

SOCIAL MEDIA AND OUR YOUTHS TODAY: EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON MALAYSIAN YOUTHS

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ABSTRACT

Communication in our society today is being shaped by the introduction of new media such as the internet, 3G phones, etc. These hardware and software of information and communication technology are continually changing and advancing in their features. Furthermore, their usage is influencing the way people interact and keep in touch with each other. They also enable people to communicate and seek information from various sources. The emerging new media that are shaping the communication in society today are the social media. The exponential growth of social media is making them part of our youths' daily communication. This paper explores the possible impact of the social media on the lives of Malaysian youths. Do the social media complement the usage of the mass media in Malaysia? Do they have a unique role which other media are unable to provide to our young people? The social media where the users are the owners open up doors that were once non existence in the days of our forefathers. Nowadays our youths have the whole globe at the point of their finger tips. The rise of the social media therefore is shaping the way our youths is communicating and this paper seeks to illustrate some possible impacts that the social media may have on our younger generation today.

Introduction

Since the early 90s, the Internet has been booming at an electrifying pace and enjoying an overwhelming response world-wide. There is little doubt that the advent of the Internet and especially with the arrival of the World Wide Web or the WWW has transformed the way information is disseminated. Virtually anyone, from the largest multinational corporations to individual teachers and students can become an information provider to the world. This could be due to the inexpensive and easily learned technology for creating a Web site (Trochim, 1996). Access to this information is taking place at the global stage, instantaneous, and increasingly available to more and more individuals and organizations.

After taking the world by storm, the World Wide Web technology continues to improve. Previous Web applications, termed as Web 1.0, would only allow their users to be receivers of information. The expansion of the Web technology witnesses the introduction of new applications that are categorised under Web 2.0. What differentiate these applications from their predecessors is these applications allow users more than just retrieving information but also let them to contribute and own information as well as share, collaborate and as communicate with each other.

Eventually, the emergence of Web 2.0 is closely related to the increasing popularity of social media. This is due to the nature of social media that is built on the ideological and technological foundation of Web 2.0 (Kaplan and Heinlein, 2010). Over the years, social media has become one of the phenomenons to be considered in studying media and society as the social media seems to be emerging to be a new part of public sphere (Waltz, 2005). The increasing importance of Social Media is undeniable. Wikipedia, launched in 2001, today contains more than 13 million articles in 200 different languages. Facebook, founded in 2004, helps more than 300 million members all over the world to stay in touch. If Facebook were a country, it would rank 4th based on its size. Among the youngest member in the family of social media, Twitter, has only been created in 2006 and currently shows a monthly growth rate around 1,400 percent (Qualman, 2009).

Scholars acknowledged the power of social media in shaping today's society as they have argued that its impact on the political arena of countries around the world is undeniable. For instance, Ahmad Nazri et. al (2004: 222) reported that blogs have given a big impact to the political situation in the developing country like Malaysia. This paper seeks to explore the pattern of media use (particularly social media) amongst Malaysian youth and its impact on their daily life.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are:

1. to find out the pattern of media use amongst Malaysian youth,
2. to analyze the usage of social media amongst Malaysian youth, and
3. to examine the possible effects of the usage of social media amongst Malaysian youth.

Social Media

PC magazine Encyclopedia defines social media as “the online forms of communicating to the masses, which include blogs, microblogs, social networking sites and podcasts” (http://www.pcmag.com/encyclopedia_term/0,2542,t=social+media&i=61162,00.asp.) In its simplest sense, social media is “anything that uses the Internet to facilitate conversations” (Solis and Breakenridge, 2009: xvii). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010:61) defined social media as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content.” Nevertheless, they also explained that though social media, Web 2.0 and User-generated Content are three different entities, they are closely related to each other.

Web 2.0, termed in 2004 is the evolution of the ways the World Wide Web is utilized whereby content and applications are now being continuously shaped and modified by all users in a participatory and collaborative manner instead of being created and published by individuals only. Web 2.0 is treated as the platform for social media

while User Generated Content (UGC) is taken as the sum of functions which people make use of Social Media. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010:61) pointed out that the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2007) stated that UGC must abide by three fundamental requirements:

- (1) it needs to be published on a publicly accessible website or on a social networking site accessible to a selected group of people
- (2) it needs to show a certain amount of creative effort
- (3) it needs to have been created outside of professional routines and practices.

Horton (2009:3) highlighted seven characteristics that emerged from the definitions of social media:

1. Internet-based but not in totality as the internet is the organizing agent but communication is personal. Meetup.com, for example, uses the internet to set up local face-to-face meetings.
2. User-generated and published information. User generation is loosely defined as the users often republish information they discovered elsewhere.
3. Community sharing – posts and comments, file sharing and community of interest which varies by individual and group as well as being active or passive.
4. Multimedia – Social media make use of all media forms (audiovisual and print media) even haptic communication (mechanical simulation of touch).
5. Collapsed geographically i.e. there is no distance in social media.
6. Incorporate old and new internet technologies – Social media incorporate all of the technologies developed over the time spanning from e-mail through forums, instant messaging, file sharing, video transmission and more.

Social media in a sense consists of a wide range of tools such as blogs, presence applications/ micro-blogging (e.g. Twitter), video sharing (e.g. YouTube), photo sharing

(e.g. Flickr), social networks, wikis, gaming, virtual worlds, text messaging, videoconferencing, intranets, podcasts, PDAs, instant message chat, social event/calendar systems, social bookmarking, and news aggregation/RSS (Eyrich, Padman and Sweetser, 2008).

In Malaysia, the exponential growth of the social media and its usage had sparked interest in the implication of the social media especially blogs in the democratic process of this country. Blogs are amongst the most focused upon social media that had caught the academic attention as well as the Malaysian government (McIntyre, 2006, August 2). Book (Tan and Zawawi, 2008) and conference papers (Muhamad Nazri and Suhaimee, 2008; Nur Azween and Nidzam, 2008; Mohd Shamsul, Marlia and Jasmin, 2008; Zanariah, Siti Rohana and Norun, 2008; Nursuria and Serub, 2008) discussed the blogs' role in the election process, its potential in democratizing political discourse in Malaysia and how it is affecting Malaysian public sphere.

Blog or web log is a personal, frequently updated web page with a set of archived posts in a reverse-chronological order (latest first). This definition is not all-inclusive as Bialik (2005) argues that there is still no consensus on what a blog really is. Trammell and Keshelashvili (2005) maintain that attempts to describe and define blogs follow many ways; it has been defined in term of its type, format, genre, purpose and content. However the common features (frequently updated web page, archived posts arranged in reverse-chronological order) are evident in the many attempts to describe this term (Chau and Xu, 2007; Trammell, 2007; Rittenberry, 2006; Beale, 2005; Trammell and Keshelashvili, 2005; Grossman, 2004; Drezner and Farrell, 2004; Kumar, Novak, Raghavan and Tomkins, 2004). Gurzick and Lutters (2006: 827) stated that blog is “a simplified form of web publishing that allows anyone with a computer and Internet connection to post content online.”

Blog has also been described as an online interactive, interconnected and collaborative writing tool that might change the nature of public discourse as we know it (Graff, 2005). This is due to the nature of blogs that not only provide the latest posts on

topic(s) of interest to the blogger but also writings that contain a strong sense of the author's point of view, personality and passions which are circulated within its frequent readers and / or anyone browsing the world wide web (depending on the owner's access format). Like all other Internet terms, blog also has its unique vocabulary. The term blog itself is both a noun and a verb. While a person who actively maintains a blog is called a "blogger." The act of maintaining a blog is known as "blogging" and the universe of blogs is the "blogsphere" (Tremayne, 2007; Blotzer, 2004).

Another type of social media which is drawing interest in Malaysia and also worldwide is social network sites such as Facebook, Twitter and MySpace. Boyd and Ellison (2007) defined social network sites as,

web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.

Basically social network sites are the sites that offer the infrastructure to

- a) make relationships explicit, so persons can explore their personal network, and
- b) make new connections and establish new relationships

(Decker and Frank,2004).

Social networking sites are utilized for personal and professional use, communications, new business developments and contacts, dating, virtual meetings and even establishing new communities. Whitney (2010, February 22) maintained that as in December 2009 social networks and blogs are found to be the most popular followed by online games and instant messaging. Based on Nielsen ratings, Facebook (206.9 million users) was the top social-networking site in December 2009, comprising 67 percent of social networking users throughout the world.

Social Media and Youth

Noting that youths today grow up with the Internet, it could be argued that social media is amongst their daily communication tools, be it for friendship, relationship, information, education, entertainment etc. The exploration of youths media use' particularly usage of traditional mass media and social media seeks to illustrate the changing pattern of communication amongst Malaysian youths and how it is affecting their life. This paper focuses upon the relationship between mass media usage and social media usage as well as certain possible impacts of the social media use on Malaysian youths. Of particular interest are the risks involved when youths engaged in building relationships through social media.

Methodology

The target population of this study was undergraduate students in higher learning institutions in Malaysia. In the effort to gauge the adoption and usage of social media amongst Malaysian youth, a survey method was chosen as it enabled the researchers to gather confidential information from a large group in a cost-effective and efficient manner. This study utilized self-administered survey to selected Malaysian students. The pre testing was conducted in February prior to data collection which was conducted in March 2010. Convenience sampling was adopted. The questions measured demographic variables, usage of social media and traditional mass media, media influence, trustworthiness of the media and privacy of users. The data were analyzed using SPSS.

Findings of the Study

The respondents of the study were described based on their demographic characteristics, their media use (social media and mass media) and impacts of social media use particularly privacy of users.

1) Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

The respondents of this study were undergraduate students in a private higher learning institution in Malaysia. The selected demographic variables that were analyzed includes gender, age, education level (highest education obtained) and race. There were more male

respondents (62%) compared to female respondents (37%) with one missing data. The distribution of age is illustrated in Figure1. As the target population was youth, the range of age started from 18 years old up to 24 years old and older. Most respondents were in the age group of 21-23 years (36%) followed by the 18-20 years (33%). Pertaining to the race of the respondents, Malays were the majority (97%) with the rest were Bumiputeras (3%).

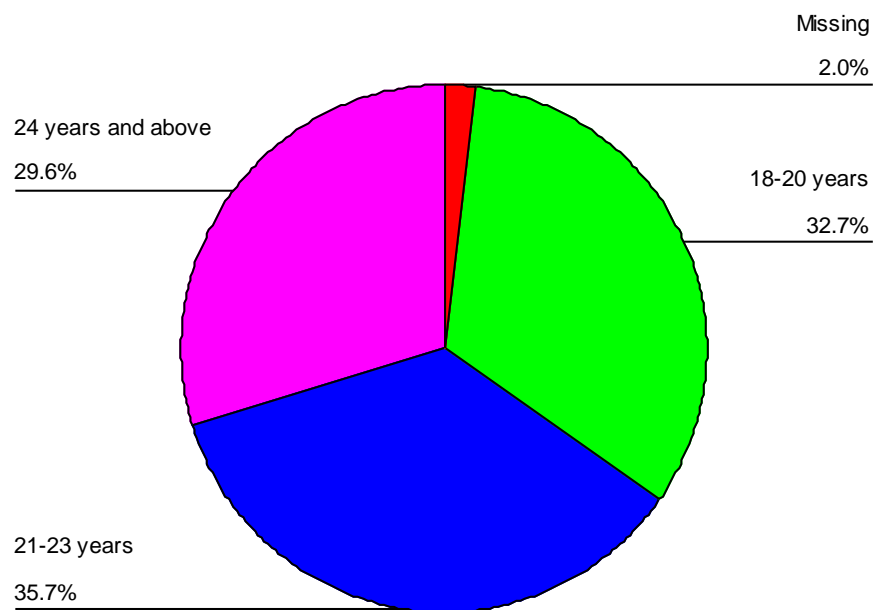


Figure 1: Age of respondents

Majority of the respondents (60%) were diploma holders with nearly a quarter (24%) had obtained their high school certificate (SPM). Figure 2 shows the distribution of education level (highest education obtained) by the respondents.

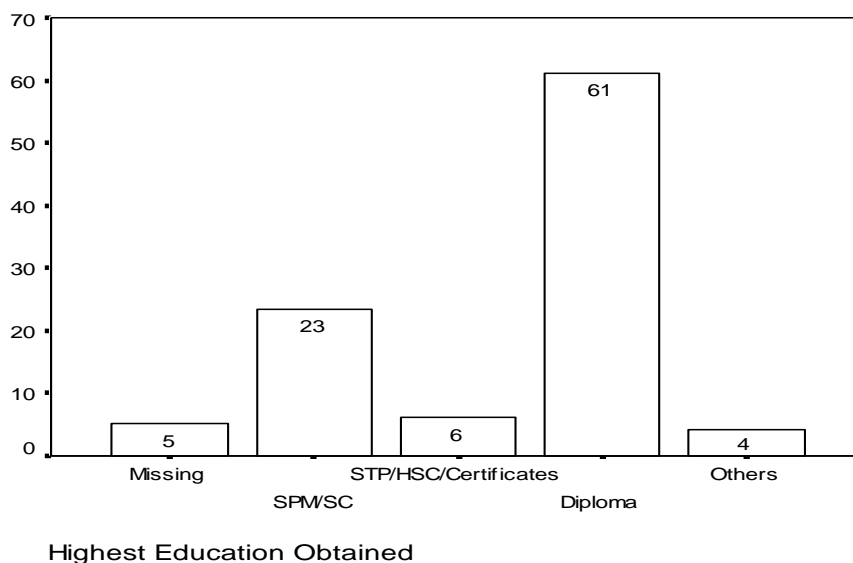


Figure 2: Education of respondents

2) Usage of Social Media

Half of the respondents (52%) indicated that they used the Internet or World Wide Web everyday. The usage of social media was divided into 10 categories ranging from (1) social networking with four sub categories to (2) blogs, (3) photo sharing, (4) video sharing, (5) audio/music sharing, (6) micro-blogs, (7) livecasting, (8) social bookmarking, (9) wikis to (10) others. Most of the respondents (88%) used Facebook with nearly half (47%) used it everyday. The second type of social media that was used most by the respondents was videosharing (62%) with nearly a quarter (22%) used it for 4 days and above in a week. The least used social media was the microblogs (12%). Comparatively social networking sites especially Facebook were used more than the other types of social media.

Fourteen activities or reasons people used the social media were listed for rating on a four point scale from never to always. The activities were divided between social network sites (such as Facebook and Myspace) and other social media (wiki, YouTube, blogs, etc.). Table 1 features the activities associated with the usage of social media. The main activities or reasons the respondents used social network sites were to socialize with

friends (64% agreed that they always used the social network for this reason) and to seek information (45%). While the main reason the respondents used other forms of social media was to seek information (38%).

Table 1 Reasons respondents used the social media.

Activities	Social Media			
	Social Network		Other Social Media	
	*S	*A	*S	*A
To socialize with friends	26%	64%	39%	15%
To play games	34%	31%	27%	15%
For entertainment and leisure	37%	39%	37%	29%
To contact family members	36%	35%	22%	10%
To find new friends	37%	36%	26%	17%
To seek information	40%	45%	33%	38%
For Education/study purposes	38%	33%	33%	32%
To discuss assignment/work with group members	33%	31%	25%	18%
To find out about what others are doing/feeling	41%	30%	24%	16%
To inform friends & others about your activities	36%	36%	28%	15%
To share your feelings with friends & others	35%	30%	26%	13%
To highlight/protest/support certain issues	35%	27%	24%	12%
To advertise your business (if any)	21%	20%	25%	9%
To share your own content (video/pictures/music)	31%	37%	26%	15%

Note: *S = sometimes, *A= always.

The data revealed that the main areas of the social media influence were communication (92%), entertainment (90%), language and learning (84%).

3) Media Use, Influence and Trustworthiness

A comparison was made among the various types of media (mass and social media) to find out the frequencies of using the selected media by the young people. Figure 3 shows the frequencies of using the media by the youths in a week.

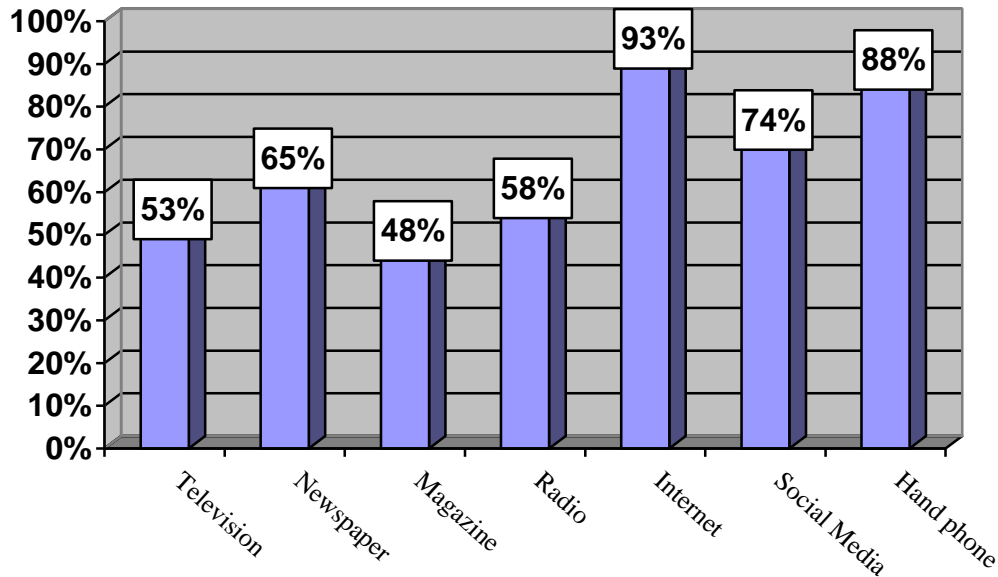
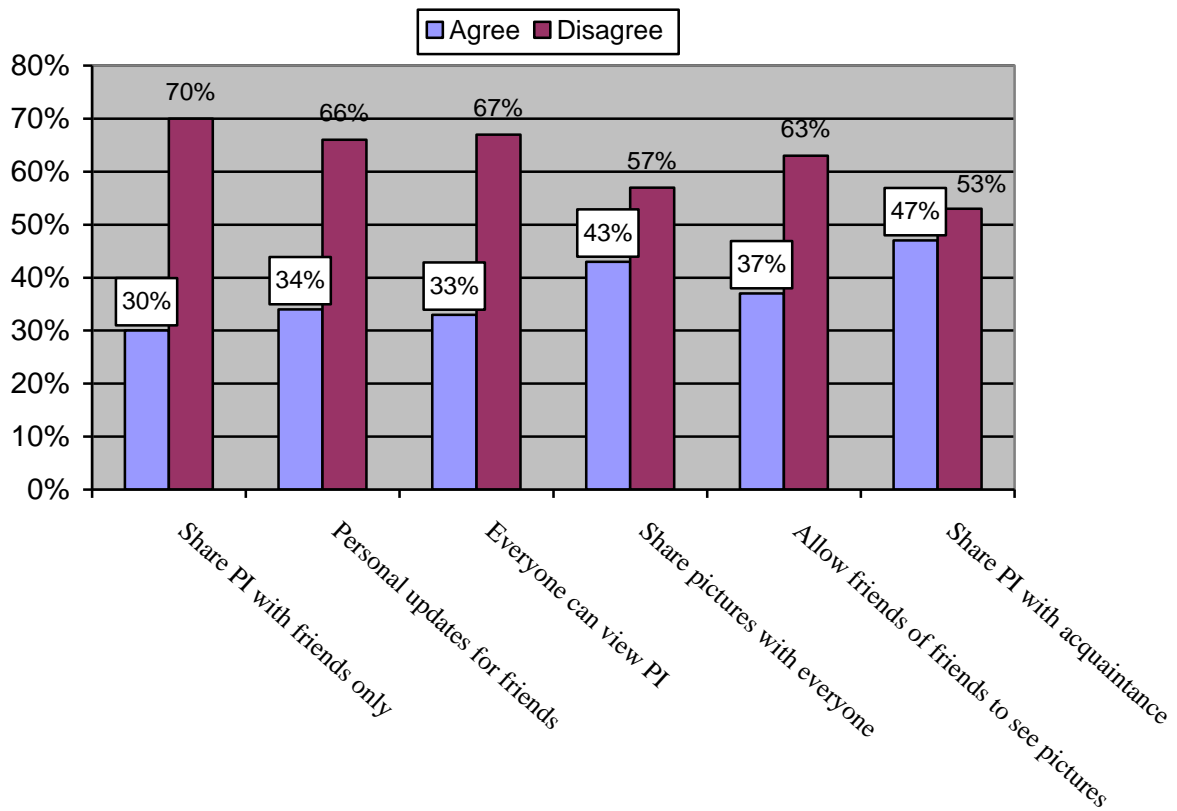


Figure 3: High usage of media amongst respondents.

While Internet, hand phone and social media hold higher percentages of high usage, the data shows that high usage of other media especially newspaper was quite high with the percentages was above 50%. The media that had the most influence on the respondents was the Internet (60%) followed by hand phone (55%) and both television and social media (34%). In terms of trustworthiness, respondents stated that they always trusted the information delivered through television (31%) and newspaper (30%) while information delivered through social media was only sometimes trusted by the respondents (49%). The respondents also indicated that they sometimes trusted the information given by radio (49%), hand phone (47%), magazine (46%) and internet (45%). Media influence on family communication was also measured with the respondents indicating that the media that always influenced their family communication was the Internet (28%) followed by television (24%) and newspaper (22%).

4) Privacy

One of the risks involved in using social media is invasion of privacy. Six statements measuring the level of privacy protection taken by the respondents were rated on a four point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. More than half stated that they only shared their personal information with friends (68%) and disagreed that their personal information (67%) and personal pictures (57%) were open to the public. Majority of the respondents also indicated that their personal updates were meant for their friends only (66%). However they were more open in sharing their pictures with friends of friends and sharing personal information with acquaintances (63% and 53% respectively). Figure 4 shows the respondents agreement and disagreement to the statements pertaining to individuals' privacy among social media users.



Note: PI = Personal Information

Figure 4: Agreement to statements on individual privacy

Discussion and Conclusions

The pattern of media use of 98 undergraduate students who were mostly Malay males in the age group of 18 to 23 years old was analyzed in this paper. Most of the respondents were diploma holders and were pursuing their degrees in a private higher learning institution in Malaysia. Half of the respondents used the Internet or World Wide Web everyday. Majority of the respondents used Facebook with nearly half used it everyday. They also used videosharing application nearly every day. The least used social media was the microblogs. The other types of social media had more or less the same percentage between users and non-users. Blogs for example had an equal amount of users and non-users. Comparatively social networking sites especially Facebook were used more than the other types of social media. The main activity or reason the respondents always used social network sites are to socialize with friends and to seek information. While the main reason the respondents used other forms of social media was to seek information. The respondents also indicated that social media influenced them the most in the areas of communication, entertainment, language and learning. In the analysis of media use, Internet, hand phone and social media hold higher percentages of high usage. However high usage of other media especially newspaper is quite high with percentages above 50%. Internet, hand phone, television and social media had the most influence on the respondents. The Internet also had the most influence on the respondents' family communication followed by television and newspaper. The respondents showed that they practised certain measures of protecting their privacy by limiting access to their personal information and personal pictures. The findings of this study illustrated the pattern of media use, media influence and trustworthiness of the selected sample and generally it showed that both mass media and social media were equally used by the youth. It could be argued that social media complemented the mass media and they were part and parcel of the youths' daily communication and life.

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