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“STOP BEING RACIST”: WHAT MALAYSIANS SAY ABOUT RACE ON SOCIAL MEDIA - A THEMATIC ANALYSIS

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Abstract:

In recent years, social media platforms, exemplified by X (Twitter), have evolved into pivotal arenas for individuals to connect over shared interests and advocate for important societal issues collectively. This trend has notably surged since GE15, with these platforms serving as dynamic spaces for Malaysians to actively participate in national dialogues spanning social, political, religious, gender, and human rights topics. Through the medium of posts (tweets), these discussions not only spotlight pertinent issues but also unveil the diverse array of Malaysian perspectives. This study employed Braun and Clarke’s thematic analysis framework to delve into social media conversations among Malaysians concerning race/ethnicity and its intersections. Utilizing publicly available posts (tweets) from January 1 to June 30, 2023, which were linked to significant local events, the analysis unearthed several salient themes. These include (1) *Race and Ethnicity in Malaysian Society*, (2) *The Political Dimensions of Race*, (3) *Religious Influence on Politics*, (4) *Social Harmony and National Identity*, (5) *Media and Public Discourse*, and (6) *Human Rights and Equality*. Collectively, these themes offer nuanced insights into Malaysia’s multifaceted socio-political landscape. Despite the sometimes cursory nature of discussions on X (Twitter), the analysis reveals that these themes not only reflect racial/ethnic biases and perpetuate stereotypes and oppression but also underscore the urgent need for inclusive policies, respectful dialogue, and collective action to nurture harmony and equity within Malaysian society.

Keywords:

Social Media, X (Twitter), Thematic Analysis, Race, Ethnicity Malaysia

Introduction

By and large, Malaysia has long been portrayed with or through an image of peaceful coexistence among its diverse racial/ethnic groups. In various spheres such as schools, government offices, and public spaces, Malays, Chinese, Indians, Ibans, Kadazandusuns, and others interact, work, and reside together. This harmony is often showcased in textbooks, advertisements, and national imagery like the iconic Malaysia Truly Asia posters, which depict a blend of races/ethnicities against the backdrop of Malaysian beautiful and picturesque landmarks. In both private and public sector committees, there is typically representation from different racial/ethnic backgrounds, fostering an impression of cohesive ethnic relations. Even in educational settings, students collaborate in mixed-race/ethnic groups for academic tasks (Mustapha et al., 2009).

Readers may question why the terms 'race', 'racial', 'ethnic', and 'ethnicity' are presented with slashes (/), a symbol often indicating options or interchangeability. According to Blackmore (2019), race and ethnicity are concepts linked to human ancestry. Race is defined as "a category of humankind that shares certain distinctive physical traits." Ethnicity, on the other hand, is broadly defined as "large groups of people classed according to common racial, national, tribal, religious, linguistic, or cultural origin or background" (Blackmore, 2019). Blackmore (2019) notes that "race" typically pertains to biology and is associated with physical features such as skin color or hair texture, whereas "ethnicity" is tied to cultural expression and identity.

Despite these distinctions, in Malaysia, these terms are often used interchangeably. This practice can be attributed to various factors, including the interchangeable usage of 'ethnicity' with 'race' in political or popular discourse within the country (Pong, 1997; Aminuddin & Wakefield, 2020). For example, Malaysian media frequently employs 'race' when discussing national integration, policies, and relationships among the three major ethnic groups, while opting for 'ethnic' when addressing issues related to the peoples of Sabah and Sarawak and cultural matters (Nakamura, 2015). Additionally, 'race' is commonly utilized in Malaysian academic literature as a recognized "scientific" concept for discussing ethnic relations (Nakamura, 2015). Furthermore, Malaysians tend to categorize the country's major ethnic groups – Malay, ethnic Chinese, and ethnic Indian – as racial groups, contrasting them with indigenous peoples of Sabah and Sarawak, non-Malay indigenous communities, and other minorities, whom they perceive as ethnic groups (Nakamura, 2015).

National Day celebrations, as reported in newspaper articles, often emphasize themes of harmony, particularly during patriotic displays (Ting, 2017). However, beneath this surface veneer of integration, race/ethnicity continues to significantly influence the Malaysian psyche, shaping social interactions and personal preferences. This enduring attachment to racial/ethnic identity underscores the potency of emotional appeals in Malaysian society. Malays, Chinese, and Indians, as distinct cultural communities, maintain deep connections to their respective languages, traditions, and faiths, actively preserving and promoting them. Consequently, individuals tend to gravitate towards others of their racial/ethnic group, drawn together by shared symbols and values, perpetuating the sway of ethnicity in Malaysian life (Zainal & Salleh, 2010).

In recent times, incidents in the mass media increasingly carry racial/ethnic undertones. For instance, the reporting of a 2017 accident involving a Chinese woman and Malay teenagers in Johor exemplifies this trend, as does coverage of inter-racial/ethnic solidarity during natural

disasters (The Straits Times, 2023; Bahari, 2022). Such media narratives shape public perceptions and behaviours by selectively framing societal events. Moreover, the rise of social media has further influenced racial/ethnic relations, with ordinary citizens voicing opinions and challenging authorities more openly. However, studies reveal a disconnect between online behaviour, characterized by inflammatory remarks, and traditional Malaysian cultural values (Ardi et al., 2020). This phenomenon underscores the need to examine how the globalization of information impacts racial/ethnic dynamics and rights assertion Tajuddin (2012). Understanding and appreciating cultural diversity through social media platforms can foster public awareness and tolerance, potentially contributing to improved ethnic relations in Malaysia (Khan et al., 1999; Soen, 2002).

The imperative of this need has grown increasingly evident in recent years, especially with the evolution of X (Twitter) into a crucial platform for Malaysians to unite over common interests and advocate for societal causes collectively. This transformation has been particularly notable since GE15, with X (Twitter) serving as a vibrant arena for Malaysians to engage in national discussions encompassing a broad spectrum of topics, including social, political, religious, gender, and human rights issues. The post-GE15 period saw the establishment of a unity government comprising two political blocs, Pakatan Harapan (PH) and Barisan Nasional (BN), with Anwar Ibrahim from the PH bloc assuming the prime minister's role. The advent of the PH-BN administration witnessed politicians, largely from opposition parties, exacerbating racial tensions among Malaysians. One instance is the promotion of the 'Malay Proclamation' by politicians as a deliberate challenge to Anwar Ibrahim's unity government (Santhiram, 2023; Zhang & Harith, 2023). Malaysians turned to social media to express diverse viewpoints on this issue—some supported it, others opposed or disapproved of it, and still, others remained undecided or held alternative perspectives. An illustrative posts (tweets) is provided below:

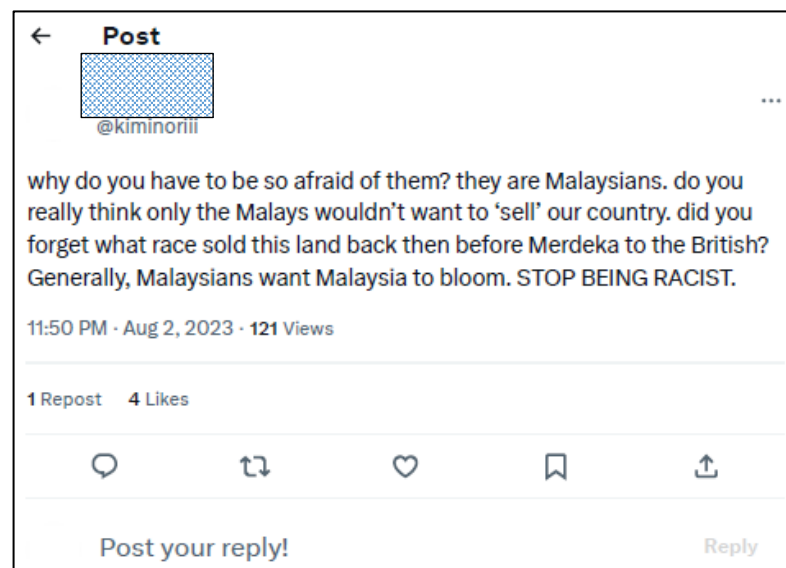


Figure 1: A Sample Posts (Tweet) on X (Twitter) Discussing the Topic of Race

Note: The removal of the X (Twitter) handle is implemented to uphold anonymity and confidentiality, despite the profile and posts being publicly available. This practice aligns with Townsend and Wallace's (2018) ethical considerations regarding the utilization of social media data in research.

The aforementioned posts, along with numerous others, merit investigation for their portrayal of diverse perspectives on the topic of race within Malaysia's contemporary political landscape. These insights gleaned from such discourse have the potential to enrich our understanding of how individuals across the nation can cultivate public awareness and tolerance, thereby fostering enhanced ethnic relations. With this objective in mind, this paper seeks to explore the discussions among Malaysians on Twitter about race/ethnicity, guided by the central inquiry: What sentiments and viewpoints do present-day Malaysians express regarding the issue of race/ethnicity on this platform?

The question becomes increasingly relevant considering the significant number of Malaysians engaged in social media. According to data from the Ministry of Communication Malaysia, as of January 2021, there were approximately 28 million social media users in the country. These figures indicate that Malaysians are among the most active social media users globally. Notably, the number of users saw a notable increase of two million, or 7%, within just a year from 2020. This surge is attributed to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which has compelled people to spend more time at home following the implementation of movement control orders (MCO) (Ministry of Communications, 2024).

The findings align with the results of the 2020 Internet Users Survey conducted by the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC), which uncovered significant trends in online content sharing behaviors among Malaysians. The survey highlighted that news (66.9%) and public service announcements (60.9%) were the most commonly shared online content. This surge in sharing can be attributed in part to the coinciding implementation of the Movement Control Order (MCO) during the survey period (MCMC, 2020). Given the circumstances, internet users in Malaysia heavily relied on online platforms to stay updated on COVID-19 cases and receive official instructions regarding daily activities. Additionally, the survey indicated that entertainment and humorous content were also popularly shared, with 56.1% of internet users engaging in such sharing activities. Furthermore, other types of online content, including political and educational content, were also frequently shared among Malaysian internet users (MCMC, 2020).

Before proceeding, it is essential to offer a disclaimer for this paper. We recognize that the subjects we are about to address, such as race/ethnicity, and other sensitive matters, may touch upon personal sensitivities and potentially cause offence to some individuals. Our main objective is to analyze social media discussions surrounding these topics. We value the significance of respecting diverse perspectives and opinions, and we extend our apologies for any discomfort or offence that may arise. Our goal is to promote understanding and insight into these intricate issues, and we appreciate your understanding and open-mindedness as we engage in this discourse.

Literature Review

Social media has become a crucial platform for discussing racial issues (Nguyen et al., 2019; Tao & Fisher, 2021; Keum, 2023; Cao et al., 2022). While it offers real-time conversations and the opportunity to raise awareness, it also presents challenges. Platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram enable individuals to engage and share experiences, but they can also breed misinformation, polarization, and online harassment, particularly regarding race (Agudelo & Olbrychm, 2022) Anonymity online may embolden individuals to express extreme views not

expressed in face-to-face interactions. Moreover, social media algorithms can create echo chambers or environments where users' opinions, political leanings, or beliefs about a topic are reinforced through repeated interactions with like-minded peers or sources, which may reinforce existing biases and limit exposure to diverse perspectives (Cinelli et al., 2021).

Several studies have explored discussions about race on social media, highlighting their diverse impacts on both directly and indirectly involved individuals. Chavez-Dueñas and Adames (2018) conducted a study examining race-based content on social media during racially charged events, focusing on Twitter users' expressions following the grand jury decision in the Michael Brown case. Through consensual content analysis of 101 posts (tweets) with the hashtag Ferguson, themes emerged, including content related to racism, anti-racist content, and news coverage. The findings suggest that social media serves as a platform for individuals to express ideas promoting social equity and opposing racial injustice. Additionally, the study highlights the role of social media in facilitating community engagement to address racism. The proliferation of social media, as Chavez-Dueñas and Adames (2018) argued, has transformed communication about race, impacting various aspects of society including healthcare, education, social justice, multiculturalism, and psychology. Understanding these new spaces of engagement is crucial for advancing racial and social justice in contemporary society.

Nguyen et al. (2019) conducted a study to analyze the sentiment of posts (tweets) containing race-related terms and to identify themes characterizing the social climate related to race. They performed a sentiment analysis on 6000 posts (tweets) from a total of 1,249,653 US posts (tweets) containing race-related terms from 2015-2016. Additionally, a qualitative content analysis was conducted on a random sample of 2100 posts (tweets). The findings revealed that posts (tweets) referencing Middle Eastern groups or Blacks exhibited the lowest positive sentiment compared to posts (tweets) mentioning Asians and Hispanics. The qualitative analysis identified three main categories: negative sentiment, positive sentiment reflecting pride in culture, and navigating relationships. Interestingly, many posts (tweets) containing race-related terms had negative sentiments, even if they were not derogatory or primarily focused on race. Agudelo and Olbrych (2022) undertook a thematic analysis of racist discourse on Twitter surrounding George Floyd's death, focusing on original posts (tweets) during the protests and utilizing counter Black Lives Matter hashtags such as #WhiteLivesMatter, #BlueLivesMatter, and #AllLivesMatter. Their analysis unveiled two primary themes: firstly, the discourse of reverse racism by the oppressor, and secondly, the social criminalization of BLM. According to Agudelo and Olbrych (2022), these themes demonstrate how certain groups craft racist digital discourse that circumvents social media regulations, underscoring the imperative to discern acceptable race discussions from racist discourse. This study aligns with the findings of a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center (2016) on social media conversations among Americans, particularly regarding discussions about race and the emergence of hashtags such as #BlackLivesMatter. The survey highlights significant differences in how black and white adults engage with race-related content on social media. Black social media users are more likely than whites to encounter and posts (tweets) about race-related topics. Additionally, analysis of posts (tweets) reveals that major news events often spark conversations about race on social media platforms. Three content analysis case studies using publicly available posts (tweets) demonstrated that social media not only facilitates discussions about news and politics but also mobilizes people around social causes, exemplified by movements like #BlackLivesMatter.

Cao et al. (2022) conducted a study to explore the content of posts (tweets) featuring the hashtag #StopAsianHate, aiming to address the lack of research focused specifically on the Asian American population. They collected posts (tweets) over two weeks beginning on May 20, 2021, coinciding with President Joe Biden's signing of the COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act. Screening the 31,665 collected posts (tweets) identified 904 eligible for thematic analysis. Their analysis unveiled five key themes: "Asian hate is not new," "Addressing the harm of racism," "Engagement in #StopAsianHate," "Appreciating the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community's culture, history, and contributions," and "Enhancing the visibility of the AAPI community." These findings lay the groundwork for evidence-based strategies to combat racism against Asian Americans on both local and global scales (Cao et al., 2022).

The aforementioned studies highlight how individuals utilize social media to express their views on racial issues, often prompted by specific events that amplify racial sentiments. Through various analytical methods such as content and thematic analysis, these studies uncover themes shaping discussions on platforms like Twitter, where conversations are polarized between racism and anti-racism. The implications of these findings underscore the importance of ensuring that social media discussions on race have a positive impact. Users must critically evaluate the information they encounter, engage in respectful dialogue, and actively seek diverse perspectives. Additionally, platforms themselves bear responsibility for addressing issues like misinformation, harassment, and algorithmic bias to cultivate more inclusive online environments conducive to constructive conversations about race.

While prior studies have predominantly focused on social media discussions about race in the Western context, particularly in America, similar trends are evident in Malaysia. Race/Ethnic-related issues have deeply permeated Malaysian society due to factors such as race-based policies and the politicization of race by politicians and citizens. Scholars like Chin (2022) argue that politics in Malaysia revolves around tensions between the three major racial/ethnic groups: Malays, Chinese, and Indians. The adoption of affirmative action policies following the 1969 ethnic riots, known as the New Economic Policy (NEP), has been widely criticized as racially discriminatory towards non-Malays. Chin (2022) further contends that the emergence of political Islam has further exacerbated these tensions, adding a religious dimension to institutional racism. This phenomenon, known as *Ketuanan Melayu* (Malay Supremacy), has entrenched racial inequalities and influenced political agendas, demonstrating how ideologies can shape political institutions and policies under the guise of affirmative action (Chin, 2022).

But, racism, like an entrenched habit, is hard to eradicate. A recent Malaysian racism report by Pusat KOMAS (2022) documents incidents of racism, racial discrimination, and xenophobia in Malaysia, providing a comprehensive overview of these issues for the first time. The report highlights a concerning increase in such incidents in 2022, attributed in part to the politicization of race and religion during the 15th General Elections. These incidents encompass various categories, including racial and religious politics, expressions of prejudice, discrimination in education and employment, discriminatory government policies, racism in sports, and xenophobia. Our study aims to explore how these incidents shape social media discussions about race/ethnicity among Malaysians, underscoring the importance of understanding and addressing racism and discrimination in the country.

Methodology

This study, as part of a broader research endeavour on ethnic relations and social cohesion, focuses on analyzing X (Twitter) posts as the primary data source to understand conversations about ethnicity and rights in Malaysia. The posts were gathered using the search terms "ethnic" and "rights," with the location set to "Malaysia," and only English-language posts were included for analysis. The data span from January 1 to June 30, 2023, a period marked by significant events sparking discussions on race, religion, and related topics. After the initial extraction, duplicates were removed, and reposts (retweets) were excluded from the analysis.

Thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2014) framework, was employed to scrutinize the data qualitatively. Given the scarcity of existing codes, the first and second authors independently analyzed the posts (tweets) and developed initial codes. Through iterative discussions, an initial codebook was created (Table 1), guiding subsequent coding of the posts (tweets). Revisions were made until consensus was achieved among the authors, ensuring the comprehensiveness and accuracy of the coding process. Once a revised codebook was finalized, the remaining posts (tweets) were coded until no new codes emerged. Subsequent discussions led to the categorization of codes, the generation and revision of themes as shown in Table 2 below. Extensive deliberations ensured agreement on results and interpretations, enhancing the study's credibility. To uphold the privacy of X (Twitter) users, for example, posts (tweets) were paraphrased, and any potentially identifiable information was removed.

Table 1: A Snapshot of the Initial Codebook

Code	Description	Examples for Posts (Tweets)
Exploiting Race	X (Twitter) users' perspectives on individuals or entities abusing race for personal gains or agendas	"PAS had spark and trigger the racial harmony in this country. PAS is using Malay and religion sentiment to stir hatred and social harmony among Malaysian. But yet, they themselves are working with other races."
Manipulating Race	X (Twitter) users' perspectives on individuals or entities manipulating race-related issues for their personal gains or agendas	"It is the country, Malaysia was taken & spoken in video, nothing to do with race, why did u provocatively drag race to mislead?"
Framing of Race	X (Twitter) users' perspectives on individuals or entities that framing issues and so on through the lense of race for personal gains or agendas	"When everything is viewed through the race and religion lense, Malaysia loses. Keep religion out of public governance!"

Table 1: A Sample Thematic Analysis Based on Braun and Clarke’s Framework

Stage	Description	Example from the Analysis		
Familiarization	We familiarized ourselves with the data by dedicating time to reviewing it multiple times to grasp its content and messages.	Malaysians, particularly those who shared on their X (Twitter) accounts, expressed extensive opinions on race, drawing from their knowledge, experiences, and observations.		
Coding	We organized and categorized the data by labeling and sorting different sections based on their content, identifying recurring patterns, ideas, or themes.	The posts (tweets) "Playing the race and religious cards again, huh? Not surprised, coming from you... Oh, and your so-called source" was categorized under "Manipulating perceptions or emotions related to race or religion".		
Generating themes	We grouped similar concepts together by assigning them common labels or codes into broader categories or themes that capture the primary patterns or concepts in the data, ensuring coherence and relevance.	Each of the following posts was coded and assigned a sub-theme:		
		Posts (Tweets)	Codes	Sub-Themes
		“Play the race religious cards again huh. Not surprise this coming from you.. oh and your so called source”.	Manipulating perceptions or emotions related to race or religion	Exploitation of race and religion
		“Bak kut teh is Malaysian. Geenrational. Definition of Malaysia doesnt have to just be one race or religion. That’s what	Interpreting or framing all issues through the lens of race or religion	Politicization of race or religion

makes us uniques.
But sure, politicise
it”.

“Practically every daily news frm him is race or religious politic, abuse their race majority. Biggest bully”.	Using race or religious issues as political tools	Politician’s abuse of race or religion
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Reviewing
themes We verified the accuracy of the identified
themes by examining them across the entire
dataset to confirm they accurately represent
the data and are not influenced by any
preconceived notions or biases.

The subsequent sub-themes were consolidated into a primary theme:

Sub-themes	Primary Theme
Exploitation of race and religion	Politicians' utilization of race and religion for power or manipulation.
Politicization of race or religion	

Defining and
refining We defined and refined the themes by clearly
articulating and enhancing their clarity, logic,
and significance through iterative discussions
and revisions.

Politician’s abuse of race or
religion
The initial theme underwent revision and was subsequently renamed as
follows:

Primary Theme	Revised Theme
Politicians' utilization of race and/or religion for power or manipulation.	The political dimensions of race

Writing up We crafted a cohesive narrative by integrating the identified themes into a comprehensive story, which was supported by examples from the data to elucidate their meaning and significance.

The following posts (tweets) were selected because they encapsulated the main theme:

“Race-baiting politics is really pathetic.”

“Speaking of the race war in Malaysia, us Malaysians are trying to prevent it but our politicians seem to be more than happy to egg us on to make everything about race. When you have racist people in power, it's kinda hard to fight it”

Results

The thematic analysis of posts (tweets) using Braun and Clarke's (2014) procedures unveiled six themes as shown in Table 3 below:

Table 3: Key Themes Identified in Analysed Posts (Tweets)

No.	Theme
1.	Race and Ethnicity in Malaysian Society
2.	The Political Dimensions of Race
3.	Religious Influence on Politics
4.	Social Harmony and National Identity
5.	Media and Public Discourse
6.	Human Rights and Equality

Theme 1: Race and Ethnicity in Malaysian Society

The posts (tweets) highlight the complex interplay of race and ethnicity in Malaysian society, touching upon issues of privilege, discrimination, and identity. There is a pervasive concern among users regarding the treatment of minorities, particularly the Chinese and Indian ethnic groups, and the implications of racial discrimination on social cohesion and global perception. The following posts (tweets) illustrate users' perspectives on the issue.

This country belongs to all Malaysians irrespective of race or religion. That's guaranteed in the constitution of Malaysia!!!

A repeat of open mass physical violence vs minorities in Malaysia, won't be based on race, as in 1969. In the global era, racial riots against ethnic Chinese & Indians, would result in huge global backlash & boycott of Malaysia. will be against LGBT, with wide support from Msians.

Theme 2: The Political Dimensions of Race

The posts (tweets) reveal that political actors are frequently criticized by users for exploiting racial and religious sentiments for their agendas, leading to division and polarization within society. There is a call among users for more inclusive and progressive politics that transcends racial and religious boundaries, emphasizing the need for unity and solidarity among Malaysians. Below are the posts (tweets) that highlight users' viewpoints on the matter.

Race-baiting politics is really pathetic.

Speaking of the race war in Malaysia, us Malaysians are trying to prevent it but our politicians seems to be more than happy to egg us on make everything about race. When u have racist ppl in power, its kinda hard to fight it.

Theme 3: Religious Influence on Politics

Users expressed their views regarding religion, particularly the use of religious rhetoric within Malaysian race-based politics. Some users "accused" certain political parties of using Islam as a tool to consolidate power and marginalize minorities. Concerns are raised among users about the growing influence of conservative religious ideologies on political discourse and its impact on national unity. Here are the posts (tweets) that show users' perspectives on the issue.

Malaysia: After Anwar slams Hadi for harping on race, PAS president insists only Malay- Muslims should lead Malaysia

UMNO is acting up with their unnecessary dramas, muda is being muda and PN with their slanders and race/religion narrative. Will Malaysia politics ever recover from this

Theme 4: Social Harmony and National Identity

Posts (tweets) pointed out the challenges of maintaining social harmony in a multicultural society like Malaysia, where diverse racial and religious backgrounds coexist. Some users called for a reevaluation of national identity, moving towards a more inclusive definition that recognizes the contributions of all ethnic groups and promotes unity. The posts (tweets) below offer insight into users' viewpoints on the matter.

Govt forms still ask you to specify your bangsa. You'd have to choose between the 3 main races or lain-lain. Its clearly designed for political reasons & contradicts with Atuk's "Malaysian" narrative. Somewhere between wanting unity & celebrating our differences, we got fucked.

Exactly right. The boxing in of people into strictly separate races [is clearly to help our country's race based politics. people need to realize our differences are malaysia's biggest asset, not weakness.

Theme 5: Media and Public Discourse

There is criticism among users regarding the media's role in perpetuating racial stereotypes and exacerbating tensions through sensationalist reporting and inflammatory rhetoric. Users believed that more responsible and balanced journalism in Malaysia must be in place to foster understanding and dialogue rather than division. The following post (tweet) provides a glimpse into users' perspectives on the issue.

In Malaysia, most journalists only want to spark hatred among race to collect popularism

Theme 6: Human Rights and Equality

Many users posted (tweeted) their concerns about human rights violations, including discrimination based on race, religion, gender, and sexual orientation. For them, there is an

urgent need for greater inclusivity and equality in Malaysian society. Furthermore, the posts (tweets) also called for healthcare accessibility without discrimination, social injustice and systemic inequalities. Here are the posts (tweets) that reflect users' perspectives on the matter.

Healthcare is universal human right. It must be accessible without discrimination on the grounds of gender, race, age, ethnicity or any other factor. If you think healthcare system in Malaysia is 100% accessible, you need to take a step back to check your privileges.

Healthcare inequalities do exist in Malaysia. Not only due to significant location-based health disparity, but also race, class, age, ethnicity, education, etc. there are many reasons why we need to address HIV disparities, in particular, focusing on transgender people.

Discussion and Conclusion

The above findings offer valuable insights into the dynamics of discussions about race and related topics on social media, which wield unprecedented influence in shaping global discourse, including within Malaysia. Primarily, the analysis revealed that conversations on Twitter among Malaysians mirror the intricate socio-political landscape of the country. Social media has become a prominent platform for individuals to freely express their viewpoints, particularly in response to significant events occurring between January and June 2023, including the tenure of the unity government PH-BN administration and the upcoming six-state elections involving both the Unity Government and opposition parties. Additionally, politicians' emphasis on the 3R (Race, Religion, and Royalty) issue to sway voters has significantly contributed to the discourse.

Furthermore, the findings highlight the diverse range of perspectives among Malaysian Twitter users concerning race/ethnicity and related matters. While some posts (tweets) perpetuated racial biases and stereotypes, others advocated for inclusive policies, respectful dialogue, and collective action to promote harmony and equality. This pattern resonates with findings from studies on social media discussions about race in other contexts, such as the Pew Research Centre's (2016) examination of Americans' discourse on race. These studies reveal that social media platforms not only serve as forums for discussing news and political matters but also mobilize individuals to engage with social causes or movements, exemplified by hashtags like #BlackLivesMatter.

However, unlike in the American context, the findings show that discussions among Malaysians on platforms like Twitter often intertwine race with a myriad of other issues, including religion, ethnicity, politics, social cohesion, and human rights. Topics related to race frequently coincide with current events that exacerbate racial tensions, such as the politicization of the 3R issue. This indicates two significant points: first, social media plays a crucial role in shaping public discourse on sensitive topics like race, reflecting the diversity of opinions and the influence of broader socio-political dynamics. Secondly, Malaysians engage in discussions about various forms of racism, as highlighted by the Pusat KOMAS (2022) report on racism in Malaysia, including racial and religious politics, expressions of prejudice, discrimination in various sectors, and xenophobia. Ultimately,

these discussions on social media platforms like Twitter can serve as echo chambers that reinforce racist attitudes and prejudices, perpetuating harmful stereotypes and contributing to societal divisions. Therefore, it is essential to critically examine and address these issues to foster a more inclusive and equitable online environment.

To conclude our study aimed to understand how Malaysians talk about race/ethnicity and related issues on social media, particularly on X (Twitter). It looked at posts (tweets) posted by Malaysian users from January to June 2023, a period marked by several key events including the politicization of 3R (Race, Religion, and Royalty). The researchers analyzed these posts (tweets) using thematic analysis, identifying several recurring themes in the discussions. These themes included "race and ethnicity in Malaysian society," "political dimensions of race," "religious influence on politics," and "social harmony and national identity." The analysis revealed that Twitter conversations among Malaysians reflected the complexities of the country's socio-political landscape. People use social media to express their opinions more openly than before, for various reasons. The study found that Malaysian Twitter users had diverse perspectives on race and related issues. Some posts (tweets) showed racial bias and perpetuated stereotypes, while others advocated for inclusive policies, respectful dialogue, and collective action to promote harmony and equality.

However, this study has its limitations, primarily relying on posts (tweets) for analysis. Future research could employ alternative methods such as surveys or interviews with Malaysian X (Twitter) users to delve deeper into the topic. While this study has no direct connection to Pusat KOMAS, its findings align with the organization's aspirations. Pusat KOMAS hopes that the new Malaysian MADANI government, along with political and public leaders, will demonstrate unwavering political will and commitment to address the longstanding issues of race and religion that have plagued the country for decades. Immediate action is imperative to safeguard the social cohesion that binds Malaysians together, preventing its erosion. Like Pusat KOMAS, we remain optimistic that the new government will take genuine steps to ensure that all Malaysians are treated with equality and dignity. With this in consideration, our study to lay the foundation for deeper exploration into this crucial domain, specifically delving into Malaysian social media dialogues concerning race within the nation.

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