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Love is color-blind: Factors that influence perception of Sunway University students toward interracial relationship

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Abstract

As the advancement of technology has tremendously changed the way people communicate with each other, it has opened up opportunities for interracial relationships. Interracial relationships are also known as intercultural or interethnic relationships. This research aims to study on students' level of acceptance towards interracial relationship. The research also focuses on determining the factors that affects students' perceptions towards interracial. This study uses a sample of university students (N=100) from Sunway University, particularly students who are undertaking business and communication major. The study was conducted through online survey questionnaires. Results revealed that students' level of acceptance towards interracial relationship was high. In addition, results also further indicated that family's approval was one of the most important factors in influencing students' perception towards interracial relationship.

Keywords: *Interracial relationship, interracial, perception*

1. INTRODUCTION

Background

The world is a diversified place that is constructed based on different races, cultures, countries, histories, and religions. As the advancement of technology has tremendously changed the way people communicate with each other, it has opened up boundaries and provide opportunities for interracial relationship. Interracial relationship is also known as intercultural or interethnic relationship (Troy, Lewis-smith, & Laurenceau, 2006).

Looking back into U.S. history, dating and marital relationship between Blacks and Whites have been forbidden (Field, Kimuna, & Straus, 2013). Marital between Whites and Black can be seen as illegal in many states. However in the year of 1967, Supreme Court ruling in the Loving

v. Commonwealth of Virginia has overturned miscegenation laws that barred sex or marriage between Blacks and Whites in Virginia along with 15 other states, majority in Southern (Loving v. Virginia, 388 U.S.1967). Since then, interracial marriage have significantly increased among the European country (Kennedy, 2002).

Interracial Relationship in Malaysia

Malaysia is a multiracial country that consists of Malay, Chinese, Indigenous, Indian, and other races which makes interracial marriages common among Malaysians (Pillay, 2014). According to Pillay (2014) the most commonly seen interracial marriages in Malaysia are the ones between Chinese and Indian. As the majority of these marriages involve an Indian groom and Chinese bride, they are known as "Chindians". As for the Malays, who are mostly Muslim, legal restrictions in Malaysia make it less common for them to intermarry with other races (Pillay, 2014).

Research Problem

Majority of the research on interracial relationship have mostly been carried out in United States. It can be seen that most of these research focused on people's attitudes toward interracial relationship; factors that influence them to be involved in interracial relationship; and interracial relationship's function in general (Troy, Smith, & Laurenceau, 2006). There are very limited research on this topic that have been conducted among the Asian countries specifically on the context of University students.

Research Questions

Hence, this research topic is addressed to study on Malaysia context whereby it will focus on the students' perceptions toward interracial relationship. This research will be examining on these research questions:

- (1) What are the students' level of acceptance towards interracial relationship?
- (2) What are the factors that influence the students' perceptions towards interracial relationship?

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

- (1) To study the students' level of acceptance towards interracial relationship.
- (2) To determine the factors that influence the students' perceptions towards interracial relationship.

Significance of Research Topic

This study is designed to provide insights on the students' level of acceptance towards interracial relationship. In addition this study also provides insights on factors that influence

students' perception towards interracial relationship as well as comparison between the perception between Business major and Communication major students.

The knowledge gathered from this research can be used by counsellors in Sunway University in assisting students who seek their help in providing advice and solutions to problems they face in interracial relationship.

The research also aims to contribute to the current research studies on interracial dating and marriage as well as to serve future researchers, reference and guidelines in exploring interracial relationship topics.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Interracial relationship

Interracial relationship is the word used to designate relationship which takes place between people who are from different nationality, ethnics, or belief groups (Ross, 2004). Interracial relationship and marriage are fairly new socially acceptable concepts that have been introduced into our society, but as time progressed, more of these types of relationships are being seen.

Before this study was conducted, reviews of previous research studies related to interracial relationship or marriage are being studied. Most of the interracial relationship studies were done by categorising the participants demographically by their age, race, gender, and more (Field, Kimuna, & Straus, 2013; Levin, Taylor, & Caudle, 2007; Ross, 2004; Wang, Kao, & Joyner, 2004). Furthermore, there are also numerous studies that are conducted to test the factors that motivated individual in engaging interracial relationship (Wang, Kao, & Joyner, 2004; Wu, Chen, & Greenberg, 2014).

Family

Family members are more likely to discriminate individuals that engaged in intermarry (Wang, Kao, & Joyner, 2004). It can be seen that most ethnicity groups prefer their member to date or marry individual that is within their racial or ethnic groups (Field, Kimuna, & Straus, 2013). They claimed that the most protruding challenge in engaging and maintaining an interracial relationships is proven to be parental objection. Furthermore, their studies indicated that interracial couples perceive less support from their families as compared to interracial couples. According to Levin, Taylor, and Caudle (2007) it is also suggested that parental approval are important in partner choice. Their research indicated that there is a positive correlated relationship between parental influences over dating and likelihood of interracial relationships among students. In Field, Sitawa, and Kimuna (2013) research findings showed that students tend to perceive lower parental support for interracial relationships. Students are least likely to date outside their race or approve interracial relationships when they have to face parental objections.

Societal

Besides that, research showed that individuals who dated interracial are reported to have lower levels of societal approval towards their relationships than those who have dated within their ethnic groups (Wang, Kao, & Joyner, 2004). Furthermore, it is also highlighted that majority of interracial couples often received stares, negative feedbacks and accusation in public areas. Troy, Lewis-smith, & Laurenceau (2006) research claimed that the social network for individuals who committed in interracial marriage would diminish significantly. Due to the large pressure from the society, both interracial parties will be more likely to isolate themselves from the public (Wang, Kao, & Joyner, 2004; Wu, Chen, & Greenberg, 2014). The authors also suggested that there is a positive connection between societal approval and the longevity of the dating relationship. Interracial couples need to overcome and manage these public harassment such as evaluative, unfavorable, and prejudiced actions from public in order to have a successful relationship. This is because it is pointed out that negative attitudes towards interracial relationships from different ethnicity groups have caused formidable psychological and emotional obstacle to interracial contact, dedicating to the maintenance of a racially laminated society (Bratter, & Eschbach, 2005).

Race

When it comes to different ethnicity or races, there are always a lot of arguments remained although there are changes in the law and cultural environment. The romance relationship in interracial still remained as a raw nerve in the society where the color line still remained strong (Field, Kimuna, & Straus, 2013) it is revealed that students in historically Black universities perceive less positive attitudes towards Black/White relationships. The authors also indicated that the attitudes towards interracial relationships differ by race. On the other hand, Herman and Campbell (2012) studies showed a distinct hierarchy dating system that coincided to the history of racism in United States. Their research revealed that their participants were least likely to date Blacks and most likely to date Whites followed by Asians and Latinos. In their research, they have examined the perception of how Black men are perceived. Herman and Campbell (2012) demonstrated, interviewers perceived darker-skinned Black women as less attractive than those in lighter-skinned Black women.

Previous research also indicated that Whites are least likely to date someone out of their ethnic groups or have more rejections towards interracial relationships (Field, Kimuna, & Straus, 2013; Herman, & Campbell, 2011; Levin, Taylor, & Caudle, 2007). As explained in Wu, Chen, and Greenberg (2014) studies, Whites often experience "secondhand racism" which means racism due to their relationships with the ethnic minorities. Besides, Wu, Chen, and Greenberger (2014) studies also identified that ethnic minorities have higher acceptance towards interracial relationships than Whites. According to Field, Kimuna, and Straus (2013), it is showed that Asians and Whites perceived most disapproving of interracial relationships with those who are categorised as Black, whereas more approving towards those in "other" category. The authors further explained that because comparatively it is more common for Asians and Whites to intermix. The racial discrimination have undermined the understandings of fairness and equal treatment toward interracial relationships. Individuals who engaged in interracial relationships

are often treated in racist ways where they encountered stares from others, stereotypes, and mistreatment (Field, Sitawa, & Kimuna, 2013; Wang, Kao, & Joyner, 2004; Wu, Chen, & Greenberg, 2014).

In conclusion, the biggest factors that affects the engagement of interracial relationships is the support from the family, friends, and society (Field, Kimuna, & Joyner, 2013; Levin, Taylor, & Claudie, 2007). Levin, Taylor, and Caudle (2007) studies indicated that “students who perceived lower level of in-group bias, intergroup anxiety and group identification before college are more likely to date member from other ethnic or racial groups during college.” In addition, researchers also further extended the work on intergroup contact where it is argued that having friends from other ethnicity is strongly related with an individual having less prejudice and intergroup anxiety. Predictors and outcome of interracial dating are derived from positive intergroup attitudes, thus, this can lead to future interracial dating or marriage (Levin, Taylor, & Caudle, 2007; Wu, Chen, & Greenberg, 2014).

Given all these social biases, researchers have studied the types of the individuals that are most likely to be involved, motivations that aroused them to date interracially (Wu, Chen, & Greenberg, 2014). Most studies indicated that ethnic minority are more likely to date interracially (Herman, & Campbell, 2011; Wu, Chen, & Greenberg, 2014). Besides, Field, Kimuna, and Straus (2013) also found that participants who are categorised as ethnic minorities have held the most positive perceptions towards interracial relationships. The authors argued that this is due to the situation whereby some of the ethnic minorities may be biracial, thus, it is common for them to not have a problem to interracial relationships nor to date interracially themselves. Besides, it is also elaborated that these ethnic minorities group have the highest level of perceived parental approval towards interracial dating.

3. METHODOLOGY

Method

The current study is designed to examine Sunway students' level of awareness and acceptance toward interracial relationship as well as the factors that affect their perceptions toward interracial relationship. In addition, a compare and contrast between the business and communication major students' result is also examined. A quantitative research method are applied in this study. Du Plooy (2009) suggested that a quantitative research is designed to count or measure variables. Quantitative design is often used to illustrate, forecast, and explain quantities, degrees and relationships in addition to simplify from a sample to the target or reachable population by accumulating numerical information (Treadwell, 2014). It is the process of transforming qualitative data into quantitative data, in other words, converting words into numbers (Vogt, 2011).

The quantitative research method are conducted through survey questionnaire. According to Sapsford (2006), survey questionnaires are an effective method as the study aims to discover participants' belief, opinion and past or present behaviour. Besides, Krosnick and Presser (2010) mentioned that surveys are famous for its ongoing popularity usage because of its adaptability, efficiency, and generalisability. In this study, participants are asked to recall their past behaviour, and opinions in predicting their future behaviour. As mentioned by Vogt (2011), online surveys are an essential tools for variety research fields due to the advancement of information-communication technologies. Besides, online surveys are proven to be less costly and less time consuming in conducting research findings (Bulmer, 2004). Thus, this study is conducted through online survey questionnaires. Both open-ended and close-ended questions are used in the questionnaires in order to meet the research objectives. The questionnaire is divided into three different sections whereby the first part of the survey are designed to be close-ended questions in order to assess the participants' demographic background information such as age, gender, race, religion, and their majors. Moving to the second section of the questionnaire, it focused on the level of acceptance toward interracial relationship. Followed by the last section that has covered the area of the factors that influenced the participants' perceptions toward interracial relationship which specifically look at Race, Family and Society influence. The questions in this two section are structured in likert scale form. Participants are asked to locate their level of agreement towards the statements given, as well as a reason to explain their choices.

Samples

In this study, targeted participants are Sunway University communication and business major students.

Sunway University Business School (SUBS) is a foremost business school in Malaysia (Sunway, 2015). The school is currently working in partnership with some of the world's leading business schools in offering high quality and leading-edge education in the business field. The populations in business school are approximately 2300 students.

Sunway University communication major is an enthrusting and well-structured programme with three interdisciplinary specialisations which are corporate communication, advertising design, and PR project management. This programme offers a complete and balanced curriculum for specialised development. The communication school populations are approximately 230 students.

Throughout this questionnaire survey, participants are chosen based on snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where it is commonly use to find someone who encounters the criteria for presence in the study, whereby in this case: business and communication majors' students. Besides, snowball sampling is helpful when researchers are attempting to access populations that are inaccessible or hard to find (Socialresearchmethods.net, 2015). Therefore, respondents are predicted to acknowledge about the identity of other members of the similar population group (Chromy, 2008; Dawson, 2009). Chromy explained that snowball sampling is collected through identifying one or more members of the minorities and requesting them to provide names of other members of the same population. Moving on, the additional person is requested to provide another name of the same population; and so forth. The cycle is continued until it reached an adequate sample size. By applying snowball sampling in forming the sample size of the study, it is expected that it will be less time consuming and cost-efficient as Sunway University has a wide demographic range of students in terms of ethics, race, age, and gender. Students are believed to have broad social connections whereby it is easier to get in touch with the business and communication students.

Data analysis

Data analysis is the process of reviewing, cleaning, converting, and showing data with the objective of finding constructive data, proposing conclusions, and proving decision-making (Bell, 2010). Raw data collected from questionnaires need to be recorded, analyzed, and interpret. The purpose of data analysis is to summarise the data collected so that it can be easily comprehended and come out with answers for the research questions (Bulmer, 2004).

In this study, the variables attained from the survey questionnaires are gathered and analysed through descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics are utilised in describing the essential features of the collected data in a study. It helped to explain, illustrate or sum-ups data into a simpler form through displaying simple graphic analysis, or percentages statistics

(Socialresearchmethods.net, 2015). The classified data is categorised accordingly to meet the research objectives and tabulated into frequency and percentage distribution. Frequency and percentage distribution allowed the findings to be presented clearly so that it is easy for the researcher to analyse. These findings are then further discussed and supported by participant's reasoning in obtaining the research objectives.

4. FINDINGS & DISCUSSIONS

The sample (N=100) for this study was chosen based on accessibility, and included students in graduate and undergraduate business and communication major to accommodate for the research objectives of this study. There were a total of 50 business students and 50 communication students. Among these 100 participants, 45% are from males' respondent, and 55% were from females' respondents. 90% of the participants were Malaysian students, whereas the other 10% of participants are International students. The ethnic breakdown of the sample included 9% Malays, 82% Chinese, 2% Indian, and 7% others. On the other hand, the religion breakdown of the sample included 12% Islam, 57% Buddhism, 1% Hinduism, and the remaining 30% others such as Christianity, and Sikhism. The mean age of the participants is 21 years old. The survey questionnaire were distributed to the participants via Facebook with an attached link to fill up the survey.

Research Objective 1: Students' levels of acceptance toward Interracial Relationship

Acceptance toward interracial relationship

Figure 1 Students' acceptance toward interracial relationship.

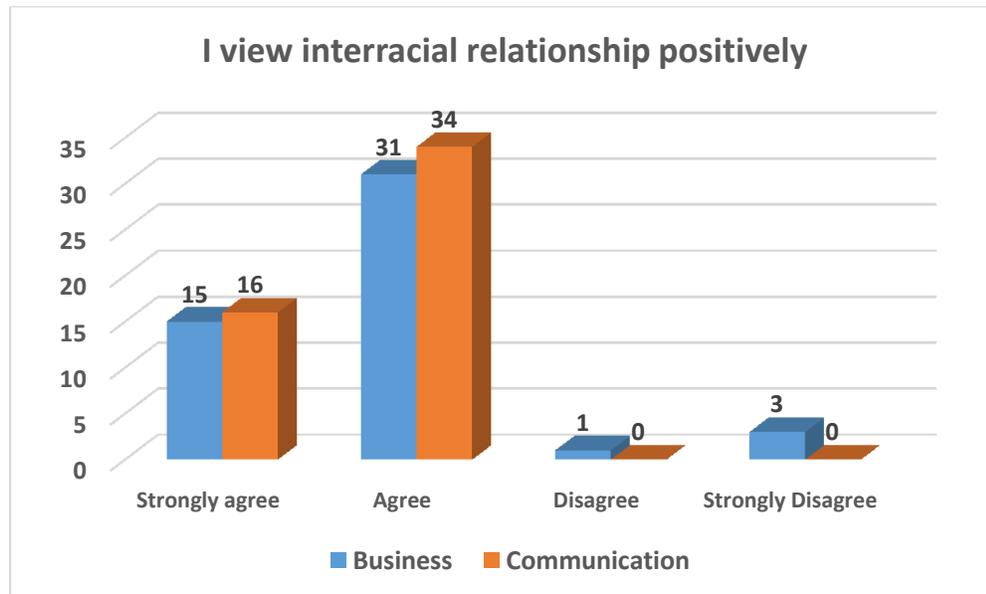


Figure 1 shows the distribution of the students' answers to the statement of "I view interracial relationship positively". As indicated, the percentage of students who have selected "Agree" in respond to the statement are 31% from business major, and 34% from communication major. Furthermore, there are also 15% from business major and 16% from communication major shows their respond as "Strongly Agree" with the statement. On the other hand, only 1% from business major and none from communication major has rated

“Disagree”, and 3% from business major and none from communication major has rated “Strongly Disagree” from the statement.

The response from both business and communication major shows an inclination toward agreeing with the statement. Through the histogram chart from Figure 1, it is clearly shown that almost 96% of the students have higher acceptance or perceived positively toward interracial relationship.

Research Objective 2: Factors that influence students’ perceptions toward interracial relationship

1. Influence of Parents approval and perception towards students ‘perception on Interracial Relationship

Figure 2. Parents’ approval and perception

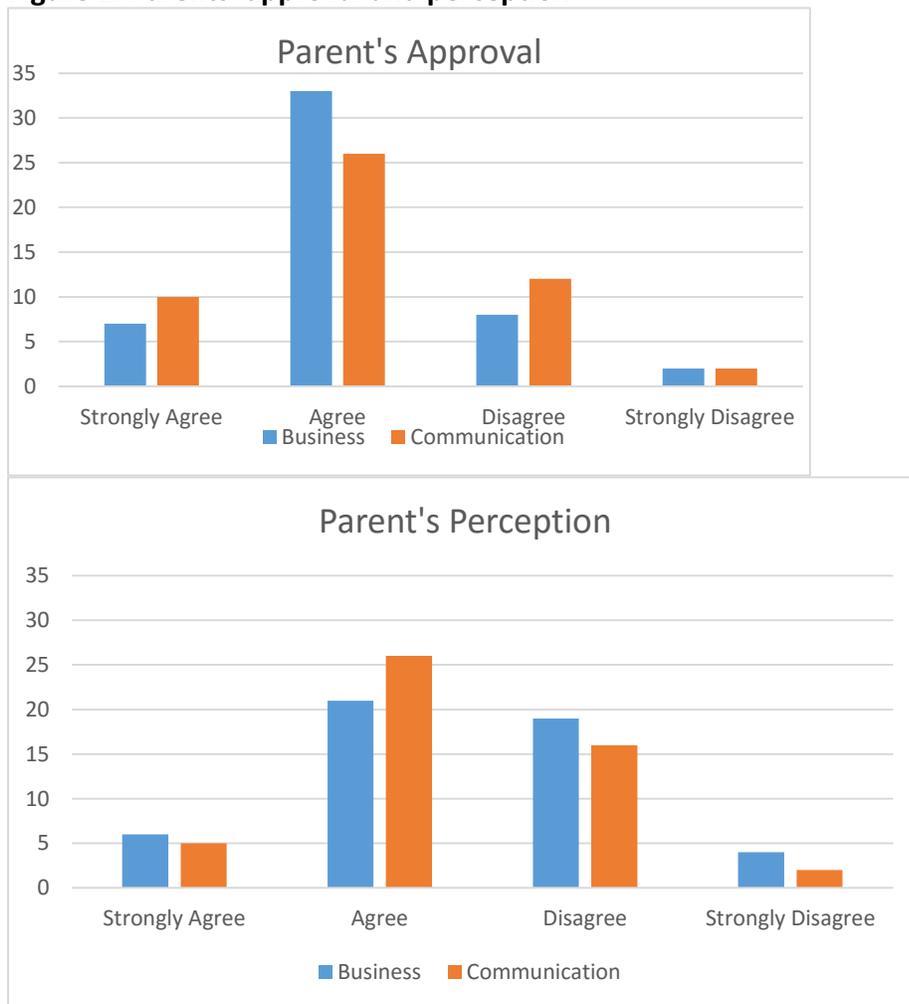


Figure 2 reveals that parent's approval are important in shaping students' perception towards interracial relationship. Result shows that 76% of the students rated strongly agree or agree towards the statement of "My parent's approval influences my perception toward interracial relationship. In contrast, only 24% of the remaining students have selected disagree or strongly disagree toward that statement. The contradiction of the result is very obvious that majority of the participants tend to agree that their parents' approval are very important for them in choosing their dates.

In respond to the histogram of parents' perception influence students' perception, result indicates that 58% of the participants think that parents' perception will directly influence their perceptions toward interracial relationship. 42% of the remaining participants disagree with this statement. As a whole, there are a total of 16% differences between those who agree that parents' perception is important and those who disagree.

Besides that, participants are requested to provide reason for their selection. Participant 6, 7, 8, 11, 15, 16, 17, 21, 59, 66 stated that they need their parents' blessing in their relationship or marriage, hence, seeking for parents' approval and perceptions are important for them in determining their perceptions toward interracial relationship. However, participant 20 argues that perceptions is something that can be change, and because parents are coming from different generations, thus, their perceptions might be conservative towards accepting new culture. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that how parents' react toward interracial relationship do affect the students' perception towards interracial relationship.

2. Influence of society's view towards students' perception on interracial relationship

Figure 3. Influence of societal views on students' perceptions toward interracial relationship

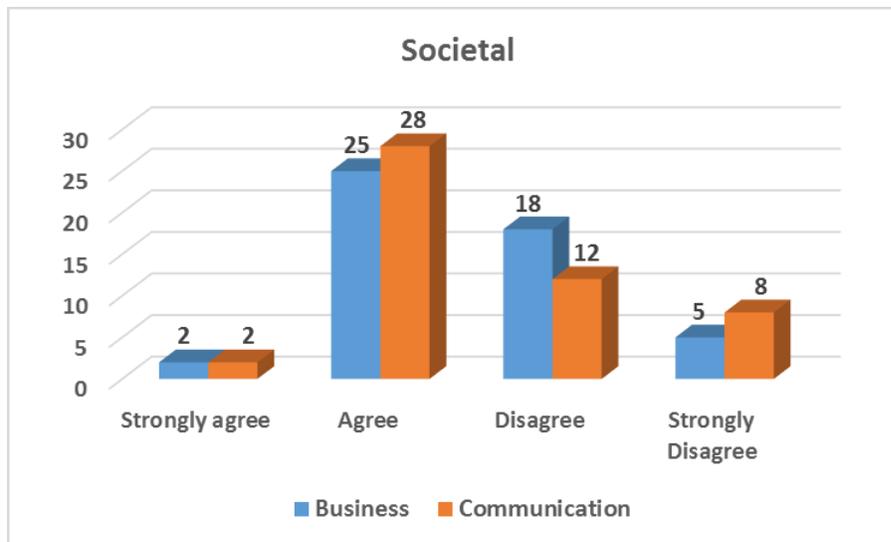


Figure 3 shows the percentage distribution of the students' answer to the statement "The society views influence my perceptions towards interracial relationship". Students who selected strongly agree and agree towards the statement occupied 57% of the whole sample. While the remaining 43% responded strongly disagree or disagree towards the statement. Both business and communication students responded equally to each of the selections. There is no diverse differences in terms of their selections.

In order to provide a more in depth understanding towards the participants' selection, they are requested to provide reason for their decision. Despite the fact that participant 3, 7, 10, 11, 13, and 28 claimed that no matter how negative or positive society perceive interracial relationship, it would not affect their perception, they would not care more about all the societal biases towards interracial relationship. Participant 16, 17, 19, 21, and 25 argued that interracial relationship often received prejudice from the public such as rude looks and poor treatment. Participant 26 stated that she had experience "secondhand racism" while she was out with her partner. Strangers were staring at her and her partner in disbelief, shock, and disgust. Although it did not affect her perception towards her relationship, it still brought her the feelings of insecure and uncomfortable. "Secondhand racism" are defined as the racism due to the relationship with the ethnic minorities (Wu, Chen, & Greenberg, 2014). Research showed that due to the perceived societal disapproval, interracial couple often engage in less public displays of affection (Vanquera & Kao, 2005).

3. Influence of type of Race on students' perception towards interracial relationship

Figure 4. Influence of type of race on students' perceptions toward interracial relationship

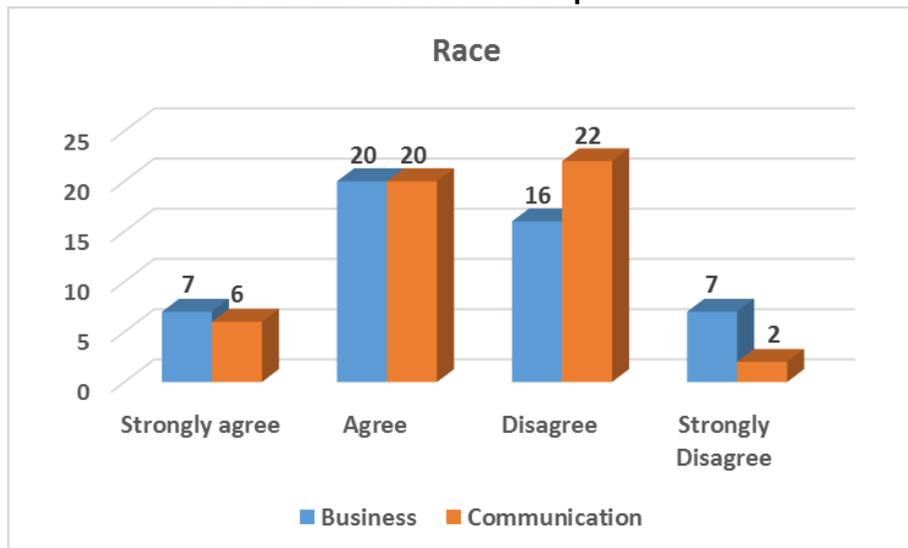


Figure 4 shows that students' perceive race as one of the factor that influence their perceptions towards interracial relationship. 53% of the participants agreed to the statement

above. On the other hand, there are 47% of participants disagreed with the statement above. There result are not much varied between business and communication major.

Participant 3, 4, 65, 76, and 79 suggested that race is not a big factor that influences their perceptions however when it comes to a certain race that requires a particular person to convert their religion, it will be a different perceptions. Participant 26, and 51 claimed that they will only date a certain race that do not require them to convert their beliefs. As a result, race as a factor is very subjective when it comes to how it influence a person's perception.

5. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Overall, several conclusions can be drawn from this study of students' perceptions toward interracial relationship. First, students' acceptance towards interracial relationship is considerably high. Data showed that 96% of the participants responded positively towards interracial relationship. Moving on, friends and family member that is currently or have been engaged in interracial relationship can directly or indirectly influence students' perception to be involved in an interracial relationship. It is proven that family support is the biggest factor that influences the students' perception towards interracial relationship (Wang, Kao, & Joyner, 2004). Furthermore, parents' approval and perceptions are also one of the important factor that shapes students' mind-set in deciding their opinion towards interracial relationship. If they perceive that their parents may not have positive perception towards dating interracially, he or she will not consider to engage in one. The result for race as a factor that influences students' perception received two different responses. Half of the participants agreed that the race of a person would influence their decision to date interracially, however another half of the participants perceived that race did not influence their perceptions. Other than that, societal perceptions were also influencing students' perceptions regarding on interracial relationship (Levin, Taylor, & Caudle, 2007). However this is also very subjective to personal point of view, as a person might face societal biases or judgement regarding on interracial relationship but he or she would not be affected by these negative assumptions. In contrast, some people could not stands these societal judgement about interracial relationship as they did not want to be viewed as strange or weird for dating interracially, they would not consider to be in such relationship.

Study Limitations and Future Directions

There are some significant limitations to the data set used for this study. The initial proposed amount of the sample size was 200 Sunway students that included 100 students from business major and another 100 students from communication major. However due to the time constraints of the study and students' peak period in rushing assignments, the amount of the sample size had reduced to 100 participants. This had affected the reliability of the result collected. Besides, this study was designed to be a small scale research, which led to the sample size of the study was not eligible to represent all Sunway students' perceptions toward interracial relationship. Hence, the recommended solution to this problem is to use a larger

sample to calculate the sampling error in future researches. Sampling error occurs when the data collected is relatively less variability or range in the sampling distribution (Socialresearchmethods, 2015).

The survey questionnaires designed consists of open-ended questions, close-ended questions, and likert-scales. For each of the likert-scales statement, participants were requested to provide reasons for their selection. This had caused the researcher to face difficulties in looking for participants to answer the questionnaires. Therefore, it is suggested that future researcher could convert survey questionnaires into interviews. By interviewing participants, it would be easier for researcher to collect the data on the spot and obtain more in-depth information in studying students' perceptions towards interracial relationship.

In addition, the study limits the factors to only three which are Family, Friends, Society and Race. More in depth research should be conducted not only on the mentioned area but also areas such as gender, age as well as religion.

Furthermore, the data analysis for this study was done by Excel where it cannot convert the data for further in-depth discussion. The recommended solution for this is to use SPSS a comprehensive and flexible statistical analysis and data management solution. This is because SPSS can generate tabulated reports, charts, and plots of distributions and trends, descriptive statistics, and conduct complex statistical analyses (Rao, 2009).

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