SOCIAL MEDIA RESEARCH TRENDS IN MALAYSIA: AN ANALYSIS OF THREE MAJOR COMMUNICATION JOURNALS IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract

The emergence of social media such as blogs and microblogs; social networking sites; virtual game world; collaborative projects; content communities and virtual social world have garnered millions of users in Malaysia. With the development of social media, the academic and media environment have shown tremendous changes in mass communication research, leading to increasing numbers of research on social media. Hence, this quantitative study aspires to discuss various issues related to social media by tracing the research trends in Malaysia. Data were gathered through content analysis by reviewing social media research articles in three major communication academic journals in Malaysia such as Malaysian Journal of Media Studies (*Jurnal Pengajian Media Malaysia*), Malaysian Journal of Communication (*Jurnal Komunikasi*) and Global Media Journal-Malaysian Edition during a ten-year period. Findings on research topics, research methodology and theoretical frameworks were identified. Comparisons of data between the early emergence of social media (2004-2008) and current era of social media (2009-2014) were also made. The results of the study provided insights for researchers and practitioners into the patterns and issues associated with social media in the country.

Keywords: social media, trends, content analysis, Malaysia

1.0 Introduction

Ever since the introduction of social media, there are tremendous changes in the academic and media landscape of the mass communication field. In the media landscape, people are turning to social media for their business communication, personal communication as well as to gain information. People utilise the social media for business marketing in promoting brands and products as well as in maintaining brand relationship and interaction with the customers. Moreover, people also use social media to interact with families and friends as well as in creating new relationships with others. In other words, social media has become a daily communication medium of our lives today. Social media is defined as a set of Internet-based application that allows the

formation and exchange of user generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). In Kaplan and Haenlein's definition, the user generated content refers to any form of content made on social media such as text messages, videos and pictures. In addition, these authors also mentioned that social media is categorised into six segments such as collaborative project (i.e. Wikipedia), blogs and microblogging (i.e. Blogs), content communities (i.e. YouTube, Flickr), social networking sites (SNS) (i.e. Facebook), virtual game world and virtual social world.

Turning to the academic landscape of the mass communication field, in the recent years, there are various scholars focusing on social media in their research. One of the most significant discussions on social media research is regarding the social networking sites (SNS). The introduction of SNSs such as MySpace, Facebook and Twitter have attracted increasing numbers of users all over the world, making these sites as part of their daily communication channel. According to the statistics of Araujo and Niejens' (2012), there are 800 million Internet users adopting social media, particularly SNSs, which is equivalent to 44% of the online population. In America, 80 percent of the population are on the Internet and 60% of these Internet users are embracing the SNSs (Hampton, Goulet, Rainie, & Purcell, 2011). These numbers of SNS users show that SNS is one of the most engaging communication channels on the Internet.

Moreover, ever since the emergence of social media such as SNS, there are rising numbers of mass communication research focusing on SNS. SNS is defined as social networking site, referring to "web-based services that allows users to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 211). These sites allow users to carry out interactive communication among their friends, families or business associates and exchange information with others such as pictures, videos, audios and more. Examples of the prominent SNS websites on the Internet include Facebook and Twitter. In February 2013, using Facebook as the keyword in the ISI Web of Knowledge, the search resulted to 3068 articles on the matter (Caers, Feyter, Couck, Stough, Vigna & Bois, 2013). The high number of research articles portray that the topic is an area of interest for scholars.

In Malaysia, the development of social media have also taken over the Malaysian online population with the invention of Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Blog and more. Since the emergence of the social media such as SNS in Malaysia, these websites have garnered millions of users, using it as their daily practice in life. According to the Malaysian Communication Multimedia Commission, Facebook is the leading SNS in Malaysia with 84.2% users, followed by Twitter (14.3%), LinkedIn (2.4%), Google+ (2.6%) and other lesser known SNSs (1.1%) (MCMC, 2013). Malaysians are also reported to have the most number of Facebook users in Asia, at 5 million users (Balakrishnan & Shamim, 2013; Wok, Idid, Misman, & Rahim, 2012).

The statistics on the SNS usage among the Malaysian population portray that SNSs' popularity in the country has been increasing.

Consistent with the trend of mass communication research in the Western perspective, studies on social media and SNS has also represented an active area of mass communication research in Malaysia in the recent years. There has been a wide range of research on social media or SNS such as analysis of research trends in Twitter (Alias, Razak, ElHadad, Mat Noh, Kunjambu, & Muniandy, 2013; Alias, Sabdan, Aziz, Mohammed, Hamidon & Jomhari, 2013) and other issues such as adoption of Facebook among youth (Mustaffa, Ibrahim, Wan Mahmud, Ahmad, Kee & Mahbob, 2011), privacy, identity and reputation, usage and gratifications, effects of SNS on users (Abdulahi, Samadi, & Gharleghi, 2014) and more. The increasing numbers of mass communication research on social media and SNS indicate that there is a budding interest in the field. However, even though we can see that research on social media and SNS in mass communication are ever increasing, but the understanding of the current trend and patterns social media or SNS in Malaysia is not yet fully covered. We need to probe deeper to understand the significance of social media or SNS usage or its effects on the Malaysian users.

Several analyses focusing on the research trends of new media, Internet and SNS in the communication journals has been done in the West (Kim & Weaver, 2002; Tomasello, Lee, & Baer, 2010; Zhang & Leung, 2014). In Malaysia, previous mass communication research trends look into the current status of communication research in Malaysia by highlighting the issues in communication research of the country such as communication research needs in Malaysia (Hassan & Salleh, 1990), the identity of communication in Malaysia (Merican, 2005), the communication journey in Malaysia (Idid, 2014) and more. However, there is a small amount of research concerning the trends of social media or social networking sites (SNS) research on Malaysian users. Since there are increasing amount of communication research adopting the development of social media in their studies, it is now important for us to understand the development of this new media on the Malaysian users, particularly on the usage and effects of social media and SNS on these users. This notion was also supported by Syed Arabi Idid (2014) whom mention that with the development of the new media (i.e social media), "the concepts of audience, effects of the media, space of communication and time have been changed" (Idid, 2014, p. 14). Hence, he also sees that it is vital to understand the adoption of social media and SNS on the society in Malaysia.

2.0   Systematic Research Trend Analysis

Prior studies on research trends regarding Internet-related research, new media and social networking sites (SNS) have provided useful information on understanding the development status of the SNS or social media research within the mass communication discipline. The following studies are considered significant to the focus of this study. There are broad studies on research trends on mass communication that offers valuable analysis on the direction and patterns of research such as on publication trends on new media (Tomasello, Lee & Baer, 2010), the theoretical and

methodological trends of communication research on Internet (Kim & Weaver, 2002) and the patterns of SNS research in mass communication (Zhang & Leung, 2014) in communication journals. From the studies stated above, it can be concluded that research focus, research methodology and the use of theory are among the variables needed to explore the trends of mass communication research on social media or SNS. These variables can also be used in conducting the content analysis of mass communication research related to social media and social networking sites (SNS) in Malaysia. The aim of this study is to provide analyses on the current development patterns of social media and SNS research in the mass communication field among the Malaysian users. The study would answer the following research question:

- What are the research patterns found on the usage and effects of social media or SNS on Malaysian users that were done from 2004 until 2014? (i.e. topic areas of study, methodology and use of theory)

Hence, the goals of this study are (a) to identify the topic of interest on social media or SNS studies; (b) to determine the methodology that were used in the studies on social media or SNS; and (c) to identify the mass communication theories used in these studies. The paper reviewed published social media studies and social networking sites (SNS) research articles in three Malaysian communication and media journals over the period from 2004 to 2014. Analysis of the research trends on the usage and effects of social media and SNS on Malaysian users is useful in understanding the overall picture of research of mass communication in Malaysia (i.e. communication development and gaps in Malaysian social media research). Moreover, the analysis can also help to recommend better directions for future research of utilising social media.

3.0   Methodology

3.1   Sampling

This study examined the research trends relevant to the usage and media effects of social media and SNS (i.e. Facebook and Twitter) on Malaysian users. The three selected communication and media journals in Malaysia are: Malaysian Journal of Communication (*Jurnal Komunikasi*), Malaysian Journal of Media Studies (*Jurnal Pengajian Media Malaysia*) and Global Media Journal-Malaysian edition for 10-year duration from 2004 until 2014. The year 2004 is not randomly selected. The year 2004 is the year when Facebook was invented (Boyd & Ellison, 2007) and when SNSs are in the mainstream of communication, to provide a clear picture of when the social media appear in research literature. All of these journals are prominent academic journals on communication in Malaysia.

3.2   Procedure

For this study, the selection criteria were undertaken through a search on the following keywords in the abstract section of the research articles: "social media",

"social networking sites", "SNS", "online social network" or the name of specific SNS platform (such as "Twitter" and "Facebook") and on Malaysian users. By social media research, this study means research on the usage and effect of social media on Malaysian users. Social media includes collaborative project (i.e. Wikipedia), blogs and microblogging (i.e. Blogs), content communities (i.e. YouTube, Flickr), social networking sites (SNS) (i.e. Facebook), virtual game world and virtual social world. Due to the limited number of articles on social media and social networking sites (SNS) in the three selected journals, hence, all research articles that are related to social media and SNS were included and analysed. Because the analysis of this study was aimed at the usage and effect of social media on Malaysian users, research that focuses on other countries than Malaysian social media users are excluded from this study.

Content analysis was implemented to examine the data based on the research topics, research methodology and mass communication theories employed in the studies. Content analysis was chosen because the methodology is useful in examining characteristics of published research to determine the common practices among scholars (Potter & Riddle, 2007). For this study, to keep the number of studies manageable, publications such as "journal editors' comments", "book reviews", "letters" and "editorial materials" were excluded.

3.3   Coding Instrument

After the research articles that are related to social media or SNS are identified through the keyword search, the content analysis examined each sample according to the unit of analysis. This procedure is to delve deeper on the research trends of social media or SNS related studies. The unit of analysis depended on all paragraphs regardless of length in the abstract, theoretical framework and methodology sections of the selected research articles. Variables such as research topic, methodology and mass communication theories used were implemented from prior similar analysis on communication studies such as of Kim and Weaver (2002), Kamhawi and Weaver (2003), Tomasello, Lee and Baer (2009) and Zhang and Leung (2014).

The variables were defined as: *Research Topic:* The research topic refers to the main subject of the social media or social networking sites (SNS) or SNS-related phenomenon that the authors of the research articles attempted to explain. For this study, the research topic were undertaken through a search on the following classification of social media or SNS studies outlined by Boyd and Ellison (2007, p. 219-222) and Zhang and Leung (2014). According to Boyd and Ellison (2007), there are four broad themes which are impression management and friendship performance; network and network structure; bridging online and offline networks as well as privacy. This study also adopted Zhang and Leung's (2014) additional thematic pattern that they have included in their research to categorise topics on social media or SNS. These researchers mentioned that there are other themes researched by other SNS scholars, hence, they included these types of studies as the "Extended Scope in SNS Research".

Based on the thematic patterns suggested by Boyd and Ellison (2007) and Zhang and Leung (2014), the five themes are defined as the following:

- *Impression management and friendship performance:* social media or SNS platforms are seen important in the process of constructing users' preferred online presentation of self as well as friendship formation and performance.
- *Network and network structure:* social media or SNS enable researchers to reveal how people manage their social networks in both manner and size.
- *Bridging online and offline social networks:* social media or SNS platforms enable users to engage daily social interaction among friends or families in maintaining existing offline relationships or solidify connections.
- *Privacy:* emphasising on the potential privacy concerns, potential threats while using social media or SNS as well as information disclosure.
- *Extended scope in social media or SNS research:* addresses other aspects of social media or SNS, their users and other themes that may cover more than one area.

Research Methodology: Each article was also analysed according to the methodology used in the study, whether a study employed "quantitative" or "qualitative" approach, or a mix of both. Quantitative methods refers to research that relies on numerical findings, where researchers use measurements to signify communication phenomena such as quantity, frequencies, degrees, values and more (Keyton, 2006). Qualitative methods are research that study a phenomenon based on their natural settings, to make sense of the phenomenon and understand the meaning people have constructed (Merriam, 2009). If the study has applied both quantitative and qualitative methods, it was coded as "mixed methods". Moreover, the analysis also looked into the data-gathering procedures such as survey, experiment, focus group, content analysis, in-depth interview and more.

Mass communication theory application: The other variable that was coded on was the mass communication theory. For the mass communication theory application, the study examined whether the research articles included any mention of specific mass communication theory, the theory that is frequently used in mass communication research related to social media or SNS usage and its effect on the Malaysian users. If yes, the specific mass communication theories were also identified. If the theories used are from other disciplines, the variables were coded as "non mass communication theory". When more than one mass communication theory was mentioned, the dominant one was coded.

4.0   Findings

All issues of the three journals that were published from 2004 until 2014 were analysed for this study. The analysis of the trends in the selected journals showed that only 25 articles related to social media or SNS were published in Malaysia from the

total of 322 articles. The total percentage of articles published on social media or SNS from 2004 until 2014 in the selected journals was only 7.8%. Table 1 summarises the frequency of social media or SNS articles published in the selected journals.

Table 1. Number of articles published on social media or SNS from 2004-2014

Journal Name	Total articles published from 2004-2014	Frequency of articles on social media or SNS from 2004-2014	Percentage (%)
Malaysian Journal of Communication	164	15	9.14
Malaysian Journal of Media Studies	138	8	5.80
Global Media Journal-Malaysian Edition	20	2	10
TOTAL	**322**	**25**	

The findings portrayed that among the three journals selected, the highest number of articles that are related to social media or SNS were published in Malaysian Journal of Communication (15), followed by Malaysian Journal of Media Studies (8) and the lowest was in the Global Media Journal-Malaysian Edition (2). There were no articles related to social media or SNS that was published in Malaysia before the year 2008. However, the number of articles devoted to social media or SNS research in Malaysia increased noticeably between the year 2008 and 2014. This statistic indicated that for the past ten years, research on social media or social networking sites (SNS) in Malaysia is relatively a new area of study in the mass communication field. The research pattern is similar to SNS research in the international level (Zhang & Leung, 2014). For example, only 84 articles that were concerned with social media or SNS were published in major communication journals between 2006 and 2011. The articles were found in leading journals such as *Journal of Communication, Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, Cyberpsychology, Behaviour and Social Networking, Human Communication Research, Communication Research and New Media and Society* (Zhang & Leung, 2014).

Since this study focused on the research trends on the usage and effect of social media on Malaysian users, one of the social media related article was excluded from this study because it focuses on Palembang social media users. Hence, after the data selection and reduction, this study's sample was reduced to 24 articles that are related to social media or SNS usage and its effects on Malaysian users.

4.1   Research Topics

This study attempted to identify the research patterns in social media or SNS studies on Malaysian users in the selected journals. Based on previous studies, there are five broad thematic patterns on the research topic areas on social media or SNS (Boyd

& Ellison, 2007; Zhang & Leung, 2014). Among them are impression management and friendship performance, network and network structure, bridging online and offline social networks, privacy as well as extended scope in social media or SNS research.

The impression management and friendship performance refers to research that investigates the importance of identity, self-presentation, impression management and friendship connections in social media or SNS (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). The theme network and network structure refers to research that explores large-scale patterns of friending, message dataset or activities, relationship of profile elements and number of friends and more. The third research topic suggested by Boyd and Ellison (2007) is bridging online and offline social network. This theme refers to studies that investigate how online interactions interface with offline ones such as maintaining and solidifying pre-existing social relationships as one of the motives in using social media or SNS. Research on privacy emphasise on potential security and threats concerns, especially on the safety of young social media or SNS users. In addition to the four themes, Zhang and Leung (2014) address other scopes of research topic on social media or SNS. This category may discuss other topics than the four themes suggested by Boyd and Ellison (2007) or research that may cover more than one theme in a study. For example, a study may mention about self-representation in social media and the risks of identity exposure among youth.

Table 2. Classification of social media or SNS research according to research topic

Themes	Frequency (N=24)	Percentages (%)
Impression Management and Friendship Performance	3	12.5
Network and Network Structure	4	16.7
Bridging Online and Offline Social Networks	9	37.5
Privacy	1	4.2
Extended Scope in social media or SNS Research	7	29.2
TOTAL	**24**	**100.0**

According to Table 2, it can be seen that bridging online and offline social networks were the dominant topic (37.5%) over the 10 years. The popularity of the research topic was shared by the Malaysian Journal of Communication and Malaysian Journal of Media Studies. Most of the research articles stated that the motives of Malaysians use social media or social networking sites (SNS) was to socialise with existing friends or families from their offline network as well as to engage in daily social interaction by using the social media platforms. As indicated in the findings, scholars have provided significant findings that suggest that social media or SNS helps to strengthened family ties between parent and their children (Mustaffa & Ibrahim, 2014), the use of social media or SNS in adapting to new culture (Ahmad, Mirza, Mohd, Pawanteh & Salman, 2014), using social media or SNS in political participation and more.

A total of 7 articles dealt on the extended scope in social media or SNS research. The extended scopes that were looked into include understanding the languages used in social media, usage of social media in environmental communication (Akmal & Ahmad, 2011), news framing in social media (Kee, Ahmad & Wan Mahmud, 2010), public relations in social media (Ahmad, 2009), awareness of audio dissemination in social media (Rahim, 2012) and more.

Other less common topics of communication research on social media or SNS include impression management and friendship performance, network and network structure, and privacy. Within the sample, 3 articles (12.5%) were focusing on impression management and friendship performance in social media or SNS. According to one of the studies, the uses of avatars in the online social worlds helped to represent the users' identity and self-expression to other users on the site (Mustafa, 2014). Furthermore, in understanding the usage of Facebook advertising among users, scholars reported that users intend to purchase products online (those advertised in Facebook) as part of their impression management (Lee, Mustaffa & Salman, 2014). Another study discussed on how blog is an outlet for self-expression and reflection (Bidin & Mustaffa, 2012).

Among the data analysed, there were four research done on network and network structure. According to the findings, research were done on the communication networks in an organisation (Wok & Hashim, 2014), the use of social media as digital networking tool between Malaysian and Indonesian users (Mustafa, 2013) and more. The least number of articles was on the privacy research topic. The findings revealed that only one research article discussed on the threats of blog in Malaysia.

4.2   Research Methods

Each article was analysed in terms of the methodology used in the study. Table 3 shows the frequency of the methodological approach employed in social media or SNS research in Malaysia. According to the findings, most of the selected articles did not mentioned any methodological approach used in their studies (41.7%).

However, this study also agreed with previous research as the findings revealed that social media or SNS related research in Malaysia employed quantitative research designs (37.5%) than qualitative approach. Previous studies have found that quantitative research using survey and content analysis were far more common than the use of qualitative research in the Malaysian mass communication field (Hassan & Salleh, 1990; Idid, 2014). The same sentiment goes for research that are related to SNS in the Western countries (Zhang & Leung, 2014). On the other hand, the current research findings also stated that fewer articles were using the qualitative approach at 16.7% to understand the usage and effect of social media or SNS on Malaysian users. There was

also a study on social media or SNS employing triangulation by utilising both quantitative and qualitative modes for investigation at 4.2%.

Table 3. Summary of methodological approach

Methodological Approach	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Quantitative	9	37.5
Qualitative	4	16.7
Mixed Methods	1	4.2
Not Mentioned	10	41.7
TOTAL	**24**	**100.0**

Furthermore, this present study also found that among the quantitative studies, survey (33.3%) was the data gathering procedure most frequently used to understand the usage and effect of social media or SNS on Malaysian users (Table 4). The research instrument used in conducting the survey was questionnaire. Moreover, the findings also revealed that descriptive and inferential data analyses were among the favoured method when analysing their survey data. Other quantitative method employed in the studies includes content analysis at 12.5%.

Whereas, among the qualitative research, the social media or SNS related studies in Malaysia employed in-depth interview, focus group, case study and observation. Research that dealt with both methodological approach (quantitative and qualitative research design) applied surveys and in-depth interviews to collect data. Across all selected articles, the findings also stated that there were numerous types of sampling methods used in the social media or SNS related studies, among them are random, stratified, purposive and voluntary participative samplings.

Table 4. Categories of social media or SNS research according to research methods

Method	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Survey	8	33.3
Focus Group	1	4.2
Content Analysis	3	12.5
In-depth Interview	2	8.3
Others	3	12.5
Not Mentioned	7	29.2
TOTAL	**24**	**100.0**

4.3   Theoretical Applications in Social Media Research

This study also sought to identify the most frequently used theories in mass communication by examining specific theories mentioned in the social media or SNS related articles. In this study, a theory refers to conceptual framework or theoretical application including models that help in interpreting, explaining and understanding the relationship between phenomena that occurs regularly (Keyton, 2006). Based on previous studies on Internet research in mass communication journals, their studies found that research that attempted to test theories or applied any theoretical framework are relatively rare (Kim & Weaver, 2002). Similarly, the analysis of this present study revealed that 12 articles out of the 24 social media or SNS related studies (50%) tested a specific theory or relied on a theory in their arguments (Table 5). The rest of the samples did not refer to any theory.

Table 5. Theoretical perspectives applied in social media or SNS research in Malaysia

Theory	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Not Mentioned	12	50.0
Non Mass Communication	8	33.3
Media Systems Dependency	1	4.2
Framing	1	4.2
Diffusion of Innovations	1	4.2
Uses and Gratifications	1	4.2
TOTAL	**24**	**100.1**

Totals may be off by one or two tenths because of rounding.

The findings showed that there are five articles that referred to theories that originated from within the communication discipline. A total of four articles applied mass communication theories in their studies, such as framing, media systems dependency, uses and gratifications as well as diffusion of innovation. The other research stated dialogic communication theory was used in their study. Furthermore, seven articles applied theories from other disciplines such as social learning, sociology, information systems and more. The theories mentioned comprised of dynamic awareness theory, social presence theory, local language referent framework, communities of practice, U-curve model, exchange theory, strength-of-weak ties theory and theory of social influence. Of the 12 articles that applied a specific theory in their studies, two research articles mentioned more than one theory used in their studies.

5.0   Discussion and Conclusions

Previous mass communication research trends in Malaysia have focused on the mass communication field in general, communication research needs and more. However, this study in particular looked at mass communication research trends on one specific medium of communication, which is the social media or social networking sites (SNS) usage and its effects on Malaysian users. Social media or SNS is becoming one

of the most popular media for interactive communication in Malaysia, which provided research opportunities for mass communication scholars to understand the development of social media in the country and the effects it has on the users. Through the content analysis of this study, the findings have identified the area of topic, methodological and theoretical trends of social media research on Malaysian users.

The analysis of the 24 articles revealed some trends on the mass communication research that were related to social media or SNS in the country. This study also compared the research trends between the early introductions of social media (2004-2008) and the current era of social media (2009-2014) in Malaysia. The research trend portrayed that the numbers of social media or SNS related publications in the selected journals increased rapidly in the second half of the ten-year timeframe. The publications increased from only 3 published articles on social media or SNS in the first half of the time period to 21 articles in 2009 until 2014 (Figure 1). From this rising rate, we can depict that scholars in Malaysia are beginning to give attention to the field of study. Since 2008, mass communication research publication in Malaysia showed a sharp increase of social media or SNS related studies, giving an impression that the popularity of the online social network in the country are ever increasing among the researchers.
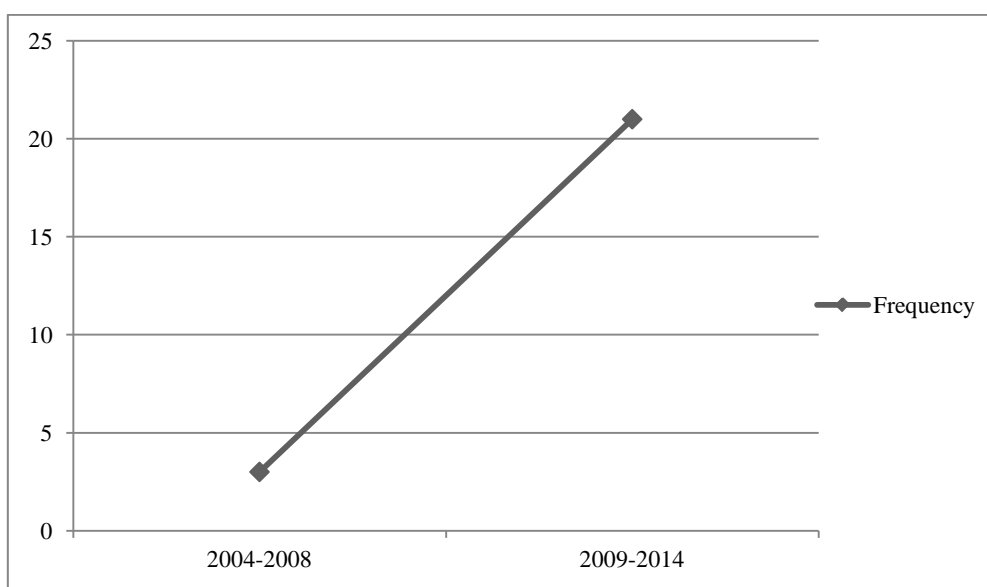

Figure 1. Comparison of published articles on social media or SNS research between the years 2004-2008 and 2009-2014

Based on the number of articles published in the three journals analysed, the Malaysian Journal of Communication and Malaysian Journal of Media Studies are two major sites for research on social media in the country. During the two periods, only Malaysian Journal of Media Studies published articles on social media or SNS on Malaysian users between the years 2004 to 2008. At the second half of the time period,

all three selected journals have published research on social media or SNS to accommodate to the fast-changing media landscape in the country. The increased amount of articles published in the three journals since 2009 suggests scholars' rising attention to the social media phenomenon in the country over the past ten years.

In between 2004 and 2008, the findings also portrayed that during the early emergence of social media in Malaysia, blog was one of the most sought social media platform in the country to disseminate information and influence the society. On the other hand, the second half of the 10-year timeframe (2009-2014) indicated that social media research in Malaysia focused on the following types of social media such as blogs and microblogging, social networking sites (SNS) and content communities (Mustafa & Hamzah, 2011). The social media platforms included Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, MySpace, Friendster and Tagged. There were also studies which mentioned emerging Malaysian social networking sites such as Ruumz, Arakians and youKawan (Mustafa & Hamzah, 2010). As the importance of social media is drastically increasing with its continued development and usage in the Malaysian media industry, the research interest on social media or social networking sites (SNS) is expected to grow in the years to come among the mass communication scholars.

In addition to the differences of social media medium among the selected journals, the comparison of research topic between the first five years (2004-2008) and the second time period revealed that the early emergence of social media or SNS were more likely to focus on bridging the online and offline networks. The research articles during the early years looked into the blogging activities and contents within the political sphere and how the social media changes the communication and readership of the ASEAN countries, including Malaysia.

On the other hand, aside from publishing articles on bridging the online and offline networks of social media and the traditional communication, the current era of social media also published more research on impression management and friendship performance, network and network structure, privacy and extended scope in social media or SNS research. From the research trend, the study found that initial research interests on social media in the country have focused on the social media itself such as its history and development, but recently, scholars are beginning to focus on the Malaysian's uses of the social media and the impact it has on these users.

From the comparison of research topics, we can conclude that the social media research in Malaysia focused on the issues on social media itself, the uses and users of social media and the effects of social media. In Wimmer and Dominick's (2006) classification of communication research development, the Malaysian social media research in communication and media journals are still in the first three phases of the model. Scholars in Malaysia are still lacking on improving the social media and

development of new concepts or theoretical framework for social media in the country. This situation coincides with the study's results on theoretical application. The current study stated that the frequently used mass communication theory such as framing, media systems dependency, uses and gratifications or diffusion of innovations theories were rarely applied in social media or SNS research on Malaysian users. This is compared to non mass communication theories such as cultural and other disciplines theories that were frequently used. The lack of theoretical application in social media or SNS studies in Malaysia shows that more studies in the future are needed in developing conceptual framework or theoretical perspectives in research writing.

Moreover, the findings also revealed that the first half of the ten-year duration articles employed content analysis in their studies. Whereas, social media or SNS research published from 2009 to 2014 was more likely to be quantitative based, utilising survey and content analysis methods. Social media scholars in Malaysia favoured quantitative over qualitative methods when collecting their data. Fewer studies used qualitative approach (such as in-depth interview, focus group, case study and observation) and the mixed methodology research design.

Although the 322 articles from the three journals do not represent a comprehensive sample of all existing mass communication research in Malaysia, the articles do cover abundant range of issues related to Malaysia and its mass communication field. However, the study did not attempt a widespread content analysis of publications on social media or SNS research in Malaysia. The selected published articles were used as a foundation to identify the development of social media research and insights for references and directions of future research.

As within any study, this research also has its limitations. The study finds that some of the articles in the selected journals are not that inclusive, hence, limits our data analysis in understanding the research trends of social media studies in Malaysia. Some of the published articles may not include the methodological approach used, data gathering procedures, data analysis method, sampling methods or theoretical application.

Secondly, not all academic communication journals in Malaysia that may publish social media research were included. Future research shall delve deeper with a more detailed content analysis by further expanding with the addition of more communication journals in the country to understand a broader picture of social media research trends in Malaysia. We hope that this study will serve as a reference for future research that covers larger and diversified sample to investigate the research trends on usage and effects of social media on Malaysian users.

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