Racial Stereotypes Among University Students in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Malaysia is a multiethnic nation comprising a mosaic of various ethnic groups, including Malays, Chinese, Indians, and others. Diversity is certainly one of the nation's greatest virtues, yet it poses problems, particularly how to maintain racial unity and harmony. Such a recurring problem is the presence of racial stereotypes negative generalizations or presumptions about a certain ethnic group resulting in discrimination, social injustice, and misinterpretation. In universities such as University Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM), students from diverse backgrounds often encounter each other daily through social and academic interactions. Social contacts serve as platforms for tolerance and multicultural interaction but also serve to expose hidden biases. The study is aimedto investigate racial stereotype among students in UTHM and to analyse the differences of stereotypes between Malay, Chinese and Indian group among student in UTHM. The findings are anticipated to provide valuable lessons to teachers and policymakers in planning programs that enhance cultural sensitivity, mutual respect, and intercultural understanding among students.

Keywords: ethnicity, racial, stereotypes, student, university

INTRODUCTION

Malays, Chinese, Indians and others are among many ethnic groups that make up Malaysia, a diverse nation. One of the country's greatest assets is its diversity, but it also presents difficulties, particularly when it comes to preserving harmony and unity. One of the ongoing problems is racial stereotypes, which usually negative opinions or assumptions about specific ethnic groups. Social inequality, discrimination, and misunderstandings can result from these stereotypes. Students from many ethnic backgrounds come together to study, live, and interact on a daily basis in the environment of a higher education institution such as Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM). In addition, to provide chances for tolerance and multicultural exchange, these interactions may also reveal hidden prejudices or misunderstandings. Therefore, in order to promote a more welcoming university environment this study focusses on understanding how UTHM students understand about racial stereotypes.

Student's perspectives, communicat -ion, and teamwork may be impacted by these prejudices, especially when it comes to group projects or social situations. Stereotyped ideas about behaviour, attitudes, or academic achievement, for example, may cause some students to hesitate from working with people of different races. This can result in discrimination, and decreased cooperation in addition to have an impact on student relationships. Even though this topic is relevant, little particular research has been done on how UTHM students view racial stereotypes and how they affect campus life. Understanding how they relate is necessary for building a welcoming and professional campus culture. Thus, this study's primary goal is:

a) to investigate racial stereotype among students in UTHM
b) to analyse the differences of stereotypes between Malay, Chinese and Indian group among student in UTHM.

This study is important because it pays attention to a problem that has a direct impact on campus diversity and social life quality. University educators, and governments can create more effective initiatives to encourage sensitivity, knowledge, and acceptance by determining how students view racial stereotypes. The results can also help guide collaboration initiatives including educational campaigns, peer discussions, and intercultural seminars.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Main Cause of the Racial Stereotypes Among Students.

Within the modern era, the issue of national unity often becomes a hot topic of discussion on all digital platforms such as social media, television shows, and others. This issue has the roots that are the source of other problems. The problems that frequently occur in our country all starts from stereotypes within the multi-ethnic society. This is due to the family itself, where parents play an important role in introducing the culture of a particular ethnicity to their children (Aqilah Ahmad & Azlina Abdullah, 2021). For example, the current generation has better socialization with their own ethnic group or race compared to socialization with other ethnic groups or races. This can be proven by a study that has been conducted. In the study, it was found that the factors leading to stereotypes and prejudices against other races were due to a lack of exposure to other ethnicities, compounded by parental up bringing, which is the main issue causing the spirit of unity among races to weaken in the current generation (Aqilah Ahmad & Azlina Abdullah, 2021).

Furthermore, racial sentiment in the election campaign in Malaysia has also become a significant factor. This issue is not new to the current generation; in fact, it has been happening for a long time. This can indeed be further proven by the riots that occurred on May 13, 1969, due to dissatisfaction among the community (Abdul Halim Ramli Mohammad Redzuan Othman, 2012). Usually, some political party members will use racial sentiment manipulation to easily gain votes and support for their campaigns (Muhammad Hamizan Azman et al., 2024). This is further reinforced by a politician who expressed the opinion that "He (UMNO) has no ideas and is lazy to face the people, and in the end, takes the easy way out by saying that if the people vote for anyone other than UMNO and Pas, then this country will be taken over by non-Muslims." (Sinar Harian, 2022)
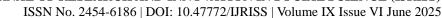
Moreover, the use of social media has also become a significant cause of the emergence of racial stereotypes. Let's take the use of the Facebook application in daily life as an example. Undoubtedly, the use of Facebook brings a positive impact on our lives. However, uncontrolled and unlimited use of Facebook invites negative impacts among the multi-ethnic society. This is due to a small number of irresponsible parties spreading false information and other inappropriate content such as sharing pornographic videos and so on (Saifulazry Mokhtar et al., 2022). The long-term effect can create negative stereotypes among the multi-ethnic community. This can cause ethnic tensions due to the misuse of social media, such as the spread of fake news and various false accusations filled with extreme racist elements, which is very distressing and can undermine national unity and cohesion among the community (Rosfazila Abd Rahman et al., 2019).

Finally, sentiments and stereotypes emerged within the community. This situation became more worse when the issue arises among the students. Therefore, several actions need to be taken to foster unity among students so that the issue of stereotypes among students decreases.

The Appropriate Methods That Can Be Applied in Reducing Racial Stereotypes.

All parties have a significant role and responsibility in reducing racial stereotypes. One of the most basic and fundamental methods is to firmly adhere to the concept of racial unity. Furthermore, as true Malaysians, it is our duty to embody the meaning of the fifth principle of the Rukun Negara, which is "Courtesy and Morality," where this principle emphasizes politeness and decorum not only towards our close ones but towards everyone (Muhammad Hamizan Azman et al., 2024).

Furthermore, with the advancement of time, the use of social media also plays an important role in addressing this stereotype issue. Now, the use of applications such as WhatsApp, Telegram, Tumblr, Facebook, Instagram,

TikTok, Twitter, and Skype can facilitate communication among a multi-ethnic society (Rosfazila Abd Rahman et al., 2019). This is because these applications have specific features that attract users in communication, which indirectly fosters unity and respect within society (Rosfazila Abd Rahman et al., 2019). Let's take the example of social media usage, when the world was hit by the threat of the virus causing the Covid-19 disease, leading to the implementation of the Movement Control Order (MCO). The use of Facebook and Skype was able to bridge the social gap between communities, allowing them to meet face-to-face even if only online. They were also able to share important information and updates during that time (Saifulazry Mokhtar et al., 2022). This can further enhance unity among the community, especially among students of educational institutions, significantly. This can serve as an example for university students to have respect for students of various ethnicities.

The Absence of Sentiments and Stereotypes Between Races Becomes the Foundation of a Harmonious Nation.

The rapid development of technology in line with the present era, social media has become a significant platform in enhancing national unity. Although it cannot be denied that uncontrolled use of social media can have a negative impact. However, that is only a small fraction; the rest provide more positive aspects in using social media as a bridge connecting a multi-ethnic society, especially among students, to expand their network. In several previous studies that have been conducted, the use of social media can enhance interactions among communities from various backgrounds, ethnicities, and religions (Rosfazila Abd Rahman et al., 2019). This can foster understanding among them, especially among university students. In addition, with the advancement of time, the use of technology and social media undeniably forms a new social pattern in society, especially among students, and can connect every individual from all corners of the world who have different backgrounds (Saifulazry Mokhtar et al., 2022).
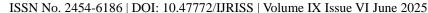
Moreover, due to the rapid development of technology, conducive and potential human labour is highly needed in several public sectors in our country. This is very useful for students who want to gain work experience or find jobs to support their lives after graduation. To achieve a skilled workforce, a company or organization requires excellent and progressive staff. The staff need to have high capability and social awareness. This can be achieved by having a diverse workforce with different backgrounds, ethnicities, and religions. Critical thinking can be achieved by having a workforce of different ethnicities. With the presence of today's younger generation, commonly known as Gen-Y and Gen-Z, they are more open to ethnic diversity in the workforce (Azlina Abdullah, 2017).

Moreover, they believe that there needs to be diversity that serves as the foundation for empowering companies or organizations. With this, national unity in the workplace can be enhanced and influence the world's values and perceptions of our country. Indirectly, this has a positive impact on our country to be competitive on a global scale. Furthermore, this can attract foreign investment and tourists to our country because we have a new generation that respects each other despite different ethnicities and is rich in culture and other unique aspects (Azlina Abdullah, 2017).

Comparative Studies from other Multicultural Society

Recent scholarship has increasingly highlighted the persistence of racial stereotypes among university students, not only in Malaysia but across various multicultural societies. For example, Lewis et al. (2021) examined racial microaggressions and stereotyping in U.S. college campuses, revealing how entrenched assumptions about intelligence and behavior continue to shape intergroup perceptions and affect students' academic and social experiences. Similarly, in Canada, Ankomah (2022) explored ethnic stereotypes among multicultural university students, finding that even within officially inclusive environments, minority students frequently face subtle forms of racialization tied to cultural and linguistic stereotypes. Studies in the United Kingdom have also reported that students from ethnic minority backgrounds often contend with biased expectations, particularly around academic performance and social behavior (Bhopal, 2018).

Comparative research from Singapore, another highly diverse society, shows parallel patterns. Goh and Chua (2019) found that ethnic Chinese students frequently held implicit biases toward Malay and Indian peers,

particularly in traits related to trustworthiness and work ethic. In South Africa, a post-apartheid society still grappling with historical divisions, Higham (2016) documented how university students navigate persistent racialized narratives shaped by both historical memory and contemporary socioeconomic inequality.

These international examples provide critical context for understanding racial stereotyping among university students in Malaysia. They suggest that such stereotypes are not unique to any one nation, but are part of a broader pattern of social categorization that emerges in pluralistic environments. Incorporating these comparative perspectives deepens the analysis of how stereotypes function within higher education and reinforces the relevance of examining such dynamics within the Malaysian context.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, two main methods were used for data collection, in line with the approach taken in the previous report entitled *"Revisiting Racial Stereotypes in Malaysia"* by Mansor Mohd Noor and Nazri Muslim (2014). Similar to that study, which explored the perceptions and attitudes of Malaysians from different ethnic backgrounds, the current research also utilized a survey method to gather data from three groups of respondent's individuals of various races categorized by faculty. The survey questions were constructed using a 5-point Likert Scale to identify stereotypes among ethnic groups, specifically comparing perceptions among students from different ethnic backgrounds. A quantitative approach was adopted, guided by the analytical frameworks of Mansor Mohd Noor and Nazri Muslim (2014) and Rabushka (1971). Data were collected through Google Forms, enabling efficient distribution, response collection, and initial data processing.

To ensure the reliability of the instrument, Cronbach's Alpha values ranged from 0.84 to 0.924, indicating good to excellent internal consistency across the items. As the data were found to be not normally distributed, the study employed both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. Descriptive analysis, particularly through percentage distributions, was used to rank the strength and prevalence of stereotypes across different ethnic groups.

For inferential analysis, the study focused on four key stereotype dimensions: cleanliness, intelligence, honesty, and trustworthiness. Kruskal-Wallis tests were used to assess significant differences in these perceptions across ethnic groups. Where significant differences were found, Mann-Whitney U tests were conducted for pairwise comparisons, and a Bonferroni correction with new p-value threshold $(0.05 \div 3 = 0.017)$ was applied to adjust for multiple comparisons and control Type I error. This comprehensive and systematic approach, aligned with methodologies used in the *Revisiting Racial Stereotypes* study, ensured the validity, reliability, and analytical rigor of the research findings.

RESULT

A survey was conducted among Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM) students between April and June 2025. A total of 315 respondents participated in the study. The breakdown of respondents by ethnicity is as follows: 194 Malays (61.2%), 63 Chinese (20.2%), and 58 Indians (18.6%) focusing particularly on the racial stereotypes held by Malays, Chinese, and Indians toward one another.

Table 1: Malay Racial Stereotype of each Ethnic (%)

	M	**C**	**I**
Intelligence	71.3	93.8	40
Ambition	66.3	63.7	75
Industriousness	57.5	45	92.5
Cleanliness	86.3	85	25
Honesty	73.8	40	43.8
Sincerity	70	43.8	70

Trustworthiness	75	33.8	65
Social Activity	73.8	52.5	68.8

M=Malay, C=Chinese, I=Indian

Table 2: Chinese Racial Stereotype of each Ethnic (%)

	M	**C**	**I**
Intelligence	53.8	96.2	34.6
Ambition	88.5	65.4	73.1
Industriousness	65.4	50	92.3
Cleanliness	69.2	92.3	23.1
Honesty	5308	76.9	23.1
Sincerity	65.4	69.2	76.9
Trustworthiness	57.7	50	61.5
Social Activity	65.4	50	73.1

M=Malay, C=Chinese, I=Indian
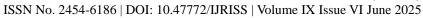
Table 3: Indian Racial Stereotype of each Ethnic (%)

	M	**C**	**I**
Intelligence	54.2	91.7	66.7
Ambition	54.2	62.5	75
Industriousness	58.3	20.8	70.8
Cleanliness	54.2	83.3	58.3
Honesty	50	33.3	62.5
Sincerity	37.5	29.2	70.8
Trustworthiness	41.7	29.2	75
Social Activity	70.8	29.2	66.7

M=Malay, C=Chinese, I=Indian

Malays, Chinese, and Indians in Malaysia generally view themselves positively, but their perceptions of other groups differ. Malays rate themselves highly in cleanliness, honesty, and trustworthiness, while seeing Chinese as intelligent but less honest. Chinese consider themselves the most intelligent and clean, yet they acknowledge Malays as ambitious and Indians as hardworking. Indians pride themselves on ambition, industriousness, and trustworthiness, but they view Chinese as intelligent yet lacking sincerity. Overall, each group maintains strong self-stereotypes while holding mixed—and often less favourable—views of the other ethnicities.

Table 4: Racial Stereotype: Malay Ranking Other Ethnic Groups

Malay	**Chinese**	**Indian**
Cleanliness	Intelligence	Sincerity
Trustworthiness	Ambition	Social Activity

Honesty	Social Activity	Trustworthiness
Social Activity	Sincerity	Ambition
Intelligence	Industriousness	Honesty
Sincerity	Honesty	Intelligence
Ambition	Trustworthiness	Industriousness
Industriousness	Cleanliness	Cleanliness

Based on table 4, The Malay group is consistently rated above 50% in all categories, which means the Malay group priotise their ethnic. These ratings suggest a generally favourable stereotype, portraying Malays as clean, honest, and socially active individuals.

Table 5: Racial Stereotype: Chinese Ranking Other Ethnic Groups

Malay	Chinese	Indian
Social Activity	Intelligence	Ambition
Intelligence	Cleanliness	Trustworthiness
Industriousness	Ambition	Sincerity
Ambition	Industriousness	Industriousness
Cleanliness	Honesty	Social Activity
Honesty	Trustworthiness	Intelligence
Trustworthiness	Sincerity	Honesty
Sincerity	Social Activity	Cleanliness

Based on table 5, the data reveals clear ethnic stereotypes among Chinese respondents, who rated their own group highest in intelligence, cleanliness, and honesty, reflecting in-group bias. Malays were seen as most ambitious and rated favorably for cleanliness, sincerity, and social activity, while Indians were viewed as highly industrious, ambitious, and socially active but scored lowest in intelligence, cleanliness, and honesty—indicating negative stereotyping. Overall, the table highlights ethnocentric perceptions and the need to challenge biased views in multicultural settings.

Table 6: Racial Stereotype: Indian Ranking Other Ethnic Groups

Malay	Chinese	Indian
Ambition	Intelligence	Industriousness
Industriousness	Cleanliness	Sincerity
Intelligence	Honesty	Social Activity
Cleanliness	Sincerity	Ambition
Sincerity	Ambition	Trustworthiness
Social Activity	Industriousness	Intelligence
Trustworthiness	Trustworthiness	Honesty
Honesty	Social Activity	Cleanliness

Based on table 6, the Indian group rates themselves highly across all traits, especially in Ambition, Sincerity, Social Activity, and Trustworthiness, reflecting a strong, value-driven self-image. Meanwhile the Malay group are more moderate. They are seen as sociable and hardworking, but rate moral traits like Sincerity and Trustworthiness lower, reflecting a balanced yet mixed stereotype. The Chinese group is then more divided. They give high marks to intelligence and cleanliness, but low marks to qualities like trustworthiness, sincerity, and social activity, indicating that they value intelligence but are skeptical of moral and social attributes.

The data shows us that all groups have their own strength. Which was Cleanliness was rated the highest among the others by the Malay group, Ambition was rated the highest by the Indians and Intelligence was rated the highest by the Chinese group. Matters of rationality are not that dominant in the indigenous groups.

Table 7: Kruskal Wallis Analysis on Ethnic Group

	Cleanliness	Intelligence	Honesty	Trustworthiness
Kruskal-Wallis H	241.176	247.960	263.967	255.394
df	2	2	2	2
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000	.000	.000
a. Kruskal Wallis Test				
b. Grouping Variable: Ethnic: Malay, Chinese, Indian				

The results from the Kruskal-Wallis analysis reveal statistically significant differences in students' perceptions of racial stereotypes across ethnic groups—Malay, Chinese, and Indian—on all four measured dimensions: cleanliness, intelligence, honesty, and trustworthiness. For cleanliness, the Kruskal-Wallis H value is 241.176 (df = 2, p < .001), indicating a significant variation in how cleanliness is perceived among the ethnic groups. Similarly, significant differences are found in perceptions of intelligence (H = 247.960, df = 2, p < .001), honesty (H = 263.967, df = 2, p < .001), and trustworthiness (H = 255.394, df = 2, p < .001). As the p-values for all four dimensions are less than 0.05, the null hypothesis of equal group medians is rejected, confirming that ethnicity significantly influences how students perceive one another in terms of these stereotype traits. To further explore which ethnic groups differ significantly from each other, pairwise comparisons using the Mann-Whitney U test with Bonferroni correction are recommended. These results underscore the presence of racial stereotype differences among university students in a multicultural setting.

Table 8: Differential Analysis on Stereotype of Malay vs Chinese

	Cleanliness	Intelligence	Honesty	Trustworthiness
Mann-Whitney U	0	0	0	0
Wilcoxon W	2016	18915	2016	2016
Z	-12.655	-12.828	-13.44	-13.424
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0	0	0
a. Grouping Variable: Ethnic Malay vs Chinese				

The Mann-Whitney U test results presented in the figure indicate statistically significant differences in stereotypes between Malay and Chinese students across all four measured domains: cleanliness, intelligence,

honesty, and trustworthiness. Each stereotype dimension recorded a p-value of .000, which is well below the conventional alpha level of 0.05, suggesting that the observed differences are highly significant.

Specifically, the Z-values for cleanliness (-12.655), intelligence (-12.828), honesty (-13.440), and trustworthiness (-13.424) confirm strong negative ranks, indicating a clear divergence in responses between the two ethnic groups. These results show that Malay and Chinese students significantly differ in how they perceive or are perceived in terms of these stereotype traits. The Wilcoxon W values, ranging from 2,016.000 to 18,915.000, further support these findings.

In conclusion, the analysis highlights a meaningful and statistically significant difference in stereotype perceptions between Malay and Chinese students, warranting further examination into the social and cultural factors that contribute to these perceptions in a university setting.

Table 9: Differential Analysis on Stereotype of Malay vs Indian

	Cleanliness	Intelligence	Honesty	Trustworthiness
Mann-Whitney U	.000	.000	.000	.000
Wilcoxon W	1711.000	18915.000	1711.000	1711.000
Z	-12.306	-12.506	-13.107	-13.105
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000
a. Grouping Variable: Ethnic Malay vs Indian				

The table presents the results of a differential analysis comparing stereotypes between Malay and Indian ethnic groups across four attributes: cleanliness, intelligence, honesty, and trustworthiness. The Mann-Whitney U test was used for this non-parametric analysis, and the results show statistically significant differences (p = .000) for all attributes, as indicated by the asymptotic significance values. The large negative Z-scores (ranging from -12.306 to -13.107) suggest that one group is consistently rated higher or lower than the other across all traits, though the table does not specify the direction of these differences.

The extremely low p-values (all .000) imply strong evidence against the null hypothesis of no difference between the groups. However, the lack of descriptive statistics (e.g., median ranks) makes it impossible to determine which group was stereotyped more positively or negatively for each attribute. The consistency of the significant results across all traits suggests pervasive stereotyping differences between the two ethnic groups in the studied population. Further analysis with additional data, such as effect sizes and descriptive rankings, would be needed to fully interpret the nature and magnitude of these stereotypical differences.

Table 10: Differential Analysis on Stereotype of Chinese vs Indian

	Cleanliness	Intelligence	Honesty	Trustworthiness
Mann-Whitney U	1732.000	1525.500	297.000	1665.000
Wilcoxon W	3748.000	3236.500	2313.000	3681.000
Z	-.589	-2.231	-8.536	-.972
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.556	.026	.000	.331
a. Grouping Variable: Ethnic Chinese vs Indian				

The table displays the results of a differential analysis examining stereotypes between Chinese and Indian ethnic groups across four attributes: cleanliness, intelligence, honesty, and trustworthiness. The Mann-Whitney U test reveals mixed findings. For intelligence, there is a statistically significant difference ($p = .026$, $Z = -2.231$), suggesting that one group is stereotyped as more intelligent than the other, though the direction of this difference is unclear without additional descriptive statistics. The most pronounced difference is in honesty, where the extremely low p-value ($p = .000$) and large negative Z-score ($Z = -8.536$) indicate a strong and significant disparity in stereotypes between the two groups. In contrast, no significant differences were found for cleanliness ($p = .556$) or trustworthiness ($p = .331$), as their p-values exceed the conventional threshold of .05.

These results suggest that while stereotypes about honesty and, to a lesser extent, intelligence differ significantly between Chinese and Indian ethnic groups in this study, perceptions of cleanliness and trustworthiness do not show statistically meaningful variation. The findings highlight that ethnic stereotypes are not uniform across all traits and that some attributes may be more subject to biased perceptions than others. Further research with detailed descriptive statistics (e.g., median rankings) would help clarify which group is favored or disfavored in these stereotypes.

DISCUSSION

The data present a vivid narrative of social transformation within a community navigating the path from tradition to modernity. From the Malays, we can see that traditional attire and rural surroundings reflect deep-rooted cultural values and a strong sense of heritage. This sets the foundation for understanding the community's origins and longstanding way of life.

As we progress to the Chinese and Indians, notable shifts emerge. Modern clothing, stylized poses, and the presence of smartphones suggest an increasing influence of technology, media, and urban culture. These elements symbolize a transformation in identity—especially among the younger generation—who appear more engaged in self-expression and influenced by global trends.

This generational divide highlights the changing dynamic: young people are adopting modern values, while elder ones preserve cultural continuity. In addition to being external, the change also represents more profound shifts in beliefs, goals, and ways of living.

These stereotype patterns show that all ethnic group measured themselves based on a commercial ethos, especially so among the Chinese and Indians. But Malays often stereotyped Chinese and Indian based on substantive rationality. This demonstrates how these ethnic group's stereotypes are shaped more by their own worldview than by the ethnic dimension calculation (Mansor, 2020).

Together, these studies essentially show a community that is undergoing change while maintaining a respect for tradition and becoming more adaptable. This slow development perfectly encapsulates societal change: a merging of the traditional and the modern as societies adjust to a world that is changing quickly.

Next, by analyzing the four types of stereotypes which are cleanliness, intelligence, honesty, and trustworthiness among Malay, Chinese, and Indian ethnic groups in Malaysia is particularly critical due to their relevance in shaping interethnic perceptions, social cohesion, and institutional equity in a multicultural society. These specific dimensions are closely tied to moral and competence judgments, which are foundational to social interactions, public trust, and educational and workplace evaluations.

Firstly, cleanliness has been historically racialized in Malaysia, often associated with socio-economic status and cultural practices, which can lead to biased assumptions about lifestyle and hygiene, particularly in shared public spaces or institutions. Negative stereotypes in this domain may result in social exclusion or stigmatization, particularly in education or housing (Anuar, 2024).

Secondly, intelligence as a stereotype significantly affects educational equity and academic self-concept. In Malaysia's context, where race-based policies and academic streaming are sensitive issues, assumptions about

ethnic groups' intellectual ability may influence teacher expectations and peer dynamics. For example, studies have shown that Chinese students are often stereotyped as more academically competent, while Malay and Indian students are subjected to more varied and often less favorable assumptions (Mansor, 2020).

Honesty and trustworthiness are central to interpersonal and institutional trust. These two dimensions are often invoked in workplace evaluations and leadership judgments. Stereotypes in these areas can shape public perceptions of integrity and reliability, which in turn affect employment opportunities and interethnic collaboration. In a society as diverse as Malaysia, trust is the backbone of peaceful coexistence, and negative stereotypes regarding honesty or trustworthiness may breed resentment and perpetuate ethnic tension (Anuar, 2024).

These four dimensions are particularly worth analyzing because they are socially consequential stereotypes that go beyond surface-level perceptions. Unlike physical appearance, fashion, or preferences, these traits affect value-based judgments and merit-based opportunities. As such, they are more likely to influence policy-making, educational streaming, hiring decisions, and even law enforcement biases. Moreover, these stereotypes map onto two major evaluative dimensions in social psychology: warmth (honesty, trustworthiness) and competence (intelligence, cleanliness as a proxy), which are widely studied in stereotype content models (Fiske et al., 2002).

In Malaysia's context of race-based affirmative action and pluralistic national identity, understanding these stereotypes is not only academically relevant but essential for informed policy reform and promoting interethnic harmony.
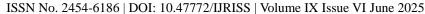
CONCLUSION

Based on the survey conducted at University Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia, we can see the stereotypes revealed among Malay, Chinese and Indian has been shown different perspectives among us. Each ethnic group rates their own members more positively across various traits, indicating a strong presence of self-enhancing stereotypes.

Research also shows Malay rated Chinese intelligence is 93.8 and Indian was 40 but for their trustworthiness is 33.8 for Chinese and Indian is 65 that makes a huge different ways of thinking and trustworthiness. These stereotypes reflect not only interethnic perceptions but also deeper cultural paradigms

Malay seems to view people more via traditional and moral prims, while Chinese and Indian respondents place more value on commercial rationalism and success. In addition, generation transformation which has been shown by younger people acceptance of recent values, represents. a more general social shift whereby ethnic identity is being formed more and more by cultural trends across the world and less by shared community based. In other words, evidence highlights the ongoing problem of ethnic bias in multicultural communities by showing that racial stereotypes reflect each group's self-image and cultural perception more than they reflect true intergroup understanding.

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