
SPECIAL ISSUE:

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION

The past three years have seen an intense shift in communication due to the outbreak of COVID-19. Since then, communication has taken a 360 degrees turn where interactions no longer focus on face-to-face communication but has transformed to a more digitized scenery. In specific, our daily life has changed where social distancing and working remotely from home have become our new normal of living due to isolation order and health threat from the coronavirus. According to Stasila-Sieradzka et al. (2023), during the pandemic, remote work was practiced by 39% workers in European countries and 50% workers in the United States of America. Due to that, this era has ushered in the advancement and utilization of a more digitized practice, where new media, social media and digital applications are adopted in staying connected with one another, consequently integrating hybrid communication in our everyday life.

Hybrid communication is defined as the incorporation of different modes of communication—a mixture of conventional face-to-face and cyberspace—to interact with other people as well as in acquiring and disseminating information. In other words, it is communication mixture of offline and online activities. After the pandemic and the easing of movement control order, people are still communicating in both on-site and remote via the cyberspace realm. As reported by *The Sun* (2021), even after the pandemic, 80% of SMEs employees in Malaysia still prefer to have a hybrid communication and work model. Hybrid communication helps us in offering the right information to the right target audience at the right time (MalaysiaKini, 2022). With this in mind, understanding how hybrid communication has disrupted or changed the communication paradigms is crucial to further comprehend how the transformation affects people and the society.

The digital transformations may require a more agile and real-time feedback, flexibility of remote work, information at your fingertips and more. However, it may also negatively affect the people such as constant distractions due to real-time response, remote working hours that are beyond the normal working hours, communication breakdowns, emotional exhaustion, information loss, team silos leading to falling-out, burnout and more (Stasila-Sieradzka et al., 2023). Moreover, it is also imperative to further recognize how hybrid communication are practiced in the context of consumer culture, environment and sustainability, gender and ethnicity, integrated marketing communication, journalism, film and broadcasting, digital

communication, political communication and more. Henceforth, hybrid communication presents immense opportunities for further exploration of its use and effect whether in research or in real life.

In light of equipping ourselves with further perspective on how hybrid communication has made an impact to our communication and media field, the School of Communication, Universiti Sains Malaysia has organized the Regional Communication Student Colloquium (RCSC) 2022 in 20th October 2022, to provide students a platform to exchange their knowledge, experience and perspectives on the pertaining issue. RCSC 2022 aspires to offer a valuable research culture among students, both undergraduates and postgraduates in preparing them to become competent and established scholars. In specific, this colloquium is about “Celebrating Novice Researchers” in fostering students to share their novel ideas and offer opportunities for students to present their research to the communication society, in Malaysia as well as abroad. Particularly, our aim is to foster research culture among students and give them exposure on the research practices among scholars. Hence, this Special Issue presents the core perspectives of hybrid communication and digitally connected world in further sustaining people’s lives.

OUTLINE OF CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE

The papers in this Special Issue comprise diverse range of topics, perspectives and research in communication and media that were presented and discoursed by both postgraduate and undergraduate students. In specific, the articles engage readers on issues, impact and challenges that are related to hybrid communication, where the colloquium was segmented into two parallel sessions: social media and digital communication as well as communication paradigm and political communication. In the first theme, the session expands on research scholarships concerning issues in cyberspace. Furthermore, in the second theme, the research direction covers various kinds of issues in the media and communication landscape including interpersonal communication, journalism, political communication and strategic communication.

In specific, the articles in this Special Issue underlined six interesting topics that are related to hybrid communication. Topic 1 conceptualizes on the key elements of branding in virtual teams for NGOs that were derived from a systematic review from three databases such as Research Gate, Emerald Insight and Google Scholar. Topic 2 highlights on the impact of online sensational news towards the public perception of Malaysian news industry. An exploration on Malaysian news readers found that although the sensational news negatively affects public perception, however, it may not precisely embody all segments of the public. The negative public perception alone may not be substantial enough to affect the existence of media markets as news readers still find enjoyment in consuming online sensational news.

Topic 3 deliberates on the cyberbullying issues and factors in Instagram among teenagers in Malaysia. The study found that factors such as bullying victim, bully and wanting to stand out in social media are among the primary reasons of cyberbullying in Instagram. Topic 4 elaborates on the impact of colorism in social media advertising among young consumers’ attitude and purchasing behavior in Malaysia. The thematic analysis of the study found that consumers’ awareness of colorism has caused negative attitude towards certain advertisements and psychological and emotional behavior towards the promoted products. Topic 5 focuses on raising awareness on privacy invasion in social media. According to the authors, although users’ privacy awareness level is high, users are still reckless in revealing their personal

information. Finally, topic 6 discusses on the reporting of environmental journalism pertaining to Panthera Tigris Jacksoni or *Harimau Malaya* in Malaysian online newspapers such as New Straits Times and the Malay Mail. Specifically, these topics are discussed in detail by 11 new and established scholars, affiliated with universities and comprise of students and supervisors. The articles were written based on their research projects, dissertations or thesis that relate to communication and media, that utilize either conventional face-to-face media or online platforms. As seen in the discussion, we can depict that digital avenue and social media has taken over the communication and media field, further substantiate the importance of hybrid communication in our daily lives and work environment.

The RCSC 2022 began with an opening keynote address by the renowned Associate Professor Dr. Elmi Nekmat from the Department of Communication and New Media, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, National University of Singapore. His address was on “Democratizing the Virtual and Actual Space: Hybrid Communication for Future Resilience”. Due to the new media, the communication technology has transformed the society to become digital citizens (i.e. functioning and becoming) and the consequences of technologies are polarization of group and cultures, public opinion formation and perception, fake news, privacy invasion and more. In his speech, future resilience is about how society as a whole in digital and real world can be resilient to the harms occurred in social media. He concludes by saying that what we, as social media users need to understand are the characteristics of social media based on affordances, then we are able to grasp on how this new media affect our behavior or social shaping.

We would like to thank all of the authors who have contributed to this Special Issue, the diligent reviewers who invested their time in assessing these manuscripts and all RCSC 2022 committee members who have given their heart and soul in ensuring the success of this publication. We hope that this issue will help to garner more interests on hybrid communication issues during and after the pandemic. We are finally grateful to the editorial team of Jurnal Pengajian Media Malaysia for the opportunity and collaboration given in the development of this Special Issue.

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