

## **YOUTHS' AWARENESS TOWARDS SARAWAK'S MALAY CULTURAL HERITAGE: SOCIAL MEDIA**

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**Abstract:** Recognized for its own distinctive aspects, Sarawak's Malay Community is unique, mainly in the aspects of culture, language, and lifestyle. One of the relevant Malay proverbs in the context of heritage states: "Yang lama dikekalkan, Yang baharu didukung" means that the traditional custom will always be practiced, while the modern way of life will be embraced. Thus, it is important to preserve these cultural heritages to sustain and protect their values. This study's objective focuses on the exploration of the Malay youths' and their awareness towards Sarawak's Malay Heritage, specifically on Traditional Malay Clothing, Music and Dances. It also recognizes the use of social media as a medium to promote and sustain Sarawak's Malay Cultural Heritage. The study involves 115 respondents who are undergraduate students of one of the local universities in Sarawak, where they have completed an online survey to address the study's objectives effectively.

**Keywords:** Sarawak's Malay Heritage, Social Media, Youths, Awareness

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### **Introduction**

To be involved in various forms of social media is a repetitive activity which is perceived to provide beneficial values to children and adolescents, in which the areas of communication skills, social connections, and technical skills could be improved. Any website that allows social interaction is considered a social media site, including social networking sites such as Facebook, Myspace and Twitter, interactive experiences and gaming sites, video sites and blogs.

Today, many youths would commonly lose interest in electronic media like television and radio and become more avid towards the use of social media. Generally, a youth is defined as “the passage from a dependant childhood to independent adulthood” where young people are in the transition between a world of rather secure development to a world of choice and risk (Eurostat 2009: p.17). In addition, the United Nations (2008), for statistical purposes, defines “youth”, as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, without prejudice to other definitions by Member States. Thus, youths are very important for the future of the progress and development of any nation and country. Consequently, social media is an effective platform to educate and to sustain any pertinent information to reach out to the younger generation.

The Sarawak Malay’s cultural heritage is a community identity that includes language, traditional clothing, beliefs, culture, art, customs, festivals, historical buildings, monuments, and all items that this ethnic group owns, worthy of preservation for the future generation. Hence, for this study, social media platform is seen to be most appropriate medium to preserve and sustain cultural heritage. This study explores the youths’ awareness towards Sarawak’s Malay Heritage, that is focusing on the Traditional Malay Clothing, Music and Dances. It also illustrates the effectiveness of social media as a platform in promoting Sarawak’s Malay Heritage, specifically among youths who are generally the keen users of various social media platforms.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Awareness of Cultural Heritage***

United Nations, Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization or known as UNESCO is the association that encourages the identification, protection and preservation of cultural and natural heritage. They support heritage as a legacy from the past and what should be passed on to the future generations. Jokilehto (2005) views that culture is different from one state law from another. Declaration of this cultural heritage within the ethnic is determined by the law. In the Canadian Law, heritage is a reality, own by community, rich inheritance that being passed on, recognize and participate from the public. According to Smith (2001), heritage defines our social values that enable us to understand who we really are, culture and community, and guide us in decision making for a sustainable future. To add, Smith (2001) further suggests that the properties of this legacy need to be sustained as they provide a voice from the past to be shared and delivered from one to another and provide opportunity to the community to contribute to the history.

Awareness on cultural heritage must be acknowledged by our own ability to recognize the elements and assets. Vecco (2010) affirms that this awareness can be achieved based on our ability to recognise its aesthetic, historic, scientific, social values etc., or rather, the society and the community must also recognise these values, upon which our own cultural identity can be built. Bandarin and Van Oers (2012) state that the beliefs on the awareness of heritage encompass the symbolic and aesthetic values of places and to a new use of the urban spaces that define the historic city (or site) as a living heritage.

### ***Social Media: Medium to Sustain Cultural Heritage***

According to Singh, Priyanka and Yagya (2013), social media is a transformation of social interaction that changes the way we look at love, friendship, family, intimacy, language and expressions. Photographs, video, music, documents and all kinds of information are all within a click. Social media can be a platform of communication to become more effective, engage

citizens, gain feedback and participation in the community. Furthermore, Singh, Priyanka and Yagya (2013) add that the social media is more localized where more people get connected. Moreover, social media is a group of internet-based applications that are based on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 as it allows the creation and exchange of users' general contents (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). The popular social network sites according to Siti Eizaleila and Azizah (2010) are Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Blog while the rest is developed based on the needs of social users in Malaysia. Hence, due to their popularity, social media sites can be effective to sustain cultural heritage so that cultural heritage will not fade and become unknown among the younger generation.

### ***Sarawak's Malay Heritage: Clothing, Music and Dance***

The most common Sarawak's Traditional Malay Clothing consist of *Keringkam* (traditional head scarf), Sarawak *Songket* (handwoven fabric) and *Tali Pinggang Besi/ Perak* (traditional alloy belt). *Keringkam* according to Dayang Sandrawati Abang Josmani et al. (2012) is a gold thread piece of embroidered veil or shawl worn by most Malays ladies in Sarawak during weddings, engagements, cultural festivals or other special occasions. Sarawak Malay *Songket* is a fabric which is hand-woven on silk or cotton fabric and intricately patterned with gold or silver threads. *Tali Pinggang Besi/Perak* is an alloy belt that is worn by a Malay girl, either for fashion or to match the attire at that time.

The most common traditional music among the community of Sarawak Malay is *Bermukun* or *Bergendang*, in which the main musical instrument is *gendang* or traditional drum, played by the musicians, who are also the singers. According to Mohammad Syawal Narawi (2016), traditionally, this music was performed basically for young people to gain partners in life, as the girls rarely went of their houses. The instruments include traditional drums or *gendang*, violin, *gong* and accordion. The music begins with the *gendang* or drums performance and they start to sing and recite *pantun* or Malay poetic forms, following the rhythms of the *gendang*.

Sarawak Malay dance is called *Bertandak* and one of the most common dances in Sarawak. *Bertandak* means dance and this *bertandak* is performed during *Bermukun* or *Bergendang* session. Basically, the dance is quite similar to the common Malaysian *Zapin* dance. Traditionally, the dancers are males who often wore masks while dancing. Sarawak's *Zapin* Traditional Dances such as *Zapin Sebat* and *Zapin Sindang* are some of the known Sarawak's traditional Malay dance. These are performed during wedding, engagement day and any special occasions. According to Mohd Ghouse Nasuruddin (1989) this traditional dance is a medium to illustrate continuous legendary stories, tales or traditional customs that are performed for entertainment.

### **Methodology**

The study involves 112 respondents who are undergraduate students in one of the local universities in Sarawak, where they have completed an online survey (google forms and were distributed via emails and messaging services) to address the study's objectives effectively. The survey is adapted from Smith (2001) and it consists of five sections: demographic; the awareness towards Sarawak's Malays Cultural Heritage and the awareness towards the different aspects of Sarawak Malay's Cultural Heritage; the sources of Sarawak's Malays Cultural Heritage; Importance of Sustaining Cultural Heritage and Social Media as a platform to sustain Sarawak's Malays Cultural Heritage. The data was analysed using SPSS and presented in tabular forms of frequencies (number of respondents).

## Findings

### Section A: Demographic

**Table 1: Gender**

| Male | Female |
|------|--------|
| 33   | 82     |

**Table 2: Age**

| 18 – 20 years old | 21 – 24 years old |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| 73                | 42                |

**Table 3: Types of Most Popularly Used Social Media**

| Facebook | Instagram | WhatsApp | YouTube |
|----------|-----------|----------|---------|
| 87       | 23        | 3        | 2       |

More female respondents were involved in this study where most of the respondents were between 21-23 years old. They were avid users of Facebook while Instagram took second place as the most popular used social media among them.

### Section B: Awareness towards Sarawak's Malays Cultural Heritage

**Table 4: Awareness towards Sarawak's Malays Cultural Heritage (SMCH)**

| No | Items  | Respondents |    |    |    |    |
|----|--|-------------|----|----|----|----|
|    |  | 1           | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  |
| 1  | I know what the aspect of SMCH is  | 3           | 9  | 47 | 41 | 15 |
| 2  | I know <i>Bertandak</i> during <i>Bermukun</i> is one of SMCH                  | 6           | 18 | 18 | 41 | 31 |
| 3  | I know what Sarawak <i>Zapin</i> Traditional Dance is                          | 6           | 17 | 32 | 35 | 25 |
| 4  | I Know <i>Keringkam</i> is one of the elements of SMCH                         | 15          | 23 | 41 | 18 | 18 |
| 5  | I know Sarawak's Malay has its own <i>Sarawak Songket</i>                      | 1           | 8  | 20 | 41 | 45 |
| 6  | I know about Sarawak's Malay Lady accessory: <i>Tali Pinggang Besi / Perak</i> | 14          | 17 | 33 | 25 | 26 |
| 7  | I know <i>Bermukun</i> or <i>Bergendang</i> is one of SMCH                     | 5           | 11 | 24 | 32 | 43 |
| 8  | I want to know more about SMCH and I am curious about it                       | 0           | 2  | 23 | 36 | 54 |

Scale: 1 (Strongly Disagree), 2 (Disagree), 3 (Not Sure), 4 (Agree), 5 (Strongly Agree)

The most significant results from Table 4 above are for the item "I know what the aspect of Sarawak's Malays Cultural Heritage is" with 53 respondents for 'strongly agree' and 'agree' and, the item 'I want to know more about SMCH and I am curious about it' with 90 respondents who chose 'strongly agree' and 'agree'. These are perceived as optimistic as many admitted that they know relevant information about Sarawak's Malays Cultural Heritage and most of

the respondents are curious to learn more about their cultural heritage. Consequently, these might further indicate that the respondents at certain level are aware of their culture and roots.

**Table 5: Awareness towards Different Aspects of Sarawak's Malays Cultural Heritage (SMCH)**

| No | Items   | Respondents |    |    |    |    |    |    |
|----|---|-------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|
|    |   | 1           | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  | 6  | 7  |
| 1  | I have known about <i>Bertandak</i>                 | 6           | 13 | 10 | 19 | 20 | 26 | 21 |
| 2  | I have known about <i>Zapin Sarawak</i>             | 6           | 13 | 10 | 19 | 20 | 26 | 21 |
| 3  | I have known about <i>Keringkam</i>                 | 12          | 7  | 9  | 9  | 12 | 45 | 21 |
| 4  | I have known about <i>Sarawak Songket</i>           | 13          | 9  | 11 | 15 | 28 | 18 | 21 |
| 5  | I have known about <i>Tali Pinggang Besi/ Perak</i> | 11          | 4  | 6  | 16 | 16 | 40 | 21 |
| 6  | I have known about <i>Bermukun or Bergendang</i>    | 15          | 10 | 7  | 16 | 26 | 19 | 22 |

Scale: 1 (Have Never Known), 2 (Between 1-5 Months), 3 (Between 6 – 12 Months), 4 (1 – 5 years), 5 (6 – 10 years), 6 (10-15 years), 7 (Have Known All My Life)

Table 5 illustrates that the respondents' awareness towards the different aspects of Sarawak's Malays Cultural Heritage in which more than half of the respondents are aware of the existence of *Keringkam* and *Tali Pinggang Besi/ Perak*, between 10-15 years and all their lives. The least aspects of cultural heritage that they are aware of are aspects of traditional music: *bermukun / bergendang* and traditional fabric: *Sarawak Songket*. The possible reasons are the respondents do not have ample opportunities to listen to such music and view *bermukun / bergendang*. As for *Sarawak Songket*, the fabric is rarely worn by Malay ladies at present.

### **Section C: Sarawak Malays Cultural Heritage Sources**

**Table 6: Most popular sources to gain Sarawak's Malays Cultural Heritage Information**

| Items                               | Respondents |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|
| Book                                | 7           |
| Family                              | 36          |
| Magazine                            | 6           |
| Museum                              | 5           |
| Exhibition (Open)                   | 12          |
| Exhibition (Science and Technology) | 1           |
| Library                             | 2           |
| Resource Center                     | 2           |
| School                              | 28          |
| Friends and Relative                | 16          |

This table demonstrates the main sources of Sarawak's Malays Cultural Heritage Information and many respondents opted for family members (36 respondents) and school (28 respondents). The result for the item of family shows that the respondents' family members are their central basis of knowledge when it comes to Sarawak's Malays Cultural Heritage Information. This is made possible as they could gain information from their grandparents and elder relatives who own traditional fabrics and accessories, and they often talk about the traditional music and dances to their younger family members. Dayang Sandrawati Abang Josmani et al. (2012) posit that the exposure from family and community through exhibitions and learning workshops can create better awareness, especially among the younger generation of the Sarawak Malays.

#### ***Section D: Importance of Sustaining Sarawak's Malays Cultural Heritage***

**Table 7: Sustaining Sarawak's Malays Cultural Heritage (SMCH): Importance**

| No | Items   | Respondents |    |    |    |    |
|----|---|-------------|----|----|----|----|
|    |   | 1           | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  |
| 1  | SMCH needs to be sustained for the future             | 0           | 0  | 14 | 26 | 75 |
| 2  | I love SMCH because it defines my identity            | 0           | 0  | 19 | 29 | 67 |
| 3  | I'm proud of my SMCH                                  | 0           | 0  | 14 | 36 | 65 |
| 4  | I will help to sustain SMCH by any means              | 0           | 0  | 20 | 39 | 56 |
| 5  | I don't care about SMCH                               | 64          | 15 | 14 | 10 | 12 |
| 6  | Schools should provide activities to sustain SMCH     | 0           | 2  | 21 | 34 | 58 |
| 7  | Community needs to provide activities to sustain SMCH | 0           | 4  | 22 | 31 | 58 |
| 8  | Museum should provide activities to sustain SMCH      | 0           | 0  | 16 | 31 | 68 |
| 9  | Library should provide activities to sustain SMCH     | 0           | 0  | 23 | 29 | 63 |
| 10 | Radio and television should help to document SMCH     | 0           | 0  | 17 | 34 | 64 |

Scale: 1 (Strongly Disagree), 2 (Disagree), 3 (Not Sure), 4 (Agree), 5 (Strongly Agree)

Table 7 demonstrates positive feedback as 111 respondents 'agreed' and 'strongly agreed' that Sarawak's Malays Cultural Heritage needs to be sustained for the future and they also admitted that their cultural heritage define their identities and roots (93 respondents 'agreed' and 'strongly agreed'). Another significant finding shows that 111 respondents were proud of their Malay heritage and thus, this is relevant to the next finding where 95 respondents would aid to protect and preserve their cultural heritage by any means. These indicate constructive efforts on their parts as the younger generation.

#### ***Section E: Social Media as platform to sustain Sarawak's Malays Cultural Heritage***

**Table 8: Social Media as Platform to Sustain Sarawak's Malays Cultural Heritage (SMCH)**

| No | Items   | Respondents |   |    |    |    |
|----|---|-------------|---|----|----|----|
|    |   | 1           | 2 | 3  | 4  | 5  |
| 1  | Overall, social media sites can help in sustaining SMCH effectively | 0           | 1 | 20 | 35 | 59 |

|   |  |   |   |    |    |    |
|---|--|---|---|----|----|----|
| 2 | Facebook is an effective media to promote SMCH                                       | 1 | 3 | 21 | 32 | 58 |
| 3 | Instagram is an effective media to promote SMCH                                      | 1 | 2 | 22 | 33 | 57 |
| 4 | YouTube is an effective media to promote SMCH  | 0 | 1 | 17 | 31 | 66 |
| 5 | WhatsApp is an effective media to promote SMCH                                       | 4 | 5 | 29 | 28 | 49 |
| 6 | Telegram is an effective media to promote SMCH                                       | 5 | 6 | 35 | 23 | 46 |
| 7 | Blog as an effective media to promote SMCH   | 1 | 1 | 25 | 27 | 61 |
| 8 | I will help to sustain SMCH by “Sharing” the information in my Social Media account. | 1 | 3 | 28 | 30 | 53 |

Scale: 1 (Strongly Disagree), 2 (Disagree), 3 (Not Sure), 4 (Agree), 5 (Strongly Agree)

Table 8 illustrates social media as the platform to sustain Sarawak’s Malays Cultural Heritage in which the most popular platform is YouTube with 97 respondents, as the youths would prefer to view and listen to the diverse aspects of Malay Cultural Heritage videos shared on the internet compared to other media. The least popular social media sites are WhatsApp and Telegram. Besides, generally, 94 respondents ‘strongly agreed’ and ‘agreed’ that social media sites can help in sustaining Sarawak’s Malays Cultural Heritage efficiently. Rubin and McClelland (2015) affirm that social networking sites have become central to the way young people communicate in their everyday lives. These sites help users to make new friends, share content, pictures, audios, videos among them and these can include contents that are related to Sarawak’s Malays Cultural Heritage.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

In general, many of the respondents are aware of certain aspects of Sarawak’s Malays Cultural Heritage and most are willing to sustain this heritage as it is part of their cultural identities. Many acknowledged the importance of this heritage and they also claimed that their main source of information would be their own family members. Notably, most are also keen to sustain the heritage by utilizing many mediums, such as the social media sites. As some of Sarawak’s Malay Cultural Heritage are slowly losing their popularity and more young people become less aware of their existence, thus, better awareness towards preserving and sustaining this traditional heritage needs to be done.

This can be achieved by utilizing social network sites, making this information to become ‘trending and viral’ and easily accessible. Users who consist of various individuals of all age levels can easily gain relevant information from social media and able to revive these traditional practices. These efforts need to be constantly conducted to enhance the youths’ awareness and to enhance their interests towards the Sarawak’s Malay Heritage, and gradually can sustain Sarawak’s Malay Cultural Heritage in longer terms.

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