

Microaggressions on Social Media: A Conceptual Framework of 3R Issues and Youth Consumer Behaviour in Malaysia

Zaliha Idris^{1*}, Doni Sagitarian Warganegara², Suhaime Saahar @ Saabar³, Ahlam Abdul Aziz⁴, Junainah Idris⁵

^{1,2,3,4}Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Malaysia

⁵Faculty of Economics, Accountancy and Management, Universiti Islam Selangor (UIS), Malaysia

*Corresponding Author

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.913COM0029>

Received: 30 June 2025; Accepted: 04 July 2025; Published: 07 August 2025

ABSTRACT

This conceptual paper explores how microaggressions and 3R issues, Race, Religion, and Royalty, manifest on social media and influence the consumer decision-making behaviour of Malaysian youth. Drawing upon Microaggression Theory and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), the study proposes a framework that explains the psychological and sociocultural mechanisms linking digital microaggressions to consumer responses. Social media platforms are positioned as key mediators, amplifying identity-based tensions and shaping attitudes toward brands perceived as inclusive or exclusionary. The framework identifies 3R perception as a mediating variable and considers TPB constructs, attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control as key drivers of behaviour. This model provides a holistic perspective on how symbolic violence and normative influences converge in a multicultural society to affect purchasing behaviour. The paper contributes to theory development in consumer psychology and multicultural marketing and offers practical insights for brand communication, public policy, and youth engagement strategies in diverse digital environments.

Keywords: Microaggression, Consumer Behaviour, Consumer Decision Making Behavior, Social Media, 3R (Race, Religion, Royalty)

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the discourse on microaggressions has gained prominence in social psychology, especially within multicultural societies where identity and intergroup dynamics are deeply intertwined. Microaggressions, defined as subtle, often unintentional, verbal or behavioural slights directed at members of marginalized groups, have been identified as critical factors shaping psychological well-being, identity development, and social inclusion (Sue et al., 2007; Nadal, 2011). These everyday forms of bias, although seemingly minor, can accumulate over time to produce significant emotional and cognitive burdens on individuals.

In the Malaysian context, where societal identity is intricately linked to issues of race, religion, and royalty, collectively referred to as the 3R issues, microaggressions carry particular resonance. Malaysia's diverse population, governed by pluralistic yet hierarchical socio-political structures, creates fertile ground for both overt and covert expressions of identity-based exclusion. The national unity vision articulated in the "*Bangsa Malaysia*" concept aims to foster inclusivity and cohesion. However, persistent social divisions and latent ethnic tensions often undermine these ideals, especially when discriminatory sentiments are perpetuated through subtle acts in everyday interactions.

The rise of digital communication platforms has intensified the visibility and frequency of microaggressions. Social media environments, while offering space for cultural expression and dialogue, also serve as vectors for

coded hostility and stereotyping. Among youth, who are the most active digital participants, these interactions significantly influence identity formation, perceptions of belonging, and engagement with national narratives (Haq, 2023; Zainuddin et al., 2021). As such, social media plays a dual role, amplifying both inclusive discourse and divisive rhetoric. The implications extend beyond individual identity into the realm of consumer behaviour, where purchasing choices are increasingly aligned with perceived cultural values and social affiliations.

Despite growing attention to microaggressions in institutional and educational contexts, their role in shaping consumer decisions, particularly within a multicultural and politically sensitive environment like Malaysia, remains underexplored. Brands and marketers now operate within a landscape where consumer perception is not only shaped by product quality but also by cultural sensitivity and ethical alignment. Missteps in this area can lead to public backlash, boycotts, and long-term reputational harm.

This paper presents a conceptual framework that seeks to bridge the gap between microaggression theory and consumer behaviour studies by focusing on Malaysian youth as a critical demographic. By integrating Microaggression Theory with the Theory of Planned Behaviour, this framework provides a basis for understanding how perceived discrimination and social norms interact to influence brand trust, purchase intention, and expressions of identity through consumption. The goal is to inform both academic inquiry and practical strategies aimed at fostering inclusive marketing and strengthening national cohesion through culturally attuned communication.

To guide this inquiry, the study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: How does microaggression behaviour influence the perception of 3R (Race, Religion, and Royalty) issues among social media users in Malaysia?

RQ2: How do the Theory of Planned Behaviour constructs, attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control influence consumer reactions to 3R issues on social media?

RQ3: What is the direct effect of exposure to 3R-related content on social media on consumer decision-making behaviour in Malaysia?

RQ4: How do TPB constructs directly influence consumer decision making behaviour when exposed to microaggression and 3R narratives on social media?

RQ5: How can an integrated model combining Microaggression Theory and the Theory of Planned Behaviour explain the influence of 3R issues on social media towards consumer behaviour in Malaysia?

Conceptual Framing of the Research Problem

Although the literature on microaggressions is expanding across multiple disciplines, much of it remains centered on institutional settings such as education and healthcare (Hamdi et al., 2019; Jiotso et al., 2021; Sue et al., 2019). There is limited research exploring how these subtle forms of bias impact consumer-related behaviours, particularly in socio commercial environments characterized by ethnic and cultural complexity. In the Malaysian digital ecosystem, microaggressions often take the form of indirect or coded messages embedded in memes, commentaries, or social media discourse related to race, religion, and royalty.

These interactions, while not always explicit, carry significant psychological and social weight. Youth exposed to these microaggressions may experience emotional alienation, identity threat, and stereotype vulnerability, all of which influence their behaviour in public and commercial domains. As digital natives, Malaysian youth frequently engage with platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter), where the use of culturally loaded symbols and language can affirm or invalidate one's social identity (Nurhayati et al., 2022; Saidin & Azrun, 2024).

The interconnection of 3R issues and consumer perception becomes particularly pronounced during politically charged periods, such as general elections. Viral content often reinforces ethnic and religious polarizations,

further embedding social divisions into the digital public sphere. Instances of racialized hashtags or references to historical trauma serve to signal group membership and exclusion, which may subsequently influence consumer responses such as brand avoidance or endorsement (Meerangani et al., 2024).

Historical and legal legacies, such as the Sedition Act 1948, have rendered discussions on 3R issues highly sensitive. These conditions contribute to an environment of microinvalidation and self-censorship, especially among minority communities who may feel overlooked or stereotyped in national narratives and commercial representations (Beh Zhao Yen, 2020; Stamps, 2020). As consumer identity increasingly intersects with social and cultural belonging, understanding how these dynamics shape decision-making is both timely and essential.

Research Gap

The empirical literature on microaggressions in consumer contexts is notably sparse, particularly in Southeast Asian settings. While researchers have documented the psychological effects of microaggressions in institutional life, few have examined how these dynamics influence marketplace interactions and consumer behaviour (Wong et al., 2019). Furthermore, studies that address race, religion, and royalty as intersecting constructs influencing consumption are virtually non-existent in Malaysian scholarship.

Another gap lies in the conceptual integration of identity theory and behavioural models. Although the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) is widely used in consumer research, its application in explaining behaviours influenced by microaggression exposure is still limited. By integrating Microaggression Theory with TPB and Social Identity Theory, this paper aims to create a robust model capable of capturing the nuanced pathways through which digital microaggressions influence brand perceptions, trust, and behavioural intentions among youth.

Moreover, while Malaysian youth represent a highly active and socially aware demographic, their voices remain underrepresented in empirical research on national identity and consumer choice. As this cohort increasingly turns to digital media for social interaction and product discovery, it becomes crucial to understand how their lived experiences of marginalization inform their consumption patterns.

Methodologically, much of the existing research in this area relies on qualitative designs, which, although insightful, may lack the generalizability required for broad policy or marketing applications. There is a pressing need for theoretically grounded, quantitative frameworks that can inform both academic and applied strategies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding Microaggressions in Multicultural Contexts

Microaggressions are subtle, often unintentional verbal or behavioural expressions that convey derogatory or exclusionary messages to individuals based on their membership in marginalised social groups (Sue et al., 2007). While these acts may appear trivial or benign, they have been shown to produce significant psychological consequences, including emotional distress, reduced self-esteem, and a diminished sense of belonging (Nadal, 2011). Such outcomes are especially pronounced in multicultural societies, where microaggressions operate not only at the individual level but also as systemic reinforcements of social hierarchies and group-based inequalities.

Although microaggressions have been widely studied in institutional contexts such as education and healthcare, recent research has expanded their relevance to digital communication environments. Eschmann et al. (2020) note that social media platforms have become significant arenas where microaggressions occur and are perpetuated, especially among youth who actively engage with these platforms as part of their identity construction. The interactive and viral nature of social media amplifies the effects of these subtle hostilities, often exposing individuals to repeated and public forms of exclusion or stereotyping.

In multicultural societies like Malaysia, the salience of microaggressions is heightened by the country's complex interethnic and interreligious dynamics. Wong et al. (2019) emphasize that microaggressions contribute to the formation of psychologically unsafe environments, particularly for minority communities, who may internalize repeated experiences of invalidation as a norm. The intersection of race, religion, and royalty (3R issues) further complicates how such interactions are experienced and interpreted in public discourse. As youth navigate their personal and collective identities within this intricate social framework, microaggressions can significantly influence their perceptions of national identity, social inclusion, and trust in societal institutions.

Understanding the mechanics and impacts of microaggressions in these multicultural settings is critical for advancing inclusive social policies, equitable communication practices, and culturally sensitive consumer engagement strategies.

The Societal Role of 3R (Race, Religion, Royalty) Issues in Malaysia

In Malaysia, the constructs of race, religion, and royalty, collectively known as the 3R issues, hold a foundational position in shaping public discourse, policy development, and national identity. While the “Bangsa Malaysia” initiative promotes a vision of unity and inclusivity, its implementation often confronts entrenched historical divisions and socio-political asymmetries (Lino & Hashim, 2019). These 3R constructs are not merely cultural signifiers but institutionalised categories that influence how Malaysians perceive their position in society.

Microaggressions in Malaysia are often mediated through these 3R lenses. Ethnic and religious minorities may experience exclusion or marginalisation through everyday comments, social media narratives, or policy framing that privileges dominant group norms. Zainuddin et al. (2021) highlight that youth from minority backgrounds frequently encounter identity-based slights related to their ethnicity or beliefs, leading to feelings of disenfranchisement and diminished national belonging.

Public discussions involving royalty, race, or religion are often framed as “sensitive” or “untouchable,” reinforcing a culture of self-censorship and social hierarchy. Shamsul (2022) argues that this institutional sensitivity constrains genuine dialogue and fosters an environment where microaggressions can flourish under the guise of cultural preservation or political loyalty. These dynamics influence not only intergroup relations but also how young people construct and negotiate their sense of national identity.

In a society where identity politics and institutional structures are deeply intertwined, the role of 3R issues becomes central to understanding the psychological and social impact of microaggressions. For youth in particular, the negotiation of ethnic, religious, and national identities within this landscape is a continuous process that affects their civic engagement, cultural expression, and consumer behaviour.

3R Issues, Racism, and Cultural Exclusion

The intersection of the 3R issues, race, religion, and royalty, with racism in Malaysia, reveals how institutionalised identity categories can perpetuate exclusion in both explicit and implicit forms. Racism in this context does not only manifest through overt discrimination but also through embedded stereotypes, systemic preferences, and subtle everyday slights that reinforce social hierarchies. Microaggressions, therefore, become one of the most common conduits through which racial and religious biases are communicated.

Ahmad and Rahim (2023) observe that microaggressions targeting race and religion often lead to feelings of cultural alienation, particularly among Muslim and ethnic minority consumers. These individuals may experience exclusion not only in interpersonal interactions but also in broader market representations and institutional messaging. As a result, such experiences can reshape trust, loyalty, and receptiveness toward commercial brands or public institutions.

Islamophobia, though often associated with Western discourse, has found growing expression in Malaysia's social media environments. Hamdi et al. (2022) report that Malaysian Muslims are increasingly subjected to

microaggression content online, which reinforces negative stereotypes and contributes to an atmosphere of distrust and withdrawal. These dynamics influence purchasing behaviours, with affected individuals preferring brands perceived as inclusive, respectful, or aligned with their cultural values.

This pattern suggests that microaggressions related to 3R issues not only erode social cohesion but also alter how individuals engage with the marketplace. As cultural sensitivity becomes a more salient factor in consumer decision-making, businesses and policymakers alike must reckon with the consequences of racialised and religious microaggressions, both online and offline.

Microaggressions and National Identity Formation

National identity is a complex and evolving construct shaped by historical legacies, institutional structures, and everyday social interactions. In multicultural societies such as Malaysia, where ethnicity, religion, and monarchy are deeply embedded in political and cultural discourse, national identity formation is particularly challenging for minority groups. Microaggressions, subtle yet frequent cues of exclusion, complicate this process by reinforcing the idea that some identities are more legitimate or valued than others.

Hamdi et al. (2019) argue that experiences of social exclusion or discrimination within educational and public settings disrupt the ability of young Malaysians to internalize a cohesive sense of national identity. These micro-level acts of invalidation accumulate over time, leading to a fragmented self-concept in which individuals may identify more strongly with their ethnic or religious communities than with the national narrative.

Nadal et al. (2014) further suggest that repeated exposure to microaggressions contributes to identity conflict, as individuals are forced to reconcile competing narratives of inclusion and exclusion. In Malaysia, this struggle is intensified by the prominence of 3R issues, which act as both symbolic and institutional markers of group belonging. Youth who perceive their cultural backgrounds as underrepresented or devalued may disengage from broader national discourses, weakening their identification with the nation-state.

The development of national identity in this context is not merely a psychological process but also a political and cultural negotiation. Understanding the role of microaggressions in shaping this negotiation is essential for promoting inclusive nation-building strategies that resonate with all segments of the population, particularly youth, who are central to the future of Malaysia's multicultural project.

The Influence of Social Media on Identity and Microaggressions

Social media has emerged as a central platform for identity negotiation, public discourse, and cultural expression, particularly among youth. While it offers opportunities for connection and self-representation, it also serves as a conduit for the dissemination and amplification of microaggressions. In the Malaysian context, where race, religion, and royalty are highly sensitive topics, digital spaces often mirror and magnify the broader social tensions embedded in these 3R issues.

Campaigns such as *#KitaSemuaMalaysia* illustrate the potential of social media to promote unity and inclusivity. However, the same platforms also facilitate the spread of derogatory content, stereotype-laden humour, and exclusionary narratives that target specific ethnic or religious groups (Tan, 2023). These forms of microaggression, though subtle, contribute to the normalisation of prejudice and shape how users perceive group boundaries and national identity.

Al-Saify et al. (2024) highlight the emotional and cognitive effects of encountering microaggressions online, noting that youth who engage with social media frequently experience threats to their sense of belonging. Repeated exposure to such content can lead to internalised feelings of exclusion and a reluctance to participate in civic or commercial activities perceived as culturally alienating.

Furthermore, the algorithmic structure of social media platforms tends to reinforce echo chambers, where users are primarily exposed to like-minded perspectives (Li et al., 2025). This digital fragmentation deepens social

divides and reduces opportunities for intercultural understanding, thereby intensifying the influence of microaggressions on identity formation. As youth navigate these online environments, their engagement with digital narratives becomes a key factor in how they construct personal and national identities, and how they make decisions as consumers.

Microaggressions and Consumer Perceptions in the Marketplace

The influence of microaggressions extends beyond identity formation into the realm of consumer behaviour, particularly in multicultural societies where group affiliation strongly shapes marketplace engagement. In Malaysia, where cultural identity is closely tied to the 3R framework, race, religion, and royalty, consumer perceptions are increasingly shaped by how brands represent, acknowledge, or ignore these identities.

Microaggressions in advertising or corporate communication may not always be intentional, but they can nonetheless send exclusionary messages that alienate consumers. Hogg et al. (2017) argue that individuals who feel culturally marginalised tend to avoid brands that fail to acknowledge or respect their identity. Alavi et al. (2021) further demonstrate that Malaysian youth who experience microaggressions online are more likely to support brands perceived as inclusive, culturally aware, and socially responsible.

Consumer decision-making in such contexts is not purely rational but deeply emotional and identity-driven. Kohli (2023) applied the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) to show that exposure to racialised microaggressions on digital platforms significantly weakens consumer intentions to engage with offending brands. This erosion of trust reflects a psychological spillover effect, where repeated instances of subtle bias influence broader market attitudes and behaviours.

Friedlaender (2018) emphasizes that microaggressions add up to ongoing harm in consumer settings. Brands linked to exclusionary language or perceived insensitivity risk damaging their reputation, especially among digitally savvy and socially aware young people. As consumer expectations move toward aligning with values, companies need to understand that brand perception is increasingly influenced by the cultural and emotional environment in which their messages are received.

Understanding these dynamics is critical for marketers operating in Malaysia's diverse consumer landscape. Microaggressions are not merely interpersonal phenomena, they are structural signals that inform trust, brand loyalty, and the broader experience of inclusion in the marketplace.

Theoretical Perspectives on Microaggressions and Consumer Behaviour

Understanding how microaggressions influence consumer behaviour requires a multi-theoretical approach that integrates psychological, sociological, and behavioural insights. Traditional models of consumer decision-making, which emphasise rational evaluation of utility, are insufficient to explain identity-based consumption patterns that emerge in multicultural societies. In Malaysia, where identity politics and 3R issues are embedded in everyday life, consumer behaviour is often shaped by emotional, social, and cultural triggers, many of which stem from experiences of microaggressions.

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) provides a valuable framework for examining these dynamics. According to TPB, behavioural intentions are shaped by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991). Kohli (2023) demonstrates that microaggressions encountered in online spaces can negatively influence all three TPB components. Consumers who perceive discriminatory or culturally insensitive messages are likely to develop negative attitudes toward brands, feel social pressure to reject them, and believe they have the agency to choose alternatives that align with their values.

The Stimulus Organism Response (S-O-R) model also offers insights into the psychological processes underlying consumer reactions to microaggressions. In this model, microaggressions function as external stimuli that affect internal emotional and cognitive states, which in turn influence behavioural responses. Jedicke et al. (2025) found that repeated exposure to exclusionary content in marketing materials can evoke

feelings of invalidation and mistrust, leading to disengagement or avoidance behaviours such as brand rejection or boycotts.

Social Identity Theory (SIT) further explains how group membership and identity salience impact consumer decisions. SIT posits that individuals derive self-worth from their affiliation with social groups and are motivated to maintain a positive group identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). When microaggressions threaten this identity, consumers are more likely to express in-group solidarity and avoid brands perceived to disrespect their cultural or religious group. Bettache (2023) underscores the importance of local context in applying SIT, particularly in postcolonial societies like Malaysia, where race and religion are deeply institutionalised and symbolically charged.

While these frameworks provide strong explanatory power, some scholars have expressed concerns about how microaggression constructs are operationalized. Lilienfeld (2017) critiques the lack of clear definitions and the heavy reliance on subjective reports, suggesting that measurement inconsistencies could impact the validity of empirical results. Nonetheless, the convergence of evidence across fields shows that microaggressions are a valid and meaningful factor in consumer psychology, especially when analysed through culturally contextualized and theoretically integrated models.

Together, these theoretical perspectives highlight the need to view consumer behaviour not merely as a matter of preference or utility, but as an outcome of complex identity negotiations shaped by everyday experiences of inclusion and exclusion.

Youth Consumer Decision-Making in a Multicultural Society

Youth in multicultural societies like Malaysia face unique challenges in making consumption choices influenced by their intersecting identities. As digital natives, they are constantly exposed to a broad array of social, cultural, and commercial content, much of which carries implicit messages about inclusion, belonging, and representation. When these messages manifest as microaggressions, even subtly, they can provoke complex psychological and behavioural responses that shape how young consumers connect with brands, products, and public narratives.

In Malaysia, the cultural sensitivity surrounding race, religion, and royalty (3R) further complicates youth decision-making. Zulkefli and Abd Rahman (2023) observe that young consumers who experience microaggressions, particularly through social media, often shift their buying preferences toward brands perceived as inclusive or socially conscious. This pattern reflects a broader value driven orientation, where alignment with identity and ethics increasingly guides market engagement among youth.

Consumer choices among young Malaysians are also shaped by their ongoing negotiation of national and ethnic identity. Many grapples with reconciling pride in their cultural heritage with broader aspirations for a cohesive national identity. When market communications fail to reflect this complexity or worse, reinforce exclusionary narratives, youth are more likely to disengage. This is particularly true in environments where 3R issues are politicised or weaponised in public discourse, further polarising how youth perceive their place in society and the marketplace.

The influence of peer groups and digital communities cannot be overlooked in this process. Social media platforms not only expose youth to microaggressions but also create spaces for collective identity affirmation and mobilisation. Hashtag activism, boycotts, and brand endorsements frequently originate within this peer led environments, suggesting that consumer decision-making is not only individual but also socially mediated.

Understanding the decision making dynamics of Malaysian youth thus requires attention to the emotional, social, and political dimensions of consumption. Brands and policymakers that ignore these layered influences risk alienating a generation of consumers whose behaviours are shaped as much by values and identity as by product features and pricing.

Theoretical Framework and Propositions

This section outlines the conceptual foundation of the study by integrating Microaggression Theory and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) to investigate how microaggressions and 3R related social media content influence Malaysian youth's consumer decision making behaviour.

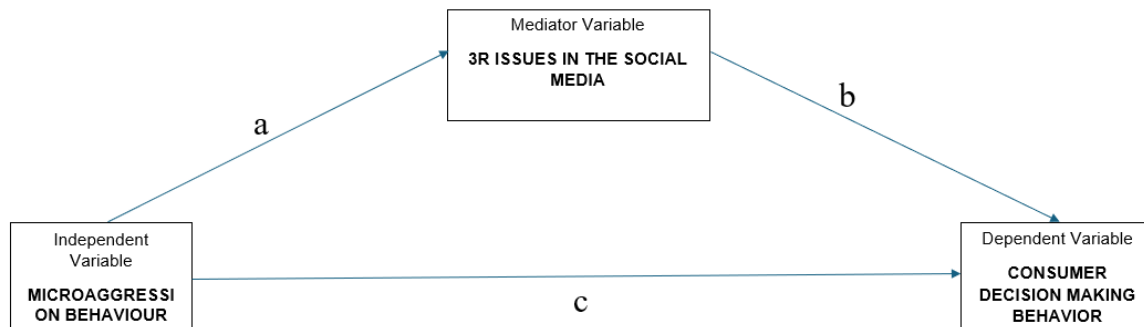


Figure 1: Proposed Mediation Model of 3R Issue Perception Between Microaggression and Consumer Decision-Making Behaviour

Figure 1 presents a proposed mediation model that illustrates how microaggression behaviour influences consumer decision-making through the perception of 3R (Race, Religion, and Royalty) issues on social media. In the rapidly evolving digital environment, social media continues to function as more than a communication tool and will increasingly serve as a key arena for identity negotiation, dissemination of cultural meaning, and interaction between consumers and brands (Hidayat et al., 2023). Platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter will significantly influence consumer attitudes by shaping brand perceptions and amplifying culturally relevant narratives. These platforms will provide opportunities for consumers to either align with or reject specific brand representations, especially when such content is perceived as culturally insensitive or discriminatory.

Microaggression experiences, whether in the form of visual stereotyping, exclusionary language, or culturally dismissive user-generated content, will be interpreted by consumers as indicators of a brand's inclusivity or lack thereof (Alavi et al., 2021; Lino & Hashim, 2019). Acts of microinsults, microinvalidations, or subtle racial bias will give rise to negative social experiences, resulting in lower brand trust and reduced purchase intention. These dynamics are particularly relevant for identity conscious consumers who will view consumption as an economic activity and a cultural statement.

In this model, social media will act as a mediator, intensifying or buffering the effects of microaggression encounters. In the future, consumers will not base their decisions solely on utilitarian aspects such as price or functionality. Instead, their choices will increasingly reflect value alignment, emotional resonance, and the ethical positioning of brands (Saidin & Azrun, 2024; Nurhayati et al., 2022). As such, when consumers feel marginalised or stereotyped by online content, they will be more likely to disengage from the brand and express symbolic resistance through digital activism or boycott movements (Williams, 2021; Stamps, 2020).

Besides that, brands that intentionally foster cultural sensitivity and inclusivity will be better positioned to resonate with diverse consumer groups. Among youth and millennial segments, in particular, such efforts will contribute to long-term brand loyalty and a positive reputation in a value-driven marketplace (Zulkefli & Abd Rahman, 2023). To theoretically underpin this framework, one behavioural theory will be employed to support the Microaggression Theory, which is the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB).

Microaggression Theory

Microaggression Theory, first conceptualised by Chester M. Pierce (1970) and later expanded by Sue et al. (2007), provides a critical lens to examine the subtle yet harmful interactions perpetuating social marginalisation, particularly in racialised, religious, or political discourse. Microaggressions are everyday

verbal, nonverbal, or environmental slights, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or harmful messages to individuals based on their marginalised group membership (Sue et al., 2007). In the context of this study, microaggressions are examined as social cues that function to invalidate, stereotype, or undermine youth identities, primarily through digital communication platforms such as social media.

The theory distinguishes between three primary types of microaggressions: microassaults (explicit discriminatory acts), microinsults (unconscious rudeness or insensitivity), and microinvalidations (negating the thoughts, feelings, or lived experiences of others). Each of these manifestations will be relevant in understanding how Malaysian youth, particularly those exposed to 3R (race, religion, royalty) issues, will interpret and respond to digital content that affirms or threatens their national and social identity.

In highly diverse societies such as Malaysia, where ethnic and religious sensitivities remain entrenched in political and cultural discourse (Saidin & Azrun, 2024), social media will act as both a reflector and amplifier of microaggression narratives. Youth in the Klang Valley, constantly engaging with content embedded with racial or religious innuendos, will likely experience internal conflict between their digital experiences and their sense of national identity. As such, microaggression exposure on social media will play a pivotal role in shaping their perception of social inclusion, cultural acceptance, and national belonging (Lino & Hashim, 2019; Alavi et al., 2021).

Furthermore, repeated exposure to microaggressions such as being stereotyped as "*Melayu malas*", "privileged Chinese" or "fanatical Muslims" will contribute to identity dissonance, emotional distress, and psychological disengagement from national narratives (Williams, 2021). For youth, particularly those who are active digital participants, such cumulative experiences will erode their sense of civic inclusion, and over time, will influence their construction of national identity, often by retreating into subcultural, ethnic, or religious affiliations online (Nurhayati et al., 2022; Stamps, 2020).

This theory will also explain why microaggressions, although subtle, will hold significant psychological weight. Because they often occur outside overt discrimination, they will be internalised rather than challenged, resulting in long-term behavioural and attitudinal shifts. When applied to the context of Malaysian youth, these shifts will include diminished identification with national symbols, loss of trust in institutions, and resistance towards intergroup integration, especially when social media reinforces negative stereotypes relating to the 3R constructs (*Rangka Tindakan Blueprint Perpaduan Negara*, 2021–2030).

Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), introduced by Ajzen (1991), provides a psychological framework that explains how individual behaviour is guided by three primary constructs: attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. In this study, TPB complements Microaggression Theory by offering a structured lens to understand how exposure to microaggression content on social media affects consumer decisions and national identity perceptions among Malaysian youth.

When consumers perceive a brand as dismissive or insensitive to racial, religious, or cultural concerns, they are likely to develop negative attitudes towards that brand. These attitudes are shaped not only by personal values but also by normative pressures within their social media networks. For instance, when discriminatory or exclusionary content is publicly criticised by peers, influencers, or community leaders online, it strengthens the social norm to reject such content and the associated brands (Stamps, 2020; Nurhayati et al., 2022). Furthermore, the ease of switching to more ethical and inclusive alternatives, whether through local businesses or socially responsible brands, increases the consumer's perceived behavioural control, empowering action aligned with their values.

Integrating TPB with Microaggression Theory enables a layered conceptualisation of how micro level digital experiences inform broader behavioural patterns. While TPB explains the psychological mechanisms through which beliefs and perceived control shape behavioural intention, Microaggression Theory contextualises these

processes by highlighting how subtle cues, such as racialised language, cultural invalidation, or exclusionary memes, trigger these beliefs in the first place.

For example, repeated exposure to microaggressions targeting religious practices or ethnic identities may lead youth to perceive Malaysian national identity as exclusive or unrepresentative. These perceptions, reinforced by peer sentiment and digital discourse, can influence their willingness to engage in national narratives or support brands aligned with exclusionary values. Conversely, online communities that celebrate cultural inclusivity or affirm marginalised identities increase youths' perceived ability to act following their group values.

In addressing the research question, how microaggressions and 3R issues on social media influence consumer decision making behaviour among youth in the Klang Valley, TPB offers explanatory power. It connects the symbolic effects of microaggressions with intentional behaviour, showing how exposure to subtle online discrimination not only shapes identity but also informs consumer decisions and social participation.

Hypothesis Development

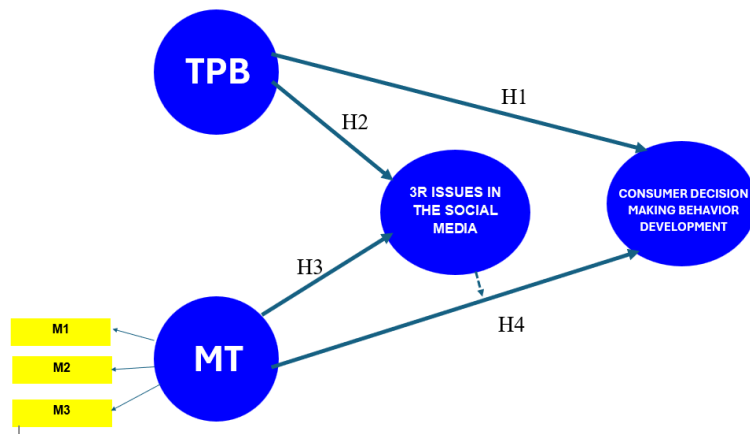


Figure 2: Proposed Conceptual Framework

This study proposes a conceptual framework (see Figure 2) that explores how microaggression behaviour and constructs from the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) interact with the perception of 3R issues, Race, Religion, and Royalty, on social media, and how these interactions influence consumer decision-making among Malaysian youth. By integrating Microaggression Theory (MT) and TPB, the framework aims to provide a comprehensive explanation of the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural responses of youth consumers to digital content involving 3R narratives. The rationale for this model is supported by existing literature that underscores the impact of racialised digital microaggressions on user identity and behaviour (Williams, 2021; Lino & Hashim, 2019), the relevance of TPB in understanding consumer decision-making in politically and culturally sensitive contexts (Ajzen, 2020), and the growing prominence of 3R discourse in shaping youth perspectives and marketplace engagement in Malaysia (Saidin & Azrun, 2024; Nurhayati et al., 2022).

Social media functions as a primary channel through which youth are exposed to microaggressions, whether through memes, comment threads, or algorithmically amplified content, that subtly stereotype, exclude, or invalidate cultural and social identities. These repeated exposures heighten sensitivity to 3R-related narratives and often result in increased socio-cultural vigilance, identity tension, and polarised interpretations of race and religion (Stamps, 2020; Williams, 2021). Within this framework, Microaggression Theory is conceptualised through three key dimensions, microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations, represented as M1, M2, and M3. These dimensions influence how youth interpret cultural signals and assign meaning to social media interactions.

In the proposed model, MT is hypothesised to influence both the perception of 3R issues on social media (H1) and to directly impact consumer decision-making behaviour (H2), particularly in contexts where national

identity and cultural inclusion are at stake. Simultaneously, the constructs of TPB, attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control, are expected to shape 3R perceptions (H3) and directly influence youth consumers' behavioural intentions (H4). The 3R perception construct functions as a mediating variable, linking psychological interpretations of digital microaggressions and social influence to actual consumer responses in the marketplace.

Ultimately, this framework provides a holistic explanation of how subtle symbolic messages encountered in digital environments translate into identity driven consumer choices. It highlights the relevance of both psychological and cultural processes in shaping market behaviour in a multicultural society like Malaysia. The summary of research questions and hypothesis is in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research Questions (RQ)	Hypothesis	Statement
RQ1: How does microaggression behaviour influence the perception of 3R issues among social media users in Malaysia?	H1	Microaggression behaviour will significantly influence Malaysian youths' perception of 3R issues on social media.
RQ2: How do the Theory of Planned Behaviour constructs, attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control influence consumer reactions to 3R issues on social media?	H2	The TPB constructs will significantly influence Malaysian youths' perception of 3R issues on social media.
RQ3: What is the direct effect of exposure to 3R-related content on social media on consumer decision-making behaviour in Malaysia?	H3	Perception of 3R issues on social media will significantly and directly affect consumer decision-making behaviour among Malaysian youth
RQ4: How do TPB constructs directly influence consumer decision-making behaviour when exposed to microaggression and 3R narratives on social media?	H4	TPB constructs will have a significant direct effect on consumer decision-making behaviour in the context of microaggression and 3R narratives.
RQ5: How can an integrated model combining Microaggression Theory and the Theory of Planned Behaviour explain the influence of 3R issues on social media towards consumer behaviour in Malaysia?	H5	An integrated model combining Microaggression Theory and TPB will significantly predict consumer decision-making behaviour regarding 3R issues on social media.

This conceptual model proposes a theoretical linkage between microaggression behaviour, 3R discourse on social media, and the formation of national identity among Malaysian youth. It aims to guide future empirical investigations by illustrating the interplay of these constructs in shaping consumer responses and sociocultural integration in online contexts.

Empirical Justification For Construct Relevance In The Malaysian Context

Although this study adopts a quantitative conceptual design, the salience and contextual relevance of the proposed variables are supported by various empirical observations from secondary sources. For instance, during Malaysia's 15th General Election, numerous TikTok and Facebook users disseminated racially charged content, such as images of "keris" and slogans like *#KetuananMelayu* and *#13Mei*, which triggered sentiments of fear and exclusion among minority youth (Saidin & Azrun, 2024). These digital expressions of ethnic dominance and religious supremacy mirror the constructs of microassaults and microinvalidations defined in microaggression theory.

Furthermore, according to the 2022 National Racial Unity Index, although Malaysia achieved a moderate score of 0.629, intergroup tension continues to rise in digital spaces (Ministry of National Unity, 2022). In line with Social Identity Theory, such tensions activate in-group versus out-group boundaries, contributing to identity fragmentation, especially among youth negotiating their national identity online (Al-Rashid et al., 2021; Amin et al., 2021). These empirical illustrations strengthen the relevance of each construct such as microinsult, 3R discourse, consumer decision making behaviour and justify their inclusion in the framework while supporting the operationalisation of measurement items for future survey instruments.

Measurement Limitations And Subjectivity In Microaggression Constructs

The measurement of microaggressions on social media presents several challenges, primarily due to its subjective nature. Perceptions of digital microaggressions are influenced by individual interpretations of text, emojis, sarcasm, and symbolic visuals, which may be shaped by emotional states, past experiences, and cultural backgrounds. To address this, the study proposes the use of multi-item Likert-scale instruments developed from validated scales, alongside open-ended content analysis of social media discourse. This dual method approach enhances construct reliability while maintaining a quantitative lens. Future studies could also consider triangulation with unobtrusive indicators such as behavioural digital traces or metadata patterns (Knight et al., 2023; Saidin & Azrun, 2024).

Cross-Cultural Relevance Of The Conceptual Framework

While the proposed model is developed within the Malaysian context, the theoretical constructs, especially the intersection of microaggression and 3R discourse, hold cross cultural relevance. In Indonesia, for instance, political mobilisation using religion based sentiments such as the Ahok blasphemy case have exhibited similar digital patterns of microinsults and identity threats. Singapore's tightly regulated digital space also reflects the tension between national harmony and ethnic representation, especially during election cycles. Thus, future research could adapt and test this framework in comparative multicultural environments to refine and validate its applicability across diverse digital societies (Saidin & Othman, 2021).

1. Minimising Self-Report Bias in Quantitative Surveys

Given that this study utilises self-reported survey data to capture youth perceptions of microaggressions and 3R-related discourse, concerns regarding social desirability and personal bias may arise. To mitigate this, the survey will adopt neutral language, include anonymity and confidentiality assurances, and incorporate reverse-coded items to detect response patterns. Additionally, future empirical work may integrate passive data collection such as public social media posts or interactions to triangulate self-reported attitudes, thereby enhancing construct validity while preserving ethical standards (Al-Saify et al., 2024).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This conceptual study proposes a quantitative approach to examine how microaggression behaviour and constructs from the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) influence the perception of 3R (Race, Religion, and Royalty) issues on social media, and how these factors shape consumer decision making behaviour among Malaysian youth. A cross-sectional survey design is envisioned for future empirical validation of the proposed framework.

The target population comprises Malaysian youth aged 18 to 30, particularly those residing in urban regions such as the Klang Valley, where digital engagement and exposure to multicultural dynamics are pronounced. A non-probability purposive sampling strategy will be applied to select social media users who are actively exposed to 3R-related content. To ensure statistical validity for Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), a minimum sample of 300 to 500 respondents is proposed, following the guideline of 10–15 respondents per observed variable.

The data collection instrument will be a structured questionnaire adapted from established sources. Microaggression behaviour will be measured using selected items from the Racial and Ethnic

Microaggressions Scale (REMS) and prior digital microaggression research. TPB constructs, attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control will be measured using items adapted from previous behavioural studies. The perception of 3R issues will be assessed through custom developed items addressing race, religion, and royalty themes in social media content. Consumer decision-making behaviour will be measured through variables such as brand avoidance, boycott intention, and purchase preferences. All items will use a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Data will be collected via an online survey platform to maximise reach and convenience. The survey will include a preamble detailing the study's purpose and ensuring participants' anonymity and voluntary participation. For analysis, Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) using SmartPLS or AMOS will be employed to test the proposed model. The analysis will include descriptive statistics, reliability and validity assessments such as Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and Average Variance Extracted, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to validate the measurement model, and path analysis to examine the structural relationships among constructs. The mediating role of 3R perception in linking microaggression behaviour and TPB variables to consumer behaviour will also be tested.

This methodology offers a robust strategy for validating the proposed conceptual framework and contributes to understanding how digital microaggressions and sociocultural content influence consumer behaviour in Malaysia's multicultural setting.

Expected Contribution

This study is anticipated to make several important contributions from both theoretical and practical perspectives, particularly within the fields of consumer behaviour, social media, and multicultural identity in the Malaysian context.

Theoretically, the paper extends the scope of Microaggression Theory by applying it to digital consumer behaviour, a domain that remains underexplored in current literature. It offers a novel lens to examine how subtle, often unconscious, forms of discrimination embedded in social media content shape youth perceptions and influence their consumption-related decisions. Furthermore, by integrating the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), the framework advances behavioural theory in multicultural societies. It explains how psychological constructs, attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control, interact with politically sensitive content, such as 3R issues, to influence individual and collective consumer actions.

In addition, the study offers a significant contextual contribution by grounding these theories within the Malaysian socio-political landscape, where race, religion, and royalty are deeply embedded in public discourse. This cultural contextualisation highlights the nuanced ways in which digital content influence's identity construction and purchasing decisions, providing a model that may be adapted for other postcolonial or ethnically diverse societies.

Practically, the proposed framework offers valuable insights for brand managers, marketers, educators, and policymakers. Marketers are encouraged to recognise the importance of cultural sensitivity in brand communication, especially on social media platforms where youth are most active. Brands that overlook subtle indicators of exclusion or bias risk alienating young consumers, while those that promote inclusivity and cultural respect are more likely to foster brand loyalty and positive consumer sentiment. For policymakers and educators, the model supports the development of inclusive communication strategies and educational content that can strengthen social cohesion and national identity among youth in digital spaces.

By addressing the intersection of microaggressions, social identity, and consumer behaviour, this study contributes a comprehensive conceptual model with broad implications for future empirical testing and real world application. It aligns with Scopus journal standards by offering an original theoretical synthesis, grounded contextual relevance, and practical utility across multiple disciplines.

CONCLUSION

This conceptual paper presents a theoretical framework that explores how microaggressions and 3R (Race, Religion, and Royalty) issues on social media influence the consumer decision-making behaviours of Malaysian youth. By integrating Microaggression Theory and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), the framework proposes a dual-layered explanation of how subtle identity-based social cues and psychological constructs interact to shape youth behaviour in digital environments.

In Malaysia's multicultural society, social media has become a critical arena for identity negotiation and consumer activism. The proposed model highlights that youth exposed to microaggressive content online often experience identity tension, influencing their perceptions of brands and ultimately their purchasing decisions. These behaviours are further mediated by TPB constructs, attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control, which help explain how social expectations and internal motivations shape consumer choices in politically sensitive contexts.

The model underscores the need for inclusive branding strategies, culturally sensitive policymaking, and a deeper understanding of the psychological and sociocultural dynamics in digital consumer landscapes. It also provides a strong foundation for future empirical research aimed at testing the framework in various demographic and cultural settings.

Overall, this study contributes to the advancement of marketing, social psychology, and multicultural communication by offering a contextually relevant and theoretically grounded model that captures the complex interplay between digital discourse, identity, and consumption in Malaysia.

REFERENCES

1. Alavi, A., Rahman, M., & Wong, S. (2021). Experiences of Discrimination and Their Impact on Youth Identity in Malaysia. *Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*.
2. Alavi, M., Mohd Noor, N., & Md Saberi, M. (2021). The Impact of Microaggressions on Customer Perception: A Cultural Perspective. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 31(2), 204–217.
3. Ahmad, R., & Rahim, M. (2023). Legal Challenges in Addressing Racial Issues: The Case of Malaysia. *Journal of Malaysian Studies*.
4. Al-Saify, H., Ibrahim, B., Alahmari, & Darwish, S. (2024). The use of social media and its relationship to national identity among university students. *Edelweiss Applied Science and Technology*, 8(3), 41–56.
5. Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behaviour. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50(2), 179–211.
6. Ajzen, I. (2020). The theory of planned behavior: Frequently asked questions. *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies*, 2(4), 314–324. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hbe2.195>
7. Beh, Z. Y. (2020). The Sedition Act 1948: The making of race, religion and royalty in postcolonial Malaysia [Master's thesis, National Chiao Tung University].
8. Bettache, K. (2023). The WEIRD Microcosm of Microaggression Research: Toward a Cultural-Psychological Approach. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 18(4), 743–748. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17456916221133826>
9. Eschmann, R. D., Pratt, C., & Jeffries, M. (2020). Digital microaggressions: Racialized experiences in online spaces. *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work*, 29(1–3), 144–163. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15313204.2020.1730276>
10. Friedlaender, C. (2018). On Microaggressions: Cumulative Harm and Individual Responsibility. *Hypatia*, 33(1), 5–21. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12390>
11. Hamdi, N. A., Lino, A. M., & Hashim, R. A. (2019). Racial microaggressions and multicultural context in Malaysian higher education institutions. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 10(2), 101–109.
12. Haq, M. (2023). Racial Discourse in Malaysia: The Impact of Social Media on National Identity. *The Star*.

13. Hidayat, F. P., Lubis, F. H., Hardiyanto, S., Ananda, F. R., & Anfasa, I. (2023). The Impact of Social Media Use on Adolescents. In S. Saputra et al. (Eds.), *InCCluSi 2022, ASSEHR 682* (pp. 178–183). https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-494069-07-7_22
14. Hogg, M. A., Van Knippenberg, D., & Rast, D. E. (2017). Intergroup Relations and the Identity Process: The Effects of Group Identification on Intergroup Conflict. *Journal of Social Issues*.
15. Jedicke, E. M., Arnold, C., & Lindenmeier, J. (2025). The dynamics of consumer boycott intention: Examining the roles of moral reasoning, cognitive dissonance, and self-congruence. *Journal of Business Research*, 189(December 2023). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2024.115127>
16. Jiotsa, B., Naccache, B., Duval, M., Rocher, B., & Grall-Bronnec, M. (2021). Social media use and body image disorders: Association between frequency of comparing one's own physical appearance to that of people being followed on social media and body dissatisfaction and drive for thinness. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(6), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18062880>
17. Kohli, S. (2023). The Intention Behind Microaggressions and the Theory of Planned Behavior. *International Journal of Psychology and Neuroscience*, 9(1), 56–64. <https://doi.org/10.56769/ijpn09104>
18. Lilienfeld, S. O. (2017). Microaggressions: Strong Claims, Inadequate Evidence. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 12(1), 138–169. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691616659391>
19. Li, Y., Cheng, Z., & Gil de Zúñiga, H. (2025). TikTok's political landscape: Examining echo chambers and political expression dynamics. *New Media and Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448251339755>
20. Lino, A. M., & Hashim, R. A. (2019). Experiencing racial microaggressions in Malaysia: A multicultural perspective. *Malaysian Journal of Education*, 44(1), 33–45.
21. Lino, F. A., & Hashim, R. A. (2019). Racial Microaggressions and Multicultural Awareness Among Malaysian Youth. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 9(5), 482–494.
22. Nadal, K. L. (2011). Interpersonal Microaggressions: A Review of the Literature and Implications for Practice *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 35(3), 391–400.
23. Nadal, K. L., Griffin, K. E., Wong, Y., Hamit, S., & Rasmus, M. (2014). Counseling Implications for Clients of Color. 92(1), 1–10.
24. Nurhayati, C., Ihsan, A. B., & Shaka, M. F. (2021). The Influence of Social Media on Religious Identity Politics among Indonesian Millennial Generation. *Simulacra*, 5(2), 57–70. <https://doi.org/10.21107/sml.v5i2.16621>.
25. Meerangani, K. A., Abdul Hamid, M. F., Abd Wahab, N. A., & Sattar, A. (2024). The influence of 3R (Race, Religion, Royalty) on the harmony of society in the digital era. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, 8(5). <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2024.805150>
26. Pierce, C. M., J. V. Carew, D. Pierce-Gonzalez, and D. Wills. 1977. An experiment in racism: TV commercials. *Education and Urban Society* 10.1: 61–87. DOI: 10.1177/001312457701000105
27. *Rangka Tindakan Blueprint Perpaduan Negara 2021–2030*. (2021). Jabatan Perpaduan Negara dan Integrasi Nasional, Malaysia.
28. Saidin, M. I. S., & Azrun, N. (2024). Digital Media and Religious Sentiments in Malaysia: Critical Discourse Analysis of Cyberspace Campaigns in GE15. *Religions*, 15(8), 920. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15080920>
29. Shamsul, A. B. (2022). Understanding the Role of Race, Religion, and Royalty in Malaysian Society. *Journal of Malaysian Studies*.
30. Stamps, D. L. (2020). The Role of Race, Racism, and Group Relevant Social Issues. *Advances in Journalism and Communication*, 8(4), 131–149. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ajc.2020.84010>
31. Sue, DW, Capodilupo, CM, Torino, GC, Bucceri, JM, Holder, AMB, Nadal, KL, & Esquilin, M. (2007). Keagresifan Mikro Kaum dalam Kehidupan Sehari-hari: Implikasi untuk Amalan Klinik. *Pakar Psikologi Amerika*, 62 (4), 271–286.
32. Sue, D. W., S. Alsaidi, M. N. Awad, E. Glaeser, C. Z. Calle, and N. Mendez. 2019. Disarming racial microaggressions: Microintervention strategies for targets, White allies, and bystanders. *American Psychologist* 74.1: 128. DOI: 10.1037/amp0000296
33. Tan, Y., & Lim, S. (2023). Navigating Identity in Digital Spaces: The Role of Social Media for Malaysian Youth. *Journal of Digital Culture*.

-
34. Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W.G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33–47). Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole.
 35. Williams, M. T. (2021). Microaggressions: Clarifying and Applying a Concept. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 16(5), 1034–1049.
 36. Wong, M. Y., Tan, S. S. H., & Toh, T. H. (2019). Microaggressions and Their Impact on Minority Group Identity. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, 22*(4), 245-254.
 37. Zainuddin, M., & Mohd Noor, A. (2021). Racial Identity and the Young Malaysians: A Study of Ethnic Awareness and National Identity. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*.
 38. Zulkefli, A. U., & Abd Rahman, A. (2023). The Importance of Educational Reforms in Promoting National Identity in Malaysia. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*.