

Vol. 2, No. 1, 2020

IIUM JOURNAL OF HUMAN SCIENCES

A Peer-reviewed Journal
ISSN 2682-8731 (Online)

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How Did People Tweet in the 2018 Malaysian General Election: Analysis of Top Tweets in #PRU14

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ABSTRACT

Since 2008, Malaysian General Elections were often dubbed as “social media election”. Twitter's combination of brevity, immediacy, interactivity and virility has enabled it to become a go-to platform for political communication among politicians, journalists and citizens. To understand Twitter uptake among Malaysian citizen during the 2018 general election, this article adopts Shoemaker and Reese's hierarchy-of-influences model. The top 50 tweets from the political hashtag #pru14 between 28 April 2018 until 10 May 2018 will be analysed. The analysis will be based on two types of influences that may affect this mediation process; influences of political reality, the influences based on individual characteristics of users and the nature of communication on Twitter. This study found that when the mediated political event cannot be accessed directly by the public, tweets from influencers dominates the Top Tweets. However, when the public can get access to the mediated events directly, tweets from the public are catching the attention on the #PRU14. This study also found that there are more male twitters than female, and most of them appeared to be in their youth.

Keywords: *election, Malaysia, politics, Twitter*

INTRODUCTION

Twitter has emerged as an important platform in shaping political discourse all around the world, particularly during elections. Rapid dissemination of information through the social media platform has enabled political actors, including politicians, journalists and the public, to broadcast their message to a wide audience (Casero-Ripollés, Sintés-Olivella, and Franch, 2017; Linvill et al., 2019; Yaqub et al., 2017). In Malaysia, due to the control of the media by the ruling government, the Internet plays an important role in opening up the space for political deliberation by the public. During the 12th General Election (GE12) in March 2008, online news and social media became the platform for the opposition group to reach the Malaysian voters (Sani, 2014). As a result, the opposition party managed to deny the ruling government party, Barisan Nasional (BN), a two-third parliamentary majority for the first time since 1969. Social media continued to play an important role during the 13th General Election 2013. Although Barisan Nasional managed to retain power, the opposition party managed to further reduce the majority of BN and win the popular vote.

The recent 14th General Election in May 2018 saw the opposition group, Pakatan Harapan coalition, which mainly used social media as a campaigning platform, manage to end the ruling Barisan Nasional coalition's six-decade-long monopoly and win a historic election. It marked the country's first transition of power since independence more than half a century ago. The victory of the Pakatan Harapan coalition, which used mainly social media platforms as campaigning tools, in the 2018 General Election has re-invigorated the discussions regarding the predictive power of social media during

elections. Twitter, in particular, has become the centre of attention for policymakers and researchers because users are contributing to and creating the content (Sweetser and Lariscy, 2008). Also, since Twitter data can be collected in real-time, it allows researchers to test and predict electoral results using social media almost instantaneously (Metaxas and Mustafaraj, 2012). Although past studies showed ambivalent results regarding its merit as a tool for election forecasting, the role of Twitter for online political discourse, particularly during elections, is still attracting the attention of researchers, policymakers, political scientists and news organisations (Small, 2011).

The main question is why Twitter users tweet the way they do and what are the factors that shape the Twitter content during the election. Jungherr, Schoen, and Jürgens (2016) argued that Twitter does not present a true reflection of social or political life, but, instead, one mediated by various factors. They found that the reflection of politics in Twitter messages is not unfiltered, but the result of a mediation process. For a person to tweet, a political event has to trigger the interest of a Twitter user and be in line with the user's political proclivity. Only then are the reactions to political events encoded in 240 characters or less. They argue that the mediation process comprises at least three sets of factors: characteristics of phenomena in political reality at large, characteristics of Twitter users and the technological design of the digital service.

This argument is based on the framework of Reese and Shoemaker's (2001, 2016) "hierarchy of influence" model, which advocates on taking levels of analysis perspective to determine the factors that shape Twitter content. It helps to explain the relationships among individual-level and their routines, the organisations and the institutions that they represent, and the social systems within which they operate and help maintain.

The question is how mediated political events, characteristic of users and the nature of communication on Twitter shaped Twitter contents during the 2018 Malaysian General Election. To examine this question, this article analyses a data set of Twitter messages referring to politics posted during the campaign for the 2018 General Election from arguably the most dominant hashtag, #PRU14. The characteristic of top Twitter users on #PRU14, dominant topics of politically-relevant messages with topics raised by them, and to what extent the political events influenced the Twitter content will be examined.

Not many studies have been carried out to look into the usage of Twitter as political communication in Malaysia particularly during elections. A study by Kasmani, Sabran, and Ramle (2014) found a lack of diversity in the discussion on Twitter-sphere during the 2013 Malaysian General Election. Pauline Leong (2015) argues that new media has enabled more voices to emerge and challenge the political hegemony. However, no literature investigates the characteristics of Twitter messages and how that could explain the political reality from the Malaysian context. This study adopts the framework from Jungherr, Schoen, and Jürgens (2016) that looks into the factors and processes influencing the mediation of reality through the usage patterns of Twitter during the 2018 General Election. The framework is adopted to demonstrate to what extent Twitter messages reflect the political reality at large during the election.

Hierarchy of influences model

Shoemaker and Reese (1996) introduce the hierarchical model of influences, by looking at the process of gatekeeping in journalism from five levels of perspectives, namely —individual, routine, organisational characteristics, extra media and ideological. They argue that these forces have different levels of strength in shaping the media content (Reese, 2001).

Shoemaker and Reese (2016) subsequently revisited the hierarchy of influences model to adapt to the ever-changing media eco-system, particularly with the advent of social media. They argue that social media has shifted old boundaries and encouraged new, more spatially-oriented concepts. However, most of the new media with which we engage is still mediated in some form whereby we don't experience it directly. To understand the mediation process, the levels of analysis perspective promoted by the "hierarchy of influences" could help to explain the relationships from the individual-level factor to the social systems within which the social media operate.

The hierarchy of influences model (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996; 2014) considers factors at five levels of analysis that shape media content, suggesting ways in which variables can be defined and related. These include, from the micro to the macro: individual characteristics of specific content producer, their routines of work, organisational-level concerns, institutional issues and larger social systems. The model 'takes into account the multiple forces that simultaneously impinge on the media and suggest how influence at one level may interact with that at another' (Shoemaker and Reese, 2016; 1). At each level, one can identify the main factors that shape the symbolic reality — revealed through content, and show how these factors interact across levels and compare across different contexts.

This article concentrates on the first and the most micro level of influence, where we assume that individual characteristics and knowing what they help understand the larger Twitter content—who is being drawn to the make the comments and how adequately they reflect the political reality of that time. The individual level of analysis considers the personal traits of Twitter users, the values they adhere to, professional roles they take on and other demographic features (e.g., gender). Thus, this level of analysis considers the relative autonomy of individuals, how they are shaped by, contribute to and identify with their surroundings.

To further explain the mediation of political reality through Twitter, this discussion also considers another two factors that may affect the mediation process on Twitter (Jungherr, Schoen, and Jürgens, 2016); these are the characteristics of political reality and the technological influence of communication on Twitter. Jungherr, Schoen, and Jürgens (2016) argue that, for a person to tweet, it should be based on the following two processes; first there should be a particular political instance that has to grab the attention of a Twitter user for him or her to consider referring to politics in a tweet. Secondly, users have to encode their responses based on the political event within the technological limitations of the microblogging service.

Influences based on individual characteristics of users

Influences based on individual characteristics of users mean that each message is based on the decision of an individual Twitter user to post a tweet mentioning political actors, events, or topics. Past studies show that Twitter reflects the opinions of a small, non-representative, politically interested and partisan subgroup of a population (Barberá and Rivero, 2015). These groups have high levels of political interest, are more Internet savvy and are more likely to be involved in political issues (Vaccari et al., 2013). With high political interest, they express strong political preferences and are more partisan (Lodge and Taber, 2013). Therefore, their views are likely more overrepresented in online communication as compared to the population at large. Studies also indicated that Twitter users are mostly young and highly educated and believe themselves to be more liberal (Mitchell and Guskin, 2013; Vaccari et al., 2013).

Besides, the supporters of a party that is underrepresented in the mainstream media tend to voice their opinions more online than supporters of parties well-represented in the media. This means

supporters of governing parties, which are well-represented in mainstream media discourse, appear to use Twitter less intensively than those from opposition parties (Vaccari et al., 2013).

Influences of political events

Influences of political events are based on the idea that the political reality at large could lead Twitter users to post messages referring to politics. Three types of political events might lead users to refer to politics in their messages (Jungherr, Schoen and Jürgens, 2016). First, users might react to direct experience of political events, such as participation in campaign events, or meetings with politicians. Second, users might react to indirect experiences of politics, such as televised debates, election night coverage, or news reports. Thirdly, they might refer to content on the Internet, such as Twitter messages or Facebook posts by other users.

Speaking about the indirect experience, most people experience politics indirectly through mass media coverage or live from the Internet, such as Facebook Live. These major political events covered by the mass media are believed to attract the attention of more users simultaneously and, as a result, will be reflected in Twitter messages and content (Jungherr, 2016).

METHOD

The backbone of this analysis is a collection of Top Twitter messages from #PRU14 posted between April 28 and May 10, 2018, about two weeks in the run-up to the 9th May 2018 Malaysian General Election and a day after the election. Using the keyword #PRU14, the Top Tweets feature, which is a new algorithm that finds tweets that are catching the attention of other users relating to #PRU14, will be used. The algorithm looks at all kinds of interactions with tweets, including retweets, favourites and more to identify the tweets on #PRU14 with the highest velocity beyond expectations (Twitter, 2018).

The dataset of Top Tweets is queried at about 8 am the next day of the selected date. This to ensure that the Top Tweets feature already finds tweets on #PRU14 that are catching the attention of other users. To ensure an even distribution of sampling, the analysis will take the 50 Top Tweets for each day. This brings the total sample of analysis for the 13-day duration to 650 Tweets. The dataset of Top Tweets is analysed in two ways. First, a thematic codebook was developed and used for manual coding of all selected tweets. The top tweets in #PRU14 are coded based on the profile associated with each tweet to get information about the types of users, whether they are politicians, celebrities, journalists, bloggers, organisations or normal public users and the gender and the age of the users. The type of information and the amount of detail can vary from profile to profile. There are limitations to this approach, as users may not give accurate representations of themselves (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). Secondly, a close reading of the selected tweets was carried out to determine the political leanings of the tweets. The type of political message and the style of Twitter communication will also be analysed. This includes determining what is the topic discussed and how the tweets are communicated. Close reading is an important approach to the analysis to identify themes and uncovering meaning from Twitter posts.

FINDINGS

The extent to which political events impacted the discussions on Twitter and to what extent the characteristics of the users shape the discussions can be measured once the daily messages in the volume of top tweets messages in #PRU14 from 28 April 2018 until 10 May 2018 are examined.

There were four important events during this period. The first was on the 28th April 2018, which was the nomination day for the candidates, after which parties could begin campaigning. The second event was the final speech on the 8th May by the leader of Barisan Nasional, Najib Razak, and his challenger, Mahathir Mohamad, the leader of Pakatan Harapan, the opposition party. The third event was the day of the voting on the 9th May 2018, and the final major political event was the oath-taking ceremony on the 10th May 2018. No major political event happened except for normal campaigning events throughout the country between 29 April and 7 April 2018.

28 April 2018: the nomination day

Examining the content of top tweets of #PRU14 on the nomination day showed that it discussed several issues and controversies which happened during the day. The first was when the Pakatan Harapan (PH) candidate for the Rantau State Assembly, Streram Sinnasamy, was barred from entering the nomination centre to submit his nomination documents. The second issue was when another PHs candidate, Tan Yee Kew, forgot to bring her identification card to the nomination centre, which almost cost her the nomination. The third issue, also involving an opposition party candidate, was the rejection of Tian Chua's nomination by the Election Commission. It is noticed that all the issues discussed on the Top Tweet of #PRU14 were about the candidates of the Pakatan Harapan coalition.

The top contributors during the nomination day are from the social media influencers in Malaysian politics. An influencer, also known as power users, in this context is defined as an individual whose actions and opinions carry more weight with the general public than is the case with most other individuals (Vaccari and Valeriani, 2015). Influencers in this context include media organisations, journalists, bloggers, NGO group, cartoonists and politicians, which contributes to more than half of the top 50 tweets during the nomination day. These influencers have at least more than 10k followers, with some of the politicians having up to 4 million followers. Table 1 shows the top 50 contributors in #PRU14 on 28 April 2018.

Table 1: *Top 50 contributors of Top Tweets in #PRU14 during the nomination day*

Type of contributors	No of tweets (n)	Percentage
Public users	19	36%
News organisations	11	22%
Journalists	8	16%
Politicians	6	12%
Bloggers	3	6%
NGO groups	2	5%
Cartoonist	1	3%
Total	50	100%

Updates from a journalist from the Malaysian news agency Bernama @f4izalhassan (Hassan, 2018) regarding issues and controversies during the nomination days are among the top tweets on #PRU14; six tweets in the top tweets in #PRU14 are from him. What is interesting is that tweets from @f4izalhassan were not simply direct reporting. His tweets, as shown below, mostly updated, with interjections that give a sense of the drama of what was happening during the nomination days.

Tian Chua has been disqualified !!! Boom!! #GE14 #PRU14 (Hassan, 2018)

Guess what happened today? PKR WANGSA MAJU candidate lost/misplaced/forgot to bring her IC!!! It's a race against the time before 10 am to find it or she will be declared as KALAH TANPA BERTANDING #PRU14 #GE14 (Hassan, 2018)

News updates from five media organisations were also top tweets during the nomination day. Three of the media organisations are from the mainstream media, namely Astro Awani, Utusan Malaysia and Harian Metro, a Malaysian independent radio station, BFMNews, and a Negeri Sembilan state news provider, Senawang TV. A video tweet from a pro-BN Malay daily newspaper, Utusan Malaysia, which showed the moment when the PKR candidate for Rantau State Assembly, Streram Sinnasamy, was barred from entering the nomination centre, was among the top tweets of the nomination day. Two tweets from BFMNews on the nomination of Azmin Ali, who was the Chief Minister of the state of Selangor, and a light-hearted tweet which featured a cat in a nomination room dubbed as “Datuk Si Manja bin Kucing” were also among the top tweets on #PRU14.

Tweets from BN politicians were dominant during the nomination day. There were four tweets from @NajibRazak updating his followers on his nomination process. There was also a tweet from Najib’s deputy, @Zahid_hamidi, and the Chief Minister of Sabah, @sallehsaid, each sharing their pictures during the nomination day.

Other tweets that were attracting attention on #PRU14 were from four influential twitter accounts; top bloggers @milosuam and @padangbolasepak, a cartoonist, @zunarkartunis, and a partisan Twitter account named @Oh_Malaysiaku. All of their tweets were either criticising the Malaysian Election Commission or showing their support for Pakatan Harapan. Tweets from @padangbolasepak gave updates on the nomination process of PH candidates, while @milosuam was attacking Barisan Nasional (BN) candidates. Cartoonist @zunarkartunis shared his sketch lamenting that the election was the dirtiest yet and @Oh_Malaysiaku, a twitter account with more than 28 thousand followers, was blaming BN for not allowing Streram Sinnasamy into the nomination room. Two tweets from political NGO Bersih 2.0 also featured in the top 50 tweets and similarly criticised the election commission for disqualifying Tian Chua and barring Streram from entering the nomination centre.

Nineteen of the tweets featured in the top 50 tweets were from public users. Public users in this context mean individuals having fewer than 1000 followers and less influencing powers than the power users as explained above. Nevertheless, they still manage to catch the attention of the Twitter user with their tweets. It is the main interest of this study, therefore, to understand the profile of these public users and their contributions which were attracting attention during the election period. From the 19 tweets, 10 tweets were reacting or commenting to the "drama" or controversial issues during the nomination day. Most of them showed their incredulity that the PH candidate, Tan Yee Kew, forgot to bring her identification card. They were making fun of her and comparing her to Azwan Ali, a flamboyant celebrity who was unexpectedly running as an independent candidate battling against his older brother, Azmin Ali, who was a major candidate in Pakatan Harapan and a former Chief Minister of the state of Selangor.

Good job PKR. Even before anyone can sabotage them, they're already fucking themselves up #GE14 #PRU14 (Choo, 2018)

I thought Azwan Ali was the worst candidate for #PRU14 until I realised he didn't forget to bring his IC. (#TeamRayaKajang, 2018)

Another nine tweets from the public were either updating on the nomination of their preferred candidates, requesting for tickets to go back to vote, showing support to their political party or commenting on random issues relating to the election, such as thanking the police force for keeping the nominations peaceful and safe.

A clear pattern to be seen in the demographic of the twitter users in the top 50 tweets is that, except for a tweet from a female student who was requesting a ticket to go back to her hometown to vote, all tweets in the top 50 were male. From the analysis of the profile of public users, all of them appear to be young males aged between 20-30 years old. Another important observation is that the main agenda catching attention in the #PRU14 during the nomination day was issues and problems faced by the Pakatan Harapan candidates.

The pattern of top tweets during the nomination day suggests that tweets from influencers were catching more attention in #PRU14 compared to the tweets from the public. One of the reasons could be because nomination events cannot be directly accessed by the public. The public relies, therefore, on updates from the news media later in the day or from the politicians or journalists who were mostly at the scene during the nomination day. This could explain why tweets from influencers were more visible in #PRU14.

Campaigning week: 29 April – 7 May 2018

Although the volume of politically relevant tweets during the nomination day showed that tweets from the influencers or the power twitters dominated the top tweets from the #PRU14, they provide a far from a comprehensive picture of the public tweets during the election campaign. Table 2 lists the top contributors and their percentage of tweets during the election campaign after the nomination day, from 29 April to 7 May

Table 2: *Top 50 contributors of Top Tweets in #PRU14 during the campaign period*

	29 April		30 April		1 May		2 May		3 May		4 May		5 May		6 May		7 May	
Contributors	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Public users	33	66	23	46	15	30	31	62	34	68	35	70	24	50	34	68	32	64
Politician	2	4	7	14	13	26	2	4	3	6	1	2	3	6	8	16	2	4
Journalists	-	-	-	-	3	6	8	16	3	6	1	2	4	8	1	2	4	8
News organisations	9	18	4	8	6	12	1	2	4	8	5	10	2	4			3	6
Bloggers	-	-	4	8	5	10	-	-	1	2	-	-	1	2	1	2	3	6
Cartoonist	-	-	1	2	1	2	2	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
NGO group	-	-	1	2	2	4	2	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	2
Partisan accounts	3	6	4	8	4	8	1	2	2	4	2	4	6	12	3	6	1	2
Others	3	6	6	12	1	2	3	6	3	6	6	12	9	18	3	6	4	8
Total	50	100	50	100	50	100	50	100	50	100	50	100	50	100	50	100	50	100

April 29 shows almost a reverse pattern to the nomination days, with 33 of the top tweets being from public users, and only 17 tweets from the influencers. From the 33 tweets, 18 of them showed support towards Pakatan Harapan, five for Barisan Nasional, one for PAS and nine showed no support towards any political party. Another important point is that, similar to the nomination day, from the 50

top tweets, male Twitterers were more dominant. Only three tweets posted were by female public users. Similarly, the analysis of the profile of public users showed all of them to be young male and female users.

Nine tweets did not show any support towards any party, either requesting for a ticket to go back to vote, sharing information about the percentage of voters, or making light jokes about the election. Due to there being no major political event on April 29, there is no clear agenda shared by the public users. Supporters of PH were mostly expressing their criticism of the Barisan Nasional government or explicitly sharing hashtags asking for a political change, such as #JomUbah, #inikalilah or #undiPH. Some tweets hashtags directly urged voters to reject Barisan Nasional, such as #tolakBN and #tolaknajib. Others criticised IMDB and PTPTN and opined how the Malaysian economy is colonised by China through economic projects done by the BN government in association with the government of China. One user asked @NajibRazak directly why he did not want to have an open debate with the leader of the opposition, Mahathir Mohamed. Two public users shared pictures from the campaign event of Pakatan Harapan.

There were nine tweets from media organisations featured in the top 50 tweets on April 29. All of them were from the mainstream media. Five were from Astro Awani sharing information about several constituencies and candidates for the incoming election. Two tweets were from Utusan Online, a pro-BN newspaper, campaigning for Barisan Nasional through hashtags #TsunamiPHitnah by attacking the opposition for allegedly spreading slanderous news. Another daily newspaper, Sinar Harian, which is seen as more independent, shared story links of PAS and BN candidates. There were only two tweets from members of political parties; one from PAS and one from Pakatan Harapan, updating their campaigning events.

April 30 shows a slight dip in the number of public tweets in top 50 #PRU14 to 23 tweets. Similar to the previous pattern, more than half of the public tweets were in support of Pakatan Harapan. Similar to the demographic of previous Twitter users, all of the Twitterers from the public are young males, either criticising Najib and accusing him of taking the citizens' money or warning voters of a rigged election orchestrated by the Election Commission.

The dips in public tweets were replaced by a "battle" between pro-BN Bloggers @ZulAzharCha and pro-PH blogger @milosuam. Each has two tweets in the top 50 of #PRU14, either attacking or supporting each other's candidates or urging voters to vote for their supported party leaders. There was also competition among the politicians of both sides in the #PRU14 on April 30. There were two tweets each from @NajibRazak and @Zahid_hamidi and three tweets from Pakatan Harapan candidate Charles Santiago, updating their campaigning events.

May 1 showed a further dip in the public tweets in the top 50 of #PRU14 with only 15 tweets. The tweets supporting Pakatan Harapan still dominated the public tweets with nine, with only one tweet that supported BN and five which were neutral. The tweet from a BN supporter shared a video that mocked Mahathir Mohammad as being a DAP "poodle" and urged voters to not vote for him. One tweet from PH supporters urged people to use their power for political change to get rid of the "corrupt government". Three tweets gave direct replies to @NajibRazak, with one asking him to stop attacking politicians on his social media and instead focus on more pressing issues and another blaming him for the hooliganism culture in Malaysia.

The decrease in public tweets in the top 50 tweets of #PRU14 on May 1 was replaced by tweets from politicians. Familiar faces, such as Zahid Hamidi (six tweets) and Charles Santiago (two tweets) were catching the attention of Twitter users. Tweets from the daughter of the opposition leader, Marina Mahathir, @netraKL, PH candidate Ong Kian Ming, @imokman, and PH political representatives Wan Saiful Wan Jan, @wansaiful and Ibdilillah Ishak @ibdil appeared in the top tweets. Both pro-BN Blogger @ZulAzharCha and pro-PH blogger @milosuam again featured in the top 50, with @ZulAzharCha sharing a picture and a video attacking Mahathir Mohamed, and @milosuam showing support for PH Candidate Nik Omar Nik Abdul Aziz and urging people to reject BN.

Two tweets were from Bersih 2.0, a coalition which advocates for clean and fair elections, which aligns to Pakatan Harapan, were also featured in the #PRU14. The tweets slammed the Malaysian Electoral Commission which was said to be responsible for removing photos of Mahathir Mohamed and Anwar Ibrahim from the billboard in Ayer Hitam and Bayan Baru, respectively. A tweet from online news provider @msiadecides, which is also aligned to Pakatan Harapan, echoed this by sharing a news link of how citizens were outraged over the issues. @msiadecides also shared quotes from a former minister, Rafidah Aziz, who showed her support of Mahathir Mohamed and urged the people to change the government.

There were also tweets from several partisan accounts, which appeared to be created to support a particular party. It cannot be ascertained as to who are the individuals behind these twitter accounts, but, from the tweets and the description of their profile, these accounts mainly showed support for BN, namely @1Agenda_1A1M, @delia_11_ and @SuaraBiasa, and their tweets were mainly attacking the leader of the opposition party, Mahathir Mohamed. Two tweets, from a pro-BN online news provider, @TheRakyatRasmi, also featured in the top 50 with one tweet allegedly blaming DAP for allowing Mahathir Mohamed's photo to be edited from the billboard and one claiming Tun M as a poodle of DAP.

From the demographic point of view, similar to the previous pattern, except for two tweets from an editor of Singaporean Media Channel News Asia, @ClaraChooi, all tweets from the top 50 tweets on the May 1 are dominated by males, with most of the public users appearing to be young male users.

The next six days of the campaigning period, as shown in Table 2, showed an increase in the number of public tweets, which accounted for more than half of the top tweets in #PRU14. One important observation is that, while public tweets catching the attention of #PRU14 were coming from varied Twitter accounts, the contributors from the influencers in the top 50 of #PRU14 during the campaigning period on the 29 April to May 7 were mostly coming from the same group. They are:

Media

- @NewsBFM (Independent media organisation)
- @BernamaNewsCH (government media agency)
- @msiadecides (pro-opposition media)
- @MalaysiaGazette (Pro- BN online news media)
- @UMonline (Pro-BN news media)
- @BHarianmy (Pro-BN news media)

Politicians

- @mpklang (Charles Santiago - PH candidate)

- @NajibRazak
- @Zahid_Hamidi
- @imokman (Ong Kian Ming - PH candidate)
- @chedetofficial (Mahathir Muhammad)
- @rafziramli

Journalists

- @Kama7esh_
- @f4izalhassan
- @ClaraChooi

Bloggers/ Cartoonist

- @milosuam (pro-PH blogger)
- @ZulAzharCha (pro-BN blogger)
- @zunarkartunis (Cartoonist)

Partisan accounts

- @fabm11 (pro-BN account)
- @delia_11_ (pro-BN account)
- @padangbolasepak (pro-PH account)

Organisation

- @bersih2 (NGO group – pro-opposition)

Similar to the previous day following the nomination day on April 28, the demographic pattern of public Twitter users from May 2 until May 7 is consistent throughout the campaigning period wherein young males who are showing support of Pakatan Harapan are dominating the top 50 tweets of #PRU14, as shown in Table 3 and Table 4 below.

Table 3: Gender distribution of public tweets in the Top 50 tweets of #PRU14 during the campaigning period

	29 April		30 April		1 May		2 May		3 May		4 May		5 May		6 May		7 May		
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	
Public Users																			
Male	29	90	23	100	14	93	23	74	27	79	27	77	14	58	31	91	29	90	
Female	4	10	-	-	1	7	8	26	7	21	8	23	10	42	3	9	3	10	
Total	33	100	23	100	15	100	31	100	34	100	35	100	24	100	34	100	32	100	

Table 4: Political slanting of public tweets in the Top 50 tweets of #PRU14 during the campaigning period

	29 April		30 April		1 May		2 May		3 May		4 May		5 May		6 May		7 May		
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	
Public Users																			
PH	20	66	17	74	11	73	24	77	24	71	27	77	21	88	27	79	31	97	
BN	5	15	3	13	1	7	2	7	3	8	-	-	1	4	1	3	-	-	
PAS	-	-	1	4	-	-	2	7	5	15	4	11.5	-	-	5	15	-	-	
Neutral	8	24	2	9	3	20	3	9	2	6	4	11.5	2	8	1	3	1	3	
Total	33	100	23	100	15	100	31	100%	34	100	35	100	24	100	34	100	32	100	

May 8 - Final address and final day of the campaign

May 8 witnessed the highest number of tweets from the public featured on the top tweets of #PRU14 with 42 out of 50 top tweets. The main mediated political event during this day was the final address by the leaders of Barisan Nasional, Najib Razak, and Pakatan Harapan, Mahathir Mohammed. It was also the last day of campaigning for the election. Thirty-eight of the tweets from the public showed support towards Pakatan Harapan, three tweets were neutral and one showed support towards PAS. May 8 also showed an increase in the number of young female Twitters with 16 tweets, but tweets from young males still dominated with 26 tweets.

There were two main discourses from the public during this date; first, they were urging voters, particularly the youth, to exercise their votes to make political change, as shown below:

40% of voters today are the youth. Go out and vote. Be the change you preach to see... #MalaysiaMemilih #PRU14 (Ash, 2018)

How privileged must you be if you can choose to detach yourself from your country's politics because "it doesn't affect you"? #PRU14#GE14 Wake up! Not everyone has this privilege. Your "peace" and ignorance comes at the price of others' sufferings. (Ler, 2018)

Others are more explicit in their persuasion in asking voters to vote for Pakatan Harapan.

Oh Lord pls make the oppo pack wins this time. We have had enough of Kleptocrats and their allies. Pls grant us new and better #Malaysia. Ameen! #GE14 #PRU14 #PakatanHarapan (Bella, 2018)

Esok pangkah PAKATAN HARAPAN #PRU14 (theikrammasiri, 2018)

The second discourse from the public is reacting to the final speech by the two-party leaders. The main consensus was that the final speeches by Mahathir Mohamad and Najib Razak were totally in contrast; while the opposition leader talked about the future of Malaysia, Najib Razak was seen as trying to “bribe” the citizens with handouts and public holidays.

I don't know about you, but the fact Najib thinks candies like those can buy our votes, it angers me more than anything. Our votes are not for meaningless handouts. Our votes are for the future of Malaysia. Remember that. #GE14 #PRU14 #BinaHarapan (Yoong, 2018)

Dr M giving the speech of his life to get Malaysians behind PH, to get rid of corruption and 'cash is king' culture. Meanwhile, Najib gave candies like no tax for 26 y.o and below, public holidays and 5 toll-free days during Raya. Vote wisely, Malaysians. #GE14 #PRU14 (Yoong, 2018)

May 9: The election day

The day of the election, which was on the 9th May, showed tweets from the public were still dominating the top tweets of #PRU14 with 36 tweets; with 24 from males and 12 from females. Tweets from celebrities appeared in the top 50 this time, such as from a model, @sfqomhz; an actor, @Alvinchong123, and authors, @aimanazlan90 and @aafaizli. There was only one tweet from the media, @NewsBFM, which gave updates of the election results. All of the tweets in the top 50 mainly showed their celebration over the unprecedented election results in which the Pakatan Harapan coalition won a simple majority in the House of Commons. It was seen as a historic victory that ended the ruling BN coalition's 60-year grip on power. There were two important themes in the public discourse on May 9; first - Malaysia is creating a new political history with the new government without Barisan Nasional for the first time since independence, and, second, they are welcoming back Mahathir Mohamed as the leader of the country.

9 May 2018. I'm so proud to be alive at this moment. I'm so happy to be able to witness history in the making. And I'm so grateful it happens. Subhanallah. Alhamdulillah. Astaghfirullah! (Gabbana, 2018)

Tun Dr Mahathir will be the longest-serving PM in the world. Malaysia is making history by tomorrow. A new change is coming. Safe to say now that Tun M will be our next Prime Minister! Tahniyah Tun Dr Mahathir! #GE14 #PRU14 (Diniesorayaa, 2018)

May 10: The oath-taking ceremony

Similarly, on May 10, a day after the election, tweets from the public users were still dominating the top 50 tweets with 36 tweets. The main political event of the day was the oath-taking ceremony by the new Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohammad. Interestingly, this time public tweets from young female users are almost equal to the young males, with 17 tweets. Most of the top tweets from female Twitterers are about observing and expressing their emotions towards Mahathir Mohammed and his wife during the oath-taking ceremony, as shown below.

AW LOOK AT BOTH TUN DR. MAHATHIR AND TUN DR. SITI HASMAH!!! THEY'RE SO CUTE MY HEART ODNSSHSSH WHY #GE14 #PRU14 (miranakajima, 2018)

There are also several tweets from the public expressing their frustrations about the oath-taking ceremony which was unusually commencing later that night.

Can I know why for the past elections, the new term PMs were sworn in right away, no delay, no need for an audience and whatever but this current one, in 2018, is dragging the time of the nation as well as @chedetofficial who obviously needs to rest!! #ge14 #PRU14 #Malaysia (Pocahontas, 2018)

Analysis of May 8, 9 and 10 shows that the mediated political events offered only a partial view of how they were getting the attention of Twitter users. Examining the top 50 users of #PRU14 during the three days showed tweets from the public dominated the top tweets when the mediated event could be accessed directly by the public. Even though the users were accessing the political events indirectly through other media, such as television channels or social media channels like YouTube or Facebook, the fact that the events could be viewed live meant more public users were reacting and commenting on the events and they relied less on updates from other media, such as newspapers, news bulletins and online news, or updates from social media influencers. The final speech by Najib Razak was available live from mainstream television channels while the final address by Mahathir Muhammad was broadcast live from the Facebook page of Pakatan Harapan. Similarly, the result of the election was available in real-time whereby the public could get the up-to-minute updates from television channels and online news websites. Another eagerly awaited event, the oath-taking ceremony, was also available to the public live on the Malaysia television channels.

This is in contrast with another high impact political event on April 28, which was the nomination day where tweets from the influencers dominated the top 50 tweets in #PRU14 with almost 70% compared to tweets from the public. Unlike the political events of May 8, 9 and 10, the nomination day was not broadcast live by the mass media, and public users on Twitter relied more on tweet updates from influencers instead of commenting on the events directly. That could explain the high popularity of tweets from the influencers in the top 50 tweets of #PRU14.

DISCUSSION

The analysis shows that Twitter users reacted to mediated political events during the election by posting more tweets referring to a specific event. Examining the data shows that days, where there was a particular high-profile event, led to the increases in the discussion of Twitter messages on that specific political event.

The community of contributors to #PRU14 is wide-ranging, including individual, bloggers, media organisations, journalists and interest groups. This article pays much attention to the division of the contributors of the top tweets in #PRU14 into two categories: public users and influencers. In line with previous studies, public users tend to be younger, having a higher propensity of being male (Vaccari et al., 2013). This is also in line with a study by Ausserhofer and Maireder (2012) among political Twitter users in Austria that showed an immense gender gap among male and female twitter users. One reason to explain uneven contributors to #PRU14 between men and women is that it mirrors men's greater representation in Malaysian politics. One interesting finding, however, is that there is an increase of female Twitter contributors as the election approaches and they tend to express their emotions and observations of mediated political events.

Analysis of the top 50 tweets on #PRU14 shows that the availability and the impact of the mediated political events shaped the way public users reacted or commented on the events on Twitter. When there were no specific mediated political events, for example, during the campaign weeks, the discussions on #PRU14 were more random, but still related to politics. As the election day approached, public users became more interested to discuss and opine about political issues on Twitter. Tweets from the public dominate the top tweets over tweets from the influencers, such as politicians, bloggers and news media.

When there is a high impact mediated event, but it is not available to the public through the mass or social media, the influencers dominate the discussion on Twitter and their tweets attract attention as public users rely more on updates by them. However, once the public can have live access to the event, they will rely less on the update from the influencers and give their reactions and opinions on Twitter. As a result, the top Twitter tweets are dominated by tweets from the public.

Based on the duration of the campaigning period until the day of the election, Twitter users on #PRU14 are seen to be politically partisan, either in support for or in opposition to a given party. Analysis of #PRU14 shows high to mention and support for Pakatan Harapan. This is in line with the past research that supporters of opposition parties appear to use Twitter more extensively than those from governing parties (Conover et al., 2012) as the governing parties are well represented by the mainstream media. Although the representation of Malaysian public opinion on #PRU14 could be said to be skewed towards the opinions of a non-representative and partisan subgroup of a population which supports the Pakatan Harapan coalition, this high support among public users towards PH in #PRU14 was reflected in the electoral results of the 2018 Malaysian General Election.

The references to candidates in Twitter messages focused almost exclusively on the leaders of the BN and PH, Najib Razak and Mahathir Mohammad, and dominated the daily political discussion on #PRU14. Other candidates are all but invisible in the messages posted by politically vocal Twitter users. It can be seen that there is a connection with the mediasphere and the Twittersverse. Media organisations and journalists contributed about 10% of #PRU14 tweets, particularly during the nomination day and the campaigning events when the public could not get direct access to the event.

However, as the election day approached and during a high impact political events where the public could get live access to them, the reference to the news reports and journalists are almost non-existent.

Looking at the nature of the conversation on the top tweets of #PRU14, messages referring to politics are mainly commentary containing information and opinion and little conversation between users (Small, 2011). Most of the commentary on candidates and parties tend to be negative in tone as well as humour, irony and satire and comments on the horse race between candidates being very prominent (Bruns and Burgess, 2011; Mejova et al., 2013; Trilling, 2015).

Based on Shoemaker and Reese's (2016) hierarchy of influences model, this article found that influences based on individual characteristics of users and influences of political events are useful in understanding the dynamics of political communication on Twitter. The findings in this article prove that Twitter messages rise strongly in reaction to mediated events (Bruns and Burgess, 2011). Looking at the individual characteristics and knowing whom they are helping to understand the larger Twitter content—who is being drawn to make the comments, when and how adequately they reflect the political reality of that time. Contributions from public Twitter users in the collective discussion and negotiation of political discourse with political elites, journalists and other influencers during the course of the campaign and mediated political events in #PRU14 is interesting. It explains the integrated element of political communication in a "hybrid media" environment (Chadwick, Dennis, and Smith, 2016). The views of politically vocal Twitter users, which represent a young, non-representative and partisan subgroup of the Malaysian public, are far from frivolous or fleeting. The fact that they rightly reflect the political reality at large based on the result of the 2018 Malaysian General Election makes want us to rethink the potential of Twitter to predict election results.

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