

Chapter 13

Exploring Online Social Networking Patterns and the Growth of Social Capital Among Rural Maritime Community Members

Marhaini Mohd Noor

Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, Malaysia

Nor Aziah Alias

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6405-1400>
Universiti Technology MARA, Malaysia

Azizan Zainuddin

Universiti Technology MARA, Malaysia

Nor Hafizah Mohamed Harith

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7503-8770>
Universiti Technology MARA, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

This research investigates the creation of social capital among members of the online community. In this case, social networking refers to interpersonal connections among members of a rural maritime community. The major goal of this study is to determine how much the maritime community uses social online networking and how social capital grows within the community via the internet. The study applied a triangulation method to analyze data from participants with several points of view and to engage people appropriately for a better understanding of the phenomenon. Main findings extracted from the interviews have been categorized into three themes: (1) patterns of online social networking and social media use, (2) social networking and trust, and (3) social capital development. Hence, it is apparent that online networking can be used to reduce the social capital divide between urban and rural communities in Malaysia.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-8953-6.ch013

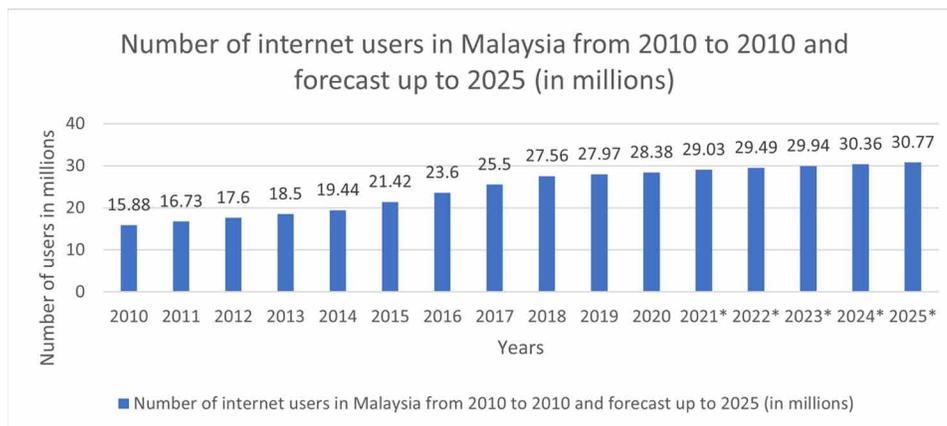
INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of social networks as a result of the rapid development of technology is inevitable; social networking is widely used at every level by various groups. There is no doubt that social networking is a global phenomenon that moves dynamically in line with its progress and the society’s needs around it. It affects every aspect of the users’ lives in terms of education, communication, social relationship, and personal productivity (Matthew, Adedamola & Sarhan, 2019). Social networking application is used as one of the channels to reach various sources of information through digital networks around the world. It is also a platform used to build an online community and the individuals who use it can share information, interests, and activities across political, economic, and geographical borders. This study is particularly significant, given that more rural maritime community users are increasingly communicating actively on the Internet wherever they may be.

In the Malaysian context, the number of internet users in 2018 was reported to be at almost 79% of the Malaysian population (Ili, 2018)., 75% of the population were using social media services and spent an average of three hours a day on social media sites then. The 2018 Digital Report showed that Malaysia ranked 9th among the most active countries in the world on social media sites. Two years on, the press reports were boasting, a shocking increase of 28 million users or 86% of the population using social media sites in 2020 as a result of the Covid-19 outbreak which limited the community movement to remain at home during the Movement Control Order (MCO) period (BH Online, 2021). Most urban and rural communities use the internet to obtain information about a product or service, download digital media, software, applications or send and receive emails as well as make phone calls. The applications in this platform have somehow become more apt, dynamic and unique to user needs and thus, can attract social network users to use it rigorously.

Like other technologies, social networking applications also have different effects on their users. The challenges, as well as the positive and negative effects of the use of these technologies, have had various consequences. Nevertheless, the question which arises is *to what extent the community utilizes the existing social networks and how do they view the use of these social networks towards social capital development.*

Figure 1. Number of internet users in Malaysia from 2010 to 2020 and forecast up to 2025 (in millions)
Source: Statista Digital Market Outlook @ Statista 2022



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