



# Newcomers in politics: A thematic analysis of 2023 Malaysian State Election candidates' TikTok content

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## ABSTRACT

In Malaysia, the 2023 State Election was held on August 12, 2023. This election only involved six states, namely Selangor, Kedah, Kelantan, Terengganu, Negeri Sembilan, and Penang. It also had a large number of candidates from different backgrounds. Among them were new candidates nominated by their respective parties. New candidates are also known as a “political newcomers”. These newcomers were of various backgrounds, including artists, athletes, entrepreneurs, and academicians. All of them presented distinctive manifestos and viewpoints that was shared on social media. In this context, this research aims to examine the content uploaded by four different newcomers in their personal social media account, which is TikTok. A total of 173 uploaded contents were analysed utilising descriptive analysis and thematic analysis. Based on the analysis, six different themes emerged reflecting the political newcomers' background including education, social welfare, economy, health and sports, corruption, and safety/security. Three major themes: education, social welfare, and health & sports stood out as the most significant and relevant to research objectives, highlighting the issues that resonate most with voters. The study underscores the significance of social media, particularly TikTok, as a powerful tool for disseminating content on critical national issues. By focusing on education, social welfare, and health & sports, political newcomers tapped into the concerns and aspirations of the electorate, in the hopes of gaining their support and eventual votes.

**Keywords:** *Malaysia election, politics, TikTok, social media, political newcomers*

## INTRODUCTION

During election campaigns, political candidates will engage with potential voters and supporters in order to gain support and trust (Tumasjan et al., 2010). However, before sharing their messages with voters, for example on social media, political parties and political candidates must clearly craft their ideas and content. This increases the assortment of topics and issues related to their campaign for newcomers in politics. Newcomers are considered inexperienced new candidates of various backgrounds such as athletes, artists, academicians, and businessmen. For the 2023 State Election in Malaysia, 110 newcomers were selected as candidates to represent their political parties.

Each of these newcomers developed their individual manifesto. A manifesto is a public proclamation of one's ideas, ideals, goals, and intentions. It defines one's future vision, the improvements they wish to see, and the values they espouse. Depending on the circumstances, these manifestos might address a wide range of issues. For example, manifestos for political newcomers may include policy suggestions, governance goals, and basic principles that influence their decision-making.

Social media is one of the most essential platforms that newcomers may utilise to communicate their manifestos. The significant impact of social media on political campaigns throughout the world is undeniable. As of April 2024, there were 5.44 billion internet users worldwide, which amounted to 67.1% of the global population. Of this total, 5.07 billion, or 62.6% of the world's population, were social media users (Petrosyan, 2024). With their rapid expansion, social media platforms have become an essential component of today's political campaigns. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, including newer ones like TikTok, have altered the way election campaigns are run, how politicians and the general public access political content, as well as how we learn about politics, form opinions and attitudes, and ultimately engage or disengage in the electoral process as a whole.

Candidates can nurture relationships with their constituents through Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, which will increase engagement in their campaigns. Each candidate's campaign is meticulously devised to reach their audience and put the candidate and party in the best possible light.

Communication technology has changed the landscape of global politics in recent years. Political parties and candidates are increasingly using social media to gain public support. Recently, there has been a significant growth in the number of political parties and political candidates using social media, and it has become an essential aspect of today's political landscape. The media's function in the modern era has changed to meet a variety of goals. In the past, the media was used as a powerful tool to instil nationalism in Malaysia's multicultural populace. The media's job has grown to include many other functions that benefit the welfare of the people these days. According to Chan-Olmsted (2006), media companies carefully analyse a number of factors before determining the patterns of media usage.

The integration of communication technology, particularly social media, into the political arena has reshaped the methods by which political parties and candidates engage with the public. The evolving role of media, both traditional and digital, reflects a broader shift towards more dynamic, interactive, and multifaceted approaches to political communication and public engagement. This transformation underscores the importance of adapting to new technologies and strategies to effectively navigate the contemporary political landscape.

According to Okan et al. (2014), social networking has become significant among political parties and political candidates to obtain more support and feedback, discuss ideas and opinions, and participate in public debates. Many scholars have studied the use

of the Internet for political communication purposes (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999; Hill & Hughes, 1998; Jones, 1998; Lev-On, 2011; Lilleker & Jackson, 2010; Livingstone, 1999; McChesney, 2000; Mcnamara, 2008; Norris, 2001; Schweitzer, 2008; Towner & Dulio, 2012; Vaccari, 2008).

Indeed, the emergence of social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter ushered in a new era of political communication (Bimber & Davis, 2003; Carpenter, 2010). Since then, politicians throughout the world have continued to capitalise on new opportunities provided by Web 2.0 applications, launching new campaigning methods, forms of funding, mobilisation, and data collection.

This research aims to explore the content uploaded by four political newcomers in their TikTok account during the 2023 Malaysian State Election. The findings will hopefully provide a better understanding of trends in the use of social media such as TikTok and the main elements of the content communicated by political newcomers.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The research objective is to explore the key themes and issues emphasised by political newcomers in their TikTok content during the 2023 Malaysian State Election.

## POLITICS IN MALAYSIA

Malaysia is a constitutional monarchy that practices parliamentary democracy. Although it is a legally democratic country, certain political and public liberties are limited. Individuals in Malaysia have the option of choosing their representatives through elections once every four or five years, according to the Malaysian Federal Constitution (Hamat et al., al 2012). Based on the results of the 2023 General Elections and State Elections, there is a positive trend of social media usage as well as strong indications that politicians and voters are both influenced by social media.

With the strong influence of social media on politics, economy, personal life, and almost every other aspect, and its rapid expansion, it is difficult to predict its widespread effect on the world (Ashraf, 2022). To survive, political parties have swiftly embraced modern technology and capitalised it. Platforms for interaction, such as Facebook and Twitter, are increasingly utilised, particularly among political personalities (McNair, 2012). Tan and Firdaus (2023) also described that political literacy is deemed a precious commodity in the political process given that it is the substance of a healthy, functioning democracy.

The way that Malaysians vote today is influenced by the new media (online) to a large extent. Apart from political parties and politicians using the new media to highlight a lot of issues, the general society also relies on the new media to understand and keep abreast about issues and information related to politics. Politics-related topics are very popular in the new media, particularly blogs. Although the new media serves as a platform for the expression of ideas and opinions, it may also incite anti-government sentiments and damage the harmony of Malaysia's plural society. Additionally, content or postings that have not been screened or edited appropriately to take sensitive matters into consideration can potentially incite resentment among readers.

In general, social media allows individuals to interact, share information, and participate in public dialogue (Donath & Boyd, 2004; Ellison et al., 2007). This leads to greater and more regular public involvement in political participation and interaction

(Kruikemeier et al., 2013). Carlos et al. (2022) also contended the unprecedented global social media usage has been effective in tearing down traditional boundaries in a number of areas, including politics.

Parties in Malaysia such as UMNO, PAS, DAP, KEADILAN, and AMANAH have their own social media campaigns, which are vital in gaining support from voters. Some of the strategic advantages that parties have identified when pursuing online strategies include the use of social networking to help them bond, engage with their supporters, collect money, and exercise influence on the news agenda (Johnson & Johnson, 2011). Candidates in political campaigns view social media strategically. Political participation is most typically accomplished through social networking, as well as editorial or face-to-face media. When elections approach, each party will rally its supporters and race to gain the support of those who are still undecided (Karlsen, 2009).

### *The use of social media in politics and election for information dissemination*

It is impossible to deny that social media has an enormous effect on delivering information to voters, particularly during the election season. Social media has become an essential tool in politics and is widely employed in political and electoral campaigns. The new media has become more potent than ever before, thanks to the rapid expansion of cutting-edge technology. As mobile devices like smartphones provide seamless dissemination of information, they have become a crucial tool for people to access news, regardless of location. According to Newman et al. (2017), 46% of smartphone users read news content in bed, instead of going to work. The rise of social media in politics has been particularly notable. Political parties and candidates are increasingly leveraging these platforms to disseminate information, mobilise supporters, and influence public opinion. The interactive nature of social media also allows for direct communication between politicians and voters, bypassing traditional media gatekeepers.

The use of social media in the political environment has a substantial influence on not only political organisations and candidates, but also on the general population. According to Tan and Firdaus (2023), political information is deemed a precious commodity in the political process given that it is the substance of a healthy, functioning democracy. This can be attributed to social media which allows a two-way engagement and interaction between political organisations and candidates and the public. For example, social media proved to be an critical determinant in President Barack Obama's election campaign in 2008 (Tumasjan et al., 2010).

Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are highly effective in transmitting the ideas and views of the Presidential candidates on major issues such as economic challenges, national security, and many others. In another study, Saufiyyan (2017) discovered that, in 2016, President Donald Trump used social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook more than YouTube to promote his political propaganda. However, in recent times, it appears that TikTok has overtaken the other social media platforms and remains the fastest growing platform.

According to Mohamad Yusuf et al. (2022), social media has become prevalent and influential, especially among the youth, as seen in the recent Malaysian 15th General Election. Despite the clear evidence of social media's influence, the full extent of its impact on politics is yet to be fully unravelled. Given that the younger generation is the most active on social media, it is crucial to comprehend why they rely on these platforms for political information and how this reliance shapes their political views and behaviours.

## *TikTok*

Over the past few years, following TikTok's inception, there has been a sharp surge in usage amongst teenagers. Young political newcomers in particular, also use them primarily with the aim of boosting their popularity and delivering their opinions and manifestos.

Short-form video pertains to any video with a duration of less than 60 seconds. Short-form videos are highly appealing for lots of individuals, particularly the younger demographics, because of the availability of multiple filters and editing tools, the ability to "stitch" together contents created by other users, and the option to incorporate diverse sounds and music (Montenegro, 2021). TikTok is widely regarded as one of the most popular social media applications for short-form content (Potrel, 2022). TikTok, created by its Chinese parent company ByteDance in 2016, has undergone various stages of political content moderation and restriction techniques (Wells et al., 2020). It was created by the creators of the app Musical.ly. TikTok, also known as Douyin in China, debuted in September 2016 and is run by ByteDance. ByteDance has maintained both versions of the app since then (Abidin, 2021).

During the 2020 United States presidential election, TikTok became a popular social media platform, drawing politicians from the wide political spectrum looking to engage with people. According to Hong and Kim (2016), social media has steadily become a compelling force in the political arena in recent years. Politicians increasingly rely on social media to communicate with their supporters. Today, TikTok has taken over televisual flow, supplanting a movie or lengthy video with an endless scrollable series of small movies (Kendall, 2021). Scrolling is accompanied by an interaction that optimises diversion and minimises boredom to produce a singularly alluring user experience.

Today, TikTok is widely used by politicians and their communication teams to build trust with potential voters. Previously, politicians depended heavily on existing social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Google, and YouTube. TikTok, is now the most recent addition to their social media toolset for building enduring relationships with prospective voters. Due to TikTok's predominantly young user base, politicians are eager to utilise the app as a means to engage with young voters and win them over. For instance, while Trump heavily relied on Twitter and Facebook for his campaigns in 2016 and 2020, Biden opted for TikTok, Instagram, Pinterest, and Snapchat to target the younger demographics (Alter, 2020).

Medina Serrano et al. (2020) studied a collection of TikTok political videos from the United States' Republican and Democratic parties in order to explore how users interacted with one another in regard to political problems and assess political communication on TikTok. The study found that political communication was much more prevalent on TikTok compared to the other social media platforms. They also discovered that supporters from both political parties in the United States are young and behave similarly on the site. Republican candidates published more political content with numerous answers, while Democratic candidates participated in more cross-party dialogues.

Cervi et al. (2021) investigated if and how Spanish political parties utilise TikTok in their political communication, by analysing the content published by Spain's five major political parties. They concluded that while TikTok is popular across the world, Spanish political parties do not fully utilise the platform's advantages, but instead use it as a one-way communication medium. The most popular posts were those that were participatory and focused on political entertainment.

## *Political propaganda*

Over the years, political propaganda has been widely disseminated through various media platforms including new and conventional media, social media, television, radio, and print

material. Almost all political parties have made use of media channels, in some way or other, to deliver political propaganda messages to voters, particularly during political campaign periods. According to Farkas and Neumayer (2018), propaganda is inextricably linked to media channels such as radio, television, film, and newspapers. Interestingly, propaganda is considered as a uniquely modern phenomenon interwoven with mass communication channels in the twentieth century.

The rise of propaganda in the context of digital media has necessitated a new understanding of the relationship between propaganda and new media (Auerbach & Castronovo, 2013; Jowett & O'Donnell, 2012). The introduction of social bots on digital media platforms, for example, introduced novel forms of propaganda (Shao et al., 2017). According to Montag et al. (2021), in their efforts to connect with the vital youth demographic, politicians acknowledge the importance of diversifying their communication channels. The inclusion of TikTok and WhatsApp reflects an acknowledgment of the evolving social media landscape and the preferences of younger voters. This multi-platform approach underscores the dynamic nature of political engagement in the digital age, as candidates seek to leverage a variety of online spaces to effectively convey their messages and engage with the diverse interests of first-time voters. However, the potential of digital media for decentralised communication should not be equated with a fundamental democratisation of knowledge, transcending current power relations and control.

According to Herman and Chomsky (2008), the rise of digital media constitutes a critical new form of communication for political movements around the world. Certain political parties have used the media to deliver political propaganda messages to voters, particularly before elections or during campaign periods. In addition, mass media is also utilised to manage controversial issues, convey the image of a political personality, and communicate the manifestos of the candidates with the aim of engaging viewers, especially potential voters. Propaganda is not a new phenomenon in industrialised countries.

Propaganda, in particular, causes divisions among society's many classes. In the arena of politics, Amila (2020) argued that the media is a weapon for propaganda rather than information. Information is power, referring to the ability to predict what happens next. Mohd Isa et al. (2022) cautioned that if political parties fail to embrace social media, a crucial tool deeply embedded in the lives of today's millennials, they risk falling behind in promoting their ideas, campaign materials, and manifestos.

## METHOD

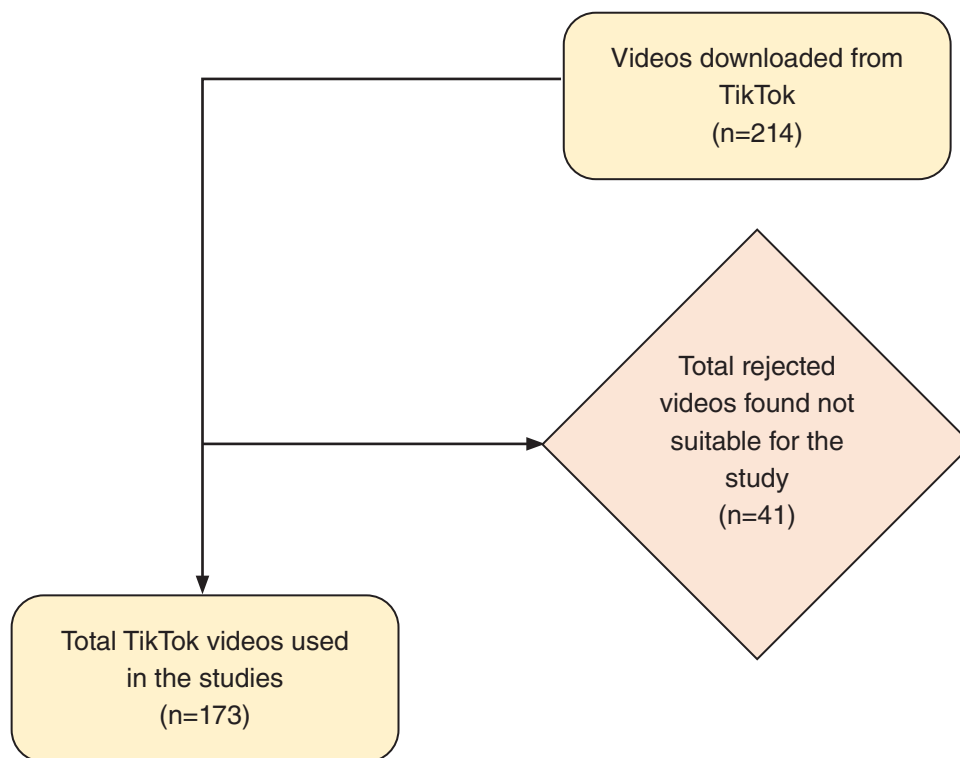
The study employed a qualitative content analysis method (thematic analysis) to understand the key themes and issues emphasised by political newcomers in their TikTok content. Content analysis can be briefly defined as the systematic (based on scientific criteria), quantitative or qualitative analysis of the characteristics of various messages (Berelson, 1971; Kiriazi, 2001; Neuendorf, 2002).

Qualitative data analysis is distinguished by the “merging of analysis and interpretation, and frequently by the merging of data collection with data analysis” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 461), and thematic analysis serves as a distinguishing tool. According to Saldana (2015), despite the fact that thematic analysis originally surfaced as a data analytic method in the 1970s, it was not generally employed until Boyatzis established precise standards and principles for “Coding and Theme Development”. Jnanathapaswi (2021) explained that thematic analysis helps researchers analyse a large range of data sets to find patterns and develop themes.

In other words, thematic analysis constitutes a systematic, reproducible technique of transforming words into fewer categories of meaning, based on specific codification rules (Miller & Brewer, 2003; Stemler, 2001), allowing researchers to examine big amounts of data through a systematic methodology (Poulakidakos & Armenakis, 2014). All the analyses were conducted using the Atlas Ti software to identify the main political themes found in the selected candidates' TikTok accounts.

### *Data collection*

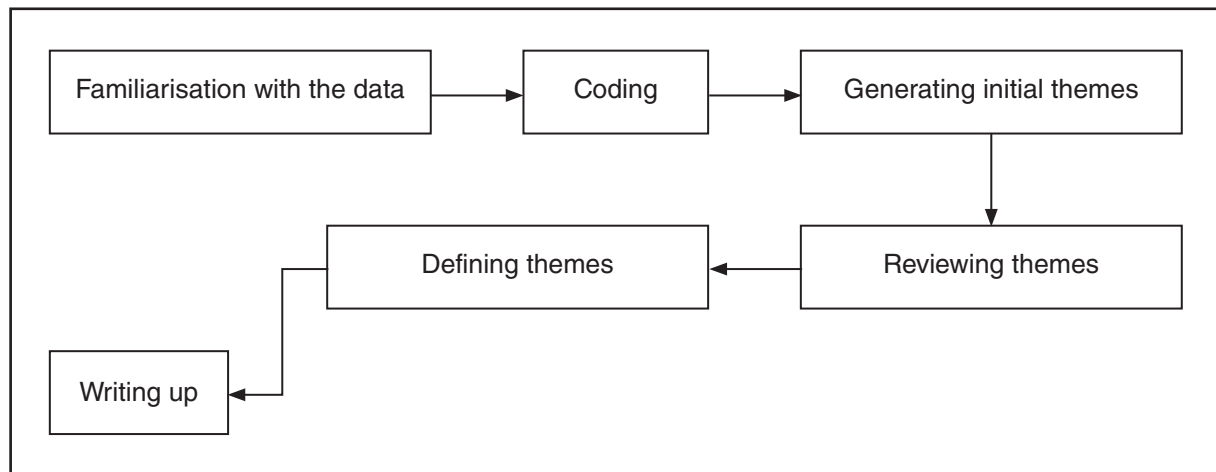
Before data collection, specific parameters were discussed and agreed upon by the research team to define the dataset. The data for this study comprised TikTok postings by four political newcomers throughout the campaigning period of July 31 to August 11, 2023. A total of 214 TikTok videos were collected from the political newcomers' TikTok personal accounts. Of these, 41 were found not suitable and removed. The remaining 173 videos were deemed fit for analysis. The dataset comprised of video graphics, audio, subtitles, and hashtags. For each video, basic information such as date posted, date saved, video length, number of likes, comments, and shares were gathered and catalogued.



**Figure 1.** Selection process of TikTok videos

### *Thematic analysis*

The researchers conducted a thematic analysis to identify the main themes featured in the videos of the political newcomers. Thematic analysis is a constant-comparative method that involves reading and rereading of transcripts systematically to identify common themes and then categorising them accordingly. To maintain the necessary rigor in the analysis, the study adopted the six-phase process as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) (Figure 1).



**Figure 2.** The six-phase process of thematic analysis (Clark & Braun, 2006)

## FINDINGS

To meet the objective of this research, the thematic analysis focused on data such as types of video content and elements of messages to potential voters. As stated earlier, TikTok videos served as the primary unit of analysis. From a total of 173 videos collected from four political contenders' TikTok accounts, the analysis identified six themes: education, social welfare, economy, health and sports, corruption, and safety/security. The frequency of the themes in the videos of the political newcomers are presented in Tables 1 – 4 while Table 5 shows the overall breakdown. Three themes with the highest frequencies will be discussed next.

**Table 1.** Themes identified in the TikTok videos of PN1 (political newcomer 1)

Themes identified						
	Education	Social welfare	Economy	Health & sports	Corruption	Safety/ Security
<b>PN1</b>	V2, V3, V4, V6 V7, V16, V22, V23, V24, V33, V34, V37, V38, V39, V41, V42, V51, V52, V53, V54, V65, V66, V67, V69, V74, V75, V76, V80	V5, V13, V14, V15, V17, V18, V28, V32, V40, V43, V50, V55, V63, V64, V68, V73, V77, V79	V1, V2, V19, 29, V35, V44, V49, 56, V61, V62, V70, V72	V6, V11, V12, V20, V21, V30, V31, V36, V45, V46, V57, V58, V60, V71, V78	V7, V10, V25, V47, V59	V8, V9, V26, V27, V48, V81

Note: V# refers to video number

**Table 2.** Themes identified in the TikTok videos of PN2 (political newcomer 2)

Themes identified						
	Education	Social welfare	Economy	Health & sports	Corruption	Safety/ Security
<b>PN2</b>	V9,16	V1, V2, V6, V7, V10, V11, V15, V16, V17, V19, V20	V3, V8, V12, V18	V14	V4, V5, V13	

**Table 3.** Themes identified in the TikTok videos of PN3 (political newcomer 3)

Themes identified						
	Education	Social welfare	Economy	Health & sports	Corruption	Safety/ Security
PN3	V4, V14, V22, V28, V42	V1, V2, V9, V12, V17, V21, V26, V30, V33, V38, V40, V44	V3, V8, V34	V5, V6, V10, V11, V13, V16, V18, V19, V20, V24, V25, V29, V31, V32, V36, V37, V39, V42, V43	V23, V35	V7, V15, V27

**Table 4.** Themes identified in the TikTok videos of PN4 (political newcomer 4)

Themes identified						
	Education	Social welfare	Economy	Health & sports	Corruption	Safety/ Security
PN4		V3, V4, V6, V7, V9, V10, V11, V16, V18, V19		V8, V12, V13, V14, V15, V20, V21, V22, V25	V2, V17, V23, V24	V1, V5

**Table 5.** Themes identified in TikTok videos (by frequency and percentage)

Theme	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Education	35	20
Social welfare	50	29
Economy	19	11
Health & sports	44	26
Corruption	14	8
Safety / Security	11	6

### *Social welfare*

Based on the analysis, social welfare is the most dominant theme, with a frequency of 29%. Political newcomer 1 (PN 1) posted a total of 18 (31%) videos concentrating on social welfare issues, followed by political newcomer 3 (PN 3) with 14 videos (24%), political newcomer 2 (PN 2) with 11 videos (19%) and lastly, political newcomer (PN 4) with 10 videos (17%). Skidmore (1971) defined social welfare as any attempt to modify or enhance a wealthy position, both physically, psychologically, and socially.

On another note, Weinberg (1970) defined social welfare as “helping activities or government social programs for poor communities.” In the context of poverty, social welfare must be seen from the economic and social standpoint in terms of income, property, services, and the underlying causes of poverty. Garland (2016) and Midgley (2016) agreed in unison that social welfare in itself is a political creature because someone either benefits or loses in its cause, making politicians cautious in making related commitments.

Politicians care about social welfare since it is the key topic that becomes a top priority that is hotly debated during elections. As a result, planning and implementing programmes or strategies that support the well-being of the people should be prioritised to maintain the country’s peace and stability.

In this regard, “social welfare” was also the primary concern of the political newcomers in their electoral campaigns, as reflected by the TikTok videos they had posted. Social welfare is a predominant theme or issue for voters during elections because it concerns their “bread and butter” issue and quality of life. This is also exemplified

in government budgeting as it had committed about RM90 billion for the country's economic stimulation, which indirectly improves the general public's quality of life (Bernama, 2021).

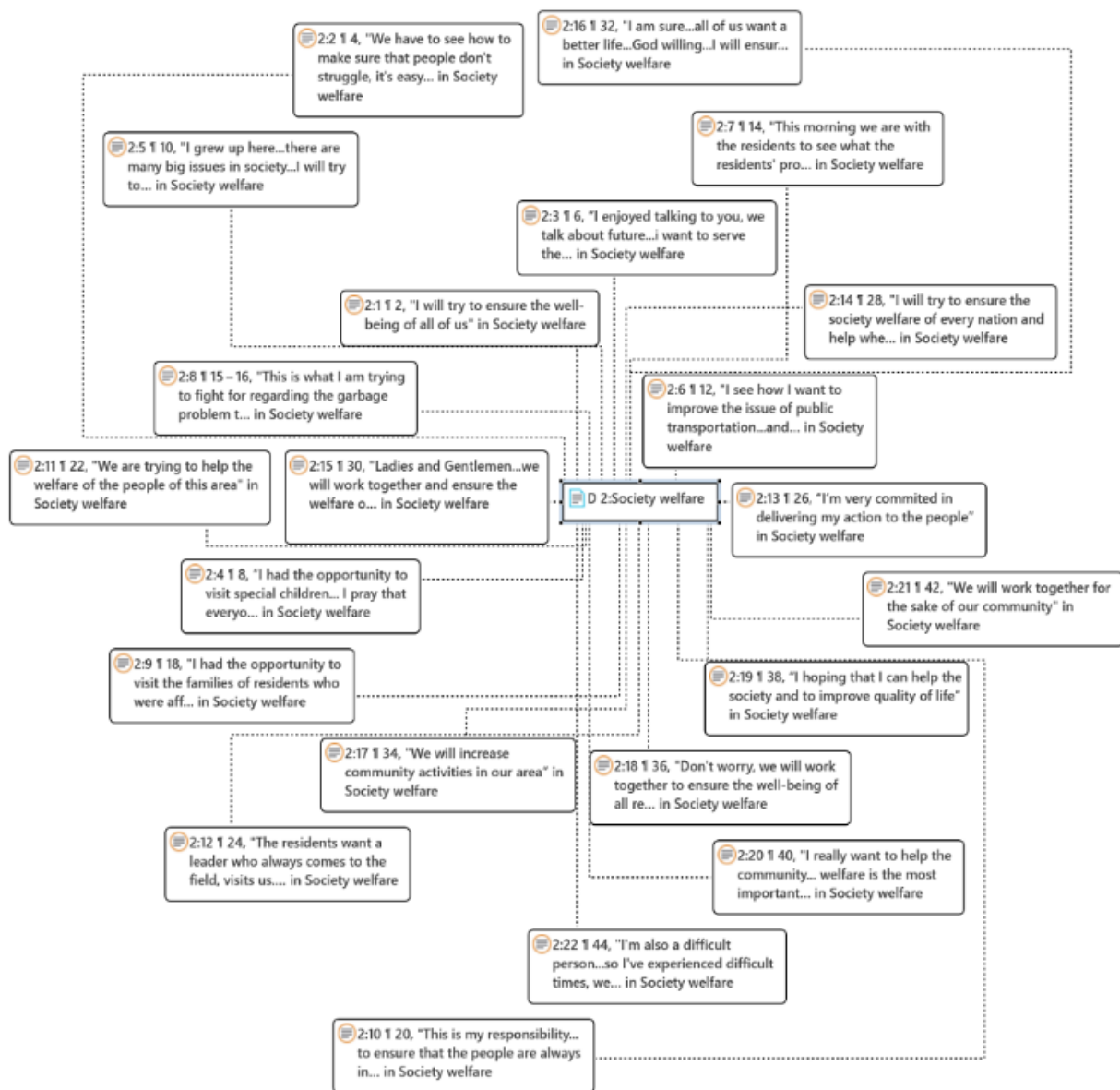


Figure 3. Video excerpts that reflect the social welfare theme

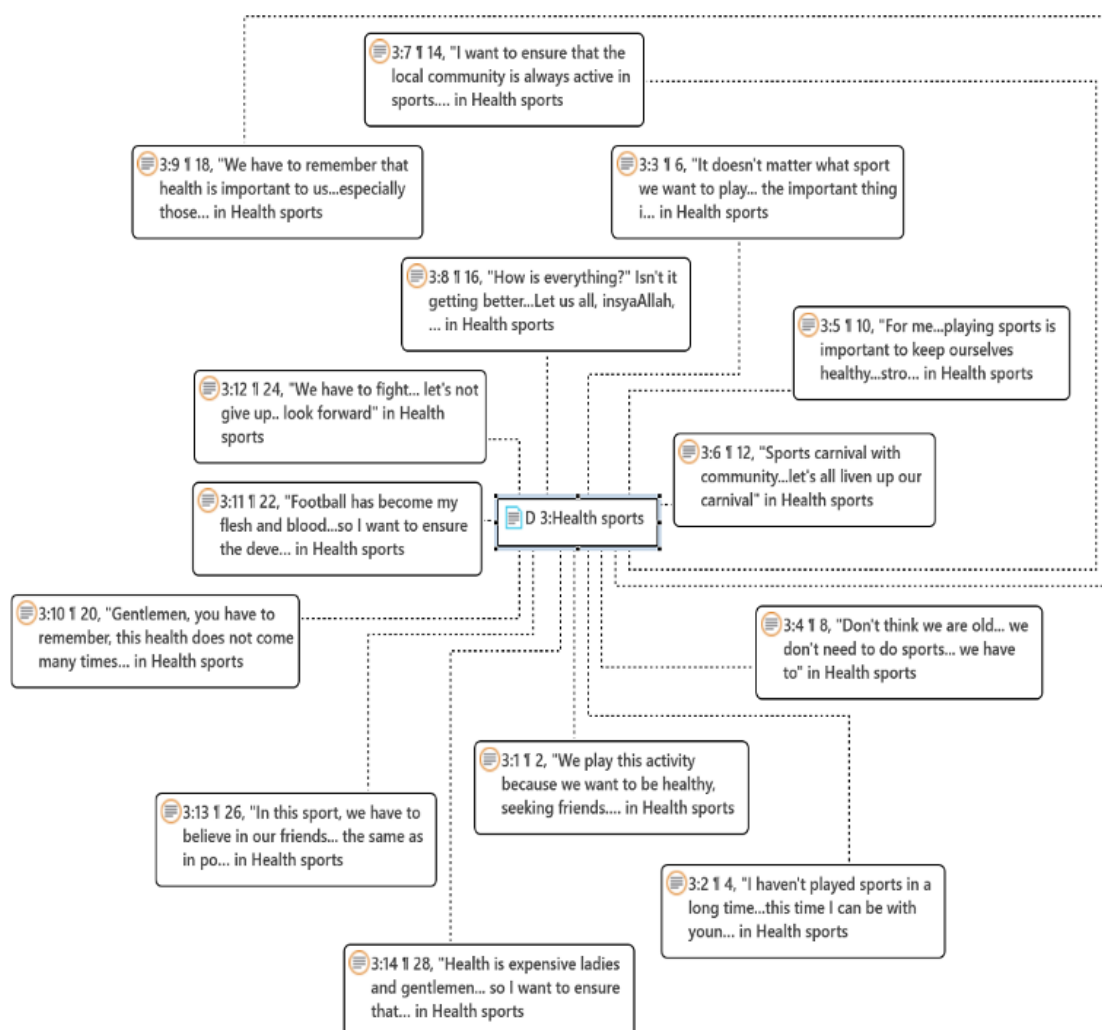
### Health and sports

Health and sports was the second highest dominant theme that emerged from the analysis with a total of 44 videos (26%). Political newcomer 3 (PN 3) posted a total of 19 (43%) videos concentrating on health and sports, followed by political newcomer 1 (PN 1) with 15 videos (34%), political newcomer 4 (PN 4) with 9 videos (20%), and lastly, political newcomer 2 (PN 2) with only 1 video (2%).

A possible reason for the highest number of posting from political newcomer 3 (PN 3) on this particular theme, could be his background, which revolves around football. This appears to influence the type of videos posted on TikTok. This finding also aligns with Davies et al. (2012) who contended that online social media platforms possess significant potential for public health initiatives due to various factors.

Multiple studies have demonstrated the potential of social media as a means of health interventions, access to and connection with supportive social circles, discussion of emotions, promotion of healthy behaviour change and counselling, health campaigns, medical education, monitoring of disease outbreaks, health research, and other health-related purposes. Abrams (2019) added to the growing body of research by highlighting social media's potential for various health interventions, including building support networks, managing emotions, promoting healthy behaviours, and facilitating education and research.

The political newcomers may have perceived health and sports as a main issue during the election campaigns to give them an advantage, due to the age of their voters. This suggests that the electoral demographic is often used as a guide in selecting topics for video content in political communication. Aside from that, another mainstay of the uploaded video content is the representation of the multiracial community in this country.

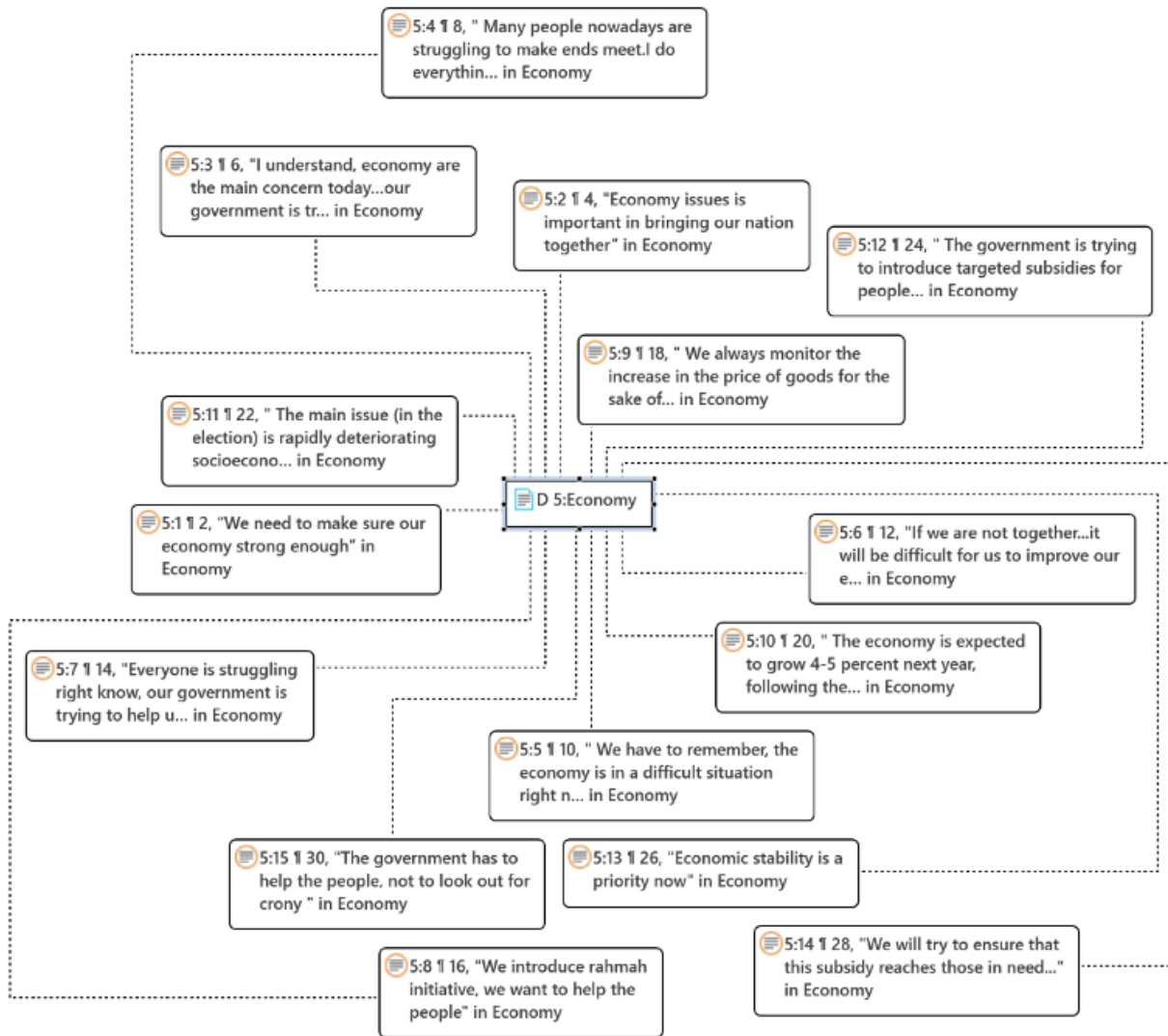


**Figure 4.** Video excerpts that reflect the health and sports theme

### *Education*

A person's education is a crucial aspect that opens up plenty of opportunities and paves the way for future success. Idris et al. (2012) stated that education plays a crucial part in creating the future generation that is capable of addressing and resolving the pressing issues facing our society.

Many political candidates choose education as the primary focus of their electoral campaigns, similar to the political newcomers selected for this study. Political newcomer 1 (PN 1) posted a total of 28 (80%) videos related to educational content. This is due to the candidate's background as an academician. Other than that, political newcomer 3 (PN 3) posted a total of 5 (14%) videos while political newcomer 2 (PN 2) only posted 2 (6%) videos with content related to education.



**Figure 5.** Video excerpts that reflect the education theme

Overall, findings demonstrate that new media such as TikTok is widely used as a medium to provide awareness and information on critical issues to the community, as part of political campaigns.

## CONCLUSION

### *Study implications*

In conclusion, this study significantly enhances our understanding of the dynamics involving political newcomers and their impact on elections, specifically through the lens of political communication on social media platforms like TikTok. The study focused

on the 2023 Malaysian State Election and involved an in-depth thematic analysis of the TikTok videos uploaded by four political newcomers. Findings revealed six key themes that were prominently featured in the videos: social welfare, health & sports, education, economy, corruption, as well as safety and security. These themes are crucial as they reflect the primary concerns and interests of the electorate, highlighting the issues that resonate most deeply with voters. The prominence of these themes in the TikTok videos posted by political newcomers indicates their strategic efforts to align their messages with the public's priorities. This alignment not only helps in gaining voter attention but also in building a connection with the electorate based on shared concerns and aspirations.

The three predominant themes were education, social welfare, and health & sports. These topics were not only central to the newcomers' campaign strategies but also resonated strongly with voters, reflecting their top concerns and hopes. The study highlights the critical role that social media, particularly TikTok, plays in modern political communication. By leveraging these platforms, newcomers were able to effectively engage with the electorate and address the issues that matter the most to them. The emphasis on education, social welfare, and health & sports indicates that these areas are key priorities for both candidates and voters. Overall, this study demonstrates the power of social media as a tool for sharing important national issues and shaping political discourse. Political newcomers can successfully use these platforms to connect with the public and advocate for the changes that voters want to see.

The study also underscores the critical role of social media in shaping political narratives and influencing voter sentiments. TikTok, with its unique format and widespread popularity, serves as an effective platform for political newcomers to frame their messages and engage with a broad audience. The thematic patterns uncovered in this research provide valuable insights into the strategic communication efforts of these new candidates, illustrating how they use TikTok to craft and convey their political messages. The use of ATLAS.ti 8 for thematic analysis allowed for a detailed analysis of the content uploaded, revealing the specific characteristics and strategies employed by political newcomers. This methodological approach ensured that the analysis was thorough and provided a comprehensive understanding of the themes present in the TikTok content.

Further, this research contributes to a significant knowledge gap regarding the function of social media in elections, particularly among political newcomers. It highlights the importance of social media as a tool for political communication and voter engagement. The findings suggest that social media platforms like TikTok are not just supplementary to traditional campaign methods but are integral to the success of modern political campaigns. This is especially relevant for newcomers who may lack the resources and recognition compared to established politicians. Furthermore, the study emphasises the need for further investigation into how both traditional and social media influence voter behaviour and election outcomes, especially among different demographic groups. Understanding the impact of media on various voter segments is crucial for developing targeted and effective communication strategies.

This study also deepens our understanding of the intricate relationship between effective political communication and electoral success. By identifying key thematic patterns and demonstrating the importance of social media content, persuasive communication strategies that appeal to diverse voter segments can be drafted for future political campaigns. The insights gained from this research can inform the crafting of tailored messages that address the specific concerns of different voter groups, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of campaign efforts. As the political landscape continues to evolve, understanding these dynamics is crucial for devising communication techniques that

resonate with voters. In short, successful political communication increasingly depends on the ability to use social media platforms effectively to reach and engage with the electorate.

Finally, this research not only broadens our comprehension of contemporary political campaigns but also paves the way for further exploration into this ever-changing field. By examining the content shared by political newcomers, this study offers a fresh perspective on political communication and contributes to a more comprehensive discussion on the strategies used in election campaigns. The insights provided by this research can guide future studies and help political candidates, campaign managers, and researchers better understand the role of social media in modern electoral processes. It also presents an alternative perspective by examining the content uploaded by political newcomers during the election campaign period. By revealing the specific characteristics of content shared by political newcomers, it presents other researchers with a range of perspectives. The findings also help explicate the hidden aspects of communication used by politicians, especially those who are new to the political arena. Consequently, this leads to a more thorough comprehension of the dynamics involved in election campaigns and enhances the discussion on approaches for political communication.

### *Limitations and future research*

This study examined content creation and impact of social media, specifically TikTok, on political newcomers in Malaysia. It shed light on how these individuals utilise this platform to engage with their audience and shape their political narrative. However, this narrow focus also means the research findings might not capture the full range of social media strategies used by political newcomers across other platforms like Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram. Thus, future studies are essential to explore the broad spectrum of social media usage among politicians, rather than confining the analysis to a single platform.

Political communication in the digital age is complex and multifaceted, with different platforms offering unique ways to reach and interact with constituents. By concentrating solely on TikTok, this research may have missed out on understanding how newcomers integrate multiple social media channels into a cohesive strategy. Future studies should therefore expand their scope to include a variety of social media platforms. This broader approach would provide a more holistic view of how politicians, both newcomers and established figures, leverage social media to disseminate information, influence public opinion, and connect with voters.

Additionally, this study focused exclusively on political newcomers, which, while insightful, means this study did not consider how experienced politicians might use TikTok differently. Including a diverse range of political figures in future research could reveal contrasting strategies and help us understand how social media usage evolves with political experience. By comparing the approaches of newcomers and seasoned politicians, researchers can better grasp the nuances of digital political communication and the different challenges and opportunities faced by these groups.

Lastly, this study is geographically limited to Malaysia, which has its own unique political and cultural context. Future research could benefit from a comparative approach, examining political newcomers in different countries or regions to see how context influences social media use. This would not only enhance the generalisability of the findings but also contribute to a richer, more complex understanding of global political communication trends.

In summary, while this study sheds important light on the role of TikTok in the political strategies of Malaysian political newcomers, future research should consider a wider array of social media platforms and include both new and established politicians

from various regions. This broader approach will help build a more comprehensive and robust understanding of the ever-evolving landscape of political communication in the digital era.

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