

## TikTok Content in Communication Strategy: Politics of the 15th General Election in Malaysia

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*Date Received: 25 September 2022 Date Accepted: 19 October 2022 Date Published: 30 November 2022*

### ABSTRACT

*Political communication is the exchange of the latest news between the government and society or vice versa. The purpose of political communication is to get support or votes from the people. Nowadays, social media is increasingly important in political communication because social media can be used by anyone interested without any limitations. Therefore, this study aims to examine the ability of TikTok as one medium of political communication strategy. This study looks at the extent by which the main youth political leaders in Malaysia optimize the use of TikTok as a political communication strategy, evaluates the adaptation of political leaders with TikTok in terms of content, identifies the type of interaction with TikTok users, evaluates the political communication strategies through TikTok and the effectiveness of TikTok use in influencing improvement political supporters ahead of GE-15. This study selected two TikTok accounts, namely Y.B. Syed Saddiq and Shahril Sufian Hamdan as a study sample. The results of the study indicated the significant advantage of Y.B Syed Saddiq in using TikTok as a political communication tool in comparison to Shahril Sufian Hamdan. The youth-friendly interaction demonstrated by Y.B. Syed Saddiq made him one of the most highly followed politicians with successful message sharing. Shahril Sufian Hamdan and other politicians should adapt to a new era in efforts to political communication. Politicians should use social media more effectively and post more friendly content to social media users and increase interaction activities with them.*

*Keywords: content; Malaysia; politic; TikTok*

### POLITICAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Political communication is one form of communication that involves the exchange of information between the government and the community and vice versa (Surbakti, 2010). Political communication usually involves mass media and rhetorical language for winning the hearts and minds of voters (Cangara, 2014). The main goal of political communication is to convey political information, form an image of candidate politics, shape public opinion and fend off ridicule and accusations of the opponent (Yusa, 2016). A dominant election candidate's effective political communication will gain the support of the next voter to win the election. Mistakes in political communication will tarnish the image election candidate and destroy his political career (Mirza, 2018). According to Rush and Althoff (2003), political communication plays a role that is very important in the political system of a country. This political communication determines dynamic elements and becomes an important part of socialization politics, political participation, and political involvement. The importance of strategic roles in political communication can also be seen in McNair (2003) who mentioned political communication regarding the allocation of resources (result), official authority (authorized to make laws, legislation, and executive decisions), and official sanctions (what is rewarded or punishment by the state). Thus it shows that political communication is a discussion process about the allocation of the public with valuable resources which is enforced by the government

to make good decisions in legislation and executive as well as restrictions imposed by the government.

However, overall the political communication strategy is conditional decisions about the actions to be taken to achieve a goal in future politics (Ardial, 2010). The existence of political leaders is very important in every political communication activity. Therefore, in order to achieve political objectives in the future, leaders must act as spokespeople and political communicators. Therefore, it is necessary to boost the image in order to support political institutions. The success or failure of political communication in attaining its objectives, particularly in the campaign leading up to the election, will depend on the personality of the political communicator and the political institutions that support him (Ardial, 2010). Thus, it is very clear that the strategy of political communication is determined by several things, namely the existence of political leaders, cohesion, and institutions that creates togetherness, consultation and building consensus. Political communication strategy is a very important tactic in winning the election. Successful political communication strategies provide a great contribution to the use and planning of candidate pairs or strategies for political parties to draft not only in the face of elections but also after the election. Strategy is planning and management for achieving a goal. However, to achieve this objective, the strategy does not serve as a road map showing the only direction but must show how the tactics of operation (Effendy, 2003).

According to Strömbäck and Kioussis (2014), the election campaign is communication politics that highlight different goals for the sake of a victory election. For example, if the purpose of the election campaign is about organizing, then the communication is between the leadership of the campaign and volunteers. If so, the purpose of the campaign is to form alliances that have shared interests and goals. In order to actively support the campaign, communication is required if the goal is to mobilise supporters. In order to influence the news media, their agenda, and the way they interpret issues, events, and procedures, relationships between editors and reporters must be built if the election campaign is to be about how the media covers politics. If the goal of the election campaign is to build relationships with voters, then the necessary communication includes calling voters, going door-to-door or doing other outdoor activities, using various social media platforms, and communicating online. Moreover, if the election campaign is about the formation of an information environment to position the campaign as well as possible and the opponent is as bad as possible, then the effort is needed to form a political information environment, branding and political communication position.

## SOCIAL MEDIA POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

Various parties' actions influence political communication on social media. Partisanship, member politics, and public interaction all work together to create intricate communication patterns. In addition to players sabotaging interactions and creating a complex political landscape, platform design and algorithms also play a role. According to a number of studies, politicians utilise platforms in various ways depending on the audience and the sociotechnical environment (Juan Carlos et al., 2018; Salman et al., 2018; Gunn & Eli, 2013; Stefan & Linh, 2013). They discuss how personalised advertising services are employed (Orestis et al., 2018) and explore if politicians' usage of the platform influences voter turnout for elections (Robin Effing et al., 2011). Other research specifically focuses on consumer political behaviour. They look into how different political partisans utilise social media platforms (Juan et al., 2019; Robin et al. 2011), how user activity is generally disclosed (Orestis et al., 2020) and assesses polarity and the content of the message spread (Despoina et al. 2017; Raphael Ottoni et al., 2018). While there are also studies that focus on the use of social media in a period of social unrest (Onur et al, 2014), platform analysis as a space for social movement coordination (Zeynep & Christopher 2012), as well as investigating how the behaviour of social groups

differs, and under what conditions are they polarized and separate (Christopher et al., 2018; Michael et al., 2011).

Numerous studies have looked at the connection between social media and political communication strategies, both during and after election seasons in American businesses (Gunn, 2017; Nir, et al, 2019; Daniel & Shannon, 2018) on different social media platforms but not yet more on TikTok. While in Malaysia, studies analyze the use of social media in the context of communication and political campaigns more are done against Facebook and Twitter application platforms (Shafizan & Kamaruzzaman, 2020; Gomes 2014; Sern & Zainuddin, 2014; Sani & Azizuddin, 2014). But there is still no study such as through the TikTok application that is increasingly gaining a place in the arena of national politics since 2022.

#### CONCEPT OF AFFORDANCE IN SOCIAL MEDIA

The concept of affordance describes how objects provide the possibility to act (Zheng & Yu, 2016). Nahon (2016) recognizes that the architecture of each social medium is different in terms of structural design, functional characteristics, algorithms, and datafication models (Dijck & Poell, 2013) and digital architecture give an impact on human behaviour. Bossetta (2018) says one can assume that technical protocols shape user behaviour in virtual space. In other words, every social medium is a social environment with unique technology, offering certain capabilities that shape the practice of dynamic communication and social interaction (Bucher & Helmond, 2018). In the context of applying the concept of capability on social media, Kreiss et al. (2017) defined capability as the platform that is capable address the perception of practices as people interact with them. Although the concept of affordability refers to the nature of communication enabled by the platform (Evans et al., 2017), architecture digital heuristic training on how platform-specific design features affect certain communication practices. In short, the digital architecture of each application including TikTok shaping capabilities and its consequences as well as user behaviour.

Accordingly, to successfully adapt to social media platforms which are characterized by different functions and algorithms (Kreiss et al., 2018) and adapt to different audiences and structural abilities, actors' politics must fully understand, especially in terms of norms about appropriate content and interaction. If they fail to understand this, they run the risk of being perceived as out of touch, inauthentic, or out of date place (Baldwin-Philippi, 2015). Before proceeding, it is important to understand the unique capabilities of TikTok.

#### SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT AND POLITICIAN INTERACTION

According to Meijer's (2012) research, the arrival of new media has changed the communication environment, creating a virtual setting that can foster social interaction and permit open involvement from a larger range of people. This is due to the flexibility that modern media affords, enabling anyone to express their opinions regardless of their background in terms of economic status. Various new media platforms, such as blogs, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and others, have been introduced. Although the flexibility it grants can aid in improving Malaysia's democratic process, what actually happened was that the blog started to fill up with complaints and the usage of unpleasant comment language. Along with blogs, there are other applications accessible through new media channels, such as Twitter. Twitter is one of the most well-known social networking sites for microblogging, allowing users to broadcast their status updates publicly for everyone to see. Furthermore, the Twitter app has the capacity to evolve into a dynamic forum for political discourse with the capacity to increase political activity. According to Hong (2013), Twitter is one of the primary means of communication for practically all American politicians. For instance, Barack Obama

was one of the politicians that used social media as a tool for his campaigning during the last presidential election in the United States. It turns out that his decision to use the platform helped Obama win the race.

Nowadays, social media plays a crucial role in the media ecology and is a crucial instrument for politicians who want to represent their voters or win elections. The use of social media in decision-making contexts has thus been the subject of numerous studies, including those on Twitter and Facebook (Jungherr 2016; Vergeer 2015). Numerous studies show that politicians typically choose broadcasting over interactive behaviour and networks of elites working against the public, adopting a conservative strategy as opposed to a new platform (Bruns & Highfield 2013; Golbeck et al. 2010; Graham et al. 2013; Graham et al. 2016; Kruikemeier 2014; Larsson & Moe 2011; Small 2010). Most of these studies focus on factors that influence how quickly politicians and political parties adopt and use social media (Vergeer & Hermans 2013; Vergeer et al. 2011); what role tweets may play (Graham et al. 2013; Graham et al. 2016; Small 2010); who politicians interact with (Graham et al. 2013b; Graham et al. 2016; Larsson & Ihlen 2015); and political networks on Twitter (Bruns & Highfield 2013 (Jacobs & Spierings 2014).

### STRATEGIC MODEL OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION IN THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN

In the context of strategic political communication, the strategic goals of political parties and campaigns are important. Although it is often assumed that the main goal of party politics and campaigns is to maximize political support (Downs, 1957), however in most cases, parties have many primary goals and objectives the strategic one may differ according to the party. According to Strømback (2007), three types of parties can be distinguished based on their main goals which are vote-based, organization-based parties and policy-based parties and policies. Another difference is between product-oriented parties, sales-oriented and market-oriented (Henneberg, 2002; Marshment, 2001; Newman, 1994; Shama, 1976). Based on the merging of political science and marketing, Political marketing theory argues that party or campaign-oriented products tend to focus on the core of political products which are ideology and policy positions as formed through internal processes and discussions. Such parties argue for their positions and beliefs. They are assuming that voters will recognize that the ideas are correct and therefore vote for him (Marshment, 2001). Therefore, the parties involved in the product can be described as based on policy.

A sales-oriented party is similar to a party that is product-oriented in the sense of ideological and policy positions formed through an internal process. Unlike product-oriented parties, they use market intelligence and marketing techniques to study and segment voters for message design and party selling. Therefore, the sales-oriented party focuses more on election campaigns and campaign communications than product-oriented parties. Although both parties are product-oriented products and sales can be characterized as policy-based, party-oriented sales are more vote-seeking than product-oriented parties but they will not change policies to attract voters. This is different from party-to-party market-oriented that uses market intelligence not only for them to form messages and develop and implement more effective campaigns but also to design products and political policies themselves. If the party is sales oriented trying to make the people want what is offered, a party which is market-oriented tries to offer what the people want (Marshment, 2001). A market-oriented party should be understood as a party that least highlights policies and policies to the people but achieve election victory by promising that all the wishes of the people will be fulfilled so that they get a lot of votes. Its politicians are also more interested in seeking office than serving the people.

The political campaign communication strategy highlighted by Marshment (2001) is a combination of politics and marketing techniques. Newman's study (1994) about how presidential candidates are marketed to voters in the United States combines marketing concepts and political campaigns to create a model that integrates marketing campaigns, political campaigns, candidate focus and natural forces around being a political marketing model. The process of exchange in politics is rooted in a candidate offering political leadership in exchange to get votes from citizens (Newman, 1994). According to Newman, the successful completion of this exchange requires the political organization to coordinate marketing and political campaigns simultaneously. Although campaign marketing was the real agenda of the political campaign, he did not specify the dimensions in which campaign marketing (eg, voter segmentation, candidate position, strategy formulation and implementation) corresponded to each stage of the political campaign, or whether any one dimension is more influential than another. Continuing from that, Marshment (2005) has highlighted the strategy model of political communication ahead of a more comprehensive election campaign by combining marketing techniques in political campaign discourse as in Fig 1. Marshment (2001) as well as Lilleker and Lees-Marshment (2005) have set out a political marketing framework that distinguishes between three types of categories the ideal of market orientation as a basis for investigating the evolution of political party orientation against voters as in Figure 2.5. Each category is defined by one series of marketing stages conducted to interact with voters.

FIGURE 1. Lees Marshment Political Campaign Communication Strategy Model Framework

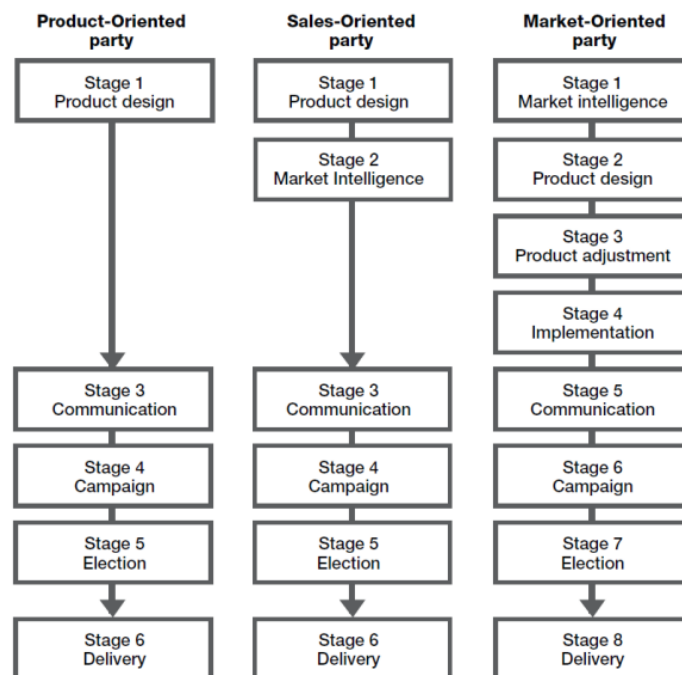
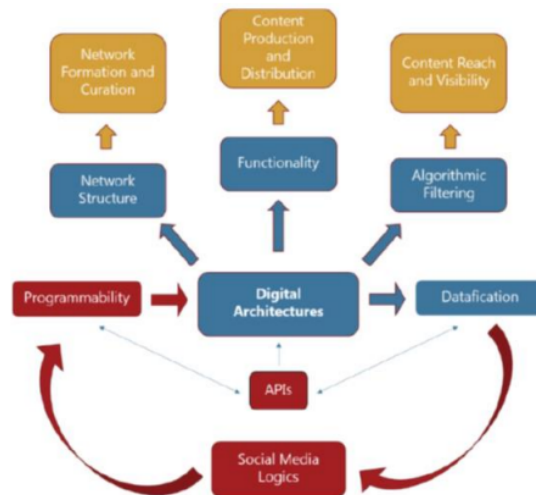


FIGURE 2. Social media digital communication capability architecture





### POLITICIANS' SOCIAL MEDIA PERSONALITY THEORY BASED ON CONTENT

There is agreement on three points about the personalising of political news or the personalities of politicians. First, customization refers to a style or a long-term process of change (Brettschneider & Gabriel, 2002; Kaase, 1994; Karvonen, 2010). Political communication through media is now more individualised than in the past (Hart, 1992). Second, academics appear to be in agreement that media technology and political actors' strategies, respectively, are the causes of the personalisation of political news. Television's ingrained attitudes and privately run media outlets are frequently held accountable for damaging this procedure (Blumler & Kavanagh 1999; Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999). According to Meyrowitz, television has made it harder to distinguish between the front and rear of politics, resulting in the emergence of a new central area with controlled informality. For instance, perhaps when politicians aren't on the clock, they can't unwind, and from the camera's perspective, they make absurd blunders. Others point out that television often focuses on people rather than abstract concepts like parties and groups due of its visual aspect (Peri, 2004). This approach is quickly embraced by politicians, who design events that prioritise personality over party (Sheafer, 2001; Strömbäck, 2008). Additionally, several academics highlight the impact of institutional changes on the prevalence of media personalisation (Rahat & Sheafer, 2007).

Third, there appears to be broad agreement in the research that political news is personalised in a variety of ways. The dimensions of personal and public limits divide the majority of scholars who make basic distinctions concerning personality at the expense of party image and political personality (Adam & Maier, 2010; Reinemann & Wilke, 2007; Santen & Zoonen, 2009).

The given typology in Figure 2 by Van-Aelst et al. (2012) is highlighted and makes a distinction between the two types of deep personalisation in media content. Individualization concentrates on the rise in attention to political parties over time, which is similar to substantive political news. This creates a professional personality that combines the aura of politicians with the ideologies and political party ideologies that they support. As opposed to the second type, which envisions members' politics as existing beyond the bounds of their official responsibilities as different from their public roles as people with private lives, members' politics in the second form are referred to as privatisation. This is a classification of analysis. Content that is user-friendly has been employed in a number of earlier studies.

### DISCUSSION

Based on Natashah Meah's interview with Y.B. Syed Saddiq through the media digital todayonline.com on March 9, 2022, Y.B. Syed Saddiq is described as a young leader who failed to defend their position because they were the victim of the country's political instability since the populist victory of the Pakatan Harapan Party. However Y.B. Syed Saddiq continues to get the attention of young people because he is smart to highlight issues that are close to multiracial youth and a simple, relaxed approach to every medium of political communication or social media by bringing issues related to quality jobs, job opportunities for youth, issues of dignified wages youth, cost of living issues for young people, affordable housing, transportation public and climate change issues. This is why communication marketing relies on the main strategy launched him during the last GE-14 campaign until causing him to win big in the Muar Parliament at that time. Y.B. Syed Saddiq too succeeded in bringing up the issue of voting under 18 years of age which has been accepted in the Constitution (Amendment) Bill 2019 with the result of voting age and eligibility being a representative of the people in Malaysia being lowered from 21 years to 18 years (Muhammad Shamsul, 2019). In fact, after no longer being a government minister, he established Parti Muda (The Malaysian United Democratic Alliance) in September 2020 which aims to further develop the role of the youth so that they don't just become the PH party wing should even be allowed to increase the participation of youth in the government's main decision-making process (Mazwin Nik Anis, 2020). As a container Asian Debate champion, while studying for an IIUM Bachelor's Degree, Y.B. Syed Saddiq was rated as a great orator and quick to issue interesting speeches and highly empathetic in attracting the attention of young supporters during the GE-14 campaign first. While Shahril Sufian Hamdan who is the Director of Economics at the Office of the Prime Minister of Malaysia, UMNO Information Chief and Deputy Chief of The UMNO Youth Movement is described as one of the dynamic young leaders and potentially far in the national political arena.

With every leadership characteristic focused, diligent, multiracial, and simple, his priority is in terms of work quality, dignified salary, affordable housing, good public transport and climate change. The TN50 debate that took place on the social media platform in Malaysia in 2017 has paired these two figures in peeling various issues, policies and policies of the ruling BN government at the time. Through comments on social media, Y.B. Syed Saddiq is described as not competitive in planning his views directly in breaking Shahril's facts Hamdan. Political communication highlighted by Y.B. Syed Saddiq as more rhetorical by playing on national issues without thinking about the geopolitical position and national stability. Y.B. Syed Saddiq also often issues views on youth and people issues to show the weakness of the government compared to Shahril Hamdan who likes to debate about facts, history and the latest data besides focusing more on solutions for debated issues. Although Shahril Hamdan's skills and quality are relatively more dynamic and have great potential in convincing political observers, the popularity and involvement of his TikTok account are so weak that it lacks the attention of youth and teenagers in Malaysia. This is because the TikTok account of Y.B. Syed Saddiq has the ability of TikTok (TikTok Affordance) which meets the needs of today's youth. The frequency of uploading interactive video content and populist issues on his TikTok account is a very effective political communication strategy. This means that posts on TikTok appear to be more successful when political parties and actors incorporate style, narrative and staging of the world of spectacle and entertainment into their communicative repertoire. Accordingly, usage rate trends indicate that short video formats are the future of social media (PiñeiroOtero Martínez-Rolán, 2020). One might expect an increase in youth political involvement and influence on campaigns in the run-up to GE-15. This is what needs to be thought about and emphasized in Shahril Hamdan's political discourse to improve the ability of his TikTok account as a campaign weapon ahead of the upcoming GE-15.

## CONCLUSION

The results of the study show that the advantage of Y.B. Syed Saddiq using TikTok as a strategy and political communication is very significant in comparison to Shahril Sufian Hamdan. Message sharing and youth-friendly interactions demonstrated by Y.B. Syed Saddiq have enabled him to gain followers on social media which is high and subsequently successful in political communication. Shahril Sufian Hamdan and other politicians should adapt to a new era in political communication. This study is important to see the extent of the two main political youth leaders in Malaysia can utilize the TikTok application as a campaign discourse politics in approaching and increasing the interest of the youth. This study is actually to identify the effects of using social media such as TikTok as the best platform to promote communication strategies in Malaysia as a guide for political parties to develop the potential of campaign materials. Politicians should use social media more effectively and post more friendly content to social media users and increase interaction activities with them.

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