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# ONLINE INFORMATION CREDIBILITY AMONG TEENAGERS IN MALAYSIA

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## ABSTRACT

Information plays a significant role in delivering society's input, ideas, and opinions. However, the rise of fake information has led towards misinformation in society. Current global issues regarding the COVID-19 outbreak include various kinds of fake news and inaccurate information that have been spread widely. Therefore, this study would like to explore the evaluation criterion of online information by assessing the youth information behaviour toward the credibility of online information among teenagers in Malaysia. The Radical Change Theory has been adopted in the development of a conceptual framework in the process of identifying the variable's relationship with online information credibility among teenagers. A quantitative approach was selected to assess the credibility of online information among teenagers. The findings show a positive relationship between youth information behaviour that consists of three principles: interactivity, connectivity and access and online information credibility, which contains accuracy, authority, objectivity, currency, and coverage. Individuals with high information credibility will carefully choose and select the information content on the website. Through the findings, the teenager is aware of the significance of choosing the right information; however, the teenager should be extra cautious about fake news, which makes it difficult to know the right and wrong information. The possible collaboration with the Ministry of Education in achieving the quality of education by enhancing the understanding of teenagers in evaluating online information in the future is in line with the Strategic Plan 2024-2030, Ministry of Education for the Strategic Pillar No 1 (Increase Access and Quality of Education)

**Keywords:** Information science, Information Credibility, Teenager, Interactivity, Connectivity, Accessibility

## INTRODUCTION

Generation Z and Generation Alpha are the teenage categories that will commonly and easily be manipulated by online information in the media. Social networking sites such as Facebook, X (previously known as Twitter), Instagram and TikTok are the platforms commonly used by this generation to create, share and delete online information. This has been supported by Hussin, Azli, and Samsudin (2019), who state that users use social networking sites (SNS) to share their ideas, personal messages, information, and other content, such as pictures and videos. However, this generation does not hesitate to use the information without confirming the sources of the information. Teenagers' awareness of assessing the credibility of information is low. This has been supported by a Stanford researcher who found out that students have trouble judging the credibility of information (Donald, 2016). Without confirmation from reliable sources, teenagers think the information they disseminate is right. According to Anderson (2017), teenagers are tech-savvy compared to their parents. However, when it comes to identifying fake news, they seem as confused as other generations. The same research has also been conducted, and the findings show that 31% of kids 10 to 18 years old have shared online information and later found out that the information is fake or inaccurate (Figueiraa & Oliveira, 2017). Other research by Sharma, Kaushal, and Joshi (2023) mentions that social media users cannot filter trustworthy information due to the enormous size of information; thus, the role of information support from the government is significant. Teenagers are much more curious than adults and want more attention on social media when they spread such kind of information.

These generations should possess the skill of searching for or seeking online information on whatever platform exists in digital media. According to Mohd Razilan Abdul Kadir, Nurul Iylia Sabeela Johari and Norhayati Hussin (2018), teenagers should develop skills in information management and usage of information tools as well as databases that will lead them to search for information accurately related to their study. These issues and problems lead teenagers or youth to create, use and disseminate

wrong information. Therefore, this study would identify and explore the evaluation criterion for online information by assessing the youth information behaviour toward the credibility of online information among teenagers in Malaysia. It is significantly important to educate this generation in evaluating the right information. This has been supported by Hassan et al. (2020), who state that the government agency gives full support in educating society to become information literate through Media and Information Literacy Programs that have been implemented by library institutions nationwide. One of the initiatives that the Malaysian government has introduced is the In4Skill program for rural communities. This kind of program should be expanded to include Sabah and Sarawak so that Malaysia can shape the information society in 2030.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***Teenagers***

According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2024), teenagers refer to individuals who are between 13 and 19 years old. During the teenage years, the behaviour and personality of this group are usually energetic, curious, and adventurous. Teenagers curious will seek more information, especially on the internet or social media. However, teenagers have also been exposed to fake information and misinformation, making them gather the wrong information online. Rodríguez-Hidalgo et al. (2023) state that teenagers have mastered Information, Communication and Telecommunication (ICT). However, they need skill and media literacy training to use the information and avoid fake news effectively. Teenagers usually do not hesitate to use the information without confirming the sources of the information. The awareness of teenagers in assessing the credibility of information is low. According to Schroeder (2021), imposter URLs and syndicated news will confuse the students in misevaluating the credibility of online news. Without confirmation from reliable sources, teenagers think the information they disseminate is correct. According to Anderson (2017), teenagers are tech-savvy compared to their parents; however, when it comes to identifying fake news, they seem as confused as other generations. This has also been mentioned by Dumitru (2020), who states that most teenagers cannot distinguish between fake and trusted information within online environments. Teenagers should develop skills in information management and using information tools as well as databases that will lead them to search for information that is related to their study. The skill and knowledge on assessing the credibility of information among teenagers should increase by providing training focused on evaluating the credibility of information.

### ***Credibility***

Credibility is generally defined as the believability of information. People judge credibility based on many different constructs, such as accuracy, objectivity, timeliness, and reliability, and rely on cues such as source credibility, social prominence, and domain knowledge. Besides that, credible information is called believable information (Fogg et al., 2001; Tseng & Fogg, 1999), and it is a person's perception of the truth of a piece of information (Eisend, 2006). Self (1996) also stated that this concept was based on Aristotle's argument that persuasion was based on fitting the message to the audience's needs in the linear model of speaker-message-audience. In sum, different researchers employed different definitions of credibility. This definition helps to demonstrate that credibility is a complex, interdependent, and multidimensional concept (Burgoon et al., 1981).

### ***Evaluation Criterion on Online Information Credibility***

Previous literature identifies five criteria that users should employ in their assessments of Internet-based information: accuracy, authority, objectivity, currency, and coverage or scope (see Brandt, 1996; Smith, 1997; Alexander & Tate, 1999; Scholz-Crane, 1998; Fritch & Cromwell, 2001; Meola, 2004). Accuracy refers to the degree to which a Web site is free from errors, whether the information can be verified offline, and the reliability of the information on the site. The website's authority may be assessed by noting who authored the site, whether contact information is provided for that person or organization, the author's credentials, qualifications, and affiliations, and whether a trusted source recommends the Website. Objectivity involves identifying the site's purpose and whether the information provided is fact or opinion. Currency refers to whether the information is up to date. Coverage refers to the comprehensiveness or depth of the information provided on the site. These

recommendations require a range of activities on the part of users, from simple visual inspection of a Web site to more laborious information verification and triangulation efforts.

### ***Radical Change Theory***

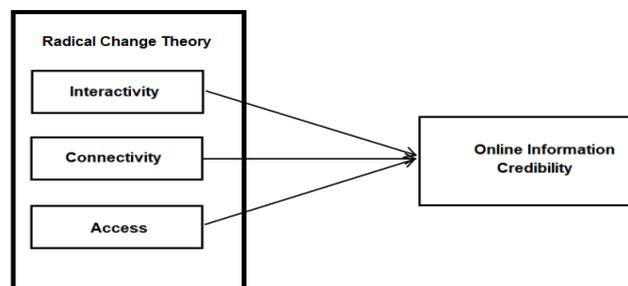
The theory of Radical Change proposes that three digital age principles—Interactivity, Connectivity, and Access—explain changes in youth information resources and behaviors in the digital age (Dresang, 2005). A typology with three types of changes, each with indicators, operationalizes the theory for the identification/ explanation of changes in information resources. The theory, however, has been applied to the information behaviour of youth without such a typology. Therefore, the proposed study seeks to further develop the theory by establishing a typology (or model) and accompanying variables that address young people’s (a) cognitive status, (b) identify/value negotiation and information creation, and (c) social interaction during their interaction with information (Koh, 2010). The Radical Change theory with a new model from the proposed study will help understand youth information-related activities and their interrelationships, not just studies of individual tasks or search sessions isolated from the context.

### ***Online Information Credibility***

The credibility of online information should be examined so that the teenager will never disseminate and share the wrong information. Previous studies have examined the credibility of information based on the criteria that have been mentioned (i.e., accuracy, authority, objectivity, currency, and coverage) to gauge the credibility of the information they find online. Respondents were asked to indicate how often they performed nine behaviors (consisting of how often they ch) and see if the information is up-to-date (currency), consider whether the views represented on a site are facts or opinions (objectivity), consider the author’s goals/objectives for posting the information (objectivity), check to see that the information is complete and comprehensive (coverage), seek out other sources to validate the information on a site (accuracy), check to see who the author of the web site is (authority), verify the author’s qualifications or credentials (authority), check to see whether the contact information for the author or organization is provided on the site (authority), and look for an official “stamp of approval” or a recommendation from someone they know (authority). The findings from a previous study by Metzger and Flanagin show the user's information behaviour in identifying the credibility of online information. This study will adopt that component to examine the evaluation criterion in assessing credible online information.

### ***Proposed Conceptual Model***

In this study, the proposed model has been constructed based on the Radical Change Theory by Dresang and Koh (2009) and the criteria of online information credibility. Radical Change Theory explains changes in information resources and human information behavior towards the current digital age. There are three dimensions to Radical Change Theory: interactivity, connectivity and access. The criteria of online information credibility include authority, accuracy, currency, objectivity, and coverage.



**Figure 1: Figure Header**

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The methodology used in the work project must be clearly stated and described in sufficient detail or with sufficient references. The quantitative research approach has been selected to explore the credibility of online information by identifying the evaluation criteria for online information as well as

evaluating existing guidelines of information behaviour toward credibility assessment among teenagers in Malaysia. The quantitative research approach deals with numerical data that could be converted into numbers (Sheard, 2018). In this research, the respondents are youths in Puncak Alam and Puncak Perdana. More than 400 questionnaires have been distributed online among teenagers in this area. However, only 265 questionnaires have been returned. An online survey was used to collect data. The questionnaire was divided into five sections: demographic, online information credibility, interactivity, connectivity, and access.

The data analysis of the quantitative study used Statistical Packages of Social Science (SPSS) version 25. It is used to create, clean, and analyze the data set. The analysis of the study is divided into two stages. Descriptive statistics is used to compare the mean within the variable, while inferential statistics is shown to test the reliability and validity of the instrument. An independent sample T-Test was also conducted to determine whether there was a significant difference between the Mean of the two groups. While assessing the relationship, the researcher conducted the Pearson Correlation Coefficient test to identify positive and negative within the variables.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Through this study, there is a positive relationship between youth information behaviour that consists of three principles: interactivity, connectivity and access and online information credibility that contains accuracy, authority, objectivity, currency, and coverage. Individuals with high information credibility will carefully choose and select the information content on the website. The finding shows that the interactivity of the sources influences the credibility of online information on the website. This has been supported by Kim (2012), who states that interactivity can be important in studying online source credibility. Interactivity is a unique aspect of credibility study. A different study found that the interactivity of the application is also a predictor of credibility in social media (Johnson & Kaye, 2016). So, this study shows that the interactivity sources of information influence the credibility of online information sources. Even though the study has different scenarios, it proves that the interactivity of either system or application has influenced the credibility of the information towards human behavior.

Connectivity also influences teenagers' behavior in searching for credible information. The findings show that low internet connectivity will disrupt teenagers in searching for credible online information to complete their tasks. The connectivity of the internet influences teenagers to search for credible information. A good internet infrastructure can assist teenagers in getting the correct information. Based on Internet Society (2017), no strategy for the Internet for education can succeed without adequate infrastructure and access to resources. It is good enough to access credible online information as long they have a good internet connection, either via WIFI, 3G, or 4G (Britland, 2013). So, connectivity is necessary to provide teenagers with credible, authentic and reliable online information.

Access to online information is essential to credible online information among teenagers. Based on UNICEF (2017), providing all children, especially teenagers, affordable access to high-quality resources is necessary. Chhachhar et al. (2014) state that the availability of the Internet and its access in schools, colleges, universities, and even houses also created various problems related to teenagers nowadays being close to the Internet. Donald (2016) states that based on a study by Stanford University reported that the challenge of accessing online resources is people's difficulty accessing authentic online information. This study has assessed teenagers in urban areas, so the findings show that teenagers do not have significant difficulties in this matter. However, further study should be conducted on access to credible online information in rural communities. The result may differ because some rural areas do not have good internet infrastructure.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, this study has examined the evaluation criterion of online information by assessing the youth information behavior toward the credibility of online information among teenagers in Malaysia. The findings show that all youth information behaviour has a positive relationship with the credibility of online information. This is a teenager's positive behaviour in assessing the credibility of online information in their daily life. However, with the emergence of various websites and platforms, we should be careful with teenagers when taking online information from digital and online

platforms. Besides that, future research should expand by conducting a comparative study of teenage information behavior towards online information credibility in different ethnic groups, which can also be conducted for further study. This is because the interesting finding will clearly show which ethnic will have positive information behavior towards credible online information.

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