

STEREOTYPE OF THE WORD “JIHAD” AND ITS INFLUENCE TOWARDS NON-MUSLIM COMMUNITY PERCEPTION IN MALAYSIA

Magdalena Sabbas*

Centre of Media and Information Warfare Studies
Faculty of Communication and Media Studies
Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM)
magdalenasabbas@gmail.com

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Abstract

The word "jihad" is often misrepresented in the media and is associated with terrorism and violence. While the majority of Muslims are familiar with the term "Jihad" and are aware of its significance, this is not the case for many non-Muslims, particularly in Malaysia. Therefore, this study aims to understand the stereotype associated with the word "jihad" and its influence on the perception of the non-Muslim community in Malaysia. The study uses a narrative review on Google Scholar from 2019 to 2023, taking into account the inclusive criteria of "jihad," "non-Muslim," and "perception" through content analysis. A total of 50 relevant articles were retrieved from which 23 were selected. This paper found that the misconception was mostly due to media representation that Muslims are mostly violent, terrorist and extremist. The study emphasises the importance of addressing this issue as well as explaining the causes of these misconceptions. This study employs a narrative review methodology to systematically assess the 'Jihad' stereotype and the influence it has towards the non-Muslim community's perceptions in Malaysia. It is important to spread knowledge about the concept of jihad across Muslim and non-Muslim communities to be able to comprehend each other effectively.

Keywords: *stereotype, jihad, non-Muslim, community perception, Malaysia*

1.0 Introduction

Media reporting especially in Western Media has always been critical of Islam and Muslim representation post 9/11. Islam as a religion is often portrayed as savage, primitive, prejudiced, and irrational while Muslims are characterised as inherently violent and repressive towards culture, democracy, and progression [1]. The current conflict between Palestine and Israel has resulted in a rise in the use of the terms "Jihad" or "Islamic Jihad" in media reporting. According to [2], the contextual meaning of "jihad" is that every day is an opportunity to become a better Muslim and to please Allah and is not just about making every effort to defend oneself physically from any adversary, but also spiritually and towards oneself. As a result, the Muslim community would be familiar with the phrase "Jihad" or "Islamic Jihad" and embrace it as a way of life.

However, constant negative representation from the Western media, would influence the stereotype towards the word “Jihad” and its consequences in generating misunderstanding towards the Muslim community. This was further supported by [3] that fear is likely to be ignited by news reports that associate Islam with terrorist activity, especially towards viewers who are non-Muslims. Based on the Department of Statistics Malaysia website, the country's population is predominantly Muslim at 63.5%, followed by 18.7% Buddhist, 9.1% Christian, 6.1% Hindu and 2.7% Atheist and Others. While the vast majority of the people are of the Muslim faith, the other community who practising other faiths may not know what the term “Jihad” means thus influence from Western media representation could affect and shape their understanding and perception of Muslims and what is happening around the Middle East region.

In recent days, people are now capable of consuming media content from other countries, including coverages with critical perspectives and treatment towards the Muslim community around the globe thanks to the rapid rise of social media. Based on research done by [4], western media plays a significant impact in the rise of Islamophobia and has an indirect impact on Malaysians who are interested in foreign news channels. Furthermore, as cited by [5], Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu highlighted that people's preferences are moulded by their social upbringing and the cultural norms in which they live. Curious individuals with internet access may now seek information that supports their thoughts and beliefs, fitting their personal experience and narrative. With concerns of misinformation from the Western media looming, this would have a detrimental effect on non-Muslim understanding and perception of Muslims in Malaysia due to generalisation.

As Muslims, Islam and its terminologies such as "Jihad" are often associated with violence and terrorism by Western media, several studies stressed the importance of responsible journalism, education and raising awareness. Hassan and Azmi [3] highlight the impact of responsible journalism and news framing on audience perception and advocate that the press and media organisations should strive to convey non-biased information while upholding accountability for their news. Malaysian media played a major part in supporting the government's initiative to disseminate accurate information, presenting different views and insights about the religion and its practitioners [4]. Such endeavours will not only raise religious awareness but are likely to enhance understanding towards Islam and the Muslim community among non-Muslims.

The research objectives of this study include examining the impact of misrepresentations of "Jihad" on perpetuating stereotypes and misconceptions about Islam among non-Muslims in Malaysia. Additionally, it aims to assess the influence of sensationalised media coverage on shaping public perception of Muslims with the term "Jihad." Understanding the media representation, cultural, and sociopolitical elements involved is critical for determining the complicated interplay between media depictions and public opinion.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Stereotype of the word Jihad

While "Jihad" has a positive connotation for Muslims, it is frequently used negatively in Western media. According to [6], the Australian press uses words such as "Islamic terrorism," "radical jihadists," and "Islamist fanatics," which provide a critical and misleading image of Muslims towards the Western community. Miscommunication of the concept of jihad in Western media has enormous ramifications for Muslim perception, as it presents Islam and its followers as violent, promoting negative stereotypes and misunderstandings in its media.

The misconception further worsens when extremist groups redefine and include armed conflict or holy war in the context of legitimising terrorism and violence and claiming to be fighting in the interests of Islam and for the greater good of the Muslim community [7]. With ongoing tensions in the Middle East region and the emergence of extremist groups that use the term "Jihad" to justify their struggle, the act would only serve to reinforce the Western world's misperception of Muslims.

Contrary to the West, the term "Jihad" has evolved over time and in the Middle Eastern community, the perception of "Jihad" varies depending on factors such as religious affiliation, political philosophy, and personal experience but generally is viewed as positive and is an important aspect of Muslim practitioner [8]. This is aligned with the contextual definition provided by [2] that "Jihad" is a constant chance for individuals to become better Muslims, whether spiritually or physically. Generally, regardless of where the Muslim practitioner resides, the term is consistent and well-recognised among practitioners, despite the existence of diverse Muslim communities in the Middle East, such as the Shia and Sunni populations.

The concept of Jihad is deeply rooted in the teachings of Islam in the Middle Eastern context. It is widely understood not as a call to violence, but as a personal struggle for self-improvement and adherence to the principles of Islam. It is important to recognise that the misrepresentation of Jihad in Western media as a form of "holy war" insinuates misconceptions about Islam and Muslims. The true essence of Jihad, as understood in the Middle East, is far from the negative stereotypes propagated in Western narratives.

In Malaysia, it is known to every Malaysian that Islam is the religion of the Federation and that other religions are free to practise their respective faith. This clause is stipulated as per Article 3 of Malaysia's Federal Constitution. According to [9], the majority of Malaysians have a basic understanding of Islam, including God's status as God, the Prophet Muhammad's role, and the Quran as a source of reference. Although the common understanding is established, the misconceptions often remain such as Islam which is the only religion of the Malays and traditionally is the religion of the Arab population. This religion was also thought to be discriminating towards women, insensitive to other believers, and laden with restrictions and prohibitions by the community, many of whom may have a limited understanding of Islam.

While there has been limited research on the view of "Jihad" or Islamic terminology towards the non-Muslim community in Malaysia, previous research suggests that most non-Muslims have a good understanding of Islam and Muslims. Tiung et al. [4] added that because Malaysia is multi-ethnic and multi-religious, the non-Muslim community in Malaysia has a certain exposure to what Islam is. While this shows a common understanding, it is important to note that the knowledge of the non-Muslim community may be limited due to personal experience, exposure, and influence from social surroundings.

2.2 Origin of Stereotyping

Stereotype is a cognitive process of categorising individuals or groups based on certain characteristics or traits associated with a particular group [19]. It is formed to help simplify and make sense of our surroundings. Stereotypes however are problematic. Based on research done by [19], stereotyping often oversimplifies and generalises individuals within a group, leading to unfair assumptions and prejudices. This in turn could contribute to social prejudices and discrimination by reinforcing negative perceptions.

Genuine communication and understanding become difficult when individuals and groups are viewed through the perspective of stereotypes. According to [17], African Americans are frequently labelled as criminals in the media, which has led to dread and mistrust among various communities. Prejudices and discriminatory behaviour result, which undermine any potential for collaboration, empathy, and harmonious integration among various cultural or religious groups.

Stereotypes and misunderstandings have a significant impact on societal attitudes and perceptions, with real consequences for social dynamics and harmony. This was illustrated by [6] as it shows differential attitudes and perceptions towards Islam and Muslims in Australia. Recognising and addressing the impact of stereotypes on communities is critical, as is working collaboratively to develop a more inclusive and empathic society. Increased awareness, education, and responsible media representation are critical in overcoming unfavourable stereotypes and prejudices.

The reasoning behind the stereotyping of Malaysians and non-Muslims in the Malaysian context be attributed to a combination of factors. These factors include historical events such as 9/11, the emergence of the ISIS attack in 2011 and other terrorist attacks that have led to heightened fear and suspicion towards Islam. Locally, the influence of political agendas that seek to promote a narrative of non-Muslim "otherness" and threat, and the perpetuation of existing cultural biases and prejudices have also caused stereotyping to increase among the non-Muslim community.

In general, stereotypes in the media are influenced by various factors such as sensationalism, the need for attention-grabbing headlines and stories, cultural biases and prejudices, lack of knowledge about specific communities or groups, and the influence of political and social agendas. Ghauri and Umer [6]

also emphasise that media portrayal often reflects biases, and stereotypical beliefs resulting from a reliance on media information to shape attitudes toward specific communities. Recognising these influencing factors is vital to combat stereotypes in the media. The responsibility lies with media sources to promote accurate representation while fostering understanding and tolerance among different groups.

Individuals must also be able to critically assess the information they get from the media and be aware of potential biases and preconceptions. According to [14], by challenging and questioning media depictions of Islam and Muslims, individuals contribute to a more informed and inclusive society. Media literacy would also create a mature audience and individuals who are keener to seek knowledge get a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of Islam and its practitioners by actively searching out varied and credible sources of information.

2.3 Influence of Stereotypes Towards Non-Muslim Community

Due to Western media's representation of Islam and Muslims where the media focuses on isolated acts of terrorism, this has resulted in the development and reinforcement of negative misconceptions about the Muslim population believing that all Muslims are violent and fanatical [10]. This statement is further supported by a study conducted by [11] where interactions between non-Muslims and Muslims living in Western nations worsen with the continuous association of Muslims and Islam with negative concepts such as terrorism inadvertently creating the feeling of Islamophobia in Western society. For Muslims residing in Western countries, such representation provided few opportunities to educate and clarify misconceptions due to constant misrepresentation.

In addition to the media, [12] emphasises how important it is to acknowledge that negative portrayals of Islam and Muslims in Western media are not the only thing contributing to non-Muslims' concerns and misconceptions about Islam. These beliefs have also been influenced by the actual conduct of certain individuals who identify as Muslims and their participation in acts of violence and terrorism. Although the media shapes perceptions, it is essential to address these fundamental concerns in addition to biased depictions to foster more understanding between Muslim and non-Muslim people.

As for the Middle East, the unfavourable portrayal of Islam and Muslims by Western media is highlighted, framing them in conflict with the West and associating them with terrorism and extremism [13]. This portrayal contributes to the development of negative stereotypes and prejudice towards the Muslim community, impacting their perception of the region. Negative stereotypes about Muslims, stemming from media coverage of Islamist terrorist threats, promote Islamophobic attitudes and have implications for the perception of the non-Muslim community in the Middle East [14]. These findings highlight the role of the media in shaping societal perceptions and call for a greater emphasis on responsible and accurate reporting in the portrayal of Islam and Muslims to combat the perpetuation of negative stereotypes and prejudice.

Many people are aware that the three major Abrahamic religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, originated in the Middle East. Negative stereotypes, particularly about Islam and Muslims, reinforced by the Western media, particularly during the heights of Post 9/11 and the rise of ISIS in 2011, contributed to the growth of fear and Islamophobic views among non-Muslim groups in the Middle East. These views undermine societal cohesion, contribute to prejudice, obstruct efforts to promote interfaith communication and understanding, and have a direct impact on peaceful coexistence among the region's diverse cultures.

The non-Muslim society in Malaysia also has some misconceptions and unfavourable views towards Islam and the Muslim community, but mostly due to different political views. Jan [15] cited Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS) as one political group that exemplifies these notions. He further added that the party emphasises that it sees its role as a unifier of the Muslim ummah and that it is both a political strategy and a religious obligation to create and maintain Malay Muslim unity. Jan [15] added that tensions arise when religious issues intersect with ethnic identity, potentially leading to social divisions and conflicts. Though Malaysia takes pride in being a melting pot of races, cultures, and religions, saying specific

statements and making comparisons between Muslims and non-Muslims, especially coming from political parties, could foster mistrust and negatively impact societal cohesiveness as well as harmonious coexistence amongst many religious communities in Malaysia.

Negative stereotypes and misconstrued portrayals of Islam and Muslims in Western media have an impact on the non-Muslim community in Malaysia [16]. These depictions contribute to the establishment of existing unfavourable preconceptions and prejudices about Islam and Muslims due to politics, which further impact the perception of Malaysia's non-Muslim community. Seiter [17] emphasises how the media perpetuates stereotypes, and [18] expands on this idea by introducing the concept of prejudice-based selective exposure, which suggests that people may consume media that validates their preexisting opinions and attitudes towards particular social groups. With technological advancements integrated into social media, artificial intelligence algorithms now read the trends of social media customers' usage and reinforce the selective exposure that influences their perspectives and opinions.

2.4 Strategies for Debunking Common Misconceptions

Although it is acknowledged that there are some misconceptions currently existing regarding Muslims and terminologies used in the media, it is important to stress that reshaping perspective is a difficult task as excessive exposure might result in misunderstandings and resistance to acceptance. Considering the current state particularly state affairs in Malaysia, several tactics be used to dispel popular myths about Islam and Muslims, along with collaborations with key stakeholders to guarantee a more effective result.

Firstly, opinions about Islam and Muslims are greatly influenced by the media. Hassan and Azmi [20] contend that media outlets must advance truthful portrayal while encouraging tolerance and understanding among various communities. Research indicates that the media has a substantial impact on public opinion and attitudes toward Islam and Muslims. Consequently, as media coverage either promotes good or negative impressions, it is imperative to engage in ethical reporting and to research how conflict situations involving Islam are presented. Additionally, this is done to dispel misconceptions, combat detrimental misconceptions, and promote accurate portrayals. Adhering to ethical norms helps prevent biased media representations. Furthermore, media content that emphasises accountability to non-Muslim audiences promotes diversity, tolerance, and understanding.

The influence of media portrayals on attitudes and views cannot be overstated and to effectively eliminate misconceptions and promote accurate representations, the government must take a proactive role in putting these policies in place. According to [14], government initiatives include collaborative efforts with media organisations to ensure responsible reporting and ethical guidelines in depicting Islam and Muslims, as well as examining visuals and online media as potential areas for debunking misconceptions and educating non-Muslim communities. It is possible to overcome the information gap and counteract Islamophobia by actively addressing the issue of misrepresentation through government efforts. This is especially critical, especially with Malaysian and political content in the country as racial content is often used to stir local issues.

Community engagement is critical in influencing Islam's perspective of non-Muslim society in Malaysia. It must also be based on current systematic or strategic models. This guarantees that the efforts are well-planned and organised, which results in more effective results. Consultation with key stakeholders and community groups is especially significant in the context of Islam and community participation in Malaysia. The image of Islam can be enhanced and misunderstandings about the religion eradicated by preaching, education, and interreligious interaction [21]. This enables the identification of specific issues and concerns that must be addressed, as well as the creation of a forum for open conversation and the sharing of views.

Previous research done by [20] and [6] has indicated that how Islam is portrayed in the media has a significant impact on how the general public views and comprehends the religion, particularly among

non-Muslims. Inaccurate reporting and skewed portrayals have the power to reinforce misconceptions and prejudices, which in turn create unfavourable sentiments against Islam. Media literacy is essential for mitigating these harmful impacts. Individuals within society must be able to critically think about the content and recognise the significance of digital media literacy to advance a better-informed viewpoint on matters about Islam, Muslim, and religion as a whole.

3.0 Methodology

The methodology for this narrative review involved systematically searching Google Scholar for literature published between 2019 and 2023, using key terms such as "jihad," "non-Muslim," and "perception." Due to time limitations, a total of 50 relevant studies were retrieved. From these, 23 studies were selected based on their alignment with the research question concerning perceptions of Islam and the term "jihad" among non-Muslims in Malaysia.

This selection process considered various factors, including relevance to the research question and diversity of perspectives. Thematic analysis was then employed to identify recurring themes across the selected literature, revealing insights into stereotypes associated with the term "Jihad" and its impact on interfaith relations, media portrayal, and potential educational interventions.

The existing literature may have biases, and it can be challenging to generalise findings due to the specific context and subjective nature of perceptions. These findings highlight the importance of education and dialogue in addressing misconceptions about "Jihad" among non-Muslims in Malaysia.

4.0 Findings & Discussion

Malaysia's unique cultural background, shaped by its broad community of people from many backgrounds, emphasises the critical link between media portrayals and interfaith understanding. It is critical to handle stereotypes proactively to prevent them from escalating into serious dangers that could jeopardise the nation's harmony, stability, and security.

Following the information gathered, while the term "jihad" is prevalent among Muslim practitioners, its perspective varies between Western countries and the Middle East. While Western media consistently portrays the true meaning of "jihad" with a negative connotation, the Middle East communities do not. In the Middle East, it is accepted that the definition of "jihad" varies depending on religious affiliation, political ideology, and personal experience, although it is typically regarded positively and is a significant component of Muslim practice [8]. Understanding the term "jihad" is important because misunderstanding could lead to misrepresentations of Islam thus evoke fear, and discrimination towards Muslim individuals and communities.

In Malaysia, while it is established that the communities are aware of the Constitution law, Islam is the official religion of the Federation, and the non-Muslim population has a basic grasp of the Islamic faith which was illustrated by [9] observation. However, the difficulties in understanding Muslim communities and the term "jihad" extend beyond the media because other variables influence the communities, such as differences in political stand. As highlighted by [15], disparities in political stances and negligent statements made without regard for sensitivity among communities may foster suspicion among the non-Muslim community, potentially resulting in division and increased hostility. In essence, it is evident the non-Muslim population has made efforts to understand the Islamic faith. However, the intricacies of this understanding go beyond media portrayal and are influenced by a multitude of factors.

Furthermore, having access to the internet and global media through many sources increases the possibility of misunderstanding and stereotyping. Internet content that is not gatekeeping could fuel any concept of pre-existing understanding, and according to a study conducted by [5], people's preferences are shaped by their social upbringing and the cultural norms in which they live. This is particularly critical and

pertinent because content from other countries may not be appropriate or suitable for Malaysian culture, habits, or narrative.

Individuals must thoroughly assess the information they get from multiple sources, particularly when dealing with content from different cultural backgrounds. In a world where the internet allows for the free flow of information, it is critical to approach such content with an open mind and a desire to learn and respect different points of view. When seeing content from foreign countries, individuals must approach it critically. This includes actively analysing and assessing the material offered, taking into account the cultural context in which it was developed, and being aware of the potential for misconceptions and stereotyping.

Biased media portrayals could impact perceptions of Islam and Muslims in Malaysia, highlighting the importance of addressing stereotypes and promoting a more accurate understanding. Negative stereotypes associated with terms like "Jihad" are often perpetuated through sensationalised narratives in the media, leading to the misrepresentation of Islam as violent and extremist. Misconceptions about "Jihad" worsen these issues by inaccurately linking it to violence and terrorism, distorting its true meaning within Islam.

These misrepresentations also oversimplify complex religious concepts and contribute to a distorted view of Islam among the general public. Biased media coverage has repercussions beyond perpetuating stereotypes, impacting interfaith relations and societal cohesion. Sensationalism and biases in Western media narratives reinforce prejudices, hindering mutual understanding between different religious groups, and potentially leading to fear and distrust among the non-Muslim population in Malaysia.

The media must take responsibility for addressing negative stereotypes and prejudiced portrayals of Islam and Muslims to foster understanding, promote tolerance, and combat Islamophobia and discrimination in society [22]. Furthermore, the media must provide a platform for diverse voices and perspectives within the Muslim community and avoid relying solely on negative narratives and sensationalised headlines [20]. By doing so, the media contribute to a more accurate and nuanced portrayal of Islam and Muslims, helping to break down stereotypes and promote a more inclusive society.

Scholars, researchers, and Muslims themselves are important stakeholders in government efforts and endeavours to counter the misrepresentation of Islam in media reporting. As suggested by [12], [23] and [11], key parties must work together to dispel false misconceptions about Islam by disseminating factual and impartial information about the religion. This cooperative strategy seeks to control any possible issue that could give rise to negative opinions about the religion and its adherents. In addition, the government and important key players would be able to provide weightage to any claims in debunking misconceptions especially when it is done collaboratively. This includes religious academics and community leaders whose participation and inclusiveness will create a multifaceted approach to addressing negative stereotypes and fostering interfaith discourse.

Furthermore, to encourage an inclusive and cohesive society, non-Muslim community groups must be included in the discourse. Correcting misconceptions and developing bridges of understanding between different communities is possible by encouraging open conversations and supporting cross-cultural contacts. This type of participation helps to break down barriers and combat prejudices, resulting in a more harmonious and inclusive community. For example, in 2021, an event, Selangor Inter-Religious Dialogue Convention 2021 was held via Zoom with the theme of "Beyond Peaceful Coexistence: Challenges and Opportunities in Fostering Religious Harmony in the State of Selangor". The Selangor State government's gathering of leaders from many religious backgrounds was a remarkable effort. It is hoped that the discussion platform will help to create potential ideas or initiatives to improve relations between communities in the state. They also discuss their objectives, priorities, and sensitivities in the quest for Selangor society's togetherness and mutual understanding.

Finally, media literacy is also an important component in terms of combating misconceptions and misinformation. Educational institutions are also important players in altering public opinions of Islam. As

a result, activities focused on increasing media literacy within educational institutions, community organisations, and public forums are critical in combating the negative impact of biased media portrayals. Individuals gain the ability to critically engage with media information and actively contribute to building a more nuanced and informed narrative about Islam and Muslims by incorporating media literacy instruction into formal curriculum and community outreach programmes.

With the cultivation of media literacy, individuals are empowered to become discerning audiences adept at critically analysing content and verifying its credibility. This not only mitigates concerns about the influence of targeted or selective information consumption on the audience but also nurtures a deeper understanding of navigating social media, recognising associated risks, and making informed choices about engaging with various types of information.

5.0 Limitations

It is acknowledged that the research on the stereotype of the word "Jihad" and its influence on the perception of the non-Muslim community in Malaysia is limited. One limitation is the potential bias in the selection of articles for the narrative review, as the search was conducted on Google Scholar within a specific timeframe (2019-2023) and using predetermined keywords. This may have excluded relevant studies outside of this timeframe or those not indexed on Google Scholar, leading to a potential lack of comprehensive coverage of the topic.

Additionally, the reliance on existing literature for the narrative review may introduce a bias towards previously published perspectives and findings. The interpretation of the selected articles and the thematic analysis conducted may be influenced by the researchers' subjective viewpoints, potentially impacting the objectivity of the study. Moreover, the generalizability of the findings may be limited due to the specific focus on Malaysia and the non-Muslim community, as perceptions of "Jihad" and Islam can vary across different cultural contexts and regions.

Furthermore, the study's methodology, which primarily involved content analysis of existing literature, may not capture the full range of perspectives and experiences related to the stereotype of "Jihad" in Malaysia. Qualitative research methods such as interviews or surveys with members of the non-Muslim community could provide more nuanced insights into how media representations of "Jihad" influence perceptions and attitudes. Addressing these limitations in future research can enhance the depth and breadth of understanding regarding the impact of media portrayal on perceptions of Islam and "Jihad" among non-Muslims in Malaysia.

6.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, the portrayal of Islam and Muslims in Western media has significant implications not only in Western societies but also in Malaysia. Western news media reportage often induces negative stereotypes and misrepresentations of Islam and Muslims, which can impact the non-Muslim community in Malaysia. The misrepresentation in Western media can lead to the establishment of unfavourable stereotypes and prejudices about Islam and Muslims, influencing the perspective of Malaysia's non-Muslim community and impeding societal cohesion.

It is critical to recognise that these widespread misunderstandings do not fully represent the various and multifaceted Muslim communities of the West and Malaysia. In Malaysia, attempts to dispel these myths and stereotypes should include both Muslim and non-Muslim groups. Malaysian media outlets must give balanced and truthful coverage that represents the genuine variety and beliefs of the Muslim community while avoiding preconceptions and biases. Malaysia may seek to challenge and debunk these misconceptions about Islam and Muslims by supporting open discourse, facilitating interfaith discussions, and promoting educational efforts.

Furthermore, promoting media literacy among Malaysia's non-Muslim audience is essential. By equipping individuals with critical thinking skills and providing resources for evaluating information about

Islam and Muslims, Malaysia can actively combat the spread of misconceptions perpetuated by Western media. Additionally, cultural events and open forums facilitating interaction between individuals from different religious backgrounds can foster genuine understanding, empathy, and respect.

The non-Muslim community in Malaysia must approach Western media or global content with a critical mindset when seeking information about Islam, Muslims or global events that involves the latter. The portrayal of Islam and Muslims in Western media may often be biased and skewed, perpetuating stereotypes and misconceptions. It is important to question and verify the information presented, seeking diverse perspectives and sources to gain a more balanced understanding.

Policymakers, educators, media professionals, and community leaders can work together to promote media literacy and develop a society that supports the ideals of fairness, understanding, and respect in the portrayal of Islam and the Muslim community. Knowledge of media literacy in the community can also serve in reducing Islamophobia and intolerance, as well as build a better understanding of diverse religions and cultures, hence narrowing the tolerance and understanding gap in both the Muslim and non-Muslim communities.

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