

Citizen Journalism Role in Promoting Cultural Integration and Peace in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Multi ethnicity and diverse cultures have shaped Malaysia. Malaysians in recent years have adopted the new communication and media technologies to initiate virtual interaction and discussion in many topics across cultural and ethnic backgrounds with the emerging ICT and internet infrastructure. The potential to promote cultural integration and peace are endless. The role of citizen journalism reflected this potential. They were found to use the internet and new media platforms to create alternative space for news on the cyberspace to express multiple viewpoints in issues relating to cultural integration and unity which is something considered sensitive in a multiracial society in Malaysia. The new media platform has made the Internet becoming more interactive thus create an alternative platform to discuss cross cultural and integration issues that often being shun away by the mainstream media. Today, thousands of citizen journalism blogs and citizen journalism have evolved in line with the accessibility and growth of these technologies. This is reflected in the society by providing instant networking and expanding the space for people from different cultures existed in harmony and integration into the diverse society. The purpose of this paper is to analyse to what extent citizen journalism does contribute in promoting cultural integration among Malaysians. Based on analysis of previous literatures, it is found that citizen journalism has influence cultural integration and peace. However, the evidence is yet to be examined in a Malaysian context. It is interesting to see if the contribution of citizen journalism in Malaysia potentially plays a more significant role in promoting cultural integration and peace among Malaysians.

Keywords: Cultural Integration, Citizen Journalism, Multicultural, Racial Harmony

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia has a unique society as it has people from diverse race and cultural background. The diversity in the society has been a blessing as well as a tricky situation. To maintain the harmony among society members, some societal issues such as cultural and religious practices were rarely featured and discussed in the mainstream media with the notion that it is a threat to the nation's peace and stability. However with the emergence of the internet and new media technologies and high penetration of internet which is 69 per cent of global penetration of mobile internet (ICT Data and, Division, ITU, 2014) and in Malaysia is about 68 per cent (Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission, 2015). Citizens were found to engage in citizen journalism to respond to the mainstream media as well as to create their own content to highlight news and issues not covered by mainstream media. The growing issue of blocking cultural and religious issues being discussed in the mainstream media is a concern (Rauch, 2015).

Thus, the potential of citizen journalist resume a more significant role in promoting cultural integration but the extension of the application and practice is rather debateable in Malaysian setting. Research showed that the representation or portrayal of a multicultural, multi-religious society in mainstream media is very much unknown as limited research is currently available to demonstrate the effectiveness in has in promoting nations peace and harmony yet opening more opportunity for discussions and interaction (Adnan, 2015; Hamdy, 2010)

The objective of this paper is to analyse to what extent citizen journalists play a role in promoting cultural integration and peace in Malaysia (Kamaruddin, Ghazali, & Muda, 2015). Some literatures which relate to this topic, has acknowledged that citizen journalists via citizen journalism have contributed in promoting cultural integration and peace which boost intercultural communication and discussion among citizens. However the extension of such promotion in Malaysia is yet to be thoroughly explored.

METHODS

Based on an analysis of previous literature, it is found that citizen journalism has influenced cultural integration and peace. The following framework suggested the potential for citizen journalism for cultural integration as a further extension of previous research (Hamid & Ishak, 2015; Hashim & Mahpuz, 2009; Ridzuan et al., 2012; Tellidis & Kappler, 2015). Controversial issue of cultural integration was addressed using citizen journalism platforms with the idea of promoting intercultural integration in Malaysia. Non restricted nature of the internet comes with the advantage to limit the taboo in discussing cultural related issues and promotion of integration among Malaysians.

Other research for instance highlighted that citizen journalism are attempting to encourage citizen activism in journalistic process although the state and the mainstream media discouraged them with the reason to safeguard national harmony. In a country such as Singapore for example, research found that citizen journalism play a role in integrating open conversations and discussions with different online spaces from different people coming from various cultural backgrounds reporting different happenings. Younger citizen journalists' using their smart phones are more interested to go out and find news (Ho & Baidon, 2013). Based on previous literature by researchers such as Fortunati, Deuze, & de Luca (2014) and Jian & Usher (2014), citizen journalism and crowd sourcing in many way investigate multicultural issues reflected content diversity that also represent news production of various cultural backgrounds (Garbett, Comber, Egglestone, Glancy, & Olivier, 2014; Saxton, Oh, & Kishore, 2013). The move has the potential to increase understanding, promoting cultural acceptance, intelligent conversation and diversity as well as harmony. Issues such as cultural and religious tolerance were among the things or discussion about unity and citizenship which were more openly discussed with follow up stories available in text or video recordings as to feature stories and discussions about these differences at a level in which mainstream media may not be able to execute.

Framework

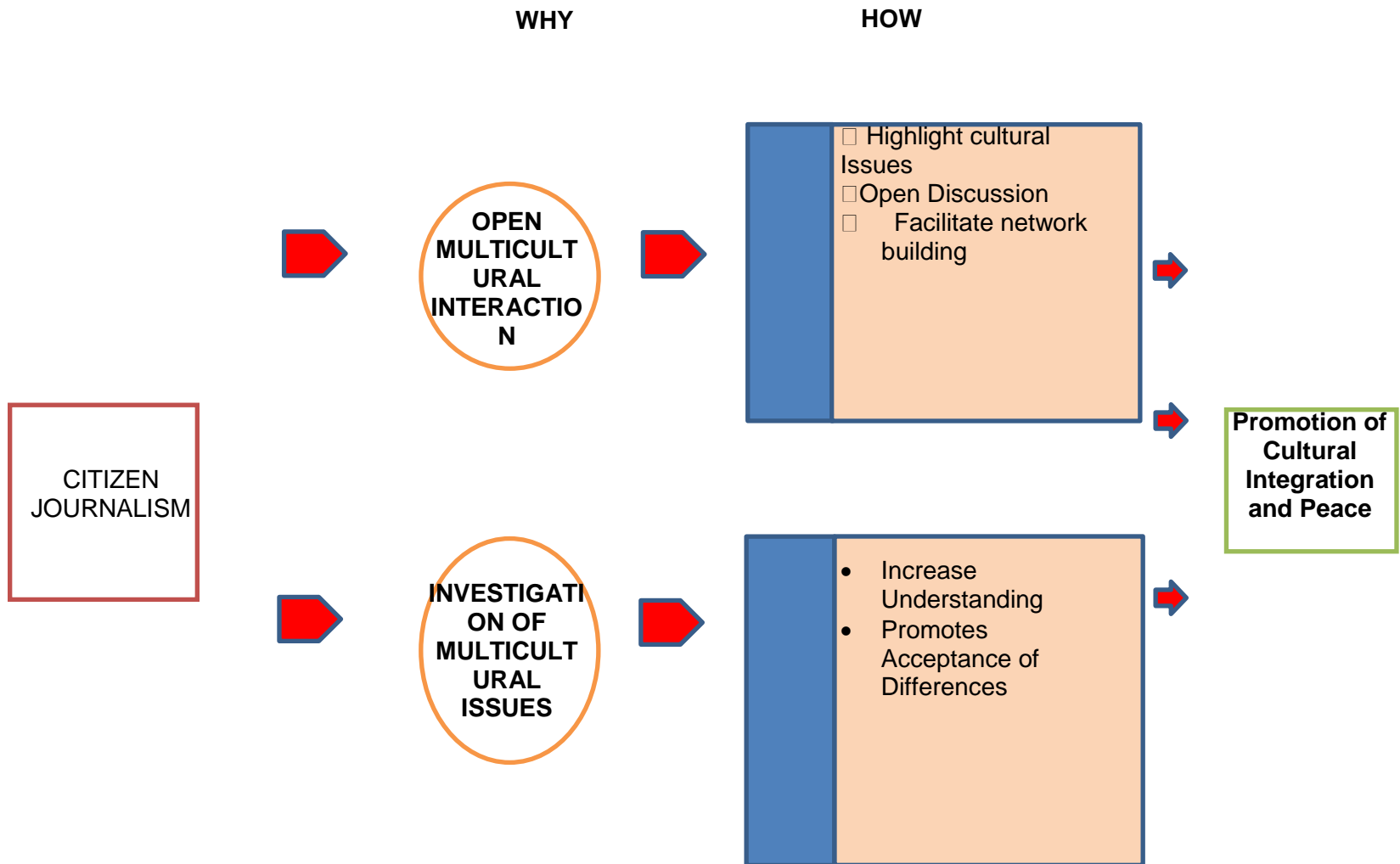


Figure: Conceptual Framework

FINDINGS

From the framework, it is determined that citizen journalism has the potential to promote cultural integration and peace in Malaysia. This paper showcases how citizen journalism has the potential to highlight important multicultural issues and further investigates them in the manner mainstream media is not. Development of the internet set a space where the citizens feel empowered and free to voice their perspectives in any given time with little and sometimes no restrictions at all. Open interaction from different people cuts across multiculturalism and integration. The findings suggests that the potentials of the internet and citizen journalism are in gathering multiple views and providing networking opportunities for multicultural interactions which thus provide the space for better understanding, integration and peace in a nation like Malaysia.

CONCLUSION

The discussion of whether citizen journalism actually potentially help promote cultural integration in Malaysia or otherwise is interesting as there is also a debate that citizen journalism is said to challenge and competes with professional journalist. In developed western nations, citizen journalism efforts are more often highlighted as they provide culturally integrated content and societal stories. Furthermore there are other areas in which citizen journalism challenges reporting on cultural or religious related issues in efforts to promote more understanding and acceptance among different cultures, racial and religious background. However, interaction and investigation of cultural issues may be considered as sensitive to be discussed openly in our society as well as in the mainstream media. The move for a more open discussion and a direct portrayal of cultural integration through the use of investigative cultural stories and issues has the potential to promote interaction and peace in Malaysia.

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