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The relationship between news media consumption and civic responsibility among university students

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Abstract

This study examined whether the use of various types of media for news consumption would influence young people's civic responsibility through a survey of university students in Malaysia. This study expands the literature on the issue of civic responsibility by looking at the effects of using different media types such as: television, newspapers, radio, and the Internet. Despite a significant worldwide decline in youth civic responsibility, few researchers investigated the inter-relationship between these two variables in a Malaysian context. Civic responsibility means active participation in the public life of a community in an informed, committed and constructive manner, with a focus on common goals. Civic responsibility is an attitudinal measure of obligation towards serving or creating change in one's community (McCrillis, 2013). Data are obtained through a survey questionnaire to a total of 606 respondents from three public research universities in Malaysia. Respondents' ages ranged from 21 to 31 years. This study employs a quantitative method using correlation to determine the relationship between these two variables. The result shows that a strong, positive correlation exists between news consumption and civic responsibility, which is statistically significant among final year undergraduate students. The Internet and various media associated with it have greatly increased the capacity of university students in Malaysia to consume the news and participate in a greater variety of civic activities. Higher education transforms communities by providing students with information and competence from which they can play significant roles within societies. This can lead to a healthier community, more skilful graduates both in their disciplines and soft skills, and in the long run, a more successful nation.

Keywords: news consumption, traditional media, new media, civic responsibility, university students

Introduction

The changes in social economic and technology patterns of society have produced shifting in younger citizens' mentality, which are less inclined to feel a sense of duty to participate civically in conventional ways, while displaying a greater inclination to embrace issues connected to lifestyle values, ranging from moral concerns to environmental quality (Ahrari, Seyedali, Jamilah Othman, Salleh Hassan, Bahama Abu Samah, 2015) [1]. Recent research has explored the role of different agents such as parents, peers, school, higher education and media in developing civic engagement among youth. The media is one of the most influential agents for youth and it plays an important role in shaping civic engagement (Daniel Halpern, 2013; Hao, Wen, & George, 2014; Homero Gil de Zuñiga Nakwon Jung & Valenzuela, 2012) [8, 9, 10].

At the same time, news media is seen as a pillar for democracy because of its potential in mobilizing the youth for civic activities by providing information as well as a forum for civic debates. From densely populated areas to rural communities, Malaysians have a strong interest in reading, listening to, watching, and discussing news. From breaking live news to daily news summaries, people want to be well informed on what is going on in their town, city, country, and world. News media is an influential ICT medium in educating youths to become agents that promote social harmony in a multiracial country like Malaysia. Therefore, the news media should be proactive and reactive in assisting the youth to become a useful and responsible citizen of the country. Such an assumption is supported by previous research, which showed that news consumption and civic engagement were closely related. Because of the perceived role of news media in mobilizing the youth for public civic action, there has been a long interest in examining the relationship between news consumption and civic responsibility, especially in today's changing media environment. This study focuses on youth civic responsibility compared to previous studies where more focus was on youth civic

engagement. Civic responsibility is defined as an individual's feelings of responsibility toward the community in which that individual is embedded, and the idea that every community member has a central role in contributing to the well-being of the local community and the wider society (Lenzi, Vieno, Santinello, Nation, & Voight, 2013)^[12]. This study carried through a survey of university students in Malaysia and tests the relationship between news consumption and civic responsibility. This study expands the literature on the issue of civic responsibility by looking at the effects of using different media types such as: television, newspapers, radio, and the Internet. Despite a significant worldwide decline in youth civic responsibility, few researchers investigate the inter-relationship between these two variables in a Malaysian context.

Reason for connected with traditional and new media

In the past, people just rely on traditional media such as television, radio, newspapers, magazines and so forth. Information presented is quite limited and easily controlled. Majority of people get news from the sources which make people have the same point of views and less argument. There is a wide variety of reason for connecting with traditional and new media. Some studies have revealed that youth mostly use media for purposes of sports update, crime news, and entertainment, gossip regarding famous celebrity or icon and latest events happening in their community. They use varieties of conventional media such as newspaper, books, magazines, radio and television have adopted new platforms using digital media and blend harmoniously with interactive media and social networks. The on-the-go phenomenon such as blogs, podcasts and social networks have proven to reach different walks of life and reduce geographical divide within youths. Now, traditional media is no longer popular. As discussed by Salman, Ibrahim, Abdullah, Mustafa, & Mahbob (2011)^[18], media the control over traditional media by government is still continuing, but they need to face the challenges of new media that is more interactive and fast-moving battle in the representation of an event. It shows that social media being popular and however it has less much influences than traditional media.

Generally, previous studies have consistently showed that youth use the various news media tools to keep updated themselves with latest information (Banaji & Buckingham, 2009; Jürgens, 2009)^[4, 11]. News consumption from different tools enables youth to become a human being who possesses civic-conscious values, tolerance and closeness to the community (Leod 2000)^[13]. Consuming traditional media and new media for news could build youth awareness about what is happening in the world. The more youths know about the world, the more likely the youths will find something that interests them enough to become engaged in the society.

News media Consumption and Civic Responsibility

The finding of research on news media consumption and civic responsibility provides a more complex picture. So far, the answers are far from conclusive. There is not much agreement in the direction and mechanisms of the impact of news media consumption on civic participation. Various studies have examined the relationship between news consumption and civic engagement in different age groups such as youths and adolescents. These studies have explored

both the positive and negative outcomes between news consumption and civic engagement. For examples, Hao *et al.*, (2014)^[9] emphasize that the findings strongly supported the association of news consumption and civic engagement among university students in Singapore. Hao *et al.*, (2014)^[9] stated that internet and various social media associated with it have greatly increased the capacity of young Singaporeans to consume the news and participate in a greater variety of political and civic activities. Similar to TV and print, leads to positive civic outcomes when it is used for news and information seeking, but has a negative effect when used for entertainment (Amirfarhangi, Sidin, & Ahmad, 2015; Atkins, 2016; Boulianne, 2015)^[2, 3, 5]. Informational media use, whether through traditional or online sources, repeatedly has been shown to contribute to civic outcomes (e.g., personal values and civic responsibility). Some research on youth and civic engagement shows increasing civic apathy among the young, demonstrated by their declining interest in civic participation, reluctance to engage themselves in politics and civic matters, and low turnout for political election (Oosterhoff, Metzger, & Babskie, 2015; Sparks, Wang, Lü, & Wang, 2016)^[16, 20].

The present study

The purpose of this study is to advance the understanding of the relationship between media use and civic responsibility among youth. Theoretically, civic responsibility is conceptualized as participation in and contributions to the activities and institutions of the community. Nowadays, youth development includes with media of different qualities and easy access medium compared to earlier historical periods. As a consequence, media has substantial impact on contemporary youth. Despite growing interest in the above area of study, there is a lack of research on news consumption and civic responsibility. There is a need for more research to understand the relationship between news consumption and sense of civic responsibility among youth in Malaysia, especially university students since university students are the human capital of that society, with a duty of leading their country to a healthy democracy.

The general question this study aims to answer is: What is the relationship between news media consumptions with civic responsibility is that positive or negative relationship and is that high level of consuming to news media will develop better sense of civic responsibility among youth.

Based on past literature, following are hypotheses drawn for the current study:

H1: Higher levels of news consumption will have stronger effects on civic responsibility compared to those with lower levels of news consumption.

H2: News consumption via different media will be positively associated with civic responsibility.

Method

A total of 606 self-administered survey questionnaires collected from the respondents were usable and included in the analysis. The respondents were randomly drawn from a list of undergraduate students from the university campus. Random sampling was conducted from the sampling frame. Trained researchers and assistants met the respondents to invite their voluntary participation in the survey. Prior to

data collection, approval to carry out the study was first sought from the residential college directors and student affairs department. Ethics approval from the college directors was granted and with their review of the survey questionnaire contents. The respondents were encouraged to answer all questions on the survey but were also reminded that their participation was voluntary and that they were free to decline to respond to any questions that they were not comfortable in answering. Those who gave consent were requested to complete the questionnaires. They received a small amount of money for their participation. The sample consisted of 377 Malay, 67 Chinese, 126 Indian and 36 other ethnic minority students. There were more female (58%) than male respondents (42%). Respondents' ages ranged from 21 to 31 years, with a mean of 26.22 years (SD=1.34).

The research reported here is part of a research study on diversity engagement among undergraduate students. The present report focuses on the relationship of news consumption and civic responsibility of final year undergraduate students studying in Malaysia public research universities. The data was collected between March and May 2015. The questionnaire was in Malay language and took approximately twenty-five minutes to complete. Students who gave their informed consent completed the measures in their classrooms or residential college, supervised by researcher and research assistant. The Likert-scale format of items was explained, and participants were informed that they could ask for clarification of items.

Measurement

The independent variable is media news consumption. News consumption is defined as the amount of time spent on traditional and new media for news on an average weekday. This is measured by asking respondent how much time they spend on various traditional and new media platforms for news on an average weekday. The response option ranged from 1=none, 2=1-6 minutes, 3=6-10 minutes, 4=11-15 minutes, 5=16-30 minutes, 6=31-60 minutes, 7=61-90 minutes to 8= more than 90 minutes.

The dependent variable is overall civic responsibility. Sense of civic responsibility is defined as the personal belief and feeling that individuals have about their responsibility and duty to the society. Civic responsibility was measured through the 9 questions. The respondents were asked to indicate their degree of agreement on a seven-point Likert scale (from strongly disagree to strongly agree). The nine items for civic responsibility dimension included 'social justice, to get care about the disadvantaged in society', 'working together to build a better society', 'helping others people', 'make community a better place to live', 'make sure people are treated fairly'. Respondents were asked 'to speak up for equality (everyone should have the same rights and opportunities)', 'contribute to my community and society'; 'make a difference in my community', 'to help reduce hunger and poverty in the society'. The respondents were also required to state their year of birth and the number of semesters they had completed at the university, and to indicate their demographic details such as gender, ethnicity, program of study, and type of secondary school attended.

Data Analysis

This study measuring relationship between engagement in news consumption and civic responsibility used Pearson

correlation.

Result

Reliability Analysis

Reliability test has been conducted to examine the internal consistency of the data. Table 1 shows reliability coefficient of the study instruments. The dependent variable, civic responsibility with 9 items (Cronbach alpha 0.926). The independent variables news consumption with 2 items (Cronbach alpha 0.622).

Table 1: Reliability Coefficient of Study Instruments

Study Instruments	Number of items	Cronbach Alpha
Civic responsibility	9	0.926
News consumption	2	0.622

Correlation Analysis

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to measure the relationship between the independent variables and dependent variables. The objective of this test is to measure the strength and direction of the association. News consumption was correlated with civic responsibility ($r = 0.88$, $p < 0.030$). The correlation was significant at confidence level alpha 0.05. Independent variables had significant positive relationship with the dependent variable, civic responsibility. Direction of relationship was positive and strength was high. According to Guildford rule of thumb ($<.2 =$ negligible, $.2 =$ low, $.4 =$ moderate, $.7 =$ high, and $.9 =$ very high) (Cohen, 1988).

Table 2: Correlation analysis

Variables	Civic responsibility	
	r	p
News Consumption	0.88	.030

Discussion

The result indicates that students are regularly followed the news using regardless of medium (newspaper, radio, television and internet) and that news consumption through different platforms related to the respondent's civic responsibility in different ways. Furthermore, news consumption using new media plays a significant role in facilitating students in getting updated news as well as enhances civic responsibility. This study allowed us to see how university students keep abreast of news events and issues, and how their news consumption may be associated with the sense of civic responsibility.

Correlations were run to see how the variables are related (see Table 2). The result shows that a strong, positive correlation between news consumption and civic responsibility, which is statistically significant among final year undergraduate students. Students who are active in getting news from various types of media are more likely to be having stronger sense of civic responsibility. What we have found from this study is that university student is nevertheless significant for understanding important of consuming news using regardless of media.

News media is a more convenient medium for university students to access information. Further news media provide more diversified information, especially on civic matters. However, news media use function as not only a way fulfilling civic responsibility but also a channel to create

interpersonal discussion among public. News consuming encourage user to become informed about public matter, involved subsequently in citizen communication and finally engaged in civic activities (Rojas, Shah, Cho, & Schmierbach, 2005; Shah, D. V., McLeod, J. M., & Yoon, 2001; Zúñiga, Bachmann, & Brundidge, 2013) ^[17, 19, 21]. News media use enables vigilant citizens to conduct communicative activities in an effort to fulfil their citizenship; but even so, it functions only as a means for heavily news consumer to benefit from more diverse channels rather than civically engage in two-way communication.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can say that the internet and various media associated with it have greatly increased the capacity of university students in Malaysia to consume the news and participate in a greater variety of civic activities. Higher education transforms communities by providing students with information and competence from which they can play significant roles within societies. This can lead to a healthier community, more skillful graduates both in their disciplines and soft skills, and in the long run, a more successful nation.

This study confirmed the role of news media in shaping civic responsibility, as highlighted by Boulianne, (2015) ^[5]; Cho, Keum, & Shah, (2014) ^[6]; Hao *et al.*, (2014) ^[9]; and Livingstone & Markham, (2008) ^[14] in different countries.

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