

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**THE MEDIA FRAMING OF
BERNAMA TWITTER IN
STRENGTHENING PUBLIC
DIPLOMACY DURING MALAYSIA'S
15TH GENERAL ELECTION**

SHAFEZAH BINTI ABDUL WAHAB

Thesis submitted in fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(Communication and Media Studies)

Faculty of Communication and Media Studies

September 2025

ABSTRACT

This research comprehensively examines how Bernama Malaysia's national news agency framed its Twitter content during Malaysia's 15th General Election (GE15) with a specific focus on its role in strengthening public diplomacy. This study used a mixed-method approach that combined quantitative content analysis with qualitative methods to analyse 1,103 tweets containing the hashtag #PRU15Bernama. The analysis covered four months across three main phases: before the election (starting from the dissolution of Parliament), during the campaign and after the election (from the announcement of results to the formation of the new government). This approach helped to understand how Bernama adjusted its messaging during different stages of the election. Additionally, in-depth interviews were conducted with nine Bernama's editorial team members to gain deeper insights into their editorial decision-making processes and strategies for framing news. The analytical framework adapted five generic frames (human interest, responsibility, conflict, morality and economic consequences) with 20 attribute statements developed by Semetko & Valkenburg (2000) to identify and address issues related to media bias and prejudice. The findings reveal significant framing patterns where human interest and responsibility frames dominated Bernama's coverage reflecting a more humanistic and responsible approach to news reporting. Conflict and morality frames were used moderately while the economic frame recorded the lowest usage. Additionally, this study emphasises strengthening public diplomacy through media framing in Bernama's tweets to enhance internal stability and foster international relations. The integration of quantitative and qualitative data revealed a deliberate editorial strategy where Bernama's digital desk consciously prioritised a human interest approach in their news delivery demonstrating a significant evolution in government agency news reporting approaches. These findings lead to the conclusion that Bernama has successfully adopted a more sophisticated public diplomacy approach through the Twitter platform prioritising people-friendly content over conventional confrontational political reporting. The implications of this study indicate a positive transformation in the national media's news reporting approach which now places greater emphasis on public interest and engagement in national issues.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First and foremost, I extend my deepest gratitude to Allah for granting me the opportunity to embark on this PhD journey and for guiding me through to its successful completion. My heartfelt thanks go to my supervisors, Associate Professor Dr. Muhammad Hakimi Tew Abdullah and Dr. Khairudin Murad, for their invaluable and continuous guidance and support.

I am deeply appreciative of the captain and crew members of Bernama, whose facilities and assistance were instrumental during the sampling process. Special thanks also go to my colleagues and friends, whose unwavering help and encouragement have been indispensable throughout this journey.

This thesis is dedicated to the cherished memory of my beloved late parents, whose vision and determination to educate me laid the foundation for my success. I also dedicate this achievement to my pillars of strength—my brother and sister, who have always been there to support and inspire me. This victory is a tribute to all of them. Alhamdulillah, may Allah make this knowledge beneficial to everyone.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
CONFIRMATION BY PANEL OF EXAMINERS	ii
AUTHOR'S DECLARATION	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
LIST OF TABLES	xii
LIST OF FIGURES	xiv
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xv
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Research Background	1
1.2 Problem Statement	9
1.3 Research Objectives	13
1.4 Research Questions	13
1.5 Scope of Study	14
1.6 Significance of Study	15
1.6.1 Policymakers	15
1.6.2 Theory	16
1.6.3 Methodology	16
1.6.4 Body of Knowledge	17
1.7 Definition of Concepts	18
1.7.1 Media Framing	18
1.7.2 Public Diplomacy	19
1.7.3 Election	19
1.7.4 Bernama Twitter	20
1.8 Summary of Chapter	20
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	21
2.1 Introduction	21
2.2 Agenda Setting	21

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

In the contemporary world, technological advancements have brought significant changes that affect various aspects of our daily lives. This transformation is evident in journalism, where news delivery, reception, and publication have experienced substantial shifts. Media framing, a key concept in media communication, refers to how the media presents and interprets information to influence audience perceptions of events and issues (Song, 2024). During Malaysia's 15th General Election (GE15), media framing played a significant role in shaping political narratives, influencing public opinion, and directing attention to specific issues. Additionally, media framing operates as a lens through which the audience views and interprets information. Media outlets can shape public discourse and influence societal perceptions by emphasising certain aspects of a story while neglecting others (Yong et al., 2024). For example, during GE15, headlines and imagery were deliberately used to evoke emotional responses, highlight specific candidates, or challenge opponents. This strategic framing shapes the way events are perceived, influencing public sentiment and potentially swaying the voting behaviour. Nevertheless, some media organisations even exhibited framing biases towards particular political parties, intensifying polarisation and separation in the country (Shultziner & Stukalin, 2021).

According to Entman (1993), framing involves selecting and emphasising specific elements of news to construct a narrative and direct the audience's focus. The Integrated Framing Process Model by de Vreese (2005) investigates deeper into this concept, exploring how frames are constructed, received, and evaluated. This model highlights the repeated nature of framing where media messages interact with audience interpretations, creating a feedback loop that shapes public opinion over time. By understanding these dynamics, communicators can craft strategies to mitigate biased framing and foster more balanced reporting. With the rise of social media, media framing has become more complex and multidimensional. Platforms like Twitter (now X) enable the rapid dissemination of information and the propagation of diverse political narratives, where these platforms have not only democratised