



Philanthropy Practices on Social Media: A Case Study of Malaysia

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Abstract

This case study investigates the evolution and impact of philanthropy on social media in Malaysia, focusing on how digital platforms have transformed traditional charitable practices. With the rise of platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, individuals and organizations are increasingly using social media to mobilize donations, create awareness, and deliver aid directly to communities in need. The study highlights notable Malaysian figures and grassroots movements to explore how emotional storytelling, public trust, and online visibility drive engagement and giving behaviour. By employing a qualitative analysis of selected case studies, this research identifies the strengths, challenges, and ethical implications of digital philanthropy. The findings suggest that while social media has democratized access to charitable action and increased civic participation, it also demands greater accountability and digital literacy to ensure long-term sustainability and impact.

Keywords: Philanthropy, charity, social media, Malaysia

1. Introduction

Philanthropy, which is the voluntary act of giving to improve the well-being of others, has long been a foundation of community life in Malaysia. It is deeply rooted in religious values, especially in Islam. Practices like *zakat*, *sadaqah*, and *waqf* are central to the Islamic moral framework. They play a vital role in reducing inequality and promoting collective welfare. Beyond Islam, Malaysia's multicultural society embraces various charitable traditions across different ethnic and religious groups. The spirit of giving is embedded in cultural norms and social responsibilities. Traditionally, acts of charity have taken place through mosques, temples, and community networks. However, digital platforms have significantly changed how Malaysians participate in philanthropy. Over the past decade, social media has become an important space for charitable activities. Malaysia has over 95% internet penetration and some of the highest social media usage rates in Southeast Asia. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter) have emerged as effective tools for promoting causes, sharing personal stories, and gathering public donations. Individuals and organizations now use these platforms not just for fundraising, but also for advocacy, awareness campaigns, and community organizing. These digital tools have led to the rise of what is often called social media philanthropy, a form of giving that is networked, visual, and instant.

This transformation has brought several benefits. Social media allows for low-cost campaigns with a wide reach. Fundraisers can connect with thousands of potential donors in real time. Using visuals, hashtags, and viral content helps build emotional connections and mobilize public support. Young people, who are often seen as less engaged in traditional charitable efforts, are now active participants. They share, donate, and create digital campaigns. However, these advantages come with significant challenges. There are growing worries about fraudulent campaigns, a lack of transparency in how funds are distributed, and the rise of "performative charity," where giving is driven more by the desire for social recognition than genuine intent. The digital divide may also exclude rural or older populations. Additionally, the saturation of online campaigns can lead to donor fatigue. In light of these changes, this study investigates how social media has transformed philanthropic practices in Malaysia. It looks at the evolution of digital giving over time, the types of platforms that have become popular, and the specific strategies that philanthropists use to attract and engage public interest. Through this exploration, the research aims to highlight the intersection of culture, religion, and technology in modern Malaysian philanthropy.



1.1. Background of the Study

Malaysia's approach to philanthropy is heavily shaped by religious values and community initiatives. Traditionally, people gave through formal religious channels, family connections, and non-profit groups. These practices made charity a moral duty and a community task. However, the fast growth of digital technology has changed these traditional methods. Social media now allows individuals, regardless of whether they are part of an organization, to create, share, and support causes easily. Malaysians are increasingly taking part in philanthropy through digital campaigns, personal appeals, and viral fundraisers that break physical barriers. This change brings both opportunities and challenges. On one side, social media helps charitable efforts reach larger and more diverse groups; it engages younger people and promotes spontaneous giving. On the other side, it raises concerns about trust, accountability, and ethical practices. The informal nature of digital platforms might lead to less oversight and higher fraud risks. Additionally, the emotional pull of visual content may distract donors from long-term social progress, focusing their attention on urgent or dramatic cases instead. Given these developments, it's crucial to understand how Malaysians use social media for philanthropy and how these digital platforms affect donor behavior and the success of campaigns.

1.2. Objectives of the Study

This study examines the growing trend of social media philanthropy in Malaysia through three main objectives. First, it explores how philanthropic practices have changed in digital spaces. It identifies how social media has altered the traditional ways Malaysians give, promote, and participate in charitable activities. Second, the study identifies which social media platforms Malaysians use most for philanthropic purposes. It looks at the unique features and user preferences that influence their choices. Third, the research examines the strategies and methods used by Malaysian philanthropists, both individuals and organizations, to engage the public and spark interest in charitable causes through social media. These objectives will deepen our understanding of how digital tools shape the culture of giving in a connected, multicultural society.

1.3. Research Questions

The research questions formulated are as follow:

- a) How has social media philanthropy evolved in Malaysia over time?
- b) Which social media platforms are most commonly used for philanthropic activities among Malaysians?
- c) What methods do Malaysian philanthropists use on social media to engage and generate public interest?

1.4. Significance of Study

This study holds significance on multiple levels particularly in the context of Malaysia's evolving landscape of charitable engagement. Academically, it adds to the growing research on digital philanthropy by providing a local perspective from Malaysia, a country with a unique mix of Islamic traditions, multicultural values, and high digital engagement. The findings may help scholars understand how religious and cultural values change in digital settings and how new forms of giving are developing alongside traditional practices. Practically, the research offers insights for NGOs, social enterprises, religious groups, and online influencers involved in charitable work. Knowing which platforms work and what strategies engage the public can help these groups create better campaigns that are clear, culturally relevant, and effective. Additionally, the study points out both the opportunities and risks of using social media for philanthropy. This can help stakeholders tackle ethical issues like trust, misuse of funds, and the authenticity of giving. Finally, the research is important for policymakers and regulatory bodies focused on digital governance and public accountability, especially as more charitable transactions and appeals occur outside formal structures. Overall, this study provides timely insights into how social media is changing the philanthropic landscape in Malaysia.

2. Literature review

Philanthropy in Malaysia is deeply rooted in religious, cultural, and communal values, reflecting the country's diverse ethnic and religious makeup. Traditional philanthropy is predominantly influenced by Islamic practices such as *zakat*,



waqf, and *sadaqah*, but also incorporates contributions from various ethnic groups who have established enduring charitable institutions (Kasim et al., 2017). This multifaceted philanthropic landscape is characterized by a vibrant interplay between religious charities, ethnic associations, and civil society organizations, all primarily focused on community welfare, education, and poverty alleviation (Ahmed, 2024).

2.1 Traditional Philanthropy and Digital Transformation

Traditional Islamic philanthropic practices like *zakat*, *waqf*, and *sadaqah* have long been institutionalized in Malaysia. *Zakat*, a compulsory form of almsgiving, is collected through government centers and distributed to the poor, supported by state Syariah laws (Ringgitplus, 2019; Balkish Rosly, 2013). Meanwhile, *waqf* (endowments) and *sadaqah* (voluntary charity) have been modernized through initiatives like Bank Islam's Sadaqa House, which integrates Islamic philanthropy with contemporary social finance models. These traditional practices are now increasingly intersecting with digital platforms, enabling broader participation and transparency.

2.2 The Rise of Digital Philanthropy in Malaysia

The advent of social media has revolutionized philanthropic practices globally, and Malaysia is no exception. Digital philanthropy, driven by technological advancements and shifting donor behaviors, has introduced new models such as crowdfunding, influencer-led giving, and peer-to-peer (P2P) campaigns (Statista, 2023). Crowdfunding platforms like GoFundMe and Kickstarter have decentralized fundraising, allowing individuals and organizations to mobilize resources for diverse causes (Nonprofit Tech for Good, 2023). In Malaysia, these platforms are increasingly used to support local initiatives, with 41% of global donors participating in crowdfunding campaigns (Nonprofit Tech for Good, 2023). Influencer-led giving, or "Charity 2.0," has also gained traction, with social media influencers leveraging their platforms to raise awareness and funds for charitable causes (Glow, 2024). This approach resonates particularly with younger audiences, who are more likely to engage with philanthropic content that is authentic and story-driven (Stanford Social Innovation Review, 2023). Similarly, P2P fundraising has empowered individuals to solicit donations from their personal networks, fostering a sense of community and shared purpose (Event.Gives, 2023).

2.3 Social Media as a Catalyst for Philanthropic Engagement

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have become indispensable tools for philanthropic organizations in Malaysia. These platforms facilitate awareness-raising, mobilization, storytelling, and fundraising, enabling activists and nonprofits to reach global audiences (Sadiq, 2021). For instance, viral hashtags like MeToo and BlackLivesMatter have demonstrated the power of social media in amplifying marginalized voices and driving social change (Pandey, 2024). In Malaysia, social media campaigns have been instrumental in mobilizing resources for disaster relief, education, and healthcare initiatives (CommsRoom, 2024). The integration of social media with crowdfunding platforms has further enhanced fundraising efforts. Organizations can now launch grassroots campaigns, share real-time updates, and engage donors more effectively (Freelon et al., 2018). This shift has democratized philanthropy, allowing even small-scale campaigns to achieve significant impact through collective action (CommsRoom, 2024).

2.4 Challenges and Future Directions

Despite the growth of digital philanthropy, challenges remain. Philanthropic giving in Malaysia often remains segmented along ethnic and religious lines, reflecting the country's socio-political landscape (Ahmed, 2024). Additionally, issues of transparency and trust in digital platforms need to be addressed to sustain donor confidence (Stanford Social Innovation Review, 2023). Future research should explore how emerging technologies like blockchain and virtual reality can further enhance transparency and donor engagement in Malaysia's philanthropic sector (Nonprofit Tech for Good, 2023).

2.5 Research Gap: Limited Focus on Malaysian Context and Evolution Timeline

While the existing literature provides valuable insights into the intersection of philanthropy and social media, a significant gap remains in studies that specifically address the Malaysian context and the evolution of digital philanthropy over time. Most research on digital philanthropy tends to focus on Western models or global trends, with limited attention to how



these practices manifest in culturally and religiously diverse societies like Malaysia (Ahmed, 2024; Kasim et al., 2017). Additionally, there is a lack of longitudinal studies tracking the progression of philanthropic practices from traditional methods (e.g., *zakat*, *waqf*) to modern digital platforms (e.g., crowdfunding, influencer-led campaigns) in Malaysia. The intersection of traditional philanthropy and digital innovation is reshaping philanthropic practices in Malaysia. Social media has emerged as a powerful tool for awareness, mobilization, and fundraising, enabling organizations and individuals to drive social change more effectively. As digital platforms continue to evolve, their role in fostering inclusive and participatory philanthropy will likely expand, offering new opportunities for collaboration and impact.

3. Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative exploratory design to identify the social media platforms most commonly used for philanthropic purposes among Malaysians. A qualitative approach was selected due to the evolving, context-specific nature of social media use, enabling the generation of rich, detailed insights into platform preferences and user behavior (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Purposive sampling was adopted to identify Malaysian individuals and organizations directly involved in social media-based philanthropy. This non-probability technique is commonly used in qualitative research to select information-rich cases relevant to the research objectives (Patton, 2015; Palinkas et al., 2015). Participants and cases were selected based on their active involvement in philanthropic activities conducted via social media—either as initiators or supporters. These include (1) individual philanthropists or digital advocates, (2) NGO campaign managers or social media leads, (3) influencers or public figures engaged in charity campaigns, and (4) entrepreneurs frequently involved in digital giving. This sampling strategy prioritizes depth over breadth and allows focused exploration of key actors and platforms. The study addressed three main objectives, namely (1) to explore the evolution of social media-based philanthropic practices in Malaysia, (2) to identify the social media platforms commonly used for philanthropic engagement, and (3) to examine the strategies used by social media philanthropists to generate public interest online. A combination of desk research and qualitative content analysis was used to address these objectives.

To address the first objective, desk research was conducted to trace the development of social media philanthropy in Malaysia. Relevant secondary sources were reviewed, including academic journal articles, reports and publications from NGOs, online news portals, archived social media content from Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and other platforms. Search terms included “online charity Malaysia,” “social media donations,” and “influencer fundraising Malaysia.” Data were systematically extracted and organized using an Excel matrix, capturing information on the year and platform of each campaign, the type of philanthropic initiative (e.g., crowdfunding, awareness, relief aid), the actors involved (individuals, NGOs, corporations), and levels of public engagement (likes, shares, comments). A qualitative content analysis approach (Mayring, 2014) was applied to identify recurring patterns and trends over time. This enabled the construction of a timeline and thematic mapping of the evolution of social media philanthropy in the country. To address the second and third objectives, a qualitative content analysis was conducted on publicly available social media posts related to philanthropy in Malaysia. This method allows for the systematic identification of communication patterns, platform usage, and engagement strategies (Krippendorff, 2018).

Data were collected from major platforms commonly used in Malaysia—Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok—focusing on posts by individual philanthropists, community-led fundraising campaigns, public figures known for their charitable engagement. Content was identified using hashtags (e.g., #donationMalaysia, #philanthropyMalaysia, #tabungbencana), relevant keywords, and public pages or groups associated with donation drives. Only posts from the past 12 months were considered to ensure relevance. A purposive sampling technique was again applied to select content with high visibility and engagement. The sampling frame included criteria such as: (1) follower thresholds (e.g., >100,000 followers), engagement metrics (likes, comments, shares), recognition or verification of accounts (e.g., NGO pages registered with the Registrar of Societies Malaysia). A target of 100–200 posts per platform was set to ensure analytical depth and cross-platform comparability. Content was coded using a combination of thematic and frequency-based coding schemes. Key variables included: (1) social media platform used, (2) type of philanthropic activity (e.g., fundraising, awareness, volunteer recruitment), (3) media format (text, image, video, live stream), (4) engagement level (likes, shares, comments). A codebook was developed and refined through pilot testing. NVivo software was used to manage and analyse the qualitative data. To ensure analytical rigor, inter-coder reliability was tested using a subset of the data. A Cohen’s Kappa



value of at least 0.70 was targeted to ensure acceptable agreement between coders (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2002). Although the study analysed publicly available data, ethical research practices were upheld. These includes avoiding disclosure of usernames or identifiable personal information, excluding private or restricted content, and adhering to platform terms of use and respecting digital privacy norms. Formal consent was not required due to the use of public data; however, ethical guidelines for online research were strictly followed.

3.1 Conceptual Framework

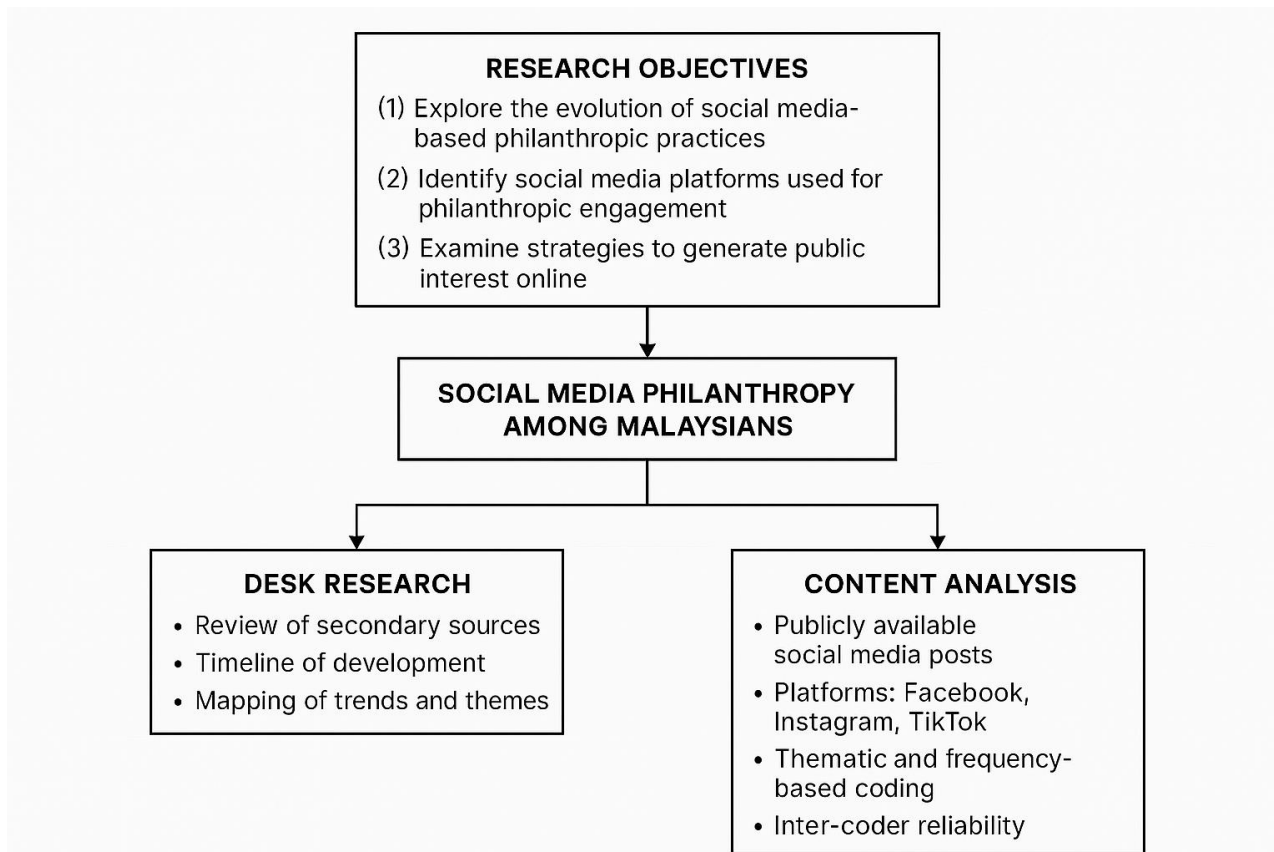


Figure 3.1 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework illustrates the methodological approach used to investigate social media philanthropy among Malaysians. It begins with three core research objectives: (1) exploring the evolution of social media-based philanthropic practices, (2) identifying the platforms commonly used, and (3) examining strategies that generate public interest online. These objectives guide a two-pronged qualitative research design comprising desk research and content analysis. Desk research involves reviewing secondary sources to map the timeline and thematic development of digital philanthropy in Malaysia. This provides historical and contextual grounding for the study. While content analysis focuses on publicly available social media posts across Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. Using thematic and frequency-based coding, this method identifies engagement patterns and strategies. Inter-coder reliability measures were applied to ensure analytical rigor. Together, these methods support a comprehensive understanding of how digital platforms and user behaviors shape modern philanthropic practices in Malaysia.

4. Findings

4.1 Findings 1 Evolution Timeline of Social Media Philanthropy in Malaysia

The evolution of social media philanthropy in Malaysia reflects a dynamic shift in how individuals and communities engage in charitable activities. Over the years, digital platforms have transformed from basic awareness tools into



powerful mechanisms for fundraising, storytelling, and direct aid distribution. This transformation can be traced through four key phases—early emergence, crisis-driven growth, pandemic acceleration, and current consolidation—each marked by changes in technology, user behavior, and public trust. Understanding this timeline is essential to contextualize how philanthropy in Malaysia has adapted to societal needs, digital innovations, and evolving donor expectations.

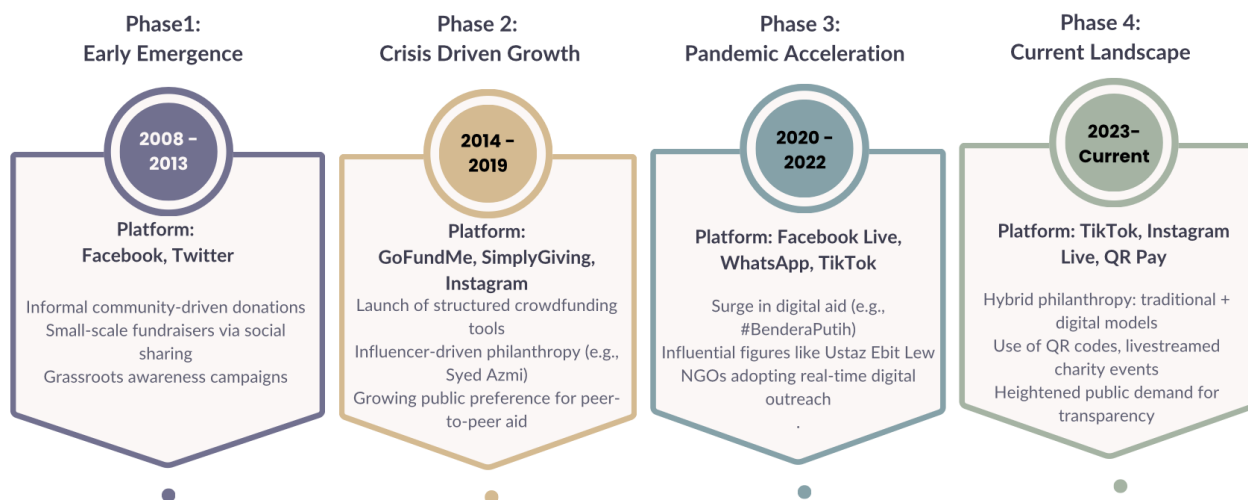


Figure 4.1 Evolution Timeline of Social Media Philanthropy in Malaysia

Figure 4.1 depicts the four phases of the evolution of social media philanthropy in Malaysia. The early emergence period marks the initial shift from traditional to digital philanthropy in Malaysia, driven primarily by the growing adoption of Facebook and Twitter as social networking tools. At this stage, social media was not yet mainstream for formal fundraising but played a vital role in spreading awareness and calls for help among personal networks. This phase laid the groundwork for the digitalization of philanthropy, building trust among communities through personal sharing. However, it lacked structured mechanisms like secure donation portals or public verification, which limited its scalability and reach. It was more communal and relationship-driven, relying heavily on trust and proximity. Phase 2 marks the expansion and formalization of digital philanthropy in Malaysia. Several crises—both personal and national—spurred greater use of structured platforms and social media advocacy. Public trust began to shift from traditional institutions to individual-led and peer-driven initiatives, largely due to their speed, transparency, and relatability. This phase reflects a turning point—philanthropy became more digitally organized, influencer-driven, and emotionally charged. People were no longer just aware; they were now mobilizing at scale through social platforms, preferring trustworthy individuals over opaque systems. This phase paved the way for mass participation in digital giving, setting the stage for its explosion during the COVID-19 era.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, social media philanthropy in Malaysia experienced a significant surge in both scale and urgency (Phase 3). Movement restrictions, economic uncertainty, and widespread unemployment pushed many individuals and families into crisis, prompting digital platforms to become primary channels for mobilizing aid and support. One of the most notable examples was the BenderaPutih (White Flag) movement in 2021. Originating from a grassroots initiative, this campaign encouraged struggling Malaysians to raise a white flag outside their homes to signal their need for food or assistance. Social media users responded swiftly, sharing images, offering help, and coordinating donations through platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp. The movement showcased how decentralized digital activism could address urgent needs rapidly, bypassing institutional delays. Ustaz Ebit Lew, a well-known preacher and humanitarian, became a central figure during this time. His frequent viral videos and social media updates documenting aid missions—such as delivering food, paying hospital bills, or building homes—garnered millions of views. His ability to combine emotional storytelling with direct action built immense public trust, demonstrating the power of individual influencers in shaping digital philanthropy. In response to this shift, NGOs and charity organizations began adopting “social-first” strategies. For instance, groups like Imaret and Mercy Malaysia ramped up their presence on Instagram and



Twitter, posting real-time updates, donation links, and interactive infographics. These adaptations helped them remain relevant and visible, allowing faster engagement with donors and volunteers.

The current phase of social media philanthropy in Malaysia is marked by consolidation, where traditional charity models increasingly integrate with digital tools to enhance reach and engagement. Rather than operating in separate silos, established institutions like religious bodies, corporate CSR arms, and long-standing NGOs now adopt social media strategies to remain relevant in a digital-first society. For instance, religious *zakat* organizations such as Lembaga Zakat Selangor and MAIWP now actively share campaign updates on Facebook and Instagram, while offering QR code-based donations through platforms like DuitNow, making it seamless for the public to contribute directly using mobile banking apps. Live fundraising events on platforms such as TikTok and Facebook Live are also gaining popularity. Influencers and NGOs host real-time donation drives, combining entertainment with calls to action. A notable example includes TikTok creators collaborating with NGOs to support flood victims in Kelantan and Terengganu, where viewers donated while watching live videos of on-ground relief efforts. However, with increased visibility comes greater scrutiny. Public expectations around transparency and accountability have intensified. Recent controversies involving influencers allegedly misusing donations—such as unclear financial reporting or exaggerated claims of aid—have sparked debates on ethical fundraising. As a result, donors are now more discerning, often demanding proof of impact, receipts, and third-party validations before contributing. This phase highlights a mature stage of digital philanthropy in Malaysia, where integration, innovation, and ethical responsibility are central. The blending of old and new approaches reflects both the opportunities and challenges of sustaining trust in an era of digital giving.

4.2 Findings 2 Social Media Platforms Commonly Used in Philanthropy Among Malaysians

In Malaysia, the evolution of digital philanthropy has been significantly shaped by the widespread use of social media platforms, which serve as powerful tools for outreach, fundraising, and community engagement. Each platform offers unique affordances that have influenced how individuals and organizations approach charitable activities.

Table 4.1 Social Media Platforms Commonly Used in Philanthropy Among Malaysians

Platform	Description	Examples
Facebook: The Core Platform for Philanthropic Engagement	Facebook remains the most commonly used platform for philanthropic efforts among Malaysians. Its broad user base, especially among older demographics and community leaders, makes it ideal for disseminating campaign information, rallying support, and coordinating aid.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activists like Syed Azmi have used Facebook to highlight urgent community needs—such as surgeries for underprivileged children or food for marginalized groups—often resulting in rapid public response and donations. • Facebook groups like KitaJagaKita and Bantuan Banjir Malaysia serve as hubs for peer-to-peer support, matching donors with individuals in need during floods or the pandemic.
WhatsApp: Peer-to-Peer Micro Philanthropy	WhatsApp plays a crucial role in informal and direct aid distribution, particularly among friends, family, and religious communities. Fundraising appeals and donation drives are often circulated through WhatsApp groups, making it a trusted medium for closed-network giving.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During Ramadan, messages requesting donations for orphans, mosque renovations, or local food drives frequently go viral within religious circles. • The low barrier to entry and personal trust between users encourage participation, though the informal nature can sometimes lack transparency.
Instagram:	Instagram is widely used by youths and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Malaysian NGOs like Pertiwi Soup Kitchen



<p>Visual Storytelling and Influencer Campaigns</p>	<p>NGOs for visual storytelling, awareness campaigns, and influencer-led fundraising. Its image- and video-based content fosters emotional engagement, which is crucial for motivating action.</p>	<p>and Charity Right Malaysia use Instagram to post photos of their community outreach, coupled with links to donation portals.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influencers often promote causes via Instagram Stories and Reels, combining aesthetic content with calls to action, such as swipe-up donation links or product sales for charity.
<p>TikTok: Emerging Platform for Youth-Driven Philanthropy</p>	<p>TikTok is a rapidly growing platform for grassroots charity and youth-led social change. Its short-form video format enables creative storytelling and emotional appeals, which are effective in mobilizing Gen Z audiences.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During the COVID-19 pandemic and recent flood relief efforts, TikTokers documented their volunteer work or highlighted families in need, prompting viewers to contribute funds via links or QR codes. • Hashtags like #CharityTok or #BenderaPutih went viral, amplifying donation campaigns and creating a ripple effect of generosity.
<p>YouTube and Twitter: Secondary but Impactful Tools</p>	<p>While not as dominant, YouTube is used by some content creators and NGOs for long-form storytelling, showcasing behind-the-scenes footage of humanitarian missions. Twitter, on the other hand, is often used for real-time updates, trending hashtags, and crisis communication.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YouTube channels such as those of Ustaz Ebit Lew or NGO missions abroad gain substantial viewership, drawing attention to neglected causes. • Twitter helped amplify the #BenderaPutih movement, coordinating aid and listing addresses of people seeking help during lockdowns.

The diversity of social media platforms used in Malaysian philanthropy reflects a multi-layered ecosystem:

- Facebook and WhatsApp cater to broad and trusted personal networks.
- Instagram and TikTok focus on youth engagement and visual storytelling.
- YouTube and Twitter support content depth and real-time interaction.

The combination of these platforms allows philanthropists to reach various segments of the population, employ different communication strategies, and foster both grassroots and large-scale giving. This finding underscores the importance of platform-specific strategies in digital philanthropic efforts.

4.3 Findings 3 Methods Used by Malaysian Philanthropists to Generate Interest Among the Public

Malaysian philanthropists both individuals and organizations, use a diverse range of strategic methods to generate interest and mobilize the public around charitable causes on social media. These methods are tailored to appeal to digital audiences by leveraging storytelling, trust-building, and participatory engagement shown in Figure 4.2.

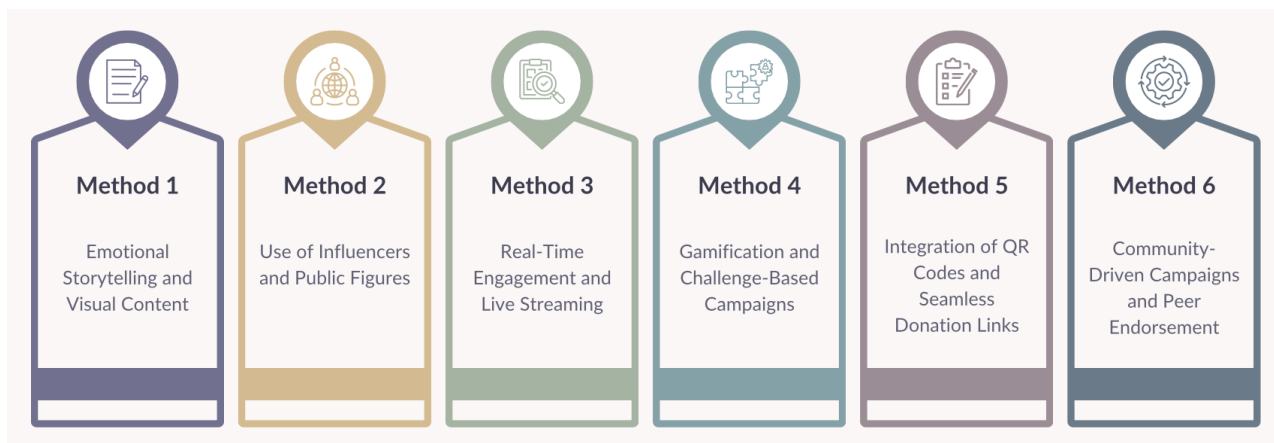


Figure 4.2: Methods Used by Malaysian Philanthropists to Generate Interest Among the Public

Method 1: Emotional Storytelling and Visual Content

Philanthropists often use compelling narratives, personal testimonies, and emotionally resonant visuals to capture public attention. For instance, Ustaz Ebit Lew shares emotionally charged videos of his visits to poor families, single mothers, and rural communities. His tone of compassion, combined with real-time documentation of aid delivery, evokes empathy and inspires giving. Moreover, NGOs like The Lost Food Project use before-and-after photos or video snippets of beneficiaries to show tangible impact. This method is effective because emotional resonance drives virality and encourages spontaneous donations and shares.

Method 2: Use of Influencers and Public Figures

Collaborations with social media influencers, celebrities, and religious leaders help extend the reach and credibility of charitable campaigns. Influencers like Heliza Helmi, a well-known public figure and humanitarian, promote causes through Instagram, often participating directly in missions and documenting their involvement. In addition, NGOs sometimes sponsor posts or collaborate with lifestyle influencers to reach non-traditional donor demographics, such as urban youth or professionals. The influencer’s existing fanbase provides a ready audience, and their endorsement increases perceived trust and urgency.

Method 3: Real-Time Engagement and Live Streaming

Live video sessions and real-time donation campaigns add immediacy and transparency to fundraising efforts. Example: During natural disasters or Ramadan charity drives, some NGOs conduct Facebook Live sessions showing food pack distribution or beneficiary interviews. TikTok users may go live while helping flood victims or preparing meals for the homeless, encouraging viewers to contribute on the spot. This method builds trust and gives donors a sense of participation and immediacy.

Method 4: Gamification and Challenge-Based Campaigns

Philanthropists sometimes use challenge-based initiatives, contests, or viral trends to spark user participation. Example: The BenderaPutih (White Flag) movement encouraged struggling Malaysians to display a white flag outside their homes, prompting others to respond with help. This simple act became a viral call-to-action. Campaigns may also involve “tag a friend to donate” posts or collaborative giveaways tied to charitable giving. These methods tap into peer influence, social responsibility, and the fun or competitive aspects of digital engagement.

Method 5: Integration of QR Codes and Seamless Donation Links

To make giving as easy as possible, philanthropists increasingly use QR codes, payment links, and e-wallets embedded in social media posts or videos. For example, donation posters on Instagram or TikTok often include a DuitNow QR



code or a ShopeePay/Touch 'n Go link. Platforms like SimplyGiving integrate with Instagram bios and swipe-up features for instant access. These tools reduce friction in the giving process and are especially effective with mobile-first donors.

Method 6: Community-Driven Campaigns and Peer Endorsement

Grassroots efforts that encourage community sharing and participation enhance credibility and outreach. Malaysians frequently repost calls for help, tag friends, and promote fundraisers for personal causes, such as medical bills or home fires. These campaigns often go viral through community groups on Facebook or WhatsApp, driven by peer-to-peer trust. Unlike institutional campaigns, these efforts are seen as authentic and often more relatable to the general public. These 6 methods reflect a shift from formal, institutional messaging to personalized, interactive, and emotionally driven outreach strategies tailored for social media platforms.

5. Discussion

This study examined the evolution of social media philanthropy in Malaysia, identified the most commonly used platforms, and analyzed engagement strategies employed by philanthropists. The findings reveal four distinct phases in the development of digital philanthropy—emergence, crisis-driven growth, pandemic acceleration, and consolidation—highlighting the dynamic relationship between social needs, technological adoption, and cultural values.

5.1 Evolution of Social Media Philanthropy

The shift from traditional donation channels to social media-driven giving mirrors global trends where digital platforms democratize charitable participation (Saxton & Wang, 2014). Similar to Indonesia’s Kitabisa platform (Hidayat, 2021), Malaysian philanthropy on social media surged during crises, notably the COVID-19 pandemic. This aligns with Liu et al. (2020), who argue that online giving spikes during high-emotion events such as natural disasters or health emergencies. However, Malaysia’s case highlights an additional cultural dimension—religious and communal solidarity—where Islamic values of *sadaqah* and *zakat* reinforced online giving during Ramadan and disaster relief campaigns.

5.2 Preferred Platforms and User Trust

The dominance of Facebook and WhatsApp suggests that trust and familiarity are crucial in digital philanthropy. This aligns with Bene et al. (2021), who found that personal networks enhance credibility in online fundraising. Instagram and TikTok attract younger donors through visual storytelling, while Twitter and YouTube serve niche audiences. This multi-platform ecosystem reflects the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), where perceived ease of use and social influence drive platform adoption.

5.3 Engagement Strategies and Donor Motivation

Emotional storytelling, influencer collaborations, and live-streaming were effective strategies in generating public interest, echoing Hibbert et al. (2017) on the power of narrative in philanthropic persuasion. Gamification elements, such as donation challenges, align with Self-Determination Theory, fostering intrinsic motivation among younger donors. Yet, the findings also reveal a gap in transparency and accountability, echoing Nurdin et al. (2019), who warn of donor fatigue when trust is compromised.

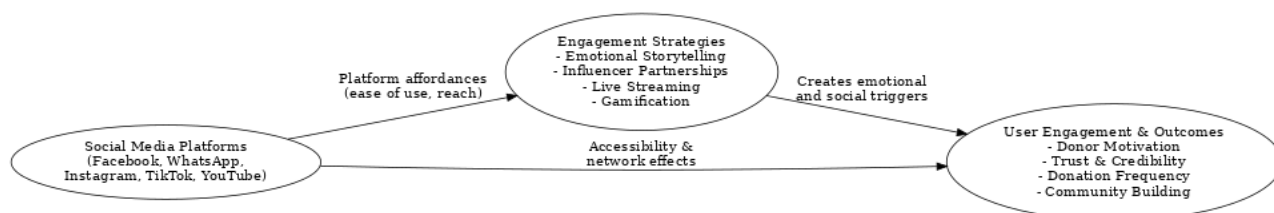




Figure 5.1 Proposed Conceptual Model Diagram for Social Media Philanthropy

The conceptual model illustrates how social media platforms, engagement strategies, and user engagement outcomes are interconnected in shaping philanthropy practices in Malaysia. Platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube serve as the foundation for digital philanthropy. Their affordances—such as ease of use, visual storytelling capability, and network reach—determine how philanthropists select and utilize them. For example, Facebook and WhatsApp leverage trust within close networks, while Instagram and TikTok appeal to younger donors through high visual engagement. In terms of engagement strategies, philanthropists use strategies like emotional storytelling, influencer partnerships, live streaming, and gamification to attract and sustain donor attention. These strategies amplify the emotional and social triggers that motivate individuals to donate, share campaigns, and participate in fundraising activities. For user engagement and outcomes, effective platform use and strategies lead to positive user outcomes, including higher donor motivation, increased trust and credibility, more frequent donations, and stronger community building around philanthropic causes. This aligns with behavioral theories like the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and Self-Determination Theory, where ease of access and emotional resonance drive participation. The direct link from platforms to outcomes (shown in the diagram) highlights how platform accessibility and network effects also influence donation behavior even without sophisticated strategies—for example, ease of sharing donation links in WhatsApp groups can still yield significant contributions. Overall, the model shows that platform choice + engagement strategy = optimized donor outcomes, offering practical guidance for NGOs and philanthropists to design more effective digital campaigns.

6. Conclusion

This study set out to examine how philanthropy in Malaysia has adapted to the digital age, focusing on social media’s role in transforming charitable practices, the platforms most widely used, and the engagement strategies that sustain donor participation. By analyzing digital campaigns and strategies used by Malaysian philanthropists, the research identified four evolutionary phases in social media philanthropy—emergence, crisis-driven growth, pandemic acceleration, and consolidation. These phases reflect the strong relationship between societal needs, technological adoption, and cultural-religious values in shaping online giving behaviors. Key findings confirm that Facebook and WhatsApp remain dominant channels, driven by trust and close personal networks, while Instagram and TikTok have become critical for engaging younger demographics through visually rich and interactive content. YouTube and Twitter, though less central, provide niche outreach opportunities. To sustain public engagement, philanthropists leverage emotional storytelling, influencer collaborations, live streaming, and gamification—strategies that align with literature on digital persuasion and donor psychology. This research makes two novel contributions. First, it introduces a platform–strategy–engagement model that explains how the affordances of different social media platforms combine with digital engagement strategies to enhance donor trust, motivation, and community-building. Second, it highlights how religious and cultural norms, particularly Islamic values of *zakat* and *sadaqah*, reinforce philanthropic participation online, especially during Ramadan and times of crisis.

Practically, the findings provide actionable insights for NGOs, policymakers, and religious institutions. NGOs can design multi-platform campaigns that balance trust networks (Facebook/WhatsApp) with youth outreach (TikTok/Instagram), while embedding transparency tools to build credibility. Policymakers can introduce clearer digital fundraising regulations to reduce fraud risks and enhance accountability. Religious institutions can integrate social media into *zakat* and *sadaqah* initiatives, modernizing outreach while preserving cultural legitimacy. Future studies could examine donor retention and long-term campaign impact or conduct comparative research across Southeast Asia to explore cultural variations in digital philanthropy. Ultimately, this study shows that social media is not merely a tool for fundraising but a dynamic ecosystem that blends technology, culture, and community values, shaping a new era of philanthropy in Malaysia.

6.1 Practical Implications

The findings of this study offer several practical implications for key stakeholders in Malaysia’s philanthropic ecosystem. For NGOs and charities, adopting a multi-platform strategy that leverages Facebook’s trusted community networks



alongside TikTok's youth-oriented reach can significantly broaden donor engagement. Embedding transparency tools, such as live campaign updates and QR-coded receipts, can further enhance trust and improve donor retention. For policymakers, the rapid growth of social media fundraising highlights the urgent need for clearer regulatory guidelines that both safeguard donors from fraud and encourage innovation in digital philanthropy. Meanwhile, religious institutions can modernize Islamic giving practices by integrating digital philanthropy with *zakat* and *sadaqah* management systems, ensuring that these traditional forms of giving remain relevant and credible in a digital era while preserving their religious legitimacy.

6.2 Limitations and Future Research

While this study mapped platform usage and strategies, it did not deeply assess donor retention or long-term impact, which future research could explore through longitudinal data. Comparative studies across Southeast Asia would also enrich understanding of cultural influences in social media philanthropy.

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