

Twitter as Safe Space for Self-Disclosure among Malaysian LGBTQ Youths

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ABSTRACT

Majority of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) youths in Malaysia are not able to express their sexual orientation in real life due to fear of threats and backlash from society. Thus, they turn to social media like Twitter to share their true selves and sexualities. Twitter plays an important role in helping the LGBTQ youths to reveal their true selves and finding a sense of belonging to a community that supports and encourages them and in a country like Malaysia, that is important to their mental well-being. Ten participants from the LGBTQ community gave their consent to be interviewed. This study focuses on the concept of self-disclosure between the participants and their Twitter followers. The results are organized around three primary themes. 1) The motivation includes knowledge, private life, self-acceptance, and movement and clique. 2) Reciprocity in self-disclosure from both the giving and receiving end which can be positive or negative. Under the giving end, recognition is positive whereas exclusion is negative and under the receiving end, acceptance is positive while dismissal is negative. 3) Consequences of disclosure in the forms of income that is internal gain and outcome, the external gain. It is found that the participants' actual intentions of self-disclosure are self-acceptance and self-actualization. They use Twitter as it is seen as a private space where they can be themselves and be safe, supporting the notion of Twitter as a safe space for LGBTQ youths.

Keywords: *LGBTQ, Twitter, self-disclosure, safe space, youth.*

INTRODUCTION

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) is a sensitive topic in Malaysia regardless of religion, culture and belief. According to Mohd Afiq (2015), the Malaysian community still believe LGBTQ is a bad influence and spreads like a virus. Azwan Ismail in 2010 received a huge backlash from Malaysians after exposing his sexuality on Youtube (The Star Online, 2010). He even received death threats as a result of his coming out. Thus, coming out is not an option for most LGBTQs in the conservative society. Malaysia's Tourism Minister, Mohamaddin Ketapi, even denied the existence of gay people in Malaysia, telling the German reporters that "I don't think we have anything like that in our country" (McKirdy, 2019).

Due to the possibility of threats and backlash as well as the denial of their existence, LGBTQ youths turn to social media to explore related matters, find a sense of belonging and socialize (Jenzen & Karl, 2014) and this study focuses on Twitter as a safe space for LGBTQ youths to disclose their identities and sexualities with the knowledge that there are accepting communities online to support them. Therefore, it is important to identify their motivation for self-disclosure on Twitter as well as recognize the reciprocity and consequences gained in the process.

The study on LGBTQ youths is important to understand what they are trying to portray to the society, that is their positive selves, as opposed to what has been positioned upon them, such