



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LAW,
GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNICATION
(IJLGC)
www.ijlgc.com



UNMASKING HATE THROUGH SOCIO-LEGAL PERSPECTIVE: UNDERSTANDING THE ROOTS OF YOUTH ONLINE HATE SPEECH IN MALAYSIA

Hafidz Hakimi Haron^{1*}, Ahmad ShamsulAbd. Aziz², Muhammad Hafiz Badarulzaman³ Hanis Wahed⁴, Nor Ashikin Md Nasir⁵, Zairudin Hashim⁶

¹ School of Law, Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia
Email: hafidz.hakimi.haron@uum.edu.my

² School of Law, Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia
Email: sham@uum.edu.my

³ School of Law, Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia
Email: mdhafiz@uum.edu.my

⁴ School of Law, Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia
Email: hanis.w@uum.edu.my

⁵ School of Law, Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia
Email: ikin@uum.edu.my

⁶ Institut Islam Hadhari, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Malaysia
Email: P115927@siswa.ukm.edu.my

* Corresponding Author

Article Info:

Article history:

Received date: 17.04.2025

Revised date: 24.04.2025

Accepted date: 11.05.2025

Published date: 16.06.2025

To cite this document:

Haron, H. H., Aziz, A. S. A., Badarulzaman, M. H., Wahed, H., Nasir, N. A. M., & Hashim, Z. (2025). Unmasking Hate Through Socio-Legal Perspective: Understanding The Roots Of Youth Online Hate Speech In Malaysia. *International Journal of Law, Government and Communication*, 10 (40), 476-487.

DOI: 10.35631/IJLGC.1040034

Abstract:

Online hate speech is an escalating concern in Malaysia, particularly among youths. Recent reports to the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) indicate that issues related to race, religion, and royalty (3R) dominate complaints. The widespread use of social media, coupled with anonymity, has accelerated the spread of such content. This study explores the factors driving online hate speech among Malaysian youth and its broader societal impact. Employing qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, alongside a doctrinal analysis of existing legal frameworks, the research evaluates the effectiveness of current regulations. The findings highlight the need for a multifaceted approach that integrates legal reforms, public education, and community initiatives to curb online hate speech. By fostering digital responsibility and ethical online engagement, this study contributes to the discourse on combating hate speech and promoting a safer, more inclusive digital landscape in Malaysia.

Keywords:

Online, Hate Speech, Youth, Social Media Regulations, Cyber Law



Introduction

Since the establishment of the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) in 1996, Malaysia has experienced rapid growth in its digital economy (Haron et al., 2020). Transitioning from an agriculture-based economy, Malaysia has emerged as a leading force in the ICT industry (Daud, 2019). The rise of digital literacy has not only boosted the economy but also significantly changed the daily lives of Malaysians, with over 97.4% internet penetration (Kemp, 2024). Recent studies reveal that Malaysians, particularly youth, spend an average of 8 hours and 6 minutes online daily, making them the largest group of internet users (The Malay Mail, 2024).

While digital progress has brought numerous benefits, it has also introduced new challenges, including the rise of online hate speech (Zamri et al., 2023). This issue threatens Malaysia's multi-religious, multiracial society (Wan Mohd Nor, 2023), as social media platforms fuel the spread of hate (Kuwi Hoi & Shi Joh, 2023), potentially leading to violent extremism or non-violent extremism, which harms individuals psychologically rather than physically (Fernandez & Barton, 2023). Online hate speech is also exacerbating tensions related to race, religion, and royalty. As youth represent the largest group of online users (Meltwater, 2024), they are especially vulnerable to being radicalized through such content.

Despite efforts by internet and social media providers, as well as government agencies, to curb hate speech, the problem persists. Existing laws, such as the Sedition Act 1948, Penal Code, and Communications and Multimedia Act 1998, are increasingly ineffective due to the rapid development of digital technology (Wan Mohd Nor, 2024). Additionally, these laws are criticized for stifling free expression and are seen as outdated (Sreedharam & Ramayah, 2020). Striking a balance between freedom of speech and the public interest, especially in preventing divisive discourse is crucial. This research suggests that addressing the root causes of online hate speech, including factors such as user persona, culture, religion, and generational context, particularly among Malaysian youth, may provide a more effective approach. Therefore, this paper aims to achieve the two following research objectives:

1. To examine the scope of guarantees and limitations, especially regarding the freedom of speech to young Malaysian online users as stipulated under the Federal Constitution
2. To identify the factors that attract young Malaysians to participate in creating, disseminating, or propagating online hate speech.

Literature Review

The Concept of Freedom of Expression

One might dispute the correct usage of the term's freedom of expression and freedom of speech. Many scholars use both terms interchangeably, and such usage's context is not clearly defined. Digesting through definitions given by jurists and scholars; social sciences and legal experts alike, it is generally understood that freedom of speech is a branch of freedom of expression. Leets and Giles describe freedom of speech as a human ideal capable of exact expression (Leets & Giles, 1997). In addition, Saeed, quoted after Paul L. Murphy further defined freedom of

speech as "an innate instinctive desire of man for the right of self-expression and for the right to commune freely with his fellow men. This desire is a natural one, and hence this freedom is a natural right" (Saeed, 1997). According to Basu, freedom of speech is "the right to express one's convictions and opinions freely, by word of mouth, writing, printing, picture, or any other manner; where provided such expression must be addressed to the eyes and ears." (Basu, 2018). In contrast, the concept of freedom of expression has been given a broader scope and meaning. Unlike freedom of speech, "it should include the right to form and hold beliefs on any subject and to communicate those beliefs to others by whatever medium one chooses whether by traditional means, oral or press, or by other means, music, and art; Includes the right to hear the opinions of others, the right to inquire, reasonable access to information, and the right of assembly and association." (Emerson, 1970). Thus, according to the above definition, the expression goes beyond mere writings, speeches, and publications; it also comprises the right of assembly, demonstrations, and any act of expression or attitude intended to convey. Reading through literature, the notion of freedom of speech and expression is not new. Its origin can even be traced back to 600 BC in the glorious city-states of Athens (Scanlon, 1972).

Nevertheless, even though the basic concept of Freedom of Speech existed at the theoretical level, the idea of freedom itself was far more limited than we understand today (Tedford, 2009). He further elaborated that freedom of speech at the time was only enjoyed by adult male citizens, whereas the rest, females, juveniles, and resident aliens, were excluded from such privileges (Tedford, 2009). Stone highlighted the trial of Socrates as an example of the finite degree of Freedom of Speech, where the illustrious philosopher was put to death by Athenian aristocracy because of his alleged seditious statements denouncing Athenian corrupted democracy (Stone, 1989). The modern phrase and interpretation of "freedom of speech" did not derive until the 17th Century, during the Anglo-American struggle to attain free debate in the Parliament (Levy, 1986). Saeed (1997) argued that the Magna Carta had become an instrumental influence on the framing of the American Constitution, where such a document had revolutionized the concept of fundamental human rights, including the right to free speech.

For various reasons, scholars argue that freedom of expression is the lifeblood of democracy. Some classical scholars contended that freedom of expression is vital as, according to him, the truth can only be discovered by a 'collision of adverse opinions' (Mill, 1859). In comparison, some argue that; freedom of speech should be protected to enable citizens to participate meaningfully in the democratic process (Meiklejohn, 1965)

The Malaysian Youth and Online Hate Speech: Radicalisation and Extremism Through Technology

Another aspect lacking in the existing academic literature is the cohesion between the advancement of technology, a specialized segment of users of the medium of communication, where in this respect, youth and the diversity of legal and non-legal approaches should be employed to combat online hate speech. There is an urgent need for this discussion due to the proliferation of digital technology, the significance of the media as a source of information, a medium of communication, and a companion in our everyday lives is greater than it has ever been (Zamri et al., 2023). Accordingly, this highly mediatized society has given rise to a new and serious problem: the dissemination of hate speech across various online social media platforms by unscrupulous individuals (Schindler & Domahidi, 2021).

The high internet penetration in Malaysia may severely threaten the sanctity of free speech. According to the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission Internet Survey 2023, the country's Internet penetration rate stood at 97% of the entire population, and as of January 2023, 79% of the Malaysian population uses social media (Meltwater, 2024). Out of the 79%, 28.6% of social media users are persons under 25 years old, while another 20% are between the ages of 25 to 40 years old (Meltwater, 2024). These data show that youth is the segment in society that have the highest number of social media and internet users. The said data is pertinent, where hate speech may lead to radicalization and further evolve toward violent extremism (Fernandez & Barton, 2023). Their paper also argues that Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) should move away from the framework that squarely associates Islam with terrorism while solely associating non-Islamic forms of Western extremism with right-wing extremism (Fernandez & Barton, 2023). In addition to that, therefore, in this aspect, according to scholars such as Daud and Marsden, the approach to online content regulation, in general, should be more dynamic, which is more self-regulation oriented rather than purely relying on a legislative approach (Daud, 2019; Marsden, 2011). This is because the development of technology that facilitates online content is more fluid and rapid, which makes the traditional legal approach inadequate.

It is also worth noting that this study is consistent with "Malaysia Cyber Security Strategy 2020-2024" was drafted as part of the effort to ensure a safer online environment in the country. Pillar 2 of the strategy addresses the need to strengthen the current legislative legal framework and enforcement, while Pillar 4 aims to enhance capacity and capability-building awareness and education (Majlis Keselamatan Negara, 2020). Nevertheless, the strategy itself does not explicitly mention a clear direction in addressing the issue of online hate speech holistically and comprehensively, which further necessitates the need for a specific study to explore the possibility of formulating a new legal framework to be conducted.

Given that youth represent the largest group at risk from online hate speech, there is a pressing need for research tailored to this demographic. Legal and non-legal solutions, including digital literacy programs and community-driven initiatives, should be explored to address the unique challenges faced by youth in combating online hate speech. A multifaceted approach is essential to safeguard against the harmful effects of hate speech and to foster a safer digital environment.

Research Methodology

To achieve the research objectives outlined earlier, the researchers adopted a multifaceted approach, combining both qualitative research methodology and doctrinal legal analysis. This integrated approach was selected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex issue relating to the factors of involvement of Malaysian youth with online hate speech. While doctrinal legal research offers a structured, in-depth examination of the legal framework surrounding hate speech, qualitative research allows for the exploration of nuanced perspectives and a deeper understanding of the social, psychological, and cultural factors influencing youth behaviour (Mack et al., 2005). Thus, combining these methodologies enables the researcher to address both the legal and social dimensions of the issue more effectively than relying solely on one approach.

The qualitative research method was chosen primarily because it offers rich, detailed insights into the lived experiences, attitudes, and perceptions of individuals, which are often not easily captured by purely doctrinal analysis (Mack et al., 2005). Hate speech, particularly in the online context, is a phenomenon shaped by a variety of factors such as personal beliefs, social norms, and digital behaviours. These complexities are difficult to quantify through traditional legal analysis alone. Qualitative methods, including interviews and case studies, provide a more holistic view of the phenomenon and allow the researcher to gather in-depth data that enhances understanding. As described by Mack et al (2005), qualitative research can uncover the underlying meanings, motivations, and social constructs that influence behaviours like hate speech, offering insights that go beyond the surface-level examination of legal texts and statutes.

In parallel with the qualitative approach, the researchers also utilized doctrinal legal research methods, which involve an in-depth analysis of legal texts, statutes, case law, and other primary legal sources. This method allows the researchers to examine the formal legal frameworks that provide guarantees to freedom of speech, while at the same time limiting it. The researchers specifically examined key legal instruments such as the Federal Constitution, which enshrines fundamental rights and freedoms, including freedom of speech, while also acknowledging restrictions related to public order, morality, and hate speech. Case law was also considered, particularly decisions that provide insight into how courts interpret and apply these laws about hate speech. By combining these legal sources, the researchers can critically assess the effectiveness and limitations of the current legal framework in combating hate speech, while also identifying potential areas for reform or improvement.

Furthermore, to enrich the study, the researchers employed secondary sources, which include a wide range of academic literature, legal commentaries, government reports, and relevant online resources. As outlined by Thornhill et al (2013), secondary sources are published materials that derive from primary data and provide analyses, interpretations, and summaries of original research or legal texts. These sources offer an additional layer of understanding, drawing on previous studies, theoretical frameworks, and empirical data to inform the research. For this study, the researcher consulted databases and platforms such as Lexis Nexis, CLJ Legal Law, Lawnet, Westlaw, Sage Publications, Emerald, Springer, Google Scholar, and SSRN. These databases provided access to scholarly articles, legal journals, reports, and other resources that are essential for understanding both the legal and socio-political dimensions of hate speech in Malaysia. By engaging with these secondary sources, the researcher was able to build upon existing knowledge and situate the study within the broader academic and legal discourse.

In addition to these research methodologies, the researchers employed interviews as a primary method of data collection. Interviews are an effective way to gather qualitative data from individuals who have firsthand knowledge or expertise on the subject matter, particularly those involved in policymaking or advocacy. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected respondents, which allowed the researchers to explore specific themes and issues while also giving respondents the flexibility to share their perspectives in greater detail (Thornhill et al., 2013). The semi-structured format facilitated an open dialogue that enabled the researchers to probe deeper into complex topics, such as the factors of involvement of youth in online hate speech issues. Hence, for this study, two key respondents were identified, both of whom hold significant roles in addressing hate speech and promoting social harmony in Malaysia. Another

factor in the selection of the respondents is due to their expertise, willingness and availability (Patton, 1990). The first respondent is Senator Dr. Zulkifli bin Hasan, who serves as the Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Religious Affairs). In his capacity as a policymaker, Dr. Zulkifli plays a pivotal role in shaping public policy related to religious and social issues, including the regulation of hate speech. His insights into the government's efforts to combat online hate speech, particularly among youth, were invaluable to the research. The second respondent is Mr. Adli Zakuan Bin Zairakithnaini, the Vice President of ABIM (Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia), a prominent Islamic youth organization. ABIM has been actively involved in advocating for greater social cohesion and promoting the responsible use of social media. Mr. Adli's perspective as a youth leader and advocate for peace and tolerance provided an important counterpoint to the policymaker's views and offered a deeper understanding of how civil society organizations are working to address this issue at the grassroots level.

Through the combination of doctrinal legal research, qualitative interviews, secondary literature, and legal case analysis, this study aims to provide a nuanced and comprehensive exploration of the issue of hate speech among youth in Malaysia. This multifaceted approach allows the researcher to assess not only the legal frameworks in place to address hate speech but also the broader social, cultural, and psychological factors that contribute to its prevalence. By examining both the legal and social dimensions of hate speech, the research seeks to offer practical recommendations for policymakers, legal practitioners, and civil society organizations in their efforts to combat hate speech and promote a more tolerant, inclusive, and responsible society, especially in the context of youth engagement and online communication.

Findings

The Scope of Guarantees and Limitations on Young Malaysian Online Users under International Law and the Federal Constitution

The right to freedom of speech is not only considered one of the most fundamental branches of human rights but is also the only political human right that is directly linked to democracy. At the international level, the right to freedom of speech is recognized and outlined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). These guarantees were explicitly mentioned by Hishammudin J in the case of *Muhammad Hilman bin Idham & 3 Ors v. Government of Malaysia & 2 Ors* [2011] 6 AMR 499. The court also emphasized that freedom of speech holds a special place, as it can be found in the constitutions of many countries (Basu, 2018).

However, the guarantee of freedom of speech is not absolute; rather, it is subject to permissible limitations, as stated under Article 29 of the UDHR. Article 29 generally allows restrictions on the right to freedom of speech to protect the rights of others and to safeguard "morality, public order, and general welfare in a democratic society." Similarly, Article 19(3) of the ICCPR states that the right to freedom of expression may be restricted to protect public order and national security. Therefore, based on the following arguments, it can be concluded that the right to freedom of speech is fundamentally guaranteed but may be restricted for legitimate reasons.

In the Malaysian context, the right to freedom of expression and speech is protected under Article 10(1)(a) of the Federal Constitution. However, it should be emphasized that this guarantee is limited to Malaysian citizens and does not extend to foreign nationals, as explicitly stated in the constitutional provision. Furthermore, as outlined in international treaties and declarations, freedom of speech in Malaysia can also be restricted if it meets the specified conditions, particularly under Articles 10(2)(a) and 10(4) of the Federal Constitution. Additionally, freedom of speech may be limited for other reasons, such as if it is deemed subversive or falls under emergency laws, as provided under Articles 149 and 150 of the Federal Constitution.

While some argue that hate speech should be considered a form of communication protected under the right to freedom of speech, Wan Mohd Nor believes that restrictions on hate speech are necessary, especially in a multiracial and multireligious country like Malaysia (Wan Mohd Nor & Mohd Asraf, 2015). This is because hate speech can threaten religious and racial harmony in the country, potentially leading to public unrest (Wan Mohd Nor & Mohd Asraf, 2015). She further asserts that the tragic events of May 13, 1969, serve as an example of how racial tensions can escalate due to the failure to curb the spread of hate speech within society.

Factors That Attract Young Malaysians to Participate In Creating, Disseminating, Or Propagating Online Hate Speech.

In Malaysia, the statutory definition of youth is provided under Section 2 of the Youth Societies and Youth Development Act 2007 (Act 668). Initially, this section defined youth as "a person who is not less than fifteen years old and not more than forty years old." However, in 2019, the House of Representatives decided to amend this provision through the Youth Societies and Youth Development (Amendment) Act 2019 (Act A1602). This amendment will reduce the youth age limit from 40 years to 30 years, and the provision is scheduled to take effect on January 1, 2026 (Awang, 2023).

Based on the latest data as of January 2024, according to Meltwater, 83.1% of Malaysia's population are social media users. Among them, 57.4% of meta-social platform users are individuals aged below 34 years (Meltwater, 2024). These findings indicate that individuals under 40 years old, categorized as youth, make up the largest segment of social media users in Malaysia. Therefore, it can be concluded that the youth segment is statistically the most affected by the risks present on social media. The virtual world, which is generally anonymous, persistent, and immersive, presents significant challenges for authorities in regulating online content, including online hate speech (Haron & Arsaf, 2022).

Generally, hate speech undermines the concepts of diversity, equality, tolerance, and fundamental human rights principles and norms (Stajnko et al., 2024). Therefore, this phenomenon poses a significant danger to a multireligious and multiethnic society like Malaysia. According to the first respondent in this study, Senator Dr. Zulkifli bin Hasan, Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Religious Affairs), several factors contribute to youth involvement in online hate speech (Zulkifli Hasan, 2024). He suggests that these factors may be driven by a lack of awareness and education on hate speech sensitivity from an early age in Malaysia. Additionally, the situation is exacerbated by social segregation, whether intentional or not, based on ethnicity within local communities, covering various dimensions, including politics and education. This demographic division based on ethnicity

creates a reality of diversity that should be celebrated, but at the same time, it raises concerns about social separation, which further limits interethnic integration.

Therefore, according to him, as a policymaker, a new framework and approach should be formulated and implemented urgently to foster stronger interethnic understanding within society. He also believes that interpretations of Islam should be more moderate to prevent any form of radical and excessive or '*ghuluw*' ideologies, which, in turn, can indirectly curb hate speech both online and offline among the community, particularly the youth. In understanding this phenomenon, he emphasizes the need to promote fresh discourse on *Fiqh al-Muwatanah* or Fiqh of Citizenship, which can contribute to mutual understanding in a multiethnic society (Hasan, 2021). He also stresses that Malaysians should embrace the spirit of the Medina Charter, which symbolizes unity and the excellence of Islamic civilization. This charter embodies the spirit of *Fiqh al-Ta'ayush* or Fiqh of Coexistence, which should be further developed in Malaysia to create a more united, peaceful, and tolerant nation. He further states that Muslims in Malaysia should adhere to the *wasatiyyah* (moderation) approach, characterized by politeness and noble character.

The second respondent in this study, Mr. Adli Zakuan Bin Zairakithnaini, Vice President of Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM), believes that youth involvement in hate speech is influenced by several other factors beyond those mentioned by the first respondent. According to Adli, another reason why youth are easily manipulated into hatred and violence is their lack of historical awareness, particularly among the younger generation. History has shown how the sultanates in the Malay Archipelago interacted with various external civilizations and exhibited openness and rationality in developing maritime empires in the region. Youth should engage with the works of scholars such as Haji Abdul Malik bin Abdul Karim Amrullah or famously known as Buya Hamka, who advocated for cosmopolitan and universal change, rather than being trapped in hostility and partisan political ideology. According to him, youth involvement is also driven by their inherent desire for social acceptance among peers. The proliferation of political, religious, and ethnic identities, skilfully exploited by influential leaders with extreme views, also contributes to the spread of hate. This situation is further fuelled by global events such as the conflicts in Syria, Palestine, and Afghanistan, where many Muslims have suffered atrocities, leading to anger and hatred that can result in extremist ideologies. Adli further argues that this issue arises due to the erosion of traditional family values that emphasize courtesy and brotherhood. The breakdown of traditional family institutions, exacerbated by modern globalized cultural influences dominated by liberalism, materialism, and individualism, has led to social neglect. This, in turn, not only contributes to the problem of hate speech but also pushes youth toward other social issues, including hedonism, radicalism, and extremism (Adli Zakuan, 2024).

Wan Mohd Nor (2023) opines that several factors can generally contribute to the proliferation of extremism through hate speech. In the Malaysian context, she notes that hate speech is widely disseminated through three main mediums: (i) social media, (ii) mass media (print, broadcast, etc.), and (iii) political communication. She further adds that the dissemination of information containing elements of hate speech through these platforms can foster extremist thinking among the general public including youth (Wan Mohd Nor, 2023). The accessibility of online content, which facilitates interaction among young people today, certainly provides an advantage to hate groups, enabling them to exploit young users in spreading their propaganda (Harriman et al., 2020).

In 2024, the Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counter-Terrorism (SEARCCT), a center under the Malaysian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, also revealed that terrorist groups are now using online video games to recruit young people into their movements (Noh, 2024). This recent development is certainly alarming, considering that online gaming platforms are difficult to regulate, while at the same time, youth and younger generations are the primary users of these platforms. This situation undoubtedly calls for stronger and more coordinated efforts to cultivate critical thinking among young people, who are also the main consumers of online entertainment. It requires the development of a “mental firewall” as well as initiatives to enhance digital literacy among the younger generation (Kuwai Hoi & Shi Joh, 2023).

Recommendation And Conclusion

To address the issue of online hate speech in Malaysia, a comprehensive, collaborative approach is required. Firstly, A more holistic regulatory approach is essential to address online hate speech comprehensively. Malaysia's existing policies, such as the Malaysian Action Plan to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism (MyPCVE), have made some strides in tackling extremism but do not specifically address online hate speech. A comprehensive framework must integrate both legal and policy measures to not only counter hate speech but also to educate and inform the public on the consequences of spreading such content. This could include promoting media literacy, online etiquette, and the responsible use of technology, particularly among the youth. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that legal and policy approaches, as well as government interventions alone, are insufficient to comprehensively curb the spread of hate speech. In this regard, more active involvement from civil society organizations (CSOs) must be intensified in efforts to combat the proliferation of hate speech, particularly among youth. In the researchers' view, preventing hate speech cannot rely solely on legal measures; rather, it must be addressed holistically by incorporating education, rehabilitation, and awareness initiatives. Simultaneously, ethical digital literacy, especially among young people, should be enhanced. Promoting digital literacy and responsible online behaviour can help prevent the spread of harmful content and equip youths with the tools to resist extremist ideologies. Initiatives led by the Malaysian Muslim Youth Movement (ABIM) to counter hate speech and extremism serve as an example of how a CSO can contribute to tackling this challenge. ABIM has been actively engaging in strategic partnerships with the Ministry of Youth and Sports (KBS) and the Malaysian Youth Council (MBM). Among its initiatives are the ‘Preventing Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE)’ program and the ‘*Program Literasi Bangsa Malaysia*,’ both of which aim to prevent extremist ideologies among youth (Adli Zakuan, 2024). Furthermore, there is a compelling need for a dedicated, robust law focused specifically on combating online hate speech. Nevertheless, the law must ensure that it does not become an overreach that stifles legitimate discussion or debate but, instead, targets harmful rhetoric that could incite violence, hatred, or discrimination.

By adopting these recommendations, Malaysia can create a more resilient and inclusive digital environment where youth are equipped to recognize and reject hate speech, and where responsible online behaviour is promoted at all levels of society.

Acknowledgement

The researchers extend their heartfelt appreciation to all those involved in the publication of this research paper. It is with deep sadness that we announce the passing of one of the co-authors, Associate Professor Dr. Ahmad Shamsul bin Abd. Aziz. He was a valued mentor and a significant contributor to this research. His insights and dedication to the project were

invaluable, and we will miss his presence in our work. We extend our deepest condolences to his family and friends. This paper is dedicated to his memory, and we hope to carry forward the spirit of collaboration and excellence that he exemplified. This paper would not have been possible without the financial support from the Research and Innovation Management Centre (RIMC) of Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) through the Geran Penjanaan Penyelidikan S/O Code 21653 for the study titled “A Study on Hate Speech Among Youth in Malaysia: Towards Strengthening the Existing Legal Approach.”

References

- Awang, B. (2023). *New Youth Age Limit To Enhance Their Maturity Level – Experts*. Bernama. <https://www.bernama.com/en/bfokus/news.php?id=2256380#:~:text=Globally%2Cthe average age for,previous upper limit of 40.>
- Basu, D. Das. (2018). *Shorter Constitution of India* (15th ed.). Lexis Nexis.
- Daud, M. (2019). *Internet Content Regulation : Contemporary Legal and Regulatory Issues in the Changing Digital Landscape*. IIUM Press.
- Emerson, T. I. (1970). *The System of Freedom of Expression* (1st ed.). Random House.
- Fernandez, K., & Barton, G. (2023). Refining the Definition of Extremism in the Context of Malaysia. *Resmilitaris*, 13. <https://resmilitaris.net/menu-script/index.php/resmilitaris/article/view/3617%0Ahttps://resmilitaris.net/menu-script/index.php/resmilitaris/article/download/3617/2824>
- Haron, H. H., & Arsath, N. (2022). Zuckerberg’s Metaverse and the Unready Malaysian Laws: Quo Vadis? *Proceedings of the International Conference on Law and Digitalization (ICLD 2022)*, 1, 123–135. <https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-494069-59-6>
- Haron, H. H., Sufian Shuaib, F., & Arsath, N. (2020). Some Like It Hoax : Lessons in Regulating Fake News in Malaysia. *International Conference on Communication and Media*.
- Harriman, N., Shortland, N., Su, M., Cote, T., Testa, M. A., & Savoia, E. (2020). Youth exposure to hate in the online space: an exploratory analysis. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(22), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17228531>
- Hasan, Z. (2021). *Fiqh kewarganegaraan manhaj Malaysia pemangkin perpaduan Nasional-Prof Madya Dr Zulkifli Hasan*. Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia. <https://www.usim.edu.my/ms/berita/in-our-words-ms/fiqh-kewarganegaraan-manhaj-malaysia-pemangkin-perpaduan-nasional-prof-madya-dr-zulkifli-hasan/>
- Kemp, S. (2024). *The state of digital in Malaysia in 2024*. Data Reportal. <https://wearesocial.com/id/blog/2024/01/digital-2024/>
- Kuwi Hoi, N., & Shi Joh, T. (2023). Exploring the Social and Cultural Implications of Hate Speech on Facebook in Malaysia. *Sains Humanika*, 16(1), 19–31. <https://doi.org/10.11113/sh.v16n1.2069>
- Leets, L., & Giles, H. (1997). Words as Weapons—When Do They Wound? Investigations of Harmful Speech. *Human Communication Research*, 24(2), 260–301. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2958.1997.tb00415.x>
- Levy, L. W. (1986). *Constitutional Opinions: Aspects of the Bill of Rights*. Oxford University Press.
- Mack, N., Woodsing, C., MacQueen, K., Guest, G., & Namey, E. (2005). *Qualitative Research Methods: A Data Collectors Field Guide*. Family Health International.
- Majlis Keselamatan Negara. (2020). *Malaysia Cyber Security Strategy 2020-2024*. <https://asset.mkn.gov.my/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/MalaysiaCyberSecurityStrategy2020-2024.pdf>

- Marsden, C. T. (2011). *Internet Co-Regulation: European Law, Regulatory Governance and Legitimacy in Cyberspace* (2011th ed.). Cambridge University Press.
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511763410>
- Meiklejohn, A. (1965). *Political freedom;: The constitutional powers of the people*. Oxford University Press.
- Meltwater. (2024). *Social Media Statistics for Malaysia [Updated 2024]*. Meltwater.Com.
<https://www.meltwater.com/en/blog/social-media-statistics-malaysia>
- Mill, J. S. (1859). *On Liberty*. Batoche Books.
- Noh, M. F. (2024). *Permainan dalam talian rekrut pengganas*. Berita Harian Online.
<https://www.bharian.com.my/berita/nasional/2024/05/1251037/permainan-dalam-talian-rekrut-pengganas>
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). Qualitative evaluation and research methods, 2nd ed. In *Qualitative evaluation and research methods, 2nd ed.* Sage Publications, Inc.
- Saeed, H. (1997). *Freedom of Speech: A Comparative Analysis Between Malaysia and India*. International Islamic University Malaysia.
- Scanlon, T. (1972). A Theory of Freedom of Expression. *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 1(2), 204–226.
- Schindler, M., & Domahidi, E. (2021). The growing field of interdisciplinary research on user comments: A computational scoping review. *New Media and Society*, 23(8), 2474–2492. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444821994491>
- Sreedharam, R. K., & Ramayah, B. (2020). Sedition Law and the Bloggers' Freedom of Expression in Malaysia. *Jurnal Undang-Undang Dan Masyarakat*, 26(2020), 85–96.
<https://doi.org/10.17576/juum-2020-26-10>
- Stajniko, J., Siter, D., & Tomažič, L. M. (2024). Discrimination, freedom of expression and two concepts of liberty: Assessing European legislation criminalizing hate speech. *Hungarian Journal of Legal Studies*, 64(2), 288–307.
<https://doi.org/10.1556/2052.2023.00444>
- Stone, I. F. (1989). *The Trial of Socrates* (Reprint). Anchor.
- Tedford, T. L. (2009). *Freedom of Speech in the United States* (6th ed.). Strata Publishing.
- The Malay Mail. (2024). *In which country do people spend the most time on screens? Here's a hint: Malaysia's in top 10*. Malay Mail Online.
<https://www.malaymail.com/news/life/2024/04/24/in-which-country-do-people-spend-the-most-time-on-screens-heres-a-hint-malysias-in-top-10/130632>
- Thornhill, A., Lewis, P., & Saunders, M. (2013). *Research Methods for Business Students* (Fifth Editi, Vol. 30, Issue 1). Mark Sauders, Philip Lewis and Adrian Thornbill.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2012.743996>
- Wan Mohd Nor, M. (2023). All-of-Society Approach to Address Hate Speech. In M. H. A. HAMID, K. SARIBURAJA, N. H. M. NOAR, S. A. TAJARI, M. A. ISMAIZAM, S. H. MUSTHAR, & S. A. B. KHAN (Eds.), *SEARCCT'S Selection of Articles 2023 Special Issue: Building Digital Resilience In Preventing And Countering Violent Extremism* (pp. 97–107). SOUTHEAST ASIA REGIONAL CENTRE FOR COUNTER-TERRORISM (SEARCCT) MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS.
<https://www.searcct.gov.my/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/SOA-2023d.pdf>
- Wan Mohd Nor, M. (2024). *From Hate to Hope : A Holistic Approach To Address Hate Speech*. Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations (IDFR). <https://stratsea.com/from-hate-to-hope-a-holistic-approach-to-address-hate-speech-by-dr-murni-wan-mohd-nor/>
- Wan Mohd Nor, M., & Mohd Asraf, R. (2015). Freedom without restraint and responsibility: The problem of hate speech in Malaysia. *Malayan Law Journal*, 5(July 2016), 44–67.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/294872318_Freedom_without_restraint_and_responsibility_the_problem_of_hate_speech_in_Malaysia

Zamri, N. A. K., Mohamad Nasir, N. N. A., Hassim, M. N., & Ramli, S. M. (2023). Digital hate speech and othering: The construction of hate speech from Malaysian perspectives. *Cogent Arts and Humanities*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2023.2229089>