

**FACTORS IMPACTING ON YOUTH'S LEADERSHIP
PARTICIPATION IN MALAYSIA: SOCIAL MEDIA, SOCIAL
GROUPS OR GOVERNMENT POLICIES?**

Ekpe I.*

Abstract: This study examined which of the factor (social media, social groups or government policies) most influences youth's ability to participate in leadership in Malaysia. Using a conceptual framework, and social impact theory, the study aimed to investigate the possible reasons why most Malaysian youths at secondary and tertiary educational institutions do not actively participate in leadership activities in their communities. The study employed cross-sectional survey and proportionate stratified random sampling method to collect data from 310 youth leaders in north, east, west and south zones of Malaysia peninsula. However, after data cleaning, data for 141 respondents were analyzed through descriptive statistics and regression methods. Among others, the study found that social media (use time), and social groups (mentors) have the most significant positive effects on leadership participation among Malaysian youths. The study, therefore, recommended that the government and the universities management should monitor and restrict information transmitted on social media to forestall negative social influence on youths by mentors. This could lead to greater participation in leadership activities among Malaysian youths.

Key words: social-media, social-group, government-policy, leadership, Malaysian-youths

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Introduction

As future leaders, the role of youths in the political and socio-economic development of a country is vital as they are considered the active working group (Aminu, 2012). Therefore, to develop their mindsets towards this role and empower them to contribute to informed decisions about their personal, family, social and political development, they need to participate in current leadership activities in their communities, irrespective of their social background. Such participation would afford the current leaders an opportunity to respond to the needs of the youths and guaranty their fundamental human rights. It would also afford the youths an opportunity to work with the adults and peers on sustainable basis (Ahmad et al., 2012). For example, youth's involvements in extracurricular activities are vital elements of community involvement in leadership (Barnett and Brennan, 2006). Studies have reported that young people aged 10-24 constituted 1.8 billion of world's population, and are experiencing difficulties in finding decent

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jobs especially due to the current downward trend in the global economy. Receiving information and access to issues related to health, education, poverty and inequality are added difficulties of the youths in recent times (ILO, 2012).

A research (Aminu, 2012) has shown that most youths in developing countries, Malaysia inclusive; do not actively participate in community development efforts and self-help projects that make for competition among themselves despite the availability of such programs engineered by most NGOs and national, state and local governments. Another research (Ahmad et al., 2012) found that most youths in Malaysia do not participate or practice their rights and duties towards a better environment. This type of attitude does not allow them to be educated to accept policy change from the leaders. What could account for this laxity in leadership activities among Malaysian youths?

Social media could be beneficial, in many ways, to individuals and corporate organizations if adopted positively. For example, most contemporary corporate leaders especially of micro, small and medium enterprises regard social media as a novel and effective means of product advertising. In the words of Rzemieniak and Iannuli (2015, p.137) "*social media constitute the essential support for the actions in the framework of online advertising*". Again, social media could influence a firm's reputation management and leadership. Studies (e.g Ayub, Hamid and Nawawi, 2014) have reported that unwholesome use of social media among youths the world over is causing serious negative consequences to their personal, academic, social and communal lives. For example, many youths who spent too much time socializing on social media in chatting, music and online games recorded poor academic performance in Malaysia (Al-Rahmi and Othman, 2013). Social media provided many youths with false sense of privacy, reduces their person-to-person communication skills, while few other youths have lost their finances to Internet scammers (Gazzar, 2011). Kennedy et al. (2003) looked at social influence as influence of social groups such as friends, families, role models or mentors, and advisors which could have positive or negative effect on one's ability to participate in politics. Kuhn (2012) stated that political-legal influence concerns issues such as political freedom (speech and legal rights) and ethnic minority tolerance which could influence leadership participation among youths.

Based on the issues raised above, this study aimed to investigate the possible reasons for lack of interest in active politics among most Malaysian youths in their communities and schools; as well as the effect of social media, social groups and government policies on their leadership participation. Are the exposure to, and much use of, social media leading to positive or negative influence on leadership activities among the youths? Do youths' parents, relatives, friends and other social groups provide positive or negative information and resources to the youths to enable them participate in leadership activities? Do government policy, ethnicity and democratic idea discourage youth's participation in leadership in Malaysia? This study is aimed at providing answers to these questions.

Contemporary studies have lent credence to the fact that social environment positively influences human behavior (e.g. Ekpe and Mat, 2012). This research is, therefore, examined the effect of social media, social group and government policies on youth's political activities because it is observed that many youths prefer to send snapshots on social media than handwritten notes, thereby negatively affecting their vocabulary, while few others have the urge to join bad social groups that pose problems to current world leaders in recent times.

Extant literature exist that examined youth's development generally (e.g. Ahmad et al., 2012; Kuponiyi, 2008), youth's political involvement (Aminu, 2012; Barnett and Brennan, 2006), social media and youth's social development (e.g. Kahne and Middaugh, 2012), and youth's academic performance (Al-Rahmi and Othman, 2013). However, scarcity of research exists on social media, social group's influence, political-legal factors and youth's leadership participation especially in Malaysia. Close to this are the works of Mohamad et al. (2009) which focused on leadership style and community leadership, and Pandian (2014) which focused on students' voting behavior in Malaysia. Therefore, to fill the gap and strengthen the literature base, the need for this study is justified.

Literature Review

Studies on Social Media and Youth's Leadership Participation

Gazzar (2011) used questionnaire survey to solicit responses from 200 high school teens (age 12-18 years) on the effect of social media, particularly Face-book, on youth's attitude towards political and social changes in Egypt. The study found positive effect of social media on youth's political engagement, and involvement in social activities like cleaning the streets. However, other youths indicated that receiving a forwarded message or spreading calls about revolution make them feel they need to participate in their country's events. This proves that social media could provide information to the youths that could be anti-leadership in a country.

Using a survey on 3,000 students (age 15-25) in USA, Kahne and Middaugh (2012) found positive impact of digital media on academic and political engagement of the youths in terms of networking and information exchange. Similarly, using a qualitative research method and descriptive statistics, Kafai et al. (2012) studied online social awareness of 21 high school local teens (age 14-15) in six groups on task completion, and found a positive relationship due to collaborative team work in USA.

With a survey of 51 Face-book account users (undergraduate and postgraduate university students), Park and Suh (2014) discovered a significant positive influence of direction of message in social networking service and word-of-mouth Face-book information on receiver's attitude in Seoul, Korea. Ayub et al. (2014) found a very low correlation between internet access duration and use on student's behavior towards academics in Malaysia. Thus, explaining that students who spent

more time on the internet did not make much greater use of it for academic purposes, compared with students who spent less time on internet.

Studies on Social Influence and Youth's Leadership Participation

Oc and Bashshur (2013) found that family background, schools and communities have profound influence on youth's leadership activities. For example, youths from high-income families and youth's interactions with their parents on a wide range of political topics enhance their self-development for leadership participation in future. Similarly, it was discovered that youth's involvement in extracurricular activities, voluntary associations, and the influence of peer groups encourages future leadership participation among youths (McFarland and Thomas, 2006). This was also supported by Asikhia (2010) and Blair et al. (2008) that strong social network ties with parents, friends and teachers produced better behavior and quest for excellence.

Studies on Political-Legal Influence and Youth's Leadership Participation

Pandian (2014) found that majority of the university students sampled had never voted in election due to issues such as family background, government policies, party leadership, and electoral process. Sahri et al. (2013) supported Ali (2002) that university students' participation in community volunteer activities was very limited in Malaysia due to low level of commitment and self-motivation among the youths. UNDP (2012) found that there was higher level of leadership participation among youths in Africa than in Asia.

Based on the above literature review, we therefore hypothesize that:

H1: Social media has the most significant effect on youth's leadership participation

H2: Social group has the most significant effect on youth's leadership participation

H3: Political-legal framework (government policy) has the most significant effect on youth's leadership participation

Latane (1996) stated that attitudes, values, practices and identities could be influenced through interactive communication with other people on the social media. Therefore, this study is linked to Social Impact Theory (Latane, 1996) and Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991). The conceptual model for this study is as shown in Figure 1.

Methodology

Survey Procedures

The study involved male and female students (age 18-25) of Malaysian public universities, colleges and secondary schools in Malaysia peninsula during 2015/2016 academic session.

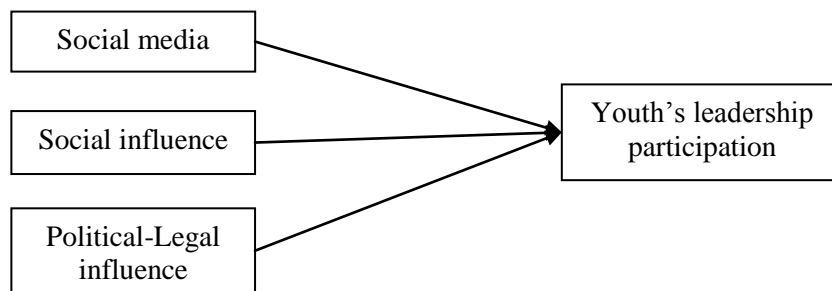


Figure 1. The Conceptual Framework

This age bracket was chosen because this is the youths where government's development effort concentrates, in line with Malaysian Youth Report (MYR, 2007). Specifically, the unit of sampling was youth leaders who were members of Student Parliament or Student Representative Council, School Clubs/Associations, and Senior Prefects in their schools; most of who were final year students. However, students from public universities were used to represent respondents in the tertiary institutions. The respondents were contacted through permission from their respective school's unit heads.

The study adopted a proportionate stratified random sampling method to collect pilot data from youth leaders in north (Kedah), east (Kelantan), west (Selangor) and south (Johor) zones of Malaysia. That is, the country was stratified into four regions for the study. Then, simple random sampling was applied on each institution's sample members to select the sample elements. With a total population of 1,640 youth leaders, a sample size of 310 was used; determined by Cavana et al. (2001, p.278) for finite population. 146 questionnaires were returned. This translated into 47% response rate which achieved the acceptable level of 30% (Sekaran, 2000). However, after data cleaning, data for 141 respondents were used for the analysis. Data analysis was done using descriptive statistics and regression methods.

Measures

Social media, social influence, political-legal influence and youth's leadership participation were operationally defined and measured in line with previous studies (Al-Rahim and Othman, 2013; Kennedy et al., 2003; Pandian, 2014; McFarland and Thomas, 2006). For example, Al-Rahmi and Othman (2013) defined social media as the amount of time spent on the use of Facebook, Twitter, Google+, Wikipedia, blogs and others. Kennedy et al. (2003) defined social influence as influence of social groups such as friends, families, role models or mentors, and advisors. All the measures were tapped on a 6-point Likert scale, made up of (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) quite disagree, (4) quite agree, (5) agree, and (6) strongly agree.

Results

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1 shows that most of the youth leaders (56.8%) were within age bracket 15-20 years. The statistics also show that undergraduate youths (36%) constituted the majority of the youth leaders, and most of the respondents (52.1%) speak *bahasa melayu*, which is the indigenous language.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Category	N	%
<i>Age:</i>		
15-20	83	56.8
21-25	62	42.5
26-30	1	0.7
Total	146	100.0
<i>Education Level:</i>		
UPSR	-	-
PMR	-	-
STPM	48	33
Diploma	46	32
Degree	52	36
Total	146	100
<i>Language:</i>		
Bahasa Melayu	76	52.1
Mandarin	1	0.7
Tamil	2	1.3
English	5	3.4
More than one language	62	42.5
Total	146	100.0

Data Cleaning and Descriptive Statistics

This study employed a series of data cleaning approach, for example, detection and treatment of missing data, outliers and normality. After keying in the data and running the descriptive statistics (frequency), it was discovered that there was no missing data. For checking outliers, chi-square statistics table was used to determine the optimal values for predictor variables at $p < 0.001$ (Hair et al., 2010). Corresponding to 34 predictor items (table value 65.25), five outliers (ID 24, 59, 72, 91 and 114) were identified and deleted. For normality, there was no case of non-normal data at $p < 0.05$ corresponding to z-score 1.96 (Hair et al., 2010). After data cleaning, data for 141 respondents were finally used for the analyses.

The principal component analysis (EFA) revealed that the predictor variables converged into four components (social media use time, type, mentor's advice, freedom of opinion), with total variance expected (TVE) as 66.571% and measure of sampling adequacy (KMO) as 0.804. The criterion variable converged into one component (involves in decision-making), with TVE as 67.765% and KMO as 0.850. After the principal component factor analysis (EFA), the data were

standardized (mean of items) to become variables for subsequent analyses such as ‘reliability’. The reliability test indicated that all the factors were highly reliable as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics (Mean and Std. Dev.) and Cronbach’ Alpha Reliability

Variable	Mean	SD	CA	Items after EFA	SS (N)
Social Media Use (time)	4.07	1.34	0.901	6	141
Social Media Use (type)	3.74	1.41	0.773	4	141
Social Influence (mentors)	4.03	1.04	0.819	4	141
Political-Legal Influence (freedom)	3.90	1.19	0.786	3	141
Leadership Participation (decision)	4.23	1.05	0.904	6	141

Table 2 showed that, among the predictor variables, social media use time (more than 2 hrs in a day) had the highest mean value (4.07) and Cronbach’s alpha (0.901); indicating that too much time spent on social media influences youth’s leadership activities in Malaysia. The influence of mentors also had a higher mean value (4.03) and Cronbach’s alpha (0.819); indicating that social group (mentors) influences youth’s leadership participation in Malaysia. This was followed by political influence (freedom of opinion), with mean value of 3.90 and Cronbach’s alpha of 0.786; indicating that youth’s participation in leadership depends on their ability to have freedom of expression of opinion about governance or administration.

Testing Hypotheses

Pearson Correlation analysis was performed to test the variables relationships and to determine which of the predictor variables had higher influence on criterion variable (leadership participation). The result was presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Pearson Correlation Analysis on Leadership Participation

	SMU-Time	SMU-Type	SI-Mentor	PLI-Freedom	LP-Decision
SMUTime Pearson Correlation	1.000				
Sig. (2-tailed)					
N	141.000				
SMUType Pearson Correlation	0.520**	1.000			
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000				
N	141	141.000			
SIMentor Pearson Correlation	0.333**	0.150	1.000		
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.075			
N	141	141	141.000		
PLIFreedom Pearson Correlation	0.317**	0.190*	0.397**	1.000	
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.024	0.000		
N	141	141	141	141.000	
LPDecision Pearson Correlation	0.286**	0.072	0.225**	0.175*	1.000
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001	0.397	0.007	0.038	
N	141	141	141	141	141.000

*Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).
 **Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).
 Dependent Variable: Leadership Participation (LPDecision)
 Note: SMUTime=Social media use time, SMUType=Social media use type, SIMentor=Social influence (mentor), PLIFreedom=Political-legal influence (freedom of opinion on governance)

The correlation analysis in Table 3 showed that social media use time (beta 0.286**, $p < 0.01$) had highest positive relationship with leadership participation among Malaysian youths. This was followed by social influence (mentor) with beta 0.225**, $p < 0.01$, and lastly, political-legal influence (freedom of opinion) with beta 0.175*, $p < 0.05$. This satisfied Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3.

However, the regression analysis in Table 4 also showed that though the overall model was significant (Sig. F Change 0.003, $p < 0.01$), yet from the individual coefficients, social media use time had the most significant positive effect (beta 0.281, $p < 0.01$) on leadership participation among Malaysian youths.

Table 4. Regression Analysis on Leadership Participation

Variables	(IV-DV) Beta	Hypothesis
Social media use (time)	0.281***	H1
Social media use (type)	0.104	
Social group influence (mentor)	0.126	
Political-legal influence (freedom)	0.055	
R square	0.111	
Adjusted R square	0.085	
R square Change	0.111	
F Value	4.240	
Sig. F. Change	0.003***	
Note: * $p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$; **** $p < 0.001$ DV = Leadership Participation		

Discussion

The result of this research agreed with previous studies (Gazzar, 2011; Kahne and Middaugh, 2012) that too much time spent on social media could hamper youth’s ability to effectively participate in leadership activities in school/community. The study also supported other scholars (Asikhia, 2010; Blair et al., 2008) that negative advice from social groups (e.g. mentors) could negatively influence youth leadership participation. Furthermore, the outcome of this work is in line with Pandian (2014) that unfavorable government policies could hinder youth’s political participation.

Conclusion

The correlation analysis shows that social media (use time) has highest positive relationship with leadership participation among Malaysian youths. This is followed by social group’s influence (mentor), and lastly, government policies

(freedom of opinion). This indicates that too much time spent on social media in a day can negatively influence leadership participation among the youths. Similarly, negative advice from mentors can hamper leadership participation among the youths. Again, unfavorable political and legal framework can hinder youths' freedom of opinion expression about governance or administration, and so can hinder their leadership participation. The regression analysis also shows that, from the individual coefficients, social media use time has the most significant positive effect on leadership participation among Malaysian youths, though the overall model is significant. Therefore, the government and the universities management should monitor and restrict information transmitted on social media to forestall negative social influence on youths by mentors. Such effort can lead to greater involvement in leadership activities among Malaysian youths.

Limitation and Suggestion for Future Research

The findings of this study should be applied within the context understanding that the research was limited to Malaysian youths age 18-25, as defined by Malaysian Ministry of Youths and Sports. It was also a pilot study, not a report of full research. Again, future researchers could investigate social media influence on youths age 18-30 in order to extend the sample members to include postgraduate students.

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CZYNNIKI WPLYWAJĄCE NA UDZIAŁ PRZYWÓDZTWA MŁODZIEŻOWEGO W MALEZJI: MEDIA SPOŁECZNE, GRUPY SPOŁECZNE CZY POLITYKA RZĄDOWA?

Streszczenie: W badaniu sprawdzono, który czynnik (media społecznościowe, grupy społeczne czy polityka rządu) ma największy wpływ na zdolność młodzieży do udziału w przywództwie w Malezji. Korzystając z ram koncepcyjnych i teorii wpływu społecznego, badanie miało na celu zbadanie możliwych przyczyn, dla których większość malezyjskich młodych ludzi w szkołach średnich i wyższych nie uczestniczy aktywnie w działaniach przywódczych w swoich społecznościach. W badaniu wykorzystano ankietę przekrojową i metodę proporcjonalnej stratyfikacji losowego próbkowania w celu zebrania danych od 310 liderów młodzieżowych w północnych, wschodnich, zachodnich i południowych strefach półwyspu Malezji. Dane zebrane od 141 respondentów przeanalizowano za pomocą statystyki opisowej i metod regresji. Badania wykazały, między innymi, że media społecznościowe i grupy społeczne mają najbardziej znaczący pozytywny wpływ na zaangażowanie przywódcze wśród malezyjskiej młodzieży.

Słowa kluczowe: media społecznościowe, grupy społeczne, polityka rządowa, przywództwo, młodzież malezyjska

影响马来西亚青年领袖参与的因素: 社交媒体, 社会团体或政府政策?

摘要: 本研究考察了哪些因素(社交媒体, 社会团体或政府政策)对青年参与马来西亚领导能力的影响最大。本研究旨在调查大多数马来西亚中等和高等教育机构的青少年不积极参与社区领导活动的可能原因, 并采用概念框架和社会影响理论。本研究采用横断面调查和比例分层随机抽样的方法, 收集马来西亚半岛北部, 东部, 西部和南部地区310名青年领袖的数据。然而, 在数据清理之后, 通过描述性统计和回归方法分析了141名受访者的数据。其中, 研究发现, 社交媒体(使用时间)和社交群体(导师)对马来西亚青年的领导能力有最显著的积极影响。因此, 研究建议政府和高校管理层应该监督和限制在社交媒体上传播的信息, 以防止导师对青少年的负面社会影响。这可能会导致更多的参与马来西亚青年的领导活动。

关键词: 社交媒体, 社会团体, 政府政策, 领导力, 马来西亚青年