

# **Gender and Religious Interpretation in Malaysian Social Media: Sentiment and Semantic Representation Analysis**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The social media has become the communication platform of choice where netizens are engaged with political issues, economics, social, cultural and even personal. The new media has a deep impact and seems to assist in the effort of winning the hearts and minds of netizens. Issues that are close to the hearts of netizens especially in terms of religion and gender are widely discussed using the new media. Therefore, the main objective of this paper is to discuss the gender and religious interpretation and discourse in Malaysian social media within sentiment and gender representation

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semantic framework. This article analyses four keywords; *aurat*, *poligami* (polygamy), *tanggungjawab suami/isteri* (husband's/wife's responsibility) and *taat suami/isteri* (loyalty to husband/wife). Sentiment analysis focuses on three categories; positive, neutral and negative sentiments while taking into consideration the concept of power relations particularly 'power over' and 'power with'. While, semantic representation analysis applies substantive equality and hegemonic masculinity concepts. This study employs both qualitative as well as quantitative research methods. The data from social media was extracted by using Trackur, Social Mention and facebook tracking applications. The findings of the study reveal that there are more negative sentiments in the form of 'power over' rather than in the forms of 'power with' and 'power within'. The study also found that most perceptions and interpretations pertaining to *aurat* leans heavily towards hegemonic masculinity of religious interpretation while *poligami* leans toward the unacceptance of the polygamous practice as well as upholds substantive equality interpretation.

**Keywords:** *Gender, Religious Interpretation, Malaysian Social Media, Sentiment and Semantic Representation.*

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The term 'social media' refers to forms of electronic communication through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content. This form of communication has become popular among netizens around the world including Malaysia since more than a decade ago. They owe their immense popularity to their speed and convenience in spreading or viralling news. As such, they have become a very effective tool in changing and shaping the perceptions of the public. The massive networking infrastructure of the internet, in fact, has enabled various applications to further increase the efficacy of social media in influencing their minds and hearts. A number of researches had been undertaken in the recent past to analyse the influence of social media on political, economical, social, and cultural aspects of human life. These studies revealed that social media were able to change these aspects

by changing people's perceptions about everything around them. These perceptions in turn increased the impact of an issue, an individual or a social cognition on a certain community.

To begin with, the Malaysian community is one that has a strong patriarchal culture. Here, most of the controversial issues usually revolve around women and the religious-cultural perceptions of them. These are evident in various instances that are found online involving women being ridiculed because of their choice of clothing to cover their aurah and how far they are willing to comply in regard to that with the local culture which is coloured by Islam. In view of the above, this current study seeks to explore and provide understanding of these issues concerning gender and religious interpretation of Islam in Malaysian Social Media through the use of a sentiment analysis as well as gender semantic representation.

## **2.0 BACKGROUND OF STUDY**

In 2015, a female gold medallist in the 2015 SEA Games was criticised for wearing a leotard in public. The criticisms were voiced by Muslim netizen in harsh and despicable manner. Most of them were so flabbergasted by her extra tight outfit until they failed to applaud her for the gold medal that she had won for the country in the spectacular sport event [7]. This incident was an attestation of the patriarchal centred community and manifested its 'power over' women who did not comply with the code of Islamic dressing for women [17].

According to Wood [21], there are three different types of women as portrayed by media. The first are those women who play insignificant role as opposed to the role of men in any society. The second are those women who are stereotyped according to their social contributions. The third and last type of women are those who are oppressed and abused into accepting and enduring their traditional functions as a woman. Besides that, Wood [21] has also accused media for continuously stereotyping women and men thus limiting their natural prospects and capabilities. Men are usually portrayed as active, adventure loving and aggressive. On the other hand, women are portrayed as men's sex partners who are alluring but passive, dependent and incompetent.

The vast expansion of the social media network through the establishment of Facebook in February 2005 has led to a group of new type of media that is different from the traditional one. Bailey, Steeves, Burkell, and Regan [2] claim that the development of social networks as a channel has helped women spread and strengthen their influence in understanding their gender. Loiseau and Nowacka [8] point out that there are three useful strategies that can be employed to enhance the role of social media to empower women, namely the ease of access to technology for them, the increase in their involvement in the public service, the opportunity for them to work with social media and various groups of people.

Malaysians are generally active users of social media. As such, they are the ones who cause most of the issues they put into social media to become sensational. According to Cherian George [5], the internet infrastructure in Malaysia is not as developed as the one available in Singapore but the use of social media data among Malaysians is higher than that of Singaporean users. George [5] alleges that different Malaysian and Singaporean users use social media for different purposes. A research conducted by Afendi Hamat et al [6] shows that university students use social media to socialise, write blogs and even study. These people seem to spend more time socialising online rather than studying. Nonetheless, socialising in this context can be considered as an informal way of learning which help to improve their cognition in politics, economy, society, lifestyle and religion.

### **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

This study uses both quantitative and qualitative data that are obtained from discussions taken from facebook and twitter which were was procured using the social media tracking application, Trackur. This application is normally used by various agencies in gathering the perceptions of a particular group of people regarding a certain product or service. It was first introduced in 2007 and since then has an approximately 70,000 users [19].

This application is able to extract all words according to the key word chosen and analyse sentiment associated with them automatically. However, for this study the researcher had opted to conduct a manual sentiment

analysis because the application was unable to analyse sentiments in Bahasa Melayu. Therefore, the researcher had analysed over 1000 samples of data for all three key words that she had chosen to analyse. Nevertheless, out of 1000 samples some had to be discarded either because they did not represent the study or they are redundant. There were FIVE (5) steps in obtaining the data, namely tracking, extracting, cleaning, denoising and analysis.

At the initial stage of the study, two key words were extracted which were *aurat* and *poligami*. Both keywords were chosen based on popular issues that were related to gender as specified by the Social Mention application which is also a social media tracking application. This Social Mention application is able to extract data from more than 100 social media sites like Twitter, Facebook, Friend feed, YouTube, Digg, Google and many more [16].

In terms of epistemology, this study uses a social constructivist approach in analysing the data. According to Berger & Luckmann [3], social constructivism is a sociological theory that explains how people in a social system develop, over time, concepts or mental representations of each others' actions and how these concepts in the end become reciprocated into complementary roles played by the actors in relation to each other. However, once these roles are made accessible to other members of society the reciprocal interactions then become institutionalised. During this process meaning too becomes embedded in society. Knowledge and people's perception and conviction about what reality is become rooted in social institutions of society. Reality is therefore said to be socially constructed. In relation to the study, the social construction of the online community is germane in grasping the findings of the study.

Rheingold [14] believes that online communities are virtual communities whose members interact with each other using the Internet. For some of them, the community feels like home that consists of a "family of invisible" members. An online community can act as an information system where members can post comment on anything they want on the Internet, take part in discussions, give advice or co-operate with anyone in

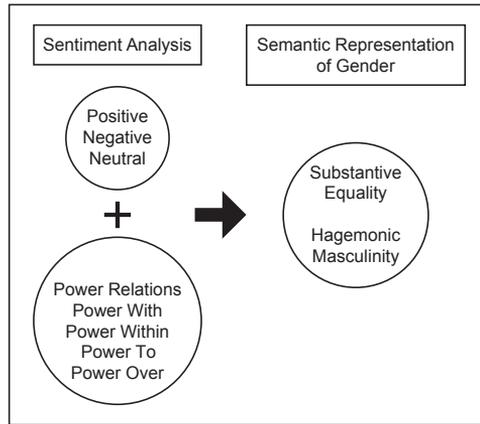
undertaking something. Each of these online communities has their own social constructions based on the background, race, religion and individual cognition of its members.

This present study also takes into consideration discussions obtained from Facebook by using the Facebook search system. FOUR (4) keywords had been chosen; *aurat* (genitalia and other parts of the body that needs to be covered as required by Islam), *poligami* (polygamous marriages), *tanggungjawab* (responsibility), and *taat* (obedience). The selection of these four key words was made based on issues regarding gender and Islam specifically those that are associated with the way Muslim women are clothed as well as matters pertaining to polygamous marriages. In the CEDAW reports [9], [10] and [11], it is stated that Muslim women usually face many challenges that have arisen because of the interpretation of Islam with regard to women that influences the Malaysian society and the social status accorded to them when they get married. As such, these four issues are deemed important focus of this study.

Therefore, facebook postings, written comments, shares and likes associated with all the FOUR (4) issues mentioned above were selected analysed. Nonetheless, only posts showing active participations involving more than 100 responses irrespective of whether they are likes, comments or shares were selected. Then, a deductive thematic analysis was conducted on the selected posts.

#### **4.0 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

Figure 4.1 shows to the conceptual framework that is used in the study. There are two types of analyses in the study the first being the sentiment analysis and the other is the analysis of semantic representation. The purpose of the sentiment analysis to find the perspectives, opinions and emotions that are embedded in the written texts and speeches in the data gathered via Natural Language Processing (NLP). In sentiment analysis, opinions in written documents and speeches are classified as either positive, negative, or neutral sentiments [20]. On the other hand, Pang & Lee [13] prefer to categorise data into opinions, sentiments or facts.



*Figure 4.1: Conceptual Framework Source*

Next, the sentiment analysis is also analysed and measured in terms of the concept of power as in ‘power over’, ‘power to’, ‘power with’ and ‘power within’ The concept of power has been introduced by Rowlands [15] in his research regarding women empowerment. Positive sentiments refer to the use of positive words while exhibiting the attributes of ‘power with’ and ‘power within’. In contrast, negative sentiments are those that are often attributed to ‘power over’. Unlike the earlier types of sentiments, neutral sentiments are those that contain words that represents general questions, general news, as well as advertisements that are attributive of ‘power to’ [18]. Besides sentiment analysis, the data is also analysed for its semantic representation. This research paper supports feminism and social constuctivism, thus, patriarchal culture is analysed in accordance with hegemonic masculinity and substantive equality in the Malaysian Social Media [12].

Both, the sentiment analysis and the analysis of semantic representations in this study are used in measuring substantive equality and masculine hegemony. The term ‘substantive equality’ means having equal treatment, role and power as socially inculcated due to inborn biological differences in male and female which result in them having different needs and desires [1]. On the other hand, the term ‘masculine hegemony’ refers to the culture and the social construct of a society that advocate the belief and practice

men's domination over women. Hegemonic masculinity can also be used to refer to the practices and upholding of the culture of patriarchal supremacy in a system so as to ensure that it remains dominant [4].

## 5.0 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

There are two discussions of the findings in this study, the first, the discussion regarding the quantitative data obtained from Trackur and the other is the discussion involving quantitative data that was procured from observations and participations in Facebook posts.

### 5.1 Sentiment Analysis

Data associated with gender and religious interpretation of Islam was gathered via Trackur appertaining to the use of two distinct keywords. The selection of the keywords was made based on their frequency and popularity of usage in Social Mention. The keyword *aurat* is mentioned every 51 seconds and *poligami* is mentioned every 48 seconds. Trackur managed to detect a total of 415 postings during a period between November 2015 and April 2016. After undergoing extensive cleaning and sentiment analysis, only 220 posts were deemed worthy of use for this study.

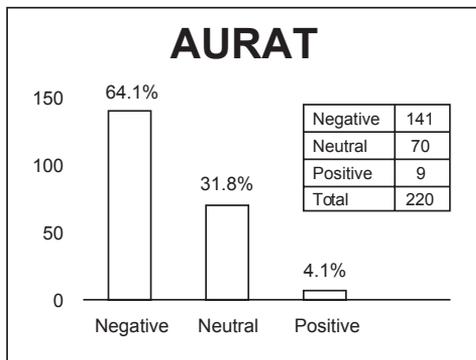


Figure 5.1: Extracted data from Trackur: - *Aurat*

Out of the 220 samples, 64.1 % were negative sentiments, 4.1% were positive sentiments and the remainder 31.8% were neutral sentiments. As

such, this proves that positive sentiments were scarcely used for aurat in comparison with both negative and neutral sentiments. An example of this is;

*“...yang ingin suami yang taat, mulailah menutup aurat, yang ingin istri solehah mulailah serius dalam ibadah.”*

Neutral sentiments refers to words that were used in advertisements that tilted toward neither positive nor negative sentiments in promoting Muslimah clothing and fashion like;

*“..tampil sopan dan menutup aurat dengan mengayakan baju muslimah. Sekiranya berminat whatsapp.”*

Neutral sentiments were also related to “power to” in buying the clothing.

A large portion of the data could be associated with negative sentiments due to the use of words whose connotations sloped toward semantic representations of a criticism and force exhibiting ‘power over’ such as the ones below:

*“zaman sekarang banyak pakai hijab tapi tidak menutupi aurat.”*

*“Menutup aurat adalah wajib pada semua mukmin”.*

Both the statements above were disparagements made against women who wears hijab but did not seem to cover their aurat in accordance with the understanding and belief of the netizens who voiced them. Similarly, women who wore hijab but at the same time wore tight fitting clothes were seen as women who were not compliant to the Islamic dress code. In some cases, such women were considered as unclothed although they did wear clothes as highlighted in a popular social blog, Siakapkeli in 2016.

There were also statements that adjudged husbands as cowards and therefore, unfit to become head of their household when their wife and children did not cover their aurat as prescribed by certain groups of clerics. Below are some examples of such statements:

*“kalau bergelar suami maka membiarkan isterinya tak menutup aurat maka suami tu dayus dalam hukum Al-Quran (..)”*

*“..Kalau Najib tidak boleh memimpin isterinya untuk menjaga aurat, jangan harap nak memimpin rakyat.”*

Both statements above manifest a ‘power over’ attribute of the power relation concept where men were blamed for not ensuring their daughters’ or wife’s/wives’ adherence to the above mentioned dress code. Other than that, there were statements urging netizens to disfavour pictures of women who exposed their aurat by accusing the latter as takfir or less abiding Muslims. Examples of such statements are:

*“Jangan la like gambar tak tutup aurat.”*

*“Solat jaga tapi tidak menutup aurat. Alhamdulillah jaga solat, tapi jangan lupa menutup aurat pun wajib.”*

*“Mungkin ada salah dalam solat.”*

All the above statements, especially the last one reflect the social cognition of that women who did not cover their aurat were sinful because they did not embrace the Islamic values expected of them. In addition, there were also negative statements which ridiculed employers who did not allow their employees to wear hijab like;

*“Majikan tak masuk akal! Melarang wanita ini tidak menutup aurat ketika bekerja?”*

Yet from another perspective, the Sisters in Islam (SIS) felt that no one should be given the right to impose or use force to influence their choice of clothing. They had openly spoken against both sides of the continuum whether those who were imposed to wear hijab or those who were forced not to wear hijab [18]. There was in fact a posting that made fun of the way the hijab was worn by calling it “the Justin Bieber’s hijab style”. This was of course made with the intention to mock the modern women with reference to their hijab which attracted 10 shared views containing negative sentiments.

The practice of polygamous marriages or simply termed as *poligami* in Bahasa Melayu had also enticed a high percentage of negative sentiments. There were three different viewpoints that were disclosed by the negative

sentiments: i) those that were against the practice of polygamous marriages which were almost all voiced by women; ii) those that supported this practice and were against groups who did not support polygamy, and iii) supported it but at the same time concurred with groups that did not support it.

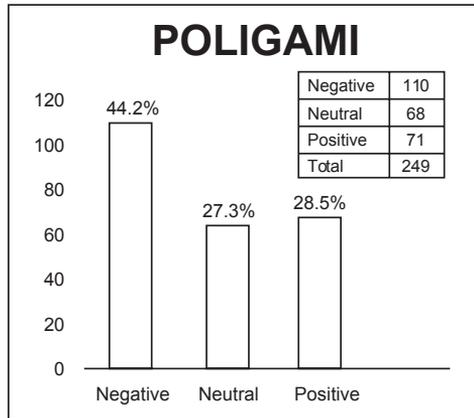


Figure 5.2: Extracted data from Trackur: - Poligami

There were 44.2% negative sentiments compared to 27.3% neutral and 28.5% positive ones. The number of negative sentiments which did not support polygamous marriages was higher than that that supported them and that which criticised groups that did not support them. The following are some examples:

*“Bila cakap hal ehwal Islam, as long as focus on their convenience, champions chauvinism and poligami its ok.”*

This statement shows the insinuation that polygamy had been the practice of people especially men who abused religion in satiating their sexual appetite.

*“Melayu pantang dicabar hal ehwal Islam tapi bila dituntut tugas kemanusiaan, memilih ikut warna kulit, hina si Rohingya, poligami si Syria”*

The statement below portrays women's abhorrence of polygamous marriages.

*"Saya seorang wanita. Saya sungguh membenci poligami dengan alasan kecemburuan."*

All these statements show 'power over' that label the practice of polygamy as victimization of women. Those netizens who supported polygamy were cynically criticised by other netizens who did not support it. An example of a statement that contains negative sentiments that supports polygamy is;

*"Poligami halal tapi dihujat, zina haram tapi dibiarkan."*

The above statement came from netizens who thought that people who opposed polygamy were people who supported adultery. It also implied that those who were in favour of polygamy were those who believed that by allowing polygamy they could help prevent adultery from destroying their society.

Below are some examples of comments showing negative sentiments against polygamy:

*"Cita-cita poligami tapi no hope."*

*"Kesan apabila kau cuba masuk topik poligami time wife tengah tumbuk sambal."*

Both statements reveal that there were netizens who had the intention of practising polygamy but knew that they would not be able to do so because of the negative reactions they had to put up with from their spouses.

Most neutral sentiments took the form of general questions and news about polygamy. Some examples are:

*"Apa itu poligami?"*

*"Poligami itu apa?"*

*"Desa di Colorado Arizona disebut sebagai desa poligami kerana hampir semua lelaki yang ada di desa ini berpoligami."*

Meanwhile, statements with positive sentiments were those that were prone towards promoting polygamy as a beneficial practice that would not only benefit the husband but the wife and their entire family. The following are some examples of positive statements:

*“Damainya poligami.”*

*“Orang zaman dulu berpoligami sebab time tu banyak perang, as a result banyak women jadi widows in order tuk sara kehidupan diaorang. Islam benarkan poligami.”*

The second statement above explains why the polygamous marriages were practised during those days when there were many wars. Both statements express ‘power with’ and ‘power within’ in regard to the relationship of power.

## *5.2 Gender Semantic Representation Analysis*

Gender semantic representation analysis is an analysis that focuses on the concept of substantive equality and the concept of masculine hegemony that are consistent with the social construction of patriarchal supremacy. In relation with the two keywords *aurat* and *poligami* which were discussed earlier, this study found that there were insufficient statements that promoted substantive equality. The majority of statements and discussions found in the samples were those that strengthened masculine hegemony and patriarchal supremacy in the Malay society in Malaysia. The analysis of sentiments reveals that discussion regarding *aurat* leaned towards negative sentiments with a ‘power over’ power relation. The data from Facebook, nonetheless, discloses that the gender semantic representations leans towards strengthening masculine hegemony. Four significant postings that have more than 100 comments, shares and and likes were chosen. Some titles on Facebook posts pertaining to *aurat* are:

- (i) *“Wanita di Kelantan tidak Menutup aurat kena tegur”* that was shared by Berita Harian Online on June 13<sup>th</sup> 2016, that has 17 thousand likes/expressions, 327 comments and was shared by 1.1 thousand netizens.

- (ii) “*Seluar menutup aurat ibu bersalin*” shared by Harian Metro on April 3<sup>rd</sup> 2016, that had 22 thousand likes and expressions, 361 comments and was shared by 3.2 thousand netizens.
- (iii) “*Kenapa Aurat Wanita Lebih Banyak Dari Aurat Lelaki*” that was shared by PenMerah on May 28<sup>th</sup> 2015 that consisted of 34 thousand likes, 338 comments and was shared by 1 thousand netizens.
- (iv) “*Khairy Jamaluddin: Jangan ganggu Atlet Kita (as in the case of Farah Ann)*” that was shared by Friends of Barisan Nasional on June 13<sup>th</sup> 2015 that consisted of 19 thousand likes, 3.5 thousand comments and 1.5 thousand shares.

The issue of *aurat* had been found to have gained extensive attention among Malaysian netizens judging on the number of people who liked, commented and shared the issue. Unfortunately, this issue tended to attract criticisms and threats against women who were non compliant with the Muslim dress code of covering their *aurat*. Most of the netizens were of the opinion that it was alright to use force, threats, and harsh criticism against women who were not covering their *aurat*. Men who defended such women were also not spared from similar treatment. An example of this was a statement made by YB Khairy Jamaluddin below:

*“Dalam gimnastik Farah menarik perhatian hakim-hakim dan membawa pulang emas. Dalam perbuatan hanya Maha Kuasa sahaja boleh menhakimi dia. Bukan anda. Jangan ganggu atlet kita (Friends of Barisan Nasional, 2015)”*

For making the above statement, Khairy Jamaluddin received threats and was asked to repent for what he did was considered a blasphemy. The following are some of the criticisms thrown at Khairy Jamaluddin which obviously exhibit a ‘power over’ relation:

*“YB Khairi ni apa agama dia ya?? YB Khairi segera bertaubat sebelum Allah menjemput mu (Amy Suhaimi, 16th June 2015)”*

*“Open minded kepala hotak korang. Haram tetap haram. Perlu ditegur dan ditegah (Zairol Iz, 16<sup>th</sup> June 2015)”*

*“Astaghfirullah kitab sudah diberi utk di baca dan fahami. Muhasabah diri wahai menteri. Knp semenjak ni menteri berkata tdk mengikut akal. Hanya ikut kemarahan (Kay Abadi, 16<sup>th</sup> June 2015).”*

Most of the the criticisms regarding the issue of *aurat* were like the ones above. They were absolute rather than expressing any difference in opinion for such expression would only looked upon as a blasphemy or heresy These criticisms were also biased towards patriarchal supremacy with the cognition that they assumed that it was the holy duty of men to protect the sanctity of women’s *aurat*. In addition to that, the comments that contain elements of ‘power over’ showed strict force and anger came from men who supported patriarchal supremacy.

In the case of polygamy, however, most criticisms were prone towards achieving substantive gender equality despite the high percentage of negative sentiments. Four instances of postings pertaining to this keyword are as follows;

- (i) *“Revie Drama: Cinta Paling Agung Bari Mesej Berguna Tentang Poligami”* that was shared by Astro Gempak on July 23<sup>rd</sup> 2015 that had 21 thousand likes, 116 comments and 207 shares.
- (ii) *“Rasulullah Baru Poligami di Usia 51 tahun”* that was shared by Islampos on July 10<sup>th</sup> 2016 that had 1.3 thousand likes, 18 comments dan 216 shares.
- (iii) *“Video: Poligami Tak Bagi Tau, Pengantin Lelaki Diserang Isteri Di Majlis Kahwin”* that was shared by BeautifulNara.com on February 7<sup>th</sup> 2016 with 915 likes, 125 comments dan 118 shares.
- (iv) *“Bila Isteri Tak Percaya Suami Berpoligami”* that was shared by PenMerah.com with 12 thousand likes, 264 comments and 317 shares.
- (v) *“Kerjasama PAS-UMNO poligami yang ditolak rakyat”* that was shared by Malaysiakini on December 11<sup>th</sup> 2015 with 1 thousand likes, 492 comments and 123 shares.

All the likes, comments and shares on this issue revealed that polygamy was an issue that attracted many of the Malaysian netizens although it was not as highly debated as aurat. Although negative sentiments highly tainted the discussions, the issue was leaning towards substantive gender equality rather than masculine hegemony. Several comments on this issue are provided below:

*“Nak kawen seorang bini pun merungut hantaran tinggi. Ada hati nak poligami (Maksu Azie, 21<sup>st</sup> Oct. 2014).”*

*“Nak poligami kena adil. Kalau lelaki tu tak boleh berlaku adil dengan isteri-isteri, please jangan poligami. Mampun tu maknanya mampu berlaku adil la. Dekat sekolah kalau belajar bab ini, semua lelaki suka, ade acah-acah nak poligami. Tapi bila ditanya boleh berlaku adil, ambik kau diam terus. Bukan duit yang penting, kasih saying yang sama tu best, baru bahagia. Macam Rasulullah (Hazman Hamzah, 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2015)”*

*“Zaman sekarang isteri kurus, cantic dan stylo pun suami curang. Kesian si isteri. Kalau si isteri curang tent uterus diceraikan kat situ juga. Tiada air mata dilihat dari si isteri tapi hati yang hancur sape yang tahu. (Zalina Lina 7<sup>th</sup> February 2016)”*

The above represent the majority of comments online on the issue of polygamous marriages. Although the practice of marrying more than one wife was seen as an advantage for Muslim men, many netizens that were sensitive to substantive gender equality which emphasised on justice, love, and economic status did not necessarily agreed with it. Most of them haboured negative sentiments because they did not condone the practice as they felt sympathetic towards the first wife whom they saw as a victim of unfaithfulness.

With regard to tanggungjawab, however, the comments or criticisms were prone towards achieving masculine hegemony where patriarchal supremacy was evident by the high percentage of negative sentiments. Four examples of postings pertaining to this keyword are:

- (i) *“Video: Inilah hukumnya seorang suami / bapak yang biarkan keluarganya membuat dosa. Besarnya tanggungjawab seorang*

*lelaki*” that was shared by PenMerah [dot] com on December 25<sup>th</sup> 2015 with 69 thousand views, 1.9 thousand shares, 1.9 thousand likes and 73 comments.

- (ii) “8 tanggungjawab suami yang sering diabaikan kepada isteri (PERLU TAHU)??” that was shared by PenMerah [dot] com on April 8<sup>th</sup> 2015 that has 24 thousand likes, 268 comments dan 2.2 thousand shares.
- (iii) “*Ingat ya lelaki, besarnya tanggungjawab awak. Silakan Share*” that was shared by PenMerah [dot] com on March 20<sup>th</sup> 2016 that had 24 thousand likes with 12 thousand shares and 196 comments.
- (iv) “*Jangan lupa tanggungjawab terhadap ibu bapa*” that was shared by Friends of Barisan Nasional with 10 thousand likes, 2 thousand shares and 64 comments.

The likes, comments and shares revealed that tanggungjawab or responsibility was another favourite issue of Malaysian netizens. The scope of *tanggungjawab*/responsibility was that between parents and family, husband and wife, and son and mother. Several comments from this issue are shown below;

*“Kpop bodo, pempuan yg suke kpop ni sbnrnya gile btg kpop ni. Pempuan yg suke kpop ni semua bodoh (Mohd Kamil, 20<sup>th</sup> Dec 2015)”*

*“Ko nak buat pasal ke, nak buat maksiat ke, ko punya pasal. Jangan sebab ko, agama yg aku syg dihina dan dikeji, Sedarlah ko berhijab. Nasib tak jumpe je. (Pa Che Wan, 23<sup>rd</sup> Dec 2015)”*

*“Wahai anak lelaki, bacalah agar kamu tidak lupa dgn tanggungjawab kepada orang tua mu serta anak2 dan keluargamu.. Amiin... (Mulia Cintaku Sejati, 20<sup>th</sup> March 2016)”*

The above comments represented the majority of the comments online regarding this issue. It had evoked negative sentiments that contains elements of ‘power over’ as well as ‘power within’.

Nonetheless, the issue of taat was prone towards achieving masculine hegemony where patriarchal supremacy was made based on the high percentage of negative sentiments. Four postings pertaining to this keyword are as follows;

- i. *“Sudah menjadi kewajiban seorang isteri untuk taat dan patuh kepada suaminya, Suami menjadi pemimpin baginya dan mengarahkannya pada hal yang baik-baik. Sekiranya isteri tidak mengikut perintah suami maka ia termasuk di dalam golongan orang yg berdosa”* that was shared by Islampost on January 12<sup>th</sup> 2016 with 790 likes, 115 shares and 2 comments.
- ii. *“Sekarang awak dah jadi isteri saya. Ingat! Taat pada suami (caption on a picture of two cats; one kissing the forehead and one looking down)”* that was shared by Himpunan Cerita Lawak on Sept 05<sup>th</sup> 2015 with 15 thousand likes, 1.5 thousand shares and 399 comments.
- iii. *“Rakyat mesti taat setia, jujur kepada agong”* shared by Sinar Harian on June 3<sup>rd</sup> 2016 with 6.1 thousand likes, 289 shares and 448 comments.
- iv. *“Video -Suami lepas kawin masih kena taat pada ibu tapi taat wanita kena pada suami kerana suami sebab wajib taat kepada org yg menanggung dosanya – UAI”* that was shared by Taiko Tai on Oct. 20<sup>th</sup> 2015 with 622 likes, 13 thousand views, 779 shares and 32 comments.

Perhaps it is also worth to mention here that all the likes, comments and shares had revealed that taat was not as popular as an issue as tanggungjawab. The scope of taat or obedience was more focused on the relationships between husband and wife, children and mother, and citizen and ruler. Several examples of comments involving taat are;

*“Zaman sekarang ramai isteri menderhaka kepada suaminya (Hazim Jalaludin, 28<sup>th</sup> Oct. 2015)”*

*“Ampun tuanku, Cuma pandangan rakyat marhaen. Kalau zmn2 feudal, zmn kesultanan Melaka bleh ar rakyat ni taat setia membuta tuli (Rushan Akmal, 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2016)”*

*“Bagaimana sekiranya isteri berhijab dan suami mengarahkan supaya tidak berhijab adakah perlu mengikut kata suami? (Tunjung, 12<sup>th</sup> January 2016)”*

*“Peringatan untuk kita semua. (Haidah Marisa, 8<sup>th</sup> Sept 2015)”*

The above comments represented the majority of the comments online regarding the issue. The issue seemed to elicit negative sentiments that suggested masculine hegemony and elements of the ‘power to’ and the ‘power within’.

## **6.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study found that online discussions among online communities pertaining to gender, patriarchal supremacy and Islam are prone to negative sentiments thus, suggesting the upholding of hegemonic masculinity through the social construction of patriarchal supremacy. On the other hand, the instances of substantive equality in the discussions regarding polygamy are those that have been heavily criticised as being skewed from the real Islamic teachings. To sum up, the study finds that most Malaysian netizens usually do not use positive language and therefore, are not fair to both sexes of gender when they hold discussions that are tainted with ‘power over’. This is especially so as in the issue relating to women for example *aurat*. The data also discloses the presence of cyber bullying as can be seen in the way the netizens interpret the Islamic religion through their social construct of patriarchal supremacy.

In view of the above, the gender bias issues online can be dealt with in the following THREE (3) ways:

- i. Changing communication style by using positive words that exhibit positive sentiments;
- ii. Avoid using ‘power over’ in terms of power relation; and

- iii. Learn the significance of the concept of substantive equality before engaging in debates pertaining to gender and Islam in social media.

Unless Malaysian netizens take heed of these recommendations, then Islam will be seen as a religion that advocates cyber bullying by condoning the use of pugnacious and belligerent language in pursuit of upholding Islamic teachings and way of life. This should not be allowed to happen as an end does not justify the means.

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