

Embracing Youth Volunteerism Through Digital Literacy for a Sustainable Future

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Abstract

In an increasingly digitalised world, youth engagement in volunteer activities is crucial for fostering sustainable cities and communities. This study aims to offer comprehensive insight into the challenges and opportunities of cultivating a volunteer-oriented youth in the era of the Industrial Revolution 5.0. The results of the study will be used to understand youth perceptions of volunteer involvement and integration as virtually connected to attract and sustain many volunteers. It will contribute to Sustainable Development Growth 11 and 4. A narrative study design was selected to conduct this study. Observational notes, texts, and documents were used to gather the data from online databases, which was then subjected to content analysis. The findings suggest that an integrated system that nurtures volunteer-oriented youth can significantly increase the attraction, commitment, and longevity of volunteers, enabling young individuals to participate in volunteerism and community service, irrespective of their geographical location or circumstance.

Keywords: Volunteers, Youth, Digital Literacy, Nurturing, SDG

Introduction

Motivation and justification for research

In today's digital economy, digital literacy has become an essential skill for personal and professional success. As we navigate the challenges of SDGs 11 and ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) development, the role of youth volunteerism empowered by digital literacy emerges as a transformative force with immense potential. Motivating youth to engage in volunteerism through digital literacy is crucial due to the increasing demand for digital economy. By equipping young volunteers with digital skills, will empower them to

contribute effectively to ESG (Smith et al., 2021; Yasmin et al., 2021). This paper will improve readers knowledge on youth digital empowering .

Background of the Study

UNESCO recognise that youth participation in volunteer activities is a crucial factor in driving significant societal change within countries (Lourenco, 2021). According to the Ministry of Malaysia Youth and Sports, Hannah Yeoh, 30% of Malaysian population are consists of youth aged 15 to 30 years, who will play a vital role in shaping the future digital economy. Guiding them towards the right path during this crucial stage is imperative (The Malaysian Insights, 2023). In addition, Malaysia government through Rakan Muda (Young Peers) programme has allocate RM 500 for volunteering activities, RM 20 million for Young Youth Entrepreneur (TUBE), and RM 10 million for Young Mobilepreneur Scheme (The Vibes.com, 2024). Such engagement fosters a sense of accountability, enabling active participation in the creation of inclusive communities and the development of sustainable solutions. Volunteering also provides them with vital skills such as teamwork, leadership, and problem-solving. Therefore, the involvement of young people in volunteer activities makes a substantial contribution to the development of resilient and sustainable urban areas (Yasmin et al., 2021).

Industrial revolution 5.0 and online voluntary service has become increasingly popular among young people, providing them with a means to work with a community project from anywhere in the world. This is the first step towards creating a meaningful contribution towards community awareness. There are many different types of online voluntary works that the youths can be involved to achieve the sustainable cities and communities. These include works that promote community service as an education hub and social development (Raza et al., 2023), digital involvement (Khushnood et al, 2022), online voluntary service during crises and disasters (Smith, 2021), advocacy activities (Hansen et al., 2014), and community integration (Au et al. 2014), just to name a few. However, recent studies indicate a general decline of youth participation in voluntarism around the world and Malaysia (Normah & Lukman 2020; Yasmin et al., 2021). This trend extends to online volunteerism, where Malaysian youth actively use social media for news consumption but are less engaged in social, political, or economic activities (Ahmad, 2017). Addressing this low participation requires a clear could be remedied if there is a clear understanding between the factors that encourage and inhibit youth participation in volunteerism. Therefore, this study aims to explore the challenges and opportunities involved in nurturing volunteer-oriented youth in this digital era.

Youth participation in volunteer activities is declining worldwide, including in Malaysia and other developed and developing countries (. According to statistics, only 27.1% of Malaysian adolescents participate in voluntary activities (IYRES, 2021). Normah and Lukman (2020) reported that volunteerism is also decreasing, especially among Malaysian university students. This could be due to lack of motivation and lack of awareness regarding such opportunities among youngsters (Arshad et.al, 2022).

Studies on volunteering in Malaysia focuses on examining the factors that influence people to volunteer (Hamzah et al. 2015), the challenges in voluntary work (Kauthar et al. 2013), empowering youth volunteerism and motivating factors (Mardiyyah et al. 2013), altruism as motivational factor towards volunteerism among youth (Zaleha & Mohd Ramlan 2012), and psychosocial factors that influence volunteers to offer their services to the community (Surjit

et al., 2005). The number of studies looking at volunteerism in the digital era are still few; an example would be gig volunteers during the pandemic (Yusof et al., 2022), in the area of digital development (Gomex, 2022). The fundamental question of “how extensive do youth volunteers utilize digital technology in IR 5.0? This study seeks to shed light on nurturing youth engagement in volunteering in the digital era.

Literature Review

Volunteerism

Voluntarism is a dynamic concept with a wide range of possible definitions (Ganesh & McAllum, 2009). It refers to the act of offering one's time, skills, and resources voluntarily to support and contribute to a cause or organisation without any financial compensation. It can be classified into four categories such as mutual aid or self-help, charity or service to others, civic participation, and advocacy or campaigning (United Nations Volunteer, 2011). Volunteerism plays a crucial role in nation-building by fostering a sense of community and social responsibility. It not only helps address social and environmental challenges but also promotes a culture of empathy and collaboration. Volunteers contribute to the implementation of sustainable urban development by participating in various activities such as community clean-ups, urban gardening projects, and advocacy for affordable housing and public transport. Their efforts help create a sense of ownership and responsibility among community members, fostering a sustainable and resilient urban environment.

In the technology development era, online volunteerism, virtual volunteering, or digital volunteerism has become popular. It means volunteers actively conduct work remotely using internet-connected devices and platforms (Basheva & Ermolaeva, 2020). This form of volunteerism allows individuals to contribute their time, skills, and efforts to various causes and organizations without the need for physical presence at a specific location. Digital volunteerism gained prominence during pandemic and post-pandemic crisis, providing social and humanitarian support to those are affected by the disease and experiencing trauma or fear feeling situation. It exemplifies how technology can facilitate meaningful contributions and community engagement, even in challenging circumstances.

Youth Volunteerism

Youth volunteering commonly a direct involvement of young people in volunteer activity and community service that benefits both the volunteer and the community. Youth volunteerism promotes a balance between academic performance and character development, leading to the development of exceptional pupils (Normah & Lukman, 2020). Young volunteerism has always been a way for people to give back to society without receiving a monetary reward. Although there is no monetary exchange for volunteering, research has shown that volunteers expect other benefits for their efforts. Many young people actively participate in volunteer activities to meet their personal needs while also assisting others in the society (Hamzah et al., 2015). Goethem et al (2021) discovered that youth are more inclined to volunteer when people close to them join such activities. This tendency is associated with factors such as lack of awareness and competing with other form of interest like gaming. In Malaysian context, family members have a significant influence on youths' participation in volunteering activities (Ramlan et al., 2021). The support of family members encourages the younger generation to engage in both physical and online volunteering quickly and effectively.

Moreover, volunteerism promotes inclusive and participatory urban planning processes, ensuring that the needs and voices of all community members, including marginalized groups, are considered. By engaging in volunteering activities, individuals can contribute to the design and implementation of sustainable infrastructure, affordable housing, and accessible public spaces, thereby supporting the realization of SDGs 4 and SDGs 11. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) emphasizes the role of youth in the Youth Agenda 2030, aiming to foster mature and mutually beneficial integration of youth into international and national communities. These efforts aim to empower youth to contribute effectively to sustainable development and social progress, aligns with the principles and objectives of the SDGs.

Digitalization in Industrial Revolution 5.0

Digital era is a term used in internet network technology, especially information technology, and requires ongoing innovation, technology, and resources for special education quality (Iswari, 2019). One of the key characteristics of digital era is the widespread use of digital technologies in various aspects of life and includes the use of computers, smartphones, and the Internet for communication, information retrieval, and entertainment. Cox and Simmons (2018) were well-established democracy boasting a high voluntary index, the promotion of voluntarism online as an evident, facilitated by digital usage that allows individuals to participate in online voluntary acts. Another study by Grey and Hopkins (2018) on non-profit organizations in New Zealand underscores the significance of digital media as a valuable tool, empowering citizens to volunteer anytime and anywhere.

Methodology

This narrative review seeks to synthesize existing research on youth volunteering in digital literacy and identifying the challenges and opportunities in nurturing young generation. By examining a range study with diverse methodologies and systematic reviews, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of methodologies, or which examined different theoretical conceptualisations, constructs and/or relationships (Baumeister, 2013). Narrative reviews useful to evaluate the meaningful linking together of many studies on similar scope of the study from different perspectives that contribute towards theory or model development. This narrative approach allows for a deeper exploration of the complex dynamics and evolving trends in youth volunteerism in technology development and societal norms. The insights gleaned from this review will contribute to the development of effective approaches to harness the potential of technology for fostering meaningful youth engagement in volunteer activities.

Conceptual model of youth volunteering and digital literacy

Digital literacy for youth volunteers is defined as the combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable the younger generation to succeed in an expanding global digital environment while feeling secure and empowered, respecting their age and cultural context (Smith et al., 2021; Gomex, 2020). Transformation among digital volunteers increasing employee's commitment at workplace (Smith et al., 2021). Pietilla et al. (2021) identified four factors contributing to the drawbacks experienced by young people in social participation: i) trust and safety, ii) motivation to participate, iii) integration into governmental processes, and iv) efficiency. The study was organized via virtual council sessions and six workshops aimed at identifying the usage of digital tools among participants. Digital literacy is essential for

practicing digital citizenship, including among youth volunteers. It comprises a set of activities falling within 'digital citizenship' and relies on 'digital literacy' for its realization. While digital literacy knowledge is not new to the youth community, the willingness to engage in long-term volunteering after the pandemic crisis has declined. Gomex (2020) identified five criteria influencing digital literacy among young people in Madrid, including the duration of activities (e.g., long-term commitment), self-motivation, degree of formality, social engagement, and types of digital tools used.

Mastering information technology for online volunteers is crucial, as it enables them to analyse, seek, and evaluate information (Sutirman, 2022). This is particularly important given that most youth were exposed to digital platforms during and after the pandemic, increasing the risk of manipulation and cyberattacks. In 2019, 30% of Malaysian volunteers actively connected to digital platforms to help others (Nor et al., 2019), but this trend slowed down after the pandemic in Spain (Fernandez-de-Castro et al., 2023). Southeast Asian youth are increasingly demanding digital literacy skills due to facing numerous digital challenges such as cyberattacks and information manipulation.

Table 1
Summaries of Youth Studies in Digital Literacy

No	Authors	Topic	Scope study
1	Nor, Othman & Bahari (2019)	From Traditional Volunteering to Online Volunteering: Moving Beyond Real Border	Youth participation in online volunteering in Malaysia
2	Stornaiuolo & Thomas (2017)	Information creation and information sharing using digital technologies among youth	Youth digital activism
3	Gomex (2020)	Exploring Digital Literacy Criteria Among Youth in Madrid	Factors influencing digital literacy among youth
4	Pietilla et al. (2021)	Understanding youths' needs for digital societal participation: towards an inclusive virtual council	Youth digital usage and tools
5	Fernandez-de-Castro et al. (2023)	Digital youth work: a systematic review with a proposal	Systematic literature review on digital literacy, digital competencies, and social inclusion
6	Sutirman et al. (2022)	Youth Empowerment Through Digital Literacy Education.	Awareness program for youth development

Challenges and Opportunities

Developing volunteer-minded youth is not as simple as it appears, it presents challenges and opportunities. According to Cornelis et al (2013), six reasons for volunteering have been found through research, the most common of which is that volunteers are self-centred rather than people oriented. In this case, as was already highlighted, understanding the typical motives for young volunteers is one potential challenge (Cornelis et al., 2013). This indicates that many

young people may be inspired by their own personal gains, such as skill improvement, professional growth, and social connections. However, it's important to bring young generation beyond than philanthropic intention, to build nation with volunteerism. Therefore, by recognising and addressing these motives, organisations can better engage and nurture youth-oriented volunteers. Rewarding and integrating young efforts to be part of key performance indicators will be able to increase social obligation and social driven income community.

Next challenge is about reaching socially vulnerable youth and giving them chances for social and personal growth is another challenge, although sports programmes have been found to be successful at improving the social standing of socially vulnerable youth (Gomex, 2023). In this regard, few recommendations have been implemented to provide training and skills development for young people with high income generation, equipping them with the confidence to perform their roles as volunteers. Thus, these programmes not only benefit the youth participants but also contribute to positive youth development, which, in other words, could attract a larger number of volunteers.

Third, the post-pandemic era brings up brand-new challenges that the world has never experienced. Our youth must have the necessary abilities to take on these challenges and turn them into possibilities, as they are the most technologically literate generation, and because of their incredible adaptability, they can pick up new skills fast and make the most of digital technology. Therefore, despite these challenges, there are also opportunities when nurturing volunteer-oriented youth. It is about engaging youth in volunteer work that can provide them with valuable skills, experiences, and personal growth opportunities. It also provides them with the chance to make a positive impact on their communities and develop a sense of civic engagement. Moreover, there is a decline in demand in the youth volunteerism arena, so it is necessary to approach it in a comprehensive, well-integrated, and digitalized way. A developmental advantage of relationships is enhanced by the integration of the following three factors: quality, quantity, and sustainability (Benson et al., 2000).

Findings and Discussion

In accordance with the primary aim of the study, which sought to investigate the significance of fostering youth-oriented volunteerism in the context of digitalization, the research emphasized the concept of integration as a crucial aspect of digital literacy that connects small communities to volunteerism. First, establishing an integrated volunteer-oriented platform for youth would enable volunteers of various backgrounds to discover and choose opportunities that align with their individual needs and specialties. Therefore, this integrated platform for youth represents an effort to develop a contextually based solution that supports young individuals inclined towards volunteering and eager to participate in meaningful voluntary endeavours.

The second factor is the study has demonstrated that educational partnerships significantly contribute to volunteer participation. The greater the number of volunteer activities, the more exposure youth receive to volunteering. Educational institutions are encouraged to integrate opportunities for online volunteering into their curricula or extracurricular programs for students. This initiative aims to keep students informed and updated about ongoing issues and circumstances in their communities. Moreover, by engaging in such activities, students may become more civically engaged, develop a sense of responsibility, and ultimately evolve into more volunteer-oriented citizens.

According to Sutirman et al (2022), they highlighted in their study that youth should be given the essential information and abilities to properly use technology for learning resources and online volunteer requests, and this could be one of the greatest ways to teach and nurture young people to digital literacy so that they strive to develop their understanding of information technology and its proper usage. In addition to that, educational institutions are trusted entities within the community and have a strong reputation for promoting education and social development (Raza et al., 2023). Therefore, by partnering with these institutions, volunteer-oriented youth and organisations can benefit from their positive image, which could attract not only more volunteers but also donors to the organisation in this digital world.

The third factor is virtual mentorship. This could be done by establishing online mentorship programmes where experienced volunteers, community leaders, and other volunteer-oriented organisations and volunteer-oriented youth can connect with the platform together. The study verified that through this mentorship, volunteers could be nurtured by providing guidance, support, valuable insights, career pathways, and opportunities (Karaboga et al., 2021).

Conclusion

In conclusion, nurturing volunteer-oriented youth in the digital era is a multifaceted endeavour that requires a deep understanding of their motivations, targeted outreach to socially vulnerable individuals, and the provision of tailored training and support. By addressing challenges and capitalizing on opportunities, we can create meaningful and impactful volunteer experiences for youth. The outcomes for nurturing volunteer-oriented youth include promoting integration by encouraging them to explore well-integrated platforms that offer diverse volunteering opportunities aligned with their passions. Collaborating with educational institutions can also be instrumental, providing vital information, networking opportunities, and physical mentorship to youth volunteers.

Volunteers often start with noble intentions but may feel disheartened if they perceive a lack of clarity in the program's objectives, if their motivations and preferences are not aligned with the volunteer opportunities available, or if the nature of volunteerism is not clearly defined. This study argues that volunteerism can be intentionally nurtured and cultivated within specific contexts to ensure its sustainability and effectiveness. Furthermore, virtual mentorship programs led by experienced volunteers or community leaders can provide essential guidance and one-on-one support to empower volunteer-oriented youths. Nurturing volunteerism in this digital era represents a reliable approach to attracting, securing, and sustaining a large cohort of youth volunteers.

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