

# The Manifestation of Government Strategic Communication through Social Media

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## ABSTRACT

The development of strategic communication in social media is something that is ideal to be discussed and this matter is considered vital. This includes planning and analysing issues that are often being debated at national level to which it will inevitably lead to difficulties in regulating the information that exists in the cyberspace. Apparently, the movement to become vocal and open in expressing opinions through social networking sites begin during Malaysia's 12th General Election back in 2008. This study is very important to delineate the elements of government strategic communication through social media and at the same time to clarify the strength and weaknesses of the strategic. This study wishes to improve the current government strategic communication through social media by addressing the correct message through convincing storytelling-technique as to face current challenges in the future. It is important for the current government to

upgrade and develop new skills on government strategic communication through social media and it is hoped that there will be an in-depth study of Anti Fake News and its impact on the sentiment especially in changing public perception and social convention on norms.

**Keywords:** *Government strategic communication, Social media, Strategic Communication*

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The development of strategic communication in social media is something that is ideal to be discussed and this matter is considered vital. This includes planning and analysing issues that are often being debated at national level to which it will inevitably lead to difficulties in regulating the information that exists in the cyberspace. The latter is being used in order to address the emerging issues on social media such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, blogs and portals.

In the local context, government faces challenges in fending off allegations and slander made available through the cyberspace as well as efforts made by certain parties in disseminating false information that might affect our national security especially when public nowadays put more trust in the news spread through the cyber world rather than the news that came directly from the original source. According to [1], there are some netizens who are misusing the social media to spread rumours and unsubstantiated information. Apparently, the movement to become vocal and open in expressing opinions through social networking sites begin during Malaysia's 12th General Election back in 2008. At that time, the Internet's role as 'an agent of political change' became the subject in debates and controversies in Malaysia [2]. This was supported by [3] that have mentioned on the results of a study in 2012 which found that high usage of internet amongst Malaysian voters has resulted to great change upon voters from the rural areas.

On top of that, the of internet-enabled working facilities that will help in conveying the information to the public as well as enabling communication to occur between the campaigning individuals and the

voters or supporters. In addressing this issue, the government has taken an important initiative by placing this responsibility on the respective government strategic communication practitioner, to react as a leading information management centre that provides strategic information to the government.

### ***1.1 Problem Statement***

Communication strategies carried through effective social media practices are often able to bring big returns to the government. [4] has attributed this to the emergence of the resurgence in the world of new technology, stated that cyber war campaigns are taking place in the last election and it has been one of the factors on what made BN became defeated.

According to [5] who is a web blogger in Biro Tatanegara, politics happened to be manipulated the most by individuals who many would acknowledge them as the “keyboard warriors” whom their main goal was to bring down the credibility of the opponent in an effort to raise public sentiments to hate the party. The challenge that follows post-Malaysia’s 13th General Election is meeting a more inclusive nation. However, [6] concluded that government never underestimate nor remain silent upon any issue and in fact, they monitor the content made available in social networking sites. Hence, this form of constraint was thought to be necessary in order to focus on the effective strategic communication strategies include practising the best communication blueprint as a relational communication process in fending out issues in social media. Nevertheless, this effort is not limited to post GE-12 only. In fact, the government has added a number of outreach programmes for the people through the Government Transformation Program (GTP) which works as new government’s advocacy.

To achieve this goal, this study will delineate the elements of government’s strategic communication through social media from the perspective of government practitioner and will indirectly clarify the strengths and weaknesses of the strategic communication made through

social media by the agencies. This study will help the government in further enhancing the strategies that have been implemented to a better level and as well as to have an integrated standard in facing current challenges.

## **2.0 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE**

The focal point of this study is the emphasis placed by the researcher in delineation of the existing elements that are being practiced in strengthening strategic communication by the ministries in Malaysia through social media.

The research focuses on 3 different objectives: The objectives are as follows:

- RO1: To delineate the elements of the government strategic communication through social media by a government practitioner.
- RO2: To clarify the strengths and weaknesses in the strategic communication through social media by a government practitioner.
- RO3: To propose improvements in the current strategic communication through social media in the face of current challenges.

### ***2.1 Research Question***

The research focuses on 3 different research questions are follows:

- i) What are the elements of the government strategic communication through social media by government practitioner?
  - a. What are the important elements of government strategic communication through social media?
  - b. What is an effective communication tool that can be used by the government to get closer between people-government in delivering messages by the government?
  - c. What is the groundwork that could help the government, if the government has use social media as main strategic communication in systematic gathering of information?

- ii) What are the strengths and weaknesses of the government strategic communication through social media by the government practitioner?
  - a. What are the risks that the government needs to know to ensure government campaigns and programs through social media do not negatively impact?
  - b. What are the government strengths and weaknesses of the strategic communication through social media?
  - c. Should the government need to develop more outstanding communication 'outlets' through the various medium, to ensure the messages delivered by the government agencies are more easily understood by the public?
- iii) What are the improvements that can be implemented in the current strategic communication through social media in the face of challenges?
  - a. Should the government improve the current strategic communication through social media in the face of current challenges?
  - b. Should the government agencies be more aggressive and critical thinking when the issue has affected the image of administration?
  - c. What is the new innovation that might be applied by the government to attract the public attention, especially in changing perceptions of managing issue through social media?

## 2.2 Conceptual Framework

The following conceptual framework describes and explains briefly the elements that are being studied and its relationship with one another.

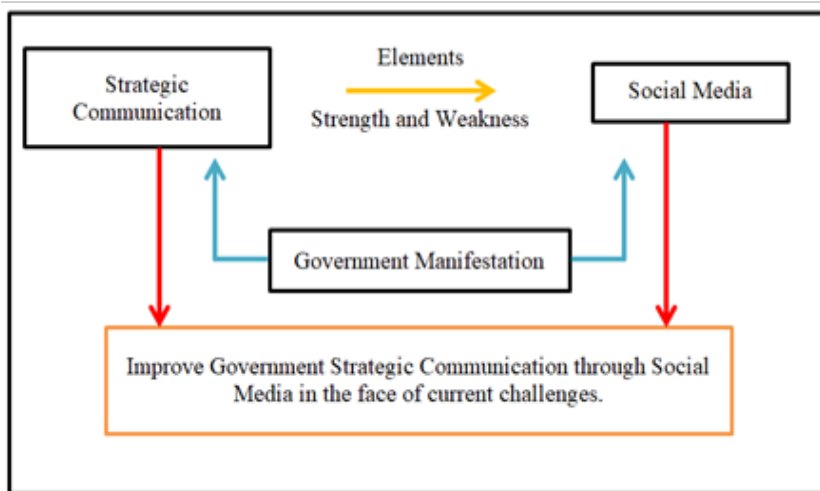


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

## 2.3 Significance of the Study

The issue of government strategic communication is being issued in this study as to aid the related parties in creating a framework of cooperation between various parties upon addressing messages that contain threats and seditions as well as those that appear to be malicious and/or threatening both the national security and public order.

The significance of this study is to strengthen the credibility of strategic communication as to reduce the threats in social media by managing the national issue effectively by the government. This study may also give a new dimension to the government in the form of intact and integrated communication structure as to repel wrong facts in which it is being disseminated widely without censorship and thus can harm the national security.

### **3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

Social media can be considered as the new battlefield that needs to be paid attention especially on its ability to spread the information without constraints. This also explains how new media can become a part of ‘war propaganda’ as quoted by [7]. These two researchers also have emphasised social media work directly with a set of data and it will become a strong “weapon” in propaganda. [8] has concluded that news organizations often play a major role in propagating hoaxes, false claims, questionable rumours and dubious viral content which are polluting the stream of digital information.

#### ***3.1 Social Media and Politics***

During Malaysia’s 13th General Election, there has been a drastic change in the country’s political system involving a breakdown of the vote, especially by the Malays. The changes of generations, modernization and technological rapidity have been identified as the contributing factor to the defeat of BN. Multiple analysis done on the regression shows that social media users who believe the information from the internet and those that came from their friends on election-related news are the individuals who have contributed positively to GE-12 by favouring the coalition of the opposition parties [9]

The Internet has become a great platform for political parties by giving huge impacts to the political arena in Malaysia. Consequently, more than 90% of the voters who aged below 30 years old have voted for Anwar Ibrahim rather than opposition’s candidates [10]. This scenario is part of a review in *Political Perceptions* back in 2013, titled *General Elections: a Case Study in the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur* that acknowledged the influence of media and the internet is the factor that has led the public to support the leadership by the opposition party.

##### ***3.1.1 The Trending of Social Media***

The exchanges of ideas and opinions do not only help other people to make pre-purchase decisions, but also help them to create a

unique opportunity for businesses and the ability to understand what their customers want, who are their competitors and the key leaders' opinions [11]. In findings by [12] based on Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) report (2015), has indicated that “*Digital in Malaysia*”, from 30.5 million total population, 20.1 million are active internet users and 16.8 million are active in social media account. Its indicates the growth of active internet users compared to 2014 which it increases 5% and increase 8% of the number of users that active in social media account”. The government intends to use the social media as a ‘virtual machine’ for government in addressing government strategic information management through communication strategy. The role of social media is due to the development of technology and the opportunity provided by the social network [13].

### *3.1.2 Social Media Threat in Malaysia*

In the Malaysian context, the use of social media by the government administration itself has gained considerable coverage. As outlined in the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission’s (MCMC) Annual Report 2012, the issue of social media abuse still occurs when there are a handful of individuals who are using the platform to defame and spread out false news. [14].

Social media is susceptible to manipulation while propaganda that was being created through the new media is to change and influence the intended people [15] This include a paradox and discrepancy between the concern on privacy and actual setting as netizens would often disguise their identity as to upload the status anonymously [16]. The latest challenge faced by the government is to deal with the fraudulent news that is becoming more rampant on social networking sites.

In a Media Statement issued by MCMC on March 20th, 2013, this governmental agency has warned the netizen about the dangers in disseminating false news through either the internet or the simple messaging system (SMS). This was supported by [17] who had mentioned that the need for False News Act indeed crucial because there is a great number of false news that is being spread – especially in the social media which if



they are being left unchecked, can threaten the country's stability, public security and unity.

### *3.1.3 Social Media Transition*

In a study entitled *Malaysian Political Communication and Its Role in the Electoral Process*, [18] found that the mainstream media may face competition with the social media. It is to be noted that social media is a group of internet-based application that builds ideological and allows the creation and exchange of generated content [19]. A local website called *Siakap Keli* Fan page offers open source of gathered information it has independently has reached a total 4,554,192 followers on Facebook. This page published hot and viral issue as its contents in order to attract readers and followers. This assumption was proven to be correct as this page has won the award *Anugerah Pilihan Online 2016* through an event organized by the local newspaper, *Berita Harian* – the *Anugerah Bintang Popular 2016* [20].

### *3.1.4 Government and Social Media*

Government officials seek to leverage these resources to improve services and communication with citizens. From a political perspective, young voters tend to obtained news via the internet to which the information mainly came from prop-opposition outlets. As a result, these young voters who are also from Generation Y would perceive that the information that came from this medium is more credible compared to the mainstream media [21]. Generally the government has the option of continuing to use face-to-face communication or information technology advantages. More precisely this issue has also gained attention by [22] in highlighting the concept of e-government applications which were designed to provide information from government to citizens in a mono-directional manner and consequently without any reflexive feedback mechanisms. It is able to give early warning to the government to act quickly without any provocation.

### **3.2 Strategic Communication**

#### **3.2.1 Strategic Communication Apparatus**

The global national security has been transformed into a complex and dynamic form of transition and thus brought forwards structured tactics in order to gain interest as well as to suit the application. Nevertheless, what Strategic Communication is all about? Often, the questions raised was ‘*does it has an impact on the national security?*’ and “*what strategy we can implement in doing so?*” [23]. The concept of Strategic Communication itself should be clarified as to answer the question raised in getting information from social networking sites, [24] has described on the point of application in Strategic Communication crisis and how it works as well as how it was being communicated by the government at the national strategic level, especially when the culpability could not be determined immediately through a study done through content analysis of the incident happened on March 18th, 2003 when Singapore was declared to be hit by a virus called SARS by the World Health Organization (WHO). Through analysis, the role of Strategic Communication is very important in the process of interaction between the relevant stakeholders.

#### **3.2.2 Government Strategic Communication**

Thus, one of the ideal medium to implement strategic communication for governmental office is through the social media where it can be utilized into a branding method to show the credibility of the governmental bodies. According to [25], this can be seen as aggressive context and is a part of marketing discipline through social media. It clearly states that Malaysia’s 11th general election campaign held in 2004 witnessed changes in political campaign with the widespread use of advertisements in television, newspapers and other media.

### **3.3 Social Media Engagement Theory (SME)**

Social Media Engagement (SME) Theory is a significant theory and is closely related to the change in information technology that led to overlapping in some sensitive issues that require immediate attention. The basic study on SME was based on two questions: i) what factors shape user

engagement in social media? And ii) to what extent does user engagement affect an individual's social media usage behaviour? [26]. Meanwhile, [27] has declared the role of media in conflict resolution is something that could have an impact when playing the rhetoric war and sometimes, it distorts the facts with the spreading propaganda and hatred for some specific purposes through the exploitation of the facts.

A mode on controlling public opinion and intelligent, monitoring actions should exist to address the issue of viral detrimental to the country's stability and unity in Malaysia [28]. The original idea of this theory has popularized the Model of Co-operation in the service sector. As a result, it has given a new perspective on the user experience influences engagement and subsequently usage.

#### **4.0 METHODOLOGY**

This study will be using the qualitative technique through thematic analysis from the series of semi-structured questions and researcher will focus on understanding and explain clearly the phenomenon discussed rather than counting or measurement. However, in this research, the researcher has chosen the Manual Thematic Analysis to interpret the collected data rather than the methodology used by NVivo 11 for better understanding based on the identified themes. In this study, a series of in-depth interviews were conducted with participants of different backgrounds and work experiences but with same expertise in relation.

## 5.0 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The table below shows the breakdown of each expert that was being interviewed for this research and their primary expertise:

*Table 1:* Breakdown of each expert interviewed for this study and their primary expertise

Name	Organization	Position	Expertise
Dr Mohd Fadhlullah Suhaimi Abdul Malek	Strategic Communication Committee	Chief of Strategic Communication Committee of Malaysia (JUSA A)	Government Strategic Communication and Social Media Analysis
Mr Tun Faizal Ismail Aziz	<i>Jabatan Hal Ehwal Khas (JASA)</i>	Director of Communication strategic/UMNO Official Blogger/ Government Cyber Troopers (JUSA C)	Government Strategic Communication and Social Media Analysis
Mrs Noorzawiyah Bulka	Strategic Communication Division, MCMM	Deputy Secretary of Strategic Communication Division (S54)	Government Field Work Officer
Mr Tai Zee Kin	Prime Minister Office (PMO)	Social Media and Digital Communication Officer to Dato' Seri Mohd Najib bin Tun Hj Abdul Razak (PTD M48)	Social Media Analysis
Mr Mohd Fariq Huzair	Strategic Communication Division, MCMM	Social Media Analyst Officer (PTD- M48)	Government Social Media Analysis
Mr Mohd Suhaimie Sahaar	UiTM Shah Alam	Senior Lecturer	Government Political Analysis and Strategic Communication

### 5.1 Findings

#### 5.1.1 Delineate the Elements of Government Strategic Communication Through Social Media

In order to answer this research question, three (3) underlying question has been asked to the respondents as mentioned at Chapter One (1), which is to delineate the elements of government strategic communication through social media.

### *5.1.1.1 Technology Fluctuations in Digital Communication*

All participants were being asked on the important elements in government's strategic communication as well as to provide a scenario in relation to the development of social media and the revolution of internet that had left a major impact on the performance of government communication strategies.

Mr Mohd Fariq Huzair used his experience as an official social media analyst at MCOMM by elaborating that the overall government's communications strategy is still in a moderate level. This is because fan pages or portal sites that are being too critical on the political situation in Malaysia have begun to lose its followers. Nevertheless, according to him, the government do has the idea and a clear blueprint in reaching out to the audiences with its messages. However, those are still being considered less effective to be put into action. Dr. Mohd Fadhlullah Suhaimi Abdul Malek viewed that the changes in the internet revolution has made the government became more aggressive in taking action by making the existing social media as the best platform to distribute the information to the public.

On the other hand, Mr Sahaar Suhaimee has questioned the credibility of the internet revolution. This statement was supported by Mr. Tun Mohd Faizal Ismail Aziz who stated that "In 1998, there was no special template in framing the ideas while blogging in online media because by that time, the government was too dependent on the traditional media" In fact, according to him, the authority ignores the revolution of communication strategy created by the opposition known as the 'alternative media' for rakyat to seek for second opinion.

Therefore, only four (4) out of six (6) informants have agreed that the environment is changing whereas the government's communications strategy was based on the revolution that had occurred before.

### *5.1.1.2 The Diversity of Demographic Data*

The informants have also informed the researcher that there was a significant statistical increase after the 12th General Election in 2008. According to Mr Suhaimee Sahaar, the statistic on internet users in Malaysia now reads at about 18 million to 20 and most of them are expose to the

Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Hence, according to him, efficient law monitoring should be promoted as to celebrate the concept of ‘freedom of expression’ as it has been stated in the Constitution. He has added by saying that “*It’s not only to advocate but they have to educate the importance of using social media correctly.*”

Through this perspective, the informants have linked the increase in public awareness on information disseminated by the government through the role of the portal developed by MCMC, which Mr Mohd Fariq Huzair based on his random surveys has expressed his concern for the domination of the opposition in virtual space. However, he also had noted that there is an increase in the number of visitors on the website *sebenarnya.my* whereby so far, the page has been viewed by more than 50,000 visitors. This is being considered as a good development for MCMC who have come up with this effort. In contrast, Dr Mohd Fadullah Suhaimi Abdul Malek has positively stated that up until now, a number of 21 million internet users have visited the webpage (*sebenarnya.my*) to look for information which at the same time can be used as a guide that will eventually help the government in giving feedback on false news. Literally, it is being known as ‘*a crowd space*’.

Hence, based on this discussion, it can be concluded that, despite the increase in the number of people who have visited the portal *sebenarnya.my* and become their secondary references, the question now is whether the public really do understand, believe and put trust on the information presented by the government exclusive of facts that are being double standard.

### *5.1.1.3 Transformation of Technology*

In this theme, all informants have their own distinctive comments in regards to technology flows that are closely related to the government’s actions either as a government or government agency in organizing a communication strategy. This was agreed by Mr Mohd Fariq Huzair and Mrs. Noor Zawiyah Bulka who have stated that nowadays, technology has opened the door for the government to turn social media as a platform

to share information as well as attracting the attention from the youths.

Mr. Tai Zee Kin on the other hand had exposed the role of social media as a field to manage sentiments of citizens but certainly not to 'manage these issues' per se. Apparently, the emergence of diverse technology has greatly changed the people's landscape to make something acceptable as argued by Mr. Suhaimie Sahaar that *"how far people use this technology wisely." The concept of 'free sky' in 1998 and during those days we never think about 'cyber information 'and the reliable information"*

However, in contrast, Mr Tun Faizal Ismail Aziz has stated a different stance and is opposing to the aforementioned statement as he noted that UMNO's Youth Wing must acknowledges that the spreading of false news back in 1990 was in a higher number as there is a slight change. According to him, the reason why the technology was not so "user-friendly" at that time was because the speed of the internet was not as fast as it is now. *"Therefore, in the previous year, the news took time to reach the target audiences whereas nowadays, the news can travelled and be delivered overnight"*

Specifically, all informants recognize the role of technology as the most important agenda of the government in enhancing their ability to regulate the change so that it can serve as an advantage to the government in controlling the sources of information.

#### *5.1.1.4 Blended Communication Method*

Upon inquiry, all participants have given the researcher a realistic and unpredictable opinion that blended or integrated communication method can still be considered by related parties to ensure that the government can deliver messages more effectively. This point of view was being supported by Mr. Suhaimie Sahar who has defined blended communication method by saying *"we blend with social media and traditional social media that depends on the audients and not all audients have a smart phone, so that government need to utilize a diverse media whether social media or conventional media (Integrated media) as reason to dominate the virtual space."* In other words, he gives differentiates between the 'old states' and the 'virtual states' where 'old state' is hard to compete compared to a

virtual state.

Mr Mohd Fariq Huzair and Mrs. Noorzawiyah Bulka have similar views and agree that the use of face-to-face communication is still relevant to be implemented without denying the function of social media needs to disseminate information. In contrast, Dr Mohd Fadullah Suhaimi Abdul Malek has stated that *“in the context of face-to-face communication, when we look at, is just a mess because you communicate by way of words. How can we do face to face communication if the audients are more than 30 million of population! Unless if you are a subject method expert and I can tell you, the face to face communication is the best way to communicate and, can you do it? It must be impossible! Because the world is not like that! The world doesn't operate in the 'tunnel vision'”*.

However, Mr Tun Faizal Ismail Aziz has a fairly positive view on this subject by insisting that, obviously, face-to-face communication is a machinery of the 'human touch' techniques.

#### *5.1.1.5 Verifying the Content and Convincing Narrative*

This perspective has opened a new dimension to the element in the government's communications strategy. As it is being illustrated by Dr Fadullah Suhaimi Abdul Malek, the content and narrative works as a 'story house' where it tells the public about the brand and it face no changes. According to Mr. Suhaimi Saahar, although the government has the advantage in terms of policy makers, however, there is a high paradigm shift in the past where the situation is different compared to the past because they now have to deal with false news. His reason was *“we do not need new Act! It is time for the government to educate the citizens by making comparisons between defamation and false news”*.

Mr Tun Faizal Ismail Aziz has emphasized that the important thing is not the platform used, but the communication activity itself as well as the messages to be delivered. He has said that if the message was not being processed for the purpose of persuading and influencing the people, it was to be considered unsuccessful. As for, Mr Tai Zee Kin, the purpose of the content and messaging should have a clear correlation which in the end, the elements of government's strategic communication must involve a



concrete data analytic as a core of the Content, Communication Planning and also amplification through Social Media to see a relevant audience and demography.

#### *5.1.1.6 Segmentation of Audiences*

In general, Malaysians has a diverse society with a greater advantage. However, in order to address this, the use of integrated communication is very helpful in clarifying government policies. But in cyberspace, the government has difficulty in classifying the appropriate audient based on the message to be submitted.

This was being voiced out by Mr Tun Faizal Ismail Aziz where he found that this phenomena is somehow weird because public prefer to choose sensational issues rather than facts. He noted that face-to-face communication can also be difficult because the degree of connectivity is also limited as technology that also contributes to limitations that make no bilateral interaction. Upon inquiry, Mr Suhaimee Sahaar had raised a few questions on the best way to control the audiences and link the controls through existing law enforcement through the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998 because not everyone knows about it. It is different from the views of Dr Mohd Fadullah Suhaimi Abdul Malek whom has stated that *“It’s coming back to your segmentation of audiences. People conversing about this and you answer from this angle, you are not answering anybody. So what you are communicating; otherwise you think you have done your job. But you do not!”* because we are tend to tell people like ABCDE but, your audient wants to know DEFG, and then you said *“yes I have”*, but actually you are wrong! It is because audient expect something else, and you give something else in answering the same question. You actually failed when you *‘walk out the door!’*. So, audient is so important”

He also commented on the importance of regular monitoring to look at the impact of communication and feedback because for him, ‘time is the essence’ and the perceptual game will occur when there is a repetition of lies without any counter-information.

#### *5.1.1.7 The Capability of Big Data Analytics*

Respondents have been asked about the efficient elements of communication and for that, some informants have given their views. Dr Mohd Fadullah Suhaimi Abdul Malek has connected with the revolution of Internet Revolution (IR) 4.0 which talks about the big data. At this point, he had mentioned about 'big data analytic' and 'buy a keywords' to forecast the result from difference angles.

This was also agreed by Mr Suhaimee Sahaar, who has highlighted the importance to use 'buy a keyword' that stating "we still fail to master SEO (Search Engine Optimism) at this moment. For example, if you google Najib Tun Razak, information will link to Wikipedia but do not go direct to his net website. So when you ask me, their administration of strategic communication in the Prime Minister Department has failed to put him as number one. People tend to click on the first link listed in the search engine rather than the second link given!" Meanwhile, Mr. Tai Zee Kin strongly believes that through the use of analytics data, such as social media raw data (analytics, insights) that are owned by the government's agencies can have a great impact on the government strategic communication in social media.

#### *5.1.1.8 Sentiment Analysis and Public Reaction*

Most informants associate the technology and the power of delivering the messages has its own impact. According to Dr Mohd Fadullah Suhaimi Abdul Malek, over a period of 24 hours, many things can happen and there is also a possibility for various negative thinking reactions where a great number of netizen will believe it as the truth. A quick investigation by the relevant agencies can change the public reaction. So, the word of 'forecast' the public reaction is the best word that could explain in organizing the chaos by the government to be more manageable. Mr Suhaimee Sahaar has asserted that the level of public respect by now towards the government has changed, no longer as it used to.

### ***5.1.2 Clarify the Strengths and Weakness of Government Strategic Communication Through Social Media***

All participants were asked on the strength and weaknesses of government's strategic communication made through social media. All participants have agreed that there is strength and weaknesses that need to overcome when talking about the challenges faced by many government practitioners. There are also some arguments in the statement specified by the respondent, when it comes to certain issues which the argument can be categorized as a weakness of the government to be improved.

#### ***5.1.2.1 Risk Assessment and Implementation of Policy***

Mr Mohd Fariq Huzair has stated that the government has no problem in communicating information because the government is the one who is in-charge. Dr Mohd Fadullah Suhaimi Abdul Malek argued that the segmentation of the audience was among the most important element for the government to communicate properly through the forecast of an issue that interrelated to the news. However, Mr Suhaimee Sahaar has commented in a sense of black psychological operation point of view which the government needs to identify its purpose and objective. He also continues to comment from the perspective of alternative information that 'bad do looks good' as among the strategies that can be applied in this context are: first, 'instil hatred' and second, by providing false news to look like the "real" news. In contrast, Mr Tun faizal Ismail Aziz was found to be saying that *"in this social media, we need to know whether the issue is 'really noisy' because it sometimes seems to be critical but in fact, there is nothing to be done and is not necessary to be answered There is a possibility the people will not read the fact, and if they read, did they spread? So that's a risk!"*. Mr Tai Zee Kin also has pointed out the risks to the government in which certain parties would be misinterpreting and twisting the words in order to construct a favourable message that will benefit only one side. Most informants have agreed that the government will face certain risks in ensuring that communication activities can be made possible with the *rakyat*.

### *5.1.2.2 Promoting Government 'Feel Good Factor'*

Social media is one of the most important contributors in forming new perceptions among the communities in Malaysia and thus, the government should take this opportunity to further promote the government policies and proverbs as reviewed by the following respondents.

Mr Mohd Fariq Huzair argued that social media such as Facebook account owned by MCMM which has a great number of followers by a whopping two million followers and to ensure that this strategy is successful, every agency should avoid working in 'psylo'. Mr Suhaimee Sahar also has the same view in which he saw that social media is the only medium and platform that works as a channel that carries out all messages on the condition that the government needs to identify the potential and the targeted audience as well as the need to customize the messages. However, according to Suhaimee, there is still a power source that is not used being perfectly because sometimes the leader makes only for self-interest and it manifests an individual's interest beyond the national interest.

Mr Tun Faizal Ismail Aziz had also commented on the role of the rakyat who refused to spread government information by saying that *"things were based on 'educating' is not many people bother about that, while the people do not want to spread it, and how much we lose!"*. As a whole, respondents have manifested their views by giving details of the message brought by the government for the purpose of attracting public attention.

### *5.1.2.3 Policies and Regulations*

Mr Mohd Fariq Huzair called on the government to insist that the existing government policy and regulations need to be enforced against irresponsible parties, but unfortunately these are still not being implemented properly. This was also being agreed by Mr Noorzawiyah Bulka whom had urge the government to speed up the implementation of the Notorious News Act by saying *"I agree 100% if the government has taken the initiative to formulate a new Fake News Act though there is Grievance that this act is in favour of the government"*. According to Dr Mohd Fadullah Suhaimi Abdul Malek, *"the government policies is fit enough to encounter the*

*strategic communication strategies because communication whether you communicate or you de-communicate, you still achieve what you want. Because sometimes you need to explain why, because of the exposure is there”.*

Mr Suhaimie Sahaar has affirmed that *“any policy must come from the ‘bottom’ and the will of the grassroots but, right now the society is less concerned with all the qualities because there are many things are politicized”*. Meanwhile, Mr. Tai Zee Kin stated that the best way is through policy modification, enforcement of law and regulation, or deploying Standard Operating Procedure (S.O.P) and actions relevant to the issues.

#### *5.1.2.4 Synergy of Multiple Communication Method*

Mr. Mohd Huzair Fariq argues that the government’s communications strategy will be more effective if it is using the face-to-face communication strategy and technology in an integrated manner to produce the best synergy.

Nonetheless, Dr Mohd Fadullah Suhaimi Abdul Malek has said that the government has emphasized the appropriate selection of words without raising the issue as saying *“government is really careful about the suitable word that could represent the different meaning. Word is important. The words like ‘subsidies will be adjusted’ is better than ‘subsidies will be abolished’, because that makes a different perception”*. This matter was also agreed by Mr. Tai Zee Kin by saying *“wordings need to be concise, precise, as well as with high level of accuracy”*. Mr Suhaimie Sahaar criticized the challenges that the government needs to face in the future is what the measurement that can be used to measure the mechanisms adopted.

#### *5.1.2.5 Strengthening Government Strategic Communication*

Mr Mohd Fariq Huzair still confident of face to face communication method as saying *“face to face is seen to be relevant by the leaders and government should play a black propaganda sentiment against the opposition that should be done in the form of covert, while white propaganda should be imposed on the people and it need courage to do that”*. He is

convinced that the presence of reverse psychology can also be adopted as the public interest to support the government to approach the outside habits or more extreme environments than normal can be successful.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Noorzawiyah Bulka states “*we need a thinker because the government has no issues that can be created*”. Dr Mohd Fadullah Suhaimi Abdul Malek) has said the strategic communication is the best way to communicate especially in crisis by making it as a strategic standpoint in the new perspective of ‘engage with the reaction’. Mr Suhaimie Sahaar has commented that in reality, government departments is merely depending on monthly report of the issue, but the extent to which the report has received the highest management attention is unknown. However, Mr Tun Faizal Ismail Aziz said that the government’s strategic information distribution has been improvised and it will study into what needs to be answered or not, which requires coordination.

### ***5.1.3 Propose the Improvement of Government Strategic Communication in the Current Challenges through Social Media***

All participants were asked to propose an improvement for the current government strategic communication made through the social media. For this section, every informant has submitted some suggestions that are deemed appropriate for the practice of the government to further improve the quality of public delivery to understand government operations better.

#### ***5.1.3.1 Strategic Communication Enhancement***

Mr Mohd Fariq Huzair said that “*the government needs to change strategic communication function especially among the top management. As government machinery, we should be on the spirit of NBOS so that all government agencies need to work together without any interest. The perception management needs to be taken seriously as it is often misinterpreted by the audiences.*” According to him, all government agencies need to work together without any interest by sharing the same information as a capacity of ‘ruling government’, in order to gained support from the public. Mrs Noorzawiyah Bulka mentioned the linked with mass media because according to her, everything that is being done should have a rating that the government needs to find the appropriate strategic

communication that must be a media plan, a good narrative to ensure that issues can be countered.

In this perspective Dr Mohd Fadullah Suhaimi Abdul Malek responded positively by saying *“in the current context, we have improved a lot compared to the revolution of social media since 2014. The facts today did you see the same chaos that you may see just like in 2014, you do not! Why? Because things are more properly manage, people are reacting well and the level of understanding among people is quite good and the government responding is faster than before.”*

#### *5.1.3.2 The Management of Public Perception*

Mr Mohd Fariq Huzair has affirmed that perception management needs to be taken seriously as it is often misinterpreted by the audiences. He is very confident as to take the example of Malaysia’s capabilities as in managing crisis during the incident of the missing flight MH370 which he thinks diversifying the existing information and continuing to disseminate the right information to the people without rhetoric is very important.

However, this is clearly different from the point of views of Dr Mohd Fadullah Suhaimi Abdul Malek who has stated that currently, people do not even bother about the government’s message. By taking the MRT project implemented by the government as an example, many complaints have been heard at that time, but it disappeared after the project is commissioned. In this case he stated in the opposition’s perspective that the opposition is not based on the facts and the lies.

#### *5.1.3.3 Eliminate Duplication of Task*

Mohd Fariq Huzair asserted that every ministry needs to know about the function and role of an organization to prevent the ministry from reaching its proper obligations as promoting the government policies in an ongoing basis just to ensure that this government machinery is relevant. This was agreed upon by Mrs. Noorzawiyah Bulka, who had emphasized that *“we need to revert to our essential task in order to market government information for people’s understanding through various platforms”*.

Meanwhile, Dr Mohd Fadullah Suhaimi Abdul Malek has given a translation on the role of the government by saying that civil servants are representing the ruling party of politician. So, according to him rules need to be followed and work in harmony between the departments. This is because the roles of each organization are varied according to the situation and it depends on the priority.

#### *5.1.3.4 Attract and Attack Strategies*

Mohd Fariq Huzair viewed that between it is the best time to implement the concept of ‘attract and attack’ communication strategies as well as using a spoke person in answering the controversial questions in social media. However, Mrs Noorzawiyah Bulka has stated otherwise whereas the government should apply the black propaganda as the government needs to be more aggressive in countering the information wisely. She also had stresses that the government should ensure that the message in the ‘narrative’ is truly effective.

However, Dr Mohd Fadullah Suhaimi Abdul Malek sees this in the context of the differences between the past and the present, seeing that the government has been making a lot of changes to the social media since 2014. Consequently, Tun Mohd Faizal Ismail had agreed with the fact that without a ‘counter-attack’, the defensive strategy will not bring success as well. As a whole, the five (5) respondents have argued that governments need to manage communication relationships more efficiently by using appropriate propaganda especially in social media as well as using face-to-face communication as to strengthen the facts

#### *5.1.3.5 Aggressive and Critical Thinking*

Mr Mohd Fariq Huzair has said that *“I think the government should be more aggressive, especially in terms of processing the content, and even the government does not have to treat the opposition at times which negatively impacts the government”*. He said that the government also needs to be more aggressive in giving priority to current issues by giving exposure to servants as an effective government propaganda agent. In contrast, Mrs Noorzawiyah Bulka does not agree on becoming more aggressive because government needs support and the government cannot force and control the



people. Mr Suhaimie Sahaar has proposed that the government's machinery needs to be more aggressive in terms of tools, content, and setting up more fan pages by hiring cyber troopers. Government should concern more on the 'smart attack' by the cyber troopers to the best way to play safe.

Besides, Mr Tun Mohd Faizal Ismail has also stressed that the government needs to be critical and aggressive because the government is dealing with opposition parties who practice unethical actions in continuously spreading false news and most sadly no legal action against them. He also expressed disappointment over the role of MCMC and Attorney General Chambers in preventing such things from happening by saying *"it being a mistake on the government as we have never taken action against them government, especially from MCMC to prevent this as it has become a culture now; it is quite difficult for us to nowhere"* Mr. Tai Zee Kin also has agreed that the government should be more aggressive and critical in delivering government messages. Three (3) respondents have very similar views on the government's ability to address issues in social media, especially with the more aggressive strategy but comprehensive.

#### *5.1.3.6 Attract the Public Attention*

Mr Mohd Fariq Huzair has a more holistic view. Mr Tun Faizal Ismail Aziz has stated that the government need to do more to 'advocate', 'defense' and 'attack'. Meanwhile, Mrs Noorzawiyah Bulka concerned more on the government delivering system by saying *"we just need to diversify the delivery again, through the internet revolution the government needs to get along with the changes, otherwise we will miss it"*. However, she thinks that integration between technology, printed media and face-to-face communication needs to be diversified. A new innovation was being suggested by Dr Mohd Fadullah Suhaimi Abdul Malek on how the government crafts the message and according to him, the real innovation is 'thinking'. He has also mentioned that *"the appreciation of the big data analytical. From that it will help you to do the things in the right way because its help to do critics, forecast, measure the possibility and it would merely specific if I can say we should have a media intelligence because I really don't care about social media intelligence"*. Meanwhile, he said that the messages carried by government should be 'readable and digestible'.

### *5.1.3.7 The Affirmation of Integrity and Neutrality*

Upon inquiry, all respondents agreed that civil servants should act neutral and distribute information with more integrity as stated by Mr. Mohd Fariq Huzair. According to him, *“I think it is more impactful when all civil servants will perfectly perform the duty without the need to highlight the political party and I think it will get a positive impact”*.

Dr Mohd Fadullah Suhaimi Abdul Malek by giving the view that there is a difference in that context because politicians often have a different vision compared to the civil servant because the latter cannot speak as it will. Meanwhile, he also commented that communication is about tackling in neutral as much as possible. As a civil servant, the main job is to advise on to avoid the possible effect. Under these conditions, Mr. Tun Mohd Faizal Ismail Aziz has questioned the credibility of the netizens comments that sometimes it's again the rule of laws. He said that *“it is impossible to impose this charge to be tried in court, but it is suggested that the Special Tribunal be established to handle cases relating to offenses in social media”*.

### *5.1.3.8 Digital Data Management*

In the perspective of big data, Dr Mohd Fadullah Suhaimi Abdul Malek has stated that *“word is the appreciation of the big data analytical. From that, it will help you to do the things in the right way because its help to do forecast the sentiments and measure the possibility”*.

This has caught Mr Suhaimi Sahaar's attention in which he has responded by stating that currently, there is still no available application or websites that can measure one's personality. Due to the overwhelming amount of black information disclosed to the netizens, it is important for the government to look at the big data on how much white information is being provided to the people. Dr Mohd Fadullah Suhaimi Abdul Malek also suggested that government should emphasis on media intelligence because he really does not care about social media intelligence. When it comes to analysing the behaviour, people have begun to make comparisons to find the news legitimacy by referring to the mainstream media. It is based on the view of being an expert and proficient who is so concerned about this.

## **5.2 Discussion**

The discussion will be conducted based on the themes that have been identified to be discussed in more detail in this chapter.

### **5.2.1 Delineate the Elements of Government Strategic Communication through Social Media by a Government Practitioner**

#### *5.2.1.1 Technology and Environment as Catalyst of Change*

Mastery of technology in today's virtual space has already shifted to a more modern way to be able to change one's stand and perception if it is linked in the context of communication in forming perceptions and behaviour. [29] has highlighted the concept of 'push-button warfare' as the best way to influence the society which has continually metamorphosed in media discourses as a symbol of technological warfare from a distance.

#### *5.2.1.2 'In House Story Telling' and Big Data Analytics*

Some of the Big Data's utilization opportunities in the public sector are, among others, to gain feedback and public response from government service information systems [30]. The controversies in the distribution of messages are government's major challenge of '*crafting the messaging in a way that lay man can understand*' as mentioned by Dr Mohd Fadullah Suhaimi Abdul Malek. According to the participants, the narrative presented by the government should be the same and are being standardized in order to avoid the confusion among the public

This was also being discussed in an article written by [31] on Optimizing Millennials Communication Styles in which it was referring to the respondents who were born between the year 1980 to 2000 by reviewing communication as an interactive process — a two-way sharing and understanding of information. The author said the ability of the government to dominate the virtual space will be a major challenge when it does not use Search Engine Optimism (SEO) as the main driver in data manipulation as stated by Mr Suhaimee Sahaar: "*people tends to click number one, not number two*". The role of SEO in communication among others is to define users' experiences of the internet – a common one-stop shop for finding information, entertainment, or other content [32].

### *5.2.1.3 Government Indoctrination through Social Media*

Big power states such as the United State and Russia have apparently used covert method to win the battle and for the purpose of shaping public opinion and perception. The effectiveness of warfare in cyberspace can no longer be denied, but it is increasingly challenging the government's ability to regulate these patterns as it often gives a great blow to the government on a number of issues. In the researcher's opinion, the wisdom of the opposition is that as they have studied on both the 'behaviour' and 'sensitivity' of Malaysians, they will succeed in influencing public thoughts as many sensitive issues begun to be questioned. Freedom and patriotism is being always a part of their campaign to 'win the hearts and minds' of the international opinion.

### *5.2.1.4 Social Media Intelligence (SOCMINT) and Measurement Signature Intelligence (MASINT)*

Intelligence is a part of updated gathering information which includes the collecting data through some process of strategic and coordinated intelligence activities that serve as a source of information warfare [33]. The government should establish a digital forensics team as soon as possible through the related government agency for a more realistic idea and apply them with the algorithm as the measurement in SOCMINT. It should be mobilized as soon as possible due to fears of side effects on the sentiments and public reactions of Malaysians when the opposition has begun to aggressively and vividly manipulate facts for misleading purposes.

Measurement and Signature Intelligence (MASINT) as a symbol of the deeper meaning of the message which gives a sign to the government to track the issue raised by irresponsible individual to be more sensitive to physical elements and, 'signature' of a matter before it spreads. The enforcement could bring a lot of damage to the society as they are so obsessed in disseminating fake news, especially through the use of Facebook and Twitter.

## ***5.2.2 Clarify the Strength and Weaknesses in the Government Strategic Communication through Social Media***

### *5.2.2.1 Mix Method of Communication*

It is undeniable that government agencies who have been accustomed to using face-to-face communication skills are bring extremely difficult to achieve the level of speed of communication among the people. According to the respondents, due to the fact that this kind of communication is still important when it is not as expected, today's technology were being made as to back up the information and checked upon its validity.

This is confirmed by the respondents of the ministry's agencies that acts as a front liner government likes Mr Mohd Fariq Huzair from MCMM and Mr. Tun Mohd Faizal Ismail Aziz from JASA who appreciated technology and face to face communication as a great communication in generating synergy that include emphasis of the content and messages, by using an appropriate words.

### *5.2.2.2 Communication Branding and Prospect*

The current trend certainly cannot be separated from the mainstream technology and this often leads to the debate about the validity of the facts – especially that information those are being disseminated through these modern applications. This parable can also be attributed as 'communications marketing' that sells its own branding to achieve the ultimate goal of achieving the expected 'profit'. Marketing is a new paradigm and from one perspective, it works as an entity and has the function of a complex with various patterns of consumerism [34].

However, the role of persuasion in strategic communication activities are important as a factor in the decision-making process that is being driven by medium of communication that helps *rakyat* in making judgments.

### *5.2.2.3 Strengthening Government Communication Mechanism*

In an effort to strengthen the government communication outlet, it can also be categorized as 'marketing' in the dissemination of information, regardless of whether it came from the positive perspective or stated otherwise. Strategic communication is also being considered as a primary

process that could affect the influences projected at a strategic level as to provide the underlying context against the strength of consistency between strategic meanings. In this case, information was being adopted and absorbed as a strategy that identified the most effective way to defeat the enemy who in turn use communication strategies as a prerequisite to the determination of propaganda, that could cause significant impact on the management of perception and thought. Under these conditions, [35] have identified the fundamental of network-centric which acted as a catalyst and mover to the effectiveness and success of any military activity by outlining the basic network-centric as ‘psychical domain’ where all elements of the force are robustly networked in achieving secure and seamless connectivity and interoperability.

#### *5.2.2.4 Covert Media*

The benefit of psychological operations (Psy-Ops) is highly valued and constantly monitored by the sufficient intelligence data that contribute to the enemy defected. Information warfare and its operation is the key player behind the scene in order to engage this three component by collaborating and balancing the potential ‘to win the heart and mind’ of the people. Shaping public opinion is being made possible by gaining and engaging with the media to mould the cognitive by crafting comprehensive messages so that it is being acceptable by the netizens and affects the perception. The need to create covert media in government agencies is very accurate to divert negative perceptions of the government.

### ***5.2.3 Propose the Improvement of the Government Strategic Communication through Social Media in the Face of Current Challenges***

#### *5.2.3.1 Social Media Algorithm*

TAccording to [36], the study of algorithms is so complex that no single person can fully understand them. According to [37] Seaver algorithm is any well-defined computational procedure that takes some value or set of values as input and produces some value, or set of values, as output.

The government should be more proactive in monitoring a big amount of data which has the possibility to own a threat whereas in many situations, it can be measured either through covert or overt observations.

The government also faces challenges in fending off allegations and slander through cyberspace with various activities by certain parties in the dissemination of false information that might affect the security of the country, especially when people have more trust in news gathered from the cyber world rather than seeking for the truth.

#### *5.2.3.2 Government Strategic Communication Framework*

The media has a vast function to the society. It can be regarded as medium to convey messages and information to the society. The function of social media is very critical inclusive of providing important information and endless entertainment to the people [38]. Currently, the new evolution of technology or it is commonly being known as the ‘social media’ happened to be the most effective propaganda agent as discussed in Chapter One. The previous study found in Chapter Two shows that social media is one of the best political strategies to gain support or trust. Elements such as ‘black propaganda’ or ‘white propaganda’ should be prioritized in all government strategic communication machinery that is capable of getting over the opposition’s ability by actively using social media.

In this thesis, if it is being referred to the first Chapter, the researcher has outlined a conceptual framework for the study conducted by involving the identified variable of strategic communication and social media as the main domain of the study. Hence, the following is proposed by the Progressive Government Strategic Communication Framework as clarifying the results of the research findings in figure 2. Based on the accompanying framework, all of these items should be taken into account and periodically reviewed in order to have a greater impact on the government’s operations in heightens the public’s confidence.

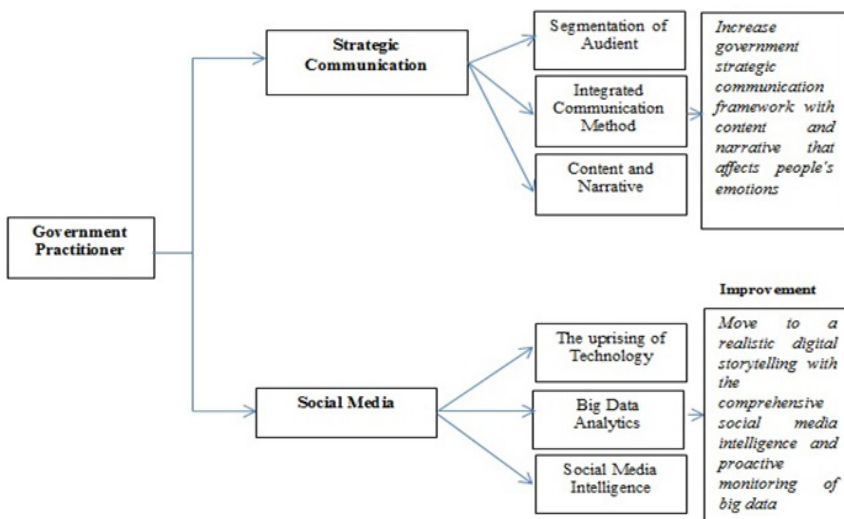


Figure 2: Progressive Government Strategic Communication

### 5.2.3.3 Reformation of Government Social Media

The strategic communication stages of formative research are strategy, tactics, and evaluation which provide campaign guidance for communicating messages, but less direction is available for the specific tactics of channel selection and message delivery [39]. According to the framework above, technology is the catalyst to change the Malaysians' mind-sets based on the problem statement included in this study. Generally, a drastic environmental change following evolution in technology has enabled the flow of change to be difficult to address by the government. It is important for the government to fully understand the situation that is happening especially in the virtual space by continuously reforming narrative and standardized to be made more consistent.

## 6.0 CONCLUSION

Overall, this thesis has touched on several sections that clearly describe the phenomenon related to Government Strategic Communication made through the Social Media from the perspective of Government Practitioner.



The importance of information and it is the most powerful to create the dynamic cognition to the perception with the applying of the new pattern of thinking as the acceptance to shape the hegemony as a superior formation as described in the first two chapters in this study. Echoed to that, this study also proved that government strategic communication has important element for exclusive attention which in this study researcher delineate eight (8) elements in the strategic communications within the government that require immediate actions as mentioned in the discussions part of this study.

Despite that there are many things that the government needs to improve, especially in dominating the virtual space by using credible media power, but they should have been given the credit as to still practicing tolerance in social media where the people are free to voice their opinions on current issues but still need some absolute restrictions on the phenomenon to be invited to problems in the future, particularly in *rakyat's* trust towards the government.

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