

## SOCIAL MEDIA AND MALAYSIAN YOUTH'S PARTICIPATION ON FACEBOOK: AN EXPLORATORY CASE

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Social media, such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, have drastically transformed social activities by bridging the gap between the public and politics. Numerous studies have been focusing on how social media such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter influence modern day politics, with emphasis given to the relationship and level of interaction that have been enabled and restricted by such social media influences. In a study by Lenhart (2009), generally, 93% of teens aged 12-17 go online and 63% of online teens go online daily.

In today's modern politics, candidates cannot dispute the role of social media as one of the most important and influential elements of a successful political campaign, particularly when it comes to gauging popular support, for example, the 2008 US Election, during which both Democrats and Republicans used a wide arsenal of different social media strategies in order to broadcast their political messages to an increasingly bigger Internet audience, was probably the best example of the until then underrated power of social media. Social media has proven to be a democratic tool in advocating change particularly with the change in heads of government, as witnessed recently across several nations in North Africa, where anti-Government groups have used blogs and especially social media outlets like Facebook and Twitter as their most effective weapons against dictatorial regimes.

According to Eickelman and Anderson (2003), the emerging new media, in terms of their comparative diversity, flexibility, and lower barriers to entry, is channels for diverse, flexible, and more accessible participation. This evolving public sphere is not only one of talking back to power, but also one of a wider range of actors who talk to each other, sometimes about power, and often about the power of the new media in their communication.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

According to Abd Jalil, Abd Jalil, and Abdul Latiff (2010), the increasing importance of social media is undeniable. Wikipedia, launched in 2001, today contains more than 13 million articles in 200 different languages. Facebook, founded in 2004, helps more than 300 million members all over the world to stay in touch. If Facebook were a country, it would be ranked 4th based on its size. Among the youngest member in the family of social media, Twitter has only been created in 2006 and currently shows a monthly growth rate of around 1,400 % (Qualman 2009).

Scholars have acknowledged the power of social media in shaping today's society as they have argued that its impact on the political arena of countries around the world is undeniable. According to Abd Jalil, Abd Jalil, and Abdul Latiff (2010) and Ahmad Nazri et al. (2004), blogs have given a big impact to the political situation in a developing country like Malaysia. Horton (2009) emphasized six characteristics that appear in the definitions of social media:

- a) Internet-based but not in totality as the Internet is the organizing agent but communication is personal. Meetup.com, for example, uses the Internet to set up local face-to-face meetings.
- b) User-generated and published information. User generation is loosely defined as users that often republish information they discovered elsewhere.
- c) Community sharing - posts and comments, file sharing and community of interest which varies by individual and group as well as being active or passive.
- d) Multimedia - Social media make use of all media forms (audio visual and print media) even haptic communication (mechanical simulation of touch).