

ETHNICITY STEREOTYPES IN VIRTUAL WORLD: A STUDY BETWEEN MALAYSIAN NEW MEDIA USERS

Nurliyana Kamilah Khairul Anuar
Faculty of Communication and Media Studies,
Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), 78000 Melaka, Malaysia
Email: nurliyana.kamilah@gmail.com

Rosilawati Sultan Mohideen
Faculty of Communication and Media Studies,
Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), 78000 Melaka, Malaysia
Email: shielasultan@yahoo.com

Abdul Rauf Hj Ridzuan
Faculty of Communication and Media Studies,
Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), 78000 Melaka, Malaysia
Email: raufsan@yahoo.com

Dzaa Imma Abdul Latiff
Faculty of Communication and Media Studies,
Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), 78000 Melaka, Malaysia
Email: dzaa71@yahoo.com

Fazlul Haque Kamarudin
Faculty of Communication and Media Studies,
Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), 78000 Melaka, Malaysia
Email: fazlul_kamarudin@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

In the pursuit of modernization, stereotyping to some extent not only exists in the current community, but also has spread into the virtual world involving new media users. Stereotypes are being indicated as false or misleading generalizations of groups that strongly shape the stereotyper's view of stereotyped groups, looking at the stereotypic features when they are not present, failing to look on the contrary of those features when they are, and eventually homogenizing the group in general (Blum, 2004). Ethnicity stereotypes usually occur in a diverse community with various ethnic groups such as in Malaysia. However, if the issue is being left untreated, it could bring a more serious and detrimental issue towards the community such as ethnocentrism. This study used the uncertainty reduction theory and aimed to determine the level of ethnic stereotypes among Malaysian new media users and also to identify the most frequent ethnic stereotypes belief happening in virtual world between the users. This study used quantitative approach with multistage sampling procedure in which in the first stage, the cluster sampling method is being used to select five states across Malaysia. 482 respondents from the three main ethnics in Malaysia were then chosen using purposive sampling method as the sample to participate in the self-administered questionnaires. Findings indicate that ethnicity stereotypes do exist in virtual world and the level of ethnicity stereotypes among new media users in Malaysia is considered high with the highest stereotype beliefs of: their ethnic should be a role model to other ethnics.

Key words: ethnicity, stereotypes, virtual world, new media, uncertainty reduction theory

Introduction

It is a nature for humans to be biased or having prejudice by using stereotypes, no matter how much the humans are in denial of not doing it. Stereotype, as according to Chang and Kleiner (2003), is a fixed idea or image that most people have towards a particular person or thing; however it is usually untrue in reality. This idea is also agreed by Blum (2004) by stating that stereotypes are being signified as misleading or false generalizations of groups which greatly form the stereotyper's view of stereotyped groups, looking at the stereotypic qualities when they are not present, failing to look on the contrary of those qualities when they are, and eventually homogenizing the group in general.

In addition to this study, the notion by Blum (2004) has its own significance in which it gives the direction on identifying the frequent stereotype beliefs or generalizations being made by the ethnic groups involved that shape their perceptions towards other ethnic groups.

Stereotyping has turned into common occurrence out of consciousness, especially in a diverse community consisting of various ethnics such as in Malaysia as supported by Buck-Coleman (2010) stating that the act of stereotyping and classifying other people is the natural tendency of human beings, although not regularly to a negative effect. Alas, stereotyping to some extent not

only exists in the real world, but also has spread into the virtual world involving new media users. However, if the issue is being left untreated, it could lead to a more serious and detrimental issue towards the community such as ethnocentrism.

Hence, this study is designed to determine the level of ethnic stereotypes among Malaysian new media users and also to identify the most frequent ethnic stereotypes belief happening in virtual world between the targeted users focusing on major ethnic groups such as Malays, Chinese and Indians. These three ethnic groups are being chosen as the sample due to countless ethnics in Malaysia. According to Department of Statistics Malaysia (2015), there are three predominant ethnic groups with 63.1 percent of Malaysia's population are of Malay ethnicity, followed by Chinese ethnicity with 24.6 percent, and 7.3 percent are of Indian ethnicity which will be easier to just focus on these three major ethnics. The remaining 5 percent are of other minor ethnicities.

A brief context of ethnicity stereotypes in Malaysia

Malaysia which was previously a part of international spice route with remarkable history has now developed into a wonderful country with a colourful mixture of ethnics and cultures (Tourism Malaysia, 2015). Being acquainted with the people of Malaysia is crucial in comprehending with the combination of Malaysian cultures and captivating heritage.

A truly Malaysian culture has been formed when vast majority of ethnics have been living in Malaysia for generations and the diverse cultures have been influencing each other. The largest ethnic in Malaysia are the Malays with more than 50 percent of the whole population, and followed by the Chinese and Indians. Nonetheless, the percentage of the Malay group plummets to less than 25 percent in East Malaysia due to the myriad of indigenous ethnicity in Sabah and Sarawak with their very own traditions and unique heritage (Tourism Malaysia, 2015).

As a result from these diverse cultures, each of these ethnics will go through a social perception process beforehand to facilitate them with the communication process. In other words, it refers to the internal process of a human that is involved during the selection, evaluation and organization of catalyst acquired from their surroundings. Humans then construct their own interpretations and give meanings to the phenomena happening around them through this social perception process (Ismail Sualman, 1998).

As human life is covered by cultures, thus the components of culture will mould and determine any characteristics for selection, evaluation and organization of the catalyst received. According to Ismail Sualman (1998), each catalyst will be given its own interpretation based on the cultural principles of the groups involved.

The process of categorizing catalyst is one of the crucial elements in stereotype's development. Stereotype occurs when an individual is making assumptions towards others based on general attributes and not from their own experiences. This view is strengthened by Ismail Sualman (1998) by adding that when someone's image is being determined as a symbol of reference by the ethnicity attributes, it eventually generates concepts based on shallow knowledge which are too simplistic, even though not always to a negative effect as what has been suggested by Buck-Coleman (2010).

Stereotyping is being used to help in assisting the known and unknown. Stereotypes also facilitate in bridging us with others and promote a sense of instant community with strangers. Nonetheless, concern arises in situations when an individual or groups are unaware of their own prejudice or discrimination, or when letting those prejudices shrouded the individual or groups from considering the classification of others which do not fit into the preconceived ideas of who they are (Buck-Coleman, 2010).

Tormsen (2015) also sees the concern brought up by Buck-Coleman (2010) stating that ethnicity stereotypes generally happen from common fears of the unknown and are typically supported by confirmation bias; that is a logical misleading idea whereby society tend to search information that confirms their current beliefs while ignoring any other evidences to the contrary.

In supporting this notion, a study related to stereotypes between ethnics focusing on Malaysian context was conducted by Hazri *et.al* (2004) in which researchers made an attempt to determine factors that influence the level of social interaction between students from various ethnic groups in secondary schools. Results of the research proven that the level of social interaction between students from various ethnics is influenced by factors such as social backgrounds, situation, ethnicity level, prejudice of the students and also the school policy.

In addition, the stereotypical beliefs will unfortunately construct negative feelings within the diverse community such as Malaysia. This is because the stereotypical beliefs could lead certain ethnics to look down on other individuals or groups that are different from them which will eventually limit interactions among different ethnic groups and further lead to racism instead (Hazri Jamil and Najeemah Mohd Yusof, 2013).

In contrast, Simpson and Yinger (1985) divided stereotypes into two categories. The first category is whereby low traits such as 'unintelligent' and 'lazy' were given towards minority groups. These traits tend to arise during the slavery institution in which minorities often being exploited by the dominants. Second category of stereotype occurs when status and power differential between minority and dominant groups are closer. Minorities have also experienced upward mobility and attained success either in schools or businesses. However, the relative success is still negatively viewed with expressions such as 'too materialistic', 'too cunning', 'too clever', and such.

New Media As The New Communication Dimension

Nowadays, the word new media or social media is no longer sounds bizarre to the society as it has altered the life of most individuals. According to Socha and Eber-Schmid (2014), new media is a twenty-first century catchall term in defining anything that is related to the internet and interplay between technology, images and sounds. In fact, the term 'new media' and its definition changes almost daily, and will keep on being that way. Social media is part of the new media and can sometimes develop unpredictably and transforms continuously in a very fast and furious ways.

According to Kaplan and Haenlein in an article written by Whiting and Williams (2013), social media is defined as a set of internet-based applications that establish on the ideological and technological basis of Web 2.0 that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated contents.

In new media world, there is an extensive array of platforms that could be used as a virtual communication dimension. The most popular ones include blogs like Blogspot and WordPress, micro-blogs such as Tumblr and Twitter, social networking sites such as Facebook, content communities such as YouTube, virtual game worlds such as Dota and Clash of Clans, virtual social worlds such as Second Life (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2012), photo sharing sites like Instagram and Flickr as well as business networking sites like LinkedIn.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2009b) affirmed that new media realm created a lot of hype between the year of 2006 to 2007 whereby at least an article a day will appear in media proclaiming new media realm to be 'the next big thing', which is proven now with a huge number of individuals utilizing it every day.

There are countless reasons of spending time on new media. Kaplan and Haenlein (2009a) also proposed that besides entertainment, establishing personal relationships with others, learning and researching, as well as making it as a source of income are among the main motivations to that. As for active users of new media, the virtual world is considered as an extension of their real lives instead of just game. With this, the boundaries between both the virtual and real worlds will effortlessly fade away (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2012).

A research done by Whiting and Williams (2013) on uses and gratifications approach in new media suggested communicatory utility as one of the features in gratifying the needs of new media users. Findings with 56 percent of the respondents discussed about how new media is being utilized in providing users ideas and subjects to discuss with others. Respondents also stated that new media offers them ideas to talk about with families and friends, and Facebook gives them things to gossip about. The remaining mentioned that they converse with others on what they found on social networking sites like Facebook and will inquire their friends if they saw what a person said on that site.

On top of that, communicatory utility is a form of new media use and is defined as communication facilitation that provides information to be shared with others (Whiting and Williams, 2013). This notion is also supported by Korgaonkar and Wolin (1999) by stating that it acts as catalyst of communication and is very practical in terms of conversational value.

Succinctly, new media world is the new communication dimension which provides users to communicate with thousands, and perhaps billions of individuals around the world (Williams *et al.*, 2012). New media sites are economical and mostly are entirely free to use (Whiting and Williams, 2013). Hence, immense growth can be seen in the new media phenomenon that boosts a vast number of people to consider Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram for instance, as their daily regular fix.

Methodology

This research used quantitative approach with multistage procedure whereby at the first stage, the cluster sampling method is being utilized to choose five states across Malaysia. The five states were being randomly selected based on the regions. For example, Perak as to represent the northern region, Kuala Lumpur for central region, Malacca for southern region, Pahang for east coast region as well as Sabah.

Quoted from Abdul Rauf Ridzuan, Jusang Bolong, Siti Zobidah Omar and Mohd Nizam Osman (2010), new media sites such as the "social networking sites are where Malaysians spend the largest share of their time online. Based on Malaysia Facebook Statistics in 2012, Facebook, as one of the most used social networking sites has 12,948,320 users which involve 49.5 percent of the population in Malaysia". Therefore, four hundred and eighty two (482) respondents of the three main ethnics in Malaysia from those five selected regions in Malaysia were then chosen using purposive sampling method as the sample to participate in the self-administered questionnaires. This sample size is considered more than enough as only 384 respondents are needed based on Krejcie and Morgan Table, 150 to 400 respondents for SEM based on Hair (2009) and 138 respondents based on G*Power Analysis (Abdul Rauf Ridzuan, Jusang Bolong & Salahudin, 2014).

The respondents were selected based on three definite characteristics such as firstly respondents need to be Malaysian. Second characteristic is whether they are among the three major ethnics such as Malay, Chinese or Indian. Thirdly, whether the respondents have new media accounts despite whether they are active users or vice versa. Specifically for the third criteria, the scope of the new media accounts is being narrowed down to social media accounts mainly social networking site such as Facebook, micro-blog such as Twitter, and/or photo-sharing application such as Instagram. The reason behind this is because these three social media are interactive with the most interaction involved such as the status updates on certain issues, photo and video uploads as well as commenting or responding on other people updates or live feeds. The researchers would like to know the stereotype beliefs that other ethnic groups have towards one another from the perceptions made virtually.

For research instrument, self-administered questionnaires involving four scales, four sections and closed questions were designed to cover on ethnicity stereotypes in virtual world involving new media users in Malaysia and to answer the two main research objectives which are to determine the level of ethnic stereotypes among Malaysian new media users and also to identify the most frequent ethnic stereotypes belief happening in virtual world between the targeted users focusing on major ethnic groups such as Malays, Chinese and Indians. The data collection procedure was conducted through formal survey using structured questionnaire.

Findings And Discussions

Based on the results, findings indicate that ethnicity stereotypes do occur in new media world and it has been recognized that the highest stereotypes belief is that their own ethnic group should be a role model to other ethnics and the lowest stereotypes belief is that other ethnics are backward. Table 1.1 provides more insights on the stereotypes beliefs among main ethnic groups in Malaysia focusing on new media world.

Table 1.1 Stereotype beliefs in new media world among main ethnics in Malaysia

Stereotype beliefs	Mean	Std. Deviation
My ethnic should be role model to others	2.52	.92
My ethnic has the best lifestyle	2.44	.88
Other ethnics would be happier if they live like mine	2.44	.87
Life in my ethnic is better compared to others	2.41	.89
Other ethnics are primitive	2.24	.95
Other ethnics don't know what is good for them	2.21	.95
Cultures from other ethnics are not as valid as those in my cultures	2.17	.92
Other ethnics are backward	2.15	.97
Overall	2.32	.69

Findings also determine the level of ethnicity stereotypes between new media users in Malaysia which is considered high with frequency of 306 which made up 63.5 percent. Table 1.2 explains more in-depth on the distribution of respondents by level of stereotypes.

Table 1.2 Distribution of respondents by level of stereotypes

Level of Stereotypes	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Low (<2)	176	36.5
High (>2)	306	63.5

The correlation between stereotypes beliefs and behaviors, either positive or negative should be explored because they will determine the nature and intensity of the interaction between cultures. Through identifying and understanding the stereotypes beliefs and the implications, only then, designers can create programs that can improve and broaden the minds of those who have been inculcated with negative views of other ethnics. Starting with programs that focus on shaping good attitudes towards each other, only by then other reconciliation efforts can be accepted and executed with enthusiasm and confidence by members of the public (Ismail Sualman, 1998).

Summary

Ethnicity stereotypes could develop into a communication hurdle and due to some of the negative influences, society should therefore acknowledge ethnicity stereotypes and brilliantly facilitating it before it worsen into something serious. Furthermore, education is also an important way to provide the factual ethnicity image to the society and everyone has the responsibility to oversee the media in order to steer clear from the spreading of ethnicity stereotypes in the country.

When individuals from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds communicate, it is suggested that each one of the individuals should face each other with an open mind, and free themselves from any forms of stereotypes shackles and prejudice. This is because any kinds of stereotype beliefs preached by them will have an effect on the possibility of knowing the true nature of others, and will then interjects the harmonious interaction. In addition to it, if individuals or certain groups rely on stereotypes information or preconceived ideas to understand or predict the behavior of others, it will contribute to a vicious cycle of stereotypes. This is because when an individual or groups replace the ability to objectively evaluate and depends on the stereotypical image, the potential of using the information precisely will be stunted as proposed by Ismail Sualman (1998)

Even though ethnic relations conflict in Malaysia is at a minimal level in which according to the Global Peace Index 2012, Malaysia was positioned the twentieth most peaceful country in the world and fourth in Asia, overall measurement should still be taken in order to entirely deny the conflict factor from spreading. Opinions from younger generations should also be taken into account as they would be the future leaders of the nation (Nur Azuki Yusuff, Nik Yusri Musa, and Wan Sopian Sori, 2012).

References

- Abdul Rauf Ridzuan, Jusang Bolong, Siti Zobidah Omar, Mohd Nizam Osman. (2010). Social Media Contribution towards Ethnocentrism. *Procedia Social & Behavioral Science*, 65, 517-522.
- Abdul Rauf Ridzuan, Jusang Bolong, S.Salahudin. (2014). Developing SNS Factor Structures towards Constructing SNS Survey Question. *Journal of Human Capital Development*, 8(2).
- Blum, L. (2004). Stereotypes and Stereotyping: A Moral Analysis. *Philosophical Papers*, Vol.33 (3) pp.251-289. Retrieved November 5th, 2015 from http://www.faculty.umb.edu/lawrence_blum/publications/publications/A48.pdf
- Buck-Coleman (2010). Navigating Cross-Cultures, Curriculum and Confrontation: Addressing Ethics and Stereotypes in Design Education. Retrieved November 5th, 2015 from <http://search.proquest.com.ezaccess.library.uitm.edu.my/artshumanities/docview/743850827/E577660ABA484343PO/12?accountid=42518>
- Chang, S. and Kleiner, B.H. (2003). Common Racial Stereotypes. *Equal Opportunities International*, Vol.2 (3) pp. 1-9. Retrieved November 5th, 2015 from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/02610150310787388>
- Department of Statistics Malaysia. (2015). *Population Distribution and Basic Demographic Characteristic Report 2010 (Updated:05/08/2011)*. Retrieved February 19th, 2016 from https://www.statistics.gov.my/index.php?r=column/cthem&menu_id=L0pheU43NWJwRWVVSZklWdzQ4TlhUUT09&bul_id=MDMxdHZjWTK1SjFzTzNkRXYzcVZjdz09
- Hazri, J., Molly, N. N. L., Santhiram, R., Hairul Nizam, I., Nordin, A. R., Wah, L. L., and Nair, S. (2004). *Ethnic Interaction among Students in Secondary School in Malaysia: USM*.
- Hazri b. Jamil Najeemah bt. Mohd. Yusof. (2013). Prejudis Dan Stereotaip Dalam Kalangan Murid Pelbagai Etnik Di Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Malaysia. *Proceeding of the Global Summit on Education 2013 (e-ISBN 978-967-11768-0-1) Kuala Lumpur*. Retrieved November 5th, 2015 from http://worldconferences.net/proceedings/gse2013/papers_gse2013/257%20Muhammad%20Amar%20Ibrahim.pdf
- Ismail Sualman. (1998). *Fenomena Stereotaip: Kesannya Ke Atas Komunikasi*. Retrieved November 5th, 2015 from http://ir.uitm.edu.my/3547/1/LP_ISMAIL_SUALMAN_98_24.pdf
- Kaplan, A.M. and Haenlein, M. (2009a). Consumer Use And Business Potential Of Virtual Worlds: The Case Of Second Life. *The International Journal on Media Management*, Vol. 11 (3/4), pp. 93-101.
- Kaplan, A.M. and Haenlein, M. (2009b). The Fairyland Of Second Life: About Virtual Social Worlds And How To Use Them. *Business Horizons*, Vol. 52 (6), pp. 563-72.
- Kaplan, A.M. and Haenlein, M. (2012). Social Media: Back To The Roots And Back To The Future. *Journal of Systems and Information Technology*, Vol. 14(2), pp.101 – 104
- Korgaonkar, P.K. and Wolin, L.D. (1999), A Multivariate Analysis Of Web Uses. *Journal of Advertising Research*, Vol. 39 (1), pp. 53-68.
- Nur Azuki Yusuff, Nik Yusri Musa, Wan Sopian Sori. (2012). *Faktor Utama Konflik Etnik dan Kemampuan Gagasan 1Malaysia Menurut Perspektif Mahasiswa*. Retrieved February 5th, 2015 from <http://umkeprints.umk.edu.my/1071/1/Paper%201.pdf>
- Simpson, G.E., and Yinger, J.M. (1985). *Racial and Cultural Minorities: An Analysis of Prejudice and Discrimination*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Socha, B. and Eber-Schmid, B. (2014). What is New Media? Defining New Media Isn't Easy. Retrieved February 5th from <http://www.newmedia.org/what-is-new-media.html>
- Tormsen, D. (2015). *10 Logical Explanations For Ethnic Stereotypes*. Retrieved November 5th, 2015 from <http://listverse.com/2015/06/25/10-logical-explanations-for-ethnic-stereotypes/>
- Tourism Malaysia. (2015). *About Malaysia: People*. Retrieved November 5th, 2015 from <http://www.tourism.gov.my/en/us/about-malaysia/culture-n-heritage/people>
- Whiting, A., and Williams, D. (2013). Why People Use Social Media: A Uses And Gratifications Approach, Qualitative Market Research. *An International Journal*, Vol. 16(4), pp.362 – 369.
- Williams, D.L., Crittenden, V.L., Keo, T. and McCarty, P. (2012). The Use of Social Media: An Exploratory Study of Uses among Digital Natives. *Journal of Public Affairs*, Vol. 12 (2), pp. 127-136.