



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH IN BUSINESS & SOCIAL SCIENCES



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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v13-i5/17245>

DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v13-i5/17245

Received: 17 March 2023, **Revised:** 19 April 2023, **Accepted:** 30 April 2023

Published Online: 16 May 2023

In-Text Citation: (Manan & Shukri, 2023)

To Cite this Article: Manan, N. A. A., & Shukri, A. I. S. S. (2023). The Relationship Between Vividness and Engagement on Social Media Postings of Selected Malaysian Politicians. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 13(5), 2034 – 2044.

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Vol. 13, No. 5, 2023, Pg. 2034 – 2044

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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH IN BUSINESS & SOCIAL SCIENCES



www.hrmars.com

ISSN: 2222-6990

The Relationship Between Vividness and Engagement on Social Media Postings of Selected Malaysian Politicians

Nor Ashikin Ab Manan¹ & Alia Izzati Sham Shul Shukri²

¹Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Perak, Kampus Seri Iskandar, MALAYSIA, ²Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA 40450 Shah Alam Selangor, Malaysia

Corresponding Author's Email: noras914@uitm.edu.my

Abstract

This study was conducted to investigate vividness level of the Facebook and Twitter posts put up by four selected Malaysian politicians and to determine the relationship between vividness and engagement on their social media postings. The study employed purposeful sampling and the data collected were analysed quantitatively. The participants of the study were four (4) politicians dubbed as the new generation of Malaysian politicians: Syed Saddiq [1], Hannah Yeoh [2], Amirudin Shari [3] and Kasthuri Patto [4]. The data for the study were social media postings put up by the aforementioned politicians, which were directly related to the Taman Sri Muda flood crisis, dated from the 17th of December 2021 to the 10th of January 2022. It was found that a total of sixty-three (63) related posts were put up by the politicians during the study period. Thirteen (13) posts have high vividness while thirty-two (32) and eighteen (18) posts have medium and low vividness respectively. It was also found that there is a significant ($p=0.001$) moderate positive linear relationship ($r = 0.392$) between vividness and engagement on the social media postings of the selected Malaysian politicians. The findings of the study are significant as they contribute to the body of literature on social media communication. The information from the study is beneficial to social media platform managers for businesses or political parties as it provides useful insights on vividness and its effects on social media engagement.

Keywords: Social Media Engagement, Vividness, Communicative Practices

Introduction

Social media has become a powerful instrument for social interactions in modern society. According to Meel and Vishwakarma (2020) social media users spend numerous hours on social media sites daily. Based on a study by Kemp (2020), ninety-nine percent (99%) of internet users in Malaysia have access to social media sites. It was also found that eighty-six percent (86%) of Malaysian population are active social media users, with a penetration rate of eighty-nine percent (89%) on Facebook and seventy-five percent (75%) on Instagram (Statista, 2021). Individuals and businesses have been using social media to express their

opinions openly and to promote their products respectively (Jeong et al., 2019). Beyond that, most-followed social media users, known as social media influencers, post marketed content to persuade and influence consumer purchase intention towards certain brands (Hudders et al., 2020).

Politicians are no exception. Politicians often use social media platforms to persuade the general public by applying techniques that stimulate public reactions. The posts are strategically curated to strengthen the exposure and reinforce the image of politicians in the public sphere. These platforms enable political candidates to engage with voters, reach out and influence the general public (Stier et al., 2018). This study aims to explore the vividness levels of social media postings by the new generation of Malaysian political members on their social media to influence public opinion and develop social media engagement.

This study only focuses on Facebook and Twitter, as both platforms are the most popular choice for social connection (Larsson, 2017; Shane-Simpson et al., 2018). Four Malaysian politicians who fit the criteria of a new generation of politician, were chosen for the study. These politicians are among the driving force of Malaysian politics, often questioning the traditional way of thinking thus, have acquired important roles in the political scene. The research objectives of the study were:

- RO1: To determine the vividness level of the social media postings of the selected politicians.
- RO2: To investigate the relationship between vividness and engagement on the selected politicians' social media postings.

Based on the study objectives, two research questions were formulated which were:

- RQ1: What is the vividness level of the social media postings of the selected Malaysian politicians?
- RQ2: What is the relationship between vividness and engagement on the selected politicians' social media postings?

Literature Review

Previous scholars have studied how social media influences news consumption, political discourse, and political information (e.g. van Erkel & van Aelst, 2020; Kim & Ellison, 2021; Kim & Lee, 2021). Along the same line, scholars have analysed the potential of online discussion sites in a political context (e.g. Song et al., 2018; Yoo & Zúñiga, 2019) and politicians' use of social media for political communication (e.g. Buccoliero et al., 2018).

Vividness

Vividness refers to "the degree to which information addresses various senses" (Schultz, 2017, p. 24). The message posted on social media can evoke different types of receptive emotions and responses from the publics. For example, a text message that only stimulates visual sense is less vivid than video content that stimulates both audio and visual senses. A study by Luarn et al (2015) found that vividness had some influence on social media engagement.

Engagement

Bruce and Shelley (2010) defined engagement as interactions between organizations and the public. Social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook provide mainly three distinct

routes for public engagement: *Like*, *Comment*, and *Share* (or *Retweet* for Tweeter). For example, Facebook users often share contents on their social networks and such content forwarding behaviour could significantly increase the reach of the messages. Furthermore, Facebook users could actively craft *Comment* to engage in conversations. Cho et al. (2014) identified public engagement with Facebook messages as *Like*, *Comment*, and *Share*. Similarly, scholars interested in public engagement on social media often employed behavioural metrics of Like, Comment and Share, as engagement (Men et al. , 2018; Rus & Cameron, 2016). Such conceptualization of public engagement assisted researchers in capturing public interactions with organizational messages on Facebook.

Scholars have paid considerable attention on understanding the communication characteristics on social media that could trigger public engagement since public engagement is considered an indicator of content popularity and effectiveness on social media (Jain et al., 2020; Mazid, 2022; Saxton & Waters, 2014). Researchers such as McLachlan and Newberry (2021) gave the impression that content can simply be more engaging or less engaging. However, Tenenboim (2022) opined that the ways of interaction or modes of engagement may be associated with different content characteristics. For example, Akpinar and Berger (2017) found that emotional messages trigger engagement on social media. Similar findings were reported by Alhabash et al (2013) who revealed that emotional tone influences engagement. However, Kim (2015) found that engagement could be triggered by informational utility, content familiarity, exemplification, and positive sentiment. In addition, engagement can also be triggered by political attack messages as attested by (Lee and Xu, 2018). Most importantly, in addition to social media contents there have been numerous studies which concluded that the richness of the posts, or vividness impacts user engagement (de Vries et al., 2012; Luarn et al., 2015). Aydin (2019) further elaborated that video format posts encourage active engagement such as sharing of opinions and comments, while picture-formatted content stimulates passive users' engagement through liking behaviour.

Research Methodology

The researcher used purposive sampling for this study as proposed by Campbell et al. (2020), since this method is best suited to meet the study objectives. Four politicians dubbed as the new generation of Malaysian politicians were selected for the study. The politicians were Syed Saddiq who was labelled as [P1], Hannah Yeoh was labelled as [P2], while Amirudin Shari and Kasthuri Pato were labelled as [P3] and [P4] respectively. The politicians were selected based on the specified requirements which were: (a) being keen on reformation, (b) being critical of the government and societal issues, and (c) having social media platforms. Consistent with prior social media research, this study considered the number of Facebook and Twitter *Like*, *Comment*, and *Share* or *Retweet* as metrics to measure public engagement. The level of vividness is considered as 'LOW' for text-only posts, 'MEDIUM' for posts with pictures and 'HIGH' for posts with videos. This study employed descriptive statistics to address RQ1 and Pearson Correlation to address RQ2.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

The researcher went online and collected relevant Facebook and Twitter posts of the four selected politicians on a specific issue which was the Taman Sri Muda flood crisis. Taman Sri Muda, a residential area in the state of Selangor, Malaysia, experienced the worst flash flood in December 2021. Many residents lost their homes and even lives as parts of the residential area were inundated in flood waters as deep as four metres. The incident caught

the local government off guard and caused an uproar among the public for the lack of coordination in the rescue efforts during the crisis. Facebook and Twitter posts put up by the selected politicians dated from the 17th of December 2021 to the 10th of January 2022 were used for the study. The selected posts were those which highlighted relief efforts initiated by the politicians and their calls for more government accountability on the issue. The captions, visual aspects, and the total number of likes, shares, and comments of the posts were also collected for the purpose of examining vividness and social media engagement relevant to the objectives of the study. There were no ethical issues in data collection as the social media posts collected are in the public domain.

Results

A total of 63 posts were collected during the study period. Table 1 shows the number of Facebook and Tweeter posts collected for each politician in the study.

Table 1
Number of Facebook Posts and Tweets During the Study Period

Politician	Number of Facebook Posts and Tweets
Syed Saddiq [P1]	18
Hannah Yeoh [P2]	5
Amirudin Shari [P3]	35
Kasthuri Patto [P4]	5
Total	63

Figure 1, 2 and 3 are excerpts of the social media posts of Syed Saddiq [P1], Hannah Yeoh [P2] and Amirudin Shari [P3], depicting the posts with ‘HIGH’, ‘MEDIUM’ and ‘LOW’; vividness levels respectively.

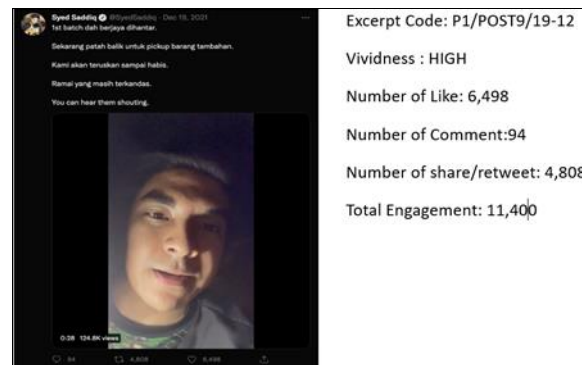


Figure 1
An Example of a post with High Vividness

Figure 1 shows a post by Syed Saddiq [P1] which was considered as having high vividness. In addition to text message, the post was accompanied by a video message as well. It can be seen that the post received 6,498 *LIKE*, 94 *COMMENT* and 4,808 *SHARE* which came to a total of 11,400 engagement.

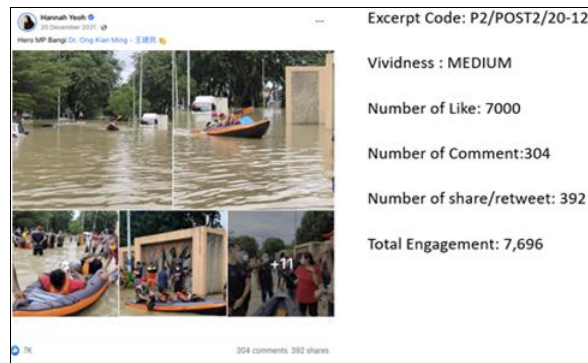


Figure 2
 An Example of a post with Medium Vividness

Figure 2 shows a post put up by Hannah Yeoh [P2]. In addition to a text message, it was accompanied by several pictures taken at the site showing the relief efforts underway. The post is considered as having medium vividness. The post received 7000 LIKE, 304 COMMENT and 392 SHARE which came to a total of 7,696 engagement.

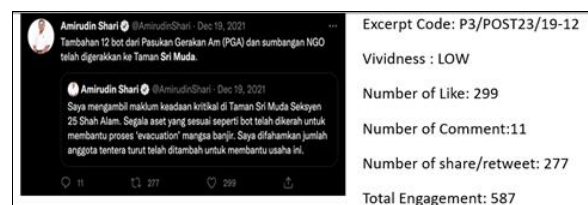


Figure 3
 An Example of a post with Low Vividness

Figure 3 shows a text-only post which was put up by Amirudin Shari [P3]. The post is considered as having low vividness. The post received 299 LIKE, 11 COMMENT and 277 SHARE which came to a total of 587 engagement.

Research Question 1

The first research question (RQ1) was: ‘What is the vividness level of the social media postings of the selected Malaysian politicians?’ To address the first research question, table 2 is referred.

Table 2
 Vividness level of the Social Media Posts

	VIVIDNESS LEVEL		
	HIGH	MEDIUM	LOW
Syed Saddiq [P1]	7	9	2
Hannah Yeoh [P2]	3	2	0
Amirudin Shari [P3]	3	19	13
Kasthuri Patto [P4]	0	2	3
Total	13	32	18

Based on Table 2, out of eighteen (18) posts put up by Syed Saddiq [P1] seven (7) of them were of high vividness, nine (9) were of medium vividness and two (2) were of low vividness. On the other hand, Hannah Yeoh [P2] put up three (3) posts with high vividness and two (2)

posts with medium vividness. Amirudin Shari [P3] posted three (3) high vividness posts, nineteen (19) medium vividness posts and thirteen (13) low vividness posts. Finally, Kasthuri Patto put up two (2) posts of medium vividness and three (3) posts of low vividness.

Engagement

Table 3 shows vividness of the social media postings by the selected politicians and the total number of engagement.

Table 3

Vividness level of the Social Media Posts and Engagement

Vividness Level	Number of posts	Total LIKE	Total COMMENT	Total SHARE/RE-TWEET	Total Engagement	Average Engagement Per-post
HIGH	13	59,269	2,005	37,159	98,433	7,571.76
MEDIUM	32	66,156	8,451	34,802	109,409	3,419.03
LOW	18	13,305	987	6,889	21,181	1,176.72
TOTAL	63	138,730	11,443	78,847	229,023	12167.51

Based on Table 3 it can be seen that social media posts with HIGH vividness received an average of 7,571.76 engagement per post while posts with MEDIUM and LOW vividness received 3,419.03 and 1,176.72 engagement per post respectively. Thus, it can be concluded that posts with high vividness received a higher number of engagement per post compared to posts with medium and low vividness.

Table 4

Average number of LIKE, COMMENT and SHARE

VIVIDNESS LEVEL	AVERAGE PER POST		
	LIKE	COMMENT	SHARE
HIGH	4574.54	3012.62	2858.38
MEDIUM	2067.38	264.09	1087.56
LOW	739.17	54.83	382.72

Table 4 shows the average number of *LIKE*, *COMMENT* and *SHARE* per post for postings with high, medium and low vividness. Based on the table it can be seen that postings with high vividness have a higher number of average *LIKE*, *COMMENT* and *SHARE* per post which were 4574.54, 3013.62 and 2858.38 respectively compared to postings with medium vividness which received an average *LIKE*, *COMMENT* and *SHARE* of 2067.38, 264.09 and 1087.56 respectively. Similarly, postings with low vividness received a much lower average number of *LIKE*, *COMMENT* and *SHARE* of 739.17, 54.83 and 382.72 respectively.

Research Question 2

The second research question (RQ2) was: 'What is the relationship between vividness and engagement on the selected politicians' social media postings?' To address the second research question (RQ2) a null hypothesis was developed as follows

H0: There is no relationship between vividness and engagement on the selected politicians' social media postings.

To determine whether there exists any relationship between the two variables, Pearson's correlations statistical analysis was utilised. Table 4 shows the summary of Pearson's correlation results.

Table 4
Results of Pearson's Correlation

		Vividness	Engagement
Vividness	Pearson's Correlation (r)	1	0.392*
	Significance (p)		0.001
	N	63	103
Engagement	Pearson's Correlation (r)	0.392*	1
	Significance (p)	0.001	
	N	63	63

**Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level.*

Based on Table 4, since the probability value obtained from the statistical analysis (0.001) is less than the predetermined alpha value of 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected. There exists adequate evidence to show that $p < 0$. Thus, it can be inferred that there is a significant moderate positive linear relationship ($r = 0.392$) between vividness and engagement on the social media postings of the selected new generation of Malaysian politicians. From this result it can be inferred that the higher the vividness level, the higher the engagement.

Discussion and Conclusion

The study found a moderate positive linear relationship between vividness and engagement which is in line with a study conducted by Fortin and Dholakia (2005) who stressed that the impact of vividness appears to be linear with a steady increase across low, medium, and high levels. However, Pearson Correlation results in the current study cannot be inferred as causal relationship. Nevertheless, the findings are consistent with the findings of Yousaf et al (2021) who concluded that greater message vividness, with more interactive/audio-visual content, leads to higher engagement. Unlike Bronstein et al (2018) whose research do not point to a clear relationship between multimedia use and social media engagement, Shahbaznezhad et al (2021) found that online content richness or in other word, vividness, determines engagement.

Implication and Future Research

The findings of the study are significant as they contribute to the body of literature on social media communication. The information gained would be beneficial to social media managers tasked with managing social media platforms for businesses or politicians as it provides useful insights on vividness and its effects on social media engagement. Given the volume of research in this field, this research is able to aid in setting the groundwork for possible future research. This study only focused on two social media platforms of these politicians which were Facebook and Twitter. Thus, future research may be extended to include data from other social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok which are gaining popularity among the younger generation. As stressed earlier, the relationship suggested by Pearson Correlation does not infer causal relationship. To determine whether there is causal relationship between vividness and engagement, Regression analysis can be carried out in future research.

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