

Propagation of Liberalism by Youths on Social Media Penyebaran Liberalisme dalam Kalangan Belia di Media Sosial

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ABSTRACT

Social media has been rooted in our society in that it is impossible, particularly for youths, to not be in any social media platform. Everyone gets frenzy when it comes to socializing online. They spend an average of 6-8 hours on the Internet per day. Thus, raises the fact of being exposed to varied contents including misleading ones. This study discloses the role of social media in propagating liberal thought among youths in Malaysia. Through observation, eleven influenced and liberal-inclined Facebook youths have been selected to be interviewed and five had agreed. Four Islamic scholars were also approached for their opinions and recommendations toward this issue. The finding shows that youths do play a significant role in influencing social media users' thought. This study also exposed that liberal movement in Malaysia is well planned in its effort to propagate liberalism in Malaysia. Everyone from individuals to authorized bodies and government must do their part in curbing the spreading of liberalism.

Keywords: Liberalism; social media; propagation; youths

ABSTRAK

Media sosial telah menular dalam masyarakat di Malaysia terutamanya bagi golongan belia. Ketagihan terhadap penggunaan media sosial telah menyebabkan golongan belia menjadi obses. Secara purata, golongan ini meluangkan masa 6-8 jam sehari di Internet yang mana ianya akan menyebabkan golongan belia terdedah kepada pelbagai kandungan termasuk yang mengelirukan. Oleh itu, kajian ini dijalankan untuk mendedahkan peranan media sosial dalam menyebarkan pemikiran liberal di kalangan belia di Malaysia. Melalui pemerhatian, sebelas belia yang berpengaruh dan menjurus kepada fahaman liberal telah dipilih untuk diwawancara dan hanya lima yang bersetuju. Dalam masa yang sama, empat ilmuan Islam telah dipilih untuk memberikan pandangan dan cadangan terhadap isu ini. Hasil dapatan menunjukkan bahawa para belia memainkan peranan besar dalam mempengaruhi pemikiran pengguna media sosial. Kajian ini juga mendedahkan bahawa gerakan liberal di Malaysia dirancang dengan teliti dalam usaha untuk menyebarkan liberalisme di Malaysia. Semua pihak dari individu ke badan yang diberi kuasa termasuk kerajaan perlu memainkan peranan mereka dalam membendung penyebaran liberalisme.

Kata kunci: Liberalisme; media sosial; penyebaran; belia

INTRODUCTION

Liberalism is a thought that challenges the teachings of Islam and tries to divert away from Islamic bonds by reviewing interpretation or refuting any advocates' arguments to suit Western philosophical ideas. Reforming Islam in their own interpretation is based on rationality and logic without considering the revelation from Allah and the Hadith.

Apparently, with the popularity of social media being a platform that has no form of morals or relative laws to abide to, everyone is free to express their thoughts and feelings. Consequently, liberalism

has the same opportunity to be spread openly or indistinctly, whether social media users realize the influence upon them or not. This pose as a primary concern in terms of the impact it may cause. This study attempts to identify the influence of liberalism by youths on social media and uncover the framework of liberal movement in Malaysia.

LIBERALISM

Liberal in language means freedom, unbound, progressive, reformist or radical (Oxford Dictionaries

2018). Liberal thinking is a belief or establishment that seeks democracy and freedom in economic activity (Dictionaries Dictionary 2013). It refers to the basis of thought based on concerns in protecting, promoting individual autonomy and autonomy in all aspects (Wan Adli Wan Ramli 2012). While Marzuki (2008) says that it is a thought that accepts the superior secular-liberalism of the West and reaffirms the idea of freedom in Islam in parallel with the demands of that thought. This explains liberalism is a thought that attempts to liberate Islam from any Islamic bonds by interpreting, processing or denying any proponents' arguments to suit Western philosophical ideas (Asri Zainul Abidin et al. 2006).

Many studies on liberalism have been carried out which cover various aspects of human life including education, religion, social and so forth. It also adheres to rational concepts, openness and intellectual freedom (Wan Adli Wan Ramli 2012). From the studies conducted in Malaysia on Liberation by (Lukman Hakim & Mohd Nasir Omar 2011; Indriaty Ismail & Ahmad Mahyuddin Hassan 2011; Tammam 2016);

1. Liberal thinkers prioritize human rights as a measure and orientation will in turn reject all religious interpretations if they are contrary to their thinking.
2. Liberal thinkers are in line with scientific findings that cause major conflicts with attempts to transform religion into free-human rights-oriented orientation.
3. Liberal thinkers criticize the Shari'a as a legal basis, as cultural liberalism wants to liberate humanity from various domination which is considered to be the liberation of freedom of expression and human will.
4. From the religious perspective, this understanding continues to evolve and influence the Islamic world when it feels that humans need to be free of sharia that is thought to be outdated.

There are four agendas of liberalism promoted by the West, which are political agendas, religious tolerance, liberation of women and freedom of expression (Zarkasyi (2009) and Suciati (2006). According to Mohd Fauzi (2018), the liberalism movement has spread in Malaysia beginning from international relations and planning, local authority policies and the attitude of the Muslim community. The liberalism movement in Malaysia is divided into four phases:

1. First phase: Started during British colonial era in Malaysia. The British not only came to colonize and take the nation's wealth but also sent Western orientalist to study and research the strengths and weaknesses of the Malays at that time (Ahmad Sanusi and Norsaleha 2018). The early Western scholars wrote about the Malay and Muslim Malay communities as Lord Reid (1912), De Eredia (1930), Raffles (1930), Richmond (1928), Swettenham (1895), Winstedt (1934), Wheeler and Skeat (1967). The Skeat (1967) study of Malaya at that time that the British had formed a feudal class of Malay but had British influence (Rahimin et al. 2010).
2. The second phase: Malaysia gained independence from British colonists on August 31, 1957. Although the British colonialists had left Malaya from the aspect of government and administration, they had provided a group of locals with a British and Western mind. Some of these groups have been appointed as rulers who maintain British policy and politics (IRIS2017; Rahimin et al. 2010).
3. The third phase: In this phase there was a shift in domination of British-minded government and executing secularism in the administration and education of the nation to non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Emerging NGOs that bring liberal thinking and strive to influence people, especially young people in the university. Among the liberal NGOs that emerged in the 80s and 90s were the anti-Hadith movement, the Jamaah Al-Quran of Malaysia and Sister in Islam. The government implemented Islamization and Islam Hadari policies to win the hearts of the people, while the opposition also chanted the policy of the Islamic state as an alternative to the people. In this era the liberalism movement has not emerged boldly and blatantly to the people. They are moving more in support groups and groups. The country's crisis that took place in 1998, led to a reform movement that gave space to the liberal agenda to slip through the ideas of change and reforms based on the people's power.
4. The fourth phase: This involves 2007 until now in 2019. In 2007, Rand Corporation (Center for Middle East Public Policy) published a book titled Building Muslim Moderate Network written by Angle Rabasa, Cherry Bernard, Lowell H. Schwartz and Peter Sickle. RAND Corporation is a Center for Strategic Studies and Research on Islam in the Middle East sponsored by Smith Richardson Foundation based in Santa

Monica-California and Arlington-Virginia, USA. According to Angel Rabasa et al. (2007), the United States played a major role in producing moderate Muslims. According to Asmuni's fauzi (2018), the impact of the Arab Spring in the Middle East brought about a change in the way Islamist movement in West Asia where they had begun to accept absolute democracy and this led to the Islamic movement of Malaysia. The normalization of the creation of a liberal group that speaks out loud demands freedom of religion so emerges the coalition of NGOs in the UPR Process that strives for freedom of apostasy, the freedom to commit LGBT, abolish the criminal law of sharia, amend the Islamic family law, dispute the rights of people Malay and Bumiputera and allow the Christianity and Shi'ite.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND YOUTHS

Media through printing, mass or even technology media is one of the fastest changing technologies that evolve every moment (Normaliza Abd Rahim 2014). A sub-set of Information Technology (IT) technologies implying to social media has recently unfold the prominence of IT phenomena through a field of distinctive categories of social media taxonomy (Wolf et al. 2018). Those categories include blogs, social networking sites, collaboration projects, content communities, virtual social worlds, virtual game worlds, wiki, and forum (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Blog, social networking sites and wiki are the most common categories used by society worldwide (Ahlqvist et al. 2008). All of the stated categories work through the Internet. According to Internet Users Survey 2018 done by Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commissions, the percentage of Internet users at national level increased from 76.9% in 2016 to 87.4% in 2018. Text communication and visiting social networking platform were the most common activities for Internet users with 96.5% and 85.6% respectively.

People define social media in numerous ways. Among them, Collin Dictionary (2018) stated "social media refers to websites and computer programs that make communication possible with the use of computers or mobile phones". Boyd and Ellison (2008) mentioned that social media is a "platform to create profiles, make explicit and traverse relationships". According to Richter and Koch (2008), the function of social media is to create identity management, expert finding, context

awareness, contact management and exchange information. However, Ahmad Munawar Ismail et al. (2018) concluded that people interact amongst themselves by creating, posting, sharing, or exchanging information and visualization through a variety of social media platforms. Among the social media platforms are Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, blog, WhatsApp, Myspace, and Plurk.

As the years pass by, different platform becomes popular throughout the year. Through the findings from Aini Maznina & Muhammad Syawal (2014) research, they stated that Twitter is a very popular microblogging service. While according to Sa'adiyah (2015), Facebook is the most popular social media platform with 53.9%, followed by Instagram with 30.0% and Twitter with 15.6%. On the other hand, the Internet Users Survey 2018 done by Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commissions stated that WhatsApp and Facebook were the most popular communication and social networking platform. The survey found that on average, respondents spent 6.6 hours online in a day.

Youth is defined by the National Youth Development Policy 1997 (Dasar Pembangunan Belia Negara (1997)) as people at the age of fifteen to forty years old. From the Internet Users Survey 2018 done by Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC), the data is inversely correlated between age and duration of daily Internet use. Youths in their twenties spend the most average amount of time which is 8.0 hours daily on the Internet, followed by 7.3 hours by youths in their thirties, 5.9 hours by forties and 4.5 by people in their fifties. Surprisingly, people at the age of sixty and above spend an average of only 3.7 hours daily on the Internet. Meanwhile those who are below twenty years old spend an average of 6.7 hours daily on the Internet. Figure 1 show the average duration of daily use of internet by age group.

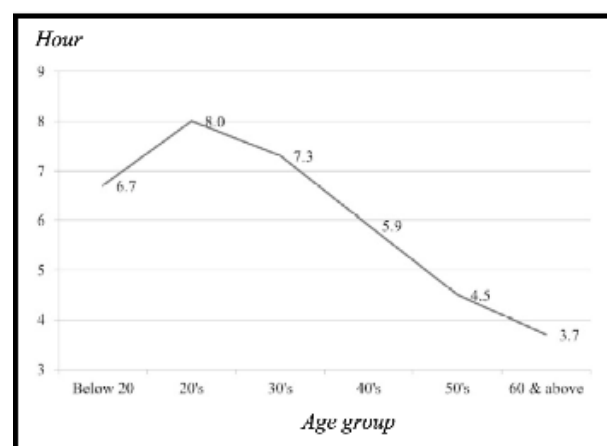


FIGURE 1. Average duration of daily use of internet by age group

With the use of social media platform and electronic aids, a simple message on Islam can be viewed and read by billions of people around the world despite their religion. Even though Twitter has a maximum length of 140 characters, today's youth managed to spread the beautiful teaching of Islam to millions of users throughout its 500 million profiles (Aini Maznina A. Manaf & Muhammad Syawal Abdul Rashid 2014). Thus, by using social media, Islam can be disseminated and negative influence can be countered by educating and conveying the true meaning of Islam in a faster and efficient manner just by short posts.

Even though social media has many positive effects, it could also be wrongly used, which could create negative impact on society. Gore images of violence, sexual content and so forth are exposed for view. Disseminating of misleading ideology like Liberalism, which contradicts with Islamic teachings, will also cause potential danger.

METHODOLOGY AND FINDINGS

Observation was done particularly on Facebook to identify youths having inclination towards liberalism. Eleven were chosen to be further observed closely. All of them are of different education background; law, Islamic studies, social science and others. Three of them work as columnist, three as politician, one as lawyer, one as lecturer, one as pharmacist, and two are still pursuing their studies. All are involved in youth organization which promotes liberalism like Komuniti Muslim Universal Malaysia (KMU), Islamic Renaissance Front (IRF), Sisters in Islam (SIS), Universiti Terbuka Anak Muda (UTAM), Democratic Action Party (DAP), Socialis, The Malaysian Insight (TMI), and BAR. These individuals have many followers ranging from the least; 5000 to the most; more than 100,000 followers. Out of the eleven, five of them agreed to be interviewed. On top of that, four Islamic scholars were also approached to be interviewed.

TABLE 1. Frequency of posts by the eleven youths selected having inclination towards liberalism and reactions received in duration of one month

Youth#	Number of Posts	Like	Angry	Sad	Love	Haha	Share	Comment
1 Youth1	35	5177	54	93	61	173	45	772
2 Youth2	94	238	17	2	7	37	8	102
3 Youth3	38	7784	89	121	101	339	339	512
4 Youth4	10	144	0	0	1	0	2	11
5 Youth5	396	82071	3174	4586	568	613	17151	4159
6 Youth6	34	50366	364	150	830	1015	2458	2689
7 Youth7	211	28731	66	197	299	3124	1938	5109
8 Youth8	137	18491	36	121	80	439	603	990
9 Youth9	20	1164	55	83	18	2	76	39
10 Youth10	25	456	12	27	14	19	17	45
11 Youth11	94	2968	60	88	24	116	344	584

Base on Table 1, it shows that youths do play a big role in influencing media social users' thought. The influence can be concluded from the many number of reactions given and through comments and sharing of the posts. The more the post, the more influential the youth becomes on Facebook. Looking at the post uploaded, it showed how the youths ignored religious view and mannerism when expressing their views.

This study exposed that liberal movement in Malaysia is well planned in its effort to propagate liberalism in Malaysia. The framework is as follows:

1. Perception - Positive perception is built towards the West being progressive and negative towards Islam being backward. They build perception that Islam needs to be reformed.
2. Principle - In principle, they support secularism, liberalism, pluralism, equality, human rights, orientalism, LGBT, western politics, and oppose shari'a (Islamic law).
3. Motive - They give visualization that the teachings of Islam has bad effect especially if it dominates the government.
4. Scale - Scale ranging from extreme to merely following the trend without realizing that they are jeopardizing their faith in Islam.
5. Propaganda - Liberal movement arrange propaganda systematically to lure youths to be

- attracted to and subsequently defend liberalism. They portray openness and friendliness so the youths are intrigued to express their thoughts and feelings. Also, they cover behind freedom of speech and human rights.
6. Recruitment – Youths are trained to adopt liberal thinking through conferences, workshops, discussions, work distribution, funding, publication, education and continuous monitoring.
 7. Social network – Despite the network amongst liberal organizations, they have built collaborations with western embassy and Iran.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Information, ideology, thought is freely shared by liberal-inclined youth through their personal social media account. They propagate the hidden agenda by posting liberal ideology directly and by promoting activities or programs like workshops and conferences. Those who do not possess a firm principle adhering to Islam will be easily influenced by them. Our biggest concern is that the liberal movement will become even stronger and subsequently cause a threat if there are no action and control taken by the authorities and individuals alike.

Liberalism encourages youths to speak and act freely backed by logic and rational regardless of the situation. Hence, we may find youths displaying themselves offensively without control on social media. This is sadly destroying civilization that is brought about by Islam.

Muslims should understand that Islam is not merely confined to the five pillars of Islam, but Islam is the way of life; a civilization. To truly understand Islam, one must seek knowledge by learning the teachings from the Al-Quran and Hadith; as it is obligatory to Muslims. Muslims should also be made aware by providing scientific proof that western ideologies like secularism, liberalism, feminism, pluralism in religion and so forth are against the worldview of Islam. Muslims should try to revive the knowledge tradition where *ulamak* also master knowledge like mathematics, economics, medical, and others; and Vis versa.

Due to the growing influence of social media on people, particularly on youths, there is a great need for Muslims to have a degree of power over social media and play an active role in offering answers or rebutting to liberalism which is wide-spreading.

Comparatively, one may reach millions of readers or viewers on social media but only hundreds or thousands in a face to face setting (Hamid Zakasyi 2018). Government policy can help curb the spread of liberalism. A clear policy addressing the harm of liberal agenda and to stop liberal thinking from spreading is crucial especially to Muslim youths.

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