

# ACCESSING NEWS AMONG THE ELDERLY IN BRUNEI DARUSSALAM

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This paper discusses how the older generation in Brunei Darussalam is adapting to technological changes and how they have shifted from traditional media to using smartphones to access news today. The participants consist of village heads age between 50-75 years old. The method used to collect data is a focus group interview. The participants are divided into three separate categories during the focus group interview. Results showed that the younger group among the three which is the 50-59 and the 60-69 tend to access news from the smartphones. The participants have adapted to the use of technology by using social media apps such as WhatsApp and Facebook as a way of accessing news. Some of the participants also maintained using traditional media such as television, newspapers and radio from time to time because it has become a habit to access traditional media since they were at a young age. The oldest group of participants, age 70-75 solely maintain using traditional media because they have difficulties adapting to technology due to age factor, health reasons as well as lack of adaptability to new technology.

*Keywords: older generation, technological changes, smartphones, news, traditional media*

## **Introduction**

This study gives an overall insight into how news is being accessed in Brunei Darussalam, particularly by the older generation. This study is interesting because nowadays the majority of people around the world is accessing news digitally and the researcher believes that this is an important issue to look into especially in Brunei because more people are now having the luxury of owning smartphones. The study looks into the older generation and how they are accessing news today in this competing world of technology. It is interesting to see whether they are able

to cope with technology or would rather stick to traditional media. This study is conducted in Negara Brunei Darussalam in which the participants are 100% local *bumiputras*.

Negara Brunei Darussalam is a country located in South East Asia with a population of 451,804 ("Brunei Darussalam Population", 2019). The country is divided into four main districts, i.e. Brunei Muara district, which is the most densely populated, Tutong district, Temburong district and the Belait district. The capital is Bandar Seri Begawan. Brunei's main resources are oil and gas in which the oil production is mostly concentrated in the Belait District. The country's population consist of the local *bumiputras* which consist of the seven 'puak jati' which are Brunei-Malays, *Tutong, Belait, Dusun, Kedayan,, Murut and Bisaya*. The country is reigned by the His Majesty the Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah, the 29<sup>th</sup> Sultan of Brunei who is currently the longest-ruling Sultan in the country. A monarchy system rules the country and the main philosophy of the country is MIB. The main religion of the county is Islam.

## **Background of Study**

This particular study has tackled the interest of the researcher because there are no known studies in Brunei Darussalam who looks into the use of smartphones among the elderly. Nowadays with the growing number of people who not only own but are seen to be heavily reliant on their smartphones, I believe it is important to conduct studies base on how people access news through their smartphones. This study not only aims to see how the older generation access news through their smartphone but also to look into the effects of the older generation using smartphones to access news, the challenges and also whether the existence of traditional media will decline or still sustain over the coming years, despite the challenge of technological factors.

## ***Smartphones and Its Development***

The development of smartphones has, in many ways, creating a change in people's lives. The technology developed has improved the quality of life for users of smartphones in a way that is a multi-functional gadget in which people can use it to take pictures, videos. The smartphones have become an extension of human beings lives by unconsciously making them rely on smartphones in their everyday lives. Hence, the accessibility of news on smartphones has made people start accessing news through the use of technology.

### ***Statistics of Smartphone Use in Brunei Darussalam***

Statistics show that as of January 2017, Brunei has the highest internet penetration of 86% in South East Asia, which is measured by the number of internet users compared to the total national population (Kemp, 2017). Bruneians are also the third-largest social media users 76% in the world (“Bruneians 3rd largest”, 2017). According to digital in Brunei Darussalam, the number of active mobile social users as of January 2018 is 350,000 with a penetration of 81% (“Southeast Asia digital”, 2018) with a mobile connection of 534,400 vs the population of 124%. This shows that the number of mobile internet users is increasing in the country despite the small population. Brunei Darussalam has also shown an increase in annual digital growth since January 2017. The annual digital growth for mobile connection has increased 4%, which is equivalent to 19,000 since January 2017, and the active mobile social users have increased by 6%, which is about 20,000. Active social media users have also increased by 11% with an equivalent of 40,000. These statistics show that Brunei’s population is catching up with the use of technology; hence this study becomes important. The mobile internet users as a percentage of the total population are also 81%.

Although there are studies conducted worldwide about studies on the elderly people and their access to social media with smartphones, there are no known previous studies conducted in Brunei on how the elderly access news through the use of the smartphone, therefore this study is new because it is a new study conducted uniquely on its own.

### ***Background of the Newspaper Industry in Brunei Darussalam***

Brunei’s media industry is relatively new when compared to other countries. The first newspaper published in 1952 which is *Salam Seria* published bilingually, which is now known as *Salam*. The second newspaper is *Borneo Bulletin* which was first published in 1953, printed by the Brunei Press Company. In 1959, *Borneo Bulletin* was sold to the Straits Times of Singapore and in 1985 QAF took over part of the shares from the Straits Times. In 1990, *Borneo Bulletin* became a daily newspaper with a circulation of 20,000 copies on average daily. However, the newspaper industry began to grow slowly. *Borneo Bulletin* was the first English selling newspaper in the country. News Express another English newspaper was developed in late 1999 but eventually closed down by early 2001, due to lack of sustainability in the Brunei newspaper market. Another newspaper agency Brunei Times was also opened in 2006 but later shut down by the end of 2016, leaving Brunei Darussalam with only currently one English newspaper, which is the *Borneo Bulletin*. The recent closure of *Brunei Times* in 2011 and the closure of

another popular English newspaper *News Express* back in 2001 has left *Borneo Bulletin* to be the only standing English newspaper in the country.

### **Objectives**

The objective of this study is to understand how the older people in Brunei Darussalam access news and to see whether the development of smartphone has created a shift in the way the older generation access news. These objectives lead the researcher to develop two research questions.

This study has two research questions, as follows:

- 1) Is there a shift in the consumption of news between generations? And if so, what is the shift and how has it taken place?
- 2) Do Bruneians use social media to receive news updates? If so, how reliant are they towards the use of social media to receive and spread the news through the use of smartphones?

### **Literature Review**

In today's world of technology, it is very crucial to understand how the older generation is trying to cope up with the use of smartphones. The news is also an important aspect of our everyday life because it informs us about what is going on in this society. Some studies relate to the older generation and the use of technology. Previous studies have shown that the older generation is now adapting to the use of technology such as the smartphone, and more people are accessing news through their smartphones. Although many studies look into the younger generation and news access through the use of the smartphone, there are no known studies in Brunei yet with regards to accessing news through the use of smartphones among the elderly. Hence, this study helps to fill the gap of literature within the older generation and the use of the smartphone to access news.

According to Anderson and Perrin (2017), seniors are more digitally connected than ever, although there is still a digital difference between younger and older Americans. With smartphone ownership increasing in the United States, the share of adults age 65 above whom own smartphones have risen 24 percentage points.

On the other hand, a study in Malaysia by Hazwani and Nazlena (2014) also found that elderly smartphone users also used smartphones for their primary purposes, such as making calls and texting messages. This was conducted with 21 participants using a semi-structured interview method. Due to a different

experience and different features of a smartphone, some find it hard to adapt to the smartphones. According to Hazwani and Nazlena (2014), visual impairment was another factor that caused the barrier between the older generation and smartphones.

Pew Research findings also show that mobile devices have also become common for Americans age 50 and over to get news. Their finding shows that more than eight-in-ten U.S adults now get news on a mobile device (85%), compared with 72% in the previous year and slightly more than half in 2013 (54%). Among 50-64 years old, 79% gets news on mobile, which nearly doubled from 2013 (Lu, 2017).

The development of smartphones has provided with opportunities not only to access news information but also to become news producers as well as sharing information among themselves (Westlund, 2013). This can be seen happening every day where boundaries between consumers and producers are blurred.

Westlund and Fardigh (2011) argue that “the strong uptake of online news has not only fueled readership decline, however, it also threatens the business models of newspapers” (p. 177). Lee, Ma, and Goh (2011) also looked into why people shared the news on social media. Her results showed that informativeness was the strongest motivation in predicting news sharing intention, followed by socialising and status-seeking.

## **Methodology**

### ***Participants***

The participants consist of a group of village heads from various ‘mukims’. The participants were selected based on their age group, which was required to look into the older age group and how they access news through smartphones.

The participants are divided into three groups, as follows:

Group 1 – Aged 50-59 years.

Group 2- Aged 60-69 years.

Group 3 – Aged 70-75 years.

The focus group interview was conducted in the *Brunei-Muara* Municipal District office. The department is under the Ministry of Home Affairs where the department is in-charge for the welfare of the village heads for the whole of *Brunei-Muara* district. Permission to conduct the focus group interview was obtained by the researcher. The reason why the village heads were selected as a participant for

this study is that village heads are recruited within a certain age group 50-75 and that their nature of the job will require them to be updated on current issues. Hence, this particular group of people will fit the criteria for the research to investigate whether people within the age range have started to access news through the use of smartphones or do they still maintain accessing news through traditional media such as newspapers. The focused interview was also conducted within three separate time frame. The purpose of separating the participants is to compare the results and to see the difference between the various age groups.

Participants were selected randomly according to age strata. The officials of the Brunei-Muara district selected the participants according to the researcher's requested criteria for a particular age group and village. The name of the participants selected and villages they represented were attached along with the letter of approval for conducting the interview. The interview took place in three consecutive days with one and a half hour for each interview. Each group consisted of five participants.

### ***Research Instrument***

The research instrument used to collect data for this study is the focus group interview. This is the most suitable instrument to collect data because all participants came from the same background in which they held the position of village heads. The focus group interview took one hour for each group. The purpose of the focus group interview is to get in-depth data of how participants in the group access news from the use of their smartphones. According to Liamputtong (2011), "In a focus group interview, it is not much about the group but a group of people who gathers together to discuss a focused issue of concern" (p. 23). Hence, in this focus group, the participants also interact with each other to the extent that they were discussing issues about the smartphone among each other.

### ***Data Analysis***

The method used to analyse this data is thematic analysis. This study borrows a framework analysis by Kreuger (1994), which incorporate some key stages of framework analysis described by Ritchie and Spencer (1994).

The process in this data analysis involves transcribing the data and making sure that the important points were identified and picked up during the process of transcribing. There were five participants in each group and the data were analysed according to the age groups. Being familiar with the voices helped the researcher to analyse the data more efficiently. Observational notes were also

taken into consideration during the process. The researcher extracted keywords that were used repeatedly within each category and came up with related themes. The data were separated according to themes by highlighting keywords with different colours. The researcher made sure that the research questions and objectives of the study are by the themes that emerge during the analysis process. This is a very important factor as research questions act as a guide to the central of the study, this will also ensure that the objectives of the study are met and the research questions are addressed.

## **Findings**

### *Findings from Participants Aged 50-59 Years*

The findings from participants (labelled as 'P. 1', 'P. 2' and so on) aged 50-59 years are as follows:

P. 1 – I feel that the smartphone is the fastest medium when we want to reach the news. The speed of the internet is very fast and speed is important when we want news.

P. 2 – Smartphone makes it easy for us to access news.

P. 3- Smartphone is best when we talk about fast communication and receiving information. We are able to receive images and videos at a click of a finger. We need to have fast communication especially when the village encounters problems or disasters, like recent flash floods and landslide. I was informed by one of the villagers through WhatsApp and I manage to go to the place immediately, snapped photos and send it immediately through the smartphone.

P. 4- I can easily take a photo of a disaster happening in the village. I took a photo of the flash flood in Kg Sengkurong and sent it to my head. It is faster than conventional news.

P. 5- I look for news on Facebook and Youtube on my smartphone. It is very convenient and always with me.

### *Findings from Participants Aged 60-69 Years*

The findings from participants aged 60-69 years are as follows:

P. 1 – When something happens in a kampong, like an emergency fire, the smartphone is very important as we can communicate and let the whole community know there is a danger. Like last time I am in charge of Kampong Ayer, and there was a fire breakout, I receive a call from the villagers informing me about the fire. When I arrive, the first thing I do was to take the photo and send

it to all relevant WhatsApp group to inform them of the fire, the groups are all the co-village head, our community. The message arrive to them very fast with photos and videos... the Smartphone is fast, good sophisticated. I think it is a good way to access news as it gives immediate access to any kind of information needed.

P. 2 – Smartphone can multi-tasks , it can perform many tasks in one gadget for example when we need to send some information or news to another person, we can snap photos or take videos and send it immediately.

P. 3 - I prefer a smartphone to access news because we can watch and listen at the same time. It is a multi-functional tool with many features and functions. We can watch streaming videos live of what is happening at that very minute even when we are anywhere.

P.4 - News through smartphones is received more especially about local news. For us holding the post of *ketua kampongs* using smartphones and accessing news through our smartphones becomes an essential part of the job. We regularly get news from our smartphones due to our busy schedule. We can get news anytime we want. Besides we get informed much faster than other news.

P.5 - I think a smartphone is a very much needed gadget in today's society. It helps with fast communication to keep you updated. With smartphones, I am never left behind with news or anything.

### ***Findings from Participants Aged 70-75 Years***

The findings from participants aged 70-79 years are as follows:

P. 1 - I cannot stay long using a smartphone because my eyes will start to tear.

P. 2 - I usually wait for the news on television or radio although I agree that we can get news faster through the smartphone.

P. 3 - I tend to have headaches the longer I look at my smartphones due to the bright light and the tiny fonts.

### **Discussion**

#### ***Fast and convenient way to access news becomes the main reason to use the smartphone***

The findings in this study have shown that participants from all the age group find it easier to access news from their smartphones because it is fast and convenient, especially when receiving the news. Participants have mentioned fast and convenient repeatedly, and this also shows an emphasis on the importance of its features as a strong reason to access news from smartphones.



*Smartphones indirectly encourage the older generation to become citizen journalists*

Results show that the use of social media apps through the use of smartphones has enabled the older generation to access news and also enabled them to become a producer of news. For example, when the village heads are required to inform the villagers about an emergency or a situation that involves the villagers, the information is passed through WhatsApp. According to the participants, dissemination of news through the use of WhatsApp and smartphones is very efficient, and it reaches the recipient almost immediately; hence, immediate action and attention can be taken. This is the best way of communication today. This is important as we can see how the use of smartphones and social media are able to change how news is consumed and disseminated in today's society. Both the young and older generation is participating in citizen journalism.

The types of news which are commonly shared by the older generation are particular issues regarding the concern of the community. The news which is likely to be produced by the older generation usually issues in regards to the village activities or tragedies, such as fire outbreak, flood, landslide, electrical breakout. These issues are usually shared and forwarded to family and friends through the use of social media. According to OhmyNews a collaborative online newspaper with the motto "Every citizen is a reporter" has become an influential news resource in Korea and elsewhere (Montopoli, 2005). This motto also proves true in Brunei, where even the older generation who are digital immigrants can also become citizen journalists.

Results also show the shift between the older generations from traditional to new media. In this study, we can apply Jenkins, Ford and Green's (2013) theory of spreadability in which news that are spread on social media is appraised the more it is being discussed.

Results also show that citizen journalists can also work hand in hand with traditional media and can cover what journalists cannot cover at a particular period. Participants mentioned that they also send photographs and details of incidents that happen in their village to the reporters. The participants who are the main eye witness account for the village events usually send images to a traditional journalist because for example when there is a sudden fire breakout in the middle of the night; the most journalist will receive the information quite late. This shows that traditional media still stand firm and is also supported by the use of new media. This is an important finding because it shows that new media can support traditional media, and it goes together hand in hand.

### ***Health issues with prolonged use of the smartphone***

Although most of the participants agree that they have shifted to the use of new media to access news, participants from the age group 50-75 years also mentioned about not being able to stay long on the smartphones as their eyes start to water. The glare and the light from smartphones has caused the participants not to stay on their phone for a more extended time. This finding is also similar to the findings of Hazwani and Nazlena (2014) regarding older participants, in which they claim that the older generation has problems with their vision and adaptability to the use of smartphones.

### ***Importance of social media as a medium/app to access news through smartphones***

The use of social media becomes an important application for the older generation to access news. This is because the results show that the participants do not use news apps to get their news, but they use social media as a tool to access news from their smartphone. This is because according to the participants a lot of their network is on social media particularly WhatsApp and they have formed a group in WhatsApp in which the members can disseminate, access and exchange information about what is going on around their community. This way, the participants are quickly informed, and they are sure that they can be continuously updated with the latest information.

Results also show that social media plays a crucial part in encouraging the participants to access news through their smartphones. Furthermore, social media is easy to navigate and use especially for the people who are just learning and adapting to the new technology particularly the participants age 50-69 although for the participants aged 70-75 results shows that although they are keen, there are finding technology a challenge which is probably due to old age.

### ***Referring back to traditional media for the authenticity of the news***

Results also show that the elderly participants who access news through the use of smartphones still access news from newspapers. Most of the participants age 70-75 mention that they still read newspapers because they are still used to the traditional way of accessing news and also have problems with adapting to new technologies. On the other hand, participants from the 2 groups age 50-59 years and 60-69 years also said that they access traditional news as a means to verify the authenticity of the news that they see on social media. The results differ with Prensky's (2001) theory, where he mentions that digital immigrants will usually look for traditional news first and new media second. Results also show that even though the older participants are adapting to technology and accessing news

through social media, traditional media will still be their choice be it for verification of news or personal preference.

This shows that traditional news in Brunei has not shown any potential in decline due to the need to access news. This is in-line with Prensky's (2001) theory of digital immigrant where he states that even some immigrants are better than others "to adapt to their environment, they always retain, to some degree, their 'accent'". Although he claims that digital immigrants turn to the internet for information second rather than first, this study shows the other way around where the older generation turn to internet information first and then double-check the authenticity of the news.

### *Sharing and spreading the news*

The results in this study has shown that the majority of the participants from the groups which are the 50-59 and the 60-69 are active in sharing and spreading news through social media. This is an important finding because it relates to the theoretical framework of this study which is Jenkins et al. (2013) theory of spreadability. According to Jenkins et al., spreadability aims to challenge the meaning of viral, in which viral news tend to be spread by people unconsciously. Results show that the participants share and spread the news most of the time to inform the villagers about an emergency or about any events. Hence, in this situation, sharing and spreading the news is in-line with Jenkins et al. (2013) spreadability because the sender consciously shares the news with an intent. Sharing news also helps to spread the news and inform others what is happening in a particular place at a particular time.

### **Conclusion**

This results of this study show that the use of social media to access news has encouraged the older generation to disseminate and access news through the use of the smartphone. Not only the younger generation is becoming a citizen journalist, but the older generation is also adapting to technology and performing their part as a citizen journalist. Findings also show that the older generation although they access news from their smartphones, they tend to refer back to traditional media for verification; hence they tend to consume traditional media still to verify what they see on social media is true. Because of this, Brunei does not see any decline with traditional media shortly. Traditional media is also seen to work hand in hand with social media as the participants provide first-hand news to the traditional journalist. This study shows the importance of citizen journalist in today's era of technology where citizen journalists are able to provide

better images of sudden events and also provide first-hand witnesses. What is groundbreaking in this study is that not only the younger participants are becoming citizen journalists, but the older generation is also adapting to technology and also taking the role of a citizen journalist.

Findings also show that social media sites play an important role in the participants to access news from their smartphones. Only a few participants access news from actual news sites, but the majority of the participants access news through social media sites such as WhatsApp and Facebook. The act of sharing and spreading news through social media sites are the main contributor to participants getting information about news through social media. This is important because it complies to the theory of Jenkins et al. (2013) in which he described spreadability as an act of sharing and spreading the news on social media consciously and that spreadability can gain value and content of news is appraised through discussions and comments by the news consumers on social media.

Although the elder participants are adapting to using their smartphones as a way to access news, the oldest group among the participants age 70-75 have encountered problems in accessing news through smartphones, and this is because they claim that they have a problem learning and adapting how to navigate through the smartphone. They complain that they are not able to understand, and fonts are too small for them to read. Furthermore, they have also complained that the glare on the smartphone has affected their eyes; hence they mostly stick to traditional media such as newspapers, radio and television. This may also suggest that the oldest group of participants aged 70-75 years are not easily adaptable to new technology which makes them prefer to use traditional media instead. Therefore, this study shows that there is a difference between age group consumption on smartphone usage, as we can see, the participants aged 50-59 years and 60-69 years are adaptable to the smartphones whereas it is difficult for the participant age 70-75 who are struggling to keep up with technology.

Nevertheless, this study shows that there is a shift in the older generation consuming news and how they are adaptable to new technology. Furthermore, it gives an insight into how smartphones encourage the older generation to become citizen journalists despite their limitations of age and to be 'digital immigrants'.

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