Enhancing Effective Leadership: The Role of Social Media among Youth Leaders in Malaysia

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Abstract: The development in communication technology, especially in the usage of electronic devices, the internet and social media such as Facebook, Twitter and Blog has become a new phenomenon whether at the micro or macro cultural level in societies. The term 'without borders' has embrace the communication level one step ahead in connecting people throughout the world. As the fact, the president of the united states, Barack Obama has intelligently using social media, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and website Blog in promoting himself in arising vote in the President USA election 2008. However, does communication skills through social media is enough for a youth leader to be effective? The view of this study is based on the quantitative survey. A total of 1000 questionnaires were distributed among youth leaders in Malaysia and 727 were completed and analyzed. By any means, the youth leaders need to adapt with the changes and current technology development for improvement in their leadership skill and communication.

Key words: Social media, effective leadership, youth leaders, communication, technology, questionnaires

INTRODUCTION

Youth is a potential societal change agents and leaders of future development of a country. Malaysian government has put an effort on developing leadership potential among youth, since, 2006. Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi in his speech upon launching The Ninth Malaysia Plan believed in molding strong human capital within the youth and instills positive leadership values in them. Youth of today is nothing as before, they not just listen and accept the information. Rather, youth of today is capable to evaluate the information accordingly and openly state their opinions on certain issues. To influence and lead this youth population, the youth leaders are most suitable indicators (Wattal *et al.*, 2010).

The development of leadership continues in the late 1960's as some criticism appointed that the leadership styles were applied differently for different follower rather the contingency approach presumes the situation as the essential determinant that contributed toward leadership success. Then, in the early 1980s, the leadership concept has emerged to a "New Leadership Approach" which emphasis on development of relationship between leader and follower.

Leadership has form a special bond that must be accepted by the members to build and maintain credibility, to clarify principles, identifying the employee desires, build consensus, communicate shared values, raises confidence and give a good example in leading an organization.

Today's leader need to improve communication skills as it is the key to be effective and good leader. As asserted by Novick *et al.* (2008) that the most essential skills needed by a leader in today's 21st century are communication skills which will influences people towards a common purpose and objectives. Nonetheless, different leaders use different means of communication with their subordinates and the social media is one of the recent communication tools effectively used. As quoted by Smith (2009) "the potential benefits for the use social media enable the increase of trust between leaders and subordinates, the increase in knowledge, sharing information and lastly it also increases productivity".

Yet, as one can say to success as leaders depends on an ability to have profound conversations with constituents while taking advantage of technologies in today's web-connected world. In this case, the young generation was more eligible audience that the leaders should allure their attention most. Thus, to meet and connect in particular with members of the younger generation who prefer to communicate and learn in open environments, the leaders should consider using online social media to create an environment of openness and transparency.

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So, the question is does communication skills through social media is enough for a youth leader to be effective?

Literature review: Nowadays, communication is no longer an issue. People are connected worldwide none limitlessly. Likewise, the revolutionized in communication has close up the gap between the nations in the education, economy, politic, social and many others. Based on survey conducted by the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) in 2014, the internet users in Malaysia are 20.1 million (comprising 66.6% of the total population). The globalization endlessly leads to pattern change in the internet usage among Malaysian from all walks of life (Pawanteh *et al.*, 2009) while the social media sites co-existent have raised the internet usage level drastically (Wok *et al.*, 2012).

The influence and the potential power of new technology especially social media, Facebook, Twitter, Websites Blog, Instagram, YouTube among the generation of young people was undeniable fact. Each of these provides a different way of connecting and communicating with others via. status updates, short comments, sharing of photos, useful web links or more extensive study. Allison (2013) has classified the generation as the "digital natives", people at the aged 13-30 that share a similar culture of communication with their generational peers across borders and across continents. According to an study by mStar online, the number of active users on Facebook in Malaysia stood at 13,354,900 which is the 20th highest in the world, while users on Twitter has reached 1,128,000.

Nonetheless, there are positive and negative results of the use of social media, especially, among the young generation. Positively, this particular electronic communication through social media is seen as one of the important channels in the dissemination and sharing of information. The emergence of social media as a medium of communication technologies not only popular among the public but also affirmed and adopted among local leaders and internationally. For instance, through reported that Dato' Sri Mohd Najib Tun Abdul Razak above the list of most favorite profile page, Facebook and Twitter with the largest number of followers in Malaysia, 1, 510, 127 for his Twitter page (@ NajibRazak). He is also listed in the world's top 20 in Southeast Asia together with ex-President of Indonesia, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono who was ranked 8th with 1,709,746 followers.

The power and popularity of social media: The popularity of social media continues to grow as evidenced by ongoing publicity highlighting its benefits and widespread use. The advent of social media provides a new and rich source of easily accessible data about individuals, society and the world in general. Particularly, data from social media captures online behavior of users who communicate or interact on a diversity of issues and topics. Its cost effectiveness and ease at disseminating information across the world has made it a growingly popular way to communicate in the workplace (Obar *et al.*, 2012). More importantly, it's free. Facebook, Twitter, Blogs and YouTube along with other social networking site such as LinkedIn had currently exploded in terms of its popularity among users globally. As social media becomes well recognized for its potential, many scholars and researchers have conducted various studies to justify the popularity of this medium (Kelleher and Sweetser, 2012; Obar *et al.*, 2012).

The explosion of social media sites and their usage globally is illustrative of their potential to attract wide audiences. Kelleher and Sweetser (2012) also added that "the use of social media could improve the exchange of knowledge and greater dialogic communication". However, Chi claimed that "social media can have tremendous benefits but also can have serious security risks for organizations".

The exploitation of social media was also illustrated in the demonstrations on city streets in the Philippines in 2001, revocation of the results of the fraudulent elections in Moldavia in 2009, the M-15 movement with their camps and demonstrations in Spain in 2011 and the "Occupy Wall Street" movement that started in New York in 2011. Moreover, Charles indicated that social media much more than just a communication channel, it empowers leaders to improve their communications skills as well as deepen connections with people. He further claimed that, the leaders who engage in social media are practicing effective leadership and better capable of leading organization.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Basically, this study applied a quantitative study where the data were gathered from a population of the youth leaders in Malaysia. The data were collected using a questionnaire designed based on the literature and adapted from the existing leadership instrument. A total of 1000 questionnaires were proportionately distributed to all the State Youth Council across Malaysia with the concentration on Kuala Lumpur and Selangor (400 questionnaires). The rest were evenly distributed to other 12 states (50 questionnaires for each state). In addition, another 150 questionnaires were distributed during the

Assembly of Youth Leaderships organized by Institute Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad's Thoughts (IPDM), Universiti Utara Malaysia. Enumerators were assigned to conduct the survey and 828 were successfully collected with 72% response rate that is considered high for a quantitative research (Fincham, 2008). Apart of 828 questionnaires returned, 727 were considered complete and analysed. The SPSS tool has been used to analyse the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 indicates that 77.7% with a total 565 of youth leaders used the social media as medium of communication in practicing leadership more effectively. However, only 22.3% of respondents do not use social media. The high percentage of social media usage reveals that there is awareness among youth leaders on the advancement in science and technology to disseminate information and communicate more effectively to the public.

Further findings on ethnicity identify that among the respondents that used social media 46.5% are Melayu, Cina 14.2%, India 10%, Kadazandusun 1.2%, Bajau and Pribumi Sabah 1.5%, Melanau 0.3% and others 2.5%. The details of total respondents as referred to Table 2. The current finding is in line with the population of Malaysia that comprises three major ethnics which are Melayu, Cins and India. Ethnic minority such as Orang Asli and Iban may not preferred social media as their main communication channel because of low internet coverage in rural area and their followers not many were exposed to technology advancement. As such, this situation does not apply to other minority ethnic like Kadazandusun, Bajau, Melanau and Pribumi Sabah.

Table 1: The social media usage among youth leaders

Variables	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percent
Do not use	162	22.3	22.3
Use social media	565	77.7	77.7
Total	727	100.0	100.0

Table 2: Ethnicity and social media usage

Variables	Do not use	Use social media	Total
Melayu	104	338	442
Cina	35	103	138
India	13	73	86
Orang Asli	1	0	1
Kadazandusun	2	9	11
Bajau	3	11	14
Pribumi Sabah	1	11	12
Melanau	0	2	2
Iban	1	0	1
Others	2	18	20
Total	162	565	727

Furthermore, this study also found that among other communication channel available, the respondents still choose social media as prefer channel to communicate effectively with their followers. As result show 78.6% of youth leaders selected social media as compared to electronic media 62.7%, digital media 35.8%, printed media/media mass 35.3%, interpersonal 30.1% and others 0.6%.

CONCLUSION

While many of the top leaders have embraced social media as a useful tools in marketing and managing organization, youth leaders adoption of social media has been slow to pick up its pace. The contemporary community has been reshaped its structures and methods through social media as its influencing the way leaders interact with their followers, public citizens and each other. Social media engagement presents strategic challenge for today's leaders, however, as leaders begin to migrate to social media channels, this shift is likely to have strategic implications for brand loyalty, brand image and brand awareness. The next generation of leaders will require new talents and a different set of skills to successfully grow and polish their leadership. This study concludes that followers will increasingly value a leader commitment to having true conversations with followers and will reward that engagement with trust and loyalty. These new interactions will build lasting relationships between leaders and followers that will lead to a foundation in transparency and openness.

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