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## LOCAL-GLOBAL MEDIA IMAGES: MEDIATING NOTIONS OF HOPE AND CHANGE AMONG RURAL YOUTHS IN SABAH

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### **Abstract**

This article is about identity and lifestyles formation among rural youths in Sabah through their use of the global-local media images in the midst of living in remote places with little socio-economic activities. The key issue here is to identify to what extent globalization have reached into the lives of rural youths and how these developments have shaped their identity. Findings presented are a combination of quantitative and qualitative data that has been collected over a span of two years beginning 2013. In terms of their media consumption pattern, globalizations have indeed penetrated into the lives of rural youths where almost 70 percent of them are said to have enjoyed a variety of Asian and Western television programs. However, in an interview with 40 informants, out of 38 media images shown, only one girl picked images of a *K-pop* all girls group as representing who she is. Rather, it was media images of U.S president Barack Obama, Disneyland, Japan and Eiffel Tower that was frequently selected as representing their identity. The reason for this is because these images mediate notions of ‘hope’ and ‘change’ for these youths, who experienced social exclusion. Thus, the main issue concerning globalization, is not about cultural imperialism but how rural youths appropriated global cultures from the media to communicate their local condition in line with Kraidy’s (2002: 17) notion of ‘cultural hybridity’ as a “communicative practice”. Rural youths may appropriate global media content, but it is used to articulate their hope for a better future.

**Keywords:** *Rural, identity, globalization, exclusion, media*

IMEJ MEDIA LOKAL-GLOBAL: PENYEBARAN IDE HARAPAN DAN PERUBAHAN DALAM KALANGAN BELIA LUAR BANDAR DI SABAH

### **Abstrak**

Artikel ini melihat pembentukan identiti dan gaya hidup belia luar bandar yang tinggal di kawasan terpencil di Sabah yang dipengaruhi oleh imej yang di bawa dalam media lokal dan global. Fokus utama kajian ini adalah mengenalpasti

sejauh mana globalisasi telah menyerap masuk ke dalam kehidupan belia luar bandar dengan aktiviti sosio-ekonomi yang terhad dan bagaimana senario ini telah mempengaruhi pembentukan identiti mereka. Dapatan kajian diperolehi merangkumi gabungan data kuantitatif dan kualitatif yang dikutip selama dua tahun bermula 2013. Dari segi pola penggunaan media mereka, globalisasi media jelas kelihatan telah menembusi kehidupan belia luar bandar di mana 70 peratus dikenalpasti menggemari pelbagai program televisyen dari Asia dan Barat. Berdasarkan 38 imej-imej media yang ditunjukkan, hanya seorang responden wanita sahaja daripada keseluruhan 40 responden yang ditemubual memilih imej kumpulan wanita K-pop sebagai mewakili identiti mereka. Imej-imej daripada media global seperti Presiden Amerika Syarikat Barack Obama, Disneyland, Jepun dan Eiffel Tower yang lebih kerap dipilih oleh responden sebagai mewakili identiti mereka. Antara sebabnya ialah kerana imej-imej tersebut menyelitkan konsep ‘harapan’ serta ‘perubahan’ bagi belia-belia ini yang mengalami masalah peminggiran sosial. Apa yang boleh dicerap di sini termasuklah isu utama mengenai globalisasi bukanlah soal imperialisme budaya tetapi lebih kepada bagaimana belia luar bandar menggunakan budaya-budaya global dari media untuk mengkomunikasikan keadaan setempat mereka. Ini sejajar dengan pandangan Kraidy (2002: 17) mengenai ‘cultural hybridity’ sebagai “amalan komunikasi” di mana belia luar bandar menerima-pakai kandungan media global tetapi ia bagi maksud untuk menyuarakan keinginan terhadap suatu masa depan yang lebih baik.

*Kata kunci: Luar bandar, identiti, globalisasi, terpinggir, media*

## INTRODUCTION

Among the most significant impact of media globalization, is how it polarize views, perspective and fragment identities, specifically, on young people. Youths’ identity in the global era, are said to be more plural, shifting and hybridized where they now tend to appropriate global cultures into local practice (Nilan & Feixa, 2006).

New generation are said to be rewriting their own biography by contrasting and negotiating the various lifestyle that they saw from the global media and appropriate it into their daily lives (Giddens, 1991). This led to a fierce debate about cultural globalization and how local cultures maybe displaced by the global culture. And that the world will emerge as one global and homogeneous culture, purportedly from the West. But this paper argued that cultural

globalization is more than just about cultural imperialism and homogenization. Rather, its tool such as the media, may act as counter-hegemonic against dominant national culture towards marginalized local rural communities. Thus, one needs to understand the reason and context of young people's lives when they are rewriting their biography as Giddens (1991) put it, specifically, from the global media.

The focus of this study is to identify to what extent, cultural globalization has reached into the lives of rural youths in Sabah and what kind of identity and lifestyles that are being shaped from their use of the global media. Considering that rural youths lived in a multi-context condition – located in remote and isolated places where there is limited economic, social and infrastructural activity, coupled with the prevalence of local culture (religion and ethnicity) through family, community as well as exposure to national identity propagated through the local media and schools, it raise a question of how cultural globalization have an impact on their identity. Due to the hilly and heavily-forested nature of Sabah's rural area, internet access is rather limited. And in certain area, it is difficult to get TV3 broadcast. Rural communities relied heavily on parabolic dishes from subscribing pay-TV services of Astro in order to get reception of television broadcast from any channels. Apart from geographical factor, low socio-economic status of the rural population also shaped their media consumption habits. As television enables them to watch and listen to information and other cultural products, television ownership is high as it is a very essential media for them to keep them informed and entertained. Television ownership stands at 90.6 percent compare to 17.6 percent of owning luxurious item like the Tablet or internet connection at home which stands at 15.1 percent for rural community in Sabah (Department of Statistics, 2014). Handphones are not just to call their families but it is also a tool for young people to access the internet. Rural communities' usage of the internet is made possible under the 1 Malaysia Wireless Village programme where they benefited much from this project to stay connected. In other words, the physical and economic context of rural

communities in Sabah, made television and handphones as the most essential media that enables them to get connected from the world outside. Thus, taking into account the mediascape in the rural area of Sabah, the concept that are useful in exploring the question of identity lies within the framework of cultural globalization, identity and cultural hybridity.

### **CULTURAL GLOBALIZATION AND ITS DEBATES ON IDENTITY**

The central issue concerning cultural globalization is whether it will diminish local cultures with the omnipresence of globalizing tools such as the new media and satellite television in local lives. And so, the discussion on cultural globalization focus around the question of universality against particularism, the inflow of transnational cultures known as the “third cultures” (Featherstone, 1990:1) against cultural imperialism.

Academic debates on cultural globalization was sparked by Marxist scholars notably Herbert Schiller (1991) who viewed globalization as another form of imperialism on developing countries. Thus, the cultural imperialism thesis was borne. It argued that the mass imbalance flow of international media and cultural products into developing and post-colonial countries have resulted in yet another form of imperialism which sees local cultures as being displaced and that the world are moving towards cultural homogenization.

But this paradigm has been challenged and strongly criticized by scholars who countered it with various empirical audience studies to disprove the idea that audience are passive individual through the active audience theory. Well-known studies by Ang (1985) on American soap opera “Dallas” in among Dutch audience found that they are actively interpreting and making meanings of the show. Straubhaar (1991) criticized the cultural imperialism thesis for viewing the flow of culture in a linear direction from West to East. In proving his point, his study found that transnational cultural flows through the media also occurs in countries among audience who share some form of geo-cultural attributes in those television programmes. Elsewhere, other cultural powerhouse from Japan have

evidently found a strong fan base among young Malaysians, so much so, that consumption of the various form of Japanese cultural product such as the *anime* and *manga* has become part of their lifestyles (Yamato et al, 2011).

The third intellectual group are those whose thoughts are rooted within the postmodernist strand. They too, opposed the cultural imperialism thesis, and proposed that the way to view and understand globalization is by seeing it as “a process of hybridization” (Pieterse, 1995:45).

### **CULTURAL HYBRIDITY AND THE MEANING OF IDENTITY**

The meaning of ‘hybridization’ has been termed as “the ways in which forms become separated from existing practices and recombine with new forms in new practices” (Rowe & Schelling, 1991:231 in Pieterse, 1995: 49). Speaking in a similar vein, Nilan and Feixa (2006: 1) went on to view ‘hybridity’ as a form of “cultural creativity”. Transnational cultures disseminated instantaneously through the global media have facilitated the process of cultural hybridization not only from the West to the East or the centre to the periphery, but also from the East to the West as well as among the East themselves.

Such process of ‘cultural mixing’ between global and local practices and cultures, have indefinite impact on one’s sense of self. Tendency towards an ‘in-between’ identity, in which one’s self is de-centered from the core and is constantly shifting between in and out of cultures, are bound to emerge. One must acknowledged that identity in this post-modern era must be understood as shifting, fragmented, mutable, contingent and fluid (Woodward, 1997). The interplay between the global-local media with the audience’s own surrounding made identities to be less fixed and essentialised. One such example is through Kraidy’s work (1999) which demonstrated the formation of a hybrid cultural identity between the West and Arab cultures among young people in Lebanon. While it is widely acknowledged that identity in this period, tend to be more fluid and mutable precisely due to the rapid interconnectedness between the global and local cultures, yet, we are careful with the term ‘cultural hybridity’ and

'hybridized identities'. It does not fully accept the idea that people happily appropriate global cultural practice into local and reconfigure it in newer form of local identity. Without looking into the social, political and economic conditions of the audience, the concept of 'cultural hybridity' itself is meaningless.

In this respect, Kraidy's (2002:317) view on 'hybridity' as "a communicative practice constitutive of, and constituted by, sociopolitical and economic arrangements", is more helpful in understanding the complexity of local audience's reception of global media. Shim's (2006) important work on cultural hybridity in among Korean media industries, shows that cultural hybridity, is not simply an act of cultural democracy where the local appropriated global cultures. Rather, Shim successfully points out that it is a strategy to stave off the domination of global media giants from America. The move to incorporate some of the elements of American popular culture into Korea's own is actually counter-hegemonic towards the Western cultural domination. By adopting Kraidy's notion of 'hybridity', this study view that the social condition of the audience will determine how the process of hybridity will take place. Hence, the reason behind why some scholars notably David Morley (2006) have urged for a re-examination of the cultural imperialism theory.

"We may live in a globalized world, but in most places global time still ticks to the clock of CNN, and we may do well to recognize the extent to which the Anglo-American media continue to provide, for many people, the constitutive horizons of what has been called the 'Global Familiar' of our times," (Morley, 2006: 41).

Global media corporations have been aggressive in attempting to subtly "seduce" local audience that they become receptive of its values and contents. Young Indians youths' reception of MTV shows that cultural hybridity indeed took place but Juluri (2002:367) found that it is not about resisting global culture but it is about "co-optation of global hegemonic forces". Thus, while it can be counter-hegemonic and it also is otherwise yet why this is so, depends greatly on the context of living where the local audiences are embedded within.

## **RURAL YOUTH, MEDIA AND IDENTITY**

But what of all these to the rural youths? Some studies have shown that class and geographical factor determines the kind of impact brought about by cultural globalization on identity. Geographical locations and class saw rural youths in South Africa's identity to be a hybrid yet ambivalent identity, shifting between being a modern versus tradition subject and West (American) versus local African identity (Strelitz, 2003).

The same kind of ambivalence of identities can be found in among young rural and low class Maltese who is said to be more incline towards local and nationally produced television programmes even though they complain about the quality of local programmes (Gritxi, 2006).

In both studies, identities were shaped not just due to class factor but also the interplay with other factors such as the social, economic and political condition in which they are embedded in. In this respect, rural youths are constantly negotiating and contrasting global and local culture into their lives. As in the case of rural youths in Sabah, ideologies of national culture are propagated within the national education curriculum and in the media. While, religion and family values are disseminated at their private sphere alongside the global cultures from their consumption of the new media and satellite television. In addition, the huge development gap between urban and rural creates a sense of social exclusion among rural communities. Mohd Nizam (2010) research on television consumption among rural communities in Kg Poring, Sabah found that rural communities viewed television programmes to be excluding rural communities. His study revealed how rural communities try to adopt the consumption culture from television by imitating the fashion that is found in the media, even though it has economic implication on their daily lives. Serious local interest on identity construction among youths in the wake of globalization can be found in the works of Latiffah Pawanteh (2003) and Latiffah, Samsuddin, and Fauziah (2009) by way of analyzing young Malaysian through how they labeled

themselves and their everyday media consumption norms. Another effort on youth, identity and internet can be found in Normah mustaffa et al (2013). While such works are commendable, but these studies have focused mainly on urban youths in the Klang Valley. There is little work done on rural youths, media globalization and identity, particularly in Sabah where the level of development is uneven between the urban-rural and the socio-cultural environment is less vibrant than in the city. Apart from bigger districts like Keningau where the social life is more lively the social environment in other parts of the rural area in Sabah are very quiet and slow-paced. Aside from few government offices like police stations, hospitals, schools, other available buildings are shops, mosque and churches. Rural youths' social activities involved sports, going to school and churches or mosque apart from attending family or community gatherings in areas where are no cinema or shopping malls. Their lives essentially revolved around school, attending religious classes or services, family and community gatherings. Their only exposure of the global cultures comes largely from the media. It raises a question of what kind of identity that may emerge between the interplay of media globalization and rural youths in Sabah.

Taking into account of all the limitations and strengths of all intellectual paradigm concerning globalization and its impact on the formation of identity, this paper are more incline to adopt the cultural hybridity theory drawing from Kraidy's (2002). Kraidy (2002) cultural hybridity theory can be viewed as taking a middle-ground position between cultural imperialism and active audience theory. It argues that in examining the process of appropriating global and local media texts, it is the social condition of the audience that may have shaped the global and local media text that they negotiate and appropriate. This paper argued that while transcultural interaction between the global and local culture through the media are inevitable, it does have an impact on local audience's identity. Therefore, as active audience, one must assume that rural youths in Sabah also used both - global and local media text interchangeably in their lives.



However, if cultural hybridity is indeed a form of “communicative practice constitutive of and by the sociopolitical and economic arrangements” (Kraidy, 2002: 17), it would be intriguing to know which global and local media text that are meaningful to them based on the conditions that they are in. And what identity that have emerged out of it. Finally, it is important to mention here, that this study has adopted a social constructivist approach to the study of media and identity among rural Malaysian youths.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopts a qualitative approach to the study of identity, media and rural youths. As there has been scant information on the media accessibility and consumption pattern among these young people in Sabah, this study employs a survey method and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) methods as its qualitative methods.

This project was based on several research questions:-

- i. What kind of media that is available to rural ethnic youths in Sabah?
- ii. What kind of identity and lifestyles that are found through their consumption of the media?

Data collection process was divided into phases. Phase I involves collection of quantitative data in 2013 in which data was then analyzed to gain insights of their consumption pattern and access to the media. A total of 20 schools which had been categorized as ‘rural’ by the State Education Department had been identified throughout Sabah to participate in answering the questionnaire. Two age cohorts were chosen namely Form Two and Form Six; altogether a total of 900 respondents answered the questionnaires across ethnicity, religion and gender.

Researchers proceed to the second phase of the fieldwork i.e to conduct the focus group interview between 2014-2015. For the focus group discussion (FGD), only the 18-19 years old was selected because of their level of maturity to engage in critical discussion. It was conducted in two sessions, consisting of

eight respondents altogether (four girls and four boys), in a session held separately. A total of 40 individuals from 10 focus groups interviews cover five schools were gathered. The schools are SMK Keningau II, SMK Tambunan, SMK Kemabong, SMK Desa Wawasan, Tambunan and SMK Nabawan I, all located within the Interior Division of Sabah. In Sabah, rural areas has been administratively divided under a 'division' system. There are five administrative division altogether The Upper Interior Division of Sabah covers Nabawan, Tenom, Keningau and Tambunan.

Before conducting the interview, a total of 38 pictures of global and local media images were selected based on the findings from the quantitative data gathered which highlighted various lifestyles (exotic global tourist destinations) and identities including from political identities such global, national and local leaders.

The most significant lifestyles and identities data from the questionnaires were then picked up to be followed up in the form of images, in our discussions with informants. Interviews were done in two phases – group and individual identity. For group identity, respondents were asked to choose and discussed five pictures that they think represent their identity, collectively. Then, at the individual identity level, respondents were asked to select one picture that represents who they are, individually. There were nine pictures selected. However, if the respondents did not found any pictures that is aligned to who they are, individually, they will also be asked to explain why this is so.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Demographic Profile of Respondents**

Before proceeding to address the research questions, one will begin by describing the demographic background of the respondents. A total of 522 (58 percent) were girls and 375 (41.7 percent) are boys. In terms of age, 404 or 44.9 percent were from Form Two while 55 percent or 495 were from the Form Six class.

Religion wise, Muslims forms the largest number of respondents i.e 565 (62.8 percent), followed by 326 or 36.2 percent of the respondents were Christians. The Kadazan/Dusun, (the term used here is Kadazan/Dusun and not Kadazandusun or KadazanDusunMurut (KDM) because KDM is a political and constructed term while this study employs a natural term as how the local identify their ethnic identity. Moreover, the term cannot be KDM because in this study, Murut has been identified as a separate ethnic group. The Murut as an ethnic group, has never been not a sub-ethnic group of the Dusunic tribe) form the highest number of respondent in terms of ethnicity. There were 304 or 33.8 percent of Kadazan/Dusun respondents, followed by the Bajau (169 respondents or 18.8 percent), Murut (109 respondents or 12.1 percent) and 108 (12 percent) were the Brunei Malay (including those who sees themselves as ‘Malay’) group.

The socio-economic status of these respondents shows that 310 or 34.4 percent of the respondents had parents earning RM500 and below per month which forms the majority of the respondents here. This shows a much grimmer situation faced by rural youths in this study as the official figure for Average Income Poverty Line by Region by the Economic Planning Unit (EPU) in 2014 states that those earning RM760 a month is considered to be the ‘Hardcore Poor’ group in the rural area.

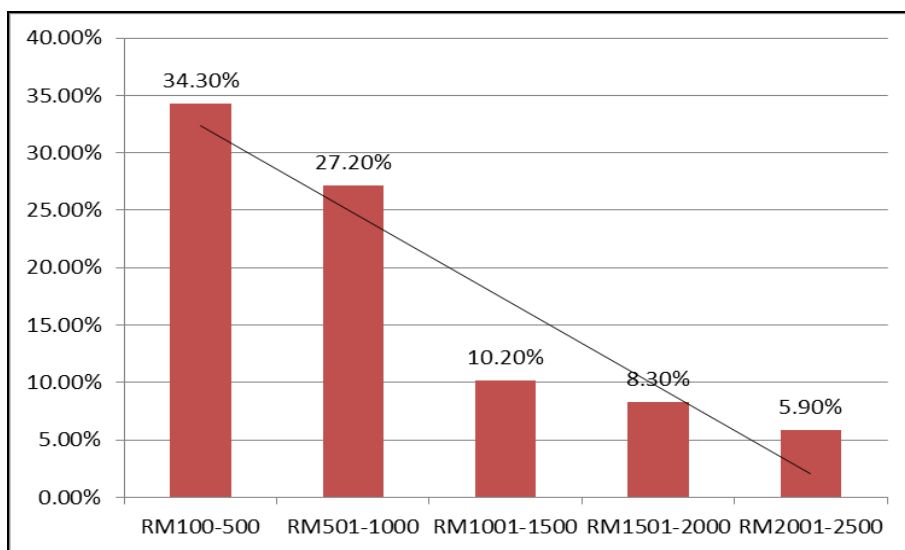


Table 1: Household Income Per month For Rural Youths' Home (N=900)

### Media Consumption Pattern Access and Availability

Owing to the fact that a large number of the respondents came from a low-income family, it raises a question of their access to the media, if availability maybe an issue. At the outset, it appears that although they are living in the rural area and where majority are very poor, data shows that their socio-economic does not hamper their active usage of the media.

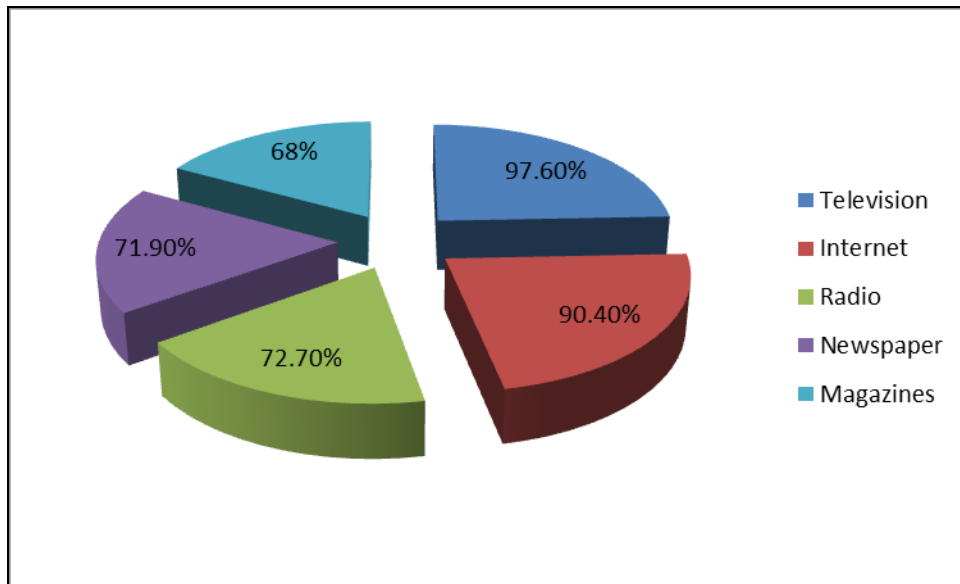


Figure 1: Percentage of media being used by rural youths in Sabah (2015) (N=900)

Figure 1 shows the kind of media that respondents often used. It shows that television is the most widely used media involving over 97 percent of the respondent with the internet as the next most widely used media at 90.4 percent with over 3 hours every day after school. This shows that both these media are deemed to be the most important media for them. And a significant globalizing tools to these respondents.

### THE GLOBAL-LOCAL IDENTITY

Rural respondents are able to watch a variety of programmes from free-to-air channels such as TV3, RTM1, RTM2 and also pay-TV from Astro at home both

global and national television programmes. But among all, both Astro (59.3 percent respondents or 534 respondents) and TV3 (56 percent or 504 respondents) were rated as the most important among all channels. This research, however, did not asked which specific channel of Astro package that respondents tune to. Global television programmes are far more popular among respondents for its drama and musical shows where areas the most frequently watched local programme were the news. Rural youths' taste for drama, film and musical programmes are more global than local.

<b>Country</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
Korea	626	69.6
Indonesia	557	61.9
Philippines	446	49.6
Japan	400	44.4
India	407	43.3
USA	375	41.7
Hong Kong	311	34.6

**Table 2: Patterns of watching global drama programmes (N=900)**

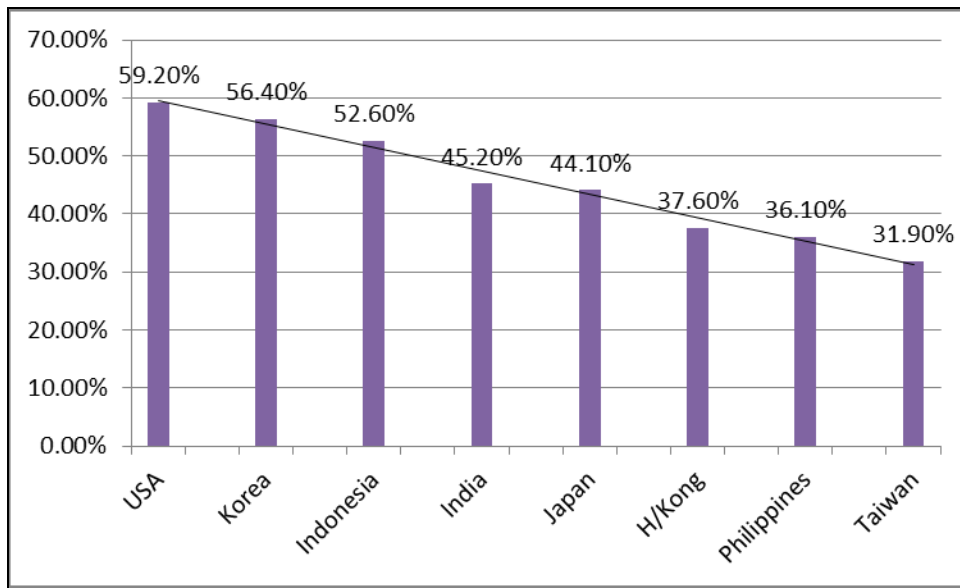
<b>Country</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
Korea	564	62.7
Indonesia	446	49.6
USA	410	45.6
Japan	304	33.8
Hong Kong	224	24.9
Philippines	219	24.3
India	204	22.7

**Table 3: Patterns of watching global Entertainment (Musical) shows (N=900)**

In contrast to informative shows like documentaries and news, serial drama appeared to be the most popular television programmes among rural respondents. As evident in Table 2 to 3, Korean programmes is very popular compare to other countries, particularly, its serial drama. Almost 70 percent or 626 out of 900 respondents cited Korean drama as their favorite programme.

This was followed by programmes from neighbouring Indonesia. Its drama, musical shows and films receive huge followings from rural respondents here. Suffice to say, based on the data in Table 2 and 3, both Korean and Indonesian programmes command the most fans among rural respondents in Sabah. The 'global' identity here was more 'Asian' rather than 'American'. One reason for this is values. Rural youths find values in Korean and Indonesian programmes resonates with theirs rather than American or Filipino films and drama. On the other hand, the large inflow of Asian programme can also be attributed to the government's own stance towards controlling foreign programmes and allow only those with appropriate cultures to be shown for Malaysian audience.

Nonetheless, what these media consumption patterns shows that it disproves the cultural imperialism thesis that sees cultural flows as moving from the centre to the periphery, when what is actually happening here is a cultural flow from among the periphery. And that 'values' is the differentiating factor as well as the tool that local audience used in appropriating global cultures into their lives. The strength of the Korean wave is evident when 62.7 percent or 564 respondents cited their preference for its entertainment/musical shows, indicating that the spread of Korean pop (K-pop) has penetrated into the rural areas in Sabah. Despite not understanding Korean, compare to English and Indonesian, the appeal of Korean artistes far outweighs the appeal of Indonesian and English-speaking artistes abroad.



**Table 4: Percentage of global films being watched by rural youths (N=900)**

In terms of films, Hollywood still reigned supreme over Korea and Indonesia because of its diverse genres, excellent cinematography and its long-time reputation as a major global film producer. By and large, Astro, plays an important role in letting rural youths uses global media content in constructing their sense of self.

#### **GLOBAL HOPE, LOCAL CONCERNS**

Despite their strong preference for Korean and Indonesian popular culture, this, does not in any way suggest a strong attachment for global culture and values from these two countries. Because out of 38 media images, only one girl chose images of all-girl K-pop group during the focus group interview session. Rather, it was the global media images that depict 'Japan', Eiffel Tower, Disneyland and U.S President Barack Obama that was often selected by informants. Images of 'Japan' selected four times, Paris' Eiffel Tower (thrice), 'Disneyland' (twice), and U.S President Barack Obama (twice).

Each of these images was used to express their views on issues that are affecting them which include racial discrimination, challenges of being economically

disadvantaged and desire to uplift their socio-economic status. Using thematic analysis, theme that consistently emerge were 'Hope For Change'.

### **Global Media Images – Mediating Notions of Hope and Transformation**

Rural informants were drawn to global media images for mediating the notion of hope, dream and change. Local media images may have circulated notion of conventional and ordinary path in life but the global media images, however, mediates a hopeful feeling of 'change'.

'Change' through Barack Obama means the breakdown of the purportedly existing racial discriminations towards rural people in Sabah as 'low' and 'inferior' according to these informants. Images of the Eiffel Tower, Japan and Disneyland was used by rural youths, to inspire them to overcome the obstacles they are experiencing due to the lack of social capital and attain global success.

#### **Global Media Images 1: Barack Obama – A Symbol of Hope**

Among the most common theme in our discussion with the informants on Obama is how he showed them the way, to change. Being the first African American to succeed as United States' president, rural youths here marveled at how he was able to break down the racial barrier occurring within the American society. To them, he represents 'hope' that anything is possible. Rural youths' relates themselves to the situation faced by African American in the United States.

*"This is what happen to us here, sometimes the rural people in Sabah, are often taunted as "pindik-pindik tagap" (short and stout). We feel challenged in a positive way. Indian people in Malaysia, are often viewed as violent just because some are involved in gangsterism but a large number of them are successful. As for us, doesn't mean (that if) we are short, we are weak, easily oppressed," (M1, 19-years old, SMK Nabawan I).*

*"There is so many things I learn about Obama. He is my role model, a leader that I am proud of ok? Because he made history in the world (by) becoming the first African American to become the world's most powerful man in the planet. It shows that nothing is impossible right? And, it also shows that it doesn't matter*



*what colour is your skin, (or) what is your ethnicity, we can lead the people and we can lead the world.” (M2, 19-years old, SMK Tambunan)*

M2 was hopeful that other Malaysians would be less racist in their view of Sabahans. In this respect, M2 harbours a dream of becoming Malaysia’s Prime Minister and believed that through Obama, ethnic minorities in Sabah would have equal opportunity to become one. Global media images not only give them ‘hope’, it also inspires them, that being ‘poor’ does not prevent them from becoming globally successful. Very often, their narratives unveiled their sense of marginalization and a strong desire to get out of being in the lower rung of the social ladder.

### **Global Media Images 2: Eiffel Tower - The Tower of Strength**

For the rural youths, Paris’ Eiffel Tower, is not just a place to visit but the complex architecture of the tower, remind them of their own life that is full of challenges and difficulties due to poverty. The complex design was interpreted as akin to life that is full of hardship but the height of the tower, gave them hope that they can achieve anything they dream of even though they are poor.

*“We could also see that the design of the tower has criss-crossed lines, which to me, marks a kind of challenge, obstacles which is not easy for us. If we wish to overcome it. It is not going to be easy to achieve it. We have to go through the challenges, which sometimes pushes us to madness but looking at this picture, I’m always open to faces challenges” (F1, 18-year-old, SMK Desa Wawasan, Tambunan)*

*“Because this tower is very high. My dream is as high (the tower)..., my dream is that I could be here (Eiffel Tower) some day, (and) if I have the good fortune of bringing my family to visit this place. I do want, my life to be as bright as the skyscraper tower, some day,” (M3, 19-year-old, SMK Kemabong, Tenom).*

While M3 is hopeful, a tinge of despair can be traced when he often used the word “if”, subtly indicating his doubts of his ability to set foot in Eiffel Tower.

### **Global Media Images 3: Japan & Disney – Ideal Vision of Success**

The image of Japan and Disneyland both mediates the ideal notion of success and innovation. Disneyland was chosen not because of its cartoons but because of the creator Walt Disney. M4, from SMK Keningau II, who developed a strong interest in software engineering, hoped to emulate Disney to become successful in that field.

*“I focused on this (Disney). I’ve long been interested since I was small; I am interested not because he (Disney) created the cartoon. I’m interested in his idea, the way his ideas can entertain the whole world like Mickey Mouse. Because of a cartoon, he can entertain the whole world. So, if I could, I want to be like him (Disney). Not to entertain but to be visionary, as people said,”* (M4, 19-years old, SMK Keningau II).

Another country that they greatly admire is the technologically-advanced Japan. Through their use of the internet and television, they know that Japan is a country that is modern while retaining their cultural identity. This dual quality, attracts rural youth who shares similar vision for ambivalent and hybrid identity.

*“They...(Japan), although they are modern but there is still a lot of trees there. And their culture is beautiful,”* (M5, 19-year-old, SMK Keningau II)

Living in a life where their parents earning less than RM1,000 a month, rural youths realize that they can never be successful without determination and hard work and that the global media images mediates that belief in them. ‘Japan’, ‘Disneyland,’ ‘Eiffel Tower’ and ‘Obama’ are symbols of success that was achieved through creativity, determination and faith and not through connections and wealth. ‘Japan’ in particular, appeal to rural youths because the Japanese are successful because they are diligent.

In addition, just like the Japanese, rural informants envisioned themselves as ‘globally successful’ individual while retaining their cultural identity. Which is why, despite their yearning for change and coming out of their locality, images of New York City, Switzerland and even K-pop was meaningless to them. K-pop was just a fantasy and a means of escapism but not images of Japan, Disneyland, Obama and Eiffel Tower because it articulates their idea of a successful life.

Quantitative data may depict them as a typical 'globalized youth' but qualitative data demonstrates a hybrid of 'local-global' identity whereby despite their heavy consumption of global media content, rural youths remained local where the use of global media images are merely to express a local concern. Indeed, their act of cultural mixing, here is a purported act to contest against the current socio-economic and political condition that they are in. Local media images may have articulated their immediate needs for employment, emotional and financial security but it is the global media images that fueled that feeling of hope that they can achieve all that they hoped for. Unlike Shim (2006), where hybridity is to counter cultural hegemony of outside, here, it is used to counter exclusion and cultural dominance from within.

More importantly, the global and local media images became a site for rural youths to express their sense of exclusion. As part of a rural community, they feel they are powerless to change their lives because of the local socio-political and economic structure that entrenched them into exclusion. Being socially excluded, it propels them, the desire to get out of their locality and strive to become a political and economic icon at a global level. Ultimately, these also reflect their frustration against the perceived failure of national development policies in helping the rural communities.

## **CONCLUSION**

Despite living in poverty and in isolation, rural youths have found ways and means to selectively appropriate local and global media content to express forge a hybrid identity. But unlike the local media, global media include them into thinking that, they, too, can achieve greater global success while remained essentially 'local'.

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