UTILIZING VIRTUAL REALITY TO REDUCE INTERGROUP BIAS

STATEMENT OF RESEARCH PROJECT

As globalization becomes pervasive and the increasing global mobility of human capital in the labor market, many countries around the world face challenges to understand and manage cultural differences. The increased diverse population and frequent contact with cultural different others is not always accompanied by the same level of rising social acceptance of minority groups. Majority groups within each country tend to have a strong tendency to maintain their own culture and privileges. As a result, minority groups such as migrants, refugees, persons with low social economic status or disabilities often face social exclusion and prejudices. As such, diversity management within any given society is imperative in this global age, both scholarly and pragmatically.

Virtual reality (VR) allows people to take the perspective of another individual through embodying an avatar in virtual environments. Research has found that VR can help reduce intergroup bias through perspective taking. Therefore, this project aims to develop and test a VR environment with carefully designed storyline for users to engage with the topic of social inclusion and develop positive attitudes towards intergroup relationships.

The research questions include:

1. What are the effects of interacting with culturally different group members in the VR environment on reducing intergroup bias?
2. What are the effective VR features that enables the reduction of intergroup bias?
3. Is VR a more effective medium than other types of media for reducing intergroup biases?

SCOPE OF WORK FOR SELECTED PHD STUDENT

Aside from fulfilling requirements by IGS and the university to obtain a Ph.D. degree, the student will work closely with supervisors and their respective research teams to collaborate and co-publish with researchers across disciplines. The student is expected to be familiar with relevant theories and methodological and/or programming skills from both disciplines in the topical area of the project. Specifically, the student needs to

1) make significant intellectual contributions to the body of knowledge;
2) conduct empirical user studies and think analytically;
3) apply critical thinking to the research field;
4) communicate effectively -both orally and in written form;
5) design a gamified virtual reality environment.