

Goods and Service Tax: Opinion Leaders Persuasion Strategies

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Abstract

The paper aims to identify the strategies and tactics used by opinion leaders in influencing public opinions. Based on GST implementation issues, which have sparked huge talks in the social media, thematic analysis method was used to identify strategies and tactics used by the politicians in influencing public opinions. Rank's Model of Persuasion was used as a basis to determine the strategies and tactics. Using intensification strategy, the persuader can utilize repetition, association and composition

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tactics while the other strategy, downplaying, offers three more tactics which are diversion, omission and confusion. Twitter postings of Ahmad Maslan and Rafizi Ramli related to GST were used as the data source. The data were then processed and classified into themes according to Rank's Model of Persuasion for further analysis. The results showed that even though both Ahmad Maslan and Rafizi prefer to use intensification strategy, there are differences in their approaches. While Ahmad Maslan chose to concentrate on repetition, Rafizi chose to be more diverse in applying tactics under the intensification strategy. Findings from this study provide a clearer understanding of online opinion leaders' persuasion techniques, thus offering as a reference for future researchers.

Keywords: *GST, Persuasion, Rank's Model, Social Media, Twitter*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This section introduces the topic by explaining the background of the study which focuses on the role of social media in current era, how people benefit from the technology and how it become a tool to influence public opinion. This section further provides readers with the problem statement to briefly explain on the strategies used by opinion leaders on Twitter to gain support and influence public opinions.

1.1 Background of the Study

The emergence of social media as the main conduit for information dissemination has forced governments and organizations to shift their paradigms in gaining the public to be on their side, and agree with their ideas and actions. This propaganda process was traditionally done via printed media, free to air television and radio, public rallies, plus other mediums that used to be controlled by the government. However, social media are a very different channel for information dissemination that demands different treatments from the governments and organizations in power, if they want to utilize it as effectively as the traditional medium. This is because social media can reach through traditional barriers and can influence not only

public opinion but also the society [1]. Information technologies have also increased people awareness on the current local world issues and discuss it on the social media platform. Therefore, any attempt to disseminate propaganda or to shape public opinions via traditional media or new media should be done delicately, in order to make the target audience agree with the suggested idea willingly. This so-called technique is famously termed by Joseph Nye Jr. [6] as soft power.

The recent move by the Malaysian government to introduce Goods and Service Tax (GST) has sparked a big wave in the Malaysian social media sphere. The opposition party has used this opportunity to provoke Malaysians to go against the government, and managed to overwhelm the government's efforts to do otherwise. Therefore, it is beneficial to identify the strategies used by the opposition, and understand how it differs from the other party.

In this particular study, the focus is set on the strategy used by social media opinion leaders on Twitter on issues related to GST. Their tweets were analysed according to Rank's Model of Persuasion; a simple model which provides a useful explanation about political persuasion. Findings of the study will help to explain the strategies used by opinion leaders to influence public opinion through the use of the social media, especially Twitter.

1.2 Problem Statement

Social media is one of the most effective propagation medium at the moment since the information conveyed through it is more acceptable by the audience because it propagated by known peers [2]. A study by Kathy Richardson [24] in the United States of America also deduced that the usage of Twitter by politicians has helped them in creating public persona and stimulating perceptions of political efficacy. In Malaysia, a study by Abu Hassan Hasbullah from Bernama found that seventy percent of the 12th general election results were influenced by the new media, especially blogs [17]. Therefore, Malaysian government led by the Prime Minister has strived to utilise social media to engage the public as well as to disseminate

information. The effort can be seen in the top Malaysian politician list published by Social Baker (<http://www.socialbaker.com>) where the top three politicians are personalities from the ruling party. However, despite the efforts to utilize social media platform to their advantage, the opposing organizations and movements are seen to be more successful in wielding the soft power in social media, thus creating bad perceptions on the nation states. Hence, there are increasing needs of utilizing social media and engaging social media key opinion leaders to fight against bad perception [3]. Therefore, the importance of opinion leaders in social media community must be acknowledged. Quoting Lazarsfeld in their book, Baran and Davis [4] described opinion leaders as people who are being looked up to by groups or community they are affiliated to as the source of reference. They are also called “heavy user/early decider” which described their habits or activities as heavy users of the media. They selectively share information and news to the public, and frame it in the manner that will encourage their target audience to share their views [4].

The implementation of GST has been another challenge to the government, as it provides the oppositions with new ammunitions to attack the government, while gaining more and more followers especially in the cyber space. Campaign against the implementation of GST is actively held online through social media platforms, especially on Facebook and Twitter, with hashtags #GST and #LawanGST. Leading the campaigns are opposition leaders such as Rafizi Ramli and Nik Nazmi, who are influential enough to be considered as key opinion leaders.

Contrary, on the government side, the campaign for GST are being carried out by government agencies, especially the Royal Malaysia Custom Department (RMCD). Apart from the efforts by the agencies, political figures from the ruling party have also taken part in promoting and explaining the new tax system to the public. The most prominent figure from Barisan Nasional on this issue is Datuk Ahmad Maslan, the Deputy Finance Minister who is also information chief of United Malay National Organization (UMNO). However, the efforts by Datuk Ahmad Maslan to promote GST to the public have made him infamous, since he

was against the popular opinion which is against the GST implementation. This situation echoed Nicco Mele's opinion that any effort to influence public opinion is easier, if the drive is against the establishment, and showed concerned over public frustrations. In this case, the opposition campaign is well equipped with the immediate negative impact of GST, thus overwhelming the government's efforts to inform the public about the actual mechanisms of GST and its long-term positive outcome.

The situation shows that Rafizi Ramli and other opposition leaders have successfully positioned themselves as opinion leaders of Malaysian online community. They have embraced the opportunities brought by the social media, to gain support from Malaysians.

From the literature review conducted by the researcher, it was found that there are no previous study conducted on Twitter, one of the top social media platform that focus on the opinion leaders persuasion strategies and tactics, hence leaving a research gap. Therefore in this study, the researcher aims to study both Rafizi Ramli and Ahmad Maslan's strategies and tactics in their effort to influence public opinion on the implementation of GST in Malaysia.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review acts as a foundation of the research by investigating and analysing past literature based on the following key topics, related media theories, social media, big data, soft power, and the relation between social media and public opinion. The review started with the general idea of the social media and its rapid development factors, followed by its relationship with public opinion. The literature review also covered theoretical parts of the research, which the research theoretical framework was based on, together with information on GST which was the case study of this research.

2.1 Web 2.0 and Social Media

The advancement of human civilization has always been associated with the ability of a particular society to communicate and disseminate knowledge

and information effectively. Charles U. Larson [8] suggested that there are five major communication innovations in human history. The innovation started with a very basic skill in communication, which is the spoken word, followed by the written word, which has allowed the ancient civilizations to practice legal systems and document the ownership of properties. But tangible materials such as lands and properties were not the only things that have assigned legal owner; writings also have given scholars the ownership of their knowledge. As such, knowledge has become an exclusive right for certain groups of people only, like the western church in the fifteenth century, until the introduction of the printing press in Germany by Johannes Gutenberg in the late 1400s, which kick-started the third innovation; the printed words.

The fourth iteration of communication innovation, the electronic word, is much more familiar with today's society. However, the complex mesh of communication network was originated from only one simple and straight-forward communication system; the telegraph, which uses electrical pulses to send messages from a particular point to another via Morse code. From its birth in 1844, the telegraph has paved ways for many more inventions in electronic communication. Radio, television, compact-disks, and the internet are among the various mediums and conduit of electronic communication that have enabled faster ways of information dissemination and sharing.

The speed of information dissemination has become so fast and the distribution range has widened so much, to the extent that a normal civilian can have access to information that was previously restricted and privileged to governmental and military audiences. Information now flows in so many channels and medium, and has become borderless with the advancement and the utilization of the Internet. Thus the idea of governing information flows has become almost an impossible task.

In this era, where the content of the internet is generated by the users or the audience themselves is what Larson [8] categorized as the fifth communication innovation; the interactive electronic word, or in a more popular term, the Web 2.0. What the Web 2.0 has truly contributed

was the decentralization of the internet information gatekeeping. The information flow is not one dimensional anymore, like from the webmaster to the audience, but the role of a webmaster has changed from being the information provider, into the platform provider. The platform has enabled people without information technology skills, like Hyper Text Mark-up Language coding and Apache webserver configuration, to create and share pages of information on the internet; something which was not possible prior the introduction of Web 2.0. The share of thoughts can be as short as one hundred and forty characters in Twitter, to thousands words of writings in blogs.

Access to information is no longer dominated by the traditional media. This is noticeably proven in the 10th general election in 1999, whereby even though the ruling party of Barisan Nasional (BN) has great influence over the mass media, they suffered huge losses, including losing the state of Terengganu. This occurred during an era, when the Internet penetration in Malaysia was still low. More recently, the devastating result of the 12th General Election in 2008 by BN was a clear signal to show that they can no longer rely on the traditional media to communicate their political messages to influence the public.

The significant role of the new media, including blogs in the outcome of the election results, was admitted by the then Prime Minister Dato' Seri (Tun) Abdullah Badawi. He claimed that, "*We certainly lost the Internet war, the cyber-war. It was a serious misjudgement. We made the biggest mistake in thinking that it was not important,*" Whereas, according to Abu Hassan Hasbullah in a study entitled *The 12th Malaysian General Election: A study on theory, form and strategic concepts from media coverage analysis*', it was found that 70 percent of the election results were influenced by the new media, especially blogs [17].

2.2 The Contributing Factor in Social Media Development

In his book, *Persuasion: Reception and Responsibility*, Charles Larson [8] explained about media convergence; a situation where information technologies, media content and network communication are interconnected.

Encyclopaedia Britannica described media convergence as “a phenomenon involving the interconnection of information and communications technologies, computer networks, and media content. It brings together the computing, communication, and content in one package or device. It is also a direct consequence of the digitization of media content and the popularization of the internet especially web 2.0. Media convergence transforms established industries, services, and work practices and enables entirely new forms of content to emerge. It erodes long-established media industry and content “silos” and increasingly uncouples content from particular devices, which in turn presents major challenges for public policy and regulation [20].

Media convergence allow news to travel much faster and carry much more than the traditional ways; where one medium is meant for one type of media, such as voice communication for land line telephone, and text for mail. Technology developments have made way for the invention of device like smart phone, which can do the job of the land line telephone, traditional mail, camera, voice recorder, and many more in a single and mobile device. The convergence has become a strong foundation in the development of the social media platform.

The other factor that has always been associated with the social media is its role as an alternative media. In a country, where the mainstream media were tightly controlled by the government, the citizens will turn into the social media to acquire and propagate censored information, like what happened in China [23]. The more extreme example can be seen in the recent uprising in the Middle East, which was also called as the Twitter revolution.

Therefore, the extremely fast development and innovation of the social media cannot be factored solely by technological advancements, but the need for such technology also play a major factor in the diffusion of innovation into the world population.

2.3 Social Media and Public Opinion

In this information technology era, social media has been an integral part of the people's day to day activities. Almost everybody within the reach of information technology coverage is able to interact within the social media platform since the cost of having the device that is able to connect people to the social media is becoming cheaper. Since majority of people in a society are now interacting with social media, social media have become an important channel for communication activities, including exchange of information and public service announcement. As a result, social media have become the most effective medium to empower people towards positive change [5], which is enabled by the influence that social media have over general public perception. In other words, formation of public opinion in this era is strongly influenced social media, thus making it an ideal medium for soft power.

Soft power is defined as the ability to persuade other people to willingly agree with the persuader without the use of force or political power [6]. Social media is one of the most effective propagation medium at the moment since the information conveyed though it is more acceptable by the audience because it propagated by known peers [2]. A study by Kathy Richardson [24] in the United States of America also deduced that the usage of Twitter by politicians have helped them in creating public persona and stimulating perceptions of political efficacy.

However, impact of social media campaign over general public perception and action is more obvious in anti-establishment movement. For example, social media platform, especially Twitter and Facebook has successfully been used in mobilizing worldwide protest against the Government of Malaysia and Election Commission of Malaysia in Bersih 3.0 campaign [18]. There also opinions that the frustrated factions of the public are said to shift from public rallies or physical protest to digital protest. Comparing Reformasi movement in 1998 to the recent #kitalawan rallies to protest Anwar Ibrahim's jailing for sodomy, Datuk Dr Mujahid Yusof Rawa, a member of Parliament from Malaysian opposition party, Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) cited that social media platforms such

as Twitter, Facebook and even Whats Apps are the easier alternative for people to disseminate and receive information on any issues whereas in 1990s the main channels for news such as television and printed media controlled by the government, hence holding rallies was the best way to gather support for a cause. Therefore the reducing number of people attending public rallies such as #kitalawan is not a true measure of the overall number of supporters. His statement is even supported by Barisan Nasional politician, Teng Chang Yeow who suggested that sentiment against the ruling government should be gauge in different manner since people nowadays are more likely to express their sentiments through the social media compared to the limited internet availability in 1998 [21].

Outside Malaysia, there are many examples of anti-establishment movement that utilized social media or technology to gather support and mobilize public rallies. Even in pre-social media era where only Short Message Service (SMS) was available for mobile phone instead of Whats Apps and Twitter, people have already utilizing the simple yet effective communication technology to organize public rallies.

In a movement against Philippine President Joseph Estrada in 2001, close to seven million text messages “Go 2 edsa. Wear blk” were sent by the citizen of the Philippines in a week which then translated to over a million people in the streets of Manila to protest against the Philippine Congress decision to set aside important evidence of Estrada’s corruption case. The overwhelming volume of protesters which resulted from the simple text message forced the Congress to change the initial decision thus ending Estrada’s term as president prematurely. On the other side of the world, text messages have also become the medium of communication in a movement which succeeded in toppling the Spanish Prime Minister, Jose Maria Aznar who wrongly accused the Basque separatist over a Madrid transit bombings incident. With the introduction of social media platform, more channels of communication are available for such movement, such as the drive that forced the Communist Party in Moldova to step down in 2009 which was coordinated by using text messages, Facebook and Twitter to protest against an obvious fraudulent election [7].

Therefore, any government or organization who have control over internet have to put control mechanism in place to make sure that the negative influence of social media does not outweigh the good qualities brought by the social platform. However, if the control elements are too nation-centric like the one implemented by the Chinese government, people will strive to overcome the barrier and eventually forcing the government to revise its policy [23].

The examples presented above shows that any effort to influence public opinion is more effective if the movement is against establishment or the ruling government. Oppositions or non-governmental organizations will use current issues that can bring negative impact to the government and utilize the internet and social media to disseminate their propaganda effectively. In his book, *The End of Big*, Nicco Mele [19] listed four key elements of such effort which are compelling narrative, being in line and appealing to the public frustration, credible grassroots campaign and utilization of current and latest technology available.

Thus, when the government of Malaysia implemented the Goods and Service Tax (GST), the opposing parties and organizations utilize it as a delightful ingredient in their effort to magnify the public frustration against the government. Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter have been used to sway public opinion against GST.

2.4 Media Theories

Social media is a relatively new medium of communication, compared to the legacy medium such as radio, television and printed media. Therefore, there is no media theory that is formulated specifically for social media communication. However, there are some models and theories which were introduced based on the legacy media can be applied to social media communication, especially theories that involved opinion leaders, public opinion and perception.

2.4.1 Rank's Model Of Persuasion

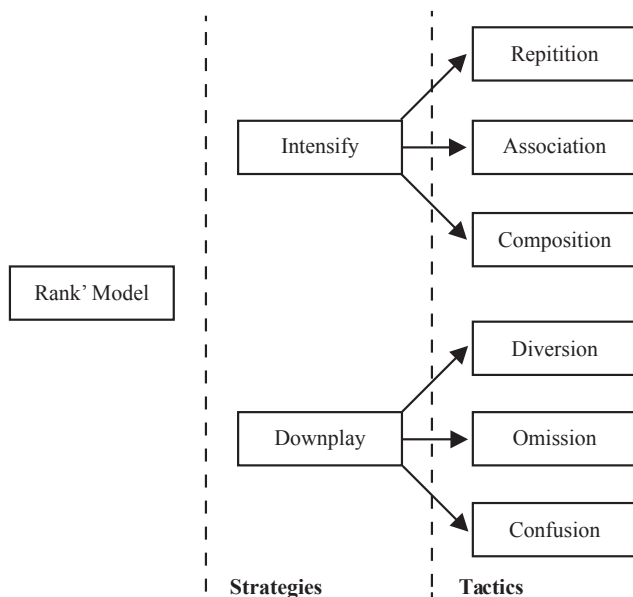


Figure 1: Rank's Model of Persuasion

The model is based on the strategy used by a persuader to intensify their points of arguments and down play the points or arguments of the opposite party. As explained by Larson [8], the model is based on two main strategies used to persuade the public which are intensification and downplaying. In order to implement intensification strategy, the persuader usually highlights his good points and his opponent weaknesses. On the other hand, the persuader will try to downplay his weaknesses and the opponent good points.

The next level of Rank's model is the tactical level, which contains three tactics for each strategy. As stated by Larson [8], the first and simplest way to intensify good or weak points about an issue or person is repetition. The technique is practiced by repeating the points regularly to the target audience. The most common example for this technique is

television and radio advertisement. Although we might not pay attention to the advertisement the first few times, after a while, we will automatically associate the message of the advertisement with the brand. For example, an advertisement for a well-known telecommunication company heavily used yellow as the main colour of their advertisement. Yellow subjects in the advertisement are pictured as vibrant, happy and reliable. As the advertisement repeatedly seen by the audience, people will automatically associate the colour yellow with the brand together with the positive qualities presented in the advertisement.

Repetition can be used in intensifying both the persuader good points and the opponent weaknesses. For example, in Bill Clinton hearings and trial in the United States of America Senate in 1999, the United States representatives who wanted to convict the former president use intensification strategy by repeating the same part of the grand jury testimony over and over again to highlight his bad behaviour which involves sexual misconduct. Conversely, Clinton's camp use the same tactics by repeating the argument that the charges were not "high crimes and misdemeanours" [8].

The next intensification tactic is association. The tactic involves three-part processes which are:

- 1) A cause, subject or personality, associated with
- 2) Something already liked or disliked
- 3) By the crowd or the public [8]

Therefore it is important for the persuader to identify the first two parts of the tactic in order to get the attention of the target audience and subsequently win their support. The effort will be much easier if the target subject or the cause already been acknowledged by the audience and both the persuader and the audience have a common point of view. In the case of GST implementation, the tax is already disliked by majority of Malaysian; therefore, association tactic can easily be applied to further amplify the dissatisfaction of the Malaysian public towards the ruling government.

The third tactic of intensification is composition. As the name explained, the tactic highlights the good characteristics and values of the persuader campaign and bad points of the opposite party by changing the physical makeup of the message. The changes are usually done by using non-verbal and visual means [8]. The simplest form of this tactic is changing the makeup of printed words, like replacing “S” with “\$” in GST. The symbol “\$” signifies money which are the main public concern in the GST issue. Composition of images or videos can also be significant in delivering the intended message. For example, putting an image of a wealthy politician with his glamorous lifestyle against an image of poor citizens in less than conducive situation can convey an impression that the politician does not care about less fortunate citizens and only interested in maintaining his lavish lifestyle.

The next three tactics which are omission, diversion and confusion are used in downplaying strategy. With omission, the persuader simply chooses to leave out certain details in their campaign to hide their own demerit points. On the contrary, the persuader can also choose to leave out his opponent strong points or efforts than can help the opponent win public support.

As the first downplaying technique, the second one, diversion also has the same objective but using slightly different way. In diversion, the persuader will try to divert the public attention from their bad points and the opposite camp stronger sides. In other words, persuader will try to distract focus or diverting attention from the significant issue that potentially can decrease their probability of success and increase the opponent chance, this objective usually implemented by intensifying other issues so that the public attention will shift from the real issue to the other publicized issue [9].

Finally, the persuader can choose to create confusion in the audience mind. The confusion can be introduced by using uncommon jargons, inconsistencies, faulty logics and anything that can reduce clarity. In his book, *The Pitch*, Hugh Rank [9] explained that issues can be downplayed by making things seems so complex and confusing hence people will get

overloaded with information or simply confused. As a result, people will not be able to fully understand the issue and be less reasonable in making decisions, thus the persuader can take this chance and offer “simple solution” to them.

2.5 Goods and Sales Tax (GST) In Malaysia

Goods and service tax is a multi-stage consumption tax imposed on goods and services. The tax is also known as Value Added Tax in many countries. The tax is based on a concept created by French tax official in the 1950s and already implemented by more than 160 countries including European Union countries and Asian countries such as Singapore, Sri Lanka and China. To date, more than 90 percent of the world populations live in countries with VAT or GST [10].

GST is levied on the supply of goods and services at each stage of the supply chain from the supplier up to the retail stage of the distribution. Even though GST is imposed at each level of the supply chain, the tax element does not become part of the cost of the product because GST paid on the business inputs is claimable.

Malaysia has started to impose GST on goods and services from 1 April 2015 to replace sales and service tax (SST). With the implementation of GST also, the government has introduced a few initiatives to soften the process such as:

- A reduction in the corporate income tax rate from 25% to 24% with effect from the year of assessment (YA) 2016
- Individual income tax rates will be revised downwards by 1% to 3% across all chargeable income bands with effect from YA 2015 after the implementation of GST
- Accelerated capital allowances (ACAs) on the cost of information and communication technology equipment (ICT equipment) will be given until the YA 2016 to assist entities in acquiring the appropriate ICT equipment and software to prepare for GST implementation

- Expenses incurred for GST-related training in accounting and ICT will be given double deduction for tax purposes for the YAs 2014 and 2015 [11].

The negative sentiment against GST is magnified by key figures in Malaysia, mainly from the opposition parties. Lim Kit Siang, leader of Democratic Action Party (DAP) accused the government of misleading the public with the impression that a lot of items will be cheaper with the implementation of GST, since the number of items taxed using SST is far less than the number of items taxed under GST. He added that since the implementation scale of GST will be far wider than SST, the number of business operators that involved with GST will rise significantly, and that translate to the increase of price of more goods and services, thus forcing the public to spend more [12].

Despite many calls to scrap the implementation of GST, especially from the opposition personalities, the move back to old taxation system, SST by the government will be a bad move said Jeyapalan Kasipillai, a member of the Finance Ministry's GST Monitoring Group, as there is no country has ever regressed after implementing GST. He also added that to prepare for this implementation, the government has spent a huge amount of money to recruit around three thousand work force for the Customs Department. Business owners also have invested a lot of money in training their human capital and buying software for GST. Furthermore, Jeyapalan mentioned that the initial implementation problem is a normal situation as every country undergoes teething stages of six month to a year. Eventually everything will settle down as the monitoring by the government agencies will be more effective and the acceptance of the public will be better as the mechanism of the taxation improving over time. The tax revenue will help the country to offset the global drop in oil price and ultimately assist the country to achieve a developed nation status [22]. The Prime Minister (PM) of Malaysia, Datuk Seri Mohd Najib Tun Abdul Razak also urged Malaysian to give GST more time to allow for additional improvements and promised that the revenue of the tax will make Malaysia a more competitive

country. The extra income will be used to benefit the citizens of the country and how it will be spent also will be made public. The PM also added that increase revenue will allow Malaysia to have a deficit free and balanced budget in year 2020 [13].

As the popular perception of GST is a regressive taxation system, the secretary-general of Federation of Malaysia Consumer Associations (FOMCA), Datuk Paul Selvaraj stressed that the new taxation system not necessarily means that the poor citizens would have an increase in day to day budgetary. Even though more items are taxable now, there are more than four thousand items are excluded from GST. Therefore, the effect of GST is greater to people who spend more on items outside the list. His view is shared by Datuk Nadzim Johan, president of the Muslims Consumers Association of Malaysia (PPIM) who added that the six percent tax is not a big issue because consumers always have the option to buy cheaper goods and control their own budget. Likewise, goods price fluctuation has always be a constant in our market but unnoticed by most people until the implementation of GST. Both consumer associations' leaders also believed that the profiteering is the bigger problem. They pointed at traders' alleged profiteering as the factor that would hurt Malaysian consumers more than the GST [14]. This accusation is supported by the Customs Department statement which announced that around twenty percent of five thousand GST tax returns prepared by traders have raised red flag when audited. According to Datuk Subramaniam, Customs GST director, there are four common problems in the flagged tax returns filled which are incorrect declaration, over-claim of tax, less payment of GST and avoiding tax payment [15].

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Theoretical Framework

To further understand and explain the information flow in social media, the researcher used Multistep Flow Theory which explains the interactivity provided in social media and the role played by key opinion leaders in

influencing public opinion or perception [8]. Furthermore, as the means to explain and categorize the technique used by the subjects, Rank's Model of Persuasion was used.

Rank's model of persuasion is a simple model introduced by Hugh Rank in 1976 that can be used to categorize and explained the technique used by politicians to persuade the public. Although the model was introduced decades from the inception of the Internet and social media, it can be used to explain techniques of political persuasion via social media platform such as blogs, Facebook and Twitter [16].

The general idea of the model is revolved around the strategies used by persuaders to influence public opinion by intensifying and downplaying points and arguments about the persuaders and their opposition. The basic strategies of the persuaders can be summarized as follows:

- Intensify their own good points
- Intensify the weak points of the opposition
- Downplay their own weak points
- Downplay the good points by the opposition

Hugh Rank's intensify and downplay tactics provides a good reference point in grouping the data collected from Twitter into meaningful themes. According to the schema, intensify method is used when the persuaders try to increase the important points of the message so that the target audience will pay more attention to the message and view it seriously. Conversely, the downplay schema is used when the persuaders want to play down the significance of the ideas so that the target audience will take it as less significant points which require less attention [8].

As part of data collection and analysis process, each Twitter message with keyword GST was categorized according to Rank's model tactics. In order to do that, key characteristics of each tactic was used as guidance. The characteristics are shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1
 Characteristics of Rank’s Model Tactics

Tactics	Key Characteristics
Repetition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • repeated words, sounds, visual elements, patterns (through direct repetition or repetition of similar words, sounds, visual elements, patterns)
Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ideas, words, visuals that might be symbolic of abstract ideas • use of allusions/ references to people/ events, media, popular culture, etc. with which the audience might be familiar • appeals to emotions instead of logic
Composition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • notice where words, visual elements, and ideas are placed in a message/ text • things that are at the beginning of text or paragraphs and things that are at the end tend to be the ones that are emphasized for readers or viewers • notice how much space the words, visual elements, and ideas take up
Diversion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • small or hidden text or visual element, or warnings at the end or embedded in a verbal message • think about how the message would be different if the elements were moved, reduced, or expanded
Omission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • consider what is missing from the text or message • Consider points of view or interests that are not included or which make up a small percentage of the overall message.
Confusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use of complex or obscure data • words or visuals which ask questions or create uncertainty in the audience

3.2 Research Sampling

The first step in collecting data from Twitter was to determine the political personalities that should be taken into consideration. Therefore, statistics about top politicians in Malaysia on Twitter was sourced from a well-known

social media analytics and monitoring site, <http://www.socialbakers.com>. The researcher then download all the Twitter messages posted by the top 20 political personalities on the list to get the number of Twitter messages posted by them from 1st January 2015 to 20 May 2015 that contain the keyword GST. The list was then sorted according to the highest number of GST related Twitter messages. The top two personalities were selected for further investigation. Overview of data collection method is summarized below.

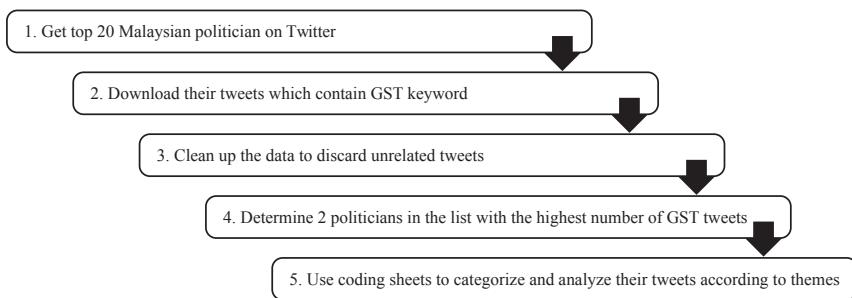


Figure 2: Data Collection Method

The initial and sorted lists are tabulated in Table 2 and Table 3 respectively.

TABLE 2

Top 20 Political Figures in Malaysia (As viewed on 21st May 2015)

	Name	Twitter Handle	Followers
1	Ahmad Maslan	@NajibRazak	2,450,422
2	RafiziRamli	@Khairykj	979,476
3	NurulIzzah	@HishammuddinH2O	744,261
4	Dr Wan Azizah Ismail	@anwaribrahim	654,808
5	Nik Nazmi	@MuhyiddinYassin	540,137
6	Lim Guan Eng	@n_izzah	485,891
7	Lim Kit Siang	@MukhrizMahathir	378,456
8	Tan Keng Liang	@cmlinguaneng	239,978
9	Khairy Jamaluddin	@nikabdulaziz	220,481

10	Tony Pua	@limkitsiang	193,250
11	Mohd NajibTun Razak	@rafiziramli	185,614
12	Mohammad Nizar	@drwanazizah	185,195
13	Ismail Sabri	@Zahid_Hamidi	175,826
14	Anwar Ibrahim	@tonypua	107,805
15	Hishammuddin Hussein	@markchomel	101,703
16	Ahmad Zahid Hamidi	@mbnizar	95,709
17	Muhyiddin Yassin	@tankengliang	66,433
18	Mukhriz Mahathir	@IsmailSabri60	59,781
19	Nik Abdul Aziz	@ahmadmaslan	48,674
20	Markiman Kobiran	@niknazmi	47,565

TABLE 3

The 20 List Sorted According to the Number of GST Tweets

	Name	Twitter Handle	GST Tweets in 2015
1	Ahmad Maslan	@ahmadmaslan	296
2	RafiziRamli	@rafiziramli	192
3	Nurullzzah	@n_izzah	165
4	Dr Wan Azizah Ismail	@drwanazizah	58
5	Nik Nazmi	@niknazmi	53
6	Lim Guan Eng	@cmlinguaneng	41
7	Lim Kit Siang	@limkitsiang	41
8	Tan Keng Liang	@tankengliang	25
9	Khairy Jamaluddin	@Khairykj	24
10	Tony Pua	@tonypua	20
11	Mohd NajibTun Razak	@NajibRazak	8
12	Mohammad Nizar	@mbnizar	8
13	Ismail Sabri	@IsmailSabri60	8
14	Anwar Ibrahim	@anwaribrahim	5
15	Hishammuddin Hussein	@HishammuddinH2O	1
16	Ahmad Zahid Hamidi	@Zahid_Hamidi	1
17	Muhyiddin Yassin	@MuhyiddinYassin	0

18	Mukhriz Mahathir	@MukhrizMahathir	0
19	Nik Abdul Aziz	@nikabdulaziz	0
20	Markiman Kobiran	@markchomel	0

4.0 FINDINGS

A total of 296 Twitter messages from Ahmad Maslan and 192 Twitter messages from Rafizi Ramli with GST keyword from January 2015 to 20th May 2015 were processed and analysed. The data was then processed using Microsoft Excel. More sophisticated statistical software such as Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was not used because the study only require simple mathematical calculations and functions such as pivot table and comparison graph; therefore the usage of Microsoft excel was sufficient.

4.1 Results

TABLE 4

Number of Twitter Messages with GST Keyword

Name	Repetition	Association	Composition	Diversion	Omission	Confusion
Ahmad Maslan	158	78	4	61	1	3
Rafizi Ramli	65	55	38	9	2	11

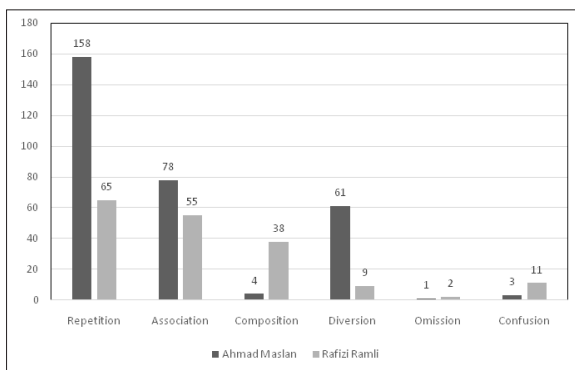


Figure 3: Comparison of Ahmad Maslan and Rafizi Ramli's GST Tweets

In between 1st January 2015 to 20th May 2015, Ahmad Maslan and Rafizi Ramli have posted 296 and 192 Twitter messages respectively which contain the keyword, GST. However, after data analysis was done, there were 52 tweets from Ahmad Maslan and 49 tweets from Rafizi Ramli found as non-persuasive postings thus not fit in any of the categories. The tweets mainly act as announcement of events and clarification of GST facts.

In comparison between tactics, both of them have more GST tweets in three from six categories, even though Rafizi Ramli total number of GST tweets is only about two third from Ahmad Maslan’s total. The summation of number of tweets according to categories resulted in bigger total than the actual number of tweets. For example, total number of tweets for Ahmad Maslan is 296, whereas the summation of the six categories is 305. This situation happened because in many cases, there are more than on tactics were found in a tweet. This technique is largely employed by Ahmad Maslan where he prefers to repeat previous messages and supplement it with extra information. For example in Twitter messages posted by him on 24th April 2015 below, Ahmad Maslan repeatedly using the same phrase “*Yg patut dilawan bukan GST*” and supplement it with diversion to shift the blame of GST implementation problems to traders and business owners.

TABLE 5

Combination of Tactics by Ahmad Maslan on 24th April 2015

<i>Yg patut dilawan bukan GST tapi peniaga yg tidak beretika &; suka naikkan harga barang! GST turunkan cukai SST 10% kpd 6% utk banyak barang!</i>
<i>Yg patut dilawan bukan GST tapi peniaga yg boleh tuntutan SST 5%,10% dlm stok lama. Ada yg campur SST dgn GST. Patut tolak SST baru campur GST’</i>
<i>Yg patut dilawan bukan GST yg turunkan cukai pendapatan 1-3%, sykt 1%, PKS 1%, Koperasi 1-2%. Patut lawan SST yg banyak org tipu/lari cukai.’</i>

4.2 Ahmad Maslan’s Postings

4.2.1 Distribution of Ahmad Maslan’s Postings by Categories

As explained in the previous section, during the data collection period, Ahmad Maslan posted 296 Twitter messages which contain GST keyword.

However, during the classification activity, 52 messages were omitted leaving only 244 messages for further analysis.

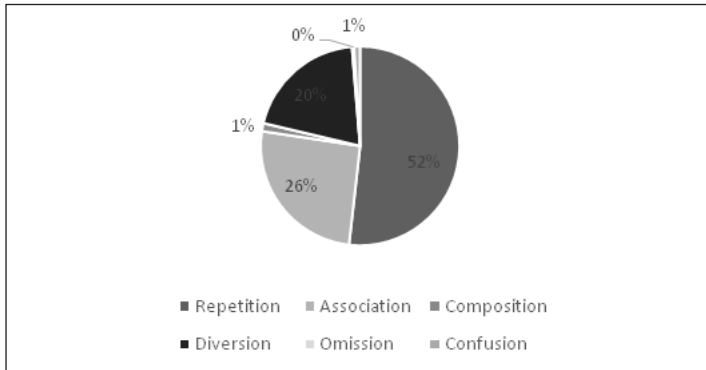


Figure 4: Distribution of Ahmad Maslan's GST Twitter Messages by Categories

From the pie chart in Figure 4, we can see that Ahmad Maslan focused on two tactics which are repetition and association to intensify and only use diversion to downplay. The other three tactics, composition, omission and confusion are rarely used by Ahmad Maslan as those tactics only contributed around two percent from the total percentage.

4.2.2 Distribution of Ahmad Maslan's Postings by Issues

After analysing the Twitter data from Ahmad Maslan, the Researcher managed to identify eight main issues. The issues are:

- i. **Bad Merchant** – Tweets about unethical business owners who take advantage of GST to raise prices of goods and services
- ii. **Enforcement** – Tweets about GST enforcement by RMCD and other government agencies
- iii. **Good Merchant** – Tweets about business owners who comply to GST and reduce goods and services prices
- iv. **GST Positive Effect** - Tweets about the good effect of GST implementation

- v. **Information** – General information about GST
- vi. **Opposition** – Comment related to opposition regarding GST
- vii. **Price** – Tweets on goods and services price with regard to GST
- viii. **Rebuttal** – Rebuttal of opposition negative accusation on GST and the government

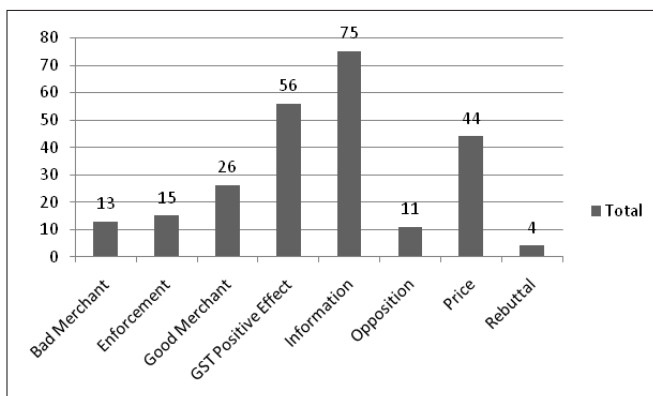


Figure 5: Issues in Ahmad Maslan’s Postings

From the graph above, we can see that the main issue or topic brought by Ahmad Maslan is information about GST, followed by GST positive effect and information about goods and services price. The third top issue is GST positive effect while the fourth is good merchants who have supported the government initiative by not increasing good and services prices. Other issues such as bad merchants, enforcement and opposition are almost equally mentioned at thirteen, fifteen and eleven percent respectively while rebuttal of the opposition accusation is the least mentioned issue.

4.3 Rafizi Ramli’s Postings

4.3.1 Distribution of Rafizi Ramli’s Postings by Categories

In the data collection period, Rafizi has posted 196 Twitter messages which contain keyword GST. However, after thorough analysis, 49 of the messages were found to be intended only as announcement or general information about GST. The remaining 147 messages have been classified as follows:

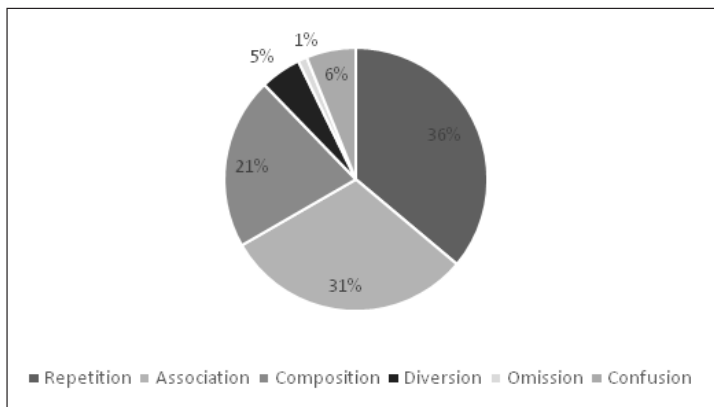


Figure 5: Distribution of Rafizi's GST Twitter Messages by Categories

From the figures in Table 4 and percentage in Figure 5, we can see that Rafizi mainly used intensification strategy. The summation of percentage of the three tactics under the strategy which are repetition, association and composition is eighty eight percentages which is more than three quarter of the total. The percentages of the three tactics also quite close to each other unlike Ahmad Maslan tactics which is dominated by repetition.

On the other hand, downplaying tactics is calculated at only twelve percent with omission being the least favourable tactic at only one percent.

4.4.2 Distribution of Rafizi Ramli's Postings by Issues

Analysis of Rafizi Ramli Twitter data highlighted seven types of issues which are:

- i. **Anti GST Campaign** – Campaign held by the opposition against the implementation of GST
- ii. **By Election** – The opposition using the GST issue in Permatang Pauh by election
- iii. **GST Negative Effect** – The undesirable effect of GST especially on price hike
- iv. **Implementation Weaknesses** – Weaknesses of GST implementation by government agencies

- v. **Information** – General information about GST
- vi. **Jet** – Negative comment on the purchase of new jet for the Prime Minister and its relation to GST
- vii. **Discredit Personality/Government** – Tweets that try to discredit personalities such as Ahmad Maslan and the Prime Minister on their knowledge and actions with regard to GST.

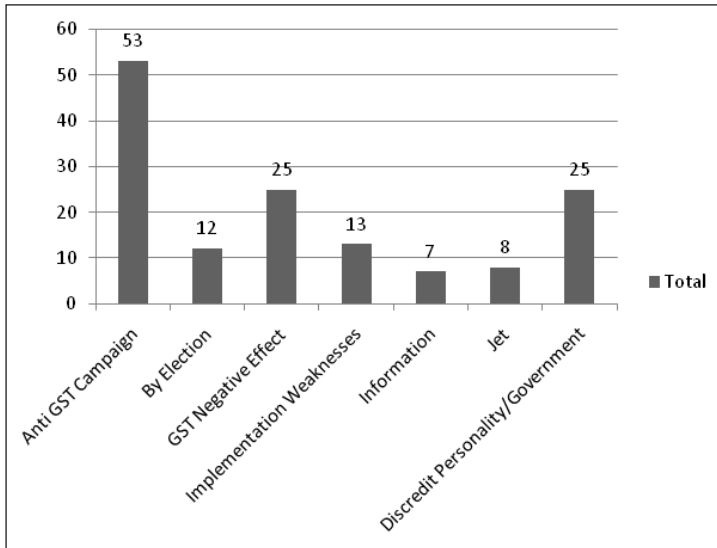


Figure 6: Issues in Rafizi Ramli Postings

The graph above shows that the highest mentioned issue in Rafizi’s postings is anti GST campaign. The issue was used fifty three times followed by postings about GST negative effect and postings to discredit personalities or the government; both mentioned twenty five times each. Issues about GST implementation weaknesses and relating Permatang Pauh by election with GST are ranked fourth and fifth respectively followed by postings that associate of the new jet brought by the government with GST. Finally, postings with general information about GST are ranked last with seven postings.

5.0 DISCUSSION

5.1 Strategies and Tactics - Ahmad Maslan

Figure 5 shows the percentage of tactics used by Ahmad Maslan in handling issues related to GST. As mentioned in the previous section, he likes to use repetition tactic which constitute of fifty two percent of the total followed by association which is at twenty six percent. As mentioned before, the Deputy Finance Minister likes to repeat the same message to remind the public about the good values of GST. Apart from repeating the exact phrase like Table 5, he also chooses to use different sentences but with the same meaning or objective, for example in the three statements below, Ahmad Maslan did not exactly use the same sentences, but repeating the themes that Malaysian opposition is against the GST which offer more good qualities and benefits to the public, such as no GST for exports from this country and lower individual tax:

- *7th April 2015:*

GST tidak dikenakan cukai kpd eksport, jadikan ia lebih murah. Kenapa pembangkang suka SST yg ada cukai kpd eksport, kurang daya saing negara?

(GST does not impose tax on exports, making it cheaper. Why the opposition prefer SST which has tax on exports, making the country less competitive?)

- *7th April 2015:*

Kenapa pembangkang tak suka GST yg dah diumumkan dlm Bajet 2015 dapat kurangkan cukai individu 1-3%; cukai sykt, koperasi & PKS/SME kurang 1%?

(Why the opposition did not like GST which was announced in Budget 2015 that lowered individual tax 1-3%; corporate, co-operation & PKS/SME less 1 %?)

- *7th April 2015:*

Kenapa pembangkang suka SST 10% iaitu cukai yg lebih tinggi dikenakan kpd rakyat dlm banyak barangan sblm ini dibanding GST yg lebih rendah?

(Why the opposition like SST 10% which is higher tax imposed to the public on many goods before this compared to the lower GST?)

The repetition was made to insist that the opposition only want to condemn the government initiatives, even if the initiative's aim is good, which is to give better values to the public.

The second tactic, association, constitute of only half of the percentage of repetition. Mainly it was used to demonstrate that GST will only be successful with cooperation of all parties, from the government, traders and consumers. It also used to highlight the benefits that were brought by the new tax system, or associating the implementation of GST with good consequences that potentially looks appealing to the public, like lower income tax, no export tax and lower business cost. Examples of the usage of this tactic are as follow:

- *13th March 2015:*

Sebab GST: eksport skrng ada cukai tapi GST tidak, mak aeksport lebih laku; pelancong bertambah, ekonomi berkembang. GST lebih baik drpd SST!

(Because of GST: Current export is taxable but GST not, therefore export will be more saleable; economy expanding. GST is better than SST!)

- *27th March 2015:*

Saya lawat Domino's Pizza yg turunkan harga 92% produknya sbb GST. Kos turun sbb claim cukai input & pengguna untung!

(I visited Domino's Pizza that decreased 92% of its product price because of GST. Cost decreased because of input tax claim & consumer profit!)

The third most utilized tactic is diversion. The main agenda of this tactic is to divert the public attention from the government to business owners and other parties who allegedly have contributed to the problems in GST implementation. In other words, by intensifying others wrong doings, the tactic try to downplay the weaknesses of Malaysian government in

implementing the new tax. Examples of the usage of the tactic are as below:

- *28th April 2015:*
Yg salah bukan GST tapi peniaga yg sokong pembangkang naikkan harga. Boikot mereka itu. Jika turun, boleh beli semula
(GST is not guilty but the traders who support the opposition. Boycott them. Buy back only if the price is decreased)
- *28th April 2015:*
Kes peniaga yg naikkan harga bawah Akta Kawalan Harga & kesalahan bawah Akta GST perlu di segera agar jadi pengajaran!
(Cases of traders who increased price under Price Control Act & wrong doings committed under GST Act has to be hurried as examples to others)
- *8th April 2015:*
Pembangkang suka peniaga tak beretika berleluasa tak ikut kaedah GST ? Kenapa? Akta Kawalan Harga & Anti Pencatutan akan disiplinkan peniaga.
(Opposition prefer unethical traders not following GST method? Why? Price Control and Anti-Profitteering Act will discipline the traders)

The other three tactics which are composition, omission and confusion make up only two percent of the total. Therefore, it is safe to assume that in his effort to gain public support in the GST issue; those tactics are less preferred by Ahmad Maslan.

5.2 Strategies and Tactics - Rafizi Ramli

In contrast with Ahmad Maslan, Rafizi's tactics not highly dominated by one category. Even though there are three categories with total of twelve percent, it is not as negligible as the bottom half of Ahmad Maslan's most used tactics. Moreover, the other three of his tactics were quite evenly utilized with repetition; association and composition are calculated at thirty six percent, thirty one percent and twenty one percent respectively.

The most employed tactic, repetition was mostly used to intensify the government weaknesses and bad points, invalidating the claims that GST is actually a good move that can benefit the public. The examples of such claims are as follows:

- *2nd April 2015:*

Kebanyakan pengguna tidak ada masa untuk adu kpd @ahmadmaslan tiap2 hari. Tp itu tidak bermakna harga barang tidak naik setelah GST (Most people do not have time to report to @ahmadmaslan every day. But that does not means prices of goods not increased after GST)

- *2nd April 2015:*

Dari Parlimen: @ahmadmaslanbangga GST tlhmenyebabkan cukai2 lain turun. Ya cukai syarikat. Sdg knrakyat yg x pernah bayar cukai kena skrg (From Parliament: @ahmadmaslan is proud as GST has caused other taxes to go down. Yes, corporate tax. But the people who never paid tax have to do so now)

The two twitter messages show how Rafizi depict GST as a burden to Malaysian public as a theme in his tweets. Although the repetition is not as obvious as Ahmad Maslan's, the objective is clear. Other than that, one of the main issues brought up repeatedly by Rafizi is the purchase of a new aircraft for the usage of Malaysia leaders especially the Prime Minister and described as not sensitive to the economic situation of the country and using the GST money from the public to maintain the aircraft. Examples of the tweets are as below:

- *31st March 2015:*

Jet maintenance over 15yrs almost 25% to net GST collection for 2015; at RM2m maintenance

- *16th March 2015:*

Sdr @Khairykj perlu tegur @NajibRazak jangan boros guna duit rakyat beli jet baru. Kami kenabayar GST (@Khairykj needs to tell @NajibRazak not to misuse the people money to buy a new jet. We have to pay GST)

Both set of examples exhibit how Rafizi played with current issues to repeatedly send messages to the public that GST is a bad scheme introduced by the government. To achieve this goal, he also used association tactic to relate other issues related to the government which have bad reputation, such as 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) debt issue. Samples of tweets regarding this matter are as follows:

- *16th March 2015:*

*Ini jet ACJ320 yang baru dibeli @NajibRazak dlm kita gawat dgn #1MDB #harga barang Kita bayar GST, menteri beli jet
(This is jet ACJ320 that just been bought by @NajibRazak as we are in critical condition with #1MDB, we pay GST, minister buy jet)*

- *17th April 2015:*

*Ceramah #BantahGST #1MDB #jet #altantuya di TgKarang, masuk kwsn @nohomar
(Talk on #BantahGST #1MDB #jet #altantuya at TgKarang, into @nohomar territory)*

- *8th May 2015:*

*Wacana #1MDB #GST bersama @anthonyloke @tonypua Full house di One Garden. Nampak mcm kena tour satu Msia ni
(Forum on #1MDB #GST with @anthonyloke @tonypua Full house at One Garden. Looks like we have to tour Malaysia)*

The third technique, which is composition, is slightly lower in percentage than the previous two. Since Twitter is a text based medium, the tactic can only be applied by changing the composition of the word GST with substitution of letter or alphabet or adding another catchy word to it. The message can also be composed with interesting and popular phrase like the following tweet:

- *29th April 2015:*

KEADILAN akan mulakan kempen “Awak kat mana, awak awak kat mana” khusus utk @NajibRazak turunkan PKR P Pauh jawab sendiri isu #GST

(KEADILAN will start a campaign “Awak kat mana, awak awak kat mana” for @NajibRazak to come down to PKR P Pauh and answer the #GST issue himself)

The phrase “Awak kat mana, awak awak kat mana” or “Where are you, where are you” is a very popular and catchy phrase from a famous song in Malaysia. Therefore, Rafizi cleverly ride on the song popularity to get the attention from the public.

Apart from the catchy and trendy phrase, there are also messages that were composed to associate GST with undesirable condition. Words like “sengsara” which means suffering and phrase like “rakyat marah” that explain the anger of the public are used together with GST like the following messages:

- *1st May 2015:*

*Selfie #KitalawanGST #BantahGSTturun ramai2 jumpa di Sogo 230ptg ini. Jgn bagi rakyat lupa sengsara dibawa GST
(Selfie #KitalawanGST #BantahGST meet together at Sogo at 230pm, don't let the people forget the suffering brought by GST)*

- *7th May 2015:*

*‘Dengan keputusan setakat ini, undi kepada @drwanazizah naik 2-3% berbanding PRU13 & undi Melayu meningkat 3-5%. Rakyat marah #bantahGST’
(With the current result, votes for @drwanazizah increased 2-3% compared to PRU13 & Malay votes increased 3-5%. The public are angry #bantahGST)*

The second message started with the opposition party winning the PermatangPauh by-election with higher margin, followed by a statement that the public are angry with GST. Thus, the message was composed to show that more people are supporting the opposition because of GST.

The other two tactics are diversion and confusion. Diversion was used to shift the attention of the public to other issues or personalities. For

example, Rafizi associate Tun Mahathir with his cause against GST as a diversion so that people will concentrate on the famous Tun Mahathir in anti GST related matters instead of him. The diversion can be seen in the following tweet:

- *4th April 2015:*

Sementara Tun M masuk padang sbg pemain gantian, saya nak tumpu #KitalawanGST Na ksiapkan bbrp video menjawab propa GST @ahmadmaslan ha3

(While Tun M enter the field as a substitute, I want to concentrate on #kitalawanGST. Want to prepare a few videos to answer GST propaganda by @ahmadmaslan)

As for confusion, the tactic was employed with elements that can reduced the clarity of the issue, including inconsistencies and uncommon jargon that will make the subject matter seems complex. Below is an example of this tactic:

- *9th March 2015:*

GST is a tax on value added. It taxes consumption & profit element at each value chain. So not exactly 4 X 6% for 4 levels of value chain

The posting consist of financial terms such as profit element and value chain. People who are not well versed with financial jargons will not have a clear understanding of what the message is all about, or simply confuse.

The last tactic, omission only constitute of one percent of the total messages. The tactic seems to be less favourable by both Rafizi and Ahmad Maslan in downplaying strategy.

5.3 Comparison

Based on section 5.1 and section 5.2, by judging on the frequency of each tactic utilization, we can deduce that both of the politicians prefer to use intensification strategy in their effort to influence public opinion in the GST related issues. Both of them also love to employ repetition strategy

in their strategy. However, Rafizi is seen to be more balanced in selecting tactics within the intensification strategy; not concentrating on repetition tactic like Ahmad Maslan.

5.3.1 Repetition

Repetition is the most used tactic by both politicians. However Ahmad Maslan, seems to rely more on this tactic. This situation may happen because his position as a Deputy Minister in the government where he has to convey information about GST to the public and the positive impact of it. Thus, messages started with phrases like “*GST akan berjaya di Malaysia*” (GST will be a success in Malaysia) and “*GST turunkan harga barang*” (GST lowered goods price) were used repeatedly. On the other side, Rafizi utilized repetition tactic in his anti GST campaign as well as to strengthen his argument on the negative impact of GST.

5.3.2 Association

In term of percentage, Rafizi used this tactic more than Ahmad Maslan. As an opposition, Rafizi like to associate GST with other issues that have bad reputation in Malaysia like 1MDB mismanagement issue and the purchase of new personal jet buy the government. By doing that, he tried to influence the public that GST was implemented not to benefit the nation, but as financial means to cover the cost of problematic government initiatives and the government unnecessary expenditures. The tactic is also used to associate GST with the negative financial impact on the society. On the contrary, Ahmad Maslan used this tactic to associate GST with the positive news such as the reduction of prices by well-known companies like Mydin, Domino Pizza and KFC.

5.3.3 Composition

The tactic was mainly used by Rafizi since Ahmad Maslan only used it four times in his postings. Rafizi utilized the tactic thirty eight times in his postings with tweets like “*awak kat mana, awak awak kat mana*” which was creatively quoted from a very popular song in Malaysia. Apart from

catchy and fun tweets, he was also creative in choosing suitable words in his tweets. For example, message composed with words like “*sengsara*” or suffering will surely describe heightened the negative values of GST. Both example shows that Rafizi is creative enough to make his tweet fun and descriptive to attract the attention of the public. This skill helps him to become a popular figure in social media community especially Twitter. This explained why he ranked higher than Ahmad Maslan in the top twenty politician list (refer to Table 2).

5.3.4 Diversion

This tactic was primarily used by Ahmad Maslan to divert the negative impact of GST implementation to others, especially business owners who did not comply with GST regulations. For example, the tweet “*Isu dlm GST ialah peniaga tidak beretika sengaja naikkan harga walhal banyak patut turun sebab SST 10% turun kepada GST 6%*” (Issue in GST is unethical traders simply increase prices while a lot should have been decreased because SST 10% reduced to GST 6%). Some of his tweets were also openly accusing that the business owners who are not GST compliant as the supporters of the opposition. The opposition also accused of opposing the better new taxation system just because they are against the government not because the old tax system provide better values to the public. Again, Ahmad Maslan tried to divert the public attention from the bad reports on GST to the attitude of the opposition who only want to discredit the government effort even though the objective is to provide better values to Malaysian. Additionally he also like divert the bad review on his statements on GST to the reporters who according to him, failed to capture the actual essence of his statements or even publishing inaccurate reports about his statement like the tweet “*Tidak pernah walau sekali saya sebut top up tiada GST dlm 18 bulan penerangan GST di pelbagai tempat. Tapi ada juga akhbar yg silap petik*” (I have not mentioned top up is exempted from GST even once in the eighteen months of GST explanations all over the place. But there is newspaper misquoted me).

5.3.5 Omission

Omission is the least favorable tactic of both personalities. Since the main strategy for both is to intensify their own good points and the other side weaknesses, much effort were concentrated to include information, facts and even accusations in their tweets, therefore, omission of facts and information is rarely used and quite negligible in their overall tactics.

5.3.6 Confusion

The last tactic, confusion is favoured more by Rafizi than Ahmad Maslan. The situation was mainly due to the affiliation of both personalities. As a representative of the government, Ahmad Maslan is expected to be as clear as possible in his explanation and campaign whereas as a key member of the opposition party, Rafizi used confusion to create uncertainty and doubt to the public with regard to the implementation of GST. One of the main features of confusion tactic, which is the use of complex data, was repeatedly applied by Rafizi, his use of percentages and procedures that are not well known as to show the weaknesses of GST implementation. The use of questions in his tweets also is one of the characteristics of confusion tactic. The use of both features can be seen in the following tweets;

- i. *“GST is a tax on value added. It taxes consumption & profit element at each value chain. So not exactly 4 X 6% for 4 levels of value chain”*
- ii. *“Rakyat bayar GST, tp bila nak pulang balik GST kpd pelancong, ada syarikat swasta dpt komisen 15%. Knp bukan Kastam?”
(The public pay GST, but in refunding the GST to the tourist, there is private company get 15% commission. Why not the Customs?)*

6.0 CONCLUSION

Social media have been the medium of choice to propagate news and information to the masses. Similar to the conventional media, social media can be utilized as an agenda-setting medium. Although the interactive nature of social media is different from the one-way channel form of conventional

media [17], the concept of two step flow theory can still be applied as the basis of the social media communication study. According to the theory, opinion leader play an important roles as a gatekeeper. That means opinion leader who have access to information control the information flow to the target audience according to his view [8]. Therefore, in the implementation of GST issue, social media opinion leader play an important role in shaping public opinion.

Based on Rank's model of persuasion, a thematic study have been conducted to identify the strategies and tactics used by the chosen opinion leader and to determine which tactic is the most frequently used by them. Ahmad Maslan and Rafizi Ramli was chosen based on their popularity ranking on Twitter, although they are not rank highest in the list, they are the top contributor in matters related to GST, therefore, their Twitter messages was sampled as research data and processed using thematic analysis.

The results shows that prefer intensification strategy with repetition being the most frequently used tactics by both of them. However, the findings shows that Rafizi only concentrated on using intensification strategy since only twelve percent of the data collected shows that he employed downplaying strategy. On the other hand, Ahmad Maslan seems to concentrate on repetition tactic as more than half of his postings related to GST utilized the tactic.

The high frequency of repetition tactic utilization was mainly contributed by Ahmad Maslan effort to disseminate information about GST and to explain about the new tax system to the public. He was also keen one using the same prefix one many tweets that collectively explain an issue. For example in his series of tweets to list down goods and services that are exempted from GST, he started three tweets with phrase "*Berjaya GST di Malaysia.*" which means the success of GST in Malaysia. There are also other series of tweets that start with positive statements about GST and its implementation, like "*GST akan berjaya di Malaysia*" (GST will be a success in Malaysia) and "*GST turunkan harga barang*" (GST lowered goods price). From the examples, we can see that repetition tactic has been used to positively reinforce the readers about the positive outcome of GST

implementation. This technique is described by Skinner as continuous reinforcement where the persuader continuously provide positive reinforce regardless of the public response [8].

On the contrary, Rafizi used repetition tactic as negative reinforcement to the idea of GST implementation. The repeatedly tweets on how consumers will experience good and services price hike with the implementation of GST. The phrase like *“kos perniagaan mereka naik sebab GST”* (their cost of business rised because of GST), *“pengangkutan awam naik kerana GST”* (public transportation cost rise because of GST) and *“@NajibRazak tahu laksana saja #GST harga barang naik”* (@NajibRazak knows that the implementation of GST will raise the goods prices) were used to reinforce negative idea about GST implementation. He also like to associate GST with other issues that have bad reputation such as IMDB, purchase of new jet by the PM and even death of Altantuya, a Mongolian with GST. The negative association will encourage the public to view GST implementation as a bad effort by the government. In addition to the two tactics, Rafizi also use composition tactic regularly. He used catchy phrase like *“awak kat mana, awak awak kat mana”* and negative word like *“sengsara”* to compose messages to gain attention of his Twitter followers.

In a nutshell, although both Ahmad Maslan and Rafizi prefer to use intensification strategy, there are differences in their approach to apply the strategy where Ahmad Maslan choose to concentrate on repetition and Rafizi choose to be more diverse in applying tactics under the intensification strategy.

6.1 Limitations

The study managed to get data from Twitter from 1st January 2015 to 20th May 2015. However, the data only contain postings from the selected personalities without the reaction of the public, or replies to the messages. This limitation is caused by the software used by the researcher is only a trial version that is available on the internet. A full fledged paid software like Sysomos Social Media Monitoring Tools will offer more data and analysis.

The thematic analysis used in this study allows the researcher to categorize the data into themes which are the tactics from Rank's model. The classification was done based on the understanding and opinion of the researcher. As such, the results are not entirely free from biases of the researcher.

6.2 Recommendations

The study concentrated only on two personalities and an issue. Therefore, future studies, with longer period of study and better social media analysis tools should expand it to include many more personalities, and not restricted only to politicians. If the future researcher is able to include more than one issue in a study, comparison can be made in strategies and tactics employed by a persuader in different kind of issue.

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