Twitter as a Tool for Malaysian Leaders in Building Credibility and Trust Among Young Voters

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ABSTRACT

Credibility among leaders has always become an interesting topic to be debated in the millennium era. The influx of information derived from the advancement of technology has changed the public perspective and hence makes it complicated. The rise of Social Network Sites (SNS) specifically Twitter as a new medium of communication makes it even worse because it is an influential tool in disseminating information as well as to exchange opinions and views within the society. Twitter has become one of the most frequent applications used under SNS category especially among young voters. In response, politicians also have ventured into this new communication landscape in order to interact and get closer

to the voters. This phenomenon plays an important role in changing the public perception towards the credibility of political leaders in the world. This research aims to study the roles of Twitter as a tool used by Malaysian leaders in building both credibility and trust through the virtual engagement made with young voters. This research is based on the findings obtained from the in-depth interviews done with participants that have been selected from purposive sampling. The research's findings were being analysed using the ATLAS.ti software in order to explore the young voters' reactions towards the virtual engagement approach, the perception and the voting behaviour which are being illustrated into network graphics. The Social Judgement Theory (SJT) together with the communication framework has been used in order to study the possibility of attitude change during the virtual engagement process. The research also shows that a leader must comply with certain criteria such as having a good personality, bring positivity to the society, media literate and fully utilising the media platforms in order to be seen as a credible leader and gain the trust of the young voters.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Credibility is one of the most important elements that a leader or politicians need to have. To be exact, it has become a must because without this element, it is hard for the leader to convince the people to follow with their ideology. For some scholars, the word 'credibility' is a substitute for 'believability' [1]. Credibility can also be measured through three (3) aspects which are: trustworthiness, expertise, and dynamism. Even though it is subjective to measure the three aspects, in the context of leader or politicians, however, credibility can be built by using several approaches such as having a good personality, always posting positive messages, the medium used, holding a good post in the organisation and so forth. The more responsibility you inherit, the more credible you are in the eyes of the public. Therefore, it is important for everyone to understand what credibility is and how great the impact of credibility is towards another individual.

One of the criteria that make people is being seen as credible is the language used in communication. According to a study, a male leader who used a powerful style of communication have a higher percentage in persuading users to participate in activities and he is being perceived as credible compared to a female candidate [2].

In contrast, a different scenario or situation can be seen in the case of the Egyptian revolution. During that particular time, people believe and viewed any information offered by members in social networks as credible and trustworthy [3]. On top of that, towards a certain extent, scholars claimed that people who communicate in social networks and develop a relationship with those who have a similar interest have indirectly created a mutual understanding on the credibility of the source.

Again, the above scenario can be interpreted, as there are no specific criteria to follow in order to measure a person's credibility in social media. Or maybe, the credibility is more towards individual sentiments such as personality, issues that were being raised or anything else that are solely based on personal emotion and judgment. The latter is a reference to the case of Donald Trump. Trump cannot claim that he won the U.S presidential election because he is more credible and trustworthy than Hillary. However, some scholars said that it is more of a situation where the people need to choose who is the lesser evil between the two, instead.

Nevertheless, there is a strong evidence showing that such scenario will not give effect or applicable to Malaysia's political culture. Accordingly, the credibility or trust gained by the leaders in social media cannot be counted as votes [4]. For example, in the 2013 Malaysia General Election (GE), Barisan Nasional (BN) formed the government with 60% of the parliamentary seats despite winning only 47% of popular vote. Without a doubt, social media – especially Twitter – has increased the participation of public towards politics.

SNS is an influential tool in disseminating information as well as to exchange opinions and views within the society [5]. Twitter has become one of the most frequent applications used under SNS category especially

among young voters. In response, the politician also has ventured into this new communication landscape in order to interact and get closer to the voters. This phenomenon plays an important role in changing the public perception towards the credibility of political leaders in the world.

Records showed that countries like the United States (US), Korea, Germany and Iran that have used social media in its political campaign has an increasing number of participation and engagement between the leaders and the public [6]. In reality, social media offers no guarantees that every supports, credibility, trustworthiness and a high number of followers will give an ultimate indication and translated into votes.

Therefore, this research will study the roles of Twitter as a communication tool for Malaysian leaders in building their credibility together with gaining the trust of young voters through virtual engagement and does it been translated into voting behaviours in the upcoming General Election (GE).

2.0 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Therefore, the research objectives for this paper are:

1. To explore the role of Twitter as a tool in building credibility in Malaysian leaders.

2. To study the role of Twitter in creating trust towards Malaysian leaders among young voters.

3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Twitter

The broad functions of social media have impetus the introduction of application known as Twitter which been introduced to the public in 2006. Initially, previous researchers claimed that Twitter was created by 10 persons that based from San Francisco and in the early stage, the application was known as Obvious [7]. Twitter is a text-based application that only

allows its users to send updates (tweet) up to the 140 characters in length to be displayed. However, users have the ability to choose either to make their tweet seen by the public in chronological order on the public timeline on Twitter.com homepage or only to a network of friends (followers) from a multiple of devices [8].

In addition, users do not need a mutual permission from the sender in order to read the tweets because the default setting for tweets is set public by the Twitter [8]. All the updates for each user are aggregated into a single list known as Twitter page. Besides, there are varieties of channel the tweets can be displayed to its followers such as through instant messaging, Short Message Service (SMS), Really Simple Syndication (RSS), email and any other social networking platforms. This thing happens because the Twitter Application Program Interface (API) allows the integration with other web services and applications.

According to some researchers, Twitter is one of the preferred social networking and micro-blogging site [9]. And not only that, instead of broadcasting updates to an audience of followers, it also offers the users to communicate with others in two primary public ways known as retweets (RT) and mentions (@user). Therefore, every user has widespread of networking or platforms that can guarantee the message or tweets seen and read by other users.

On top of that, the function of retweets is to foster the content visibility by allowing other users to rebroadcast the message [10]. It also gives a signal that the message is important and gain attention from other users. Meanwhile, mentions function is by addressing to a specific user directly. Both modes of channel work differently for opposite purposes but it was vital to ensure that the message circulation meets with Twitter principle as public user-user interaction. Interestingly, hashtags (#) also been is another feature in the Twitter platform [10]. This feature will help users to track information or marked tweets based on the topic or subject of communication.

Hence, Twitter is indeed one of the applications that can be categorised under micro-blogging service that allows users to send short text together with picture or audio clips [11]. The most important element in Twitter is that it works on a real-time basis.

3.2 Twitter Influence in Politics

The characteristics of Twitter made it very popular on its users. Even though it only offered 140 characters per message, but it has become its unique selling proposition (USP) because it focuses on the message rather than allowing users to send wordy and long messages. Definitely, it will distract the viewers from getting the main point that supposes to be the main agenda. Twitter also helps close the gap between young voters and politicians through digital interactions.

The former President of the United States, Barack Obama was the first candidate for the presidential seat who uses social media in his presidential election back in 2008 [12]. Even though he is not the first in exploring this tool, but the use of social media inclusive of Twitter has produced a fruitful result to his campaign specifically in getting the young voters endorsement. The strategy does not only enable him to win the election, but the president also has been able to collect over $55 million dollars in donation throughout the duration of his campaign in the social media. These are the evidence on how powerful the social media is in helping the candidate.

Similarly, Twitter has become an important tool in disseminating information and news about the elections as such that can be seen in Spain, United Kingdom, Canada, South Korea and so on [13][14]. Consequently, the virtual interactions between politicians and public have become more direct and serious. This scenario also has affected the media organizations in providing political news to the public. The Twitter accounts owned by every politician have become the primary source for the media in order to quote something that relates to the news. Thus, the media organizations also have created their own Twitter accounts in order to be coordinated with the trends.

However, in contrast, there are also some politicians who use Twitter in negative ways such as calling people for a rally in order to dethrone the current ruling government. The former President of Thailand, Thaksin Shinawatra has once used Twitter as a platform to call upon his supporters to run the street rally known as the 'Red Shirts' [15]. Even though this can be categorized as unethical and selfish, the tweet or messages posted by him still contain the substantial elements that can drive the public to the streets. This is also evident on how Twitter is being used to influence people to follow the sender's intention.

In addition, the change of regime resulted from the Egyptian revolution is also due to the usage of social media especially Facebook and Twitter. Some scholars said that Egypt's revolution happened because of both the economy and social factor faced by the Egyptians. However, the more prominent cause was the influence of Facebook and Twitter that made the people came to the streets and started the revolution in Egypt.

Nevertheless, the above phenomena do not affect the Indian voters in India as found in a research conducted by IMRB International that was being carried out between 1st and 5th of May 2009 during India's 15th General election [16]. The study covered the four main cities of India (Delhi, Bangalore, Mumbai and Kolkata) and it was done as to study on the impact of political campaign done through social media towards the young voter in India. The result had shown that the political campaign ran through the social media has failed to influence the young voters. Moreover, there were not even ten percent (10%) of the young voters who can recalled the political advertisement published in the net during the whole period of campaigning. Apparently, one of the reasons behind such failure was because a majority of Indian population live in rural areas and does not have the access to both the Internet and the technology.

Relatively, Cambodia shows the same results when it comes to the impacts of social media. The Internet penetration in the country is at the lowest end and they are close to one hundred percent (100%) of Internet inaccessibility. The internet population is very small in number and that it

also only able to reach to certain categories such as students, government servants, non-governmental organization (NGOs) and employee companies that provide internet services [17]. However, it is to be noted that the number of Cambodians who are using the Internet is increasing year by year. So at this particular moment, studying the influence of social media towards the Cambodian people towards can be seen as irrelevant. However, it will be an interesting study to do when Cambodia is having its general election in 2018. It is expected that social media such as Twitter and Facebook will become the main weapons in reaching the audiences.

Under the circumstance, this study finds an indicator to says that the social media cannot influence people in total. People especially the youngster have their own preferences in choosing what media that could attract their attention or influence their behaviour. Without proper infrastructures that support the accessibility to the Internet and technology also could lead to ineffectiveness of the impacts of social media.

3.3 Social Judgement Theory

This theory is a self-persuasion theory as the perception and evaluation of an idea by comparing it with the present attitude. Historically, Social Judgement Theory (SJT) is a theory proposed by Carolyn Sherif, Muzafer Sherif, and Carl Hovland in 1965 [18].

However, some scholars view that this particular theory is an extension of a psychology model from the Austrian-American psychologist known as Egon Brunswik (1903–1955) who began his career in psychology at the University of Vienna [19]. The previous discussion of Brunswik's psychology was said to be extremely influenced by the development of SJT, especially in regards to organising around a set of ideas. The main objective is still the same whereby it studies the change of attitude or behaviour as a result of the study.

Social Judgement Theory was constructed on the principle of reactions from the receiver evaluation towards the persuasive message received on a particular issue [18]. Meanwhile, another scholar believed that SJT is a

communication process that involves individual to the situational contexts [20]. The prediction of attitude change and assimilation-contrast effects in a judgement of communication about particular issues will be varying because it depends on the individual judgement. Because of that, it needs multiple and innovative methods to test the research findings. Therefore, it shows that the key point of SJT is the attitude change through persuasion that is being mediated by judgmental processes and effects.

Furthermore, this theory has been regularly used in the context of communication fields such as political communication, health communication, group communication, advertising research, public relations, and legal communication [18]. Hence, it shows that the theory is not only restricted to a certain situation but also can be applied in various scenarios.

There are three (3) latitudes in SJT that become the foundation to this theory which are the latitude of acceptance, non-commitment and rejection [18][20][21]. All these latitudes vary in structures, which refer to the level of the person's involvement in accepted positions. As such, when a person is involved at the higher level, automatically the rejected latitude will broaden while non-commitment latitude will disappear.

For example, 'ego' will be highly involved when a person – as the receiver – has a significant issue that related to his or her life. Thus, in this situation, when ego involvement goes up, it will increase latitude of rejection but decrease the latitude of non-commitment. In other words, found that when a person finds it acceptable towards something, then he or she is in the latitude of acceptance (assimilation effects) [22]. For the latitude of non-commitment happen when persons at the positions of in-between neither acceptable nor unacceptable. Meanwhile, it is obvious that when a person is in a position of rejecting towards something, he or she is in the latitude of rejection (contrast effects).

However, all these reactions are highly depending on the messages received. In order to claim success, the messages must be persuasive and suit for a specific audience and targeted at the far reaches of their latitude

of acceptance, or into their latitude of non-commitment [18]. Messages that contain a strong message or persuasive elements can determine which latitude that the person belongs to.
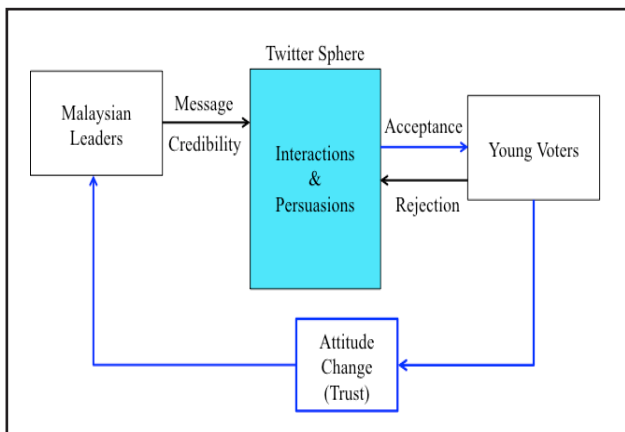
3.4 Communication Framework

Figure 3.3: Communication Framework

The communication framework showed above described how Malaysian leaders used messages and credibility to persuade target audiences or young voters in order to reach the acceptance level. This later changed the attitude of the young voters to which it shows that they have the trust towards the Malaysian leaders.

There are numbers of scholars who have discussed on the matter of sender's credibility in influencing the people. A scholar has once determined credibility as the reactions of an individual towards the level of truth in the information received [23]. However, it is a multi-dimensional concept that serves as a mean for the receiver of the information to rate the sender or transmitter of the communication in relation to the information.

In addition, it was found that personality as a trait of extraversion as being unrestrained and actively disseminating information in social media was seen as a requirement for influencing people [24]. Furthermore,

credibility also has been associated with communication phenomenon because it is tied to information.

Thus, this research would like to analyse on the impacts of information and interactions in Twitter towards Malaysian leaders' credibility, as it has become one of the popular media to transmit information to the young voters in Malaysia.

Therefore, these communication frameworks are also in-line with the social judgement theory's main criteria that are 'involvement' and 'acceptance'. The interactions in the Twitter-sphere will encourage users' involvement to change information and ideas with one another. Once they have come to an agreement on what is being discussed, they actually have to go to the next level known as 'acceptance'. In this level, the followers will agree and follow the message that has been published by the leader(s) for most of the times.

However, if it happened to be that the user has rejected the messages from the sender during the interaction process, then the attitude will remain the same as before.

4.0 METHODOLOGY

The aim of this research is to study Malaysian leader's virtual engagement on Twitter in building credibility and on how it can help in gaining the trust of young voters. The researcher had decided to use a qualitative research for this research by obtaining the information from the selected participants, who in the researcher's view are experts and have the qualification to give the information that is in-line with the study.

This research involves a qualitative method that can be best defined by the uses of information gained from several interview sessions. An author to a book entitled "Introducing Qualitative Research in Psychology" claimed the aim of data collection in qualitative research is to create a comprehensive record of participants' verbal (words) and non-verbal (actions) [25]. This is to ensure that everything is under the radar and helps to avoid a lost in translation during the interpretation or data analysing

process. However, this process will make the qualitative data becomes bigger and difficult to manage. Normally, the researcher need to wait until the data have been analysed before it can be selected based on the need of the research.

For that, semi-structured interview was used during the interview sessions in order to give more freedom to the participants in giving their opinion and data. The data collected as a form of information will then be analysed, orchestrated and later included almost accurately in this research. The researcher also has used the ATLAS.ti software in order to analyse the data collected as well as producing the network's graphic that will represent the findings.

*4.1 S*ampling

The purposive sampling method used by the researcher was seen as the most suitable sampling method for this research. In a book entitled *"Mastering Research Methods",* the author has stated that purposive sampling is a process of selecting the subject or group of individuals who have certain characteristics or elements that suit to the purpose of the study. In other words, those who are not falling under this category will automatically will be eliminated and will not call for an interview [26].

For that, the researcher has identified a number of participants for the in-depth interview sessions who came from various backgrounds that are related to the goal of this study. There are six (6) participants who have participated in this study and they consist of young voters and politicians as well as academician. Each of the interview sessions were being proceeded within 30 minutes to one (1) hour. The participants are briefly explains as below: one (1) young politicians that actively used Twitter as communication tools, one (1) honourable academician in the New Media and Political Journalism major, one (1) government officer that responsible in managing government social media platform and three (3) young voters that used Twitter as source of information and knowledge gathering.

4.2 The Research Instrument

Each research objectives have five (5) questions and it is compulsory for the participants to answer all questions in order for the researcher to obtain useful information for this research. The questions are as shown below:

The first section is purposely to explore the role of Twitter as a tool in building Malaysian leader's credibility.

a. Some researchers had mentioned that the use of persuasive messages that are being tailored for a specific audience would affect the voter's perceptions towards the credibility of the leaders. In your opinion, does the content of persuasive message important to determine the leader's credibility? Why is that so? – Q1.

 The purpose of this question is to analyse the participant's opinion towards the content of the message in order to determine leader's credibility.

b. In your opinion, does the leader's credibility determine the level of truth perceived by the voters? Why is that so? – Q2.

 The purpose of this question is to analyse the participant's opinion on the level of truth perceived by the voters based on leader's credibility.

c. Recently, there are some of Malaysian leaders who had used controversial or negative persuasive messages as their political strategy in order to gain both the attention and support from the young voters. In your opinion, how does the use of controversial or negative persuasive messages will either benefit or backfires the credibility of the leader? – Q3.

 The purpose of this question is to analyse the participant's opinion on the advantages and disadvantages of using negative persuasive messages towards leader's credibility.

d. Why do political leaders' (either from government or oppositions) prefer to use Twitter rather than the other social media? – Q4.

The purpose of this question is to analyse the participant's opinion on the advantages and disadvantages of using negative persuasive messages towards leader's credibility.

e. Normally, Malaysian leaders' will act as a feeder that gives input to influence young voters' behaviour. In your opinion, do you think the voters can react the same way and get influenced by the leader's behaviour? Why is that so? – Q5.

The purpose of this question is to analyse whether voters can influence the leader's behaviour.

The second section is purposely to study the role of Twitter in creating trust towards Malaysian leaders among young voters.

f. Attia, Aziz, Friedman, & Elhusseiny (2011) claimed that people who communicate in social networks and develop a relationship with those who have a similar interest have indirectly created a mutual understanding about the credibility of the source. Do you agree with this statement? Why? – Q6.

The purpose of this question is to analyse whether participant's that have a similar interest in social networks have a mutual understanding about the credibility of the source.

g. In your opinion, what are the elements that determine the trustworthiness of the messages sent by Malaysian leaders towards young voters? – Q7.

The purpose of this question is to analyse the elements of trust that need to have in the message.

h. How does the Malaysian leaders' credibility would gain the young voters' trust based on virtual interaction through Twitter-sphere? – Q8.

The purpose of this question is to analyse whether Twitter can build young voters trust towards Malaysian leaders.

i. How does the credibility or trustworthiness that a leader gained in social media particularly Twitter could become an indicator for

a leader to win in an election? Why? – Q9.

The purpose of this question is to analyse whether the voter trust is translated into votes.

j. Do you have suggestions or ideas that can help to improve the credibility of Malaysian leaders? – Q10.

The purpose of this question is to analyse participant's ideas on improving the Malaysian leaders' credibility.

5.0 FINDINGS

5.1 Theme 1: The Role of Twitter as a Tool in Building Malaysian Leader's Credibility.

5.1.1 Sub-theme 1: Persuasive Message

All participants were agreed on the importance of using the persuasive message in order to determine the leader's credibility. The content of the message is important because this is the only 'weapon' that the leaders have in order to convince the voters. In other words, the good content of persuasive message function is working as what the face to face communication is doing but in a virtual engagement version.

In spite of that, there are no other ways for the leaders to convince the voters that he/she is the right leader for them. But, with a good content, putting in statements with good structure and using the right words will show the courage, seriousness and commitment of leaders towards the voters in every message that been sent.

The opinion was shared by Alvídrez and Franco-Rodríguez in 2016, which claimed one of the criteria that make people seen as credible is the language that used in communication.

5.1.2 Sub-theme 2: Level of Truth

Based on the findings, all participants agreed that the importance of leader's credibility in determining the level of truth perceived by the voters. Thus, this finding was in-line with Eisend's findings which claimed

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credibility as the reactions of an individual towards the level of truth in the information received [22].

There are many factors that need to be looked into when talking about the level of truthfulness. One of the main elements is the personality of the leaders. As mentioned before, in order for the leaders to influence the voters, he or she needs to have a very good content in every message sent to the public. But, without a good personality that the leaders carry, the good persuasive messages will be seen as rubbish in the eyes of the public particularly the voters.

For example, Azwan Ali during the recent UMNO General Assembly has made a statement that he willing to help UMNO by contesting in the constituency of Selangor's Menteri Besar, Dato' Azmin Ali which is his brother. The video has gone viral on social media. However, the feedback received from the netizens was as expected and the negative impact also went to UMNO indirectly. This is happening because the voters do not perceive Azwan Ali's personality as a credible person in politics and as a result of the level of truth also impacted because of that.

The importance of personality in influencing the voters by claiming that the leaders are indeed credible especially in the social media has also been mentioned by Winter and Neubaum in 2016. The two scholars have claimed that the trait of extraversion as being unrestrained and actively disseminating information in social media and it was seen as a requirement for influencing people [23].

5.1.3 Sub-theme 3: Implication of Controversial Message

Apparently, a majority of the participants dismissed the idea of using controversial message in order to enhance the credibility of the leaders. This is because they believed that the use of controversial messages will lead to failure and backfires on the credibility of the leaders. For example, YB Pandan, Rafizi Ramli has made a claim in his social media account saying that the government through YB Dato' Seri Abdul Rahman Dahlan, Minister's in Prime Minister Department has appointed his own brother as

the main contractor for the Negaraku project, which is an expo open for public at Dataran Merdeka, Kuala Lumpur.

However, the allegation was totally misleading and Rafizi has since taken down all the allegations in his social media account. On top of that, he has also issued a statement of apology to the respective particulars. Based on this issue, it is clearly shown that the credibility of YB Rafizi has been tarnished as his act backfired due to the controversial message that he made. Apparently, the strategy was made to gain the voters' attention. However, the issue, unfortunately, has seriously affected his credibility as a leader.

In addition, the participants have also agreed that the leaders should portray good image and bring positivity to the public in order to gain trust. The message was shared by Al-Sharawneh and Williams in 2010 who have mentioned that even though it is subjective to measure it, but in the context of leader or politicians, credibility can be built by using several approaches such as having a good personality, always posting positive messages, proper use of the available medium, holding a good post in the organization and so forth [1].

5.1.4 Sub-theme 4: Twitter Preferences

Based on the inputs, a majority of the participants have agreed that political leaders – either from government or opposition – prefer to use Twitter rather than the other social media. The elements of Twitter such as real-time basis, minimal concept and limited character have convinced the politicians to use it.

Echoed to that, the researcher believed that the leaders from both sides are looking for a certain volume of information that they can provide to the voters. This is because in social media structure, the more messages you posted on the net, the more attention you will gain from the social media users.

In addition, another element that made Twitter seem to suits well with the leaders from both sides is the 'retweet' function. As mentioned before, the 'retweet' function enables the users to rebroadcast the message

posted by the leaders and at the same time, it serves as an indicator that the message is important to capturing the attention of the readers or viewers. This statement is supported by Boyd, Golder and Lotan in 2010 who claimed that the function of 'retweets' is to foster the content visibility by allowing other users to rebroadcast the message [10].

5.1.5 Sub-theme 5: Voters as Influencer

Technically, the very nature of political scenario that has been put into practice in Malaysia for quite some time is more towards the concept of a top-down approach. Normally, the top leaders will indicate what needs to be done and the followers will execute as what has been planned. However, the rise of social media has changed the landscape of political scenario in Malaysia particularly in the case of information chain.

In the context of this study, the findings have shown that majority of the participants have agreed that the young voters could be influenced by the behaviour of the leaders that is being communicated through the Twitter-sphere. Apparently, this is not a new scenario that one can see in Malaysia's political atmosphere because we uphold and exercise freedom of speech as every Malaysians have the right to do so.

For example, there was a campaign on Twitter, suggested by the netizens upon YB Khairy Jamaluddin, a Minister from the Ministry of Youth and Sports to appoint a local actor, Mr. Bront Palarae, as the commentator for the football final between the Malaysian team and the team from Thailand in the KUALA LUMPUR SEA GAMES 2017. The idea came upon a netizen following the actor's success in playing the role of a sports commentator in the local box-office movie released in the year 2016, 'Ola Bola'. On top of that, the mere suggestion has caught the attention of the media and thus indirectly gives the extra pressure to the said minister. However, the minister decided not to proceed with suggestion after considering the other elements that need to be taken into account as well in deciding the applicable individual for the post.

Echoed to that, the researcher can now confirm that there are two (2) things that reflect this question. First, it is proven that the netizen

-- particularly the young voters – that they can indeed become such an influencer to the leaders. Second, the leaders themselves need to have a strong will to evaluate and analyse all the demands made and raised by either the public or the voters. This is because at the end the day, the credibility of the leaders is the one element that will be at stake. It is good if the decision made given positive results but what happens if the results turn out to be the other way around?

5.2 Theme 2: Twitter's Role in Creating Trust Towards Malaysian Leaders Among Young Voters

5.2.1 Sub-theme 6: Mutual Understanding

The majority of the participants agreed with the statement made by the scholar Attia, Aziz, Friedman and Elhusseiny in 2011 who claimed that people who communicate in social networks and develop a relationship with those who have similar interest have indirectly created a mutual understanding about the credibility of the source [3].

On top of that, it shows that these groups of people have already built trust among themselves towards the same interest. For example, mutual interest the Muslim society had on the issue of the declaration of Baitulmaqdis as Israel's capital by the US President, Donald Trump. The issue has brought the Muslim society from all around the world to respond to the issue through either conventional or traditional approach inclusive of the use of the social media platforms. Relatively in the Malaysian context, a campaign that is being put forward on going against the declaration has been organised and it has gone viral on the social media. As a result, a peace rally has been organised with thousands of people marched towards the United States' embassy in Kuala Lumpur. Evidently, this form of unity shows on the solidarity the Muslims in Malaysia have in showing support to the Palestinian people.

This is a projection of powerful mutual understanding that was created by the users of social media towards the issue. Not only that, it shows the element of trusts towards the message or campaign that been viral on the

Internet. Without trust, the researcher believed that the number of people that had joined the rally will not be successful.

5.2.2 Sub-theme 7: Element of Trust

All of the participants agreed that there is a need for the leaders to be trusted in order to influence the voters. Because of that, the participants have given several inputs or elements they feel that the leaders need to have in order to gain trust from the voters.

The most common elements raised by the participants were the need for the leaders to be honest and 'walk the talk'. Meaning to say, the voters would love to see their respective leaders be saying the right things and not only think about the rhetoric. The researcher also needs to emphasize that the art of rhetoric that has been practised in the past are no longer valid in the information era of today. This is also a reminder for the leaders that they need to give the positive vibes to the society. By doing so, public or the 'rakyat' will acknowledge them as a credible or trusted leader.

5.2.3 Sub-Theme 8: Gain The Trust

Majority of the participants have agreed on the importance of gaining the trust of young voters through virtual interaction particularly Twitter. Basically, several elements were being mentioned by the participants during the interview's sessions such as the need to have a good content and persuasive message. This is important because the users or voters will make an early judgement to the credibility of the leaders through what has been posted by the respective leaders.

Echoed to that, the participants also have suggested about the usage of the third party as an endorser to the leader. Meaning to say, the third party will convey the good things about the leaders in hope that the voters on the net are influenced by that strategy.

There is also another strategy that has been put into use by the political leader which is generating more followers. Most of them believed that the high number of followers will determine the credibility of the leaders.

Apart from that, it helps in influencing the voters by giving the impression that this leader is backed by a majority of people. This opinion was shared by Larson in 2017 who claimed that Twitter has the impact to influence the people's perception by having such huge numbers of followers [27].

5.2.4 Sub-theme 9: Winning Indicator

All participants agreed that the supports and trust gained through virtual interaction could not become an indicator for the leaders to win the election. This was supported by previous scholar's research. A scholar has claimed that the credibility or trustworthiness that the leader gained in social media cannot be count as votes [4]. There are many events that can become a reference case to this statement. For example, the reception that Hillary Clinton had received in the social media was far better than Donald Trump. Not only that, Hillary also has won the popularity votes among the Americans. However, she failed to become the US President. This is kind of situation proved that the supports and trusts that a leader gain could not guarantee the success in real politic.

However, a majority of the participants believed that the combination of strategy between conventional and social media approach can indeed make dreams becomes reality. This is proven when Barrack Obama had won the presidential seat during the 2008 presidential campaign. Thus, it is not an impossible mission to translate it into Malaysia's political context.

5.2.5 Sub-theme 10: Suggestions To Improve Credibility

Referring to the engagement in social media, all of the participants would like to see their leader as genuine, 'walk the talk' and have the knowledge about the media and thus making them media literate. Nevertheless, the first two elements have been discussed for quite sometimes in this study.

Thus, the researcher wants to focus on the need for the leader to equip themselves with the knowledge on media particularly the social media. In today's political scenario, the leaders not only need to have the knowledge on what messages need to be posted or convey to the voters. But, it is

more than that whereby they also need to have the ability to analyse the trends that are happening in the social media. By having this knowledge and skills, the researcher believed that it would be the biggest advantage for the leaders, compared to others.

For example, from the data analysis, it was found that the leaders who know the nature of thinking of their followers, on the taboo issues for them, topics that attract them the most and so on. A smart leader will use all these information, mapped and suited it with the applicable communication strategy for his or her campaign in the media.

6.0 DISCUSSION

6.1 Theme 1: The Role of Twitter as a Tool in Building Malaysian Leader's Credibility.

From the findings as well as based on the five (5) sub-themes' discussed above, the researcher had come up with a conclusion on the first objective. Majority of the participants have agreed about the ability of Twitter in building Malaysian leader's credibility. This is based on the capability that the Twitter have to which it provides two-way communication between the leaders and voters, fast interaction because of the speed the information is travelling that is being offered in a real-time basis that makes users find it is easy to read and that it has wider coverage.

However, there are several elements that need to be taken into account such as the content of the message. The findings showed that the ability to develop and construct a good persuasive message is important in order to convince the voters because it becomes a representation of the leaders' credibility. This important message was also being endorsed by the previous scholar's as mentioned in the sub-theme discussions.

Furthermore, pleasant personality is one of the key elements for the leader in order to be seen as a credible leader. It brings advantage to the leader in influencing the voters. This opinion is in-line with the scholar's thought that claimed a leader is a role model to the society and applicable to both government and opposition's leaders [28].

6.2 Theme 2: Twitter Role in Creating Trust towards Malaysian Leaders among Young Voters

Based on the findings of the five (5) sub-themes' earlier, the researcher came up with a conclusion on the second objective. Majority of the participants agreed on the ability of the leaders to influence the trust of young voters is via Twitter interactions. The researcher is saying this on the basis of the mutual understanding element that been created by the leaders and the users that lead to the issue of trust.

Even though the researcher understands about the subjectivity on the issue of trust, but the findings showed that the trust can indeed be developed. In other words, the leaders need to be honest, brings positivity to the society and 'walk the talk' as mentioned in the earlier discussion.

Echoed to that, the leaders also could use the third party as an endorser to the leader. It will also help the leader to gain trust from the young voters. Basically, there are no rules in politics, but the things that the voters would love to see is a leader that gained the trust by portraying his true colours. The number of followers, tweets and retweet are just the mechanisms to influence the voters by showing that you are the reference of the society. But, it does not become the indicator that everything the leaders are doing is right.

Last but not least, all participants agreed that the supports and trusts the leaders have in social media could not be a certificate of guarantee for the leaders to win the election. There are many other factors that need to be taken into consideration as mentioned before such as the conventional approach, personal touch, demographics of the voters and so forth [29].

7.0   CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, this study has proven that the virtual engagement through Twitter could help in building the credibility and trust in Malaysian leaders towards young voters based on the findings that came from the ten (10) sub-themes.

Echoed to that, this study has proved that Twitter holds important roles in building leaders' credibility in the eyes of young voters. The findings have also stated the several elements that can be followed by the leaders as mentioned in the discussions part of this study such as 'walk the talk', becoming the role model to the society, having a good personality, have good media literacy and savvy.

Apart from that, this study also answers the question of whether the trust that was given by the young voters will be translated into votes later. Even though the answers received were negative, but it also gives the indication to the leaders for not relying only on one medium. The combination of both conventional and social media approach would serve the leaders better results rather than depending on one medium only.

Besides that, based on the Social Judgement Theory (SJT) and communication framework that was being used in this research, the findings have fulfilled all the components that were being stated in the theory. There are three (3) components involved which are the message posted by the leader, the interaction between both the leaders and the young voters and lastly the change of behaviour (acceptance) that lead the young voters to put his or her trust on the leaders. Based on this explanation, the study has complied with the theory that has been chosen.

However, the application of this scenario towards the actual context is totally different. For example, based on the findings, it shows that all participants are dismissing the claimed that both the credibility and trust that the leaders gained through virtual engagement can be counted as the winning indicator in the election. Hence, it is theoretically going against or does not comply with what has been stated in theory.

The variation of findings and contradiction in the application makes this research more interesting to be conducted. One of the reasons is because of the political culture that is being exercised in Malaysia are different compared to the other developing countries. On the other hand, it was also indirectly proven that our young voters had dissimilar responses which differ from the voters in other countries.

Last but not least, through this research, the Malaysian leaders could understand more on the needs and projections of the leaders that suit the voter's aspirations. The leaders should prepare themselves to at least be at par with the standards that have been outlined by the voters.

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