



Malaysian social media regulation? Welcome to the dark side of social media

We thought the social media such as Facebook are a boon to finding out only the truth. We believe this because information flows unrestricted and uncensored from an open, diverse, and hyper-connected network of friends, friends of friends, and freedom fighters in the social media world. There are no gatekeepers here. No one decides which information goes forward and which does not. Information flows to you quickly and unbridled from censors and manipulation from an authoritarian and paranoid regime. But think about it: why should the unbridled social media disseminate only the good and the truth?

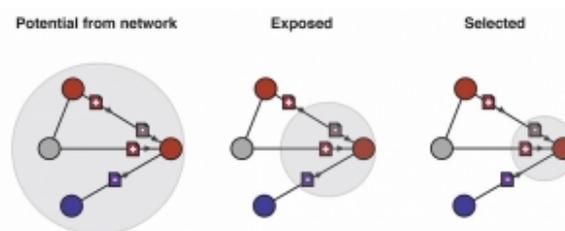
The freedom we have on the social media is the same freedom bestowed on those driven by personal and political agendas to spread their misinformation and propaganda. Information that goes viral are those that provoke anger and shock, so what better way to create viral messages than to spread hate?

Consider the [recent Lowyat incident](#) that begun as a run-of-the-mill mobile phone theft but that soon mutated into a racial fight, encouraged by the spread of misinformation on the social media and blogs. Or consider the [“social media experiment” by CAGM](#) (Citizens for Accountable Governance Malaysia) who deliberately spread misinformation about our Prime Minister to bring home the point that our media thrive on reporting sensational news.

Dear naïve Malaysians, welcome to the dark side of social media.

Social media, in particular Facebook, help to polarize people and encourage herd

mentality. We are naive to think the use of Facebook will promote national unity. Facebook actually accentuates differences between groups of people. Facebook's collaborative filter helps us to find like-minded people: those who share our beliefs, ideas, and perspectives. When everyone in our circle of friends think alike, is there room for a greater understanding of opinions and perspectives that are different from ours? Facebook's news algorithm further selects news that matches our interests and beliefs. To have an open and effective discussion and learning experience, we need to have a diversity of opinions and point of views. Instead, Facebook encourages herd mentality. Facebook validates and entrenches our existing stance and opinions.



Does Facebook encourage group polarization? The social media “filter bubble” technology filters and chooses news and information that matches our interests and opinions. We further choose to read articles that matches our opinions and views, so at the end, our views are not challenged but entrenched (from Bakshy et al., 2015).

Facebook is our “echo chamber” where we only hear, see, and click on what we want to hear, see, and click. On social media, we insulate ourselves from news and views that are different from ours.

Furthermore, the 2014 survey by the Pew Research Center found that social media stifle debate. They found that social media users were less willing to discuss the [Snowden-NSA controversy](#) in social media than they were in person. 86% of Americans reported that they were willing to debate this issue in person, but yet only 42% of those who use Facebook or Twitter were willing to debate such issues on social media. Moreover, the survey also found that people were

more willing to share their views on social media only if they thought their audience agreed with them. Likewise, a 2013 study by Carnegie Mellon University found that people tend to self-censor more their social media posts or comments if the topic of discussion is highly specific or if the audience are less defined. People self-censor more, out of fear of offending others, instigating an argument, disagreeing with others, or being criticized by others. Facebook can promote racism, as reported by a 2013 study by two US psychologists. They observed that prolific Facebook users were more susceptible than by casual users to negatively racial postings on Facebook.

Prof. [Susan Greenfield](#), who is also a member of the British upper house, is a vocal critic of social media. Social media, she explains, promote narcissism and reduce empathy and self-identity, especially among the youths. Words are only 10% of the social cues in communication, so connecting with others via social media deprives people of the other vital social cues. Consequently, Prof. Greenfield explains, social media make it easier to insult others without noticing the repercussions the insults have on the victims. A recent 2014 study in the US revealed that when preteens were not allowed to use any screen-based media and communication tools for only five days, their interpersonal skills improved.



Prof. Susan Greenfield is a vocal critic of social media which she explains encourage narcissism and reduce empathy and self-identity. The social media also make it easier to insult others (from telegraph.co.uk).

The social media have a very dark side. Far from being some utopian tool of truth, democracy, and social justice, the social media can also be a tool of

misinformation and hidden agendas, a playground for malicious attempts to divert and encourage people to believe and behave in a certain given way. Social media can stifle, not promote, debate, and they amplify differences between groups of people. Social media discourage tolerance and understanding of people who have different of beliefs and opinions from ours.



Racism is rife in Malaysia, including in public universities. We are naive to think social media will reduce racism. It might instead promote it (from www.lukeyishandsome.com)

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