

Posting Is Not Doing? Performative Activism and Offline Action among Young Students of the Faculty of Information Science, UiTM Rembau

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Date: 9 October 2026

Abstract

Social media makes it easy to show concern for a cause with one tap. Critics call this “performative activism” or “slacktivism” when visible support replaces real effort. This study asks whether sharing and posting about social causes is linked to offline action among young Malaysian students, and what motivates sharing. A cross-sectional survey was administered to students of the Faculty of Information Science, UiTM Negeri Sembilan, Rembau Campus. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Spearman correlation and Mann-Whitney U tests. In the sample data of this practice copy, sharing frequency showed only a weak link to offline action, and students with high image concern took fewer offline actions. The paper also treats the topic as an information problem: sharing unverified content is a form of information behaviour that library and information professionals can help improve. A “Share, Verify, Act” model and recommendations for students, student leaders and the faculty are proposed. The sample is small and from one campus, so findings are exploratory.

Keywords: performative activism, slacktivism, Gen Z, social media, moral licensing, information literacy, Malaysian youth

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Reposting an infographic takes seconds. Volunteering, donating or turning up to an event takes time, money and effort. In everyday online slang, students sometimes describe empty moral posturing as “moral masturbation”: expressing virtue for the feeling or the image rather than for impact. Academic writing uses more neutral terms: **performative activism**, **slacktivism** and **virtue signalling**. This paper uses the academic terms and keeps the slang only as a note on how the idea circulates among young people.

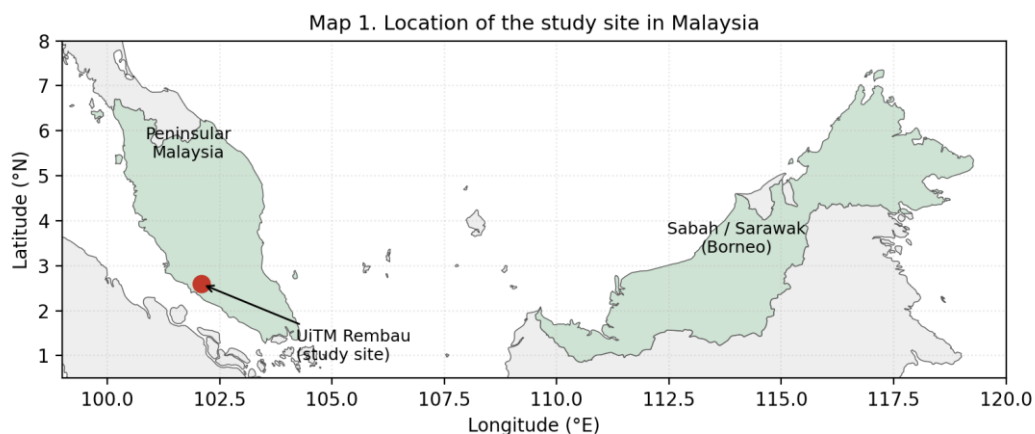
The concern is old but sharper in the social media age. Gladwell (2010) argued that online networks produce weak ties that rarely lead to costly action, and Morozov (2011) criticised “slacktivism” as feel-good activity with little effect. Others disagree. Bozarth and Budak (2017) asked whether slacktivists are underrated, and a review of the psychology of online activism found mixed evidence that online protest prevents offline action (Greijdanus et al., 2020). The debate is therefore open, and local evidence is thin.

1.2 Why this matters for Malaysian youth

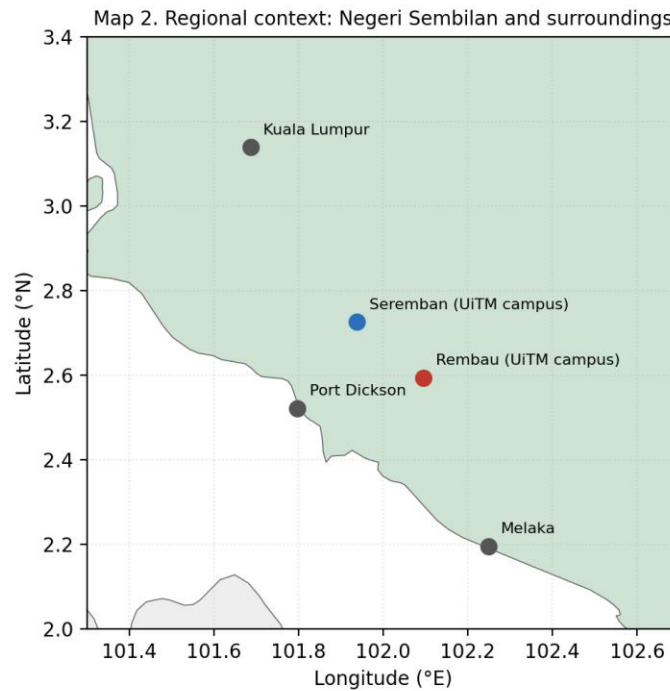
Malaysian law defines youth as persons aged 15 to 30 (Youth Societies and Youth Development (Amendment) Act 2019), which covers most Gen Z undergraduates and diploma students. Malaysian youth have used social media for real civic action, including video blogging on rights and justice issues (Lim, 2013) and TikTok campaigns in Southeast Asia that mobilised public attention (Jalli, 2025). At the same time, not every shared post is informed or followed by action. Information science students are well placed to study this because sharing a post is also an act of information behaviour: choosing, checking and passing on content.

1.3 Research context

UiTM Negeri Sembilan Branch operates two campuses, Seremban and Rembau. The Rembau campus (Jalan UiTM Rembau, 71300 Rembau, Negeri Sembilan) hosts the Faculty of Information Science students surveyed here. Most students are young, connected through WhatsApp, Instagram and TikTok, and take part in campus activities such as gotong-royong, charity drives and club programmes, which allows both online and offline engagement to be observed.



Map 1. Location of the study site in Malaysia. Source: Natural Earth boundaries; site coordinates approximate.



Map 2. Regional context of the Rembau campus. Source: Natural Earth boundaries; coordinates approximate.

1.4 Problem statement

Many young people share content about causes, yet it is unclear how far this sharing connects to action in their own community, and whether motives such as image concern or peer pressure reduce that link.

1.5 Research questions

- **RQ1:** How often do students share or post about social causes online, and which causes?
- **RQ2:** How many offline actions (donating, volunteering, attending events, signing petitions) do they take?
- **RQ3:** Is online sharing frequency associated with the number of offline actions?
- **RQ4:** What motives do students report, and are image-related motives associated with fewer offline actions?

1.6 Hypotheses

- **H1:** Online sharing frequency has at most a weak association with offline action.
- **H2:** Students with higher image concern take fewer offline actions than students with lower image concern.
- **H3:** A substantial share of frequent sharers take no offline action.
- **H4:** Informing others is the most common stated motive, ahead of image-related motives.

1.7 Significance

For students and student representatives, the study offers a mirror and practical habits. For lecturers and the faculty, it shows where information literacy and civic programmes can help. For the information profession, it links sharing behaviour to verification skills.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Slacktivism and performative activism

Slacktivism refers to low-effort online support that is thought to give a feeling of contribution without real impact (Morozov, 2011). Performative activism is related but focuses on display: support shown mainly to be seen. Gladwell (2010) contrasted the weak ties of social media with the strong ties that sustain high-risk activism.

2.2 Moral licensing and grandstanding

Moral self-licensing describes how a good deed can free people to behave less well afterwards, because they feel they have already shown their goodness (Merritt, Effron, & Monin, 2010). Applied here, posting about a cause might reduce the felt need to act. Moral grandstanding is the use of moral talk to impress others (Tosi & Warmke, 2016), which fits the “image” motive measured in this study.

2.3 Does online support help or replace action?

Evidence is mixed. Experiments suggest that when a first act of support is public and observable, people may later give less (Kristofferson, White, & Peloza, 2014), and that online expression can sometimes lower later contribution through moral balancing (Lee & Hsieh, 2013). Yet other work finds slacktivists can still add value to movements (Bozarth & Budak, 2017), and a review concludes that evidence that online action prevents offline action is mixed (Greijdanus et al., 2020).

2.4 Youth, social media and activism in Malaysia

Malaysian young people have used online video and social platforms to raise issues often neglected in mainstream media (Lim, 2013), and recent work on TikTok describes youth in Southeast Asia using it for activism despite risks and misinformation (Jalli, 2025). These studies show that online action can matter, which makes the question of when it connects to offline action more important.

2.5 The information angle

Sharing a cause is also information behaviour. Without checking sources, students may spread incomplete or false claims, which can harm the cause they want to support. Information literacy, a unit already taught in the programme, therefore offers a practical response.

2.6 Research gap

Few studies look at the link between online sharing and offline action among Malaysian students in a specific campus setting, and fewer treat verification and information behaviour as part of the picture.

2.7 Conceptual framework

Step	Element	Expected influence
1	Online sharing frequency	May increase awareness, but may not lead to action
2	Motives (inform, image, peer pressure)	Shape whether sharing leads to action
3	Image concern	Expected to be linked to fewer offline actions
4	Offline action (donate, volunteer, attend)	Outcome of interest
5	Verification habits	Affect the quality of what is shared

Figure 1. Proposed relationships.

3. Methodology

Design. Quantitative, cross-sectional survey with one open-ended item.

Sample. Students of the Faculty of Information Science, UiTM Negeri Sembilan, Rembau Campus, recruited by convenience sampling through class groups. Target $n \geq 50$ [actual $N = 50$]. Survey open for 7 days.

Instrument. Google Forms questionnaire with sections on demographics, online sharing, offline action, motives, image concern (5 Likert items, 1 to 5) and verification habits. Items were kept neutral and avoid asking about political party membership or sensitive personal beliefs. Full instrument in Appendix A.

Variables

Variable	Type	Measure
Sharing frequency	Ordinal	Never / 1 to 2 times / monthly / weekly or more (past 3 months)
Offline actions	Count	Number of actions taken in the past 6 months (donation, volunteering, event attendance, petition, boycott, community work)
Image concern	Scale	Mean of 5 Likert items
Motives	Nominal	Multiple response
Verification habit	Ordinal	How often a source is checked before sharing

Analysis plan

Question	Test	Reason
Profile and frequencies	Percentages, median, SD	Describe the data
Image-concern scale reliability	Cronbach's alpha (target ≥ 0.70)	Check consistency

Question	Test	Reason
H1: sharing vs offline action	Spearman's rho	Ordinal and count data
H2: high vs low image concern	Mann-Whitney U	Two groups, non-normal
H3: share of frequent sharers with no action	Percentages	Descriptive
H4: motives	Frequencies	Multiple response

Significance level $\alpha = 0.05$. Software: Google Sheets or Excel for descriptives, JASP or SPSS for tests.

Ethics. Voluntary, anonymous, no identifying information; participants may withdraw at any time.

4. Results

PRACTICE COPY: every figure, table and statistic in Sections 4 to 6 is sample data for rehearsal. It is not from a real survey and must be replaced with actual results before this paper is submitted or published.

4.1 Respondent profile

Sample: 50 students; 56% female and 44% male; semester 2 (16%), semester 3 (30%), semester 4 (32%), semester 5 (22%); 60% living in hostel and 40% off campus.

4.2 Online sharing (RQ1)

Sharing frequency (past 3 months)	n	%
Never	3	6%
1 to 2 times	12	24%
Monthly	15	30%
Weekly or more	20	40%

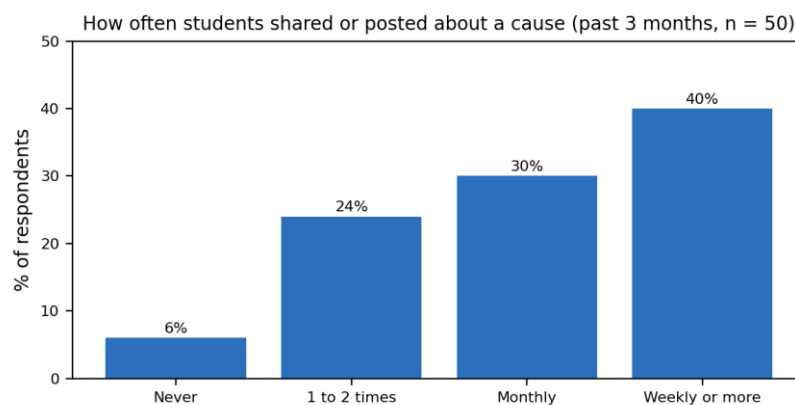


Figure 2. Online sharing frequency (sample data).

Causes shared most often (multiple answers): humanitarian crises 72%, environment 40%, education and student welfare 34%, local community 30%, animal welfare 18%.

4.3 Offline action (RQ2)

Offline actions (past 6 months)	n	%
None	19	38%
1 action	14	28%
2 actions	10	20%
3 or more	7	14%

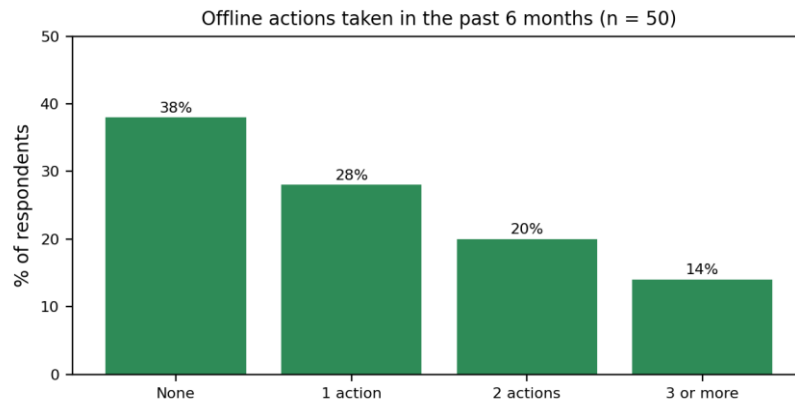


Figure 3. Offline actions taken in the past 6 months (sample data).

4.4 Sharing and action (RQ3, H1, H3)

Spearman correlation between sharing frequency and number of offline actions: $\rho = 0.17$, $p = 0.24$, which is a weak and non-significant association. Among respondents who shared at least monthly (n = 35), 13 (37%) took no offline action in the past 6 months.

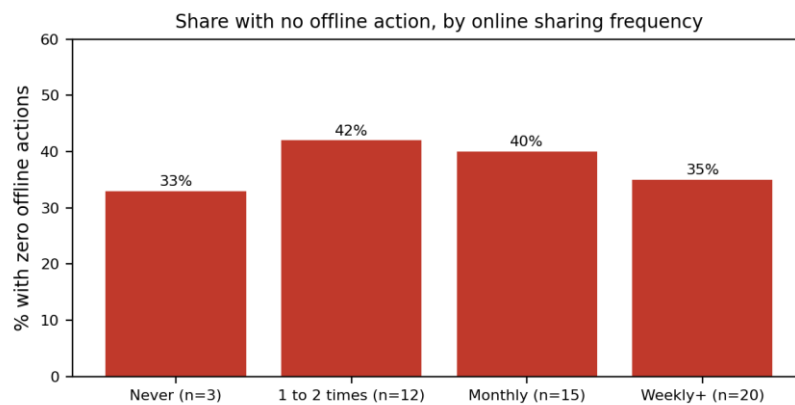


Figure 4. Share of respondents with no offline action, by sharing frequency (sample data).

4.5 Motives and image concern (RQ4, H2, H4)

Reason for sharing	%
To inform others	66%
To show I care or support	54%
Friends are doing it or it is trending	46%
Fear of being judged if I stay silent	30%
To start a discussion	28%

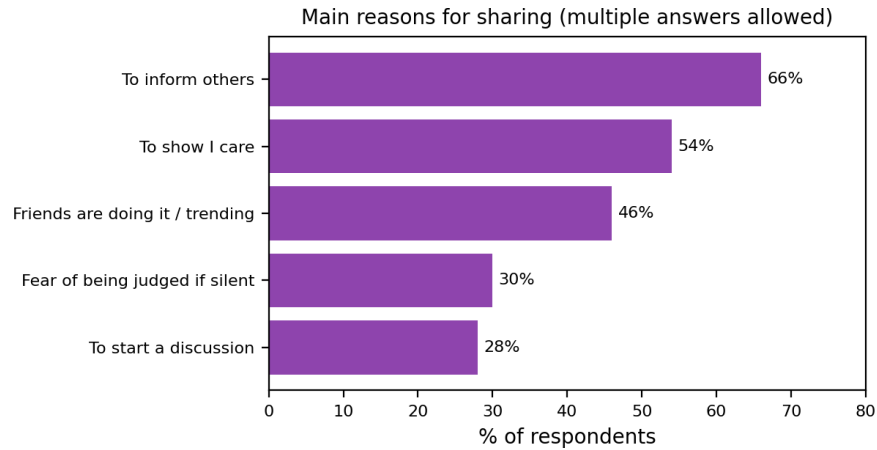


Figure 5. Reasons for sharing (sample data).

Image-concern scale: mean 3.1 (SD 0.9), Cronbach alpha 0.78. Students with high image concern ($n = 24$) had a median of 1 offline action, compared with 2 for students with low image concern ($n = 26$); Mann-Whitney $U = 197$, $p = 0.03$.

4.6 Hypothesis summary

Hypothesis	Supported?	Evidence
H1	Yes	$\rho = 0.17$, $p = 0.24$ (weak, non-significant)
H2	Yes	$U = 197$, $p = 0.03$
H3	Yes	37% of monthly-or-more sharers took no offline action
H4	Yes	Informing others was top (66%); showing care second (54%)

5. Discussion

5.1 Interpreting the pattern

In the sample data, frequent sharing was not clearly linked to more offline action, and over a third of regular sharers had done nothing offline. This fits the cautious view that online expression does not automatically become action (Gladwell, 2010; Kristofferson et al., 2014), but it does not show that sharing prevents action, because evidence is mixed (Greijdanus et al., 2020). The sample also shows that most students shared in order to inform others, which suggests many are sincere. Image concern was the clearer warning sign: students who cared more about how they appeared took fewer offline actions, consistent with moral grandstanding (Tosi & Warmke, 2016) and moral licensing (Merritt et al., 2010). These are associations in a small sample and should be tested with real data.

5.2 Everyday examples (illustrative scenarios)

Situation	Performative version	Meaningful version
A disaster appeal goes viral	Repost the poster and move on	Verify the organisation, donate a small amount, tell two friends how
Campus welfare issue	Complain in a story	Send it to the student representative with details and a suggested fix

Situation	Performative version	Meaningful version
Environmental cause	Post a clean-up photo from someone else	Join one real gotong-royong event this month
A trending hashtag	Add the hashtag without reading	Read one reliable source first, then decide
Charity drive	“Like” the post	Volunteer for one shift or donate an item

5.3 Why the gap exists

Three reasons are plausible. First, online support is cheap and visible, while offline action costs time and money. Second, social pressure rewards a quick post. Third, students may not know where or how to act locally. The practical lesson is to make the first real step small, specific and easy.

5.4 The “Share, Verify, Act” model

1. **Pause.** Before sharing, ask whether you actually understand the issue.
2. **Verify.** Check at least one reliable source (official body, reputable news outlet, library database).
3. **Share with purpose.** Add what people can do, not only what to feel.
4. **Pick one real action.** Donate, volunteer, attend, or contact the right person.
5. **Follow up.** Record what you did and the result, so action becomes a habit.

5.4.1 For students

Set a “one real action per post” rule for causes you care about, and tell a friend so you stay accountable.

5.4.2 For student representatives and clubs

Share the action, not just the awareness: every call-to-action post should include a date, a place and one thing people can do.

5.4.3 For lecturers and the faculty

Add short activities on verifying viral content to information literacy lessons, and connect students with real community programmes in Rembau.

5.4.4 For the library and information professionals

Run workshops on fact-checking and source evaluation, and keep a simple guide to reliable fact-checking sites for students.

5.5 Limitations

Small convenience sample from one campus; self-reported behaviour that may be affected by social desirability; cross-sectional design, so associations only; and the offline action list may miss forms of help that students do not call “activism”. Future studies should use larger multi-campus samples, interviews, and compare Gen Z with older groups.

6. Conclusion

In the sample data, online sharing was only weakly linked to offline action, and image concern was associated with taking fewer actions. If real survey data show the same pattern, the main message is not that sharing is bad, but that sharing should be the first step rather than the last. Information literacy and small, specific calls to action can help young people turn concern into impact.

6.1 Recommendations

1. **Students:** follow the “Share, Verify, Act” steps and pair every share with one concrete action.
2. **Student representatives and clubs:** include a date, place and task in every call-to-action post.
3. **Lecturers:** use real campaigns as case studies in information literacy and social media literacy classes.
4. **Faculty and library:** host fact-checking workshops and publish a short guide to reliable sources.
5. **Researchers:** compare self-reported action with verified attendance or donation records, and widen the sample.

References

Verify each entry against the original source before submitting, and format it to your publisher's required style.

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Appendix A: Survey instrument

Consent: This anonymous survey is for a class research paper and takes about 5 minutes. Participation is voluntary. ☐ I agree to participate.

Section A: About you 1. Semester: 1 to 6 or above 2. Gender: Female / Male / Prefer not to say 3. Residence: Hostel / Off campus

Section B: Online sharing 4. In the past 3 months, how often did you share or post about a social cause? Never / 1 to 2 times / Monthly / Weekly or more 5. Which causes? (select all) Humanitarian crises / Environment / Education and student welfare / Local community / Animal welfare / Other 6. Why do you share? (select all) To inform others / To show I care or support / Friends are doing it or it is trending / Fear of being judged if I stay silent / To start a discussion / Other

Section C: Offline action (past 6 months) 7. Which did you do? (select all) Donated money or goods / Volunteered / Attended an event or programme / Signed a petition / Joined gotong-royong or community work / Boycotted a product / None

Section D: Image concern (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) 8. I think about how my post will make me look. 9. I share things my friends would approve of. 10. I feel judged if I stay silent on a trending issue. 11. I post more when many people are posting about it. 12. I like seeing how many people react to my posts.

Section E: Verification 13. How often do you check a reliable source before sharing? Always / Often / Sometimes / Rarely / Never

Section F: Open-ended 14. What would make it easier for you to take real action? _____