

**Title** : Social Media Propaganda: Politics in Pandemic Covid-19 in  
Malaysia

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# Chapter 1

## **Social Media Propaganda: Politics In Pandemic Covid-19 In Malaysia**

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### **1.0 Abstract**

Propaganda is always associated with the persuasion method during historical war; however, in this paper, the author will highlight how propaganda can be used in the contemporary world. Living in an inventive world, one may not escape from using the social media platform since it does not only serve for the purpose of watching a dancing cat but also to spread information. In this context, to spread propaganda. The purpose of this research aims to identify how social media and propaganda relate together with their impacts. The scope of time will be during 2020-2021 where the pandemic of Covid-19 hits in Malaysia. The author will highlight the spread of pandemic Covid-19 propaganda by the politician in Malaysia, identifying social media's role and their impacts on the politics of pandemics in Malaysia. Lastly, to analyze the response of social media user in absorbing the rightful information about Covid-19. This research is conducted through survey and observation from past events. The author conducted this survey by using a model of propaganda, therefore, the author has found that the pandemic of Covid- 19 and political instability become the main propaganda in Malaysia. In addition to issue of fake news and misinformation, the author would like to highlight the key importance of educating society with media literacy.

**Keywords:** Propaganda, Social Media, Politics, Covid-19, Media Literacy,

## 1.1 Introduction

The term "*propaganda*" appears to have first become popular in Europe due to the Catholic church's missionary efforts. While the United Nations was slow to use fast and efficient communication devices for propaganda purposes, they are now hit back blow for blow. Hitler, Mussolini, and Tojo preferred to exploit this method for selfish and inhumane ends, thereby expanding the role of propaganda in today's world.

In our modern era, man's inventive genius perfected communication machinery that, while speeding up and extending the influence of information and ideas, provided propagandists with a quick and efficient system for the spread of their appeals. "Propaganda" is an ancient and honourable word in its origins. Propaganda has existed since the Middle Ages and has continued to the present day. The power and triumphs of propaganda were dramatized during World War I. Religious activities associated with propaganda commanded the respect of the entire human race. In the post-war years, both fascism and communism were hotbeds of revolutionary propaganda. In England, the conflict between kings and parliament was a historical struggle in which propaganda played a role(*The Story of Propaganda* / AHA, n.d.).

Propaganda is more than just spreading ideas and opinions to the masses to influence their beliefs and actions. With the use of omnibus symbols and charged words to stir emotions in the masses, the loaded style of communication distinguishes propaganda from other forms of communication in some ways. The idea is that when deciding or taking action, people frequently use cognitive shortcuts rather than a more rational approach, making them vulnerable to manipulation by propagandists. These techniques are heavily used in modern mass communication by both political parties and corporations.

For instance, the Internet is used by Al Qaeda, a broad-based militant Islamist organization, to reach its followers in 68 countries (Jowett & O'donnell, 2018). The 1989

Tiananmen Square protests, which shook the world, cannot even be discussed on the Internet in China, as there are no records of them in China's public domain. Similarly, ISIS propagandist messages have triggered recent violent acts worldwide even when they are not directly involved (Jowett & O'donnell, 2018). The Internet undermined state control over information flow (Stelter & Stone, 2009). For years, China has tightly controlled the flow of information available to its citizens via the Internet.

On the other hand, governments have moved beyond simply suppressing dissent and controlling the flow of information and have begun to use these new technologies to spread propaganda. As a result, as communication technology has advanced, from print and radio to satellite TV and high-speed mobile Internet, the reach and speed of propagandists' messages have multiplied through social media. (Woolley & Howard, 2016). (Malhan & Dewani, 2020)

Like the rest of the world, Malaysia is also one of the countries still affected by the pandemic of COVID-19. It does not only impact the country's economy, tourism movement, and livelihood but also towards the political stability in the local context. Adding on fuel to the fire, contemporary propaganda in social media adds on the challenge to the shoulder on the head of the ruling government, Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yasin. Malaysia was thrown into a deep political crisis after COVID-19, culminating in the declaration of a state of emergency and the suspension of parliamentary sitting earlier this year (Lukáš Rychetský and Pavel Šplíchal, 2021).

The researcher aims to observe the environment of a new form of propaganda in Malaysian politics during 2020-2021. First, the researcher will look into the spread of propaganda regarding the pandemic COVID-19 by the local politician to answer the main question. Second, identifying the effect of social media on pandemic politics, to look on whether it may come in harm. Third, to observe the local responses of social media users in

absorbing the rightful information on COVID-19. Finally, the researcher will use a combination of qualitative and quantitative by using a survey.

## 1.2 Problem Statement

The political crisis in Malaysia has occurred since a long time ago. However, Malaysia's recent political development has stirred the local news and caught international attention. The author is referring to the Pakatan Harapan (PH) 's brief reign that came to an end as a result of the "Sheraton Move," a political manoeuvre to shift party allegiances planned by several members of parliament in the Sheraton Hotel on February 23, 2020.

The crisis began with the demise of the centrist reformist “Coalition of Hope” (Pakatan Harapan, PH), which had come to power after defeating the long-dominant conservative National Front in the historic 2018 general election (Barisan Nasional, BN). Since the Sheraton Move, political developments in Malaysia have been extremely volatile, with a constant realignment of political forces to remain in power or keep other forces out of power. Pakatan Harapan victory in 2018 over a coalition that had been in power for decades demonstrated to Malaysians that a change of government was possible through democratic elections. After months of chaos, the crisis reached a new peak on January 12, 2021, when the new government declared a state of emergency and suspended parliament (*To Fix Democracy in Malaysia, Rebuild Mass Movements*, n.d.).

Next, the intrusion of politics into the scientific game plan to end the pandemic was extremely concerning. Politicians were riding the epidemic to stifle the democratic process, suspend parliament, and grant the Prime Minister draconian powers, putting our country on the edge of autocracy.

Also, the role of social media in the politics of the pandemic of Malaysia should be given a spotlight. With the increasing number of users of social media like Twitter, Facebook, or Whatsapp, it can become a powerful tool to control people perception and behaviour in accordance to what those who hold the power want.

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

The main objective of this research is to examine the role of social media propaganda in the politics of the pandemic Covid-19 in Malaysia.

- a) To study on the spread of pandemic COVID-19 propaganda by the politician in Malaysia.
- b) To identify the impact of social media on the politics of pandemics in Malaysia.
- c) To analyze the response of social media user in absorbing the rightful information on the topic of COVID-19.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

Based on the problem statement stated before, the following questions are raised:

- a) What is the reason for the spread of pandemic COVID-19 propaganda by Malaysian politician?
- b) What are the impacts of social media in Malaysian politics of pandemics?
- c) What are the responses of social media user in absorbing the rightful information regarding COVID-19?

### **1.5 Significance Of Research**

The author would like to highlight the topic of social media propaganda in politics Malaysia is because the role of propaganda plays a huge role in influencing public opinion. Under the form of unfiltered widespread of information on social media, it may raise a concern of misleading information, misconception, especially during the ongoing pandemic of Covid-19. The spread of fake news and propaganda would cause more harm rather than goods right now.

### **1.6 Scope And Limitation**

The scope of this research is to look at the political crisis that occurred since the pandemic of COVID-19 hits Malaysia from 2020-2021. The data is collected through surveys with the Malaysian community as the target group. The focus will be on the propaganda that used social media platform.

### **1.7 Literature Review**

The *Propaganda as Communication Strategy: Historical and Contemporary Perspective* talks about how propaganda is bound to exist as a communication strategy. It begins with explaining the historical perspective of propaganda as the subject of people's persuasion. Then, Mohit follows the development of the definition of propaganda way back before 1980 until the present of 2020. It also outlines the types and techniques of propaganda used by the governments or the corporate world. This journal article's significance is that it not only views the propaganda from a historical perspective but explains how propaganda develops along with the advance of technology.

Next is the *Propaganda in the Information Age*, which updates Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model for the first twenty-first-century media landscape and makes the case relevant today. This book tells about the purpose of media is to assemble consent for elite policies and decisions. The authors highlight the five filters of all news that must pass through before reaching people's screen or newspaper. Many stories are blocked by one or more filters, while others will be changed. In America, the propaganda model has ignored the media's true agenda to tell people the truth and how it functions by the elite.

Besides that, in *Teaching About Propaganda: An Examination of the Historical Roots of Media Literacy*, the author, Renee Hobbs, points out that the key to fighting propaganda is education. It also shares the history of the establishment of Propaganda education institution. It teaches technique to recognize propaganda and create a method to combatting it. The author realizes that the key dimension to media literacy is not personal, but it is a fundamental social.

Furthermore, the author of this journal article is from the Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) with the title *Malaysian Youth Political Participation: A Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis Development (2020)*. The focus of this journal article is to look at the online youth political and observe the youth behaviour. Its study on youth political knowledge through social media. It studies the reliability of social media as a source of information of political knowledge. Due to the algorithm, the younger generation may read political knowledge without even looking for it. Subsequently, the youth would read it subconsciously. Understanding youth behaviour towards political participation will help the government design a better policy, training, and programs to engage with youth involvement.

Lastly, the *Media Effects Research* by Glenn G. Sparks. That mentions the persuasive effect of media that linger with the element of emotion, fear, guilt and humour. Other than that,



it also controls to stir the reader's emotion when receiving the news. Moreover, it also provides the consequences for spending too much time on media for our mind and behaviour.

### **1.8 Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework will guide the study to order to answer the research questions. This framework is for the theory on the spread of pandemic propaganda, social media effect in the politic of the pandemic, and the responses of social media user in absorbing the rightful information regarding COVID-19.

The author would like to examine this political pandemic in Malaysia through the model of propaganda.

### **1.9 Methodology**

The author's method in this research is through a combination of qualitative and quantitative, which emphasizes the qualitative of entities and quantitative through a questionnaire that has been given out to 133 respondents.

Other than that, the author used information from books, journals, website, online news, data, and statistics. The author gain information and data collected from the past events that had occurred, along with opinions from the questionnaire respondents.

## 1.10 Chapter Outline

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## Chapter 2

### **The Spread of Pandemic Propaganda: Who Said the Truth?**

#### **2.1 Political Instability during Pandemic in Malaysia**

The first painful lesson came early in the pandemic. The Jemaah Tabligh was "allowed" to hold their Ijtima' (gathering) in Malaysia from February 28 to March 1, 2020, at the Sri Petaling Mosque. Malaysia was in the midst of political upheaval at the time, and both sides of the political divide blamed the other for granting permission to the Ijtima' organizers. Citizens were made victims of the politicians' squabbles. It meant maintaining vigilance with masking, distancing, hand washing, avoiding the 3Cs, stepped-up testing, tracing, quarantine, and strict border controls to prevent the spread of the case.

Another regrettable failure of our pandemic was the late detection of index cases 131 and 135, which were discovered one week after the Ijtima' ended. Until its abolition on July 8, 2020, the infamous Tabligh cluster registered 3,375 cases, accounting for 38.9 per cent of all Covid-19 cases in Malaysia. Meticulous public health planning and astute political stewardship were required to map out our Covid-19 exit strategy to protect our health, lives, jobs, economy, and future.

Pilihan Raya Negeri (PRN) 2020 was not only a super-spreader event, but it also released another set of super-spreader people into the Malaysian Covid-19 landscape, this time allegedly a politician ICN 12553, who spawned the Bah Kasturi cluster, which infected 18 people.

Covid Index Case Number (ICN) 26 infected 114 people early in the pandemic, and ICN 8937 from the Sivagangga cluster infected 45 people across three states. Thus, the PRN

2020 was the precursor of the 3Cs and thus a potentially explosive super-spreader event. The politicians and their entourage of die-hard party supporters were super-spreader individuals. (Musa Mohd Nordin, 2020)

The intrusion of politics into the scientific game plan to end the pandemic was extremely concerning. Politicians were riding the epidemic to stifle the democratic process, suspend parliament, and grant the Prime Minister draconian powers, putting our country on the precipice of autocracy. The 2020 Sabah state election was held in September 2020 with certain Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) in place. Still, Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin later blamed it on increasing COVID-19 cases in Sabah and across the country. As a result, a State of Emergency was declared in December 2020 to postpone by-elections in two constituencies. One of which was thought to be the epicentre of a COVID-19 outbreak. The impact of a nationwide State of Emergency, all elections are suspended.

Furthermore, two veteran politicians, Mahathir Mohamad and Anwar Ibrahim won a stunning election victory in 2018 to depose then-Prime Minister Najib Razak, who was embroiled in a massive money-laundering scandal involving the state investment firm 1MDB. However, the King foreshadowed his efforts by appointing Muhyiddin Yassin, Mahathir's former right-hand man, as Malaysia's eighth prime minister. Mahathir, now 95, was re-elected Prime Minister (he had previously served from 1981 to 2003), with the understanding that he would hand over power to Anwar at some point. Delays in establishing a date and policy disagreements within the unwieldy coalition fueled tensions that erupted in late February 2020. (Anuradha Raghu, 2021) Concerning this situation, both influential figures have a political plan to be back in power; however, Muhyiddin Yassin has become a hindrance to accomplishing their goal.

Mahathir and Anwar are opposing the current government. Still, there is a disagreement coming from the United Malay's National Organisation (UMNO)'s party when the State of Emergency was declared, which suspended all election and parliament sessions. According to President UMNO Zahid Hamidi, the Perikatan Nasional government may want to keep closing its "front door" – about threats to its legitimacy – but it must still allow parliamentary democracy to function. Within the government, critics have included UMNO politicians and Deputy Speaker Azalina Othman Said, who has written open letters to the government, emphasizing the importance of parliament reconvening even during the emergency.

In response to Takiyuddin Hassan's Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Parliament and Law) statement, the government is investigating the possibility of holding a virtual-cum-physical parliamentary session; Zahid stated that other countries had already held virtual sittings during the pandemic. Opposition MPs have repeatedly condemned the suspension of parliament during the state of emergency, accusing the Perikatan Nasional government of attempting to avoid checks and balances. Takiyuddin stated that a hybrid session would include some lawmakers present in the chamber and others participating virtually ("IS THERE PROOF COVID-19 CAN SPREAD ONLINE?" 2021).

The critics came from the place where they believe that Perikatan Nasional uses the pandemic, trying to delay the election to be held to stay in the ruling power. In response to that accusation, Muhyiddin said his Perikatan Nasional government was formed in the aftermath of an unfortunate political crisis. He is intentionally staying out of politics because it is the role of leaders to create a conducive environment for cooperation from all sides. According to Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin, Malaysians are tired of constant politicking in the country, which is focusing on providing political stability and ensuring the government runs smoothly during the pandemic. Malaysia is confronted with three major challenges: the pandemic health crisis, its economic ramifications, and political instability.

Muhyiddin, who took over as Prime Minister last year after the elected Pakatan Harapan administration collapsed, has been repeatedly chastised for forming a government through the "back door." His strategy is to maintain political stability. Since then, the country has been in political turmoil, with many calling for his resignation and a return to the 2018 electoral mandate amid the national emergency declared in January to reduce the daily four-digit Covid-19 cases, resulting in the suspension of Parliament sittings. (Chan, n.d.).

The political stability in Malaysia has been rocky since Muhyiddin Yassin takes over as the eighth Prime Minister. A lot of opposition side trying to topple him down by pressuring for re-election. However, after looking at the after the event of Sabah's Pilihan Raya Negeri (PRN) 2020, the election may hardly be conducted, especially with the rising number of four-digit cases of Covid-19. Some politicians even suggested holding a virtual parliament session, as I believe after they have learned the new method from the "Parlimen Digital" session held by the youth. Suppose there's any suggestion to hold an online election due to the pandemic situation and the SOP. In that case, the author finds it quite impossible to be done since a democratic election should be done fairly and truthfully. There would be a high risk to prevent any corruption or sabotage on the vote result occurs.

Regardless, with the current pandemic situation, the political party and the public health department should be hand in hand, not through passing the responsibility hand to hand of another person. The act of political intervention for a selfish desire during this emergency should be condemned for obstructing the nation's peace.

## **2.2 Propaganda Used in Politic Pandemic in Malaysia**

Many people believe that propoganda is an insidious, deceptive, and manipulative pattern of negatively influencing behaviour. While there is no doubt that propoganda has been used for

those purposes in the past and continues to be used in the present, it has also been used for good, such as in spreading public health messaging. As a result, propaganda is an ethically neutral concept – it is the content that varies.

The information-generation process has been democratized due to the growth of the Internet, particularly the explosion of social media. We are issuing propaganda whenever we post an opinion on Facebook, Twitter, or any other social media site. Propaganda is a piece of information designed to make those who read it think about an issue or behave in a conducive to what we want them to do. Corporations have recognized this, which is why they are so active on social media. Advertising has become an important aspect of social media for all businesses, with far greater personalization to meet the needs of consumers. By promoting brands, we are effectively disseminating propaganda on their behalf. Without we realize, we have consented to the act of propaganda upon our thinking and behaviour. (Dr Peter Johnston, 2013)

Therefore, it is important to recognize when the use of political propaganda can be categorized under the types of propaganda.

**Table 1**

**Five Media Propaganda Techniques Used in Malaysian Politics**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Example</b>
1. Glittering Generalities	A tactic to seize the emotions and ensure the target followed by the “solidarity” and the propagandists by using highly valued concepts and beliefs ensuring the audience feels positive and by inviting a big round of applause	When Muhyiddin says the priority now is Malaysia's <b>political stability</b> , he promises to return the mandate 'when the time is right. (Chan, 2021)
2. Plain Folks	A trick putting propagandists as ordinary people like the target audience to demonstrate the ability to	Prime Minister Joins Students Of Happy Hill



	empathize and understand the concerns/feelings of the public	Secondary For Assembly (Mikey Live, 2020)
3. Testimonial	The use of famous figures (actors/actresses/ politicians) to advertise the candidates/products. Testimonial has great appeal to emotions instead of logic because it gives a weak justification for a product/action.	Malaysia Prime Minister gets First Shot of Vaccine.
4. Stacking Cards	A propaganda technique is conducted by selecting statements based on certain events or using selective facts to support its interests or prove the prior statements.	Covid-19 rages on, Muhyiddin regime frustration grows when Kepong left out of screening programme even though chalking a shocking 300 new cases daily – ‘was this intended?’ questions Kepong MP Lim Lip Eng.
5. Name Calling	A tactic to ensure the target receives a conclusion without deep consideration of the facts. It uses words relating to a person or an idea to a negative concept.	Propagandists call Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin and his political party Perikatan Nasional as “backdoor PM or backdoor government.”

# Chapter 3

## **To Identify the Social Media Effect Towards Politics of Pandemics In Malaysia**

### **3.1 The Role of Social Media in Politics Malaysia**

According to studies, social media usage has a positive impact on knowledge levels. However, the relationship between media consumption and political knowledge suggests that other platforms frequently provide information on social media platforms rather than qualified reporters. As a result, the reliability of such information is called into question, raising the possibility of misrepresentation and misunderstanding by the masses as such information spreads quickly across social groups.

According to evidence, social media users are also more likely to view lighter in nature or a form of entertainment rather than current events. If audiences avoid confidential broadcast content, it is safe to assume that using social media would positively impact an individual's political knowledge. Social media would provide timely coverage of breaking news. Such unintentional disclosure occurs when viewers come across news information by chance rather than consciously searching for it—possible consequences of remaining knowledge on the use of popular social media platforms. As a result, while audiences navigate platforms like Facebook with the primary goal of networking, they may come across information about current events and politics.

Although knowledge acquisition is not the primary goal of using social media, repeated disclosure of such information may result in secondary learning. Based on these discussions, it is possible to conclude that social media usage is significantly related to political knowledge. The poor quality of information provided reduces young people's political knowledge, which

impacts political participation. As an outcome, the perceived quality of information influences political knowledge, particularly among younger generations. (Halim et al., 2020)

### **3.2 Positive Effect Towards Politics of Pandemic**

Malaysian youth were praised for their performance in Parlimen Digital, which included well-researched speeches and demonstrating that holding an online parliamentary session for all 222 members of the country's parliament is possible. The Parlimen Digital event was hosted online, with 22 representatives in the virtual parliament for youth being women, representing the OKU community, Orang Asli community, and Orang Siam community. According to Parlimen Digital data, the indigenous community received 64% of the seats in Sabah and Sarawak. In addition, the representatives chosen for the 222 seats in Parlimen Digital, which was open to candidates aged 15 to 35, had an average age of 21.

Even social activist Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir expressed her admiration for the Parlimen Digital, which conducts parliamentary proceedings virtually. Sabah and Sarawak were well-represented, and it was encouraging to see them raise issues specific to their regions. In addition, there are concerns about youth mental health, the need for improved digital access, people with disabilities, and migrants and refugees. Youth should be given more space and a platform to speak up for their causes(Lim, 2020).

This event shows that the youth should be given more opportunity to participate in the event where their political knowledge would be enriched. Since most social media consist of young child and adult, the influence that the Parlimen Digital or "YB Digital" can encourage other youngsters to understand the political needs in our country. Moreover, by using social media for the right purpose, the platform can become a powerful tool for spreading information

and see the problem that needs to be fixed in the community. Therefore, the "YB Digital" can bring their good influence among peers in social media.

### **3.3 Negative Effect Towards Politics of Pandemic**

However, not every day is a shine and rainbow for the media in Malaysia. Journalist agreed that the media situation had worsened over 2020. The ruling coalition's pressure plays a role in security issues, including legal issues and individual threats. Last year, Malaysiakini editor-in-chief Steven Gan was charged with contempt of court for comments he made on their websites criticizing the judiciary. Then there was the time when police and the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) raided Al Jazeera's local office as part of their investigation into the controversial documentary Locked Up in Malaysia's Lockdown. According to the report, media freedom will continue to be stifled because the government is likely to use the pandemic as an excuse to restrict access to information.

Based on the report, "the deterioration of journalism in Malaysia will be exacerbated by the economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic, with salaries decreasing and closures imminent.". (Dzulkifly, 2021)

Malaysia has improved in the electoral process, and pluralism has resulted in more democratic political institutions, according to the Economist Intelligence Unit's (EIU) Democracy Index from last year, 2020. The EIU defines flawed democracies as nations in which free and fair elections are held and "basic civil liberties are respected, even if there are problems such as infringements on media freedom."

However, flawed democracies have significant flaws in other aspects of democracy, such as problems in governance and low levels of political participation. The EIU in its Democracy Index also classifies hybrid regimes as having substantial irregularities that

disallow the countries from being free and fair." In hybrid regimes, government pressure on opposition parties and candidates may be common. Where there is harassment and pressure on journalists, pressure on civil society and the media is common. According to the EIU, the judiciary is not independent of the executive and legislative branches in such regimes.

Full democracies and authoritarian regimes are the other two categories, both at the extreme ends of the four types. Basic political freedoms and civil liberties are uplifts in fully functioning democracies. There are effective systems of checks and balances in place. The judiciary is separate from the executive and legislative branches, and the media — the Fourth Estate — is also separate. There are only a few issues with how democracies work. State political pluralism is absent or severely restricted in authoritarian regimes, many of which are dictatorships.

“Some formal democratic institutions may exist, but they lack substance. Elections, if they take place at all, are not free and fair. Abuse and violations of civil liberties are tolerated. The media is typically owned by the state or controlled by groups affiliated with the ruling regime. There is repression of government criticism and widespread censorship. According to the EIU, “there is no independent judiciary.” (Danisha Hakeem, 2021)

Thus, we can see that Malaysia's concept of democracy does exist in respecting civil and liberties right; however, it also ties up to the authoritarian ruling, especially on the suppression of media freedom. Social media should be a forum where one could express their opinion without fear, however with strict control by the government, the people wouldn't receive fully truthful information. Moreover, it would cut the youth critical thinking in differentiating fake news.

# Chapter 4

## **To Analyze the Response of Social Media User In Absorbing Rightful Information**

### **4.1 The Influence of Propaganda in Social Media**

Since social media has such enormous potential, China, for example, has its own social media site, Weibo. In recent years' popular revolutions, uprisings, and protests around the world, social media has played a significant role in mobilizing, informing, and influencing public opinion and shaping consensus on events from around the world. Both sides use modern communications, and it is here that the modern propaganda and information war is waged in front of a global audience.

There is also the possibility of anonymity on social media, and there have recently been several cases where accounts have been exposed as fake or deliberately designed for political purposes. Such accounts are very much in the mould of the black propaganda seen throughout the First and Second World Wars, deceptive propaganda issued under one guise but emanating from another source. This direct parallel demonstrates the significance of social media in the ongoing information war. (Dr Peter Johnston, 2013)

### **4.2 Observation on Respondents Answer Behaviour**

To analyze the media literacy's objective in social media user response in Malaysia, the author will highlight the theory that can be seen by observing respondent's answers behaviour.

Based on the survey result, 133 respondents answered the survey question. The majority gender of the survey is female with 56% compared to the male 42%. In addition, 71 respondents come from 40 to 60 years old and above, while there are 31 from 19 to 25 years old.

In question 6, there are 123 respondents out of 133 that use the application WhatsApp. Second to that is Facebook, with 92 users. And next is Instagram, with 81 users.

The researcher believed that it is necessary to know how long a person spends their time on social media. The more time a person staring and scrolling at their phone, the higher tendency for the individual to be influenced by propaganda. The impact of the algorithm on social media will trace an individual history, interest, or hate on something or someone. It can be traced through their activities on social media; the higher participation in social media, the easier it is to be influenced by social media propaganda.

In the survey, 47% of the respondents spend 3 to 5 hours on social media, and six up to 12 hours, for 23% respondents.

For question 8, it can be seen that 43% of the respondent receiving their news about Covid 19 in Malaysia either through online news or social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram or WhatsApp. And there are only 28% who is still using separate devices from their gadgets like Television, newspaper or radio. Moreover, 28% of respondents use the MySejahtera app, an app for the Malaysian government to trace the Covid cases in your area.

By seeing the majority number of respondents receiving news from the online news, there might be a tendency to receive fake news spread online.

In question 9, the majority of 80% of respondents saying that sometimes the news on social media can rely on their truthfulness. And 18% said Yes to the reliability of social media news.

Next is question 10, and 83% of respondents agreed that sometimes headline news could cause misconception. The researcher believes that the title of the news, either online or offline, can cause misconception or misunderstanding of the news context. In addition, there might be an element of exaggeration, an emotional approach, judging that can influence the reader's opinion before they absorb that information.

Furthermore, in question 11, 68 respondents choose unlikely to read the full article of news they found on social media. Therefore, by combining the data from questions 10 and 11, we can see that most social media users in Malaysia are likely to be influenced by propaganda from online news.

Moreover, the researcher asks respondents whether fake news can influence public opinion in matters of Covid-19. And 93% agreed to this question. The impact of fake news will cause fear, uncertainty or doubt towards the upcoming information in future. The people will be doubtful regarding news shared on social media, or rather it's going to be hard to differentiate between real news and fake news.

Last but not least, the researcher would like to know the public opinion regarding how to stop the spread of fake news. The majority of the respondents suggest only relying on their news on legit pages like government official page or channel. Looking at this answer, the researcher would like to highlight where the media freedom in Malaysia is suppressed, especially during this Covid-19. Therefore, there are highly tendency that the government may filter the shared information on social media. With the government controlling the media, propaganda can be used to spread an idea or certain information to control or influence the target group, in accordance with what propagandists want. This method can be useful in managing the Covid-19 situation so that the government can repeatedly tell the citizen to follow the SOPs in social media.



### **4.3 Propaganda Used in Asian Country**

Based on the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) Democracy Index 2020, Last year, Asia gained three new “full democracies” in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, while Western Europe lost France and Portugal, signalling a “shift in the global balance of power from the West to the East.” The EIU stated that the pandemic had highlighted the widening gap between a dynamic East and a declining West, and it is likely to accelerate the shift in the global balance of power towards Asia,"

The Asian governments' previous experience with the SARS outbreak prompted them to act decisively during the COVID-19 pandemic, "albeit using coercive powers in some cases." By contrast, they said that the European governments were slow to act, some of the health systems were on the verge of collapse, and the public trust in government has deteriorated.

The Asia region has fared far better than virtually any other in dealing with the pandemic, with lower infection and mortality rates and a rapid economic recovery. The COVID-19 pandemic, in particular, has "accelerated" the shift mentioned above, according to the report. (Danisha Hakeem, 2021)

## CHAPTER 5

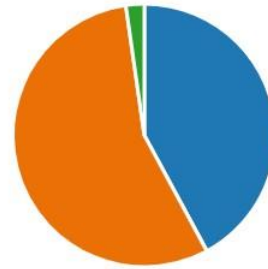
### 5.1 RESULTS AND FINDINGS

#### *PART A: DEMOGRAPHY*

#### 2. Gender

[More Details](#)

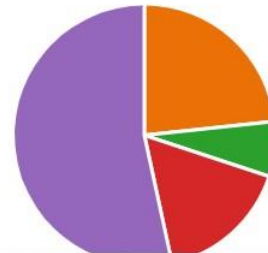
● Male	56
● Female	74
● Prefer not to say	3



#### 3. Age

[More Details](#)

● 13-18	0
● 19-25	31
● 25-29	9
● 30-40	22
● 40-60>	71



Question 2. Gender			
	Male	Female	I prefer not to say
Frequency	56	74	3
Percentage	42%	56%	2%

Question 3. Age					
	13-18	19-25	25-29	30-40	40-60>
Frequency	0	31	9	22	71
Percentage	0%	23%	7%	17%	53%

## 4. Choose your ethnicity

[More Details](#)

● Malay	121
● Chinese	3
● Indian	5
● Others	4



## 5. What is your occupation?

[More Details](#)

● Students	29
● Employed	78
● Unemployed	26



Question 4. Choose your ethnicity				
	Malay	Chinese	Indian	Others
Frequency	121	3	5	4
Percentage	91%	2%	4%	3%

Question 5. What is your occupation			
	Students	Employed	Unemployed
Frequency	29	78	26
Percentage	22%	59%	20%

In this research, 133 respondents respond to the questionnaire given. In addition, there are four questions regarding the identity of the respondents.

The first one is gender. There are 56 male respondents with a percentage of 42%, 74 females with a percentage of 56%, and three prefer not to say with a percentage of 2%.

The next question is age. For 19-25 years old, there are 31 respondents with a percentage of 23%. For 25-29 years old, there are nine respondents with a percentage of 7%. Next, for 30-40 years old, there are 22 respondents with a percentage of 17%. And lastly, for 40-60 years old and above, there are 71 respondents with a percentage of 53%.

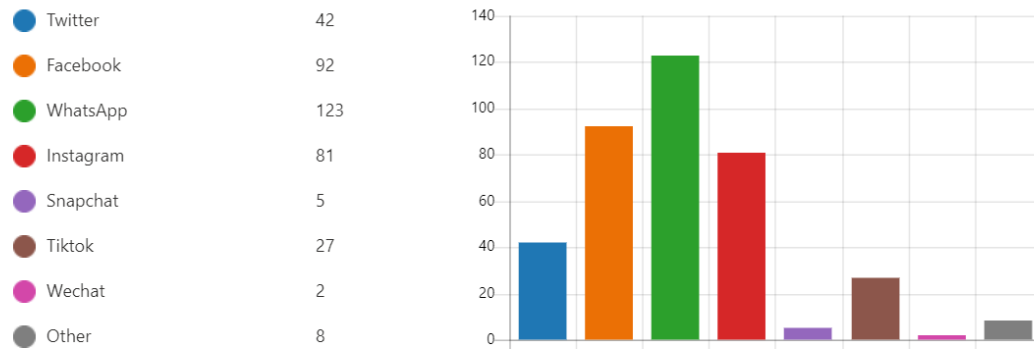
For ethnicity, there are 121 Malay respondents with a percentage of 91%, 3 Chinese with a percentage of 2% and 5 Indian with 4%. For Other ethnicities, there are four respondents with a percentage of 3%.

Lastly, for the question occupation of the respondent. There are 29 students with a percentage of 22%. There are 78 employed respondents with a percentage of 59%. And 26 unemployed with 20%.

*PART B: THE RESPONSE OF LOCALS IN ABSORBING RIGHTFUL INFORMATION  
THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA*

6. Do you use social media? If you do, which platform that you use?

[More Details](#)



Question 6. Do you use social media? If you do, which is a platform that you use?								
	Twitter	Facebook	WhatsApp	Instagram	Snapchat	Tiktok	WeChat	other
No.	42	92	123	81	5	27	2	8

Part B of the questionnaire consists of 9 questions relating to their opinion about online news. In the first one, the researcher asks the respondent to choose the said social media platform above. It is multiple answers, so a respondent may choose all the options if they use all platforms. Based on the data, there are 42 users of Twitter, 92 of Facebook, 123 of WhatsApp, 81 users of Instagram, 5 Snapchat users, 27 users of Tiktok, two people use Wechat, and 8 choose Other social media platform.

7. Approximately, how many hours do you usually spend on social media?

[More Details](#)



Question 7. Approximately how many hours do you usually spend on social media?			
	1-2 h	3-5h	6-12>
Frequency	41	62	30
percentage	31%	47%	23%

The next question is to know how many hours respondent usually spent on their social media. For 1 to 2 hours, there are 41 with a percentage of 31%. For 3 to 5 hours, there 62 respondents with a percentage of 47%. And for 6 to 12 hours and above, there are 30 respondents with a percentage of 23%.

## 8. Where do you receive an update about COVID-19 in Malaysia?

[More Details](#)

● Television, radio, newspaper	78
● Online news or Social Media (...)	119
● MySejahtera app	79
● Others (please specify)	1
● Other	2

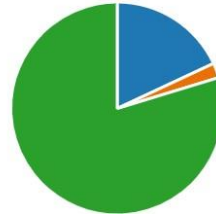


Question 8. Where do you receive an update about COVID-19 in Malaysia?				
	Television, radio, newspaper	Online news or Social Media Platform (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, etc.	MySejahtera App	Other
Frequency	78	119	79	3
Percentage	28%	43%	28%	1%

For this question, the researcher wants to find out where the respondents would receive news about Covid-19. For Television, radio, newspaper, there are 78 respondents with a percentage of 28%. There are 119 who choose online news, or social media platform like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, etc., with a percentage of 43%. For the MySejahtera app, there are 79 respondents, with 28%. And also three people who chose Other with 1%.

9. Do you think the news on social media are true and reliable?

[More Details](#)



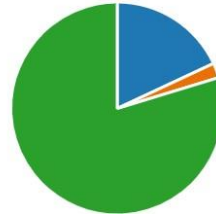
Question 9. Do you think the news on social media is true and reliable?			
	Yes	No	Sometimes
Frequency	24	3	106
Percentage	18%	2%	80%

For this question, the researcher asks the respondent whether the news on social media can be reliable. 24 respondents are choosing Yes with 18%. Three respondents are saying No with 2%. And 106 respondents answer Sometimes with a percentage of 80%



9. Do you think the news on social media are true and reliable?

[More Details](#)



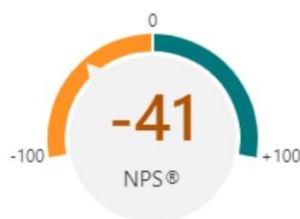
Question 10. Do you agree that sometimes headline news can cause misconception?				
	Yes	No	Maybe	Other
Frequency	110	0	23	0
Percentage	83%	0%	17%	0%

In this question, the researcher asks whether the respondents agreed that sometimes headline news could cause misconception. For Yes, there are 110 with a percentage of 83%. For No, there are 0 with 0%. Those who choose maybe consists of 23 people with 17%. And Other, is 0 with 0%.

11. How likely would you read the full article that shared on social media?

[More Details](#)

Promoters	13
Passives	52
Detractors	68



Question 11. How likely would you read the full article that shared on social media?			
	Promoter	Passive	Detractor
Frequency	13	52	68

For this question, the researcher asks how likely the respondent will read a full article shared on social media. Again, 13 respondents answer likely or Promoter, 52 choose Passive, and 68 choose unlikely or Detractor.

Question 12. Have you ever received or saw fake news on social media? If Yes, what is it about?	
Responses	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Obviously yes. Rumours on the covid-19 vaccination</li> <li>2. The numbers of covid cases reach up to 10,000.</li> <li>3. PM Press Conference</li> <li>4. About vaccines that can kill people</li> <li>5. About Covid19, about MH 370, about politics and the police action</li> </ol>

The respondents who choose Yes on this question stated their opinion, and the opinion is on the table above.

13. Do you think the spread of fake news on social media, can give an impact in influencing public opinion? Especially on COVID-19.

[More Details](#)

● Yes	124
● No	1
● Maybe	8



Question 13. Do you think the spread of fake news on social media can have an impact on influencing public opinion? Especially on COVID-19.

	Yes	No	Maybe
Frequency	124	1	8
Percentage	93%	1%	6%

In this question, the researcher asks the respondent whether the spread of fake news on social media can have an impact in influencing public opinion regarding the Covid-19. Again, 124 respondents are answering Yes, with a percentage of 93%. One person saying No, with 1%. And eight others saying Maybe with 6%.

Question 14. Lastly, as a responsible reader, how would you suggest reducing the spread of fake news about COVID-19?

Responses

1. Be a smart reader. Only read news on trusted sources. Always check the information.
2. Only read and hear from reliable sources like prime-time news on tv or an authentic website like from the government and its official page/ announcements. If some news seems suspicious or people talk loud (not literally, but) about something that is next to nothing, keep your ear and eyes away and run (not literally, but can also literally).
3. A simple, interesting & informative PSA about COVID-19 on major platforms, especially on free TVs, i.e., TV1, TV2, TV3.
4. Media plays an important role in correct information dissemination. However, people should rely on trusted sources rather than copy & paste and forward messages without checking the authentication & reliability.
5. Educate the people to not fully believe in everything they read/ hear, especially double-check the truth.

## 5.2 CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, in the contemporary context, propaganda has become a powerful communication tool to spread idea, belief, perception, and society's behaviour. However, compared to the traditional propaganda, the medium of targeted audience to propagate is quite limited, need to use a lot of time and energy to spread the propaganda. However, with the advanced technology and high-speed Internet, propaganda evolves along with globalization that creates new means and methods.

The Internet, or specific in this study, has become a new propaganda communication strategy for the propagandist to gain their agenda. Other than public relation, the state government has begun using social media as a platform to spread their political campaign and more. Moreover, with the pandemic of Covid-19, the users of social media began to increase since people spend most of their time at home. Thus, social media is no longer a place only for entertainment, but it has expanded its scope into spreading information towards society at a global level.

Therefore, with this vast power given, the propagandist would try to control and hold on to the power of information to spread their propaganda.

In the Malaysian context, the issue that arises under the scope of social media propaganda is the politics during the pandemic of Covid-19. The political instability has occurred since Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin and his political party, Perikatan Nasional, takeover the parliament. Since then, the propaganda coming from the opposition party trying to topple him and the rest of his cabinet by pressuring them to re-elect. However, when Malaysia's Covid-19 cases began to improve, a new cluster breakout from the Pilihan Raya Negeri (PRN) Sabah 2020. Consequently, the cases began to rise months by months till they become four-digit case. The impact of that, the King announced for the State of Emergency To give the ruling government space and time managing the covid crisis and also

recover our economy. The parliament and election will be suspended until the crisis began to recover. But, the opposition party are restless by this news, and till now, they insist on pressuring the ruling government to hold the virtual parliament session.

The propaganda techniques haven't always been used only by the opposition party and the government in authority. This can be seen when the public health matter is involved since it requires the full cooperation given by the Malaysian society to reducing the spread of covid cases.

The government uses social media as the medium of propaganda to encourage public awareness in maintaining the SOP's and applying for the vaccine. Conversely, other propagandists are trying to advantage by spreading fake news, misinformation about covid-19 that can confuse, doubt and fear in society.

After that, the government use the fake news act to apprehend the fake news offender. But, there is a criticism towards the government's actions. Because the media freedom in Malaysia is restricted even before the pandemic, right now, with the fake news law exist, it seems like the government has total authoritarian towards the media, which would not be good since the element of freedom and unbiased are crucial. If the media cannot write or speak about the real issue and sugarcoating, that would not help society be critical thinking.

By looking at the data, the researcher has a fund that society fully relies on the government to give true and transparent information. Thus, they can be easily influenced by whatever propaganda the government's throw at them since no one are allowed to critique the government anymore.

### **5.3 RECOMMENDATION**

By looking at the arising issue of social media propaganda, the author suggests that, first, the social media user must have the education to combat the propaganda influence. They must learn how to differentiate between fake news or not, identifying the real intention of that message, question from where they came, who spread them so that the society would be easily influenced by propaganda. The author highly recommends the spread of awareness regarding media literacy, as it would create an informative and knowledgeable society.

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## Appendix

# Social Media Propaganda: Politics and COVID-19 Pandemics in Malaysia

I am Nur Hazirah Binti Ibrahim, a Final Year student of International Relations from Faculty of Law and International Relations, University Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA). I am currently conducting a research study for my Final Year Project on "Social Media Propaganda: Politics and COVID-19 Pandemics in Malaysia". This survey conducted to asses the locals responds in absorbing rightful information through social media.

This survey consists of two parts, Part A and Part B.

The survey will only take less than 5 minutes. Your participation is greatly appreciated and the response will be kept confidential.

Thank you in advance for your time and effort.

\* Required

\* This form will record your name, please fill your name.

## Part A - Demography

### 1. Email

### 2. Gender \*

Male

Female

Prefer not to say

## 3. Age \*

- 13-18
- 19-25
- 25-29
- 30-40
- 40-60>

## 4. Choose your ethnicity \*

- Malay
- Chinese
- Indian
- Others

## 5. What is your occupation? \*

- Students
- Employed
- Unemployed

## Part B - The response of locals in absorbing rightful information through social media

6. Do you use social media? If you do, which platform that you use? \*

- Twitter
  - Facebook
  - WhatsApp
  - Instagram
  - Snapchat
  - Tiktok
  - Wechat
  -
- Other

7. Approximately, how many hours do you usually spend on social media? \*

- 1-2
- 3-5
- 6-12>

8. Where do you receive an update about COVID-19 in Malaysia? \*

- Television, radio, newspaper
- Online news or Social Media (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Whatsapp or any other social media platform)
- MySejahtera app
- Others (please specify)
- 
- Other

9. Do you think the news on social media are true and reliable? \*

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

10. Do you agree that sometimes headline news can cause misconception? \*

- Yes
- No
- Maybe
- 
- Other

11. How likely would you read the full article that shared on social media? \*

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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Not at all likely

Extremely likely

6/4/2021

12. Have you ever received or saw fake news on social media? If Yes, what is it about? \*

13. Do you think the spread of fake news on social media, can give an impact in influencing public opinion? Especially on COVID-19. \*

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

12. Have you ever received or saw fake news on social media? If Yes, what is it about? \*

13. Do you think the spread of fake news on social media, can give an impact in influencing public opinion? Especially on COVID-19. \*

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

14. Lastly, as a responsible reader, how would you suggest on reducing the spread of fake news about COVID-19? \*