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## The use of social media technologies among Malaysian youth

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### Abstract

This exploratory study report findings on the profile of Malaysian young adults age 20 to 24, also known as the Generation Y and/or the Millennial generation, with special regard to their use of Internet and social media technologies. Data were collected from 379 youth from a public Malaysian university across six schools of studies in a Malaysian public research-based university: the Academy of Islamic Studies, School of Economics and Administration, School of Engineering, School of Education, School of Business and Accountancy, and School of Arts and Social Sciences. Findings indicate that the most preferred activities are online communication and socialization, followed on researching on specific information for the purpose of completing assignments, “how-to” and “do-it-yourself” information. The least preferred activity is buying things such as books and clothing online. Additionally the Academy of Islamic Studies students are more active in discussing political issues online compared to their peers from other schools. Data from this study will allow social researchers to utilize Internet and social media technologies for the teaching and learning activities.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Mobile technologies, Internet and social media have become social phenomenon especially among young adults age 18 to 29 or also known as the Millennial generation (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010). Among others, their findings indicated that the use of social networking sites American teenagers and young adults has risen significantly since 2006. They are found to be more engaged in many social relation activities such as sending daily messages to friends, sending bulletins, group messages and private messages on these sites.

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This paper intends to investigate the Malaysian youth online activities within the various social networking sites (SNS). This study is designed to answer three main questions:

- what are the general characteristics of Malaysian young adults with reference to their access to telecommunication technologies and Internet across these six schools?
- what are the online activities Malaysian young adults are engaged in across these six schools?
- what are the social media activities Malaysian young adults are engaged in across these six schools?

## 2. Social networking and online activities

Social networking is a technology that allows two-way communication and interaction between specific individuals and/or organizations in an online environment. Many of these social networking sites (SNS) such as Facebook and Twitter are built with microblogging technology that supports blogging activity with smaller size of word posts (Chin & Yusop, 2011).

The user-friendly feature of SNS invites its wide usage among youth and adults. The Pew Internet and American Life Project (2010) has identified several activities carried out by these two groups of people using SNS. The activities include:

- sharing content like photos, videos and stories with others
- remixing online content such as music and videos together to make “artistic creations” (p.23)
- blogging and commenting on others’ blogs
- building websites
- posting comments to news group, website, blog or photo sites
- information searching on topics like health, news and political news, and
- online purchasing.

Except for blogging, all of these activities are reported to be either steadily maintained or increased since 2006.

## 3. Methodology

A survey on online social media activities are distributed to a sample of 379 young adults in the age of 20 to 24 years old (referred to as young adults throughout this paper) across six (6) main faculties in a Malaysian public research-based university. These schools are Academy of Islamic Studies, School of Economics and Administration, School of Engineering, School of Education, School of Business and Accountancy, and School of Arts and Social Sciences.

73% of the respondents are female, thus, the ratio female to male is 2.7. For ethnicity, 53% of the respondents are Malay and 37% are Chinese which is aligned with Malaysia’s population in 2010 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2010). The number of respondents surveyed is representative of the Malaysian population, and the gender and ethnic distribution in Malaysian higher education institutions. Table 1 presents the background of the respondents based on their schools, gender and ethnicity.

Table 1. Background information on survey respondents: schools, gender and ethnicity.

Background information	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
<b>Schools</b>		
Academy of Islamic Studies	49	13%
School of Economics & Administration	60	16%
School of Engineering	73	19%

School of Education	99	26%
School of Business and Accountancy	57	15%
School of Arts and Social Sciences	41	11%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>379</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	103	27%
Female	276	73%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>379</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
Malay	201	53%
Chinese	140	37%
India	14	4%
Others	24	6%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>379</b>	<b>100%</b>

#### 4. Findings

Data from this study reveal several interesting findings on students' access to technologies and their activities both online and on social media. Findings are presented by the three main research questions of this study.

##### 4.1. Malaysian young adults access to telecommunication technologies and Internet

Table 2 indicates that more than 90% of the respondents own various types of handheld telecommunication devices such as cell phones and smart phones, and close to 100% of the students own computers. All of them have access to the Internet and most utilize the Internet to check, send and receive emails. This finding confirms the initial assumption that the surveyed groups are technology-savvy and do utilize their technological devices for communication purposes.

Table 2. Access to telecommunication devices, computers and Internet to send and receive emails.

Schools	Have telecommunication devices (%)	Use computer (%)	Use Internet (%)	Send and receive emails (%)
Academy of Islamic Studies	98%	96%	98%	98%
School of Economics & Administration	98%	98%	100%	100%
School of Engineering	93%	95%	100%	99%
School of Education	91%	97%	100%	98%
School of Business and Accountancy	95%	100%	100%	100%
School of Arts and Social Sciences	95%	98%	100%	100%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>94%</b>	<b>97%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>99%</b>

However, as displayed in Table 3, it is interesting to note that majority (90%) of the respondents access the Internet on campus compared to from home (73%). This finding suggests that majority of their times are spent on the university's campus for academic purposes such as attending lectures, having group discussions and

completing assignments. It also suggests that the students rely heavily on the free Internet access provided by the university due to high costs of subscribing to commercial telecommunication providers.

Table 3. Access to Internet based on locations.

Schools	From home (%)	From campus (%)	From other places (%)
Academy of Islamic Studies	51%	94%	45%
School of Economics & Administration	77%	90%	53%
School of Engineering	82%	89%	56%
School of Education	70%	92%	52%
School of Business and Accountancy	89%	88%	56%
School of Arts and Social Sciences	61%	83%	34%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>90%</b>	<b>51%</b>

#### 4.2. Online activities Malaysian young adults are engaged in

To understand the online activities Malaysian young adults are engaged in, a crosstab analysis on the online activities across five activities was conducted. The activities are:

- *reading* personal, political and social issues online and on blogs;
- *share* comments, photos and videos related to political and social issues in social media, blogs and websites;
- *searching for information* online including information to complete assignments, do-it-yourself (DIY) and self-improvement information;
- *online shopping* such as buying flight tickets, reserve for hotel rooms and/or services; and
- *socializing* and sharing latest updates using various social media sites such as MySpace, Facebook, LinkedIn.

Results, shown in Table 4, indicate that, on daily basis, socializing via various social media sites is the most popular online activities among majority of the students across schools (88%). This result is similar to of other reports that young adults socialize and interact with one another via social media very frequently compared to adults beyond 25 year old (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010). This activity is followed by information searching activities (65%), reading (28%) and sharing information (23%). The least popular online activity across schools is online shopping (12%).

Table 4. Online activities across schools.

Schools	Reading (%)	Sharing (%)	Information Searching (%)	Online Shopping (%)	Socializing (%)
Academy of Islamic Studies	41%	25%	71%	14%	90%
School of Economics & Administration	26%	24%	68%	20%	92%
School of Engineering	23%	23%	60%	10%	88%
School of Education	31%	24%	64%	9%	88%
School of Business and Accountancy	16%	22%	67%	19%	89%
School of Arts and Social Sciences	29%	18%	66%	2%	80%

<b>Total</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>88%</b>
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#### 4.3. Social media activities Malaysian young adults are engaged in

Zooming into Malaysian young adults' social media activities, we categorized respondents' activities into 4 categories. They are:

- discussions on political issues;
- social sharing;
- click "Like" to show preferences and supports towards comments and/or organizations; and
- sharing both positive and negative comments.

As shown in Table 5, it is found that preference of "Like" clicks has the highest weights (67%). Among schools, both students of the Engineering, and Business and Accountancy schools have relatively low percentage (59% and 54%) of being involved in this activity. It may due to the fact that they are much more burdened with academic life and thus spend less time on social behavior of clicking "Like". Additionally the Academy of Islamic Studies students (56%) are more likely to involve in online political discussions compared to students of other schools. This finding aligns with the current situation in the country where students of Islamic Studies are among the most active group of young adults interested and engaged in both on-campus elections and national political discussions.

Table 5. Social media activities across schools.

<b>Faculty</b>	<b>Political Purpose</b>	<b>Social Sharing</b>	<b>Click "Like"</b>	<b>Opinions Sharing</b>
Academy of Islamic Studies	56%	63%	74%	35%
School of Economics & Administration	49%	70%	68%	37%
School of Engineering	43%	58%	59%	26%
School of Education	42%	59%	70%	24%
School of Business and Accountancy	42%	56%	54%	26%
School of Arts and Social Sciences	43%	66%	78%	27%
<b>Total</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>28%</b>

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, we noted that there are different behavior patterns between students from each school who participated in this study although they are all in the categorized as Generation Y (Gen Y). It is mainly due to other factors such as their backgrounds, the courses they are pursuing, peers' influences, and access to technologies. However, this group of young adults does share some characteristics. They are actively engaged in the social media sites both for sharing information and for educational purposes. This shows they are comfortable in using technology for teaching and learning process, and are aware of and interested in political and social issues around them. From academic point of view, findings from this study reveal that academics of higher educational institutions should utilize the technologies in communicating with this young generation of students

and design their teaching and learning tasks to encourage them in social activism tasks relevant to their academic programs.

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