

Examining the Public Awareness on Digital Ethics for Social Media to Foster Responsible Digital Citizenship in Higher Education Institutions

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ABSTRACT

Social Media platform is a main platform for the individual to share ideas, interact and search information in variety format such as text, audio and video through virtual network. Social media has become a part of the individual's lifestyle. However, the use of social media can be misused. Cyberbullying, misinformation, social media addiction are negative effect that associated with the social media usage nowadays. For this reason, the digital ethics on social media should be highlighted to minimize the problem. Therefore, this paper purposely to examining the public awareness on digital ethic of social media especially among student in higher education institutions. The quantitative approaches have been adopted to assess the level of awareness of digital ethics in using the social media among student in higher education institutions. The number of samples that participate in this study is 145 respondents among student in higher education institutions in Malaysia. The descriptive analysis will be conducted to examine the understanding and awareness on the ethics to use the social media in their daily life. Findings show that majority of the student in higher education institution aware to use the social media ethically. The findings also reveal that the student strongly agree that the lack of public awareness related to ethics in social media will trigger many social problems in the future. Through this research, the government agency or responsible agency could highlight the appropriate guidelines or codes of ethics for the social media user to use the social media in ethical and appropriate ways.

Keywords: Information Science, Digital Ethics, Social Media, Awareness, Cyberbullying.

INTRODUCTION

Social media is a powerful platform to communicate, interact and knowledge sharing within the society. This platform also able to generate new ideas and searching for the information like news or current trends to the users. The capability and features of the social media platform could facilitate individual to managing their daily life in systematic ways. This has been supported by Yurder & Akdöl (2021) that state the social media could managing their daily life systematically by providing the accurate information that related with its users. According to Singh (2022), social media platform could also connect with others individual who have similar interests and making the communication faster and efficient. There are various types of social media platforms that available in the media platforms such as WhatsApp, Telegram, TikTok, Facebook, Instagram and many more that used to interact with family, friends and colleagues and share the current trends occur in the worlds. Other than that, the capability of social media not only interaction and share of information, but also could show the visibility and promote the businesses of the user in which this is potential way to get the new customers.

Social media has become an integral part of to the community particularly youth. Globally, the average range of youth within the community is 15 until 30 years old. The university student includes in this group of

community. Social media has become lifestyle for the university students updating the activities in their daily life. Some activities that usually participate by university students are texting with friends or lecturer, collaboration, sharing information, foster innovation and discussion in which these activities relate with academic purposes. Meanwhile, the activities for non-academic purposes when using the social media include online games, watching movies, online shopping, and networking. Ohara (2023) state that the social media play a significant role in promoting the educational communication management such as collaborative sharing with friends and lecturer, active participants on virtual communication as well as professional development especially to youth.

However, the excessive usage of social media could affect negatively in university student academic performance and their personality or attitudes. Various study has been conducted show that the social media could influence negatively during their study. The continuous habitual behaviour on excessive social media usage will negatively impact on the performance of university students in the class, their relationships with friends and shorten their sleep cycle in which it routine will make the university student disengaged from their studies (Kolhar et al, 2021). Social media also contribute with the negative activities that may affect to the student well-being, when they addiction with social media, in which the student could become cybervictim who been targeted of cyberbullying. This scenario aligned with the study by Lee et al (2023) that state the addiction to social media could positively associated to become the victim of cyberbullying and this situation could lead towards anxiety, stress and depression among the students. The social media itself also have inaccurate in term of credibility of information in which could lead towards misinformation, manipulation and violence.

It is necessary for the university student to have awareness on digital ethics for the social media usage in their life. The awareness on digital ethics could overcome the issues like cyberbullying, body shaming in social media, manipulation of the personal data, privacy as well as violation in social networks. Therefore, this paper purposely to examining the public awareness on digital ethics for social media usage among university students. The social media show the huge impact on the social problem among the university students. This statement aligns with the statement by Iwamoto and Chun (2020) that mention the social media negatively affect the student's self-esteem, self-confidence that could lead towards the depression, anxiety and stress. So, it is significant to understand the level of awareness of university student regarding the digital ethics towards creating healthy of digital culture and online environments.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The term "social media" describes a range of technological tools that allow people to share information and ideas with one another (Dollarhide, 2024). Social media also refer as a computer program or website that assist the user to share and seeking the opinion and information, communication, share picture and video via the internet especially in the social networking websites (Cambridge Dictionary website, 2024). This computer program has capability to share information and news, control algorithms for user experience and content sharing just in the fingertips of its users. The well-known social networks worldwide are TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and X (also known as Twitter). This platform commonly been used by user particularly in Malaysia. Woodward (2024) in Search Logistic website mentioned that the active social media user today is 58.4% of the world population.

The advancement of social media has facilitated user especially in term of sharing the information, communication and networking. Abbas et al (2022) state that the social media is essential platform in sharing information especially in term of demographics characteristic, cognition, sentiment, healthcare product as well as information regarding the Covid19. Feature in the social media such as content sharing, news feeds, privacy and security and social media analysis allow the user to control their own social media without problem. The feature exist in social media could enhance the user experience in using the digital technology. In digital era, the social media also powerful tool for virality and content sharing and this trend has changed the perception of the user or netizen regarding certain issues. The advanced feature of social media has increased the number of user own social media account and Malaysia one of the developing countries that social media usage is increase over the time.

Social Media Landscape in Malaysia

Malaysia is one of the countries that already consume the social media content. The data reveal by Howe (2024) in the Meltwater website show that 28.68 million of Malaysian are actively in social media platform. Nowadays, the connectivity to the internet has important digital tool to Malaysian. The outbreak pandemic Covid19 has made Malaysian go through the changes from traditional practices into digital environment. In that time, the Movement Control Order (MCO) has push Malaysia to stay at home, so the smartphone is the only digital tool that could be a use to communicate with friends, family as well as colleague. From these moments, its change the environment of Malaysia to go through for the digital transformation. Business, education, manufacturing, automobile, agriculture, oil and gas and other fields begun to embrace the usage of the social media in promoting their business or sharing digital contents in social networks. It shows the social media not only used for enjoyment but also as a platform for networking and interaction with others.

Nowadays, social media like WhatsApp was a major digital tool for immediate information sharing and contact with employers and family. This application has been used widely in Malaysia especially for communication. Meanwhile, Facebook is the dominant application that has been used by Malaysian, despite there are issues like leakage of personal data as well as fake news. Siddharta (2024) in the Statista website state that the social media platform like TikTok has gain popularity among Malaysian and commonly the user between the ages 18 years old until 32 years take interest with this social media platform. This social media landscape seems to increase over the year with multiple kinds of social media available in Malaysia. It shows the positive growth of the social media landscape in Malaysia. Therefore, it is essential for the Malaysian to understanding the need regarding the digital ethics particularly in social media.

Digital Ethics on Social Media in Malaysia

The increased number of active social media user in Malaysia required to understand the important the digital ethics in social media. The implement the digital ethics is to foster for Malaysia to be a responsible digital citizenship especially in social media platforms. There are some activities in social media that need to cultivate the ethics understanding especially among youth nowadays such as cyberbullying, misuse of information, misinformation, fake news, manipulation as well as violation. These negative activities in social media will influence especially Generation Z and Alpha to influence with the negative behaviour and attitudes. This statement has been supported by Mujiwati & Laili (2023) that state the overuse of social media will be result the unpredictable action that outside the social norms such as suicides that affect from the cyberbullying in social media networks.

Alismaiel (2023) mention that almost half of young generation admit that they have been harassed, stalked and bullies in digital platform, in which it is needed to have quick measurement to overcome these issues. Therefore, that is important and essential for the young generation to understand the digital ethics in which the alternative potential for the young generation to become responsible digital society. Based on Deviv and Lawa (2023) the university students must follow the rules and conventions of digital ethics since social media presents issues including cyberbullying, hoaxes, and privacy breaches that are connected to digital ethics. Meanwhile, the student and teacher need to improve their ethical and communicative culture in the context of higher education institutions. It shows that the youth especially university students should have knowledge regarding the digital ethics that could foster to become the responsible digital citizenship.

Fostering Digital Citizenship

Digital Citizenship should employ various technological skills and adhering to social norms, standards, and behaviours whether utilising technology at home, at work, or in educational settings. Digital citizenship denotes the responsible and ethical use of digital technologies. According to Sadiku, Tembely, & Musa (2018), the digital citizenship will help in term of promote the responsible and ethical of technology used as well as fostering social interaction in all areas of life. Besides that, it also entails comprehending the rights and duties of individuals and communities in the digital environment, as well as the impact that technology can have on society. It encompasses a wide range of abilities and behaviours, including digital literacy, online safety and

security, digital ethics, and appropriate social media usage. It involves understanding concerns such as cyberbullying, digital identity, and online privacy.

Technology especially social media has becoming increasingly vital in all parts of people lives; therefore, the digital citizenship is essential. Malaysia should be a responsible and ethical digital citizen contributes to ensuring that technology is used in a way that maximizes its benefits while minimizing its hazards and negative social impact. In this study, the researchers were assessing the awareness of university students regarding the digital ethics in fostering this generation to become a responsible digital citizenship. Further discussion on the awareness of university students on the digital ethics will further discuss to know whether the university student understand the digital ethics in using the social media in their daily lives.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed quantitative research approach using self-administered survey which was distributed among universities student who use social media platforms daily. Quantitative research deals with the data in a numerical form or that can be converted into numbers (Sheard, 2018). The researcher aiming to study on public awareness on digital ethics in social media, quantitative research could portray the awareness of individual on the social media ethics particularly university student in Malaysia. The location of this study involved the university in Malaysia and the number of respondents of this study is 145 of university students particularly in Malaysia universities. In term of data analysis, the IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) has been used because this scientific software is easy to use and convenience to the researcher of this study.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

In examining the public awareness on digital ethic of social media especially among the university student, the survey has been conducted in this study within the higher education institution in Malaysia. The data that has been collected and descriptive analysis has been conducted and analysis. According to Karabatak et al (2024), descriptive analysis consists of means, percentage and frequency analyses based on the items within the variable of the study. The survey began with the open-ended question to the respondents in this study, in which the statement of the open-ended question to known whether the respondents is the social media user with the measurement is “yes” or “no”. The statement as follows “I am a social media user” and the result revealed that majority of 145 respondents are social media users. This statement has been supported by Siddharta (2024) in Statista website, that 83.1% of Malaysia population are active social media users. Further discussion on the awareness of the university student on the awareness of digital ethics in social media.

Awareness to use Social Media Ethicality

Table 1: Descriptive Statistic for Social Media Ethics and Awareness

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	1	.7	.7	.7
Disagree	1	.7	.7	1.4
Neutral	17	11.7	11.7	13.1
Agree	73	50.3	50.3	63.4
Strongly Agree	53	36.6	36.6	100.0
Total	145	100.0	100.0	

The survey was continuously assessed the awareness of university students on social media ethics by measure using 1-5 Likert scale in which respondents will responses to statement items were scored as: “Strongly disagree” = 1, “Disagree” = 2, “Neither agree nor disagree” = 3, “Agree” = 4, “Strongly agree” = 5. The data revealed that 36.6% of the respondents strongly agree that they are aware to use the social media in the right ways, meanwhile 50.3% agree to use the social media ethically. However, there are also the respondents

neutral with 11.7% with the statement and 2 respondents with 0.7% disagree and strongly disagree with the statement **“I am well aware of ethicality in using social media”**. Through this survey, the finding in Table 1 reveals that most university students are aware to use the social media in ethically and appropriately. This statement aligns with study conducted by Amălăncei et al (2022) that student in higher education institution show the positive attitudes regarding the awareness on ethics in using the social media. The self-awareness the impact of ethics in social media significantly important so that the university student will be more careful when using the social media. Apart from self-awareness, the applicable regulations are also supportive, for example with the enactment of Law Number 19 of 2016 concerning Amendments to Law Number 11 of 2008 concerning Information and Electronic Transactions (Parwitasari et al., 2022), so that social media users are expected to be more careful in responding to news on social media. This kind of enforcement is more essential to control any unethical behaviour when using the social media.

Social Media Etiquette is essentially a loose set of rules governing on online communication behaviour

Table 2: Descriptive Statistic for Social Media Etiquette

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	1	.7	.7	.7
Disagree	5	3.4	3.4	4.1
Neutral	26	17.9	17.9	22.1
Agree	84	57.9	57.9	80.0
Strongly Agree	29	20.0	20.0	100.0
Total	145	100.0	100.0	

The analysis follows by asking the following statement **“Social Media Etiquette is essentially a loose set of rules governing online communication behaviour”** to respondents. The data revealed that 20% with the number of respondents is 29 respondents show that they strongly agree with the statement. Meanwhile, 57.9% of respondents agree that agree that social media etiquette in Malaysia is quite loose. Minorities of the respondents from university student in higher education institution neutral (17.9%), disagree (3.4%) and strongly disagree (0.7%) with the statement. Through this survey, the researcher wants to understand whether the respondent is aware of whether the Social Media Etiquette a loose set of rules governing online communication behavior. In other words, it is to explore the appropriate behavior, practice and norms to communicate with the people within the social network. From the data it shows that the university student is aware that there is unspoken rule in interacting using the social network. Miller and Munday (2015) mention that nowadays the adults adhere to unwritten guidelines to prevent harmful interactions on social media platforms, such as avoiding stalking, disclosing undue personal information, and forming online connections with individuals they already know. This is due to the unique characteristics of social media that make it more prone to violations of netiquette in online communication (Dejong, 2013).

Lack of public awareness related to ethics in social media trigger many social problems

Table 3: Descriptive Statistic on Public Awareness on Social Media

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	1	.7	.7	.7
Neutral	11	7.6	7.6	8.3
Agree	65	44.8	44.8	53.1
Strongly Agree	68	46.9	46.9	100.0
Total	145	100.0	100.0	

The data revealed that 46.9% of respondents strongly agree and 44.8% respondents agree that public awareness related to ethics in social media triggers many social problems. Meanwhile, 44.8% of respondents are neutral in response with the statement and follow by 0.7% strongly disagree with the statement. Based on the data collected, it shows that majority of university students aware if there are lack of public awareness related with social media ethics could lead to many social problems. Deviv and Lawa (2023) mention that students' behaviour and academic performance are greatly impacted by social media use in higher education, underscoring the need of abiding by digital ethical guidelines and standards. More than 90% of respondents agreed with the belief that a lack of public awareness regarding ethics in social media will trigger social problems. For example, inappropriate use of language in social media can trigger crime in the real world (Fadhli et al, 2020). Besides that, there are individual who are faking other people identity, usually it is public figure as well as organization (Wijaya, 2023). This kind of social problem will trigger more social problem that may affect to the social media user in real environment.

Important to avoid spreading information on hates, races, pornography and violence issues

Table 4: Descriptive Statistic on the Important to Avoid Misinformation

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
strongly disagree	2	1.4	1.4	1.4
neutral	8	5.5	5.5	6.9
agree	37	25.5	25.5	32.4
strongly agree	98	67.6	67.6	100.0
Total	145	100.0	100.0	

Table 3 revealed that most of the respondents in this study strongly agree with 67.6% that it is significantly important to avoid spreading information on hates, races, pornography and violence issues. Followed by 25.5% respondent agree, 5.5% respondent neutral and 1.4% respondent strongly disagree with the statement. Even though, the findings show majority strongly agree with the statement but there are some minority groups who strongly disagree with the statement even though as university student, they should not have any intention to spread information on hates, races, pornography and violence issues. Data shows that more than 90% of respondents understand the importance of always avoiding the spread of information regarding issues of hatred, race, pornography and violence. Through this statement show that there is positive awareness to the university student to avoid spread any false information in social media that could trigger problem and violence issues in the future. Previous study also mentioned to prioritize the fact-checking, cultivate fact-checking culture among user as well as the user to fact-checking could help reduce any risk of violent incident that caused from social media (Naher & Minar, 2023). This is important to avoid any misinformation that leads to worse incident in the future.

Information Validity

Table 5: Descriptive Statistic on University Student will check on validity of information

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
strongly disagree	2	1.4	1.4	1.4
neutral	25	17.2	17.2	18.6
agree	77	53.1	53.1	71.7
strongly agree	41	28.3	28.3	100.0
Total	145	100.0	100.0	

Table 4 show the descriptive statistics on the statement "I always check the information validity". The findings show that 28.3% of the respondents strongly agree meanwhile 53.1% of respondents agree with the statement.

Table 4 also mentioned that 17.2% of respondents neutral and 1.4% of the respondents strongly disagree with the statement mentioned in the table above. Through this survey, it shows that more than 80% of respondents always check the information validity before sharing it with other people. That is important to check the credibility of the information to know whether that information is reliable to be shared with others. According to Hussin et al (2020) state that it is a need proper care on digital information credibility such as providing the good guidelines as important practices.

Important to have self-righteous upon commenting others in social media

Table 6: Descriptive statistics on the Important to have self-righteous upon commenting others in social media

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
strongly disagree	12	8.3	8.3	8.3
disagree	21	14.5	14.5	22.8
neutral	40	27.6	27.6	50.3
agree	43	29.7	29.7	80.0
strongly agree	29	20.0	20.0	100.0
Total	145	100.0	100.0	

Based on Table 6, the descriptive statistic has been conducted on the statement “It is important to be self-righteous upon commenting others in social media”. The finding revealed that 20% respondents strongly agree and 29.7% agree with the statement mentioned in this survey. Meanwhile, there 27.6% respondents are neutral, disagree (14.5%) and strongly disagree (8.3%). More than 40% of respondents agree that the people should have self-righteous in writing the comment to other people posting in social media. This has been supported statement by Turk (2019) that mention self-righteous remarks on social media may be attributed to a variety of factors, including among others, a sense of importance, individuality, and group membership. The individual feel it is needed for them to commenting with the issues that associated with them in other people posting. Based on the data also show that there are also a group of university student who neutral in commenting to other people posting. This group of individuals may feel if the posting in social media not associated with them, they would not comment on it. The result also could relate with the personality of the individual. Based on Bogg (2017) mention that individuals who possess both emotional stability and extraversion are more inclined to use social media, while those who exhibit less neuroticism and extraversion are less likely to sign up. Additionally, older individuals who exhibit certain combinations of neuroticism and extraversion are less likely to update their accounts.

DISCUSSION

The public awareness on digital ethics for social media platform is important component in shaping the well-being of the community and society. Without ethics in social media platforms, the issues and problem like misinformation, harassment and cyberbullying, privacy violation, the prevalence of echo chambers will increase and manipulation will occur without control. Digital ethics is significantly important to utilize to increase trust and accountability in the social media, protecting the personal data and controlling misinformation in social network. According to Rallabandi, Kakodkar, & Avuku (2023) by addressing the ethics related with artificial intelligence (AI) technology could encourage towards the responsible and ethical environment for social media in ensuring the society will using the AI. The society should have awareness on the digital ethics in the social media especially university student. The findings reveal that majority of the respondents of this study owned the social media accounts and frequently used it daily. The social media platform has become the main social networking to interact with family, friends as well as their lecturers. This is aligned with Bashir, Malik, & Mahmood (2021) that state majority of universities student used social media daily and visit this platform a few times, and WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube are widely used by this group.

Through the results above show that majority of the respondents aware on the ethics in using the social media. However, there are small group of the university student not aware regarding this matter. The higher education institution plays a significant role to exploit the role of digital ethics in social media in increasing the awareness within the university student. The appropriate activity and program should be organized by staff in higher education institution to make sure to increase the level of awareness on social media ethics nowadays. Higher education institution should promote the awareness on digital ethics in social media (Fenwick, 2016). This is significantly important for the university student to use the social media in a right way by developing the digital ethics codes for the community. According to Zvereva (2023) that the university community in the educational process has seen the digital ethics codes is effective tool to control the communication in digital educational platforms.

Other than that, the majority of the respondents understand on the needs to highlight digital ethics in social media and without ethics, it will trigger the social problem among university students. Social media platforms could affect the student's academic performance of university student, therefore the student need to proper time in using the social media (Rana, Farooqi, & Ahmad, 2023). Besides that, the cyberbullying, manipulation, misinformation and eco-chamber will increase if this issue does not been tackled earlier. If this issue does not handle earlier, the spread of misinformation, race, pornography will increase too. Besides that, the attention also should be given to student's interaction, management of digital content as well as follow to digital ethics rules will assist in term of prevent cyberbullying in higher education institution (Deviv & Lawa, 2023). This attention can help prevent cyberbullying among students..

Besides that, the data also revealed that majority of university student have self-confident or self-righteous and appropriate behaviour, practice and norms to communicate with the people within the social network. This study is significant because social media can lead to lower self-esteem, self-confidence and self-worth among university student that could potentially to anxiety, depression and others mental health issues (Iwamoto and Chun, 2020). Without the appropriate attitudes in social media, the positive digital culture will never happen among university students. The university student should also have good attitudes within the social media platform. The issues of cyberbullying will keep occur if the social media were not appropriately controlled and right ways. Cyberbullying could be avoided, and this kind of cases can be reported to the appropriate authorities through empowering oneself to utilise the social media efficiently (Haris, 2023).

This study shows that the university student has good level of awareness in term of digital ethics in social media platforms. The university student could encourage and foster the responsible and good online environment in the social media. As the university student increasing engage in social network, it is significantly important to understand the digital ethics in this social media platform. Unawareness on the digital ethics in social media will affect the behaviour as well as academic performance of the student. This has been supported by Deviv and Lawa (2023) that mentioned the social media usage among students in higher education institutions poses issues and challenges related with digital ethics when the cyberbullying, hoaxes and privacy violation, misinformation could influence student behaviour, attitude and achievement in university. This study has highlighted the important on the awareness on digital ethics in social media platform in hinder the worse cases in the future especially among university students nowadays.

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, public awareness on digital ethics plays an essential role in shaping the university student with the healthy online environment and social network. As social media has become the main platform for interaction and communication, the university student should enhance the digital literacy skill and knowledge to overcome the issues especially in term of misinformation, cyberbullying and many more issues that related with social problem in social networks. Furthermore, the university student should foster with the good digital culture environment within the social media to foster and encourage the responsible community in social media. Through cultivation of digital ethics in social media, could create the community with the good attitude, personality and excellent on ethics practices in this platform (Abu, 2023). Besides that, the higher education institution and government agency should promote the healthy digital ethics in social media networks. The enforcement should be increased in reducing the individual who unethical in using the social media. The effort

of higher education institution and government agency will be beneficial not only university student but the community as a whole in practicing the healthy and trustworthy online ecosystem.

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