

## Citizen Journalism Role in Promoting Cultural Integration and Peace in Malaysia

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### Abstract

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

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

## **Introduction**

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

Thus, the potential of citizen journalist resume a more significant role in promoting cultural integration but the extension of the application and practice is rather debateable in Malaysian setting. Research showed that the representation or portrayal of a multicultural, multi religious society in mainstream media is very much unknown as limited research is currently available to demonstrate the effectiveness in has in promoting nations peace and harmony yet opening more opportunity for discussions and interaction (Abd Hakim, Mohamed Shuhidan, Husain, & Mohamed Shuhidan, 2017; Adnan, 2015; Hamdy, 2010).

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

## **Relevance Of Citizen Journalism In Promoting Cultural Integrtation And Peace**

Recent work relating to citizen journalism and cultural integration and peace of Chang & Koh (2017) and Hamid & Ishak (2015) reported that the internet and social media including via citizen journalism has democratise interactions between people from different cultural background in promoting integration and unity among Malaysians besides acknowledging the role of media role of the media in disseminating information, creating discourses for national integration.. Their findings suggested the interaction between these different cultural groups go beyond the coverage of mainstream media has ever been.

Subsequently, others such as Wok & Mohamed (2017) and Ali & Ariffin (2017) indicated although there are sections of the Malaysian law created to control the media in Malaysia, the internet somehow allowed Malaysians make their voices heard. These everyday Malaysians including citizen journalists call for unity and shared anti-racism sentiments. Interestingly many of them shared memories of harmonious open interactions they had with fellow Malaysians of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. They also expressed the importance of integration to maintain peace and harmony in the country.

Interestingly, the internet has put forward people's aspirations beyond political ambitions of politicians with internet and new media technologies shift the Malaysian media landscape to be

more open to two way interactions. Mohd Nizah, Ku Samsu, Abdul Azzis, & Abu Bakar (2017) acknowledged that Malaysian landscape of social media plays significant role in influencing ethnic tolerance particularly when it is near to election period by demonstrating open multicultural interactions and multiple views among Malaysians. Besides that, Balaraman, Hashim, Hasno, Ibrahim, & Arokiasmy (2015) indicated in their findings that citizen journalist offered investigative grassroots views from various angles, free from political party influence in promoting unity, cultural integration and peace among Malaysians.

Hence, in an attempt to conceptualize the potential of citizen journalist for cultural integration and peace were found substantial not only in Malaysia but in other comers of the globe as well and has growing relevance. Recent report by UNESCO (2016) on education and peace highlighted that citizen journalists related projects for internet and media literacy have the potential to promote peace and integration particularly in crisis prone areas and regions and marginalized groups thus promote inclusion . Education and media literacy suggested to be given to citizens to become agents of peace to facilitate understanding and acceptance in conflict areas. However the biggest challenge is to improve the internet penetration in these areas so that programs are made possible and able to reach more people (Luce, Jackson, & Thorsen, 2017). Therefore based on the arguments presented in this section, it is appropriate to analyse to what extent citizen journalists play a role in promoting cultural integration and peace in Malaysia among those of different culture, faith that shaped communities.

### **Methods**

Based on analysing previous literatures, it is found that citizen journalism has influence cultural integration and peace. The following framework suggested the potential for citizen journalism for cultural integration as a further extension of previous research (Chang & Koh, 2017; Hamid & Ishak, 2015; Hashim & Mahpuz, 2011; Ridzuan et al., 2012). Focusing on controversial issue of cultural integration was address using citizen journalism platforms and considered the idea of promoting intercultural integration in Malaysia. Non restricted nature of the internet comes with the advantage to limit the taboo in discussing cultural related issues and promotion of integration and peace among Malaysians.

Other researchers, Ho & Baildon, (2013) highlighted that citizen journalism are attempting to encourage citizen activism in journalistic process although the state and the mainstream media discouraged them with the reason to safeguard national harmony. In a country such as Singapore for example, research found citizen journalism play a role in integrating open conversations and discussions from different online spaces from different people coming from various cultural backgrounds and report different happenings. Younger citizen journalists' use their smartphones are more interested to go out and find news (Ho & Baildon, 2013) Based on more previous literature other researchers such as Fortunati, Deuze, & de Luca (2014) and Jian & Usher (2014) explained that citizen journalism and crowdsourcing in many ways used to investigate multicultural issues reflected content diversity that also represent news production of various cultural backgrounds (Garbett, Comber, Egglestone, Glancy, & Olivier, 2014; Saxton, Oh, & Kishore, 2013). The move has the potential to increase understanding and promoting cultural acceptance, promote understanding and diversity as well as harmony. Conversations about issues such as cultural and religious tolerance were among the things discussed. Citizen

journalism in this technological era of internet and social media is often seen as a tool to call for unity and peace, where issues were openly discussed with follow up stories available in text or video recordings as feature stories and elaborate discussions about these differences. Such initiatives were done in a scale and spaces which mainstream media may not be able to execute due to policies and law restrictions.

***Framework***

In line with the review of some literatures which relates to this topic is to analyse to what extent citizen journalism does contest or compliment mainstream media. Some literatures which relates to this topic, it has been recognized that the two main nature of relationships which are “Citizen Journalism contesting mainstream media by looking at the power constrained.

WHY

HOW

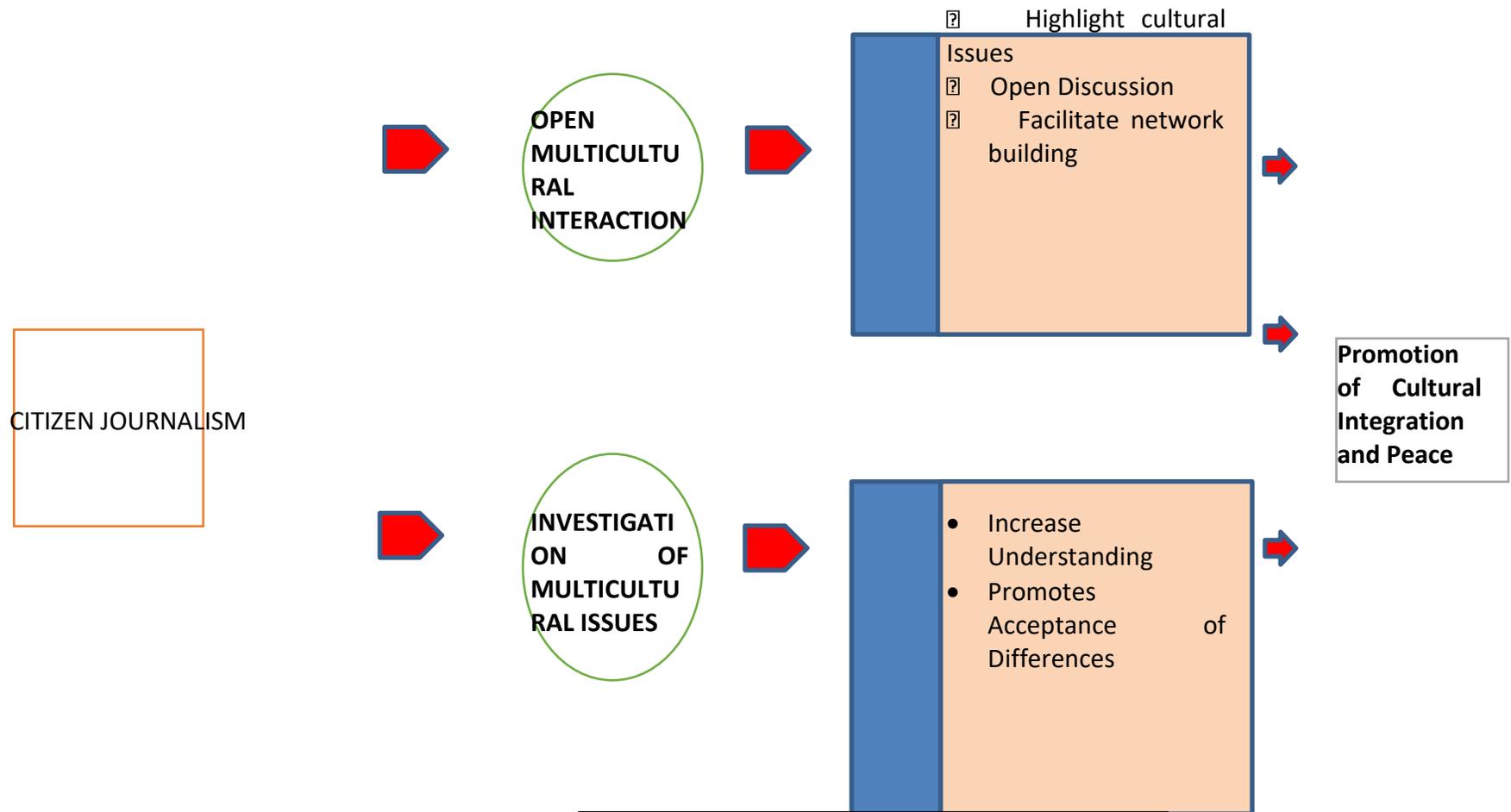


Figure: Conceptual Framework

### **Findings**

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

### **Conclision**

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

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