

## **Consumption of Local News in Television and Newspapers and National Pride among Malaysian Youth**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Drawing from the development journalism theoretical perspective, consumption of local news is posited to correlate with national pride. However, empirical evidence on the theoretical relationship between local news consumption and national pride among youth in Malaysia is lacking. Hence, a survey was undertaken to determine the relationships of exposure and attention to local news in television and newspapers with national pride and whether the relationships vary by ethnicity. A total of 625 Malay, 416 Chinese, and 112 Indian youths voluntarily participated in the survey. Controlling age, gender and self-identification, the results of multiple regression analysis showed that exposure and attention to local television news significantly predicted national pride, and the relationships were shown to be true for all the three major ethnic samples but these varied in strength. Exposure and attention to local news in the newspapers was a significant predictor of national pride only for the Chinese sample. Implications of the findings were also discussed.

**Keywords:** News media, news consumption, national pride, youth, Malaysia

### **INTRODUCTION**

According to Cohen (2008), much has been studied about the influence of mass media on various social outcomes, such as social capital, political participation, civic engagement, and nationalism. However, there exists an important gap in the literature on the relationships of exposure and attention to news of public and national affairs with national pride, and whether the relationships vary as a function of ethnicity. In the pages that follow, the paper describes the rationale and the relevant literature, and reports the method and results of a survey designed to determine whether exposure and attention to local news in television and newspaper are related to national pride among 15 to 25 year old

Malay, Chinese, and Indian youths in Malaysia, and whether the relationships vary by ethnicity.

### **NATIONAL PRIDE**

The sense of pride of being a Malaysian and towards the nation, an important social outcome, serves a number of different purposes. Mobilization of the population, promotion of solidarity and integration (Henderson and McEwen, 2005), and enhancement of collective self-esteem of the nation (Muller-Peters, 1998) are among them. Identification with the nation and national identity, if it is to be meaningful, has to be accompanied not only by a shared understanding of what that nation presents but also the feeling of pride with the positive

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characters of the country (Cohen, 2008). According to Muller-Peters (1998), national pride refers to the emotions toward the national collective, emotions which vary with societal and individual processes. Smith and Jarkko (1998) describe national pride as the positive feelings citizens have towards their country, which are derived from one's sense of national identity. They further argue that national pride involves both the feeling that one has some kind of share in an achievement or an admirable quality.

In discussing the domain of the concept national pride, Muller-Peters (1998) argues that pride in one's nation can be seen in general or overall terms (e.g. I am proud of my nation) and with specific contents (e.g., I am proud of our history), and points out that national pride can express itself, first, in terms of cultural-historical pride, and second, in terms of economic-political pride. In the current study, national pride is used to designate the positive affective bond to national characters, symbols, and achievement.

#### **DEVELOPMENT JOURNALISM THEORY OF NEWS MEDIA ROLE**

Development journalism has been advocated and practiced in Asian countries including Malaysia, where nation building remains a priority (Ramano, 2005; Xu, 2008). Within a nation-building approach perspective, the core idea of development journalism theory is that journalists and the news media, as agents of change, are news-information disseminators and interpreters, advocating and supporting national development policies and programmes, and portraying a positive image of the country (Ramano, 2005). In line with this premise, dissemination and interpretation of positive national news should instil national pride. This pride is derived from a sense of national identity, senses of confidence and self-efficacy, and fortified collective self-esteem as a result of news consumption (Shah, McLeod and Yoon, 2001). It is reasonable to expect national news media to continuously engage in reproduction and reinforcement of

national narratives that promote and enhance national pride (Guo, Cheong and Chen, 2007).

Given the important development role played by the news media, the issue of media use and effects has been extensively studied. Past studies on mass media effects, mostly in the west, have demonstrated positive as well as negative effects of mass media use on many social outcomes. While the past studies have contributed significantly in understanding the role of the mass media, many (e.g. McLeod, Kosicki and McLeod, 2002) have commented that the mixed findings of the mass media effect studies could be attributed by the fact that different types of media form and content produce different effects. Hence, there is a consensus in the literature arguing for the need to be specific in the type of media and the type of information in the studies on media use and effects (McLeod, 2000).

News use has been found to correlate with a number of social outcomes, such as social capital (e.g. Beaudoin and Thorson, 2006; Fleming, Thorson and Peng, 2005), political participation (e.g. Zhang and Chia, 2006), civic engagement (e.g. Brehm and Rahn, 1977), nationalism (e.g. Guo, Cheong and Chen, 2007), and national pride (Cohen, 2008), to mention a few. Overall, the line of literature in general suggests that people who have high level of newspaper readership and television news viewing have higher levels of social capital, political participation, civic engagement, and social trust.

Of particular interest in the present study is the relationship between national news media consumption and national pride. The study extends the assumption of the positive role of news media in helping spread nationalism, solidify and strengthen national identity and patriotism (e.g. Anderson, 1983; Guo, Cheong and Chen, 2007) to national pride. Studies that specifically examined the relationship of news media use and national pride are scanty, with the exception of Cohen's (2008) study which found that local television viewing is associated with national pride, but the relationship is rather small.

Past studies on mass media effects have also factored in the role of ethnicity in examining the relationship between media use and effects. Beaudoin and Thorson (2006), for instance, found significant differences between Blacks and Whites in terms of media use and its effects on social capital. The explanation for the different media responses and effects has been tied to distinctiveness theory, which posits that media effects are stronger for the minority because ethnicity is expected to be more salient to people of a minority than to those of majority. In addition, bias in media portrayal of ethnic groups could also lead to different media responses and effects, as suggested in the literature (e.g. Appiah, 2001; Beaudoin and Thorson, 2006). Thus, an examination on the relationship between news media use and national pride should also consider the role of ethnicity in the relationship.

### RESEARCH CONTEXT

Malaysia, a multi-ethnic and multi-religion country, and its media system offer an interesting place to test the relationship between the local news consumption and national pride and to determine whether the relationship varies by ethnicity. While there are many ethnic groups, the three main groups are the Malays, Chinese, and Indians. The mainstream news media are readily accessible to the people. Television and newspapers are major sources of news and information for the people (Media Planning Guide Malaysia, 2007). While news media accessibility is high, the news media are highly regulated and controlled by the government. In view of the developmental role of the news media and as part of the nation building agenda, editors and journalists are expected to advocate the objective of building a Malaysian society that is characterized with strong attachment and pride to the country by informing and reinforcing positive national narratives and symbols. The national narratives of national interest in the mainstream news media are a good instrument to cultivate collective consciousness and sense of pride being Malaysians (Tamam *et al.*, 2005).

A review of past studies on the role of the mass media in Malaysia, Hassan (2008) noted that the news media carry a lot of messages on unity and integration, as well as messages that promote nationalism. While there are studies that have found a positive relationship between news media use and a number of social outcomes such as multiculturalism attitude (e.g. Tamam *et al.*, 2008), studies that specifically examined the contribution of exposure and attention to local news in television and newspaper on national pride have been overlooked. Based on the above discussion, the present study tested the hypothesized relationships of exposure and attention to news of public and national affairs in television and newspapers and national pride, and to determine if the relationships vary by ethnicity. The analysis focused on the 15-25 years youth since they made up a substantial and important segment of the Malaysian population, i.e. 28.6 percent of the population (Media Planning Guide, 2007). The findings of the present study will not only contribute to the literature on the linkages of news consumption with national pride but also provide insights into the efficacy of the news media in enhancing national pride among the youths in Malaysia.

### METHODS

#### *Sample*

The sample was composed of 625 Malays, 416 Chinese, and 112 Indians youths. The mean age was 19.5 year (SD = 2.83). Overall, the sample seemed representative in terms of ethnic ratio in the country, with males and females quite evenly represented. The sample also represented youths from all four regions in the Peninsula Malaysia — 23.5% was from the northern, 33.6% from the central, 21.0% from the southern, and 21.9% from eastern region.

#### *Procedure*

The data analyzed were part of a larger data set from the youth attitude and media use survey conducted between October 2007 and January 2008. A section of the youth attitude and

media used survey questionnaire containing questions pertaining to national pride. The self-administered questionnaires, written in Bahasa Malaysia, were administered on individual or group basis and in different social settings—residential areas, schools, and universities/colleges. The secondary school and college/university respondents were recruited from randomly selected schools and institutions of higher learning after approval from the relevant authorities was obtained. With a written permission from the State Education Department of the selected study area, the researcher contacted the randomly selected secondary schools to conduct the survey. For this group of respondents, the questionnaires were administered in group, ranging from 15 to 30 students per group and their participation was on voluntary basis. For the university student samples, two science-based and one Social Science/Humanities faculties were randomly selected from one private and three public universities. The questionnaires were administered during classes with the consent of the instructors of the selected courses. In addition to this, a substantial portion of the survey sample was recruited from residential area. They were invited to, or found at socially acceptable gatherings. Their participation was also on voluntary basis, and the questionnaire was administered on individual basis. The respondents were given ample time to fill in the questionnaire and encouraged to ask if they had any questions for clarification. The time taken to fill the questionnaire ranged from 20 to 40 minutes. The secondary school students took a longer time to fill the questionnaire compared to university/college students and working youth. All the respondents worked on the questionnaire independently after they had been given instruction on how to fill the questionnaire.

### *Measures*

A measure of national pride consisted of twelve 5-point Likert items. The respondents were asked to indicate how strongly agreed/disagreed they were with the items. The scale essentially

measured the strength of pride in socio-political achievement and pride in culture and history. Some examples of the items are “I am proud to be referred as a Malaysian,” “I am proud of the country which is made up of various race and ethnic groups,” “I am proud of the cooperative spirit achieved among the various ethnic groups,” “I feel proud when the national anthem is played at official functions,” “I fully accept Vision 2020,” “I am proud of the national cultural policy aimed at fostering national identity,” “power sharing among the various ethnic groups is a core national attribute that has ensured political stability in the country.” All the items loaded on one factor. The Eigen value of the scale was 6.14 and the variance explained by the factor was found to be 51.36. Thus, the scale was reliable with a reliability coefficient of .91.

The respondents were asked to respond to four-category items by estimating how frequently they watched national and public affairs news in the following three television programmes, namely news programme (0= none, 1= less than 30 minutes; 2= 31-60 minutes, 3= more than 60 minutes a day), televised leader speeches (0= “never” to 3= “regularly”), and news magazine-format programme (0= none, 1= less than 30 minutes; 2= 31-60 minutes, 3= more than 60 minutes a day). For each exposure question above, the respondents were also asked to indicate how much attention they paid to the news on a four-point scale (0= no attention at all, 1= little attention, 2= some attention, 3= much attention, 4= very much attention). The exposure score was multiplied to the attention score to create an index of exposure and the attention to news of public and national affairs. The overall mean scores provide the overall measure of exposure and attention to the local television news. Likewise, the respondents were asked to self-report how much time they spent reading newspapers for national and public affairs news (0= none, 1= less than 30 minutes; 2= 31-60 minutes, 3= more than 60 minutes a day) and how much attention they paid (0= no attention at all, 1= little attention, 2= some attention, 3= much attention, 4= very much attention). It is important to note that a higher composite score

indicates higher exposure and attention to news of national and public affairs in the newspaper.

The respondents were asked to report their gender, year of birth, and how they would like to identify themselves with the response options of Malay, Chinese, Indian, Malaysian Malay, Malaysian Chinese, Malaysian Indian, or Malaysian.

#### *Analysis Strategies*

Data analysis for this study proceeded in three steps. First, the data exploratory analysis was performed to check for data entry error and normality in distribution. A factor analysis and reliability test was performed on the national pride scale constructed for the study. Second, a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the zero-order correlations between age, gender, self-identification, exposure and attention to public and national affairs news, and national pride. Finally, hierarchical regression analyses were performed to examine the relationship and contribution of the news media exposure and

attention in predicting national. The regression analysis was done in two steps. In the first step, the independent variables were age, gender, and self-identification. In the second step, exposure and attention to television and newspaper news were added to the regression analysis. The data were disaggregated by ethnicity.

## RESULTS

To better understand the findings, the descriptive statistics for gender, age, self-identification, national pride, and news exposure and attention variables were produced, as presented in Table 1. In terms of gender distribution, the Malay sample was quite balanced in the proportion of males (52.1%) to females (47.9%). However, there were slightly more females (59.5%) in the Chinese sample, and more males (59.5%) in the Indian sample. Meanwhile, the proportions of the males and females in the three groups were adequate for comparative analysis. In terms of age, the Malay, Chinese and Indian samples were comparable. Interestingly, more of the Malay

TABLE 1  
Descriptive statistics of gender, age, self-identification, exposure and attention to news of public and national affairs and national pride

Variables	Malay (n=625)	Chinese (n=416)	Indian (n=112)
Gender			
Male	52.1%	40.5%	59.5%
Female	47.9%	59.5%	40.5%
Mean age (year)	19.3 (2.90)	19.7 (2.64)	20.1 (2.84)
Self-identification			
Malay	54.0%	-	-
Chinese	-	58.0%	-
Indian	-	-	35.1%
Malaysian Malay	32.7%	-	-
Malaysian Chinese	-	33.7%	-
Malaysian Indian	-	-	48.1%
Malaysian	13.0%	7.9%	14.5%
Mean national pride score	4.31a (.537)	3.78b (.639)	4.16c (.767)
Mean news exposure and attention score			
TV	4.27a (2.123)	1.73b (1.496)	3.89c (2.570)
Newspaper	3.47a (2.906)	2.84b (2.434)	3.75a,c (3.319)

Note: Different subscripted means are significantly different at  $p < .01$

and Chinese respondents were found to identify themselves in term of ethnicity first, i.e. 54.0% and 58.0% respectively. Only 35.1% of the Indians identified themselves in term of ethnicity first. The number of the respondents identifying themselves as Malaysians was rather small, less than 15.0%.

The mean scores on the national pride were on the high side of a maximum score of 5, suggesting that the respondents generally are proud of the country and of being a Malaysian. The Malay sample scored significantly higher ( $M= 4.31$ ) than that of the Indian and Chinese samples ( $M= 4.16$  and  $M= 3.78$ , respectively), [ $F= 519.5$ ,  $\rho < .01$ ].

With regard to exposure and attention to public and national affairs, news in television and newspaper, it seems that exposure and attention to local news were on the low side of the range of possible scores. All the means were below the theoretical mid score, suggesting low exposure and attention to local news. While exposure and attention to the local news were rather low, the Malay sample had a significantly higher mean ( $M= 4.27$ ) as compared to that of the Indian ( $M= 3.89$ ) and Chinese ( $M= 1.73$ ) samples [ $F= 239.4$ ,  $\rho < .01$ ]. A similar pattern of the results was observed for the newspaper reading [ $F= 9.31$ ,  $\rho < .01$ ].

The results of the zero-order correlations are presented in Table 2. Age is positively correlated with exposure and attention to news of public and national affairs in the television ( $r= .147$ ,  $\rho < .01$ ) and newspapers ( $r= .253$ ,  $\rho < .01$ ), indicating that news consumption increases with age. The data also showed that exposure and attention to television news are positively correlated with newspaper use ( $r= .458$ ,  $\rho < .01$ ). Meanwhile, self-identification (identify self in terms of ethnicity first) is negatively correlated with television news consumption ( $r= -.130$ ,  $\rho < .01$ ) and national pride ( $r= -.113$ ,  $\rho < .01$ ), but not with newspapers news consumption. Age, however, is not correlated with national pride. The findings indicate that age, self-identification, and gender need to be controlled for a possible confounding influence in examining the relationships and contribution of news media exposure and attention on national pride.

The analysis in this study focused on the relationships and contribution of exposure and attention to news of public and national affairs in television and newspaper on national pride. The regression analysis was done separately for the three samples and the results are summarized in Table 3. Taking into account the possible confounding influence of age, gender, and self-

TABLE 2  
Zero-order correlations of gender, age, self-identification, exposure and attention to local news and national pride

	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
(1) Gender (Dummy=male)	-.087*	-.109*	.039	-.016	.034
(2) Age	-	.016	.147*	.253*	.007
(3) Self-identification (dummy= ethnicity first)		-	-.130*	-.056	-.113*
(4) Exposure and attention to public and national affairs news in television			-	.485*	.492*
(5) Exposure and attention to public and national affairs news in newspaper				-	.179*
(6) National pride					-

Note: One-tailed test of significant, \*  $\rho < .01$

TABLE 3  
Exposure and attention to local news in television and newspaper as predictors of national pride

Variables	Malay (n=625) Std. Beta	Chinese (n=416) Std. Beta	Indian (n=112) Std. Beta
Step 1. Demographic and control variable			
Gender (1=male)	.163*	.135*	.009
Age	-.123*	-.175*	.225*
Self-identification (1=ethnicity)	-.206*	-.223*	-.328*
R-square	.082*	.100*	.166*
F value	13.778*	11.329*	5.323*
Step 2. Exposure and attention to local news			
Television news	.243*	.135*	.295*
Newspaper	.018	.161*	.086
R-Square	.139*	.157*	.258*
F value	16.669*	12.644	6.075*
R-Square change	.057	.057	.092

Note: \*  $p < .01$

identification, the results in the Table 3 clearly show that exposure and attention to television news correlate positively and significantly with national pride, at  $p < .01$ . The relationships hold true in all the three samples, and the relationships seems to be stronger in the Indian ( $\beta = .295$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and Malay ( $\beta = .243$ ,  $p < .01$ ) samples than that of the Chinese ( $\beta = .135$ ,  $p < .01$ ). However, no significant correlation was observed between exposure and attention to news of public and national affairs in the newspaper with national pride for the Malay and Indian samples, except for the Chinese sample ( $\beta = .161$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Overall, the findings show that exposure and attention to television news are the only significant predictors of national pride. Exposure and attention to news of public and national affairs in television and newspapers collectively explained about 5.7 % of the variance in both the Malay sample and the Chinese sample. The variance accounted by these two factors is slightly higher (about 9.2%) for the Indian sample.

Interestingly, the results of the regression analysis also show that self-identification is significantly negatively correlate with national pride for all the three samples ( $\beta = -.206$ ,  $p < .01$  for the Malay,  $\beta = -.223$ ,  $p < .01$  for the Chinese;  $\beta = -.328$ ,  $p < .01$  for the Indian). The results imply that the Malay, Chinese and Indian respondents, who identify more in nationality term, seem to have higher pride toward the nation and of being Malaysians as compared to those who identify self more in ethnicity term.

#### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

While generalizing the descriptive findings to a larger youth population must be done cautiously, the present analysis seems to suggest that youths in the country, aged between 15-25 years, have favourable attitude and feelings towards the country and being Malaysians. Despite of this positive note, it seems that local news consumption among the youth is a bit low. The reason for this is not clear. A lack of interest, low

news information need, and a poor perception of media credibility are possible explanations. Although this study has overlooked questions on antecedents of news media use, it found that older youths seek and consume more local news than the younger ones. This finding is compatible with the findings of a past study (e.g. Zhang and Chia, 2006). Another issue worth pondering is more Malaysian youths asserting themselves more in ethnicity than nationality. The finding, suggesting that ethnicity is an important and core element of social identity among the respondents, is consistent with that of Liu, Lawrence and Ward (2005) who found that ethnicity is an important attribute of social identity among Malaysians. It is important to highlight that this ethnicity emphasis could pose problem in managing interethnic relation issues in the country.

The present study was designed to determine whether exposure and attention to local news in television and newspaper correlate with national pride among 15-25 year youths. At the same time, ethnicity is factored in examining the connection of news consumption with national pride. The contention is the mainstream news media, which are regulated by the government and being an agent of development and nation building, provide narratives that should enhance shared understanding of what that nation presents and feeling of pride with the positive characters of the country and being a Malaysian. The study found mixed supports for the contention. Only television was found positively and significantly correlated with national pride for all the three ethnic groups studied. The positive association between television news consumption and national pride implies that television news to some extent have an impact on the youths in instilling national pride among the youth, despite the relatively low consumption of television news among them. In addition, the association between television news consumption and national pride was much weaker for the Chinese than for the Malay and Indian samples. This indicates that the impact of television news consumption in instilling national pride is

relatively greater on the Malay and Indian samples than on the Chinese. The finding is compatible with previous research that has demonstrated that media responses and effects vary by ethnicity (e.g. Beaudoin and Thorson, 2005).

While television news seems to have a role in instilling national pride among youths, the same cannot be assumed for newspaper. Contrary to the contention, exposure and attention to news in the newspaper were found to have no association with national pride for the Malays and the Indians. If this is the case, it then implies that the mainstream newspaper in the country has failed in its role in instilling national pride among the youths. However, a significant finding was observed for the Chinese sample only. It is important to consider explanations for the mixed findings. A possible explanation could be the differential in perception of newspaper credibility. Meanwhile, low involvement, an attribute of newspaper consumption, could be another explanation for the non-existing relationship between newspaper reading and national pride. It makes sense that television news consumption has a greater impact than the newspaper consumption because television viewing is a high involvement information processing activity as compared to that of newspaper reading (Cohen, 2008).

The findings generally show that exposure and attention to news of public and national affairs in television and newspaper contributed about 5.7%, 5.7%, and 9.2% in the variance in national pride for the Malay, Chinese and Indian samples, respectively, with television news as a significant determinant. Despite the small contribution, the news media (particularly the television) should be strategically used in citizenship education. It is also important to take note that the news media effect vary by ethnicity, and therefore it should be considered in employing the news media as an agent of nation building.

Nonetheless, several limitations need to be acknowledged. First, the measurement of national pride may be inadequate if it is viewed



as a multidimensional construct. Moreover, the measure may have not adequately captured the theoretical domain of the construct of national pride. Second, a self-report measure of exposure and attention to news in news media is not the best method to measure news consumption. In addition, the study has not ascertained which news types and narratives are actually consumed and contribute to national pride. Thus, the study should be replicated to adult samples to improve generalizability of the findings. In addition to improve measurements, future research should also extend the study of how news media effects on national pride and other social outcomes may differ according to ethnicity.

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