An Analysis of Public Perception towards Proclamation of Emergency during Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Malaysia's ruling regime has a lengthy history of manipulating security issues to achieve political goals, as seen by its proclamations. As a result, rumours of Proclamations of Emergency to prevent the rapid spread of COVID-19 cases emerged in October 2020, which the public viewed as an attempt to maintain the ruling party's authority. Citizens and political opponents both reacted negatively to the rumours. The study reported in this paper attempted to understand public perceptions and perception management toward tweets posted on Twitter and through the online survey with general society, that could be related to the emergency and the COVID-19 pandemic, which could affect government administration in dealing with social, political, and economic situations. To evaluate public perceptions and perception management in the aforementioned conditions, this study used social media content analysis and an online survey. The content was analysed using hashtags such as #Darurat, #KerajaanGagal, and #Kitajagakita to gain insight into the concerns that were addressed among Twitter users. As a result, three major topics have been identified in this research – i) public perceived the emergency as a political move; ii) public perception towards the King; and iii) public perception on economic situation. Meanwhile, the government's perception management was identified using the Four Canonical Information Warfare Strategies as a guide. As a result of this research, it was determined that the government used two techniques to influence public perception on the concerns discussed, i.e., Denial and Destruction. Following that, 702 people took part in an online survey released through Google Forms. The findings revealed that 48.2 percent of respondents are dissatisfied with the government's handling of the pandemic outbreak, while 40.2 percent are currently satisfied. Then, 55.3 percent of respondents disagree that the government has managed the negative effects of the national and personal economies properly, and 48.4 percent disagree that the government should extend the emergency beyond August 1, 2021, which would jeopardise Malaysia's economic resilience. Ultimately, the public's perceptions of the Proclamation of Emergency and the government's management of the matter, which is related to the COVID-19 outbreaks, were revealed in this study. The final set of public perception and perception management issues investigated using content analysis on Twitter and an online survey has provided insight into people's sensitivity to the current topics highlighted.

Keywords: Proclamation of Emergency, Public Perception, Perception Management, COVID-19.

1.0 Introduction

Based on the history of Malaysia, there were five states of emergency or *Darurat* had been declared. The first declaration was in 1948 to weaken the Malayan Communist Party. The second was in 1964 due to a confrontation with Indonesia and the third was in 1966, which the emergency was declared in Sarawak to deal with the constitutional impasse caused by the dismissal of the Chief Minister of Sarawak. Whilst the fourth was in 1969 to deal with racial conflict – the 13th May Tragedy and the fifth was in 1977 in Kelantan, as a result of deteriorating ties between the Central and State governments. Out of these five Proclamations of Emergency, only two proclamations of the post-independence period? were justified by the grave of emergency conditions at that time, namely, to deal with the Indonesian Confrontation and the 13th May Tragedy [1].

Examining the history of proclamations reveals that Malaysia's ruling regime has a long history of manipulating security issues to accomplish political objectives. It was a useful instrument to adopt in terms of state-building and political power maintenance. Thus, it is foreseeable? that when speculation about the Proclamation of Emergency is to combat the growing spread of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) cases began in October 2020, which? was interpreted by the public as an attempt to maintain the ruling party's power. The rumours elicited negative responses from citizens and political adversaries.

As previously said, the issue is viewed from a particular perspective. The political opponents used the Proclamation of Emergency rumour to tarnish the ruling government – *Perikatan Nasional's* public image. The smear campaign spread quickly with the advent of technology and social media where 8th the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin alleged trying to stop opposition political activities to ensure his party continue to hold power, to prevent Members of Parliament from voting against Budget 2021, and to silence voices demanding for the 15th General Election.

The mainstream media, such as TV3, *Berita Harian*, and *Utusan Malaysia* said that the announcement will have no impact on society's ordinary life because it was meant to stop the spread of the COVID-19. However, since these dominant media entities are government-owned and their contents are selected to give positive images to the ruling government, it is impossible to claim that the contents represent the entire Malaysian public. This behaviour is consistent with Haswell's Seven Principles of Deception — multi-channel assistance.

Therefore, as discussed above, the primary purpose of this study is to analyse public perceptions and perception management toward tweets posting on Twitter and through an online survey with the society in general, which could be related to the Proclamation of Emergency and the COVID-19 pandemic, which in turn, could affect the government administration in handling the situations, i.e., social (public health), political and economic. Hence, this study attempts to employ social media content analysis and an online survey to investigate the public perceptions and perception management towards the aforesaid situations. Also, this study strives to seek the comparison of public perception and perception management between tweets content on Twitter and direct responses using an online survey, which could explain the sensitivity of the people towards the issues discussed.

Additionally, the analyses of public perceptions and perception management used by the government or certain parties would assist this study to demonstrate the Malaysian public responses toward the government's pandemic emergency directive in terms of the relationship between overall risk perception and crisis management; risk perception and economic threat perception; crisis management and behavioural guidelines compliance; as well as perceptions of crisis management and economic threats. Moreover, the social media content analysis data and online survey data will be use in this study to analyse the constitutional monarchy and government roles in disclosing and tackling the issues on COVID-19 pandemic, which in turn also, will help the citizens to be proactive and effective in curbing the situation.

Henceforth, the outcomes of the public perceptions and perception management that could be related to the Proclamation of Emergency and the COVID-19 pandemic situation in this country,

derived from the analyses, will be described at the end of the study, representing the significance and conclusion of the study as well.

2.0 Literature Review

This section discussed a theoretical review of the past literature pertinent to this study. Therefore, the subsection of the past literature is stated below.

2.1 The 2020 State of Emergency: A Double-Edge Sword of Political Stability

The past studies on the state of emergency in Malaysia that are conducted by scholars and researchers were mostly based on the state of emergency period during the Communist Insurgency era from 1948 to 1960. Not many past studies can be found that studied the state of emergency occurrences although there were four emergencies that have been declared in Malaysia history since its independence.

Important to note that there are two main reasons for the declaration of the state of emergency including to protect the national security of Malaysia and also for internal security and political purposes. For instance, according to [2] the 1964 Emergency was declared under the security reason of the Federation, which was threatened due to the direct result of the neighbouring country Indonesia's that declared a policy of confrontation against Malaysia, as well as against the formation of Malaysian state on 16 September 1963. Whilst the 1966 Sarawak Emergency and 1974 Kelantan Emergency was declared to deal with the constitutional and political impasse caused by the dismissal of the Chief Minister of Sarawak and political squabbles and the power struggle between Federal and State government, respectively.

Looking back from the history of previous Proclamations of Emergency under political reasons, undeniably, there are a lot of questions on the sincerity and objectivity of the ruling government which was perceived as using the emergency as their tools to accomplish their political objectives in terms of maintaining political power). Thus, the Proclamation of Emergency in 2020 by the King – Yang Di-Pertuan Agong (YDPA) Sultan Abdullah Ri'ayatuddin Al-Mustafa Billah Shah Ibni Almarhum Sultan Haji Ahmad Shah under the ruling government of *Perikatan Nasional* (PN) led by the former Prime Minister, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, which was declared under the pretext of fighting COVID-19 pandemic spreads, was also seen as a double-edged sword to maintain the ruling party's power under the pressure of the opposition parties because of the razor-thin majority that the ruling government have in the Parliament.

The state of emergency can occur in a variety of situations. They are not always political, but natural disasters can also result in emergency situations. The reason for emergency powers is self-evident. It is to avoid any threat to the country's stability. Therefore, according to popular belief, there are six basic sorts of emergencies, such as war, economic slump, natural disasters, secession, insurgency, and subversion. Except in the case of a war-induced emergency, the others are considered as internal emergencies, and they are addressed through the use of peacetime emergency powers.

On the other hand, the term "emergency" is perplexing in and of itself. These confrontations were either possible or real colonial wars, or they were mainly public relations exercises. It had the benefit of allowing the government to exercise broad coercive powers while preserving the appearance of normal civil rule. Above all, the presence of emergency contributed to the idea that the issue at hand was one of law and order rather than a political threat to the ruling parties. An emergency was declared to restore order, with the goal of putting a stop to those who were causing the chaos. The emergency measures permitted the ruling government to identify opponents as lawbreakers who could be turned into criminals or terrorists as a result of their actions [3]. Whether the cause for the state of emergency is legitimate or not, the legal basis for its declaration under common or general law is generally based on the idea of state sovereignty [2].

Under the Malaysia Federal Constitution, in Article 150 (1) and (2), has empowers the YDPA to make a Proclamation of Emergency if he is satisfied that a grave emergency exists whereby the security, or the economic life, or the public order in the Federation of Malaysia or any part thereof is threatened or there is an imminent danger of the occurrence of such event. According to [3], there are various

interpretations by scholars on the major factors that led to the Proclamation of Emergency in 1948, and it has been divided into several schools of thought that focused and discussed the cause and reaction by the Communist Party of Malaysia and the British government. The decision by the British government to impose a state of emergency in Malaya in 1948 was motivated by the desire to maintain British dominance in the country. The emergency was also declared as a type of 'colonial war' as part of a British scheme to quell the threat of a nationalist movement that the British had purposely accused of being infiltrated by communist forces according to [3].

From this point of view, this study scrutinised that what happened in the 1948 emergency can be related with the current Proclamation of Emergency. As previously said, the emergency was declared under the pretext? of containing COVID-19 pandemic spreads, which was merely a measure to maintain the political power of the ruling government that is under pressure from the opposition parties. If we revisit Article 150 in the Federal Constitution, it clearly mentioned that the Proclamation of Emergency can only be made when the grave situation threatens the security, economic life or public order of the Federation. In the current situation, although the threat to the security, economic life and public order of the Federation was seen to exist, at the same time, the threat on the political power maintenance of the ruling government also exists, which is far more obscure and vulnerable. Henceforth, it could make the majority of the public see it as a sheer excuse by the ruling government to maintain their political power under the pretext of containing COVID-19 pandemic spreads.

Based on the previous research also, there is no doubt that the general society will give their full support to the Proclamation of Emergency if it is based on the real threats that came from outside, for instance, during Confrontation with Indonesia in 1964. This can be seen from the civilian arrest of the Indonesian paratroopers that landed in Pontian before they handed them to the authorities.

2.3 Public Perception and Perception Management: A Euphemism of Propaganda

Perception is defined as the way people think about something and their assessment of it. Also, it could be defined as the way people notice things with their senses of sight and hearing, and their innate capacity to understand and notice things fast. Moreover, perception is the process of becoming aware of or comprehending sensory information in psychology. The word 'perception' comes from the Latin words, such as '*perceptio*', '*percipio*' which means receiving, collecting, action of taking possession and apprehension with the mind and senses.

The term 'public perception' is difficult to define. At its most basic level, public perception can be made from the type of data gathered from a public opinion poll. To put it another way, 'public opinion' is simply the sum of the opinions or perceptions of a group of individuals (typically a randomly selected sample) who are asked directly what they believe about specific subjects or events. The answers to structured questions can be recorded and analysed in basic, quantitative terms as a 'snapshot' of public opinion at a certain point in time [4].

The distinction between an objective truth based on facts and a virtual truth created by popular opinion, media attention, and/or reputation is the social phenomena known as public perception [5]. The public's perception is not always correct or based on something other than the truth. Without depending on innuendo or inaccurate rumours, the general society can often obtain enough true information to establish a general view on something. However, there are times when other factors, such as cultural bias or prejudice, influence one's perspective of a scenario. A defendant suspected of committing a horrible crime may or may not be guilty of the actual crime, but the perception of such a crime might be difficult for a jury to overlook while deliberating it [6].

More importantly, one individual's 'perceptions' at one point in time are not always typical of their opinions at other times or in different settings. Beliefs are not just the product of accumulating knowledge in a linear fashion. Most people choose to 'see' things in specific ways, and the social and cultural determinants of those choices vary with time and place. Perception entails comprehension (or misunderstanding) as well as decision and action: people choose to 'see' things in certain ways. In addition, many beliefs are formed as a result of social contact. The act of expressing and debating one's views contributes to their development. Behaviour and practices are affected not only by beliefs, but also by the reflexive processes of social interaction, in which behaviour is challenged, affirmed, and

modified by others' perspectives. Knowledge and experience are influenced by a variety of social factors, such as the character and extent of people's faith in scientific experts and authority. The technique of gathering public perceptions and the consequences of those beliefs through research must be equally complex.

On the other hand, perception management is a communication method based on interaction; it is the process of changing communications in accordance with the target audience's perception level, resulting in the intended attitude and behaviour modification [7]. The view of perception management is a strategy for influencing another party's motives, emotions, and conclusions by utilising various approaches to change that party's perception of past events and projections of future occurrences [8]. Therefore, it could be interpreted as a euphemism for propaganda. In order to manage perceptions, an individual must ask questions and solicit input from others. This is because communication is the most important instrument for influencing views and motivating desired behaviour, and it takes a powerful combination of messages, messengers, and media to do it.

According to [5], perception management is the process of conveying and/or withholding selected information and indicators from targeted audiences in order to influence their emotions, motives, and objective reasoning. Also, it could be seen as intelligence systems and how leaders at all levels used it in order to influence official estimates, resulting in foreign behaviour and official actions that are favourable to the originator's objectives. Truth projection, operations security, covert operations, deception, and psychological operations are all part of perception management. Perception management is also known as public diplomacy, and some claim that it is now an established aspect of international strategic influence. Individuals, communities, and organisations all have distinct levels and aspects of the perception management process.

The perception management and information warfare have grown so common in the digital age that it can be difficult to distinguish myth from fact and image from reality at times. As a result, it is critical for the government to manage society's perception of all of the government's policies and programs in order to ensure that society will completely support the government. Therefore, as mentioned before, this study will employ social media content analysis on Twitter, and an online survey to assess public perception and perception management in relation to the ruling government's declaration of the emergency, which could be related to the COVID-19 pandemic situation.

It is critical to comprehend general society's perceptions of the current state of emergency because it will decide society's support for the move. For instance, if the society was not happy and perceived that the ruling government had hidden motives and agenda, then they would surely be against the move. It is also important to determine how the general society sees the government managing the perception of the people in dealing with the disagreement on the Proclamation of Emergency. Through the investigations of the content analysis on Twitter and an online survey, this study will analyse and evaluate the public perception of the society and perception management used by the government or certain parties, with regards to the proclamation of emergency, which in turn, could be related to the COVID-19 pandemic situation.

2.4 The Emergence of Social Media and A 'Free-Flow' of Information on Twitter

Social media is a phenomenon that has changed the way people connect and communicate all around the world. Social media, on the other hand, is not a new notion; it has existed since the 'birth of human connection'. In recent years, social media has had a significant impact on many facets of human communication, including business. In the life of some users, social networking has become a daily routine. According to [9], social media is defined as "forms of electronic communication such as websites for social networking and microblogging through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content such as videos".

Moreover, social media could be referred to activities, practises, and behaviours among communities of people who gather online to share information, knowledge, and opinions using conversational media. It is a group of internet-based applications that builds on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and allows for the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Conversational media are web-based apps that allow users to quickly produce and share material in the form of words, images, videos, and audios [10].

Valentini [10], again emphasized that, social media is defined as internet-based applications that allow users to create, exchange, or simply consume user-generated content, which includes blogs, wikis, RSS feeds, and social networking sites, as well as user-generated content aggregators such as Yelp and TripAdvisor, and location-based services applications, such as Google Places or Foursquare. The increasing use and dispersion of social media in many nations has made the social media ecosystem an appealing marketplace for organisations looking to get awareness and communicate directly with huge groups of people. The strategic communication professionals have both possibilities and problems as a result of social media.

Edosomwan et al., [11] stated that it is difficult to analyse social media without comprehending the term 'social networking'. There are numerous theories on when social media initially appeared. For example, the telegraph, which was used to send and receive messages over large distances, became the first source of information. Then, during the late 1800s, Emile Durkheim, a French sociologist, and Ferdinand Tonnies, a German sociologist, were regarded pioneers of social networks, who believed that social groupings may exist because members shared values and views or because they were in conflict with one another. Their ideas focused on society's social contract conceptions.

Over time, social networks have evolved into digital media-based platforms. However, social media is not a new phenomenon. Furthermore, it did not begin with the computer, but rather with the telephone. The public witnessed the birth of email in the 1960s. The internet, on the other hand, did not become widely available until 1991. An email, for instance, was originally a method to exchange messages from one computer to another, but both computers were required to be online.

Afterwards, during the 1970s, social media was further developed, and several social networking sites were launched in the 1990s. In the year 2000, social media gained a significant boost with the launch of a slew of new social networking sites, including Twitter in 2006. Twitter grew in popularity due to the variety of features it provided, such as microblogging, and the fact that it was used by celebrities [11]. According to [12], Twitter is a widely used free social networking tool that allows people to share information in a real-time news feed by posting brief comments about their experiences and thoughts [12]. Public messages sent and received via Twitter or 'tweets' – are limited to 140 characters and can include links to blogs, web pages, images, videos, and other online material. Despite the brevity of this media tool, it is widely utilised in a range of situations, and thousands of academics and researchers at all levels of experience and across all disciplines already use Twitter on a daily basis.

Twitter, as a communication medium, allows for the free flow of ideas between people interested in similar fields of knowledge on a national and worldwide scale, as well as the ability to engage in critical discourse. As a result, Twitter has recently emerged as one of the most essential digital channels for information dissemination and sharing. Users can utilise brief and direct messages to express their ideas and opinions, promote their results, and argue with millions of other users on this platform. The site's success is based on the capacity to follow and be followed, which results in a dense network of contacts who transmit and respond to messages. This results in a massive and continuous information flow in which even the most insignificant post can quickly become a global hot issue [13].

Henceforth, in this study, the researchers will examine how Twitter is being used by society or netizens to express their feelings and perceptions against the government's action to declare the current state of emergency. For example, the netizen was seen has created and shared series of hashtags such as #KerajaanGagal and #Darurat to express their negative feelings towards the government. However, there are other parties that are also being dragged into this polemics, including The King – YDPA, who was accused of supporting the ruling government – the PN, through the Proclamation of Emergency and even his royal families are also being harassed by the netizens.

3.0 Methodology

To examine the public perception and perception management towards the Proclamation of Emergency that could be related to the COVID-19 pandemic situation, this study used the qualitative and quantitative method to analyse the anticipated data from the content on social media – Twitter, as well as from the online survey. Therefore, the description of all the processes of the methodology used in this study is described accordingly throughout this subsection.

3.1 Qualitative Method: Social Media Content Analysis

3.1.1 Stimuli and Specimen

The qualitative method was used to analyse the social media content analysis. Therefore, the qualitative methods are intended to achieve depth of understanding on a particular topic [14]. According to [15], qualitative study is the best method to analyse social media since it holds much promise for qualitative researchers in information systems. The presentation of images might not only increase the contextual understanding of the reader, but can also provide empirical evidence to support a theoretical point [15].

Social media is chosen as the unit of analysis since it has become a part of our daily lives as it affects the way people communicate with their friends and families, catching up current events or issues. Therefore, the specimens used in this study originated from one of the most popular social media platforms – Twitter, which could elucidate the Proclamation of Emergency that relates to the COVID-19 scenario in Malaysia. Therefore, Table 1 below shows the control conditions used in selecting initial tweets from Twitter for the preparation of the specimens.

TABLE   **1**
Control Condition of the Study

No	Item	Condition
1	Social Media	Twitter
2	Focus Content	Keywords and hashtags such as #Darurat, #KerajaanGagal, #Kitajagakita
3	Frequency	>1,000 Retweets
4	Timeline	October 2020 till June 2021
5	Language	Malay/ English

According to [16], Twitter offers feelings of users since the tweets are usually becoming their personal perspective on the subject matters to them, including emotions and sentiments. Thus, it can be expected that during the 2020 state of emergency, most netizens used social media, especially Twitter, to get the information quickly and disseminate their opinion towards the current issues discussed.

Therefore, the tweets that were chosen for this study were selected using purposive sampling. According to [17], purposive sampling is based on characteristics of the population guided by the objective of the study. Henceforth, the researchers of this study analysed the content of the tweets based on the keywords and hashtags i.e., #Darurat, #KerajaanGagal and #Kitajagakita, to provide insight on the issues discussed among the netizens on Twitter.

The period of selected tweets is from October 2020 until June 2021, because it was when the first-time rumours of the Proclamation of Emergency started, until at the peak of the COVID-19 cases spike in this country. Most of the issues discussed among the netizens were related to the government failure to manage the COVID-19 pandemic situations, which could also relate to the current state of emergency, which had tainted the PN's government administration that was led by the former Prime Minister, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin. There are two languages used in the selection of specimens, which were English and Malay in the content of the tweets posting. This is because the Malay language is the national language and it is spoken by over 80 percent of the population. Meanwhile, Malaysia also has a high English proficiency level among Asian countries [18].

3.2 Quantitative Method: Online Survey

3.2.1 Stimuli and Survey Questions

According to [19], quantitative research focuses on objectivity and is appropriate when there is the possibility of collecting quantifiable measures of variables and inferences from samples of a population. She also mentioned that quantitative research collects data using organised processes and formal tools, in which the data are gathered objectively and methodically. Conclusively, statistical techniques are used to analyse numerical data.

Most of the researchers constructed a survey in which all respondents will be asked the same questions and there are no follow up questions. Moreover, this method can provide findings and data in numbers accurately, thus, making researchers able to find answers for problem statements. Besides, the structured survey also helps the researchers to keep focus on the research topic.

Therefore, in this study, there are 14 questions developed by the researchers, five of which were demographic questions. The demographic data enables the researchers to get a deeper understanding of respondent's background characteristics, such as their age, race, ethnic origin, geographical locations, income, employment position, and marital status. After obtaining survey data, it can be classified into different data categories depending on the demographic information obtained during the survey. All questions were written in Malay because it is the official language in this country and most Malaysians understand the language.

Six close-ended questions were designed to discover the public perception towards the state of emergency. The other three questions were developed to determine public perceptions of the government's management towards the emergency, with two close-ended and one open-ended question. In determining the public perception on the situation of the current state of emergency, this study used close-ended questions since it helps to achieve quantifiable and measurable data. By allowing respondents to choose between 'Agree', 'Disagree', or 'Not Sure' on the SD-Likert Scale, the researchers were able to eliminate irrelevant responses to this study, which indirectly made the responses easily comparable.

To analyse responses gathered from the online survey, the data were transferred to Google Forms, which allows for the visualisation of data in charts. Also, this method will aid in the recognition of trends. Although other online platforms were available for survey purposes, this study decided to use the Google Forms medium, which is a part of Google's feature for its convenient interface. Besides, any user with an average Internet knowledge also can create or answer the forms using this tool. Moreover, according to [20], 98.13 percent of Malaysians used Google in August 2020 as their search engine.

On the other hand, the open-ended question used in this study has enabled the respondents to provide more information and provides the researchers with more valuable and contextual information as well. The open-ended question also allows the researchers to get more comprehensive understanding of the respondent's actual emotions and opinions about the topic of the survey given. The online survey was chosen due to the limitation in access physical approach caused by the COVID-19 pandemic situation. Then, the researchers had blasted the online survey questions using the Google Forms' link through their own social media accounts.

3.2.2 Respondents

As for the sampling procedure, voluntary response sampling was used in this study. Instead of the researchers choosing the respondents and directly contacting them, the respondents were volunteering themselves by responding to a public online survey. The targeted respondents were Malaysian people in general. The researchers of this study estimated to get 500 respondents when the link was distributed from 24th May 2021 until 31st May 2021. Ultimately, the link was closed when researchers managed to garner 702 respondents by the end of the time period mentioned.

3.3 Rationale of Using Mixed Method Analysis

Mixed method is a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches in the same study. This method began in the social sciences and has evolved in various fields such as medical and health sciences [21]. Almeida [19] stated that the objective of the qualitative methodology is to give deeper understanding on meanings, motives, aspirations, beliefs, values and attitudes on an issue. Therefore, this study scrutinized that the qualitative method used in this study would give the researchers an understanding of the public perception and perception management on the state of emergency, especially in terms of political, constitutional monarchy and economic situation during the COVID-19 pandemic situation.

On the other hand, the quantitative method allows the researchers to analyse a larger sample of the population which is proven by the number of respondents in this study. Thus, the following subsection will describe the reasons why this study used the mixed method analysis in this research.

3.3.1 Compliment Data from Both Methods

The anticipated data garnered from the qualitative approach has complimented the data collected from the quantitative method, which will further support the finding of this research. Therefore, this study discovered that the public has evoked a perception towards the Proclamation of Emergency and the way the government was handling the issue, which is related to the COVID-19 pandemic situation.

3.3.2 Collects Comprehensive Data

The mixed methods also mirror the way individuals naturally collect information which is by integrating quantitative and qualitative data [22]. For example, during the Tokyo Olympic Game 2020, the public was provided with quantitative data (scores) and qualitative data (images and videos) that provide more complete information rather than just using one method alone. In the context of this study, the researchers determined that numbers of opposing the Proclamation of Emergency using the quantitative data, while the qualitative data on social media will provide insight on the aspect of what people liked or disliked about the situations that could be related to the emergency, the ruling government, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.0 Results and Discussion

4.1 Public Perception towards the Proclamation of Emergency Based on Social Media Content Analysis on Twitter

As a result, this study has classified into three main topics discussed among the netizens, which was identified from the social media content analysis conducted on the public perceptions about the Proclamation of Emergency and the COVID-19 pandemic situation posted on Twitter. Each of the three mains topics were evaluated based on the length and pattern of comments on Twitter, as well as from the keywords and hashtags, i.e., #Darurat, #KerajaanGagal, and #Kitajagakita.

Moreover, the total of reposts or retweets of each posting was more than 1,000 retweets, either in Malay or English language. The total of tweets posted that has been used as specimens in this study was 300 tweets overall. As mentioned before, the analysis was conducted between October 2020 until June 2021. Between that time, Twitter users or netizens in Malaysia expressed their assumption that the Proclamation of Emergency is merely a political measure.

Based on the analysis conducted in this study, the researchers found mixed responses from the netizens, where some of them support and also object to the proclamation. Moreover, the researcher also scrutinised that the public views and opinions began to question the government's responses toward COVID-19 pandemic situation, with politicians defending their position over the public and societies' security. Between April until June 2020, the public lost patience and began to make different unfavourable guesses about the state of emergency, which was called a failure and a source of inconvenience for the populace. Therefore, this study classified the situation mentioned as 'Topic One: Public Perceived the Proclamation of Emergency as a Political Move'.

Additionally, the netizens on Twitter also discussed the YDPA role regarding the Proclamation of Emergency gazetted by him, which related to the COVID-19 pandemic situation throughout the time period. In early October 2020, a variety of perceptions on the state of emergency assistance occurred. While some argued that it was necessary, others argued that it was not timely, while the YDPA insisted that the political game should be halted. From the analysis conducted in this study, it can be said that the public voiced overwhelming support for the YDPA's move.

Then, by mid-February 2021, the voice of the people on social media platform, especially on Twitter, had endorsed the YDPA's decision to extend the emergency implementation time, as COVID-19 cases continued to spike and fewer people recognised YDPA as the sole authority during a pandemic. In the intervening period, the public began to lose faith in the YDPA's chosen administration and expressed frustration that the emergency measures had not resulted in beneficial reforms, particularly with regard to the COVID-19 issue, which continued to spread. Hence, based on the discussion described above, this study classified that situation as 'Topic Two: Public Perception towards YDPA Regarding the Issues on the Proclamation of Emergency'.

On the other hand, when emergencies are implemented, the economic issues of the afflicted individuals continue to become a heated topic. Based on the analysis conducted in this study, the researchers found that most Malaysians claimed that they have no income and are running low on funds as a result of the pandemic's continued expansion. In early January 2021, the populace contested the government's deployment of policies that had a detrimental effect on the populace during times of emergency. At the end of March 2021, the populace released their anger on Twitter platform, expressing dissatisfaction with the compound action, economic policy uncertainty, and low job opportunity. Therefore, this study classified the situation described as 'Topic Three: Public Perception on Economic Situation During the Proclamation of Emergency'.

Using the aforementioned issues that have been discussed among the netizens, the researchers of this study were able to assess the impact and outcome of emergency response during the COVID-19 pandemic situation throughout this time period. Finally, these three topics are inextricably linked to the question of enhancing national security and the well-being of the populace. Hence, the following subsection is the description of each issue discussed.

4.1.1 Topic One: Public Perceived the Proclamation of Emergency as a Political Move

The researchers of this study examined that 'Topic One' is the most significant issue discovered during the process of the content analysis, in which many tweets posted on Twitter can be categorised under this topic. The researchers formed this topic because most of the tweets posted were criticising *the Perikatan Nasional* (PN) government, which discussed the state of emergency as a means of retaining power and preventing Members of Parliament from voting against Budget 2021 due to the razor-thin majority situation.

Under this topic, the researchers found that the public perceived the state of emergency had transformed Malaysia into an authoritarian regime, effectively eradicating democracy in the country. Moreover, other than #Darurat, #KerajaanGagal and #Kitajagakita, keywords and hashtags such as #ProtestDarurat and #BantahDarurat have been trending as well since it was first rumoured.

Based on the issue and negative responses on Twitter, the ruling government attempted to appeal to the public sentiments in order to convince them to support the state of emergency by invoking viperous or *derhaka* sentiments toward the YDPA, as only the YDPA has the authority to declare the proclamation. The Minister of Finance, Tengku Zafrul Aziz, also stated that if the Budget 2021 is not approved, the government will be unable to pay public servants and frontliners' wages. Since the frontliners – particularly in the medical sector, are working exhaustingly long hours and already being paid pitiful wages, the statement was interpreted as a threat. The public considers that the government is unappreciative of medical public servants who have worked tirelessly since March 2020 to treat the COVID-19 cases.

This is the reason that the perception of the state of emergency as a political manoeuvre by the PN government has been constant since October 2020 until now – August 2021. In fact, any failure in terms of the country's governance is being affiliated with the emergency since the Member of

Parliament cannot convene during that period. Therefore, Figure 1 below shows the example of tweets posted from the netizens regarding this topic.

Figure 1: The Example of Tweets Posting Classified Under Topic One.

4.1.2 Topic Two: Public Perception towards YDPA Regarding the Issue on the Proclamation of Emergency

As stated before, the state of emergency can only be declared by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong (YDPA) when he is satisfied that the security, economic life, or public order of Malaysia is threatened. The YDPA is the only person in the country who has the authority to declare a state of emergency. Based on the tweets posted on Twitter, this study scrutinised that most netizens praised the YDPA for rejecting the present government's request for the emergency in October 2020. In fact, the YDPA was hailed as a 'woke' monarch. Based on the issues discussed among the netizens on Twitter, this topic was created because the YDPA's action is considered as a significant advancement in Malaysia's constitutional monarchy tenets.

However, when the YDPA declared the emergency on January 11, 2021, public perception and opinion shifted. It was widely accused that the YDPA favoured the PN party when it rejected opposition leader Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim's claims to have a majority of support from the cabinet members in Parliament. Since the YDPA appointed Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin as the 8th Prime Minister, therefore, any failure of his coalition is seen as a failure of the YDPA.

According to the issue, it does not help the YDPA's image when the public blames the monarch for the rise in COVID-19 cases while doing nothing to admonish the political party members who broke the Standard Operation Procedure (SOP), which has been set up by the government. Other than that, the royal family's logging operation in national forest reserves was also exposed and the incident was related to the flood at Pahang in January 2021, which damaged citizen's residences and shook the economy. On top of that, on the Queen's Instagram account, when the netizen asked about the allegation of receiving Saudi vaccines, the Queen slyly answered "*Dengki ke?*" (Envy?). Consequently, the remark provoked uproar throughout the social media. Afterwards, Twitter has been flooded with the hashtags, *#Dengkike* and royal memes. The Queen's cluelessness on the location of Malaysia Agro Exposition Park Serdang (MAEPS) which houses patients of Covid-19 also angers the public and is viewed as insensitive.

Overall, the monarch's reputation has deteriorated in recent months where Twitter users show their dissatisfaction to any royal family members. For instance, Twitter users responded to the Regent of Pahang, Tengku Hassanal's three-month donation to the Palestinians targeted by the Israeli Zionist state with statement on tweets, such as "*kejap lagi dia potong lagi la pokok nak cover balik duit dia*" (he will cut trees again to cover his three months allowance) and "*rakyat sana dia kasi duit, rakyat sendiri gi mampos*" (he helped people in Palestine, but his own people were left to fend for themselves) on Twitter. Soon, the royal family once again became viral on Twitter over the pictures of deforestation in Tasik Chini linked to their business. Figure 2 below shows the example of tweets posted from the netizens that have been classified under this topic.

Figure 2: The Example of Tweets Posting Classified Under Topic Two.

4.1.3 Topic Three: Public Perception on Economic Situation During the Proclamation of Emergency

This topic concerns the economic situation that also alarmed the public during the Proclamation of Emergency. One day after YDPA declared the Proclamation of Emergency, the CGS-CIMB Securities – a joint venture company by CIMB Group Sdn. Bhd. and China Galaxy International Financial Holdings Limited, a financial information research analysis provider, expected that Proclamation of Emergency will shave 0.7 percentage points off Malaysia's 2021 growth forecast, estimating daily economic losses of RM750 million. According to a number of international news portals including CNBC and The Guardian, the Malaysian stock and currency will also fall.

Therefore, based on the content analysis that was analysed in this study, most of the Twitter users expressed concerns over the livelihoods of low-income families, B40 in particular. The public expects additional monetary aid and moratorium from the government, such as in Movement Control Order (MCO) 1.0, to keep them afloat. To properly regulate the present COVID-19 scenario, the Malaysian government issued various levels of the MCO, ranging from high-risk to low-risk locations. MCO 1.0 was implemented from 18th March through 3rd May 2020. However, to date, the Malaysian government has implemented three levels of MCO – the MCO 3.0, with no monetary aid and moratorium given.

The topic of the economy rose again when the government decided to change the fine system for the SOP violators under the Emergency Ordinance in March 2021. Offences will now be categorised as 'normal', 'moderate' and 'severe', with the amount of the compound issued accordingly. The former Minister in the Prime Minister's Department, Datuk Seri Takiyuddin Hassan explained that the 'normal' category, for instance, is the first-time offenders caught for not using face masks or entering premises without checking in via the MySejahtera (an apps to assist in monitoring COVID-19 outbreak), which he/she could be fined up to RM1,500. Before the state of emergency was announced, the public will be slapped with a RM1,000 fine with the same offences. The payments that are beyond 14-days would have to settle in the full sum or risk being hauled to court. There has been a mounting public outcry against the new rates of the SOP compounds with the opposition leaders rushing to provide legal aid for those who wish to contest the decision on Twitter.

As expected, the public's fears for Malaysia's economy and B40's future come true. The unemployment rate rose from 4.8 percent to 4.9 percent in February 2021, less than a week after the proclamation. At that time, news reported individuals became homeless and were sleeping on the street due inability to pay their rent. Previous MCO 1.0 only affected non-government employers, however, this time around, everyone was affected because the government employees' pay was also slashed up to 30 percent.

When it comes to the state of emergency situation surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, which is still contagious at the moment, this study demonstrates that the public perceptions of the YDPA's preferred government have yet to overcome the difficulties associated with combating the contagion, which in turn have affected the populace. The purpose of this platform is effective since the information received is unfiltered. Thus, Figure 3 below shows the example of tweets posted from the netizens, which showed their frustrations with the government's administration in managing the COVID-19 situation that related to economic issues discussed.

Figure 3. The Example of Tweets Posting Classified Under Topic Three.

4.2 Perception Management on the Proclamation of Emergency Based on Social Media Content Analysis in Twitter

This section discusses how the government manages the public perception of the Proclamation of Emergency on Twitter through the use of the Four Canonical Information Warfare Strategies by Carlo Kopp – as a guideline. According to [23], information warfare is defined as any action aimed at denying, exploiting, corrupting, or destroying the adversary's information and functions, defending ourselves against such actions and maximizing the use of our own military information functions. Based on the analysis of content conducted, the researchers of this study found that two of the Four Canonical Information Warfare Strategies, which is Denying and Destroying were used by the government to manage the public perception on the issues discussed that related to the state of emergency and the COVID-19 pandemic situation. According to the strategies, the use of deception techniques for intelligence operations, strategic and tactical deception in war, politics, business and media manipulation is well established and well documented. Therefore, this study discovered that the deception techniques used by the government can be explained through strategies developed by [23], since it involved politics and media manipulation.

Kopp [23] also mentioned that the purpose of the Four Canonical Information Warfare Strategies was created to gain an advantage in a survival game. Each strategy aims to induce in the target behaviour that is detrimental to the target, or to prevent the target from engaging in behaviour that is beneficial to the target. Hence, this strategy can be used to analyse how the government manages the emergency during the COVID-19 pandemic situation, as to stay relevant in the eyes of the people and to defeat the political adversaries. Moreover, the targeted behaviour that the government hopes to achieve through the use of these strategies is public support. Henceforth, the description of perception management based on each topic classified through the content analysis conducted in this study is described in the subsection below.

4.2.1 Perception Management on Topic One: Public Perceived the Proclamation of Emergency as a Political Move

According to [24] Denial of Information (DOI) is defined as concealment and camouflage or stealth. The DOI entails making the signal sufficiently noise-like that a receiver cannot distinguish it from the channel noise. When integrating the DOI with Topic One, it can be seen that the government has attempted to normalise the state of emergency by giving a statement such as, "the emergency is not only implemented in Malaysia, but other countries i.e., Japan, Australia, Italy and France also carry it out based on their respective laws" said Chief Secretary, Tan Sri Mohd Zuki Ali on program *Bicara Naratif* entitled *Ordinan Darurat 2021* [25].

The public's claimed that the government was afraid that Members of Parliament will vote against Budget 2021, which Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin has stated that, if it were up to him, he would have sought the consent of the YDPA to dissolve the parliament in order to pave the way for the general election. He also mentioned that since the country is facing the COVID-19 crisis that cripples the economic situation, he wished for the swift approval of the Budget 2021, which focuses on the welfare

of the people. Therefore, based on the justification made by Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, this study has identified the situation as a technique to camouflage the real issue that occurred in this country, by demonstrating that he cares for the people.

For instance, to sway the public perception from thinking that the Proclamation of Emergency is a political move, the government attempts to persuade the public into accepting the emergency on several occasions, via the official account of Ministry of Health Malaysia (KKM) – @KKMPutrajaya, as shown in Figure 4. When the government utilises this account during the peak of the COVID-19 spreads, consequently it will result in high engagement, as the public will be constantly checking the KKM's tweets for updates on the pandemic situation. Using an account that supposedly raises public awareness about health in order to convince the public to get on board with the state of emergency is another form of camouflage used by the government.

Figure 4: An Example of Tweets Posting by KKM Endorsing the Proclamation of State of Emergency.

4.2.2 Perception Management on Topic Two: Public Perception towards YDPA Regarding the Issue on the Proclamation of Emergency

Under this topic, the DOI and Disruption and Destruction (DOD) were referred to by this study to identify the perception management of the YDPA. According to [24], the DOD is centred upon techniques that disable or impair the basic function of an opponent's sensory apparatus or receiver. Based on the analysis, this study found that the DOI was used by official accounts of the government bodies as soon as another issue arose, which has deteriorated the image of the monarch. For example, the DOI technique was clearly seen in Department of Islamic Development (JAKIM) – @MyJAKIM, was tweets on hadith – as shown in Figure 5, regarding the loyalty and obedience toward the monarch after the former Parti Keadilan Rakyat's Sarawak Chairman, Iswardy Morni posted a video deemed seditious and allegedly insulting the constitutional monarch.

Figure 5: The Example of Tweets Posting by JAKIM Classified as the DOI Technique Used by the Government.

Following a number of cases that insult the monarchy, for instance, by Fahmi Reza, a political graphic designer and activist, who tweeted *"Dengki ke?",* along with Iswardy Morni, the Minister of Home Affairs, Datuk Seri Hamzah Zainudin has requested the Royal Malaysia Police (PDRM) to monitor and take more decisive and swift action against any individuals who commits such offenses, in order to ensure that the Royal Institution remains preserved. The action of criticizing the monarch is considered unpatriotic, irresponsible, causing public unrest and considered a crime.

Meanwhile, based on the analysis, this study found that the government used the DOD technique in the case of Fahmi Reza, who has been arrested for allegedly 'insulting' the Queen. After making bail, his laptop, router, modem and smartphone were confiscated by PDRM, which makes it difficult for him to get access to the internet that basically impairs his ability to connect to social media to update his followers regarding his arrest for a short while. According to [24], cutting an opponent's access to a receiver is a technique most frequently employed by authoritarian regimes or movements which control media content.

4.2.3 Perception Management on Topic 3: Public Perception on Economic Situation During the Proclamation of Emergency

When the rumours of a Proclamation of Emergency started in October 2020, the public worried about the effect of the already-worsening economic state. However, a few mainstream media use their official Twitter accounts to convince the public that the proclamation would not affect the economic situation. Even so, the public was not convinced after seeing the unemployment rate keep going up, the price of basic goods increasing and more people losing their homes. The government is doing their best to change the narrative of the worsening economy by stating that the state of emergency is the key to recover the economy as Budget 2021 approval includes *Pelan Jana Semula Ekonomi Negara*, which allegedly keeps investors interested by improving urban and rural infrastructure and economy. Once again, based on the analysis, the researchers of this study discovered that the government was convincing the public that the country is benefiting from the state of emergency economically through DOI technique. Hence, Figure 6 below shows an example of tweets posted from the news media quoting the Minister of Finance's statement regarding the situation mentioned.

Figure 6: An Example of Tweets Posting by News Media Classified as the DOI Technique Used by the Government.

4.3   Public Perception towards the Proclamation of Emergency based on Online Survey

According to the findings, the respondents' responses for each individual question were added together to find the highest frequency of occurrence, i.e., the number of times that a particular response occurs. These responses to the questions, which are quantified, are then presented in percentage forms. Based on the results, the socio-demographic analysis shows that;

i. Men are more open to give their opinions about the current emergency issue: 79.5 percent of men compared with 20.5 percent of women.

ii.   Older respondents are more likely to give feedback about the current state of emergency in the sample of respondents taken 33.7 percent of 40 to 49 years old, falling to 24.1 percent of those aged 30 or younger.

iii. Respondents who are of Bumiputera races are more likely to complete the survey (90.1 percent versus 0.9 percent among those of other ethnicities).

Based on the survey form, the researchers asked about the satisfaction of the respondents regarding the steps and approach taken by the government to handle the pandemic outbreak in Malaysia. There was a mixed response since 48.2 percent of the respondents expressed that they are not satisfied with the execution and 40.2 percent expressed that they are currently satisfied with the current state of emergency. Since the arbitrary curfew on the entire population (including states that were not at risk) and a curfew on geographical areas such as rural areas of Kedah, Perlis, and Sarawak where contagion was low, they saw the move as excessive and disproportionate.

Another finding of the study is a significant correlation between overall satisfaction perception of the state of emergency policy and success level perception of the respondents about the emergency announcement by the government. There is a whopping 55.3 percent of respondents that do not agree that the government has handled the negative consequences of national and personal economy properly; therefore, the respondents were afraid not only of the health threat but also the inherent economic threat.

Another finding shows that it is very likely the respondents who perceive a high personal economic threat feel that the government is not managing the crisis well if it is allowing their economic resilience to be harmed. This is proved by the 48.4 percent respondents that do not agree for the government to extend the state of emergency past the 1ᵗ of August 2021. The feeling that the crisis management is causing economic harm to the Malaysian economy also arises from conversations on social networks and the Malaysian media, where it has been argued that the high economic and political price that Malaysia is paying is even more dangerous than COVID-19 outbreak.

4.4   Perception Management Towards the Proclamation of Emergency Based on Online Survey

Three questions were developed to study the public perception on how the government is managing the current state of emergency. For instance, question number eight has asked the respondents if the state of emergency has changed the routine behaviours and habits of their personal lives. The result indicated that 70.8 percent of respondents agree that the execution of the emergency has affected the routine and functions of the respondents in their respective domains – especially for those who have to adjust their work routine to working from home.

The survey also highlighted that 50.9 percent of the respondents have the understanding that establishment of the current state of emergency is in fact not to handle the health crisis of COVID-19, but simply to ensure political stability. Throughout the situation, the former Prime Minister, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin appeared at dozens of press conferences and delivered the guidelines to the public himself. The crisis management was evaluated as significantly worse by respondents who perceived the Minister of Home Affairs, Dato' Seri Hamzah Zainudin as the representative of National Security Council (MKN), to be the most credible spokesperson to communicate with the public during and after a health crisis is a strategic decision that can have far-reaching results [26]. Similarly, the COVID-19 health crisis should be updated by Dr. Adham Baba, who served as the Minister of Health at that time. Therefore, this study proves the importance of spokespersons during the epidemic crises.

Moreover, the researchers also included an open-ended question for the respondents to give some comments on the impression that they have about the current state of emergency. Based on the responses, this study analysed the keywords based on the negative and positive sentiments of the responses. For example, if the number of positive word appearances is greater than the number of negative word appearances, the system returns a positive sentiment, and vice versa. Based on the total of respondents, the top three keywords were*; #KerajaanGagal* (58.9 percent), to secure political stability (32.7 percent) and only a small margin on respondents that gave positive feedback (8.4 percent) that support the current state of emergency to better contain the current pandemic situation.

4.5   The Findings on Social Media Content Analysis Versus an Online Survey

4.5.1 Public Perception on Twitter Versus an Online Survey

Based on the social media content analysis' findings examined on Twitter, this study found that the majority of netizens were sceptical with the state of emergency and believe it is a political manoeuvre to conceal underlying issues, such as to get quicker approval for Budget 2021. The netizens were believed to have developed such thinking due to the role of opposition politicians that are actively spreading negative sentiments on the emergency on social media. Meanwhile, most of the online survey respondents are hoping for the emergency to end soon. Both results in this study have shown that people are tired and restless being in lockdown when the cases are still rising every day. A study by Wong shows that mental health symptoms, especially depression and anxiety, have been overwhelmingly prevalent in the Malaysian population as the COVID-19 pandemic has progressed [27].

Henceforth, the results from the analysis of the content on Twitter and an online survey has determined that Malaysians rely on social media to get information related to the emergency, such as COVID-19 cases, government latest announcements, for example on the financial aids and SOPs. As of January 2021, 86 percent of Malaysians are active social media users [28], since this platform provides real-time information to the users. Besides that, findings by Ahmad [29] in his study has clearly shown that social media was widely used as a communication network among candidates and voters since people can directly engage policy makers by tagging them.

4.5.2 Public Management on Twitter Versus an Online Survey

Based on the online survey in terms of political aspect, there is a mixed response with 48.2 percent expressing dissatisfaction with the Proclamation of Emergency and 40.2 percent expressing satisfaction with the emergency. The researchers of this study concluded that because the majority of respondents are government servants, they are more likely to support the government's decision. As suggested by the Spiral of Silence theory, people remain silent on certain issues of opposition to others out of fear of extreme isolation and loss of jobs.

Other than that, findings on the analysis of the content on Twitter showed mixed responses. The results of the online survey showed that 51.3 percent respondents agree to the Proclamation of Emergency and this could be due to demographic factors, in the sense that 90.1 percent of respondents are Malay that are perceived more inclined to support the government's decisions. For example, the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) winning formula was based on massive support for the politically dominant Malay community, and mobilising government institutions in support of the party [30] – a strategy that is also employed by PN since most of their leaders are from UMNO. The findings on online surveys and the analysis of the content on Twitter showed that respondents wished the state of emergency would end on 1ˢᵗ August 2021.

4.5.3 The Results Perspectives

Based on the analyses, the results are consistent with findings related to the classification of topics discovered in this study by using the social media content analysis, which is shown in Table 2, whilst, the keyword responses in an online survey are illustrated in Figure 7. The results show that the netizens on Twitter and online survey respondents have agreed that the Proclamation of Emergency was a political move by the ruling government. In this study's context, the researchers determined that the number of respondents that opposed the Proclamation of Emergency is greater than the number who agree through quantitative data. Meanwhile, the qualitative data from Twitter has provided insight into what people disliked about possible emergency-related situations. Moreover, the qualitative data revealed that the emergency harmed people by causing job losses, crippling the economy, business closures, and emotional distress.

TABLE 2
Keywords Related to Themes Based on SCMA

| Keywords Related to the Topics/ Months	October 2020 – December 2020	January 2021 – Mac 2021	April 2021 – June 2021
Keywords related to Topic One	No majority, failed, prorogation of parliament, *Belanjawan 2021*	Hold on power, implemented, emergency power.	impatience, high cases of Covid-19, lockdown, loss of income, politic intention
Keywords related to Topic Two	No need to declare an emergency, political games, respect to YDPA	Political intention, no election, YDPA declared *Darurat*, high cases of COVID-19	Incompetent government, suspension of parliament, politic games, responsible from YDPA
Keywords related to Topic Three	Lost the ability to survive, loss of hope, tired of *Darurat*	Political intention, no election, lost the ability to survive, high cases of COVID-19	not the basic provisions of the economy, lost job, threatening election votes
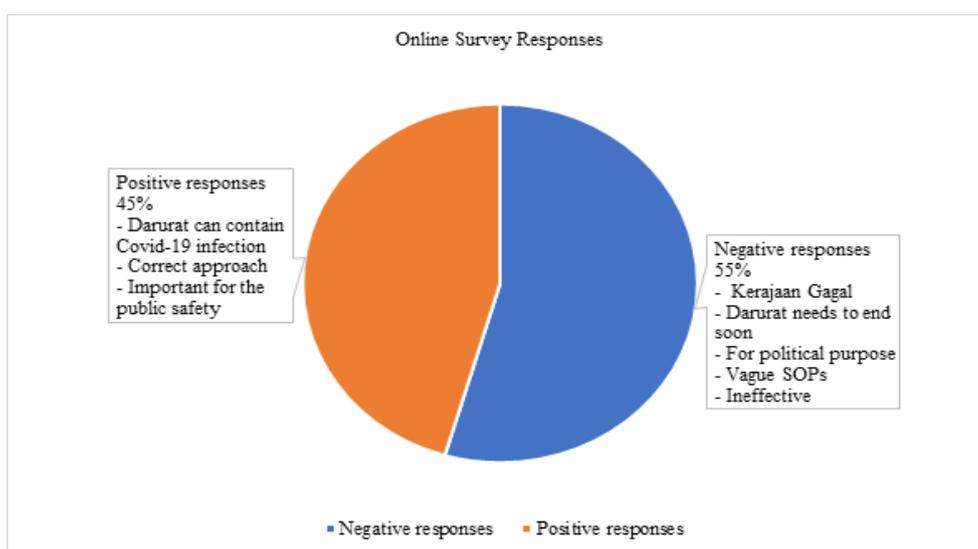
Figure 7: Online Survey Keywords Response.

5.0 Recommendation of the Study

Upon the completion of the study, the researchers have gathered several significance and recommendations for the government to improve the current public perception, for the society to better understand the subject matters more objectively, as well as for the other researchers or academics who are interested in this field. The explanation of the recommendations of this study is discussed below.

5.1 Government

The recommendations for the government are broken down in the aspect of health, economy, and integrity. For example, the vaccination rate must be sped up by the society, especially in boosting outreach programmes to ensure that the people get the vaccine as soon as possible, e.g., the recent mobile vaccination centre has launched. It is essential for the public to see that the government is pushing for acceleration since three out of four most dangerous variants of the COVID-19 have now been found in Malaysia.

Other than that, the Ministry of Finance needs to make sure the wellbeing of the affected B40 and M40 that are now slowly slipping into B40 as well, as the COVID-19 crisis delivered a major blow on Malaysians' income level. This significant drop in income levels and the fact that more people are losing

their jobs in the last six months in 2021 has raised economic long-term concerns from the public. More incentives should also be provided in terms of cash assistance for the vulnerable section of M40 households instead of just focusing on the B40, small and medium enterprises – fair and equitable distribution should be included for M40.

The government also must give out subsidies or control COVID-19 test kit, especially for the Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) test (RM250), Rapid Test Kit (RTK-Ag) (RM100), and the Self-Test Kit (RM40). These prices are considered expensive since the public's economic situation is deteriorating and causing many people to refuse to do the screening thus becoming a risk of the spread of the pandemic because they cannot afford it. Different prices from different clinics for the tests also invites various questions as to why some clinics are able to offer cheaper prices than others. A systematic regulation needs to be established so that no clinic takes advantage of this critical situation.

5.2 Society

This study could assist society to understand the issues manipulated by the social media, specifically in tweets posting, particularly on the state of emergency that related to the COVID-19 pandemic situations. The findings on public perceptions and perception management used by the government and certain parties could also help society to view matters more objectively so as to better understand the social, political and economic issues in Malaysia, and how they affect people's sentiments toward the situation. Furthermore, it could cultivate more mature thinking in the part of the society in deciding the real truth about certain issues that are being manipulated by the social media agendas, especially on Twitter that could shape people perceptions, either positively or negatively.

5.3 Future Research

This study could benefit academics and researchers who are interested in this field. The findings are beneficial to other researchers interested to examine the subject more extensively in the future. It could also be used as a reference for other studies. Due to the limited time executed for the research – there are also several recommendations for future research. For example, the first gap that can be further investigated is the opinions of the state of emergency based on more keywords found on social media or the underlying perceptions made in each of the tweets that are going to be analysed. During the analysis of this research, the finding shows that the general public has become agitated in waiting for the emergency to be resolved. Perhaps it will be more beneficial for future research to find out the factors that contribute to the public knowledge about the state of emergency and the developed attitudes towards this particular emergency declaration.

6.0 Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to analyse public perceptions and perception management used by the government or certain parties towards the Proclamation of Emergency, which is related to the COVID-19 pandemic situation. Henceforth, this study employed mixed-method – qualitative analysis and quantitative analysis to collect and analyse the anticipated data.

For the qualitative analysis, this study used social media content analysis to analysed the public perception and perception management from the tweets posting on Twitter that associated with the emergency and the COVID-19 pandemic situation, based on three main keywords and hashtags, i.e., #Darurat, #KerajaanGagal and #Kitajagakita. As a result, the study enabled to classify three mains topics of public perception, which has been discussed among the netizens on Twitter, based on aforesaid keywords and hashtags, i.e., 'Topic One: Public Perceived the Proclamation of Emergency as a Political Move', 'Topic Two: Public Perception on YDPA Regarding the Issues on the Proclamation of Emergency' and 'Topic Three: Public Perception on Economic Situation During the Proclamation of Emergency'.

Whilst, for perception management, this study found that the government is worried on the possibility of Members of Parliament voting against Budget 2021. The former Prime Minister, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin mentioned that he cares about the people is a tactic to hide the underlying issue,

which could be classified as a technique of camouflage in Denial of Information. In addition, the government tries to persuade the population to accept the state of emergency and take more decisive and prompt action against anyone who commits such crimes to protect the Royal Institution. Besides, the public was concerned about the impact on the economy, which in response, the government tried to convince the people that this would not harm the economy.

Quantitatively, this study used an online Google Form poll to assess public views and management of the state of emergency in relation to the COVID-19 issue. There were 702 respondents who participated in that survey. With 48.2 percent unsatisfied with the implementation and 40.2 percent satisfied with the present emergency status, the arbitrary curfew on the whole population (even non-risk states) was judged unreasonable and unfair. Moreover, this study also found a significant correlation between overall satisfaction with the current state of emergency policy and respondents' success level with the government's announcement. The government has not handled the negative consequences of the national and personal economy properly, so the respondents were afraid of both the health and economic threats.

People who sensed a high personal economic risk also believe the government is mismanaging the emergency situation. Based on the results, it shows that the respondents reject the idea of prolonging the state of emergency beyond August 1, 2021. The significant economic and political consequences are deemed more hazardous than the COVID-19 by social media and Malaysian media sources.

According to the results as well, this study found that the public perceptions on the current state of emergency could be greatly affected by the social influences made in the interactions of the tweets posted. Moreover, this study managed to explore the sentiments of the tweets posted, which actually coincide with the personal perception made in open-ended questions of the online survey. Other than that, this study found that most of the general public has become more restless in waiting for the current state of emergency to be ended. This was reflected mainly in the public survey that highlighted the fact that the public no longer has the trust towards the government and the emergency was just held for their own governmental benefits.

Building trust by government policymakers is crucial. The public will follow instructions if they trust and evaluate emergency management and information updates as the correct move. The public cannot approach crisis management and information in the same manner. In conclusion, this study scrutinised that the government should assess the hazards and risks associated with the state of emergency and tailor its message to the Malaysian public, both urban and rural, based on their risk perceptions in terms of health literacy and economic challenges. For this reason, it is impossible to explain and focus solely on the health risk without communicating the economic and societal dangers as well.

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