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THE ROLE OF POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION ON FACEBOOK AMONG MALAYSIAN CHINESE

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Abstract:

The Barisan Nasional (BN), Malaysia's dominant coalition party that has ruled since 1957, lost the 14th general election. Various analyses were conducted, and many discussions centred on Chinese voters who had switched to opposition, Pakatan Harapan, and rejected BN entirely. This situation raises an interesting discussion about what prompted Chinese voters to make drastic changes in this ethnic-based country's politics. This study, therefore, focuses on whether political socialization in social media will build a political opportunity for Malaysian Chinese. In investigating how social media propaganda can provide Malaysian Chinese a political viewpoint, these studies argue that the internet and social media have led to unparalleled complexity in Malaysia's political socialization process. A bottom-up, constructivist approach is used to decide how social media played their position as Malaysian political socializers.

Keywords:

Political Socialization, Facebook, Malaysian Chinese

Introduction

According to the Department of Statics of Malaysia (2019), it was projected at 32.63 million for the third quarter of 2019, up 0.6 percent compared with the third quarter of 2018. (32.43 million). With 69.3 percent, ethnic Bumiputera reported the highest percentage, followed by

Chinese (22.8 percent), Indians (6.9 percent) and others (1.0 percent). This ethnic-based politics is something that deserves attention in the process of understanding nation-building because of the multi-racial and plural demographic structure of the people (Shamsul, 1997). It is in this sense that the study aims to examine Malaysian Chinese roles by using the social network site such as Facebook to become inspired to engage in a political socialization process. This study will explore online media political socialization mechanisms in a culture that dominates political information in conventional media and, in turn, forces people to look for political information in traditional media. and, in turn, compels citizens to seek alternative news sources online. Wong, Ezhar and Annette (2013) found that higher levels of political participation among Malaysian voters were positively correlated with online media use. Link between social media with political advocacy have been demonstrated by the usage and visibility of social networking sites, political blogs, political online videos, party websites, and political advertising on mobile phones.

Literature Review

Social Media and Youth

According to Pandian (2014), many young voters under the age of 39 voted for the first time in the 13th general election, giving victory to opposition candidates, particularly in urban parliamentary seats. This voter group is also described as having a high level of technological knowledge and relying solely on information obtained from the internet. These young voters are undecided voters with no fixed political ideology and Azhar (2012) claims that this group votes very carefully, considering the country's future. Because of this, this group is completely reliant on information obtained via the internet and social media (Chang & Jen Sern. 2016).

Social media has a constructive role to play for the society. It is the fact that in most of the eras, social media were being given free and fair chances to explore the issues of society more openly than it is being given now (Rizuan et al, 2012). Around 86 percent of Malaysians were active social media users as of January 2021. This was a 24 percent increase from 2016, when social media users accounted for approximately 62 percent of Malaysia's total population. Facebook was the most popular social media platform there, out of all the ones available.

Facebook, Instagram, Facebook Messenger, and LinkedIn were the most popular social media platforms among Malaysians in 2020. According to Jamilah Ahmad (2015), the most active users of social media in Malaysia are those aged 13 to 34. This group focuses on social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, which revolve around their daily lives. This assertion is backed up by Ismail (2014), who claims that social media users among these youth use it for communication, socialization, information gathering, and entertainment.

Political Socialization and Social Media as a Political Tool

Hess and Torney (1967) classified political socialization as a process of social learning and socialization refers to the process by which the beliefs, attitudes, and other conduct of a junior or new member of a community or institution is taught. Hyman (1959) proposed his own concept of political socialization, which naturally concerns learning; in particular, his learning of the social trends which correspond to his social positions as mediated through diverse social agencies.

Langton (1969) defines politics as a mechanism mediated by various societal agencies, in which an individual acquires political significance in his attitudes and behaviour. The environmental categories of these organizations include family, peer group, education, adult and mass media organisations. Political socialization function at the level of the person and of the group, as Dawson and Prewitt (1969) have noted. It is better described at group level as cultural diffusion and political socialization explores the individual's political interactions. Gimple, Lay and Schluknecht, 2003, noted in the sense of political science that political socialization is the mechanism by which new generations are introduced into political culture, acquire the skills, values and behaviours that enable the political system to be supported.

In comparison with these definitions, it is clear that the majority of political socialization definitions have four components: (1), political socialization is a study process by which (2) the person (3) learns political attitudes and actions from one generation to the next, (4) is influenced by actors of political socialization. Although often there are minor variations in wording, both individual (learning) as well as group (cultural transmission) levels relate to the same unidirectional method of obtaining knowledge about the political system (Dawson & Prewitt, 1969).

Research Methodology

Digital Ethnography explains the ethnographic study process and methodology in a digital space (Murthy, 2008; 2011). Creswell describes ethnography as "a research strategy that the researcher studies through observational data and interviews in an intact cultural group in a natural environment over a lengthy time. For this study MCA's leadership, Nicole Wong's discussion posts were investigated on the Nicole Wong Facebook page from the span of 16 days (02/11/2019 to 18/11/2019). Due to the material and the large number of participants of the Tanjung Piai elections, the Nicole Wong Facebook page was selected. The objective was to obtain a sample of at least five discussion papers relating to the Tanjung Piai by-election and to review Malaysian social interaction on Facebook with at least five answers each.

Research Findings

There are 50 by-election related posting published by the MCA Youth Leader. Of these, 5 randomly-selected posts were accepted for analysis, cumulatively attracting 2,232 comments.

Date	Topic	# of likes to the Topic	Total # Participants in Comment
02/11/2019	Kita Pilih No.2 Wee Jeck Seng #TgPiai #BNPilihanKu	2263	177
04/11/2019	Jom kita berganding bahu dan #tawanbalik Tanjung Piai bersama sama! Undi Calon No.2 Wee Jeck Seng pada 16.11.2019. Jgn lupa ya! #JomTukar	3016	263

05/11/2019	Ketika saya ingin bergegas ke Tanjung Piai, saya didatangi seorang pemuda yang menyatakan hasrat untuk menyertai Pemuda MCA. Dia turut meluahkan rasa kagum terhadap segala usaha Pemuda MCA selama ini, bukan sahaja dalam mempertahankan semangat Perlembagaan Negara dan hak-hak kaum Cina, malah sebagai parti pembangkang. Katanya Pemuda MCA telah memainkan peranan yang cukup baik di negara ini. Saya memberitahunya bahawa masa depan Pemuda MCA bukanlah mudah dan mencabar, tetapi kami pasti akan memberi yang terbaik demi masa depan Malaysia. Saya berharap dia dapat bersama kami untuk memperjuangkan masa depan negara. #PEMUDAMCA #TidakBerputusAsa #BerharapLebihRamaiAkanMenyertaiBarisanKami	3178	305
09/11/2019	kita bersama. #BN4TgPiai #ApaLagiMauTipu #TanjungPiaiTolakPakatan	2104	169
10/11/2019	Teruskan Perjuangan, kita pilih Biru. #BN4TgPiai #ApaLagiMauTipu #TanjungPiaiTolakPakatan	7200	244
13/11/2019	Nyanyian lagu-SETIA dgn gelombang lautan biru anak muda di Tanjung Piai sem Alam. #PemudaTerasKebangkitan #BangkitKembali #BN4TanjungPiai	19,328	1074

Figure 1: Five Randomly Chosen Post from Nicole Wong Facebook Page

A number of members participated in the discussions on the Nicole Wong Facebook page, including Malaysia and the Indians. 2,232 comments have been shared from five subjects to examine the way that participants use top-down and bottom-up methods in the Nicole Wong Facebook page. Based on the previous literature, coding began in a deductive manner with the three categories: knowledge, emotions, and connection with the online community (Oh, Kwon et al., 2010; Tampere et al., 2016).

Categories	Subcategories	Descriptions	Comments
Providing information	Pro BN	Comments that provide information to support BN	<p>“Tanjung piai ingat bakti budi ingat calon no 2 saudara kita wee jeck seng... x perlu menahan rindu lagi ini kalilah u- turn pd BN.... muafakat nasional berjuang utk rakyat Malaysia....”</p> <p>“Saya yakin BN akan menang.. Kerana rakyat sudah muak dgn tipu helah ph dgn janji2 manis....”</p> <p>“Mahathir cakap orang melayu mudah lupa, saya cakap orang muda tak akan lupa apa yang Mahathir buat menyebabkan duit Malaysia jatuh teruk 2 kali. 2 kali menjadi Perdana Menteri, 2 kali duit Malaysia jatuh bertubi-tubi!!!!!!”</p>
	Anti BN	Comments that provide information to criticize BN	<p>“ruu355 kau tolak...”</p> <p>“Saya akui saya memang tak cerdik.....sekolah tak tinggi....saya betul2 tak faham macam mana orang yang waras boleh terima pemimpin dan parti politik yang dikaitkan dengan rampasan duit hampir satu ribu juta dalam puluhan bag disimpan dalam</p>

			condominium ????...”
Forging connection with the online community	Call to action	Comments that encourage the followers to support BN	“Terbaik tanjung piai.teruskan menyokong BN...” “Tahniah MCA kerana menunjukan sikap positif, semoga kemakmuran di negara kita kembali gah di zaman era BN...”
Others	Irrelevant content	Comments that are unrelated to the Tanjung Piai by-election.	“lawa org nya...” “Ni please find attached the invoice...”

Figure 2: Categories and Subcategories of Comments (Adapted from Pal, A. Et Al., 2017)

Discussion

Overall, Pro BN commented on posts made on the Facebook page of Nicole Wong. All 50 posts on the Facebook page have been written in Malay and not one in English or Mandarin. And the commentators are mostly from different ethnic groups as all the articles are written in Malay. The #takebackourcountry hash tag was one of the most widely used hash tags in the comment section. Instead, the anti-BN comments are based on attempts by the MCA to oppose the RUU355 law and on those who support the #VMF or Vote Muslim First movement focused on the candidate from BERJASA. While it was very aggressive with the Vote Muslim First (#VMF) movement, Gerakan Pengundi Sedar (GPS) overall did not impact the 'Muafakat Nasional' propaganda. It was very aggressive. Comments like 'Terbaik Nasional Muafakat' and 'Undi Nasional Muafakat' belong to the most popular comments found in nearly all posts on this Facebook page. Knowledge acceptance is based on top-down methods. The best example is based on the reporting of the MCA and PAS policy partnership on 13/11/2019, which earned 19,036 likes and 1,074 observations. This sends a strong message that the political position of the commentators on this Facebook page is already driven by top-down facts and misinformation.

According to Abyyzaar (2017), political participation is one type of active community involvement in political decision-making. In the context of the political socialization process in social media, it is necessary to recognize that there is autonomous and voluntary participation, as well as mobilized participation that is essentially intangible. Traditional steps in political participation, according to Dahl (1989, in Putnam, 2000), are usually demonstrated by votes, campaigns, and monetary donations, as seen from the foundation of democracy. Many studies, however, have found that this type of participation is declining, particularly among

young voters (Zukin, Keeter, Adoline, Jenkins, & Carpini, 2006). Political participation is currently carried out in a variety of ways, with young people finding it easier, more practical, flexible, and personal to respond to these socio-political issues. Because of the nature of social media, which tends to be semi-interpersonal and semi-mass, young people or adolescents prefer to express their political aspirations through it.

Malaysians are socialized politically through social media which have been an agent for shaping their political attitude. These selective comments demonstrate how a leader from a political party with an ethnic political ideology can pique the interest of people of various ethnicities on social media. This demonstrates that Malaysian Chinese social media users socializing on Nicole Wong's Facebook page will undoubtedly influence political views, resulting in an inclusive politics of how a Chinese political party leader is able to unite people of various races on her Facebook page. This inclusive politics is also thought to be one of the factors that helped the Barisan Nasional candidate from a Chinese-based party, MCA, win a large majority in the Tanjung Piai by-election. In other words, the socialization process in social media has the potential to create not only political socialization but also inclusive politics, regardless of ethnicity or language.

Conclusion

This top-down knowledge opens the way to an active dialogue on social media policy issues. Although this is basically a good step in the process of democratic participation involving the people but this process also does not basically reflect the participation of all Malaysians because the use of fake accounts to provoke an issue has also damaged this process of political socialization. However, this process of political socialization is no longer just mainstream but also develop a political self, a sense of personal identification within the political world in social media.

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