



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

***PERCEIVED EFFECTS OF ETHNOCENTRISM, OFFLINE AND ONLINE  
INTERETHNIC INTERACTIONS ON INTERETHNIC BRIDGING SOCIAL  
CAPITAL AMONG UNDERGRADUATES IN MALAYSIAN PUBLIC  
UNIVERSITIES***

**SOMAYEH MORTZAVI GANJI KETAB**

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By

**SOMAYEH MORTZAVI GANJI KETAB**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti  
Putra Malaysia, in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**August 2015**

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## DEDICATION

*I dedicate this thesis to my beloved parents Hasan and Azizeh. I hope that this achievement will complete the dream that you had for me all those many years ago when you chose to give me the best education you could.*



Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of the Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

**PERCEIVED EFFECTS OF ETHNOCENTRISM, OFFLINE AND ONLINE INTERETHNIC INTERACTIONS ON INTERETHNIC BRIDGING SOCIAL CAPITAL AMONG UNDERGRADUATES IN MALAYSIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES**

By

**SOMAYEH MORTZAVI GANJI KETAB**

**August 2015**

**Chair: Professor Ezhar bin Tamam, PhD**  
**Faculty: Modern Languages and Communication**

The development of interethnic bridging social capital in societies with ethnic diversity is quite challenging when ethnicity is considered as an obstacle. Individuals in Malaysian “ethnocratic state” may have their own exclusive ways of interpreting other ethnics. These attitudes may prevent them from effective interaction with people of different ethnic groups. Hence, examining the elements that strengthen or weaken interethnic bridging social capital is of importance in Malaysia. Therefore, this study was designed to explore the possible theoretical relationship between ethnocentrism (independent variable) and interethnic bridging social capital (dependent variable). This relationship was then mediated by interethnic interactions in both offline and online mode and moderated by ethnicity among undergraduate students in two Malaysian public universities.

A self-administered questionnaire was employed to collect the data in this cross sectional survey. Sampling method used for the population of this study was stratified systematic sampling for 343 Malay, Chinese and Indian undergraduate students in Universiti Putra Malaysia and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. Descriptive analysis, one-way Analysis of Variance, and Structural Equation Modeling were employed for data analysis.

The results show that ethnocentrism has a significantly negative effect on interethnic bridging social capital among students. Ethnicity of the majority Malays and the minority Chinese negatively affected the relationship between ethnocentrism and interethnic bridging social capital, while this relationship was not moderated by minority Indians. Functioning as a mediator, offline and online interethnic interaction lessened the negative effect of ethnocentrism on interethnic bridging social capital. The results indicate that ethnocentrism predicts interethnic bridging social capital by explaining 16% of variance in the direct model. In addition, the 39% and 28% of the interethnic bridging social capital variances are explained by the offline and online frameworks respectively.

Results reveal lower ethnocentrism among the students lead to higher interethnic bridging social capital. Both offline and online interethnic interactions were at moderate level, but the former was slightly higher than the latter. The Chinese and the Malays do not differ in their level of interethnic bridging social capital as well as offline interethnic interaction, but the Indians illustrates significantly higher interethnic bridging social capital and interethnic interaction. The Indians had the most online interethnic interaction, followed by the Chinese and the Malays.

The main conclusion of this study is that Malaysia cannot be labeled as an ethnocentric society as claimed before. However, ethnicity is still a matter of consideration for Malaysian students to form their interethnic interaction, particularly in online realm. Comparison between two offline and online models reveals that the formation of weak ties among different ethnic groups in online space is more challenging than in the real world. Therefore, Malaysian government must take significant actions to strengthen online communication among various population groups. The present study contributed to the previous literature by filling the gap-existed in interethnic bridging social capital studies in Malaysia. Moreover, the lack of literature about face-to-face as well as online interethnic interactions was fulfilled by the results of this study.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi sebahagian keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**PENERIMAAN KESAN ETNOSENTRISME DAN INTERAKSI LUAR TALIAN DAN DALAM TALIAN KE ATAS MODAL SOSIAL PENGHUBUNG ANTARA ETNIK DALAM KALANGAN SARJANA DI UNIVERSITI AWAM MALAYSIA**

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Pembangunan modal sosial penghubung antara etnik dalam masyarakat dengan kepelbagaian etnik adalah agak mencabar apabila perkauman dianggap sebagai penghalang. Di Malaysia yang disifatkan sebagai “ethnocratic state”, individu mungkin mempunyai cara tersendiri dalam mentafsir etnik lain. Sikap ini mungkin menyebabkan mereka mengelak untuk berinteraksi secara berkesan dengan orang daripada kumpulan etnik yang berbeza. Oleh itu, penelitian ke atas kekuatan dan kelemahan modal sosial penghubung antara etnik amat penting di Malaysia. Maka itu, kajian ini telah direkabentuk untuk meneroka kemungkinan hubungan teoritikal di antara etnosentrisme (pembolehubah bebas) dan modal sosial penghubung antara etnik (pembolehubah bersandar). Hubungan ini diantarai oleh pembolehubah interaksi antara etnik melalui interaksi dalam talian dan bersemuka, dan hubungkait ini dimoderasi oleh pembolehubah etnik dalam kalangan pelajar di dua universiti awam Malaysia.

Soal selidik tadbir sendiri telah digunakan untuk mengumpul data dalam tinjauan merentas sempadan ini. Kaedah persampelan yang digunakan untuk populasi kajian ini persampelan sistematik berstrata untuk 343 pelajar sarjana muda Melayu, Cina dan India di Universiti Putra Malaysia dan Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. Analisis deskriptif, Analisis Varians Sehala dan Pemodelan Persamaan Berstruktur telah digunakan untuk menganalisa data.

Hasil kajian menunjukkan etnosentrisme mempunyai kesan negatif dan signifikan ke atas modal sosial penghubung antara etnik dalam kalangan pelajar. Majoriti Melayu dan minoriti Cina secara negatifnya menjejaskan perkaitan di antara etnosentrisme dan modal sosial penghubung antara etnik, manakala perkaitan ini tidak dimoderasikan oleh etnisiti minoriti India. Berfungsi sebagai moderator, interaksi luar talian (bersemuka) dan dalam talian antara etnik mengurangkan kesan negatif etnosentrisme ke atas modal sosial penghubung antara etnik. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa etnosentrisme adalah peramal kepada modal sosial penghubung antara etnik dan ia menjelaskan 16% varians dalam model kajian ini. Di samping itu, sejumlah 39% dan 28% daripada varian-varian telah diterangkan menggunakan kerangka luar talian dan kerangka dalam talian masing-masing.

Dapatan kajian menunjukkan etnosentrisme adalah lebih rendah dalam kalangan pelajar berbanding modal sosial penghubung antara etnik yang lebih tinggi. Kedua-dua interaksi antara etnik (luar talian dan dalam talian) berada pada tahap sederhana, tetapi interaksi bersemuka didapati lebih tinggi berbanding interaksi dalam talian. Minoriti Cina dan majoriti Melayu tidak berbeza tahap modal sosial penghubung antara etnik dan juga tahap interaksi antara etnik bersemuka, tetapi minoriti India didapati mempunyai modal sosial penghubung antara etnik dan interaksi antara etnik yang lebih tinggi secara signifikan. Orang India mempunyai interaksi antara etnik dalam talian yang paling banyak, diikuti kaum Cina dan Melayu.

Kesimpulan utama kajian ini adalah Malaysia tidak boleh lagi dilabel sebagai masyarakat etnosentrik seperti yang didakwa sebelum ini. Walau bagaimanapun, perkauman masih menjadi perkara berbangkit bagi pelajar Malaysia untuk mereka membentuk interaksi antara etnik, terutamanya interaksi secara dalam talian. Perbandingan antara model interaksi luar talian dan model interaksi dalam talian menunjukkan pembentukan hubungan lemah dalam kalangan kumpulan etnik yang berbeza di ruang dalam talian adalah lebih mencabar berbanding di dunia sebenar. Oleh itu, kerajaan Malaysia harus mengambil tindakan untuk mengukuhkan komunikasi dalam talian dalam kalangan pelbagai kumpulan penduduk. Kajian ini menyumbang kepada literatur yang sebelumnya dengan mengisi jurang yang wujud dalam kajian modal sosial penghubung antara etnik di Malaysia. Selain itu, kekurangan literatur mengenai interaksi antara etnik secara bersemuka dan juga dalam talian telah dipenuhi kajian ini.



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Finally, from the bottom of my heart, I extend my great thanks to my beloved father and mother, for their unlimited sacrifices, firm and continuous support, earnest understanding and great intensity of patience. Thank you for all your love.

I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 6 August 2015 to conduct the final examination of Somayeh Mortazavi Ganji Ketab on her thesis entitled "Perceived Effects of Ethnocentrism, Offline and Online Interethnic Interactions on Interethnic Bridging Social Capital among Undergraduates in Malaysian Public Universities" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Doctor of Philosophy.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AMOS	Analysis of Moment Structure
ASV	Average Shared Square Variance
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
CR	Composite Reliability
C.R.	Critical Ratio
GENE	Generalized ethnocentrism
GFI	Goodness of Fit Index
GOF	Goodness of Fit
HERI	Higher Education Research Institute
IBSC	Interethnic Bridging Social Capital
MSV	Maximum Shared Squared Variance
PNFI	Parsimony Normed Fit Index
RMSEA	Root Mean Square Error of Approximation
SNS	Social Network Site
SRMR	Standardized Root Mean Square Residuals
UKM	Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
UPM	Universiti Putra Malaysia
YFCY	Your First College Year

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims to provide the introductory information about the relationship between ethnocentrism and interethnic bridging social capital. This introduction classifies the research in terms of the background, problem statement, objectives, and significance of the study which are explained in the following.

#### Background of the Study

Although the term social capital has been defined many years ago by social scientists, different groups of people including sociologists, economists, political scientists, and policymakers have paid a great deal of attention to social capital concept from 1980s afterwards (Portes, 1998). Coleman (1988, p. 100-101) referred to individual social capital as being “the relations among persons”. However, social capital is considered a necessary element of countries stability by Giddens (2009). Socially speaking, it is analyzed by Kearns and Forrest’s (2000) that social capital plays a key role in cohesion improvement among societies members. Moreover, in the context of in multicultural communities, social capital is considered as an indispensable tool which elevates the speed of economic, political, and social growth (Cheong, Edwards, Goulbourne, and Solomos, 2007).

According to Robert Putnam (1995a), the best-known contemporary scholar on this topic, social capital refers to “features of social life -networks, norms, and trust – that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives” (p. 664-5). Individual-level social capital roots in individuals’ social ties (Zhong, 2014) hence, in a community where the levels of social capital are higher, people live longer and happier. High levels of having social capital within a society can improve social outcomes, such as superior education level, higher employability, and lower poverty (Putnam, 1993, 2000). Once you subtract the significant factor of social capital, there is no economic growth as well as human well-being, and society at large will decay and collapse (Putnam, 1993). In other words, resources which are derived from the relationships among individuals refer to social capital (Coleman, 1988).

Social trust, relationships and norms of reciprocity are considered as the columns to build and sustain social capital and on the contrary, there are some issues that may affect negatively on it. Social capital can become obscure when various factors such as gender, class, ethnicity and race impact on social interactions (Scanlon, 2004). The more diverse a community in terms of ethnicity, religion and education is the less chance will be for members to trust, and have social interactions. Consequently, the creation or generation of social capital is limited (Vermeulen, Tillie, & van de Walle, 2012).

When it comes to differences in a society, the focus is much more on bridging social capital rather than bonding social capital. According to Putnam (1995b), bonding social capital (or exclusive social capital) refers to ties to individuals who have same ethnic, age and gender; while bridging social capital (or inclusive social capital) refers to

creating ties to people coming from different social groups with different generation, ethnic, age or gender. Bridging ties consist of informal networks, formal relations, and other connections among socially dissimilar people or groups (Briggs, 2002). Bridging ties connect people with differences in status, interests, space and norms and help to bind diverse communities in order to expand social and civic identities.

The generation of bridging social capital in multiethnic communities depends on generalized trust, reciprocity and social participation of community members (Farouk & Bakar, 2007). The importance of creating bridging social capital in societies with ethnic and cultural diversity is more than in uniform societies (Rahimi, 2012). It is due to the fact that individuals in multiethnic societies may have their own exclusive ways of interpreting some cultural values and norms (Vermeulen et al., 2012). These factors prevent them from effective interaction and communication with people of different ethnic groups. Hence, examining the elements that strengthen or weaken bridging social capital is of importance for a multiethnic society. One of the controversial multiethnic societies is Malaysia.

For centuries, Malaysia has been a multiethnic country, and its population consists of several ethnic groups such as Malay and other Bumiputra (indigenous peoples), Chinese, Indians, Eurasians, others and to date, the population of Malaysia is almost 29,906 million (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2013). Each ethnicity in Malaysia has its own unique culture and heritage, including but not limited to their preferred languages, belief systems, traditions and religion (Mustapha, Azman, Karim, Ahmad, & Lubis, 2009). Although the ethnic diversity in Malaysia is, from the historical evidence, an ancient legacy, the presence of the largest non-indigenous populations can be attributed to the massive immigrant influx of Chinese and Indian laborers. This sudden increase of the foreigners' presence in the country was due to colonial rulers to meet the labor needs of their colony (Tamam, 2009). Gradually, ethnic groups defined different social, political and economic roles for its own in society. The Chinese as a minority dominate the economy, the Malays as a population and political majority have more invested in political structures and the civil service, and the minority Indians are the least economically advanced but are far from few in number, even if their numbers are less than the other two groups (Baharuddin, 2005). Thereby, creating social cohesion and ties faces a great deal of obstacles in such a multiethnic society.

Malaysia, since its independence, has targeted unity and integration as the national objectives (Mustapha et al., 2009; Yin, 2008). But the importance of ethnicity in Malaysia is to the extent that Malaysians have to provide identification of his or her ethnicity at almost every juncture of public life (Mydin, 2008). In other words, the issue of ethnicity has been the most persistent social problem in Malaysian society (Mustapha et al., 2009). Based on Chandra Muzaffar (2010), it would be more precise to label Malaysia as an ethnocentric society rather than racist. It leads to the fact that when a community becomes overly ethnocentric, interethnic harmony is threatened (Ridzuan, Bolong, Omar, Osman, Yusof, & Abdullah, 2012).

Ethnocentric attitude is a barrier for effective interactions among ethnic groups; not only does it diminish the trust among community members, and obstructs the flow of accurate information, but also it damages their interactions. Ethnocentrism prevents people from interacting with others in a positive way, forming a barrier against intercultural friendship (Arasaratnam & Banerjee, 2007). One of the reasons is that for ethnocentric people, making in-group interaction has more priority than out-group

communication. This motivates ethnocentric people to develop cooperative relations with in-group members rather than out-group ones (Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997a). Ethnocentric people hold biased attitudes to support the in-group's behaviors, and on the contrary, to disapprove the out-group's ones (Hewstone & Ward, 1985; Islam & Hewstone, 1993; Weber, 1994; Dong, Day, & Collaço, 2008). In other words, ethnocentric attitudes have deleterious effects on the level of trust, cooperation, unity and social participation among community members in a plural society.

Naturally, there are certain obstacles, such as the process of building solidarity among Malaysians being complicated by the willingness to misperceive ethnic differences in the form of stereotypes and misconceptions, which can easily encourage discrimination, leading to tensions and conflict (Ali & Mansor, 2006). A study in 2007 indicated that the level of unity and ethnic relations in Malaysia has declined (Aziz, et al., 2007 as cited in Ridzuan et al., 2012). Similar studies have shown that the lack of unity among the various ethnic groups in Malaysia is due to their ethnocentric attitude (Isman & Hanafi, 2008 as cited in Ridzuan et al., 2012). Whether or not ethnocentrism is identical to outright racism, ethnocentric attitudes certainly encourage the negative manifestations of ethnic discrimination.

Due to the above issues and because of the country's diverse socio-cultural fabric, harmonious interethnic interactions are strongly stressed in Malaysia (Tamam, 2013). Social interactions among the various ethnicities have become a highly debated topic in this country (Crouch, 2001; Hirschman, 1986; Shamsul, 1996). Malaysian people are encouraged to struggle continuously to find viable solutions to promote interethnic unity (Farouk & Bakar, 2007) which, without it, the community can hardly achieve social, economic and political developments. A possible modern way to open more communication channels for interethnic interaction in multiethnic societies can be taking advantage of the Internet.

In these modern times, particularly in a prosperous nation, interaction among people is not limited to face-to-face relationships; technology has enabled online interactions to become a huge share in users' daily communication. The rise of new media enables users to connect to a variety of people from different backgrounds and allows them to find common grounds in their beliefs and interests (Hunter, 2002). Online communication helps users to create new online norms and transfer the norms of real-life social relations into online relations. The growing popularity of social network sites makes them useful to examine the effects of using social network sites *SNS* services on users' social capital and civic behaviors (Gil de Zuniga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012). Scholars found that some social network sites (*SNS*) may amplify bridging social capital, since they enable users to build and maintain larger networks of relationships (Donath & Boyd, 2004; Resnick, 2001; Wellman & Haythornthwaite, 2002).

Social media can play two different roles regarding to users' online interaction. On one hand, it is possible that social media can help create solidarity, as increased online communication and the seeking out of likeminded interests transcends ethnic origin; on the other hand, it can also encourage ethnocentrism, as people abuse social media and promote negative sentiments (Ridzuan et al., 2012).

Some scholars have tried to find links between the Internet as well as social networking sites with social capital (Donath, 2007; Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Williams, 2006; Wellman, Haase, Witte, & Hampton, 2001). New types of media and virtual



communities have the ability to engender, maintain or even weaken levels of social capital, and can even impact on trust, social interaction and the generalized norm (Ferlander, 2003; Lee & Lee, 2010). Hence, online interaction among individuals and social capital are strongly connected.

### **Statement of the Research Problem**

Malaysians prefer to identify themselves in terms of ethnic identity rather than national identity (Haque, 2003; Tamam, Idris, & Tien, 2011). The ethnocentric attitudes of Malaysians lead them to perceive their own ethnicity in relation to other ethnicities in negative ways; it is very difficult to encourage a lasting common identity beyond the individual level. Not only for individuals, but also the ethnicity is significant for the government. Malaysia has been characterized as an “ethnocratic state” because of its role in practicing ethnic preferential policies in favor of the Malay majority ethnic group (Haque, 2003). This “ethnocratic states” in general makes society members to express ethnocentric attitude towards others (Yiftachel, 1999), which endangers development of interethnic relationships.

The significance of bridging social capital is more prominent when a multiethnic community faces the issue of ethnicity. Bridging social capital is the glue that binds all different types of people together (Putnam, 1995b) and its vigorous role is more pivotal in heterogeneous communities. Based on Tamam (2013) interethnic bridging social capital refers to “social capital that allows individuals to draw on resources from those who are ethnically different” (p. 86). Tamam (2012a) also states that interethnic bridging social capital is concerned with the weak ties that connect individuals to social worlds and resources that exist outside their inner circles.

One of the best locations that different ethnic groups experience interethnic bridging social capital is in multiethnic universities. Kent (1996) considers a multiethnic university to be microcosmic in nature, in the sense that the nature of ethnic relations in a multiethnic university can be regarded as a small-scale version of a larger multiethnic society. The university context, certainly, provides the best instance of an interethnic contact situation in which ethnic groups frequently meet on a relatively equal status (Finchilescu & Tredoux, 2008).

Ethnic tension is becoming more serious in Malaysian community, particularly among the young generation (Mustapha et al., 2009). Many colleges and universities across the world have failed to actively encourage their students to interact across ethnic backgrounds (Robinson, 2012) and Malaysia faces much the same problem. The lack of students’ offline interethnic interaction in Malaysian multiethnic universities is connected to the failure of universities to take action and encourage or enhance ethnic integration among different students (Kamaruzaman, 2006; Sidek, 2007 as cited in Mustapha et al., 2009). In other words, ethnic segregation seems to have grown more and more pronounced at all levels of education in Malaysia (Yeoh, 2006).

University life tends to be heavily “wired”; students’ contacts are not restricted to face-to-face or on campus communication only, but involve a vastly expanded network of interactions with their friends and peers of other ethnic groups via social media. Not only on campus, but also ethnicity issue has been found to be dominant in the culture of

computer-mediated environment. Burkhalter (1999) believes that many of the social norms and ills that exist offline are often regenerated in online environments as well.

Malaysians are renowned heavy users of social media, and yet, studies indicate that Malaysians prefer to make relationship and communicate through the Internet with their own ethnicities rather than other ethnicities (Bolong, et al., 2008 as cited in Ridzuan et al., 2012). No wonder why, Verkuyten and Khan (2012) emphasized that future studies should examine Malaysian interethnic relations through more extensive measures. In addition, the importance of social networking on social capital is to the extent that Jaafar (2011) asserted it is necessary to explore the role of social media such as *Facebook* in relation to the impacts of online networking on social capital in the context of Malaysia. Hence, this study also aims to fill the research gap by investigating the impact of online interethnic interaction on interethnic bridging social capital to present a more comprehensive perspective of different aspects of students' interethnic communication.

Although ethnic segregation is an issue in Malaysian multicultural university campuses (Aziz, Salleh, & Ribu, 2010; Santhiram, 1995; Yeoh, 2006), as of this time only a few relevant studies have been done to investigate the extent of interethnic bridging social capital among local students of various ethnic groups (Tamam, 2013). So, studies on the extent to which students' experienced interethnic bridging social capital should look at the influence of ethnicity, if any, on this social phenomenon (Tamam, 2013). It is reasonable to assume there is strong influence, but what exactly that influence is, once you break it down, has yet to be thoroughly determined.

There is still another noticeable gap that demands to be filled. Research related to the issue of interethnic contacts and its impact on social capital has been widely studied in Western countries, but the lack of studies on social capital and particularly on interethnic bridging social capital in Malaysian context is extremely evident (Mura & Tavakoli, 2014; Tamam et al., 2011, Tamam & Hashmi, 2015). Thus, Malaysian cultural setting and the tendency of Malaysian citizens to stress their own ethnic identity over and above a shared national identity necessitates the authors to consider ethnicity as a moderating factor on the relationship between ethnocentrism and interethnic bridging social capital. In order to contribute to previous literature, this study will investigate the direct and indirect effect of ethnocentrism on students' interethnic bridging social capital through offline and online interethnic interactions.

### **Research Questions**

By having a look on the above mentioned discussion over the research problem, the following questions are arisen that will be answered through this research:

- 1- Is there any relationship between interethnic bridging social capital and ethnocentrism phenomenon in Malaysian Universities?
- 2- Does ethnicity play a moderating role in the relationship between ethnocentrism and local students' interethnic bridging social capital in Malaysian academic environment?



- 3- Do online and offline interethnic interactions mediate the relationship between ethnocentrism and local students' interethnic bridging social capital in Malaysian academic environment?

### **Research Objectives**

Given the above research questions, the main research objective is to specify the relationship between ethnocentrism and interethnic bridging social capital among Malaysian undergraduate students. Specially, this study has the following objectives:

- 1- To identify the level of ethnocentrism among Malaysian undergraduate students.
- 2- To determine the level of interethnic bridging social capital among Malaysian undergraduate students.
- 3- To identify the level of offline interethnic interaction among Malaysian undergraduate students.
- 4- To determine the level of online interethnic interaction among Malaysian undergraduate students.
- 5- To determine the relationship between ethnocentrism and interethnic bridging social capital among Malaysian students.
- 6- To identify the moderating effect of Malaysian ethnicity on the relationship between ethnocentrism and interethnic bridging social capital.
- 7- To identify the mediating effect of offline interethnic interaction on the relationship between ethnocentrism and interethnic bridging social capital in Malaysian universities.
- 8- To determine the mediating effect of Malaysian students' online interethnic interaction on the relationship between ethnocentrism and interethnic bridging social capital.

### **Significance of the Study**

Due to ethnic diversity in Malaysian context, solidarity and integration are highly emphasized by authorities. The Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak has introduced the concept of “*One Malaysia*” which has become the kinesthetic force in contemporary Malaysia's development. The main mission of this concept is to unite all Malaysians who are culturally and religiously different (Ramli & Jusoh, 2011). The Prime Minister fervently promotes interethnic living in harmony and solidarity with cultural and social diversity. Hence, the findings of this study will provide relevant data to help formulate the extent of which Malaysian universities could bring unity and closeness among students of various ethnic groups and to what extent students accept the diversity in ethnicity.

Several studies have been conducted regarding ethnocentrism, interethnic interaction and bridging social capital; however, having these three variables in a single study provides the current research with the advantageous possibility of creating two new models applicable to different circumstances. In addition, this research concentrates more on interethnic bridging social capital (IBSC) which is related to heterogeneous communities with different ethnic groups like Malaysia. So, the findings can provide better understanding of current interethnic bridging social capital in Malaysian universities and it may further improve interethnic relations in future.

Results from this study can theoretically confirm the robustness of the Social Capital theory and Constrict theory in a different context. While Social Capital theory emphasizes on Bridging Social Capital as one of its main factors, this study narrows down and highlights the importance of Interethnic Bridging Social Capital. Additionally, Constrict theory as a new theory employed to emphasize on the issue of ethnicity in Malaysian context. This study can, therefore, help the dynamism and evolution of these two theories.

Another important contribution of the current study is the measurement of the relationship between IBSC and ethnocentrism both directly and indirectly through face-to-face (offline) and online interactions. The indirect relationship helps to find the effective factors which may increase or decrease the outcomes. This study will indicate what type of interethnic interaction has more positive impact on interethnic bridging social capital.

Using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) method, this study would methodologically help to overcome limitations of other methods of analysis most commonly used in social sciences studies. SEM is able to take measurement error into account by explicitly including measurement error variables. Therefore, conclusions about relationships between constructs are not biased by measurement error. In addition, SEM allows to make use of several indicator variables per construct simultaneously, which leads to more valid conclusions on the construct level (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). So, using other methods of analysis would often result in less clear conclusions, and/or would require several separate analyses.

This study will be conducted among the young, university-age generation, as it is their attitudes and beliefs that would logically eventually determine the national situation. One of the main laudable goals of higher education institutions is to make sure that graduates are prepared to live and work in an increasingly diverse and global society (Bastedo, Batjargal, Eufrazio, & Yaroslav, 2009). In any country, young people should be considered a national asset and universities play a leading role in preparing the educated young generation into becoming efficient and capable active citizens (Dusi, Steinbach, & Messetti, 2012). The outcomes of this study could be used to evaluate the students' interethnic interaction for further improvement, if needed.

This research also helps higher education practitioners and policymakers to have a broader view of the role of students' ethnicity in strengthening or even weakening the interethnic interactions. In addition, this study will provide a better understanding of the quality of students' interethnic interaction within the campuses. Moreover, revealing the extent of how ethnocentric attitudes impact on the quality of interethnic interaction, along with interethnic bridging social capital is an added significance of this study.

Undoubtedly, the Internet as a medium of entertainment, communication, and education is becoming an inseparable part of students' routine lives. In addition, the Internet usage helps them to create their identities, connect with distant people, and learn norms and values as parts of socialization processes (Lee, 2007). But little empirical research regarding interethnic bridging social capital in online environment has been carried out in Malaysia. Any additional research with valid results can help indicate to what extent the online communication and especially *SNSs* increased or decreased interethnic interaction among students and how important is the role of it in building or even damaging interethnic bridging social capital. So, the findings of this research will provide a better understanding about the significant factors that affect interethnic bridging social capital among students of different ethnic groups. In a sense, we are making maps of mostly unexplored territory.

### Scope of the Study

As this dissertation aims to investigate interethnic bridging social capital among university students in Malaysia, the scope of this study is limited to local undergraduate students who are studying in public universities. The main reason for selecting public universities rather than private ones is having access to the variety of students from different ethnic groups. Among the students, undergraduates are preferred for this study, as they have many classes to attend and frequently receive group assignments, in contrast to postgraduate students who have fewer classes to attend and have less opportunity for interethnic cooperation.

Because of the fact that this research will be carried out on a sample from a population of students at only two public institutions (UKM and UPM) in Malaysia, the results should not be generalized to students at all universities in Malaysia. This study is limited to Malay, Chinese and Indians, the three main ethnic groups in Malaysia.

### Keyword Definitions

- **Interethnic bridging social capital:** in this research it is defined as social capital that allows individuals to draw on resources from peers that are of different ethnic groups.
- **Ethnocentrism:** In this study refers to the extent that individuals consider their own ethnic group as the center of everything which all others are scaled and rated with reference to it. In other words, self-focused perceptions of Malays, Chinese and Indians within their own groups which tend to decrease trust and cooperation with other ethnics. It is to prefer their own groups over other groups without due cause.
- **Offline Interethnic interaction:** In current study it refers to any face-to-face interaction that Malay, Chinese and Indian undergraduate students have to each other on campus.
- **Online Interethnic interaction:** In this study refers to any online interethnic communication through Internet, emails, chat rooms and social network sites that Malay, Chinese and Indian undergraduate students have to each other.

• **Ethnicity:** it refers to Malay, Chinese and Indian as the three main ethnic groups in Malaysia which each has its own specific unique ties like language, religion and custom.

It is important to note that the conceptualization of these variables will be further elaborated in Chapters Two and Three.

### Summary

This chapter has provided information about the research gaps and knowledge contributions that motivated the researcher conduct this study. The research problem addresses the significance of discovering the relationship between ethnocentrism and interethnic bridging social capital which is mediated by offline and online interethnic interactions. The scope of the study is restricted to local undergraduate students in two Malaysia public universities, UPM and UKM.

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