Media and Youth Participation in the Decision-Making Process:
A Malaysian Case

Youths aged between 15 and 25 years old make half of the world's population. The UN data in 2012 showed that this age group is jobless, under-employed and being excluded from social and economic opportunities, particularly the marginalised groups. Their participation in nation building, political process, and civic engagement is still considerably low (Golombek, 2002; UNDP, 2012). Various calls have been made to support and engage the youth in nation building. Habermas (1987) suggested the role of media in the functioning of a civil society. The current revolution in the media industry has created a new public sphere for public deliberation. The new media, in particular, has changed the landscape for citizens to exercise their rights and strengthened civil society movements in transforming public opinions. This paper reports the first phase of a study conducted on the role of media as a tool to facilitate the participation of the youth in the nation's social, economy and political agendas in the context of Malaysia.

YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND THE ROLE OF MEDIA

Youth development faces challenges and contradictions. While the youth are recognised as a national asset, on the one hand, they are also perceived as being immature for constantly challenging the status quo, leading them to be labelled as lacking social responsibility. Scholars argued that the contradiction can be attributed to the media that consistently paints a negative portrayal of the youth (Minnebo & Eggermont, 2007; Welch et al., 2002). The youth are pictured as problematic and frequently involved in negative acts. Seldom are they depicted as having potentials. Such media portrayal does not help resolve the issue of at-risk youth.

In Malaysia, approximately one million of 4.5 million youth between the ages of 15 and 25 years are at-risk. According to the Malaysian Youth Index 2008, almost 500,000 youth between 14 and 25 years of age were involved in, at least, one social wrong-doing. However, not much effort has been made to overcome the problems of at-risk youth. Most of the youth developmental programmes currently implemented target all levels of the youth community. Nothing has been created specifically for the at-risk youth of the country. By ignoring the at-risk youth, the nation is losing out on reaping the hidden potentials that could help in nation building. Samsudin (1995) and Rozmi (2007) found that at-risk youth came from one of the marginalised communities i.e. the low socio-economic group.

Nadchatram (2007) argued that the youth are in the process of becoming the world citizens of tomorrow. The media have the responsibility for ensuring that the youth are protected as well as informed both intellectually and emotionally. Therefore, the media should be proactive and reactive in assisting the youth to become a useful and responsible citizen of the country. According to Nobaya et al. (2008), the television broadcasting media is an influential ICT medium in educating youths to become agents that promote social harmony in a multiracial country like Malaysia. For them to be able to play their role well, they suggested that the broadcasting media need to be creative in that the design of the unity campaigns should have both the elements of *infotainment* and *edutainment*.

METHODOLOGY

A survey was used to ascertain the status of marginalised youth participation in the social and political process through the use of media in Malaysia. The survey asked questions on the demographics of the youth, media use, engagement in social, economic and political processes,

the influence of socio-economic and geographical factors on the usage of media, and the perception of the role and impact of social media on youth engagement in social, economic, and political processes. The questionnaire was evaluated for construct and face validity by a panel of three experts. A pilot test involving 30 participants was carried out to measure the reliability. The final instrument was administered to 2,000 randomly selected youth throughout the country, out of which 1035 were returned and 1029 were usable for data analysis.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

PART A: DEMOGRAPHY OF PARTICIPANTS

The survey participants were made up the age group of 19-20 (33.5%) and 17-18 (23%). The survey was almost equally represented by male and female youth. On race, the majority were Malays (69.4%), followed by Indians (3.1%), Bumiputera in Sabah and Sarawak (19.8%), and Chinese (5.2%), and. The majority completed SPM[1] (41.0%), followed by STPM[2]/Diploma/Matriculation (16.7%), and a bachelor's degree (11.2%). Most participants had more than three siblings. Some of them (15.9%) even had more than six siblings. Most participants lived in a household that had only one family (80.9%) and the accommodation of which belonged to their parents (77.7%).

The majority of the participants (73.1%) were still receiving a formal education either at a secondary school or institute of higher education, but 17.4% were already employed. Since the majority of them were still studying, they did not have any source of income. Those with employment mostly earned below RM2001 per month. While a small number of the participants' parents earned more than RM4000 per month, the majority earned only less than RM2000. It should also be noted that 11.9% of the parents were reported to have a monthly income of only RM500 or less, which is below the national poverty level.
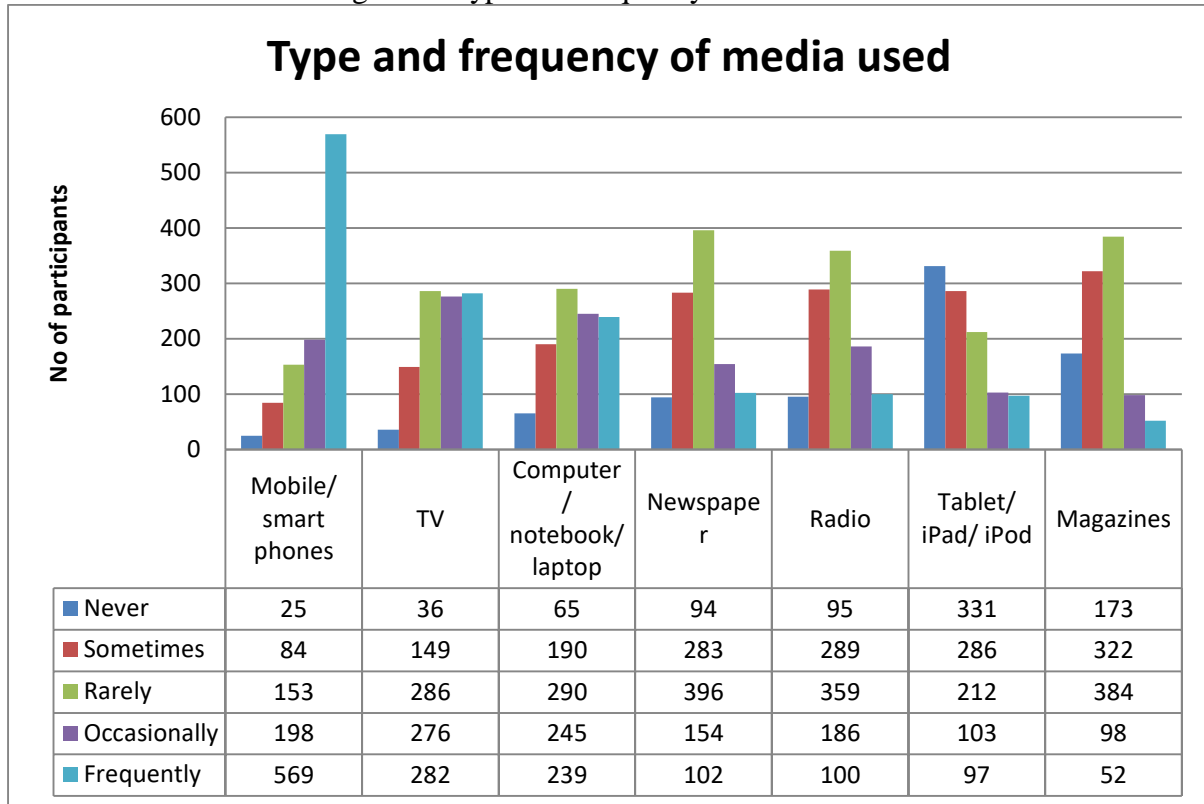
PART B: MEDIA USE

TYPE AND FREQUENCY OF MEDIA USED

Most participants reported to using mobile phones and computers frequently. The result also shows that the importance of conventional media such as TV, newspapers, and radio should not be underestimated since a substantial number of the participants were still using them frequently or occasionally. Details are presented in Figure 1.

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[1] Equivalent to O level.
[2] Equivalent to A level.

Figure 1: Type and frequency of media used

Type and frequency of media used

No of participants	Mobile/ smart phones	TV	Computer / notebook/ laptop	Newspaper	Radio	Tablet/ iPad/ iPod	Magazines
Never	25	36	65	94	95	331	173
Sometimes	84	149	190	283	289	286	322
Rarely	153	286	290	396	359	212	384
Occasionally	198	276	245	154	186	103	98
Frequently	569	282	239	102	100	97	52

HOW DO PARTICIPANTS GET ACCESS TO THE INTERNET?

Participants reported using multiple methods to get access to the Internet (Table 1). Unsurprisingly, the top three methods used were via the use of a computer at home (693), with mobile smart phones/portable Wi-Fi/broadband (680), and the use of a computer at workplace or place of study (511).

Table 1: Methods of Internet Access

Methods	Yes	No
1. Use of computer/ laptop/ notebook and access to Wi-Fi /broadband at home	693	336
2. Anywhere with mobile smart phones/portable Wi-Fi /broadband	680	349
3. Use of computer/ laptop/ notebook at workplace/ lace of study	511	518
4. Use of computer at cyber café/internet café	292	737
5. Use of computer at Pusat Internet Desa (PID)*	120	909
6. Not relevant because there is no internet access	40	989

* Rural Internet Centre

SOURCE OF CURRENT NEWS DEVELOPMENT

Despite the importance of conventional newspapers as a source of information and news for the participants, a significant number of them (i.e. 812) turned to social media to get the latest news. Table 2 show that social media and conventional newspapers are still used as a medium of communication among youth in Malaysia.

Table 2: Sources of Current News

Sources	Yes	No
1. Social media posts (Facebook, Twitter, Blog, Youtube, WhatsApp)	812	217
2. Newspaper (conventional)	628	401
3. TV/ radio (conventional)	490	539
4. News portal	426	603
5. TV/ radio (Internet)	348	681
6. Others	15	1014

TYPE AND FREQUENCY OF SOCIAL MEDIA USED

Table 3 reveals at least seven major social media tools used by the participants. They were WhatsApp, Facebook, Google+, WeChat, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter. Among these, WhatsApp and Facebook were the most popular tools used; more than 50% of the participants used them frequently. Surprisingly, Google+, WeChat, and YouTube were also popular among the participants overtaking Instagram and Twitter.

Table 3: Type and Frequency of Social Media Use

Type of social media	Frequency of use				
	Never	Sometimes	Rarely	Occasionally	Frequently
1. WhatsApp	256	62	104	166	441
2. Facebook	41	136	283	228	341
3. Google+	63	101	284	250	331
4. WeChat	300	92	142	170	325
5. YouTube	369	90	188	190	192
6. Instagram	549	81	119	107	173
7. Twitter	601	101	119	94	114
8. Skype	750	97	79	51	52
9. Viber	902	41	27	26	33
10. Telegram	916	31	32	17	33
11. Blog	769	93	91	51	25
12. LinkedIn	904	21	35	21	18
13. Tumblr	942	29	31	12	15
14. MySpace	923	55	28	10	13

ROLE WHEN USING SOCIAL MEDIA

Table 4 reveals that the participants played the role of an observer (830) or follower (594) when using social media. Not many of them were willing to become contributors or entrepreneurs. These two roles need to be supported to encourage the youth to express their opinions and excel in business in relation to social media use. Intervention programmes can be introduced by relevant agencies to materialise these potentials.

Table 4: Participants' Role When Using Social Media

Role	Yes	No
Observer	830	199
Follower	594	435
Contributor	177	852
Entrepreneur	69	960

PURPOSES OF USING NEW MEDIA/ SOCIAL MEDIA

The top five purposes of using social media were (a) to get in touch with friends and families, (b) get information and latest news, as a hobby during free time, (c) build a network and meet new friends, (d) share knowledge and expertise with others, and (e) document and share a personal experience with others (see Table 5). The finding highlights the potential role of social media as a tool for the youth to engage in a decision-making process in social, politics, and economy.

Table 5: Purposes of Using New Media/Social Media

Purposes	Yes	No
1. To get in touch with friends and families	826	203
2. To get information and latest news	692	337
3. As a hobby during free times	579	450
4. To build network and meet new friends	549	480
5. To document and share personal experience with others	514	515
6. To share knowledge and expertise with others	472	557
7. As a platform for mind development (including learning and revisions)	458	571
8. To get feedback about products or services	315	714
9. To enhance creativity	235	794
10. To explore and build confidence and self-belief	227	802

PART C: THE LEVEL OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

The participants were asked 14 questions about their involvement in social, political and economic activities on a five-point scale with never (1), rarely (2), occasionally (3), frequently (4), and very frequently (5).

The result shows that the participants were not actively involved in all activities where the mean scores of all items were below 3.0 (see Table 6). Two activities received the highest mean scores. They were "share the current news/information/opinions via social media with family/friends on the social/political/economic issues" (mean = 2.88) and "obtain information about social/ politics/economic issues (mean = 2.88). This finding suggests that the government and relevant agencies implement necessary intervention and awareness programmes due to the low level of participants' involvement in social and political activities.

Table 6: Participants' Online Social and Political Activities

Activities	Mean
1. Share the current news/information/ opinions via social media with family/ friends on the social/political/economic issues	2.88

2. Obtain information about social/ politics/economic issues	2.88
3. Organise activities that help local society	2.08
4. Follow social activities while at school/ college/university/working place	2.48
5. Spread messages/comments/articles on social/politics/economic issues	2.25
6. Follow the news of current issues in and outside country	2.83
7. Volunteer to help society	2.13
8. Contribute energy, ideas and money in empowering youth activities	2.02
9. Involve in community activities organised by other parties/government/ NGO	1.98
10.Write own blog about social/political/ economic issues	1.69
11. Share the latest issues with others	2.71
12. Access social media to know about social/political/economic issues	2.65
13.Disseminate information about social event/programs such as political/religious talks/sports/communal work	2.28
14.Participate in event/program where I can express opinion on social/political/ economic issues	2.00

PART D: YOUTH PARTICIPATION DOMAIN IN MEDIA

This section reports the domain of youth participation and involvement in the media. The responses were based on a five-point Likert scale ranging with strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), slightly disagree (3), agree (4), and strongly agree (5). Even though the mean scores for most of the items were below 3.0, the results highlight the domain of participants' involvement in the media (see Table 7). The participants reported that they were interested in searching for information or discussing issues in the media related to seven domains - social problems, crime issues, career/employment, national education system, cost of living, and freedom of the press.

Table 7: Participants' Participation Domain

Domains	Mean
1. Social problems (such as abandoned babies, illegal street racing, drugs)	3.01
2. The issue of crime (such as robbery, theft, rape, murder)	2.98
3. Career/employment	2.79
4. National education system	2.78
5. The increase in cost of living	2.73
6. Freedom of the press	2.73
7. Racial unity in Malaysia	2.69
8. Cost/price of buying a home	2.54
9. Rights/interests of certain	2.49
10. Freedom of speech	2.42

PART E: PERCEPTION OF THE ROLE OF NEW MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA

This section describes the result of the participants' perception of the role of new media and social media. Fifteen items were asked on a five-point Likert scale.

Table 10 shows that the majority of the participants agreed that the new media is the choice of youth today (mean = 3.97) and the use of smartphones provides convenience in doing work, getting information and communicating (mean = 3.98). Most of them also thought that sharing of information becomes easier/more comfortable/more attractive through the new media/social media. Reassuringly, most participants were aware that some information in the new/social media is dubious (mean = 3.62).

Interestingly, the majority perceived that the government/administration had considered views from the youth in new/social media before any decision in the development of the country was made (mean=3.55). Also, they believed that youth in Malaysia require special space and programmes through new/social media to enable them to participate in the development of the country.

Table 10: Perception of The Role of New Media and Social Media

Activities	Mean
1. New media is the choice of youth today	3.97
2. The use of new media and social media has potential to contribute to the sensitive issues related to religion, culture and race	3.71
3. I am more convinced of the truth of information through conventional media	3.30
4. The use of smartphones provides convenience in doing work, in getting information and in communicating	3.98
5. Conventional media pay less attention to youth	3.16
6. Sharing of information becomes easier/ more comfortable/more attractive through new media/social	3.80
7. Conventional media content is controlled and censored more	3.35
8. Many of the information through new/social media is dubious	3.62
9. Information through conventional media is more reliable than new/social media	3.30
10. Space for youth to voice and provide views through conventional media is limited	3.31
11. The cost of using the new media is a burden	3.11
12. New/social media provide space for me to express dissatisfaction about the current issues to the government or non-government entities	3.15
13. I have used new media such as news portals, TV streams (e.g. KiniTV, SelangorTV) and radio streams (e.g. hitz.fm, ikim.fm) to give opinion or received information	2.86
14. Youth in Malaysia require special space and programs through new/social media to enable them to participate and give opinion on the development of the country	3.53

15. Views from youth through new/social media are desirably recorded and considered before the government/ administrative make any decision in the development of the country	3.55

CONCLUSION

This study investigated how youth, in particular, those who live in the marginalised communities, can contribute to the decision-making process in nation building in the era of new information and communication technology. This paper reports the first phase of the study which concerns with the development of an instrument to ascertain the status of youth participation in the decision-making process. The instrument relates to the demographics of the youth, status and trends in media use, engagement in the social and political process, the influence of socio-economic and geographical factors on the usage of media, and the perception of the role and impact of social media on youth engagement in social and political processes.

Those who are interested to know more about this study are kindly requested to communicate with Prof. Shahizan Hassan at shahizan@uum.edu.my, who is the lead author. Prof. Hassan is also Deputy Dean (Research, Innovation, & Knowledge Transfer) of the Othman Yeop Abdullah Graduate School of Business, Universiti Utara Malaysia. The study is led by Prof. Norshuhada Shiratuddin. Other members include Prof. Mohd Azizuddin Mohd Sani, Dr Mohd Khairie Ahmad, Dr Noor Sulastry Yurni Ahmad, and Dr Kartini Aboo Talib.[7]

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