

## Student's Participation in Volunteerism Activities

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### Abstract

Students are important individuals who will be contributing to social development in the future. Aside from formal lessons, students should also get involved in community activities as informal training to show their responsibility as youths. High expectations are placed on students of high education institutes; however, it is found that they rarely get involved in volunteer activities in their own communities. Instead, they spend more time on their personal activities. In efforts to encourage student's involvement in volunteerism, factors that contribute to their involvement must first be identified so that follow-up actions can be taken. This literature study is undertaken in order to identify the contributing factors. Applying the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) as well as supported by previous studies, this concept paper is proposing motivation, personality, family, neighbourhood, values, and involvement in clubs as the predictive factors on student's involvement in volunteer activities at the community level. This finding can be benefitted by relevant stakeholders who can manipulate these factors to encourage more student's involvement in the social activities.

**Keywords:** Volunteerism; Social work; Community; Youth; University students.



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### 1. Introduction

Youth is defined as young people between 15 to 24 years old (Ho *et al.*, 2015; UNESCO., 2012; Weinstock *et al.*, 2004). However, in the Malaysian context, the 1997 National Youth Development Policy has defined youth as people in the age range between 15 to 40 years old. In a country, the youth forms the majority of the population composition and they are very important in the context of nation development (Haslinda *et al.*, 2012). From the social aspect, Malaysia acknowledges youth as the future leaders who will look after the wellbeing of the nation and society. The future of a nation will be shaped by the youth of today. If the nation has high quality youth, its future will be bright.

Besides, youth is also viewed as an important resource or workforce to maintain the nation's ongoing development and growth to drive the nation forward and reach the status of developed country by the year 2020 as well as to achieve the National Transformation 2050 aspiration, because the youth will be at the helm of the country in the future. The youth is the backbone of a country and will lead the nation in the future (Sarimah, 2014), a high expectation is placed on the shoulders of youth by the leaders and society to see them become more responsible, confident, charismatic, active, and efficient in all aspects. All these characteristics are important preparations that the youth need to form quality human capital and valuable asset in order to contribute to the wellbeing of the community, society, and nation.

As young people with healthy physical, as well as having active and open mind, the youth must be alert, care about the community as well as get involved with them. The youth should be involved in various society activities at the community level, especially participating in volunteer activities and neighbourhood. Youth involvement in volunteer activities is an issue with growing importance in order to face the development and challenges in individual and community wellness (Ezhar and Madiha, 2015). Youth must get involved actively in social works at the community level, for example in communal work, religious activities, security watch, and others. It would be even better if there are volunteer activities in the community which are led by the youth, with some guidance and tips by community members who are older and more experienced.

Even when pressed to get actively involved in social work and volunteerism, studies (Ezhar and Madiha, 2015; Haslinda *et al.*, 2012; Sarimah, 2014; Warren *et al.*, 2014), showed that youth involvement in community activities are not at a satisfactory level yet; in fact youth involvement is deteriorating over time. This development is quite worrying and viewed as adverse to the aspiration of Vision 2020 and National Transformation 2050, which is to

form a developed society while retaining the good traditional values, as well as helping each other towards a harmonious living together.

The process to mitigate the issue of youth involvement in volunteer activities need to start by identifying the factors that can encourage their involvement in altruistic activities. The encouraging factors then need to be triggered continuously to further increase youth involvement in volunteer activities in the community. Since personal psychology and social factors such as demography, motivation, personality, family, neighbourhood, religion and other factors have been frequently discussed in previous studies, this review will focus on the factor of communication practice which is linked to involvement in volunteer activities, that angle has not been examined in depth by previous researchers.

## 2. Issues & Problems

In efforts to achieve the status of high-income developed country, there is a price to pay, specifically in the aspects of value deficit. Among issues that are often debated in recent years include the decline of volunteerism culture among community members, especially relating to the youth. Today's generation is seen as shunning social volunteering activities (Ibrahim, 2012), such as communal work for wedding reception or any type of festival, security watch in the neighbourhood, helping and providing assistance in the aftermath of disasters, etc. The issue of youth involvement in volunteer activities is evident as open lifestyle and democratic practices are adopted. Such lifestyle has impacted on significant reduction of youth involvement in volunteer activities compared to the involvement of older generation (Zhang and Lallana, 2013), who still practises the old lifestyle.

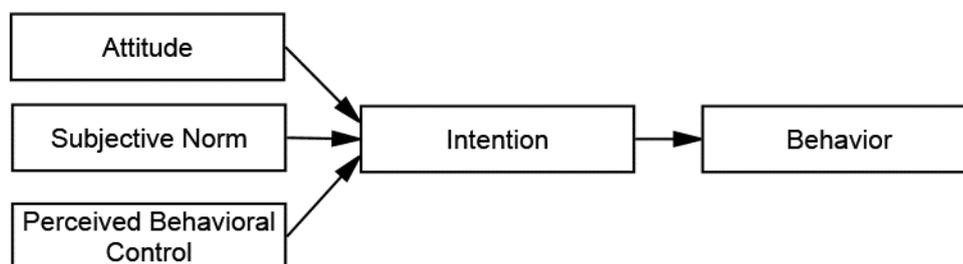
Without denying that there are still groups of youth who are involved in community activities, it is also true that more youths prefer to spend their time doing less altruistic activities such as chilling by the beach, watching concerts, consuming entertainments, racing, and even getting involved in crimes. Youth are frequently criticized because they are less involved in social-related issues (Warren *et al.*, 2014). To make the matter worse, the criticism by the public and other community members did not serve to chasten the youth, but instead has only angered them. Recent development showed that the youth are getting less obliged to help other people (Sarimah, 2014), do not get involved in social activities, and mix only with their peers.

It is not only the youth in general whose involvement level are low, even the youth studying in higher education institution are also showing similarly low level of involvement. University is the best place to raise awareness and train the youth about their role in social and community development, however the percentage of youth participating in volunteerism while in the university is very low (Sarimah, 2014). It is a cause for concern when education produced knowledgeable youth who are experts in technology, but has minimal participation as a volunteer (Sarimah, 2014). By right, highly knowledgeable individuals would be prone to get involved in volunteerism as well as having more opportunity, however they are also easily influenced and can remain impervious (Head, 2011). This paper will discuss the factors that contribute to encourage universities student involvement in volunteer activities, especially those at community level. Because the context of Malaysia include university students as part of the youth component, the term of discussion covers both students and youth.

## 3. Theoretical Approach

The behaviour of the youth and students' involvement in volunteer activities can be explained by the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1985;1991). TPB is a theory relating to social psychology that can explain various situations of human conduct, including involvement in volunteer activities at the community and neighbourhood level. This theory is a continuity and expansion from the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) with additional new predictive factor which is behaviour control.

Figure-1. Theory of Planned Behaviour



From this theory, actual behaviour of student's involvement in volunteer activities begins with intention. It is intention that stirs the conscience of the students so that they contribute their time, energy and various capability voluntarily to the community, especially at their neighbourhood. The intention with awareness and planning concept will motivate the youth and students to help out in events or festival activities, assist in funeral management when there is death in the community, assist communities who have been affected by disasters such as flood, fire and so on, take part in the security watch in the neighbourhood, participate in community activities and programs at places of worship, help neighbours who are ill or facing difficulties, as well as get involved in clubs and encourage peers to join volunteer activities.

The trigger of good intention to join volunteer activities is spurred by three main factors which are the individual's attitude (Ajzen, 1991; Sherif and Hovland, 1961), subjective norm (Bandura, 1977), and perceived behaviour control (Ajzen, 1991). From the TPB theory, it can be summarized that youth and university involvement in volunteer activities can be predicted through their personal attitude, subjective norm which refers to how the environment influences them, as well as the degree of individual control over their own behaviour.

#### 4. Participation Factors

Based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1985;1991), determining factors for youth and university students involvement can be identified by reviewing previous studies by scholars and researchers in the field of social behaviour. Based on literature review, the first factor that contributes to involvement in volunteer activities is the individual's motivation (Azizan, 2016; Clary and Snyder, 1999; Ibrahim, 2012). Motivation is the internal factor of an individual which will determine the action to participate in any activity. In the case of volunteerism involvement, university students are motivated to get involved due to personal awareness, encouragement from friends, to seek recognition in the social system, for reward, and others.

Other than motivation, the factor of personal motivation is also a predictor of student's involvement in volunteer activities at the community level (Aishah and Tajul, 2013; Baston *et al.*, 2002; Saifuddin, 2001). The personality factor that influences involvement in volunteerism is explained by the altruism and idealism characters. Altruism is when an individual get involved in volunteer activities without expecting any external reward, but instead the individual is motivated by personal satisfaction because she is able to help other people. As for idealism, an individual will participate in volunteer activities due to the values that they hold strong, specifically the understanding of good values in the social system. Both elements will form excellent personal character values for university students who will get involved the community.

Family is also a factor that encourages the youth and students involvement in volunteer activities. A family background which is caring, responsible, helpful and mix well in the community will influence the children's involvement in activities at the community level. Communication in the family also has significant influence towards youth involvement in social work because family would be the earliest to convey information about local happening such as events (Kim and Ball-Rokeach, 2006a), wedding reception or *kenduri, tahlil* and communal work in the community to the youth. Interaction within a family is a process that always takes place and will never discontinue. Family unit like parents, grandfather, and grandmother as leaders with advanced communication will influence volunteerism involvement (Wilkin *et al.*, 2009) among youth in community activities.

Neighbourhood is also a factor of youth and university student's involvement in volunteer activities (Ibrahim, 2012). Neighbourhood is a social capital for unity of a society (Mohd *et al.*, 2011). The term refers to the time and energy that individuals or society spend in matters such as the community belief, social network, civic involvement, and other activities that create social bond between individuals and the group. Neighbourhood relationships create perfect social communication and can foster unity among local residents (Mohd *et al.*, 2011), while neighbourhood interaction will encourage volunteer activities among youth through the spread of information about a particular activity.

A good neighbourhood relationship can be shown through community contribution to activities organised (Mohd *et al.*, 2011) by local community such as communal work to clean the mosque or cemetery that involves all groups of people. Other than that, residents who interact with their neighbours can form a perfect and quality community, they can sit together and discuss as well as accept advice or criticism in peace.

Social neighbourhood has made it easier for individuals to make decisions through participation in various communication groups to exchange information, identify problems and solutions, manage contradicting information, and improve health (Sampson *et al.*, 2002). With that, youth view themselves as individuals who look after one another, ready to solve issues and show higher commitment in volunteerism involvement when living in a neighbourhood (Lenzi *et al.*, 2012).

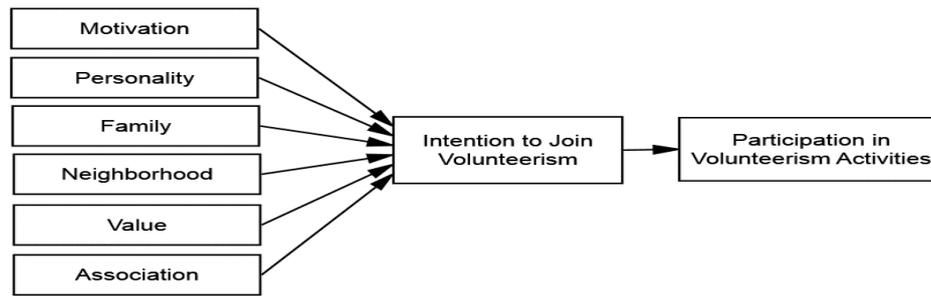
The factor of values linked to religion and moral also contributes to students and youth involvement in volunteer activities (Ibrahim, 2012; Wilson, 2000). For example, Muslim individuals who understand their religion well believe that volunteer work that assist other people will be rewarded by Allah, and this will encourage them to get involved. Majority of other religion is also similar, where they encourage their respective followers to do well among people, especially volunteer activities with no material returns. There are also individuals who do not subscribe to any organised religion but still get involved in volunteerism because they believe in universal values, that helping one another is very good moral.

The final factor that is identified as factors that encourage students involvement in volunteer activities is their participation in clubs or any form of groups (Ibrahim, 2012), especially community-based organisation. Based on the study of Kwok *et al.* (2015), community-based organisations (CBO) are organisations that not based on profit but are formed as initiatives by the members of the community with the purpose to react towards problems that they face. CBO are also organisations that seek to fulfil the needs of the community through collective action and involvement from local community members with the hope that the efforts can develop and improve the wellbeing of the community.

A particular community group exists because of the gap in services by certain parties to the target community, therefore creating the movement of the third sector of the volunteer sector (Korten, 1987), which emerged as an alternative sector to handle community issues. Hence, the existence of community-based organisation is viewed as the basis of community development which is spurred by the community members themselves (Kwok *et al.*, 2015), community movement will support the youth and students to continue to be involved in volunteer activities.

Based on the literature review, it can be summarised that university students involvement in volunteer activities are influenced by six main factors which are (1) motivation, (2) personality, (3) family, (4) neighbourhood, (5) values and (6) participation in clubs or groups. The summary of this finding from this review is shown in Figure 2 below.

Figure-2. Participation's factor in volunteerism activities



## 5. Conclusion

As a conclusion, it is stressed again that youth and student's involvement in volunteer activities specifically at the community level is still poor. This situation gives a worrying signal, especially in our efforts to build our nation with strong social system, such as united communities, responsible, working together, supporting one another, and others. In recent years, volunteer works are still overseen by the older generation, and there will be gap in this role in the future is the younger generation today is not ready to serve the need.

All parties should pay serious attention to this problem. Programs to promote volunteerism such as campaigns, appreciation, recognition, and others should be organised soonest to foster and encourage youth involvement in volunteer activities. Because the same issue also involves university students, these programs to promote volunteerism must include this target group. It would be a major loss if our education system is successful in producing graduates with high intellectual value, but fall short in the aspect of values and moral when it comes to living in a community.

For that purpose, factors that contribute to youth involvement must first be identified. From this information, the factors can be manipulated by various parties either through education, training, incentive, campaign, and others to maximise youth involvement in community and neighbourhood activities. Through this initiative, it is hoped that a more responsible, caring, warm and loving society can be built, in effort to develop an exemplary nation at a larger scale.

This study has successfully identified the contributing factors that can encourage youth involvement. The wish is that the finding from this study can be benefitted by various parties such as the government, university administration, non-government organisation and others in efforts to increase university student's involvement in volunteer activities. It is hoped that the efforts will produce the intended outcome to develop a more competent young generation at the community level in the future. The concept model developed can also benefit future researchers who wish to carry on further study on the topic, specifically to test this hypothesis against actual data collected from the field.

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