“I reserve my right to tweet”
An analysis of the use of Twitter among Malaysian politicians
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INTRODUCTION

• “The Household Use of the Internet Survey 2009” report by the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commissions (MCMC) showed:
  ▪ 46.8% of the Internet use in Malaysia - purpose of social networking and the online community.
  ▪ 2008 MCMC report did not include this report significantly, this indicates that using the internet for SNS purpose is picking up in Malaysia.
While the use of Facebook, Friendster and MySpace are mainly the social networking sites (SNS) which dominates the figures, Twitter is following suit in popularity among users.
INTRODUCTION

• Marwick & Boyd (2011) - a research on the use of Twitter by celebrities and have further opened up the avenue to study similar practice by non-famous individuals.

• Kwak et. al (2010) - most Twitter accounts with more than a million followers belong to either celebrities of media outlet.

• In the politics, Tweetminster is an example of UK website that follows the UK political scene, helps the public to follow active UK politicians active on Twitter.

• Pew Research Centre, USA - 2010 election campaign both the Democrats and Republican used Twitter and SNS and also used by about 22% of Americans.
INTRODUCTION

• Green (2009) - one of the main contributing reasons to President Obama’s win in the 2008 elections is his ability to communicate rhetorically and connect with the younger voters through the use of new social media including Twitter.

• Opoku & Williams (2010) – minor political parties also resorted to the use of the Internet including Twitter to promote their parties due to fewer opportunities in using the traditional media, both printed and electronic.
Twitter – the technology and usage

- Official website - Twitter is a real-time information network that connects its users as according to the latest information and updates on various and unlimited issues within the 140-character limit and follow others to receive their tweets.

- Dunlap & Lowenthal (2009) - Twitter, it is a freely accessible, multiplatform, Web 2.0 tool which is partly a social networking and microblogging, short messages that people use to provide updates on their activities, observations and interesting content, directly or indirectly to others.
LITERATURE REVIEW

• Features of Twitter:
  ▪ The relationship of following and being followed in Twitter requires no reciprocation.
  ▪ Trending using the hashtag (#), Twitter as a favourable option for marketers in strategically directing their interests to their followers in disseminating and spread information and news (Marwick & boyd, 2010)
  ▪ Retweet - original posts made by users are forwarded by others and assists to propagate interesting posts as well as link the community (Asur & Huberman, 2010), also acts as a mechanism to for other users as an indication of the importance of the issues (Tumasjan et.al, 2010).
  ▪ DM, direct messages for users to send private messages but it’s limited to people that follow one another only.
LITERATURE REVIEW

An outlook of Malaysian political scene

• Malaysia politic structure - constitutional monarchy with the Parliament as the legislative authority

• The Federal Constitution of Malaysia - the supreme law of the nation that distributes the power of governance in accordance with the practice of Parliamentary Democracy.

• The Parliament is divided into three components namely Yang di-Pertuan Agong, the Senate and the House of Representative.
• Yang di-Pertuan Agong - the Supreme Head of State, elected every five years through the rotating succession system as set by the Malaysian Conference of Rulers.

• The Senate - 70 members, 44 members are appointed by the YDP on the advice of the Prime Minister and the balances are from the 13 states in Malaysia, 2 members accordingly.

• The House of Representatives - 222 members elected by the people through general elections, hold the office for a period of five years.

• The majority of representatives come from the ruling coalition party; Barisan Nasional (BN) that hold 196 seats with the balance coming from the Opposition parties with 90 seats.
Communicating through Twitter – Why and What?

• Four elements of interpersonal communication - transactional, process, creating & managing relationship where both verbal and non-verbal communication give different yet meaningful interpretation of messages occurring in communication events. (DeVito, 2005; Vederber & Verderber, 2001)

• Communication in SNS and interpersonal context - several similarities, a message receiver or in the case of Twitter is the audience, SNS can be viewed as a combination of both interpersonal and mass communication but the context of Twitter the messages are sometimes interpersonal in nature.
LITERATURE REVIEW

• Green (2009) - communicative is seen as one the rhetorical qualities that influence the voting behaviors among Americans as in the presidential election of Barrack Obama.

• Lassen & Brown (2010) - more than 200 members have an account, also argued that that Twitter and other social media will continue to play one of the major roles in future political campaigns.

• General search on this microblogging media, many Malaysian prominent politicians both from the ruling coalition and the opposition are found to be active users.

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Communicating through Twitter – Why do people tweet?

- Hargittai & Litt (2011) - users usually follow popular or common themes with entertainment taking the front lead of popularity.
- Griffin (2010) - Uses and gratification theory (Katz E, 1959) states that people deliberately use media for particular purposes, the motivations on why certain media are chosen over other by different users.
- Marwick & boyd (2010) – “imagined audience” and the audience that users have in mind does not really represent the actual profile of the audience themselves.
- Marwick & boyd (2010) - Twitter’s textual contents offers dynamic, interactive identity presentation to unknown audiences where self-presentation through ongoing ‘tweets’ and conversations with others, rather than static profiles offering a diverse range of readers or audience.
LITERATURE REVIEW

Rhetoric in online media

- Griffin (2010) – Aristotle described rhetoric as discovery of “the availability means of persuasion” and established the five canons of rhetoric mainly in the context of speeches.

- Doherty (2008) - political communications affect the public by priming a set of concerns and values play a central role in structuring the political attitudes of the public.

- Hamilton (2003) - the importance and significance of the language of the text in terms of being rhetoric and that the rhetoric of a document is depending on how the documents were perceived based on the audiences past experience.

- Tumasjan et.al (2010) - political blogs act as prediction markets, focus on issues in real-world politics and contents of their tweets actually affect the how the public’s views on the overall political landscape.
LITERATURE REVIEW

• Flory & Iglesias, 2010 - the art of rhetoric has constantly been viewed as superficial, unsubstantial and unnecessary and are not always appropriate especially in the research of management where it has been an issue with manipulation of employees.

• McCloskey (2009) - a true leader is a person who is able to not only to engage in persuasive conversations or, as expressed “sweet talk” but also to carefully listen to others and open to being persuaded,
  ▪ Politicians apply this through the functions of reply, re-tweet and direct messages that allows the opportunity for politicians as leaders to listen and respond accordingly to their followers.

• Vergeer et.al, 2011 – Politicians create a stronger bond with people, going beyond the professional one, that will lead to closing the psychological distance between politician and citizen through personal messages.
LITERATURE REVIEW

Theories in CMC related media - Social Presence Theory

• Social Presence Theory (SPT) by Short, Williams and Christie 1976 - a medium’s social effects are principally caused by the degree of social presence which it affords to its users.
  ▪ Assumption - increased presence leads to a better person perception and as communication channels are restricted, social presence decreases within a group.

• Social presence varies between different media such as face-to-face, audio, video and others affects the nature of the interaction.

• Face-to-face communication is still the richest communication medium in the hierarchy
LITERATURE REVIEW

• Papacharissi & Rubin (2000) - social presence is the feeling that audience members experience or don’t experience of being involved in a communication interaction when using mass media.

• Keil & Johnson (2000) - based on SPT, a text-based e-mail is considered a more socially present communication medium in providing feedback to their students as compared to feedback written on the assignment.

• Concept of presence is still depending on the medium used and the communicators themselves.
METHODOLOGY

• In-depth interview with 4 selected Malaysian politicians.

• Request were sent to:
  ▪ 2 politicians from the Government
  ▪ 2 politicians from the Opposition

• Only one politician responded and was interviewed accordingly
METHODOLOGY

Motivation and objectives to use twitter.

• When and why did you start using Twitter?
• In reference to the above and your position as a political figure, do you tweet with specific objectives or reference to current political issues?
• What are the common topics that you prefer to tweet about?
• How often do you tweet issues that are politically related?

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METHODOLOGY

Audience (Twitter followers)

• Marwick & Boyd (2010) wrote that most twitters have different perceptions of audiences or followers when they tweet and these concepts are mostly abstract in nature. Ideal audiences are often thought as the mirror-image of the user, while strategic audiences are audiences that user can strategically maintain through ongoing communication and interactions

• What is your opinion on the above statement?
• What kind of audiences that you have in mind when you tweet?
• In reference to the question above, how do you navigate your tweets to the different multiple audiences?
• How do you deal with “negative” followers?
Rhetorical content and language

• As a political figure, are your tweets commonly rhetoric in nature? If yes, please elaborate.
• In your opinion, does the use of formal or informal language styles have any effect on your tweets?
• What are your opinions of the function of re-tweet (RT) by your followers?
• What are you opinions on the use of your tweets by the media?
• Are you familiar with the rhetoric concepts as suggested by Aristotle (Canon of Rhetoric)
**FINDINGS & DISCUSSION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Twitter username</th>
<th>Information and Details (as at 31 July, 2011)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>MukhrizMahathir</td>
<td>Start date</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|     |                  | No. of tweets                                : 2,830
|     |                  | No. of followers                             : 30,765
|     |                  | No. of followings                            : 7,753
|     |                  | Other websites/blog                          : 1
| 2.  | Khairykj         | Start date                                   |
|     |                  | No. of tweets                                : 17,332
|     |                  | No. of followers                             : 51,509
|     |                  | No. of followings                            : 329
|     |                  | Other websites/blog                          : 1
| 3.  | anwaribrahim     | Start date                                   |
|     |                  | No. of tweets                                : 12,284
|     |                  | No. of followers                             : 84,493
|     |                  | No. of followings                            : 14,682
|     |                  | Other websites/blog                          : 1
| 4.  | teresakok        | Start date                                   |
|     |                  | No. of tweets                                : 2,489
|     |                  | No. of followers                             : 8,179
|     |                  | No. of followings                            : 53
|     |                  | Other websites/blog                          : 2

*Note: I reserve my right to tweet, Norhayati Abd Manaf*
Interview with Twittername: anwaribrahim (AI)

- Anwar Ibrahim, born on 10th August 1947 was the Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia from 1993-1998, also served as Minister of Finance, Agriculture, Education, and Youth and Sports during his tenure in the government.

- He is an ardent supporter of democracy and is an authoritative voice in bridging the gap between East and West and was publicly known as the protégé to succeed Mahathir Mohamad as Prime Minister of Malaysia.

- Public fallout over policy disagreement as well as political fall down due to charges of corruption and sodomy, Anwar was convicted and sentenced to prison for 15 years which was shortened to 6 years following an overturn of conviction granted by Malaysia's Federal Court in 2004 for his sodomy case.

- Anwar made his return in 2008 and currently active again in the Malaysian political scene.
FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

Question - Motivation and objectives to use twitter.

• Started using Twitter in March 2007, as an academician in Georgetown University, US as it was more convenient to communicate with his students and colleagues and a very useful and simpler tool to

• Interesting as more youth are responding to the culture and it was convenient for him to communicate with his followers but however mindful that Twitter is being used as a vehicle for others to attack him personally.

• The limitation of 140-characters allowed in tweeting:

• “It’s quick and interactive, very convenient. Although from an academic’s point of view, very little can be said and you can’t actually reason but you can always link it to some other earlier statements and to the blog”

• “The constraint is not the use of Twitter, the constraint is that the people going there, the intention to learn, to interact or to abuse.”
FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

Question - Motivation and objectives to use twitter.

• In reference to question 2, 3 and 4 - the content of his tweets are mostly to convey message and information to encourage the knowledge culture, but he does sometimes respond to general enquiry by his followers which are more personal such as replying “salam” and “hello”

• Generally, AI tweets about political issues, commented about the control of the media by the Government where he felt that the Opposition parties are always painted in a bad light to the public.

• He is delightful to get various responses from especially from the youth and students of public universities indicating that there is wisdom in the masses in judging and challenge information disseminated by the traditional media and they are prepared to listen as well.

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FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

Question - Audience (Twitter followers)

• Doesn’t set any types of audience in mind when tweeting and is more concern about the subject being tweeted.
• Discussed about the cultural diversity and multiplicity of audience that he has and put great consideration on the suitability of the language being used in his tweets
• He added that tweeting is simpler than writing and his main concern is to get the message across to his followers despite some of his concerns are also on the grammatical mistakes and colloquial language e.g: ASAP, LOL.
• Negative followers - will generally ignore them and they do not affect his communication behaviour in using Twitter and will only respond to constructive comments and feedback.
• “If they give reasons or to argue a case, like for example “Buku Jingga, your point no. 2 says this but it doesn’t cover this, etc..it’s fair, they can disagree”
Question - Rhetorical content and language

• AI noted the art itself originated from the Greek on elegant writing and eloquent speech but is in view that the main part should be the substance and one should not lose sight of it.

• “To me, rhetoric when seen in the negative sense is when rhetoric supersedes the substance”

• Uses both informal and formal language in his tweets and strongly feels that the suitable language affects the message and the substance carried by it.

• “I feel strongly that the cultivation of language to enhance the use and quality is very important. The message is cultural empowerment, so it’s not only the substance but the language used, the vocabulary. Although you have the limitation of 140 words but have to try and not rush into things”
Question - Rhetorical content and language

• Use of short-forms and abbreviated spellings are used without destroying or compromising the language.

• Unhealthy and improper use of colloquial language and “local slangs” in social media that could destroy the content of the message itself, he sometimes correct improper language when replying to his followers.

• On re-tweet (RT), he is aware of the negative consequences such as misquoting, improper citations and others. On this matter, he said:
  “I think that they need to be educated on what tweet is all about, what comes from you or which you re-tweet, which you tend to agree or get people to understand or link your name but if you understand Twitter, you know where the source is.”

• His tweets had been misquoted but he feels that it also helps encourage people to be more educated on the issues and find more information and the truth of the subject.
CONCLUSION

• Only one interview conducted but there is opportunity to conduct a more thorough and further research on the communication behaviour of Malaysian politicians in using this microblogging media.

Based on LR and interview, these are several conclusions:

• Twitter is one of the preferred tool to be used in the politics arena in disseminating information as well as share information with the constituents (Vergeer et.al (2011), Tumasjan et. Al (2010), Green (2009), Ifukor (2010).

• The limitation of 140-characters it’s still an efficient tool and actually promotes the interests of issues among the followers on top of other new social media such as blogs and SNS.

• Several concepts of audiences, (Marwick & boyd (2010); it is also highlighted in this study that Malaysian politicians varied their messages as according to the different users and tweeted as according to different issues

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CONCLUSION

- Issues tweeted to its followers ranges from politics, personal updates, international and national news and general issues including entertainment.
- Literature reviews has mentioned that rhetoric is evident not only in speeches but in text and writing (Hamilton, 2003; Opoku & Williams, 2010) as well as in the practices of management (Flory & Iglesias, 2010; Doherty, 2007; Bonet & Sauquet, 2007).
- For this study, it was noted that rhetoric is an element taken into consideration and how the text are being constructed impact the overall effect of the message and its meaning, the substance and language used and how these elements can also affect the rhetoric in both negative and positive manner.
CONCLUSION

The limitations of the research on this topic:

• Impossible to collect data from all users in Malaysia as Twitter is a public internet domain and accessible to be used by anyone, issues on the authenticity of the users themselves,

• Does not however contradict this social media itself as it is a general platform for users to connect and link themselves in the Internet, regardless of the topics and interests of their users.

• Another limitation of this paper is concerning the topic of interest, which is only on politics, other research can further be explored to study on communication behaviour of its users on other topics as suggested in the research by Armstrong & Gao, 2010; Hargittai & Litt, 2011.

• Further researcher to explore on the use of language as well as the different strategies in constructing messages and information in this platform that is limited to only 140-characters
CONCLUSION

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