

The using of Facebook in Malaysia's 14th General Election: An Analysis of INVOKE

Zawiyah Mohd Zain and Zalinah Ahmad

School of Government, UUM COLGIS, Universiti Utara Malaysia, Kedah, Malaysia

Keywords: Facebook, Barisan Nasional, General Election, Pakatan Harapan.

Abstract: The Barisan Nasional coalition had dominated Malaysian election for more than 60 years. Most of the time, the coalition party were able to have majority to form the government. However, Barisan Nasional had lost their powers to Pakatan Harapan coalition during 14th election in year 2018. The usage of social media such as Facebook may influence the result of the election. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to discuss the using of Facebook as platform for political campaign in Malaysian 14th general election by using of INVOKE Facebook as a discussion case. This paper uses secondary data such as books, journals, social media and research reports. Information from secondary data is analyzed by using content analysis method and thematically discussed. This paper argues that Facebook is the effective medium to get support from the people in 14th general election. This is due to two factors, first, Facebook had easier and greatest platform to reach among potential voters and it can be targeted very specifically to voters' locations, demographics and interests. Second, via Facebook, peoples had discussed various scandals that happened during Najib Razak's premiership as Prime Minister during May 2013 until May 2018. One of the popular Facebook account during 14th general election campaign is INVOKE Facebook, the volunteer organization that supported Pakatan Harapan candidates.

1 INTRODUCTION

Social media is a medium used to promote social networking specially explore the usage of social network websites, Majority of American citizens gather online and offline social capital because the primary purpose of social media use is to maintain and increase one's online and offline social networks (Ellison et al., 2007). Social media is a popular media platform around the world including Malaysia. This media is synonym with the increasing number of internet users around the world. In 2019, there are 4.44 billion of internet users and the number keeps increasing by 9.1% year-by-year. In addition, the user of social media is 3.48 billion increased by 9.1% year-by-year also. In Malaysia, the number of internet users in 2018 was 25.1 million, which represented 79% from 31.83 million of Malaysian population (Smartinsights,).

Political candidates may have limited control over how mainstream news media may frame the election. Therefore, they are using social media as a platform to design and provide alternative election narratives (Howard et al., 2006)(Kreiss, 2012). Candidates have adopted digital communication for strategic purposes, allowing supporters to engage with the

campaign. The use of internet in Malaysia as a part of political campaign has been widely applied since the reformed era, known as Reformasi, in which, after Anwar Ibrahim was sacked from cabinet in 1998. His supporters switched to alternative media, namely Internet because government restricted the issue to be broadcast in main media. The popular application during reformed era and 1999 general election was website. With the development of technology, there have various applications of social media likes blogs, Linked in, You Tube, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

Social media has been popular for the purpose of gaining supports from voters since 12th General Election (GE12), through blogs and news portals (Sani and Azizuddin, 2014). While in the 13th General Election campaign (GE13), the most popular social media is Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and twitter. During the 14th General Election (GE14), the Internet campaign is more focused on Facebook, and it is one of the factors that BN lost its power in GE14 and no longer formed the government. The Internet World Statistics in year 2017 estimated that out of Malaysia's 32 million people, some 22 million people are Facebook users (Chinnasamy and Manaf, 2018).

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to analyze the use of Facebook in GE14 in Malaysia.

According to (Sani and Azizuddin, 2014), during GE13 Barisan Nasional's, also known as BN (the political party that previously formed the government) image was marred by the issues of graft and abuse of power such as Port Klang Free Zone scandal, National Feedlot Corporation scandal on cow-and-condominium fiasco, and the Scorpene submarine Saga. Pakatan Rakyat (PR) coalitions exploited the issues through social media to gain votes, later contributing to the significant outcome of the election. BN won 133 parliamentary seats and maintained the federal power with seven seats fewer than 2008 election. BN also lost popular votes to PR, and during the following election in 2018, BN lost its power to Pakatan Harapan (PH) coalitions (previously known as PR).

Welsh (Welsh, 2018) argued there are two factors that contributed to the BN's failure to retain the power during GE14. The first factor is the social political conditions which is political polarization and anger among Malaysian about various issues (such as 1MDB scandal, corruption, the implementation of Goods and Services Tax - GST). The second factor is the extensive use of modern campaign through social media (such as Facebook and WhatsApp).

In addition, Nadzri (Nadzri, 2018), as identified four major contributing factors, and all these factors are interconnected to the fall of BN in GE14. First, the existence of a much more credible, representative, and stronger opposition during GE14 has influenced the result of GE14 in which the inclusion of Mahathir, Bersatu and Warisan within PH coalition. Second, the rupture existed among the elites within the ruling regime also contributed to the failure of BN to remain in power. . Third, the existence of influential negative issues surrounding Najib's administration. Finally, the advancement use of ICT and its impact on the emergence of a digital had influenced on creating more participative society in Malaysia.

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section will discuss the method used by the authors to study the using of internet in the political campaign. The researchers used secondary data such as articles from the selected journals, books that focus on social media as well as research reports published by other scholars who are relevant to the topic under study. Besides, the specific Facebook accounts also have been monitored before and after the General Election in order to gauge the extensive used of the

social media by political candidates. The INVOKE Facebook also has been explored since the account really influenced public in terms persuade public in choosing the political candidates. All the information derived has been analyzed by using the content analysis method and thematically discussed.

3 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section will discuss the findings based on secondary data that both authors used to get information on usage of social media. The focus will be on the using of Facebook, as a main social media instrument used by the candidates in the general election.

3.1 Social Media and Facebook

Statistics showed that 29% of the entire world population has used social media (aresocial.sg). Out of the 2.1 billion do have active social media accounts, 1.685 billion are the active mobile social accounts. Among popular social media platforms, Facebook is way ahead with more than 1.3 billion active user accounts monthly. Thus, the scenario makes the social network something akin to the largest virtual nation of the world. It has close to 1 billion daily for active users (Zai, 2016).

Kaplan and Heinlein (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010) defined social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content". Additionally, social media applications are websites that "communicate with the users, while giving them information." It is this two-way nature of social media that make it preferable than the traditional media networks. The most popular social media application is the Facebook. Mark Zuckerberg, a student in Harvard University, had created Facebook in 2004 as a way to connect with fellow students. Initially, the media was adopted by high school and college students. However, during its initial public offering filing in year 2012, there were 845 million active users of the social network worldwide. In addition, approximately 161 million active monthly users in the United States of America and making it the leading social media service in the world. If Facebook were a country it would be the third largest country behind China and India (Safranek, 2019). The Facebook users can communicate by sending the friends requests. They have options to deny the requests or accept them. In case of adding friends they can update their status, can write on the friend's time line, send private and public mes-

sages, share pictures and make audio and video calls. The Facebook provides the facility of joining pages and groups, liking, following and searching their interest groups and events.

3.2 The using of Social Media in General Election

During the 12th General Election in year 2008, opposition parties highly depended on using internet for political campaign because they were barred from using main media by the ruling government. The focus was on news portal application and blogs. The ruling party, BN had disregard and ignored the use of internet since the printed media and electronic media were under their controlled and believed that these two media had more advantages over the blogs (Ronasina, 2018). Consequently, BN failed to get two-thirds majority in Parliament (House of Representative).

The 13th General Election was considered as an era of social media in election because the usage of twitter, Instagram and Facebook for political campaigns. Both contested parties (BN and PR) had extensively used the social media and took the opportunities to interact and got support from public at large. For instance, ex-Prime Minister, Najib Razak was active in twitter and popular in Facebook as well. Similar like previous elections, opposition parties or coalition, and social activists did not have access to dominant mass media and they had to use the media social platform effectively. Towards 13th General Election, they have used social media to express dissatisfaction towards Najib Razak and his ruling party (BN) and urged public to reject UMNO and BN for the coming election. There were several issues that had been raised via media social. First, the luxurious expenses recorded on Najib's family during oversea vacation and purchasing of expensive accessories by Najib's wife, Rosmah Mansur. Second, government action in designing and implementing Akta Perhimpunan Aman (Peaceful Assembly Act) and SOSMA to replace Internal Security Act (ISA) that was abolished in 2011. Third, public were dissatisfied with government action on introducing new tax, known as goods and services taxes while the costs of living keep increasing from time to time. As a result, PR had successfully reduced the number of seats won by BN in the 13th General Election. The BN maintained 133 seats in which previously were 140 seats and PR had achieved popular votes by 50% as opposed to BN (47% of popular votes).

3.3 Facebook and 14th General Election

The 14th General Election was held on 9th May 2019. This general election had witnessed three-cornered contest among main political parties, namely Barisan Nasional, Pakatan Harapan and Warisan, and Gagasan Sejahtera (PAS). For the first time, BN had lost the power since 1957. PH had put a history by gaining enough seats to form a government. PH and Warisan had won simple majority by having 129 seats as compared to BN (79 seats). PAS on the other hand, had won 18 seats. In terms of percentage, PH had managed to get 50.1% of votes, BN got 32% of votes while PAS got 18% of votes (Cheng and Pey, 2018).

The main reason why BN had lost the election was due to political campaign through social media specifically Facebook. Towards the 14th General Election, social media, like Facebook had been extensively used for the purpose of the campaign. One of the main reason of using Facebook because of its characteristics such as less concern on distance and time, borderless and the huge number of Facebook users. Facebook can broadcast the political campaign activities, forum, current news, live video coverages to followers and targeted audience or public at large. In fact, the posted video can be viewed at any time. Previously, public relied on the dominant mass media especially electronic media to get information about current political news and it only showed news from the ruling party. Thus, through Facebook, public can get information from both sides – ruling and opposition parties. They can view the activities and news from the opposition parties as well. Besides, candidate running for the election may show their political campaign activities by uploading photos and news.

Moreover, by using smartphone, the process would be faster and easier to upload the photos and events and update the candidates' status from time to time. All the displays about candidates' activities either formal or informal may create close relationship between candidates and voters or public in general. Indirectly, the voters may support the candidates. This approach was consistent with the trend among public who were the Facebook users by updating status and uploading photos and sharing information. During the 14th General Election, among the candidates who used Facebook account to deliver their messages were Najib Razak, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, Mohamad Sabu, Nurul Izzah Anwar, Khairy Jamaluddin, Lim Guang Eng, Syed Saddiq, Hannah Yeoh and others.

Furthermore, media social like Facebook offered direct communication with followers and public at large. Any questions or issues can be posted and get

the immediate answer or explanation by the candidates. The candidates may display current news without the help from reporters. The Facebook account holders may update information, status, and news and upload any other relevant materials by themselves. They may not need the reporters or other people to update their status. Besides, the communication among followers also occurred and these interactions may expedite the process of delivering the messages.

Second reason was the issues and scandals that overwhelmed the government administration that created dissatisfaction from public towards BN and Najib Razak. One of the issues was about the introduction of GST in year 2016. GST imposed had increased the price of goods and cost of living. Besides, the misuse of power within the administration of government link corporation, such as 1MDB. There was a claim that the money from 1MDB had been channeled to Najib Razak's personal bank account (Saravanamuttu, 2016)(Wright and Hope, 2018). Another issue was corruption and misuse of power in other government link corporations such as FELDA, Tabung Haji and MARA. These issues were widely discussed among Facebook users. According to Chinasamy & Norain (Chinasamy, 2019) issues like GST, candidates' reputations and 1MDB scandal were the main causes of political hatred expressed on social media platforms. In gaining support and momentum for the 14th General Election, Facebook INVOKE has been developed to expose and discuss the weaknesses of government administration.

3.4 INVOKE

What is INVOKE? INVOKE is a non-governmental organization created by Rafizi Ramli (an ex Member of Parliament from Pandan and Vice President of PKR). He developed INVOKE officially in year 2016. INVOKE had recruited nearly 42,000 volunteers to assist PH to win the election (14th general election). INVOKE had used multiple approaches or methods such as doing political campaign for PR candidates, and over the phone surveys covering almost 400,000 Malaysians. INVOKE had gathered data from social media, petitions and online communication involved huge numbers of voters. The weekly calls done by volunteers were aimed to identify swing voters in order to know their voting preferences. By having the profile of voters' political preferences, INVOKE may identify issues and provided messages that were effectively persuade these groups of voters. In fact, political campaigns are increasingly using sophisticated data analytics to direct targeted messages to potential voters (Kreiss, 2016). Besides volunteers to help

in campaigns, INVOKE also mobilized polling and counting agents (PACAs) nationwide to monitor the election process. By doing so, it may contribute in reducing incidents of reported electoral fraud in the election.

INVOKE had interacted with public by using varieties of social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, twitter and Instagram. INVOKE established its Facebook account on 28th December 2016 and received 105 million 'LIKE' till May 2019. Some of the activities showed were live events or activities on political campaign. INVOKE used a modified truck as a vehicle to reach voters and bring all political campaigns all over the country. INVOKE arranged series of talk and dialogues with public over national issues, such as salary/pay rise, price increase in goods and GST, illegal foreign workers. In addition, live press conference on issues in government such as 1MDB, FELDA, MARA and Tabung Haji also had been aired under INVOKE platform. For instance, INVOKE had live press conference on issues of Tabung Haji on 13th October 2017 and it had reached up to 6.6 million viewers. Besides, INVOKE also produced local and foreign news to public. For instance, GST new was released on 27th July 2017 while news about Rohingya refugee crisis was also uploaded on 17th September 2017. INVOKE also had prime news at 8 in the evening, known as INV8. This news program served as alternative news channel for public since BN monopolized the entire mainstream news channel during the campaign.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Before the general election, political campaigns did play important role in gaining supports from the voters. In Malaysia, the used of varieties social media as an interactive medium or platforms for political campaigns had contributed to the winning of political parties. Public or voters used social media to interact to each other and also share information. During 13th General Election, political actors had used You Tube, Facebook, twitter, blog and portal news to share information. However, during the campaign for 14th General Election, Facebook was a popular social media and effective platform that described the changes result of the general election. Facebook had been chosen due to its characteristics such as accessibility and borderless.

REFERENCES

- Cheng, K. and Pey, J. Y. (2018). *The Numbers on Malaysia's 14th General Election*. Penang Monthly Jun 2018.
- Chinasamy, S. (2019). *Facebook is expected to be the main platform to be used to disseminate information during the 14th*. New Straits Times.
- Chinnasamy, S. and Manaf, N. A. (2018). Social media as political hatred mode in malaysia's 2018 general election. In *SHS Web of Conferences*, volume 53. EDP Sciences.
- Ellison, N. B., Steinfield, C., and Lampe, C. (2007). The benefits of facebook "friends:" social capital and college students' use of online social network sites. *Journal of computer-mediated communication*, 12(4):1143–1168.
- Howard, P. N. et al. (2006). *New media campaigns and the managed citizen*. Cambridge University Press.
- Kaplan, A. M. and Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! the challenges and opportunities of social media. *Business horizons*, 53(1):59–68.
- Kreiss, D. (2012). Acting in the public sphere: The 2008 obama campaign's strategic use of new media to shape narratives of the presidential race. In *Media, movements, and political change*, pages 195–223. Emerald Group Publishing Limited.
- Kreiss, D. (2016). Seizing the moment: The presidential campaigns' use of twitter during the 2012 electoral cycle. *New media & society*, 18(8):1473–1490.
- Nadzri, M. M. (2018). The 14th general election, the fall of barisan nasional, and political development in malaysia, 1957-2018. *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 37(3):139–171.
- Ronasina (2018). 2018. *UndiRosak Musuh Baru Harapan*. Dlm. *Tang Ah Chin*, pages 81–86.
- Safranek, R. (2019). *The Emerging Role of Social Media in Political and Regime Change*. ProQuest Discovery Guides <http://www.csa.com/discoveryguides/discoveryguides-main.php> [1].
- Sani, M. and Azizuddin, M. (2014). The social media election in malaysia: The 13th general election in 2013. *Kajian Malaysia: Journal of Malaysian Studies*, 32.
- Saravanamuttu, J. (2016). *Power sharing in a divided nation: Mediated communalism and new politics in Six decades of Malaysia's elections*, volume 536. ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute.
- Smartinsights. Global social media research summary 2019 — Smart Insights.
- Welsh, B. (2018). "saviour" politics and malaysia's 2018 electoral democratic breakthrough: Rethinking explanatory narratives and implications. *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 37(3):85–108.
- Wright, T. and Hope, B. (2018). *Billion Dollar Whale: The Man who Fooled Wall Street, Hollywood, and the World*. Hachette Books.
- Zai, Y. (2016). State of Social Media in Pakistan in 2016.