

## **New Media Utilization among Rural and Urban Youth in Marginalized Communities in Malaysia**

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**Abstract:** Studies have shown that marginalization has an impact on the level of youth participation and engagement in social, political and economic processes. This study presents a study that attempts to determine the way in which youth in marginalized communities utilize new media to participate in the decision making process. It also aims to identify issues commonly raised by the youth and to ascertain whether there are any differences in the issues raised by the rural and urban youth in the marginalized communities. Data gathering for this study includes focus group discussions involving 51 participants from five different states in Malaysia, development of new media portal for youth (i.e., youth 4 Malaysia) and five intervention/training programmes involving 393 rural and urban youth of marginalized communities in Malaysia (the northern, central, southern, eastern and Sabah and Sarawak). The findings show that the participating youth are more interested to voice out issues related to social aspects via new media platform, particularly issues related to living quality. Other important issues are freedom of speech under political category and rising cost of living under economy category. However, there are some differences in terms of the issues raised by the rural and urban participants. The urban youth are very worried about the rising crime rate whereas the rural youth are more interested in the rising cost of living issue and political stability. This study highlights the need for the government and relevant authorities to take into account various issues raised by rural and urban youth to ensure that their voices are heard and have an impact on the nation building.

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**Key words:** New media, social media, youth inclusion, media use, marginalised communities

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Marginalisation could potentially widen the social, political and economic inequalities. It can occur due to geography, age, race, gender, sexual orientation, religion and so forth (Hourcade *et al.*, 2010). The marginalization issue also has an impact on the level of youth participation and engagement in public decision making. Youth in marginalized communities have less access to media and communication technology resulting into the lack of opportunities in social, political and economic processes. Nonetheless, the prices of computers and mobile devices are becoming more affordable now and many youth are able to own the technology. In the

context of Malaysia, there is an exponential growth of mobile phone ownership. In 2014, it was reported that there were 43,248,000 mobile phone subscriptions with a penetration rate of 144.2% 100 inhabitants. Out of these, 50% are smart phone users. This shows that the gap in terms of access to technology among Malaysian citizens is small. Taking this into account, mobile phone can be a good platform for youth in marginalised communities to participate in the policy and decision making process. With the emergence of new media and popularity of mobile phones, youths have better opportunities to exercise their rights and engage in the civil society. A study was conducted to investigate the way in which new media is utilised by youth in

marginalised communities to participate in the policy and decision making process. Specifically, this study attempts to look at three main issues:

- Can youth in marginalised communities utilise new media to participate in civil society?
- What are the key issues raised by youth in marginalised communities?
- Are there any differences in the issues raised by youths in urban and rural marginalised communities?

This study will consequently present the outcome of the study. It starts with a discussion on the youth and media participation and the motivation and justification of the study, followed by the method used to achieve the objectives. Next is the presentation of the findings which include the key issues raised by the youth and the differences of issues of concerns between youth in the rural and urban areas. The study will then conclude with a discussion on the outcome of the study and suggestions on future work.

## **YOUTH AND MEDIA PARTICIPATION**

United Nation defines youth as those between the ages of 15-24. Youth at this age range make half of the world's population. The UN report in 2013 shows that about 225 million youth or 20% of all youth in the developing world, are "idle" not in education, employment or training. Their participation in nation building, political process and civic engagement are still low (Golombok, 2002). Hence forth, the youth are demanding equality to exercise their full rights as citizens to participate, engage, and voice opinions on issues affecting the nation (Cohen and Kahne, 2012). They want to be heard and to be consulted in the process of developing the national agendas particularly those related to education, politics and economic issues. In lieu of this, there is a need to study the extent of which new media can play a role in enhancing the participation of youth in nation building.

In Malaysia, approximately one million out of 4.5 million of youth population between the ages of 15.25 years are potentially at-risk. According to the Malaysian Youth Index 2008, almost 500,000 youth between 14.25 years of age admitted to being involved in, at least, one social wrongdoing. Nonetheless, not much effort has been initiated on overcoming problems of at-risk youth. Most of the youth developmental programmes currently being implemented target all categories of youth in society. By ignoring the at risk youth, the nation is losing out on reaping the hidden potentials, of approximately 1 million of its youth

between the ages of 15-24 years, that may be hugely beneficial to the nation's building. The at-risk youth in Malaysia can be defined as those coming from low-waged families who are not emotionally supportive with unsatisfactory living conditions, lacking parental supervision on activities that they are involved in, deficient in social skills, low aspiration, emotional control and self-esteem and devoid of suitable role model.

This study covers a discussion on a focus group's findings with a group of youths who come from marginalized communities in the rural and urban areas. It also highlights the role of a new media such as web TV, web radio and web journalism in providing a platform for youth to share their opinions to exercise their rights.

**Focus groups:** The five focus group discussions involving 51 youths were conducted separately in five states in Malaysia-Kelantan, Kedah, Selangor, Johor and Sabah. The main focus of the discussions was two-fold to ascertain the participants' opinion regarding the potentials of new media usage among youth and to identify key issues affecting youth in the marginalized communities. A set of guidelines was used for the focus group to ensure that the objectives were achieved. Video recording and note taking were used to collect the data, after which thematic data analysis was conducted to analyse the qualitative data. Thematic analysis is the most common technique used in qualitative study to pinpoint, examine and find patterns or themes to describe a phenomenon (Guest and MacQueen, 2012).

Based on the analysis, 15 issues (four economy, three politics and eight social) were identified. This finding is used as a basis for developing a portal called Youth 4 Malaysia. The portal provides three tools which are web TV, web radio and web journalism for youth to voice their opinions in the issues and areas which are previously identified via the focus group discussions.

Once the portal was completed, 5 intervention programmes were conducted involving 393 rural and urban youth of marginalized communities in several geographical locations in Malaysia (Northern, central, Southern, Eastern and Sabah and Sarawak). These intervention programmes are trainings being provided by the researchers to instill the basic skills of using the three new media tools on the participating youth. Once they know how to utilise these tools, the participants developed their own contents for the web TV, web radio and web journalism (i.e., study). The materials were then uploaded onto the portal's server for assessment and review purposes. In addition, all users of the portal were encouraged to view and comment on the content. The content uploaded by the youth were then analysed to ascertain the key issues raised by them. Feedback and comments by viewers of the content were also analysed.

In addition, the researchers also attempted to ascertain whether there are any differences in the issues raised by youth in the marginalized communities in the urban and rural areas. This may be imperative especially for the policy makers to ensure that the initiatives to develop youth are effective and contextually relevant.

### KEY ISSUES OF CONCERNS

Table 1 shows a list of key issues identified by the youth during the focus group discussions. Social category has the highest number of issues (eight issues) which include hobbies, sports, health, beauty, arts and entertainment, crimes, racial issues, current social issues and quality of living. This is followed by the economy category which are hot economic issues, business, jobs and cost of living. Politics has the lowest number of issues (only three) which are—current political issues affecting the nation, economic stability and the gaps between rural and urban.

**Participation in web TV:** Table 2 shows web TV submissions by category and by rural and urban youth in marginalized communities. There are a total of 71 web TV clips being submitted, out which 64 (90%) are under social category. This means that the participating youth in both rural and urban area are more interested in social aspect rather than politics and economy. Surprisingly, majority of the clips are related to quality of living issues (40% by rural and 33% by urban youth). This clearly indicates that the youth especially those who live in rural area are expressing their views on the need by the government to improve quality of living especially among the youth in Malaysia. In addition, the youth especially those who live in urban area (19% of the submission) are also expressing their concerns regarding the rising crime rate. This is another important area which should be taken care of by the government. The urban youth are also submitting considerably high number of clips on issue related to hobbies, health and beauty.

Based on the analysis of the views and access to the web TV, interestingly a clip under social category entitled “social media crime” receives the highest view (420). This clearly shows the awareness of the youth regarding the potential harm of social media to society. The second highest view is under politics category entitled “Youth should be given equal rights”. The youth highlights the need by the government to treat youth as equal to adult citizens who enjoy rights to participate freely in politics, economy, education and other aspects.

Table 1: Issues of concerns identified by Youth

Politics	Social	Economy
Current political issues	Hobbies	Hot economic issues
Economic stability	Sports	Business
Urban and rural gap	Health and beauty	Jobs
	Arts and entertainment	Cost of living
	Crimes	
	Racial issues	
	Current social issues	
	Quality of living	

Table 2: Web TV submissions for politics, social and economy category by issues and youth group

Category (issues)	Quantity	Rural	Urban
<b>Politics</b>			
Current political issues	1	1	0
Political stability	2	1	1
Freedom of speech	3	2	1
Sub total	6	4	2
<b>Social</b>			
Living quality	23	9	14
Crime issues	11	3	8
Hobbies	9	2	7
Health and beauty	6	1	5
Current social issues	6	3	3
Arts and entertainment	4	2	2
Racial issues	4	2	2
Sports	1	0	1
Sub total	64	22	42
<b>Economy</b>			
Hot issues	0	0	0
Business	1	1	0
Jobs	0	0	0
Cost of Living	0	0	0
Sub total	1	1	-
Total	71	27	44

Table 3: Web Journalism submissions for politics, social, economy category by issues and youth groups

Category (issues)	Quantity	Rural	Urban
<b>Politics</b>			
Current political issues	12	7	5
Political stability	6	5	1
Freedom of speech	22	14	8
Sub total	40	26	14
<b>Social</b>			
Living quality	27	4	23
Crime issues	7	2	5
Hobbies	11	5	6
Health and beauty	5	1	4
Current social issues	9	1	8
Arts and entertainment	11	5	6
Racial issues	1		1
Sports	1		1
Sub total	72	18	54
<b>Economy</b>			
Hot issues	12	1	11
Business	4	0	4
Jobs	1	0	1
Cost of living	10	4	6
Sub total	27	5	22
Total	139	49	90

**Participation in web journalism:** Table 3 presents submissions of web journalism materials by the

Table 4: Web Radio submissions for politics, social, economy category by issues and youth category

Category (issues)	Quantity	Rural	Urban
<b>Politics</b>			
Current political issues	2	1	1
Political stability	1	1	0
Freedom of speech	1	0	1
Sub total	4	2	2
<b>Social</b>			
Living quality	-	-	-
Crime issues	-	-	-
Hobbies	1	0	1
Health and beauty	2	0	2
Current social issues	0	0	0
Arts and Entertainment	1	0	1
Racial issues	0	0	0
Sports	0	0	0
Sub total	4	0	4
<b>Economy</b>			
Hot issues	2	1	1
Business	1	0	1
Jobs	1	0	1
Cost of living	2	1	1
Sub total	6	2	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>10</b>

participants. Surprisingly, the portal received more submissions in this category (139 contributions) compared to web TV (71 contributions) and web radio (28 contributions). There are some interesting findings from the analysis. For politics category, more than 50 percent of the articles are related to freedom of speech. This indicates that the participants in both rural and urban areas perceive that youth should be allowed more freedom to express their opinion in the political issues particularly those which have an impact on youth. Nonetheless, participants from rural area are also expecting the government to maintain political stability in the country. This is evident when 19.2% of the submitted articles by this youth group discussed political stability issues.

In social category, there is a clear difference between the two youth groups on the issue of living quality. Participants from urban area seem to pay more attention on this issue where 42.6% of the 54 articles submitted describes the need for the government to upgrade the living quality of the youth in the poor family in the urban area. In line with this, the youth in the rural area are concerned with the issue of rising cost of living. In the economics category, 80% of the submitted articles by this youth group reveal the hardship they are suffering due to the rising cost of living in the rural area. Based on the analysis of user views, articles in the economy category which are related to quality of living, receives the highest views/reads compared to the other two categories. This indicates the importance of this issue among the participants and the users (readers) of the portal.

**Participation in web radio:** Table 4 presents the statistics on web radio submissions. Most of the submissions were made by the urban participants (i.e., 71.4%). Again, the trend shows that the participants are more interested in the social and economy issues rather than politics. Urban youth in particular, submitted their radio clips on social issues related to hobbies, health and beauty and Arts and Entertainment. None of the rural participants submitted their clips in this category. Similar number of submissions were made by the rural participants for economy issues (i.e., hot economy issues, business, jobs and cost of living). A notable difference to the statistics of web TV was found whereby urban youth are more concerned regarding freedom of speech and the rural youth are more interested in political stability.

Despite low number of submissions in the political category, these web radio clips received commendable views/hits. In fact, two of the clips submitted in this category are the top two mostly viewed among the portal users/visitors. The highest is the clip on current political issues (543 views), followed by the clip on freedom of speech (490 views). This shows that despite the low interest among the participants to submit their works on political issues, the users and visitors of the portal are more interested to follow on these issues. Unfortunately, further analysis on the portal users or visitors cannot be conducted due to limited information on their backgrounds.

## CONCLUSION

Youth exclusion in the decision making process is a global issue which exists everywhere around the world. This is more apparent among the youth group who are living in the marginalized communities. The outcome of this study provides a clear indication that new media can indeed be a good platform for the youth to participate and voice out their opinions regarding various issues affecting their welfare. This is in line with several other studies such as Hourcade *et al.* (2010) which also highlight the positive impact of new technology on youth engagement in politics, social and economy. This study also reveals the fact that when attempting to tackle the youth issues, the government and relevant authorities need to differentiate between youth in the urban and rural areas. It appears that issues of concerns for these two groups may differ due to different living conditions, neighbourhood and lifestyle. In this study, for example, the youth in the urban area are very concerned regarding the crime rate and living quality compared to the youth in the rural area who are paying more attention to the issues such as rising cost of living and political stability. Having

said that there are also areas whereby both youth in the rural and urban areas share similar concerns, particularly issues related social and economy.

This study provides evidence on the importance of new media as platform to bridge the gap between the government and relevant authorities with the youth in the marginalized communities. Consequently, it can minimize the youth exclusion problem which as it is commonly known, can hinder the nation's progress.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

In the context of future research, it is recommended that researchers conduct similar study but with wider and bigger samples involving youth groups in more cities and villages in rural areas. This is to further support and validate the outcome of the current study. In addition, the Youth 4 Malaysia portal can be maintained or handed over to the relevant government agency under the Ministry of Youth and Sports so that the youth can continue to participate and contribute their ideas and

thoughts via the portal. The content of the portal can be further qualitatively analysed to look at the issues put forward by the youth in greater details.

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