

## **THE USE OF PERSONAL WEBSITES IN BUILDING ONLINE IMAGE BY MALAYSIAN PARLIAMENTARIANS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Political careers of politicians depend on keeping a clean image and reputation to stay in positive public opinion for all purposes. This article is focused on how do Malaysian parliamentarians present themselves to the public. It is based on an analysis of content on 47 personal websites found of 13<sup>th</sup> elected Malaysian Members of Parliament. The analysis was done in terms of the different languages used considering the country is multiethnic, the photos shared and the issues discussed as their stand on particular issues on the websites. Some interesting finding like none of the MPs used Tamil on their website, scandalous photos have forced MPs into apologizing and even resignation were found in keeping their image. Others used their websites to attack opposition, expose corruption as well as putting out their stand on controversies to protect their reputation. This study is valuable in understanding reputation building online by politicians as more people access information from internet in a increasingly complex world.

Keywords: Websites, Online Image, Parliamentarians, Reputation, Malaysia

### **INTRODUCTION**

The growing sophistication of society's dynamic environment and power of online communication, has greatly increased those seeking sustainable image and strong positive reputation. Politics is no different and considered to be an "image-intensive sector" in which public administration requires public institution's transparency.<sup>1</sup> Norris states, "Post-modern political campaigns are understood as those where the coterie of professional consultants on advertising, public opinion, marketing, and strategic news management become more co-equal actors with politicians, assuming a more influential role within government in a 'permanent' campaign, as well as coordinating local activity more tightly at the grassroots. The news media fragments into a more complex and incoherent environment of multiple channels, outlets, and levels."<sup>2</sup> Self image can be broadly defined as an identity representing the values and

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<sup>1</sup>Oržekauskas.P, Šmaižienė. I'Public Image and Reputation Management: Retrospective and Actualities' Viesoji Politik IR Administraimas, 2007. Nr. 19 retrieved from <file:///C:/Users/ACER/Downloads/2328-4979-1-SM.pdf> on 27th June 2016

<sup>2</sup>Oržekauskas.P, Šmaižienė. I'Public Image and Reputation Management: Retrospective and Actualities' Viesoji Politik IR Administraimas, 2007. Nr. 19 retrieved from <file:///C:/Users/ACER/Downloads/2328-4979-1-SM.pdf> on 27th June 2016

performance standards while reputation management is based on a more holistic approach in which reputation is being driven by behavior, communication, visual appearance, performance results and their interpretation among various stakeholders, as well as by exogenous factors such as media messages, gossips, other stakeholder's reviews and appreciations.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the concept of building maintaining political image has become more complex and with social media more relevant where people read less and see more.

Gee's theory of image structure includes varying external and internal intangibles and deals with organizational reality, as well as with its publicity. He represents four levels of image structure: fundamental, internal image, external image and intangible one. The first stage – image fundamental – includes individual or organizational principles, philosophy, objects, and standards for practice.<sup>4</sup> On the base of this fundamental, image strategies should be created and implemented. Internal image relates to planning and organizing performance, organizational politics and actions towards its members and personnel, programs for encouraging members' loyalty to the organization and solidarity inside the organization, etc. The external image is due to all the factors related to a particular person or organization; that can be evaluated with the help of individual senses – smell, hearing, feeling, and seeing. According to Gee, the most important factors making an impact on ones external image are presenting oneself to public, building relationships with public, media and other organizations, public work and organizational members' attitude towards their job and practice. Intangible image is related to stakeholder's individual (physical and emotional), cultural, educational and motivational attitudes.<sup>5</sup>

The growing power of communication via internet has encouraged focusing on a concept of sustainable image and reputation. Reputation expresses one's seeking to be not just visible but trustworthy and believable among all stakeholders. Brent, researching reputation management in municipal politics, describes it as the "estimation in which a person stands in the opinion of others."<sup>6</sup> While, Dalton describes reputation, as the sum values that stakeholders attribute to an organization, based on their perception and interpretation of the image that the organization communicates over time.<sup>7</sup> One's image and reputation can be affected not only on stakeholder's direct meeting with the a politician, some representatives of the party, institution or public organization, but it is also being influenced by media messages, gossips, other stakeholders' reviews and appreciations. On a cautionary note, in politics, social media can serve as a double-edged sword; it can mobilize people to different kinds of responses depending on the situation in a very fast manner leading to any kind of outcomes. Knowing this, candidates try to manipulate the electorate and show an image of themselves as if they really have that image. In order to get the vote, they do whatever they can to enhance their personal image. Therefore, it is important to study their websites for authentic information on them, the image they maintain of themselves and correct information for the public against other sources such as the media and other political parties. Moreover, in many cases politicians hire experts on image building to help them to create an image that will be appreciated by a significant part of the electorates. These are values such as looks, integrity, honesty, transparency, family values, respect for cultural and religious

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<sup>3</sup>ibid

<sup>4</sup>Ibid

<sup>5</sup>Ibid

<sup>6</sup>Brent R. H. Clear Sailing: Reputation Management in Municipal Politics. Retrieved from [https://www.thomsonrogers.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/05/Reputation\\_Management.pdf](https://www.thomsonrogers.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/05/Reputation_Management.pdf) on 27th June 2016

<sup>7</sup>Oržekauskas.P, Šmaižienė.I,' Public Image and Reputation Management: Retrospective and Actualities' VIEŠOJI POLITIKA IR ADMINISTRAVIMAS, 2007. Nr. 19 retrieved from <file:///C:/Users/ACER/Downloads/2328-4979-1-SM.pdf> on 27th June 2016

diversity and segments of society, e.g. women, the disabled, minorities or aging pensioners. For each different area of the city, state, or country, the candidates act in appropriate and specific ways.

### **Image of Malaysian MPs on Their Websites**

It is common knowledge how social media provide a platform for people who have gone on to become social media celebrities and politicians are no different. They have adopted the medium to campaign in elections of a parliamentary system in the style of presidential system where persona is emphasized more. In Malaysia, the 2013 elections saw the use and building of charisma of politicians who were initially not know- for instance youth leaders like Khairy Jamaluddin who went on to become the Youth and Sports Minister or Tony Pua, a blogger who got elected to Parliament; both had little background in politics. They were considered active, engaged with the public and popular politicians of social media age in the country.

A study was conducted on sitting Malaysian parliamentarians during 2015 as to, how they present themselves online on their websites to maintain an image they wish to present of themselves to the public. It tried to determine the role they have to play as MPs and the image they maintain online. MPs websites are tested for their ability to share information, connect in terms of language used Malaysia being an ethnically diverse society, the kind of photos shared to build connection with the people and the issues they take up in playing their role of an MP. It would assist in understanding different political personalities, their ability and charisma as being approachable, friendly and one from among the people. Such an ability to maintain and sustain a “clean” and respectable image that makes an MP acceptable to the people for public office.

In studying the image of MPs on their websites, the methodological challenge for content analysis has that of coding large volumes of information that may not be strictly comparable across mediums over time. Furthermore, a website’s content is dynamic in nature. It changes multiple times a week or even several times in a day, as observed during this study. Changes to website format, hacking incident or suspended for a period or even indefinitely could be seen. The websites of Member of Parliament will be seen for the language as in translation facility available online considering the multiethnic and multilingual nature of Malaysian society. What kind of photos do they share to present themselves to the people and their concerns? Lastly how websites support MPs in their role of being a representative of a constituency, legislator, representative of party and a politician.

### **Language Used by MPs**

Language plays a key role in the art of communication and people tend to respond positively based on the language they used. They can easily identify the message, emotions, idioms and ethos and relate better. In Malaysian politics, language has been associated with entitlement and has been an issue often debated resulting in a change to a neutral world language, English; however, so far this has been a critical point of difference. When all the Malaysian MP’s websites were examined for language of the websites, they were found to be mostly in the national language (Malay), with translation available in English and Mandarin. No websites were found using Tamil or translation made available although Malaysian politics and society are

organized along racial lines. This was interesting finding since MPs of Indian ethnicity have also opted not to use Tamil, like P. Govindswamy, Charles Anthony Santiago or Jeykumar Devraj. It is difficult to know the reasons since it may point to large audiences not using the Tamil language. It could also be that the language is not popular among young Malaysian users and especially for political purposes for cultural reasons or the multilingual nature of Malaysian Indian society.

It was found that the Chinese MPs were more regular in their use of their language and script for mobilizing participation and networking. In sharing information, Chinese MPs do not shy away from having separate blogs for this purpose or automatic translation online option. Party lines do play a role in the use of language where MPs from Malay nationalist parties such as UMNO and PAS were more likely to have their websites in Malay language sometimes without translation too. When language is used to refer to harsh words to attack other individuals or parties, Lim Kit Siang's and Khalid Samad's website use both are known for it. The quality of language and style is individualistic since the content analysis shows different types of writing in the speeches, press releases, articles and newspaper articles. Although the Malaysian government promises not to censor the net, there are certain restrictions like sedition law under section 2, 3(1) that prohibits any blogger from inciting hatred or contempt or dissatisfaction against any ruler or the government.<sup>8</sup> Under this Act, Aduka Taruna was arrested for allegedly insulting the late Sultan of Johor. Home Minister Hishamuddin Hussain has commented "let his case be a lesson to others who think they can express themselves openly without worrying about repercussions."<sup>9</sup> Likewise, PM Najib has stressed that the government does not fear dissent, in another statement he said, "in order for democracy to function well, we need to have a population that is discerning and education would give the people the ability to decide on what the truth was and what was not."<sup>10</sup> However, in a recent case, a Malaysian graphic artist named Fahmi Reza did an art work depicting the PM as a clown and it was not taken lightly. He was charged under section 233(1)(a) of the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998 Section 233(1)(a) which prohibits the use of network facilities or network service to comment, request, suggestion or other communication which is obscene, indecent, false, menacing or offensive in character with intent to annoy, abuse, threaten or harass another person. If convicted, he could face up to one year in jail and/or a RM50,000 (US\$12,200) fine.<sup>11</sup> There was no response or reaction on the PM's website on the matter and it is probably treated as a criminal offenses to which he is not personally involved.

Under Article 10(4) of Malaysian Constitution, Parliament may pass laws prohibiting the questioning of four politically sensitive matters: right to citizenship under Part III of the Constitution, the status of the Malay language, the position and privileges of the Malays and the natives of Sabah and Sarawak, and the prerogatives of the Malay Sultans and the Ruling Chief of Negeri Sembilan.<sup>12</sup> In addition, the Computer Crimes Act 1997 and the Communications and

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<sup>8</sup>Shad Saleem Farooqi, Document of Destiny, The Constitution of the Federation of Malaysia (Selangor): Star Publication, 2008), p.293

<sup>9</sup>Mazwin Nik Anis &Farik Zolkepli, "Hishamuddin: Blogger must answer for insulting Sultan" The Star, 28 January 2010.

<sup>10</sup>Kamariduan Mohd Nor, "We don't fear bloggers, says PM", The Sun, 25th April 2011, p.2

<sup>11</sup>Sumisha Naidu, Malaysian artist charged over Najib clown image, Channel News Asia, 6 June 2016 retrieved from <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asiapacific/malaysian-artist-charged/2848478.html> on 17th June 2016.

<sup>12</sup>Horil,K, "Disintegration of the Colonial Economic Legacies and Social Restructuring of Malays" The Developing Economies, 29(4).

Multimedia Act 1998 seek to retain some control over cyber communications.<sup>13</sup> These laws restrict the freedom of information in Malaysia as do the Official Secrets Act 1972, the Printing Press and Publication Act 1984 and others. This can be a reason why low levels of insult and poor language are not found although it encourages MPs to self-censor and be restricted in the way they can freely communicate with their audience.

### **Photo Sharing of MPs**

Photo share is an important part of image building, because they can be reinforced to make the public recall a positive image. It was found that MPs do not share slogans but share their famous quotes from speeches. The majority of MPs on their websites do not prefer to use photos as a medium placed in the photo gallery but prominent politicians with greater resources understand its power and use it effectively to build an image they wanted of themselves. The following are some chosen MPs and their reflection of their photos and video shares with the public on their personal websites.

PM Najib Razak maintains a website full of interesting photos that project an image of a friendly, approachable and social leader. He has the unique feature of a live stream channel which is operational on certain occasions and not free streaming at all times. The albums sequence his public life as a friend of President Obama, celebrating Muslim religious festival of Eid with the public, working trips, meetings, political party events, elections and national and international events. They show official photos of foreign dignitaries' visits to his office.<sup>14</sup> The website is equipped with videos and podcast as well for listening. In comparison his 1Malaysia website pictures focus on multi-ethnicity and rural life settings.<sup>15</sup>

The photos of youth leader and icon Khairy Jamaluddin show him involved in visiting the elderly and disabled people, visiting schools, attending sports and youth events. They are more organic and show him as a likeable, handsome leader whom youth like to take selfies with and meet in person like a popular star. He uses the option of mobile upload of pictures that instantly connect his followers to him in events he hosts or attends as guest thus attracting a following. He has presented himself as a cultured young Malay, religious, dynamic and friendly. His pictures show his following base to be of Malays and few taken with Chinese and Indians at multiethnic functions he attended.<sup>16</sup> Joining the celebration for National Sports Day, Khairy surprised his fans by participating in events like swimming in muddy and dirty water, throwing spears, climbing walls and even carrying buckets of water like all other participants. He was later featured on the cover of Men's Health Magazine showing a clean image.<sup>17</sup> These activities inspire the youth to action and they look up to him as a leader.

Photos can be sensitive to public perception; they can present facts in a fictitious way and vice versa. Take the example of MP Nur Izzah's photo session at the Council of Philippine Affairs & the Asian Institute for Democracy, Manila that become a sensitive topic back home when her and Jacel Kiram's photo began circulating online. Kiram is the daughter of the self-

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<sup>13</sup> The Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Code <http://www.skmm.gov.my/Resources/eDocument/Codes.aspx>

<sup>14</sup> Personal website Najib Razak retrieved from <https://www.najibrazak.com/en/digital-media/> on 23rd June 2016.

<sup>15</sup> 1Malaysia website retrieved from <http://www.1malaysia.com.my/photo-gallery> on 23rd June 2016

<sup>16</sup> Personal Website of Khairy Jamaluddin retrieved from <http://www.rembau.com.my/?lang=en> on 25th June 2016

<sup>17</sup> Spartance Championship website retrieved from <http://spartanrace.my/press-releases/youth-sports-minister-khairy-jamaluddin-spartans-spartan-race-malaysia/> on 25th June 2016

proclaimed Sultan of Sulu Jamalul Kiram III, who was reportedly responsible for sending about 200 armed gunmen to take over Lahad Datu, Sabah in March, 2013. It led to a standoff and violent clashes, leaving scores dead including Malaysian security personnel. MP Nur Izzah had to apologise when attacked by the public and the government for the pictures.<sup>18</sup> A similar incident could be related of her mother, MP Wan Azizah, when her picture of sitting and eating *Nasi Lemak* in a commuter train went viral, dividing her supporters into those who believe it was wrong to eat in a train as breaking the rules and those who believed she could, because it was a train traveling out of KL where eating is allowed.<sup>19</sup> Hence we can see that photo misrepresentation can easily divide public opinion for Malaysian politicians.

Photos can also serve a message of warning to the opposition like the arrest of the sitting elected Chief Minister of Penang, Guan Eng was arrested by anti corruption body (MACC) on two charges of corruption. The video and pictures of the arrest were shocking and when snap polls were announced by the ruling party in the state to regain lost image as a corrupt official, it was seen as DAP's rescue plan for the party to clean up its image and that of its Secretary General through the snap election.<sup>20</sup>

In the case of Seputeh Member of Parliament (MP) Teresa Kok was charged with sedition over her controversial 'Onederful Malaysia CNY 2014' satirical video. Kok's 11-minute satirical clip has caused a stir when several right wing groups and Barisan Nasional (BN) leaders accused it of being offensive. In the video, Kok had played the role of a Feng Shui talk show host interviewing three panelists on their predictions for the lunar New Year. The 'panelists' had, among others, poked fun at the country's education system, rising cost of living, and Sulu terrorist intrusion in Lahad Datu, Sabah. Kok had always insisted that her video was done in good humor, denying charges that she was being anti-Islam or anti-Malay. She maintained that her video was mere political satire and asked those who felt he or she was ridiculed by the video to sue her. She boldly declared, "I will fight this heinous charge to the end. I have not committed any crime and I shall be proven innocent in court," said Kok.<sup>21</sup> It shows how MP's videos and pictures are under public, government and right wing groups' scrutiny, and are easily questioned.

On the negative side of incidents, when MPs have had to pay dearly for certain photos circulating online it has been a disaster for their political careers. In a bizarre case involving MP Rafizi Ramli where he shared with the media how someone had given his personal mobile number to a call girl center site and he began receiving obscene calls. In a posting made on his official Twitter account, the Pandan Member of Parliament shared an image of a text message he received by someone seeking for "Rara".<sup>22</sup> Taking the matter rather sportingly he highlighted

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<sup>18</sup> Ida Lim, 'Blogs attack Nur Izzah over meet with Jacel Kiram: MP says arranged by Philippines leaders' retrieved from <http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/blogs-attack-nurul-izzah-over-meet-with-jacel-kiram-mp-says-arranged-by-phi> on 25th June 2016

<sup>19</sup> Did Dr. Wan Azizah break the rules when she ate Nasi Lekak on the KTM train ? retrieved from <http://says.com/my/news/dr-wan-azizah-criticised-for-eating-nasi-lemak-on-the-ktm-but-it-s-actually-allowed> on 25th June 2016

<sup>20</sup> Penang snap elections, DAP's ploy to clean up Guan Eng image- Sohaimi retrieved from <http://malaysiagazette.com/en/national/penang-snap-election-daps-ploy-clean-guan-engs-image-%E2%80%93-sohaimi> on 25th June 2016

<sup>21</sup>Teoh El Sen, 'TeresaKok Charged with Sedition over 'onederful Malaysia' video claims trial Astro Awani 6th May 2014' retrieved from <http://english.astroawani.com/malaysia-news/teresa-kok-charged-sedition-over-onederful-malaysia-video-claims-trial-35294> on 30th June 2016

<sup>22</sup>Rafizi wards off messages soliciting sex services Rakyat Post January 16<sup>th</sup> 2016 retrieved from <http://www.therakyatpost.com/news/2016/01/16/rafizi-wards-off-messages-soliciting-sex-services/> on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2016

the disconnection of Malay youth from Islam and their realities of life which do not adhere to their faith. In an interview with *Malaysiakini*, Rafizi said, "On one extreme, you have much rhetoric about Islam, but it appears disconnected with what is happening on the ground. In reality, there is a lot less emphasis on Islamic values on the ground."<sup>23</sup> The Pandan MP however chose to highlight the negative effects of socio-economic factors on Malay youth's stance on Islamic values, saying, "Based on my experience from these 9 out of 10 youths is that they seem to be the lesser educated and poorer Malays. Because of the socio-economic situation, the situation is worsening on the ground. Poverty and hardship push them further away from Islamic values."<sup>24</sup>

The image of MP Jeff Ooi comes out to be refreshing as it is more reflective of his personality. He shares his political responsibilities with passion for photography, travel, books and music on his website. This certainly can play a role in people liking his hobbies and skills like photography. It gives more to the visitor to connect in terms of sharing likes. There were a few pictures of him that show that he was not self-promoting, rather connecting with the visitors to his site.

### **Issues on MPs Personal Website**

Several ministers and MPs have used the social media to clear their names against allegations leveled against them on their personal websites. The most prominent being the Prime Minister himself, and Tony Pua's social media posting on the eye of the storm on corruption as well as Jeff Ooi's concern on increasing Malaysian Chinese immigrating to other countries. Due to space and time, only a few MPs will be chosen for discussion of in their active role in their social media.

PM Najib Razak's personal website states he has three websites to maintain close contact with Malaysians. Only one is chosen <https://www.najibrazak.com/en/> for this study in which he clarifies allegations leveled against him personally. In his tenure, several controversies have attacked his image and damaged public sentiment compared to previous Prime Ministers the country has seen, including his father. The first and most serious case involved his former aide who was also linked to a case involving the murder of a Mongolian national in 2006. The aide was acquitted in 2008. He responds on his website as below:

"As it was a lengthy court case, the appellants had ample time to give their full account and tell the courts everything. So why are we listening to individuals whose testimonies have already been given and who have been found guilty of the crime? What is important is that the judgment brings justice to everyone, most importantly to the family of the victim, to the accused and even to me. I have stated many times that I have nothing to do with this issue, and even sworn an oath on the Quran in a Mosque. The people must take into account that in politics, many issues keep being played up, and this is one of them. It became hot at a time when I was PM in waiting and the Opposition needed a way to prevent me from advancing. Because the two bodyguards had worked for me, and Razak Baginda was a friend and associate, they tried to connect the dots to me. Razak Baginda has openly admitted to the relationship with Altantuya

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<sup>23</sup>ibid

<sup>24</sup>Samantha Koh, 'People are texting RafiziRamli on What's up and asking him for sex', says .com 18<sup>th</sup> January 2016 retrieved from <http://says.com/my/news/someone-thought-it-d-be-funny-to-put-pkr-rafizi-ramli-s-number-in-a-sex-service-flyer> on 23rd June 2016.

but in no way did I have any knowledge of it. Pakatan and their media have irresponsibly tried to play the psyche-war game by trying to implicate me and influence perception. They even went as far as to superimpose a photo of me, dining with the victim in a restaurant. In this era of social media, these things go viral uncontrollably, including the superimposed photo.”<sup>25</sup>

The country’s image took a serious nose dive by the mishandling of Malaysian Airlines of two aviation disasters in his tenure in 2014. Malaysia was rocked by two aviation disasters - the disappearance of Malaysia Airlines MH370 in March, and the shooting down of MH17 in Ukraine in July. PM Najib and his team of leaders came under fire for mismanaging the government's response to the first incident and providing inadequate and tardy information to families. However, in the second case, the government successfully negotiated with Ukrainian rebel leaders to secure the bodies of victims and the flight recorders.

However, one of the most politically damaging accusations to be leveled at PM Najib relates to the ailing 1MDB state investment fund.<sup>26</sup> He has responded on his website as below:

“It is unfair for certain politicians to convict the government in the court of public opinion way before the actual facts are laid down by lawful authorities, namely the Auditor-General and the bi-partisan Public Accounts Committee (PAC). When concerns began to be raised, I wanted a detailed explanation, so I ordered the Auditor General and PAC to investigate 1MDB’s books. Anyone found guilty of embezzlement or misappropriation will be brought to justice. We are expecting the release of the preliminary report by the Auditor General very soon. In the meantime, please do not speculate and form conclusions without the information that will be laid out by the Auditor General, who will provide a detailed report into 1MDB’s finances. We all want detailed answers but it is only proper to let the auditors do their job and tell us clearly what the situation really is. If we pre-empt it, we would be undermining them, as many others have done. This is not the proper procedure. If we are sincere in finding out the truth behind those allegations, we need to get the information from legitimate sources (like the Auditor General) and not third-party news portals or online blogs that might have hidden agendas.”<sup>27</sup>

This is his explanation to respond to those tarnishing his political image. This shows social media can be an agent between the highest leader of the country and the public. It points to a political change in the country where the Internet has provided freedom to MPs and the public in questioning the highest officials despite blocking of websites like the Sarawak Report<sup>28</sup> that first exposed the 1MDB issue in the country.

MPs have been questioned for their posting on social media especially on government’s corruption record. A few have been charged and fighting their legal cases. Several cases come to mind, the latest being Tony Pua’s posting on social media on US Department of Justice’s complaint on 1Malaysia Development Bhd and Malaysian Official One. He was questioned and

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<sup>25</sup>Personal Website Najib Razak retrieved from <https://www.najibrazak.com/en/the-truth/> on 25th June 2016

<sup>26</sup>BBC Asia 26th January retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-22338100> on 17th June 2016.

<sup>27</sup> Personal Website Najib Razak retrieved from <https://www.najibrazak.com/en/the-truth/> on 27th June 2016

<sup>28</sup>Beh Li Yi, ‘Sarawak Report whistle blowing website blocked after PM allegations, The Guardian 20th July 2015 retrieved from ‘ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/20/sarawak-report-whistleblowing-website-blocked-by-malaysia-over-pm-allegations> on 27th June 2016



investigated under Section 233 of MCMC Act for improper use of network facilities or network services;<sup>29</sup> for now he has refused to take down the posts since he deems them not necessary.<sup>30</sup> When his Facebook postings were checked there were several discoveries one was that indeed he had shared several newspaper articles on 1MDB story and had not written any himself and rather remarked,

“Can you laugh any louder? Yes, we noticed [Malaysian Official No 1], we took note of that and we have explained that to the public. Whhhhhhaatt?!?!!! Do we laugh or do we cry?” as a caption.”<sup>31</sup>

Earlier too Pua had challenged PM Najib over 1MDB who had responded with a defamation case in 2015 over social media postings. It was reported in the media that the DAP national publicity secretary confirmed his lawyer, Gobind Singh Deo, had indeed received the court notice served by Najib’s lawyers. Pua said in a short statement, “I would like to declare here that I will contest the suit by the Prime Minister. He also claimed the suit was filed as a “strategy to silence” him and other government critics. The Petaling Jaya Utara MP said he “will certainly not be shackled by the suit” but would instead continue to investigate and raise questions surrounding the state investment fund’s projects.”<sup>32</sup> In a surprise move, the Prime Minister took to his Facebook page and explained that he was suing Pua because of the negative public perception against him and his family that could arise from “lies,” “we cannot allow lies and slander to continue,” Najib wrote. The PM is reportedly seeking an apology, a retraction of the statement and compensation in his suit against Pua.”<sup>33</sup>

Tony Pua started out as a blogger was elected to Parliament, and has been using the social media to head the opposition campaign against corruption and corrupt practices. He has been threatened, warned, sued and placed under travel restrictions including his expired passport was impounded and he states on his Facebook, “The High Court has just dismissed my judicial review against the Director of Immigration for barring me from travelling overseas. So it looks like my passport will be kept in cold storage for a while to come. The Judge said she was bound by the Federal Court decision in Loh Wai Kong vs. Govt of Malaysia which ruled that there is no constitutional right to travel. The Judge didn't agree with our claims that the case was materially different because Loh has been charged in court and his passport has also already expired. The police have made no contact with me since September last year on a purported case on "actions detrimental to Parliamentary democracy". The judge also said that DG has wide unwritten powers including the powers to restrict travel through Section 3(2) of the Immigration Act which we had disputed. Based on the judge's arguments, I can literally be barred from travelling for the rest of my life. Oh well, more days in Court then to appeal the decision.”<sup>34</sup>

Pua follows trends in politics and participates actively in sharing information, views and reactions with public. He has revealed on his website of a new scandal, “The Sarawak Report has

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<sup>29</sup>FazleenaAziz, 'TonyPua quizzed for an hour by MCMC over social media posting NST 1st August 2016 retrieved from <http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/tony-pua-under-investigation-for-naming-malaysian-official-1> on 2nd August 2016

<sup>31</sup>Tony Pua Facebook post 27 July at 10.36 p.m retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/MPTonyPua/?fref=ts> on 27th July 2016

<sup>32</sup>DAP's Tony Pua to challenge Najib's 1 MDB Lawsuit Malaymail online 7th March 2015 retrieved from <http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/daps-tony-pua-to-challenge-najibs-1mdb-lawsuit#sthash.P0nP80xl.dpuf> on 27th June 2016

<sup>33</sup>ibid

<sup>34</sup>Tony Pua's Facebook Page retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/MPTonyPua/> on 27th June 2016

exposed new documents which alleged that the Malaysian Government is in the midst of finalizing a new contract to award China Communications Construction Company (CCCC) for a whopping sum of RM60 billion. The East Coast Economic Region Development Council had previously expected the cost of the project to be 'only' RM30 billion. Malaysians are taken aback by the speculated cost for the project and cannot be blamed for giving Sarawak Report the benefit of the doubt because the whistle-blower website has been proven right time and again, especially with regards to its reporting of the multi-billion dollar 1MDB scandal. As a measure of comparison, the 329km Ipoh-Padang Besar double-tracking project was awarded to MMC-Gamuda consortium for RM14.5 billion in 2003. More recently in December 2015, the 179km Gemas-Johor Bahru link was awarded to China Railway Engineering Corporation for the sum of RM7.1 billion. On average, the railway projects cost RM44.0 million and RM39.8 million per kilometers respectively. However, at the cost of RM60 billion, the 620km ECRL will cost a monstrous RM96.8 billion per kilometer to construct. That would mean that the ECRL will cost 120% and 143% more than northern and southern double-tracking projects respectively!"<sup>35</sup> This clearly shows him to be in the eye of the storm, who dares to share and challenge using social media.

MP Mohd Rafizi Ramli, who is also the political party, PKR Vice-President and Secretary-General, was accused of illegally possessing page 98 of 1MDB Audited Report, which he shared on his blog as well as Facebook with the public before the report was disclosed. He was also charged with revealing the contents of the report at a media conference, under Section 8(1)(c)(iv) of the OSA Act that carries a sentence of seven years, if convicted. According to government counsel, Nor Salwani Muhammad, to date, the 1MDB final report has been classified as an official secret under the Official Secret Act 1972 (OSA), as well as the final report known only to the audit team and the Public Accounts Committee (PAC). On being cross-examined by Counsel Gobind Singh Deo, who represents Mohd Rafizi, Nor Salwani however agreed that the issue of Armed Forces Fund Board (LTAT) stated in his client's blog was an issue of public importance.<sup>36</sup> The question however is that, can an MP representing and responsible to the people in parliament not disclose matters of public interest like corruption to them?

Another interesting concern raised is in the case where MP Teresa Kok used her website to raise funds to fight her sedition case. Kok was detained in 2008 under the controversial law, which had provided for detention without trial, based on rumors about her allegedly opposing the azan of a mosque in Puchong. The court found that the allegations, namely her involvement in an "azan" (religious prayers' call) volume protest, petition on removing Jawi signage, the SMS directing her involvement, as well as a petition on not to have the "azan" played were "stale". Kok failed to challenge the government on her 2008 ISA arrest and detention. The High Court ruled that the detention was lawful. She was ordered to pay RM50,000 as cost. She launched a campaign to raise RM50,000 including on her website when she was ordered to pay on losing her civil suit against the police and the government for her wrongful detention under the now-repealed Internal Security Act (ISA). The Seputeh MP along with Cheras MP Tan Kok Wai announced the "RM 1 for Teresa Kok" campaign, which encourages the public to donate RM 50,000 or any other amount towards paying the court costs. They claimed the bid would also

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<sup>35</sup>Personal Website Tony Pua retrieved from <http://tonypua.blogspot.my/> on 27th June 2016

<sup>36</sup> 'A-G confirmed 1 MDB Report found in Razali's Blog, witness says' Malaymailonline 31st May 2016 retrieved from <http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/ag-confirmed-1mdb-report-found-in-mohd-rafizis-blog-witness-says> on 27th June 2016

double as a message to the government that such a hefty fine discourages Malaysians from seeking legal recourse. She was able to collect RM1,501.11 initially from well-wishers and supporters through her Seputeh office following the court decision<sup>37</sup> and filed an appeal against High Court decision to dismiss her case with costs. The appeals court ordered the government to pay the DAP vice-chairman RM350,000 in general, exemplary and aggravated damages in 2016 against the government over her detention under the Internal Security Act (ISA) and total damages cost of RM70,000 in the case.<sup>38</sup> Now the question that needs to be raised is can sitting MPs who are representatives of people and in the role of working for them seek funds to fight a personal legal case? Since, she has won the case with award of damages and costs, what happens to the money raised as donation and where will it go?

MP Jeff Ooi was the only MP to have taken up the issue of Malaysian Chinese ethnic migration to other countries by giving up their citizenship. This is an alarming trend considering the numbers he quotes at, 56,575 Malaysians of Chinese ethnicity during 2010 - 2016. They were the highest in numbers, constituting 88.14% of those who emigrated.<sup>39</sup> This issue has not been touched by other parliamentarian or debated publicly earlier.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we see personal websites and social media in particular have made strong inroads into the Malaysian political environment. It was also discovered that websites were used by MPs for presenting their stands on issues that concern their personal image and reputation. Various languages, pictures and videos are used by MPs to convey their messages and personality that would appear trustworthy to the people. There is no doubt that MPs use their online presence to influence the image people have of them, particularly when they use them to raise their voice against corruption, raise funds to fight their legal cases, share sensitive documents in the interest of public awareness and spreading information. A number of issues are related to parliamentary immunity of MPs and abuse of websites for personal gain. It is unfortunate to observe that there was no way to confirm or refute gossip and false news online as it does affect people's perception of MPs especially when cases of morality and religious sensitivity are concerned.

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<sup>37</sup>Mayuri Mei Lin, 'DAP's Kok seek crowd funding for RM 50,000 bill from ISA lawsuit', Malaymailonline 12 May 2015 retrieved from <http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/daps-kok-seeks-crowdfunding-for-rm50000-bill-from-isa-lawsuit#sthash.Yrp1N5ed.dpuf> on 27th June 2016

<sup>38</sup> Teresa Kok gets RM 350 k for ISA detention retrieved from <http://teresakok.com/2016/07/26/teresa-kok-gets-rm350k-award-for-isa-detention/#more-17321> on 26th July 2016

<sup>39</sup>Personal Website Jeff Ooi retrieved from <https://translate.google.com/translate?hl=en&sl=zh-CN&u=http://www.jeffooi.com/&prev=search> on 27th June 2016

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