Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (MJSSH) (e-ISSN : 2504-8562)
2022, Volume 7, Issue 10, e001831
DOI: https://doi.org/10.47405/mjssh.v7i10.1831

Social Media and Politics: How Candidates Used Facebook in 2020 Kimanis By-Election

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KEYWORDS:
Facebook
Political campaign
Kimanis
Barisan Nasional (BN)
Pakatan Harapan (PH)

CITATION:
Azrina Husin & Azeem Fazwan Ahmad Farouk. (2022). Social Media and Politics: How Candidates Used Facebook in 2020 Kimanis By-Election. *Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (MJSSH), 7*(10), e001831. https://doi.org/10.47405/mjssh.v7i10.1831

ABSTRACT

This article explores the ways politicians used Facebook as part of their political campaigns based on postings of Mohamad Alamin and Karim Bujang who contested in the Kimanis 2020 by-election. Throughout the two-week campaigning period from 4 to 17 January 2020, a total of 22 postings related to Kimanis were made by both candidates on their respective pages, evidence that the platform was used as part of their campaigning tools. However, both candidates used the platform differently and the difference is attributed to their familiarity (or lack of) with the platform's various social buttons. In his usage of these affordances, Mohamad had created an online trail that linked him to prominent politicians who were campaigning for him. These politicians generated 43 Kimanis-related postings on their respective pages. On the other hand, as Karim did not utilize these buttons, there was no online trail that linked him to other politicians in his camp. As for the nature of the postings, both candidates did not use Facebook to raise issues of concern to the voters. Rather, it was utilized to document their offline campaign activities. However, Mohamad certainly benefitted from his online network as the influential politicians generated contents that were important to the voters. This study shows that despite the incorporation of Facebook in the candidates' political campaigns, it is not fully utilized for active political conversations. Additionally, a familiarity with the social affordances of Facebook could be strategically used to create a more impactful online campaign.

Contribution/Originality: This study contributes to the existing literature on Facebook and political communication in Malaysia by focusing on an election campaign in a rural setting. It opens discussion on ways Facebook affordances can be used to create an online campaign trail, linking one to others in his or her online network.

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1. Introduction

As a popular social networking sites, Facebook creates social interactions and social connection through its various social button features such as sharing of content, tagging online friends on the content as well as creating online groups of like-minded people. These social affordances had also attracted well-known personalities, including celebrities and politicians to the platform. In fact, Facebook played a crucial role in political campaign and activism throughout the world (Wolfsfeld et al. 2013; Gerodimos & Justinussen, 2015) due to its ability to connect and create online community that built around the notion of "friends" via information sharing.

In the Malaysian context, there is a consensus that the hegemony of the then Barisan Nasional (BN) government was dependent on its control of the mass media institutions. This hegemony was challenged during the 12th General Election (GE) in 2008. Unlike the past, the fight for votes took place online with the availability of smartphones and computers and the infrastructure that supported information dissemination. The advent of the internet had allowed Malaysians to bypass the highly controlled mainstream media with the then government's assurance that the internet would be free from censorship and restrictions. Since then, information including user generated content was accessible through various online platforms, impacting and changing the public consumption of political news. The 12th GE result brought about the realization that the then-BN government had to have an online presence to counter the popularity and credibility enjoyed by the then-Opposition parties. Malaysian politicians from both sides of the divide have also used Facebook and other social media platforms to their advantage. According to Socialbakers (socialbakers.com), Datuk Seri Najib Razak commands over 4 million followers on his Facebook account, followed by Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad at over 3 million followers. These platforms had allowed for direct connection to their followers which included disseminating personally crafted messages in the form of social media contents.

This paper uses the Kimanis by-election that was held on 18 January 2020 to look at how Facebook was used by the politicians involved in the election as part of their political campaign. Following the Federal Court ruling against Anifah Aman's victory in the 2018 GE, the by-election was viewed as a fight between Pakatan Harapan (PH) and BN, represented at the local level by a contest between Warisan and UMNO. Mohamad Alamin who was the Kimanis UMNO division chief was put against former UMNO stalwart Karim Bujang. Both contestants held deep personal connection with Kimanis evident in their family ties and political career (Lee & Zhang, 2020). While there were many unresolved issues that are of concern to the voters, such as standard of living and local development, it was the Sabah Temporary Pass (*Pas Sementara Sabah*/PSS) that was played out the most between the two camps. BN campaigned heavily against the PSS by equating the pass with the road to citizenship for the illegal community in Sabah. PH, through Warisan on the other hand, wanted the voters to view this policy as a solution to Sabah's long-standing problems with illegal migrants. Although it has always been a stronghold of BN, many political commentators opined that the advantage was with Warisan. This was attributed to the backing it received from the PH government as well as Karim's affiliation and popularity in the constituency. A younger Mohamad however could benefit from support by giant personalities such as Najib Razak and the former MP of Kimanis, Anifah Aman (Julia Chan, 2020). Yet, against these odds, BN won the by-election with a larger majority of 2029 votes as opposed to the earlier 156 votes.

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While existing studies on Malaysian politicians and Facebook have focused on prominent figures, this study used a rural area as context and brought the attention to local level politicians and their use of Facebook as part of their campaign tools.

2. Literature Review

Facebook started as a platform to build and maintain one's social network that consists of people we know from our lives. This online network is enhanced through online interactions via content sharing, made even more possible with the introduction of various social buttons such as the like, share and comment functions, as well as the use of hashtags, mentions and tagging. The "like" button, for example, allows users to convey positive messages surrounding a particular content (Lonkila & Eranti, 2015). Studies under the umbrella of hashtag activism show hashtags function to show support and unity towards a common course (Lee, 2018), as well as to express emotions (Papacharissi & Oliveira, 2012). It is then predicted that the more one uses the social buttons afforded by Facebook, the more he or she is connected online, creating the user's online network of "friends".

Facebook also enables individual politicians to shape, control and manage what and how messages reach their followers. In this way, politicians can now circumvent traditional media institutions, allowing for direct access to voters. Competency in social media usage paves the way for social media presence and these are crucial for politicians to gain influence in an increasingly complex media environment. This has certainly disrupted the conventional manner of political communication. Facebook is seen as contributing to personalization of politics by increasingly placing the importance on individual politicians over political parties (Rahat & Sheafer, 2007; Balmas, 2012). In a study conducted on Iceland politicians, Guðmundsson and Svervisson (2019) found that the use of individual social media, including Facebook, resulted in popularity among individual candidates over their political party. They also found that young politicians were savvier in their use of multiple social media platforms. The gap of Facebook usage between older and younger politicians was also reported by Larsson and Kalsnes (2014) in a study on Swedish and Norwegian politicians. Their study revealed that non-incumbent younger politicians used Facebook more actively. Findings from both studies confirmed Strandberg's (2013) view that Facebook may not necessarily be the preferred channel of communication among those in a relatively secured political positions. Acknowledging the trend towards personalized politics, McGregor (2018) has argued that the usage of social media platforms has brought about more personal contents revolving around a politician's personal lives at the expense of more credible and trustworthy information. This tendency has a potentially negative effect in democratic practices. While studies have provided insights on the changing nature of doing politics on Facebook, there is a lack of understanding on the ways politicians communicate or use Facebook affordances to meet their ends.

The literature on social media and Malaysian politics has established the important role social media had played in transforming the country's political landscape. In a highly controlled media environment (Mustafa, 2005), social media (first in the form of blogs and online news portal, then popular social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter) made available a more diverse political information for the public in a much more accessible manner (Weiss, 2012). Mohd Azizuddin (2014) has argued that social media were skillfully used by the then-Opposition PH to win the hearts and minds of the voters that subsequently brought about the fall of BN. Tapsell (2018) attributed

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Facebook and Whatsapp for their accessibility in providing alternative political news to the voters. Leong (2015) also argued that the new media have expanded Malaysian public sphere enabling more Malaysians to participate in the democratic processes.

Facebook is shown to be the most popular site among Malaysian politicians especially prior to the 12th GE (Lee, 2017). Content analysis of the Facebook content of prominent Malaysian politicians shows evident towards personalization of political communication in an otherwise party-centered political system (Wan Norshira et al., 2019). In addition, Shafizan et al. (2020) discussed how Facebook was used by local politicians for positive image building and personalization of messages on issues related to the nation. Similarly, Azahar and Hasniza (2021) studied Facebook pages of key political parties to identify issues that were raised as well as the communication strategy used by those commenting on these pages.

3. Data and Methods

This study used the Kimanis by-election as an event that guided the data collection process. We focused on the two-week campaigning period that began with the nomination day on 4 January 2020 and ended on 17 January 2020. Polling day was on 18 January 2020. We followed the two candidates—Mohamad Alamin (BN) and Karim Bujang (Warisan)—on their respective Facebook accounts throughout the 14-day campaigning period. A total of 12 and 10 postings were made by Mohamad and Karim respectively. As we were interested in the ways they used the social affordances of this platform, we also retrieved postings from pages that appeared in their pages by way of their directly sharing and tagging these pages. As a result, an additional 55 postings were included in the study from three other Facebook pages belonging to Maximus Johnity Ongkili, Khairy Jamaluddin and Hishammuddin Hussein Onn. From the 55 postings, we only included 43 postings that were made about Kimanis. In total 64 postings were analyzed for this study, as shown in Table 1 with a breakdown of 22 postings as primary data set, obtained from Mohamad and Karim respective Facebook, and 55 postings as secondary data set, obtained from the three politicians who were tagged or whose contents were shared by Mohamad. No additional data came from Karim's use of Facebook social affordances.

Table 1: The number of postings made by each politician in this study throughout the campaign period from 4th to 17th January 2020

		Number of postings	**Number of postings related to Kimanis**
Main data set	Mohamad Alamin	12	12
	Karim Bujang	10	10
Secondary data set	Maximus Johnity Ongkily	14	7
	Khairy Jamaluddin	11	10
	Hishammuddin Hussein Onn	30	26
Total			**64**

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Each posting was copied to an Excel document created for each individual politician. The verbatim postings were first cleaned up by removing spelling and typo errors, without changing the meaning behind each posting. Most of the postings were in Bahasa Malaysia and English, while words in local dialects appeared sparingly. We first coded the way the social buttons were used to gauge the familiarity with the various Facebook affordances, especially for Mohamad and Karim. We then coded the content of the postings to determine whether the posting is about campaign activity or about issues related to the voters. Lastly, to understand how these postings were communicated, we categorized the postings into "political posting", "personalized posting" and "personalized political posting" before we conducted a qualitative analysis on how these postings were communicated.

4. Result

4.1. Number of Postings and The Use of Facebook Affordances

As presented in Table 1, the number of postings made by the two candidates was rather low, although Facebook was incorporated as part of the candidates' campaign tool. When it comes to the usage of the various Facebook social buttons, hashtag was the most used. A total of 11 hashtags appeared in the data and these are: #PRK_Kimanis (included #prkkimanis and #prkkimanis2020), #RaduTatapRadu, #Say_No_To_PSS, #PBSBBantahPSS, #bantahPSS, #SabahTanahTumpahDarahku, #undilahcalonnombor1, #UbahBalik, #kimanis and #SembrongKita. These hashtags can be grouped into two categories. The first category are hashtags that are directly related to the upcoming by-election. #PRK_Kimanis was predominantly used to connect the postings with the election. #RaduTatapRadu was another regularly used hashtag in the BN camp, appearing in Mohamad's postings twice, Khairy's three times and Hishammuddin's seventeen times. In fact, this hashtag which means "fight through and through" was the "war cry" for the campaign chosen by UMNO Sabah. Another hashtag, #UbahBalik, which appeared in Khairy's (three times) and Hishammuddin's postings (two times) also refers to the election, expressing BN's message to the voters to flip the election result in favor of BN. This hashtag was also a reference to another hashtag, #ubah, made popular by the then-Opposition during the 14th GE. The second category revolves around pressing issues facing the voters from these politicians' point of view, and the issue was the PSS. As these postings can be seen as part of their bigger campaign on the ground, hashtags such as #bantahPSS and #Say_No_To_PSS also appeared especially in Maximus' postings. Related to this thorny immigration issue, Maximus had also put #SabahTanahTumpahDarahku to express his stance. Other pressing issues were not highlighted both in the form of hashtag generation and postings.

When it comes to the familiarity with Facebook social buttons, it is clear that Mohamad had an upper hand. His usage of these buttons had connected his online campaigns with the other three bigger politicians who were also campaigning for him. As for hashtag usage alone, Mohamad had incorporated these four other hashtags at the end of his postings: #PRK_Kimanis, #RaduTatapRadu, #Mantul and #SAY_NO_TO_PSS and #mantul. Karim, on the other hand, only used #prkkimanis in his first posting on nomination day.

The other three politicians showed a wider range of Facebook affordances usage. Video sharing of live and recorded events, while quite absent from Mohamad and Karim Facebook postings, were often used. Maximus shared three campaign activities live on

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his Facebook. Khairy also shared UMNO live posting once as well as a link to a location of a campaign activity once. Hishammuddin shared both live and recorded videos in eight of his Kimanis postings. As for the use of emojis, only Hishammuddin showed a flair of incorporating emojis ranging from smiley faces, thumbs up, to love and laugh in his postings. These repertoire of emojis became part of Hishammuddin's unique communication style and will be further elaborated later.

4.2. The Content of the Postings

Both candidates had made postings about Kimanis their priority during this time. Two themese emerged from the qualitative content analysis of the 22 postings generated by Mohamad and Karim. First, while Facebook was incorporated to their campaign activities, it was not used as a platform to raise pertinent issues of concern to the Kimanis voters. The only issue that was played out on their Facebook postings was the PSS. Yet, despite being a contested issue, explanations on PSS only appeared once in Mohamad's postings, in the form of a hashtag, #SAY_NO_TO_PSS on 9 January 2020. Although the posting centered on the support he received from Maximus' Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS), he had included the hashtag as a way of riding on PBS' strong objection to PSS. Karim, on the other hand, fared better in providing information about PSS. He posted a lengthy explanation on the policy so that the voters "understand what PSS is". Addressing the concerns voters might have, he explained that "polling day in Kimanis is on the 18th and moving forward to the coming elections, there is no way they [the foreigners] can vote because they are not citizens". Visuals containing key points on this issue was also added to this posting. Second, as pertinent issues were not highlighted, Facebook then was utilized as a platform to document their offline campaign activities. In Mohamad's case, it is used to thank influential figures for their support throughout his political journey by using the social buttons such as mentioning, tagging and content sharing. For example, besides Maximus, he also mentioned Anifah Aman as his "mentor and boss" in his 8 January 2020 posting and tagged Hishammuddin to thank the latter for "kindly assisting" him in his campaign in his 14 January 2020 posting. Karim on the other hand had opted for less written text and posted visuals such as pictures and posters related to his offline activities. It is not used to express his gratitude for the support received and his postings centered on his campaign journey and at times to directly speak to his followers by sending good wishes.

The other three politicians had been on various locations in the constituency to campaign for Mohamad and these events provided contents for their Facebook. Both Khairy and Hishammuddin announced their arrival in Sabah to "campaign for Barisan Nasional" and "together with my friend, Barisan Nasional candidate" Support for Mohamad is a recurring theme in their postings and he was identified in their postings by using his full name or as "candidate number 1" or his nickname, Tok Mo. In numbers, Maximus and Hishammuddin mentioned Mohamad four times, while Khairy five times. This support was further enhanced with pictures and videos of their campaign activities at various locations that included Mohamad. The PSS issue was also played out in their postings. Maximus especially had taken to task to share videos of his campaign activities in which he shared his unfavorable views of the issue. Additionally, his strong sentiments were made clear with the various PSS-related hashtags that accompanied his postings. Khairy had also posted a political content on 6 January 2020 to rebut statements made by the late Datuk VK Liew regarding the Constitutional Amendments with regards to the positions of Sabah and Sarawak in Malaysia. As for Hishammuddin, issues pertaining to Sabah security threat found a place in his Facebook postings, often using his years as the

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Defence Minister to explain the issue. He also used his various ministerial portfolios to highlight his familiarity with the local people and customs.

4.3. Personalized Content and Communication Styles

Presented in numbers in Table 2, these politicians generated either "personalized political postings" or "political postings", and rarely "personal postings". Mohamad generated more personalized political postings while Karim had more political postings. As for the other three politicians, the data shows that for Maximus, his postings were divided almost equally between personalized political postings and political postings. Khairy, on the other hand, generated slightly more political postings over personalized political postings. Hishammuddin, who generated the highest number of postings, had preferred personalized political postings. Put differently, Hishammuddin had tackled political matters by giving these matters a personal twist.

Table 2: The number of postings categorized into "personalized political postings", "political postings" and "personal postings"

	"Personalized political postings"	**"Political postings"**	**"Personal postings"**	**Total**
Mohamad Alamin	8	1	3	12
Karim Bujang	3	5	2	10
Maximus Johnity Ongkily	3	4	0	7
Khairy Jamaluddin	4	6	0	10
Hishammuddin Hussein Onn	25	1	0	26

In terms of communication styles in the personalized political postings, a qualitative analysis was conducted on Hishammuddin's and Mohamad's postings. Mohamad's communication style was straightforward in nature, informing his activities or expressing his gratitude for the support received. There was a lack of sharing of personal point of view on important issues or personalizing activities he was involved in. This is exemplified in his re-posting of Hishammuddin's posting. Mohamad had opted for a simple text that read "Nostalgia from 15 years ago! Thank you, YB Dato' Seri Hishammuddin Tun Hussein for graciously assisting [me]", focusing on thanking the latter. The original posting made by Hishammuddin was colored with personal story, relaying to his followers that someone had shown him the pictures while he was on his walkabout as part of his campaign activities. He went on to tell his followers about the event that took place 15 years ago, which included meeting Mohamad who was Kimanis UMNO Head at that time. He had ended his posting by sharing his own feelings on how meaningful it was to see the picture and relive the event. This is one of many examples of Hishammuddin's style of communication that was engaging, laden with personalized information and taking the form of storytelling.

As such, while Mohamad's personalized political postings centered on expressing his gratitude for the support received, Hishammuddin had turned postings on campaign activities to engage with his followers, especially the voters. Take this posting dated 11 January that read: Even though I had just arrived I did not feel tired at all once I met with the people of Kimanis in Kampung Sinar Baru tonight. As always, people of Sabah are very friendly! Thank you all for the extraordinary reception at Barisan Nasional's talk

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just now. Sabah is the best!" Hishammuddin's personality is injected in this posting that focused less on the campaign activity but more on his personal take on the local hospitality, communicated in an informal language, sprinkled with playful emojis. His thoughts on the "future and fate" of the people of Kimanis was made clear in his posting dated 12 January 2022. Here he disclosed the sentiments of the voters on PH-Warisan block as "famous for many issues and polemic rather than ability to work for the people" after his "heart to heart talk" with them. Words and phrases that convey his feelings as well as inviting his followers along were often used in his postings. Immediately upon arrival, his 10 January posting invited people of Kimanis to meet him at Kampung Sinar Baru where he was headed to and declared his love for all teachers and people of Sabah in his 12 January. So too was the use of emojis such as love, strength, big smile and laughing in his postings. These added to the already informal, yet engaging style of communication found in Hishammuddin's postings, that in turn, was absent from both the candidates as well as the other two politicians.

5. Discussion

The data suggest that although Facebook was utilized as part of a political candidate's campaign, it was not used to create politically charged content aimed at political engagement. Rather, it was used to document the candidates' offline campaigns serving as a notice board of activities for their followers. This is true for both candidates. However, what set the two apart is their familiarity with the platform, in which Mohamad had an upper hand. This could be attributed to the fact that he incorporated his already active personal Facebook to his campaigning tool. Using Strandberg's (2013) categorization of politicians and Facebook, Mohamad falls in the "continued use of social media" while Karim in the "adoption" categories. Larsson and Kalsnes (2014) discussed how Facebook is used more by "underdogs" politicians who are "younger, in opposition and out of the political limelight". Mohamad certainly fits this bill. There is close to 20 years age difference between the two candidates (Mohamad was 48 and Karim 67 years old at the time of the by-election). He also lacked national prominence as compared to Aniffah yet representing a political party that is desperate for another win.

Mohamad demonstrated his Facebook literacy by capitalizing on its social buttons that, when put together, culminated into an online campaign trail, connecting him to bigger names in Malaysian politics. In this way, the support he received from federal level politicians, namely Maximus, Khairy and Hishammuddin, who had campaigned for him in Kimanis, was also made visible online. Mohamad certainly benefitted from these politicians who had bigger number of followers and wider reach. Each of them made Kimanis by-election *the* postings on their respective pages during campaigning period. Albeit independently, they succeeded in amplifying Kimanis by-election (and consequently Mohamad's profile) to an event of national interest. Thus, the online trail had showcased not only the quantity, but also the quality of his network. As BN was also determined to strike another by-election win, the online campaign trail certainly showed a more united front. Maximus, in his post-result press statement attributed the victory to "the culmination of solid cooperation among the opposition parties". It is likely he was referring to the ground campaign machinery, but this study shows that the cooperation was also evident online.

Using hashtags related to the event is another way Facebook afforded networking among its users and both candidates incorporated hashtags related to the by-election in their postings. Again, Mohamad showed a more concerted manner in the way he used

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hashtags, opting mainly for two hashtags, #PRK_Kimanis and #RaduTatapRadu to end most of his postings. Karim adopted only the hashtag #prkkimanis in only two of his postings. #PRKKimanis, despite its various versions especially on the BN front, certainly pointed to the by-election by way of keeping the event newsworthy in the flow of information online.[1] However, a standardized hashtag agreed upon by the concerned parties would have made their online campaigns more organized. Another hashtag worth mentioning is #RaduTatapRadu, the war cry chosen by UMNO Sabah. Although it gained momentum on the ground among BN supporters (Juwan Riduan 2020), Mohamad only used it twice in his postings. The person who captured the roaring spirit of the war cry in his postings was Hishammuddin who incorporated this hashtag sixteen times throughout the period.

As mentioned earlier, the online campaign trail that was established for Mohamad is not one that is complex. However, in comparison to this, Karim's online campaign appears desolate. His Facebook usage reveals his lack of familiarity with this platform that is characterized by its affordance for online networking activities, content sharing and engagement. As such, his Facebook did not connect him with other prominent politicians in his camp.

Khairy had also posted a political content on 6 January 2020 to rebut statements made by the late Datuk VK Liew regarding the Constitutional Amendments with regards to the positions of Sabah and Sarawak in Malaysia.

With more and more politicians in the country resorting to their own social media accounts to reach their followers, they are in a better position to create political contents that are advantageous to them. Yet, this is not the case here as such content did not dominate both candidates' Facebook postings. Political commentators in the country had identified four issues that are important to the Kimanis voters which are the Pan Borneo Highway, bread and butter issues, PSS and recurring day-to-day issues such as floods and drainage. However, only PSS appeared in their postings. Left with no online political alliance, Karim had to explain his party's position in defending PSS, making a "clarification so that the people of Kimanis understand what PSS is."[2] For Mohamad, his political alliance did the job of explaining why PSS must be rejected. This issue found a special place in Maximus whose sentiments were manifested in the various hashtags he used. As far as the PSS issue is concerned, the data from this study stood in contrast to the arguments made by Syahruddin et al. (2020) that BN had better usage of Facebook to explain this issue compared to Warisan. Khairy and Hishammuddin also addressed some contentious issues plaguing Kimanis. What differentiate the two though is the way in which these issues were addressed. Khairy had opted for a lengthy posting, filled with technical jargons that prompted one follower to comment, "Learn from Najib… simple posting so that people understand".[3] Social media platforms have made it possible for

[1] Mohamad consistently used #PRK_Kimanis in his postings. Karim, on the other hand, did not fully incorporate this hashtag (or any other hashtags for that matter) and was also not as consistent, using #prkkimanis and #PRKkimanis. Maximus opted for #prkkimanis2020, while Khairy and Hishammuddin used #PRKKimanis.

[2] The original posting read as "Pencerahan supaya rakyat Kimanis faham apa itu PSS". In this lengthy post, Karim explained for whom the pass was meant for, differentiating those who have stayed in Sabah for an extended period and those with PATI status. He went on to justify why PSS is necessary as it would make ways for documentation of foreign workers (Karim's Facebook, 6 January 2020).

[3] The original comment read: "Belajar dengan Najib bossku… Typing simple-simple untuk posting janji masyarakat faham".

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politicians to speak their minds as individual politicians, giving rise to personalization of politics (Rahat & Sheafer, 2007; McGregor, 2018) but the platforms support discourses that are simple but with impact. This kind of communication style can be found in Hishammuddin's postings that are often personalized even when he touched on topics of political interest. A case in point is his approach to Sabah security issue. Rather than relying on technicalities, Hishammuddin was more engaging in the way he communicated the issue,[4] gently reminding his followers of BN's stance on PSS,[5] conveying his concerns for the voters should the by-election result sided with the opponent, as well as rallying the voters to go out and vote. While at times his postings were lengthy, he conveyed his message using simple, conversational manner, lending his personality to his first-person postings, likely ever mindful that communication on Facebook requires simplicity and must be entertaining, and that personal storytelling is the key to communication on this platform.

This study has shown that on campaign days, Facebook is used by candidates as part of their campaign tool. However, echoing Small (2011) on her study of Canadian politics on Twitter, the findings of this study also suggest that informing is the main function of this platform, and not political engagements nor political dialogue. This study then leans towards the bulk of literature that has proven social media platforms may not be an effective agent of democracy as they were lauded to be. However, because this study had shown the social nature of Facebook manifested by the trail of online network built around a candidate's usage of Facebook social buttons, it has also shown that when used together strategically, Facebook can be used to create an impactful online campaign.

7. Conclusion

Social media, especially Facebook, have transformed the way politicians communicate with their followers, not only in more advanced society, but also in Malaysia. Probably because of its reputation to connect and inform others within and outside of one's network, these platforms have become an important channel for politicians to reach out to their followers, making social media presence crucial even among politicians. Data collected during the 2020 Kimanis, Sabah parliamentary by-election from the two contestants reveal two important ways on how politicians use social media platforms. First, despite the incorporation of social media in their respective political campaigns, these platforms merely serve as an endorsement of their offline campaign activities, to inform rather than to engage in active political conversations. Second, while one's political network could be established using the social functions of the platform such as sharing and tagging, this network is rudimentary at best, suggesting that the politicians can make better use of these functions to their advantage. Taken together, these results point to the fact that social media platforms are not used to create political contents specific to issues of concern to the voters, neither do these platforms used to encourage

[4] His 11 January 2020 original posting read as "Soal keselamatan Sabah bukan perkara kecil. Sebab itu, selain ketidaktentuan Pakatan Harapan mentadbir negara, saya turut bangkitkan dalam ceramah malam ini tentang kelemahan mereka memperkukuh keselamatan Sabah. Dah dua tahun, satu inisiatif besar demi memperkasa keselamatan Sabah pun kita tak dengar. Yang diperjuangkan hanyalah Pas Sementara Sabah (PSS) yang dibimbangi menambah risiko keselamatan di negeri ini".

[5] Hishammuddin's original posting on 11 January 2020 read as "Bila ada #PRKKimanis, tiba-tiba PH tuduh pelaksanaan Pas Sementara Sabah (PSS) idea BN. Padahal, sehingga hari terakhir BN memerintah, ia tidak pernah diumumkan.. Jadi, kalau Menteri Dalam Negeri datang ke Sabah esok hanya untuk beritahu idea ini dimulakan BN, tak payahlah. Ini tidak akan meyakinkan rakyat Sabah khususnya pengundi Kimanis bahawa dasar yang dilaksanakan PH betul".

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political participation and engagement with voters. While the number of postings did point to the importance of social media in one's political campaign, face-to-face interactions with voters was still by far the dominant campaign tool, which was then documented online. Thus, social media platforms are not utilized to focus on issues or political party, but to focus on the individual politicians, with the potential risk of isolating them from their own compatriots.

Funding

This study received no funding.

Conflict of Interests

The authors reported no conflicts of interest for this work and declare that there is no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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