SOCIAL MEDIA AS AN AGENT OF SOCIAL SOLIDARITY IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract

Dato' Seri Mohd Najib Bin Hj Abd Razak, under his managerial, 1Malaysia had been announced to be the main issue in the Malaysian development. The lifelong dream of Malaysia's 6th Prime Minister, Dato' Sri Mohd Najib Bin Tun Hj Abd Razak, is a united, peaceful and prosperous Malaysia, with abundant opportunities for all citizens. However, the unity in Malaysia is still threatened. There are many forms of strain and conflict that occur in ethnic relations in Malaysia, having occasionally erupted into riots and killings, as occurred during the May 13, 1969 incident. This disunity also caused by prejudice, racism and ethnocentrism. Social Networking Sites (SNS) which is one of the forms of social media seem to be one of the ways to unite people. This study used social capital theory as foundation theory for model development. The minimum sample was determined through G*Power analysis. The study will be involving 482 respondents, selected through a multistage sampling technique. A cross sectional survey and structured questionnaire were used for data collection. Based from the findings, interaction and intimacy in social networking sites have significance influence on social solidarity. This research hopefully will contribute knowledge on SNS factors and social solidarity.

Keywords*: Social Media, Social Solidarity, Social Networking Sites, Social Capital*

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is a multiracial country consisting of three main ethnics, namely Malay, Chinese and Indians. Social solidarity is very important in order for Malaysia to maintain national harmony. Therefore, social solidarity among the ethnics is crucial to ensure people live in peace. According to Kendall (2010), social solidarity refers to a group's ability to maintain itself in the face of obstacles. Social solidarity exists when social bonds, attractions, or other forces hold members of a group in interaction over a period of time. Thus, once people always get connected and expose through social media, they can share their problems, sympathies or interest among them which can empower social solidarity. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak reiterated that 1Malaysia was not a new concept or formula and that its ultimate objective of national unity was the main vision of past leaders of the country, albeit in various forms. In other words, 1Malaysia is a concept to foster unity in Malaysians of all races based on several important values which should become the practice of every Malaysian (Bernama, 2009). However, according to Hafizullah Emadi (2002), national unity cannot be attained by the negation of ethnic communities but by their recognition. This is when social media play significant roles in helping the government achieve its objective. Government has opened channels of communication to all Malaysian so that they easily interact and close to the government, especially with the help of social media. Sproull and Keisler (1996) stated that by

using new communication technology such as social media, it can help people build relationship without considering the users status either they are rich, educated, and vice versa. As the communication exists, it also can create social solidarity between one another. In addition, the usage of new communication technology such as social media can enable people to socialize, changing opinion, sharing problem and interest and etc. (Al-Hawamdeh and Hart, 2002).

However, according to Syed Husin Ali (2008), the agenda for national unity in Malaysia, 55 years after independence has still not flourished but, instead, seem to have withdrawn further and further into the distant mirage. It is due to as ethnic differences exist, which often manifest in stereotypes, discriminations, tensions and conflict that complicate the process of building national unity. There are many forms of strain and conflict that occur in ethnic relations in Malaysia, having occasionally erupted into riots and killings, as occurred during the May 13, 1969 Incident. The statement is also supported by Mokhtar Muhammad (2008) states that the country of diverse ethnic, cultural, economic class and language is not easy to maintain and preserve unity.

METHODOLOGY

According to Kowalczyk (2013), explanatory research is defined as an attempt to connect ideas to understand cause and effect, meaning researchers want to explain what is going on. Explanatory research looks at how things come together and interact. This study employed the quantitative study approach (explanatory study) to identify the pattern and magnitude of relations and interactions existing between the predetermined exogenous (interaction, involvement, quality and intimacy) and endogenous variables (social solidarity) in order to understand the phenomenon of solidarity in social network sites (SNS). The design of this study offers an enhanced understanding on the relationships that exist among variables involved in this study. The minimum sample was determined through G*Power analysis. The study will be involving 482 respondents, selected through a multistage sampling technique. A cross sectional survey and structured questionnaire were used for data collection. Lastly, the data were key in by SPSS and analyzed through Structural Equation Modeling (SEM).

Social Solidarity in Malaysia

All the ethnics in Malaysia have their own cultural identity. Initially, it was hard for these groups to mingle and interact with each other as they were segregated by the nature of their residential locations. Cultural and religious practices also varied amongst these groups. This diversity made it very difficult to unite the country when it was occupied by foreign powers. After Malaysia attained independence, the government had implemented various policies and programmes to ensure social solidarity amongst the different ethnics in the country. (Mardiana Nordin and Hasnah Hussiin, 2011).

For this reason, The Department of National Unity has defined national unity as "a situation in which all citizens from the various ethnic groups, religions, and states live in peace as one united nationality, giving full commitment to national identity based upon the Federal Constitution and the Rukun Negara." Wawasan 2020 (Vision 2020), a government policy targeting developed status for Malaysia by the year 2020, names national unity as a key component of a developed country.

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Social Media as an Agent of Social Solidarity

Social media is defined as "a communication medium that is devoted to or described by interaction between members of the medium" (Kalamas, Mitchell and Lester, 2009). It is also said to be a general name for websites that permit users to share content, media, photographs etc. The common ones are the famous networking sites like Myspace, Friendster, Facebook, YouTube, Flicker, Photobucket, etc. They are therefore described as media for social interactions which employs highly accessible and large communication apparatus. It is a web based and mobile technology which allows communication to become active and interactive dialogue. According to Kaplan, Andreas and Michael (2010), it is a group of Internet-based applications that builds on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, which as he says, allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Ultimately, all social media tools allow for some degree of sharing. Without it such a thing would not be social (Green, 2011).

The supremacy of social media essentially depends on its mainly purpose. When social media engagement contributes to positive changes, there is an inevitable forward movement with regard to the development of peaceful relations as well as the construction of a healthy, harmonious, and prosperous society. It is also a tool created for information delivery, and fundamentally the nature of the message and method of conveyance either aid or hamper social development (Moala, 2011). According to Taske and Plude (2011), through facebook, users can choose which messages make it to the inbox, block advertisements and save work-related e-mails for other formal e-mail accounts. In addition, users will be able to send and receive messages in real time through whatever medium or device is most convenient for them. Facebook and Twitter can serve a very distinct purpose – to keep people connected on a personal level. People meet digitally to discuss politics, rally for a common cause and gossip about neighbors. They also help users announce their availability to other people and, potentially, services.

In addition, Cheong (2011) stated that social media bring numerous benefits associated with increased access and interaction where clergy and congregation can connect in new ways. He also belief that social networks allow the exchange of textual, visual and video information among participants, now known not just as 'users' but also as hybrid producers and consumers or 'pro-sumers'. Users also can connect and share their faith and lives with others through photos, audio messages, blogs, prayers, music, causes and so much more. Furthermore, blogging can also function as a form of social and prayer support as they provide an avenue for connections via hyperlinks, hits and comments from other bloggers, including comment from family, friends, and even strangers.

Research done by Fenton (2007) stated that new media have the potential to mediate solidarity, but that in order for a political project to emerge from a collective identity, a collaborative and collective understanding of an end point is necessary. Moreover, media is the most powerful tool of communication. It helps promoting the right things on right time. It gives a real exposure to the mass audience about what is right or wrong. Even though media is linked with spreading fake news like a fire, but on the safe side, it helps a lot to inform us about the realities as well (Danish Raja, Bahawalpur, n.d). Government of Malaysia also has uses media including social media widely in order to promote 1Malaysia. The media always helps government to give exposure to

the public about the concept of 1Malaysia as some of the alternative parties have misinterpreted the term.

The social media have an important role in modern democratic society as the main channel of communication. The statement is supported by Mohd Nizam Osman and Junaidy Abu Bakar (2008) showed that majority of people in Malaysia can access the media easily. Most respondents felt that media institutions, especially newspapers and television have played an important role in providing the increased level of understanding of the respondents in relation to government policy. The Malaysian Prime Minister and government also have realized the important of social media in order to get close with the community and encouraged harmony.

Social Capital Theory

For this research, researcher used social capital theory as a guide. Morrow (2001) provided three dimensions of a social capital framework. The first component is social networks and sociability. It is an original dimension of Bourdieu's social capital theory – the ability to sustain and utilize one's social network. As mentioned by Coleman (1990), it is a fundamental component of social capital. It is a connection developed among members of a community. Sociability is no less a central concept in social capital as well. This research focuses on social network sites among multiethnic users that can contribute to social capital. The second dimension is trust and reciprocity. According to Putnam (2000), in order to benefit from relationships to others and to use them as resources, one needs to be able to trust that network members. Trust is also one of the important elements in order to achieve solidarity and avoiding ethnocentrism. In addition, the increase level of interaction among society will help to the increase the level of social trust and it will lead to the involvement of community members (Pretty, 2003). The last dimension is sense of belonging. It refers to the degree to which people feel that they are part of a collective community. These all dimensions are the main contributors to social capital in society. Later, based from Morrow (2001) social capital framework, Boeck et al. (2006) has improved the framework by adding another 5 elements in social capital for their research. Those new elements are diversity, values in life, citizen power, participation and reciprocity. The explanation of the social capital framework can be illustrated in figure 1.0.
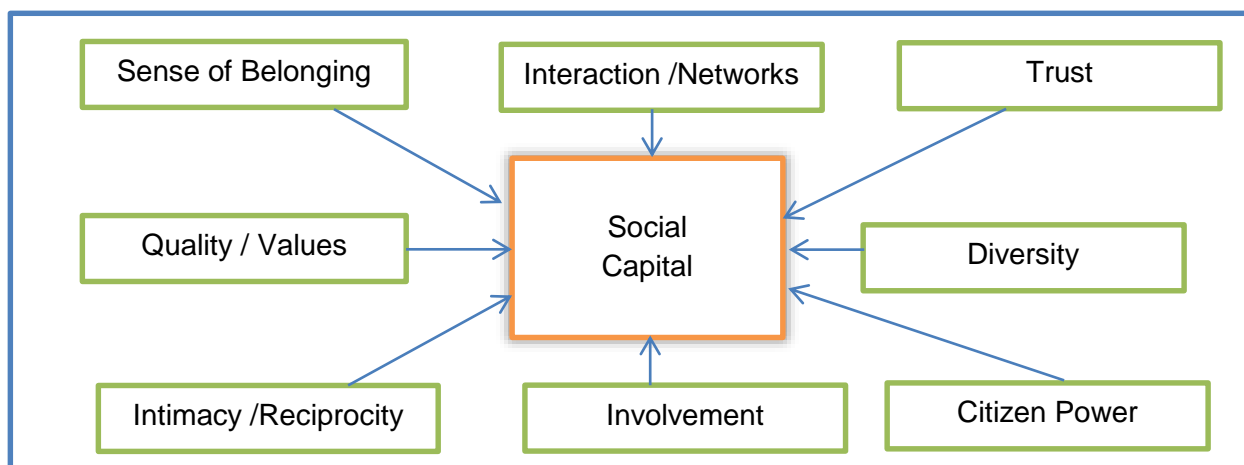
Figure 1.0: Social Capital Framework (Proposed Model)

Past Research Findings

A few research has been done to study the level of solidarity among multiethnic in Malaysia. Summary of studies done by Ravin Ponniah (2006) found that promoting interaction between ethnics may increase solidarity. Researches also have demonstrated that both contact quality and frequency of contact with out-group members enhance intergroup attitudes (Tropp and Pettigrew, 2005). However, research done by Khalim et al. (2010) have shown that people in Malaysia are not interacting enough with those of other ethnics. The research of Amir Hassan (2004) found that the socializing agent such as family background, religion and peers contributed in establishing sense of solidarity towards different ethnic groups.

Although the research has shown that Malaysians have the most number of friends on social networking sites (SNS) in the world, research done by Jusang Bolong et al (2008) have found that people in Malaysia prefer to communicate and have friend with their own ethnic rather than communicating with people from other ethnics. This can be seen when there are some people who still hang out in groups, and the difference between the majority and the minority still exists (Mohd Hamzatul Akmar Md Zakaria, 2012). The level of integration and inter-ethnic communication also is declining. However, there is better inter-ethnic communication at the university as well as better understanding of government integration policies (Zahara et al., 2010). As discussed by Ezhar et al. (2006), the youth with high academic qualifications also showed a high tolerance level compared with those with low academic achievements.

According to Khalim and Norshidah (2010), the ethnic relations among the youth are at the average level. The research findings indicate that the youth in Malaysia understood the important of solidarity but, practically, it is only at the average level. Research among youth in Malaysia showed that their tolerance was at an average level (Ezhar et al., 2006). Research done by Zahara Aziz et al. (2007) has proved that the relationship between ethnic in Malaysia deteriorate due to the attitude of the community members who are still concerned with ethnic. It is difficult to increase solidarity among ethnics as they are lack of interaction among them. Research also has shown the level of unity and ethnic relations in Malaysia in year 2007 has declined. This clearly demonstrates the unity and ethnic relations issues yet to be resolved despite plans by the ministry of unity exercised to improve unity.

RESULTS

The researchers found that only two elements from social capital model which are interaction and intimacy in social networking sites have significance influence on social solidarity. So, in order to create social solidarity, multi ethnics' social networking site users must interact more and have intimacy in their relationship. Table 1.1 below shows the result after researchers have done the analysis through Structural Equation Modeling (SEM).

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficient	Significant
	B	**Standard Error**	**Beta**	
Interaction	.221	.055	**.254**	**.000**
Involvement	.037	.049	.047	.453
Quality	.124	.091	.137	.173
Intimacy	.450	.087	**.513**	**.000**

Table 1.1: Main Predictor of Change in Social Solidarity

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATION AND SUGGESTION

The findings of this study underline the importance of SNS factors in influencing social solidarity. Interaction and intimacy in SNS will help building solidarity. It is recommended that multi ethnics SNS users should interact more in order to gain solidarity and reduce ethnocentrism. People should develop intimacy among multi ethnic members as it plays significance roles in developing social solidarity. Future research should refine the model of the antecedents' influence on social solidarity. The antecedents only explain 30.5% of the variation of the data in social solidarity. Future research should enhance the predictive power of the model by measuring other factors that influence social solidarity such as from other social media namely Youtube, Instagram and Whatsapp. Lastly, this study is theory-confirming, rather than theory-testing. Thus, new theory on social capital relationships in social networking sites may also be tested using new constructs of social capital relationships explored from qualitative methodology, such as interviews with SNS users. The methodology employed may also be extended to a mixed method, which includes both qualitative and quantitative methods of study.

CONCLUSION

Nowadays social media plays crucial roles in uniting the multi ethnic society. Furthermore, through social media, it can build confidence and faith among the society and indirectly will change the society behaviours. To realistic the dream of 1Malaysia is totally can be promoted by social media where it can lead and influence the society towards the goals of the governments which multi ethnics in Malaysia leave peaceful and harmony. This research hopefully will contribute knowledge on SNS factors and social solidarity.

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