



Reactions of Malaysian citizens towards Movement Control Order (MCO) during the transmission of COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

COVID-19 has been declared as a pandemic situation. It does not only affect the health of an infected individual indirectly, but also poses extinction in one's country if no quick and smart measure is taken to overcome it. Social distancing as publicly announced by World Health Organization (WHO) is one public health preventive measure that is effective in breaking the COVID-19 chain. Therefore, this article evaluates the reactions of society and their compliance of MCO implemented by Malaysian government. The research used quantitative approach as the main method that is by using a survey form which was distributed online using google form. A number of 959 respondents answered the survey. The main outcome is, the majority of respondents reacted positively towards MCO. In terms of compliance, majority show compliance to MCO. However, it was found that the reason of the compliance is because of the visibility of the authorities all over the country. It is better if all citizens of this country are compliant with MCO because of self internalization about the awareness on the importance of following MCO, which is to ensure the chain of COVID-19 is destructed as opposed to the concern of getting captured by the authorities.

Keywords: social distancing, reactions of society, social interaction, COVID-19, sociology

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INTRODUCTION

The year 2020 has witnessed hundreds of countries attacked by a pandemic known as novel β -coronavirus (2019-nCoV) or COVID-19. According to the World Health Organization, updated up to 23rd April 2020, a number of 225 countries have been involved in the widespread of pandemic that WHO has declared it a pandemic level with 175694 deaths (WHO, 2020). This pandemic was detected to start in Wuhan, Hubei Province, Republic of China at the end of November 2019 (Giovanetti et al., 2020). Hence, to prevent this from spreading, most countries facing COVID-19 have implemented action plan by using the approach of wearing nose and mouth cover, social distancing practice along with full and half Movement Control Order (MCO) in certain provinces or country.

According to BBC News Research, as this pandemic has spreaded worldwide which makes it more difficult to defeat, more countries have chosen to take strict actions to overcome it. More than 100 countries in the world have implemented full or parts closure in the end of March 2020, influencing millions of people. Not only that, more people suggested for limited movement for some or all of their country citizens. In the province that has

recently been confirmed of their first corona virus case, they were said to study at neighbouring country, Asia and Europe. African government seems to take quick and firmer actions to prevent the coronavirus pandemic as Africa has a crisis in healthcare system for that province (BBC News Research, 2020). The implementation of lockdown in a few countries has witnessed behaviours as shown in social media and online news portals. This is because the society feels overwhelmed with their own fear which explains the argument happening in shopping malls over food or healthcare stocks for the residents in a number of countries.

In Prime Minister Special Announcement on 16th March 2020, the Prime Minister, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin has announced the MCO phase 1 which was effective from 18th March to 31st March 2020 for the whole country to stop the widespread of COVID-19. The MCO includes the total prohibition of movement and social gathering in the whole country, including religious, sports, social, and cultural activities. Phase 2 was

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implemented through a special announcement by Prime Minister on 25th March 2020 with the extended MCO phase 2 that starts on 1st April to 14th April 2020. On the second phase from 1st April to 14th April, the government has released the permission for business premises that sell daily needs items including supermarkets and pump stations, to operate from 8.00 a.m. to 8.00 p.m. Moreover, in this second phase, the order for individual movement limit is fixed to not exceed more than 10 kilometres (km) from residential area. On 10th April 2020, after the order from the Ministry of Health Malaysia, the Prime Minister announced the extension of MCO for another two weeks from 15th April to 28th April 2020, with the school sessions postponed until the situation is clear (Sinar Harian, 10th April 2020).

Movement Control Order (MCO) is now in Phase 3 and will be possibly extended again. However, this implementation of MCO has its own challenges. Until now, the implementation has not been successful in ensuring 100% compliance. This is due to the factor of society in this country and the culture among Malaysian society that focus on social interaction and relationship in daily life even before the MCO period. Moreover, it has been a culture for Malaysian citizens since long time ago, to go back to their hometown every time they have a long holiday from the Government. Therefore, when the Government announced the first stage of MCO, many citizens took the opportunity to go back to their hometown, as what is seen on social media (Malaysiakini, 17th March 2020). Indirectly, it is against the government initiatives of the MCO that every citizen should stay at their current location at that time. Those are the things that make it a challenge of MCO in this country. Nevertheless, the government has started to realize that more serious control must be done to ensure the society follows the MCO.

This research will discuss the reactions of society towards MCO order. The discussion comprises the knowledge of society about MCO, society reactions towards MCO and the level of society compliance to MCO. Understanding the reactions of society is very essential for Malaysia in general as it is a method to deal with the new norm. This is because, as stated by the Prime Minister in one special interview for 45 minutes at Malaysia Television Show (RTM) on 25th April 2020, which explained that the citizens must be properly taken care of from all perspectives in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. The level of society compliance towards the analysed MCO order will be able to prepare Malaysia to think of an effective method in handling disaster so that the citizens are always prepared with unpredictable phenomenon.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The implementation of Movement Control Order which is synonym with the word lockdown definitely

influences citizen's life. Countries that choose to lockdown are facing challenges. Apart from that, the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the economic activities, disrupted daily life, and causes chaos to the prospects of growth all over the world (ASEAN Policy Brief, 2020). Therefore, the Movement Control Order has made some parts of the society confused and depressed psychologically. This is because, the society needs to interact between each other to create social relationship (Tomasello, 2020). The lockdown order has restricted them from carrying out social activities until the law enforcement is implemented. For countries that do not apply lockdown, it is because of the dependency on the economy as the country economy is steepening which causes the lockdown unsuitable and unable to be done such as in Cambodia, Gambia and Somalia. Such countries are more concerned on the economy rather than the pandemic prevention. However, interaction along with culture has turned the lockdown order into the approach of drinking alcohol and having sauna as what was done by Belarus (BBC News Research, 2020). Belarus has recorded 55 deaths and nearly seven thousand COVID-19 positive cases (WHO, 2020). For countries such as Indonesia, and India that have dense population and large economic gap between citizens, have their own challenge due to varied social class and ethnics, leading to difficulties in implementing lockdown.

Karnon (2020) with the title "A Simple Decision Analysis of a Mandatory Lockdown Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic" explained that on 29th March 2020, nearly the whole world debated on the how the ruler should act on COVID-19 pandemic. Lockdowners is considered as a stricter restriction in a simple way as stated by the Prime Minister of New Zealand. The second debate is the compulsory massive quarantine. The argument on lockdowners is to reduce the crisis period in order to lessen the number of COVID-19 cases and the disturbance period towards the economy of the countries involved. A serious argument on it is the implementation of giving advice and increase the awareness, with the types of punishment for noncompliance of the rules need to be stressed on. There have been many discussions as what was mentioned by the Prime Minister of Australia, Scott Morrison regarding the importance of considering the possibility of bad effects from lockdown towards the well-being of the residents including the psychological and physical effects due to the lack of access to health care and the increased number of domestic violence as well as the isolation effect. In Karnon's research, the analysis result went through the 'result tree' to sort the problem. It was used to compare the choice of instant lockdown with the preservation of steps by stage approach. This tree shows the possibility that mandatory lockdown is necessary or unnecessary at the crisis stage through three evaluation outcomes which take into consideration

i) total case of COVID-19; ii) effect on economy; iii) isolation effect towards residents' well-being.

The latest research regarding the emotions during the lockdown by Barkur & Kamath (2020) discussed the lockdown issue all over the world using the unified analysis sentiment. With the title "Sentiment Analysis of Nationwide Lockdown due to COVID-19 Outbreak: Evidence from India", it discussed the sentiment analysis of Indian people after the announcement of lockdown was made. The research using social media platform; Twitter had been analysed to measure the emotion of Indians towards lockdown order. Tweets were extracted using two highly used hashtags; #IndiaLockdown and #IndiafightsCorona from 25th March until 28th March 2020. A number of 24000 tweets were taken for analysis by Barkur and Kamath. The approach of the content analysis found that there are several positive and negative aspects. Although there were negative sentiments, like fear, disgust (seeing abandoned corpses) and despair over lockdown, there were positive sentiments for them to flatten the curve and they were committed towards breaking the infection chain. The analysis found that there were tweets stating the shock over the decision but overall, citizens were hoping for lockdown to restrict the spread of the virus, and also practise social distancing and hygiene steps such as washing hands frequently using soap or sanitizer.

The analysis from the tweets also found that lockdown will lead to emotions towards rules. This encouraging research about lockdown stated that people are sad as they are concerned about the fate of daily salary workers during the lockdown period. Apart from that, there were also concerns with the absence of alcohol and alcohol addiction which led to rebelliance towards the lockdown order. The research regarding the tweets found that overall it can be seen that Indian people want to win against COVID-19 positively and the majority agree with the decision of their ruler to announce the lockdown in order to flatten the curve. The citizens also think that the lockdown is ordered earlier before the cases rise in India and ensure that the citizens who just came back from overseas should be quarantined by the ruler. The effects of the lockdown have now shown that India has successfully controlled the spread of the virus very well (Barkur & Kamath, 2020).

The implementation of lockdown order has stopped several human daily activities. In countries that implement lockdown nationally, social interaction activities like the exercises at recreational parks, outing at the beach and so on are also stopped. This is seen as reducing the societal health level. Therefore, a wise advice by Peijie Chen et al. (2020) in the research article entitled "Opinion Wuhan coronavirus (2019-nCoV): The need to maintain regular physical activity while taking precautions" explained that physical activity must be

done to avoid health problem in the future. The activity stated refers to the basic movement. It should be done to reduce stress due to lockdown and prevent the people from going against the Movement Control Order outside of the house. Handling of such activity can indirectly make family closer as this can be done with family members. The frequency of physical activities at home will also indirectly reduce people from going out and maintain the health level due to high frequency of food intake before the lockdown phenomenon. As mentioned by Chen et al. "one-time activity is better than none".

In India, protests towards lockdown order were made by academic staff. This is because the staff were ordered to work at their respective institutions be it at higher education institution or school. As the writer Bhat et al. (2020) expressed their feeling through an article entitled "COVID-19" outbreak: The disappointment in Indian teachers" explained the lockdown order was restricted to students only. This disappointment is translated into a petition signed by 53 thousand academic staff to push the government to include the academic staff in the lockdown order. Private and government educational institutions need to guarantee the safety of the academic staff from the virus infection so that all parties in the society can play their own part in breaking the COVID-19 chain in 82 affected districts.

Nazir & Rashid in their article entitled "Community callousness towards lockdown of COVID-19 pandemic and the role of preventive specialist" conducted a research in Srinagar on society members that enter the health premises. An observation was made on individuals who break the rules of social distancing practice, who were then interviewed by the writer about the excuse that they have. The research analysed the number of people who break the rules for seven days in a row. The variables comprising the age, gender, marital status, education, and occupation were put into consideration for people who broke the rules. The mean age for individuals who broke the rules is 29.86 ± 3.24 years old. The majority is males, with 674 people or 91.57%. The total number of people who broke the rules on the second day is 438 people, with higher number of males that is 398 people or 90.87%. On the third day, the number of people who disobeyed the rules dropped to 216 people, with 198 males (91.66%). The number of people who broke the lockdown rules decreased drastically four days after that with only seven people seen on the last day of the research. There were significant differences in rules between the whole groups of age, gender, education level and occupational status. The groups that are significantly related to breaking the rules on the first day of lockdown are the education level, age and gender. Similar trend is seen on the analysis of logistic regression of varied demography variables for breaking the rules on the following days during the interview session with the people on their excuses or

reasons for going out from their house and breaking the lockdown rules.

The research outcome showed that the patients answered that “as I am healthy, COVID-19 will not infect me”. Regression analysis found that there is a significant difference statistically between “as I am healthy, COVID-19 will not infect me”, “COVID-19 is a fraud by media”, “God will help us”, “bored staying inside the house”, and “going out to buy food ingredients”. The research found that there is a significant difference in breaking the rules between the groups of age, gender, education level, and occupational status. There is a proof showing that young people (29-32 years old) are exposed to a number of social situations due to somebody, like choices, environmental influences and lifestyle changes. This age group usually does not take life and responsibilities seriously. They are naturally rebellious and go against the societal norms besides easily break rules. Education level reflects the attitudes towards ruler’s advice. Therefore, the understanding that education is related to better compliance towards lockdown is actually happening in India. Meanwhile, a big number of unemployed people who also did not have previous education background contributed to frequent violation of the rules (Nazir & Rashid, 2020).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research used quantitative approach to obtain the data. One set of questionnaire was created and distributed through online survey. The writer had placed the survey on-line for three days to get as many respondents as possible to answer the questionnaire. Convenience sampling method was used to get the respondents. Since MCO involves all public society, therefore this sampling is suitable to be used as anybody can answer the questionnaire given based on their availability. Apart from that, secondary method using content analysis like document, journal and newspaper cutting is one of the processes in data collection. Next step is processing and analyzing data. The writer used *Statistical Package for Social Sciences* (SPSS) application to process the data. Meanwhile, the data are presented in the form of table by percentage. Secondary data were analysed using thematic analysis in which the writer sorted the data using particular themes and explained them descriptively.

RESEARCH OUTCOME AND DISCUSSION

Sociodemography profiles of respondents

A number of 959 respondents answered the online questionnaire. There were 68.9% females and the rest were male respondents. In terms of age distribution, the majority of respondents that is 67.5% are adults between 20 to 45 years old. Meanwhile, the rest 32.5% are 45 years old and above. The majority of the respondents are Malay with 85.6%, followed by 9.8%

Table 1. Knowledge of MCO

Knowledge of MCO	Positive (Agree & Strongly agree %)	Negative (Disagree & strongly disagree %)
Cannot leave the house without valid reason	94.1	5.9
Have to work from home	93.8	6.2
Stop the spread of COVID-19	98.8	1.2
Can go out with many people in a family to buy basic needs	5.6	94.4
Can be captured and punished if going against MCO	94.5	5.5
An order to implement social distancing	100.0	0.00

Source: Survey Research, 2020

Bumiputera (natives) respondents, 1.7% Chinese respondents, and 1.1% Indian respondents. The residential areas of the respondents are divided into three main categories which are city, suburb, and countryside in Malaysia. 42.4% respondents live in the city, followed by 30.8% in the countryside, and the rest 26.8% live in suburb.

Knowledge about Movement Control Order

As stated earlier, COVID-19 is a new virus that attacks human aggressively around the world. Therefore, among the prevention steps to stop its spread is through MCO. Through Prevention and Control of Infectious Diseases Act 1988, Malaysian government has taken act to announce the MCO that starts on 18th March until 31st March 2020 for MCO Phase 1, followed by MCO Phase 2, and Phase 3 which is predicted to end on 28th April 2020. MCO is also subjected to Police Act 1967 because Royal Malaysia Police (RMP) has full responsibility in ensuring MCO is going smooth, assisted by several other enforcement agencies. A number of 7,500 members of Malaysian Armed Forces (MAF) across the country were ordered to help Royal Malaysia Police (RMP) in carrying out MCO (Sinar Harian, 10th April 2020). The government has a variety of mediums in delivering information about MCO to make sure every citizen knows the importance of staying compliant to MCO.

Based on **Table 1**, the respondents were asked to answer about their knowledge of MCO. It can be concluded that the majority of the respondents know about the MCO concept practised in Malaysia. 94.1% respondents stated that MCO means people cannot leave the house without valid reason. This statement has a relationship with the main objective of MCO which is to stop the spread of COVID-19. 98.8% respondents gave positive reactions, which were ‘Strongly agree’ and ‘agree’ that MCO’s purpose is to control COVID-19 virus and breaking the infection chain in Malaysia. For respondents who are not categorized as essential workers, they have to work from home following the government order. 93.8% respondents agreed with the statement that PKP means the employees especially

Table 2. Reactions towards MCO

Reactions towards MCO	Positive (Agree & Strongly agree %)	Negative (Disagree & strongly disagree %)
Had expected MCO will involve a long period	94.2	5.8
Stressed because of prolonged MCO	45.3	54.7
Concerned of getting terminated by the employer	25.0	75.0
Hope that critical sector will be given more room for operation	19.4	80.6
Enforcement needs to be stricter	19.4	80.6
Hope all citizen comply to MCO order	19.0	81.0

Source: Survey Research, 2020

those who are not in important category still have to work but from home.

All respondents agree that MCO needs everybody to practise social distancing between one another. This is because, COVID-19 virus can easily spread from human to human (Muhammad Adnan Sheeren, 2020). Therefore, social distancing is very important and hence the MCO is implemented. However, MCO is not an emergency order, in other words, the public society can still go out especially to buy daily needs for the house. Nevertheless, there are guidelines from the government, in which only the family leader is allowed to buy those necessities. 5.6% respondents disagree with that statement. This situation might be due to lack of awareness among respondents regarding the importance of not going out in large group to buy items. Apart from that, since MCO has been announced under Police Act 1967, this means RPM as formal social control agent has the power to capture, investigate and open investigation paper upon those who do not comply to MCO. 94.5% respondents agree and strongly agree that anyone who goes against MCO order can be captured, charged and punished. The fundamental essence of the implementation of MCO is to promote social distancing between individuals in a community and that is agreed in total by all respondents.

Reactions towards Movement Control Order

While this research is being conducted, MCO has gone through Phase 3. Since MCO has been ongoing for quite a long period, the respondents gave a variety of responses towards MCO to this extent. Based on **Table 2**, the majority of respondents that is 94.2% had expected that MCO is going to involve a long period. Nevertheless, the long period of MCO does have negative impacts on some individuals. This is proven when 45.3% respondents agreed that the long period of MCO makes them stressed. There are many forms of stress that could happen; one of them is the stress from not being able to see their parents for those who live far from each other. Stress can also happen because of lack of social interaction with other people. Human is a social animal that needs another group of human to connect and create social relationship (Tomasello, 2020).

Table 3. Compliance with MCO

Compliance with MCO	Positive (Agree & Strongly agree %)	Negative (Disagree & strongly disagree %)
Comply due to fear of getting captured by authorities.	56.0	44.0
Comply due to fear of getting charged in court and receive punishment.	57.4	42.6
Comply due to responsibility as Malaysian citizen.	98.5	1.5
Comply due to the will to break COVID-19 chain.	63.4	36.6

Source: Survey Research, 2020

Being stressed with the possibility of job termination or salary deduction by the employer also leads to reactions of the society, although the government has convinced that employers cannot dismiss their employees during MCO period. 25% respondents also stated feeling stressed as a result of thinking of the possibility of termination by their employer. The research outcome found that the respondents who voiced out this concern are among those working in private sector and not from essential service. Therefore, 19.4% respondents opined that there will be more sectors of services that are allowed to operate by the government. 19.4% of other respondents also hope that a stricter enforcement is implemented by the government especially when MCO has entered the third phase. This will indirectly help in breaking the COVID-19 chain more quickly and thus making it possible for MCO to be ended as soon as possible. During this COVID-19 pandemic, companies are encouraged to help handling the emotions of the employees through operational continuity. In such difficult situation, it is the role of private sector to enhance their company image directly and shape responsibilities (Accenture, 2020). Looking at the pattern of infection all over the world generally, and Malaysia particularly, the extension of MCO is really necessary to control more serious spread of infection. Strict social distancing definitely could help in reducing the COVID-19 pandemic (Milne & Xie, 2020).

Compliance with Movement Control Order

99.8% respondents which are the majority, admitted that they have been compliant with the rules of MCO by the government up to now. Meanwhile, the remaining two percent have gone against MCO order because of several reasons. The compliance with MCO is shown in **Table 3**. Almost all respondents; 98.5% stated that they complied with MCO because they feel responsible towards the country. Whereas, 63.4% respondents stated that by being compliant with MCO, they hope that it will help to break the chain of COVID-19 in Malaysia.

Compliance in social distancing is one way of prevention in public health with the purpose of isolating individuals that are present with symptoms from other community members (Pearce, 2020). Looking at the MCO steps which have been practised until now from

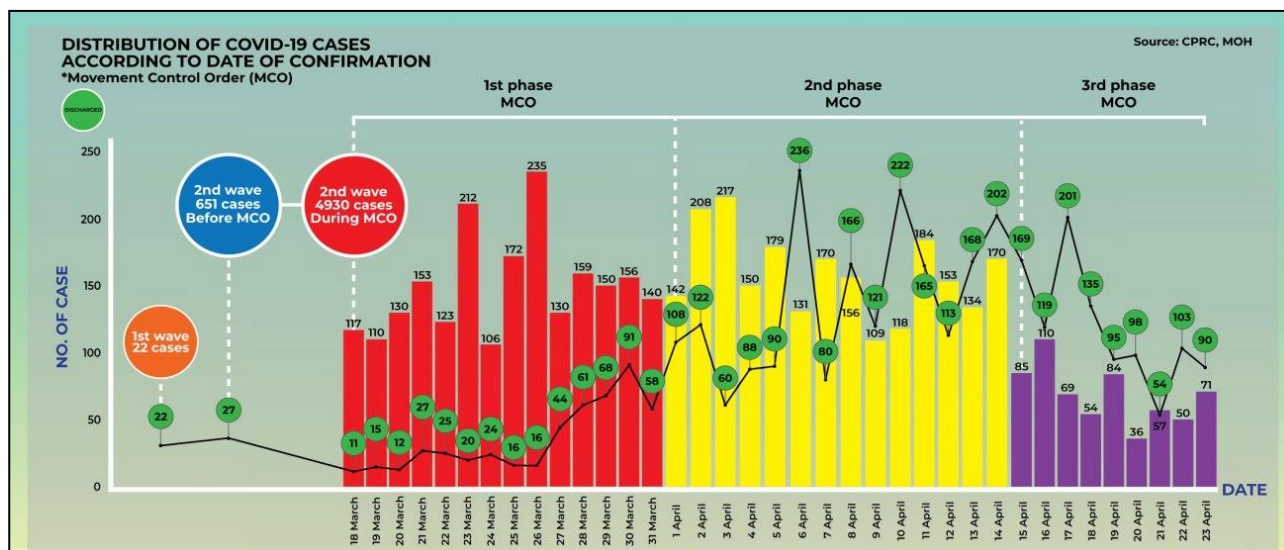


Fig. 1. Pattern of COVID-19 infection in Malaysia by MCO stage (Source: Ministry of Health, Malaysia, 2020)

18th March to 23rd April 2020, it can be considered as successful in controlling the spread of COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia (Figure 1). At the end of MCO Phase 3, declining number of cases does not exceed 100 people a day as of before.

Apart from that, 56% respondents admitted to comply with MCO order due to the fear of getting captured by the authorities. Entering MCO Phase 3, government has taken a stricter approach towards rebellious individuals. The infographic shown on 23rd April 2020 by Harian Metro entitled "Movement Control Order Phase 3 showed that 19,048 people were captured from 18th March to 23rd April 2020. Whereas, 1,014 people were accused in court all over the country (Harian Metro, 23rd April 2020). Those individuals were under remand, some were charged with either paying fine of RM 1000 or prisoned. Indeed, stricter enforcement step taken by the government shows determination to ensure all citizens follow the MCO order.

For respondents who did not comply with MCO, among the reasons given were having to attend the hospital or clinic due to health problem, relatives passed away, and work permission. We are still unsuccessful in ensuring 100% MCO compliance, when looking at the statistics of daily capture by RMP. It is important for all citizens, to take serious of MCO suggestions and comply with every order regarding MCO. This is supported by 77.8% respondents who stated that there are still many Malaysian citizens who do not realize the importance of complying with MCO. This is admitted as true in the reports by Harian Metro on 2nd & 16th April 2020 and Sinar Harian on 17th April 2020 regarding the excuses from the society saying that they do not know about the MCO when captured by the enforcement officer in Dungun, Endau and Alor Star. Besides, the selfish attitude for not complying with MCO will affect other

members of society and directly complicate the government's wish to break COVID-19 chain in the nearest time possible.

In society's reactions towards MCO compliance to flatten the infection curve, self internalization process is very important because that human himself can control the situation. For such situation where there is spread of COVID-19, the self-determination theory by Deci & Ryan (1985) explained that an individual is naturally motivated to internalize rules. The two processes happen to produce self regulatory value and integrate regulation style. One takes the value or regulation process and assimilates it with own self for inner control and to determine his own fate. This clearly shows that self internalization plays an important role in influencing the society to prioritize more on the fate of the future together.

On the other hand, Epstein (2006) considers self internalization as a norm. It is a process that leads to compliance automatically or without being explained as self internalization is made up of learning accepted by the relevant family regarding rules or law. Indirectly, it will benefit everybody. To explain the benefit to the rules, Vansteenkiste et al. (2018) explained that any external rule is a form of first extrinsic motivation. External rule is a form of main extrinsic motivation. When rules are implied, the pull force exists in which one will work to fulfil other people's hope to meet the demand.

CONCLUSION

Social distancing is still a new thing for the citizens of this country. That is why there were still citizens who lived normally during the early phases of MCO like those who gather at coffee shop, socialize at open space and ignore the government order. This is because Malaysia, in fact the whole world, have never confronted such virus as COVID-19 which forces us to limit our social

interaction and relationship with other people. Therefore, our society needs a little more time to understand why they need to comply to MCO. Now, the effort on social control through MCO has started to show its outcome when many infection cases have started to show decreasing pattern. Nevertheless, there is still a concern about the lack of self internalization among society members. This is proven when the citizens do not

comply to MCO because they realize that they have to. Instead, they are worried that if they do not comply, there is a high possibility for them to get captured, charged and punished. The awareness issue on the importance of being compliant to MCO has been done a lot by the MOH, but it is still insufficient if there are individuals who purposely break the MCO rules without rational reason.

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