Engaging Youth in Change: Examining Differences in Youth Social Media Engagement with Malaysian NGOs

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Research Question

How does Nongovernmental Organization social media engagement with Malaysian youth differ by gender?

Literature

•Supporting democracy building efforts in Southeast Asia is a matter of US national security. In recent years the US has partnered with foreign NGOs to work toward these security goals.

•By partnering with NGOs the US can take advantage of a pre-established presence in a foreign country and expertise while avoiding duplication of efforts.

•NGOs can contribute to democracy building efforts by encouraging youth civic engagement and providing outlets for youth to learn democracy. Youth engagement in democracy building improves personal, relational, and collective wellbeing and positively impacts both youth and community development. (Evans and Prilleltensky, 2007)

•Within the Southeast Asia region, the governments in Malaysia and Singapore place fewer limits on digital media than on traditional media outlets, making internet outlets the preferred outlet for social mobilization and activism (Weiss, 2014).

•Social media plays an important role in youth involvement in democratization as it can both provide the motivation for involvement encouraged by a social network, as well as show clear pathways to involvement (Yohalem and Martin, 2007).

•Malaysia in particular has a flourishing NGO sector, evidence of NGO use of social media to influence social change, and a government which has committed resources to hinder the growth of extremist sentiment in youth.

•There are gaps in research regarding youth engagement with different types of social change and engagement, as well as in factors that influence involvement. This research works to fill this gap by assessing engagement with different types of organizations and the factor gender plays in engagement.

•By further understanding how different segments of youth in developing countries engage with NGOs on social media, governments and NGOs can better involve youth in democracy building.

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Malaysian NGO Social Media Engagement by Gender

Bar chart — Y-axis: Females per Males; X-axis: Organization Type

- Economic Opportunities n=11: 0.85
- Educational Opportunities n=11: 1.28
- Religious n=9: 0.734
- Tolerance and Diversity n=12: 1.694
- Volunteering Opportunites n=12: 1.521

Research Methodology

•Malaysian NGOs (n=55) were selected based on social media following (at least three thousand Facebook likes), and engagement in democracy building activities.

•NGOs were grouped based on youth opportunities: economic, educational, religious, tolerance and diversity, and volunteering.

•The number of males and females between the ages of 17-40, living in Malaysia, who engaged with each NGO was determined using Facebook's advertising analytics (Kalampokis, Tambouris, & Tarabanis, 2013).

•This method works well due to the relatively high internet penetration, as well as high Facebook usage in Malaysia, particularly among youth.

•Because organizations may be more effective in mediums beyond social media, this method is limited in that it does not accurately measure overall NGO engagement with youth.

•This method is further limited because it does not adequately reflect all economic classes and geographic areas, with the represented population skewing younger and more urban.

Key Findings

•Overall, females between the ages of 17-40 engaged more with NGO social media than males, with an overall average of 1.25 females for every 1 male.

•Results differed between subgroups, with females more likely to engage with NGOs involved in educational opportunities, tolerance and diversity, and volunteering opportunities and males more likely to engage with organizations involving economic opportunities and religion.

Implications for Research and Practice

•This research allows funders to target organizations based on engagement with target youth populations, and gives NGOs insight into how to engage certain youth segments.

•Further research should work toward understanding the underlying reasons and implications of differences in gender engagement with subsets of NGOs, differences between ethnic, religious, and socio-economic groups, as well as differences between countries and regions.
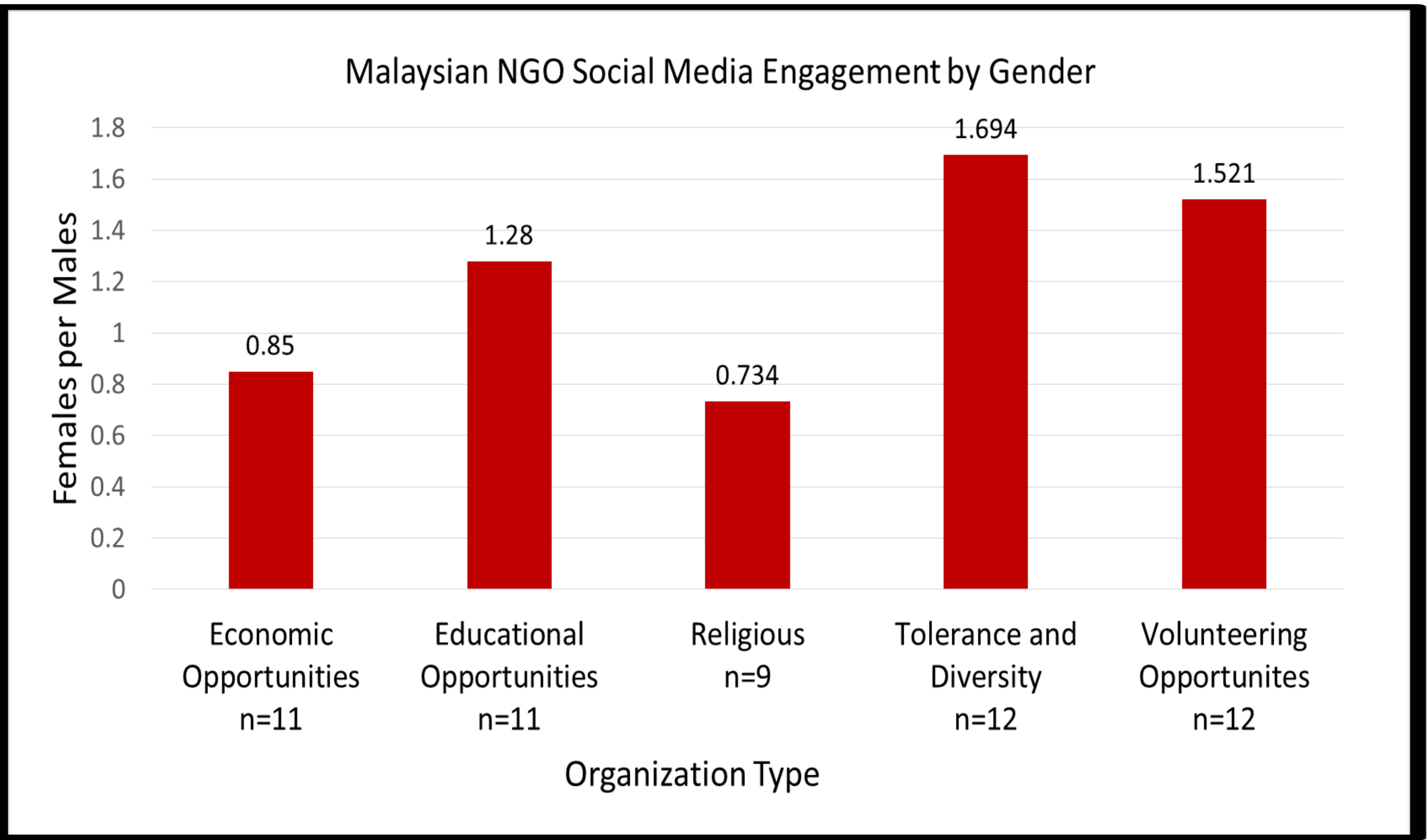
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