

Cultural globalisation & its impact upon Malaysian teenagers

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ABSTRAK

Wacana tentang globalisasi sering menjadi tumpuan para sarjana dan penyelidik kerana fenomena ini memberikan kesan secara empirikal kepada kehidupan masyarakat dari segenap sudut: ekonomi, politik, sosial, teknologi dan komunikasi serta demografi. Artikel ini membincangkan tentang arus dan senario globalisasi di Malaysia dari kacamata sosial dan budaya masyarakat, iaitu dari sudut komunikasi, media dan hiburan, informasi teknologi (ICT) dan gaya hidup moden masyarakat kontemporari. Justeru, fokus perbincangan adalah berkisar kepada kesan dan impak globalisasi terhadap budaya, etika dan nilai moral khususnya di kalangan generasi muda Malaysia.

INTRODUCTION

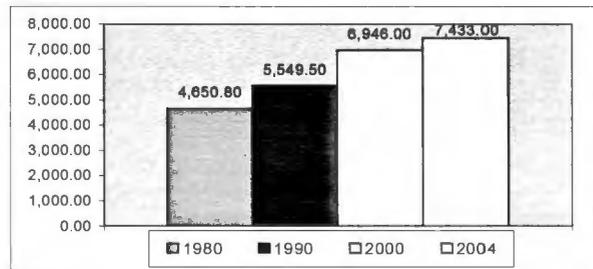
The era of information and communication technology (ICT) has improved people's standard of living in a community. This situation happens because the advancement of ICT was controlled by the 'powers that be' and thus, the western values and ideas were adopted into the community and have been inculcated into all sections of the society especially the teenagers (Abdul Jalal 2001). It is important to note that it is not appropriate to introduce all the modern trends brought by globalisation into Malaysian society. Nevertheless, the impact of globalisation does not favour and is unsuitable for Malaysian culture and tradition (Adnan 2000).

For the purpose of this paper, we shall examine the impact of globalisation upon teenagers in Malaysia. These teenagers and students are the group of people that are most affected by the globalisation process in Malaysia (Shairi 2001). They are the receivers and importers of the foreign culture and values from the west. At the age of 10 to 24 years old, teenagers and students are the group of people that are searching for their identity, exploring something new and discovering new things. It is a transformation period from child into adult.

MALAYSIAN TEENAGERS: AN OVERVIEW

To assist the discussion, first we look at the population of teenagers according to the age group 10-14, reported by the Department of Statistics, Malaysia. According to the Malaysian official population statistics illustrated in Figure 1, the population for the age group between 10 to 24 years old in 1980 was 4.6 million. In 1990, the population was 5.5 million and in 2000 the figure increased to 6.9 million. In recent statistics 2004, the population for the age group 10-24 is 7.4 million out of the total Malaysian population of 25.6 million people. These figures show that the population of the age group of 10 to 24 years old has continued to grow since 1980. Therefore, it is not surprising if the social problems which occur in Malaysia are being dominated by these groups i.e. teenagers .

FIGURE 1: Malaysian Population of Age Group 10 to 24 Years Old



Source: www.statistics.gov.my

Initially, a survey was carried out by Optimum Media Direction (OMD), an international media organization which revealed some interesting findings regarding the teenager lifestyle in several Asian countries. The survey was called ‘The Right of Admission Reserved (ROAR)’ and involved 4,400 respondents from age 15 to 29 years old. Those respondents come from India, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore. According to Florence Ong, the survey aimed to observe the teenagers’ perceptions of the influence of global and local trends upon their lifestyle. The variables of the research involved the teenagers’ favourite music, fashion, branded items, their role models (leadership), most favourite hobbies and leisure activities and their perceptions towards modern life today (Ibrahim 2001).

Table 1 has listed the top ten hobbies of the Malaysian teenagers. Mobile phone usage is the most popular hobby with the highest percentage (91%) closely followed by ‘watching VCD/DVD/Video’ in the second rank with

90%. The third popular hobby is internet surfing with 88%, followed by laptop usage (79%), visiting cafés/cyber cafés (79%) and going to the cinema (72%). Other hobbies which are also popular among those teenagers are wearing ‘ray bans’ (71%), WAP usage (61%), playing football (58%) and car renovation (58%). What is interesting from this survey is that ‘playing football’ is no longer a popular hobby among the teenagers and it is replaced by such modern and up-to-date hobbies or activities like mobile phone usage, watching VCD/DVD and internet surfing. The result of this survey therefore suggested that the advancement of modern technology and the global process have had an impact on the teenagers’ lifestyle.

TABLE 1: A scenario of Malaysian teenagers and their hobbies

No.	Teenagers’ hobbies	Percentage (%)
1.	Mobile phones	91
2.	Watching VCD/DVD/Video	90
3.	Internet surfing	88
4.	Laptop	79
5.	Cafe/cyber cafe	79
6.	Cinema	72
7.	Wearing ‘ray ban’	71
8.	WAP (wireless internet protocol)	61
9.	Playing football	58
10.	Car renovation	58

Sources: The Right of Admission Research (ROAR)

With regards to Table 1, further discussion of the impact of globalisation among the teenagers and students in Malaysia can be divided into several categories. Those aspects include the globalisation of communication, media, information technology, culture and modern lifestyle (fashion and fast food). Each of these categories is discussed briefly in the next paragraph.

CULTURAL GLOBALISATION & ITS IMPACT UPON MALAYSIAN TEENAGERS

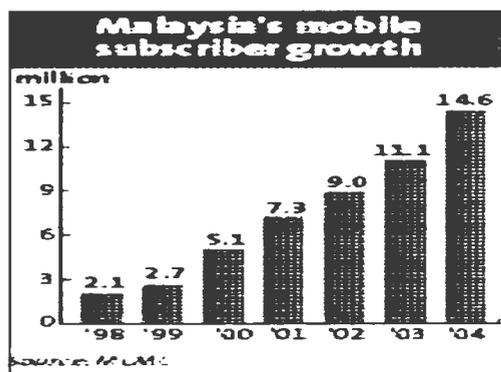
GLOBALISATION OF COMMUNICATION

In the global age, mobile phones and WAP (Wireless Application Protocol) are considered the most popular communication tools by Malaysian teenagers. Since the introduction of mobile phones in the mid 1980's, both devices have rapidly gained popularity and become one of the fastest selling consumer electronic products in the world. In a very short time they have become an essential part of life for the population in many countries. In many developing countries, most adults and many children now own mobile phones. Mobile phones are very popular because they allow people to maintain communication with each other wirelessly and continuously.

In Malaysia, there were about 5.1 million mobile phone subscribers at the end of 2000 and the number increased to 7.3 million by the year 2001. In 2002, there were about 9.0 million subscribers and the figure increased to 11.1 million by the year 2003. In 2004, there were about 14.6 million mobile phone users in Malaysia and this figure was more than half the total population (Sidhu 2005). The statistical figures of the Malaysia's mobile subscriber's growth can be referred to in Figure 2. Moreover, about half of that figure comes from the Kelang Valley and 50% of them are active SMS (System Message Send) users. This figure will grow even more and the survey anticipates that SMS usage will be widespread from individuals to corporations and institutions (Mohd & Osman 2005).

According to the research which was carried out by the Right of Admission Research a high percentage of (91%) of Malaysian teenagers like to use mobile phones. The Research also found that more than half (61%) of them like to use WAP. This finding reveals that mobile phone usage is popular in Malaysia. Moreover, the high levels of mobile telephone subscribers have evolved a mobile phone culture. This is the situation where the mobile phone has become a key social tool and people rely on their mobile phone to keep in touch with their friends. Likewise, many people keep in touch using SMS, and a whole culture of 'texting' has developed from mobile phones usage. SMS is a vital medium to communicate with peers and relatives. More significantly, SMS text and emoticons can be used to replace verbal communication (Buang, A. S. 2002).

FIGURE 2: Malaysia’s mobile subscribers growth



Source: Sidhu 2005

The importance of this modern communication technology is truly reflected in a recent random survey of mobile telephone users in Malaysia, where 60% of those who responded felt that the phone was a convenient communication tool, 25% of them thought it was a necessity and only the remaining small number (15%) felt it was a status symbol (www.mint.gov.my, 2005). In another survey carried out by Yahoo! Mobile Phone Survey, almost 90% of the 3054 respondents currently own hand-phones. 80% of current mobile users intend to either upgrade or change their phone within the next 6 months. Among 365 respondents of the current non mobile phone users, almost 75% of them intend to buy new mobile phones in the next 6 months (www.yahoo.com/malaysia_mobile_survey2004).

The results of the three surveys suggest that the mobile phone is a popular device for people, especially for teenagers in Malaysia. These findings are due to the fact that, with the emergence of the global world, mobile phones are used practically everywhere in the world including Malaysia. In less than twenty years, mobile telephones have gone from being rare and expensive pieces of equipment used by businesses to a pervasive low-cost personal item.

Nevertheless, the mobile phone usage among teenagers and students has an impact upon them. The mobile phone itself has become a fashionable object, with the teenager users decorating and accessorizing their mobile phones to reflect their personality.

Moreover, the capabilities of mobile phones are now being expanded further, to become smart phones which can adopt the roles of internet browser, game console, personal music player and personal digital assistant. This is even worrying because those teenagers can have direct access to the undesirable sites. The spreading of rumours and misinformation through text messaging can also contribute to the negative uses of mobile phones.

Overall, we cannot deny the enormous usefulness and necessities of mobile phones. Many of us cannot imagine life without mobile phones, but does every member of the family need to have their own mobile, including those in the primary schools and kindergartens? Parents, teenagers and the community have to think about this and choose the best way to benefit from the use of mobile phones and at the same time not overspend their money on it.

GLOBALISATION OF MEDIA & ENTERTAINMENT

Media and entertainment are part of the main instruments of the globalisation process. The global situation can affect teenagers and students by means of media and entertainment. The survey carried out on teenagers by the Right of Admission Research found watching VCD/DVD/video had the second highest popularity (90%) after mobile phones. The result also found that 72% of the teenagers like going to the cinema. The result from the survey is not surprising because young people such as teenagers like entertainments i.e. watching TV, VCD/DVD and going to cinema with their friends. This is a normal situation elsewhere, but what worries many people is that they come into contact with the negative values e.g. sex, violence and crimes, through the media and entertainment and this may have an effect on the teenagers in Malaysia.

There are criticisms and comments from academicians and journalists regarding the inappropriate values in the local media. The first view comes from Uthman (2003: 308) where he discusses the influence of the global media upon the community. Uthman states that:

...the global media is the most powerful channel through which the decadent values of the western world have been spread round the world (Uthman 2003: 308).

The statement by Uthman has been supported by Salleh Yaapar (2001: 4) where he articulates that most of the TV programmes shown by local broadcasters are imported from the USA and other western countries. The values of these programmes are different from the eastern values which are rooted in Malaysian communities. In his own words Yaapar says:

Most of the film, sitcom and drama series shows on TV broadcasting channels in Malaysia for example are imported and transmitted directly from the USA, UK, European countries, and Australia. These shows are embracing the values that are familiar to the western communities. (Yaapar 2001:5)

Other views come from Malaysian journalists where they share their observations about the impact of global media upon teenagers. Ku Seman Ku Hussain (2001) considers that:

...the negative element of global media was transmitted through the Hollywood film which is full of sex, violence, science fiction etc. Most of the film produced in Hollywood is an example of hegemonisation of culture by the US. (Ku Hussain 2001)

Likewise, Mohd Pileh (2001) and Zakaria (2001) stated that:

The influence of Americanisation can also be seen through the entertainment and music channel which succeeded in creating a younger generation who follows Michael Jackson and Maddona as their idols.

All the statements and views rendered by these academicians and local journalists have the same connotations that the negative values from the global media have had an impact upon teenagers. In addition, we would not be surprised if the teenagers try to imitate what they have seen from watching TV, VCD and DVD.

To support the discussion regarding the impact of global media among teenagers and students, we use the example of some TV sitcoms which are shown on TV broadcasting channels in Malaysia. Take 'Friends' for example. This sitcom is exported from Hollywood. It is currently popular in Malaysia and portrays the life and companionship of a group of young men and women in a metropolitan city. It promotes free mingling among sexes and couples living together (Yaapar 2001).

Another example can be taken from the drama series 'Baywatch'. Baywatch was launched in the US in 1989 and was viewed by more than 1.1 billion viewers including people in Malaysia. It shows beautiful actresses in skimpy swimsuits jogging and running around the beaches of Santa Monica. The drama shows a lack of intellectual content and displays the culture of

Baywatch which exposed people to modern western fashion and life styles (Yaapar 2001). Likewise, 'Sex and the City' is another sitcom which shows some halfnaked scenes and portrays a modern entertainment and lifestyle. 'Charmed' is another drama series which embraces demons, witches, evil power and violence. In addition, the question can be raised as to what the purpose is of showing these unsuitable sitcoms and drama series to the Malaysia audience.

Apart from Hollywood films, the Bollywood movies imported from India also embrace a hedonistic culture. In the late 1990s, most of the Malaysian broadcasters competed daily to show Bollywood movies on their TV channels to attract the audience. Their reason is because those films are popular and cheaper than the other imported movies. In consequence, Dato' Harussani Zakaria, a representative of the Malaysian Mufti Committee has stepped forward and advised the Ministry of Information Malaysia to put a limitation on the Bollywood movies, due to the fact that those films seemed to encourage social problems and sexual harassment in the community (<http://www.pkpim.net>).

Moreover, in 2003 and recently, there has been a new trend of adapting western TV shows by the local television stations in Malaysia. At present, there are four reality shows which have attracted tens of thousands of local audiences (or probably even hundreds of thousands). These reality shows are namely, 'Akademi Fantasia' and 'Mentor', adopted from 'La Academia' from Mexico; 'Mencari Cinta' was adapted from 'Bachelor Lorette' and 'Malaysian Idol' was a Malaysia version of the 'American Idol'. These reality shows were clearly an adaptation from the western TV shows. For example, Akademi Fantasia and La Academia, both have some similarities i.e. concept of the programme, background music, montage, presentation, programming and even the name of the show. These shows were aired on local TV i.e. TV3, Astro and NTV7 (Jalil 2005, Abd. Ghani 2005).

As recently as August 2005, the Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dato' Seri Najib Razak chided the producers of the reality shows for displaying a notable lack of Malaysian values. According to Najib Razak, most scenes failed to conform to Eastern values and were unsuitable for a Malaysian audience. Razak was reported to have made a statement that:

We don't have to ape Western culture to the extent that we blindly copy everything they do. It was important that the content of the television programme helped in nation-building outlined in Vision 2020 (www.nst.com.my 2005).

Overall, the global media and entertainment have had an impact on the Malaysian community especially teenagers. It is everybody's role, especially the Government's, to control the transmission of unsuitable films, movies, reality

shows, sitcoms etc shown on TV broadcasting channels. The broadcasters cannot give an excuse by showing Bollywood films only because of the cheapness and popularity of those movies. We are worried that if the globalisation of the media is not monitored, eventually it can demolish the unity of the Malaysian society, especially among teenagers (Mahmood 2002, Yaapar 2001).

In addition, teenagers and the younger generation today have to be given an essential understanding and fundamental education about moral and ethical values. It is crucial to build their strength and nation building in order to face the contemporary challenges posed by the global media. On the other hand, the global media and different cybernetic gadgets have provided an adequate means for a faster and more precise da'wah and therefore, we have to take this opportunity to spread the globalism of Islam and present a role model of a good community (Uthman 2003: 308).

GLOBALISATION OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

With the widespread and overwhelming influence of cybernetic devices such as the internet, electronic email etc, globalisation has reduced the world into a global village. The rapid advancement of technology and the advent of the internet in recent times has even further revolutionised the way we communicate and share information. This section will discuss the impact of global information and technology upon Malaysian teenagers.

According to the Right of Admission Research there is a high percentage (88%) of Malaysian teenagers who like to surf on the internet. The hobby of internet surfing is nominated as the third most popular activity after mobile phone usage. The survey also found that 79% of the teenagers like to hang around in cafés or cyber cafés and, similarly, 79% of them have access to laptops and notebooks. The outcomes of the survey suggest that the global information and technology, especially the internet devices, are influencing the teenagers' world and their lifestyle.

In Malaysia, the government's aggressive policy to develop ICT through the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) projects appears to have resulted in high rates of internet access. Malaysia is a Muslim majority country with the greatest per capita access to internet, apart from Turkey (Karim 2002: 47). According to data listed from the Nua Internet Surveys, internet subscriptions in Malaysia have achieved the total number of 600,000 of Jaring Network. The Internet World Statistics also revealed that there are over 9.5 million internet users in Malaysia, with 35.9% penetration of the total population (Mohd. Jarjis 2005).

Accessibility to the internet has increased and is continuing to increase. People can now access the internet from their homes, school, offices, shopping malls, cyber cafés and more recently, through mobile phones. Few would argue that the internet is an invaluable educational tool for teenagers and children. One can learn about practically anything on the internet. This makes it a valuable resource that can contribute to the nation's evolution into becoming a knowledge-based economy and society. In view of this, the Malaysian government launched a long-run campaign on the establishment of 'one computer in one house' in the late 1990s (Mohd. Nor 2001). The aim of this campaign is to encourage the use of PCs and the internet, and to enable the community especially the younger generation to learn IT skills and acquire the benefit from e-learning, access to emails etc.

However, being user-driven, there is little or no control over what content goes into the internet and, hence, it is open to both positive and negative uses. People have to acknowledge that there are dangers that lurk on the internet and relate to moral and social implications e.g. pornographic sites and IRC (Internet Relay Chat). In May 2005, the Malaysian Coalition for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse (MCPCSA) highlighted that there are an astounding 1.5 million easily accessible websites with pornographic material on the internet (Mohamad 2005). In the year 2000, a search on characters such as Pokemon, My Little Pony and Action Man called out 26 web pages that contained hundreds of link to porn sites. Furthermore, nine out of ten children aged 8 to 16 disclosed that they had been exposed to pornography on the internet, in most cases accidentally, while looking for information related to schoolwork (Mohd. Jarjis 2005).

Policies and guidelines can, to some extent, regulate the use of the internet. In Malaysia, the government has enforced laws enacted in the Penal Code, Film Censorship Act 2002 and the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Act 1998. Moreover, the issue of internet misuse e.g. sending messages or images that are indecent with the intention to harass or abuse, can be reported to the Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission (MCMC), one of the media watch that has been established in Malaysia (www.mcmc.gov.my 2005).

Overall, the global information and technology revolution had an impact on the Malaysian community especially teenagers. The threat posed by the internet is not just about inappropriate content. What is even more worrying is the increase in sex crimes involving teenagers as a result of the people they meet in the chat rooms. Even more, there are also undesirable activities on the internet e.g. feeding misinformation or rumour mongering. Such misuse can corrupt and negatively impact the people in society, particularly teenagers.

Nevertheless, parents and teachers need to play a more active role in guiding, monitoring and playing their part in controlling teenager's activities on the internet. Barring the internet from homes is not a solution, but by installing the filtering software they can at least block out undesirable, sites whether intentionally or unintentionally accessed. Moreover, the community has to be educated to use the internet positively. Thus, nurturing a positive internet environment will be a long-term challenge for the government and NGOs (Mohd Jarjis 2005, Ku Hussain 2005).

GLOBALISATION OF CULTURE & MODERN LIFESTYLE

The cultural hegemony and embracing modern lifestyle are parts of the impact of globalisation upon the community especially teenagers. The Right of Admission Research found that a high percentage (71%) of the teenagers like to wear 'ray bans', 58% like renovating cars and similarly 58% like playing football. The result from ROAR survey indicates that wearing ray bans is more popular than renovating cars and playing football among those teenagers. To them, wearing 'ray ban' is an up-to-date fashion and it portrays a modern lifestyle, whereas playing football is an evergreen sport for generations. Even if they cannot play it outdoors, they can still enjoy and play football virtually through electronic devices e.g. the internet, 'play station', X-Box etc. The variation of these hobbies reflects the changes in their habit. Thus, globalisation through the advancement of modern technology had had an impact upon the teenagers' world, culture and their lifestyle.

Furthermore, the discussion on the impact of global culture and modern lifestyle among teenagers can be divided into three aspects i.e. food, fashion and consumerism. In general, the inculcation of western style and values on local food and fashion is considered as the assimilation of global culture into Malaysian traditions (Mohd. Pileh 2001, Zakaria 2001, Sulaiman 1998). At first glance, all this seem harmless, but eventually, global fast food and fashion have begun to change the national traditional culture and slowly diminish its popularity (Ahmad 2000). Akgunduz (2002) fears these global phenomena and has asserted that:

Globalisation has popularized a consumer culture worldwide. Several branded T-shirts, jeans, fast foods and so on, which are associated with the global culture, have caught the imagination of the Muslim youth. Globalisation is also guilty of propagating a superficial American pop culture, which titillates the senses but deadens the spirit. (Akgunduz 2002: 4)

The spread of the fast food habit is not only prevalent in this part of the world, it is a global phenomenon. Today, we can see the tendency of people shifting from eating local food to going to fast food restaurants such as McDonalds, Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC), Pizza Hut, Burger King etc. These restaurants can be found elsewhere in all parts of the world. Not only that, favourite soft drinks e.g. Pepsi, Coca-Cola, Seven Up are trademarks which are popular among all people, especially teenagers (Mohd. Pileh 2001, Zakaria 2001, Sulaiman 1998).

In terms of global fashion, we can observe that there are branded goods, clothes, handbags, shoes, fragrance and watches which are produced by famous and giant world designers. Timberland, Diesel, Boss, Polo and Dunhill are several names that are not alien to the teenagers. Likewise, fragrances such as Versace, Tommy Hilfiger, Christian Dior and Burberry are also well known to them. The communities, especially teenagers as such, are groups of people that enjoy buying and spending their money on these branded items due to the impact of the global culture. Moreover, one can observe that these fashions and modern trends can also change the way they dress.

Furthermore, the aspect of consumerism is closely related to the fast food habit and modern fashion. According to Mahmood (2002), the basic principle in consumerism is to buy something essential, practical, necessary and useful to necessitate the living of a person or family. In Malaysian culture, the branded items are expensive and costly. Not everyone in the community can afford to purchase them, especially teenagers. People do not realize that they spend their money on purchasing the expensive 'image brand' and not the actual goods. They only like to own the 'brand' because it portrays a modern lifestyle to be up-to-date (Mahmood 2002).

Overall, the discussion of this section does not intend to blame the widespread appearance for appeal of global fast food, drinks and world fashion. It is more important to examine the cultural changes among teenagers which have resulted from the process of globalisation. It is important to note here that globalisation has succeeded in creating new mega trends 'fast food and fashion' upon the traditional culture elsewhere in the world, and teenagers are the group of people that are mostly affected by this phenomenon (Sulaiman 1998). Thus, we should strengthen the value system in a person, family and community so that we can overcome the challenges posed by globalisation. At the same time, it is everybody's role to preserve the dignity of local culture and tradition (Ab. Rashid 1998).

CONCLUSION

In summary, people cannot deny the enormous usefulness and overwhelming reality derived from globalisation today, but what worries them is the negative impact from the global communication, media and entertainment, information technology, culture and modern lifestyles. The younger generation, especially teenagers have to be aware that they are now living in a competitive world where the globalisation of hegemonisation and assimilation of every aspect of life is currently take place. To face these challenges, it is the religious and spiritual aspects that need to be strengthened. The community has to ensure that young people, especially teenagers, have strong religious understanding, great knowledge and essential skills. The government, NGOs and community, can each play a distinct part in addressing social issues and cultivating a positive global environment in Malaysia. They have to think globally and act locally.

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