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## **NEW MEDIA USAGE AND YOUTH PARTICIPATION**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The Internet is considered a huge development in human civilization. It is literally considered as a practical key or essential to human development and social advancement causing massive innovation in the world. Over the years, the advent of new media has permeated most aspects of our lives, especially that of the young generation. It is against this background that this paper aims to analyse the present use of the new media by youth to gauge their usage in relation to participation and nation building. This study is a country wide survey covering Peninsula and East Malaysia. For sampling purposes the country is divided into six zones. A survey research using questionnaire as instrument was used to obtain data. Prior to the actual survey, a pilot study was first conducted. Some 1182 respondents' age between 18 and 25 were randomly sampled from the six zones and selection was based on ethnic ratio. The data was analysed descriptively and inferentially using SPSS 20.0. From the results, majority of the respondents, 89% are social media users having a social media account. A discouraging trend with regard to participation is the very low level of giving comments on general societal issues ranging from social issues, the environmental to politics. As it is now, the youth are more inclined to using the new media for entertainment and social networking. It is time to use the new media to engage with community leaders and politicians and comment on issues related to nation building.

**Keywords:** **New media; youth participation; nation building; social media; youth; online; offline**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The Internet is considered a huge development in human civilization. It has become the main sharing tool around the world and enables people to create massive developments for many countries that are interconnected. Furthermore it creates very large, heavy and solid interconnectivity. It is literally considered as a practical key or essential to human development and social advancement causing massive innovation in the world (Firas H. Al-Hamman and Almas Heshmati 2011). Internet is viewed as an environmental element with potential for developmental impact (Johnson 2010).

Over the years, the advent of new media has permeated most aspects of our lives, especially that of the young generation. New media, especially the Internet has gained popularity among young people wherever they might be and in spite of significant differences among the developed and developing world, the use of computers and the Internet is rising steadily, fastest among young men (Gigli 2004). It is a household name coupled with its ubiquitous nature. The youth which includes the generation Y or the millenials are associated

with the new media (Palfrey and Gasser, 2008). As leaders of tomorrow they are supposed to use the new media to get involved in nation building.

Youth are said to be 46 percent of the total global population and can be defined as a person who is still in their formative years, undergoing character modelling, personality development and sometimes receiving training that has to do with human capital development. Youth is an important human capital development in the process of national building due to the great potential they have (Kayode 2011).

Youths are vital resources of a nation so that nations should invest in human capital especially the youth. Nations should give priority attention to their youth development as they constitute the bulk of their human resources. They create half the population in the least developed nations as well as less than a quarter in the most industrialized ones (Gigli 2004).

New media play an important role of transformative social change. It has an overall impact on youth physically, socially, and intellectually (Weigel et al. 2009). The rise of new media has already brought several main changes in life. They are digitalization and convergence of all features of media, increasing interactivity and network connectivity, mobility and dislocation of sending and receiving, adaptation of publication and audience roles, appearance of diverse new forms of media „gateway“ and fragmentation and blurring of the media institution (McQuail 2010).

Like the conventional media, the power and facilities of the new media can also be harnessed for development leading to nation building by way of participation and commenting on issues pertaining to national development. Based on quantitative data, this paper aims to analyse the present use of the new media by youth to gauge their usage in relation to participation which may have implications on nation building. Hence, their online and offline participation will be analysed.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Three fundamental technical changes in ICTs are responsible for the explosion in their use to promote economic development. They are plummeting cost that allowed many people and applications that could not afford to communicate in the past to link, expanding access to the network, and more powerful human to machine interfaces which allow new users to understand how to use the services without manuals, instruction, or translation (Kirkman et al. 2002).

Although the Internet has consistent positive impacts on modern society, a recent study by Firas H. Al-Hammad and Almas Heshmati (2011) on determinants of Internet use in Iraq indicates that while Iraqis are eager or full of excitement to adopt this technology in order to reach out to the world, a number of factors are not allowing it to become a public domain. Factors include lack of adequate resources, insufficient incentives and encouragement from the government, and social inhibitions. Hence, for the Internet to be adopted fully for development and nation building purposes, encouragement and support must come from the government.

Several studies in regard to relationship between new media practices by youth and nation building has been done. Wallis (2011) studies on new media practices in China through four broad themes: networked community and identity, gaming, networked public sphere and civic engagement, and new media consumption. The findings show that diverse new media practices emerge in China within the tensions and contradictions of the government's desire to simultaneously expand new media technologies and control what are perceived as "harmful" influences. Within a highly commercialized and more liberalized sociocultural environment, new media technologies have opened up new spaces for multiple modes of expression, and as such, they are constitutive of complex processes of social change.

New media like Facebook, Twitter, Google+, YouTube, live blogs, podcasts, webcams, smartphones, or tablets play in the post-modern, on-demand, interactive, and open societies of today. Changes in access to technology have facilitated new conditions for young people to shoot, cut, and mix multimodal texts, and the emergence of the Internet as a convergent multimedia vehicle and a hangout for a global audience has enabled youth to communicate across borders and across the street (Hoechsmann 2008).

New media has power. For example using social media to mobilise political participation initially gained prominence during the 2008 US presidential election, when then-Senator Barak Obama successfully employed a social media platform that incorporated Web 2.0 applications such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to make a range of self organising tools available to young users. The recent events in Tunisia, Egypt, the UK and the USA leave little doubt that the role of new technology in youth political mobilisation extends beyond the Obama paradigm (Theocharis 2011).

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

This study is a country wide survey covering Peninsula and East Malaysia conducted in 2012. For sampling purposes the country is divided into six zones consisting of four zones in Peninsula Malaysia and two in Sabah and Sarawak. A survey research using questionnaire as instrument was used to obtain data. Prior to the actual survey, a pilot study was first conducted to test the respondents' understanding of the questionnaire. Respondents for this study were randomly sampled from the six zones and selection was based on ethnic ratio, age and gender using an already prepared sampling frame table. The age of respondents range from 18 to 25 and there was fairly equal number of males and females. Some 1182 respondents were sampled from the six zones. Base on the ethnic ratio of the country, most of the respondents are Malays. The data was analysed using SPSS 20.0 and the analysis are mainly descriptive.

## **FINDINGS**

Of the total number of respondents who were surveyed, 59.8% have Internet subscription. Moreover there is a significant difference between the total number of respondents who have social media account. The majority of respondents were social media users (89%) and only 11% did not sign up for an online social media account.

Table 1 Internet subscription / Social Media Account

	%
<b>Internet Subscription</b>	
Yes	59.8
No	40.2
<b>Social Media Account</b>	
Yes	89
No	11

N = 1182

Table 2 indicates the means for the Internet and social media activities of the respondents. The results show that information search is the most common activities among the respondents (M=2.92), followed by chatting with friends (M=2.85), surfing the web (M=2.81), interacting and communicating with new and old friends (M=2.76), downloading activities such as music, pictures and videos (M=2.60) and sending and receiving email (M=2.54). This shows that e-mail which was the main usage of the Internet, has now been overshadowed by other functions.

Table 2 Internet / Social Media Activities

	Mean*	SD
Chatting with Friends	<b>2.85</b>	.96
Surfing the web	2.81	.88
Sending and receiving email	2.54	.97
Information Search	<b>2.92</b>	.92
Download music/picture/video	2.60	1.01
Interaction with new and old friends	2.76	.92

\*Likert Scale = 1(seldom) – 4 (very frequent)

Table 3 presents the offline participation by the respondents. Among the offline activities, the most common activities is discussing current issues featured in the media (M=2.25). This is followed by involvement in welfare work (M=1.94), helping the poor and the needy (M=1.83), volunteering in teaching the less fortunate teens (M=1.63) and giving opinion for policy formulation (M=1.61). Except for discussing current issues featured in the media, the respondents' offline participation is below average.

Table 3 Offline Participation

	Means*	SD
Involve in Welfare work	1.94	.81
Helping the poor and the needy	1.83	.84
Giving opinion for policy formulation at workplace or area of resident	1.61.	.76
Volunteer in teaching less fortunate teens	1.63	.81
Discussing current issues in the media	<b>2.25</b>	.88

\*Likert Scale = 1(seldom) – 4 (very frequent)

Data in Table 4 indicate that the majority of the respondents are interested in online discussion group (M=1.49). This is followed by commenting on blog post or articles (M=1.43), uploading and downloading video as a protest (M=1.38), commenting on online newspapers (M=1.31) and sending comments to the editor through e-mail (M=1.28). Similar to offline participation, the means for online participation are also below average.

Table 4                      Online Participation

	Means	SD
Commenting to the editor through email	1.28	.60
Commenting on online newspaper	1.31	.65
Commenting on blog post / articles	1.43	.74
Involve in online discussion group	1.49	.78
Uploading and Downloading video as a protest	1.38	.75

\*Likert Scale = 1(seldom) – 4 (very frequent)

## DISCUSSIONS

The Internet, especially Social Media (SM), is often associated with the youth who are seen to be more attached to the SM. Youth who belong to the generation Y are said to be natives of the new media. For them the new media is part and parcel of their lives. As this study shows 89 percent of the youth interviewed have SM account. However, only about two-thirds (59.8 percent) of the youth interviewed have internet subscription. This might be due to the fact that some of the youth interviewed were still studying coupled with the fact that for some of these youth Internet subscription is still expensive. Also internet is now available free at universities, working place, restaurants and cafes.

With most of the youth having SM account, SM has the potential to serve as a platform to galvanize the youth for a meaningful participation in nation building. Thus the public sector can take advantage of this development to engage the youth in a meaningful participation in nation building.

As distinct from the generation X who are the older generation, the youth who are considered generation Y tend to use the new media more for their activities. This study showed that the common activities in order of importance include information search, chatting with friends, and sending and receiving email. This shows that e-mail, which was the main usage of the Internet, has now been overshadowed by other functions. For the youth, especially those who were not working, email use was not a priority for using the Internet.

When it comes to online participation, the findings indicate that the youth are found wanting. Except for participating more in online discussion groups, which is very low, participation in other aspects is much lower. Likewise, in terms of offline participation, except for discussing current issues featured in the media, the youths' offline participation is below average. Hence, not encouraging and this could be due to the lack of interest in politics by Malaysian youth who are by and large comfortable with their lives and therefore not bothered with issues related to politics. Malaysians youth are mostly active in politics during General Elections and they translate this by way of surfing for political news and consequently affect their vote. This is obvious in the 2008 and 2013 General Elections.

From the foregoing, one may ask where lies the empowerment? This is because literature shows the capability of the Internet in nation building, especially by youth; hence not using it as such is a waste of resource. Does it mean that our youth use the Internet for diversion and not for empowerment which may lead to nation building? These questions and others need answers from which lasting solutions can be derived to make the youth more involved in nation building by way of participating online through commenting on national and social issues.

## CONCLUSION

As it is now, the youth are more inclined to using the new media, social media to be precise, for entertainment and social networking. It is time to shift to more empowered usage such as using the new media to engage with community leaders and politicians and comment on issues related to nation building. Failing this, will be a waste of resource made available by the new media for citizen participation.

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