Moral Panics and Foreign Nationals: Perceived Attitude and Intentions

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigated *moral panics* on activities of African nationals as reported in three local dailies from the period 2007 to 2010. Cohen (1972) defines moral panics as "a condition, episode, individual or groups of persons who emerge to become defined as a threat to societal values and interest." Content analysis was used to examine the news articles against Goode and Ben Yehuda's (1994) five criterion moral panics model to analyse the construction of moral panics in the news articles on the activities of African nationals. Content analysis of 124 news reports indicated that the three newspapers succeeded in constructing moral panics pertaining to the activities of African nationals. The analysis also revealed that the media-fuelled moral panics specifically focused on African students. Miller and Reilly (1994) argued that media content alone cannot determine the emergence or disappearance of moral panics. In tandem with this argument, this study also explored the media influence on attitude and behavioural intentions of the local population based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour. The media influence on attitudes and intentions is often unexplored but crucial in confirming the existence of moral panics. A survey of 185 respondents revealed that the *panic* in the moral panics was not obvious. The respondents had *a positive attitude* towards African students. Intention to avoid befriending them was also not obvious. All the three constructs of the Theory of Planned Behaviour were predictive of behavioural intentions to befriend African students. Based on both findings, it can be concluded that the moral panics phenomenon constructed by the print media did not translate into actual panic behaviour among the surveyed respondents.

Keywords: Behavioural intention, content analysis, moral panics, perceived attitude

1. INTRODUCTION

Human migration across the globalised world has reached unprecedented levels. Rapidly developing nations like Malaysia have become powerful magnets attracting foreign nationals. In the context of Malaysia, foreign nationals comprise immigrants, migrant workers, tourists, and students. The current count stands at 1.8 million and this accounts for 2% of the total population of Malaysia (Mohd Sabri Kariman, 2010).

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As a result of Malaysia's strong economic growth and job opportunities, the local workforce moved up to higher-paying and more dignified jobs leaving behind a void at the bottom. Foreign workers have filled this gap. The changes in the Malaysian labour market are similar to the European nations which experienced a large inflow of foreign nationals from North Africa in the late 1990s (Melossi, 2003).

A 2009 news article in the *New York Times* stated that Malaysia attracted thousands of international students to pursue studies in Malaysia. This fulfilled the government's strategy of establishing itself as an 'education hub' in the Asian region (*New York Times*, 2009). The government set a target of 100,000 foreign students by 2010 (Ninth Malaysia Plan 2006-2010). According to news reports in the local newspapers, thousands of African nationals came into Malaysia as students and eventually formed African enclaves in different parts of the city of Kuala Lumpur.

The local population embroiled in this fast multicultural transformation triggered by the 'influx of foreign nationals' was unable to respond to the 'strangeness' and 'foreignness' of their social behaviour and culture. Research on the impact of migrants in Europe showed similar misgivings, anxiety and distrust among the local people (Melossi, 2003). An unsympathetic public perception inadvertently positioned foreign nationals as possible scapegoats for the emerging ills of a society despite the fact that the common ills of society had always been in existence.

1.1 Research Objectives

This paper examined the phenomenon of moral panics and criminalisation of foreign nationals, in particular, African nationals. Activities related to African nationals have been the main focus of newspaper reports in the recent past. Crimes have also been perpetrated by other foreign groups; yet there seems to be a greater media interest in the activities of African nationals. Therefore, the first objective was to examine media construction of moral panics pertaining to African nationals activities based on Goode and Ben-Yehuda's (1994) five criterion model (*concern, consensus, hostility, volatility and disproportionality*). The second objective was to evaluate the success of newspapers in influencing attitudes and intentions of the Malaysian public.

The research was based on two research approaches. First, content analysis was undertaken to study the frequency, content and focus of news reports on the activities of African nationals. This will reveal whether there was *media fuelled moral panics*. Second, the study will evaluate the impact of the media fuelled panics on the attitude and intentions of the local population through a survey. Local population, for purposes of the study, refers to students studying in private institutions of higher learning. As reported in the newspapers, most of the African nationals entered the country as students registered in private institutions of higher learning. As such, local students studying in these institutions were expected to be most affected by the news reports. The outcome of the survey will indicate whether the media was successful in influencing attitudes and intentions towards African students.

1.2 Significance of Study

Thus far, there has been no published research on moral panics pertaining to activities of foreign nationals in Malaysia. Most published moral panics studies focus on content analysis

only; however, this study applies both content analysis and a population survey. The research findings of this study will provide information on the existence or non-existence of moral panics related to the news coverage on the activities of African nationals. The findings will also be useful to policy makers to decide on a relevant course of action to ensure social stability in the country.
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PHASE 1: CONTENT ANALYSIS

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Research questions pertaining to the content analysis are:
1. What is the frequency of news reports on the African nationals in the local dailies?
2. What is the focus (positive/negative) of the content of such reports?
3. What is the frequency of 'stylised' description, if any, used on this group?
4. What is the frequency of specific words used to describe their activities?
5. What proportion of the news content reflect Ben Yehuda's five criterion moral panics model?

Research questions pertaining to the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) analysis are:
1. Does attitude positively correlate with avoidance intentions?
2. Does subjective norm positively correlate with intention?
3. Does behavioural control correlate positively with avoidance intentions?
4. Which variables were most closely associated with the behavioural intentions?

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Cohen's (1972) research defined moral panics as "a condition, episode, individual or group of persons that emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests: its nature is presented in a stylised and stereotypical fashion by mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions and ways of coping are evolved."

Cohen's research on moral panics originated from his interest in youth culture and its threat to social order. His original study was on British adolescent groups such as Mods, Rockers, Teddy Boys and Skin Heads who were associated with youth violence and deviance. Their behaviours were emphasised and criminalised by the local media which led to a social upheaval or moral panics. According to Miller and Reilly (1994), moral panics functioned as a mechanism of control by the 'control culture' in which the mass media played a moral barricade role and amplified deviant behaviours of a specific group. The motive was to create panic in the public domain in order to pressure authorities to implement policies to curb the activities of this group. Hall *et al.* (1978) stated that the moral panics phenomenon appeared to be one of the principal forms of ideological consciousness through which a 'silent majority' is won over to support relevant authorities in employing various forms of control. The control culture refers to forces that wish to control or discipline society within their definition of moral values. The concept of control society was researched by Foucault (1955). According to him, the nineteenth century righteous societies used enclosed spaces such as family, schools and prisons to discipline society. While *enclosed space* facilitated the disciplining process, so does social *panics* in today's open societies.

Moral panics can start from almost any issue that threatens the moral foundations of a society particularly those forms of lawlessness perceived as novel. Examples of such issues include *Mugging* (Hall *et al*., 1978), *Crack Babies* (Humphries, 1999), *Crank* (Jenkins, 1994), *Freeway Violence* (Best, 1991), and *Wilding* (Welch *et al.*, 2002). Generally the deviance is described in a stylised word e.g. *Wilding* (sexual violence committed by a group of urban teens in New York) and *Ethnic Gangs* (Middle Eastern urban teens involved in a stabbing incident, in Sydney) (Pyonting *et al*., 2001). Moral panics can also spread out of technological developments. The mobile phone, a simple device, created moral panics in India when a 2.37-minute video on an explicit sexual performance by two college students was sent out via MMS to several recipients, resulting in parents refusing to buy phones for their college-going sons and daughters. Many institutions of higher education banned mobiles on their campus grounds (Gopalan, 2009).

Moral panics refers to a defined social problem and acts as a sociological phenomenon. A social problem can be analysed from different angles. From the perspective of objectivism, it is a phenomenon that causes death or diseases; it has to be true, damaging and threatening (Manis, 1974). According to Goode and Ben Yehuda (1974), functionalists define social problems as a consequence of decadence and dysfunction, and role and value conflict in a society. For the constructionist, it is a collectively built phenomenon, that is defined collectively in reference to conditions which pose a problem or the level of felt concern over the issue. To the constructionist, social problems are constructed by the human mind (Spector and Kitsuse, 1977). A simple expression of unfavourable attitude or participation in demonstrations and other actions represents the manifestation of a social problem.

3.1 Media and Moral Panics

Constructionists see social problems as a collectively constructed phenomenon. Media plays a key role in the communication research tradition and based on the agenda-setting function of the media, the "media does not determine how people think, but mostly what to think about" (Miller, 2005). Research within the discourse analytical tradition indicates that media coverage shapes the way people speak and think about immigrants (Maneri and Terwal, 2005). Maneri and Terwal (2005) citing Van Dijk's (1988) research on ethnic minorities, found that media, personal experience and hearsay provide stories about ethnic minorities and this information is shared with others in their daily interactions. Thus, it is clear that the media is a source of ethnic stories and opinions which acts as building blocks in combination with personal experiences and hearsay to develop moral panics related to ethnic minorities or foreign nationals.

This content analysis of news articles on activities of African nationals is based on the social constructionists' approach. This approach was proposed by Goode and Ben Yehuda's (1994) model. This model explains that moral panics arise from the general public's concerns and anger about perceived moral deviants, and, unable to obtain personal expression, the media and social authorities pick it up and reflect this as public opinion about the reality of the threat (Goode and Ben-Yehuda,1994). The media assumes the role as a moral entrepreneur

or moral barricade. Maneri and Terwal (2005) state that moral panics fits better with newspapers than the television format because newspapers have sections for opinions and are open to diverse views and interpretations about events, issues and problems.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of this study was developed based on the framing theory which has its roots in the agenda setting theory. McCombs (2005) introduced the agenda setting media theory in 1972. He proposed that the media does not just tell the public what to think but also what to think about. This implies that the media deliberately chooses topics or issues to influence public discussion. Currently the most frequently applied research in the field of communication science is the framing theory (Byrant and Miron, 2004). Framing theory refers to how the media chooses to portray issues they cover (Wimmer and Dominick, 2010). Framing research shows that the media communicates a particular perspective, or 'spin' to a news story, and this in turn, could affect public attitudes on an issue (Ghanem, 1997). For example, Andsager (2000) analysed how interest groups frame their views about abortion. The pro-life group's interpretation was more successful only because the media emphasised their views more than the opposing group.

McCombs (2005) stated that to frame is to select a specific perceived reality and make it salient for the audience to think about. Weaver (2007) emphasised that framing is more concerned with how issues or other objects (people, groups, organisations etc) are presented in the media. For example, Yang Lai Fong (2009) analysed how a local Chinese daily newspaper framed the 'keris wielding' (unsheathing of the ceremonial dagger), incident taking into consideration the sensitive multi-ethnic society of Malaysia. The unsheathing of the keris or dagger implied a sense of conflict against other ethnic groups. Her research concluded that the keris-wielding incident and subsequent apology were not given much publicity. This *cautious* framing by the newspaper was mainly to keep ethnic sentiments under control.

5. METHOD

To determine the media construction of moral panics in the context of African nationals and their activities, a content analysis of news items from three national (Bahasa Malaysia and English) newspapers namely, *Utusan Malaysia, Berita Harian* and *The Star*, from the period 2007 to 2010 was done. The other Bahasa Malaysia and English dailies were not selected because they had extremely few articles on this issue. The unit of analysis included straight news, feature articles, editorials and letters to editors. A total of 124 news items were found on activities related to African nationals. News coverage was analysed based on four items namely frequency of news items, positive news reports, negative news reports, frequency of stylised words and frequency of words describing activities. The coding categories for moral panics frame, based on Goode and Ben Yehuda's (1994) criteria, included five items namely, volatility, hostility, consensus, concern and disproportion Both news coverage items and frames are summarised in Table 1 while the news frames are elaborated in Table 2.

Table 1. Research framework on content analysis of activities of African nationals/students as reported in the selected newspapers

News Coverage	Issue
Types of news items	
Number of news items	
Number of positive news items	
Number of negative news items	
Number of stylised words used	
Number of specific words used to describe activities	
	Coverage of African nationals' activities
News Frames	
Concern	
Hostility	
Consensus	
Disproportional	
Volatility	

Table 2. Moral panics coding categories for frames used by the selected newspapers

1. CONCERN	There must be awareness that the behaviour of the group in question is likely to have a negative impact on society
2. HOSTILITY	Hostility towards the group in question increases, and they become 'folk devils'. Stylised terms (special names/name calling) are used frequently to refer to the group in question. A clear division forms between 'them' and 'us'.
3. CONSENSUS	Need not be a nationwide consensus. However, there must be widespread acceptance amongst main stakeholders of the issue that the group in question appears to be a real threat to society. The stakeholders or moral entrepreneurs refer to the public, politicians, media, non-profit organisations and relevant others
4. DISPROPORTION	The action taken is disproportionate to the actual threat posed by the accused group.
5. VOLATILITY	Moral panics are highly volatile and tend to disappear as quickly as they appear due to a wane in public interest or news reports focusing on another topic.

6. FINDINGS

6.1 News Coverage

Out of a total of 124 news items, 121 were related to deviant activities related to African nationals, and, of this, 60% of the articles or 73 articles referred to them as *African students*. Only three items were on how the African students were coping with the challenges of studying in Malaysia.

As seen in Table 3, *Utusan Malaysia* had the highest number of news items on this issue that is 73 (59%) followed by *Berita Harian* 33 (27%) and *The Star* 18 (14%). *The Star* was the only paper which had three positive news items but the remaining 121 news items were negative news pertaining to African nationals and their deviant activities. Table 3 provides details on the frequency, content and stylised words used in the three newspapers.

As shown in Table 4, the majority of the news items analysed were straight news articles (89%), followed by Letters to Editors (5%), Editorials (3%) and Feature articles (3%). Negative news articles formed the majority of the news articles (97.5%).

A total of 14 repeated words related to crime were used to describe their activities or behaviour and this is shown in Table 5. The most frequently used word were *scams* (116), followed by *syndicated crime* (112), *duping women* (107), *drug trafficking* (96) and *criminal activities* (91).

Table 3. News coverage of African nationals/students in the *Utusan Malaysia*, *Berita Harian* and *The Star*

Newspaper	Freq: 2007-2010	Stylised description	Content/category	Remarks
Utusan Malaysia	73	*Warga Afrika*: 65 *Awang Hitam*: 22 *Pak Hitam*: 1 *Gagak Hitam*: 2 *Lembah Hitam*: 1	100% negative crime news content	Highest number of news articles on this issue
Berita Harian	33	*Warga Afrika*: 17 *Awang Hitam*:18	100% negative crime news content	
The Star	18	African nationals: 15 Africans: 24 African students: 13	97% negative crime news content with 3% positive content	The positive news highlighted how the African students were coping with their new environment as well as highlighting the fact that not all were involved in crime

Table 4. Types of news on African nationals/students

Type of news	Percentage
Straight news	110 (89%)
Editorials	4 (3%)
Letters to editor	6(5%)
Feature articles	4(3%)
Negative news	121(97.5%)
Positive news	3(2%)

Table 5. Activity descriptors used to describe the activities of African nationals /students

Word count on negative words used to describe the activities of African nationals/students

Common words	Frequency	Remarks
Scams	116	Refer to black/fake money; duping schemes; parcel scams; get-rich quick ; inheritance & lottery scams; marriage scams; document falsification & Internet job scam
Syndicated crime	112	
Duping women	107	
Drug trafficking/syndicate	96	
Criminal activities	91	
Intimidating	77	
African students	74	Identified as IPTS student(s) or private college students
Social ills/ problems	60	
Break-ins	18	
Disturbing girls/neighbourhood	17	
Fighting	3	
Kidnap	2	
Prostitution	4	
Rape	1	
Murder	2	

6.2 Framing Analaysis

The framing analysis in Table 6 shows that 97% of the total articles were hostile. Words related to criminal activities and stylised words like *Awang Hitam* or *Pak Hitam* (black chap) were often used in the news reports. (*Berita Harian*, 26 January 2009; *Berita Harian* 31 August 2010; *Utusan Malaysia*, 18 November 2009; *Utusan Malaysia*, 30 November 2009; *Utusan Malaysia*, 20 March 2010). Consensus and concern amounted to 97% amongst the key claims makers reported in the news items. The claims makers include police, politicians, and members of the public and community leaders. In relation to coverage of news, 97% was found to be disproportional because there were crime news items which involved African, locals and other foreign nationals but the news content primarily focused on the African nationals. There were also news items which though reporting current crime, also referred to earlier crimes committed by other groups of African nationals.

Volatility of news coverage was also evident because African nationals were in the news as far back as year 2000 but were hardly reported then. It suddenly erupted in 28 Septembert 2007 after a brutal murder of a woman and her housemate in Taman Usahawan Kepong, KL by two Nigerian students. News coverage on this group was strong till mid-2008. From mid-2008 till the end of 2009, the news coverage on this group decreased but erupted again from March 2010 onwards.

Table 6. Framing analysis used by selected newspapers to cover news of African nationals/students

Frame	Frequency	Percentage n = 124
Hostility	121	97.5
Consensus	121	97.5
Concern	121	97.5
Disproportionality	83	67
Volatility	Coverage peaked from end Sept 2007 till mid-2008; slowed down in 2009 and picked up again from March 2010 onwards	Note: This issue was still in progress at the point of this study. According to Cohen (1972), the moral panics phenomenon will end when firm policies or laws are enforced by the government. Thus far, no firm policies or laws have been enforced by the Malaysian government.

6.3 Overview of News Coverage and Framing

A total of 121 out of 124 news articles analysed from 2007 to 2010 attributed negative or deviant activities in the country to African nationals and African students. Based on Goode and Ben Yehuda's five criterion model (1994) on framing analysis in Table 6, the media reports and public outcry that erupted after a brutal murder of a woman and her housemate at Taman Usahawan Kepong by two Nigerian students on 28 September 2007 can be defined as a moral panics. Taman Usahawan Kepong is one of the many African enclaves in the city. The local residents who stayed in this area had organised a public demonstration to pressure the relevant authorities to take affirmative action on the African nationals. The Kepong MCA public service bureau chairman, Datuk Liu Thim Soon, who participated in the protest said that he had received several complaints from the residents and restauranteurs against the Africans. Residents complained of frequent fights in the neighbourhood, ogling and teasing of women, and dining at eateries without paying their bills (*The Star*, 2007: 28 September)

Immigration statistics showed 99,769 African students and tourists arrived in Malaysia from January to October 2009 alone (Mohd Sabri Kariman, 2010). A large number entered the country as students enrolled in private colleges. Most moral panics research involves minority groups who are vastly different in culture, religion and behaviour and tend to be feared most by the general population. Isolated incidents of deviancy are sufficient to cause a moral panics episode.

The *Utusan Malaysia*, a leading Bahasa newspaper, was the most active in highlighting the crime activities of the African students. *Utusan Malaysia* carried the most number of reports about the African threat (73 reports) and clearly identified the crime perpetrators as Africans. This paper was the only paper which stylised this threat as '*Awang Hitam*' or '*Gagak Hitam*'. '*Awang Hitam*' is a derogatory description and translated in English it means 'Black Chaps'. The other word, *Gagak Hitam* refers to *Black Crow*. *The Star*, a leading English daily, was not so scathing in its depiction and referred to them as African

nationals or students. This paper was the only paper which carried three positive news articles on African nationals. (*The Star*, 29 September 2007; 11 December, 2008; 8 December 2010).

Utusan Malaysia's news article titled *Tubuh Unit Khas Memantau Warga Afrika* (Form Special Unit to Monitor the African Migrants) quoted a politician from the leading political party that the deviant acts of the African nationals must be controlled, and foreign student recruitment must be monitored (*Utusan Malaysia*, 2010: 4 March). In an earlier report, the President of the Malaysian Youth Movement (Majlis Belia Malaysia), Datuk Shamsul Annuar Navarra, called for eradication of 'crude culture' of the Africans and wanted authorities to monitor abuse in student pass issuance (*Utusan Malaysia*, 2009: 17 November - *Tubuh Jawatankuasa Pantau Aktiviti Warga Afrika*). Most of the media reports boldly identified the deviant immigrants in the headline. Normally the media do not divulge information on ethnicity of criminals. According to Maneri and Terwal (2005), particular ethnic groups receive significant attention, for example, in the German Press, Turks are covered as if they are representative of the entire range of foreigners in the country. A similar analogy can be drawn with the African deviance reporting in Malaysia.

6.4 Moral Panics: Perceived Attitude and Intentions

The content analysis confirmed the existence of moral panics; however, this paper will employ an additional method to prove the existence of *panics* in moral panics by evaluating the perceived attitude, and intentions of the public pertaining to the negative news coverage of African nationals. Measuring the perceived threat in the form of attitudes, perceptions and intentions will reveal the extent to which the media were successful in influencing the public. The attitude and behavioural intentions will be measured based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). This theory also includes significant others (friends & family). In most social issues, individuals tend to refer to relevant others to decide on how they should react towards an attitude object, and in this case, the attitude object was the African nationals.

PHASE 2: STUDENT SURVEY

7. THEORY OF PLANNED BEHAVIOUR (TPB)

While the media possesses the ability to create moral panics by communicating to the audience what to think about, but how they would respond (attitude & intentions) requires further investigation. The *panics* in the moral panics phenomenon is a behavioural construct. As such, it must be verified by measuring the attitude and intentions of the public exposed to the moral panics phenomenon in question. The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) is based on attitudes and intentions, and as such would be the most relevant theoretical framework to study the effect of media fuelled issues on the audience or public. The TPB is an improvement over the original Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). Based on the research of Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), the TRA constructs consist of attitude (A), subjective norm (SN), behavioural control (BC) and intention. Attitude in this theory refers to behavioural beliefs of a person or object. The subjective norm refers to relevant others like friends, parents and others who may have certain beliefs about an issue, and behavioural control

refs to the ability of an individual to make an independent decision on an issue. According to the theory, all three constructs or variables will affect behavioural intention (dependent variable) (Perloff, 2010). Figure 1 illustrates the TRA constructs.
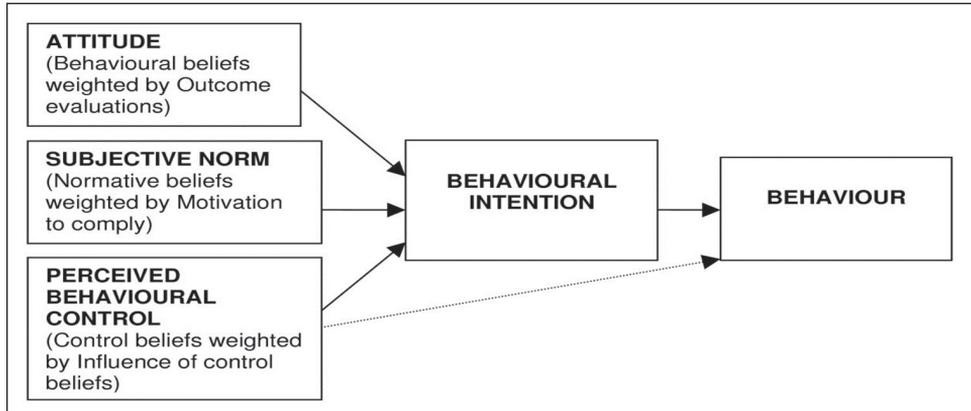

Figure 1. Theory of Planned Behaviour constructs
Source: *http:// www. implementationscience.com*

The second phase of this study was aimed at evaluating the attitudes and behavioural intentions of the local population towards the African nationals by evaluating all the constructs of the TPB. Both TRA and TPB have been extensively used in Social Science studies. Studies on TPB include Merille's (2003) research on health behaviours and car seatbelt use; Theodorakis (1994) and McCaul *et al.* (1993) found TPB had strong predictive ability. Hagger *et al. (*2002) concluded that TPB is superior to the TRA in predicting behaviour. The 185 meta-analysis of studies of Armitage and Conners (2001) supports TPB's predictive ability.

8. METHODOLOGY

A total of 220 Malaysian students were selected using convenience sampling procedure from nine private university and university colleges in the Klang Valley. This being an exploratory study, convenient sampling was deemed appropriate. According to Uma Sekaran and Bougie (2009), convenience sampling is often used during the exploratory phase of a research project to obtain the required information quickly and efficiently. Local students were selected as respondents for two reasons. First, because they were more regularly exposed to African students than others, their experiences and interactions with African students are anticipated to provide reliable responses. Second, based on the content analysis, the African nationals are often referred to as African students because most of them entered the country as students registered in private institutions of higher learning, and as such selecting local students studying in these institutions as respondents would be appropriate.

8.1 Research Design

Selected local students pursuing Foundation, Diploma and Undergraduate degree courses were each given a questionnaire which had 21 questions. Section A consisted of 3 questions on the demographic profile and one question on awareness of the African student issue and one question to quantify sources of information pertaining to this issue. Section B consisted of 9 questions (1-9) on attitude, and Section C had 4 (10, 11, 14, 20) questions on behavioural control, 6 questions on subjective norm (12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18) and 2 questions on intention (19, 21). Scale of measurement used in Sections B and C was based on a 5-point Likert scale. Questions were adapted from TPB research on seat-belt usage study by Merille (2003). The questionnaire was pilot-tested and adapted based on the findings. Among the statistical analysis used were the correlation analysis to find the strength of the relationship between the independent constructs of attitude, subjective norm and behavioural control against intention and multiple regression analysis to determine which TPB variable was the best predictor of intention.

8.2 Reliability Analysis

The Cronbach's alpha analysis was used to evaluate the internal consistency of the items used to calculate the four constructs of the TPB. The Cronbach's alpha value for the constructs of attitude, perceived behavioural control, subjective norm and behavioural intention are shown in Table 7. Cronbach alpha values nearer to 1.0 are considered to exhibit stronger internal consistency compared to Cronbach values nearer to 0 (Uma Sekaran and Bougie, 2009).

The Cronbach values for attitude, subjective norm, and intentions showed strong internal consistency, ranging from .79 to .95, and the lowest Cronbach value recorded was for Perceived Behavioural control that is .507. A .507 value indicates moderate consistency and but it is still admissible for this research.

Table 7: TRA Cronbach alpha reliability values: attitude, subjective norm, behavioural control & intentions

Reliability statistics: Attitude			Reliability statistics: Behavioural intention		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha based on standardised items	N of items	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha based on standardised items	N of items
.949	.952	9	.936	.937	2

Reliability statistics: Behavioural control			Reliability statistics: Subjective norm		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha based on standardised items	N of items	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha based on standardised items	N of items
.497	.507	4	.798	.794	6

9. FINDINGS

A total of 250 participants from nine private institutions of higher education responded to this survey. Of this, 35 respondents were dropped because their questionnaires were incomplete. The majority of the respondents were from degree programmes (39.5%) (Table 8). As seen in Table 9, of the 185 respondents, males made up 47% while female students comprised 53%. Table 10 indicates that a total of 97% were aware of the African deviance issue while only 3% were not aware. According to Table 11, Chinese respondents were the majority at 69%, followed by Malays 14%, and Indians 8%. Table 12 shows that the main source of information on the African deviance issue was from the newspapers (33%), followed by friends (24%), family (15%), the Internet (15%), and TV (12%). This clearly indicates that the newspapers play a significant role in creating awareness of this issue. This implies that the newspapers have an impact on what the public and in this case students should think about. This is supported by the findings of Maneri and Terwal (2005) where the media were found to be relevant and influential in the context of the way people think and talk about foreigners.

Table 8. Course of study of students

	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid Foundation/ Certificate	36	19.5	19.5	19.5
Diploma	76	41.1	41.1	60.5
Degree	73	39.5	39.5	100.0
Total	185	100.0	100.0	

Table 9. Gender of students

		Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Male	87	47.0	47.0	47.0
	Female	98	53.0	53.0	100.0
	Total	185	100.0	100.0	

Table 10. Student awareness of issues

		Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Yes	180	97.3	97.3	97.3
	No	5	2.7	2.7	100.0
	Total	185	100.0	100.0	

Table 11. Ethnicity of students

		Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Malay	26	14.1	14.1	14.1
	Chinese	127	68.6	68.6	82.7
	Indian	18	9.7	9.7	92.4
	Others	14	7.6	7.6	100.0
	Total	185	100.0	100.0	

Table 12. Source of information of students

		Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Papers	61	33.0	33.0	33.0
	TV	23	12.4	12.4	45.4
	Friends	45	24.3	24.3	69.7
	Family	28	15.1	15.1	84.9
	Internet	28	15.1	15.1	100.0
	Total	185	100.0	100.0	

9.1 Correlations: Attitude and Behavioural Intention

Research Question One addressed the correlation between attitude and behavioural intention. Based on the TPB, the local students' attitude towards African students will determine their behavioural intentions of befriending the African students or rejecting them. In order to test this, the Pearson's correlation coefficient movement analysis was used. The Pearson's correlation coefficient attitude output of 0.773 was significant at alpha <0.01. This implies that attitude is strongly correlated with behavioural intention, and in the context of this study, the respondents have positive intentions of befriending African students. Results of the analysis are shown in Table 13.

The mean score for attitude towards African students was 2.808 based on the descriptive statistics in Table 14, and this is supported by the positive correlations in Table 13.

Table 13. Correlations: Intention and attitude

		INTENT	ATTD
Intention	Pearson Correlation	1	.733[**]
	Sig. (1-tailed)		.000
	N	185	185
Attitude	Pearson Correlation	.733[**]	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000	
	N	185	185

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

Table 14. Descriptive statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Attitude	185	1.00	5.00	2.8082	.74644
Subjective norms	185	1.00	5.00	3.1991	.67062
Intention	185	1.00	5.00	2.9297	1.03888
Behaviour control	185	1.00	5.00	2.0811	.61804
Valid N (listwise)	185				

9.2 Subjective Norm and Behavioural Intention

Research Question Two addressed the correlation between subjective norm and behavioural intention. Based on Table 15, the Pearson's correlation coefficient movement analysis indicates a moderately positive correlations .428; alpha <0.01. This implies that subjective norm is positively correlated with behavioural intention and has low predictive ability compared to attitude.

Table 15. Correlations: intention and norm

		Intention	Subjective norm
Intention	Pearson correlation	1	.428**
	Sig. (1-tailed)		.000
	N	185	185
Subjective norms	Pearson correlation	.428**	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000	
	N	185	185

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

9.3 Behavioural Control and Intention

Research Question Three addressed the correlation between behavioural control and behavioural intention. The Pearson's correlation coefficient output for behavioural control was .089 (Table 16). This implies that behavioural control has a positive, but weak correlation with intention.

Table 16. Correlations: behavioural control and intention

		BC	INTENT
BC	Pearson Correlation	1	.089
	Sig. (1-tailed)		.113
	N	185	185
INTENT	Pearson Correlation	.089	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.113	
	N	185	185

9.4 Gender and Attitude: T-test

Based on T-test findings on gender and attitude in Table 17, there was no significance (183) = 0.727, $p>0.05$. It can be concluded that both male and female local students have similar positive attitudes towards African students.

Table 17. Independent samples T-test

	Levene's Test for equality of variances		t-test for equality of means			
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
ATTD Equal variances assumed	2.368	.126	.727	183	.468	.08002
Equal variances not assumed			.720	169.791	.473	.08002

9.5 Multiple Regressions: Attitude, Subjective Norm and Behavioural Control

The positive influences of the three constructs of attitude, behavioural control and subjective norm on intentions to befriend African students were evident. To determine which variables were most influential in predicting intention outcomes, a multiple regression analysis was done. The outcome of the analysis is shown in Tables 18, 19 and 20.

The model summary in Table 18 shows that when all constructs are simultaneously tested, the adjusted R-Square is 0.549. This means that 54% of the variance is accounted for by the three constructs or variables. The F statistics of 75.634 shown in Table 19 at alpha value $p=0.05$ is significant; therefore, it can be concluded that behavioural intention is predictable at a confident level using all three constructs of attitude, subjective norm and behavioural control.

Table 18. Model summary[b]

Model	R	R-Square	Adjusted R-Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.746[a]	.556	.549	.69775

a. Predictors: (Constant), Behaviour control, Attitude and Subjective norm
b. Dependent variable: Intention

Table 19. ANOVA[b]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	110.467	3	36.822	75.634	.000[a]
	Residual	88.120	181	.487		
	Total	198.586	184			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Behaviour control, Attitude and Subjective norm
b. Dependent variable: Intention

Table 20. Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardised coefficients		Standardised coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	.776	.436	1.781	.077	
	Attitude	.928	.077	.667	12.056	.000
	Subjective norm	.222	.086	.143	2.579	.011
	Behaviour control	.124	.084	.074	1.475	.142

a. Dependent variable: Intention

Referring to Table 20, the beta weight comparison indicates the relative contribution of the TPB constructs; attitude is the best predictor for accepting or rejecting African students in this study (Beta 0.667). The weakest predictor is behavioural control (Beta: 0.74).

10. DISCUSSION

Based on the content and framing analysis, the news articles in the three newspapers succeeded in establishing a negative image of the African national's activities, and by doing so created a moral panics phenomenon pertaining to this group of foreigners. The newspapers played a pivotal role in emphasising criminal or deviant activities of this group. It played a moral entrepreneur position by emphasising what was not acceptable and damaging to the norms and values of the society. It is essential to note that the media fuelled moral panics existed only on the newsprint and not in the attitude and behaviour of the public. According to Marwick (2008), since moral panics is by definition public, any analysis of moral panics must attempt to access public discourse.

The survey proved that the student population were not affected by news reports. The survey respondents had *positive attitudes* towards African students in their campuses despite the fact that 98% of them were aware of the negative news about African nationals. The majority was neither hostile nor concerned with the negative news reports. Behavioural intentions to befriend African students were positively influenced by all three variables namely attitude, subjective norm and behavioural control. Attitude was the strongest predictive variable which was the case in most TRA or TPB studies such as in Hagger *et al*. (2002). The *panics* in moral panics was clearly not evident in the survey. Of the 185 respondents, 85% had foreign friends, and of this, 27% had African friends. Miller and Reilly (1994) stated that the moral panics concept *may be flawed* because moral panics is determined by analysing media content alone, and *"audience belief and the impact of public opinion was frequently unexplored."* It could also be flawed because earlier studies like Pyonting *et al.* (2001) state that the marginalised community become a scapegoat for society's ills, and this could be the same for the African nationals. The *Malay Mail*, a popular mid-day daily newspaper, reported that locals committed 97% of the total crimes in the country and in the same article it quoted the Executive Director of Empower, a non-profit organisation, who said that African arrivals in 2009 numbered 99,767 and of this 153 or 0.06% were involved in criminal activities. (The *Malay Mail*, 22 December 2009).

According to Goode and Ben Yehuda (1994), some degree of consensus of an issue must be achieved in order to explain it as moral panics. Although consensus does not need to be unanimous across the population, 'there must be a widespread belief that the problem at hand is real, it poses a threat to society, and something should be done about it' (Welch *et al*. 2002). The outcome of the survey showed that most of the respondents were not concerned, and there was neither consensus on the threat nor hostile attitude towards the African nationals.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study show that the three newspapers succeeded in constructing moral panics pertaining to the deviant activities of the African nationals; however, there was no broad consensus, concern and hostility amongst the surveyed members of the public. More research is needed to ascertain the other agents or stakeholders of this moral panics phenomenon such as the general public, media gatekeepers, and local community close to the African enclaves, government agencies and non-profit organisations to determine the full impact of this media fuelled moral panics.

The present study proved the importance of studying the impact of moral panics on the audience to decide on key indicators of this phenomenon like consensus, hostility and concern. It can also be concluded that the use of the Theory of Behavioural Control to evaluate the impact is relevant and predictive.

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