

Malaysian Youth, Social Media Following, and Natural Disasters: What Matters Most to Them?

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This study attempted to understand youth's social media following during natural disasters. It investigated Malaysian youth's perception about the importance of immediacy, trust, and accuracy of social media news and information during natural disasters. This study found that youth prefer to consume social media news and information during natural disasters such as flooding, landslides, and haze. This is mainly contributed by the immediacy of news and information on social media. Besides immediacy, youth also value trust and accuracy of social media news and information during natural disasters. As the findings of this study revealed, youth are more inclined to become followers to social media creators who have a high level of trust and whom they believe can provide accurate natural disasters news and information. Hence, it is crucial that the authority and news organizations to provide natural disasters news on social media that is timely and accurate.

Keywords: Social media, natural disasters, accuracy, immediacy, trust

The advances of digital technologies have significantly contributed to the increase in access and usage of new media, particularly among youth (Dash & Dash, 2019). In Malaysia, it was reported that, as of 2015, there were more than 13 million Facebook users, and this was equivalent to about 45.2% of the entire 30 million inhabitants in the country (Go-globe, 2015; Stats, 2015). While on Twitter, Malaysia has also been identified as one of the highest contributors in information production (Graham & Stephens, 2012; Leetaru, Wang, Cao, Padmanabhan, & Shook, 2013). These statistical reports confirm the high usage of social media among Malaysians.

A closer look indicates that youth age 13-34 make up a huge percentage of 80.3% of the social media users in Malaysia. According to Mahadi (2013), the highest percentage of social media users in Malaysia are the 18-24 years old (34.5%), followed by youth age 25-34 (29.5%) and those in the 13-17 age category (16.3%). Ahmad and Ismail (2016) and Ismail (2014) elaborated that, Malaysian youth rely on social media to serve several crucial functions such as, for connectivity (Mun, Li, & Fernandez, 2011), news and information sharing (Wok, Idid, & Mismam, 2012), education (Hamat, Embi, & Hassan, 2012; Yin, Agostinho, Harper, & Chicaro, 2014) and entertainment (Baboo, Pandian, Prasad, & Rao, 2013). This signifies how social media is being embedded in the youth's everyday lives (Dhaha & Igale, 2014; Subramaniam, 2014).

Social media can have both positive and negative effects on individuals and the community at large, depending on the way how it is being utilized (Al-Saggaf, 2017; Siddiqui & Singh, 2016). The social media sphere enables anyone to become content creator, and to

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freely interact with one another (Ojebuyi & Salawu, 2019). While this is in general a good thing, it can also be misused and lead to serious implications. For instance, in a study conducted to investigate Malaysian youth's information-sharing practice on social media, it was reported that they are inclined to disseminate negative content online (Wok et al., 2012). Muniandy and Muniandy (2013) added, among the negative content frequently shared by the youth on social media include rumors, slander, as well as inaccurate news and information. Negative online content is deceiving, can incite hatred among people, and as a result, may threaten social harmony and public security (Muniandy & Muniandy, 2013).

About natural disasters, it was reported that inaccurate news and information were shared on social media during the recent major flooding and landslides incidents (Mustafa, 2014). They were misleading, caused unnecessary panic, and made the rescue efforts even more difficult (Mustafa, 2014). This is explained by Sannusi (2015), who elaborated that, the public in general, is very concerned about natural disasters. Many of them are inclined to believe that information about natural disasters, which is shared on social media to be true without considering the trustworthiness of the news sources (Sannusi, 2015).

Taking into consideration youth's inclination to share negative information on social media, and the negative implication resulting from their sharing of inaccurate news, this study aims to understand youth's social media following during natural disasters further. Hence, the following research questions were asked:

RQ1: Why do youth use social media during natural disasters?

RQ2: How important is the immediacy of information to youth's social media following during natural disasters?

RQ3: How important is trust and accuracy of information to youth's social media following during natural disasters?

Social Media Usage During Natural Disasters

Considering the high usage of social media among youth (Mahadi, 2013; Yusop & Sumari, 2013), it is expected that they utilize the platform to share various news and information, including about natural disasters (Mustafa, 2014). Based on examples from the major flood incident in Queensland and the bushfire in Tasmania, Quodling and Potter (2014) reported that social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter were used as important means of communication by the public to convey information about the disasters.

Realizing the importance of social media, particularly during a crisis, Facebook introduced the Safety Check application, aimed to enable users to report on calamities, including natural disasters and terror attacks (Victor, 2016). However, the question remains, as to whether natural disasters information disseminated through social media is accurate and useful.

As the ownership of digital technologies such as smartphone and tablet continues to rise (Poushter, 2016), almost everything can be shared online, making even dark clouds images look like a devastating hurricane that is going to happen. This, together with inaccurate information gathered from unreliable sources, have the potential to strike fear and create unnecessary panic and chaos among the public (Sannusi, 2015). It is important to note, however, that unlike the more traditional media such as television, radio, and newspapers, information conveyed on social media is considered to be inferior in term of credibility, due to the lack of gatekeepers and the ambiguity of its sources (Li & Suh, 2015; Quodling & Potter, 2014).

Earlier studies reported that a reliable information source on social media is professional media organizations, followed by family and friends (Mitchell, Gottfried, Barthel, & Shearer, 2016). In spite of its flaws, the public continues to use social media to get information and to share it with others in the times of crisis. According to Fraustino, Liu, and Jin (2012), even though information shared on social media could not be easily verified and may not be accurate, many are still inclined to utilise the medium. They use social media to get the latest news about natural disasters, to know the update of their family members and friends, to mobilise assistance and to gain moral and emotional support (Fraustino et al., 2012).

One of the main reasons why the public prefers to use social media in times of crisis is because of its immediacy in delivering the latest news and information (Alejandro, 2010). During an adverse event of natural disaster, information disseminated through social media spreads faster than facts provided by the authority (Winerman, 2009). This makes it difficult for the authority, who expects to be in control of the flow of information in times of crisis. Like it or not, the way the public consumes news has changed, from being passive to active consumers, always on the hunt for the latest information online (Alejandro, 2010). Communication has become more open, with the public having the opportunity to become content creators themselves (Alejandro, 2010). To overcome this situation, Winerman (2009) highlighted the needs of the authority to thoroughly understand the usage of social media during natural disasters.

One way to thoroughly understand the usage of social media during natural disasters is, by adopting the Social-mediated Crisis Communication Model (SMCC) (Austin, Liu, & Jin, 2012; Jin & Liu, 2010; Jin, Liu, & Austin, 2014; Liu, Jin, Briones, & Kuch, 2012). Originated from the work of Jin and Liu (2010), SMCC provides a useful framework to understand the interaction that takes place between organizations in crisis, and the publics who are involved in the information production and consumption, before, during, and after crisis (Austin et al., 2012). According to the SMCC model, the three main publics are; (i) influential social media creators who produce information, (ii) social media followers who consume information, and (iii) social media inactives who indirectly consume information (Austin et al., 2012; Jin et al., 2014).

According to Austin et al. (2012), crisis information can be distributed either directly or indirectly through social media. In SMCC, influential social media creators play a central role in distributing information directly to their followers. On the contrary, social media followers may distribute information indirectly to social media interactives. Austin et al. (2012) added crisis information is directly distributed between social media and the traditional media. Based on the SMCC model (Figure 1), Austin et al. (2012) proposed that, (i) the main motivation for the usage of social media during crisis is mainly due to the fulfillment of informational and emotional needs, (ii) media have an indirect influence during crisis, and (iii) information-seeking behaviour is influenced by the source of crisis information.

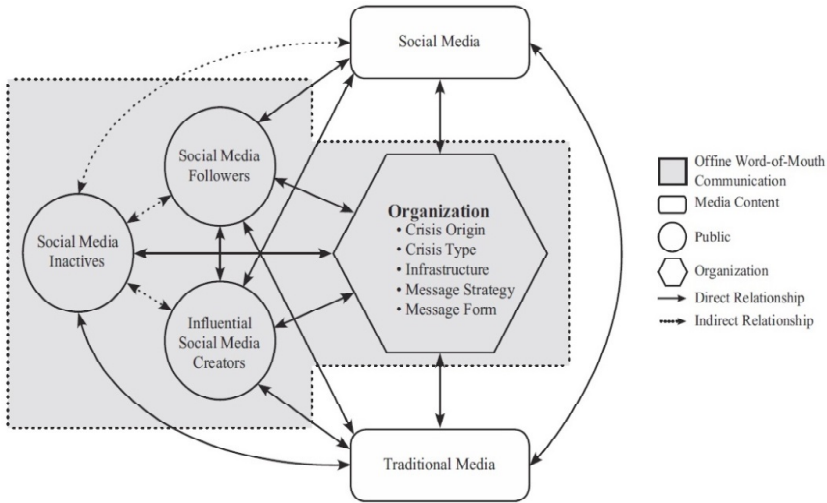


Figure 1. Social-mediated Crisis Communication Model (SMCC) (Austin et al., 2012)

Based on the findings of the earlier studies who suggested that, social media is generally preferred during natural disasters due to its immediacy in providing the latest news and information (Alejandro, 2010; Fraustino et al., 2012; Quodling & Potter, 2014; Sannusi, 2015), professional media organisations provide reliable social media information (Mitchell, Gottfried, Barthel, & Shearer, 2016) and the usefulness of SMCC model (Austin et al., 2012; Jin & Liu, 2010), this study tested the following hypotheses:

- H1:** Youth’s social media following during natural disasters is positively related to their desire for insider information.
- H2:** Youth’s social media following during natural disasters is positively related to the immediacy of information of the creators.
- H3:** Social media creators with a higher level of trust and accuracy are more likely to get more youth following during natural disasters than those with a lower level of credibility.

Methodology

A total of 400 respondents were invited to take part in a paper-and-pencil survey, which was conducted across four different parts in West Malaysia. The respondents were between 18-34 years of age during the time of the survey, and they must be users of social media. The justification for the selection of this age group was made based on Mahadi (2013), who reported that youth age 18-34 made up 64% of the social media users in Malaysia. Responses provided in the survey were anonymous to ensure the privacy of the respondents. As participation in the study is voluntary, one respondent decided to quit halfway through the survey. Hence, the final number of respondents who completed the survey was N = 399. The questionnaire was divided into two main sections, which are (a) social media awareness and practices and (b) social media following during natural disasters. The internal consistency for all scale items in the questionnaire based on Cronbach’s Alpha ranges between 0.706 to 0.936.

Results and Discussions

Respondents' characteristics

The respondents of the study (N = 399) consisted of 39.3% male and 60.7% female. The three social media sites that the respondents most frequently use are Instagram (83.3%), Facebook (81%), and YouTube (75.7%). In term of accessibility and time of usage, 94.0% of the respondents reported that they access social media through mobile devices, and 85.0% prefer to use it at night.

Social Media Awareness and Practices

The findings of this study indicate that youth, in general, have a high level of knowledge about social media. While youth appreciate the role of social media as an outlet for them to get the latest news and information $M = 4.22$, they are also aware that its content can be freely created and disseminated by anyone $M = 4.18$. This is reflected in the low level of trust that youth have in the news and information disseminated on social media $M = 2.96$. In spite of the low level of trust, youth are still inclined to consume news on social media, and this is shown in the moderately high mean scores of $M = 3.76$ and $M = 3.89$ respectively (Table 1). These findings reaffirm the important role of social media as a source of news and information for youth (Madden, Lenhart, & Fontaine, 2017). To overcome the lack of trust issue, youth are inclined to verify the news and information that they consume using multiple sources and media platforms (Madden et al., 2017).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics: Social media awareness and practices

| Awareness and practices | Range | Mean | SD |
|---|-------|------|-------|
| Social media enables me to update myself with the latest news and information | 1-5 | 4.22 | .735 |
| I know that news/ information content on social media can be created by anyone including me | 1-5 | 4.18 | .835 |
| I trust the news and information that I read on social media | 1-5 | 2.96 | .971 |
| I use social media to search for news and information | 1-5 | 3.76 | 1.078 |
| I use social media to read news and information | 1-5 | 3.89 | 1.004 |

Social Media Usage During Natural Disasters

This study found that social media is youth's most preferred source of news and information $M = 4.15$ during natural disasters such as flooding, landslides, and haze, followed by online news portal $M = 3.82$, television $M = 3.71$, print media $M = 3.37$, radio $M = 3.08$ and blog $M = 2.82$ (Table 2). When probed further on the characteristics of natural disasters news that they follow on social media, the respondents of this study indicated that, the information is quick and up to date $M = 4.01$, easy to navigate $M = 3.95$, contains graphics which help to explain situation $M = 3.89$, short and precise $M = 3.84$, can be trusted $M = 3.16$ and is reliable $M = 3.11$ (Table 3). Even though it can be argued that youth's preference towards social media as evidenced in this study does not necessarily entail practice, it should be taken into consideration that, the finding tallies with the previous occurrences of natural disasters, where social media was utilized for communication, information seeking and even for rescue efforts (Maron, 2013; Velev & Zlateva, 2012).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics: Youth's media choices during natural disasters

| Media choices | Range | Mean | SD |
|--------------------|-------|------|-------|
| Social media | 1-5 | 4.15 | .910 |
| Online news portal | 1-5 | 3.82 | .959 |
| Television | 1-5 | 3.71 | 1.091 |
| Print media | 1-5 | 3.37 | 1.144 |
| Radio | 1-5 | 3.08 | 1.123 |
| Blog | 1-5 | 2.82 | 1.245 |

Table 3. Descriptive statistics: Youth's characterizations of natural disasters news and information on social media

| Media choices | Range | Mean | SD |
|--|-------|------|------|
| Quick and up to date | 1-5 | 4.01 | .783 |
| Easy to navigate | 1-5 | 3.95 | .798 |
| Contain graphics to help explain the situation | 1-5 | 3.89 | .789 |
| Short and precise | 1-5 | 3.84 | .786 |
| Can be trusted | 1-5 | 3.16 | .838 |
| Accurate and reliable | 1-5 | 3.11 | .841 |

Based on these findings, it can be ascertained that, during the time of crisis including natural disasters, social media has become the main source of news and information that is used by youth (Mis, 2016; Taylor, 2016). This is mainly due to its ability to provide information that is timely and updated (Alejandro, 2010; Quodling & Potter, 2014; Sannusi, 2015). Other major factors such as increased internet and mobile access, as well as convenience, also contribute to youth's inclination to use social media as the main outlet for news and information (Lenhart, 2015). Besides, it must also be noted that social media may be the only option available, at a time when the other conventional communication methods fail or are experiencing disturbance due to disasters (Velev & Zlateva, 2012).

Social Media Following During Natural Disasters

Correlation coefficient and multiple linear regression tests were performed to test the hypotheses. Correlation coefficient were performed to examine, (i) the possible relationship between youth's inclination to become followers on social media and their desire for insider information during natural disasters, and (ii) the possible relationship between youth's inclination to become followers on social media and their needs for immediacy of information during natural disasters. Also, multiple linear regression tests were conducted to predict youth's following based on *trust* and *accuracy* of social media creators. The social media creators are divided into, (i) family and friends, (ii) relevant authorities and organizations handling the crisis, (iii) local mainstream media, (iv) alternative media and (v) international media.

Based on the finding in Table 4, it can be noted that the correlation coefficient is $r = 0.334$, showing that there is a positive relationship between youth's inclination to become followers on social media and their desire for insider information. $P < 0.001$ indicates that the coefficient is significantly different from 0. Hence, it can be concluded that youth's inclination to become followers on social media during natural disasters,

is positively related to their desire for insider information. This finding, in particular, supports Austin et al. (2012) who proposed that the fulfillment of information needs, is one of the main factors that motivate the public to use social media during the time of crisis. It was also reported that one of the main reasons for using social media during natural disasters is, to obtain unique and unfiltered information related to the incidents (Fraustino et al., 2012). This includes getting real-time information from those who are experiencing the calamities, or from insiders who are at the locations of the disasters (Fraustino et al., 2012).

Table 4. Correlation test between social media following and desire for insider information

| Variables | | To get insider information |
|--------------|--|----------------------------|
| Social media | Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) | .334** .000 |
| | N | 399 |

**Correlation is significant at 0.01 levels (2-tailed)

Table 5. Correlation test between social media following and desire for an immediacy of information

| Variables | | Immediacy of information |
|--------------|--|--------------------------|
| Social media | Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) | .411** .000 |
| | N | 399 |

**Correlation is significant at 0.01 levels (2-tailed)

The finding in Table 5 shows that the correlation coefficient is $r = 0.441$, indicating that, there is a positive relationship between youth's inclination to become followers on social media and their desire for the immediacy of information. $P < 0.001$ indicates that the coefficient is significantly different from 0. Therefore, it can be confirmed that youth's inclination to become followers on social media during natural disasters is positively related to their desire for the immediacy of information. This finding highlights the needs of the public for quick and updated news and information in the times of crisis, which is afforded by the immediacy of social media (Alejandro, 2010; Quodling & Potter, 2014; Sannusi, 2015). Citing Japan's Tohoku earthquake incident in 2011, Mcseveny and Waddington (2017) also reported that, news of the disaster was disseminated on social media much earlier compared to the conventional media. Due to its immediacy, social media was heavily used by the public, as the main medium for information seeking during the Tohoku disaster (Mcseveny & Waddington, 2017).

The finding in Table 6, which derives from a multiple linear regression model, predicts youth's social media following based on the *trust* and *accuracy* of news and information created/shared by family and friends. It explains 10.2% of the variance. The significant regression equation is $[F(2,390) = 22.219, p < .000]$, with an R^2 of .102. The finding shows that the *trust* variable makes the strongest unique contribution with the Beta value of .275, to explain the dependent variable. The Beta value for the *accuracy* variable is lower at .071, indicating that it makes less of a contribution. The significance value for *trust* is lesser than .05 ($p < .05$), which means that it makes a significant unique contribution to the prediction of the dependent variable. However, the significance value for *accuracy* is greater than .05 ($p > .05$), which indicates that it does not make a unique contribution to the prediction of the dependent variable.

Table 6. Multiple linear regression model that predicts youth's following based on the trust and accuracy of news and information created/shared by family and friends

| Model summary | | | | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|----------------|-----------------|------------------------------|-------------------|
| Model | R | R ² | Adjusted square | R std. error of the estimate | |
| 1 | .320 ^a | .102 | .098 | .786 | |
| ANOVA ^a | | | | | |
| Model | Sum of squares | df | Mean square | F | Sig. |
| Regression | 27.463 | 2 | 13.732 | 22.219 | .000 ^b |
| Residual | 241.020 | 390 | .618 | | |
| Total | 268.483 | 392 | | | |
| Coefficients ^a | | | | | |
| Model | Standardized coefficients | | t | Sig. | |
| | Beta | | | | |
| (Constant) | | | 11.028 | .000 | |
| Trust | .275 | | 4.771 | .000 | |
| Accuracy | .071 | | 1.233 | .218 | |

Table 7. Multiple linear regression model that predicts youth's following based on the trust and accuracy of news and information created/shared by the authorities

| Model summary | | | | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|----------------|-----------------|------------------------------|-------------------|
| Model | R | R ² | Adjusted square | R std. error of the estimate | |
| | .354 ^a | .125 | .121 | .695 | |
| ANOVA ^a | | | | | |
| Model | Sum of squares | Df | Mean square | F | Sig. |
| Regression | 27.302 | 2 | 13.651 | 28.271 | .000 ^b |
| Residual | 190.248 | 394 | .483 | | |
| Total | 217.549 | 396 | | | |
| Coefficients ^a | | | | | |
| Model | Standardized coefficients | | t | Sig. | |
| | Beta | | | | |
| (Constant) | | | 13.413 | .000 | |
| Trust | .328 | | 5.226 | .000 | |
| Accuracy | .038 | | .611 | .542 | |

The finding in Table 7 predicts youth's social media following based on the *trust* and *accuracy* of news and information created/shared by relevant authorities /organizations responsible for handling the natural disasters. It explains 12.5% of the variance. The significant regression equation is [$F(2,394) = 28.271, p < .000$], with an R^2 of .125. The finding reveals that the *trust* variable makes the strongest unique contribution with the Beta value of .328, to explain the dependent variable. The Beta value for the *accuracy* variable is lower at .038, showing that it makes less of a contribution. The significance value for *trust* is lesser than .05 ($p < .05$), which indicates that it makes a significant unique contribution to the prediction of the dependent variable. However, the significance value for *accuracy* is greater than .05 ($p > .05$), which means that it does not make a unique contribution to the prediction of the dependent variable.

Table 8. Multiple linear regression model that predicts youth's following based on the trust and accuracy of news and information created/shared by the local mainstream media

| Model summary | | | | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|----------------|-----------------|------------------------------|-------------------|
| Model | R | R ² | Adjusted square | R std. error of the estimate | |
| 1 | .354 ^a | .125 | .121 | .677 | |
| ANOVA ^a | | | | | |
| Model | Sum of squares | Df | Mean square | F | Sig. |
| Regression | 25.869 | 2 | 12.935 | 28.191 | .000 ^b |
| Residual | 180.314 | 393 | .459 | | |
| Total | 206.183 | 395 | | | |
| Coefficients ^a | | | | | |
| Model | Standardized coefficients | | t | Sig. | |
| | Beta | | | | |
| (Constant) | | | 14.869 | .000 | |
| Trust | .162 | | 2.414 | .016 | |
| Accuracy | .221 | | 3.295 | .001 | |

In Table 8, we predict youth's social media following based on the *trust* and *accuracy* of news and information created/shared by the local mainstream media. It explains 12.5% of the variance. The significant regression equation is [$F(2,393) = 28.192, p < .000$], with an R^2 of .125. The finding shows that the *accuracy* variable makes the strongest unique contribution with the Beta value of .221, to explain the dependent variable. The Beta value for the *trust* variable is lower at .162, indicating that it makes less of a contribution. It is worthy to note, however, that *accuracy* and *trust* have significance values that are lesser than .05 ($p < .05$), which indicate that, both variables make a significant unique contribution to the prediction of the dependent variable.

Table 9. Multiple linear regression model that predicts youth's following based on the trust and accuracy of news and information created/shared by the local alternative media

| Model summary | | | | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|----------|-----------------|------------------------------|-------------------|
| Model | R | R square | Adjusted square | R std. error of the estimate | |
| 1 | .467 ^a | .218 | .214 | .718 | |
| ANOVA ^a | | | | | |
| Model | Sum of squares | Df | Mean square | F | Sig. |
| Regression | 56.406 | 2 | 28.203 | 54.784 | .000 ^b |
| Residual | 202.320 | 393 | .515 | | |
| Total | 258.727 | 395 | | | |
| Coefficients ^a | | | | | |
| Model | Standardized coefficients | | t | Sig. | |
| | Beta | | | | |
| (Constant) | | | 11.566 | .000 | |
| Trust | .291 | | 4.114 | .000 | |
| Accuracy | .203 | | 2.867 | .004 | |

The finding in Table 9 predicts youth's social media following based on the *trust* and *accuracy* of news and information created/shared by the local alternative media. It explains 21.8% of the variance. The significant regression equation is [$F(2,393) = 54.784, p < .000$], with an R^2 of .218. The finding indicates that the *trust* variable makes the strongest unique contribution with the Beta value of .291 to explain the dependent variable. The Beta value for the *accuracy* variable is slightly lower at .203, implying that it makes less of a contribution. It is important to note, however, that the significance values for *trust* and *accuracy* are lesser than .05 ($p < .05$), which mean that both variables make a significant unique contribution to the prediction of the dependent variable.

The finding in Table 10 predicts youth's social media following based on the *trust* and *accuracy* of news and information created/shared by the international media. It explains 34.3% of the variance. The significant regression is [$F(2,394) = 102.933, p < .000$], with an R^2 of .343. The finding implies that the *trust* variable makes the strongest unique contribution with the Beta value of .393, to explain the dependent variable. The Beta value for the *accuracy* variable is lower at .224, indicating that it makes less of a contribution. It is worthy to note, however, that the significance values for *trust* and *accuracy* are lesser than .05 ($p < .05$), which indicate that, both variables make a significant unique contribution to the prediction of the dependent variable.

Table 10. Multiple linear regression model that predicts youth's following based on the trust and accuracy of news and information created/shared by the international media

| Model summary | | | | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|----------|-----------------|------------------------------|-------------------|
| Model | R | R square | Adjusted square | R std. error of the estimate | |
| 1 | .586 ^a | .343 | .340 | .678 | |
| ANOVA ^a | | | | | |
| Model | Sum of squares | df | Mean square | F | Sig. |
| Regression | 94.636 | 2 | 47.318 | 102.933 | .000 ^b |
| Residual | 181.120 | 394 | .460 | | |
| Total | 275.755 | 396 | | | |
| Coefficients ^a | | | | | |
| Model | Standardized coefficients | | t | Sig. | |
| | Beta | | | | |
| (Constant) | | | 11.411 | .000 | |
| Trust | .393 | | 5.919 | .000 | |
| Accuracy | .224 | | 3.368 | .001 | |

Based on the findings of the multiple regression tests as shown in Table 6-10, it can be confirmed that youth have placed varying levels of trust and accuracy towards different social media creators, which have a profound implication on their inclination to become followers or not as the findings of this study suggest, youth trust international media organizations such as the CNN and BBC the most during natural disasters ($\beta = .393$). They also believe that the international media is the most accurate in delivering natural disasters news and information through social media ($\beta = .224$), compared to other creators, including family and friends, the authorities responsible handling the crisis, local mainstream media and the local alternative media organizations. This is also reflected in the significant positive relationship that is established between trust and accuracy of

news and information, and youth's inclination to follow the social media sites owned by the international media during natural disasters. The lack of trust in the local mainstream media is not surprising, considering the negative perception that the huge majority of the Malaysian public has towards them (Omar, Ismail, & Kee, 2018). According to the Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2017, Malaysians, in general, have a trust issue towards the local mainstream media, mainly due to the tight state control and ownership, as well as the propagated political agenda (Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, Levy, & Nielsen, 2017).

Study Implications

Based on the theoretical lens provided by the SMCC model, this study attempted to understand youth's social media following during natural disasters. It was found that social media is the youth's most preferred choice of media consumption during natural disasters. They prefer social media over the other types of media, including newspapers, radio, and television, mainly because of the immediacy provided. It was also found that the other factor that influences youth's social media following during natural disasters is, due to their needs for the latest news and information. This finding, in particular, reaffirms Austin et al. (2012) who indicate that youth utilize social media during the crisis to fulfill their desire for insider information.

As the results of this study revealed, youth are more likely to follow news and information created or shared by the social media creators whom they trust. The likelihood for youth to become followers of news and information on social media increases with a higher level of trust and accuracy that they have towards the creators. Unlike the high level of trust that youth have towards the international media, they perceive the other social media creators to be lower in trust and accuracy. This is explained by The Media Insight Project Report (2016) who indicate that, whether the public trust the social media information or not, is very much influenced by their perception of the news source. Mitchell et al. (2016) added that the public is more likely to trust professional media organizations who provide reliable news and information.

Based on the findings of this study, it can be ascertained that the immediacy of news and information, along with trust and accuracy of the social media creators, are important considerations for youth's social media following during natural disasters. Their usage of social media during natural disasters is not entirely due to negative intention, such as to spread rumors, false news and incite hatred as claimed (Mustafa, 2014; Muniandy & Muniandy, 2013; Wok et al., 2012), but mainly due to their desire for the latest information related to the natural disasters. Hence, it is vital for the authority who is responsible with the handling of the crisis, to take into consideration of youth's needs during natural disasters, by providing information through social media that is timely and accurate, to increase youth's trust towards them.

Recommendations

As trust continues to be an issue to be dealt with (Newman et al., 2017), what can the authority and the local media do to improve it? As suggested by The Media Insight Project Report (2016), trust lies within the realm of the public's perception. Thus, to improve trust means improving youth's perception towards the credibility of news and information disseminated by the authority and the local media. Hence, we recommend that future studies to work with along the issue of trust, by uncovering the perception that youth have towards the authority and the local media during the time of natural disasters.

It would also be fruitful for future research to explore further the impact of different traditional and technological factors as suggested by Chung, Nam, and Stefanone (2012) in improving trust towards the local media.

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