

Strengthening Patriotism Among Malaysian Youth Through Social Media: A Quantitative Study Based on Media Dependence and Structural Functionalism Theories

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ABSTRACT

Patriotism serves as a foundation for strengthening national identity, promoting civic responsibility, and fostering social cohesion, particularly among young people in today's digitally connected society. This study investigates the relationship between social media usage and patriotic sentiment among Malaysian youth, using Media Dependence Theory and Structural Functionalism Theory as conceptual frameworks. As digital platforms increasingly serve as primary sources of information, understanding their role in shaping patriotic attitudes is crucial for effective national integration strategies. A quantitative research design was employed, involving 400 respondents from diverse ethnic, gender, and age groups across Malaysia. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire and analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including Pearson correlation tests via SPSS. Findings revealed a strong and statistically significant positive correlation between social media usage and levels of patriotism ($r = 0.878$, $p < 0.001$). TikTok was the most influential platform, followed by Instagram and WhatsApp, underscoring the effectiveness of short-form, interactive content in enhancing national pride and youth engagement. The study identifies opportunities for patriotic engagement through digital storytelling, cultural campaigns, and interactive historical content. However, it also highlights key challenges such as misinformation, digital illiteracy, and performative nationalism, which may undermine genuine patriotic sentiment. This research examines how social media can be strategically leveraged to cultivate genuine patriotism. It calls for collaboration among policymakers, educators, influencers, and content creators to strengthen digital literacy and promote responsible, inclusive content. In doing so, social media can function not only as a communication tool but also as an agent of socialization.

Keywords: *Patriotism, social media, Malaysian youth, media dependence theory, national identity.*

INTRODUCTION

Patriotism is a crucial element in fostering national unity and strengthening a country's identity. In the context of Malaysia, patriotism among youth has become a growing concern due to a declining trend in awareness and appreciation of the nation's history and heritage (Siti Norayu & Mohd Zaini, 2020). Contrasting this decline, new media serves as a channel through which youth access information and entertainment, and its interactive features can positively influence the development of patriotic values and behaviours (Nur Aishah, Mohd Azul & Wan Amizah, 2021). With various digital platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook, there is significant potential to enhance patriotism through interactive and easily accessible content.

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Although social media can be an effective medium for disseminating patriotic messages, it also presents certain challenges. For instance, the spread of misinformation and provocative narratives can distort youths' understanding of the nation's history and diminish respect for national values (Mahamood, Rahman, Ramli, & Yaakob, 2021). Furthermore, social media algorithms tend to prioritize sensational content over factual and educational material, leading to an environment where misleading or biased information about national identity may overshadow genuine patriotic discourse (Azman et al., 2024). This highlights the need for a balanced approach to leveraging social media as a tool for strengthening patriotism while mitigating potential negative consequences.

Recent studies have demonstrated a significant positive correlation between social media usage and patriotism levels among Malaysian youth (Azman, Ishak, Aduan, & Syed Hassan, 2024). With the majority of young people spending at least three to four hours daily on social media, these platforms have become the primary channels for spreading patriotic information (Kirin & Warman, 2023). The interactive nature of digital media, such as live discussions, virtual commemorations, and crowd-sourced historical projects, offers a dynamic way to engage young people in national discourse (Nghadiman & Ab Razak, 2021). However, challenges such as digital illiteracy, exposure to conflicting narratives, and the commodification of patriotic content must be addressed to ensure that social media fosters genuine and informed patriotism rather than performative nationalism.

Moreover, in an era defined by globalization and unprecedented digital interconnectedness, the traditional understanding of national borders and identities is increasingly fluid. The rise of transnational communication networks, instant information exchange, and global cultural convergence has redefined how individuals, particularly youth, perceive nationhood and belonging. Consequently, the concept of patriotism is undergoing significant transformation. Conventional expressions of patriotic sentiment, such as participation in national parades, public flag displays, and attendance at historical commemorations, are now being supplemented, and in some cases replaced, by digital forms of civic engagement. These include virtual campaigns, social media advocacy, user-generated content celebrating national milestones, and active participation in online discourses related to national issues (Zhang & Zhong, 2020). Digital platforms have given rise to what scholars refer to as "networked patriotism," where allegiance and civic pride are expressed through hashtags, viral videos, infographics, and digital storytelling, often transcending physical spaces and institutional frameworks.

This evolution of patriotic expression poses both opportunities and challenges. On one hand, digital activism enables broader participation, especially among tech-savvy youth who may feel disengaged from traditional patriotic rituals. On the other hand, the brevity and virality of digital content can lead to oversimplified or performative nationalism, lacking the depth and critical understanding essential for sustainable nation-building. In this context, understanding how these contemporary manifestations of patriotism influence youth perspectives are crucial for multiple stakeholders, including policymakers, educators, civil society actors, and digital content creators. These insights are especially vital for designing interventions that resonate with the evolving values, media habits, and cultural expectations of the younger generation.

Therefore, this study seeks to critically analyse the role of social media in shaping patriotism among Malaysian youth. Specifically, it investigates the types of content that most effectively foster patriotic engagement, the demographic and psychographic factors

influencing youth participation, and the challenges posed by misinformation and digital misconduct. Furthermore, this research aims to compare the influence of digital media with traditional methods of nation-building, such as education systems and civic ceremonies, ultimately offering recommendations for integrating both approaches in a cohesive strategy to cultivate an informed, inclusive, and resilient national identity in the digital era.

Problem Statement

Patriotism is a vital component in fostering national unity, promoting civic responsibility, and reinforcing the social fabric of a country. In Malaysia, patriotism among youth has become a subject of concern, as studies have shown a gradual decline in patriotic sentiment (Siti Norayu & Mohd Zaini, 2020). While various factors contribute to this phenomenon, one significant issue is the lack of exposure to the nation's history and cultural heritage. Social media, with its vast reach and influence, has the potential to play a pivotal role in addressing this gap by providing accessible and engaging patriotic content. However, its effectiveness remains debatable, as the unregulated nature of these platforms can also lead to the spread of misinformation and divisive narratives.

The increasing reliance on social media among Malaysian youth further underscores the need to examine its impact on their sense of patriotism. Platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and X (Twitter) have become primary sources of information and entertainment for the younger generation. While these platforms offer opportunities to promote national pride through government campaigns, NGO initiatives, and user-generated content, their influence can also be counterproductive. For instance, the ease of sharing unverified information can distort historical facts, diminish respect for national heritage, and foster negative perceptions about the country. This duality of social media's impact raises pertinent questions about its role in shaping patriotic attitudes.

On the other hand, Ibrahim and Rabialdy (2022) highlighted a concerning trend among students in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields, particularly those classified within the youth demographic. Their study revealed that this group exhibits a significantly higher intention to disengage from academic pursuits, with many expressing thoughts of dropping out of higher education institutions. This phenomenon can be attributed to a variety of interrelated factors, including increased pressure from academic demands, a perceived lack of relevance between curriculum content and real-world challenges, and the overwhelming influence of digital distractions. The lack of holistic education that integrates national values, historical awareness, and civic consciousness into STEM curricula may also contribute to a diminished sense of national belonging and purpose among these students.

When youth in STEM fields begin to experience academic burnout or detachment, the implications extend beyond individual academic performance. Such disengagement often correlates with a decline in civic participation, reduced interest in national development issues, and a weakening of emotional connection to the country's cultural heritage and societal needs. Given that STEM students are typically regarded as future innovators and key contributors to national progress, their alienation from the broader national discourse poses a potential threat to the sustainability of patriotism and national cohesion. Without meaningful integration of national identity narratives and civic education into the learning experiences of STEM students, the formation of responsible, patriotic citizens may be compromised.

Furthermore, the dominance of global content in digital media, combined with the technical orientation of STEM education, may lead these students to be more attuned to international developments than to local or national issues. This could inadvertently foster a global identity at the expense of a national one. Thus, targeted interventions such as incorporating patriotic themes into STEM-related projects, encouraging civic tech innovation, and promoting national narratives within technological content are urgently needed to bridge the gap between technical education and national consciousness. Addressing this disconnect is critical to nurturing not only competent professionals but also engaged citizens with a strong commitment to nation-building.

Studies have shown that active exposure to patriotic content on social media can increase national awareness and pride among young people (Abdullah et al., 2021). This includes short documentary videos, historical storytelling through infographics, and interactive campaigns celebrating national events. However, there is a lack of comprehensive research on the extent to which such content fosters genuine patriotic sentiment and behavioural change. Moreover, the level of reliance on social media for patriotic content varies depending on socio-economic factors, regional disparities, and cultural influences, further complicating the assessment of its impact.

Meanwhile, another critical aspect is the role of government regulation and content moderation on social media platforms. In democratic countries like Malaysia, where citizens enjoy greater freedom of expression, social media provides a platform for constructive discourse on national issues. However, in the absence of effective monitoring, it can also become a breeding ground for hate speech, propaganda, and politically motivated content. Pahang's Menteri Besar, Dato' Sri Diraja Haji Wan Rosdy Wan Ismail, recently emphasized that uncontrolled social media use could undermine national unity by spreading hatred and divisive views (The Star, 2024). Therefore, a balanced approach is necessary to ensure that social media serves as a constructive tool for fostering patriotism without compromising the principles of free speech.

Furthermore, the lack of digital literacy among some segments of the youth population exacerbates the issue. While many young people are proficient in using social media, their ability to critically evaluate the credibility of online information remains limited. This vulnerability makes them susceptible to misinformation and reduces the effectiveness of authentic patriotic campaigns. Integrating digital literacy programs into educational curricula and promoting responsible social media usage are essential steps toward addressing this challenge.

The concept of patriotism itself is evolving in the digital age. Traditional expressions of patriotism, such as participating in national celebrations or displaying national symbols, are now complemented by virtual acts of patriotism. These include sharing patriotic content, participating in online discussions about national issues, and supporting digital campaigns that promote national unity. Understanding how these digital expressions of patriotism manifest among Malaysian youth is crucial for developing targeted strategies that enhance national pride in the digital landscape.

To address these challenges, it is imperative to conduct in-depth research that examines the relationship between social media use and patriotism among Malaysian youth. Specifically, studies should investigate the types of content that resonate most with youth, the role of influencers and content creators in shaping patriotic narratives, and the effectiveness of existing patriotic campaigns. Additionally, exploring the perspectives of youth

on what constitutes genuine patriotism in the digital era can provide valuable insights for policymakers and content creators.

In a nutshell, while social media holds significant potential to enhance patriotism among Malaysian youth, its dual nature as both a constructive and destructive tool necessitates a careful and strategic approach. By fostering digital literacy, promoting responsible content creation, and implementing effective regulatory measures, social media can be leveraged to instil a stronger sense of national pride. Through collaborative efforts involving the government, educational institutions, and social media platforms, Malaysia can harness the power of digital media to cultivate a more patriotic and unified society.

Theoretical and Empirical Foundations of Social Media and Patriotism

In understanding the role of social media in strengthening patriotism, this study is based on two main theories, namely the Media Dependence Theory proposed by Sandra Ball-Rokeach and Melvin DeFleur (1976) and the Structural Functionalism Theory introduced by Émile Durkheim. Both theories provide a strong conceptual framework to explain how social media is not only a primary source of patriotic information but also functions as a socialization tool that connects individuals with their country.

The Media Dependence Theory, introduced by Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur in 1976, emphasizes that the higher an individual's dependence on the media, the greater the influence of the media in shaping their thoughts, beliefs, and behaviours (Vander, Nail, Liviatan & Jost, 2014). This theory explains how media power emerges when individuals and society rely on media resources to achieve their goals, influencing cognitive, affective, and behavioral outcomes (Kim, 2020; Fitriana, 2022). According to Kim (2020), higher Media System Dependency (MSD) relationships can create affective arousals such as fear, anxiety, morale, and alienation, suggesting that increased dependency facilitates stronger emotional reactions to objects, issues, and groups of individuals. Even Fitriana (2022) proved that frequent and high use of social media will cause addiction, which will affect the behaviour and communication methods of youths.

Media Dependence Theory is very relevant in the current situation of individual dependence on digital media. In Malaysia, in particular, dependence on social media to understand the country's history and the struggle for independence is increasing, replacing traditional methods such as textbooks and lectures in schools. This are consistent with those of Nur Aishah, Mohd Azul and Wan Amizah (2021), who revealed a positive relationship between the use of new media and the cultivation of patriotism. New media serves as an effective medium in fostering patriotic values through learning processes, value formation, contemporary social environments, and the development of youth behaviour. National information accessed through new media not only contributes to learning but also shapes attitudes and patriotic values that align with current contexts. Therefore, appreciation and understanding of such national content should be strengthened to ensure that youth continuously internalize and embody patriotic values.

Meanwhile, Structural Functionalism Theory explains how society functions as a system consisting of various interdependent parts. In the context of patriotism, social media can be seen as one of the mechanisms in the social system that helps convey the values of nationalism to the people (Durkheim, 1997). In other words, social media is not just a medium for disseminating information but also functions as a socialization agent that forms a collective understanding of the importance of patriotism. In Malaysia, the government and

non-governmental organizations (NGOs) frequently utilize social media to convey patriotic messages, including National Day campaigns, commemorations of national history, and the promotion of pride in local culture.

When compared to the international context, the use of social media in shaping patriotism shows different patterns in various countries. A study by Zhang and Zhong (2020) shows that in countries with stricter media control, such as China, social media plays a major role in spreading nationalist narratives controlled by the government, in contrast to democratic countries where social media is more free in shaping patriotism discussions (Zhang & Zhong, 2020). People's dependence on social media for obtaining information related to patriotism is increasing, in line with the changing global digital communication landscape.

There are several previous studies that emphasize the role of social media in shaping the spirit of patriotism among society, especially the youth. Azimah (2017) stated that social media is able to instil a spirit of patriotism among users, especially the younger generation. Platforms such as Facebook and other social media are often used to spread patriotic messages, including pictures of the Jalur Gemilang, the national anthem, and videos related to the country's history and culture. The findings of this study are reinforced by Nur Aishah, Mohd Azul, and Wan Amizah (2021), who emphasized that new media plays a crucial role in shaping and cultivating the spirit of patriotism among youth, particularly as an effective medium for disseminating national information and strengthening patriotic values.

In addition, a study by Hazlin, Wan Amizah and Maizatul (2016) showed that social media plays an important role in disseminating patriotic information and shaping public thinking about national values. However, the dissemination of information through social media needs to be filtered and verified to prevent the spread of fake news that can lead to misunderstandings or distorted understandings of the country's history and identity. Individuals who rely heavily on media, including social media, are more likely to be influenced by the narratives brought through the media platforms, shaping their social perceptions (Ball-Rokeach, 1976). Therefore, reliance on social media as the primary source of patriotic information should be accompanied by self-control and a critical assessment of the content shared.

Meanwhile, a study by Awang (2018) emphasized that the level of patriotism among youth is decreasing and needs to be strengthened through various channels, including social media. According to him, a lack of exposure to the country's history is one of the primary factors contributing to the weakness of patriotism among the younger generation. This is also supported by a study by Siti Nurbayu, Syahrudin, Aisah, Cyril, and Eko (2020), which stated that youth lack patriotism, but active use of social media can help increase their awareness of the country's history and struggle. This can be seen in the use of social media for patriotic campaigns carried out by the government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), such as short documentary videos, historical storytelling through infographics, as well as awareness campaigns on platforms such as TikTok and YouTube.

Furthermore, a study by Alivi, Ghazali, Tamam and Osman (2018) show that social media is not only used for entertainment purposes but also as a tool for disseminating important information, including the value of patriotism. Virtual activities on social media, such as discussions in forums or comment sections on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, allow youth to be more involved in the discourse of patriotism and voice their views on national issues. In this context, Zhang and Zhong (2020) in their study on Media System

Dependency Theory stated that society's dependence on social media to understand patriotism is increasing in various countries, especially in countries with stricter media control such as China, where social media is often used to shape nationalist sentiments that are controlled by the government (Zhang & Zhong, 2020). This is in contrast to democratic countries such as Malaysia, where citizens have greater freedom in shaping their patriotic narratives.

Previous studies have shown that social media plays an important role in shaping the spirit of patriotism among the community, especially the younger generation, who are increasingly relying on digital platforms as the main source of patriotic information. However, the level of reliance on social media and the way it is used varies from country to country depending on the political system, government control, and existing social dynamics. Therefore, to ensure that the value of patriotism can be effectively fostered among Malaysian youth, a more systematic strategy is needed to deliver accurate and relevant information through social media platforms.

In conclusion, the Media Dependence Theory and the Structural Functionalism Theory both complement each other in understanding how social media influences patriotism in the Malaysian and international contexts. Social media is not only a primary source of information about patriotism but also functions as an agent that connects individuals with their country. However, the level of dependence on social media and how it is used differs in each country depending on the political system, government control, and social dynamics that exist. In the Malaysian context, social media has great potential to strengthen the spirit of patriotism among youth, but it also requires an effective strategy to ensure the delivery of accurate and relevant information so that the value of patriotism can be cultivated more sustainably. In the context of this study, social media serves as a major platform that provides information about patriotism to Malaysian youth from various ethnic backgrounds. With the rapid development of digital technology, social media such as Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, and Instagram have become the main source for the younger generation to obtain information about their country. Therefore, youths who are more exposed to patriotic content on social media tend to form a more positive understanding and attitude towards patriotism.

METHODOLOGY

This is a quantitative research design examining how social media can be used to promote patriotism among Malaysian youths. The study adopts a quantitative technique based on surveys as a primary data collection tool. A structured questionnaire was designed with the view to quantifying relationships among variables, specifically social media usage and levels of patriotism among youths.

The research employs a cross-sectional survey design, an effective method for determining the influence of social media on the patriotic sentiments of youths. The questionnaire consists of four parts: demographics, social media usage, the impact of social media on patriotism, and its overall influence on the national identity of youths.

By employing a probability sampling technique, the findings can be generalized with a sample size of 400 youths, calculated based on Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) formula for representative sampling. For statistical data analysis, the study applies descriptive and inferential statistical techniques through SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Descriptive analysis presents an overview of youth's social media usage and their level of patriotism, while inferential analysis, in the form of correlation tests, compares social media

usage with levels of patriotism. Instrument reliability is ascertained via the application of Cronbach's Alpha.

Table 1: Cronbach alpha values for each construct

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Reliability level
Social media & patriotism	0.859	Good
Role of social media	0.934	Very good
Effects of social media	0.959	Very good

The values indicate a high level of internal consistency, confirming the reliability of the measurement instruments used in the study. The Cronbach's Alpha score for all constructs exceeds the acceptable threshold of 0.7, ensuring that the survey items measuring social media's influence on patriotism are statistically reliable.

DATA ANALYSIS

The demographic information of the respondents consists of descriptive analyses on gender, race, and age. Data analysis will all be displayed with percentages and frequency information for each item.

Table 2: Demographic data

Item	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	117	29.3
Female	283	70.8
Race		
Malay	162	40.5
Chines	71	17.8
Indian	151	37.7
Others	16	4
Age		
19-21	102	25.5
22-24	240	60
24 above	58	24.5

This study involved a total of 400 respondents, with a higher percentage of female youths (70.8%) than male youths (29.3%). This suggests that female youths are more likely to provide responses to the questionnaire. This gender distribution can also be used to see if there are differences in how social media influences patriotism levels based on gender. Respondents came from a variety of racial backgrounds, with Malay youths being the majority group (40.5%), followed by Indian youths (37.7%), Chinese youths (17.8%), and others (4%). This distribution presents a diverse representation of Malaysian society, enabling this study to assess whether ethnic background has any influence on the use of social media in shaping patriotism. In terms of age, the majority of youths involved in this study were in the 22–24 age range (60%), followed by those aged 19–21 (25.5%), and 24 years and above (24.5%). Differences in gender, race, and age may play a role in the extent to which youths rely on social media as a tool for obtaining patriotic information and how they interact with patriotic content.

Table 3: Preferred social media platforms among youths

Item	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Tik Tok	126	31.5
Instagram	107	26.8
WhatsApp	100	25
YouTube	32	8
Facebook	22	5.5
Twitter	13	3.2

Table 5 shows the frequency that TikTok was the most popular app, with 126 youths (31.5%) using it as their primary platform. TikTok has become the top choice among youths and makes it an effective tool in conveying nationalist narratives to the younger generation. Apart from TikTok, Instagram (26.8%) and WhatsApp (25%) are also the top platforms of choice among them. Although YouTube is a platform rich in documentary and historical content, only 8% of users choose it as their primary application. Facebook, once a major platform for communication and information sharing, is now experiencing a decline in popularity among the younger generation, with only 5.5% of youths still actively using it. Twitter is at its lowest, with 3.2%, suggesting that this platform may be less effective in spreading patriotic content to youths.

Table 5: Social media engagement: Frequency and duration of use

Item	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1-2 hours	60	15
3-4 hours	170	42.5
5-6 hours	71	17.8
More than 6 hours	99	24.8

Table 5 presents the frequency and duration of social media use among youths on a daily basis. The majority of youths (42.5%) reported using social media for 3 to 4 hours per day, indicating that social media plays a significant role in their daily lives. A large proportion of respondents (24.8%) spent more than 6 hours per day on social media, reflecting a high level of engagement with the digital platform. Meanwhile, 17.8% of youths used social media for 5 to 6 hours per day, while only 15% of respondents limited their usage to 1 to 2 hours per day. These findings indicate that most youths spend moderate to long periods of time on social media, with over 85% of respondents using social media for at least 3 hours per day. This high level of usage shows that social media has great potential in influencing youths' thinking, attitudes, and behaviour, including in terms of patriotism and national awareness. A Pearson correlation test was conducted to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between social media usage and patriotism levels.

Table 6: Correlation test on the relationship between social media usage and patriotism

		Social Media	Patriotism
Social Media	Pearson Correlation	1	0.878
	Sig(2-tailed)		<0.001
Patriotism	N	400	400
	Pearson Correlation	0.878**	1
	Sig(2-tailed)	<0.001	400
	N	400	

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The Pearson correlation coefficient ($r = 0.878$) indicates a strong positive relationship between social media usage and patriotism, with a highly significant p-value (< 0.001), confirming that increased social media engagement is associated with higher levels of patriotism.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Social media use has a strong and significant relationship with the level of patriotism among youth in Malaysia. The results of the Pearson correlation test showed a value of $r = 0.878$ with $p < 0.001$, which indicates that the higher the use of social media, the higher the level of patriotism reported by the respondents. This result is in line with recent studies that show that social media plays a major role in spreading the values of patriotism and national awareness among the younger generation (Abu Safaqa, 2024).

The results of the study also found that TikTok is the most popular social media platform among the respondents, with 31.5% of them choosing it as their main platform. This indicates that the interactive nature of new media plays an important role in engaging youth with national issues and fostering their awareness of the country's history, as it allows for two-way communication and active participation in discussions on patriotism (Nur Aishah, Mohd Azul & Wan Amizah, 2021). A study by Azman, Ishak, Aduan, and Syed Hassan (2024) found that platforms that emphasize visual interaction, such as TikTok, are more effective in spreading messages than platforms that rely solely on text.

In terms of the duration of social media use, the majority of respondents (42.5%) use social media for 3 to 4 hours a day, while 24.8% use it more than 6 hours a day. The prolonged use of social media demonstrates that it has become the primary source for young people to obtain information. A study by Ngahdiman and Ab Razak (2021) stated that social media usage does not harm students' academic achievement. Social media with internet speed has become the main platform for searching for information across fields, including patriotism. Kirin and Warman (2023) support this by stating that interactive searches are the main searches made by teenagers and adults, and youth cannot escape engaging in activities on social media because it has become a lifestyle.

However, although social media has proven to be effective in increasing patriotic awareness, it also poses challenges in the dissemination of information that is not authentic or propaganda-based (Mahamood, Rahman, Ramli & Yaakob, 2021). The influence of social media on patriotism can be negative if individuals do not have critical thinking in evaluating the information received. Therefore, it is important for social media users to evaluate the authenticity of information and obtain sources from authoritative parties to avoid misunderstandings about the country's history and identity.

In addition, the role of the government and NGOs in using social media to increase patriotism cannot be ignored. This study found that patriotic campaigns carried out by the government and community organizations, such as short documentary videos, national history infographics, as well as awareness programs through digital platforms, successfully attracted youth to understand and appreciate their national heritage. Digital initiatives that involve interactive and collaborative elements are more effective in increasing patriotic spirit compared to conventional approaches. However, the impact of using social media depends on the quality of the content shared, the ability of users to critically evaluate information, and the concerted efforts of various parties to ensure that the message of patriotism can be conveyed effectively.

CONCLUSION

This study reaffirms the important role that social media plays in shaping and enhancing patriotic awareness among Malaysian youth in a rapidly evolving digital landscape. The results in quantitative analysis, underscore a strong and statistically significant relationship ($r = 0.878$, $p < 0.001$) between the frequency of social media usage and the degree of patriotic sentiment. Platforms such as TikTok and Instagram emerged as the most influential tools in this process, primarily due to their visually dynamic formats, short-form content, and high levels of user interactivity. These features enable the delivery of national narratives, historical content, and cultural messages in a format that resonates with the digital consumption habits of the younger generation.

The findings suggest that digital media content ranging from historical storytelling through infographics to national awareness campaigns can effectively foster a stronger connection between youth and their national identity. Such content not only informs but also emotionally engages users, contributing to the internalization of patriotic values. These results align with the Media Dependence Theory, which points out that individuals who rely heavily on media platforms for information and interpretation are more likely to be influenced by the content they consume. Moreover, when viewed through the lens of Structural Functionalism Theory, social media serves as a modern-day agent of socialization that transmits shared values, reinforces collective norms, and nurtures a sense of belonging among citizens.

However, despite these positive outcomes, the study also exposes several critical challenges that may compromise the sustainability and authenticity of this patriotic influence. Chief among these are the pervasive issues of misinformation, the absence of effective content regulation, and the spread of performative or superficial expressions of nationalism that lack depth and critical reflection. Furthermore, the study highlights a concerning gap in digital literacy among certain segments of the youth population. While these individuals are technically proficient in using social media, they often lack the analytical skills required to evaluate the credibility, bias, or intent behind the content they encounter. This makes them vulnerable to propaganda, distortion of historical facts, and manipulation by ideologically driven narratives.

In light of these findings, the study calls for a multi-strategy to strengthen the role of social media in fostering genuine and informed patriotism. First, educational institutions must integrate digital literacy modules into the curriculum to equip students with critical thinking skills and media discernment. Second, content creators, influencers, and government bodies should collaborate to produce authentic, engaging, and culturally inclusive patriotic materials. Finally, policy-makers must work towards establishing ethical guidelines and regulatory frameworks to monitor the quality of digital patriotic content without undermining the principles of freedom of expression.

Overall, this study makes a meaningful contribution to the academic discourse on national identity, youth engagement, and digital citizenship. By contextualizing patriotism within the evolving digital media environment, it provides insight into how social media platforms can function as sources of information and also powerful instruments of national integration and civic responsibility. The integration of Media Dependence and Structural Functionalism theories offers a holistic perspective on the mechanisms through which social media influences youth perceptions of patriotism in Malaysia, and potentially, in other democratic societies with multicultural settings.

BIODATA

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