



# A political discourse analysis of the twitter posts of @najibrazak prior to 2018 general elections

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## ABSTRACT

The microblogging site Twitter gives politicians greater autonomy and enables them to operate individually by easily communicating online and on a personal level with the public. Based on the framework of Political Discourse Analysis, this article analyses the language use on the Twitter posts of former Malaysian Prime Minister, Najib Razak – @NajibRazak. This paper attempts to discern discursive practices that may produce and reproduce unequal power relations between politicians and the public. This is done through analyses at both topical or macro level and lexical or micro level. Findings show that Najib's tweets convey implicit common sense assumptions, which highlight a paternalistic and government-knows-best approach that is known as a common characteristic of Asian governance.

Keywords: ***Twitter, political communication, Malaysia, political discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis***

## INTRODUCTION

Political communication through mass media from the perspective of power relations has continuously attracted a great deal of attention from media scholars. While political speeches (Schaffner, 2010), political press conferences (Bhatia, 2006), political advertisements (Ansolabehere, Iyengar & Simon, 1999), and political news (Pickering, 2001; Teo, 2000) have been extensively studied, not much is known about the political discourse through social media, from the perspective of how language is used to convey power. Although there have been some studies reported in the area of Twitter and language (Bouvier, 2015; Park, Lim & Park, 2015), there has been very little work on Twitter from the perspective of power relations.

This article intends to fill that gap by focusing on Twitter and political communication from the perspective of political discourse analysis involving the Twitter posts of former Prime Minister of Malaysia, Najib Razak. He was also the leader of the *Barisan Nasional* (BN) coalition, which had formed the ruling government for 60 consecutive years since Malaysia's independence in 1957. At the time this article was written, which was about a year before the 2018 Malaysian General Election, his Twitter account, @NajibRazak, had the most number followers among Malaysian politicians and was one of the most popular Twitter accounts in Malaysia with more than 3.3 million followers. However, several online media claim that @NajibRazak has one of the highest number of fake followers among world leaders. However, this scenario is not unique to Najib Razak's Twitter account. Many leaders, including Barack Obama and Manmohan Singh, are said to have more than 50% fake followers (Waugh, 2013; Yeoh 2013). Even the Twitter accounts of other Malaysian party leaders, such as Anwar Ibrahim and Lim Kit Siang, are said to have fake followers. Nevertheless, excluding fake followers, these leaders still have substantial social media followers (Lian, 2016).

The @NajibRazak account was created in September 2008, the year that the BN coalition failed to win two-thirds majority for the very first time since 1969. After the 2008 election, BN began to robustly adopt social media as part of their campaigning platform. High-ranking leaders in the coalition, such as Prime Minister Najib Razak, Khairy Jamaluddin, and Hishamuddin Hussein, started using Twitter or Facebook to communicate with their supporters (Liow, 2012; Surin, 2010).

This article will analyse how power relations were asserted through language use and how political issues were discussed and communicated by the former Malaysian Prime Minister through his Twitter account. Based on Van Dijk's (1997) conception of Political Discourse Analysis, this article will look into Najib's Twitter conversations at the topical level and lexical level.

## SOCIAL MEDIA AND POWER

Discussions about "social media" such as Facebook, YouTube or Twitter have, in recent years, been examined in relation to power. Castells (2007) defines power as the structural capacity of a social actor in imposing his or her will over other social actors. Power relations according to him however, are conflictive due to the diverse and contradictory nature of society. He argues that all institutional systems reflect power relations, which includes limiting these power relations through the formation of counter-power. Counter-power is defined as the capacity of a social actor to resist and challenge power relations that are institutionalised.

The Internet is said to have heightened the process of counter-power by reflecting opposing values and interests, and engaging a plurality of social actors in creating and discussing social events. Before the Internet, the principal traditional political communication channel was television since the mid-twentieth century alongside the press and radio (Medina & Muñoz, 2014). During this era, political communication and campaigning was dominated by a top-down, asymmetrical-relations pattern and a strong mediatisation of political strategies (Castells, 2007). The 24-hour news cycle further increases the importance of politicians for the media. This system reflects unequal power relations where citizens have little to say and the possibility for them to directly engage politicians was virtually non-existent. Not surprisingly, this provided the breeding ground for social disaffection with politics, particularly among the younger generations in society (Grusell & Nord, 2012).

Today, the Internet, particularly social media, has allowed citizens and politicians to generate and broadcast their own content and this has seen the emergence of what Castells (2007) calls mass self-communication. Web 2.0 such as Facebook and Twitter offers a medium of counter-power which enables social actors to challenge and eventually change the power relations institutionalised in a society. Castells (2007) explains that the Internet gives a platform for social movements and rebellious individuals to build their autonomy and confront established institutions in their own terms. For this reason, social media is believed to have spurred and enabled social revolutions such as the 2011 Tunisian and Egyptian Revolutions also known as the Arab Spring. The proponents believe that social media empowers citizens and consumers, which has resulted in political revolutions, and that it makes the society, economy and culture more democratic.

In line with Castell's views, some scholars associate the Internet with the liberation of the people's voice where the mainstream media is bypassed and self-presentation and expression are facilitated by the structural features of online spaces (Papacharissi, 2002, 2009). Since the mid-1990s, studies have shown how Internet users have better opportunities in interacting with politicians in ways that reduce societal hierarchies and allow them to narrow the gap separating them from their elected representatives (Medina & Muñoz, 2014). Twitter, in particular, allows for immediate, fast, and widespread dissemination of information. Indeed, Twitter has shown the potential to collapse societal hierarchies and is impacting significantly the relationship between political leaders and citizens by providing political candidates with a personal platform to interact with voters more closely. In bypassing the mass media, Twitter breaks the dominant media logic of the old campaigning style and paves the way for politicians to interact with voters (Medina & Muñoz, 2014).

More importantly, by reaching out directly to potential voters, social media allows politicians to develop more personal relationships with them. It also allows candidates to concentrate on how they want to present themselves to the voting public. This self-presentation has a significant influence on how people perceive candidates due to the public's increasing reliance on social media rather than on traditional news outlets (Waters & Williams, 2011). Twitter is of particular interest in this article. Twitter's open structure makes it, potentially, the best space for developing a more direct relationship between politicians and citizens. Politicians who use Twitter regularly may be able to tap into the intimacy and visibility that Twitter fosters (Graham, Broersma, Hazelhoff, & van't Haar, 2013). Additionally, Twitter allows a politician to foster a reciprocal relationship with citizens by interacting, sharing information and requesting for their input.

Past studies show that political candidates tend to use Twitter predominantly to post information on their campaign activities, and links to their own websites. Mentions or discussions of policy matters, however, appear to be less (Evans, Cordova, & Sipole, 2014; Small, 2011). Studies also found politicians tend to adopt a "broadcasting" style for twittering

by predominantly posting messages with personal content (Evans et al., 2014; Kruikemeier, 2014) and interacting infrequently with other users (Small, 2011; Suiter, 2015). There is very little evidence of Twitter being an enabling device for dialogue between political candidates and normal citizens. The use of Twitter by political candidates however, is considered very beneficial as it can be interpreted as the candidates being approachable (Jungherr, 2016) which can lead to stronger feelings of connectedness and social presence (Lee & Shin, 2014).

This raises the question of how Twitter has altered the power structure between politicians and citizens, particularly in the context of Malaysia, a country known for controlling the mainstream media but not the Internet. This study examines the extent to which Twitter could further influence practices and relations that may reproduce existing power structures, or the potential emergence of new ones.

Fuchs (2015), however, argues that although social media empowers citizens, by making society and culture more democratic, they are still shaped by the structures of economic, political and cultural power. Fuchs (2015) contends that social media has specific mechanisms for the generation of reputation and popularity. This means that social media's power is not asymmetrically distributed to favour certain actors to have more visibility than others on these platforms. As a result, social media can also act as conveyors of ideologies by certain highly visible actors.

Since the dominant social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are privately owned, economic, political and ideological forms of media power come into play. Further, since private ownership relies on advertising, the logic of consumption and entertainment is regarded as the most important factor for these social media companies. Higher visibility and more attention, therefore, are given to elites and celebrities who command a large share of economic, political and ideological power. Although social media platforms can be challenged by alternative actors, fewer resources means lesser visibility and attention, which give them an unequal share of media power to fight against the dominant powers (Fuchs, 2015).

In this regard, this is in line with the normalisation hypothesis (Hindman, 2009), which argues that e-campaigning reinforces existing power relations and maintains the political status quo. The normalisation hypothesis also asserts that online power distribution is merely a replication of the offline power distribution. Larger and older parties might still have the upper hand because they have the advantages of a strategic department and financial capacity to deal with publicity continuously. These arguments imply that established parties use new media technology more effectively than new parties (Vergeer & Hermans, 2013). Fuchs (2015) concludes that social media is indeed embedded with contradictions and mirrors the power structures of contemporary society. It can play a role in both exerting control, exploitation and domination as well as challenging asymmetric power structures of domination and exploitation.

This notion, to some extent, is reflected in the online political communication scenario in Malaysia. The 2008 Malaysian general election was well known for the unprecedented use of social media, particularly by the opposition parties during their campaigns. The 2013 general election, however, showed that BN had quickly caught up in the utilisation of social media. A content analysis of the most prominent hashtag during the 2013 Malaysian general election #pru13 demonstrates that BN had absolute domination of the Twitter sphere, compared to the opposition group, although this domination was not reflected in the election vote share (Kasmani, Sabran, & Ramle, 2014). In addition, although the opposition parties were the early adopters of social media, the current most popular Facebook page and Twitter accounts among politicians in Malaysia are from BN.

The recent 14th General Election in May 2018, however, saw the opposition coalition, *Pakatan Harapan* (PH), which mainly used social media as its campaigning platform, end the

ruling BN's six-decade-long monopoly and win a historic election. It was the country's first transition of power since independence more than half a century ago. The victory of PH, which used mainly social media platforms as campaigning tools in the 2018 General Election, has reinvigorated discussions regarding the power of social media in politics. This is in line with the argument of social media as an "equaliser" and how social media enables candidates from opposition parties to create more online visibility. Further to this, due to the low operation costs, opposition parties with low campaigning budgets were able to disseminate information and interact with potential voters. Based on the innovation hypothesis (Hindman, 2009), social media is believed to have the potential to narrow down the existing gulf in candidate visibility by empowering the disadvantaged and small parties. This will result in an equalising effect, by changing existing power structures (Vergeer & Hermans, 2013).

## POLITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Since political communication on Twitter provides a context for interesting sociopolitical action, the political discourse analysis (PDA) has strong potential for offering a detailed analysis of the possible motives of politicians who communicate through the social media. It is particularly suitable for investigating why politicians say what they say, and how they say it. Van Dijk (1997) defines political discourse analysis both as a political discourse and a critical discourse. In line with the critical discourse analysis approach, political discourse analysis particularly deals with the reproduction of political power through political discourse, including the various forms of counter-power against such forms of discursive dominance (Dunmire, 2012). In particular, such an analysis deals with discursive conditions and consequences of social and political inequality as a result of such domination (Fairclough, 1995).

Political discourse analysis emphasises on understanding the changing practices of language use in political communication through social media and how it connects with the wider processes of social and cultural change (Fairclough, 1992). Political communication on Twitter could demonstrate how the voices of powerful individuals and groups in politics are represented in the form of everyday speech where social identities, relationships and distances are collapsed. Through Twitter, political elites are expected to speak in everyday language (Fairclough, 1992). This also means that Twitter can be regarded as affecting the ideological work of transmitting the voices of power.

Political discourse on Twitter is essential for understanding the political process in today's world. The political discourse on Twitter not only involves the official 'administration' but also the wider field of politics, including propaganda, campaigning and influencing or being influenced by citizens or 'public opinion'. This article examines closely the political discourse of Twitter, which includes written texts, visuals or videos as a form of social and political action. The categorisation and analysis of Twitter talk as political discourse may not always be easily identified as political. This is because many of such postings on Twitter during a campaign or even informal posts with citizens may have multiple goals, where public and private, informal and formal discourse genres, may become mixed (Van Dijk, 1997; Dunmire, 2012). The genre of political communication on Twitter is not only different from television, radio or newspaper articles, but also varies in the way it is produced, distributed and consumed. Twitter genres can be associated with a particular style, which is "informal", "conversational" or "casual" (Scott, 2015).

## ANALYSIS

This article presents a political discourse analysis of the language used by the former Malaysian Prime Minister in his Twitter posts. The analysis is based on a corpus of @NajibRazak tweets, at the time when he was the Prime Minister, from 1 December 2016 to 28 February 2017. During this period, there were 276 Twitter posts by @NajibRazak, with an average of 3 tweets per day. There are several reasons why this particular period was chosen. First, January 2017 marked the launch of *Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia* (PPBM) by the opposition leader at that time, Mahathir Mohamad, which signalled the coming together of opposition groups to openly contest BN in the upcoming election (Tang, 2017). Secondly, this was also the period where Najib Razak was beset by a corruption allegation where he was implicated in a global investigation exposed by a Wall Street Journal report which alleged that more than \$700 million had flowed from the state fund of 1MDB to Razak's personal bank account (Lee, 2017). Thirdly, although he was dogged by the 1MDB global corruption scandal, Razak appeared to be at the top of his game during the general assembly of the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) in December 2016 and managed to command the unflagging loyalty of the party during the assembly (Banyan, 2017).

The sample of @NajibRazak tweets will be analysed at both the topical or macro level, and lexical or micro level. This includes identifying the political themes and the extent to which his political discourse highlights preferred topics, such as his own policies and political actions or conversely, his opponents and political enemies. The analysis at the macro level will also examine the participants or agencies that contribute to Razak's political discourse on Twitter, particularly those from elite groups (Dunmire, 2012; Van Dijk, 1997) and the public. Further, the macro analysis will also look into the predicates of semantic propositions, such as how Razak's political events will appear on his Twitter posts and how his personal, private, non-elite, trivial or everyday acts predicate his Twitter conversations.

At the lexical level, the analysis will concentrate on the meanings of words used and the level of lexical choice and variation. This article will look at a more subtle lexical choice, particularly the use of pronouns, which can denote political polarisation: us vs. them (Bramley, 2001; Zupnik 1994). The use of the political plural 'we' or possessive 'our' may carry many implications for the political position, alliances, solidarity and other sociopolitical positions of the speaker (Dunmire, 2012; Van Dijk, 1997)

### *Topical Level*

Findings show that topically, the political discourse of Najib Razak's tweets from 1 December 2016 to 28 February 2017 is primarily related to the political system, ideology, institutions, political processes, political actors, and political events of the government.

Looking into the agency of Najib's posts, the participants in his Twitter conversation are usually confined to elite groups. In total, 79 of his Twitter posts mentioned an individual as the object of the sentence. Of that figure, 60 of them involved elite actors and only 16 were individuals who are neither politicians nor powerful or influential elites. It is interesting to note that Najib's Twitter posts of elite individuals repeatedly mention his meeting or his attendance of events with royalties. As shown in samples 1–4 below, there is regular mention accompanied by pictures of his meeting with the royal family including his meeting with the King of Malaysia Sultan Muhammad V and attending royal events. The phrases such as "accompanied His majesty the King..." in [1] and [3], "had a chance to talk with Crown Prince of Kelantan" in [2], and "...was received in audience and had friendly chat..." in [4], show attempts by Najib to show his affinity and friendliness with the Malaysian monarchy.

1. *Merafak sembah*, accompanying SPB Yang di-Pertuan Agong Sultan Muhammad V at the National Palace last night for a ceremony to celebrate His Majesty King Salman.  
*Merafak sembah mengiringi SPB Yang di-Pertuan Agong Sultan Muhammad V di Istana Negara malam tadi bagi majlis meraikan Baginda Raja Salman* (February 27).
2. At the National Palace today, had a chance to talk with YMM Tengku Mahkota Kelantan, TYT Sabah and His Excellency Tunku Mahkota Johor.  
*Di Istana Negara hari ini, sempat berbual bersama YMM Tengku Mahkota Kelantan, TYT Sabah dan juga DYAM Tunku Mahkota Johor* (February 23).
3. Accompanying SPB Yang di-Pertuan Agong Sultan Muhammad V at the 245th Council of Rulers meeting chaired by His Royal Highness the Sultan of Perak.  
*Mengiringi SPB Yang di-Pertuan Agong Sultan Muhammad V di Mesyuarat Majlis Raja-Raja ke 245 dipengerusikan oleh DYMM Paduka Seri Sultan Perak* (February 23).
4. *Menjunjung kasih* His Majesty the Sultan of Perak and His Majesty the Sultan of Selangor. Was received in audience and had friendly chat at a dinner just now.  
*Menjunjung kasih DYMM Sultan Perak & DYMM Sultan Selangor. Berkesempatan mengadap & berbual mesra di majlis santapan malam sebentar tadi* (February 23).

This strategy to show affinity with the Malaysian monarchy is not unexpected of Najib given that he is also the leader of The United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), Malaysia's largest political party, and a founding member of the BN coalition. The monarchy's function in reality is about protecting and defending the rights of the Malays and the Islamic religion and this is in line with UMNO's *raison d'être*, which is to represent and defend the Malay-Muslim interests.

In the 12th and 13th general elections in 2008 and 2013 respectively, the ruling BN lost its two-thirds parliamentary majority to the PH alliance. The Malay votes were evenly split between BN and PH parties and that eroded UMNO's influence as the foremost formidable protector of Malay-Muslim interests. In states like Perlis, Terengganu, Perak, Kedah and Selangor, when elections results reveal no clear majority for any one party or the elected Assembly members are divided on their choice of leader, the King takes on an important role and, the prime minister must yield to the King's selection for the post of chief minister. This has elevated the monarchy's position as a competitor for the Malays' political allegiance.

The post-2008 period has forged a new relationship between UMNO and the monarchy, which is consensual and complimentary. For the people, post-2008 has revitalised the image of the monarchy as the most potent symbol of Malay unity and hegemony. This means an embattled UMNO needs to show its cooperation with the monarchy as reflected in Najib's tweets (Hamid & Ismail, 2012).

Occasionally non-elite individuals would appear in Najib's Twitter posts. As shown in samples [5]–[8], non-elite individuals were mostly described as a group rather than as individuals and the posts contained pictures of them with Najib. The pictures were mostly taken during his political visits. However, there were a number of posts that highlighted non-elites as individuals. In sample [9], a post describes how "Ponvannan Murthy" received pre-skilled training assistance from a government agency, which resulted in an improvement of his earnings. Samples [10] and [11] show Najib's tweets relaying his sympathy to a "Pn Bidah" and "Rahim Sarbini" with pictures of him visiting their houses. These appearances of non-elite individuals in Najib's tweets, however, have a special rhetorical effect. They represent persuasive discourses "with a personal touch" and highlight how government initiatives have helped these individuals.

5. (I am) swarmed with cheerful faces this morning at Kampung Sri Makmur! #wefie  
*Dikerumuni wajah-wajah ceria pagi ini di Kampung Sri Makmur ! #wefie* (February 25)
6. Pedalling a bike this morning with the Gen Y of Kedah in Alor Setar Square. People of Kedah are cool indeed!  
*Kayuh gerak pagi tadi bersama orang muda Gen Y Kedah di Dataran Menara Alor Setar. Orang Kedah memang sempoi!* (February 12)
7. Having Nasi lemak for breakfast with the fisherman this morning in Sungai Bilis LKIM Sg Sembilang, Kuala Selangor. Thank you everyone who was present at the ceremony.  
*Sarapan nasi lemak bungkus brsm warga nelayan pg ini di Jeti LKIM Sg Sembilang, Kuala Selangor. Terima kasih ramai yg hadir meriahkan majlis* (February 3)
8. With the workers at Pengerang Integrated Complex. Officiating the Propylene fractionation column assembly, the highest and heaviest in Asia, same as Airbus weight!  
*Brsm pekerja di Kompleks Brsepadu Pengerang. Rasmikan pemasangan turus pemecahan propilena tertinggi & terberat di Msia, berat sama dgn Airbus!* (December 5)
9. Murthy Ponvannan received pre-skills training in partnership with YKSM, (his) revenue rose from RM3 thousand to RM9 thousand.  
*Ponvannan Murthy dapat bantuan latihan pra-kemahiran dgn kjsama YKSM, pendapatan naik kpd RM 9 ribu drpd RM 3 ribu.* (January 26)
10. He did not expect to get it, but thank God for sustenance, now Rahim has a comfortable house of his own.  
*Beliau tak sangka boleh dapat, tapi Alhamdulillah rezeki Allah SWT, kini Rahim Sarbini ada rumah sendiri yg selesa.* (December 27)
11. Visiting Pn Bidah at her home in Kg Sepauk. Although she has been paralysed for 5 years, she is still enthusiastic, happy chat earlier. Hope assistance can help.  
*Ziarah Pn Bidah di rumahnya di Kg Sepauk. Walau dah 5 thn derita sakit lumpuh dia msh brsemangat, gembira sembang td. Moga bantuan dpt bantu* (December 17)

Besides mentioning meetings and encounters, the predicates of semantic propositions in the Najib's tweets mainly show preferences for political events and political actions – especially relating to what the government has done or has decided.

The main topic revolves on the salient point that “the government has done a lot” particularly for the economy. The word “government” is repeatedly employed in his tweets. An analysis of agency shows that his tweets directly place the “government” as the subject or the doers, which presents them as holding the power in decision making for the country. The usage of verbs such as “the government spent” in sample [12], “the government agreed to launch” in [13], and “the government provides” in [14] describes what the government has done to help citizens. Often, the transitivity of Najib's tweets place government projects as the implied agent of the sentence.

In sample [15] for example, *Skim Latihan 1Malaysia* (SL1M) was said “to have helped” 99,000 graduates. In sample [16], the tweet describes, “A lot has been executed” on the River of Life KL project to transform the Klang River in Kuala Lumpur. In sample [17], a government housing project called PR1MA is described as “another success of the Barisan Nasional government”.

Notice that most of the predicates of the samples given tend to be past-oriented either in the present perfect passive tense or the simple past passive. Past-oriented tweets by Najib triggers presupposition that the government has been continuously doing a lot for the citizens and appears to be an attempt to prove the success of government initiatives.

12. This year, the government spent almost RM10 billion in subsidies and incentives in various sectors.  
*Pada tahun ini, kerajaan membelanjakan hampir RM10 bilion subsidi dan insentif dalam pelbagai sektor (February 17)*
13. The government agreed to launch an initiative, "Negeraku" which is rooted in the spirit of love towards Malaysia.  
*Kerajaan bersetuju melancarkan satu inisiatif "Negeraku" yang bertunjangkan semangat cintakan Malaysia. (February 8)*
14. Generally, for higher education institutions, the government provides 90% of the cost of education and students only need to pay 10%.  
*Secara amnya, bagi IPT, Kerajaan menanggung 90% kos pendidikan dan pelajar cuma hanya perlu membayar 10% sahaja. (January 6)*
15. Since its launch in 2011, the 1Malaysia Training Scheme (SL1M) has assisted a total of 99,000 graduates.  
*Sejak Program Skim Latihan 1Malaysia (SL1M) dilancarkan pada 2011, seramai 99,000 graduan telah dibantu. (February 21)*
16. Reviewing the #RiverofLifeKL project yesterday at Masjid Jamek. A lot has been executed and it can be enjoyed by people from April 2017 onwards.  
*Meninjau projek #RiverofLifeKL di Masjid Jamek semlm. Banyak yg telah dilaksanakan & akan dapat mula dinikmati oleh rakyat April 2017 kelak (February 21)*
17. Reviewing PR1MA in Sg Petani, over 2 thousand units here. Another milestone for @barisanasional government to provide affordable housing across the country.  
*Tinjau PR1MA di Sg Petani, lebih 2 ribu unit di sini, satu lagi kejayaan Kerajaan @barisanasional sediakan rumah mampu milik seluruh negara (January 18)*

Very few of the predicates of Najib's tweets are about his personal, private, trivial or everyday acts. There were about seven posts related to non-political and personal matters. One was a retweet congratulating Manchester United's Wayne Rooney on being the all-time record goal scorer, two of them were about food he enjoyed as shown in samples [18] and [19], one was about a view that amazed him in samples [20], another was about asking his followers how they spend their school holidays [21] and one post introduced to his followers "the latest addition" to his family [22], accompanied by a picture of a kitten. The last two tweets received more than 3,000 likes and 2,000 retweets, 900% more than his average likes and retweets.

18. (I) was cycling in Alor Setar for 3 km, but had fermented fish, gravy, grilled meat and fermented glutinous rice. Need to peddle more when (I go) back.  
*Di Aloq Staq tadi kayuh gerak 3km, tapi makan tgh hari pekena ikan pekasam, gulai, daging bakar, tapai pulut. Balik kena kayuh lebih lagi ni (February 12)*
19. If (you) are in Johor, don't forget to try *Kacang Pol*. Very delicious.  
*Kalau diJohor jangan lupa cuba Kacang Pol. Sangat sedap (December 6)*
20. A view from the 35th floor of *Kerjaraya Tower*. Very impressive!  
*Pemandangan dari tingkat 35 Menara Kerjaraya . Sungguh mengagumkan ! (December 7)*

21. How was (your) school holidays? I saw a lot of beautiful family pictures on vacation on IG. *Alhamdulillah, (I) am happy a lot of (you) can take advantage of the holidays to spend time with loved ones. Mcm mana cuti sekolah? Sy lihat di IG byk gmbir cantik2 keluarga bercuti. Alhamdulillah, gembira ramai dpt memanfaatkan cuti brsm yg tersayang* (December 22)
22. My new addition to the family ... Leo. (January 5)

### *Lexical Level*

Analysis at the lexical level indicates that the most common pronoun used by Najib is I, in 44 posts. On a personal level, this shows authority and personal responsibility as well as commitment. The personal pronoun used by Najib indicates his wish to bear responsibility (Karapetjana, 2011). This is exemplified by phrases such as “I will monitor” in sample [23], “I received a lot of complaints” in sample [24], “I instructed” in sample [25], and “I want a detail investigation” in sample [26]. At the same time, these predicates appear to be persuasive rhetorical moves to convince his followers by demonstrating that he is doing the job and he has taken the preferred course of action.

23. Received a report that a ship with 31 passengers and crew missing in Sabah. The search and rescue has been launched, I will monitor the developments. *Terima laporan sebuah kapal dgn 31 penumpang & krew hilang di Sabah. Operasi mncari & menyelamatkan tlg dilancarkan, sy akan pantau perkembangan* (January 29)
24. I received a lot of complaints, not supposed to happen. We must ensure that public facilities are always clean and comfortable to be used by all. *Saya banyak terima aduan, tak sepatutnya berlaku. Kita perlu pastikan kemudahan awam sentiasa bersih dan selesa utk kegunaan semua* (February 14)
25. Met with the manager at the launch of KL KLIA ATCC earlier. I instructed that the cleanliness of public toilets should always match the level of international standards. *Bertemu pengurus KLIA di pelancaran KL ATCC tadi, saya arahkan kebersihan tandas awam sentiasa brada pada tahap piawaian antarabangsa* (February 14)
26. I take seriously the tragedy in Sabah, and I want a detailed investigation to be conducted to identify the cause of the incident. *Saya pandang serius tragedi bot karam di Sabah, dan saya mahu siasatan terperinci dilaksanakan untuk kenalpasti punca kejadian* (January 30)

At the same time, the use of “I” in Najib’s tweets may have a distancing effect (Karapetjana, 2011). Using the pronoun I presents Najib as an individual, speaking from his own perspective, and highlighting his accomplishments. It shows Najib’s tendency to emphasise the importance of his authority. This is shown in the usage of words such as “I have received reports” in sample [27], “I called” in sample [28] and “I announce” in sample [29]. The elements of an unequal power structure of a vertical top-down form of governing is more pronounced in Najib’s tweets as shown by sample [30] in which he describes the completion of the MRT project as a new year “gift” to the citizens. It can be argued that the usage of the pronoun “I” in Najib’s tweets has strong hints of a paternalistic and government-knows-best approach where citizens mostly seem content to have the state in the driving seat (McCourt, 2012). The discourse appears to support what Ramraj (2003) called the idea of soft authoritarianism justified in terms of Asian values where the government is led by honourable men whom the citizens can trust. This is in contrast to the idea of governance in many

Western democracies where the government should be given as limited powers as possible, and should always be treated with suspicion unless proven otherwise (Ramraj, 2003).

27. I have received reports from KKM regarding the improvement that I suggested during a visit to Serdang Hospital last month.  
*Saya tll terima laporan KKM berkenaan penambahbaikan yg saya cadangkan sewaktu lawatan ke Hospital Serdang bulan lps. (February 14)*
28. I call all these projects *infrarakyat*. Learn more in the following webpages...  
*Kesemua projek ini saya gelar Infrarakyat. Ketahui lebih lanjut di laman berikut... (February 16)*
29. I announced a new policy for PRIMA. We will raise the household income eligibility limit and shorten the moratorium.  
*Saya umumkan dasar baru bagi PRIMA, kita akan tingkatkan had kelayakan pendapatan isi rumah & pendekkan moratorium. (January 17)*
30. I am pleased to announce a New Year gift to the people of Malaysia, @MRTMalaysia Sungai Buloh-Semantan and free feeder bus for a month until January 16, 2017.  
*Sukacita saya umumkan hadiah tahun baru utk rkyt Msia, @MRTMalaysia Sg Buloh-Semantan & feeder bus percuma selama sebulan hingga 16 Jan 2017. (December 15)*

There were 38 posts that used the pronoun “we” in Najib’s tweets. Karapetjana (2011) states that the plural form of the pronoun “we” is used when the decisions are controversial and to impart a sense of collectivism and shared responsibility. And this sense of collectivism is clearly demonstrated in many of Najib’s impassioned posts about the Rohingya crisis. As shown in samples [31]-[33], the pronoun “we” was mostly used as the subject to condemn the Myanmar government for the torture, murder and killing of the Rohingya ethnic group.

31. We cannot remain silent watching the suffering of Rohingya ethnic group without feeling sad and not extending help.  
*Kita tidak boleh berdiam diri melihat penderitaan dialami etnik Rohingya tanpa rasa pilu dan tidak hulurkan bantuan (February 4)*
32. We fight for the rights and justice for the Rohingya ethnic group, as we have and will continue to do for our brothers in Palestine.  
*Kita berjuang utk hak dan keadilan buat etnik Rohingya, sebagaimana yang telah & akan terus kita lakukan buat saudara kita di Palestin (January 19)*
33. We call upon the government of Myanmar to stop the discrimination and attacks on the Rohingya ethnic group immediately and bring those who do it to face trial.  
*Kita seru kerajaan Myanmar hentikan diskriminasi & serangan ke atas etnik Rohingya serta-merta & bawa mereka yg lakukannya ke muka pngadilan (January 19)*

The use of the pronoun “we” by Najib also reflects grouping and creates a distinction between “us” and “them” (Bramley, 2001; Van Dijk, 1997). As shown in samples [34] – [37], “us” in this context mainly refers to “Barisan Nasional” and “them” is the opposition group. In this context, the use of the pronoun “we” shows Najib’s solidarity as leader and a member of BN.

34. What we the government of @barisanasional promised, we fulfilled. This 16 December, @MRTMalaysia becomes the new icon for the country, bringing benefit to the people.  
*Apa yg kita Krjn @barisanasional janjikan, kita tunaikan. 16 Dis ini, @MRTMalaysia jadi ikon terbaru kpd ibu negara, bawa manfaat kpd rkyt. (December 13)*

35. They have tried various means within their power to divide us. But they do not know UMNO and the loyalty of its members.  
*Mrk telah cuba plbg cara dlm bidang kuasa mrk utk pecahbelahkn kita. Ttp mrk tidak kenal UMNO & kesetiaan anggotanya.* (December 11)
36. The Malaysian economy is not what the opposition claims, as if our country is going bankrupt and on the verge of crisis.  
*Ekonomi Malaysia bukan spt yg diuar-uarkan pembangkang, seolah-olah negara kita ini bakal di ambang muflis & krisis.* (February 16)
37. Projects such as the Pan Borneo Highway, Rapid Pengerang, MRT and many more that we have delivered were not luxury projects or aimed at boasting.  
*Projek2 seperti L/raja Pan Borneo, Rapid Pengerang, MRT & byk lg yg telah kita laksanakan bukanlah projek mewah atau bertujuan utk bermegah2.* (January 26)

It is important to note that Najib did use three of the most important tools in Twitter, namely '@reply', retweets and hashtags. However, the usage was only limited to the realm of the political process, political actors, and political events of his government. Najib's Twitter conversations, therefore, did not add much meaning to conversations on Twitter as a part of a community-driven movement to create a form of public communication (Zappavigna, 2011). From 276 tweets, only 27 employed hashtags and most of them were related to government projects such as #JomNaikMRT and #BR1M2017. Najib only retweeted seven times and three of them were from the tweets of his office – the Prime Minister office – @PMOMalaysia and his 1Malaysia initiative – @1MOfficial. There were 14 mentions in his tweets but they mainly came from the twitter account of government agencies such as @MOFmalaysia and @MagicCyberjaya, his own party, @barisannasional, and his ministers, @zahid\_hamidi and @Khairykj.

## CONCLUSION

From the political discourse analysis perspective, Twitter communication from Najib to the public embodies common sense assumptions, which treat authority and hierarchy as natural. The government is assumed to be the unchallengeable “father” who exercises custodial roles and is in a position to determine what the public should get; it is considered natural that the government should make decisions about the needs of the public, and that the public should comply and cooperate and obey the “father”. From the analysis, it is possible to find assumptions of this sort embedded in the forms of language that were used, particularly in the usage of the pronouns “I” and “we”, analysis of transitivity, as well as emphasis on elite actors.

This article argues that Najib's Twitter account, which is by far the most followed politician account in Malaysia (at the time this article is was written), shows that the power structure, the ruling coalition's incumbent advantage and access to government resources and political “common-sense” from the ruling government political elites are played out on social media (Gomez, 2014). This, to a certain extent, supports the argument for the normalisation hypothesis, that online political campaigns reinforce existing power relations and the power distribution online is merely a replication of offline power distribution (Vergeer & Hermans, 2013). Larger and older parties like BN still have the upper hand because they have the advantage of financial capacity to deal with publicity issues continuously through social media. According to Jasin (2016), Najib Razak was believed to have a group of social media team and communication strategists which he dubbed as “propaganda operators” who helped

him with his social media campaign. The opposition leader at that time, Mahathir Muhammad, had just started his official Twitter account in December 2016, and could barely keep up with the number of Twitter posts from Najib Razak.

This however, did not translate into votes in the 2018 general election. Although Najib Razak retained his parliamentary seat in the 14<sup>th</sup> General Election with a higher majority, his party suffered a stunning loss to the opposition coalition, PH, helmed by his former leader, Mahathir Mohamad.

Although this article suggests that Najib Razak's usage of Twitter communication has yet to significantly change traditional political relationships, there is still ample of territory left unexplored. This article is also aware that there are differing styles of Twitter use among politicians, depending on their profile (Thimm, Dang-Anh & Einspänner, 2012; Jackson and Lilleker, 2011; Sæbø, 2011). A comparative study with other politicians from the same or a differing party would shed further light on the patterns of usage and styles of communication on Twitter.

What is not covered in this paper and should be covered in future studies is the resistance and change that are continuously happening, particularly on Twitter, where people can reply and speak directly to politicians. This may show the effectiveness of resistance and the realisation of change on people developing a critical consciousness of domination in language, rather than just accepting it.

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