FACEBOOK AS AN ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORKING TOOL: THE CASE OF THE MALAYSIAN ARMY

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ABSTRAK

Facebook has become increasingly important social media channel, not only in civilian society but also in the military sector. As one of the social media platforms, it can be used as a strategic communication tool for opinion-forming and psychological operations. Facebook is used by big and small organizations to communicate within the public sphere. It can also facilitate communication and interaction with potential recruits, family members, and friends. The Malaysian Army, the biggest component in the Malaysian Armed Forces (MAF) is aiming to fulfill its vision as a credible Army force in achieving peace and stability for the country. After eighty-six years since its inception, the question rises whether the Malaysian Army remains relevant in communicating information to the general public about security and sovereignty of the nation. Hence, the Malaysian Army optimised its communication strategy by using Facebook to communicate to the people at large in the cyber space. In this study, we conducted a content analysis of the Malaysian Army Facebook to explore its potential in building the influence and empowerment of the Malaysia Army. The results indicated that the the Malaysian Army had moderately operated its Facebook as a communication channel for various military operations and activities, hence it is suggested that they optimize the social media platform to instil the sense of patriotism and the confidence among the people.

1.0 Introduction

Today, social media channels like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram are undeniably among the channels that have become the people's choice from all over the world (Amir, 2019). Since the advent of internet and the development of social networking, Facebook media operates in a dialogic mode (many sources to many receivers) (Gottsegen, 2015). Apart from its substantial and pervasive impact within organizations, communities, and individual's communication, Facebook is also seen as a tool of geostrategic potential in this 21st century (Facebook.com and myspace.com). This means that it makes use of two-way communication methods and techniques – enabling the building of build trust, the exchange of knowledge and perceptions, simplifying efforts to achieve mutual understanding, and enabling assessment of risks and opportunities. Based on the two-way communication it operates, the exchange of information, dissemination of ideas and speedy replies which take place at rapid speed, Facebook has been successful in playing its role in developing ideas and will find its field of use not just among common people, but also leaders, politicians and academicians. Facebook, one of the most popular online social networking is used

by 1.1 trillion users while YouTube has access to 1 trillion users and its communities have emerged for people aspiring to or working in a wide range of professions (Guo, 2010). This inevitably has led to ease of access where communication interaction is concerned and brought about lightning speed to information distribution. The main objectives of this paper are to identify trends of information uploaded in the Army Facebook and to analyse the impact of Facebook as a means of communication tool by the Malaysian Army and to assess the potential of Facebook as a tool for promoting Malaysian Army to the public.

2.0 Literature Review

Facebook Page comes to life when we engage our supporters and constituents (Cohen and Shade, 2008). Facebook was founded under the leadership of Mark Zuckerberg at Harvard University in early 2004, with the initial intention to create a student directory containing student profiles and pictures (Hodge, 2006). It was opened to the general public in 2007. Our message reaches a broader audience when people like, share, or comment on our posts. The average person on Facebook has over hundreds of friends; and when we engage with our posts, our friends can see those interactions and connect with our Page. Facebook, the most popular social network site in the United States and worldwide, reported an average of 968 million daily active users in June 2015 (Cichocki and Unbehaven,1993). Boyd and Hargittai (2010) stated that more than half of U.S. adults over 65 who were online were members of Facebook. Facebook, one of the most popular online social networking is used by 1.1 trillion throughout the world (Internet Users Survey, 2014). This inevitably has led to ease of access where communication interaction is concerned and brought about lightning speed to information distribution. Based on the efficiency and effectiveness of this new media and its substantial and pervasive impact within organizations, communities, and individual's communication, it is also seen as a tool of geostrategic potential in this 21st century.

Research indicates that Malaysians are among the most active users of the social media domain as a virtual communication medium. In the Internet Survey Users 2014 report published by Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC), Facebook has shown a marginal growth of Malaysian user base at 86.8% and 12.6% of them are having more than one Facebook account (MCMC, 2018). Based on how it operates, it reflects that Facebook allows the exchange of information, dissemination of ideas and responses happens speedily. Facebook has been successful in playing its role in sharing imformation not only among the common people, but also other professionals. According to MCMC (2018), Malaysia had Internet Users that increase up to 28.7 million. This statistic increased rapidly compared to 2016. This represents an increase of 4.2 million. 93.1% of users in 2018 use a social media platform, compared to 89.4% in 2016. The survey aslo estimated that there were about 24.6 million social networking users in 2018, of those, 97.3% owned a Facebook account, making it remains the most preferred social networking platform in the country.

The Malaysian Army (will be addressed as the Army in the rest of this article), the biggest component in the Malaysian Armed Forces (MAF) formation aims to defend Malaysia's interests, stability of region and sovereignty from external threats and assist the public authority to achieve peace and harmony. In war and during emergency, the Army will oppose or block and consequently destroy enemies of the nation. They will also act towards any emergency or violence assisted internally or externally. The Army has been given few tasks, amongst them are to defend the country's frontier and border from foreign intruders at all times, to assist the Royal Malaysian Police (RMP) and other Public Authorities in a situation of natural disaster or calamity and to execute peacekeeping operations under the banner of the United Nations and other international organizations.

The army also forms a steady vision of readiness where its main objective is to form a modern, credible and balanced Army force which is able to comminucate its mission to the public at large. Therefore, these roles and responsibilities must be enlightened effectively to the public via the social media like Facebook. The Malaysian Army operates its own Facebook under the account *Tentera Darat Malaysia– Aerospace/Defence* as a medium to highlight the force's activities and to connect with the people at large. The Army Facebook is expected to instil the public's confidence in the Army's credibility and capability in carrying out their tasks. This Facebook has been activated on 10 March 2013 where the operation and the control tasks are parked under the Army Cyber Monitoring Cell, called *Pusat Teknologi Maklumat Tentera Darat* (PUSTEKMA). The content for this Facebook page is prepared by the Army Public Relation Officer, who is fully responsible in providing coverage of the activities forwarded by the units and brigades under the Army divisions. Until recently, the Army Facebook has been visited by more than 170,000 viewers (Facebook Tentera Darat Malaysia, 2016). Subsequently, on 19 January 2016, a resolution has been made

for the establishment of the Regional Digital Counter-Messaging Communications Centre (RDC3) which will function as a communication platform between the Army and the public.

3.0 Research Methodology

This study used evidence from Malaysian Army's Facebook to identify the significant factors that influence their interest and decision to adopt Facebook for communication. A qualitative field study was used whereby a content analysis was used to empirically examine the effectiveness of the Army Facebook as a tool of effective communication to people at large. This was found to be the most appropriate method to carry out in order to find out the growing importance and the use of Facebook as a tool of communication. The units of analysis selected for this study were the videos of the popular tasks or critical issues carried out and highlighted by the Malaysian Army in its Facebook. The videos were chosen as units of analysis because they function more effectively in convincing the viewers and influencing the public's perception of the Army's capability in carrying their tasks. Analysing the related videos posted would be able to reflect wheter the the Army Facebook could connect the Army and the people at large.

4.0 Result and Discussion

Facebook is one of the best medium that can help buid the confidence of Malaysians and international community towards the Army's readiness of security and sovereignty aspects. The capability to handle conflicts be it internal or external, will mirror the credibility of the Army, parallel with its main tasks in defending the country from being intruded by the enemies. On January 15, 2020 the video about *"Majlis Perutusan Perintah Ulung Panglima Angkatan Tentera Ke-21 - Wisma Pertahanan 15 Januari 2020"* posted on the Army Facebook had attracted 4.2 thousand viewers. On August 15, 2018, the video about the Army's acitivities posted had tickled the attention of more than 12 thousand viewers. Another video about recruitment posted on September 20, 2018 had caught attention of 12 thousand viewers. These big numbers of people watching the videos indicated that the people were interested to know what the Army was actually doing apart from defending the country. This is supported by Gate and Podder (2015) who claimed that Facebook can also be used as the medium to recruit staff.

Even though facebook has become prevalent in the army's world, however, it was unfortunate to discover that the Malaysian Army had not really maximized their Facebook for communication, propaganda or advocates. Obviously, displaying the Army's main tasks through Facebook should not have been limited to only activities conducted by the Army, but it could also be utilised to disseminate information related to the other responsibilities of the Army. There were so many instances whereby the Army did not post their important activities. For example, the video on the 2016 Fire Power Training which shows the credibility and capability of the Army's personnel and weapons (see Figure 1), has attracted 269,462 viewers. However, the promotional video clip was not posted by the Army, but by TV3 through its Majalah 3 documentary show promoting the Army's elite unit - the 10th PARA Brigade. This video has recorded 208,766 viewers. Another video entitled *Tentera Darat Teguh Siaga ATM Gah ATM Perkasa,* posted on the Army Facebook on September 3, 2015 which has recorded 13,067 views potrayed the respective Army corp's and regiment's tasks and duties. This indicated that the Army Facebook was used as a medium to educate the public about regiments and corps' expertise, roles and tasks. The utilization of the Army Facebook was seen as an effort to display its tasks and responsibilities for the nation.

The other video which reflected the worst flood that swept Malaysia at the end of December 2014 and early January 2015 had recorded how the secondary task shouldered by the Army in assisting Malaysian citizens facing the natural disaster. The coverage on the Army's secondary task, which is centred on the Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW) concept, should be widened not only through the conventional media, but also through the social media like Facebook. The display of an Army personnel carrying a flood victim to be sent t the Flood Relief Centre (as shown in Figure 1), is the best visual display on the Army Facebook. Such display has to be increased in the effort to shape the people's confidence and appreciation on the sacrifices made by members of the security forces all this while. This will enable continuous information dissemination which will not only involve assistance during natural disasters such as flood, but also cover tasks that include the the inter-cooperation of various agencies (Azman Anuar, 2015).

Figure 1: The effort of Army personnel to rescue a flood victim in Kelantan (2004) as posted on the Army Facebook.

The Army Facebook is also seen as an effort to display its secondary tasks as it could assist the operation centres involved during the flood in coordinating food and monetary contributions from corporate bodies, communities and individuals. Such announcement made through the Army Facebook (see Figure 2) had enabled a two-way interaction between the Army and the people in the process of channelling the contributions to the victims. This Facebook has been viewed by 3400 people and shared by 68 users. Therefore, this indicated that at certain level, the Army and the people are able to get connected via the Army Facebook.

Figure 2: Announcement on the Flood Contribution Collection Centre on MINDEF's Facebook.

5.0 Conclusion

Overall, the space utilised on the Army's Facebook was not only used to highlight the Army activities. It also acted as a medium to disseminate information related to the nation's security and awaken the feelings of concern for the public to participate in the collective efforts to uphold the nation's sovereignty and security. It is vital that this feeling of concern is inculcated so that the public will realise that the responsibility for the nation's security is a shared responsibility – not the sole, exclusive rights of the armed forces only, thus the Army Facebook should not only have a role of illustrating the real responsibilities of this security force, but it can even be widened in assisting the Army to handle global issues, nurture patriotism and encourage the people for a joint effort in protecting the country's sovereignty. It could be concluded that, the Army Facebook was not fully utilised by the Army. Comprehensive utilisation will in the larger context, be able to widen and strengthen the roles and responsibility of the Malaysia Army through the dissemination of the Army's credibility, reflecting its maturity after 86 years since its inception. Only after the news of the

big flood in the East Coast of Peninsular Malaysia was posted full blast on the Facebook, then the Army Facebook began to receive attention (Azman Anuar, 2015).

Due to that, apart from posting news, it is suggested that the Malaysian Army adopts its Facebook to eradicate terrorist ideology since the terrorist organisations are pioneering the use of new media in spreading their propaganda to expand their influence and ideology. Gates and Podder (2015) mentioned how the internet, especially the social media like Facebook is being used as effective virtual propaganda machinery and medium to recruit staff. Such effectiveness is clearly shown by its media arm, for example, Al Hayat Media Centre which is doing a tremendous job in portraying an opposite side of the militant group (Fuchs, 2011). In moving parallel with information technological advancement, the Army cannot sideline the strength of social media like the Facebook which has become a medium to channel information on its roles and tasking (Fuchs, 2011). The strength of such media is unquestionable – due to its popularity which shapes the world's social network plus it plays the role to connect organizations and people. The acceptance for Facebook social pages can very much be credited to its local nature; where local languages may be used to operate the pages, making it accessible to any user (Fuchs, 2012).

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