

Cultural Dimensions of Malay Cultures: Performance of IT Professionals

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Abstract: The main objective of this research is to investigate the cultural dimensions of IT Professionals from the Malay ethnic group in Malaysia. The research will also provide empirical support on the findings of literature analysis on the Malay Cultural Dimensions by adapting the questionnaires based on Hofstede's Values Survey Module 2008. Literature analysis was performed on key research areas such as cultural theory and Malay cultural dimensions. Findings of the literature analysis shall provide partial answer to the identified research question. The Malay cultural dimensions are determined by matching the findings of literature analysis on Hofstede's cultural dimensions and Malay 'Budi' concept. These cultural dimensions are then compared with Hofstede's cultural index formula for verification. The data collection was carried out over a period of two months in 2015 with 164 IT Professionals from the Malay ethnic group working from selected area in Malaysia such as Perak, Selangor and Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia. Future work may include mapping Malay cultural dimensions to Information Technology body of knowledge and various related various discipline such as human-computer interaction.

Index Terms: Culture Dimension, Malay Culture

I. INTRODUCTION

Culture plays a critical role in human lives. The social norms and behaviours, individuals believe they should or should not perform are influenced by culture. As each culture is different from another, cultural dimensions are used to explain these observed cultural differences [1]. The choice of appropriate dimensions for conceptualizing and operationalizing culture have been discussed by several scholars in the past.

However, the most widely used national cultural framework are the Hofstede's cultural dimensions [2].

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions theory is a framework designed for cross-cultural communication [3]. The framework is useful in formulating hypotheses for comparative cross-cultural studies [2].

The Malay race is the largest ethnic group in Malaysia. According to Jerome (2013) [4], Malay is a term that refers a race of people originated from the Malay Archipelago or also known as the Malay World, which consists of countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines. Malays are one of South East Asia largest group of indigenous people who populated the Malay Archipelago. The Malays also reside outside South East Asia as minorities in countries such as South Africa, Sri Lanka and Western Australia [5].

In Malaysia, the term Malay is legally defined as a race with three significant characteristics: Islam as religion, Malay language as primary communication medium and practices the Malay culture. One key element of Malay ethnic identity is Islam which has a significant impact on the development of Malay culture [5]. The religion and ethnicity are not exclusive but multidimensional and key pillars in the Malay society.

II. THE MALAY CULTURE

The Malays interaction among themselves and other communities are highly influenced by the cultural system. Previous researches in this subject matter showed that the Malays are kind and polite when interacting among themselves and other communities. The humble nature and sensitivity of the Malays were supported by the strategic geographical location of the Malay World. Bestowed with ideal climate and well protected from natural disasters, the land provided them with abundant provisions to avoid famine. The Malays were also fortunate where they had relatively never suffered any form of cruelty acts from their kings and rulers. These elements resulted in the nature of compromise and respect in the Malay community [6].

A. The Budi Concept

Budi refers to a set of internal value that forms a person's personality and mentality.

These internal values differ from one society to another depending on the community's expectations [7]. The *Budi* concept is a key factor in understanding the Malay culture, particularly the behaviour patterns of Malays in Malaysia.

The *Budi* concept encompasses the Malay way of life, which also encapsulates their ethical system. This concept influences the norms and behaviours of the Malays in both

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individual and social relationships, and guides how an individual should perceive about him or herself and others [8].

The profound way of how *Budi* and Islam are interwoven resulted in each concept reinforces the other. For example, the *Budi* concept is in line with the Muslim belief where one's destiny or fate is ultimately lies with Allah, the God Almighty [8].

Upholding peace and harmony in the relationship with others is the upmost aim of '*Budi*'. The example is reflected in the proverbs such as 'if it is good for you, then it is good for me, unanimously agreed, harmoniously discussed and consensually cooperated' [7].

These strong moral values have is being reflected in their interactions and actions. The personality of Malay is determined by the related skills, communication use and behaviour that highlight the person being modest [7]. '*Budi*' concept provides the Malays with norms and expectations with regards to reciprocity. The symbolic interaction between these norms and expectations produces a certain politeness characteristic in a person that receives approval from others. This polite system covers all aspects of verbal and non-verbal communication. For example, the intonations of speech, way of addressing people according to status hierarchy and the use of body postures or gestures [8].

The Malays become a mild-mannered and highly cultured ethic community as the result of the '*Budi*' values cultivation. It is obvious that '*Budi*' is the principle element that strongly influences the Malay culture, which defines the way a Malay thinks and interacts. For the Malays, a person is considered civilized and cultured when he or she displays politeness that being reflective through cooperative and respectful [7].

B. Malay Culture Dimensions

This section discusses the Malay cultural dimensions based on Hofstede's cultural theory and '*Budi*' concept. Findings of the literature reviews are used to as the basis for the formulation of the Malay cultural dimensions. However, the validity of these findings will be further investigated during the data analysis phase of this research.

C. Collectivism

Based on Hofstede's cultural dimensions, Abdullah (1996) provided evidence that the Malays are rated low on individualism (as cited in [9]). This is partly attributed to the teaching of Islam that emphasizes society rather than individuals, and partly to '*Budi*' concept which also stresses on the collective wellbeing ahead of individuals. The concept of '*zakat*' which provides a mechanism for the rich to help the poor, also promotes collectivism amongst the Malay community.

Asians in general are more inclined towards cohesive lifestyle which emphasizes on the importance of group welfare rather than individual's interest [10]. The result of this research similarly showed that the Malays scored low in individualism, hence showing that this ethnic group is highly coherent and collective.

Collectivism practices amongst the Malay which is related to the importance of having peace and harmony in one's live

and surrounding was described by Abdullah (1996) (as cited in [11]). This value is reflected in Malay sayings of 'United we stand, divided we fall' (Bersatu kita teguh, bercerai kita roboh). Example of collectivism in Malay culture could be seen in 'gotong-royong' (mutual help/collaborative work). In 'Gotong-royong', people who offer help or service are implied to expect the same help and service to be returned in future [12].

D. High Power Distance

According to Hofstede (2003), the Malay community has very high regard for authority, and are willing to be subjected to those in power (as cited in [10]). This reflects the community's high power distance, which is consistent with the Malay cultural value of respect for elders, parents and higher authority. According to Lim (2003) [14], the Malays' loyalty to those in power are reflected in malay proverb of 'whoever becomes king, my hands still go to my forehead' ('siapa menjadi raja, tanganku ke dahi juga').

E. High Uncertainty Avoidance (HUA)

Uncertainty avoidance describes the tolerance of culture for uncertainty. A society with high uncertainty avoidance will avoids unfamiliar and ambiguous situations as much as possible [10]. Hofstede in his book titled *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind* (as cited in [15]), discovered the Malays as the main ethnic group in Malaysia are found to have a high uncertainty avoidance. This is further supported by their belief in Islam, a religion based on the existence of absolute Truth [16]. The society's disdain towards uncertainty is reflected in Malay proverb such as 'Do not empty the water jars just because you hear the thunder in the sky' ('Mendengarkan guruh di langit, air tempayan dicurahkan') [17].

F. Femininity

Masculinity versus Femininity dimension refers to the distribution of values or emotional roles between the genders [3]. Masculinity is reflected in one's preference for achievement and material success, while femininity is more towards preference for relationships and caring [18]. Malaysian cultures value relationships and selflessness which show low masculinity and high femininity [19]. This is supported by Lim (1998) [20] who further asserted that the Malays are a low masculinity society.

The important aspect of the South East Asia's cultural system is its bilateral nature, where females have the same social roles and positions as the men. This is the result of dynamism between the Malay traditions and Islamic values that acknowledge women's rights and positions in society [21]. The Malays value relationships more than wealth [7]. This is reflected in the proverb 'debt in gold can be paid, however debt in gratefulness will be carried to the grave' ('hutang emas boleh dibayar, hutang budi dibawa mati').

G. Short Term Orientation (STO)

As describe earlier, community with STO fosters virtues related to the present and past, having upholding tradition



and responsibility of fulfilling social duties. According to Hofstede (2011) [3], example of STO values are sharing social duties and uphold tradition. Malays in general, are occupied with tradition. This is reflected in Malay sayings ‘One must never lose sight of one’s roots and moral tradition’ (*Biar mati anak jangan mati adat*), which shows the importance of upholding not only tradition, but also Islamic rules [22] [7]. Malays are sensitive about the feelings of others. This is reflected in their choice of words and actions to save the ‘face’ of others. Generally, Malays tend to avoid conflict when interacting with others [23].

III. RESEARCH METHOD

The following is the research objective for the research:-

- To investigate the cultural dimensions of IT Professionals from the Malay ethnic group in Malaysia.
- The first research objective is to provide empirical support on the findings of literature analysis on the Malay Cultural Dimensions by adapting the questionnaires based on Hofstede’s Values Survey Module 2008 [24].

The following research questions are established to guide the research work towards achieving the aim and objectives of this research.

What are the cultural dimensions of the Malays in Malaysia? Data collection was carried out over a period of two months in 2015 with 164 IT Professionals from the Malay ethnic group working from selected area in Malaysia such as Perak, Selangor and Kuala Lumpur.

IV. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

H. Malay Cultural Dimensions

Based on Hofstede’s Values Survey Module 2008 [24], the cultural dimensions for the Malay ethnic group were determined by using the values’ index formula as stated in Table-1 below.

Table. 1 Malay Cultural Dimensions Index

Dimension	Formula	VSM 2008 Outcome	
		Index value	Result
PD	$35(m07-m02) + 25(m23-m26) + C$	26.54	LPD
IDV vs COL	$35(m04-m01) + 35(m09-m06) + C$	6.06	COL
MAS vs FEM	$35(m05-m03) + 35(m08-m10) + C$	0.90	FEM
UA	$40(m20-m16) + 25(m24-m27) + C$	-7.44	LUA
LTO vs STO	$40(m18-m15) + 25(m28-m25) + C$	38.97	STO

Note : m refers to mean score of VSM question, for example m02 refers to mean score for question number 2 in Hofstede’s VSM. C refers to a constant, either a positive or negative value, which shifts value of result between 0 to 100.

Result of the VSM index calculation showed that the Malay Cultural dimensions are Low Power Distance (LPD), Collectivism (COL), Femininity (FEM), Low Uncertainty Avoidance (LUA) and Short Term Orientation (STO).

The result of Hofstede’s VSM as shown in Table-2 showed that there are several disparities between the findings of the literature review as compared to the findings of data analysis. Only Individualism (IDV), Masculinity (MAS) and Long Term Orientation (LTO) comply with the findings of literature reviews. The low score values for these dimensions showed that the Malay ethnic group is a society with Collectivism, Femininity and Short Term Orientation (STO) values. Meanwhile, the low scores for Power Distance and Uncertainty Avoidance dimensions do not support findings of the literature reviews which claim the Malays have a High Power Distance (HPD) and High Uncertainty Avoidance (HUA) values. Table 2 summarizes the findings on the Malay cultural dimensions from the literature review and data analysis phases.

Table. 2 Summary of findings on Malay Cultural Dimensions

Cultural Dimensions	Literature Review		Data Analysis
	Scholar	Malay Proverbs	Hofstede’s VSM result
IDV vs COL	The Malays are rated low on individualism (Abdullah, 1996). (as cited in [9]).	‘United we stand, divided we fall’ (<i>‘Bersatu teguh, bercerai roboh’</i>).	6.06, Low individualism.
PD	The Malays believe in hierarchical relationship (Abdullah, 1996). (as cited in [9]).	‘Whoever becomes king, my hands still go to my forehead’ (<i>‘siapa menjadi raja, tanganku ke dahi juga’</i>).	26.54, Low Power Distance (LPD).
MAS vs FEM	Malaysian cultures value relationships and selflessness which indicate low masculinity and high femininity [19] [20].	‘Debt in gold can be paid, however debt in gratefulness will be carried to the grave’ (<i>‘hutang emas boleh dibayar, hutang budi dibawa mati’</i>).	0.90, Femininity.



LTO vs STO	Malays in general, are occupied with tradition (adat), which shows the importance of upholding not only tradition, but also Islamic rules [22] [7].	'One must never lose sight of one's roots and moral tradition' ('Biar mati anak jangan mati adat').	38.97, Short Term Orientation (STO).
UA	The Malays as the main ethnic group in Malaysia are found to have high uncertainty avoidance [7].	'Do not empty the water jars just because you hear the thunder in the sky' ('Mendengarkan guruh di langit, air tempayan dicurahkan').	-7.44, Low Uncertainty Avoidance (LUA)

The cultural dimensions disparities among the findings of literature reviews and data analysis could be caused by acculturation factor. Acculturation is the process of culture learning by individuals who are exposed to a new culture or ethnic group. Globalization also promotes acculturation around the world which resulted in the sharing of cultures and values through music, electronic, media and education [25].

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory is also not without its criticisms. Schwartz (as cited in Jones, 2007) [26] argued that a survey is not the most appropriate instrument to determine accurately and measure cultural disparity, especially when measuring a variable which is culturally sensitive and subjective value. In terms of statistical integrity, Hofstede's analysis is based on the same questionnaire items which are used on more than one scale. The use of only few 'subjects' in an analysis depends greatly on chance, which may also increases the likelihood of sample error [26].

Another factor that may affect outcome of the cultural values index calculation is the size and representativeness of the sample. The Value Survey Module version 2008 [24] may influence the result. Convenience sampling could lead to the under-representation or over-representation of particular groups within the sample, which in return would produce bias results. A larger and more represented sample may produce different results.

V. CONCLUSION

Literature analysis was performed on key research areas such as cultural theory and Malay cultural dimensions. Findings of the literature analysis shall provide partial answer to identified research question. The Malay cultural dimensions are determined by matching the findings of literature analysis on Hofstede's cultural dimensions and *Malay 'Budi'* concept. These cultural dimensions are then compared with Hofstede's cultural index formula for verification. There are growing research on cultural influences to the IT domain [27 – 35]. Future work may include mapping Malay cultural to Information Technology body of knowledge and various related various discipline such as human-computer interaction.

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