Digital Experience and Citizen Participation in Bridging Ethnic Divide: An Analysis of Young Generation in Malaysia

SAMSUDIN A. RAHIM
Taylor's University, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

Information and communication technologies provide communities, service providers and advocates with mechanisms through which service can be more effectively and efficiently provided to the young generation. The young generation and these technologies can unite to create an agenda for positive change that will ultimately benefit them and society. The role that information and communication technologies may play and the impact they may have on the ethnic divide and national unity among the young generation in a multicultural society are not well understood, and there are gaps in the evidence base surrounding the possibilities and approaches for national integration that involves information technologies. This paper investigates the usage of ethnic media and issues related to the ethnic divide in multicultural Malaysian society. More specifically, internet use, types of participation, ethnic identity and their interrelations were observed. A national sample of 1,640 respondents between the ages of 21 and 40 years were interviewed. The results indicated that those with more experience and longer usage of the Internet showed higher levels of online and offline participation. The high penetration of information and communication technology among the young generation provides an opportunity for active citizen participation that could lead to a better understanding of the citizens' rights and responsibilities, which can form the basis for bridging the ethnic divide.

Keywords: *Ethnic divide, citizenship, young generation, participation, Internet.*

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is a multi-ethnic and multi-religion country. Each ethnic group was once polarised along economic occupation and place of residence. The polarisation of society is further enhanced by a media system that offers each ethnic group its own vernacular media. In the political scene, political parties are based on ethnic lines to champion ethnic causes. Efforts in social engineering were made in the early 1970s through the New Economic Policy (NEP), which aimed to eradicate the identification of ethnic groups according to their place of residence and occupation (Malaysia, 1970). Although substantial inroads have been achieved with regard to identification with place of residence and occupation, the media system still exists along ethnic divide. To further compound this polarisation, vernacular schools exist parallel to the national school system.

In many Western countries, ethnic or minority media are on the rise due to globalisation and multiculturalism. Studies have suggested that the rise of ethnic media is a manifestation of the convergence between the new and the old culture of migrant citizens (Houssain, 2013; Sheed, 2014). They questioned whether such development really works to reify differences or to support complexity. In the case of Malaysia, ethnic media were rooted well before independence and have been flourishing well into independent years. Ethnic media were allowed to exist mainly to provide means of communication between the government and the various ethnic groups in the latter's mother tongue. This was important because not many migrant citizens originating from India and China who had been accepted

as citizens in independent Malaya (as Malaysia was known at that time) were learned in the lingua franca of the country, the Malay language.

As Malaysia embarked on its national development plan, one of the prime objectives was to foster national unity and integration among its multi-ethnic citizens. Although the current citizens are proficient in the national language, ethnic media still dominate the media landscape. The continued existence of ethnic media is a hindrance to achieving unity and integration because each ethnic mindset is conditioned and influenced through the ethnic perspective which, in many ways, is promoted by the ethnic media.

With the introduction of information and communication technologies in the early 1990s, the Internet has become the preferred mode of communication and resource, especially among the younger generation. Internet penetration in Malaysia increased from 70% in 2015 to 85.7% in 2018 (NST, 19 March 2018). Households with computer and mobile phone access across Malaysia rose to 74.1% and 98.1%, respectively, compared with 67.6% and 97.9%, respectively, in 2015.

The Internet allows a latitude of expressions to be shared across the ethnic divide and creates critical debates and discussions. This was not possible before because most ethnic issues were confined to discussions in ethnic media among their own readers. There are now more frequent debates and critical comments on major issues, whether social, economic or political. Young people are making their viewpoints known in public and are ready to be criticised and debate to defend their viewpoints. According to Lessing (2004), the Internet has created a 'creative common' where people, for various reasons and agenda, contribute their views, skills, resources and time to issues of special or public interest. This development sort of creates a 'market place of ideas' that should be a catalyst in forging the ethnic divide in Malaysian society, especially among the young generation.

This paper aims to explore the Internet use among young citizens from various ethnic groups in Malaysia and the extent to which Internet use affects the participation of the young generation in social and political issues. Furthermore, it seeks to answer the following question: Does such participation influence how citizens orient themselves with regard to ethnic identity that will help narrow the ethnic divide?

CITIZENSHIP, THE INTERNET AND PARTICIPATION

In any democratic society, citizens are encouraged to participate in the decision-making that affects their lives. Participation is considered a part of the rights and freedoms in democratic constitutions. The central concept of participation is that citizens transform themselves from bystanders to actively involve themselves with issues, aiming to realise what they perceive as the public good (Meijer, Burger & Ebbers, 2009). Participation is not limited to voting in elections. Active involvement among citizens may take the form of putting demands on the political and administrative system, and it includes developing systems of mutual support to reach common goals. According to Rowe and Frewer (2000), the reasons for developing forms of citizen participation vary, from the recognition of basic human rights concerning democracy and procedural justice to a practical recognition that public participation may result in more support for government policies. Bullock (2014) suggested we can look at participation as a mechanism for protecting citizens and developing citizens and society. However, participation should not be an end by itself because it could be a means for achieving further outcomes, such as narrowing the ethnic divide in a multicultural

society. According to Gustavo and Talmud (2011), the lack of Internet access and, therefore, participation might reflect or even enlarge existing social inequalities.

Meijer, Burger and Ebbers (2009) suggested three forms of participation: political, policy and social. Political participation consists of actions of citizens that aim to influence the selection and behaviour of political decision-makers. Policy participation focuses on the role of citizens in regulation. Social participation refers to relations between citizens and government but includes interactions among citizens. In the Internet age, participation is also categorised as online and offline participation. Is online participation, or e-participation, just an extension of offline activities? Does the Internet provide new avenues and resources where it breaks beyond the traditional form of participation?

The emergence of the Internet facilitates, influences and changes the ways citizens participate. The Internet has democratised the source of information and the means of communication, has increased participation in social issues (Meesuwan, 2016) and has empowered citizens by giving more choices to citizens (Livingstone & Lunt, 2007). In a study of Internet diffusion in 159 countries, Groshek (2009) found that increased Internet diffusion was associated with certain countries becoming more democratic and that often those countries were at least partially democratic *already*. Zuñiga and Valenzuela (2010) indicated that the relationships between online and offline network size and civic engagement were positive and fairly similar in strength. In addition, they found that online networks entail greater exposure to weak ties than offline networks.

The advantage of the Internet as a form of communication is that it blurs the traditional boundaries between producers and consumers. It encourages the media participation of ordinary citizens in the public sphere (Sylvester & McGlynn, 2010). In the Internet context, it allows for more horizontal communication among citizens. The studies of Chung and Henderson (2005) suggested that some people see the Internet as a 'social' technology and use it primarily to participate in online social contexts and to expand their social connections. Others might use the Internet for its utilitarian function, mainly as a convenient source of information or as a capital-enhancing activity (Hargitti & Hinnent, 2008). Hence, one may argue that the financially less advantaged may use the Internet to participate in social contexts more than their wealthier counterparts would. In addition, the egalitarian social environment of the Internet may motivate lower-income groups to use the Internet for social participation more than it may motivate the wealthy. However, Xu, Ye and Zhang (2018) suggested that Internet use for participation was very much influenced by Internet access and skills.

Putnam (2000) described how social capital is created through 'bonding' and 'bridging'. Individuals who are lead to engage with others outside of their own group and widen their horizons are 'bridging social capital' whereas those who only seek information within their own ethnic groups are 'bonding social capital'. Neves (2015) found that the association between Internet use and bonding social capital has strong support in the literature. The significance of social capital is found in its ability to increase both individual and community outcomes in terms of good governance, democracy, economic development, education, safety and health (Neves, 2013). Even among the older age group who generally have lower social capital, the use of Internet increased their social capital as compared with those who did not.

New media and communication technologies promote contact with ethnic cultures and changes in social climate that reduce the pressure to acculturate. Verba, Scholzman and Brady (1995) argued that people who have more resources – such as money, time and civic skills – can more easily afford the costs of participation and develop more positive attitudes towards politics; thus, they are more likely to participate. Bakker and de Vreese (2011) revealed that various Internet uses are positively related to different forms of political participation, whereas the relationship between most uses of traditional media and participation is weak, albeit positive.

The study rejects the predictive power of *duration* of media use but finds support for the *type* of media use. However, Boulianne (2015), after analysing the metadata of 36 studies, found a positive relationship between social media use and participation. Even though more than 80% of coefficients were positive, only half of them were statistically significant. Thus, questions about whether the relationship is causal and transformative remain.

While Internet usage has been known to influence participation, would participation itself generate other outcomes? Extending on Putnam's 'bridging social capital', when there is interaction among people of different groups in society, will Internet usage and participation help narrow the ethnic divide? While no specific study has looked at relationships among media use, participation and ethnic divide, Valkenburg and Peter (2008) found that adolescents who had many opportunities to communicate with people of different ages and cultural backgrounds through the Internet tended to have better offline social competence.

Social competence is defined as their ability to effectively form and manage offline interpersonal relationships. The Internet also holds many opportunities for enlarging or maintaining social networks (Hargittai & Hinnant, 2008) and for social support (Hlebec et al., 2006). Carpini, Cooks and Jacobs (2004) argued that as one of several socialising agents, the media provided much of the 'raw material' that made up social and political beliefs, attitudes and schema.

Jeffres (2000) suggested that ethnic groups used media either for cultural maintenance or for assimilation and acculturation. Ethnic media use leads to higher ethnic identification across time in a multicultural context. Communication processes with ethnic groups strengthen internal cohesion, whereas communication processes linking ethnic with non-ethnic do the reverse. In many societies, ethnic groups try to maintain their ethnicity and thus create cultural pluralism. Participation either online or offline provides an opportunity for individuals from different ethnic backgrounds to promote contact and interaction and thus assimilation and acculturation.

In a multi-ethnic society, interaction among various ethnic groups happens but tends to concentrate more on the formal rather than on the informal basis. Such interaction can be confined to workplaces and businesses. In situations where ethnic media are available, each ethnic group tends to use the ethnic media to seek information and thus, in many ways, form their opinion and attitude based on whatever information is conveyed through such media. In such cases, issues are normally analysed and interpreted through each ethnic perspective. Subsequently, each ethnic group will regard other ethnic groups with suspicion to a certain degree with stereotyping.

The Internet provides for a public sphere where individual participation in online discussions would enhance one's understanding of other ethnic views on certain issues. Such discussion might either close the gap because of shared understanding and worldview or, at times, even widen the gap because of misunderstanding and disagreement. A study involving a minority in the Netherlands found that not only ethnic minority youths but also their native counterparts take part in online discussions that produce a positive outcome in understanding of and respect for one another's viewpoints. In this way, according to D'Haenens, Koeman and Saeys (2007), these websites could bridge the gap among cultures. At the very minimum, the opportunity to cross the ethnic divide through online or offline participation would allow individuals to be more accommodating and not ethnic-centric.

Phinney (1997) suggested that ethnic interaction could result in three forms: other group orientation, ethnic identity orientation as well as affirmation and belonging. Kleinpenning and Hagendoorn (1993) argued that ethnic attitudes were derived from four factors, namely, biological racism, ethnocentrism, symbolic racism and aversive racism. Daniels (2013) suggested that issues related to race and racism persisted online in ways that were both new and unique to the Internet, alongside vestiges of centuries-old forms that reverberated significantly, both offline and online.

A significant relationship between political participation online and participation offline was found in a study conducted by Weber, Loumakis and Bergman (2003). Kobayashi, Ikeda and Miyata (2006) also found that online social capital played a significant role in predicting participation in online political activity and suggest strong potential for online social capital to improve offline political participation.

A study conducted by Jeffres, Lee, Neuendorf and Atkin (2007) found that reading newspapers was related to a positive trend in various forms of community participation and social capital. Empirical research has found strong support for the association between news use and social capital (Shah, Cho, Eveland & Kwak, 2005; Zuniga et.al. 2012). Penard and Poussing (2014) found that online usage significantly affected volunteer activities and social capital. The studies mentioned above researched the capital-enhancing activities of young people, with a specific focus on Internet activities that empower young people toward upward mobility in human, financial and social capital. These activities include the ability to obtain information about job vacancies, health services, and financial advice as well as political information.

METHODOLOGY

A total of 1,640 respondents were interviewed for this study. Face-to-face field interviews were conducted by undergraduate students trained as enumerators. The National Youth Development Act of 2007 defines the young generation as people between 15 and 40 years of age. The sampling was conducted to reflect the current youth population: 56% of the total samples were Malays, 23% were Chinese, and 21% were Indians. Among the respondents, 55% were male and the rest were female. A total of 22% of the respondents received tertiary education, 32% had post-secondary education, and the remainder had secondary school qualifications.

The key variables used in this study were Internet usage, participation and ethnic identity. The two Internet variables were Internet experience and Internet use. Participation consisted of three dimensions: cause-oriented, citizen-oriented and civic. Ethnic identity was measured based on its three dimensions, namely, ethnic affirmation and belonging,

ethnic identity achievement and other group orientations which were a part of Phinney (1997) multigroups measure of ethnic identity (MEIM).

Internet experience was defined as the duration an individual had experienced in using the Internet. To measure this variable, respondents were asked, 'How long have you been using the Internet?' Respondents had five options to choose from: less than 6 months, 6 months to 1 year, 2–3 years, 4–5 years and more than 5 years.

Internet use was measured by a single item asking respondents to indicate how much time they spend on the Internet in a week. Respondents had five possible responses: less than 3 hours, 4–7 hours, 8–11 hours, 12–15 hours and more than 15 hours per week.

To measure participation, respondents were asked to respond to 17 items based on a Likert-type scale that ranged from 'never' to 'very frequently'. These items were then factor analysed, which subsequently produced three factor loadings: cause-oriented participation, citizen-oriented participation, and civic participation.

Cause-oriented participation was measured using five items that related to taking action: engaging with government officials to address problems, wearing badges in show of protest, visiting political party websites, approaching elected representatives to share opinions and writing to the media to voice dissatisfaction. The five items showed a Cronbach's alpha of 0.78.

Citizen-oriented participation consisted of five items, with a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.85. The items included writing comments on online news portals, e-mailing letters to the editor, sharing comments on blogs, taking part in online discussion groups and partaking in the upload and download of videos to protest certain issues.

Civic participation refers to participation in community services, such as philanthropy, volunteering time for the poor, sharing opinions on policy development at the workplace, volunteering to teach less fortunate children and discussing current issues with family members. The Cronbach's alpha value was 0.86.

Ethnic affirmation and belonging dealt with the feeling of belonging to an ethnic group and attitude towards other group. Five items range from feeling proud of ethnic culture, being satisfied with ethnic achievement, feeling proud of one's ethnic to feeling togetherness with the members of ethnic group. The Cronbach's alpha value was 0.

Ethnic identity achievement had four items which included spending much time tracing history and tradition of own ethnicity, participating actively in organisations managed by own ethnicity, thinking of how own ethnicity influence one's life and asking others about my own ethnic background. The reliability value of Cronbach's alpha was 0.

The other group orientation had three items. The items asked respondents whether they would like to have friends outside of their ethnic group, have time to learn more about other ethnicities or prefer his own and does not befriend other ethnicities. The Cronbach's alpha was 0.

The three types of participation had low to moderate correlations: cause-oriented participation with citizen-based participation (r=0.62), civic participation (r=0.59) and citizen-based participation with civic participation (0.48).

RESULTS

Although the Internet was introduced in the early 1990s in Malaysia, it did not reach its critical mass acceptance until recently, with broadband infrastructure facilitating mass access. Today the Internet penetration in Malaysia is at 87%. The data in Table 1 indicate

the respondents' experience in using the Internet. Among the respondents, only 22% have more than 5 years' experience in using the Internet. Another 11% have 4 to 5 years' experience. Those who have been using the Internet for the last 2 to 3 years are about 27%.

A substantial proportion (41%) started using the Internet in the last year. In terms of ethnicity, the Chinese have a longer experience in using the Internet, with about 41% having more than 4 years of experience in using the Internet. Among the Indians, 33% have been using the Internet for more than 4 years. The Malays have the least number of young people using the Internet for more than 4 years at only 28%. The percentage of young people having an experience using the Internet for less than 6 months is higher among the Malays (25%) and Indians (25%) than the Chinese (15%).

Table 1: Experience in using the Internet.

	Overall (%)	Malay (%)	Chinese (%)	Indian (%)
<6 mos	27	25	15	25
6 mos–1 yr	18	21	11	15
2–3 yrs	27	26	33	28
4–5 yrs	11	10	13	12
<5 yrs	22	18	28	21

Besides Internet experience, respondents also reported their weekly use of the Internet. Heavy users of the Internet, that is, those who use the Internet for more than 15 hours per week, make up only 17%. The percentage for the Chinese is 20%, which is above the overall percentage, whereas for the Indians, it is 15%, which is below the overall percentage. Among the Malays, 17% use the Internet for more than 15 hours per week, which is at par with the overall percentage.

Access to the Internet is not free, and it involves a substantial monthly financial expense; these could be deterring factors that discourage respondents from using the Internet for much longer hours. For comparison, we analysed the data for those who spend less than 7 hours weekly (about an hour daily) on the Internet. For the overall data, slightly more than half (55%) uses the Internet for 7 hours or less in a week. The Chinese and the Malays have the same number of young people (56%) using the Internet for less than 7 hours a week. Among the Indians, the percentage is slightly higher at 60%. In Internet terms, daily usage of one hour is more than sufficient to accomplish one purpose for accessing the Internet. In such cases, the respondents have a reasonable opportunity to use the Internet.

Table 2: Internet usage.

	Overall (%)	Malay (%)	Chinese (%)	Indian (%)
< 3 hrs	31	33	32	34
4–7 hrs	24	23	24	26
8–11 hrs	18	19	22	15
12–14 hrs	10	9	11	10
>15 hrs	17	17	20	15

One of the main purposes of this study is to determine whether Internet experience and usage help increase citizen participation in cause-oriented, citizen-oriented and civic participation. Before venturing into the effect of the Internet on participation, we analyse Table 3, which presents the results of a one-way ANOVA performed to examine the differences in participation between the three ethnic groups. In cause-oriented

participation, Indians obtained the highest mean (M=7.33) followed closely by the Malays (M=7.33). The Chinese showed the lowest mean (M=6.91). The results indicate that the Indians and Malays were more willing to voice their opinions and defend their cause against the authorities when compared to the Chinese. The ANOVA showed that there was a significant difference in cause-oriented participation among the Malays, Chinese and Indians.

A similar pattern emerged in citizen-oriented participation among the three ethnic groups. The Indians showed the highest mean (M=11.82), the Malays following closely behind (M=11.40) and the Chinese with the lowest mean (M=11.01). Citizen-oriented participation focuses specifically on online participation where respondents share their opinions, leave comments or upload/ download videos in show of protest to certain issues. It was found that the Indians and the Malays were more likely to advocate their cause or show protest when compared to the Chinese. This remained true despite the Chinese showing higher levels of Internet usage compared to the two other ethnic groups. Results of the ANOVA indicated that participation using online facilities were significantly different among the ethnic groups.

Civic engagement, on the other hand, refers to participation in non-governmental organisations to champion certain causes. The Malays showed the highest participation (M=6.83), followed by the Indians (M=6.76) and the Chinese (M=6.70). Similar to the results of the other types of participation, the Chinese showed the lowest means. Even so, the ANOVA indicated that the difference between three ethnic groups was not statistically significant.

Table 3: ANOVA Participation among ethnic group.

	Cause-oriented	Citizen-oriented	Civic engagement
Malay	7.05	11.40	6.83
Chinese	6.91	11.01	6.70
Indian	7.33	11.82	6.76
F	3.80*	9.09*	1.73 ns

Table 4 presents the data on one-way ANOVA of Internet use and participation in general as well as the analysis within ethnic groups. The general data indicate that the levels of participation are statistically different in the categories of Internet use. Higher usage of the Internet shows a relatively higher level of participation compared with lower Internet use, which also indicates a lower level of participation. These data indicate that Internet use is a factor that contributes to the participation of citizens in political and civic engagement. Is this trend seen within each ethnic group analysis?

For the Malays, the same pattern emerged, that is, the level of participation in cause-oriented, citizen-oriented and civic engagements increases with a higher use of the Internet. Among the Chinese, civic activities and citizen-oriented participation show a significant difference among different categories of Internet use. However, with regard to cause-oriented participation, there is no significant difference among the different categories of Internet use. The Indians show a different pattern of participation in civic engagement and citizen-oriented participation in relation to their Internet usage. There was no statistical difference, however, between amount of Internet usage and cause-oriented participation.

Table 4: ANOVA participation and media usage/experience.

	Cause-oriented	Citizen-oriented	Civic engagement
Internet experience	16.31**	19.12**	15.90**
Internet usage	27.16**	11.49**	32.45**
Television usage	1.98 ns	1.14 ns	1.38 ns

This study is interested in knowing the extent to which Internet use affects participation. ANOVA is again used to determine whether there are differences in participation among the different categories of Internet use. Table 5 shows that there are significant differences in all three types of participation within different categories of Internet use. For caused-oriented participation (F=27.16<0.01), the least time spent using the Internet also produces the lowest mean for participation (M=6.35) compared with those who have higher Internet use (M=7.79). The same pattern is evident in civic participation (F=11.49<0.01), where those who use the Internet for less than 3 hours (M=10.65) show a lower mean compared with those who use Internet for more than 15 hours (M=11.49). With regard to citizen-oriented participation (F=32.45<0.01), those who use the Internet for more than 15 hours weekly (M=7.75) have a higher mean of participation compared with those who use the Internet for less than 3 hours weekly (M=5.85).

Table 5: ANOVA participation and Internet usage.

	Cause-oriented	Citizen-oriented	Civic engagement
< 3 hrs	6.35	5.85	10.61
4–7 hrs	7.05	6.72	11.60
8–11 hrs	7.29	6.89	11.64
12–14 hrs	7.78	7.29	12.09
>15 hrs	7.79	7.75	11.96
Overall F	27.16**	32.45**	11.49**
Malays F	16.87**	17.70**	6.44**
Chinese F	1.91 ns	4.61**	3.09*
Indian F	5.38**	11.29**	1.73 ns

In terms of ethnic data, ANOVA shows a significant difference in participation among the Malays (cause-oriented participation, F=16.87<0.01; citizen-oriented participation, F=17.70<0.01; and civic engagement, F=6.44<0.01) in the different categories of Internet use. Among the Chinese, significant differences are found in civic engagement (F=3.09<0.01) and citizen-oriented participation (F=4.61<0.01). For cause-oriented participation, the difference is not significant. Among the Indian respondents, there is no significant different in civic engagement among the different categories of Internet use. For cause-oriented participation, ANOVA shows a significant difference (F=5.38<0.01). The same goes for citizen-oriented participation (F=11.29<0.01), where participation is highest among the heavy users of the Internet compared with lower usage of the Internet.

Another purpose of this study is to determine if participation could in some way help narrow the ethnic divide in Malaysia. This could be achieved if each group does not only focus on its own ethnic identity orientation but also considers other ethnic identity orientations. In addition, an ethnic group should less emphasise on affirmation and belonging to its own ethnic group. The argument is that since online or offline participation unites people in a common cause, then in some way, it could help interethnic interaction and understanding and thus narrow the ethnic divide.

The data in Table 6 indicate that participation contributes towards ethnic identity, but the contribution is rather small. Those who have higher involvement in citizen-oriented participation (Beta=−0.09) tend to be less in affirmation and belonging to their own ethnic. However, those who are involved in civic engagement (Beta=0.17) contribute positively towards ethnic affirmation and belonging. The next identity variable is orientation towards own ethnic group. In this case, all three participation dimensions show a significant relationship. Citizen-oriented (Beta=−0.12) and cause-oriented (Beta=−0.10) participation contribute negatively, while civic engagement (Beta=0.17) contributes positively. For own ethnic identity orientation, only civic engagement (Beta=0.17) and cause-oriented participation (Beta=0.06) have significant relationships.

Table 6: Participation and ethnic identity.

	Participation	Beta	t
E-belong	Cause-oriented	0.15	6.02**
	Citizen-oriented	−0.09	−3.60**
	Civic engagement	−0.02	−4.72 ns
E-orientation	Cause-oriented	−0.12	−4.17**
	Citizen-oriented	0.17	6.20**
	Civic engagement	−0.10	−3.14**
E-identity	Cause-oriented	0.17	6.23**
	Citizen-oriented	0.06	2.10*
	Civic engagement	0.02	5.64 ns

Among the Malay respondents, those who are involved in civic engagement (Beta=−0.15) are less focused on their own ethnic identity orientation. However, the citizen-oriented participation (Beta=0.09) contribution is positive. With regard to other ethnic orientation, civic engagement (Beta=0.15) has a positive contribution, but citizen-orientation (Beta=−0.12) contributes negatively. In terms of affirmation and belonging, only one of the participation variables, civic engagement (Beta=0.07), contributes significantly.

The same participant variables contribute significantly towards identity among the Chinese. Firstly, the higher participation in civic engagement (Beta=0.34) contributes positively towards affirmation and belonging to own identity. The opposite is true for citizen-oriented participation where higher participation leads to less emphasis on ethnic affirmation and belonging (Beta=−0.20). The Chinese orientation towards other ethnic groups is influenced by civic engagement (Beta=0.23). Nonetheless, citizen-oriented participation (Beta=−0.27) contributes negatively towards orientation to other ethnic groups. Civic-oriented engagement shows positive and significant relationships with own ethnic orientation.

Table 7: Summary of multiple regression of participation on identity according to race.

	Participation	Malay	Chinese	Indian
E-belong	Cause-oriented	ns	ns	ns
	Civic engagement	0.07*	0.34**	ns
	Citizen-oriented	ns	−0.20**	ns
E-orientation	Cause-oriented	ns	−0.26**	ns
	Civic engagement	0.15**	0.23**	0.23**
	Citizen-oriented	−0.12**	ns	0.21**
E-identity	Cause-oriented	ns	ns	ns
	Civic engagement	0.15**	0.18**	0.19**
	Citizen-oriented	0.09*	ns	ns

The data from Table 7 further indicate that among the Indian respondents, no participation variable contributes significantly towards ethnic affirmation and belonging. However, the emphasis of Indians on their own identity is influenced by civic engagement (Beta=0.19). Two participation variables, civic engagement (Beta=0.23) and citizen-oriented participation (Beta=0.21), contribute positively towards identifying with other group orientation.

CONCLUSION

Citizen participation in a democratic society is often taken for granted, especially by the younger generation. The Internet has created a new environment for the young generation to participate, especially online. Those with longer experience and high usage time with the Internet show higher online and offline participation than those with shorter experience and low usage time with the Internet. Participation should not be looked upon as an end by itself. Instead, it should be asked if participation could lead to a better outcome for a particular society. In a multi-ethnic society such as Malaysia, online participation like citizen-oriented participation shows different effects among different ethnic groups. Among the Indians, such participation increased their orientation towards other ethnic groups. Among the Malays, however, online participation negatively affected other ethnic orientation but positively affected their ethnic identity orientation. No significant effect was observed among the Chinese. Although the findings are still preliminary, further studies should pursue the contribution of participation in narrowing the ethnic divide in a multi-ethnic society.

With the expansion of public sphere provided by the Internet, young people who are mostly considered as native to the advancement and application of information and communication technology should be encouraged to communicate across their ethnic group. Such communication could not be forced on any ethnic group. However, with proper planning and encouragement, organic growth of interaction should be encouraged among different ethnic groups by allowing them to participate in forums on issues that affect their lives such as education, future endeavours, entertainment, ethnic relations and job opportunities. By such interactions, they would better understand the world view and ethnic perspective of such issues across ethnic groups and contribute to narrowing ethnic divide.

BIODATA

Samsudin A. Rahim is a professor at the School of Communication, Faculty of Social Sciences and Leisure Management, Taylor's University, Malaysia. His research interests include media and cultural identity, media and young adults, new media and digital inclusion, and development and health communication. Email: samsudin.abdrahim@taylors.edu.my

REFERENCES

Bakker, T., & de Vreese, C. (2011). Good news for the future? Young people, internet use, and political participation. *Communication Research*, 20(10), 1–20.

Boulianne, S. (2015). Social media use and participation: A meta-analysis of current research. *Information, Communication & Society*, 18(5), 524–538.

Boonaert, T., & Vettenburg, N. (2011). Young people's internet use: Divided or diversified? *Childhood*, 18(1), 54–66.

Bullock, K. (2014). Citizen participation and democracy. In Crime Prevention and Security Management (Ed.), *Citizens, community and crime control*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Carpini, D., Cook, F., & Jacobs, L. (2004). Public deliberation, discursive participation, and citizen engagement: A review of the empirical literature. *Annual Review of Political Science,* 7, 315–344.

Chung, W., & Henderson, J. (2005). *American on the internet: Utilitarian and social participation perspective* (Working paper 1(16). Retrieved from http//sprouts,aisnet.org

D'Haenens, L., Koeman, J., & Saey, F. (2007). Digital citizenship among ethnic minority youths in the Netherlands and Flanders. *New Media Society*, 9, 278–299.

Daniels, J. (2013). Race and racism in internet studies: A review and critique. *New Media and Society*, 15(5), 695–719.

Groshek, J. (2009). The democratic effects of the internet, 1994–2003: A cross-national inquiry of 152 countries. *International Communication Gazette*, 71, 115.

Gustavo, M., & Talmud, I. (2011). Ethnic differences in internet access. *Information, Communication & Society*, 14(4), 445–471.

Hargittai, E., & Hinnant, A. (2008) Digital inequality: Differences in young adults' use of the internet. *Communication Research,* 35(5), 602–621.

Hlebec, V., Manfreda K., & Vehovar, V. (2006). The social support networks of internet users. *New Media and Society*, 8(1), 9–32.

Houssain, C. (2013). Dispora, memory and ethnic media: Media use by Somaalis living in Canada. *Bildhaan*, 12, 87-103.

Jeffres, L. (2000). Ethnicity and ethnic media use: A panel study. *Communication Research*, *27*, 496–535.

Jeffers, L., Lee, J., Neuendorf, K., & Atkin, D. (2007). Newspaper reading support community involvement. *Newspaper Research Journal,* 28(1), 6-23.

Malešević´, S., & Beaudoin, C. (2009). Exploring the association between news use and social capital: Evidence of variance by ethnicity and medium. *Communication Research*, 36, 611.

Kleinpenning, G., & Hagendoorn, L. (1993). Form of racism and the cumulative dimension of ethnic attitudes. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 56(1), 21–36.

Kobayashi, T., Ikeda, K., & Miyata, K. (2006). Social capital online: Collective use of the internet and reciprocity as lubricants of democracy. *Information, Communication & Society,* 9, 582–611.

Livingstone, S., & Lunt, P. (2007). Representing citizens and consumers in media and communications regulation. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 611, 51.

Malaysia. (1970). *The second Malaysia plan*. Kuala Lumpur: Percetakan Negara.

Meesuwan, S. (2016). The effect of internet use on political participation: Could the internet increase political participation in Thailand? *International Journal of Asia Pacific Studies* 12(2), 57–82.

Meijer, A., Burger, N., & Ebbers, W. (2009). Citizens4Citizens: Mapping participatory practices on the internet. *Electronic Journal of e-Government,* 7(1), 99–112.

New Straits Times. 19 March 2018. Malaysia's Internet penetration.

Neves, B. (2013). Social capital and internet use: The irrelevant, the bad and the good. *Sociology Compass*, 7(8), 599–611.

Neves, B. (2015). Does the internet matter for strong ties? Bonding social capital, internet use, and age-based inequality. *International Review of Sociology*, 25(3), 415–433.

Neves, B., Fonseca, J., Amaro F., & Pasqualotti, A. (2018). Social capital and internet use in an age-comparative perspective with a focus on later life. *PLOS ONE*, 13(2): e0192119. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0192119

Penard, T., & Poussing, N. (2014). Internet use and social capital: The strength of virtual ties. *Journal of Economic Issues*, 44(3), 564–595.

Ping Xu, Yinjiao Ye, & Mingxin Zhang (2018). Assessing political participation on the internet in contemporary China. *Chinese Journal of Communication*. doi: 10.1080/17544750.2018.1445119

Phinney, J. (1992). The multigroup ethnic identity measure: A new scale for use with diverse groups. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 7, 156.

Phinney, J., Furgeson, D., & Tate, J. (2006). Intergroup attitudes among ethnic minority adolescents: A causal model. *Child Development*, 1(5).

Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Rowe, G., & Frewer, J. (2000). Public participation methods: A framework for evaluation. *Science, Technology & Human Values*, 25(11), 3–29.

Shah, D. V., Cho, J., Eveland, W. P. Jr., & Kwak, N. (2005). Information and expression in a digital age: Modeling internet effects on civic participation. *Communication Research*, 32, 531–565.

Sheed, T. 2014. Diversity in journalism and where ethnic media has carried its weight. *US News*. May 16, 2014.

Sylvester, E., & McGlynn, A. (2010). The digital divide, political participation, and place. *Social Science Computer Review*, 28(1), 64–74.

Valkenburg, P., & Peter, J. (2008). Adolescents' identity experiments on the internet: Consequences for social science. *Communication Research*, 35, 208.

Verba, S., Schlozman, K., & Brady, H. (1995). *Voice and equality: Civic voluntarism in American politics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Weber, L. M., Loumakis, A., & Bergman, J. (2003). Who participates and why? An analysis of citizens on the internet and the mass public. *Social Science Computer Review*, 21, 26–42.

Xu,Ping., Ye, Yinjiao & Zhang, Mingxin (2018). Assessing political participation on the internet in contemporary China. *Chinese Journal of Communication*. doi: 10.1080/17544750.2018.1445119

Zúñiga, H., & Valenzuela, S. (2010). The mediating path to a stronger citizenship: Online and offline networks, weak ties, and civic engagement. *Communication Research*, 20(10), 1–25.

Zuniga, H., Jung, N., & Valenzuela, S. (2012). Social media use for news and individuals' social capital, civic engagement and political participation. *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication,* 17(3), 319-336.