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Impact of Facebook Toward Social Collective Action Among Malaysia Youth During Movement Control Order Case Studies With Caremongering Malaysia

Mansurni Abadi¹, Putu Ayu Suniadewi²

¹Philosophy departement, Avondale Christian University, Coranborg, NSW,Australia

²Faculty of information technology, INTI University, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Corresponding Author: putuayusuniadewi@gmail.com

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Abstract:

The enforcement of Malaysia's Movement Control Order (MCO) 1.0 during the first wave of COVID-19 created widespread panic, social disconnection, and practical hardships, especially for vulnerable groups, while also intensifying the need for rapid, community-based responses. Within this context, Facebook emerged as a new public sphere that enabled young people to organize collective action through the Caremongering Malaysia movement. This study aims to examine the reasons behind the movement's formation, identify the strategies it employed, and explain how it sustained mobilization during and beyond MCO 1.0. Using a qualitative approach grounded in a constructivist paradigm, the research collected primary data through group discussions, in-depth interviews, and participatory observation involving eight coordinators and volunteers, supported by secondary literature. The findings show that Caremongering Malaysia was driven by a combination of collective identity, disappointment with government responses, and social solidarity. Its mobilization was sustained through three core principles mutual aid, direct action, and autonomy which were operationalized through decentralized coordination, need-based assistance, digital networking, interactive mapping, and inclusive volunteerism across diverse social backgrounds. The movement also helped connect aid seekers and volunteers efficiently nationwide. The study concludes that Facebook functioned not merely as a communication platform but as an effective infrastructure for grassroots mobilization, enabling Malaysian youth to strengthen solidarity.

Keyword: Collective Action, Youth Activism, Caremongering Malaysia, Movement Control Order (MCO)



INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic was not only a public health emergency but also a multidimensional social crisis that exposed vulnerability, inequality, and fragility within modern societies. In Malaysia, the first phase of the Movement Control Order (MCO) 1.0, implemented from March 18 to May 6, 2020, was introduced as a government response

to the sharp rise in infections following the Sri Petaling religious gathering (Osman et al., 2021). During this period, schools, universities, places of worship, and non-essential sectors were closed, interstate travel was restricted, and household mobility was tightly regulated (Aziz et al., 2020). These restrictions were among the strictest in East Asia and were enforced under the guidance of the Malaysian National Security Council through the Prevention and Control of Infectious Diseases Act 1988 (Act 342) and the Police Act 1967 (Osman et al., 2021; Pfordten, 2020). Although necessary for disease containment, these measures intensified social isolation, food insecurity, and the marginalization of vulnerable groups.

The broader significance of this crisis lies in the fact that COVID-19 revealed deep structural weaknesses in society, including fear-based reactions, mutual suspicion, prejudice, and fragmented responses to collective suffering. Haase (2020) argues that the pandemic should be understood as a social crisis and a justice challenge, particularly for communities with unequal access to resources and support. In such conditions, conventional institutional responses were often insufficient to address urgent everyday needs. This situation created a strong demand for alternative forms of civic action capable of responding quickly, flexibly, and inclusively to emerging hardships.

Scholars have emphasized that solidarity and collective action are essential responses to crisis because they enable communities to move beyond passive fear and toward practical mutual support (Tomasini, 2021). Likewise, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs stressed the importance of solidarity and collective responsibility in managing the social impacts of COVID-19 (UN DESA, 2020). In this context, the Malaysian case is particularly important because it demonstrates how crisis conditions can stimulate community-based initiatives that are not always initiated by formal institutions, but rather emerge organically from citizens themselves. This article positions collective action not merely as a temporary emotional response to the pandemic, but as a socially meaningful process that reflects civic agency, moral responsibility, and new forms of digital participation.

One such initiative was Caremongering Malaysia, a Facebook-based community response founded by Joseph Mathers, a Scottish expatriate living in Malaysia, to connect those in need with those willing to help. Inspired by similar mutual-aid ideas circulating elsewhere, Caremongering Malaysia developed as an autonomous local movement rather than as an official branch of an international organization. Its emergence reflected a practical response to immediate humanitarian needs, especially among individuals perceived to be at higher risk of COVID-19 infection or severe socioeconomic disruption. The movement is significant because it illustrates how digital-native communities, especially youth, can transform online interaction into concrete social intervention during crisis.

The relevance of this topic is strengthened by the rapid expansion of social media use in Malaysia. Internet penetration reached 88.7 percent in 2020, rising from 87.4 percent in 2018, and was projected to continue increasing in subsequent years (MCMC, 2020; Mullers, 2021). Malaysia also ranked among the top countries globally in mobile social media penetration, with Facebook remaining the most widely used platform in the country (Bernama, 2019; Azizan et al., 2020; Mustafa et al., 2013). By 2020, Facebook users accounted for a substantial share of the Malaysian population, indicating that the platform had become an important digital environment for information exchange, public discourse, and social coordination (Socialbakers, 2020). These conditions make Malaysia

an important case for examining how social media can function as a public sphere for collective action during emergencies.

Table 1. Position of the Present Study in Relation to Previous Research

Previous studies	Main focus	Relevance to this article	Research gap addressed by this article
Haase (2020)	COVID-19 as a social crisis and justice challenge	Explains the broader social disruption caused by the pandemic	Does not examine grassroots digital mutual-aid movements in Malaysia
Tomasini (2021); UN DESA (2020)	Solidarity and collective action during crisis	Establishes why solidarity is necessary in pandemic response	Does not analyze a concrete youth-led movement sustained through Facebook
Farooq et al. (2020)	Online information and behavioral response during COVID-19	Shows the importance of digital information flows in crisis	Focuses more on information effects than on organized collective action
Sahharon et al. (2018); Tsatsou (2018); Lewis et al. (2014)	Social media participation, discourse, and activism	Demonstrates how digital platforms facilitate participation and mobilization	Does not specifically discuss Caremongering Malaysia or mutual aid under MCO
Azizan et al. (2020); Mustafa et al. (2013)	Facebook use and online solidarity in Malaysia	Confirms Facebook's centrality among Malaysian users	Leaves open the question of how Facebook-supported activism is organized and sustained beyond the initial crisis

Source: Author, 2026

Previous studies have shown that social media can facilitate discourse, expand access to information, reduce communication costs, and enable individuals to act as both receivers and producers of content (Sahharon et al., 2018; Tsatsou, 2018; Lewis et al., 2014; Bertot et al., 2010; Vahedi et al., 2019). Social media also enables communication beyond territorial boundaries and provides opportunities for flexible coordination during crisis situations (Siegert et al., 2020). However, much of the existing literature discusses online participation in general terms and pays less attention to how digital interactions are transformed into sustained grassroots mobilization. This article therefore fills an important gap by examining not only how Facebook supports the emergence of Caremongering Malaysia, but also how the movement maintained collective action during and beyond MCO 1.0.

The originality of this article lies in its focus on Caremongering Malaysia as a youth-driven, Facebook-mediated mutual-aid movement operating in a multicultural society during a period of national emergency. Rather than treating Facebook merely as a communication tool, this study approaches it as a social infrastructure through which collective identity, solidarity, and practical mobilization were constructed. The article also extends existing discussions by showing that digital collective action is not exhausted in symbolic expression or “keyboard activism,” but can develop into direct assistance, volunteer coordination, and sustained grassroots engagement.

In this sense, the article contributes to broader debates on digital activism, civic participation, and community resilience under crisis conditions. This issue is urgent to discuss for at least three reasons. First, pandemics and other large-scale crises require

rapid and decentralized responses that state institutions alone may not be able to provide effectively. Second, the increasing dependence on digital platforms in everyday life means that social media now plays a strategic role in shaping public behavior, solidarity, and civic intervention. Third, youth participation in online spaces is often underestimated or dismissed as superficial, even though evidence suggests that young people can become major actors in crisis response when provided with suitable platforms and networks (Farooq et al., 2020). By examining Caremongering Malaysia, this article shows why youth-led digital collective action deserves serious scholarly attention.

Accordingly, this article aims to address three main questions. First, what factors encouraged the formation of Caremongering Malaysia during MCO 1.0? Second, what strategies did the movement use to organize aid and coordinate volunteers? Third, how was the movement able to sustain mobilization during and beyond the immediate lockdown period? These questions are important because they allow the article to move beyond descriptive accounts of pandemic solidarity and instead explain the social mechanisms that made the movement effective, adaptive, and durable. The discussion therefore highlights the scientific contribution of the article by linking crisis conditions, digital platforms, and collective action within one analytical framework.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design within a constructivist paradigm to examine how Facebook facilitated collective social action among Malaysian youth through the Caremongering Malaysia movement during and beyond Movement Control Order (MCO) 1.0. The qualitative approach was selected because the study aimed to understand socially meaningful actions, motivations, and interactions among participants involved in the movement rather than to test statistical relationships. Specifically, the research focused on exploring three issues: the reasons behind the formation of Caremongering Malaysia, the strategies used by the movement, and the ways it sustained mobilization over time.

The target population consisted of individuals actively involved in the Caremongering Malaysia network, particularly coordinators and volunteers. Using purposive sampling, the researchers selected eight informants based on their direct participation and relevance to the study objectives. Primary data were collected through group discussions, in-depth interviews, and participatory observation, while secondary data were obtained from literature review. These methods enabled the researchers to capture both participants' perspectives and the practical dynamics of the movement in different operational areas.

Table 1. Profile of Informants

No.	Initial	Age	Gender	Profession	Ethnicity	Role in Caremongering Movement	Code
1	K.J	29	Male	Student	Malay	Coordinator for Kajang, Selangor	R1
2	H.K	20	Male	Student	Arab	Coordinator for Penang Island	R2
3	M.S	26	Female	Student	Malay	Coordinator for North Kuala Lumpur	R3
4	R.W	18	Female	Student	Chinese	Coordinator for Johor Bahru, Johor	R4
5	E.Z.G	21	Female	Mechanic	Bugis	Volunteer for Kinabalu area, Sabah	R5
6	T.L	28	Female	Teacher	Indian	Volunteer for Labuan area	R6

No.	Initial	Age	Gender	Profession	Ethnicity	Role in Caremongering Movement	Code
7	H.I	29	Male	Teacher	Iban	Volunteer for Kuching	R7
8	J.I	30	Male	Chef	Kadazan	Volunteer for Miri area, Sarawak	R8

Source: Author, 2026

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Reasons Behind the Movement

Based on interviews with eight informants involved in Caremongering Malaysia, this study found that the emergence of the movement was driven by the interaction of three main factors: collective social identity, disappointment with government responses, and social solidarity. These three factors functioned as the main preconditions that encouraged participants to move beyond online expression and engage in sustained collective action during and after MCO 1.0. In practice, this combination generated shared awareness of social problems, a sense of togetherness in responding to crisis, and a rational commitment to maintain the movement beyond the initial emergency period.

The first factor relates to collective identity. The findings show that participants developed a sense of belonging not only to specific communities or local groups, but also to a broader humanitarian cause. This is important because collective identity helps explain why individuals are willing to recognize common problems and act together despite differences in ethnicity, profession, and social background. In theoretical terms, collective identity is shaped through processes of social comparison and self-categorization that distinguish between in-groups and out-groups, while also producing perceptions of shared values and common purpose. In the case of Caremongering Malaysia, this process contributed to the formation of a positive social identity centered on helping others during crisis conditions rather than reinforcing exclusionary boundaries between groups (Eder, 2009; Davis et al., 2019).

The second factor concerns social solidarity. The informants consistently described their involvement as a moral response to the suffering of vulnerable groups during the pandemic. Helping people who were isolated, economically affected, or at higher health risk was not understood merely as charity, but as a practical expression of social obligation. This finding is significant because it shows that solidarity in Caremongering Malaysia was grounded in mutual trust and moral responsibility. In this sense, solidarity was not based solely on formal agreement or institutional obligation, but on the recognition that communities under crisis need to support one another directly and immediately (Allan & Daynes, 2020).

The third factor relates to dissatisfaction with the limitations of formal crisis responses. Several informants indicated that the movement gained momentum because there was a perceived gap between urgent community needs and the speed of institutional assistance. This perceived gap did not necessarily produce overt partisan opposition, but it encouraged participants to organize outside conventional bureaucratic channels. As a result, Caremongering Malaysia emerged as a grassroots response that prioritized speed, flexibility, and practical assistance over formal procedures. This finding helps explain why participants viewed the movement as both necessary and effective in a rapidly changing emergency context.

Another important finding is that Facebook played a central role in transforming concern into organized action. Although social media became a space where both positive and negative narratives circulated during the pandemic, Caremongering Malaysia used Facebook as a relatively neutral arena to cultivate attachment, empathy, and civic

responsibility. Rather than reproducing polarized positions, the movement used the platform to connect volunteers, identify needs, and maintain a sense of shared purpose. This dynamic supports the argument that identity can operate at the personal, social, and human levels, with the broadest level emerging when individuals identify themselves as part of a larger humanity facing common vulnerability (Choi, 2020; Autin, 2010).

Table 2. Main Factors Behind the Emergence of Caremongering Malaysia

Factor	Description	Contribution to the Movement
Collective social identity	Shared awareness among youth and volunteers that they belonged to a broader humanitarian community	Encouraged togetherness, common purpose, and sustained participation
Social solidarity	Moral commitment to assist vulnerable groups affected by the pandemic	Strengthened trust, empathy, and responsiveness in crisis situations
Disappointment with formal responses	Perception that urgent needs could not always be addressed quickly through institutional channels	Motivated grassroots action outside bureaucratic mediation
Facebook as a digital public sphere	Social media functioned as a platform for communication, coordination, and mobilization	Turned online awareness into practical collective action
Cyberactivism and youth participation	Digital-native actors used online tools to organize and respond to urgent needs	Enabled rapid coordination and expanded the movement's reach

Source: Author, 2026

Taken together, these findings show that the interaction between social media as a tool and youth as social actors was strengthened by broader social conditions. Caremongering Malaysia did not emerge simply because Facebook was available, but because participants already possessed a sense of attachment, concern, and readiness to act. In this respect, the movement reflects the convergence of collective identity awareness and cyberactivism, where digitally connected individuals organize themselves intelligently and responsively in the face of crisis. This helps explain how online engagement was transformed from symbolic participation into concrete humanitarian action during MCO 1.0 and beyond (Haryadi & Malitasari, 2020; Sandoval-Almazan & Ramon Gil-Garcia, 2014).

2. Caremongering Strategy

The findings further show that Caremongering Malaysia developed a distinctive operational strategy that enabled the movement to survive beyond the immediate lockdown phase. One coordinator from the Kuala Lumpur area stated that the movement was guided by the principle of helping “based on intention, not attention.” This statement captures the ethical orientation of the movement, which emphasized service over visibility. Interviews with coordinators, including R1 and R4, suggest that the movement consistently relied on three interrelated principles: mutual aid, direct action, and autonomy. These principles became the main framework through which Caremongering Malaysia organized volunteers, distributed aid, and maintained internal cohesion.

The coordinators further summarized these principles through the term MU.D.A, which refers to mutual aid, direct action, and autonomy. According to the findings, MU.D.A was not merely a slogan, but a practical framework that guided daily operations

and long-term mobilization. The movement's founder also explained that, while Caremongering did not explicitly position itself as a political movement, it adopted certain strategic elements commonly associated with anarchist practice, especially the rejection of rigid hierarchy and excessive government interference in community action. This orientation is important because it helps explain why the movement was able to remain flexible, decentralized, and community-centered throughout the crisis.

The first strategic principle was mutual aid. In theoretical terms, mutual aid refers to forms of collective support that are oriented toward survival needs, solidarity-building, and democratic participation in problem solving. The relevance of this concept to Caremongering Malaysia is clear because the movement focused on identifying real needs, responding quickly, and ensuring that helping practices did not become performative. Mutual aid also strengthened the relationship between helpers and recipients by positioning both as participants in a collective response rather than as actors separated by rigid hierarchies of benefactor and beneficiary (Spade, 2020).

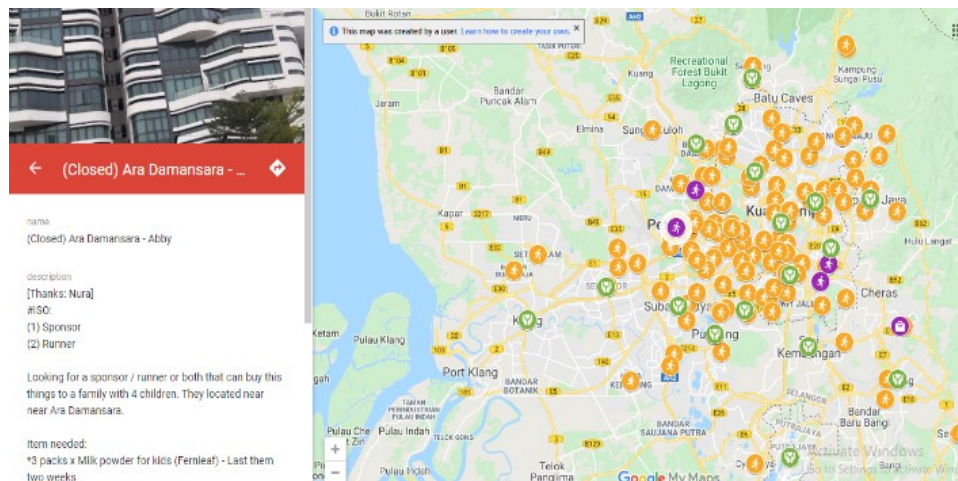


Figure 1. Interactive maps that organize between volunteer and people needed
Source: Private documentation

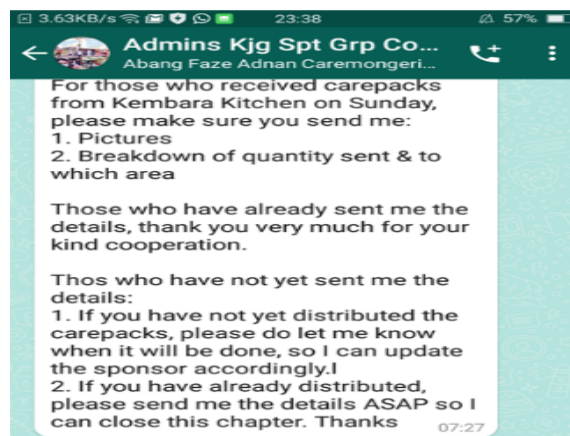


Figure 2. WhatsApp group of Caremongering based on area operation
Source: Private documentation

In practice, mutual aid within Caremongering Malaysia was implemented through several mechanisms. First, assistance was organized on the basis of need rather than visibility or popularity. Second, the movement created regional coordination networks through WhatsApp to manage communication more efficiently across locations. Third, it

developed an interactive map to connect those who needed help with those who were able to provide assistance. Fourth, the movement maintained a culture of immediate internal evaluation, where operational problems were discussed and resolved quickly after aid distribution. These practices demonstrate that mutual aid in Caremongering Malaysia was not only compassionate but also structured, responsive, and operationally effective.



Figure 3. Facebook group of Caremongering Malaysia
Source: Private documentation

The second strategic principle was direct action. In this movement, direct action referred to immediate intervention without relying on bureaucratic intermediaries, political actors, or corporate structures. This principle was especially important during the pandemic because urgent needs often required rapid response rather than prolonged institutional processing. From a broader theoretical perspective, direct action is closely related to non-hierarchical communication and democratic participation, both of which support solidarity by enabling people to act together without waiting for external authorization. In the case of Caremongering Malaysia, direct action strengthened the movement's capacity to respond independently and maintain flexible leadership structures across regions (Fountain, 2011).

Interviews with volunteers R5, R6, R7, and R8 indicate that direct action was generally seen as effective, although they also identified areas that required strengthening. First, they emphasized the need for egalitarian practice so that no single ethnic or social group would dominate the movement. Second, they highlighted the importance of zero tolerance toward members or coordinators who attempted to turn the movement into a populist platform for personal image-building. Third, they argued that decision making should remain decentralized and rooted in grassroots coordinators rather than being concentrated in a single national figure. These observations show that direct action was valued not only as a method of response but also as an ethical principle that required constant internal discipline.

The third strategic principle was autonomy. In this context, autonomy referred to the collective capacity to build alternative ways of organizing social action based on responsibility, solidarity, and togetherness. This principle is especially relevant in understanding how Caremongering Malaysia maintained independence while still mobilizing a broad and diverse volunteer base. Autonomy did not mean isolation from society, but rather the creation of a self-organized system that could function without being captured by partisan, sectarian, or exclusionary agendas. This interpretation aligns with understandings of autonomy that stress cooperation, alternative social relations, and collective responsibility (Böhm et al., 2010).

In practice, autonomy was expressed through three major commitments. First, the movement was built on volunteerism rather than coercion or formal obligation. Second, patriotism within the movement was framed in inclusive terms, meaning that social action had to transcend ethnic and religious boundaries. Third, Caremongering Malaysia sought to remain distant from political tensions that had affected many youth movements during the pandemic. Informants stressed that participation in the movement required a commitment not to reproduce racism, sexism, transphobia, classism, ableism, or other forms of bigotry while carrying out humanitarian work. These findings suggest that autonomy within Caremongering Malaysia was not simply organizational independence, but also an ethical commitment to inclusivity and non-discrimination.

Table 3. Strategic Principles of Caremongering Malaysia

Strategic principle	Core meaning	Practical implementation	Main contribution
Mutual aid	Helping based on need, solidarity, and shared problem solving	Needs-based assistance, WhatsApp coordination, interactive mapping, rapid evaluation meetings	Built trust, expanded solidarity, and improved aid distribution
Direct action	Immediate action without bureaucratic or political mediation	Flexible leadership, grassroots coordination, rapid response to urgent needs	Increased speed, responsiveness, and operational independence
Autonomy	Self-organized collective action grounded in responsibility and inclusivity	Volunteerism, inclusive patriotism, distance from partisan conflict, anti-discrimination commitment	Sustained movement integrity and long-term mobilization

Source: Author, 2026

Overall, the findings show that Caremongering Malaysia was able to transform Facebook-based engagement into a durable form of grassroots collective action because it combined strong social motivation with a clear operational framework. The movement was not sustained by technology alone, but by the interaction between collective identity, solidarity, mutual aid, direct action, and autonomy. These elements enabled Caremongering Malaysia to operate as a community-based response that remained inclusive, adaptive, and resilient during and beyond MCO 1.0. Consequently, the movement represents an important example of how youth-led digital activism can evolve into meaningful social intervention in times of crisis.

CONCLUSION

The social movement conducted by Caremongering is a manifestation of social solidarity and collective identity awareness during the crisis that is driven by youths from various backgrounds who use Facebook to connect volunteers and those who need help. Youths, therefore, have highly open opportunities to use social media as a chance to build their activities, such as in community empowerment and to develop themselves as part of civil society. Caremongering has three principles: mutual aid, direct action, and autonomy that resulted in an awareness of the problem, togetherness in action, rationality to response, and consistency with movement beyond MCO 1.0 to maintain and mobilize their action during and beyond MCO 1.0. Although the Caremongering

movement practices an anarchism strategy, they stay away from mainstream political narratives.

During MCO 1.0, Caremongering succeeded in empowering and strengthening social cohesion and solidarity, which is crucial in maintaining altruistic values in a multicultural society such as Malaysia. Caremongering is an alternative movement to counter the populism of social activities during covid 19. Our study shows that the Caremongering campaign effectively leverages Facebook to mobilize youths from keyboards warriors to social warriors during the crisis. Caremongering already shows consistency helps disadvantaged groups during and beyond MCO 1.0. and contributed to strengthening organic solidarity, raising awareness of health procedures and issues, and maintaining community cohesiveness, which impacted national unity during MCO 1.0 and beyond through inclusive awareness, direct action, mutual aid, and autonomous grassroots mobilization.

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