

## **The Relationship Between Gender And Ethnicity Upon Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Among Sabah Ethnicities**

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**Abstract :** *Culture plays an important role in many aspects such as the way employees perform their job, productivity of organization as well as the relationship among employees in the workplace. Therefore, it is important to understand cultural dimensions among individuals to predict their behaviour that will lead to organizational success. This study was conducted to identify whether gender and ethnicity will influence people's cultural dimensions. In short, this study intends to understand the cultural dimensions among Sabah communities which involve three major ethnic groups in Sabah namely Malay-Brunei, Bajau and Kadazan-Dusun. The sample of this research was selected based on purposive convenient sampling whereby all respondents are located in Kota Kinabalu. A questionnaire was administered for data collection with a sample of two hundred and nineteen employees from both the public and the private sector. The data was analyzed using the one way ANOVA and it showed that three major ethnic groups in Sabah appear to be not significantly different on Hofstede's cultural dimensions. However the t-test found that the males differ from females on three out of four cultural dimensions namely power distance, individualism-collectivism and masculinity-femininity. The findings of this study can be considered as very interesting since a majority of Malaysians perceive that the values of the three ethnic cultures of the Malay-Brunei, Bajaus and Dusuns are different but the study proved otherwise.*

**Keywords-** *Cultural dimension, Ethnic groups, Gender, Malaysia*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Malaysia is well known all over the world with its diverse racial and ethnic composition. Besides the local Malays and the native groups, immigrants from China, India, Indonesia and other parts of the world contribute to multiracial composition of Malaysia's population. Consequently, Malaysia is often described as a minefield of cultural sensitivities (Asma and Lim, 2001). Moreover, Fontaine (2007) described Malaysia as a country where Malays, Chinese, Indians and other ethnic groups live in a multicultural environment. Culture plays an important role in many aspects such as the way employees perform their job, relationship among employees in the workplace as well as their acceptance towards their leaders. There are a few studies conducted such as Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) which intend to see the variations of culture in different countries. There is also study conducted by Wafa *et al* (1999) who conducted a study in Peninsular Malaysia by using three major ethnic groups as their sample of study namely the Malays, Indians and the Chinese. However, research on Sabah communities has not been done yet. Therefore, this study investigated whether cultural differences exist among Sabahans.

Sabah is located in east Malaysia and known as the second largest state in the country. According to Swee-Hock and Kesavapany (2006), consistently higher rate of population growth was recorded in Sabah. Sabah's population has a rich cultural diversity with various ethnic communities. Each ethnic community has their unique heritage which makes them different from one ethnic group to another. These ethnic groups still maintain their customs and traditions until today. This study is conducted in Sabah whereby it focused on three major ethnic groups namely Malay-Brunei, Bajau and Kadazan-Dusun.

The primary objective of this research is to determine the cultural dimensions of the three major ethnic groups of the Sabah population. Therefore, the research questions that will be answered are:

- I. How do the Sabahans score on Hofstede's cultural dimensions?
- II. Are there any differences in Hofstede's cultural dimensions among the three major ethnic groups?
- III. Do males and females differ in their cultural dimensions?

### **II. RELATED LITERATURE**

According to Kluckhohn (1951), culture is defined as a pattern of ways of thinking, feeling and reacting acquired and transmitted through symbols. Basically, Kluckhohn (1951) claims that the fundamental nature of culture consists of conventional thoughts and standards. Additionally, culture provides values, norms and roles that are enforced by positive and negative sanctions (Van Maanen, 1976). Agents of socialization such as family, peers, media and experiences will support the learning of these standards, custom and roles.

Moreover, Littrell and Valentin (2005) claim that the fundamental nature of culture is not what is observable on the surface but defined as way set by the community to realize and infer the world.

Hofstede (1980) has developed four fundamental cultural dimensions in human societies which represent the basic elements of common structure in the cultural system of the countries. Four of Hofstede's cultural dimensions provide an important framework in analyzing national culture and cultural differences on management and organization (Peng and Yuquan, 2002).

According to Hofstede (2001), power distance refers to the "different solutions to the basic problems of human inequality". The fundamental issue involved in this dimension is related to how the society deals with the fact that people are unequal (Hofstede, 1993). Furthermore, Hofstede (1993) has grouped the society as 'weak uncertainty avoidance' society and 'strong uncertainty avoidance' society. Basically, those who are in the 'weak uncertainty avoidance' societies will accept each day more easily and will take risk rather easily (Hofstede, 1993). Moreover, according to Stedham and Yamamura (2004), individualism-collectivism dimension addresses the extent to which members define themselves in terms of group membership in a country. According to Hofstede (2001), individualism-collectivism dimension refer to the integration of individuals into primary group. Finally, masculinity refers to societies that value assertiveness, material and economic aspect of life whereas femininity refers to cultures that emphasize social relationship and quality of life (Alves *et al*, 2006).

Kennedy (2002) reported that Malaysia is well known as an Islamic country with a mixed population of Malays, Chinese and Indians. Therefore the most interesting thing about Malaysia is the combination of Asian principles and cultural characteristics. Moreover, Abdullah (2001) states that each ethnic group in Malaysia has a distinct culture based on age-old beliefs, traditions, practices rooted in their Asian heritage. In addition, Malaysian societal formation is overlaid by Islamic beliefs and values which dictate appropriate behavioural practices (Kennedy, 2002). Most of studies on cultural dimensions are independent whereby it was not differentiated by age, gender, education and occupation (Stedham and Yamamura, 2004). Hofstede (1980) argued that culture can also be applied to gender even though he concluded that gender do not generally influence the cultural dimensions.

### III. THE STUDY AND METHODOLOGY

This paper intends to identify the cultural dimensions of the three different ethnic groups in Sabah. Secondly, it will attempt to explore whether significant differences exist between the three ethnic groups on their cultural dimensions. Finally, this study will try to test whether significant differences exist between gender on the cultural dimensions of Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Individualism-collectivism and masculinity-femininity adopted for the study.

For the purpose of this study, the sample was selected based on purposive quota sampling. This research adopted the instrument developed by Yoo *et al* (2011) who conducted a study regarding Hofstede's cultural dimensions. However, the questionnaire was modified and was translated into the Malay language. This is to facilitate the needs of the sample population who are not proficient in English. A total of 270 questionnaires were distributed and 239 were returned from workers in the public and private sector in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. However, only 219 questionnaires were valid and useable which shows that the returning rate of the study is 88.5% while the usable rate was 81%.

### IV. RESULTS OF THE STUDY

#### 4.1 Reliability of Measures

Based on the reliability analysis conducted, all four cultural dimensions were found to have Cronbach's alpha values of more than 0.60. Table 1 reports the results from reliability analysis for each dimension.

**Table 1: Reliability measures**

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha
Power Distance	.687
Uncertainty Avoidance	.827
Collectivism/Individualism	.753
Masculinity/Femininity	.635

#### 4.2 Descriptive Statistic of Variables

The descriptive analysis was employed to obtain the means and standard deviations for independent and dependent variables in this study. Table 2 reported the descriptive statistic of cultural dimensions. Table 2 shows that Malay-Brunei scored the highest mean for power distance (2.0062) while Kadazan-Dusun had the lowest score for power distance (1.8844). The Kadazan-Dusun had the highest mean for uncertainty avoidance (4.3801) while the Bajau appear to have the highest score on collectivism (3.4516) and the Kadazan-Dusun scored the highest on masculinity-femininity (3.1290).

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistic of Respondents Cultural Dimensions**

Cultural Dimensions	Ethnic	Mean	Std Deviation
Power Distance	Malay-Brunei	2.0062	.58006
	Bajau	1.9597	.66071
	Kadazan-Dusun	1.8844	.59399
Uncertainty Avoidance	Malay-Brunei	4.2313	.66878
	Bajau	4.3419	.47271
	Kadazan-Dusun	4.3801	.53146
Individualism-Collectivism	Malay-Brunei	3.3573	.63389
	Bajau	3.4516	.72579
	Kadazan-Dusun	3.4215	.63289
Masculinity-Femininity	Malay-Brunei	3.0078	.64237
	Bajau	2.9355	.94948
	Kadazan-Dusun	3.1290	.75327

**4.3 Demographic Variables and Cultural Dimensions**

Relationship between gender and ethnicity and cultural dimension was analyzed using the t-test and the one way ANOVA. Table 3 reports the results from the t-test and ANOVA analysis. From the table, the result of the t-test indicates that there is a significant difference between the males and the females on power distance, individualism-collectivism and masculinity-femininity culture recording a sig. t-value of 0.013, 0.008 and 0.000 respectively. The only dimension that was not influenced by gender is uncertainty avoidance culture. However, the result of one way ANOVA indicates that there is no significant difference between the Malay-Brunei, Bajau and Kadazan-Dusun on the Hofstede's cultural dimensions of power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism-collectivism and masculinity-femininity.

**Table 3: Differences between Genders on Cultural Dimensions**

Cultural Dimensions	Gender		Mean	Mean
	t-value	Sig	Male	Female
Power Distance	2.497	.013	2.0926	1.8732
Uncertainty Avoidance	.207	.837	4.3375	4.3205
Individualism-Collectivism	2.668	.008	3.5858	3.3327
Masculinity-Femininity	-4.484	.000	2.6895	3.1921

**Table 4: Differences between Ethnic Groups on Cultural Dimensions**

Cultural Dimensions	Ethnicity	
	F-value	Sig
Power Distance	0.796	0.452
Uncertainty Avoidance	1.374	0.255
Individualism-Collectivism	0.340	0.712
Masculinity-Femininity	1.200	0.303

**V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The profile of the respondents shows that 68 were males and 151 were females. The results of this study found significant differences in cultural dimensions among the three ethnic groups of Sabah but significant differences were found between the males and the females on their cultural dimensions.

Based on the mean scores in the descriptive statistics, all three groups were found to have low power distance because the all mean scores are below 3. The higher the score in particular group shows a higher level for power distance. This finding was different from Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) which categorized Malaysia as a country with high power distance. In addition, Wafa *et al* (1999) who conducted a study in Peninsular Malaysia by using three major ethnic groups as their sample of study namely the Malays, Indians and Chinese also found that Malays are categorized as high power distance. The lower power distance may be due to the changes over time to the population of manager who are more modern and more open towards western concept and practice which has reduced their power distance values.

The mean for these three ethnic groups reveals that they are high on uncertainty avoidance. The finding was in line with the findings of Yong (2010) which categorized Malaysia as high in uncertainty avoidance due to a few observations such as preference for regulations and showing low tolerance for unstructured situations. For individualism and collectivism the three groups can categorized as leaning towards collectivism and as such is in line with Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) which categorized Malaysia as a collectivist society because of

several criterias namely generous, friendly, and tolerant of errors and show concern for others. Finally, the mean scores for these ethnic groups show that they are leaning towards femininity culture.

The one-way ANOVA analysis found that there were no significant differences in terms of mean scores for each ethnic group on Hofstede's cultural dimensions. Therefore, it can be concluded that the Malay-Brunei, Bajaus and Dusuns share the same values and beliefs. The finding was supported by Fontaine and Richardson (2005) who suggests that consensus can be reached that the culture of each ethnic groups in Malaysia is actually quite similar. Fontaine and Richardson (2005) claims that multi-ethnic teams in Malaysia can have enough shared values to work together.

The results of this study showed that males scored higher in three out of four cultural dimensions namely power distance, collectivism and masculinity dimensions compared to females. No significant difference was found between males and females on uncertainty avoidance. This finding was not in line with the assertion of Hofstede (1980) who claims that cultural dimensions do not generally differ according to gender. According to Hofstede (2001), the effects of gender on the mental program are largely unconscious. It can be concluded from this difference that the females in Sabah are very submissive to the males and as such are different on their value dimensions of power distance, individualism-collectivism and masculinity-femininity. Stedham and Yamamura (2004) had listed education, female participation in the workplace and legislation on gender equity as factors that impacted women's values, attitude and perception. However, the findings of this study showed that these changes have not changed significantly the values of the females across the three ethnicities in Sabah.

In conclusion, the significant difference that were found in the cultural dimensions between males and female but not between ethnic groups. It is really an interesting finding since the three ethnic cultures of the Malay-Brunei, Bajaus and Dusuns have more in common with each other than what is generally perceived by most Malaysians. Further studies need to be conducted before a definitive conclusion can be made.

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