

RFCS

RESEARCH PROGRAMME IN THE STUDY
OF MUSLIM COMMUNITIES OF SUCCESS

Insights and Perspectives

No. 006 - April 2023

The Importance of Facilitating Youths in Fostering Mutual Trust and Cohesion On Social Media

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Fostering mutual trust and cohesion on social media

It is undeniable that youths are more well-versed in navigating social media¹ and that they use it more often than other age groups. We witness how youths have the power to champion a cause or to condemn or, in more modern slang, “to be cancelled”. They are more equipped with the skills and resilience to bring their cause to social media and find a way (or ways) for it to achieve its objective. According to the founding chair of *City Sikhs* (United Kingdom), Mr Jasvir Singh,² social media has successfully introduced the mass stories of minorities in the United Kingdom. This was achieved by *City Sikhs*' initiative in spreading the hashtag ‘South East Asian Heritage Month’ on Twitter predominantly. They successfully multiplied their outreach to 405 million interactions with the hashtag, a 1306% increase from their 31 million interactions in the span of only 3 years.³

This article emphasizes the role of youths in fostering mutual trust and solidarity on social media and how we as a community provide a platform or a channel for them to thrive and successfully be a vital player in fostering harmony within the community and more importantly, maintaining it subsequently. We will explore this within the framework of our latest local context and *Sirah*, where important individuals or events will be cited as references or focal points in establishing a compelling guide for youths in fostering mutual trust and solidarity in the community. I hope that these insights will benefit readers and youths, especially as we further explore ways to strengthen community unity with the *wasilah* (medium) that is made available to us, such as social media.

Sense of belonging and responsibility in youths

For youths to develop a sense of belonging and responsibility for the community, it is important to ensure they are valued and feel valued. When youths put down roots in their own community and feel recognized, they will evolve to become catalysts for solidarity, bearing responsibility for the joys and woes of their community. An illustrative example would be Mus'ab Bin Umair whom *Rasulullah* ﷺ entrusted despite his youth, to serve as the first ambassador to Medina and initiate the Islamic *da'wa* there. Mus'ab *r.a.* played a significant role as a political diplomat for *Rasulullah* ﷺ and contributed to solidifying the societal foundation for building a Muslim

[1] There are currently 4.59 billion social media users, which equates to about 58% of the population (Statista, 2022). According to Statista, 90.94% of the Singapore population will have access to social media by 2023. Both statistics are an indication of the inevitable role social media has on our lives and how it will revolve around our daily activities in the near future. As a result, it may be irresponsible or, at the very least, foolish on our part to be ignorant of the effects and possibilities posed by social media.

[2] Mr Jasvir Singh is a prolific community activist and a leading figure within the British Sikh and British South Asian communities. *City Sikhs* is one of the main Sikh organisations in the UK and provides a voice for over 10,000 members across the country. He is also the former Co-Chair of the Faiths Forum for London that encourages and promotes interfaith social initiatives.

[3] Singh, J. (September, 2022). How Technology Can Be Leveraged to Foster Mutual Trust. *The International Conference on Cohesive Societies*. <https://www.iccs.sg/programme-and-speakers/sessions/plenary3/>

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nation in Medina.⁴

Receiving acknowledgement, similar to the recognition bestowed to Mus'ab *r.a* by *Rasulullah* ﷺ can empower youths to create a harmonious community both in the physical world and online. Social media have been leveraged by youths to promote togetherness and synergy between individuals and communities. In Singapore, youth organizations recognized by the government such as *Roses of Peace*⁵ and *Interreligious Organization (IRO) Youth Wing*⁶ have been effective in utilizing social media to reach out to youths from different racial and religious backgrounds, and providing a safe place for everyone to get to know one another more and have genuine conversations. Initiatives proposed and executed by them are significant in promoting religious harmony and inter-faith dialogues amongst Singaporean youth, and within the larger society.

Local government and community-level organizations should continue to invest in youths by giving them credit for their contributions and involvement in promoting social cohesion. Apart from that, more platforms can be provided to identify talents and harness potential. Platforms such as The Youth Action Challenge⁷ prove to be impactful as it allows youths to come together to address issues facing the community and come up with brilliant, innovative, and practical solutions.

Bringing online discussions to the physical world

Social media platforms should be made safe for youths to express their thoughts and concerns. Discussions in the digital world should be facilitated, regulated, and moderated constructively. Local community leaders should also work with social media companies to ensure the platforms' safety for its users and to combat any discrimination or any kind of violence that may potentially occur. It is known that the lack of segmentation and the unrestricted flow of information in the online space can contribute to social tension. A core group of *Asatizah* well-equipped with digital skills and committed to serving the community online, especially the youths needs to be created. To better manage resources, Islamic agencies, bodies, and non-governmental organizations should coordinate, complement, and engage in collaborative efforts.

[4] When Mus'ab first arrived in Medina for this honorable mission, there were only twelve Muslims. In a short span of a year after his arrival, many others from two opposing tribes (Aus and Khazraj) became Muslims through him, and he then eventually and successfully united these two tribes to become brethren in faith. In the following hajj season, he led a big group of seventy Medina Muslims to take an oath with *Rasulullah SAW* (bai'ah).

[5] *Roses of Peace* is a youth-driven, ground-up movement that aims to promote the interfaith messages of peace, love and harmony.

[6] The *IRO Youth Wing* serves youths and young adults aged 18 to 40 from different religions; Hindu, Jew, Zoroastrian, Buddhist, Taoist, Jain, Christian, Islam, Sikh & Baha'i.

[7] The Youth Action Challenge (YAC) is a platform for youth to provide solutions that tackle the issues we are concerned about. Teams will receive grants of up to \$50,000 to realise these solutions.

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The *Asatizah Youth Network* under the patronage of *Muslimsg*⁸ has been successful in its efforts to educate youths on different aspects of the religion. Their articles, *Facebook* and *Instagram* posts, and *YouTube* videos address topics on personal growth as a Muslim and also on Islamic guidelines for cultivating a harmonious community, especially in the local context. Their efforts range from combating extremism and radicalism to promoting inter-faith dialogues and exchanges.

Given the nature and limitations of social media, discussions and sharings should not be confined to just the online sphere. Physical discussions and meetings facilitate more intimate and deeper conversations. Therefore, discussions to promote harmony and cohesiveness should encompass both online and physical efforts. This approach preserves the essence of community interaction while embracing up with technological advancements e.g. digital media.

Likewise, *Muslimsg* has adopted the dual approach to further engage with the masses. Other than online engagements, they also have offline physical programs where *Asatizah* meet with the community and interact with them. The attendees get a chance to ask questions directly to the *Asatizah*, fostering a connection between them. In his book '*Meetings Matter*', Paul Axtell, a corporate trainer, explained the psychological power behind face-to-face contact. According to Axtell, in-person meetings provide a sense of intimacy, connection and empathy that is difficult to replicate via video. He also added that it was much easier to ask for attentive listening and presence in person, which creates the psychological safety that people need to sense in order to engage and participate fully.⁹

This effective way of engaging and interacting with others has been the core communication trait of Rasulullah ﷺ. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ effectively conveyed the most significant message for and to humankind (message of Oneness) to people from different walks of life, and his ways became the embodiment and reference for us all to emulate. Other than using positive body language, strategizing in giving advice, upholding justice in conversations and making others feel heard and appreciated, Rasulullah ﷺ too gave us powerful tips in forging ways to really understand others from differing backgrounds and provide two-way communication instead of one that is passive towards the receivers. He ﷺ showed a living demonstration of *Surah An-Nahl*, verse 125:

[8] Muslim.Sg is a one-stop online media platform that aims to inspire and empower Singapore Muslims with bespoke Islamic religious content.

[9] Axtell, P. (2015). *Meetings Matter: 8 Powerful Strategies for Remarkable Conversations*. Jackson Creek Pr.

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“

.....
“Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best. Indeed, your Lord is most knowing of who has strayed from His way, and He is most knowing of who is [rightly] guided.”

”

.....
Aiming for a good approach and a well-planned strategy in conveying peaceful messages and warding off hatred should be a constant goal so that the message will be easily accepted and others will contribute to this important cause. As a result, conversations and discussions must evolve into future-impacting decisions, which necessitate both online and physical presence and commitment.

Narrowing the gap between groups that are not adept with digital media

Due to technological advancements, geographical, political, and other barriers that once stood in the way of getting things done are no longer an issue.¹⁰ However, when we talk about social media and its use in this modern time, we should not forget the fact that not everyone is privileged to use or even access them in its entirety. There are two well-known trends in Singapore. Firstly, the country is evolving into a Smart Nation, harnessing technology to improve the overall quality of life. Secondly, its population is ageing, with increasing life expectancy and consistently low birth rates. These factors have raised concerns about the digital divide, in which seniors become unable to navigate a world where a more frequent use of technology is becoming increasingly prevalent. As we digitalize and reap the benefits of technology, commentators have emphasized the importance of ensuring that those unfamiliar with technology stay caught up.¹¹

The reason why I chose to raise this point is that in cultivating a harmonious community, inclusivity is key, involving the older and younger generations, each playing vital roles. Our community would not have valued the importance of social harmony like we do today without the effort and sacrifices of our older generation; therefore, they have the right to be involved in maintaining, promoting, contributing to harmony as much as everyone else, even if they lack the digital skills to be more involved on social media.

[10] Shaikh Mohd Salleh, S. (2003, March). Strengthening Dakwah with Technology. Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia. <https://www.ikim.gov.my/new-wp/index.php/2003/03/01/strengthening-dakwah-with-technology/>

[11] Singapore Government (2021, November 3). Bridging the digital divide? It can start with you. GOVTECH SINGAPORE. <https://www.tech.gov.sg/media/technews/bridging-the-digital-divide>

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The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ mentioned in a hadith, “He is not one of us who shows no mercy to the younger ones and does not acknowledge the honour due to the elders”.¹² This hadith shows the importance of both groups and the different needs and expectations that they have, respectively.¹³

One of the ways that youths can benefit from our older generation is through mentorship programmes. Mentorship programmes do not just benefit the youths, but also the more senior mentors. In return for the wisdom and vast experience-sharing and guidance, youths provide their mentors with an insight into their daily lives and, of course, the digital world, e.g. social media.

Youths can also recruit other youths through social media to help narrow the generational and digital gap between them and the older generation. The ultimate desired result is not necessarily that the older generation will be as tech savvy as the younger one, but to have a close relationship between both generations despite their different digital understanding. *Youth Corps Singapore*¹⁴ initiated their first *Senior-Savvy* event last year. Their goal was to provide volunteering opportunities and further youth’s abilities to engage with seniors meaningfully. This would be in the form of changing mindsets and providing them with the right tools and skills. From breaking stereotypes and changing perceptions to starting a conversation and sharing companionship, Youth Corps Singapore felt that these initiatives were a stepping stone for youths to contribute more to society and build a more inclusive and compassionate environment. In addition, their work was shared online and thus bringing awareness to the other youths.¹⁵

With the right effort and shared objectives, a community that embraces its elderly and values its youths has the power to create a more cohesive and harmonious society that not only strives for a better nation, but also prioritizes understanding and caring for everyone for a safer and more inclusive environment for all.

[12] Narrated by Imam at-Tirmizi

[13] These two hadiths also echo the same message: Abu Sa`id Samurah bin Jundub (May Allah be pleased with him) reported: I was a boy during the lifetime of Messenger of Allah SAW, and used to commit to my memory what he said, but I do not narrate what I preserved because there were among us people who were older than me. (Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim), and Anas bin Malik (May Allah be pleased with him) reported: Messenger of Allah SAW said, “If a young man honours an older person on account of his age, Allah appoints someone to show reverence to him in his old age”. (Narrated by Imam at-Tirmizi).

[14] Youth Corps Singapore was launched in 2014 by the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth. A division under the National Youth Council, they empower and support youths, aged 15 to 35, to ignite positive change in society through community service. They do this by catalysing meaningful collaborations between youths, the social service sector and society.

[15] Foo, K. (2022, February 22). Keeping Up with the Senior. YOUTH CORPS SINGAPORE. <https://www.youthcorps.gov.sg/connect/youth-stories/seniors/keeping-up-with-the-senior>

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Conclusion

Our younger generations face a different reality than our elders; they are privileged to have technology as a tool or even a necessity in their daily life. They also possess the power, as we do and the previous generations did, in shaping the future we envision - a cohesive and peaceful one, both as a community and as a nation. For *Asatizah* to play a pivotal role among our youth in fulfilling this legacy, it is crucial that we comprehend their potential. We have an obligation to provide them with the skills and knowledge that they require for them to effectively carry on this tradition in the future.

I appeal to the religious leadership and *Asatizah* fraternity that we continue to support our youths by addressing their concerns and equip ourselves with the skills and knowledge to understand their reality and challenges (e.g. misinformation, possessing cyber identity, risk of exposure to destructive and negative contents or radical contents, and social expectations online and offline). We, or at least some of us, need to have expertise in digital media literacy and the dynamics of the internet today, such as information algorithms, echo chambers, and competent content creation. This is especially important for tackling the social media space where most of us virtually reside.

In conclusion, it is necessary for *Asatizah* to emphasise to the community the significance of developing *taqwa* and spiritual fortitude to become strong individuals and, ultimately, to develop strong communities that nurture youths who are prepared to take on the role of vicegerents wherever they may be and in whatever capacity they may be entrusted. Mus'ab Bin Umair triumphed as a youth and as a community leader not only due to his knowledge and brilliance but also because of the trust and support of the Muslim community (especially the religious leadership, Rasulullah ﷺ) that was given to him, which impacted his level of *taqwa* as a servant and bearer of *risalah*. Verse 2 and 3 of *Surah At-Thalaaq* further supports this statement:

“.....
“And whoever fears Allah - He will make for him a way out. And will provide for him from where he does not expect. And whoever relies upon Allah - then He is sufficient for him. Indeed, Allah will accomplish His purpose. Allah has already set for everything a [decreed] extent.”
.....”

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About Author

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About RPCS

The Research Programme in the Study of Muslim Communities of Success (RPCS) is developed as part of Muis' efforts in advancing religious thought leadership for the future. The programme seeks to develop contextualised bodies of knowledge on socio-religious issues that are typical for Muslim communities living in secular states and advanced economies. The RPCS focus will be on developing new understanding, interpretations and application of Islamic principles, values and traditions to contemporary issues and challenges.

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