Facebook as Social Media Tools among Muslim Youths in Malaysia

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Abstract

Facebook has been regarded as an important social media tools. Previous studies show that Facebook had globally registered over 750 million active users, with half of them logging on to the side daily (Facebook Statistics, Stats and Facts for 2011).However, there is still limited understanding and study about the level of Facebook usage, especially among the Muslim youthsin Malaysia. This study addresses this gap by exploring the level of Facebook usage and its impact on Muslim youths religion understanding. The data of this study has been collected from Muslim youths in Nilai district, Malaysia through survey and interview. The findings show that the Facebook usage among Muslim youths in Malaysia is at medium level (M = 2.94, S.D = 0.93). The findings from in depth interview also reveal that the Facebook can be use as one of the sources religion understanding. This study provides valuable knowledge and understanding about the usage of Facebook among Muslim youths in Malaysia and its impact on their religion knowledge.

Keyword: Facebook, social media, Muslimyouths, Malaysia

Introduction

According Zulkiple and Nurul Widyamirza (2008), many previous research conducted has shown the influence of the Internet on the lives of individual Muslims. Internet use is not just limited to activities related to finding jobs or to communicate with contacts, but it also involves many activities of everyday life. This proves that the effect of the Internet on the Muslim society is inevitable.

This is supported by easy access to the Internet in Malaysia. Many individuals already have Internet access in their homes (Zulkiple & Nurul Widyamirza: 2008). Paid Internet center is also very easy to find and they offer access to the Internet at cheap rates. Studies of Internet use among adolescents also show that they constitute a majority of the cyber cafe visitor (Mohd Taib& Che Su in Zulkiple & Jenn Widyamirza: 2008). Apart from access to the Internet cyber cafes can also be found in educational institutions and near at home. Access to the Internet is very important for young people to obtain educational materials for teaching and learning (Zulkiple & Jenn Widyamirza, 2008).

However, exposure to the Internet among adolescents can also give negative implications. There are many studies that show there is a relationship between use of the Internet to increase social problems among youth such as adultery, gangsterism, drugs, gambling (Hashim et.al, 2010), vandalism (Azizi, 2010) and suicide (Adekola et.al, 2008). This is because most teenagers are found using the Internet to visit sites that are not helpful and immoral (Liau, Khoo&Ang, 2008) which exposes them to information that are destructive. Furthermore, this was so among group of teenagers at the transition from childhood to adulthood. At this stage the environment as well as their peers very easily influence them.

At present, there is a tendency among the Muslim community to use the Internet for the purpose of conveying the da'wah, deliver religious lectures, search and retrieve information related to Islamic teachings and also answers related to the tenets and rituals of everyday problems.

This is seen as a very good development and a positive impact on the Muslim community in Malaysia. Due to the diversification effect and the role of the internet on the Muslim community, researchers feel there is a need to review and explore the patterns of use of the internet especially Facebook as a tool to deliver da'wah and its impact on the understanding of religion among Muslim youths in Malaysia especially in Nilai district, Negeri Sembilan.

Literature Review

The adoption of Facebook in Malaysia

According to Effective Measure and the Malaysian Digital Association, Facebook is ranked first among the most popular websites visited by Internet users in Malaysia. Having realized the potential of Facebook, more and more people are trying to use this social networking site. As with any communication technology, the future of Facebook will eventually be determined by public response. While Facebook is undergoing a rapid diffusion process, it is important to monitor not only how users use it as a new medium, but also how potential users perceive Facebook as compared to other social sites (Mustafa N., Ibrahim F., Wan Mahmud W.A., Ahmad F., Chang P.K., Mahbob M. H., 2011)

Youth of today face a myriad of challenges. They enjoy a higher level of affluence and tend to be technologically savvy. The United Nations defines youth as persons between the ages of 15 of 24 years (United Nations, 2005), but in Malaysia, the Youth Society and Youth Development Act 2007 defines as those who are aged between 15 and 40-years-old. Griffin (1997: 97) points out that youth are "treated as a key indicator of the state of the nation itself." However, in the National Youth Policy in Malaysia which was formulated in 1985 and revised in 1995, the main targets of its programs are youth in the age bracket of 15 to 25 years old (Mustafa N., et.al 2011.

Youth between 15 and 25 years make up a substantial portion of the population, and they carry greater responsibility toward further progress in the country as it moves toward a progressive, harmonious and united civil society as envisioned in the Malaysia Vision 2020. In 2003, there were 4,684,700 in this age group (18.7% of the population), of which 2,375,400 were male and 2,309,300 were female. Most of this age group is still in secondary school, college or university. They are considered by the government as a primary national asset and the future of the nation. Under the Ninth Malaysia Plan (2006- 2010), the government has allocated RM2.2 billion for activities related to the development of these young people (Mustafa N., et.al 2011).

The existence of social media has created a more democratic sphere among the citizens. At the press of a button or a touch of a finger on the screen, consumers are able to channel out opinions to get chains and chains of feedback—globally for that matter. Nielsen Media Index indicated that Internet users increased to 21% world's population in 2008 with almost 4 in 10 users spending between one to two hours on the Internet every day. Email, surfing and information gathering are familiar traits among Malaysians, but the more popular activities among "netizens" are online TV/music/games (47%), message/chat/blogging (45%) and reading newspaper/magazines shows (35%) the least. About 90% of Malaysians use Facebook as their prime social media network. 5.14% Malaysians visit You Tube, while another 1.97% frequent the latest media network Twitter. MySpace was one of the favourite among Malaysian a few years back, but it is in 6th place and continues to lose popularity (Mustafa N., et.al 2011).

The possible application through user-generated content has transformed users from content consumers to content producers, supporting the democratization of knowledge and information. Social media come in the form of podcasts, social blogs, weblogs, news portals, internet forums, etc., to create a public sphere communications sphere. Having public sphere elements, these forms of social media are very interactive and dynamic channels of news and information. They allow citizens to access information, send messages, offer views and opinions, and deliberate over critical issues. Consumers are able to upload videos, photographs, texts comments and the like forming a highly interactive cybersphere. Social networking sites such as MySpace, Facebook, Youtube, Twitter etc., have allowed consumers to chat, to exchange information and also to be persuasive unlike radio and television. The popularity of Facebook has shown a special increase in its use among youth. As of April 2009, Facebook has over 200 million active users worldwide. In Malaysia, the number of users has reached 10 million, with 38% being 18 and 24-years-old (socialbakers.com, 2010). This makes Malaysia the 17th largest concentration of Facebook users in the world and 3rd behind Indonesia and the Phillipines in South East Asia (Mustafa N., et.al 2011).

Faith in Religion

Faith plays an important role in shaping the worldview and moral character of an individual Muslim. Perfect faith will produce human capital with high self-esteem, admirable character, protected from false teachings and can provide benefits to the community. (Mahmud Shaltut, 2001, 11) However, what must be understood is that the perfection of faith and its preservation are very closely linked with the effort and environmental factors. (Engku Ahmad Zaki, 2007,1-2)

The fact isthat faith or *aqidah*is one of the core sciences in understanding Islam. Modern Islamic scholars classify knowledge into many parts in the Islamic epistemology. Apart from the knowledge of the *Quran, Sunnah, Al-Fiqh, Usul Al-Fiqh* and *Al-Tasawwuf*,faith or *aqidah*is chosenas the most important knowledge compared to the other knowledge, because it discusses on theprinciples of belief in Islam. (Al-Zuhayli, 1992, 335)

In today's society, human condition continues to grow and change in the aspect of thinking and understanding his surroundings.These changes are necessarily moderated to serve to strengthen the faith of Islam, so that people are able to face the challenges ahead and to ensure the understanding of Muslims continues to be strengthened and well preserved. (Al-Maydani, 1979, 33 – 41) *Ahl Al-SunnahWa Al-Jamaah* approach is the only approach that guarantees the integrity and authenticity of the Islamic faith. This Sunni sect is, in fact holding to the original teachings of the Prophet, Companions and *Tabi'in* and generations after them, composed byscores of distinguished scholars. It is very difficult to find a group or sect of Muslims that really suits the original teachings of the Prophet, Companions and *Tabi'in,*except the people of *Ahl Al-SunnahWa Al-Jamaah*. (Abdul ShukorHusin, 1998, 38-39; Abdul Hamid, 2006 and Engku Ahmad Zaki, 2007, 129-140)

Virtual life through Facebook has certain influence on the formation and the making of the Muslim faith. This can be easily understood through the following logic:

As 'digital natives' (persons who always have computers at hand), adolescents view laptops and 'smart' phones (mobiles with Internet capability) as just another tool they may use for spiritual purposes. When they share their 'status' (current activity or emotion) on Facebook and follow the 'threads' (postings and responses) of others, they tune into the thoughts and feelings of a diverse group of people who may function as a 'community of the heart' that brings 'memory, feeling, imagination, and thinking' together to shape the human spirit (Ford, 1997). (Yust, Karen-Marie; Hyde, Brendan & Ota, Caty, 2010, 291-292)The above findings illustrate that there is a relational factor between the group, individual and Facebook. This relational factor is described as able to influence, whether good or bad, to its users.

In a previous study conducted by Ab Halim Tamuri dan Zarin Ismail, myriads of negative contents in the media can result to negative impacts on its users. Their findings indicate that high exposure to the negative mass media has a negative impact on moral values and to the perceptions of the effectiveness of moral education lessons provided at national schools. (2009, 211)

Despite the flooding of information through the media, Muslims generally have to sustain the culture of Islamic knowledge to ensure that the real appreciation of the faith can always be nurtured, which can result to the success and happiness in this world and the Hereafter. (Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, 1990, 55.)

Aim of the Study

This research is to identify the use of facebook amongst Muslim youths in Nilai, Negeri Sembilan Malaysia and this study also examines the impact of facebook usage on Muslim youth religion understanding.

Methodology

The sample for this study consist of 354 Muslim youths at Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. 36.7 Per cent (N = 130) of them were male and 63.3 per cent (N = 224) were female. The average age was 15 years old. This data for this study was collected through quantitative (survey) and qualitative (interview) method.

The first objective of this study is to examine the use of facebook among Muslim youths at Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. To answer this objective, a survey has been developed and distribute (using stratified random sampling technique) to Muslim youths at Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. The researchers have received 354 complete questionnaire.

The second objective of this study is to examines the impact of facebook usage on Muslim youths religion understanding. A semi-structured interview technique was implement during the interview session. The interviewees were selected randomly among Muslim youths at Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. The interview sessions were recorded. The duration for each session is between is around 20 to 30 minutes.

Result and Discussion

Facebook usage

Table 1: The use of facebook amongst Muslim youths in Nilai, Negeri Sembilan Malaysia

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
FB	359	1.00	5.00	2.9392	.92650
Valid N (listwise)	359				

The result from Table 1 shows that the use of facebook amongst Muslim youths at Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia was average(Mean: 2.9392). This result shows that the Muslim youths at Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia familiar with facebook application and have used it in their daily life. It could be this application provide a platform for them (the Muslim youth) to involve in social activities such as chatting with their peers, sharing picture and idea and also gain some infomation related to religion and current issue.

The Impact of Facebook Usage on Muslim Youth Religion Understanding

The study found that, there are informants who considered Facebook as not the perfect medium to learn about Islam. Therefore, its usage does not affect their understanding of Islamic religion. According to informant B, " Facebook does not affect my understanding of Islamic teachings because I do not use it to find information about Islam. I feel more confident to learn about Islamic teachings from religious teachers at school." Informant C from the same school also claims that the usage of Facebook does not affect his/her or her religion understanding. The difficulties to find information on Islamic teachings, especially *Fiqh* (Islamic Law) and *Aqeeda* (Faith and Belief) and trustworthy issues make the informant to limit its usage to social purposes only. This is supported by informant A who claims that the Islamic information disseminated on Facebook cannot be trusted because of the difficulties to verify its sources and authority.

On the other hand, the usage of Facebook is claimed can enhance one understanding of Islamic religion. According to informant D, it is depended on how one use the Facebook. If one joints a Facebook group founded by a well-known Islamic scholar, one may learn about Islam from the scholar. One may also share the Islamic teachings posted by the scholar with other friends. According to informant E, religious information shared by friends can help increase understanding of the Islamic faith. However, informant E insisted that the sharing of any religious information should be done with cautious and care. This is to avoid the dissemination of false or heretic teachings that would be creating confusion among the Facebook friends.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that, teenagers mainly use Facebook to socialize on-line with peers. The use of Facebook, to some extent, contributes to their religion understanding. However, this is largely relied on how they use it and how they perceive the Islamic information shared on Facebook. There is also evident that Facebook has no contribution to religion understanding among teenagers. This is due to their perceptions on the function of Facebook, and their extreme concern about the validity and reliability of the sources. Hence, the study found that Facebook's usage may or may not affect the teens understanding of Islamic faith.

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