SHIFTING VOLUNTEERISM FROM THE REALITY INTO THE DIGITAL WORLD: PERSPECTIVE FROM YOUNG MILLENNIALS

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ABSTRACT

Volunteerism means the practice of providing time and skills for the benefit of other people and causes rather than financial incentive. This noble action could unite people of different races, ages, religions, and localities or a common cause. This paper aims to explore the concept of digital volunteerism among young people in a higher learning institution through a qualitative design study. A total of six informants were interviewed. A convenience sampling method comes from people that are the easiest to reach or contact; while it provides a wealth of qualitative information (Gaille,2020). The interviews revealed that involvement in digital volunteerism by these young people were rooted in the practice among family members. Data were gathered through single session and analysed using thematic analysis based on the protocol interview, an instrument of inquiry—asking questions for specific information related to the aims of a study (Patton, 2015). Thus, in the present day, the actions of volunteerism have broadened to the digital platform. In short, based on the opinions of past researchers, the description of digital volunteerism in this study could be defined as those who are involved in digital world, either online or offline in order to create and disseminate information to the networks. Future studies could aim to extent the views of "digital volunteers" among digital volunteerism.

Keywords:
volunteerism, digital, technology, young people, humanity

INTRODUCTION

Interaction among people nowadays has been strongly influenced by modern technology. According to Tully (2003), the interconnection between technology and social interaction creates new form of human relations where tools and gadgets served as a part of communication. Furthermore, these tools were not only served as a platform of communication, but also acted as a source of information as well as entertainment. Apart from the presence of gadget, another aspect that could affecting human dependency to the technology was the level of sophistication of the device (Susilawati, 2019). Social media such as You Tube Video work as a tool for motivation, entertaining and engaging way of learning for the tertiary learners (Hasan & Ibrahim, 2017), particularly the young.

Young people with sophisticated gadget would likely spend more time on it. This is due to the speed of the gadgets internet and support from the gadgets to share information and as a search engine; social media gadget is easily accessible, portable, less costly (Hasan & Ibrahim, 2017) resulting to the likeliness of sharing personal information such as photo, news or story through media social among young people (Gniezdilova, 2021; Fauzi, 2018). For some researchers, the dependency on the internet and social media could be seen as an addiction that has negative impact on young generations (Ashraaf & Othman, 2019; Susilawati, 2019). Conversely, Bayanova et al. (2019) suggested that knowledge and information sharing among young people has been highlighted to bring positive outcomes. For these millennials, gadgets and internet are a part of their life, and using the tools to interact with either intact or broader networks, helps to stay connected with the people globally. This could also be a part of a new mechanism of interaction to keep them in the mainstream for a better chance of human interaction. The change of technology in our modern world is rapidly

growing and impacted not only our lifestyle but also the way humans interact. According to Adha, Budimansyah, Kartadinata, and Sundawa (2019), information is stored digitally and for that, there is a dependency on the internet connection. Nevertheless, reliance on the internet should not be seen as a challenge to healthy human interaction.

In a growing body of research, digital volunteerism has started to gain interest from prosocial researchers (Naqshbandi et al. 2020; Adha et al. 2019; Whittaker, McLennan & Handmer, 2015; Jaafar, Kamarudin & Zakaria, 2017). However, the definition of digital volunteerism is yet to be finalised. Numerous researchers coined the term based on the scope of studies. As mentioned by Adha et al. (2019) digital volunteerism refers to those who volunteer online, as well as offline activities via social media. This group of people provides information, as well as news to their networking. For Whittaker et al. (2015), digital volunteerism involves the usage of social media to create and disseminate information to other people, involving close and broader networks. In a recent study by Max (2021), he defined digital volunteerism as informal volunteers that resemble the same qualities of formal volunteers, in which they use their capacity and link in the digital world. In short, based on the opinions of past researchers, the description of digital volunteerism in this study could be defined as those who are involved in the digital world, either online or offline to create and disseminate information to the networks.

A study conducted by Seddighi et al. (2020) on exploring the challenges and opportunities faced by online volunteers stated that due to circumstances such as a pandemic, people are shifting from offline to online volunteerism. In the study, they conducted an open-ended interview with the management of Red Crescent and reported numerous motivation factors for online volunteerism. As an example, based on the management's point of view, an online platform could serve as an option to recruit more people to become volunteers. Furthermore, by this platform, less cost is needed for the recruitment and promotion of new volunteers. However, this study also highlighted the challenges faced by the management when volunteers display non-accountability with their tasks. In their discussion, Seddighi et al. (2020) suggested that online volunteers were much dependent on their internet access and as well as intrinsic motivation.

Other than looking from the managerial point of view on digital volunteerism, a study on crowdsourcing in this area was reported by Starbird (2011). The study done by Starbird (2011) emphasised the development of syntax to tweet using media social based on the incident of Haiti's earthquake. She strongly believed that crowdsourcing was a powerful tool to spread awareness and help among the public with the use of social media, in this case, it was Twitter. Other than relying on media social, Starbird (2011) highlighted the impetus to crowdsourcing any information also relied on an individual's motivation to help other people. Jaafar, Kamarudin, and Zakaria (2019) supported the statement that involvement in volunteerism promotes healthy and positive well-being. In other words, the action to spread help and awareness via media social depends on intrinsic values among internet users.

In the same vein, Pal (2018) also emphasized media social as a platform to build connection and social capital among internet users could lead to volunteerism, connectivity as well as prosocial motivations. Furthermore, Pal (2018) argued that culture served as an influence in motivating people to engage with the internet. In his arguments, he proposed that for collectivism culture, people are prone to engage in prosocial activities due to other people's recognition. On the other hand, as for people who are living in an individualistic culture, the drive towards prosocial behaviour is more on personal goals such as self-satisfaction and self-esteem. In sum, this research done by Pal (2018) underlined the importance of understanding a human culture that shapes individual prosocial behaviour in the context of media social.

The engagement of young people with internet and media social was discussed in a previous study (Uhls, Ellison & Subrahmanyam, 2017). The engagement in this platform could be channelled into a positive outcome, which is volunteerism. To date, most of the research done in the area of digital volunteerism highlighted on helping behaviour during natural disasters via the internet. However, at the same time, a previous study reported on the involvement of young people and media social. Therefore, to have more understanding about the involvement of young people in prosocial behaviour via social media, this study aims to explore the perspective of digital volunteerism among millennials.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in a private university in Selangor due to the availability of massive technology and hubs for gadgets in such area; 42 from 70 universities are located here. A total of six (6) informants participated in the study using convenience sampling; this method comes from people that are the easiest to reach or contact; their agreement to become part of the study while it provides a wealth of qualitative information (Gaille, 2020). The number of participants follows the suggestion made by Dworkin (2012) that for a qualitative basis research, the number of participant range from five to fifty as adequate. The informants matched the inclusion criteria designed for this study which are:(i) ages between 12 and 24 years old, (ii) they were familiar with social media, and (iii) they were using any platform of social media. In this study, the researcher follows the age range of young people as university students by National Centre for Educational Studies (2016), for degree level ranging from 18 to 24 years old. Specifically, the age of informants in this study are between 20 to 24. Two interview sessions were conducted separately, three persons in each group with the duration between 30-60 minutes. Topics covered in the interview were informants' experiences in online activities and their understanding of volunteerism. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Data were gathered through single session and analysed using thematic analysis based on the protocol interview, an instrument of inquiry—asking questions for specific information related to the aims of a study (Patton, 2015) as well as an instrument for conversation about a particular topic (i.e., university student's life or certain ideas and experiences). This thematic analysis provides a purely qualitative, detailed, and nuanced account of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes were developed based on previous literature. Explicitly, Creswell and Miller (2000) asserted that 'the qualitative paradigm assumes that reality is socially constructed and it is what participants perceive it to be'. This was reiterated by Smith (2018) who pointed out that 'often the qualitative researcher believes that reality is multiple and dependent on them' as well as that 'knowledge is constructed and subjective.'

RESULTS

In total, six informants were interviewed in this study. Three female and three male informants respectively were involved in the interviews. Their age ranged from 21 to 24 years old. Based on the interviews, the findings reported the informants' involvement in online activities, physical volunteerism, and their digital volunteerism.

i. Involvement with Internet and Media Social

For the informants, they admitted that they were involved in online activities based on their interest and the types of engagements were various. For example;

> *"I don't think it is only limited to social media, it is also involving yourselves in activities online like quizzes, sometimes we have activities like online quizzes or online question and answer sessions. For social media, yes I think I'm very frequently online. I message every hour; I scroll on IG every hour. So I think my involvement is quite high".* (INAM, female)

As for the other informant, INADE, she shares that she did not use the internet on a frequent basis to check on social media, but more playing online games;

> *"For me, Facebook and Instagram not every hour because sometimes quite busy with the assignments. So I don't have time to check. Most frequent use of the internet is maybe two or three days a week. [However], recently I played a game name 'Call Me Emperor' the game".* (INADE, female)

As for the male informants in our study, they also reported that they spent three to four hours a day doing online activities, as stated below;

> *"Mostly, I go to IG; but most of the time gaming and WhatsApp. Three to four hours in a day but I take breaks in between".* (INSA, male)

As for INDIV, he explained that he played online games for up to four hours per day. However, the activity could be expanded to more than that during the semester break or after examination;

> *"I spent 4 hours per day. If holidays I play more than 4 hours during the term break or after examination".* (INDIV, male)

In short, the informants demonstrated different activities involving internet usage.

ii. Physical Volunteerism among the Young People

Based on the interview, the informants share that they were also involved in physical volunteerism. The behaviour differs in terms of type as one of the informants shared that he also helped to do house chores;

> *"I help to feed cats to eat and also help around the house if my mother needs to do something".* (INDIV, male)

As for INAM, she admitted that she prepared herself to join an activity at the campus as one way of volunteering;

> *"Last semester I was asked to join the faculty representative council but I wasn't prepared. So this time when there was another chance I wasn't asked by anyone to join, but I was prepared for it and I volunteered to enter the election. So that's another kind of voluntarism for me".* (INAM, female)

Interestingly, one of the informants mentioned that he would make sure that the donation would be done by him or even his family members;

> *"I donate money. If I don't have it, I will ask dad to give the donation online".* (INKAV, male)

Other than viewing donation as a personal deed, informants in this study expanded their activities to a bigger network. For example;

> *"I went to church that provides help from house to house. Then, sometimes, when there's a prayer, I will help them to".* (INADE, female)

These findings suggested that the informants in this study displayed helping behaviour when with the family members. They also shared that they helped other people in different settings such as in the university, people in general, and church.

iii. Internet and the Digital Volunteerism

Derived from the interview, it shows that the informants in this study perceived themselves as doing their part as a volunteer in the digital setting. The activities varied based on their involvement in the digital world. For them, participating in online video games is also an example of volunteerism. As mentioned by INAM;

> "*When it's a group there's a group of four and sometimes you don't know who you are playing with you are just playing with three other people. So, you have to volunteer yourself to save the other person so sometimes in PUBG you have this thing when you play in a group".* (INAM, female)

In the same vein, INED also agreed that playing the online game could also serve as volunteering;

> *"Yeah. It's when people invite you to play, then you join. That is also volunteerism for me".* (INED, female)

However, not all informants in this study preferred online gaming as their activity in the digital world. For some, they were involved in online business such as INTAN and INDEV. For example, INDEV mentioned that;

> *"Yes, I help my friends to sell things online, help to find advertisements online for friends".* (INDEV, male)

Because the age of our informants falls under the category of young people, the influence of an artist or a band as one of their preferences could be seen in the interview. As reported by INADE;

> *"You read news on entertainment, then you could see the members of the band. You comment on that band".* (INADE, female)

From that, INAM also mentioned that when someone comments during an ongoing conversation in social media, it is also considered as involvement in volunteerism;

> *You're supporting the person's comment and I think it's voluntarism as well. Voluntarily supporting someone's comment".* (INAM, female)

On the other hand, the male informants connected their voluntary aspect in the digital world with sharing information from the internet to their friends, while doing the assignments. For example;

> *"I go online to search info for assignments, such as sharing the info with*
> *friends".* *(INKAV, male)*

For the informant, the sharing process in doing the assignment using digital technology was quick and effective;

> *I could use my knowledge in Electrical Engineering to share with others.*
> *It could be done online, especially using IG (Instagram) and Twitter as it*
> *is more effective and faster".* *(INSA, male)*

The informants demonstrated digital volunteerism in such an exclusive approach. They exhibited helping behaviour from the online game networks, digital advertisements up to their university classmates.

DISCUSSIONS

Young people in the modern world witness the impact of technology in their daily activities, ranging from personal needs to the mechanism of socialization with other people. In our study, these young people spent up to four hours a day engaging in online activities. However, this case is not exclusive as the informants in this study were university students. They used the internet to search for information as well as media social for sharing knowledge with other classmates while making assignments. Besides that, this activity is also using a virtual platform which allows the circulation of knowledge and information faster among the university community.

These kinds of activities played a significant role in promoting linkages among the virtual communities (Hussain, 2012; Karunagaran & Saimin, 2019). As for the 21st century learners, having a healthy relationship with other students could promote social and psychological support while in the learning process. In line with our findings where the informants reported using social media to discuss the assignment, Hussain, Cakir, and Candeger (2018) also reported that this platform has enhanced the learning experiences and promoted chances to collaborate as virtual teams. In other words, using the internet in doing the assignment is also reflecting mutual help among university students.

Other than looking at the social media as a learning tool, the informants also used this platform as a gaming activity that was closely related to digital volunteerism. The involvement in online games among young people has been documented in previous literature (Tham, Ellithorpe & Meshi, 2020; Wong et al. 2020). These studies highlighted both positive and negative effects of gaming. Isolation, lower level of communication skills in the real world, and depression are some of the negative effects due to the massive involvement in online gaming. Yet, as suggested by Cole and Griffiths, (2007), the online networks could also mimic interaction in the real-world, thus leading to friendship ties and social support among the users. In the same vein, a study done by Zhang and Kaufman (2017) reported that online gamers displayed the same level of trust as much as for their real-life friends. Hence, playing online games that requires cooperation between the players demonstrates positive values among the young millennials.

In this recent study, the informants revealed that they were involved in real-world volunteerism activities. The involvement took place at home with their other family members doing house chores. This finding suggested that young people do provide social support in helping their closest networks. Interestingly, an interview with one of the informants reported that if this person was not capable of giving money to the needy, support from other family members would be asked. This interaction displays a positive value and mutual understanding in helping behaviour among the young people and their families. One possible explanation that could describe the finding is the impact of role models among the family members. Parents that practice volunteerism and do charity could

transfer the value to the other family members (Sablina & Trusevich, 2019). Thus, the practice of doing good deeds to a broader network could strengthen the ties among family members.

As described by the informants, they also expend their helping behaviour to a wider network such as joining the university activities. This could be due to the fact that volunteering with a close network has enhanced the inner value to the other community. This finding contradicts from the study done by Normah and Lukman (2020) which reported that university students were reluctant to get involved in volunteerism activity in the community due to interpersonal barriers. However, Normah and Lukman (2020) supported the idea that the influence from the environment such as good examples from the parents could encourage the development of positive values among young people. In other words, the family could become the breeder of positive values among young people, thus leading to involvement in the real-world helping activity.

Based on the digital volunteerism perspective, this study found that informants perceived that they were involved in helping through online activities. Young people who were involved in online games reported that they felt cooperation between online players existed during their virtual interaction. Besides that, the interaction also resembles a form of social support among online gamers. The importance of social support among the online community has also been highlighted by Nick et al. (2018) in which he mentioned that this aspect covers emotional, social companionship, informational as well as instrumental support. Other than showing support among the online players, our study also revealed that young people perceived digital volunteerism also covers the act of commenting on the product advertised on the internet. They felt that their action was done on a voluntary basis and without rewards. Moreover, the group of participants involved in this study was young people who have been exposed to the internet in their daily activities.

This study demonstrated that from the informants' perspective as young people, their actions on helping behaviour existed in the real world and virtual platforms. They were reported to give aids to the other family members and in other settings such as the church. In addition, their helping nature extends to help other friends in providing materials for assignments via the internet search. However, it seems crucial to mention that the young people in this study exhibited volunteerism both in the real world and online. These findings demonstrated the importance of healthy role modelling by parents to their children in shaping good values of helping others. The process of strengthening good value could exist in the earlier phase of childhood (Oesterle, Johnson & Mortimer, 2004). Even though these informants were in their early stage of adulthood and as university students, they were still consistent in their physical volunteerism, as well as in online platforms. In short, this study suggested that volunteerism among young people could be a stable trait and exposure to the internet and media social may well strengthen this inner value to a wider community.

CONCLUSION

The involvement of young people in volunteerism in this study suggested that it is rooted in the family's influence. They were encouraged and supported in helping family members, thus led to the action to a wider community. This sense of helping others provides an essential value in helping other people via the internet and social media. They have not only developed trust in the real world but also time towards their online counterpart to promote understanding of good values among the new generation. Although we have been shifted to be more independent towards the gadget and technology, there are still good values in this scenario. Apart from being critical of the well-being and interaction skills among modern young people, this study highlighted that spending time with the media social could also lead to digital volunteerism. This study suggested that the emergence of volunteerism value among the young people is rooted in the family's influence, driven by the parents. Among implications of this study include parents as role models in shaping volunteerism among their family members. Establishing community programs that could promote 'helping behaviour' among

family members which could serve as a tangible platform to build trust and reciprocity among a wider community, as an example the neighbourhood area. In addition, this study also suggested that using more online platforms could create and reinforce digital volunteerism. This study showed that the digital volunteerism behaviour among young people was circulated among the networks, either through social media or online gaming. Therefore, having an established internet application could help to provide a digital volunteerism platform. Internet applications that could be downloaded on the smartphone could provide quick information about the needy such as the location, types of help, and the channel of helping aid. Despite the limitation in this study where the information is gathered from a single university, the result highlighted the involvement of volunteerism among the millennials. Also, it is worth mentioning that the data in this study cannot be generalised into the other setting of young people (i.e adolescent in general, school students or young employee). This is in line with the recommendation by Polit and Beck that a qualitative study is not to generalize but rather to provide a rich, contextualized understanding of some aspect of human experience. Therefore, for future research, it is recommended to explore in-depth the involvement of young people in different settings of digital volunteerism. Such research is vital to improve the understanding about digital volunteerism among young people as it could help to provide a guideline for volunteerism management in the future. In summary, the young generation demonstrates a unique way of volunteerism as it involves interaction not only with people in the real world but also via the digital world.

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