YOUTH AND MEDIA PARTICIPATION: KEY ISSUES OF CONCERN

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Abstract— The importance of youth participation in decision making process in nation building should not be underestimated. Studies have shown that youth in the marginalized communities have lack of opportunities to get engaged in a democratic process. However, the advent of media technology provides an opportunity for the authority to tackle this problem. Henceforth, how participation of youth who are at risk in the marginalized communities can be increased through the use of media is undertaken. To measure the media participation among youth, focus groupswere conductedto investigate the issues preferred to be engaged by the youth, the contents to be produced as participation manifestationwhile exploring youth web based skills. The findingsindicate that there are three issues to be highlighted which are economy political and social issues. In exploring the youth participation, a website for youth, called Y4M: youth for Malaysia, which has three main web broadcasting sub-menus: web tv, web radio, and web journalism is produced as a gateway for the youth to voice their opinions.

Keyterms— Media, Participation.

I. INTRODUCTION

Studies have shown that majority of youth do not enjoy full citizenship due to their inability to exercise their full rights as citizens to participate, voice opinions, and influence decisions on issues affecting the nation. Studies also show that the roles of media, in particular new media, have changed the landscape of the way the citizens exercise their rights and participate in a civil society.

To address these issues, a research was conducted to identify ways of how to increase youth participation in the nation's agendas at national and regional levels through media utilization. Specifically, this project attempts to identify the current status of youth participation in the country, determine the ideal roles of marginalized youth participation in the social and political settings, reveal the existing and changing participation norms of the marginalised youth, implement strategies and programmes that promote marginalized youth participation in schools, communities, and the government's transformation plan by utilizing various media tools that are managed and produced by youths, and develop and propose specific policy and good practices on media in support of youth participation. This paper describes the findings of focus groups undertaken to explore issues of youth concern as well as the design of a website as a gateway for youth participation.

II. YOUTH AND MEDIA PARTICIPATION

Youths aged between fifteen to twenty five years, make half of the world's population. The UN data in 2012 shows that this age group are jobless, under-employed, and being excluded from social and economic opportunities, particularly the marginalized groups. Their participation in nation building, political process, and civic engagement are still considerably low and thus far many of youths do not enjoy full citizenship (UNDP, 2012; Golombek, 2002). The youth are demanding equality to exercise their full rights as citizens to participate, voice opinions, and influence decisions on issues affecting the nation (Cohen & Kahne, 2012). They want more participation and consultation in the national agenda particularly educational, political and economic issues. As such, there is a need to study the important roles of media in empowering youth to engage more in nation building. Efforts must be undertaken to ensure that various authorities and institutions support and engage youth, particularly those come from marginalised communities to utilize various types of media positively as tools to facilitate their participation.

Realising the importance of the role of media (Kreutzer, 2009)and its impact on youth participation, steps need to be taken to ensure youth, in particular the marginalized groups, are being consulted and represented, and their voices are constantly being heard. This research attempts to answer several research questions such as what does youth participation means in context of the marginalized groups and in what way various media can be utilized to enhance marginalised youth participation in the nation building?

In Malaysia, approximately one million out of 4.5 million of youth population between the ages of 15 - 25 years are at-risk. According to the Malaysian Youth Index 2008, almost 500,000 youth between 14 - 25 years of age admitted to being involved in, at least, one social wrong-doing. In general, not much effort has been focussed on overcoming problems of at-risk youth. Most of the youth developmental programmes currently implemented target all levels of youth society. 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, of approximately one million of its youth between the ages of 15 - 24 years, that may be hugely beneficial to the nation's building. The profile

of the at-risk youth in Malaysia can be summarized as (Samsudin, 1995 and Rozmi, 2007) coming from low-waged families who are not emotionally supportive with unsatisfactory living conditions, lacking parental supervision on activities that they are involved in, deficient in social skills, low aspiration, emotional control and self-esteem and devoid of suitable role model.

This article covers discussions on a survey and focus groups findings with a group of youths. This article also briefly introduces a website developed specifically for youth to provide their opinions to exercise their rights.

III. SURVEYAND FOCUS GROUPS

A survey from 1,029 youth and 5 focus group sessions were used as a data collection method to identify issues of youth concern. These involved youth of different races, religions and background environments from all states in Malaysia. The objectives are to explore youth topics of concern. In addition, the survey and focus group sessions were also intended to explore knowledge, skills, infrastructure, motivation and challenges of using new media as a means of participation.

The respondents of the survey represent all age group of youth as defined in this research, where male (464) and female (565). As for the respondents' race, most of them are Malays (69.4%) followed by Dusun (6.2%) and Iban (5.6%). The religion shows Muslim (81.0%), Christian (12.1%), Buddha (4.2%) and Hindu (2.5%). The respondents also come from different educational backgrounds where majority of the respondents at secondary school (41.0%) and University (27.2%).Most of the respondents have 4-6 family members (52.1%) and only have one family (80.9%). From the result shown respondents house is owned by their parents (77.7%).

It is noted that most respondents (73.1%) are still receiving formal education at either secondary schools or institutes of higher education. Nonetheless, 17.4% of the respondents are already employed. In term of household income status, majority of the respondents is student and they don't have any income (75.1%). Meanwhile, income of RM 501 – RM 1,000 (8.7%) and others is below 7.0%. Besides that, majority of parents have income between RM 501 - RM1, 000 (21.5%) and income more than RM 4,001 is 10.8%. Majority of respondents (40.9%) live in flat houses. The others mostly live in the estate (30.4%) .

Findings indicate that most respondents are using mobile phones (567) and computers (239) frequently. The result also shows that the importance of conventional media such as TV, newspapers, and radio should not be underestimated as a substantial number of the respondents are still using them frequently or occasionally.

The respondents also provide feedback regarding the most popular social media they use and their frequencies. The results reveal that there are at least seven major social media tools used by the respondents which are Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, WeChat, Google+, and Twitter. Among these, Facebook and WhatsApp are the most popular tools used by respondents where more than 50% respondents use them frequently.

The respondents use social media for various reasons and purposes. The top five purposes as identified in this pilot study are to get in touch with friends and families, to share knowledge and expertise with others, to get information and latest news, as a hobby during free times and to build network and meet new friends. Despite slight variations in the result, this finding highlights the potential role of social media as a tool for the youth to engage in decision making process involving social, politics, and economy. There are two activities which receive highest mean scores for respondents activities is share the current news/information/ opinions via social media with family/ friends on the social/political/economic issues and obtain information about social/ politics/economic issues.

The 5 focus group discussions involving 51 youths were conducted separately in 5 states in Malaysia; Kelantan, Kedah, Selangor, Johor and Sabah. Based on the analysis, 4 economic, 5 political and 7 social issues were identified. Participants in the intervention programmes are advised to relate their training contents to the identified issues.

IV. MAIN FINDINGS OF SURVEY AND FOCUS GROUP SESSIONS

Table 1 lists the summary of the main findings. As can be seen from these feedbacks, it is noted that all the issues voiced out by the youth sampled in this study are closely related to the national agenda being pointed out the Malaysian government. Economics, political and social issues dominated the outcomes. Under economic issues the youth are concerned about their life quality and employment/how to earn their living. Corruption, racial issues and political stability are important for the government to handle. Drug abuse and health issues are the main concerns talked by youth.

When asked about their web based skills, the youth listed these skills, which to them have allowed them to voice opinions:

- use web radio to listen to radio online
- able to download and upload video clips
- know how to share videos
- use Web TV
- post comments and feedbacks

New media as a means to participation is most welcome by the youth. However, they foresee challenges and constraints in using new media in terms of:

- Lack of skills and knowledge
- Insufficient of financial support
- Lack of understanding in Laws
- Lack of support from authorities, family and community
- Poor infrastructure to allow them to be connected in their housing areas
- Demotivated due to lack of support

V. PARTICIPATION PLATFORM

In providing a specific platform for youth to participate, a website for youth, called Y4M: youth for Malaysia (refer to Figure 1), which has three main web broadcasting sub-menu: web tv, web radio, and web journalism was developed. This website can be found at www.youth4malaysia.com



Figure 1: Y4M website

This platform is dedicated for youth to share with and learn from each other regarding issues affecting them. In other words, they can have a platform which is be able to accommodate their voices of their opinions regarding some issues around them. Their works can be published in three forms of web broadcasting, namely Web TV which covers videos form, Web Radio covers audio forms, and Web Journalism covers their voice and opinion in the form of articles.

Table 1: Issues of concern for youth participation

	Youth feedbacks
Issues to voice opinions for government to take action	a) Economic Issues 1. Life Quality 2. Pre Job Skills 3. Jobless 4. Business Skills 5. Entrepreneurship 6. GST b) Political Issues 1. Corruption 2. Racial Issues 3. Freedom of Speech 4. Political Stability 5. General c) Social Issues 1. Drug abuse 2. Health 3. Illegal racing 4. Cultural shock 5. Stress 6. Form Club-association 7. Crime: • Snatch Theft • General • Bully • Women Safety 8. Morality: • Internet abuse • Promiscuity • Baby dumping • Religious Teachings

From the focus group sessions, we have divided the most prominent categories of issues that youth are really interested to share about, namely Economics, Social and Politics. The subcategories of each can be seen in Table 2:

Table 2. Division of categories in youth4malaysia platform

Economics	Social	Politics
• Commerce • Work • Quality of life • Hot issue	• Hobby • Sport • Healthy • Beauty • Arts and entertainment • Crime and social problems	• Freedom of speech • Racism • Political stability • Divide urban / rural • Current issue

These categories allow the youth to voice their opinions by selecting a category and choose what form they want to publish (audio, video, or article). However, before they can upload their work, theyhave to register themselves to be a member. The following figures (Figures 2, 3 and 4) display some examples of work that have been published by the youth.



Figure 2. Example of an audio published in Web Radio Section, telling how to save money

For web radio, we utilized *soundcloud* plugin to be integrated in our site. To do so, the members should register first at www.soundcloud.com to record their voices or upload their videos, so then next they can copy the hyperlink of particular audio to be shared to our website. Meanwhile, for the Web TV, we deploys youtube.com to be integrated in our website.

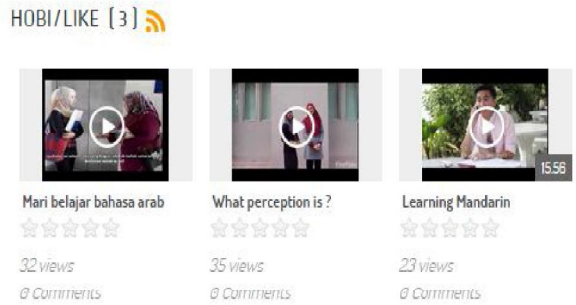


Figure 3. The youth providing language learning to peers

For each video, we also add some features, such as rating system, comment, like and dislike (see Figure 4). The intention is to boost their motivation through scores. They can also rate the work byfellow youths.

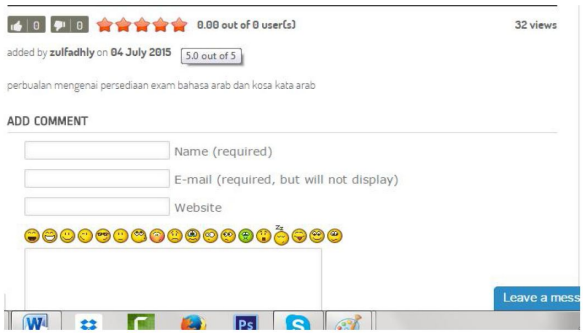


Figure 4. Features of score rating on video

Additionally, as a platform to exercise their web journalism ability (see Figure 5), the youth can share their articleswhich can be linked to Facebook and Twitter.

A Facebook page (Figure 6) has also been set up to further allow the youth to empower themselves to get engage in nation building opportunity



Figure 5. List of articles which have been written by members



Figure 6. Y4M facebook

CONCLUSION

A web based platform is created to allow the youth particularly the Malaysian to collectively provide their views on issues of concern that were identified by the youth, which are coincidentally the national agenda being pointed out by the government. The youth have been showing tendencies for their voices to constantly being heard so as to increase youth participation through new media.

The development of the Y4M platform is intended to complement the currently available media social platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. This project is at its early implementation phase. Obviously, the analysis of the contents as submitted by the members of this platform will need to be periodically conducted. These are planned for the next year ahead at an interval of 3 months. In addition intervention programmes are also under planned to educate samples of 525 youth on how to get involved through web audio, web TV and web journalism.

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