

E-Community through New Media: Influence on Non-Formal Education of Malaysian Youth

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Abstract

The advancement of information and communication technology (ICT) has driven the emergence of e-communities, which are virtual communities formed through the internet network to share information, interact, and collaborate. In the context of education, e-communities provide great opportunities for non-formal learning, especially among youth. This article discusses the aim of identifying the influence of e-communities on youth involvement in non-formal education among youth in Malaysia. This study was conducted as a survey using a questionnaire instrument involving 847 youth of various ethnicities, namely Malays, Chinese and Indians in Peninsular Malaysia. The samples were selected according to geographical zones (north, south, central and east) using stratified and simple random sampling. The data were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26 software to produce descriptive statistical analysis. The study findings showed that overall, the level of e-communities was at a high level, while the level of youth involvement in non-formal education was at a high level. The implications of this study show that the role of e-community has a significant influence on youth involvement in new media. Therefore, various programs in strengthening the role of e-community as a lifelong education platform and contributing towards the formation of a sustainable, progressive, and integrity-based society, in line with the values of Sustainability, Wellbeing, Creativity, Respect, Confidence, and Kindness which are the core of MADANI Malaysia.

Keywords: ecommunity, non-formal learning, Malaysian youth, digital literacy, educational technology

Introduction

The rapid development of information and communication technology (ICT) has changed the way individuals acquire knowledge and interact. In the context of education, the emergence of e-communities or virtual communities has opened up more flexible learning spaces, especially for non-formal learning. Non-formal learning refers to the educational process that takes place outside the formal school system but still has goals, structure, and organized content (UNESCO, 2012). In Malaysia, youth are increasingly actively using social media, online forums, and digital learning platforms as a medium for learning and self-development.

E-community is defined as a group of individuals who interact virtually to share information, experiences, and knowledge (Wellman & Gulia, 1999). This concept is in line with the definition put forward by Porterfield (2001), namely a virtual community or 'virtual' referring to a community in the millennium of information and communication technology (ICT), especially the internet. Popular forms of e-community among Malaysian youth include social media such as Facebook Group, Instagram, and TikTok for knowledge sharing and applications such as Telegram and WhatsApp Group used for closed discussions. Apart from that, learning

platforms and interactive platforms are also widely used by internet users as a form of communication, sharing and in gaining knowledge such as Coursera, OpenLearning, FutureLearn and others.

The need for social media in learning whether in formal or non-formal form is no stranger among young people. Internet access at the fingertips makes young people fast and quick to obtain information, Al-Sabaawi, and Dahlan's study (2019) shows that social media as an informal learning medium allows users to access information and share knowledge freely. Meanwhile, Afendi, Haslinda and Mohamed Amin's (2019) study found that platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and academic forums are actively used to build communities of practice. Students utilize this space for the purpose of collaborating on assignments, sharing notes, and discussing academic topics informally. This phenomenon shows the role of e-communities as a catalyst for more flexible collaborative learning, outside of formal learning structures. This study is supported by Khair et al (2025), showing that Gen Z students in Malaysia use social media such as YouTube, WhatsApp, and TikTok to gain practical knowledge, strengthen skills, and build a learning support network.

However, there are several major obstacles such as issues of information source reliability, distraction from entertainment content, and digital literacy constraints (Al-Sabaawi, and Dahlan, 2019). These obstacles are in line with the general challenges of e-communities, namely the need to balance broad access to information with the ability to assess the authenticity of content. This study was emphasized by UNESCO (2018) that the explosion of information in the digital era brings with it the challenge of accurate information filtering. In the context of e-communities, this risk is higher because content on social media and virtual forums can be uploaded by anyone without a verification process. In addition, the study by Wan Hashridz Rizalet. al. (2025) in using the Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) showed that the spread of fake news among Malaysian university students reveals how personal motivations influence the spread of misinformation. The study highlights the link between individual motivations and the spread of fake news by understanding the reasons for students' media use. It shows that students are often exposed to fake news or inaccurate academic information, which ultimately affects the quality of non-formal learning. High digital literacy is required so that users can assess the validity of sources, apply fact-checking methods, and distinguish between opinions and facts. Other studies have also shown that there is a decline in academic performance because the brain has difficulty processing complex information simultaneously if they do digital multitasking, i.e. reviewing while watching videos (Junco, 2012). Therefore, this study looks at the influence of e-communities as a non-formal learning medium depending on the youth in using new media.

Objective

This study aims to identify the role of parental encouragement on youth involvement in social activities in Malaysia. Specifically, the objectives of this study are to:

1. Identify the level of ecommunity encouragement on youth.
2. Identify the level of Nonformal Education for New Media Aspects Among Youth in Malaysia

Literature Review

New millennium education demands a dynamic, flexible learning system that is in line with the development of information technology. In this context, virtual communities emerge as important platforms that connect students, educators, and the general public without being

limited by space and time. According to Wenger (1998), a virtual learning community is a social space where members share knowledge, experience, and practices to achieve common goals. Thus, the existence of virtual communities in education brings various significant benefits.

Among the interests of virtual communities in educational activities is facilitating the discussion process in conducting learning activities between youth. With the help of technology today, learning in the form of virtual communication such as online conferencing and others helps youth in attending classes, doing exercises and discussing with other community members. For example, there are studies that have found that through social media such as Facebook has proven to be an easy, fast and effective learning tool, especially for informal learning (Madge et. al, 2019). This is because this application offers file sharing, has video messengers and discussions in chat rooms that make it easier for youth to interact with other friends in discussing scientific and academic activities. This study has explained that the online community learning environment includes an active interaction involving course content and personal communication, collaborative learning is evidenced by comments directed primarily by youth to other youth and not by youth to lecturers only, socially constructed meaning is evidenced by consensus or question and answer with the aim of reaching agreement on issues of meaning and sharing of resources among youth as well as expressions of support and encouragement exchanged between youth, and a willingness to critically evaluate one's work (Charalambos, Mechalinis, & Chamberlain, 2004). Through the internet, youth can also follow virtual classes, discussion forums, and massively open online courses (MOOCs) that allow them to learn according to their own needs. This situation overcomes geographical barriers and time constraints, thus supporting the aspiration of lifelong learning (Siemens, 2005).

In this regard, the youth community is also able to improve computer literacy. According to Johari Hassan & Raja Shahrina (2012) stated that from the perspective of youth, the use of social sites through chat rooms, information sharing and so on helps to make them proficient in using computers. Skills in MsWord, Power Point, making videos and other applications can be improved if exposure to the use of technology is introduced at the youth level earlier. Skills in using technology applications, interactive software, and educational platforms are important aspects in forming competitive human capital in the digital era (Selwyn, 2016). Mastering digital literacy also helps students assess the validity of information, thus preventing them from being exposed to the distortion of false information. This is because computer literacy is an important foundation in skills for the future of youth.

In addition, the importance of virtual communities is that in an individual who learns, he can not only increase his knowledge but also impact the community around him. In the study of Tu and Corry (2002) described online community learning as when participants or youth learn together horizontally as opposed to the vertical meaning that not only community members learn, but the community itself also learns. This learning process will continue to occur if maintained when community members actively share the knowledge they have. This study is also supported by Greenhow, Robelia, & Hughes (2009) where E-communities form a stronger social support network and increase the ability of families to face the challenges of new millennium education. For example, parents can share experiences in educating children, access family learning materials, or attend online parenting workshops. For youth, e-communities of learning become an important platform in forming self-identity, strengthening social networks, and providing a space to exchange views and experiences. Interaction in virtual communities allows youth to connect with peers from various backgrounds, thus enriching their perspectives on educational, social, and economic issues. This is in line with

the views of Moon et al. (2024) show that the elements of diversity, openness, connectedness, and autonomy in connectivism theory can be maximized through virtual group work. Peer influence here drives a more complex and meaningful process of shared knowledge construction. Therefore, ecommunities not only influence parents, peers, but also those around the individual.

In addition, through the support of virtual communities, it is not only possible to develop the voice or opinion of youth but also to apply various roles and responsibilities to youth. The World Assembly of Youth (2015) through the report “Youth Participation in Decision Making” found that youth participation leads to better decisions and outcomes. This study was also stated by O'Toole, Lister, Marsh, Jones, & McDonagh in 2003 who found that youth who participate are more likely to choose, get involved with their community and make concrete contributions to society in the form of politics, society and economy. The decision-making process by authorities can be achieved when there is participation of individuals, legal bodies and certain groups with the availability of information and communication technology facilities (Steffen Albrecht, 2008). Therefore, the role of youth who give opinions, speak out on certain issues and are responsible for a community planning is very important through virtual community platforms.

Apart from that, active participation in such communities not only allows an individual to share expertise, write articles, or contribute to industry discussions, but also increases credibility and marketability in the job market. The study by Prihatini et al. (2022) found that academics in Indonesia use Google Scholar and ResearchGate as a medium to build their digital presence. This study shows that being active in academic communities increases visibility, thus strengthening one's credibility in their respective fields. Other studies such as Herrero et al. (2025) emphasize that involvement in open communities of practice and the open dissemination of academic work allows members to expand their networks and build a reputation at the global level. This shows that e-communities are not just communication channels, but also function as ecosystems that support career development through collaboration, idea sharing, and access to a wider audience. In increasing the marketability of graduates, it is proven that active use of LinkedIn, including the production of quality content, can increase the competitiveness of graduates in the job market (Hidayah et al. 2025). This proves that personal branding strategies in e-communities can be directly translated into job opportunities. In fact, Hernanda's study (2025) also emphasizes that personal branding combined with social capital has a significant impact on employability, because social networks in digital communities open access to new career opportunities. Finally, e-communities are also an important channel for proving competence through digital signals. A study by Athey and Palikot (2024) showed that students who shared MOOC course certificates on LinkedIn experienced a significant increase in job opportunities, especially in related fields. This proves that e-communities not only serve as a space for social interaction, but also a formal recognition platform that can add value to one's career profile.

Research Methods

This study used a quantitative survey design to examine the influence of parental encouragement on youth involvement in social activities. The survey method was chosen because it allows for efficient data collection from a large and diverse sample and allows for measurement of variables using standardized instruments. The study population consisted of Malaysian youth representing the three main ethnic groups, namely Malays, Chinese and Indians residing in Peninsular Malaysia. A total of 847 respondents were selected through

stratified and simple random sampling methods. Sampling was conducted according to the main geographical zones, namely the northern zone, southern zone, central zone and eastern zone, and stratification based on ethnicity and location to ensure a balanced distribution and represent the population as a whole. The study instrument was a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher and adapted from existing instruments that have been validated related to ecommunity support and Nonformal Education for New Media Aspects. The questionnaire contained three main sections, namely demographic information, ecommunity encouragement scale, and Nonformal Education for New Media Aspects scale. Respondents were asked to provide feedback using a five-level Likert scale, from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" on the ecommunity encouragement scale. While the scale of Nonformal Education for New Media Aspects is from "very rarely" to "very often". The data collected was analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. Descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation were used to determine the level of ecommunity encouragement the level of Nonformal Education for New Media Aspects. This analysis provides a general picture of the patterns and tendencies among the respondents studied.

Study Finding

Level of Ecommunity Encouragement

The aspect of ecommunity encouragement in the context of this study was measured based on 6 items. The results of data analysis on ecommunity encouragement are as shown in Table 1. Overall, the level of ecommunity encouragement (Mean = 4.36; S.P = 0.75) was at a high level. Analysis of each item in this aspect showed that the item with the highest mean was the item "Providing various platform facilities in honing soft skills" (Mean = 4.43; S.P = 0.80) and was at a high level. While the item with the lowest mean was the item "Helped me a lot in creating social networks inside and outside the country" (Mean = 4.26; S.P = 1.00) and was at a high level.

Table 1: Level of Ecommunity Encouragement

No.	Item	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
1	Frequently discuss online to get new input in the career.	4.30	0.85	High
2	Frequently exchange the latest information on careers.	4.31	0.89	High
3	Always give a positive response in new media about pure values.	4.39	0.82	High
4	Always give likes and share information in new media to spread.	4.35	0.87	High
5	Providing a variety of platform facilities to hone soft skills.	4.43	0.80	High
6	Helped me a lot in creating a social network in and outside the country.	4.26	1.00	High
	Overall Ecommunity	4.36	0.75	High

Level of New Media Aspects

The new media aspect in the context of this study was measured based on 6 items. The results of the data analysis on new media are as shown in Table 2. It was found that overall, the level of new media activity (Mean = 4.14; S.P = 0.90) was at a high level. Analysis of each item in this aspect showed that the item with the highest mean was the item "Always exploring new

technologies to improve soft skills” (Mean = 4.27; S.P = 0.97) and was at a high level. While the item with the lowest mean was the item “Surfing Youtube to find new information to generate income” (Mean = 3.86; S.P = 1.23) and was at a medium-high level.

Table 2: Level Of New Media Aspects

No.	Item	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
1	Browse Youtube to find new information on generating income.	3.86	1.23	Sederhana Tinggi
2	Interacting in new media to improve career networking.	4.08	1.10	High
3	Interact positively using new media with friends from other ethnicities.	4.16	1.04	High
4	Following non-formal learning to improve knowledge.	4.20	0.98	High
5	Refer to various websites to gain various skills in life.	4.24	1.01	High
6	Constantly exploring new technologies to improve soft skills.	4.27	0.97	High
Overall New Media Aspects		4.14	0.90	High

Conclusion And Implications

The findings of the study show that new media plays an important role in career development, non-formal learning, the formation of moral values, and the improvement of soft skills among youth. In career development, it was found that respondents often discuss online to obtain new input and exchange the latest information on job opportunities. This interaction is seen to help them strengthen social networks, both domestically and internationally. New media also provides respondents with space to interact positively with friends from various ethnicities, thus expanding cross-cultural career networks. This finding is in line with the views of Wellman (2001) who emphasized that virtual networks are able to connect individuals regardless of geographical boundaries or cultural differences. This is further strengthened by a study by Yusuf (2022) who found that the use of social media in the work environment strengthens network ties, shared vision, and trust, which then contributes to increased engagement and professional innovation performance. Furthermore, research in 2025 showed that online social capital helps drive innovative performance among the public sector in Malaysia through increased work engagement (Wider et al, 2025).

New media is also used as a medium to spread moral values. Respondents showed a tendency to respond positively to moral content and frequently share information that is beneficial to the community. This practice of liking and sharing positive messages proves that new media can form a culture of social support and function as a platform to indirectly educate the community. This is in line with the study by Al-Kandari and Al-Qattan (2023) which found that social media plays a major role in promoting cultural values and identity among youth, thus proving the great potential of new media in forming a positive culture of social support. Other studies show that messages framed with moral principles such as caring or justice are able to encourage social media users to share the message, thus proving the great potential of new media in forming a positive culture of social support (Yang et al, 2024).

Furthermore, new media also encouraged respondents to engage in non-formal learning in an effort to improve their knowledge. Respondents actively referred to various websites to acquire life skills, in addition to taking online courses or webinars. This reflects a culture of lifelong learning, where youth do not only rely on formal education alone, but also take their own initiatives to enrich their knowledge and new skills. This finding is in line with research results showing that student engagement in non-formal online learning has a positive impact on learning outcomes, through behavioral, cognitive, and emotional commitment (Wang et al, 2022). In addition, a study in Malaysia found that TVET students use platforms such as YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram to strengthen their skills, communication, and teaching content (Mazni et al, 2023).

The study found that social media forms a global interaction space that supports the development of critical skills such as communication, critical thinking, and intercultural sensitivity, especially among youth (Harahap, Hasanah & Hartati, 2023). Meanwhile, other surveys show that soft skills including communication, leadership, collaboration and technological adaptation are essential requirements in facing the challenges of the digital workforce (Marliani et al., 2024).

In conclusion, building a virtual learning community requires rules, roles, rounds and rituals (Bryce-Davis, 2001). Rules must be transparent and in accordance with community protocols. Roles determine the activities carried out in the learning community and set expectations for participation. Rounds are the repetition of activities and rituals that become routine in the community. Once a learning community is formed, the way of communication and the context of the community must be monitored to ensure the continuity of the community (Renninger & Shumar, 2002). Therefore, the importance of virtual community support in educational activities is to facilitate discussion, increase computer literacy, youth learning influences the virtual community and develop the voice and opinion of youth. However, virtual community support is not only a form of encouragement between community members but also involves the functionality of the virtual community itself. Virtual communities play a role in obtaining sources of knowledge, skills, training as well as attitudes and values that are fostered within the community. Therefore, the importance of virtual communities influences the participation and involvement of youth, whether active or otherwise.

Overall, this analysis shows that new media is not just a communication medium, but has developed into a holistic development space that includes career enhancement, the empowerment of noble values, the expansion of knowledge through non-formal learning, and the strengthening of soft skills. In other words, new media has the potential to be an important instrument in building balanced human capital in terms of intellectual, social, and professional.

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