IIUM JOURNAL OF HUMAN SCIENCES

IIUM JOURNAL OF HUMAN SCIENCES

IJOHS

IIUM Journal of Human Sciences

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Facebook and Political Communication: A Study of Online Campaigning during the 14th Malaysian General Election

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ABSTRACT

Every democratic country has to go through the general election where political candidates must convince the public to vote for them. In recent years, Facebook has become one of the most popular social media used in election campaigning. Due to its popularity and easy access to the public, Facebook offers election candidates the ability to personalise their political messages and directly communicate with the voters and win the voters' trust. This study looks into this phenomenon by studying how election candidates used Facebook to campaign during the 14th Malaysian General Election. The study investigated how the candidates' personalised their campaign by looking at the types and characteristics of the candidates' Facebook posts as well as the issues highlighted and slants applied in the posts. Content analysis of the candidates' Facebook posts showed that the candidates were very active on Facebook and had strategically used Facebook to create and maintain a positive image rather than promoting issues and engaging in discussions with the public. The study also found a significant case of personalisation in the Malaysian politicians' campaign strategies on Facebook.

Keywords: *elections, Facebook, personalisation of politics, political communication, social media*

INTRODUCTION

Online campaigning during elections is not a new phenomenon in Malaysia. In the previous two elections, held in 2008 and 2013, it was the opposition parties that were truly maximising the potential of the Internet. This was due to the nature of the Malaysian media system that was strictly biased towards the ruling elites. Through laws and political power, political dissidence is not accepted in the mainstream media (Wok and Mohamed, 2017). Opposition political parties are specifically blacked out from media broadcast. To reach the people, these parties would usually need to use smaller media such as books, cassettes, flyers and brochures. The advent of the Internet offered an alternative media platform for political communication. In the 2008 election, opposition parties started to use online platforms more actively. They were reaching the people through websites, groupnets and emails. Malaysians were then introduced to political news and views that were different from those they usually get from the mainstream media (Mohamed, 2017).

The rise of web 2.0 and the increased internet penetration during the 13th general election further fragmented the Malaysian political media. While the government was still maintaining their stronghold over the traditional media, the opposition parties and its politicians were already actively engaging the electorate via social media notably, Facebook. Many studies have recorded the impact of Facebook on the 13th general election. Most of these studies provided a general analysis on the impact of Facebook on the

election (Gomes, 2014) (Sern and Zainuddin, 2014) (Sani and Azizuddin, 2014) while several others were more specific. Hasmah et al. (2017) studied the issues shared by MIC candidates' Facebook; Salleh, Fathir and Rahman (2015) analysed the political sentiment brewing on Facebook before the election and; Yeap (2013) investigated how citizen groups organised campaigns on Facebook to encourage voters to exercise their civil rights on the Election Day.

Even before the historic 14th General Election, many prominent Malaysian politicians were already engaging with the electorate via Facebook. Lee (2017) studied the presence of Malaysian politicians on Facebook by exploring the number of Facebook followers, Malaysian political parties and several prominent Malaysian politicians . His study found that the use of Facebook for politics is more intensive at the politicians' individual level than at the political party and political coalition level. Lee (2017) further discovered that the level of social media presence, when measured by the number of followers, was uneven within coalitions and parties. For example, within Barisan Nasional (BN) and UMNO, the then Prime Minister Najib Razak has invested a lot to maintain a significant social media presence. Except for Khairy Jamaluddin and Hishammuddin Hussein Onn, other UMNO politicians appear to lag in social media presence. A similar problem was observed in the Pakatan Harapan coalition where only a few politicians had a very high number of followers, especially Mahathir Mohamad (PPBM), Anwar Ibrahim (PKR), Wan Azizah Wan Ismail (PKR) and Muhyiddin Yassin (PPBM).

Although Lee (2017) found that the level of Facebook adoption among Malaysian politicians varied, he noted that most prominent politicians from the main coalitions were active on Facebook. On Facebook, these politicians can curate their own media presence. Unlike traditional broadcast media that is governed by strict gatekeeping and political bureaucracy, Facebook allows candidates, regardless of parties and inclinations to personally reach the voters. This brings forward the interest in understanding how the use of Facebook has affected the ways Malaysian politicians' campaign during the election.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Researchers agree that the personalisation of politics is an old phenomenon, as political personae have always been considered relevant in both political science and political communication. The increase of political personalisation in contemporary times is mostly explained through the increase in individualisation in western societies. Individual self-expression values have been replacing group-related survival values as a basis for social and political life, a trend that has led to the decline in partisanship and political parties.

Media personalisation is also strongly related to the mediatisation of politics, a process in which the relative importance of "media logic" has grown at the expense of "political logic," and the media have become increasingly independent of politics, while politicians have become increasingly dependent on the media (Strömbäck, 2008). To the extent that the media are becoming the main arena for politics and that political legitimacy is increasingly affected by media legitimacy, communicating via the media has gained importance compared with other forms of communication. As Wolfsfeld (2011, p. 1) aptly puts it, *"If you don't exist in the media, you don't exist politically."* Thus, it has been claimed that voters are unlikely to support candidates about whom they do not know enough from the media, and that politicians are well aware of this. In light of the growing importance of media logic, political actors have had to adapt to it, for example, by constructing dramatic events that put their persona at the centre (Mohamed, 2019). This cycle of mediatisation and personalisation leads to a political world in which personalities are steadily gaining prominence (Strömbäck, 2008).

The rise of social media has placed the roles of personalities to another level whereby politicians can control and curate their own individual media presence. No longer are they tied to the bureaucracy of

political partisanship and structural media access. The availability of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and the likes allow politicians and election candidates to have full control of the image and sentiments they would like to share with the voters. As a result, some studies view that personalisation as negative towards voting behaviour. Those who support this view feel that electoral choices based on individual personae of the candidate as irrational and undemanding, and will impact public control of the political process. Thus, according to Adam and Maier (2010), "the complexity of political processes is reduced to achievements and standpoints of individual politicians instead reinforce rational opinion-building and decision-making" (p. 4). It is claimed that personalisation hampers these rational processes by weakening the influence of current issues and party programs on voting decisions (Mohamed, 2019).

On the other hand, some see the positive side of personalisation. Mohamed (2019) for instance proposed that an average citizen, who is only moderately interested in politics, may find a politician's image a helpful reference point to process and organize the daily flow of political news, which otherwise may seem overwhelming. To further investigate at the positive and negative impact of personalisation, this study took a step further by investigating in more details how Malaysian politicians used Facebook by focusing primarily on their election campaign. Personalisation is identified through the candidates' pattern of Facebook use. To do this, the study asks:

1.   How active on Facebook are the candidates when campaigning for the election?
2.   What are the types of posting used by the candidates?
3.   What are the characteristics of the postings shared by the candidates?
4.   What are the issues highlighted by the candidates?
5.   What are the slants used by the candidates when making statements on Facebook?

METHODS

For this election, the candidates were allowed to officially campaign from April 28th, 2018 to May 8th, 2018. This election rule is unique to Malaysia where it is illegal by law for politicians to campaign openly outside the allocated time. Therefore, this time was very suitable to observe how Malaysian politicians used Facebook to campaign and influence voters. The study also extended to two days after the election to capture how the candidates responded towards the election results. As such, the study was conducted for a duration of two weeks starting from April 28th, which was the nomination day, to Midnight May 10th, the day after the election.

Sampling

Eight prominent politicians were chosen for the study based on their political stature as well as a presence on Facebook. These politicians represented the three main coalitions that ran for the election. These coalitions composed of the then incumbent government, Barisan Nasional; the biggest opposition coalition, Pakatan Harapan and; the smaller Malay-Islamist coalition Gagasan Sejahtera that was led by the Islamic party, PAS. Each of the politicians sampled was a well-known figure as well as leaders within their political parties. For example, Najib Razak was the Prime Minister of Malaysia while Mahathir Mohamad was the ex-Prime Minister who is running against Najib in this election. Abdul Hadi Awang is the leader for PAS, while Nurul Izzah Anwar is the daughter of Anwar Ibrahim, the de-facto leader of Pakatan Harapan who at the time was still in jail. These politicians also had a huge following on Facebook. Khairy Jamaluddin, the incumbent Minister of Youth had at the time, 1.2 million followers. Likewise, Ahmad Dusuki of PAS was also a prominent figure on Facebook with more than a million followers. The 8 politicians were. See Table 1.

Table 1: *The number of political candidate Facebook followers*

Politician's Name	Political Party	FB Followers
Mohammad Najib Razak	Barisan Nasional	3,400,000
Mahathir Mohamad	Pakatan Harapan	2,600,000
Khairy Jamaluddin Abu Bakar	Barisan Nasional	1,200,000
Ahmad Dusuki Abd Rani	PAS	1,200,000
Nurul Izzah Anwar	Pakatan Harapan	613,000
Hishamuddin Hussein	Barisan Nasional	583,000
Abdul Hadi Awang	PAS	354,000
Azmin Ali (PH)	Pakatan Harapan	251,000

* the number of followers listed in the table were recorded on April 28th, 2018, the first-day election of campaign

Content analysis was used to collect the data. It is a common method used in electoral studies (Idid, 2017) especially when looking at Facebook usage among politicians. Shafi and Vultee (2018) content analysed Facebook posts of presidential candidates Barack Obama and Mitt Romney during the 12th American presidential Primaries. Bronstein, Aharony and Bar-Ilan (2018) content analysed the Facebook pages of 10 candidates in the 2015 Israeli general election. Content analysis was also used to study political issues on Facebook during the 13th general election that was held in 2013 (Manaf, Taibi and Manan, 2017) (Zainuddin et al., 2017). Quantitative content analysis was employed as the research method for this study.

Coding procedures

Wimmer and Dominick (2014) recommended two ways of establishing coding categories for content analysis. The first is known as priori coding, where the researcher establishes categories before data are collected, based on some theoretical or conceptual rationale. The second method is called emergent coding, where the researcher establishes categories after a preliminary examination of the data. This study employed the deductive or priori coding approach for both news sources and news frames. The list of sources and frames was derived from literature reviews and examination of local reporting of sustainable energy. To answer the research questions, RQ2, RQ3, RQ4 and RQ5 were measured in terms of three coding categories that include types of post, characteristics of post and issues highlighted and message slants. Each of the categories is then operationalised accordingly. The table below list the operational definitions of each coding category. See Table 2.

Table 2: *Operational definitions for coding categories*

News source	Definition
Types of Facebook posts	This category measures the types of postings available on Facebook that are used by the candidates. On Facebook, users can post videos, short status, photos, live streaming broadcast and, text-based articles
Characteristics of Facebook posts	This category defines the content of a post. For example, a photo post could be grouped into different characteristics depending on what is presented. The study identified 7 main posting characteristics used by the candidates which are Selfie, Personal activity, Objects/things, Professionally-produced campaign material, Campaign activities, Infographics, Repost, Poster
Issues highlighted	This category lists the issues talked or discussed by candidates in their posts. There were several issues highlighted but the study has listed only the main issues discussed. These issues include Politics, Election, Economy, Leadership, Religion, Education, Missing of MH370, Foreigners, Health, Patriotism, Unity
Message slants	The slants of the message indicate the sentiment used by the candidates in their posts. There are three main slants which are the 'Acclaimed/Praised' slant that represents a positive tone 'Criticise/Attack' suggests a negative inclination in a post while the Respond/Defense slant is more neutral whereby the candidates are mostly responding to comments

A standardised codebook and code sheet was designed to suit the Facebook functions and categories. Each Facebook post was the unit of analysis while details of the post such as the type, length and issues shared were the variables. Three undergraduate students were coders trained on the materials by the researchers. The coding task was done using personal computers. The Holsti's (1969) inter-coder reliability was conducted to test the trustworthiness of the findings. In general, the test result showed that all variables were above the minimum reliability value which was 0.7. All the data were recorded and analysed using the statistical software IBM SPSS software.

FINDINGS

Question 1: How active on Facebook are the candidates when campaigning for the election?

A total of 870 posts were analysed throughout the study period. There was quite a discrepancy in the number of postings by the candidates. Table 3 depicts this discrepancy.

Table 3: *The number of Facebook postings according to date*

Politician Name	Date													Total
	28 Apr	29 Apr	30 Apr	1 May	2 May	3 May	4 May	5 May	6 May	7 May	8 May	9 May	10 May	
Nurul Izzah	11	14	12	13	10	12	22	20	19	10	14	6	4	167
Najib	10	13	11	9	9	7	13	11	13	15	24	11	4	150
Ahmad Dusuki	5	3	1	6	7	7	9	14	18	12	43	16	3	144
Khairy	3	16	12	7	10	7	9	11	9	9	9	10	1	113
Hishamudin	9	13	8	9	8	5	5	4	8	10	7	3	1	90
Hadi	8	5	0	12	6	4	8	11	4	9	9	5	1	82
Mahathir	4	1	5	3	4	6	6	5	6	4	6	9	6	65
Azmin	6	2	0	9	5	4	3	8	4	7	4	5	2	59
Total	**56**	**67**	**49**	**68**	**59**	**52**	**75**	**84**	**81**	**76**	**116**	**65**	**22**	**870**

Nurul Izzah Anwar was the most active politician on Facebook with 167 posts while her fellow Pakatan Harapan comrade, Azmin Ali was the least active with only 59 posts. The second most active was Najib Razak with 150 posts, followed by Ahmad Dusuki of PAS with 144 posts. The other least active candidates were Mahathir of Pakatan Harapan (65), Hadi Awang of PAS (82) and Hishamudin Hussein of Barisan Nasional (90). The result showed that candidates of the same political parties did not necessarily use Facebook in the same way. Pakatan Harapan's Nurul Izzah was the most active, but her fellow party members; Mahathir and Azmin were the least active. This indicates that these politicians were running their social media on their own without any guidelines or shared practices proposed by their political parties. Facebook, like other social media, privileges personal campaign over a group or in this sense, political parties. An observation of the political parties' Facebook also indicates that many individual politicians (refer to Table 1) had more Facebook followers compared to their party. Barisan Nasional Facebook page had 473K followers (https://www.Facebook.com/barisanasional/), Pakatan Harapan (https://www.Facebook.com/pakatanharapan.my/) only had over 273K followers while PAS had the most followers at 521K (https://www.Facebook.com/paspusat/).

May 8th, 2018, the day before the election, recorded the most number of postings. Altogether, the candidates posted 116 posts with Ahmad Dusuki posting the most (43 posts) followed by Najib Razak (24 posts). This was only logical as the politicians were making the most of the remaining time they had before

the campaign period ended at midnight the same day. The number of posting dropped drastically on Election Day and the least number of posting was recorded on the day after the election, which was May on 10th. All the candidates posted on the Election Day. They all posted the same materials, photos of them placing their votes at their respective constituencies accompanied by captions and messages of hope. The number of postings probably dwindled on May 10th simply because the candidates and their machinery were making sense of their victory and loss. Dr. Mahathir who was initially among the least active posted the most on May 10th. This is due to Pakatan Harapan's victory in the election, which saw, for the first time, a change in the Malaysian government, a change that took over 61 years in the making. Mahathir who led Barisan Nasional for more than 25 years and was the 4th Prime Minister of Malaysia made not only Malaysian history but also world history by reclaiming the Prime Minister post of Malaysia for the second time. This time as the chairman of Pakatan Harapan; and at the age of 92, he became the oldest Prime Minister in the world. All of his posts that day were live coverage of his press conferences in which he claimed victory and restated his stand for political reform. Despite losing to Pakatan Harapan, Najib Razak did not keep quiet. He posted four times on his Facebook and had graciously accepted defeat.

Question 2: What are the types of posting used by the candidates?

Caton, Hall and Weinhardt (2015) identified that what politicians post on their Facebook explains a lot about the kind of politicians they are and how savvy they are when managing the media. As such, this study also looked at the types of post. Table 4 lists the types of Facebook posts shared by the candidates in the study.

Table 4: Types of Facebook posting

Politician's Name	Video	Photo	Live Streaming	Status update	Text
Nurul Izzah	8	111	47	0	1
Najib	41	72	24	3	10
Ahmad Dusuki	19	91	28	6	0
Khairy	38	72	2	0	1
Hishamudin	11	72	7	0	0
Hadi	1	36	41	1	3
Mahathir	14	31	20	0	0
Azmin	13	36	7	0	3
Total	**145**	**521**	**176**	**10**	**18**

Altogether, 521 photos were shared by the candidates making it the most common type of posts followed by 321 videos, of which 176 are live streams. The least popular were text-based posts, which accounted for 28 posts only. When it comes to text-based post, the candidates mostly provided either short status updates or lengthy articles that support their candidacy. Although Facebook was already significantly used in 2013 during the 13th General election, it was only in this election that the live streaming function was made available to politicians. And it appears that the candidates in this study, especially the ones from the opposition parties, were exploiting its use. Nurul Izzah used it 47 times, followed by Hadi Awang (41), Ahmad Dusuki (28), Najib Razak (24) and Mahathir (20). The other candidates were not significantly using it. Live streaming allowed the opposition candidates to match the media access previously only available to government candidates. These politicians were sharing press conferences, live broadcast of their campaign trails, and speeches, as they were ongoing. It has always been a tradition that on every night before the election, the head of Barisan Nasional will go live on television to give his last mandate. The opposition leaders would not have the option to address the whole nation. But on the eve of May 9th, 2018 both heads of oppositions, Dr. Mahathir and Hadi Awang

used Facebook to live broadcast their final mandate and call for votes to a worldwide audience. See Image 1.

Image 1: *Hadi Awang's final election address was delivered live on Facebook on 8th May 2018 at 9 pm.*

Question 3: What are the characteristics of the postings shared by the candidates?

Looking only at what was posted may not give enough information about how these candidates were using Facebook. Thus this study further observed the contents of the postings. Table 4 lists the different characteristics of the candidates' Facebook postings.

Table 4: *Characteristics of Facebook posting*

Politician's Name	Selfie	Personal activity	Objects /things	Professionally-produced campaign materials	Campaign activities	Infographics	Repost	Poster
Nurul Izzah	0	37	1	16	102	0	8	0
Khairy	0	7	18	18	61	0	3	0
Hishamudin	2	8	7	13	59	0	1	0
Najib	0	25	16	23	40	1	18	1
Ahmad Dusuki	0	37	0	13	38	38	9	3
Hadi	0	25	0	4	38	7	1	1
Mahathir	2	7	10	20	13	0	1	8
Azmin	0	7	2	22	11	2	6	0
Total	**4**	**153**	**54**	**129**	**362**	**48**	**47**	**13**

The study found that the candidates were sharing the same kind of contents and they could be grouped into eight general categories. These contents were mostly formal and campaign-focused. This could be because the study was conducted during the campaign week. All the candidates were very careful in their postings. There were no obvious attacks or heavy criticism against their opponents. They were more focused on their campaign and manifestos. The most shared content was campaign activities such as photos and videos that depict the candidates in action like going on their campaign trails, giving

speeches, meetings and socialising with voters. Nurul Izzah was the most active when it came to sharing her campaign activities. She posted it 102 times.

'Professionally-produced campaign materials' is a category that includes the candidates' campaign and manifestos. This category included contents such as dramatised videos, music clips, brochures and animations. There were 129 of such posts. One of the most prominent examples of professionally-produced content was Khairy Jamaluddin's series of short dramatised videos. In the videos, Khairy played the role of an ordinary Malaysian contemplating about the future of the country if bad decisions are made on Election Day. Realising the people's general despondent with the Barisan Nasional government, Khairy used an empathetic tone in which he presented the sentiment of an unhappy youth who loved the country but was not willing to change the government because of the uncertainty offered by the opposition parties. Khairy painted a picture where it would be best for the people to still give a chance to Barisan Nasional despite their hesitation because it would be riskier to take a change on an inexperienced government. (Refer image 2). The video dramatised Barisan Nasional's narrative for the people to play it safe at the ballot box. Dramatized content is powerful as it triggers user reaction. Studies (Shafi and Vultee, 2018), (Bene, 2017) have shown that emotional and personal contents tend to get more user interaction and engagement compared to more serious and formal posts.

Image 2: *Khairy Jamaluddin's professionally produced short drama was shared on his Facebook page on 8th May 2018 at 8.56 am*

The candidates also shared personal activities and this referred to contents that were not related to the election such as photos of food and daily routines. Nurul Izzah and Ahmad Dusuki shared most of such content with 37 postings each. Hadi Awang shared quite a number of posts that revolved around his activities such as going fishing and performing prayers. Other types of contents include objects (54), infographics (48), posters (13) and selfies (4). The candidates probably posted these contents in smaller in numbers because they were not related to the election. Forty-seven posts were the reposts where the candidates chose to share other peoples' content rather than theirs.

Question 4: What are the issues highlighted by the candidates?

The chosen period of study that was during the campaign weeks proved to be a limitation to the study. This is because it appeared that the candidates were mostly focused on sharing about their campaign activities and election manifestos rather than discussing issues. Because of this, almost all, amounting to 759 of the posts shared, revolved around the election. Table 5 lists the issues shared by the political candidates during campaign week.

Table 5: *The issues according to the political candidate*

Main Issue	Najib	Hishamudin	Khairy	Mahathir	Azmin	Nurul Izzah	Hadi	Ahmad Dusuki	Total
Election	110	76	86	62	57	158	79	131	759
Economy	4	0	2	3	0	2	0	1	12
Leadership	2	0	0	3	0	0	0	3	8
Religion	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	3
Politic	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
Education	1	0	1	0	0	3	0	0	2
Missing of MH370	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Foreigners	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Health	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Patriotism	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Unity	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	**123**	**76**	**91**	**65**	**57**	**165**	**80**	**140**	**797**
	Barisan Nasional BN (290)			**Pakatan Harapan PH (290)**			**PAS (217)**		

This significant focus on the election is related to the types and contents of the post discussed above. Since most of the contents were campaign materials, not many non-election issues were put forth. Election issues here primarily focused on the candidates' and their parties' promotion of credibility, call for votes, the proposal for change, promises and mandates. Even in their manifestos, the candidates hardly touched on specific issues. Rather, they took a general stand by highlighting their campaign activities and broad promises of better governance. It was somewhat discouraging to see issues that were popular running up to the election such as 1MDB, corruption and the Malay rights were not openly discussed by the candidates. It could be that the candidates were playing it safe by not triggering the sensitivities of any particular groups or be in trouble with the election commission. Hence, Facebook was mostly used for image building rather than issue sharing. This lack of focus on issues concur with Shafi's and Vultee's (2017, p: 21) study that found:

> "The nature of the Facebook posts suggests that the candidates use Facebook as a strategic public relations tool, rather than as a source of information. The candidates mostly attempted to show their presence, uphold their personality, appeal to the audience or engage in cyber-rallying, rather than debating and discussing their issue policies."

The economy was the second most shared issue. But 12 posts were still very small compared to the number of total posts which was 870. Only Najib Razak and Nurul Izzah touched on the economy. Again, this was rather dumbfounding as the troubled economy had been the oppositions' main argument against Najib and his government. Leadership was the other issue touched upon by the candidates. Issues of leadership primarily focused on Najib Razak. In his posts, Najib Razak defended his leadership and questioned Mahathir's age and credibility. On the other hand, Dr Mahathir also posted about leadership three times and in his posts, he criticized the weaknesses of Barisan Nasional's leadership and proposed

for change. Issues on religion were posted by Hadi Awang and Ahmad Dusuki and this was justified by their party's identity that was embedded in political Islam. Other examples of issues that were also discussed but not significantly were issues of health, unity, patriotism and education.

Question 5: What are the slants used by the candidates when making statements on Facebook?

The researchers also looked at the candidates' message slant and this refers to the direction of their messages, whether it was positive or negative. The slants were very much related to the target audience. Since the candidates were predominantly targeting the voters and their party members, the general message slants were positive. Table 7 highlights the candidates' message slants.

Table 7: *Message Slant*

Politician's Name	Acclaimed/ Praised	Criticise/ Attack	Respond/ Defence	Others	Balance
Nurul Izzah	157	0	4	1	0
Ahmad Dusuki	126	1	3	10	4
Khairy	106	4	0	1	2
Najib	102	26	11	1	4
Hishamudin	82	1	0	4	3
Hadi	76	1	1	0	3
Azmin	49	5	0	0	4
Mahathir	40	2	3	4	15
Total	**738**	**40**	**22**	**21**	**35**

Almost all the posts had acclaimed slants, this was simply because the candidates were promoting their candidacy and therefore highlighting their personal as well as the party's achievements, credibility and potential. Portraying a positive image is part of how the candidate personalised their approach. Voters are inclined to be more receiving of candidates that have a populist image. Most of the candidates appear to distant themselves from making any controversial statement that may disrupt the voters' image of them. On Facebook, the politicians would like to appear more like the voters' friend rather than the loud politician. It was Najib Razak had the most negative slants. He had 26 posts that were criticising or attacking the opposition. He also had 11 posts that were responses to criticisms against him. Najib was the only candidate to have a variety of posts, target audiences and message slants. This could be attributed to his position as the Prime Minister at the time. As the leader of the government as well as the head of Barisan Nasional - the ruling coalition party, he was the main target and focus during the election. He had a lot at risk and a responsibility to maintain Barisan Nasional's 60 years' reign over Malaysian politics. He had been preparing for the election and had waited for the campaign week to intensify his defence. When referring to the use of social media by his supporters, he was reported to have said: *"We have long been in defensive mode. Enough. It is now time to attack!"* (Straits Times, April 15, 2017). Dr. Mahathir had a variety of slants as well. But because he had a relatively smaller number of posts, he only criticised twice and responded to criticisms 3 times.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

One of the most important characteristics of political communication on Facebook is that attention is directed towards candidates rather than their political parties (Enli and Skogerbø, 2013). The study found this to be true. The results showed that while all the candidates were using Facebook for the same purpose, that is to campaign and garner votes, there were discrepancies in their routines and styles. Candidates from the same political block like Nurul Izzah, Azmin Ali and Mahathir Mohamad had different Facebook

routines. While Nurul Izzah was very active, posting more than 10 times a day, her counterparts were posting more conservatively (Table 2). Nurul Izzah tended to be more personal, sharing her daily activities and documenting her campaign routines (Table 4). Azmin Ali, on the other hand, relied more on professionally produced campaign materials like posters and videos that were more formal and impersonal. The same can be seen with Barisan Nasional candidates. Najib Razak had a more colourful approach to Facebook. While sharing extensively on his campaign trails, he also shared a fair amount of personal posts like photos of him out with his family. He was also very daring in his content, not afraid to attack his opponents (Table 4 and 6). Conversely, BN candidates, Khairy Jamaluddin and Hishamuddin Hussein were more careful. Posting mostly about their campaigns and hardly about anything else. Since there appeared to be no coordination between candidates and their political parties, campaigning on Facebook became a personalised effort.

Facebook is ultimately a personal platform that depends on social networking. As such, how users use Facebook depends on the friends or followers they have. For a politician who uses Facebook for political communication, the ability to balance the personal, the public and the political is vital. Bene (2017) explained that on Facebook, a politician's post will appear between the flows of everyday content by their followers' friends in their news feeds and as a result, politician's posts have to struggle for attention and reaction not only with other political content but with all types of contents. This 'contest' may incline the politician to perform more like an everyday person rather than like a politician. This may be the reason why the majority of the candidates in this study appear to be very civil and focused only on their campaign. They conformed to the demands of the social network that required them to become an everyday politician. One that is friendly and will flow well on the followers' Facebook timeline.

The significance of Facebook in political communication is no longer a question; it is a reality. This study has shown that Malaysian politicians are accepting this fact. They have extensively used Facebook in their election campaign. While some are savvier than others, they were all trying to make the most of what Facebook can offer. If in the previous elections, it was the opposition candidates that were using Facebook extensively, this election saw the then elected politicians from Barisan Nasional equally active on Facebook. Najib Razak who had all the mainstream and broadcast media at his disposal became notably active on Facebook.

This study also identified that quality is always better than quantity. While it is vital for the candidates to constantly post and be visible on the followers' timeline, the ability to attract users' reaction and engagement require wise strategy. A politician's post can simply drown within the many other posts that are continuously flowing. For example, candidates like Nurul Izzah and Ahmad Dusuki were the most active candidates in this study, posting in large numbers daily. But it does not mean that they were the most effective. It could be that Mahathir who posted much less, was more successful. By focusing on specific content such as live streaming and producing emotionally intriguing posts, he was able to attract and, most importantly, to retain the users' interest.

Facebook's effectiveness as a political communication tool can best be measured through user reactions and engagement. The ability to discover how Facebook users respond to a politician's post is valuable public opinion data. However, that would be the limitation of this study. The study had mainly focused on selected politicians' use of Facebook and did not account for the users' response. Thus, a more extensive study should cover both sides to Facebook political communication- the political entities and their audiences. Such studies can capture a more encompassing view and ultimately measure the level of success and failure.

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