

Enhancing the Sense of Togetherness among Youth via Facebook: A Case Study on 1Malaysia Wireless Village Project

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores some topics related to enhancing the sense of togetherness among youth within a virtual community. With the wider use of the Internet among the rural youth in Malaysia, rural communities are more exposed to global connection. The 1Malaysia Wireless Village Project has taken this many steps forward. The Internet has occupied social media of all kinds, and social media are widely accessed among rural youths. Rural youths occupy themselves within the social space of Facebook in a way that suggests that they find its functions useful for staying connected with friends near and far. Primary analysis has found that use of Facebook functions creates not only a social bond and support but also builds a social channel for obtaining and sharing current issues among virtual group members. The frequent use of its specific functions such as conversation, sharing, identity, reputation and group were found to have significant correlation with users' sense of togetherness. However, it was identified that the frequent use of the group function contributed the most to enhancing the perceived sense of togetherness among the virtual community members.

Keywords: Facebook function usage, group, rural youth, sense of togetherness, social connectedness, virtual community

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INTRODUCTION

After winning independence in 1957, Malaysia, a multi-racial country with diverse ethnic groups, religions and cultures, has been trying to disseminate ethnic tolerance among its population to overcome

the race barrier. Malaysians have embraced the existence of diversity, but the integrity of the population is fundamental for social harmony without assimilating altruism. As stated by the fourth prime minister in his legacy to the nation, "The Way Forward: Vision 2020" (Mohamad, 1991), Malaysians will be able to overcome a race-based mindset and become a united nation if only a sense of togetherness exists within the society and all the ethnic communities accept one another's differences (Moody & White, 2003). Social integrity is a complicated goal for Malaysia to achieve, unless there is an acknowledged social connectedness among the people within a strong sense of togetherness. It is believed that Information and Communications Technology (ICT) can contribute to achieving this goal.

Information and Communications Technology (ICT) is one of the core components of the Tenth Malaysia Plan, the blueprint for turning Malaysia into a developed country by the year 2020 (Economic Planning Unit, 2010). Ever since the Internet was introduced in 1995, the Malaysian government has planted various initiatives related to information technology infrastructure to promote ICT use among the people. The Internet penetration gap between urban and the rural areas reported in the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission's (MCMC) Pocket Book of Statistics Q1 (2014) recorded internet access and use by urban households as being 75.8% compared with rural households, which, sadly, were far behind, recording only 24.2% of Internet access. In order to close

this gap, the MCMC established numerous telecentres and distributed 1Malaysia Netbooks to underserved families in March 2010. In 2011, the organisation endeavoured to expose the netbook recipients to Internet access through the 1Malaysia Wireless Village Project with support from Universal Service Provision (USP).

Previous studies on the use of the Internet have mostly been conducted among urban communities (Marzbali, Abdullah, Razak, & Tilaki, 2014; Wickrama & Bryant, 2003), with very few focussing on rural communities (Ibrahim & Ainin, 2009). Ibrahim and Ainin (2009) found that the rural communities lacked awareness and participation in ICT as they lacked social capital. Since the 1Malaysia Wireless Village has a lot to offer in the context of social interaction (Sahharon, Omar, Bolong, Shaffril, & D'Silva, 2014), it is imperative to accumulate meaningful evidence that social media usage can foster social cohesiveness. This study aims to be a future reference for social media practices for communication. Other than face-to-face communication, computer-mediated communication can also foster a sense of emotional support and social interaction in a virtual community (Bolong, 2011). Bruhn (2009) stated that a feeling of togetherness refers to the forces that connect the parts of a group and resist any disruptive influences. This concept is the basic element for understanding group life as it conveys the members' readiness to accept the actions of others for intended actions of their own and their readiness to be influenced by other group members.

Therefore, results from this study could help improve the understanding of social media usage among rural youth and be a positive reference for its best use.

While some studies have indicated that online interaction could lead to psychological disruption such as dysfunctional behaviour, feeling a lack of community life and social isolation (Putnam, 2000), a recent study by Grieve et al. (2013), however, provided insight into social motivation through Facebook usage. Facebook usage is able to help simulate emotional indications of feeling connected; thus, Facebook can improve their cognitive and interpersonal interaction. Hence, in this study, we focussed on one of the important dimensions of social cohesion i.e. to determine the perceived sense of togetherness among virtual community members. Therefore, the first objective of this study was to explore the motivations of the youths of 1Malaysia Wireless Villages in using Facebook, while the second was to determine their level of sense of togetherness. The third was to determine whether Facebook functions can foster a sense of togetherness and lastly, the fourth was to determine which Facebook function most contributed to a sense of togetherness.

1Malaysia Wireless Village Project

By the end of the year 2014, there were a total of 5802 1Malaysia Wireless Village Projects planted across the Malaysian peninsular and Borneo (Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission, 2015). This provision offers a wide spread of wireless

technology for Internet connection also known as Wi-Fi. Service networks such as Telekom Malaysia (TM), Celcom, Maxis, Digi, Redtone and Packet 1 provide wireless coverage for underserved areas by planting Advanced Access Points (AAPs) around nearby villages through an existing hub in telecentres. Sahharon et al. (2014) construed the potential benefits of 1Malaysia Wireless Village Projects among the rural community and found that the Project could benefit the rural communities in terms of creating connections, gaining information and creating opportunities for effective communication. The role of free Internet service also helps the rural communities to connect and fundamentally communicate with people beyond their comfort zone; moreover, they can also gain access to information easily through sharing of information among virtual community members (Samah, Badsar, Hassan, Osman, & Shaffril, 2013). Social media, especially, have become the favourite media of communication among youth communities everywhere around the world.

From 2014, social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and YouTube have become part and parcel of the daily life of virtual youth communities. In Malaysia, there were 17.5 million Internet users, of whom 87.9 % had access to Facebook. By July 2013, there were already 13.3 million Facebook subscribers aged between 13 and 34 years old, of whom the group aged 18 to 24 years old was statistically shown to be the highest age group among Facebook users (Hogan, 2012). With a mobile-phone

penetration of 143.4% per 100 inhabitants, it is easy for Malaysian youths to access Facebook through mobile apps (MCMC *Pocket Book of Statistics Q1*, 2014). These users mostly access the Internet from home, where they have their own Internet subscription or a mobile data plan. In 2014, there were 13 million active users accessing social media through their mobile devices, and Malaysians' mobile penetration for social media was 44% i.e. one third of the time spent online in Malaysia was on activities related to social media (Kemp, 2015). The use of social media among youths in Malaysia is often combined with interpersonal motives, including relationship maintenance, passing time, developing new relationships and pursuing companionship (Sheldon, Abad, & Hinch, 2011). Several scholars agree that social media not only compensate for social relationships, but also enhance the relationship among users who have already established interpersonal relationship.

Facebook Usage within Malaysia Context

Previous studies on Facebook have suggested that Facebook usage can provide an opportunity for developing and maintaining social connectedness among online friends (Grieve et al., 2013) and for gaining social recognition through self-presentation (Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012) and self-disclosure (Park, Jin, & Annie Jin, 2011). Within the context of Malaysia, the adoption of Facebook among youths indicated that Facebook usage among

youths was influenced by peer pressure and the need to follow current trends, and for these reasons, it became a part of their daily routine (Mustaffa et al., 2011). Mustaffa et al. (2011) stated that 42% of Malaysian youths spent at least 1 to 3 hr per day on Facebook, of whom 67% intentionally used Facebook to communicate with friends, while 65.5% said they used Facebook to reconnect with old friends. Similarly, Kemp (2015) indicated that Facebook penetration in Malaysia by 2014 was 53% and the average time that social media users spent on social media each day was 3 hr 17 min. Facebook appeal among youths today is still eminent as it is a channel for keeping in touch with current or old friends and new acquaintances. Buechel and Berger (2012) argued that increased microblogging and emotional expression on online social networks is an indicator of emotional instability; however, they also concluded that online social networks might not be as negative to users' well-being as previously believed, which in turn could provide them with long-term social support and could foster intimacy.

Facebook Functions

The honeycomb framework by Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy and Silvestre (2011) provides an insight into social media ecology. Specifically, social media ecology offers a pervasive communication strategy through seven main functions, which are presence, relationship, identity, sharing, conversation, reputation and group. The activities conducted by youths using social

media varies in terms of the seven building blocks as each function differently and delivers different impacts on its users (Kietzmann et al., 2011). The only social media platform that consists of all seven building blocks is Facebook; social media platforms such as Twitter focus on sharing of status, while Instagram focusses on sharing of special moments through pictures. The

seven function blocks explained in Figure 1 indicate the different social media activities usually conducted by users. The blocks configured by Kietzmann et al. (2011) shows that frequent usage of the functions can lead to explicit social responses such as self-presentation, promotion and reputation through personal disclosure, conversation and sharing of information.

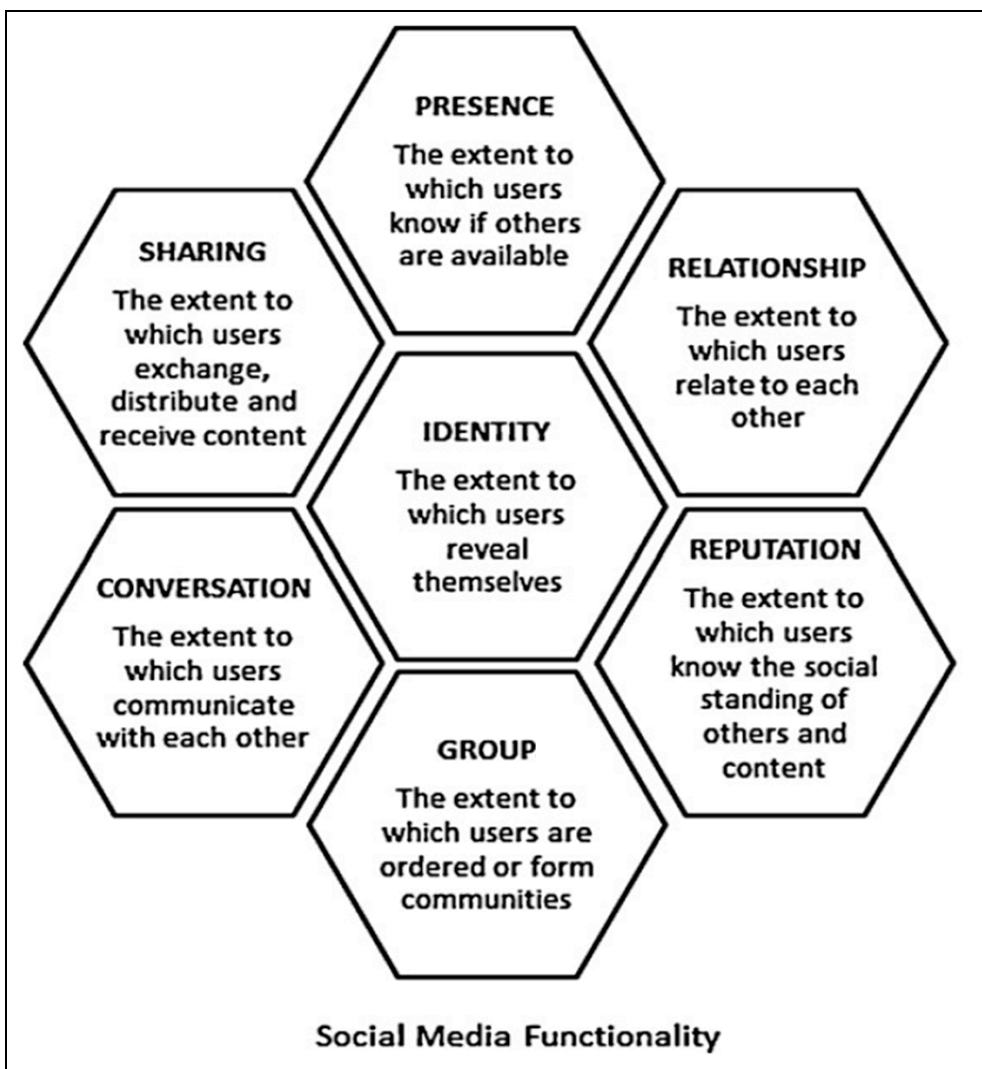


Figure 1. Honeycomb framework of Social Media building block functionalities (Kietzmann et al., 2011)

The conversation function, for instance, allows people to feel connected and the result of frequent postings allows a richer experience of social connectedness to the community as a whole. The group and sharing function blocks allow social media users to feel connected by a shared object and to form communities through online interaction that can strengthen interpersonal relationships. The relationship block forms relationships the user has with other users and shares their position within their network, leading them to make personal associations by sharing specific details with certain members, thus building a feeling of social cohesiveness. The presence block refers to the online presence of users, allowing users to know who is available at the time of use and the identity block allows users to find out more about other users by reading their self-disclosed profile. The reputation block provides information on the social standing of users and content by displaying the number of friends and followers of users.

Although several studies have shown that Facebook usage may provide the opportunity to develop and maintain social connectedness, social support, social ties and more (Gilbert & Karahalios, 2009; Grieve et al., 2013; Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012) among online community members, it is unclear whether a sense of togetherness can be built from Facebook social interaction. Facebook has different functions (Kietzmann et al., 2011) that can enhance social cohesion among its users; therefore, this study focussed on which

Facebook function, if used frequently, could enhance the sense of togetherness among rural youth virtual communities.

Sense of Togetherness

The concept of sense of togetherness is different from sense of unity as in the former, members of the group may not share the same opinions, but do possess bonds that can link them to one another and to the group as a whole. Most Facebook studies tend to focus on social connectedness, which is the concept of how people come together and interact among their social circles or even communities (Sheldon et al., 2011). Sheldon et al. (2011) suggested that the frequency of Facebook use allows social connection and the positive use of Facebook is mediated by the tendency to have positive experiences within the virtual community context. The concept of sense of togetherness is derived as a dimension of social cohesiveness (Moody & White, 2003), in which the relationship and interaction between users were based on their physical intimacy or closeness and familiarity with other members of that community. A sense of togetherness is expressed through the property of relationships by which group members are linked through everyday forms of social interaction. In Maslow's Theory of Human Motivation (1943), belonging or a feeling of relatedness is the third most important human need after physiological and safety needs. Yusop et al. (2010) agreed with this after their study found that 90% of their respondents agreed that it was important to belong to a group or

an association due to their belief that they would benefit from being part of the group.

Grieve et al. found that Facebook was able to enhance social connectedness through the frequency of interaction with other virtual members and the level of self-disclosure (Grieve et al., 2013). However, Bonds-Raacke and Raacke (2010) implied that if the motivation for social media usage was solely information seeking, then social connectedness may not be experienced. A study by Cheung, Chiu and Lee (2011) on reasons for students' Facebook usage claimed that the presence of social identity can create a sense of belonging among users of an online social networking site, where users can relate to one another as members of the community. Their study showed that students utilised Facebook to fulfil their psychological state of wanting to belong and to be able to identify themselves as

being a part of something. Furthermore, the social connectedness through Facebook is influenced by individual differences in motivation for use. Before we go into details on the level of the sense of connectedness or belonging it is imperative to first determine the concept of sense of togetherness.

Sense of togetherness in this study refers to the level of agreement among 1Malaysia Wireless Village youth community members on perceiving that their Facebook profile is their own, whether they feel associated with their Facebook virtual community members, whether they try to achieve a common goal and understanding with other members and particularly, whether they have the intention to leave their Facebook virtual community due to lack of understanding among one another. The framework for this paper, based on a review of the literature, is presented below in Figure 2.

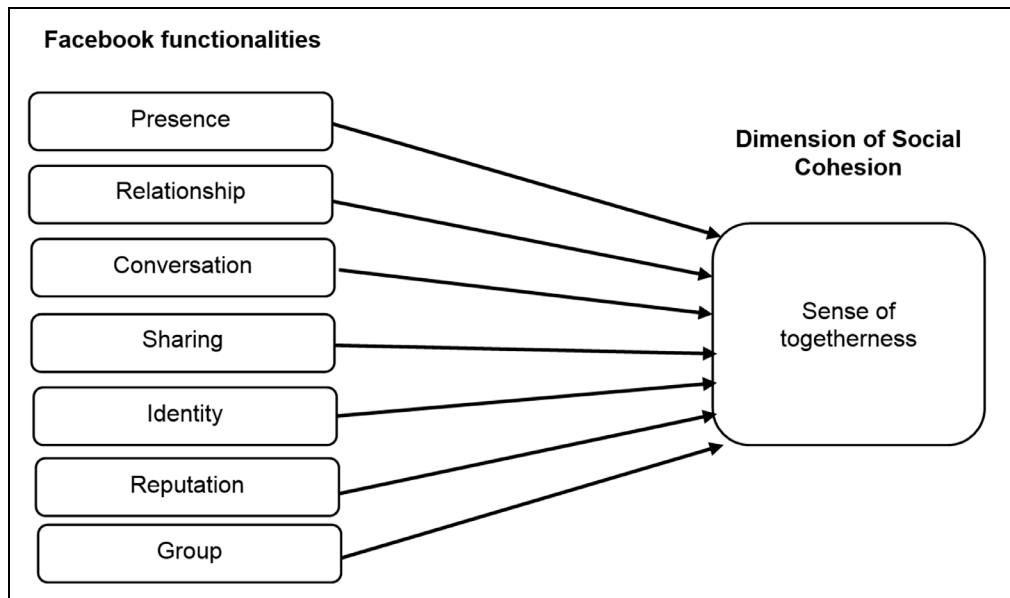


Figure 2. Framework for this paper

METHODS

This study was conducted using the quantitative method; the researcher employed the survey method and sampled the respondents through a multi-stage cluster sampling. A total of 25 respondents each were selected from four 1Malaysia Wireless Villages from four states i.e. Perlis, Negeri Sembilan, Seremban and Kuala Terengganu to represent the four zones in Peninsular Malaysia (25 rural youths x 4 1Malaysia Wireless Villages x 4 states = 400 respondents). A total of 400 1Malaysia Wireless Village rural youths aged between 15 and 40 years old were carefully chosen to represent each zone. The data collected were then analysed using the SPSS Statistics 22.

Operationalisation of Research Variables

The first part of the questionnaire consisted primarily of demographic questions (age, gender, friends' background). The second part measured the frequent use of Facebook functions. All the items were measured on a 4-point Likert scale. The third part contained items on sense of togetherness in a virtual community and a 4-point scale was also used, with 4 indicating a high sense of togetherness and 1 indicating a low level of togetherness.

Initially there were four items to describe the usage of the presence function, with items referring to the frequency of knowing if other users were available. Two examples of the items were: "I check the 'available' status (round green button) on

the right side of [the] Facebook chat sidebar before contacting my friend" and "I share my status on Facebook with friends." The response option given was a 4-point Likert scale, with 1 indicating the user never used the Facebook function and 4 indicating frequent use of it.

Originally there were six items to describe the usage of the conversation function, and the items referred to the frequency of communicating with other users. Two examples of the items were: "I start a conversation with other users through sharing [status]" and "I converse with friends by expressing my opinions in [the] Facebook comment space." The response option given was a 4-point Likert scale, with 1 indicating the user never used the Facebook function and 4 indicating frequent use of it.

There were four items to describe the usage of the sharing function, wherein the items referred to the frequency with which users exchanged, distributed and received content. Two examples of the items were: "I like to share, distribute and receive information about current issues" and "I like to share information in groups or the groups I joined as a member because we have the same passion and direction." The response option given was a 4-point Likert scale, with 1 indicating the user never used the Facebook function and 4 indicating frequent use of it.

There were four items to describe the usage of the identity function, and the items referred to the frequency with which users revealed themselves. Two examples of the

items were: “I use the Facebook profile function to share information about myself” and “I intentionally reveal my identity through the function of ‘Like’ on Facebook.” The response option given was a 4-point Likert scale, with 1 indicating the user never used the Facebook function and 4 indicating frequent use of it.

There were seven items to describe the usage of the reputation function, with the items referring to the agreement to reveal the social standing of others and content. Two examples of the items were: “My reputation can be measured through my list of friends (Friends button) on Facebook” and “Updating Facebook status determines my reputation.” The response option given was a 4-point Likert scale, with 1 indicating strong disagreement and 4 indicating strong agreement.

There were three items to describe the usage of the group function, with the items referring to the agreement among users in forming communities. Two examples of the items were: “By participating in a Group means that I have the same interests with friends” and “The Group function in Facebook allows me to create and manage different types of [friend].” The response option given was a 4-point Likert scale, with 1 indicating strong disagreement and 4 indicating strong agreement.

There were four items to describe the usage of the relationship function, with the items referring to the frequency with which users related to each other. Two examples of the items were: “I build a group on Facebook

to build relationships with friends” and “I [confirm] the identity of a person on Facebook before I ‘approve’ them as [a] friend.” The response option given was a 4-point Likert scale, with 1 indicating the user never used the Facebook function and 4 indicating frequent use of it.

There were eight items for sense of togetherness, with the items referring to the level of agreement from a Facebook virtual community member i.e. whether members perceived their Facebook profile as their own or not, and whether they saw themselves as part of the Facebook community. Two examples of the items were: “I feel like the virtual community is mine” and “I [regard] myself as part of this virtual community.” The response option given was a 4-point scale; a high mean score (max=4) would show high perception of sense of togetherness, whereas a low mean score (min=1) would show a low sense of togetherness towards their Facebook virtual community.

Pilot Test

The pilot test of the study was conducted with 30 respondents in Kuala Perlis. A reliability analysis resulted in a Facebook-function construct with a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.939 and a sense-of-togetherness construct with a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.862. Both results confirmed that both of the constructs were reliable and valid as the values exceeded the recommended Cronbach’s alpha value of 0.700 by Nunnally (1978). However, the presence and the relationship functions

were both deleted from the construct due to low construct reliability, low AVE level and failure to meet with the criteria of fit indices.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demography

The demographic characteristics of the respondents (Table 1) revealed that there were more male (58%) respondents than females (42%), of whom the majority were Malays (98.3%). This indicated that the villages included in the sample were homogenous in ethnic identity, and this explained why their Facebook friends were mostly Malays (98.8%). This study found that the highest users of Facebook among the respondents were youths aged between 15 and 20 years (76.8%), with

a mean of 19.15; this finding was similar to that of Hogan (2012), who found that users in the age group of 18 to 24 years old made up the highest number of Facebook users. The mean for age group conveyed that the majority of Facebook users within rural communities were among those who were no longer in school, had spare time in between their part-time jobs and could afford their own personal gadgets. Most of their Facebook friends consisted of close friends from school (95.5%) and the village (65.3), and more than half of them sought new friends (53.3%) online. This finding showed that the respondents were mainly using Facebook to maintain close relationships with established friends, but were also seeking new social networking outside their comfort zone of acquaintances.

Table 1
Frequency of distribution of the sampled population

Variables	Frequency	%	Mean
Gender			
Male	232	58.0	
Female	168	42.0	
Race			
Malay	393	98.3	
Chinese	4	1.0	
Indian	3	0.8	
Others			
Members' race			
Malay	395	98.8	
Chinese	54	13.5	
Indian	22	5.5	
Others			
Age (Years)			19.15
15-20	307	76.8	
21-30	72	18.0	
31-40	21	5.3	

Table 1 (continue)

Variables	Frequency	%	Mean
Type of friends			
School friends	382	95.5	
Village friends	261	65.3	
Family	238	59.5	
New friends	213	53.3	
Friends from neighbouring village	126	31.5	
Urban friends	125	31.3	
Colleagues	102	25.5	

Pattern of Facebook Usage

The location of Facebook usage was mainly the users’ own home (87.5%) and within the radius of the 1Malaysia Wireless Village hotspot (35.5%), which was the second favourite place of users to be online. This data depicted that the free Wi-Fi provided by the Universal Service Provider (USP) with the collaboration of the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) was convenient as there were several underserved families who could not afford personal Internet subscription. The gadgets used to access Facebook were primarily smart phones (90.5%) and computers (54%) provided at nearby telecentres. This finding was prominent since MCMC recorded about 143.4% of mobile-phone penetration per 100 inhabitants in Malaysia. The average hours of Facebook usage during school/work days were consistently between 1 and 3 hr (88%); this finding was in line with Mustaffa et al.’s adoption of Facebook and it was clear from the length of time spent online that some of the respondents were

still in school or had other responsibilities to attend to on regular days (Mustaffa et al., 2011).

Table 2
Pattern of Facebook usage

Variables	Frequency	%
Facebook usage location		
Home	350	87.5
1Malaysia Wireless Village hotspot	142	35.5
Cyber café	136	34.0
Eatery	102	25.5
Study place	77	19.3
Work place	72	18.0
Gadgets used to access Facebook		
Smart phone	362	90.5
Computer (PC)	216	54.0
Personal laptop (netbook)	147	36.8
IPad/iPod	51	12.8
Average hours of Facebook usage during school days/work days		
1-3 hr	352	88.0
4-6 hr	30	7.5
>7 hr	18	4.5

Motivations for Facebook Usage

In answering the first objective, which explored the motivation for Facebook usage among 1Malaysia Wireless Village rural youth, it was discovered that, remarkably, their main motivation for using Facebook was to get current news about other members (91%). This was followed by the desire to chat with other members through Facebook messenger (86.3%) and to share the latest updates in their life (79.8%). This

emphasised that the main usage of Facebook among the rural communities surveyed in this study revolved around information seeking, sharing and gathering within their virtual community activities. In contrast, Mustaffa et al.'s findings (2011) on the purpose of Facebook usage among youth in the Klang Valley revealed that they used Facebook mainly to communicate with friends (67%) and to reconnect with old friends (65.5%).

Table 3
The main objective in using Facebook

Variables	Frequency	%
To get the latest news	364	91.0
To chat	345	86.3
To share information	319	79.8
To be active in the groups joined	302	75.5
To check who is online	237	59.3
To maintain reputation/identity	220	55.0
To find new friends/networks	210	52.5
To watch videos	145	36.3

Sense of Togetherness in Virtual Community

The second objective was to determine the level of sense of togetherness among 1Malaysia Wireless Village rural youth virtual communities. The 1Malaysia Wireless Village rural youth were found to have a moderate sense of togetherness ($M=2.89$) with their Facebook communities (Table 4). This was somewhat affected by the fact that their Facebook usage was mainly for information seeking and sharing. Likewise, Bonds-Raacke and Raacke (2010)

previously implied in their study that if the motivation for social media usage was solely information seeking, then social connectedness may not be experienced. The fourth most common activity was to remain active within the groups joined (75.5%). Since the respondents were aware of their reputation, they believed that it was imperative to maintain a good image within their social group; thus, the role of group functionality somewhat contributed to their sense of togetherness.

Table 4
Level of 1Malaysia wireless village rural youth sense of togetherness with their Facebook community (n=400)

Level	Frequency	%	Mean	SD
			2.895	0.581
Low (1-2.00)	52	13.0		
Moderate (2.01-3.00)	239	59.8		
High (3.01-4.00)	109	27.3		

The SEM results suggested that Facebook functions could enhance a sense of togetherness (Table 5). A simple linear regression analysis was used to determine which Facebook functions contributed the most to sense of togetherness. A significant regression equation was found ($F [7, 392]=103.111, p<0.000$), with an R^2 of 0.648. There were items identified as affecting the factor loadings; therefore, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was done for each variable to test the relationships, and items that did not fit the construct for a model fit were deleted. Out of the seven functions on Facebook, only the frequency of group, conversation, reputation and identity usage was observed to contribute significantly towards the perceived sense of togetherness.

In answering the third objective, it was observed that the frequency of using the group function on Facebook ($\beta=0.289$) contributed the most towards the perceived sense of togetherness. This finding suggested that the majority of the respondents felt they belonged to the group and identified with

their membership in the community. When the members of a virtual community are willing to share, work together, include each other and take pleasure in benefiting from community involvement, they feel a sense of togetherness (Bolong, 2011). Just as Moody and White (2003) indicated, a sense of togetherness develops from associations that are embedded in the social network. It makes the individual feel honoured and proud that members of the community are constantly striving to achieve mutual goals and common understanding. In line with Cheung, Chiu and Lee’s study (2011) on reasons for students’ Facebook usage, it was found that the psychological state of wanting to belong and to be able to identify as being part of a group was fulfilled by using Facebook. Similarly, Yusop et al. (2010) emphasised that belonging to a group brings benefits to the members and creates closeness as it is easier to organise group activities. They are willing to share responsibilities and commit to the group by maintaining a positive social relationship (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Table 5
Results of SEM on the effect of frequency of usage of Facebook functions on sense of togetherness

Construct	β	SE	Beta	CR	ρ
Group	0.289	0.041	0.309	7.077	0.000
Conversation	0.266	0.044	0.318	6.121	0.000
Reputation	0.173	0.036	0.197	4.772	0.000
Identity	0.097	0.027	0.154	3.582	0.000
Presence	0.008	0.036	0.036	0.224	0.823
Sharing	-0.005	0.027	-0.008	-0.198	0.843
Relationship	-0.018	0.037	-0.021	-0.472	0.638

$R=0.805$

$R^2=0.648$

Buechel and Berger (2012) concluded that online interaction through Facebook could provide long-term social support and foster intimacy between the users. Referring to the respondents' pattern of Facebook usage, Facebook was accessed for 1 to 3 hr daily to feel socially connected; therefore, social context cues such as mutual friends or shared interests could guide their conversations to socially relevant topics as they had found common ground.

Despite the fact that Facebook usage among youth was previously found to maintain existing relationships, this study found that usage of the relationship function was part of the motivation for enhancing sense of togetherness after the usage of the presence function and the sharing function. Kietzmann et al. (2011) implied that social media communities that do not value identity highly also do not value relationships highly. However, this paper found it to be otherwise; the rural youth did not associate the 'multiplexity' of relationships between the members as

a form of attachment to feel a sense of togetherness although they did value the identity or the validation of authenticity of a user before adding the user as a friend. Perhaps the maintaining of relationships within Facebook is done by being active in groups, daily social interaction and ensuring a positive identity and reputation among other members on Facebook.

CONCLUSION

At the present time, youth communities have been applying social media as channels for social networking to gain more contacts and to develop interpersonal relationships with existing friends or new members from different villages. The 1Malaysia Wireless Village Project has the potential to create a community of shared values, shared challenges and equal opportunity among rural youth who use social media as channels for communication and social cohesion in the ongoing process of developing a rural community based on members' perceived sense of togetherness.

Spending time on Facebook appears to be part of the daily routine of most Malaysian youth (Mustaffa et al. 2011). The data from this study showed that the main usage of Facebook among the rural communities in this study was mainly for information seeking and sharing details of members' virtual community activities. Furthermore, it was found that the motivation of information seeking affected the perceived sense of togetherness, which was only moderate, among the 1Malaysia rural youth Facebook virtual community. The study also found that increases in the frequent usage of Facebook functions or Facebook usage purpose could increase users' perceived sense of togetherness as members of the virtual community.

In identifying which Facebook function contributed significantly towards the level of social cohesiveness, it was found that the frequency of usage of the group function on Facebook was the main motivation that influenced users' perceived sense of togetherness. As Kietzmann et al. (2011) explained, the implication of each block could assist in explaining how policy makers can develop a new project based on how online engagement takes place in social media. Through this project, the government can monitor the rural community's grouping activities and configure them to good use. A sharing network can help mediate users' shared interests, allowing them to value their national identity highly. Just as Kietzmann et al. (2011) highlighted, given the immense cyber traffic that social media

create daily, the existence of the group function is beneficial for filtering and only sharing specific details with some members and not others. This could come in handy for changing the future ecology of social media and assembling a strategy for more manageable human communication.

Due to the scarcity of interpersonal influences, different individuals tend to be in disagreement as everyone has a different attitude, beliefs and behaviour. Interpersonal interaction is needed for individuals to agree on anything and to coordinate behaviour (Friedkin, 2004). A homogenous community is not part of the national agenda, as current Prime Minister, Dato' Sri Najib Razak's vision is for a heterogeneous Malaysian society striving for the same goal (Suruhanjaya Komunikasi dan Multimedia Malaysia, 2011). Positive interpersonal attachments achieved through a dynamic of positive social interactions with like-minded people are what make a group attractive to the virtual youth members of 1Malaysia Wireless Villages. Positive consensus through social media creates rewarding interaction among members, and this in turn influences their attitudes and behaviour within the group as they become willing to contribute and commit to making the group a better place for all to feel a sense of togetherness.

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