

Comparative Analysis on Weighting Methods for the Development of Social Harmony Index Relevant to Culture and Identity of a Diverse Nation.

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Abstract

The aim of the study reported in this article is to develop a Social Harmony Index (SHI) as part of a strategy in facilitating the governance of a multi-ethnic nation in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The index considered a number of essential variables or factors contributing towards a harmonic nation, which then employed a multi-criteria decision-making (MCDM) methodology to recognize and assess those variables based on culture and identity spirits. Hence, this study utilized MCDM procedures to evaluate social cohesion in a diverse multi-ethnic nation, such as Malaysia. Specifically, the procedures involved extracting qualitative data through experts' opinions, which were then quantified in the form of ranks. Another type of quantitative data was gathered through surveys from Malaysian citizens that belong to various ethnics. These data were consolidated according to the specific procedures presenting the findings of SHIROC value of 8.4 and SHIRS value of 8.3 on a scale of 1 – 10. The indices are deemed satisfactorily high as they reside within the identified bounds. These values reflect that the diverse nation of Malaysia enjoys a commendable level of unity, peace and harmonious living situation. Therefore, this study clarified the essential variables that foster harmonic coexistence and provides a feasible, evidence-based instrument for policymakers to assess social discord and enhance social cohesiveness in varied communities in the nation. It aids in formulating weighted procedures relating to culture and identity towards fostering national social cohesion and stability in Malaysia...

Keywords: Multi-ethnic nation; Culture and Identity; Weighting Method in MCDM; Social Harmony.

Introduction

Malaysia is presented as a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-religious country made up of citizens from diverse ethnic communities. This diversity has been a unique feature of Malaysia since the dawn of its history and contributes to its harmony. Social harmony in a multi-ethnic nation refers to the peaceful co-existence, mutual respect, and functional stability among the country's diverse ethnic, religious, and cultural groups (Kirsten & Bonga-Bonga, 2025). Rather than describing a complete blend or assimilation of distinct identities, social harmony in the Malaysian context is understood as 'unity in diversity'. Diverse communities maintain their unique cultural heritage, religions, identity and languages (Lo Bianco, 2010), while operating under a shared legal, social, and political framework (Chanchal, 2024; Banban, 2018; Kimlicka & Norman, 2000). In addition, harmonious multi-ethnic relations cultivate social support networks and promote peaceful coexistence within social and economic frameworks, all of which serve as essential determinants or criteria.

Malaysia is recognised as a nation characterised by its ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity and thus portrays unique identities. This challenge intensifies when a nation faces divisions that involve race, language, and religion, as articulated by Heng (2017). The Malaysian government launched the 1Malaysia program between 2009 and 2018 with the objective of fostering multi-ethnic harmony, national cohesion, and efficient governance (Wan & Sirat, 2018; Heng, 2017). In 2019, the National Day theme "Sayangi Malaysiaku: Malaysia Bersih" (Love My Malaysia: Clean Malaysia) underscored the importance of multi-racial harmony, happy coexistence, and national pride (The Global Economy, 2022). Consequently, maintaining a pleasant living environment presents a

significant difficulty. Racial instability was documented by the Center for A Better Tomorrow (CENBET) (2019) and the Institute for Economics and Peace (2019).

Furthermore, Malaysia is ranked 35th in the Happiness Index reported by The Global Economy (2018), then 78th in 2019 (The Global Economy, 2019), and 80th in 2020 (The Global Economy, 2020). It is important for a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-religious society to instil social harmony among its citizens to stabilize the well-being and economic performance of the country (Zainal et al., 2022; Erman & Medeiros, 2021). Previous studies, including those by Dave et al. (2016), Hofstede (2011), and Shukri (2024), have explored peace, unity, and well-being. However, only a limited number of studies focus specifically on measuring harmony in society or a nation, including works by Kjell and Diener (2021), Thinyane et al. (2020), and Yusoff et al. (2018). Those studies relied primarily on computational methods such as scales and averages.

Therefore, this study intends to establish the Social Harmony Index (SHI) to facilitate the governance of a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious country like Malaysia. This social harmony index considered variables or factors that reflect the country's elements of culture and identity, which emerged through understanding the knowledge related to multi-ethnicity, multi-culture and multi-religion. Subsequently, the sections in this article are structured as outlined. The next section proceeds with an examination and evaluation of the factors or criteria pertinent to attaining the national status with respect to culture and identity. A concise evaluation of the weighting technique is presented thereafter. Subsequently, the procedures, examination and findings are presented. This article ultimately concludes with some suggestions for further initiatives.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

Malaysia's population is primarily categorized into three major ethnic groups, alongside with indigenous communities. The three major ethnic groups are Malay, Chinese, and Indian. Social harmony requires balancing the cultural traditions, languages and religious practices of these groups into a cohesive national identity. In developing the appropriate SHI, this study utilized the multi-criteria decision-making (MCDM) method with its specific procedures to evaluate social cohesion in a diverse multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious nation. The procedures involved extracting qualitative data through experts' opinions, which were then quantified in the form of ranks. Based on the ranks obtained, weights representing the level of importance of the identified criteria were computed using a weighting method. Subsequently, another type of quantitative data was gathered through a special survey from Malaysian citizens that belong to various ethnic groups to complete the whole MCDM method. However, in this study two variations of MCDM method were experimented on the same data sets so as to evaluate the performance of the varied methods. Specifically, the variations occurred in the weighting method stage employing first, the Rank Order Centroid (ROC) method and then the Rank Sum (RS) method.

Consequently, the focal point of this study was to determine the weight of each identified criterion that relates to culture and identity of the nation. Eventually, two sets of weights shall be obtained as a result of the two weighting methods. A systematic process was designed to ensure that each criterion was fairly weighed in the measurement of social harmony. Initially, the relevant criteria were identified through a review on the existing literature, which followed by comments and opinions on the ranks by four experts in the related disciplines. Then, the rank-based weighting methods were used to derive the weight of each criterion. The data involved are the identified criteria, and the explanation on how the weights are derived is presented in the following sub-sections.

A. Identification of Criteria

In this initial stage, a qualitative approach was applied to determine the criteria associated with the nation's culture and identity. The approach of content analysis was carried out involving extensive reviews on existing literature. It then followed by interviews with four experts, who are from various backgrounds actively engaged in the fields related to culture, peace, harmony, unity, identity and nationhood. Eighteen criteria were finally identified and intended to accurately represent the reality and dynamics of the Malaysian nation or society, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The identified criteria relevant to national culture and identity

Aspect	Relevant Criteria
CULTURE	Affiliation
	Community embeddedness
	Brotherhood
	Morality
	Conformity
	Congruence
	Respecting elders
	Future orientation
	Tolerance
	Mutual understanding
	Survival
IDENTITY	Language
	Communication
	Symbol
	Music
	Clothing
	Food
	Faith

B. Weight Allocation Procedures

Thereafter, the significance of each criterion was determined through the ROC and RS weighting methods, respectively which utilized the ranks provided by those multiple experts. In MCDM, the ROC and RS methods are categorized as a subjective weighting technique. The criteria were ranked by each expert in descending order from the most critical or important to the least critical. The procedures for determining the weights based on these ranks are outlined in equation (1) for ROC and equation (2) for RS.

$$w_{(ROC)p} = \frac{1}{k} \sum_{i=1}^k \frac{1}{r_p} \quad (1)$$

where:

$w_{(ROC)p}$ = Weight of criteria ranked at p^{th} position

$i = 1, 2, \dots, k$

k = Total number of criteria

r_p = Rank of criterion at p^{th} position

$W_1 \geq W_2 \geq \dots \geq W_P \geq 0$

The rank r_p was weighted and normalized by the sum of all weights in the ROC weighting method. Consequently, ranks for all criteria were obtained and are prepared for use in the computation of SHI. The ranks serve to denote the level of importance or significance of the identified criteria. Alternatively, the RS procedures are as in equation (2) below.

$$w_{(RS)p} = \frac{P - r_p + 1}{\sum_{p=1}^P (P - r_p + 1)} \quad (2)$$

where:

$w_{(RS)p}$ = Weight of criteria ranked at p^{th} position

$p = 1, 2, \dots, P$

P = Total number of criteria

$$r_p = \text{Rank of criterion at } p^{\text{th}} \text{ position and } r_1 > r_2 > \dots > r_p$$

$$w_1 \geq w_2 \geq \dots \geq w_p \geq 0$$

$$\sum_{i=1}^k w_i = 1 \quad \text{where } i = 1, 2, \dots, k$$

The rank r_p is adjusted and standardized by the total of all weights in the RS weighting method. As a result, ranks for every criterion were derived and are ready for application in the calculation of SHI. These ranks indicate the level of importance of the identified criteria. The following sub-section described the procedures for the development of SHI.

C. Development of Social Harmony Index

Formulating an index is a systematic approach that requires the assessment of multiple criteria to measure and depict multifaceted entities. The primary objective of an index is to organize diverse information in a relevant and understandable form, thus allowing for comparisons between units of study. As the main objective of this study is to develop and subsequently establish an SHI that takes into account as many as relevant criteria associated with culture and identity, this sub-section is dedicated to its procedures.

Utilizing an indexing approach that incorporates both qualitative and quantitative values is beneficial when developing an SHI based on MCDM method. Thus, a numerical method that is, the Simple Weighted Average (SWA) technique is deemed appropriate for developing the SHI with various and multi-faceted data. The overall steps carried out in this sub-section are: (i) the respective weights were allocated to each criterion according to their relative importance by ROC and RS weighting methods, (ii) scores for each criterion were obtained from a special survey assessing public opinions on the 18 criteria that were represented by the 18 pertinent questions. A Likert scale of 1 to 10 was utilized in this quantitative survey, (iii) a sample of 58 participants were randomly selected from the general public adhering to the requirements that they must be Malaysian citizen and aged 18 years or older, (iv) finally, the SWA technique was formulated by multiplying each respective weight with its respective score, and then taking the cumulative products as the value for the index. For example, the SHI using ROC weighting method was explicitly computed based on equation (3). Similarly, the SHI using RS weighting method was repeated with the respective RS weights.

$$SHI_m = \sum (w_m)(x_{di}) \quad (3)$$

Where,

$m = 1, 2, \dots, M$

M = number of SHI variations based on weighting method

W_m = weight generated based on SHI variations

x_{di} = score given by respondent, d to criterion, i

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Through extensive literature reviews, a compilation of 18 criteria was established, which are affiliation, community embeddedness, brotherhood, morality, conformity, congruence, respect for elders, future orientation, tolerance, mutual understanding, survival, language, communication, food, symbols, music, clothing, festival, and faith, as earlier shown in Table 1. Experts then prioritized these criteria based on their level of importance giving them in terms of ranks. These ranks are essential for calculating and examining the distribution of weight for each criterion. In the weighting procedures, the standardized weight must totalled to 1. The computation of weight is depicted in Table 2.

Table 2. Weight allocation for each criterion based on the ROC weighting method

Criteria (<i>i</i>)	w_{ROC}	Level of importance of the criteria
Respecting elders	0.1942	1
Community embeddedness	0.1386	2
Affiliation	0.1108	3
Brotherhood	0.0923	4
Conformity	0.0784	5
Survival of culture	0.0673	6
Tolerance	0.0581	7
Congruence	0.0501	8
Mutual understanding	0.0432	9
Faith	0.0370	10
Communication	0.0315	11
Morality	0.0264	12
Language	0.0218	13
Clothing	0.0175	14
Future orientation	0.0135	15
Symbol	0.0098	16
Food	0.0064	17
Music	0.0031	18

Based on the ROC weighting method, the findings indicate that respecting elders is the foremost important criterion, assigned a weight of 0.1942, followed by community embeddedness in the second position with a weight of 0.1386, and affiliation in the third place with a weight of 0.1108, among others. Nevertheless, music was determined to hold the lowest position, with a value of 0.0031.

Table 3. Weight allocation for each criterion based on the RS weighting method

Criteria (<i>i</i>)	w_{RS}	Level of importance of the criteria
Affiliation	0.1053	1
Community embeddedness	0.0994	2
Brotherhood	0.0936	3
Mutual understanding	0.0877	4
Congruence	0.0819	5
Faith	0.0760	6
Conformity	0.0702	7
Future orientation	0.0643	8
Tolerance	0.0585	9
Survival of culture	0.0526	10
Food	0.0468	11
Communication	0.0409	12
Respecting elders	0.0351	13
Morality	0.0292	14
Symbol	0.0234	15
Clothing	0.0175	16
Music	0.0117	17
Language	0.0058	18

Similarly in Table 3, employing the RS weighting technique, the outcomes demonstrate that affiliation is prioritized as the primary criterion with a weight of 0.1053, followed by community embeddedness in the second rank with a weight of 0.0994, and brotherhood in the third position with a weight of 0.0936, among others. Yet, language was discovered to be in the least favorable position, carrying a weight of 0.0058.

Consequently, Table 4 illustrates the SHI_{ROC} through the mean weight for each criterion, calculated from the scores of all 58 respondents utilizing equation (4).

$$SHI_{ROC} = \sum(w_{(ROC)p})(x_{di}) \quad (4)$$

Table 4. Average weight of each criterion for ROC

Criteria	Average value (weight x score, respectively)
Brotherhood	1.7074
Community embeddedness	1.1209
Affiliation	0.9402
Conformity	0.7433
Mutual understanding	0.6897
Survival of culture	0.5293
Morality	0.5125
Tolerance	0.4157
Future orientation	0.3447
Congruence	0.3190
Faith	0.2717
Music	0.1921
Symbol	0.1622
Respecting elders	0.1418
Communication	0.1215
Clothing	0.0773
Language	0.0553
Food	0.0250
SHI_{ROC}	8.3696

In computing the SHI, the average values for each criterion were summed, and the total value is 8.3696, which is rounded to two decimal places to 8.37 as the index.

Subsequently, Table 5 demonstrates the SHI_{ROC} through average weight for each criterion, derived from the scores from all 58 respondents using equation (5).

$$SHI_{RS} = \sum(w_{(RS)p})(x_{di}) \quad (5)$$

Table 5. Average weight of each criterion for RS

Criteria	Average value (weight x score, respectively)
Affiliation	0.7937
Community embeddedness	0.8039
Brotherhood	0.9256
Mutual understanding	0.7199
Congruence	0.4537

Faith	0.4041
Conformity	0.7063
Future orientation	0.4668
Tolerance	0.5335
Survival of culture	0.5977
Food	0.0474
Communication	0.2101
Respecting elders	0.2369
Morality	0.6195
Symbol	0.2613
Clothing	0.1379
Music	0.2978
Language	0.1018
<i>SHI_{RS}</i>	8.3181

Similarly, when calculating the SHI the mean values for each criterion were aggregated, resulting in a total value of 8.3181, which is rounded to 8.32 to two decimal places as the index value.

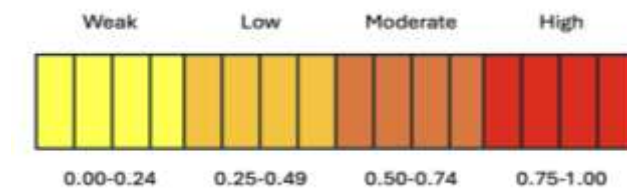


Figure 1. Level of unity scale from 0 to 1.00

In evaluating the level of harmony being studied in this case, Figure 1 was adopted as a benchmark due to its similarity. With respect to the scale partition in Figure 1, both the values for SHI_{ROC} which is equal to 8.3696 (equivalent and round up to 0.84 in 0 -1.00 scale) and the value of SHI_{RS} which is equal to 8.3181 (equivalent and round up to 0.83 in 0 – 1.00 scale) are considered high, as they are within the range of 0.75–1.00. These indices indicate that the diverse nation of Malaysia is in a commendable position with regard to unity, peace and harmony. The SHI_{ROC} of 8.4 comparatively exceeds the SHI_{RS} of 8.3, illustrating the distinct mathematical transformations of ordinal ranks into criteria weights by each weighting method. RS distributes weights uniformly with a consistent decrement between successive ranks, while ROC employs a non-linear, more noticeable weight allocation that excessively favors higher-ranked criteria. Due to the favorable performance of the primary criteria or indicators of the SHI, the increased emphasis on ROC has elevated the overall composite score marginally. Significantly, the minimal 0.1 difference between the two results illustrates substantial methodological consistency and validates that the Social Harmony Index is resilient and unaffected by the selection of the rank conversion method.

The two weighting methods present unique analytical advantages based on the objectives of the evaluation framework: RS ensures utmost simplicity, clarity, and linear fairness by allowing secondary criteria to maintain proportional influence without allowing primary indicators to outweigh the overall score, whereas ROC enhances decision precision by mathematically reducing anticipated decision errors and authentically representing real-world priority hierarchies where leading indicators possess considerably greater systemic significance.

Furthermore, the results suggest that the ROC weighting method includes a balanced approach that reduces the likelihood of substantial weight imbalances. This study illustrates that ROC is ideal for ensuring that all criteria, even those of minor importance, contribute meaningfully to the decision-making process. Thus, the advantages of ROC encompass its delivery of balanced weighing, its mitigation of bias, and its straightforward implementation. Moreover, its benefits encompass a more explicit representation of the criteria's relative

importance, and it proves especially advantageous when there is a need to emphatically prioritize specific criteria. Consequently, when the criteria encompass subtle differences and necessitate the avoidance of extreme weightings, the ROC technique is more suitable.

CONCLUSION

In summary, this study has effectively fulfilled its aim of establishing the SHI to address the harmonious situation and complexities that exist in a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious nation, like Malaysia. The overall MCDM methodology has been successfully implemented starting from identifying criteria based on theoretical and empirical insights, acquiring and processing data qualitatively and quantitatively, normalizing data for uniformity, allocating weights utilizing the respective weighting methods so as to represent the comparative value of each indication, and finally developing the SHI based on SWA for evaluative purposes. In fact, two variations of SHI were developed with comparatively positive results. The *SHI_{ROC}* and *SHI_{RS}* provide results in the form of weight distribution that can act as a preliminary basis for endeavors aimed at constructing a compassionate, equitable, and cohesive society. The results further indicate that respect for elders, community embeddedness, and affiliation are the most vital factors or cariteria for attaining harmonious coexistence living in a diverse ethnic, cultural, and religious environment. Although this study is still ongoing, the implication of these weight distributions shall be potentially utilized by the appropriate government agencies and policymakers to oversee and address any societal tensions, thus fostering national cohesion and stability.

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