

Proud to be a Malaysian!-Malaysian Identity in YouTube Comments

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Abstract: Social media has become a part and parcel of many online users' everyday life as it allows the users to share their ideas and comments. One example of social media which is content-based is YouTube. YouTube provides a platform for users to upload video clips, viewable by anyone, and the users can also write comments. Even though Internet users can remain anonymous in the boundless cyberspace many traces of identity of a particular community can still be recognised through the use of language online. Thus, a vast amount of language and computer-mediated discourse can be gathered from social media such as YouTube to aid in the understanding of a particular community's identity. This current study is interested to investigate how the Malaysian identity is being represented in YouTube comments through its users. The responses and phrases used to comment on Malaysia related YouTube videos were analysed to see whether they yield any interesting linguistic data. Findings revealed that there were a few recurring categories of expressions being mentioned in the YouTube comments that can be used to represent the Malaysian identity such as feelings towards the country and being a Malaysian, the food in Malaysia, languages, race and identity, Malaysian stereotypes or behaviours, as well as the geographical location of Malaysia. Code switching and code mixing were also regarded as part of the Malaysian identity based on the YouTube comments.

Keywords: Malaysian Identity, Computer-Mediated Discourse, YouTube Comments, National Identity

I. INTRODUCTION

The Internet has always been the source to access information and the platform for interaction among people from all over the world since the emergence of digital technology. However, in recent years, sharing of content, commenting and rating resources are also part of the functions of the Internet [1]. Internet users are constantly utilising the Internet to upload audio and textual information, photos and videos. In fact, social media websites have been created to provide all these functions. Examples of popular social media websites that allow users to share content and express their views are websites and apps such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp, and LinkedIn [2].

Many previous studies on online communication have mentioned that the Internet and social media have been associated with the construction of identity of the users [3],[4].

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This is linked to how the Internet and social media have provided many opportunities for the users to create, alter and develop their identity repertoires [4]. Social media sites have become a space of self-expression, as users can express themselves creatively and at the same time interact with ease with various communities. Even though Internet users can remain anonymous in the boundless cyberspace and somehow hide their race, gender and identity, many traces of identity of a particular community can still be recognised through the use of language and discourse [5]. This is supported by [6] Herring who also stated that even though the production of CMD is from impersonal machines, it still reflects the users' identities.

Therefore, a vast amount of socio-cultural and linguistic knowledge can be gathered from the Internet and social media to aid in understanding of a particular community's identity and users' perception and sentiments towards specific issues. This current study is the preliminary part of a larger study to investigate how Malaysia is being represented in YouTube comments through its users by tapping into this vast amount of discourse in YouTube comments. The study seeks to answer, "What are the discourse in YouTube comments which are associated to Malaysian identities?" The responses and words used to comment on Malaysia related YouTube videos were investigated to see whether they yield any interesting or novel linguistic data.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Computer-mediated Communication and Discourse

When people interact with one another by exchanging messages through a computer network, a form of communication known as computer-mediated communication (CMC) is formed [6]. There are various forms of text-based CMC (e.g. e-mail, discussion groups, real-time chat, virtual reality role-playing games) which have varying linguistic properties based on the types of messaging system used and the social and cultural contexts. For this current study, the data were YouTube comments which are considered as the text-based CMC.

There are two major CMC modes: Synchronous and asynchronous. Synchronous CMC mode requires immediate responses while asynchronous CMC mode provides interactions which are delayed. Synchronous and asynchronous CMC modes are different in the sense that the asynchronous mode give users more chances to plan and answer than the synchronous mode where they participate in real time interaction [7].

Although it is generally assumed that synchronous CMC has the features of informal spoken communication and asynchronous CMC follows the patterns of written discourse, both forms influence the nature of social networks and communication patterns in a way which makes the CMC context different from regular spoken and written communications. [8]

Another prominent early researcher of CMC is Crystal [9] (2001) who coined the term 'netspeak', which is a type of language 'displaying features that are unique to the Internet, arising out of its character as a medium which is electronic, global, and interactive' [9]. It is regarded as a new 'language variety' and is divided into sub-varieties that are related to different communication modes. For example, the 'language of chatgroups' emphasises on the 'curious mixture of informal letter and essay' which is a characteristic of asynchronous messaging, and the 'highly colloquial constructions and non-standard usage' that characterize chat messages [9].

Computer-mediated discourse (CMD), a specialisation within CMC, is the language used when human beings interact with one another by transmitting messages via networked computers. In general, many authors have stressed that computer mediated discourse contains mainly oral forms along with features characteristic of the written language [10], [11]. Due to the complexity and lack of structure for the organisation and classification of CMD, Herring (2007)[12] has devised a faceted classification scheme for computer-mediated discourse. The classification approach to CMD by Herring is organized in subjectivity to two basic types of influence: medium (technological) and situation (social) and this current study falls into the second type which is situation.

The first set of categories describes technological features of computer-mediated communication systems which are determined by messaging protocols, servers and clients, as well as the associated hardware, software, and interfaces of users' computers. On the other hand, in the second set of categories, social factors associated with the situation or context of communication were mentioned. These include information about the participants, their relationships to one another, their purposes for communicating, what they are communicating about, and the kind of language they use to communicate [13].

Several researchers have also attempted to explain diversity in CMD by investigating contextual factors that play a role in communities. For example, Casaló, Flavián and Guinalfú [14] revealed that community members tend to express themselves in a common language on social media. Graham [15] added that members need to be aware of such norms, to be a successful member of a community.

B. Language Features of CMD

Linguistic features of computer Mediated Discourse (CMD) shows that apart from being quite similar to spoken or written language, CMD also possesses simplified registers, as well as its own organizational structure and mechanisms for maintaining the topic. CMC users usually use strategies that shorten the time needed to write messages or to replace for the lack of paralinguistic and nonverbal cues [16]. The use of abbreviations, simplified grammar, the acceptance of surface errors, the use of symbols to express emotional meaning, such as multiple vowels or consonants (yeeesss) or

emoticons, and formulaic phrases are strategies commonly adopted by CMC users [16].

The majority of word choice of CMD is made deliberately by users to economize on typing effort, mimic spoken language features, or express themselves creatively. Another feature of these discourse is the textual representation of auditory information such as prosody, laughter and other non-language sounds (e.g. hahaha), emoticons. [17]

Linguistic features in CMD that have been researched on and compared across or within online communities include emoticons, unconventional spellings, representations of spoken language features, regional dialect features, obscenity, and code-switching. [18][19]. Other research also demonstrated that language variation online can be categorised by age, gender and region. For example, Androutsopoulos and Zieger [18] investigated how certain language chat can derive from a particular location by studying the representation of regional speech in #mannheim, a German city-chat. All these show that language use online can help to reveal some precious information about the users' identity.

C. Language and Identity

According to Clark [20], one can attempt to look at the definition of identity from different perspectives: social, cultural, and national as well as individual. Asmah [21] defined "identity" as a socio-psychological construct by which an individual or a group identifies itself and others through the use of certain symbols or features. Identity is also influenced by membership to a particular social group. Members of a community share similar values, characteristics and common social identification methods.

One's language has always been closely associated with one's identity. Researchers such as Johnstone [22] have shown that an individual's sense of self or identity is portrayed or seen via some form of discourse. Kramsch [23] also emphasized how important language is in expressing cultural identity as speakers' cultural values are usually manifested in their language.

D. Malaysian National and Ethnic Identity

The relationship between race, religion, and language in the formation of ethnic identity in Malaysia is evident as each ethnic community has still maintained its own sociocultural values in terms of religion, language, dress, and food while developing an integrated national identity. Malaysia's different religions, cultures and lifestyles have a significant effect on how Malaysians and non-Malaysians perceive the nation and associate Malaysia with. Abraham [24] investigated the level of consensus among Malaysians to determine whether they possess a common Malaysian identity and her findings revealed that race and ethnicity are regarded highly as a part of the respondents' national identity. The study conducted by Faiz [25] on Malaysian students also list geo-political, self, ethno cultural, linguistic, and religious identities as factors that tend to make up the perception of the state of being a Malaysian or constitutes to the Malaysian national identity. Liu, Lawrence, Ward, Abraham [26] have found out in their study that ethnic identity is stronger than national identity in Malaysia, and Malays has the strongest sense of ethnic identity whereas national identity was strongest among Chinese in Malaysia. In

order to create a cohesive sense of nation, the best method would be to make national identity more salient than ethnic identity [26].

E. Studies On YouTube Comments

YouTube comment section is an integral part of YouTube as it allows the users to interact with the contents and other users. Certain topics and content of videos will contribute more to discussions in YouTube. Studies such as Thelwall et al.'s [27] analysed large samples of text comments on YouTube videos by examining their typical length, investigating topics that trigger discussions and comments, as well as characteristics of the authors who comment on YouTube videos. The study revealed that the typical YouTube comments contained around 58 characters. It was also shown that most YouTube audience engaged with each other when making negative comments, and the biggest trigger of discussion seemed to be religion, whereas the videos from the Music, Comedy and How to & Style categories invite less discussion.

As for study of language use in YouTube comments, Jones and Schiefflin [28] have used comments to investigate language use associated with particular genres of video. In another study conducted by Lingam & Aripin [29], flaming YouTube comments in Malaysian themed YouTube videos were looked into. Their aims were to discover the types of flaming comments that are found in the YouTube videos and classify them accordingly using content and thematic analysis. The results of the study revealed that political attack and racial attack are the two most frequent types of flaming comments found in Malaysian videos.

Even though there are a certain amount of studies done on YouTube and YouTube comments, few research had focused on the language use in YouTube comments to represent a nation's identity. Therefore, it is worth to investigate what kind of discourse are used to represent the identity.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

The aim of this study is to investigate the representation of Malaysian identities in the discourse of YouTube comments among YouTube users when they are responding to Malaysian related YouTube videos. In order to understand how the Malaysian identity is portrayed in YouTube comments, the qualitative research method was utilized. The reasons for choosing qualitative research method are due to the nature of the research topic as well as the benefits it yields as qualitative research's strength is that it is able to provide complex textual descriptions of how people experience a given research issue [30].

The qualitative method for this study is textual analysis of the YouTube comments by using Herring's [6] Computer Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) and also Braun & Clarke's [31] Thematic Analysis as frameworks for analysis. Textual analysis is deemed suitable as we are analyzing the content or text of the YouTube comments to examine the Malaysian identity.

B. Data Collection and Analysis

Data sampling for this current study is based on Herring's [6] sampling methods for computer mediated discourse.

Herring [6] has presented six types of data sampling for CMD but for this research, sampling by theme was used as the chosen YouTube videos were related to the theme of Malaysia or Malaysian identity. Sampling by theme is usually used to collect data from discussion forums or other thematically organised streams of online discourse [32]. When data sampling was made by theme in this study, searches were performed for related videos regarding the study by keying in the words "Malaysia", "Malaysian", "Malaysian culture" or "Malaysian identity".

Four YouTube videos were selected by which their first hundred comments were analysed. These videos were selected as they have more than 100 comments and minimum 100,000 views based on the requirement of a similar research by [29] Lingam & Aripin. Overall, there were a total of more than 300 comments which were analysed and focused upon from these videos. The four selected YouTube videos were uploaded by famous Malaysian YouTubers. Only videos from famous Malaysian YouTubers were selected as the content they generate will relate more to Malaysia, such as Malaysian culture, issues and stereotypes that will attract more comments from Malaysian viewers to their videos. How famous these YouTubers are can be seen from the number of subscribers they have on their YouTube profiles, which are a minimum of 100,000 subscribers [33].

The first selected video was uploaded on 28 Aug 2014 by the YouTube personality-The MingThing, entitled "How To Know You're Malaysian", while the second selected video was uploaded on 22 Oct 2014 by JinnyboyTV entitled What's So Great About Malaysia? Apart from that, the third video which was chosen was uploaded on 27 Aug 2017 by JinnyboyTV which was entitled "Western Culture VS Malaysian Culture" and the fourth video that was chosen was "This is Malaysia (Parody)" by Jinnyboytv which was published on 13 Jun 2018. The first 100 hundred comments from these videos were analysed to see which were relevant to Malaysian identity.

The selected videos ranged from talking about Malaysian food, people, culture, habits, lifestyles to sentiments and stereotypes for Malaysia which prompted the users to respond by comments that reflect their perception of the Malaysian identity. The duration of the video is set from year 2010 onwards as it is not too outdated that the discourse of identity will not be relevant. The comments chosen to be analysed can be in English and also other languages. They were analysed based on the analytical framework which has the features of Herring's [6] Computer Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) and also Braun & Clarke's [31] Thematic analysis.

Susan Herring's computer-mediated discourse analysis (CMDA) framework [6] [12] is used for the analysis of messages, threads, characters, and exchanges in a computer-mediated environment and has a set of methods formed from linguistic discourse analysis for researching patterns of structure and meaning in online communication. The CMDA model is also structured around four levels: structure, meaning, interaction management, and social phenomena [19].

For this research, only structure, meaning and social phenomenawere looked upon as we are looking into the discourse related to Malaysian identity.

Thematic analysis is mainly used for “identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” [31]. The goal of a thematic analysis is to identify themes, or patterns in the data that are important or interesting. It consists of a six-phase framework which includes becoming familiar with the data, generate initial codes, search for themes, review themes, define themes and write up[31]. This study has used thematic analysis to devise the codes and categories that can be the markers for the Malaysian identity.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

When the sorting out of the comments were performed through textual and thematic analysis, it can be observed that there were a lot of comments giving reactions to the video in the forms of agreement or disagreement, laughter through the use of words like “hahaha”, “lol” or likes, and also use of exclamation words like omg as well as sarcastic comments which relates to social media language. One of the main features of the comments are also code switching and code mixing of various languages such as English and Malay or English and Mandarin slangs. Apart from that, from the textual analysis of the data relating to Malaysian identity, it was found that there were a few categories of recurring markers which are being associated with the Malaysian identity. The main ones which were identified were namely: feelings about Malaysia, food, languages, race and identity, Malaysian behaviours or stereotypes and geographical location.

The following section illustrates these various categories that were derived from the expressions in the YouTube comments in response to the research question which seeks to identify the discourse used to represent the Malaysian identity.

A. Feelings about Malaysia

Analysis of the comments demonstrates that the feelings or connotation being associated with Malaysia or Malaysian are largely positive. Table 1 provides some of the frequently occurring expressions used in the YouTube comments to describe their feelings about Malaysia.

TABLE 1. Feelings about Malaysia

Feelings About Malaysia
Love Malaysia
I love Malaysia
Miss Malaysia
Malaysia rocks
Malaysia rock!!! Yeah!!!
1 Malaysia
1 perangai... 1 malaysia... Love it...!!!
1 Perangai 1 Malaysia
#1Malaysia
Imao proud to be Malaysian
We are proud to be Malaysian!!!
Awesome! I’m so proud to b a Malaysian!
I am freaking proud of my country now
I am Malaysian. I am so proud that we can accept each other even we are different resist. (my English is bad...)
multi racial country, a harmony country, well respected leaders, and of course above all else their people high

courtesy and morality remember our national principles
748alaysian, much loveeee
B O L E H ! this is MALAYSIA 2019
Malaysia boleh!
Proud to be Malaysia #kitamalaysia #Malaysiaboleh
This is Malaysia Wooh! Da best laah!
Malaysia truly asia

As can be seen from the table, expressions such as “Proud” to be Malaysian and verbs such as “Malaysia rocks” “Love Malaysia” were mentioned repeatedly in the comments. The taglines “1 Malaysia”, “Malaysia Boleh” were also mentioned repeatedly in the YouTube comments of Malaysian videos. This implies that majority of Malaysians are appreciative and proud of being a Malaysian and the common taglines are part of the Malaysian identity.

B. Food

Food and eating is also a main part of the Malaysian identity found in the YouTube comments. Table 2 provides some of the common expressions used in the comments which relate to food.

TABLE 2. Food

Food
love/miss Malaysian food
never hungry in Malaysia
fucking delicious
always get full ... instead of hungry
a great country full of delicious food
durian
JUST DURIAN
Durian Yessss
Oh yes durian
I love durian
Best part “ Just Durian “
Am I really Malaysian if I hate durian...
Just some noob 748alaysian748 don’t eat durian.. Real
748alaysian748 have always been durian hunters...
Really? How could u hate durians? The flavour.. The taste...
Owhh....
“what do you want to eat”
We eat anything, haha
WE ALWAYS DON’T KNOW WHAT TO EAT
Malaysian in a nutshell We eat anything
Mamak is the best
MAAAAAMAAAAAAK
I’m Malaysian bc I love nasi lemak, roti canai and satay even though I sound American
Every food must have SAMBAL
Come on bruh Rendang diklaim
Rendang crispy
Tf rendang?
Eh eh ROTI PRATA

In terms of food, the words and feelings associated are expressions such as “love/miss Malaysian food”, “never hungry in Malaysia”, “delicious food”, “eat anything” shows how Malaysian love their food. There are also a few famous or typical Malaysian food which were mentioned such as the “Durian” fruit, “Nasi Lemak”, “Mamak food”, “Roti canai/prata”, “Rendang” and “Sambal”. These



foods are favourites among Malaysians which can constitute to the identity of being a Malaysian.

C. Language

Since Malaysians are multicultural, there are also various languages being used in our country and a Malaysian is usually bilingual or multilingual. Table 3 shows some expressions that were used to address how the Malaysian identity is related to language.

TABLE 3. Language

Language
English accents from all different states and languages Malaysians can speak a few languages in one sentence we can learn another language like Malay, Mandarin, Tamil and others my English are too broken and rojak liao CAM SOMEBODY SPEAK MALAYSIA You forgot something You know your Malaysian when... You know Chinese, English and Malay!!! At the end of every sentence there will be a (LA) Saya sebagairakyat Malaysia banggadenganapa Malaysia kecapi. Belajarjarahtentang Malaysia membuatkitalebih Malaysian dan lebihsedardirisiapakita.Sayabanggamenggunakanbahasakeba ngsaaniaitubahasamelayu. My accent is adjustable don't can adjust my accent speaking with British foreigner: adjusts speaking with Chinese: adjusts speaking with literally anyone: adjusts

The analysis from the comments revealed how language is seen as a part of Malaysian identity such as: able to speak a few languages in one sentence (code mixing), speak at least two or three languages, the use of Malay as the national language, the use of "la" at the end of sentences and the ability to change accents when speaking to different people [21].

D. Race and Identity

Malaysia is made up of various races and cultures. Therefore, there are a lot of comments which mentioned the topic of race and identity. Table 4 presents some of the common expressions used for race and identity.

TABLE 4. Race and Identity

Race and Identity
Malay Malaysians, Indian Malaysians, Punjabi Malaysians, Sabahan and Sarawak Malaysians I love Malays . I love Malaysia. I love Malaysia. I love Malaysia Not Malay, not Chinese, not Malays we are MalaysiaaaaaaMYMYMY I love Malaysia, Malays, Malaysian and all so please don't leave Malaysia just ignore those racist Malays WE ARE MALAYSIA!!!!!! Malaysia kita Malaysian sayamalayapa khabar bang U Malay I'm CHINESE, AND we are Malaysian LOL I am Malaysian MY. I am so proud that we can accept each other even we are different resist. (my English is bad...) multi racial country, a harmony country, well respected leaders, and of course above all else their people high

courtesy and morality remember our national principles
Malaysian, much loveeee
NiceeeeeeeIm Malaysian too
We are Malaysian.
This Is Malaysia . Don't call us an embarrassment. Don't call
us a mistake . Don't call us racist. We are Malaysian . All of
you must be jealous . We multiracial . Living together now
multi racial country, a harmony country, well respected
leaders, and of course above all else their people high
courtesy and morality
Hye guys I'm Malaysian Malay, and don't agree...we are
Malaysian. I know I'm half Malay and half Chinese cause I
have Malay and Chinese blood from my father and 100%
Malay blood from my mom. I do not hate
Malay, Chinese, Indian or others...but I just hate a racism in
Malaysia. Hope Malaysia will be better in future.

The comments from the table illustrates how most see
Malaysia as multiracial, consisting of majority of Malays,
Chinese and Indians. There are also some comments that
include ethnics from Sarawak and Sabah. Certain comments
also ask for a stop in racism and to regard Malaysia as
one-Malaysian, instead of looking at different races.

E. Malaysian Stereotypes and Behaviours

When looking into Malaysian identity, many YouTube
comments did not leave out the Malaysian stereotypes and
behaviours. Table 5 illustrates the typical Malaysian
behaviours and stereotypes.

TABLE 5. Stereotypes and behaviours

Stereotypes and behaviours
most public holidays being late on the way don't love how we have that 1perangai that makes you know when another 749alaysian is around the Malaysians' ways make their life meaningful and interesting (or annoying, lol). Hahahaha...LOL for "On The Way"..which we all know what it means...hahahahahaha... Diamasihotwsmpaiskr On the way and adjustable accent ahahahah On the way Don't forget the signal lol

The common Malaysian behaviours that have been
mentioned in the YouTube comments in response of
agreement to the videos are being late, always "on the way"
and behaviours during driving such as no signalling when
changing lanes. These behaviours, especially being late for
Malaysians are especially true as lack of punctuality is a
prevalent issue among Malaysians whereby there is a
"Malaysian timing" for most Malaysians.

F. Geographical Location

The place that a person was born is also a mark of identity for the person. Therefore, some YouTube comments related to geographical location were also found during the data analysis.

TABLE 6. Geographical location

Geographical location
born and lived in Malaysia
I'm from the bumikenyalang and I love being Sarawakian and Malaysian
how to know you're Malaysian? 1. Your parents were born here and live here 2. You're born in Malaysia!
Errr... I born here?
I was born in malaysia I was raised in malaysia And I relate to everything in this video
YEAH... iPOH
im from malaysia lmao
No sabahan and sarawakiantho, i hope people know that sabah and sarawak are the part of Malaysia
i was born here, thatsall, cut all the motherfucking crap

It can be shown from Table 6 that most users identified as being a Malaysian if they were born in Malaysia. Some of the comments were also protesting in response to the videos that talked about where Malaysians are from and the videos have failed to include Sarawakians and Sabahans as Malaysians. It is interesting to see that many East Malaysians feel that they are part of Malaysia while some West Malaysians do not know much about their counterparts in East Malaysians.

G. Code Switching and Code Mixing

The code switching and mixing phenomenon were also found throughout most of the comments of the Malaysian-related YouTube videos as demonstrated in table 7.

TABLE 7. Code-switching and mixing

Code mixing and code switching
lololi always said... ko ingat ni jalanbapak kau!!! Hahhah
Very good! Alhamdulillah! Banyak baguslah!
Yes malaysia are the bestu can say anything what u want
..no saman ..even u want kutukmenteri also can ...malaysia still said bolih ..
Why is harith so hambar? And the white dudes acting is way to over exaggerating
Angmoh like those trigger me sometimes
i just saw this... then alamarkkkk
Aiya. Oraangitutakbolehcakapbahasamelayu? Ehhh. So damn siaolah
Petronas fuel price:goes up Me:walaoleh why need to be like that

It can be illustrated in Table 7 that a lot of users code switched and code mixed when commenting about the content of the Malaysian related videos. Users code switched from English to Malay, English to Mandarin and even Malay to Mandarin from one sentence to another in response to the video or previous comments. Users also code mixed when they borrowed or used certain phrases and words from Mandarin and Malay in English sentences as seen above. It can be inferred from the table that some users code switch

and code mix to emphasise a certain point, to be sarcastic and also probably to replace a certain vocabulary that they do not remember or know in English.

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study has shown some interesting findings which gives us an insight on the discourse of Malaysian identity in YouTube comments. Markers of Malaysian identity were associated with feelings about Malaysia, food, languages, race and identity, Malaysian behaviours, stereotypes and geographical location. Code switching and mixing were also widely present in the discourse of the YouTube comments.

However, there were some limitations to the current study whereby there is a possibility that some of the comments were being driven or guided by the content of the videos which talks about some of the categories mentioned. But still, many of the participants provided their opinions on whether they agree or disagree with the content of the video, which can still provide us an insight into the Malaysian identity or how they regard Malaysia and being a Malaysian. More research work can be carried out to determine whether there are more markers for identity in the YouTube comments of Malaysian YouTube videos. The number of comments to be analysed can also be increased in future research.

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