Instilling the Understanding of Values of Interaction in Managing Extreme Attitudes towards Designing a Harmonious Ethnic Relations in Malaysia

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Abstract
Ethnic diversity, a crucial factor in promoting close-knit ethnic relations among the people in Malaysia, should be managed with precision. This will determine the future climate of ethnic relations by viewing the question of society's actual understanding of the values of interaction so that all manner of society's issues can be resolved. Aspects that are often confusing to the minds of some Muslim community is their understanding on the values of interaction that is encouraged and what can be shared with people of other ethnic, religion and culture. The Muslim community's lack of understanding of the actual values of interaction especially in the Islamic context, causes them to distance themselves from communities of other ethnicities, religions and cultures. Some, unaware of the existence of tolerance and alleviation in certain cases, behave in an extreme manner and resort to a complicated method in understanding the values of interaction. This study is conducted utilising online questionnaires among 554 respondents who were exposed to the actual values of interaction. Data from the questionnaires answered by the students were collected, analysed and coded quantitatively utilising SPSS. This enabled the researcher to conduct an in-depth analysis of the issues studied. The study identified a majority of the society understood the actual values of interaction that is based on Islam, thus it does negatively affect the society. Thus, to understand the actual values of interaction, it must be understood from the precise source that is based on a concrete understanding and not just mere assumption.
Keywords: Values of Interaction, Harmony, Extremism, Ethnic Relations, Malaysia

Introduction
Issues that frequently emerge in ethnic relations in Malaysia revolve around ethnic biases that include discrimination, stereotyping prejudice and ethnocentrism. According to Shamsul

(2012), from 1946 until the present, it can be seen that ethnic relations in Malaysia reveal a fluctuating pattern. Nevertheless, generally, Malaysia is still a peaceful country with harmonious ethnic relations.

However, untoward incidents now and then would occur creating conflict among different ethnic and religious groups which could lead to a rift in Malaysia's diverse society. Concurrently, a few in the Muslim community would distance themselves from communities of other ethnicities and religions on minor trivialities in the name of preserving the sanctity of their religion, such as not wanting to share cups used by people of different ethnicity and religion. A few, take the initiative such as providing laundry services for Muslims only as a step towards preserving the sanctity of the religion.

Thus, they require a guideline to practice a culture that would form a peaceful and harmonious society. Problems that involve Islamic Shariah ruling must be clearly described to the society so that when interacting with non-Muslims, their actions are correctly guided. The actions of these few are because of their lack of knowledge and are often triggered by perceptions from rumours floating among the general public whom themselves do not have the correct knowledge on the *hukm* (Islamic Rulings) of what is permissible or not. Methodological discourse on issues of *Fiqh* (Islamic Jurisprudence) on interactions among Muslims and non-Muslims are rarely conducted by either traditional or contemporary Islamic scholars.

It is hoped that this study would provide the real-world description of issues faced by the Muslim community when interacting with the non-Muslims in their families and also bring about the appropriate solutions within the laws and *fiqh* of Islam. Thus, comprehension of the values of interaction is a viable approach in the effort to instil stability and peace in a country. Emphasising these values is selected as an approach towards developing a harmonious and peaceful society in Malaysia.

This approach is perceived most appropriate in Malaysia as a progressive and harmonious country that rejects any form of violence causing extremism. Understanding the values of interaction is considered as the most appropriate medium to be brought forward in an Islamic society consisting of multiculturalism. Thus, social harmony and peace in the society in Malaysia will be enhanced. It is hoped that instilling awareness on values of interaction will provide guidelines to society in general, specifically the Muslim community, to take proactive steps towards achieving social harmony in the society.

Problem Statement of the Study

The people of Malaysia consisting of diverse ethnicities are committed to empowering social cohesion and integration across ethnicities and territories. This is crucial to ensure the viability of Malaysia, comprising of states that are geographically separated, and with a society of multi-cultures. Because of this diversity, issues on language, religion and the privileges of the Malays, and The Malay Rulers are crucial in ensuring ethnic cohesion among the people of Malaysia. According to Ratnam (1969), delving into the issues on the privileges of the Malays, religion and language and how they are resolved, will determine ethnic relations in the future.

Questions that often linger in the minds of non-Muslims are religious prohibitions or taboos that prevent Muslims from participating in activities that require any sharing with them. Lack

of knowledge on the rules and Islamic jurisprudence within the Muslim community itself often causes them to distance themselves from people of other ethnicities, religions and cultures. Some, unaware that discretion can be applied in certain cases, take the extreme perspective. Because of this lack of religious guidance in some of the Muslim community, their knowledge on rules of interaction among Muslims and non-Muslims are often based on assumptions and traditions of the Malay culture instead of the correct *hukm*, Islamic Jurisprudence.

Previous studies revealed that the Muslim communities often face daily issues and confusion from multiple groups, both from non-Muslims and Muslims themselves, including issues that are triggered by changes in lifestyles in the community. The dilemma begins when they find themselves at the cross-road between preserving the social harmony in a society of diverse ethnicities, religions and cultures, adjusting to understanding Islam and life as a Muslim (Osman & Abdul, 2008).

In the context of ethnic relations in Malaysia, aspects that uphold the status of the Malays in the Federal Constitution of Malaysia (1957) are equalised with other provisions that also provide leverage to other ethnicities. Article 3 determines Islam as the religion of the Federation but this is equalized with Article 11 provisioning the freedom of each person to practice religion in a peaceful and harmonious environment.

Similarly, Article 152 determines that the Malay language is the National language, Article 152(a) also states that no one can be prevented from using or teaching or learning other languages (except for formal purposes). While Article 160 determines the privileges and rights of the Malays and Bumiputera in Sabah and Sarawak, the constitution also states that the government cannot revoke or relinquish the rights of other races.

Issues that often arise among the Muslim community when interacting with non-Muslims are varied, such as familial relationships, neighbourliness, celebrations and festivities, halal food and drinks, decency of attire, patrilineal, and inheritances.

Even though Islamic jurisprudence on most of these issues is well-known, to some it is still unclear. Providing simple and relevant answers without disregarding Islamic jurisprudence is much needed by the Muslim community. Non-Muslims should also understand the justifications and reasons Islam prohibit Muslims from certain activities to avoid any misinterpretation and altercations.

Research Questions
Thus, a study on the *fiqh* of interaction is necessary as an academic study that takes into account real-world issues. The research questions are:
1) How does the society, specifically the Muslim community in Malaysia, understand the concept of values of interaction in a society of diverse ethnicities, religions and cultures?
2) What are the prevalent social problems during interactions within a society of diverse ethnicities, religions and cultures that undermine a harmonious society?
3) What interaction values can be applied within a society of diverse ethnicities, religions and cultures that would enhance social cohesion and harmony of the society?

Objectives of the Study

- To identify the Muslim community's understanding and application of the *fiqh* of interaction in a society of diverse ethnicities, religions and cultures.
- To study the real-world problems of the Muslim community that can undermine a harmonious society during interactions within a society of diverse ethnicities, religions and cultures.
- To design values of interaction applicable to the society of diverse ethnicities, religions and cultures in Malaysia as an effort to enhance social cohesion and harmony.

Literature Reviews

Generally, literature reviews on *fiqh* interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims are mostly limited to armchair research (library research) without taking into account the real-world problems faced by the Muslim community especially those who have converted to Islam and continue to interact with their non-Muslim families and friends.

One such academician is al-Qaradawi (2001). He discusses the issue of understanding the values of interaction among Muslims and non-Muslims in his book *Fi Fiqh al-Aqalliyat al-Muslimah.* He discusses the question of *hukm* (Islamic jurisprudence) relevant to Muslims as a minority community in a society of predominantly non-Muslims. He also described the method of delivering fatwas that should be followed through by religious leaders in discussions on *hukm* (Islamic jurisprudence) regarding the Muslim minorities. According to him, Muslim scholars should acknowledge intentions, extenuating circumstances and simplify when deciding on fatwas without confining themselves to any particular *Madhhabs* (Islamic sects). However, he did not detail out *fiqh* issues related to relations among Muslims as a minority in a predominantly non-Muslim society and provided only a few issues as examples.

Mohammad (2009) analysed a few *fiqh* issues regarding interactions between Muslims and on-Muslims. As the book was aimed for the public reading, discussions were focussed on *fiqh* issues and de-emphasised comparisons of *Madhabs* and specific referencing of *Hadiths.* Topics that were the writer's focus were rulings on interaction with non-Muslims during festivities, weddings, neighbourliness, food, alcohol, rulings on dogs and pigs, and also politics. Nevertheless, many other issues on familial relationships such as child custody, patrilineal, inheritance rights and the burial procedures of the deceased among Muslims and non-Muslims were not discussed. Studies were also conducted by Abdul et al., 1999; Osman & Abdul, 2008).

Studies regarding issues on ethnic relations in Malaysia have shifted over the past five decades. According to Chandra (1990), racial controversies in Malaysia can be categorised into phases. During the 1950s, issues on nationality and social contract dominated social cohesion, this shifted to language issues in the 1960s, before the implementation of New Economic Policy (NEP). In the 1970s and 1980s, quotas and urbanisation shaped ethnic relations in the country.

In the 1990s and the millennial years, religious issues became a strong influence in the country. According to him, when comparing issues in ethnic relations within the past five decades, the impact of these religious issues is critical. This perspective is supported by Syed (2008) who described the current sentiments of ethnic relations are at a phase that can result

in conflict and onslaught. There also exists a small group within the society who lack the correct understanding of the concept of societal cohesion in a country with diverse ethnicities, religions and cultures. This is because these few are more concerned that if they interact with people of other ethnicities, religions and cultures, their religious beliefs would be swayed. Some are also uncomfortable with the social rebuffs or animosity within their religious community to the extent of questioning the sincerity of their religious faith when they interact with those of different religious beliefs (Nasruddin et. al., 2018).

This is supported by a statement from Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, former Prime Minister of Malaysia in a press conference. He appealed to the media to be more responsible and not publish reports that can worsen the multi-racial cohesion in the country. The President of Pakatan Harapan also noted the existence of those who attempt to stir racial sentiments in the country, however, the media should play its role in making sure that it doesn't continue (Firdaus, 2019).

According to Shamsul (2010), among the issues faced by Malaysia currently is the misconception of equating social solidarity with economic solidarity. The characteristics of solidarity, i.e. elements of assimilation, accommodation, aqua-cultivation and amalgamation failed and were not understood or discussed. The given assumption is that if the distribution of the economic 'cake' via the DEB achieved its objectives, then automatically Malaysia would be capable of achieving national solidarity. However, the results did not achieve the expected outcomes. National solidarity was defined with a narrow perspective and evolved into a competition to fight economic rights. This issue developed into a national rival among ethnic communities.

Among the causes of lack of understanding on the assimilation in Malaysia are issues that are viewed as sensitive among the communities in Malaysia. Recently, incidents related to race relations that occur in Malaysia are widely discussed. These issues are viewed as a contributing factor causing uneasiness in certain groups within the Muslim community, and even religious authorities that seem to portray that some factions including political leaders are not asserting and practising principles in relationships among races and religion.

According to Khairul et al (2013) among the problems that arise between the Muslims and the non-Muslims in this country are the excessive worry about the influence of other religions and the confusion of understanding rituals and cultures of other religions.

This causes confusion among the Muslim community on the concept of social relations and religion, is it allowed in Islam, do those actions depict religious tolerance, are customs in other religions considered as religious practices and other queries. These issues require explicit answers in Islamic contexts so that the society's actions and stance are clear from religious perspectives. The question is, is it allowed merely based on religious freedom? Thus, the Muslim community must refer to religious authorities such as *Muftis* and the *Fatwa* Council on those issues (Hassan et. al., 2016).

The confusion is caused by ignorance of the differences between other religions and Islam itself. This is due to the lack of understanding among the society on comparative religion. As a result, two forms of extremism occur, either the individual takes the liberal perspective in all aspects of socialisation with other religions including faith and turning into a polemic of religious pluralism (Nazneen, et. al., 2018).

Among the problems that occur in society is the lack of emphasis on camaraderie based on humanity. They feel awkward and uncomfortable extending friendship and assistance to

other ethnicities, races and religions. Al-Qaradhawi (1987) asserted that if this issue is not resolved, it will cause political and religious conflicts and hostility to the extent of preventing the existence of a harmonious society and causing division in the society and country.
History has evidenced several ethnic conflicts have occurred in Malaysia. Among them, 13th May 1969 (Parker, 1979:1), the result of dissatisfaction on the segregation of the country's wealth, the Medan Village incident on March 2001 (Muhamad and Zaharah, 2005), the lack of compromise when conflicts of interest between two groups occur involving religious issues caused critical consequences the Rawa Village incident in 1998 (Muhamad and Zaharah, 2005) was caused by religious intolerance of other ethnicities' religious practices.

The Department of National Unity and Integration revealed that 327 cases were reported between 1996 to 2002. 81 were cases on ethnic conflicts, 76 were on political issues, 65 were on religious issues, 38 cases on security, and the remainder on social conflicts such as neighbourhood issues, education and other issues.

Another form of extremism is when a Muslim individual is too rigid towards those who are non-Muslims. In other words, a Muslim is more comfortable with his life in a country with a Muslim majority like Malaysia but at the same time is too worried to interact with the non-Muslims in the community (Nazneen, et. al., 2018).

There also exists a certain group in the society that is extremely rigid toward certain Islamic sects. This at times causes difficulties when interacting with the non-Muslim community. In a diverse society, Muslims cannot avoid interacting with other people including non-Muslims.

Research Methodology
The study distributed online questionnaires to 554 respondents who were exposed to values of interaction. The respondents attended a course on ethics and civilisation in Malaysia. The quantitative method was used in this action research study. Research instruments were questionnaire forms that measured the level of respondents' intensity in practising civilisation values in the course. Likert scale of 5 points; (1) Extremely Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Not Sure, (4) Agree, and (5) Extremely Agree; to measure the items in the questionnaire. The questionnaire describes the level of the respondents' perspectives. According to Cohen et al. (2007) Likert Scale is relevant as a method to measure the views given on perception, attitudes and practices.

Analysis and results identified the frequency of whether the respondents had studied civilisation values before entering university. At the end of the course, were they capable of instilling good interaction values in themselves and how did they integrate those values into their lives? This is vital to ensure that the correct knowledge and understanding of civilisation is instilled in them.

Data collected from the questionnaires were analysed and coded via a quantitative method using SPSS. This allowed the researcher to conduct a deep dive on the issue. The researcher also conducted grounded theory analysis, discourse analysis and semiotic analysis, and interpretative phenomenological experience analysis.

Results of the Study
From the study, the researcher identified that a majority of the students, almost all of them, revealed they were capable of forming a harmonious social network in Malaysia. Items for the values of harmony are detailed in the table below.

Respondents' Profile
Data from *Google Forms App* were keyed into SPSS as primary data. Then, additional analysis was carried out to eliminate respondents that did not answer more than 10 per cent of the total questions. The final total of the respondents was 554 from the initial 556, eliminating only two (2) respondents. The frequency of respondents' gender is 39 (25.1 per cent) male and 415 (74.9 per cent) female. The number of female respondents was more than male respondents and is considered normal in a public university. The distribution of gender is in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2
Distribution of Respondents' Gender

Gender	Frequency	Per centage
Male	139	25.1
Female	415	74.9
Total	554	100.0

The majority of the respondents were 20 years old (50.7 per cent). This is followed by respondents aged 21 (37.5 per cent), 22 years old (6.5 per cent), 23 years old (1.8 per cent), 19 years old (1.1 per cent), 24 years old (0.7 per cent), 25, 26 and 28 years old (0.4 per cent) respectively. Three (0.5 per cent) respondents did not answer this question on their age. Table 1.3 showed a summary of the respondents' age.

Table 1.3
Distribution of Respondents' Age

Age	Frequency	Per centage
19.00	6	1.1
20.00	281	50.7
21.00	208	37.5
22.00	36	6.5
23.00	10	1.8
24.00	4	0.7
25.00	2	0.4
26.00	2	0.4
28.00	2	0.4
Data that are lost	3	0.5
Total	554	100.0

The majority of the respondents were from National Secondary School (58.1 per cent). There were respondents from religious Secondary schools (17.9 per cent) and other school types of school (23.6 per cent). Two respondents did not answer this question. Table 1.4 details respondents' school types.

Table 1.4
Distribution of Respondents' School Types

School Types	Frequency	Per centage
National Religious Secondary (SMKA)	99	17.9
National Secondary (SK)	322	58.1
Others	131	23.6
Total calculated	552	99.6
Data that are lost	2	0.4
Total	554	100.0

A summary of the respondents' demographic background according to gender, age, faculty and school types are in Table 1.5.

Table 1.5
Respondents Demographics

Respondents' Demographics		Frequency	
		N	per cent
Gender	Male	139	25.1
	Female	415	74.9
Age	19-20	287	51.8
	21-22	244	44.0
	23-24	10	2.5
	25-26	4	0.8
	27-28	4	0.8
	Data that are lost	3	0.5
Total	SMKA	99	17.9
	SMK	322	58.1
	Others	131	23.6
	Data that are lost	2	0.4

Validity of Data
Data validity is the first aspect that requires careful deliberation when selecting research instruments (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1996). Sifted data is then analysed with Factor Analysis Test and Reliability Test to validate the items according to the research objective and validity value before further analysis.

i.   Factor Analysis Test
Analysis of the questionnaire items identified 3 main variables: Values of Interaction, Challenges and Practices as in Table 2.1 The summary of the items are in Table 2.2.

Table 2.1
Output Factor Analysis

Components		
1		**3**
M	.516	
N	.513	
R	.366	
Y	.366	
AB	.436	
AI	.320	
AO	.534	
AR	.511	
AU	.557	
AV	.521	
AY	.462	
AF		.337	
AP		.510	
AX		.420	
P			.333
T			.414
V			.354
AA			.434
AD			.515
AE			.489
AK			.304
AQ			.546

Extraction Method: *Principal Component Analysis.*
Rotation Method: *Varimax* with *Kaiser Normalization.*

Table 2.2
Indicator of Items for Instilling Values of Harmony in Ethnic Relations

No	Symbol	Item	Factor?
1	M	I like being surrounded by people even though they are of different races.	Values of Interaction
2	N	Sometimes when I read the news on murders in other countries and see their poverty, I feel sad and sorrowful.	Values of Interaction
3	R	Without a strong religious background, life is not interesting for me.	Values of Interaction
4	Y	When I am being insulted, I just try to forgive and forget about it.	Values of Interaction
5	AB	I always want a peaceful and harmonious country.	Values of Interaction
6	AC	I am happy to solve my friend's problems even though they are of other races.	Values of Interaction
7	AI	I believe differences in ideas on right and wrong within a society are relative and acceptable in the society.	Values of Interaction
8	AO	I sympathise with others who are less fortunate than me, even those of other ethnicities, races and religions.	Values of Interaction
9	AR	I am inclined to assume the good in others.	Values of Interaction
10	AY	My behaviour is guided by my religious ideology.	Values of Interaction
11	AU	I appreciate the country's legacy.	Values of Interaction
12	AV	I respect the country's formal religion.	Values of Interaction
13	AF	I feel I am capable of handling my emotions when confronted with disagreements of opinions with other ethics.	Application
14	AP	I often interact with friends from other ethnicities.	Application
15	AX	I like the food at the Mamak restaurant.	Application
16	P	I don't seem capable of allowing myself to be roommates/housemates with other races.	Challenges
17	T	Some people think that I am a distant person and too calculative with friends of other ethnicities.	Challenges
18	V	When I interact with a person of another race, I always feel uncomfortable.	Challenges
19	AA	I have problems controlling my anger towards other races and ethnicities.	Challenges
20	AD	I am better than most people and I know this is a fact.	Challenges
21	AE	I am a productive individual and always strive to contribute to the country's progress.	Challenges
22	AK	I only believe in international information aired on television.	Challenges

23	AQ	I am better than other people.	Challenges

ii.   *Reliability*

Data reliability is an internal consistency of items in research (Creswell, 2005). This consistency refers to the extent of the score of each item interacting with one another. The results obtained from the reliability test; the items revealed that all variables have excellent *Alpha Cronbach* (*a*) value. Although the value of Practices is low, this value is obtained from 3 questions only. Thus, the validity of the variables can be accepted and used for the next stage of analysis. Table 2.4 below details the *Alpha Cronbach* (*a*) value used in this study.

Table 2.3
Results of the Validity Test

Factor	Validity Coefficient	Number of Items
Value of Interaction	.833	12
Practices	.453	3
Challenges	.587	8

Discussion

Reasoning and outlooks of the generation born between 1980 – 2000s are showing signs of disarray. Hedonistic lifestyle, freedom without boundaries, and impropriety in social media are some of the examples of these signs. Rhenald (2018) stated that the current generation are known as Generation Strawberry, who are described as interesting yet fragile, due to the absence of strong mentality and virtue in facing present-day challenges. Based on the results of the study, the levels of interaction values instilled among the respondents is high. This shows that the respondents' understanding of the real value of interaction can produce harmony in a multi-racial society. The next discussion will demonstrate further on Level of Interaction Values, Practices and Challenges.

1. Likes to be around different races

This research showed that 276 respondents (49.8 per cent) agreed that they liked to be around different races. On the other hand, 136 respondents (24.5 per cent) strongly agreed, followed by 120 respondents (21.7 per cent) felt neutral, 19 respondents (3.4 per cent) disagreed, and 1 respondent (0.2 per cent) strongly disagreed. Refer to Table 3.3.

Tabel 3.3
Likes to Be Around Different Races

	Frequency	Per centage
Strongly disagree	1	.2
Disagree	19	3.4
Neutral	120	21.7
Agree	**276**	**49.8**
Strongly agree	136	24.5
Total	552	99.6
Data that are lost	2	.4
Overall Total	554	100.0

2. Feels sad and sorrowful upon watching news on murders and poverty in other countries

Besides that, the study found that 267 respondents (48.2 per cent) agreed that they felt sad and sorrowful upon watching news on murders and poverty in other countries, while 237 respondents (42.8 per cent) strongly agreed. Furthermore, only 38 respondents (6.9 per cent) felt neutral, 5 respondents (0.9 per cent) disagreed, and 4 respondents (0.7 per cent) strongly disagreed. Table 3.4 below shows the summary.

Table 3.4
Feels sad and sorrowful upon watching news on murders and poverty in other countries

	Frequency	Per centage
Strongly disagree	4	.7
Disagree	5	.9
Neutral	38	6.9
Agree	**267**	**48.2**
Strongly agree	237	42.8
Total	551	99.5
Data that are lost	3	.5
Overall Total	554	100.0

3. Has strong religious beliefs
The study found that 204 respondents (36.8 per cent) agreed that their religious beliefs were strong. Meanwhile, 191 respondents (34.5 per cent) strongly agreed, followed by 113 respondents (20.4 per cent) who felt neutral, 34 respondents (6.1 per cent) disagreed and 10 respondents (1.8 per cent) strongly disagreed. This summary can be seen in Table 3.5 below.

Table 3.5
Has strong religious beliefs

	Frequency	Per centage
Strongly disagree	10	1.8
Disagree	34	6.1
Neutral	113	20.4
Agree	**204**	**36.8**
Strongly agree	191	34.5
Total	552	99.6
Data that are lost	2	.4
Overall Total	554	100.0

4. Compassionate
The study found that 215 respondents (38.8 per cent) chose neutral when asked if they see themselves as compassionate, followed by 202 respondents (36.5 per cent) who agreed that they were, 72 respondents (13.0 per cent) disagreed, 46 respondents (8.3 per cent) strongly agreed and 18 respondents (3.2 per cent) strongly disagreed. Refer to Table 3.7.

Table 3.7
Compassionate

	Frequency	Per centage
Strongly disagree	18	3.2
Disagree	72	13.0
Neutral	**215**	**38.8**
Agree	202	36.5
Strongly agree	46	8.3
Total	553	99.8
Data that are lost	1	.2
Overall Total	554	100.0

5.   Wants a peaceful and harmonious country.

This study also found that the majority of respondents – a total of 408 (73.6 per cent) – strongly agreed that they want a peaceful and harmonious country. This is followed by 133 respondents (24.0 per cent) who agreed, 7 respondents (1.3 per cent) who felt neutral, 1 respondent (0.2 per cent) who disagreed and another 1 respondent (0.2 per cent) who strongly disagreed. Refer to Table 3.9.

Table 3.9
Wants a peaceful and harmonious country

	Frequency	Per centage
Strongly Disagree	1	.2
Disagree	1	.2
Neutral	7	1.3
Agree	133	24.0
Strongly Agree	**408**	**73.6**
Total	550	99.3
Data that are lost	4	.7
Overall Total	554	100.0

6.   Happy to solve problems relating to friends of different races.

The study found that 268 respondents (48.4 per cent) agreed that they felt pleased when solving problems relating to friends of different races. Meanwhile, 184 respondents (33.2 per cent) strongly agreed, followed by 88 respondents felt neutral, 9 respondents (1.6 per cent) disagreed, and 1 respondent (0.2 per cent) strongly disagreed. Refer to Table 3.10

Table 3.10
Feels pleased in solving problems relating to friends of different races

	Frequency	Per centage
Strongly Disagree	1	.2
Disagree	9	1.6
Neutral	88	15.9
Agree	**268**	**48.4**
Strongly Agree	184	33.2
Total	550	99.3
Data that are lost	4	.7
Overall Total	554	100.0

7. Accepting towards different religious beliefs.

Next, 260 respondents (46.9 per cent) felt neutral on their attitude of accepting different religious beliefs, followed by 250 respondents (45.1 per cent) who agreed, 36 respondents (6.5 per cent) who strongly agreed, 5 respondents (0.9 per cent) who disagreed and 3 respondents (0.5 per cent) strongly disagreed. Refer to Table 3.11.

Table 3.11
Accepting towards different religious belief

	Frequency	Per centage
Strongly Disagree	3	.5
Disagree	5	.9
Neutral	**260**	**46.9**
Agree	250	45.1
Strongly Agree	36	6.5
Total	554	100.0

8. Sympathy towards other racial, religious, and ethnic groups.

The study found that 274 respondents (49.5 per cent) agreed that they felt sympathetic toward other racial, religious, and ethnic groups. Meanwhile, 236 respondents (42.6 per cent) strongly agreed, followed by 34 respondents (6.1 per cent) who felt neutral, 5 respondents (0.9 per cent) disagreed and 3 respondents (0.5 per cent) strongly disagreed. Refer to Table 3.13

Table 3.13
Smpathy towards other racial, religious, and ethnic groups

	Frequency	Per centage
Strongly disagree	3	.5
Disagree	5	.9
Neutral	34	6.1
Agree	**274**	**49.5**
Strongly agree	236	42.6
Total	552	99.6
Data that are lost	2	.4
Overall Total	554	100.0

9. Has good intentions towards other people.

The study found that 259 respondents (46.8 per cent) agreed that they have good intentions toward other people. Meanwhile, 195 respondents (35.2 per cent) felt neutral, 81 respondents (14.6 per cent) strongly agreed, 17 respondents (3.1 per cent) disagreed and 2 respondents (0.4 per cent) strongly disagreed. Refer to Table 3.14.

Table 3.14
Has good intentions towards other people

	Frequency	Per centage
Strongly Disagree	2	.4
Disagree	17	3.1
Neutral	195	35.2
Agree	259	46.8
Strongly Agree	81	14.6
Total	554	100.0

10. Adheres to religion in Conduct

The study found that 258 respondents (46.6 per cent) agreed that they will conduct their behaviour as mandated by their religion. Meanwhile, 112 respondents (20.4 per cent) strongly agreed, followed by 169 respondents (30.5 per cent) who felt neutral, and 14 respondents (2.5 per cent) disagreed.

Table 3.17
Adheres to Religion in Conduct

	Frequency	Per centage
Disagree	14	2.5
Neutral	169	30.5
Agree	**258**	**46.6**
Strongly Agree	112	20.2
Total	553	99.8
Data that are lost	1	.2
Overall Total	554	100.0

11. Appreciates the country's legacy

The study found that 315 respondents (56.9 per cent) agreed that they appreciated the country's legacy. Meanwhile, 163 respondents (29.4 per cent) strongly agreed, followed by 67 respondents (12.1 per cent) who felt neutral, 4 respondents (0.7 per cent) disagreed, and another 4 respondents (0.7 per cent) strongly disagreed. Refer to Table 3.15

Table 3.15
Appreciates the country's legacy

	Frequency	Per centage
Strongly Disagree	4	.7
Disagree	4	.7
Neutral	67	12.1
Agree	**315**	**56.9**
Strongly Agree	163	29.4
Total	553	99.8
Data that are lost	1	.2
Overall Total	554	100.0

12. Respectful toward the country's official religion.

The study found that the majority of respondents – 327 (59.0 per cent) – strongly agreed that they have respect toward the country's official religion. This is followed by 188 respondents (33.9 per cent) agreed, 34 respondents (6.1 per cent) felt neutral, and 1 respondent (0.2 per cent) strongly disagreed. Refer to Table 3.16

Table 3.16
Respectful toward the country's official religion

	Frequency	Per centage
Strongly Disagree	1	.2
Disagree	34	6.1
Neutral	188	33.9
Agree	**327**	**59.0**
Strongly Agree	550	99.3
Total	4	.7
Data that are lost	554	100.0

Practices
1. Able to control emotions when one's point of view differs from other ethnic groups

The study shows that 299 respondents (54.0 per cent) agreed that they were able to control their emotions when their point of view differed from other ethnic groups. While 180 respondents (32.5 per cent) felt neutral, 63 respondents (11.4 per cent) strongly agreed, 8 respondents (1.4 per cent) disagreed, and 1 respondent (0.2 per cent) strongly disagreed. Refer to Table 3.21.

Table 3.21
Able to control emotions when one's point of view differs from other ethnic groups

	Frequency	Per centage
Strongly Disagree	1	.2
Disagree	8	1.4
Neutral	180	32.5
Agree	**299**	**54.0**
Strongly Agree	63	11.4
Total	551	99.5
Data that are lost	3	.5
Overall Total	554	100.0

2. Frequently interacts with friends from other ethnic groups
    The study showed 241 respondents (43.5 per cent) agreed that they frequently interacted with friends of different ethnic groups. Meanwhile, 176 respondents (31.8 per cent) were neutral, 114 respondents (20.6 per cent) strongly agreed, 16 respondents (2.9 per cent) disagreed, and 4 respondents (0.7 per cent) strongly disagreed. Refer to Table 3.22.

Table 3.22
Frequently interacts with friends from other ethnic groups

	Frequency	Per centage
Strongly disagree	4	.7
Disagree	16	2.9
Neutral	176	31.8
Agree	**241**	**43.5**
Strongly agree	114	20.6
Total	551	99.5
Data that are lost	3	.5
Overall Total	554	100.0

3. Enjoys eating at *mamak* restaurants
    The study found that 202 respondents (36.5 per cent) felt neutral, followed by 163 respondents (29.4 per cent) agreed that they enjoyed eating at *mamak* restaurants, 78 respondents (14.1 per cent) disagreed, 70 respondents (12.6 per cent) strongly agreed, and 41 respondents (7.4 per cent) strongly disagreed. Refer to Table 3.23.

Table 3.23
Enjoys eating at mamak restaurants

	Frequency	Per centage
Strongly Disagree	41	7.4
Disagree	78	14.1
Neutral	**202**	**36.5**
Agree	163	29.4
Strongly Agree	70	12.6
Total	554	100.0

Challenges

1. Unable to be in the same room/house with other races

The study found that 214 respondents (38.6 per cent) felt neutral, while 166 respondents (30.0 per cent) disagreed that they were unable to be in the same room/ house with other races. 74 respondents (13.4 per cent) agreed, and another 74 respondents (13.4 per cent) strongly disagreed, while 23 respondents (4.2 per cent) strongly agreed. Refer to Table 3.26.

Table 3.26
Unable to be in the same room/ house with other races

	Frequency	Per centage
Strongly Disagree	74	13.4
Disagree	166	30.0
Neutral	214	38.6
Agree	74	13.4
Strongly Agree	23	4.2
Total	551	99.5
Data that are lost	3	.5
Overall Total	554	100.0

2. Distant and too calculative with friends of different ethnic groups

The study showed that 276 respondents (49.8 per cent) disagreed that they were aloof and overtly calculative with their friends of different ethnic groups. Meanwhile, 131 respondents (23.6 per cent) strongly disagreed, 117 respondents (21.1 per cent) were neutral, 27 respondents (4.9 per cent) agreed and 2 (0.4 per cent) strongly agreed. Refer to Table 3.28.

Table 3.28
Aloof and overtly calculative with friends of other ethnic groups

	Frequency	Per centage
Strongly disagree	131	23.6
Disagree	276	49.8
Neutral	117	21.1
Agree	27	4.9
Strongly agree	2	.4
Total	553	99.8
Data that are lost	1	.2
Overall Total	554	100.0

3. Uncomfortable interacting with other races

The study found that 255 respondents (46.0 per cent) disagreed that they were uncomfortable interacting with other races. Meanwhile, 134 respondents (24.2 per cent) felt neutral, 118 respondents (21.3 per cent) strongly disagreed, 42 respondents (7.6 per cent) agreed, and 2 respondents (0.4 per cent) strongly agreed. Refer to Table 3.29.

Table 3.29
Uncomfortable interacting with other races

	Frequency	Per centage
Strongly disagree	118	21.3
Disagree	255	46.0
Neutral	134	24.2
Agree	42	7.6
Strongly agree	2	.4
Total	551	99.5
Data that are lost	3	.5
Overall Total	554	100.0

4. Has difficulty in restraining anger towards other racial and ethnic groups.
    The study found that 283 respondents (51.1 per cent) disagreed that they had difficulty restraining their anger toward other racial and ethnic groups. Meanwhile, 142 respondents (25.6 per cent) strongly disagreed, 107 respondents (19.3 per cent) felt neutral, 19 respondents (3.4 per cent) agreed and 3 respondents (0.5 per cent) strongly disagreed. Refer to Table 3.30.

Table 3.30
Has difficulty to restrain anger towards other racial and ethnic groups

	Frequency	Per centage
Strongly disagree	142	25.6
Disagree	283	51.1
Neutral	107	19.3
Agree	19	3.4
Strongly agree	3	.5
Total	554	100.0

5. Feels circumstance is better-off than others
    The study found that 277 respondents (50.0 per cent) felt neutral, while 145 respondents (26.2 per cent) disagreed that they felt their circumstances were better-off than others, 68 respondents (12.3 per cent) agreed, 45 respondents (8.1 per cent) disagreed, and 16 respondents (2.9 per cent) strongly agreed. Refer to Table 3.31

Table 3.31
Feels Circumstance is Better-off than Others

	Frequency	Per centage
Strongly Disagree	45	8.1
Disagree	145	26.2
Neutral	277	50.0
Agree	68	12.3
Strongly Agree	16	2.9
Total	552	99.6
Data that are lost	2	.4
Overall Total	554	100.0

6. Feels productive and always strives to contribute to the nation's progress

The study showed that 262 respondents (47.3 per cent) felt neutral, while 208 respondents (37.5 per cent) agreed that they felt productive and always strived to contribute to the nation's development. 46 respondents (8.3 per cent) strongly agreed, 36 respondents (6.5 per cent) disagreed, and 2 per cent (0.4 per cent) strongly disagreed. Refer to Table 3.32.

Table 3.32
Feels productive and always strives to contribute to the nation's progress

	Frequency	Per centage
Strongly disagree	2	.4
Disagree	36	6.5
Neutral	262	47.3
Agree	208	37.5
Strongly agree	46	8.3
Total	554	100.0

7. Trust only information on international affairs that is aired on television.

The study found that 270 respondents (48.7 per cent) disagreed that they believe in international information aired on television. Meanwhile, 151 respondents (27.3 per cent) were neutral, 99 respondents (17.9 per cent) strongly disagreed, 27 respondents (4.9 per cent) agreed, and 6 respondents (1.1 per cent) strongly agreed. Refer to Table 3.33.

Table 3.33
Trusts only Information on International Affairs that is Aired on Television

	Frequency	Per centage
Strongly Disagree	99	17.9
Disagree	270	48.7
Neutral	151	27.3
Agree	27	4.9
Strongly Agree	6	1.1
Total	553	99.8
Data that are lost	1	.2
Overall Total	554	100.0

8. Feels superior to others

The study showed that 243 respondents (43.9 per cent) felt neutral, while 166 respondents (30.0 per cent) disagreed that they felt superior to others. 43 respondents (7.8 per cent) agreed, and 11 respondents (2.0 per cent) strongly agreed. Refer to Table 3.34.

Table 3.34
Feels superior to others

	Frequency	Per centage
Strongly disagree	89	16.1
Disagree	166	30.0
Neutral	243	43.9
Agree	43	7.8
Strongly agree	11	2.0
Total	552	99.6
Data that are lost	2	.4
Overall Total	**554**	**100.0**

Discussion

In general, the findings above are in line with the actual level of interaction values and its practices in facing current challenges to creating a harmonious Malaysia. It not only involves Malay Muslim respondents that practices interaction values based on Islamic values, but also non-Muslim respondents of other ethnic groups such as Chinese and Indians who are able to practice interaction values based on the values from their belief system and culture.

Analysis of each item in various dimensions on levels of interaction values and its practices further strengthens the findings of this study. This is shown where almost all items have a high mean rating on the interaction values and its practice. Among these values are strong religious beliefs in guiding them to form interaction with others; sympathy towards other racial, religious, and ethnic groups; compassionate; positive perception of other people; high tolerance in a multi-racial setting; desire for harmony, and high appreciation and respect of the country's legacy and country's official religion. This phenomenon shows that there is a high regard for interaction values and its practices by the respondents.

The findings of the study are seen to be in tandem with many religious teachings, mainly Islam. In Islam, regarding the interaction with non-Muslims, there are a few principles based on *al-Quran* and *al-Sunnah* that need to be highlighted. There are a few *Syariah*-related formulas regarding understanding, socialisation with non-Muslims, and building relationships with diverse ethnic groups from different countries.

Based on the findings of this study, the majority of the respondents understood and were able to practice the concept of 'togetherness' or *Fiqh al-Ta'asyusy*, a term that refers to the togetherness in living with both Muslims and non-Muslims in one society. This togetherness concept would not be possible without courteous and propriety behaviours, understanding of one another, and wanting to create social bonds in the tradition known as *ahl al-dhimmah* or *al-muwatinun* – where citizens in an Islamic country lives peacefully side by side with those who seek refugee through the *al-ta'syirah* system.

However, according to Sheikh (2014), the concept of *al-Ta'asyusy* refers to Islam as a universal religion that carries a message to all mankind, namely a message that commands justice, forbids inequity, lays the foundation for peace on earth, and calls for a positive coexistence in the spirit of brotherhood and tolerance among all people regardless of race, colour and creed.

Besides that, the findings also revealed that the majority of respondents – especially Muslims – are found to have strong religious belief and are able to keep to their faith during their interaction with a society of diverse ethnicities, religions and cultures. Therefore, as long as the practices and customs do not conflict with *akidah* (principle of faith) or the teachings of Islam, they are able to integrate these practices and customs from other ethnic, racial or religious groups. This actually helps to foster tolerance. However, in practicing tolerableness according to Islam, integrating or participating in other practices and culture should not clash with the *akidah* and the concept of *halal* and *haram* (in accordance with Islamic *syariat*).

Therefore, Islam cannot tolerate if its principles are violated by any party; thus, it is necessary to understand the concept of freedom of religion as found in Malaysia's Federal Constitution. This is align with the findings of this study where the majority of respondents understand the standing of Islam as the national religion, as prescribed in the Federal Constitution.

The findings of this study are also closely aligned with the findings by Uthman (2010) which states non-Muslim figures such as the Dalai Lama portrays religious tolerance in a way that does not force or integrate various religious values and customs together; instead, being respectful toward other religions. This sentiment can also be seen among the majority of respondents in this study, where they believe that the concept of right and wrong in various religions and cultures are relative and acceptable in specific groups, and the respondents are fine with living with these differences in belief systems.

It is proven from the findings of this study where respondents – especially Muslims – emulates Rasulullah SAW when it comes to establishing relationship between individuals and society on the basis of humanity that transcend religious differences, ethnicity, colour and status, and devoid of prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination (Hani and Syauqi, 1997). From humanity's perspective, the writer of this study found that the majority of respondents understood many aspects regarding tolerance between Muslims and non-Muslims. It is more closely related to respecting humanistic values, and not instilling *akidah* and religious values. What is practiced among the respondents is the absence of negative impressions toward followers of other religions and those of different ethnic and racial backgrounds than the respondents. In fact, they are willing to provide assistance based on their humanity to those in need despite the differences in terms of religion, race, ethnicity and culture.

From this study, it is also found that the majority of respondents – especially Muslims – are understanding and tend to create positive perception among themselves and those of different religious beliefs, race and ethnicity. This is along the same line as Zaydan (1988) opinion, where he mentioned about the openness in Islam on freedom of practicing other religions without putting boundaries that could strain relations with communities of other religion. Besides that, Islam does not restrict believers of other religions to build their own houses of worship. This truth is relative to geographical location.

Conclusion
This study has succeeded in proving how far society is able to instill values of interaction in a diverse ethnicities, religions and cultures society. This is because this study has utilised instruments that were designed to identify knowledge and understanding of

respondents on the understanding of interaction values in creating a harmonious multicultural society in Malaysia.

With this data collected from this study, society will have a new guide on the understanding of good interaction value in creating harmonious ethnic relations in Malaysia, especially in the social field. The study was also able to identify the root of the problem from the Islamic community that could threaten the harmony when interacting with those of other races, religions and ethnicity.

Interaction value is a key aspect in building attitude and character in a person. This interaction value is supported by traits like having strong religious beliefs, having good intentions about other people, compassionate, helpful, love tolerance and harmony, courteousness and others. These values of interaction are able to be integrated to maintain civility among humans regardless of race, colour and creed. There is a change in the behaviour and character of a person who embraces the technological innovation that is carried by the development of modern society. With that being said, efforts to strengthen the values of interaction in a multicultural society in Malaysia must be done by taking into account the values of Islam that are at par with the development of modern society. Technological advancement and instillment of real values of interaction in Malaysia should not be neglected to keep the ethnic harmony. Awareness among this multicultural society is important to create a nation that is not only advanced in technology but also in the progress of the nation itself, where both are fundamental in the development of human civilization.

Hence, this study can prove that the great civilizational values in society, such as justice, peace, harmony, tolerance, and unity, that make it perfect, are essential as the philosophy of humanity's civilization that cannot budge.
An effective approach is to identify shared values as well as foreign values in the religion and culture of Malaysians. A comprehensive general education effort should be maintained to provide the community with knowledge and understanding of the religion and culture practised by them. An awareness should be raised that behind the differential external values, there are more similarities that can be used as shared universal values.
With this in place, there will definitely be effective partnerships and people's integration at a pragmatic and realistic level. Through good interaction and doing something meaningful, they can feel the value of unity and will appreciate the contributions of various groups of individuals.
One of the ideals of modern civilization that influences the thinking of society is the importance of individual rights that extend beyond the rights of the community. This is a very worrying challenge.
Nevertheless, there are several values of humanity, including justice, peace, security, love, compassion, wisdom, and simplicity, that remain the foundation of the community system. Such values should be practised in the organisation of each community and are very relevant in the daily life of each individual.

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