมาเลเซีย (GE14) ซึ่งมหาเธร์ โมฮัมหมัดชนะการเลือกตั้งเป็นนายกรัฐมนตรีเอาชนะพรรคอัมโน (United Malay National Organization / UMNO) ที่ผูกขาดอำนาจในการบริหารประเทศมาอย่างยาวนาน และส่งผลให้เกิดการเปลี่ยนแปลงในทางบวกกับเสรีภาพในการแสดงความคิดเห็นรวมถึงการใช้สื่อสังคมในการสื่อสารประเด็นทางสังคมของเยาวชนมาเลเซียรุ่นใหม่ด้วย ผลการวิจัยพบว่าแม้ว่าสื่อสังคมจะไม่ได้กระตุ้นให้เกิดการเคลื่อนไหวทางสังคมโดยตรงกล่าวคือไม่ได้ทำให้เยาวชนออกมาร่วมกิจกรรมทางการเมืองในเชิงกายภาพแต่สามารถเป็นช่องทางสำคัญในการเผยแพร่และส่งเสริมให้เยาวชนมีส่วนร่วมในประเด็นทางสังคม การเมือง และกิจกรรมจิตอาสาได้โดยเฉพาะในช่วงการเลือกตั้งทั่วไปครั้งที่ 14 ในขณะที่เฟซบุ๊ก (Facebook) ยังคงเป็นสื่อสังคมที่ใช้กันอย่างแพร่หลายมากที่สุดแต่เยาวชนรู้สึกมีเสรีภาพในการแสดงออกอย่างมากผ่านสื่อสังคมอื่นอย่าง วอตส์แอปป์ (WhatsApp) และทวิตเตอร์ (Twitter) ซึ่งถือว่าเป็นเครื่องมือและช่องทางสำคัญในการส่งเสริมการมีส่วนร่วมการเคลื่อนไหวทางสังคมและการมีส่วนร่วมของเยาวชน

คำสำคัญ: *สื่อสังคม มาเลเซีย เยาวชน ประเด็นสังคม*

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Abstract

This research focuses on how the Malaysian young generation exposes and communicates social issues through social media, including politics and volunteering. It is important to see changes in society caused by a unity of people with the use of communication technology. The research employed mixed research methods, both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. A questionnaire was used to explore how the young generation in Malaysia use social media to communicate social issues, politics, and volunteerism. A total of 285 questionnaires were collected from informants aged 18-30 years old in August 2018. For the qualitative part, the in-depth interview was conducted with three key informants in September 2018, after GE14. The findings suggest that although social media cannot trigger social movement in Malaysia yet, they have been increasingly used by young people in Malaysia for promoting participation in social issues, politics, and volunteerism, especially after GE14. Young people in Malaysia feel that they have more freedom of expression, especially on WhatsApp and Twitter. Therefore, social media has been perceived as a tool for promoting the intention to participate in social movements and providing a participatory platform for the youth.

Keywords: *Social media, Malaysia, Youth, Social issues*

Background

Southeast Asia has been regarded as a fast-growing and tech-savvy region. According to Sportify's The Culture Next: The Trends Defining Gen Z and Millennials in Southeast Asia report (2020), Gen Zs and Millennials are critically connected with digital world and this is a deeply socially conscious generation, and they are unafraid to show courage, as well as the vulnerability that they believe comes with authenticity and real change. The joint report on Southeast Asia's Internet economy by Google, Temasek, and Bain & Company (2019) or e-Conomy SEA 2019 report highlighted that Southeast Asia's Internet economy continues to grow at an unprecedented pace as it hits yet another milestone, soaring to US$100 billion this year. Moreover, the number of Internet users in Southeast Asia has increased by 100 million — many of whom are youths aged 15 to 19. As more of these young, digital-savvy and mobile-first Southeast Asians come of age, the region's Internet economy is set to grow further.

The advance of online communication technology causes immediate changes in people's way of life and media ecology. Due to communication technology disruption together with a change of receivers' behaviors, there is an impact on a media production and information sharing with receivers in compliance with globalization context, which a phenomenon and change can be interconnected quickly but still flow into the socio-political context in each country.

According to Bernama (2019), Malaysia ranks top five globally and highest in ASEAN for in mobile social media penetration. Internet Users Survey 2018 by Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission highlighted that social media has become an important tool for connecting people, building communities, voicing out one's opinion, and business' marketing and advertising. The survey also estimated that there were about 24.6 million social networking users in 2018, of those, 97.3% owned a Facebook account.

The article of Hwang and Kim (2015) entitled "Social Media as a Tool for Social Movements: The Effect of Social Media Use and Social Capital on Intention to Participate in Social Movements" verified the role of social media in promoting the intention to participate in social movements in Korean context by providing a participatory platform for the youth. In Malaysia, Noorriati, Saadiah; & Raja (2012) pointed out that a social media site also increases the quality of youth life since it serves variety of information and knowledge for the youth. This role of social media is vital for the young generation of a country.

It is difficult to separate social media and young generation as they grew up with it. Also, it is beneficial to know how the youth use social media for social issues. Malaysian youth is particularly interesting as they will become a core group to push forward the country. At the same time they are the generation of citizens who grew up in multicultural society surrounded by global dynamic changes and disruption. This research, therefore, focuses on how Malaysian young generation expose and communicate social issues with the focus on politics and volunteerism through social media as it is important to see changes of society caused by a unity of people with a use of communication technology. This is important as it can give a reflection and comparison on how the young generation in other ASEAN countries including Thailand use social media for social movement.

The aims of the research are to

1) Study Malaysian new generation's behavior on using social media for social activities

2) Explore a role of social media in promoting a social participation of the young generation in Malaysia

Literature Review

1. Media freedom and social media in Malaysia

Adhere to the national principles, such as Rukun Negara or Rukunegara (harmony of ethnic groups in Malaysia), the mass media is required to provide information which will be benefits to the country and avoid a conflict among the ethnic groups. Malaysians can access to the news and information from from all media platforms including newspaper, magazine, radio, TV, movies and the online. However, the media platform is under a tight control of the government and powerful political party. Meanwhile, some media do a self-censorship to avoid a problem with the government. According to "Internet and Social Media in Malaysia: Development, challenges and Potentials" (Wok, S.; & Mohamed, S. 2017), Malaysia has a history of media control through media laws and concentrated ownership. The government has issued four additional laws to control the media as follows:

1) Printing Presses and Publications Act: to regulate the media from reporting news threatening to national benefits and security.

2) Official Secret Act: to require a reporter to investigate news which is not from government's confidential data otherwise he/she can be jailed.

3) 'Broadcasting Act': to allow the government to intervene the media's works.

4) Internal Security Act: to ban news related communist or violating the national security

There are no laws on the freedom of press clearly stated in Malaysia's constitution even there is an article on the fundamental liberties related the freedom of expressions. However, after winning the 14th general election or GE14 in 2018, the government led by Mahathir Mohamad vowed to increase a freedom of the media. Not only the attempt to abolish Anti-Fake News Act introduced by former Prime Minister Najib Razak, but to reduce a shareholding ratio owned by political parties in the media to mitigate the political power in media's works. (Tan. September 2018 and December 2018). As a result, the freedom of Malaysian media ranked by the RSF gradually increased from 144 in 2018 to 123 in 2019 and to 101 in 2020 respectively.

Social media become a very important part of Malaysians' life, and they have become the tool to express ideas freely, which can influence the opinions of others leading to social and political change. Based on Internet Users Survey 2018 by Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission, the top five social networking users in Malaysia are Facebook (97.3%), Instagram (57.0%), YouTube (48.3%), Google+ (31.3%) and Twitter (23.8%). In terms of content shared online, the most shared content was educational materials (71.3%). Then, 69.6% have shared entertainment

and humorous content, followed by latest news (63.9%). Meanwhile, 62.6% shared public service announcement. Aid effort, such as search for missing person, donation for medical aids and humanitarian mission, was shared by 55.9%. Less than half shared latest promotion and discount advertising (43.0%), while political related issue was the least frequent content shared online (32.1%).

2. Social media and social movement

Social movement refers to an activity done by a group of people with their objective. It can be either formal or informal coalition, such as a social movement to cause a change of society, politics, environment or health (Narupon Duangwises. n.d.). Diani (1992) developed definition for social movement as "networks of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and or organizations, engaged in political or cultural conflicts, on the basis of shared collective identities." Suwida Thammaneewong (2001) explains the process of the social movement as a group of people who feel strains because they do not receive a justice. Therefore, they spread out this through to the majority.

1) Belief that is the problem and needs to solve
2) Increase a number of people's support
3) Mobilize human resources, fund and other to establish the organization
4) Set up the organization with the specific objective
5) Take an action to change
6) People who lost the benefits have reaction to crackdown the movement with various actions

According to Hasan Obaid (2020), "Social media networks have replaced the pre-existing mobilization structures, hence becoming the new coordinating tool for almost all social movements in the world". Social media is not only a tool for disseminating information and coordinating activities, it also represents an emotive platform for the construction of identities, sharing of emotions and building collective feelings (Wolfson; & Funke. 2017). The Oxford English Dictionary (2021) defines 'clicktivism' as "the use of social media and other online methods to promote a cause". It is the use of social media for facilitating social change and activism and can include a whole a range of activities, as for example: organizing protests, facilitating boycotts, signing petitions, hacktivism, crowdfunding, online parody and satire, Google bombing, circumventing news blackouts/keeping people informed (Tzouvara. 2016).

This research, however, focuses on how Malaysian young generation expose and communicate social issues with the focus on politics and volunteerism through social media.

Research Methodologies

This study is mixed research methods, employed both quantitative and qualitative methodology. Survey by questionnaire was used to explore how young generation in Malaysia use social media to communicate social issues. In-depth interviews with university students and media experts was employed in April 2018 for the questionnaire design. Two experts in quantitative research and media in Malaysia checked the questionnaire's validity. Then, 30 copies of the approved questionnaires were pre-tested in Malaysia. According to various youth activities and reports by organizations under UN including Youth, Sustainable Consumption Patterns and Life Styles Report by UNESCO and UNEP (2020) youths are people aged 18-30 years old. The total 285 questionnaires, therefore, were collected from informants aged 18-30 years old in August 2018. The result of the survey, then, was processed by SPSS program.

For qualitative part, there are three key informants joined the in-depth interview that were conducted in September 2018, after GE14. The three informants are purposively selected to represent academic expert in youth and social issues, youth activism and social media in Malaysia. The three informants are;

1) Mohd.Fauzi B Fadzil, Research assistant at IPSAS-Institute for Social Science Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM)

2) Muhammad Ikhmil Farisz Bin Mohd Hanif, MyCorps[2] Alumni

3) Norman Goh, former Malaysiakini Social Media Curator

The findings from the two methodologies shed the light for discussion on why, how and where do Malaysian young generation come to share information, common spaces, meaning, identity, activities and goals aiming for social change.

Results

1. Findings from the survey

1.1 Demographic information of the informants.

The informants are mixed in terms of background. About 60% of them are female and 40% are male. The age range is 18-35 years old with the mean of 25 years old. For ethnic background, about 63% are Malay, 23% are Chinese, 8% are Indian. Most of them have an undergraduate level of education (studying or graduated). For their hometown, 36% of them are from Kuala Lumpur as illustrated in Figure1.

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[2]MyCorps is a Malaysian International Volunteering Program initiated by the Malaysian government through the Ministry of Youth and Sports Malaysia. (http://mycorps.my/about-mycorps/mission-and-vision/_)
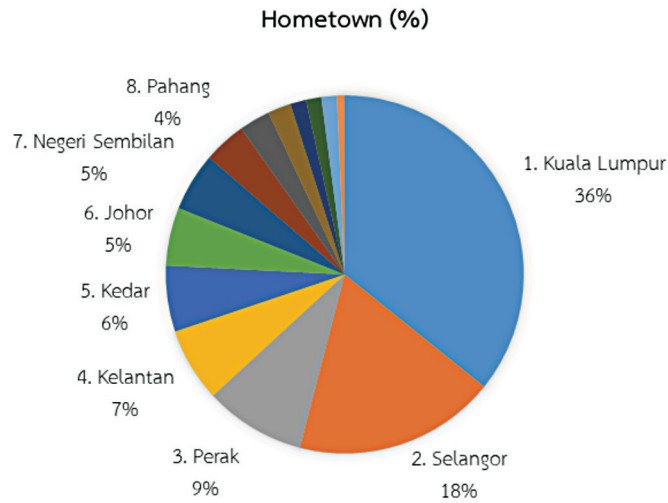
Hometown (%)

Figure 1 Informants' hometown in Malaysia

1.2 Social media usage

Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter are top 5 of the most popular social media platforms that the informants have account. However, when the informants were asked about which social media that has been actively used for the past three months, WhatsApp is the most active social media followed by Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter. This trend is nearly similar with the number of people creating their profile in the social networking sites as indicated in Figure 2 and 3.
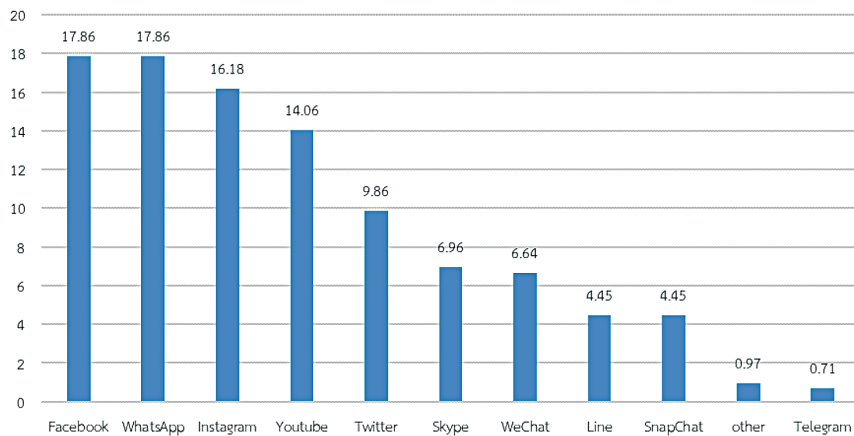

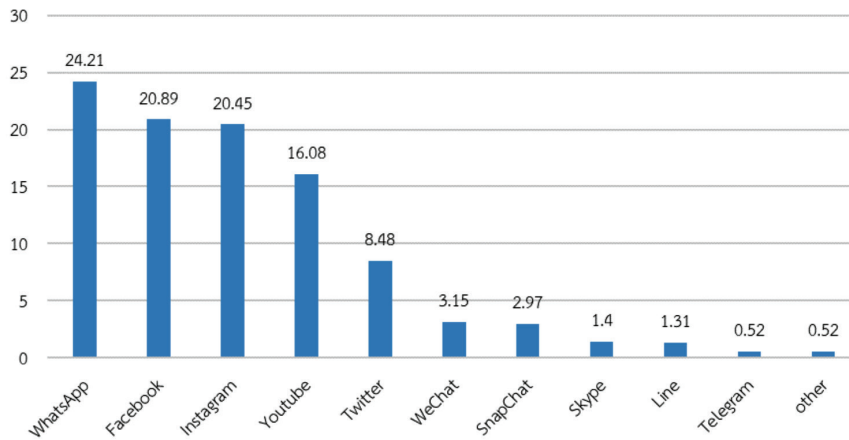Figure 2 Social network sites with created personal profiles (percentage)

Figure 3 Actively used social networks in 3 months (percentage)

For the time spending in social media platforms, most of the informants spend 3-6 hours per day for keeping in touch and interaction with family and friends, and for finding information and entertainment as shown in Figure 4 and 5. Most of informants use a mobile phone to access the social media followed by a laptop, tablet and smart TV respectively.
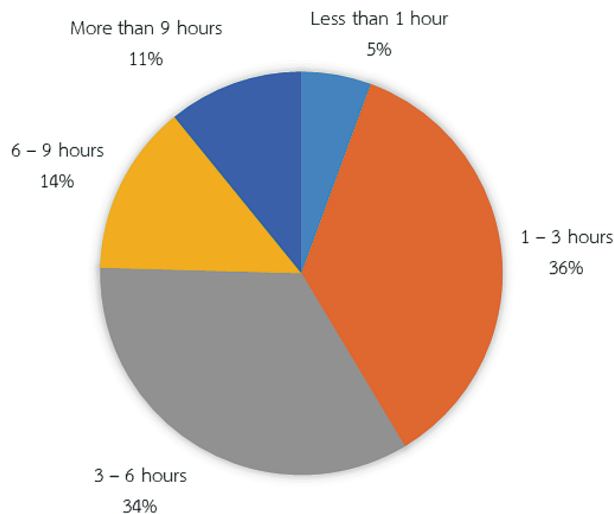
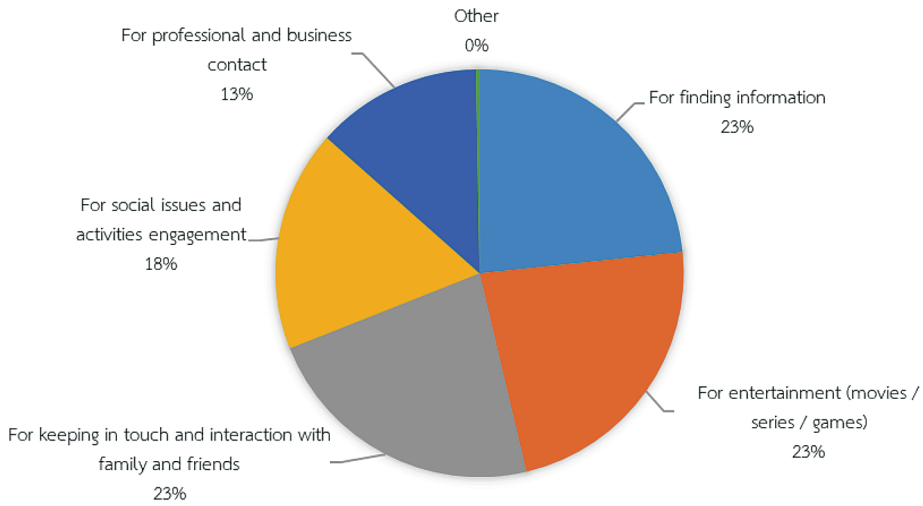Figure 4 Time spending on social media per day (percentage)

Figure 5 Social network usage purposes (percentage)

1.3 Social media usage for social activities

To examine the role of social media on promoting a social participation of the young generation in Malaysia, the survey found that the informants have experienced on using social media for social issues and movements. Then, when asked them //which social network they normally use for social activities (view, share, comment, like and post), the answer is identical with the question about the most active social media in general as can be seen in Figure 6. WhatsApp is the most preferred social media for Malaysian youths to use for social activities as presented in Figure 6. The informants also mentioned that they use WhatsApp for social issues every day.
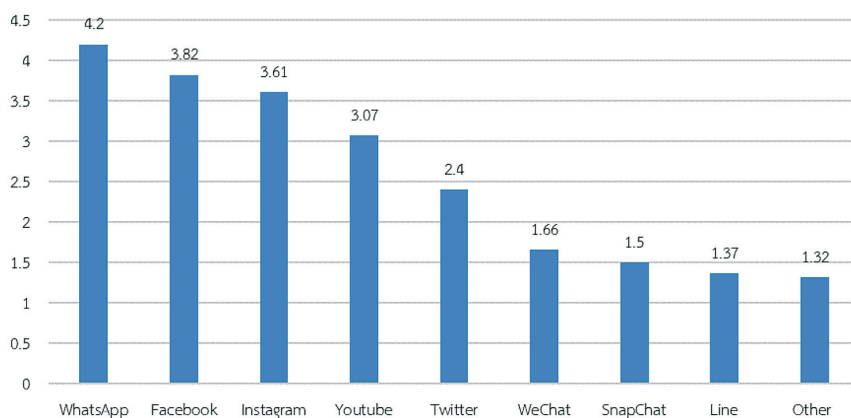
Figure 6 Social media usage level for social issues (0-5)

Most of young people in Malaysia use their social media to "view" in social issues in WhatsApp, Facebook and YouTube and to "like" in Instagram. The rest activities are share, post and comment. The least answer activity is "create a campaign". However, Facebook seems to be the most used platform for the campaign creation. Meanwhile, the informants use social media everyday to discuss or talk to friends and family, to seek for information relevant to interesting issues and to observe what people are talking about. Lastly, Malaysian young people strongly agree that social media provides platform for networking community. Together with this, they perceive social media's potential for expressing their voice and change the society.

2. Finding from the interviews

Although Facebook is the most popular and fundamental social media platform for Malaysians including young generation, the most influential social media for social activities among Malaysian youths are WhatsApp and Twitter.

Facebook is still the most popular platform among the youth in Malaysia because it is very convenient and easy to use. For example, checking news on Facebook's timeline is more flexible while its contents are very various comparing to other platforms. Nevertheless, Norman Goh (2018), a Social Media Curator at Malaysiakini, also observed that Facebook trends in Malaysia is declining and aging, similar with many countries. Young generation in Malaysia are stepping away from this mainstream social media as they concern about their security and privacy.

WhatsApp, however, seems to be the most influential social media used for social issues especially politics. In the latest general election (GE14), according to Goh (2018), WhatsApp played a significant role as it has a high confidential and privacy. Politicians and their election canvassers used WhatsApp to gain their support through a chat group. Malaysian people like to set up their chat group at least one group per family. Especially, the rural areas in the eastern and some parts of western regions, there was community's group chat to spread information on policy, campaigns as well as fake news on the general election. In this regard, WhatsApp was considered as a critical tool for the election. Although some people do not use Facebook, they have WhatsApp for communicating with friends for collecting information.

The key informants also mutually agreed that Twitter is another crucial platform that can trigger social activities. Mohd Fauzi Bin Fadzil (2018), a youth expert from the IPSAS-Institute for Social Science Studies, UPM, explained that the platform is widely used among elites, influencers and celebrities. Goh (2018) agreed that most of Twitter users are upper class. It is still a small group and has a number of well-educated users than others. Most of Twitter users are ministers, politicians, activists and it is used to

discuss and exchange views about political issues including, woman and education related issues. Unlike other platforms, Twitter focuses on the message so it attracts those who 'love to read.' As these elites, influencers and celebrities are opinion leader for Malaysian young generation, Twitter has a potential to be a platform to kick-start social activities and movement in Malaysia.

For Instagram, Malaysian young generation use it for their personal activities rather than communicating the public issues. According to Muhammad Ikhmil Farisz Bin Mohd Hanif (2018), a volunteer activist, Instagram's 'Instagram story' is widely used to update their daily activity. Some people are very active to keep posting their story. There are two specialties of this new function. First, it will be automatically deleted in 24 hours and second, the user can see who watches his/her post which makes him/her feel of receiving an attention from others.

For YouTube, it has been used generally for entertainment such as watching music and movie rather than looking for knowledge or information. Goh (2018) also suggested that YouTube seems to have a less popular because people spend more time on Facebook which also allows people to watch news video.

Discussions

There are different perspectives about Malaysian youth and politics. Before GE14 the youth seemed to be distance from politics. Fauzi (2018) mentioned that although most of them, for some reasons, went to vote, they rarely wanted to involved in political issues. Reasons behind this are partly due to the political monopolization and strict media control in Malaysia. Malaysian youth were afraid to be threatened if they show over-politicized expression. However, Fauzi (2018) and Goh (2018) thought the Malaysian youth has both active and passive persons in politics due to their education background. Twitter seems to be an influential platform for young people to express their voice and communicate social issues. Youths talked about politics in Twitter increasingly. They felt a connection with other by 'retweet' the messages to make other see it as reference.

After GE14, the freedom of expression on social media in Malaysia has been gradually increasing. The most importance factor is the "Malaysian Tsunami" that collapsed UMNO's political monopolization and Mahathir Mohamad's stance after he was elected as a Prime Minister at that time. The government led by Mahathir Mohamad vowed to increase a freedom of the media and expression. One of them is to abolish Anti-Fake News Act introduced by former Prime Minister Najib Razak before GE14. This good signal gave a greenlight to young netizens to be more vocal. For example, when the Prime Minister wanted to take another position as Education Minister, there was a strong criticism on the social media until the Prime Minister dropped the plan.

Social media are influential platform to communicate and share stories about outcomes of social activities. They have a power to gather the youth to join volunteerism. However, in case of increasing the participation or volunteerism, the face-to-face communication is needed because the volunteer works required people who are really interested. The social media can attract new comers, especially, WhatsApp and Facebook have been used for communication among the volunteer groups and sharing their activities. Besides, social media can also spread news, such as benefits of volunteer works and increase of recognition, effectively. In addition, it helps fundraising as well. Still, young people seem to use social media for gathering information rather than creating their own volunteer activity.

Social media has been perceived as a tool for promoting the intention to participate in social movements and providing a participatory platform for the youth in Malaysia. However, to create social movements by "networking informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and or organizations, engaged in political or cultural conflicts, on the basis of shared collective identities" like what Diani (1992) suggested or as we can see in other places in the world, this might not happen yet in Malaysia. It is partly due to the root and long history of media control. However, the study found that the social media has been increasing used by young people in Malaysia for promoting a participation in social issues, politics and volunteerism especially after GE14 as they feel that they have more freedom of expression especially on WhatsApp and Twitter.

Acknowledgements

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2. Muhammad Ikhmil Farisz Bin Mohd Hanif (personal communication, September 26, 2018)
3. Norman Goh (personal communication, September 26, 2018)