

Nudge Theory and Social Innovation: An analysis of citizen and government initiatives during Covid-19 outbreak in Malaysia

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Abstract—The study presents an analysis of how the Nudge Theory was mobilized in Malaysia during the Covid-19 outbreak. It was observed that during the mandatory lockdown, citizens explored various social innovation solutions to cope with the fear, anxiety and loss of income during the pandemic. The government deployed strategies which exemplified elements of the Nudge Theory to drive nationalism and citizenship. The study assembles data from public reports, media releases and social media postings which document social innovation initiatives throughout the pandemic period. Analysis has revealed how the Nudge Theory were put into play, affecting social behaviours and empathy, which led to various social innovation initiatives.

Keywords—Citizenship, Covid-19 pandemic, Nudge theory, social innovation.

I. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has unwittingly triggered innovation within the society in Malaysia. According to [1], a nudge is a form of communication technique, which can be expressed as 'pushing and tapping someone gently on the back of their shoulder' with aims to influence decision-making [2] and intervene in the choices made [3]. Nudge Theory [3], rooted in behavioural economics, is an approach of changing behaviour to investigate 'failures' in human cognition to help people make informed choices. In a typical life, human choices and behaviours are based on past experiences and routines. Nudges act on the response to an environmental change, such as a physical move to new surroundings, or a reaction triggered by disasters such as the current Covid-19 pandemic. To cope with the complexity of the environmental change, especially when it evolves with agility, what is displayed could be a representation of a fundamental human need to

survive. Such thinking, coupled with a set of actions that are focused on surviving, coping and overcoming, could stimulate an agile innovation. Agility is generally defined as the ability to move quickly and easily. In times of crisis, it is commonly associated with acts of innovation. Agile innovation is inherently about adapting and thriving on a given changed situation. Innovation is not limited to the uptake of technology, but rather it consists of continuously questioning oneself in response to change of decisions, situation and environment.

The reality of the crisis has inadvertently strategised nudging to become a necessary tool to build an individual and community-led social innovation. During the pandemic, it was observed that the government has been using a purposeful nationalistic nudge to control the COVID-19 spread at a high economic and social cost, by convincing Malaysians to abide by the Movement Control Order (MCO) rules – closure of schools and universities, compulsory wearing of masks, social/physical distancing, and frequent handwashing. With the increase in socio- and global economic crises, the government was also nudged to create rapid policy response. Dramatic overhaul policies in public health and economic stimulus were put into place, to help citizens and organisations recover from the effect of the pandemic. During the MCO, the majority of the citizens unknowingly was also nudged to respond to new ways of living. Many began to initiate innovations and solutions. Through nudging, Malaysians began to display their agility and competence in dealing and coping with the effects