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MODELLING PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF ROHINGYA REFUGEES USING STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODELLING (PLS) IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

As every part of the world is battling with the deadly virus, Malaysia is also struggling in flattening the Covid-19 curve with Rohingya refugees being one of the clusters involved. This creates both a positive and negative perception of the Rohingya community in this country. Therefore, this study aims to explore the perception of the public on Rohingya refugees in Malaysia. Public perception is referred to as the process to determine the way people interpreted their surroundings. Apart from that, the objectives are also mainly to identify the relationship between media, knowledge, government policy and competition in job toward the public perception of Rohingya refugees. 384 respondents of this study were community lived in Selayang, Selangor, Malaysia. A purposive sampling technique was used with a questionnaire as the instrument. SEM-PLS analysis was conducted and the findings show that there is a significant relationship between the variables and perception of Rohingya refugees with mass media considered as the main factor. This study suggested that public perceptions can be constructed through the tested variables even knowledge can be considered to have a low impact on perception. Hence, various parties such as authority, non-governmental bodies and community has benefited from the study.

1. Introduction

A massive assassination of the Rohingya community in Myanmar has sparked various people reactions around the world. The humanitarian crisis that happened in Myanmar also gives an impact on Malaysia as an ASEAN neighbour in terms of security ("Putrajaya: Rohingya Issue", 2016). This led to Malaysia government initiated solidarity protest against the brutal killing of people Rohingya in Arakan. However, the government of Malaysia effort in supporting Rohingya community in Arakan bring some risk towards the safety and security if there is an unexpected event that occurs during the demonstration. Even though Malaysia and other states in ASEAN protested against the humanitarian crisis in Myanmar but it did not stop the brutal attacks on Rohingya by the junta government. This issue worsen as the junta perceived Rohingya's crisis as a domestic issue with no impact to Malaysia (Mohammad, 2018). However, the increasing number of Rohingya refugees escaped from Myanmar to Malaysia will lead to an increase in the cost of shelter, food, health and education for Rohingya ("Putrajaya: Rohingya Issue", 2016). Thus, the government of Malaysia cannot bear the burden to protect refugees and propose to Myanmar's government to allow the Rohingyas to return to their homeland (Faizie, 2018). Other than that, Malaysia is not the member of 1951 Refugees Convention nor does its Protocol 1967, thus, Malaysia have no system to control the status and right of refugees (Equal Rights Trust, 2014). Due to that, Rohingya refugees were considered illegal immigrants that expose them to the risk of extortion, arrest, detention, and deportation (Azharuddin & Azlinariah, 2012). Furthermore, the environment of Malaysia's policy that lacks of advantages to undocumented migrants has caused refugees unable to access the basic services such as free healthcare and formal education (Chuah, et al., 2018). In addition, Malaysia did not acknowledge the status of Rohingya refugees due to security, economic and social factors and they are only allowed to stay in Malaysia temporarily (Yesmin, 2016). With that being said, this study aims to explore the public perception toward the Rohingya refugees who seeking protection in Malaysia.

2. Theory of public perception

The theory of perception concerns the cognition of people in which it is a process of acquiring knowledge and understanding through experience and the senses which are through nose, eyes, and ears (Démuth, 2013). Each sense organ is part of a sensory system in which this sensory may receive inputs and it will transmit the information to the brain (Helmholtz, 2018). This theory studies the perceiver's expectations and previous knowledge as well as the information available acquired by the perceiver through the sensory system (Helmholtz, 2018). The perception theory that is studied by the researcher are divided into two which is Gibson's theory of direct perception as a bottom-up approach and the Constructive theory of perception which is a top-down approach (Gregory, 1970). Gibson's theory of direct perception (bottom-up approach) proposed that people cognition is influenced by the external environment (Gregory, 1970). According to Darwin assumption, he believed that the environment caused people sensory receptor to react with what they acquire from the environment which also influences the whole process of perception (Démuth, 2013). In this study, the researchers take the media as an environment factor that influences the perception of the people. The sensory receptor of the perceivers will react to the information that disseminates by the media through newspaper, television, Twitter, and Facebook in which it can shape the people perception (Matherne, 2015).

Besides, Gibson (1972) stated that the information about shape and size are received by people sensors and then the sensors will build people perception of what they believe from the

information received (Démuth, 2013). It is the same to people ears that perceive information through vibrating waves and the information will flow to the brains in which people will process the information and may create some perception on certain issues (Démuth, 2013). To some extent, the perception will also be affected by people through an active approach which means that perception can be shaped through people movement to find the information. According to Gibson, once people move and sit at the table and find some information, the retina from people's eyes will create the perception (Démuth, 2013). Only by this movement, people will get surrounding information and acquire or be aware of the information present in our environment. The theory related to the researchers' study in which the information that is separated by the media will encourage people movement to acquire true facts. People will go and search the facts through television, the internet, and Twitter in which the information get will go through the people sensory system and result in some perception (Démuth, 2013). Therefore, this Gibson's theory of direct perception (bottom-up approach) will be used by the researcher in the study of public perception on Rohingya refugees.

3. An assessment on of public perception on rohingya refugees

The public perception of Rohingya refugees can be generated through media, education, government policy and competition in a job. The public perception of Rohingya refugees can be shown through their action and how they sustain the existence of a new community in their country (Tent, 2016). It is a view from a group of people of what they think on certain issues which will involve either understanding or misunderstanding (Dowler et al., 2006). Public perception can be different from one person to another because perception can be shaped through facts, virtual truth, and popular opinion (Zint & Wolske, 2014). Besides, the perception of the public is also created based on what people see and hear which it influenced their behaviour towards the issues (Zint & Wolske, 2014).

Political message that has been disseminated through media sometimes can be both positive and negative to the refugee's existence (Hargrave, 2017). The construction of information seemed like an important element and it needs to be taken into consideration before any information about refugees portrayed by the media because it will shape the public opinions (Blinder, 2013). Next, the way media present the information also give the same importance in forming public perception (Catherine & Greg, 2013). One of the reasons is the perception position which depends on the certain division of people such as according to race, ethnicity, and also a class (Esses, 2013). Every people have different thinking to understand and accept the information gathered from the media. The fact shows that the mental images of individuals are likely different and this highlights the importance of investigating the information from media class will affect the individual's judgments on dehumanization and infectious disease about Rohingya refugees (Haslam, 2012; Esses, 2013; Nielsen, 2016).

Apart from that, the policy made by the Malaysian government has significant impact on the public perception of Rohingya refugees (Beutin et al., 2009). Malaysia was not involved in the 1952 Refugee Convention, thus, implementing a policy such as liberal, humanitarian and rejectionist refugees' policy to control the Rohingya refugees making them as illegal migrants that can be subject to the risk of arrest, detention, and deportation (Torjman, 2005; Wake, 2016; Yesmin, 2016). However, the policies enable refugees that are acknowledged by the UNHCR to receive minimum humanitarian assistance not included monetary aid from Malaysia Government such as shelters temporarily using a community-based approach (Crisp et al., 2012; Wake, 2016; Yesmin, 2016).

Even though Malaysia follows the UNHCR Policy Guidelines, the coming of refugees to the host country has contributed to the negative outcome as there is an increase in job competition that brings down resident's opportunity to get the job (Ratha et al., 2011). Public perception is affected as the job opportunities becoming a not only competition between the public itself but also with Rohingya refugees (Geurs & Ritsema, 2003; Navruz & Cukurcayir, 2015; Barcelo, 2016; Alshoubaki & Harris, 2018). Thus, Rohingya refugees were being perceived as taken the job away in the host country. The local citizen will feel pressure to obtain a job as if he has the same capabilities that need them to compete with the refugees to get the job (Rodrigo, 2018).

The negative public perception that is manifested between the public and refugees can be converted into negative attitudes and threat and in return opposing the refugees (Beutin et al., 2007). The involvement of refugees gives impact to the host countries as refugees take a job opportunity, becoming competitors and the way policy implemented made the refugees seen as posing threats and arise consequences in the host country (Geurs & Eck, 2003; Ratha et al., 2011; Baloch et al., 2017; Ayoubi & Saavedra, 2018). By these arguments, this study is relevant to obtain a model that shaping public perception of the existence of Rohingya refugees in Malaysia.

4. Methodology

This quantitative study was conducted using a cross-sectional design with a purposive sampling technique was used. 500 questionnaires were distributed with 384 were returned with a 76.8% of the respond rate. A sample of 384 respondents stayed in Selayang, Selangor, Malaysia were involved in this study. SEM-PLS was used as the statistical software in analysing the respondents' responses. Self-administered questionnaire was used as the instrument in collecting data with purposive sampling technique was applied because researchers had designed specific judgement on respondents such as living in Selayang residential areas only and had experienced in dealing with Rohingya refugees. The distributed questionnaire consists of two sections. In the first section, researchers asked respondents about their gender, level of education and occupation as a study by Azizah (2009) suggested that such demographic profiling benefited researchers in discussing an issue about Rohingya refugees. For the second section, researchers asked questions related to the research model. Public perception was measured through a Likert-scale with five items adapted from Telhami (2014) and Topal et al. (2017). Knowledge was measured using five items adapted from Shrestha et al. (2013), mass media was measured through six items adapted from Niklander et al. (2015), government policy was measured through five items on an individual political ideology that contributes to the perception of the public on refugees (Crawley & Zanker, 2018) and last but not least, six items accessibility of job opportunity is used to measure the job competition taken from Lergetporer et al., (2018).

5. Data analysis

Most of the respondents (see Table 1) were female which are 251 (65.36%) followed by male which are 133 (34.64%). Meanwhile, as for second demographic was level of education in which most of the respondents acquired SPM with 219 (57.63%) and followed by Certificate/ STPM/ STAM/ Diploma which is 94 (24.48%) while respondent that has a degree is 42 (10.94%) and followed by SRP/ PMR/ PT3 and Master's degree which are 24 (6.25%) and 5 (1.30%) accordingly. The highest occupation of the respondents is private-sector employee 46.88% which are 180 people, and followed by self-employed 20.57% consist of 79 people, while 44 respondent are an entrepreneur that contribute to 11.46%. For other occupation records, 7.30% represent by 28

respondents, public sector employee 27 people 7.03%, 19 respondents were unemployed 4.95% while 7 respondent are retired 1.82%.

Table 1: Demographic Data (n: 384)

No.	Profile	No	Frequency (%)
1.	Gender		
	Male	133	34.64
	Female	251	65.36
2.	Level of Education		
	SRP/PMR/PT3SPM	24	6.25
	Certificate/STPM/STAM/Diploma	219	57.63
	Degree	94	24.48
	Master's Degree	42	10.94
		5	1.30
3.	Occupation		
	Public sector employee	27	7.03
	Private sector employee	180	46.88
	Self-employed	79	20.57
	Entrepreneur	44	11.46
	Retired	7	1.82
	Unemployed	19	4.95
	Others	28	7.30

Common method variance needs to be examined when data are collected via self-reported questionnaires and, in particular, both the predictor and criterion variables are obtained from the same person (Podsakoff et. al, 2003). Podsakoff and Todor (1985) also noted that: "Invariably, when self-reported measures obtained from the same sample are utilized in research, concern over same-source bias or general method variance arise" (p. 65). There are several remedies to this issue suggested in the literature. First, factor analysis without rotation in SPSS was conducted and the analysis returned a 5-factor solution explaining 70.22% of the variance. The first factor only explained 23.317% which is much lower than the majority thus indicating method bias is not a serious issue with this study. Next as shown in Table (3), the inter-correlations did not show any value of 0.9 or above with the highest inter-correlation at only 0.694 thus both this test indicates that method bias is not a serious problem in this present study. To analyse the research model we used the Partial Least Squares (PLS) analysis using the SmartPLS 3.0 software (Ringle et. al, 2015). Following the recommended two-stage analytical procedures by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), we tested the measurement model (validity and reliability of the measures) followed by an examination of the structural model (testing the hypothesized relationship) (see Hair et al., 2014; Ramayah et al. 2011; 2013). To test the significance of the path coefficients and the loadings, a bootstrapping method (5000 resamples) was used (Hair et al., 2014).

Table 2: Measurement Model

Construct	Items	Loading	CR ^a	AVE ^b
Public Perception (DV)	B1	0.777	0.898	0.638
	B2	0.748		
	B3	0.841		

	B4	0.787		
	B5	0.835		
Mass Media	C1	0.739	0.876	0.587
	C2	0.841		
	C3	0.707		
	C4	0.772		
	C5	0.764		
Knowledge	D1	0.787	0.869	0.69
	D2	0.815		
	D3	0.886		
Government Policy	E1	0.686	0.842	0.572
	E2	0.794		
	E3	0.729		
	E4	0.809		
Job Competition	F1	0.864	0.91	0.772
	F2	0.843		
	F3	0.927		

Note: D4 and D5 were deleted due to low loading

a. Composite reliability = (square of the summation of the factor loadings) / [(square of the summation of the factor loadings) + (square of the summation of the error variances)]

b. AVE = (summation of squared factor loadings) / (summation of squared factor loadings + summation of error variances)

To assess the measurement model, 2 types of validity were examined, the first being convergent validity and the second being discriminant. Convergent validity of the measurement model is usually ascertained by examining the loadings, average variance extracted (AVE) and also composite reliability (Gholami et al., 2013). The loadings were all higher than 0.6, the composite reliabilities were all higher than 0.7 and the AVE values were also higher than 0.5 as suggested by Hair et al. (2014) (see Table 2).

Table 3: Discriminant Validity

	1	2	3	4	5
1.Public Perception					
2.Government Policy	0.309				
3.Job Competition	0.479	0.694			
4.Mass Media	0.569	0.228	0.255		
5.Knowledge	0.288	0.454	0.417	0.497	

There has been recent criticism of the Fornell-Larcker (1981) criterion was reliably detect the lack of discriminant validity in common research situations (Henseler et al., 2015). They have suggested an alternative approach, based on the multitrait-multimethod matrix, to assess discriminant validity: the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations. Henseler et al. (2015) also went on to

demonstrate the superior performance of this method through Monte Carlo simulation study. There are two ways of using the HTMT to assess discriminant validity: (1) as a criterion or (2) as a statistical test. For the first one, if the HTMT value is greater than the HTMT.85 value of 0.85 (Kline 2016), or the HTMT.90 value of 0.90 (Gold et al. 2001) then there is a problem of discriminant validity. The second criterion is according to Henseler et al. (2015), is to test the null hypothesis (H_0 : $HTMT \geq 1$) against the alternative hypothesis (H_1 : $HTMT < 1$) and if the confidence interval contains the value one (i.e., H_0 holds) this indicates a lack of discriminant validity. As shown in Table 3 all the values passed the HTMT.90 (Gold et al., 2001) and HTMT.85 (Kline, 2011).

Table 4: Hypothesis Testing

	Std Beta	Std Error	t-value	p-value	BCILL	BCIUL	f2	VIF
Knowledge → Public Perception	-0.023	0.045	0.512	0.304	-0.086	0.058	0.001	1.511
Government Policy → Public Perception	0.23	0.057	4.041	$p < 0.001$	0.139	0.327	0.053	1.630
Job Competition → Public Perception	0.182	0.066	2.773	$p < 0.001$	0.071	0.285	0.03	1.797
Mass Media → Public Perception	0.43	0.054	7.89	$p < 0.001$	0.338	0.515	0.217	1.614

*R Square: 0.539

Government Policy ($\beta = .23$, $p < .001$), Job Competition ($\beta = .18$, $p < .001$) and Mass Media ($\beta = .43$, $p < .001$) were positively related to public perception toward Rohingya refugees, thus H_2 , H_3 , H_4 was supported. While Knowledge ($\beta = -0.023$, $p > .001$) were not significant thus H_1 not supported. There R^2 was .539 indicating 53.9% of the variance of public perception toward Rohingya refugees in Selayang can be explained by all the independent variables taken together.

6. Discussion and implication

The analysis found in this study is in accordance with the research done by Hargrave (2017) that media plays an important role in determining the perception of the public on Rohingya refugees. It is due to the messages that were disseminated through media can illustrated both positive and negative perception on the existence of Rohingya refugees. Media could be strong enough through its surveillance function to influence the perception of the public. This is because media have rovided the public with basic knowledge and information of all aspect of issues either at the national or international level. Besides, media also has a significant influence in directing the public to make a judgement and subsequently creating perception. Mass media does not only success in disseminating information butalso succeededin telling the public what to think because people shaping their perception according to what media present to them. The information displays by media naturally covered government policy and economic issue involving job opportunities. Thus, it parallels to the hypotheses of the study that these variables significantly affect public view on the existing of Rohingya refugees in Malaysia.

In addition, public also have a different understanding of the information gathered on the media because every people have a different judgement about Rohingya refugees due to different level of knowledge acquired. This fact aligns with Rodrigo (2018) which stated that knowledge

has shaped the perception of the public on Rohingya refugees. Rodrigo's study also found that individual with higher knowledge commonly has a positive perception as compared to person with lower knowledge on refugee issue. Blom (2008) previous study also examined that higher knowledge from education influence public perception at 49 percent as compared to the 7 percent with lower knowledge of refugees. This indicated that public perception and policy implemented by the government has to interact relationship that reinforces each other. The implementation of the Zero Tolerance Policy in 1992 by the Malaysia government was used as the foundation to refuse the existence of Rohingya refugees in the country. This led the refugees subjected to arrest and detention as refugees are treated as stateless migrants that stay in Malaysia. This situation made the refugees status same as undocumented migrant thus the public perceived them as the threat to the nation's security and safety. However, Malaysia had signed the Non-Refoulement agreement which put the government in dilemma as the agreement not allowed for refugees' deportation to the country of origin with dead treatment to them. Even though the government policy does not tolerate Rohingya refugees but they continued to serve these people in the name of human rights by providing shelter, food, and documentation. The helps from UNHCR in documenting the Rohingyas allowed the government in drafting and implementing the ATIPSOM (Anti Human Trafficking and Smuggling of Migrants) 2010 policy in dealing with refugees. Aside from that, the government is also strengthening the security at national borders through integrated security operations because Rohingya refugees were identified to enter Malaysia through land, air and sea. The authorities have claimed that the operations were successful in blocking refugees from entering Malaysia especially from the most prominent channel which are using ships and boats. There is a clear policy in Malaysia to deal with refugees but handling refugees remain challenging as the refugees who stayed in Malaysia need economy aid to survive. Thus, some of them are working as general workers in the market, shopping mall and construction sites.

The government is fully aware of the impact of refugees on the job workforce in this country. The employees might be hired to minimize labour cost and improve profit. Thus, it created competition in a job that indirectly influenced the perception of the public on Rohingya refugees. This supported by a previous analysis conducted by Alshouboki and Harris (2018) which stated that the coming of refugees to the host country has contributed to the negative outcome from the public as the situation increases the job competition between residents and refugees. Since the Rohingya labours are paid lower salary than local labours, this creates competition with local labours who are paid more and in the end it reduces the employment opportunities among the locals. Hence, employers tend to hire these refugees instead of locals. In addition, employers are not obligated to employment benefits such as pension and security schemes if they hired the refugees. Thus, this created instability in the workforce and significantly increased the amount of unemployment among Malaysian which directly affected their economic status.

7. Conclusion

This article aims to explore the public perception of the existing of Rohingya refugees in Malaysia especially in the district of Selayang, Selangor. This study has drawn several contributing factors that may shape the public perception of Rohingya refugees as statistical analysis output shows that there is a significant association between Government Policy and Job Competition toward public perception of Rohingya refugees with the highest association contributed by Mass Media in shaping an individual view on the existence of refugees in the nation. This paper also has justified that the knowledge does not have a huge impact on public perception toward Rohingya refugees, thus, their view on this issue relatively is the same. Therefore, it is important for

an education programme to be implemented to ensure the public has adequate knowledge with regards to refugees' issues.

On the other hand, this article is believed to provide an insight into why the public feel unsecured with the existence of Rohingyas as they create job competition towards the citizen. Hence, it can help the authorities to be more aware and concern about the importance of certain elements to ensure conflict does not arise between refugees and local citizen through effective policy. Additionally, the mass media must be fair in delivering information as they are the most significant actors that can influence public perception of refugees in Malaysia. Nevertheless, this study benefited several parties such as the National Security Council, Immigration Department, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Human Resource, NGOs and individual residents in Malaysia.

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