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EYE ON DIGITAL MEDIA LITERACY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF 'GENERATION Z'

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Abstract

The number of Malaysian smartphone and internet users has substantially increased within the past few years. Current university students who are considered as Generation Z or the Millennial Generation constitute the major technological gadget users under the growth rate. Their landing changed the landscape of education from passive to active learner. Nonetheless, low self-awareness of internet use, inadequate digital guidance and knowledge justification towards online behaviour, and incompetent exercise of online communication practises are among the factors that might affects this generation's learning in digital media. This paper discusses digital media literacy among Generation Z by understanding their traits and concept of digital media literacy. Quantitative research method would be applied to this study to examine the competence digital media literacy of generation z, in further, to examine the relation between digital media literacy and learning of generation Z. A questionnaire is the instrument for data collection. Pearson's Correlation Coefficient is applied for data analysis. The expected finding aims to provide a guideline for educators in identifying students' learning issues, eventually leading to enhanced teaching pedagogy in the digital age.

Keywords: Digital Media, Digital media literacy, Generation Z

1. Introduction

Technological devices are tools for young Malaysians to connect to the world. It has brought convenience to humans but also changed the basic elements of communication that go beyond time and space. However, the way people perceive the future is determined by their awareness to personal online security, as well as self-regulation when it comes to freedom of online behavior, the right of digital self-determination, and informational autonomy or right to privacy (Lee, 2016; Supratman & Wahyudin, 2017).

A survey from the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) in 2017 reported that 76.10% of Malaysian internet users are youths between the ages of 20 and 49 (MCMC, 2017). The number of Malaysian smartphone users is forecasted to increase to 23.31 million in 2022. In line with this increment, the number of Malaysian internet users is projected to grow to 23.41 million in 2022 (Statistica, 2018).

Current university students aged between 18 to 23 years old are considered as Generation Z, a generation whose daily activities are occupied by technological gadgets. They are fast learners in technological environments (Prensky, 2001). Generation Z, also named as the "internet generation", bit generation, iGeneration, or NET generation are those who were born after 1995 (Dani, 2014; Kozinsky, 2017; Mathur & Hameed, 2016; Ozkana & Solmaz, 2015). Generation Z exhibits different preferences and patterns of digital media behaviour compared to the previous generation. They possess mobile expertise, are well networked compared to earlier generations, are more exposed to digital media, are self-reliant and career driven, and have the ability to accept challenges and use media simultaneously (Kozinsky, 2017; Mathur & Hameed, 2016; Ozkana & Solmaz, 2015). For Generation Z, learning is without boundaries as a digitalized environment provides the convenience for students to be well versed in current events and exposed to various popular culture and global trends as they grow up. Generation Z has changed the way of learning, from being teacher-centred to learner-centred. The emergence of Generation Z affects the innovation of learning tools and teaching styles. Furthermore, they lead the direction of the learning environment to be more student-centred (Kozinsky, 2017).

Westlund and Bjur (2014) indicated that young people are inclined to become sophisticated media users that lead to a media-focused life. Hence, the importance of being media literate is highly emphasized for them to become competent digital citizens and future knowledge workers (Westlund & Bjur, 2014). Digital media literacy is a set of competencies that constitutes by the abilities of accessing, evaluating and analysing, creating, reflecting, and acting. It aims for the effectiveness of using new media among online users (Hobbs, 2010; Peicheva & Milenkova, 2017). Accessing refers to the ability of searching and collecting information effectively through various media platforms or technology tools, and sharing the relevant information with others (Hobbs, 2010, 2011; Literacy, 2011). Analyzing and evaluating are the abilities of reading, understanding, and judging the media content (Zhang & Zhu, 2016). Creating is focused on composing or generating content creatively to express ideas. The aim of creating is to generate awareness among audiences towards media content (Hobbs, 2010; Schmidt, 2013). Reflecting refers to the application of social responsibility and ethical principles to an individual's communication behaviour (Hobbs, 2010; 2011). Finally, acting is the skill of using media tools to find

solutions for problems to become an active citizen in digital media. Digital media is not only a platform for media users to create and share content with others, it is also used to voice out opinions that he or she may be unable to express in real life (Eristi & Erdem, 2017).

As there is an increasing convergence of media, various scholars (Buckingham, 2015; Eristi & Erdem, 2017) have urged the necessity of developing the skills and competencies required in order to understand the range of contemporary forms of communication. Thus, the ability to utilize digital gadgets and manage information competently is a set of skills which are essential for university students.

2.   Problem Statement

Technological devices are tools for young Malaysians to connect to the world in a convenient manner. However, technology does not only comprise of a software component, it also requires a high cost of personal security when it comes to online communication (Supratman & Wahyudin, 2017). According to statistics released by the Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) in 2018, 70.4% of internet users are self-employed or fulltime students. Higher education students make up the majority of fulltime student internet users (MCMC, 2018). Younger internet users who live in urban areas of Malaysia, the United States, and Indonesia contribute the highest internet penetration to society (Suwana & Lily, 2017). It is noticeable that affordable pricing of internet access and facilities have increased the number of internet users as well as freedom of expression, especially among Indonesian young children and elderly. Nonetheless, Generation Z and Millennial Generation are the most familiar with the internet and are most sensitive to online activity (Suwana & Lily, 2017). They prefer to challenge new things and are proud to be present online. However, advancements of technology have led to rapid changes in cyber world's traffic. Low self-awareness of internet use or inadequate digital guidance to Generation Z internet users could lead to involvement in cybercrime as they are able to act freely online (Supratman & Wahyudin, 2017; Suwana & Lily, 2017). In fact, there is a tendency shows that the involvement of Malaysian younger youth to cybercrime activities is more than older youth (Saidatulakmal Mohd et al., 2016). As state by Dr.Bahma Sivasubramaniam, a law lecturer in Multimedia University (MMU) to The Star newspaper that majority of cybercrimes happen in Malaysia is due to unawareness of people to their online activity is illegal (TheStarOnline, Sunday, 22 Mar 2020).

Malaysian students are considered as heavy users of computers and the internet in academics. This can be seen in the transition of learning methods, from traditional teaching and learning methods to web-based or mobile methods. This is due to higher education students relying on technological gadgets to complete academic tasks. The probability of encountering cyberbullying would be high if they fail to exercise respect in online communication or have inadequate knowledge to differentiate between online behaviour that is ethical and that is not (Lai et al., 2017). Working in the same vein, the frequency of using technological tools, the right to produce media content, and the opportunity to work with computers could not guarantee that the individual is literate and possesses high levels of maturity in exercising the power of communication online (Hobbs, 2010; Lee, 2014; Peicheva & Milenkova, 2017).

Therefore, building up a good understanding to media, the production of message, and its effects to individual or society will assist an individual in developing his or her own perception and interpretation of the world instead of entirely accepting the current events that are delivered by news organizations, thus becoming an active citizen in digital media (Eristi & Erdem, 2017; Potter, 2004b). However, there is little attention has been paid on young people's information creating behaviour although it embeds in adolescent daily practices with digital media (Koh, 2013).

A study by Muniandy et al. (2017) indicates that Malaysian higher education students are classified as vulnerable to cybercrime due to low justification to the information – give some examples of cybercrime. As internet usage increases, this would maximize the exposure to cyber security threats if the user is incompetent in analyzing and evaluating mediated message (Igba et al., 2018; Muniandy et al., 2017).

Apart from competency in analysing and evaluating, a research in Nigeria discloses that misuse of technological skills and lack of knowledge in cyber security have caused the majority of undergraduate students to be unable to protect themselves in the cyberworld (Igba et al., 2018). Cohen and Mihailidis (2013) explained that overconfidence in web use is another reason that causes United States students to mistrust online information and become vulnerable in cyberspace (Cohen & Mihailidis, 2013). Therefore, the importance of education is highly emphasized by various researchers (Igba et al., 2018; Muniandy et al., 2017) to university students with the aim of appropriateness of cyber use.

3. Research Questions

- What is the competence of digital media literacy in generation z?
- Are there any relation between digital media literacy and learning to generation z?

4. Purpose of the Study

Rapid advancement of technology from web 1.0 (i.e., one-way communication between site and user) to the Industrial Revolution (IR) 4.0 (i.e., digitalized production) transformed the way people deal with information. People are empowered to perceive and react to media content freely. Technological tools or software such as the iPad, Google, YouTube etc., are described as "another teacher" other than parents, teachers, and the physical environment to students (Cheung, 2009). Generation Z is a fast learner that spends most of their time multitasking with technological gadgets. Their landing changes the landscape of education, from passive to active learner or instructor. Nonetheless, the research of digital media literacy is still limited in Malaysia (Shin & Zanuddin, 2019).

Since current university students that categorized as generation z who has different media using and learning habit than other generation, thus, it is imperative to study digital and media literacy among higher education students. By understanding to the competence of digital media literacy among generation Z, furthermore, to examine the relation between digital media literacy to the learning of generation Z would contribute to educators in identifying students' learning issues that need to be highlighted when interacting with them. Besides, to enhance teaching pedagogy of educators in digital age.

5. Research Methods

Quantitative research method would be applied to this study to examine the competence digital media literacy of generation z, in further, to examine the relation between digital media literacy and learning of generation z. University students who belong as the category of generation z would be the respondent in this research. Random sampling technique is implemented in this study. A questionnaire with five Likert scale is the instrument for data collection. Cronbach Alpha reliability and face validity are conducted to ensure the reliability and validity of instrument. Pearson's Correlation Coefficient is applied for data analysis.

6. Findings

When the world becomes more connected, engagement between people becomes interrelated. The presence of digital media technology permits individuals to search for information, produce content, or be involved in dialogue with regards to civic or political topics (Peicheva & Milenkova, 2017). Everyone is a producer, collaborator, distributor, and even a participant with the availability of hardware and software technology (Jenkins, 2014). Digital media literacy is derived from media literacy and digital literacy with its comprehensive skills not only equip teenagers and young adults with the ability to cope with the challenges of a rapidly ageing information environment and different social value significance, but to also promote engagement on online forms of civic and political life. People are empowered with freedom of expression and interaction in digital media (Kahne et al., 2012; Peicheva & Milenkova, 2017; Supratman & Wahyudin, 2017).

Nonetheless, Generation Z are claimed to be fast leaners in searching for information using the least possible sources. Their cognitive development is not compatible with emotional development. They can comprehend information effectively but are unable to process it rationally based on the judgement or evaluation of media content. Thus, the flood of information, daily news, or web content that's skimmed over would be considered harassment for a more mature age group; but it challenges younger users who lack knowledge or are not ready to encounter voluminous information.

In fact, digital reading and writing requires a certain level of capability in evaluating, interpreting, rethinking, and comprehending the content (Dani, 2014). Without the presence of knowledge that is comprised of technical skills, social skills, and cultural competence, digital media literacy would only be retained at the technical level. It would be risky in an information rich society with technical proficiency but the absence of critical autonomy (Jenkins, 2014). Hobbs (2010) disclose that core value of digital and media literacy in formal education not only bind the digital devices and cultural enclave together, from the other hand, it motivates the learners to generalized knowledge they gain from various subjects (Hobbs, 2010).

Since this study is focused on understanding the competence of digital media literacy in generation z, furthermore, to investigate the relation between the literacy and learning. So, this research is expected to achieve the outcome of identifying different level of digital media literacy that happen among generation z, meanwhile, the competences would be relevant to the learning of Gen Z-ers via data

interpretation.. This finding not only replenishes the inadequacy research on digital media literacy of generation z; on the other hand, it also provides a guideline for educators in familiar with the learning patterns of university students, likewise, to adjust the way while delivering knowledge to them.

7.   Conclusion

Various capabilities (including recognizing, making use of, and operating digital media) are essential for an individual to live in the digital era. This is because technology is not only a software component anymore, but it has changed the basic form of human communication without assurances of acting responsible and wisely while using mass communication (Dani, 2014; Supratman & Wahyudin, 2017). Thus, consciousness of dealing with information is a relatively high demand for Generation Z because they understand the media content through the connection between bit to bit in technological system. As mentioned by Marshall Mcluhan, a communication scholar, a fish wouldn't be aware of water unless it was taken out of the water. This describes the relationship between Generation Z and media. By applying the concept of personal lotus in media literacy, the operation of a conscious mode enables a media user to exercise his or her will in making decisions when consuming media content (Potter, 2004a). Thus, future educators should be alert in mobilizing Generation Z students while differentiating between learning in reality and virtual worlds. Furthermore, to awake the underlaid goal and objective of Gen Z-ers while consuming media content.

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