

The Understanding of Social Media Usage Among Twitter Users on COVID-19 Issues

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to gain an understanding of social media usage on human interaction of COVID-19 issues among *Twitter* users. COVID-19 is an issue that is globally discussed on social media. The information can easily reach the global audience in just a split second. The Malaysian Ministry of Health took the initiative to disseminate COVID-19 information to the public by creating a *Twitter* account @KKMPutrajaya. According to David (2020), there are almost 500 million tweets per day around the world. Tweet Binder (2020) stated there were 628 million tweets about COVID-19 in May 2021. This is where we can see Twitter's enormous impact on users and how it affects human interaction. The research adopted a qualitative approach and the informants involved are Malaysians, between 18-30 years old who use *Twitter* as a medium to obtain information about COVID-19. The outcome of this study revealed the types of social media usage can be further classified into three elements which are they agree that *Twitter* provides (i) dissemination of news and ideas (ii) analysis of reliability of facts and (iii) production of reciprocal action among users. It also highlights features on Twitter that encourage communication as it provides (i) collective information gathering (ii) improved human interactivity and (iii) stimulation of information via hashtags, search, trending, and space. The factors influencing social media usage on the human interaction of COVID-19 issues among *Twitter* users are *Twitter* provides a medium for (i) a source of information (ii) financial opportunities (iii) practical technicalities and (iv) the presence of various communities.

Keywords: Twitter, COVID-19, social media, human interaction, news

INTRODUCTION

In the digital era, people communicate via various ways and platforms. Face-to-face human interaction is declining due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the emergence of new technology. More people opted to socialise online rather than offline. As the Malaysian Ministry of Health (2020) recommended, fewer human interaction is necessary to avoid the spread of the pandemic. The government had introduced a work-from-home system and many organisations followed the recommendation. According to Merkle and Richardson (2004), Relationships that were once built and maintained primarily through face-to-face interactions are now supplemented by social technology, which is leading to the rise of a new type of human interaction relationship. As mentioned by Fauzi (2017), social media has gained the interest of all age groups in society due to technological advancement. Teenagers consider social media as platforms that allow them to engage in activities and socialize online during their free time. Social media users can interact, share information, and create web content on the platforms. Olivia (2018) conducted a survey to identify how people utilise social media daily. The survey revealed that 42% of people use social media to stay in touch with friends, followed by 41% to stay up-to-date with news and current events.

Appel, Grewal, Hadi and Stephen (2020) stated that millions of individuals use social media to share knowledge and build connections all over the world. These platforms allow users to connect with friends and family, explore new knowledge, develop interests and enjoy personalised entertainment. However, various social media platforms offer diverse types of content and serve different purposes. Zuckerberg (2017) created *Facebook* in 2004 to create communities and bring the world closer together. *Facebook* also allows users to share their thoughts through text, promote their businesses by using pictures, and engage the audiences with videos. Jack Dorsey created *Twitter* to connect people by providing a platform for them to share their opinions with a larger amount of audience. Caroline (2018) described *Twitter* as a social networking platform for micro-blogging, where users can create and share short messages known as 'tweets.' Over the years, *Twitter* has developed its features which include the increasing number of characters per tweet and the introduction of new features called "continue thread" (Sarah, 2018). These features allow *Twitter* users to express themselves without a limit. Charlie (2020) mentioned *Twitter* is a platform that exists in the real world and is utilised by actual people.

COVID-19 is an issue that is globally discussed on social media. The information can easily reach the global audience in just a split second. According to Britannica (2021), social media disseminate information more quickly than any other medium. It also stated that 78.5% of conventional media reporters polled used social media to stay up-to-date on breaking news. *Twitter* is one of the platforms used by organizations, agencies, and individuals to convey and exchange information on current issues including the COVID-19 pandemic. The Malaysian Ministry of Health created a *Twitter* account @KKMPutrajaya to disseminate the latest information on COVID-19 which includes infographics on the latest number of COVID-19. According to David (2020), there are almost 500 million tweets per day around the world. Tweet Binder (2020) stated there were 628 million tweets about COVID-19 in May 2021. This is where we can see Twitter's enormous impact on users and how it affects human interaction.

Therefore, the use of social media, especially *Twitter*, is seen to be able to play an important role in influencing human interaction, especially on COVID-19 issues. Thus, this study was conducted to obtain more understanding of the usage of social media on human interaction about COVID-19 among Twitter users.

Generally, we have fewer interactions with the people we associate with because of social media. It has a slight impact on human interaction. According to the previous study by Drago (2015) from Elon University, the rapid expansion of technology is negatively affecting interpersonal communication. People are becoming more reliant on communicating through technology and are neglecting to engage personally. In Malaysia, the majority of individuals have access to social media via their smartphones. The Department of Statistics, Malaysia has published a survey report on ICT Use and Access among Individuals and Households, stated that 98.2% of respondents surveyed admitted that they own a smartphone. Hence, this study aims to:

1. What are the types of social media usage on human interaction of COVID-19 issues among Twitter users?
2. How do the features of social media facilitate human interaction of COVID-19 issues among Twitter users?
3. What are the factors influencing social media usage on human interaction of COVID-19 issues among Twitter users?

Social Media and Its Usage

Scholars defined social media as web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system. With a total of 4.72 billion people now online, it indicates that the global Internet penetration rate has doubled in less than 10 years. Moreover, the number of Internet users is still growing from day to day. According to the latest research, the global total has increased by more than 7% over the past year, with 332 million people coming online for the first time in the past 12 months (Ofcom, 2021). On the other hand, the number of social media users is growing even faster. According to the latest data, global social media users have increased by more than half a billion in the past year. On average, that means the global total is increasing every single second at a rate of 16½ new users. There are 4.33 billion social media users around the world today, representing more than 55% of the world's total population. The impressive headlines are not limited to user numbers since people are also spending ever more time using connected technologies (Dean, 2021).

According to Sawyer (2011), social media is the platform to spread and gain information widely without any barrier as the Internet can be accessed globally. Nowadays, the trend of Internet usage among the young generation has increased as there is wide exposure from the rulers and educational institutions. Basic knowledge about computer and Internet access has been introduced to the students of certain countries such as Malaysia as early as primary school. The Internet is one of the channels of various sources of information to computer networks around the world. Computers and education can no longer be separated from human life. The development of information and communication technology has brought

changes to the lifestyle of the world community. The Internet is considered an ocean of data and sources (Razak Idris & Norzalina, 2010; Normalina Adenan & Yusmarwati, 2019).

In Malaysia, social media serves as a platform to convey information to the public. It is proven that disseminating information via social media is the best method to disseminate information more broadly and easily. *Twitter* is the oldest and one of the most popular microblogging platforms in many countries (Mohammadi, Thelwall, Kwasny & Holmes, 2018). According to Stephanie (2021), the average Indonesian spends 3 hours and 14 minutes a day accessing social media. 170 million over 274 million total population of Indonesia are active users of social media. This means that the number of social media users in Indonesia is equivalent to 61.8% of the total population in January 2021. This figure also increased by 10 million, or around 6.3%, compared to the previous year. According to Ika Destiana, Ali Salman & Helmi Rahim (2019), *Twitter* which was originally designed to be used as a support app for work and communicating in small groups is now the world's largest information and sharing with its ability to deliver 350 million tweets per day dominated by younger generation users. In 2016, 26.6% of Malaysia's 21.9 million social media users had a *Twitter* account, and the number is rising in comparison to other social media platforms (Aftar Abu, Noratiqah Ariff & Eu Xiu Hui, 2018). Therefore, the previous study has shown that social media has a big impact on our communication and human interaction is influenced intensely by social media as people are spending more time on it.

Twitter Usage Among Users

According to *Twitter's* most recent figures, the network receives over 1 billion unique monthly visitors and has approximately 313 million active users, with 82% of them being active mobile users (Hutchinson, 2016). As per a recent Pew Research Center research, *Twitter* is the sixth most famous social networking tool among Americans. According to the report, around one-quarter of online adults in the United States use *Twitter*, with younger online consumers being much busier these days than older groups (Greenwood, Perrin, & Duggan, 2016). The microblogging function on *Twitter* has allowed people to broadcast their feelings and views in a "genuine messaging" style by creating tweets with a restricted number of characters initially 140 but now up to 280. Furthermore, users engage networks and chat with other *Twitter* users by using features such as hashtags, mentions, likes and retweets (Steckenbiller, 2016). Several elements of *Twitter* practices have been studied in a variety of contexts, along with tourist industry, sports, health information and elections (Malik, Heyman & Johri, 2019). Apart from enjoyment and pleasure, *Twitter* is mostly used for social engagement, knowledge exchange, information searching, self-documentation, and self-expression (Alhabash & Ma, 2017).

Twitter has lately been included as an enhanced academic communication medium for formal and informal learning. Besides, students, academics, and professionals, even the public from a variety of academic disciplines utilize the network to interact with others and the general public. They share discipline-specific and other relevant information to pursue their academic values and objectives (Kimmons, Veletsianos & Woodward, 2017). Several new types of research have also proved *Twitter's* worth, influence, and acceptability in the context of education. *Twitter*, for example, has been shown to improve language and learning skills (Bista,

2015). In addition, according to Britannica (2021), *Twitter* combines elements of social networking websites like *Myspace* and *Facebook* with instant messaging technology to build networks of users who may connect every other day with short messages called "tweets." A user enters a tweet on a cell phone keypad or a computer and transmits it to *Twitter*'s server, which forwards it to a list of other users known as followers who have joined up to receive the sender's tweets by text message to their mobile phones or instant messaging to their personal computers.

Twitter's social networking origins were evident in April 2009, when actor Ashton Kutcher won a battle against CNN to be the first *Twitter* user with more than a million followers (CNN News Portal, 2009). While celebrity "e-watching" became a massive attraction to the site, companies quickly began tweeting about promotions and events, and political campaigns realized the potential of *Twitter* as a medium of communication. Barack Obama outperformed his opponent, John McCain, in the social media realm during the 2008 U.S. presidential race, gaining nearly four times as many *Myspace* friends and more than 20 times as many *Twitter* followers (Toohey, 2013).

According to Ahlgren (2021), *Twitter* has also made Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) available to help in data gathering. A user can allow entry to the API by registering for a developer account. Upon receiving the approval, the user gains access to four keys: (i) consumer key, (ii) consumer secret, (iii) access token, and (iv) access secret, according to Roth and Johnson (2018). These keys enable advanced *Twitter* data such as tweets and profile information. *Twitter*'s Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) are the most powerful and accessible mechanism for gathering data created by *Twitter* users' interactions. *Twitter* data, which represents several demographic groups, is a diversified and relevant data source for academics and policymakers. Similarly, *Twitter* is seen to be beneficial in increasing peer involvement and cooperation among peers, professors, and students (Desselle, 2017). However, some researchers have highlighted the disadvantages of bringing *Twitter* into the educational setting. These studies have stressed improper usage, excessive exposure, image, information overload, addiction, and other concerns with substance and individual privacy (Cho & Rangel, 2016).

***Twitter* as a Platform for Discussing COVID-19 Issues**

Information and communication technology (ICT) plays a crucial role during the COVID-19 pandemic. The importance of public reaction has been emphasized, with social media sites playing a significant part in both institutional and bottom-up information-sharing processes. Platform studies, an emerging subject, have revealed that platforms increasingly affect how society operates; yet, such studies sometimes take a strongly Western-centric approach. By concentrating on *Twitter* and *Weibo* use during the initial days of the pandemic, the existing research provides an exploratory study that compares the roles of the two platforms for both Western and Chinese audiences (Yang & Vicari, 2021). The findings suggest that, during the pandemic COVID-19, *Weibo* was used as a propaganda weapon to unify the Chinese people and support public policies under the direction of the government and the supervision of the mass press.

Throughout a pandemic, individuals not only utilize social media platforms to gather reliable information but also to participate in participatory behaviours, such as expressing ideas and remarking on local or worldwide pandemic reaction tactics (Burnap, Williams, Sloan, Rana, Housley, Edwards, Knight, Procter & Voss, 2014). Nevertheless, social media platforms, since they are rooted in many sociocultural settings, may affect these dynamics in a variety of ways. This report offers an exploratory investigation of COVID-19-related information on *Weibo* and *X* to investigate these disparities and add to studies concerned with the regionality of platforms (Steinberg & Li, 2017).

Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, Internet channels were used not only to express issues of health, sicknesses, and treatments (Ahmad & Murad, 2020), but also to convey personal and political viewpoints on how national and international governments handled the pandemic response (De Saint, Glăveanu & Literat, 2021). The majority of previous platform research on the public reaction to the pandemic has focused on Western social media. To overcome this constraint and, more generally, to contribute to the 'de-westernization' of platform studies, this research offers a comparative analysis of participatory dynamics occurring on *Twitter* during the COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia.

The COVID-19 outbreak has put everyone on the red alarm to safeguard themselves from this virus, hence helping the government to stop the chain of the disease. Thus, we can see that the Malaysian public, for instance, is relying on social media every day to get the latest news about COVID-19. Whether they read the information from the main source such as the Ministry of Health's (MOH) *X* or *Facebook* page, Director General of Health Malaysia, Datuk Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah's *X* or *Facebook* page, the latest information from the Prime Minister's press conference or the noncredible page such as any individual's postings, anonymous source or blogs; these are among the main sources for them to get the latest information in real-time. The role of social media as the source of information is undeniable, as we live in this era of digitalization where technology is used in almost all of our daily activities. However, the public needs to have a good awareness of the information that they find on social media, as it also has become the primary platform to disseminate false and misleading information (Pulido, 2020).

Human Interaction and Social Media

Today, human interaction is declining due to the digital age. Hence, people are open to select their own communication ways. According to the past research from Drago (2015), it shows 92% of respondents believed technology negatively affects Interpersonal Communication, and only 1% did not. Only 7% of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed. According to Satyendra (2019), consequent to the absence of effective communication, organizational goals will surrender to individualistic and personal goals. Effective interpersonal communication skills are essential to social interaction and also to the build and maintain all relationships. Poor communication skills can cause permanent damage to relationships; affecting productivity, satisfaction, performance, morale, trust, respect, self-confidence, and even physical health (Un Ange Passé, 2008; Johannsen, 2021).

Meanwhile, the usage of the Internet creates forms of sociability and social interaction through platforms that allow virtual relations such as chats, forums, social networks and others. Walther (1996) has labelled the standard of hyper-communication or "hyper-personal communication" as interaction in the virtual space namely, (i) simple (because it requires a low level of expertise to achieve a satisfactory result); (ii) recreational (because it establishes a new form of entertainment for large segments of the internet users); (iii) wide-reaching (because it generally occurs among large groups of people and through multiple channels); and (iv) intense (because of the time and degree of involvement it requires) (Kelly, 2018).

Christakis and Fowler (2010) indicated that being part of social networks involves being affected by and affecting other people. This means that other subjects influence our habits and behaviours, which in turn has social and moral consequences. Subsequently, we lose some pride over our behaviour and our choices, without forgetting the fact that interaction in online networks makes it possible to exceed ourselves and our limitations. The new transformation can be taken as through this chain of influence. This is based on the fact that we have some influence on our friends and them over their friends and contacts. Besides, our actions and decisions can influence people that we do not know and that we can also be influenced by strangers (Schlitz, 2016).

Much current work in microblogging, as indicated above, tends to consider social media streams and underlying social networks as enormous global phenomena dominated by global processes, measurements, and statistics. In other words, the social media streams, users, and links are all regarded as a huge homogenous mass. While such a high-level perspective of the world is extremely useful for understanding massive global behaviours, it is sadly insufficient for fine-grained examination of local behaviours. Other than that, activism is one area where social media may aid in the transmission of meaningful communicative information (Cox, 2015). We defined activism as the gathering of people around a certain subject or event to affect social, economic, cultural, or political changes. In recent years, social media platforms played an important role in the birth of the expansion of activist movements that are both widely dispersed and centrally managed (Mundt, Ross & Burnett, 2018).

The platform incorporation into practically every major social media ecosystem, including *Facebook*, as well as traditional media, demonstrates its strength as an autonomous brand while also attesting to its increasingly 'appliance' character (Manifest, 2019). Every small twist or change in the platform's hardware, software, or business model may have an influence on the platform's users' behaviour as well as the influence of tweets as communicative material. Similarly, changes in the Internet environment such as the launch of new services or changes to rival platforms may have an immediate impact on *Twitter*'s prominence and position as the world's premier microblogging platform. Upcoming processes will be determined by the mutual moulding of technology, users or usage, content, and economic forces (Dijck, 2011).

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the qualitative research method to gain an understanding of social media usage on human interaction of COVID-19 issues among *Twitter* users. This study was designed using the qualitative research method due to the fact that qualitative research is a method of in-

depth investigation into real-life situations with the goal of better understanding social phenomena. It emphasizes the "why" and "how" of social phenomenon rather than the "what" and is founded on actual human experiences. According to Carol (2016), this approach is commonly used to comprehend people's perspectives and perceptions. This study employed a phenomenological approach as they are ideally suited to studying people's experiences of using the *Twitter* platform for interaction with others.

This study collected data through the methods of collecting information and literature related to the topic of the study in a library and conducting in-depth interviews. The informants of this study consist of Malaysians, between 18-30 years old who use *Twitter* as a medium to obtain information about COVID-19. The researcher used NVivo12 to transcribe the audio and video obtained from the interview session. All notes from the research and interview sessions were coded throughout this study. The coding process was accomplished by reading each of the responses submitted by the informants. These codes represented a pattern or thoughts associated with each component of the findings. The coding process entails recognizing data in text form and determining the link between them (Elliott, 2018).

The point of data saturation was achieved at the 5th informant. The researcher decided to stop the interview process entirely at the 6th informant. The interview sessions were conducted via digital platforms such as Google Meet and Zoom. This method was used as a consideration to avoid impending risks since the data collection process was conducted during the COVID-19 outbreak. Each interview session took an average duration of thirty to forty-five minutes. In this study, the informants were addressed as TU1 to TU6 (Refer to table 1). TU represents the term 'Twitter User' in the context of this study. Their professions include Corporate & Strategy Officer, Influencer & Youtuber, Chief Marketing Officer, Actress & Model, Product & Promotion Specialist, and Finance Executive Officer. The informants who were interviewed are from Petaling Jaya, Cheras, Kampung Baru, Bangsar, Putrajaya and Setia Alam. All these informants are actively *Twitter* users until now and used *Twitter* as the platform to obtain information.

Table 1: Informants' background

Code	Age	Details
TU1	26	- Corporate & Strategy Officer - Twitter user since 2014
TU2	25	- Social Media Influencer & Youtuber - Twitter user since 2011
TU3	28	- Chief Marketing Officer - Twitter user since 2015
TU4	26	- Actor & Model - Twitter user since 2011
TU5	25	- Product & Promotion Specialist - Twitter user since 2011
TU6	24	- Finance Executive Officer - Twitter user since 2012

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Types of Social Media Usage on Human Interaction Regarding COVID-19 Issues among *Twitter* Users

This study disclosed all informants believe that *Twitter* plays a vital role in disseminating and obtaining information. TU1 and TU6 believe that by using *Twitter*, they will be able to acquire global, reliable, and recent news. Their responses were stated as follows:

“...Last time, we watched the news on television to verify whether the news is true or not. But now, it hits differently where all government ministries have official social media platforms to deliver information to citizens on current news, owing to technological advancement.” (TU1)

TU6 supported the statement by mentioning *Twitter* provides more reliable and faster information than mainstream media.

“So...when we chat to friends on Twitter, Twitter provides more credible information and is faster than local media” (TU6)

In addition, TU3 mentioned that *Twitter* is the most popular social media platform, and people keep updating and sharing information on what is happening in the real world. The statement made by TU3 aligns with the research by Westerman, Spence, and Heide (2014), who stated that social media platforms appear to be intended to cater to individuals seeking real-time information.

“... We can see it has a good side and a bad side. If from the good side it's like everyone keeps sharing about information and they keep everyone updated with what happens in our country and so on” (TU3)

TU6 and TU2 whereby mentioned that sometimes people seek for their own information because they do not trust what they have heard or seen. This is regarding the issue when Ministry of Health of Malaysia deleted their tweets without providing any reasons. Their comments were stated as follows:

“...Consider what happened before this. The factory sector, according to KKM, is the largest contributor to the COVID-19 cluster. KKM, later, removed the tweet for no apparent reason. As a Twitter user, it is kind of frustrated when KKM acting up since they are not transparent enough.” (TU6)

TU2 added:

“Compared to last time, we believe in social media to read the news. But when COVID-19 kicked in, we can see that everyone starts to make their own 'move'. They find, search and check the news and spread it accordingly” (TU2)

Some informants seemed inclined to have open discussion if they had the same opinion as their mutual. If there were people who agreed with her, TU1 preferred to start the discussion, whereas TU2 mentioned that if the statement he issued got a lot of retweets and shares, there would usually be a discussion. Aside from that, TU3 stated that she prefers to discuss in person with her mutual friends, whereas TU4 prefers to read threads and only discuss them with mutual friends. Below are the excerpts exemplifying the above information:

“There will be people who agree and disagree with me whenever I post a statement. But I will go to people who agree with me and make discussions with them at any provided platform.” (TU1)

‘...but if on Twitter, most of the time I will write a statement and if there is a lot of RT, some discussion will take place, if there is no RT, it will just be silent like that’ (TU2)

“Erm ... if with followers ... I mostly just share information about COVID 19 what all, it means how to get help to and so on. But to discuss in detail about COVID 19 has an issue and so on, I rarely do. Usually, I prefer to have a face-to-face discussion with anyone and see what we can do.” (TU3)

“Actually, rarely. As a Twitter user, I prefer to read threads or info. To discuss that, only with my mutual friends.” (TU4)

TU5 mentioned he followed the Ministry of Health of Malaysia’s Twitter account. because he wanted to stay up-to-date and be aware of COVID-19 issues. However, to him, the ministry did not provide information as well as it could, giving him the perception that there was no balance in information provision. His excerpts are as below:

“...They can actually tweet more awareness about COVID-19, because I don't see much awareness. But for COVID-19 daily cases yes. For example, you share the daily update as usual, it is like a really big issue. I mean tweets about awareness is not too much.” (TU5)

The study revealed that Twitter is a crucial platform for users to engage with COVID-19 information. People rely on it for fast and reliable updates, often trusting it more than traditional media. Twitter also encourages discussions, especially among those who share similar views, though some prefer private or face-to-face talks. In general, Twitter acts as both an information source and a space for discussion, but users stay wary of official sources' transparency.

The Features of Social Media Being Facilitated on Human Interaction Regarding COVID-19 Issues among *Twitter* Users

The informants claimed that features on *Twitter* that motivate them to use the platform are its speed, up-to-date content, and detailed information. They shared their experiences as follows:

“You just press the button and direct and poof! All the information is there, fast and straightforward!” (TU1)

TU2 stated the features of the hashtags help them to find information easily, especially regarding the current issues:

“There is a lot of information we can get from using hashtags, we have loads of information that we can share. People are still talking about it even though it is about government and people will relate it to the current issue, COVID-19 When we search COVID-19, all related issues will pop out.” (TU2)

The informant TU3 mentioned the information on *Twitter* is fast and it is easier for them to access the information.

“People on Twitter are fast, so the information is also fast and it is easier for us to access and easier for us to read as compared to YouTube, we have to search one by one, I noticed things on Twitter are usually 2 3 days after that it will be trending on Instagram and so on...” (TU3)

TU5 added:

“Twitter is fast, so if you use Twitter, you will see a lot of news, compared to other social media. So, what you see on other social media is very limited compared to Twitter, Twitter you will see everything” (TU5)

TU4 expressed in his excerpts below that *Twitter* is fast in conveying information due to its nature, which only requires wording as compared to other social media which require pictures, video and captions. Similarly, the presence of a new feature called “*space*”, gives users room to make discussions that only need to use voice.

“...Twitter spread news so fast and when we think about something we tend to type and also we can directly discuss on space that require only our voice. Meanwhile, on Instagram we tend to think to post a photo or picture. But on Twitter, we just type and tweet as simple as that...” (TU4)

Reflecting all the informants’ perspectives, most of the informants mentioned that *Twitter*’s feature meets their requirements. The excerpts are as follows:

“Actually...the features are very helpful for us to keep updates like what happen...” (TU3)

TU4 added:

*“...Twitter I can see... their feature is simple but it fulfils the desire.
(TU4)*

TU4 explained that though the features on *Twitter* are simple, it fulfils his needs. The same goes with TU5 sharing the same perspective, he has been using this *Twitter* application for a long time. If before this he used *Twitter* on web base and felt it was very complicated, this time he felt *Twitter* has improved in various aspects, and he also believes that everything we desire is available on the platform as well. His excerpts are as below:

“I’ve used Twitter since a long time ago. In the past, when I used the web-based, it was complicated. But now, Twitter changed to better and, it's more users adaptable. It's getting more and easier, it's like when you open Twitter you know how to use it. It's not complicated. All you want inside it” (TU5)

The findings highlighted that all three informants have the same opinion that they briefly agreed that the features available on *Twitter* meet the needs of each user.

The Factors Influencing the Social Media Usage on Human Interaction of COVID-19 Issues among *Twitter* Users

This study found that the main reason that drives *Twitter* users to stay is due to its information system continuance. Social media, *Twitter* in particular, has been growing steadily in its use as a source of news. Besides news, information delivered via *Twitter* may also help to educate and create public health awareness among people. This role is played largely by official government accounts such as @KKMPutrajaya, @MKNJPM, @JKJAVMY and @WHO. The informants’ responses are as follows:

“...I love reading public tweets. There is benefit sometimes where people share about we do not know such as about what vaccines contains, opinion from the doctors on the benefit of taking the vaccine, and sharing from the one who has taken the vaccine.” (TU1)

Meanwhile, TU5 noticed that he received information faster than his colleagues. He also shared the information he received on *Twitter* to share facts that his colleagues are unaware of. Below are the excerpts that exemplify the above information:

“Yes it is up to date. This is my honest opinion...And I use Twitter, compared to my information, my colleague’s information is a bit slower and back dated. Then, I will share the info with my colleague, info that I received it from Twitter” (TU5)

TU6 indicated that she had no understanding of COVID-19 prior to this, but her knowledge of COVID-19 has grown as a result of her use of *Twitter*. Her excerpts are as below:

“It is true that my knowledge has increased. (TU6)

She added:

That's why, in the past, I didn't seem to know much about COVID-19, right? The memory of someone who has been impaired by the COVID-19 effect will likewise be affected by brain fog, according to studies. So that's what Twitter has given me. So there's a lot more information regarding COVID-19 now that I know more about it from Twitter. (TU6)

Besides being utilized as a platform for news, information, and communication, *Twitter* is also known as a room for financial opportunities. TU1 and TU4 believes that the existence of *Twitter* platform will help smaller businesses in their efforts to generate income.

"Business as well needs social media to engage with the users and help other businesses. They will update everything about their business and people will help to retweet anything from their Twitter..." (TU1)

"... everyone now uses social media, not only to spread important information, but as a source of income, business, ads and all through social media today." (TU4)

Practicality is always major in determining users' interest in using the application. Compared to newspapers and magazines, *Twitter* provides 100% digital space where it can be reached by online or mobile approach. Digital transformation has fundamentally altered consumers' behaviour in utilizing social media. TU3 and TU4 claimed if people communicate using technology instead of traditional techniques, it will take a long time for the message to be conveyed.

"I think social media is the best platform to get the information. We can't wait like journalists want to come with a cameraman and so on and want to edit that video then go to TV and so on." (TU3)

"...if you use the traditional way, it's like writing a letter or word of mouth and it takes a long time. this is a very relevant platform at this point to use properly." (TU4)

In addition, a user-friendly interface has attracted the public to use *Twitter* as it allows users to communicate with other users and it is simple to use. Their responses are as follows:

"In my experience, yes its user-friendly interface because it's just by the tip of the finger" (TU1)

"If it's close to Facebook, we can write as well, but usually people will write at length like a blog, but on Twitter, we tweet after that, there's a thread near the bottom. That's a user -friendly Twitter feature." (TU4)

"Yes, to deliver... It's a bit hard and complicated, because of the interfaces on other social media, but Twitter is easy." (TU5)

Twitter can capture people's engagement via the presence of a multidimensional community in their space. According to TU1 and TU3, *Twitter* platform is global and covers all the scopes plus has no limited followers. Their statements are as follows:

"Twitter usage is very wide and covers all scopes and no limit of followers" (TU1)

"...I think because Twitter does not discuss small issues, it discusses quite large ones that happen in the country or in the world and it can be no limit for people to reach. So that's why people feel like when they open Twitter they feel updated with news. So I think that's one of the issues." (TU3)

This study also revealed that each informant follows different groups depending on their interest and common property. TU1 mentioned that to search for information relating to COVID-19 and its precautions, the users follow medical practitioner's posts.

"...many medical practitioners will explain their experience in handling COVID-19 cases. They will share how to take good care of health by eating healthily." (TU1)

Another informant shared her analogy on themes of specific group. TU3, however, advises users out there to choose their own group carefully. She stated that if we choose a positive circle, we will always be in good and positive shape and vice versa. TU3 excerpts also said that the people around us will have an impact on our lives. Below are the excerpts that exemplify the above information:

"...it's the same as the real world of reality, if we hang out with the right people and so on, so of course what things go into our surrounding will be a very good thing, if we hang out with people who don't give much positivity, of course the negativity will come.." (TU3)

In summary, *Twitter* is the source of information for COVID-19 updates and increases public health awareness. The platform is also a source of income for businesses and the user-friendly features have attracted the users. They also tend to follow trusted sources and positive communities, shaping their knowledge and mindset.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights interpersonal communication on *Twitter* related to COVID-19 issues and reveals three types of social media usage which are (i) dissemination of news and ideas (ii) analysis of reliability of facts and (iii) production of reciprocal action among users. In the interviews, the participants did not mention any other attributes besides these three types of social media usage. Though COVID-19 issues are new, the findings in this study are found to be aligned with previous studies on social media usage on human interaction related to other issues.

User-friendly is always a key to facilitate users in social media. A simpler method of use provides a convenient platform for human interaction. Besides this, other features that encourage communication on *Twitter* are that it provides (i) collective information gathering

(ii) improved human interactivity and (iii) stimulation of information via hashtag, search, trending, and space. After comprehensive interview sessions and data extractions, it is crucial to understand the factors influencing social media usage on human interaction with COVID-19 issues among *Twitter* users. Based on the information gathered, four main factors hold users in this platform. The factors are that *Twitter* provides a medium for (i) a source of information (ii) financial opportunities (iii) practical technicalities, and (iv) the presence of various communities.

There are several gaps in the researcher's knowledge and ability to conduct this research. Future development of this study is most welcomed to produce a better perspective. Some recommendations suggested for future research are improving the data collection method, replicating the research with a broad context and culture, and re-assessing the theory based on specific events. After conducting this research, it was found that it would also be helpful to capture the informants' perceptions quantitatively. As qualitative study is subjective, quantitative study may provide better understanding of the research questions to reach the objectives.

Secondly, this research can be replicated using the same methodology with different contexts and cultures. All the informants in this study are Malay. Hence, various points of view from other cultures are unavailable. It would be better if the sequel of this research could find various backgrounds of informants. This is because those differences may implicate opinions and ideas. For example, religious beliefs may influence how people convey and accept information. Finally, it is possible if future studies can re-assess the same theory based on specific events only. Over the process, it was found that different users have distinct interests in information searching. Some informants were interested in the COVID-19 issue in general, while some others were more interested in specific issues only. For example, those working with NGO were interested in the issue of COVID-19's implications towards human wellbeing, while others were curious on the number of cases and vaccination progress. Therefore, future research may implement the same theory with a specific issue of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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