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ISBN: 9781787385481
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Understanding Malaysian Youth’s Social Media Practices and Their Attitude towards Violent Extremism

Nurzali Ismail
Jasmine Mohamed Jawhar
Danial Mohd Yusuf
Anis Izzati Ismail
Raja Muhammad Khairul Akhtar Raja Mohd Naguib

Abstract: The exploitation of social media to spread propaganda and violent extremism has become a serious issue, including in Malaysia. This study attempted to examine youth’s social media practices and factors that influence their attitude towards violent extremism on social media. To achieve the study aim, an online survey involving 400 respondents was conducted. The findings revealed that, youth like video content the most, followed by written content, infographic and images. Information seeking continues to be an important purpose for using social media. While youth’s attitude towards violent extremism is moderate, this study found that, information or argument quality, perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use are factors that could influence
attitude. Considering that social media technology is constantly changing, it is proposed that, future studies in countering violent extremism to continually look into youth’s social media usage, particularly in understanding different social media platforms, types of content and message design.

**Keywords:** Social media, countering violent extremism, Technology Acceptance Model, attitude, youth

**Abstrak:** Penyalahgunaan media sosial untuk penyebaran propaganda, keganasan dan ekstremisme telah menjadi suatu isu serius termasuk di Malaysia. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk meneroka amalan penggunaan media sosial dalam kalangan belia dan faktor yang mempengaruhi sikap mereka terhadap keganasan dan ekstremisme dalam media sosial. Bagi mencapai objektif kajian, kaji selidik dalam talian yang melibatkan seramai 400 responden telah dilaksanakan. Dapatan kajian mendapati belia paling menyukai kandungan video, diikuti oleh penulisan, infografik dan gambar. Pencarian maklumat dalam talian terus menjadi antara tujuan utama penggunaan media sosial. Walaupun sikap belia terhadap keganasan dan ekstremisme hanya berada pada tahap sederhana, ia boleh dipengaruhi oleh informasi atau hujah berkualiti, tanggapan kebergunaan dan tanggapan mudah diguna. Mengambil kira kemajuan aplikasi media sosial yang sentiasa berubah, adalah dicadangkan supaya kajian membenteras keganasan dan ekstremisme pada masa hadapan terus menumpukan kepada penggunaan media sosial dalam kalangan belia, terutamanya bagi memahami platform yang berbeza, jenis kandungan dan reka bentuk mesej.

**Kata kunci:** Media sosial, membenteras keganasan dan ekstremisme, Model Penerimaan Teknologi, sikap, belia

**Introduction**

In recent years, internet penetration rate in Malaysia has significantly increased (Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission, 2020). In 2020, internet penetration rate in the country was over 93%, a continuous increase throughout the last decade (Nurhayati-Wolff, 2020). Malaysia is also considered to be among the countries with the highest social media penetration in the world, as it was ranked first in Southeast Asia in 2020 at 84%, followed by Singapore (79%), and Thailand (75%) (Moore, 2020). In terms of social media usage frequency, Kemp (2021) reported that, Malaysians in general, spent an average of 9 hours online daily, of which, 3 hours were spent on social media.
Although high internet penetration is a welcome development, the liberating nature of social media opens the possibility for violent extremism to breed. Unlike the traditional media outlets such as television, radio or newspapers that are more expensive, difficult to penetrate into and are operating on mainly one-way communication, social media is a cheaper option, easily accessible to everyone and is offering two-way communication (Apuke, 2016). This makes social media an ideal platform for violent extremist organisations to disseminate messages and engage their target audience (Bender, 2019).

Youth are considered the main target online. This is a major concern as youth aged 13 to 34 consist of over 80% of active social media users in Malaysia (Ismail, Ahmad, Noor & Saw, 2019). In a study to identify the usage of social media among youth in Malaysia, communication and socialisation showed to be the most important purposes online (Yusop & Sumar, 2013). The ease of internet allows continuous and limitless access to information and interactions (Omar, Ismail & Kee, 2017), exposing youth to violent extremist content online.

Over the years, many cases were reported involving the usage of social media for violent extremism and terrorism in Malaysia. These include using social media to promote ideology, radicalise, and to recruit new members (Zolkepli, 2018; Baharudin, 2021). Even though the number of reported cases were relatively small compared to the general population of the country, the threat of violent extremism through the exploitation of social media should not be undermined.

Hence, without thorough understanding of the role of social media towards violent extremism, particularly among youth, it would be difficult for policymakers, researchers and experts to formulate effective strategies to counter such threat. This study therefore, attempted to understand Malaysian youth’s social media practices, and the factors that could influence their attitude towards violent extremism.

**Social media and violent extremism**

The study into the use of social media by violent extremist groups have been gaining ground for many years, particularly with the rise of Daesh (Thompson, 2012; Gill et al., 2017; Ganesh & Bright, 2020). In recent times, authorities and researchers alike have warned of an increased usage of social media by terrorist and violent extremist groups (Ismail,
2020; Crump, 2020). This is owed to the current global pandemic that has led many countries to impose movement control orders, which essentially make people spend more time at home and online (Ismail, 2020; King & Mullins, 2021).

COVID-19 pandemic has not only demonstrated fear of increased usage of social media by violent extremist groups, but it has also been used as a platform to justify violence. The pandemic was exploited by extremist groups from various political spectrums, from the far-left, to the far-right ideologies (Kruglanski, Gunaratna, Ellenberg & Speckhard, 2020). According to a report published by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, a large number of social media postings were made by the far-right movements to exploit the pandemic situation (Crawford, 2020). Most of the social media postings attempted to link the pandemic with immigration, Islam, Judaism, LGBT community, and the elite society (Crawford, 2020; Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2020).

Although our study did not intend to examine the link between COVID-19 and the use of social media by violent extremist groups, it was nonetheless important to note, how the pandemic has elevated concern on the exploitation of social media, particularly the way how violent extremist groups conducted their activities online (Kruglanski et al., 2020). Thus, it made this study even more relevant, to understand youth’s attitude towards violent extremism on social media.

The usage of social media by violent extremist groups is not only limited to mobilise propaganda, radicalisation and recruitment. It is also used to facilitate activities such as to gain funding, communicate, build networks, and to coordinate attacks (Jawhar, 2016). While violent extremists’ usage of social media to promote ideologies is eminent (Von Behr, Reding, Edwards & Gribbon, 2013), its direct influence remains inconclusive. In fact, literature has suggested that the role of social media is merely as a facilitator or enabler vis-a-vis violent extremism, rather than being the direct cause of it (Von Behr et al., 2013; Pauwels et al., 2015; Vermeersch, Coleman, Demuynck and Dal Santo, 2020).

It should be noted that knowledge in this area is still limited. Violent extremism within the new media environment is complex, contextual, fast changing and dynamic (Schomerus, El Taraboulsi-McCarthy & Sandhar, 2017; Hardy, 2018; Holmer, Bauman & Aryaeinejad, 2018). As argued by Seraphin, Frau-Meigs and Hassan (2019), the link between
Understanding Malaysian youth’s social media practices and their attitude towards violent extremism is at best limited and still inconclusive, particularly in the field of information and communication sciences. Hence, this present study attempted to address the knowledge gap.

The Malaysian situation

Malaysia also has the experience dealing with cases related to the exploitation of social media by violent extremists, particularly those who have been labelled as suspected terrorists. For instance, in 2018, the Malaysian authorities were reported to monitor more than 3,800 social media accounts believed to be actively promoting extremist ideologies and recruiting terrorists (“Almost 4,000 FB accounts being monitored”, 2018). It was also reported that, 240 individuals were arrested, while 800 social media accounts were blocked to curb the spread of militant ideologies in the country (“Almost 4,000 FB accounts being monitored”, 2018).

Lim (2018) reported that, a series of counter-terrorism operation in the country saw the arrests of suspected terrorists, including a 17-year-old student. The minor planned to conduct attacks on churches, Hindu temples and entertainment outlets using Molotov cocktails (Lim, 2018). While it was not clear how the minor was radicalised, he exploited different social media platforms to upload warning videos of his terror plots to groups with links to Daesh (Lim, 2018). In a separate news report, a housewife was nabbed for her alleged plot to ramp into non-Muslim voters during the 2018 Malaysian General Election (Chew, 2018). Prior to her arrest, she recruited 10 followers using different social media platforms (Chew, 2018).

McLuhan’s (1967) proposition of the creation of global village, which characterises social media and the way how it gets people connected, presents both opportunities and threats (Arriagada & Ibanez, 2020; Pennycook, Bear, Collins & Rand, 2020). For instance, there were cases in Malaysia involving individuals who tried to seek spiritual knowledge for transformation on social media, only to get connected with violent extremists and terrorists who then radicalised them (Mohamad, 2020).

While the Malaysian authorities remain vigilant and are committed towards weakening the threats of violent extremism and terrorism in the country, the danger is far from over. The ‘post-Daesh’ misconception that
leads to the thinking that the threat of violent extremism and terrorism has weakened is naïve and overly simplistic (Sinatra, 2020). According to Jawhar (2020), propaganda, radicalisation process, recruitment and networking are still actively taking place in Malaysia and throughout the region by utilising various communication spheres, making the danger even more difficult to identify.

**Understanding attitude towards violent extremism on social media**

In this study, we employed the Technological Acceptance Model (TAM) to aid understanding on youth’s attitude towards violent extremism on social media. TAM which originated from the Theory of Reason Action (TRA), underlines the fundamental premise that, technological acceptance is influenced by two integral factors; perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEOU) (Davis, 1989). According to Davis (1989), PU refers to one’s own belief that using a new technology would help to improve job performance, taking into consideration its advantages and disadvantages, while, PEOU emphasises on how a new technology would help to make job performance easier.

Based on TAM and the earlier studies related to the role of social media in facilitating violent extremism (Von Behr et al., 2013; Zolkepli, 2018; Baharudin, 2021), the following hypotheses were tested:

\[
H1 \quad \text{PU has a positive and significant effect on youth’s attitude towards violent extremism on social media.}
\]

\[
H2 \quad \text{PEOU has a positive and significant effect on youth’s attitude towards violent extremism on social media.}
\]

TAM as a standalone model, is very robust in predicting one’s acceptance of new technologies (Weerasinghe & Hindagolla, 2017). However, it is limited to the functional factors only based on PU and PEOU (Legris, Ingham & Collerette, 2003). Due to this limitation, many studies have extended TAM by incorporating other external variables to make it more comprehensive (Legris et al., 2003; Van Eeuwen, 2017; Jimenez, Garcia, Violante, Marcolin & Vezzetti, 2021). In regard to this present study, we included two other variables which are, the information/argument quality and perception towards violent extremism.

Information/argument quality was a source factor derived from the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). It refers to the quality of a social
Understanding Malaysian youth’s social media practices and their attitude towards violent extremism (Winter, 2019). According to Lee (2017), information/argument quality can help to improve the persuasion of a social media message, and more importantly influence attitude and behaviour. Based on this premise, the following hypothesis was tested:

\[ H3 \text{ Information/argument quality has a positive and significant effect on youth’s attitude towards violent extremism on social media.} \]

Perception towards violent extremism was another variable included in this study. It generally refers to how youth regard violent extremism. This stems from their own knowledge and experience, which can be influenced by a number of social-psychological related causes such as, education level and standards of living (Zinchenko, Perelygina & Zotova, 2016). According to Villa-Vicencio, Buchanan-Clarke and Humphrey (2016), community’s perception towards violent extremism varied and it can be shaped by insecurity feeling, drivers such as poverty, unemployment and other socio-economic issues, and the types of exposure received from the extremist groups. Hence, the following hypothesis was tested:

\[ H4 \text{ Youth’s perception towards violent extremism has a positive and significant effect on their attitude towards violent extremism on social media.} \]

According to TAM, attitude is crucial in influencing one’s behavioural intention towards actual usage of the technology (Davis, 1989; Yang & Yoo, 2004; Sujeet & Jyoti, 2013; Hussein, 2017). Attitude as a psychological concept is defined as an evaluation of any object including ideologies, values and people, which is based on beliefs, emotions and past behaviours. In relation to violent extremism, attitude can be evaluated through the way one endorses or justifies related risky behaviours (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2014; Nivette, Eisner & Ribeaud, 2017).

In regard to this study, we took the starting position by assuming that attitude towards violent extremism was influenced by PU, PEOU, information/argument quality and perception towards violent extremism. Taking into account the discussion on TAM and the other variables, the following framework was proposed (Figure 1).
This study addressed the following research objectives:

1. To explore the effect of PU and PEOU on youth’s attitude towards violent extremism on social media.
2. To examine the effect of information/argument quality on youth’s attitude towards violent extremism on social media.
3. To investigate the effect of youth’s perception towards violent extremism on their attitude towards violent extremism on social media.

**Research methodology**

This study employed the quantitative research method. According to Babbie (1998), a quantitative approach enables a huge population to be reached and described. Specifically, in this study, a cross-sectional online survey was conducted to understand Malaysian youth’s social media practices and factors that influence their attitude towards violent extremism on social media.

The main advantage of an online survey is that it allows data collection across geographical location, more manageable and cost effective (Fricker & Schonlau, 2002). In comparison to a longitudinal
study, the findings of a cross-sectional study are not definite. The same study if being conducted at other times and contexts may yield different outcomes (Davies, 1994). The main advantage of such a study is that it allows data to be collected within a short time and different variables to be measured (Davies, 1994).

_The instrument development_

An online survey was created and distributed using the Survey Monkey application. It was prepared in both Malay and English languages. There were nine categorical variables: age, gender, education, social media experience, duration of usage daily, devices, choice of platforms, types of content and purpose of usage; and five continuous variables: perception towards violent extremism, PU, PEOU, information/argument quality, and attitude towards violent extremism on social media.

Every categorical variable was coded numerically. As for the continuous variables, they were measured using the five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = not sure, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). Four measurement items were included in each continuous variable. They were adapted based on past studies related to violent extremism, social media acceptance and usage and TAM (Bhattacherjee & Sanford, 2006; Chen & Lee, 2008; Rauniar, Rawski, Johnson & Yang, 2013; Li & Suh, 2015; Nivette et al., 2017; Dixit & Prakash, 2018). This is demonstrated in Table 1 below.

As proposed by Elangovan and Sundaravel (2021), prior to the actual data collection procedure, the researchers have consulted two panel of experts to assist with the face and content validity of the survey instrument. In addition, a pilot study was carried out to measure the reliability of the survey instrument. An online pilot survey involving 50 respondents was conducted. The data from the survey was analysed using the Cronbach’s alpha test. This was to ensure the internal consistency of the survey instrument.

The accepted value for Cronbach’s alpha test as proposed by Cooper and Schindler (2008) is 0.700 and above. Greater score of Cronbach’s alpha value implies higher internal consistency of the construct (Cooper & Schindler, 2008). In regard to the instrument of this study, each construct was measured above 0.700, hence they were accepted. This is presented in Table 2 below.
Table 1: Variables and Measurement Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>It is necessary to react by showing anger against injustice.</td>
<td>Nivette et al., (2017)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>It is not wrong to have violent radical ideas as long as they remain as thoughts and not actions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sometimes people have to resort to violence to defend their values, convictions, or religious beliefs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>It is not wrong to support groups that use violence to fight injustices.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PEOU**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Social media is flexible to interact with.</td>
<td>Rauniar, et al., (2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I find it easy to do many things using social media.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>It is not difficult to become skilful at using social media.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Communication is made easy using social media.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PU**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Using social media enables me to get re-connected with people that matters to my life.</td>
<td>Rauniar, et al., (2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Social media enhances my communication effectiveness.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Social media makes it easier for me to get the latest news and information.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Social media enables me to get information related to my social group(s).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Understanding Malaysian youth's social media practices and their attitude towards violent extremism

Argument/information quality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>It is important that information on social media is convincing and influential.</td>
<td>Bhattacherjee &amp; Sanford, (2006); Chen &amp; Lee, (2008); Li &amp; Suh, (2015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I prefer social media information that is emotionally appealing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I like social media information that is intellectually engaging.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I like social media content that is attractive and visually appealing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Attitude towards violent extremism on social media

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Social media is a good platform for me to find friends who share similar views as I do.</td>
<td>Rauniar, et al., (2013); Dixit &amp; Prakash (2018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Social media is useful for me to get information related to injustices around the world.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Social media is a useful platform to communicate with other members of my social group(s).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I find myself to be easily influenced by social media postings, including those that promote violence in the name of faith and religion.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Cronbach’s Alpha Results Based on the Pilot Study Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Cronbach’s alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perception on violent extremism</td>
<td>0.769</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PEOU</td>
<td>0.808</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PU</td>
<td>0.743</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argument/information quality</td>
<td>0.747</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude towards VE</td>
<td>0.742</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The sample

The data collection procedure involved 400 respondents. They were Malaysians, aged 18-34. The rationale for choosing respondents aged
18-34 was supported by past studies that reported, youth made up the vast majority of social media users (Ahmad & Ismail, 2016; Anderson & Jiang, 2018). The sample size was decided using sampling calculator, based on the Malaysian population of over 33 million people. It also took into consideration the 95% confidence interval and 5% margin of error. Convenience sampling was employed in this study, mainly due to its flexibility which allows individuals who fit the criteria of the study to participate (Fricker, 2008).

The procedure

Call for participation in this study was advertised on social media. Specifically, the study was advertised in various social media groups and communities. This included promoting the study on Facebook and WhatsApp groups. Potential respondents who fulfilled the criteria of the study were invited to participate in the online survey. The criteria to participate in the online survey were; the respondents must be Malaysians, 18-34 years old and have at least one year of social media experience.

Consent for participation was sought before the start of the survey. The respondents were made aware that their participation was voluntary and they had the opportunity to quit at any time before the survey was submitted. Once the survey was submitted, it was no longer possible to identify the respondents and their responses due to the anonymity. There was no identifiable information included in the survey. Participation in the online survey took approximately 15-20 minutes.

Findings and discussion

Demographic characteristics

A huge majority of the respondents who participated in this study were Malays (88.2%), followed by Chinese (7.8%), Indian (3%) and others (1%). The large number of Malay ethnic respondents was expected, considering that the survey may possibly be shared on online platforms where participants are predominantly Malays. The lack of participation among respondents from other ethnic groups is addressed in the limitations and suggestions for future studies section.
In terms of the respondents’ age, 53.9% of them were 18-24 years old, while, the remaining 46.2% aged 25-34. Female made up 58.6% of the respondents, while male respondents consisted the remaining 41.4%. As for the respondents’ highest educational qualification, 56.1% had bachelor’s degree, 23.6% diploma, 13.3% postgraduate degree and the remaining 7% had school certificate. The demographic findings are presented in Table 3.

### Social media practices

Most of the respondents of this study (92.5%) had more than 5 years of experience using social media, 6% had between 3-4 years using social media and the remaining 1.5% had 2 years or less experience. In terms of their duration of social media usage daily, 44.3% used social media more than 4 hours daily, 24% between 3-4 hours, 18.5% between 2-3 hours and the remaining 13.3% used it for less than 2 hours.
Most of the respondents (97.8%) indicated that they accessed social media mainly using smartphone. The remaining 2.25% used other devices such as laptop, personal computer and tablet. The findings related to the respondents’ social media experience, duration of usage daily and their devices are reported in Table 4.

This study found that the respondents most frequently used WhatsApp (49%), followed by Instagram (20.3%), Twitter (11.5%), Facebook (10%), YouTube (6%) and others (3.25%). In term of their preferred types of content on social media, 35.6% preferred video, written content (26.1%), infographic (13.3%), image (12%), video story (7.3%) and others (5.8%). The findings related to the respondents’ most frequently social media platforms and their preferred types of content are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Respondents’ Preferred Social Media Platforms and Types of Content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Frequency (n)</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social media platform</td>
<td>WhatsApp</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preferred types of content</td>
<td>Video</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>35.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Written content</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>26.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Infographic</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Image</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Video story</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Respondents in the 18-24 age group preferred Instagram, while those in the 25-34 age group favoured Facebook and Twitter more. A closer examination using chi-square analysis found that there was a significant relation between respondents’ age and their choice of frequently used social media platforms $X^2(1, N = 400) = 9.581$, $p < .05$. The finding is presented in Table 6. However, a separate examination revealed that there was no significant relation between respondents’ gender and highest education qualification with their choice of social media platforms.

**Table 6: Chi-square Test – The Most frequently Used Social Media Platforms According to Age**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>9.581a</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>.024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood Ratio</td>
<td>10.121</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>.182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear-by-Linear Association</td>
<td>3.468</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.063</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
<td>400</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. 4 cells (25.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .46.

Chi-square test was also conducted to examine the respondents’ preferred types of social media content with their age, gender and highest education level. The results revealed that, there was a significant relation between respondents’ age and their preferred social media content $X^2 (1, N = 400) = 28.218$, $p < .05$. This finding is shown in Table 7.

**Table 7: Chi-square Test – Preferred Types of Social Media Content According to Age**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>28.218a</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>.018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood Ratio</td>
<td>8.605</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>.377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear-by-Linear Association</td>
<td>3.740</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
<td>400</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. 6 cells (33.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .46.
Similarly, there was a significant relation between respondents’ preferences of social media content and their level of education $X^2 (1, N = 400) = 37.3, p < .05$. The respondents with higher education qualifications (postgraduate and bachelor levels) preferred written content more, while those with lower education qualifications (diploma and school certificate) liked video content. The chi-square test finding is presented in Table 8.

A significant relation was also reported between respondents’ preferences of social media content and gender $X^2 (1, N = 400) = 18.849, p < .05$. It was found that, a bigger percentage of male respondents (42.4%) preferred video content compared to female (30.8%). On the contrary, more female respondents (28.6%) preferred written content compared to male (22.4%). The chi-square test finding is reported in Table 9.

When probed on their main purpose for using social media, it was found that 50% of the respondents used it to get the latest news and information, 21.5% for entertainment, 11.5% to share information with
family and friends, 7.3% to build and maintain relationship, 6.8% for learning and the remaining 3% for other purposes. This is presented in Table 10.

**Table 10: Purposes for Using Social Media**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Frequency (n)</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To get the latest news/information</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing of information</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building/maintaining relationship</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other purposes</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Factors influencing youth’s attitude towards violent extremism on social media**

The findings revealed that, youth respondents who participated in this study had a moderate attitude towards violent extremism on social media ($M = 3.50, SD = .585$). Breakdown of findings for the four independent variables tested showed that PEOU recorded the highest mean score ($M = 4.08, SD = .588$), followed by information/argument quality ($M = 3.43, SD = .632$), PU ($M = 3.32, SD = .764$) and perception towards violent extremism ($M = 2.45, SD = .854$).

Next, we conducted the multiple linear regression statistical analysis to measure each variable and their relationship with attitude towards violent extremism on social media. All four independent variables were entered and analysed simultaneously to identify the main predictor for attitude towards violent extremism on social media.

The findings presented in Table 11 indicate that, information/argument quality, ($p = <.001, b = .600$), PU ($p = <.001, b = .283$) and PEOU ($p = <.001, b = .112$) were significant predictors for attitude towards violent extremism on social media, $R^2 = .426$, $F (3,395) = 97.51$, $p < .05$. However, perception was not found to be a significant predictor for attitude ($p = .461, b = .026$).
Table 11: Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Attitude</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$B^a$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception</td>
<td>.018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PEOU</td>
<td>.128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PU</td>
<td>.221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information/argument quality</td>
<td>.348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted $R^2$</td>
<td>.421</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$F$</td>
<td>97.51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the findings of the multiple linear regression analysis conducted, this study supported Hypothesis 1, Hypothesis 2 and Hypothesis 3, while Hypothesis 4 was not supported. This is summarised in Table 12.

Table 12: Hypothesis Testing Result

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PU has a positive and significant effect on youth’s attitude towards violent extremism on social media.</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PEOU has a positive and significant effect on youth’s attitude towards violent extremism on social media.</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information/argument quality has a positive and significant effect on youth’s attitude towards violent extremism on social media.</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth’s perception towards violent extremism has a positive and significant effect on their attitude towards violent extremism on social media.</td>
<td>Not supported</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

Social media continues to be important for youth. Increased frequency of social media usage among youth lead to enhanced exposure of violent extremist information. Even though it was argued that exposure to violent extremism on social media does not directly translate to individuals being radicalised (Conway, 2017), it still needs to be treated with caution, considering that social media can help to facilitate the
radicalisation process (START, 2018). Continuous exposure to the extremists’ content leads to increased consumption, dissemination of information and communication with the extremists (START, 2018).

This study found that WhatsApp and Instagram were favoured more compared to Facebook and Twitter. A closer examination revealed, younger respondents who were in the 18-24 age category preferred Instagram more, while those in the 25-34 age category favoured Facebook and Twitter. This finding is similar to Alhabash and Ma (2017) who reported that, Instagram is preferred more by younger social media users due to the motivations provided such as entertainment, social interaction and convenience. This study also suggested that youth preferred video content the most, followed by written content, infographic and images. This, however, does not imply that visual is more important than verbal. Instead, both visual and verbal elements are equally important, as social media preferences can be influenced by various considerations including personality traits (Mwaba, Saini & Abratt, 2017).

It is also worth noting that youth’s preferences of social media platforms and types of content are influenced by gender, age and educational qualifications. For instance, when compared between genders, it was found that male respondents liked video content more, while female respondents preferred written content. This is explained by Karatsoli and Nathanail (2020) who indicated that the usage of social media between genders may differ in terms of liking and practices.

Information seeking continues to be the main purpose for accessing social media. This particular finding echoed the literature (Wok, Idid & Misman, 2012; Hamat, Embi & Hassan, 2012; Baboo, Pandian, Prasad, & Rao, 2013; Yin, Agostinho, Harper, & Chicaró, 2014). Youth’s preferences to consume quick stories and to get insider information on social media, particularly during crisis situation (Ismail et al., 2019), open the possibility for extremists’ exploitation (Kruglanski, et al., 2020). This also led to misinformation and disinformation of news on social media which can create confusion (Close, 2021).

PU, PEOU and information/argument quality were found to be crucial factors that can influence youth’s attitude towards violent extremism on social media. This was explained by Gerrand (2020) who indicated that, a conducive environment, including the easy-
to-use social media technology can encourage youth towards violent extremism. In addition, we found that information/argument quality to be the strongest factor that could influence attitude towards violent extremism. According to Machdar (2019), information/argument quality is important as it can influence other relating factors with regard to the usage of social media.

This study reported that perception towards violent extremism is not a crucial factor in influencing youth’s attitude towards violent extremism on social media. This is partly explained by Charkawi, Dunn and Bliuc (2021) who indicated that perceived injustice does not necessarily lead to support towards violent extremism. In fact, social identity, sense of belonging and resilience are more crucial indicators that can influence one’s support towards violent extremism (Charkawi et al., 2021).

In regard to the use of TAM in this study, PU and PEOU have provided useful lens to understand youth’s usage of social media and their attitude towards violent extremism on social media. However, TAM as an information system theory alone is not adequate to explain the behavioural and relational factors that could also influence youth’s social media adoption. Hence, a more holistic understanding of new technology acceptance needs to consider not only the functional factors, but also the psychological factors which require the extension of TAM (Park, Kim & Ohm, 2015).

Limitations and suggestions for future studies

While this study has provided useful preliminary understanding on Malaysian youth’s social media practices and their attitude towards violent extremism, it also has limitations that should be acknowledged and addressed.

This study mainly involved Malay respondents. Low participation among respondents from other ethnic groups was due to limited advertisement of the study and restricted distribution of the survey. This study which was conducted as part of an international collaboration short term research project had to consider suitable sampling method and recruitment strategy based on the available resources. Even though the quality of this study in general was not impacted as it was not meant to explore ethnicity, it is proposed that future studies consider a more inclusive participation among respondents from different ethnic groups.
based on the demographics of the country. This is to provide a more balanced representation based on the country’s ethnic composition.

It should also be noted that the findings of this study could not be generalised. Hence, future studies that aim to explore further on youth’s social media practices and their attitude towards violent extremism can consider using probability sampling method that provides equal opportunity for the population to be part of sample for the study (Taherdoost, 2016). Probability sampling can help to minimise bias and enable generalisability of research findings (Taherdoost, 2016).

In addition, this study also has a number of important suggestions related to developing a more thorough understanding on youth’s social media practices, factors that influence their support towards violent extremism and how to counter the threat online. First, it is proposed that future studies address further on youth’s preferences of the types of social media content. In order for future countering violent extremism programs on social media to be successful, knowledge of the various types of content to be used for different audiences is necessary (Lua, 2021).

Second, as shown in this study, information/argument quality is an important factor that can influence attitude towards violent extremism on social media. Hence, future studies on countering violent extremism need to develop a deeper understanding on the social media message design aspect. The message design aspect is crucial to ensure the success of countering violent extremism campaign on social media (Bodine-Barone, Marrone, Helmus & Schlang, 2020).

Third, it is proposed that future studies adopt alternative methods including the projective research techniques. As violent extremism is a sensitive topic, respondents may possibly be more careful when answering direct questions pertaining to the issue during survey or interviews. Projective techniques which aim to unravel true feelings among respondents can help to overcome this problem. In fact, the application of projective techniques is not new, especially in psychology, marketing and crime related research (Garb, Wood & Nezworski, 2000; Piotrowski, 2015).

Last, it should be understood that social media practices are dynamic and constantly changing. Hence, it is important that new studies
continue to be conducted to understand the usage pattern in relation to violent extremism. In Malaysia, the extremists would initially reach out to their target audience using open social media platforms with the aim of maximising reach (Yasin, 2017). This is followed up by a more private communication, mainly targeting selected individuals to radicalise (Yasin, 2017). As pointed out by Jani (2017), despite recent crackdowns, the extremists continue to use social media to spread their ideologies online and this remains a huge threat to the nation (Jawhar, 2020).

Acknowledgement

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