

Has the Social Media Performed Better than the Traditional Ones for Political Advertising? An Analysis on Structural Models

Azizul Yadi Yaakop, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, Malaysia
Siti Falindah Padlee, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, Malaysia
Safiek Mokhlis, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, Malaysia
Azilah Mat Sulaiman, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, Malaysia

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Abstract

Political advertising is a type of advertising that attempts to influence upon matters of extensive political debate. It includes advertising or marketing communication with community about a political party representative or candidate, advertising about political issue or issue of public interest and advertising in relation to government politics. Nowadays, its role in the society has becoming essential especially with the arrival of the modern-day social media. During the past a few general elections in Malaysia, public witnessed changes in political campaigns with the use of advertisements not only on the mainstream television and in the newspapers, but also in other form of online media like websites. In the recent 13th General Election the use of the social media was seen as dominant. This study was conducted to investigate voters' advertising perceptions and attitudes toward political advertising in Malaysia, delivered through three different media i.e. traditional television and printed media and modern-day social media. The study confirms that attitudes toward political advertising can be predicted using two main variables namely: (i) product information and (ii) hedonic/pleasure. The study found a serendipitous finding amidst the popular use of Facebook in the recent general election. The implications of the study focus on consumers' perceptual shift in terms of the relevance of social network sites (SNS) in propagating political parties in Malaysia. The limitations of the study are also discussed.

Keywords: Attitudes towards advertising, political advertising, Malaysian 13th General Election, SEM

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1.0 Introduction

Advertising are part of our social and economic systems and it has evolved into a vital communication method to deliver information to a target group. In general advertising is defined as any paid form of non personal communication about an organization, product, service or idea by an identified sponsor. Advertising also reflects how people see themselves: who they are and who they identify with, and can enter or force a way through status, economically and socially. Advertising was claimed to be able to demonstrate wholesome values like sociability, affection, generosity, patriotism, ecumenism, personal enrichment and security (Holbrook 1987). Images shown in advertising generally provide prototypical expectations about consumption patterns, characteristics of consumers, young or old, male or female, and blue collar or professional (Hirschman and Thompson 1997).

However, advertising also faces a barrage of criticism (Yaakop, et al. 2011). A major indictment of advertising reached its peak when it was criticized by several humanities and social sciences scholars for having unintended consequences which related to its influential emphasis on materialism, cynicism, irrationality, selfishness, anxiety, social competitiveness, sexual preoccupation, powerlessness and/or a loss of self-respect (Pollay 1986; Pollay 1987).

Like any kinds of advertising, political advertising also faces the same issue. Political advertising is advertising that attempts to influence upon a matter of extensive political debate (Political election advertising: What is Political advertising). It includes advertising or marketing communication with community about a political party representative or candidate, advertising about political issue or issue of public interest and advertising in relation to government political. In spite of “no rule” ruling to the content and form of political advertising, it has become increasingly essential to campaign strategy. As a matter of fact, the current state of political advertising has been considered within the world of commercial advertising (Greening and Gray, 1994). Political advertising does not exist occasionally, the presence is apparently ubiquitous. Similar to other parts of the world, political advertising is more prevalent during the elections in Malaysia’s political scene. According to Jamieson and Campbell (2000), mass media has an important role to affect the voters’ decision to vote due to its informative role. Media is also of paramount important to inform voters about candidates’ positions and affecting the ‘preferences and participatory ethos of the electorate (Ansolabehere and Iyengar, 1995).

At this point, some preliminary questions need to be answered. Firstly, what are Malaysians’ perceptions and attitudes towards political advertising? And secondly, what kind of roles do media play in propagating political issues? Therefore, in this study, we are interested to understand Malaysian voters’ perceptions and attitudes towards political advertising specifically delivered through printed media, the television and the social media.

In Malaysia’s political scene, political advertising have been practiced since the 1960’s. In 1969 election, the use of printed media such as national newspapers to disseminate information to voters was crucial (Ratnam and Milne, 1970). Nowadays, public witness changes in political campaigns when political advertisements appeared

not only on newspapers and the television, but in many forms of modern media. Likewise, the contemporary political campaigns in Malaysia now have evolved dramatically from mainly relying on using traditional media including mainstream media (electronic and printed), videotapes, banners and flyers to advertise their agenda to using the world wide web. To the practitioners, this demonstrates how mass media plays an important role in changing political landscape in Malaysia. However, from the voters' perspective, do they think political advertising has become the key to winning any political election? This is the question that needs answers prior jumping into any bandwagon.

2.0 Political Advertising on the Television

Television has played a major role in political campaigns for a long time. Although the use of television in political campaigns has changed significantly since it was first introduced in the early 1950's, it has proven to be one of the single most important and expensive strategies that candidates employ. Television affects how the general public perceives candidates and may be the most effective campaign tool. Numerous studies have shown that voters exposed to political advertising on television retain knowledge and information about the candidates, such as their name, stance on issues, or image attributes (Atkin & Heald, 1976; Kaid, 2002; Valentino et al., 2004). Exposure to political ads is also effective in influencing viewers' evaluations of the candidates (Kahn & Geer, 1994; Kaid, Chanslor, & Hovind, 1992; Kaid & Sanders, 1978; Tinkham & Weaver-Lariscy, 1993) as well as voters' perceptions of the political process in general and their political behavior (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995; Kaid et al., 1992). In this study, the product information dimension of advertising (PI) is used to measure respondent's beliefs about advertising as a valuable source of information for products or services, in this case, information about candidacy or political parties.

The importance given by candidates and campaigns to political advertising on the television has prompted substantial research about its effects. One of the most important outcomes was the impact on voter evaluations of the candidates featured in the advertising. Candidates make use of advertising to generate positive feelings among the electorate about their own qualities or to denigrate their opponents. Research has shown that advertising exposure can influence a voter's evaluations of the candidates, either in a positive or negative direction (Kahn & Geer, 1994).

In general, television is known for its ability to evoke feelings through the use of motions, colours, sound and special effects is undeniable and it is not surprising that television advertising is placed near to the attribute "stimulating emotions" in Leong et al.'s (1998) perceptual mapping. The authors suggested that television advertising has the ability to arouse emotion and to entertain viewers, and this has made it superior to the other advertising media. In fact, mixed emotions of enjoyment and dignity stimulated by television ads influenced people's overall attitudes towards advertising (Shavitt et al. 1998). For example, one of the functions of television which was found to be highly inter-correlated with people's attitudes towards television advertising was its entertainment function; in particular, people found television advertisements were fun to watch and a lot of the ads were funny or clever (Alwitt and Prabhaker 1992). Recent analysis by Tan and Chia (2007) also upheld this notion that the hedonic/pleasure function of advertising was positive and significant in

predicting attitudes towards television advertising. In this study, hedonic/pleasure (HP) is a dimension that encompasses the individual's beliefs about advertising in terms of it being entertaining, amusing and pleasurable. With this matter in mind, it is therefore predicted that:

H_{1a}: Product information role of advertising significantly predicts Malaysia voters' attitudes towards political advertising on the television.

H_{1b}: Hedonic/pleasure role of advertising significantly predicts Malaysia voters' attitudes towards political advertising on the television.

3.0 Political Advertising in Printed Media

As mentioned earlier, the use of printed media in disseminating information to voters in Malaysia can be traced back in 1969. During that time, magazines and newspapers were the only major media available to campaigners. Its popularity was, however, declining with the introduction of television to propagate political issues. But despite the competition from the television, print media has remained important media to political campaigners because of its high-involvement impact.

Although researches on the effectiveness of print media in promoting political matter, in general, for many consumers newspapers are their primary source of product or service information. Print media is also seen as not intrusive like radio and television, and they generally require some effort on the part of the reader for advertising message to have an impact. For this reason, print media are often referred to as high-involvement media. This finding is similar to previous research showing that online advertising has the ability to deliver rich information and detail, which is also in line with other traditional media such as print media (Schlosser and Shavitt 1999; Ducoffe 1996; Brackett and Carr 2001; Lei 2000; Yaakop, A et. al 2011). Leong et al. (1998) carried out a cluster analysis and produced a dendrogram that suggested that attributes such as creating brand/product/corporate awareness, communicating product/brand image and communicating corporate image are the best to characterize the press (or print advertising media). Even adolescents at the tender ages of 14 to 19 preferred to read newspapers to find out about news and current events (La Ferle et al. 2000). For that reason, it is hypothesized that:

H_{2a}: Product information role of advertising significantly predicts Malaysia voters' attitudes towards political advertising in printed media.

With no reference to advertising in printed media as characterized by its ability to amuse and entertain readers, it is hypothesized that:

H_{2b}: Hedonic/pleasure role of advertising significantly predicts Malaysia voters' attitudes towards political advertising on printed media.

4.0 Political Advertising on Social Media

Social networking sites such as Facebook have recently offered a new outlet for political candidates to reach out to the voting population. Since this method is relatively new and able to draw mass attentions especially the youth and new

generation of voters, they are being used by many campaigners. So it is not surprising that social media went from being virtually unknown in the realm of Malaysian politics in the past few general elections to a budding form of political communication during the recent one. In an advanced country like the United States, Web sites have been used by candidates for fund-raising and communicating directly with supporters for so many years. However, the recent 2013 general election showed that the social media has become increasingly popular platforms for political participation (Quily, 2008; Smith, 2009; Vitak et al., 2009). In fact, the use of Facebook for political purposes was so significant that it caused major headlines in news (Rawlinson, 2007).

It is well known that politicians view social networking as a legitimate form of publicity and that they use it accordingly. However, to what extent do voters make full use of political advertising on the social networking sites? In this regard, we should consider the potential impact of voters' perceptions to their attitudes towards political advertising as they are portrayed in the social media such as Facebook. Analyzing the content and the extent to which it adheres to such portrayals may both indicate how pervasive such stereotypes are in social media and serve as a first step to future studies of the effects of such portrayals. Although the use of Facebook is increasingly popular, Yaakop, A. et al. (2013) argued that consumers have concerns about the credibility of Facebook to disseminate truthful information. Yaakop, A et al. (2013), however, posited consumers' attitudes towards internet advertising are influenced by the capability of internet advertising to ring and entertainment. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H_{3a}: Product information role of advertising does not significantly predict Malaysia voters' attitudes towards political advertising in the social media.

H_{3b}: Hedonic/pleasure role of advertising significantly predicts Malaysia voters' attitudes towards political advertising in the social media.

Broadly, the focus of this research is to understand the perceptions of voters of the various use of media for political advertising and to investigate how do they relate to the respondents' overall attitude towards political advertising. This will involve testing a set of predictive variables in relation to the attitude of political advertising, by identifying and comparing the factors that influence consumer attitudes toward political advertising measured through the variables of advertising perceptions of product information (PI) and hedonic / pleasure (HP) during the 13th General Election.

5.0 Research Methodology

This study aims to examine the perceptions and attitudes of Malaysian voters' towards political advertising delivered through three different media in print, television and the social media. The questionnaire of the study consists of five sections. The first section is about measuring respondents' perceptions towards political advertising on the television, printed media and the social media. The next three sections are about measuring respondents' attitudes towards political advertising on the television, printed media and the social media, respectively. The final section consists of multiple questions regarding respondents' demographic profile.

In section one, four constructs were developed to measure political advertising perceptions using 5 items for each construct on a 5-point Likert scale (e.g. 1 – strongly agree to 5 – strongly disagree). The variables used were product information (PI); to measure individual's beliefs about advertising as a valuable source of information for products or services. Secondly, social role/image; to describe individual's beliefs about advertising that reflect and shape his/her personal image as well as the image of other external subjects. Thirdly, hedonic/pleasure; a variable that encompasses individual's beliefs about advertising in terms of it being entertaining, amusing and pleasurable. And finally, falsity/no sense; which explains the individual's beliefs about advertising as a source of manipulation, exaggeration or misleading information.

Meanwhile, in the section of measuring political advertising attitudes, three items were measured the construct. The items of measuring attitudes using semantic differential scales with 7-point scale (e.g. 1 – good to 7 – not good). All the items in the questionnaire were developed based on Petrovici and Marinov (2007) and Yaakop, A. and Hemsley-Brown, J. (2013).

The data collection was conducted via *surveymonkey.com* and it was carried out for a period of one month following the dissolution of the Malaysian Parliament on 4th April 2013. During this period, the campaigns from political parties participated were very aggressive and the use of the media was employed to reach the audience. The survey was posted in the *Facebook* and those respondents interested to follow the survey could click on the survey's link and would be directed to the survey. All information provided by respondents was kept confidential. A total of 266 useable set of questionnaires were collected and all data collected went through a series of analyses include confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and regression by using AMOS 18.

6.0 Analysis and Findings

6.1 Respondent Profile

Based on the Table 6.1, participation from female respondents were higher than male respondents which contribute to 72 percent and 28 percent, respectively. Majority of respondents' age were range between 21-30 years old (65 percent), followed by 31-40 years old (16 percent) and 20 and below years old (9 percent). Malay ethnic contributes to the highest ethnic composition in Malaysia to participate (77 percent), followed by Chinese (16 percent) and Indian and Bumiputra with percentage of 3 percent and 1 percent, respectively. Most respondents were Diploma and Degree holder with percentage of 56 percent. Respondents with postgraduate degree and secondary school contribute 22 and 19 percent, respectively. Respondents live in city were with the highest participation 42 percent compared to suburban and rural area, 19 percent and 36 percent respectively.

Table 6.1: Respondent Profile

CATEGORY	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL (%)
Sex (N =266)		
Male	75	28
Female	191	72
Age (N = 266)		
20 and below	24	9
21-30	174	65
31-40	43	16
41-50	17	6
51-60	1	1
61 or older	2	1
Missing	5	2
Ethnicity (N = 266)		
Malay	206	77
Chinese	43	16
Indian	8	3
Other bumiputera	3	1
Missing	6	3
Highest education level (N = 266)		
Completed primary school	0	0
Completed secondary school	51	19
Completed diploma/degree	150	56
Completed postgraduate degree	58	22
Missing	7	3
Residential are (N = 266)		
City area	112	42
Surburban residential	52	19
Rural area (village)	95	36
Missing	7	3

6.2 Measurement Model

This study applies SEM as the method of analysis – the measurement model and the structural model (Schumacker & Lomax, 2004). The measurement model is measuring by the analysis of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to determine the relationships between the constructs and its indicators (Schumacker & Lomax, 2004). The results of CFA show the convergent validity for each construct use in this study. Thus, the convergent validity determines (1) factor loadings – with each item’s factor loading ranging between 0.6 and 0.9 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988), (2) average variance extracted (AVE) – with each exceeding the 0.5 threshold and (3) composite reliability – with values exceeding the 0.7 threshold (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). For the establishment of the discriminant validity, one could find on the variance extracted from two constructs is greater than the square of the correlation between those two constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In this study, there are three models developed to answer all the hypotheses of the study. Table 6.2 shows the results of measurement

model for each model. Based on the results, it shows that all constructs for each model have achieved the threshold of CFA.

Table 6.2: The results of measurement model

Construct and Item	Composite Reliability	AVE	The Squared Path Coefficient	
			PI	HP
Political Advertising on Television				
Printed Information (PI)	0.853	0.596		
Hedonic Pleasure (HP)	0.794	0.659	0.570	
Attitude (Att)	0.872	0.697	0.204	0.252
Political Advertising on Printed Media				
Printed Information (PI)	0.829	0.550		
Hedonic Pleasure (HP)	0.70	0.498	0.141	
Attitude (Att)	0.829	0.622	0.249	0.142
Political Advertising on Social Media				
Printed Information (PI)	0.793	0.5		
Hedonic Pleasure (HP)	0.787	0.649	0.619	
Attitude (Att)	0.901	0.754	0.187	0.186

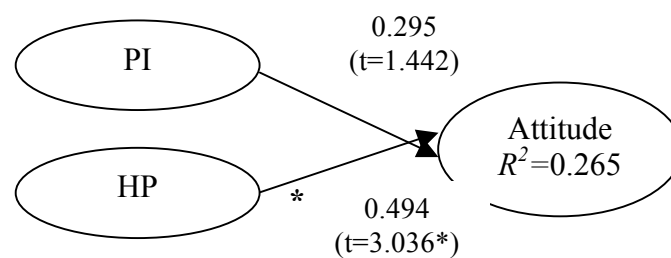
Note: To determine the discriminant validity, the AVE must be higher than the squared path coefficient results.

6.3 Structural Model

The model of Political Advertising on Television

In the first model (see figure 6.1), H1a hypothesis is not significant and rejected (path coefficient = 0.295, t-value=1.442, P = 0.149) whilst H1b is significant and show that the product information role of advertising significantly predicts Malaysia voters' attitudes towards political advertising on the television (path coefficient = 0.494, t-value = 3.036, P = 0.002).

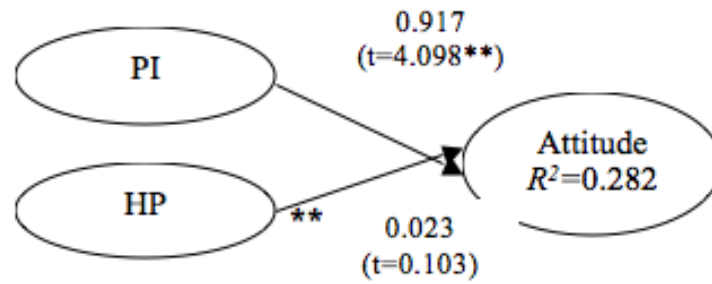
Figure 6.1: The SEM model of Political Advertising on Television



The model of Political Advertising on Print Media

On the next model (see figure 6.2), H2a hypothesis is significant which show product information role of advertising significantly predicts Malaysia voters' attitudes towards political advertising in printed media (path coefficient = 0.971, t-value=4.098, P = 0.000) whilst H2b is not significant and rejected (path coefficient = 0.023, t-value = 0.103, P = 0.918).

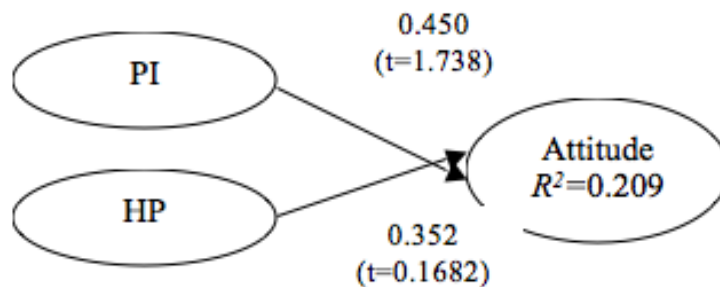
Figure 6.2: The SEM model of Political Advertising on Printed Media



The model of Political Advertising on Social Media

On the final model (see figure 6.3), both H3a and H3b hypotheses are not significant and rejected (path coefficient = 0.450, t-value=1.738, P = 0.082) (path coefficient = 0.352, t-value = 1.682, P = 0.093). Thus, product information role and hedonic pleasure are not significantly predicting Malaysia voters’ towards political advertising on social media.

Figure 6.3: The SEM model of Political Advertising on Social Media



7.0 Discussion

SEM results had partially supported the hypotheses; as expected that political advertng on printed media is favoured due to its informative nature while political advertising on the television is favoured by the Malaysia voters because of its ability to amuse viewers. To our surprise, the two predictors have no significant influence at all on Malaysian voters’ attitudes towards political advertising in the social media.

It is, in fact, interesting to understand that the social media is a medium of sharing information simply for the sake of sharing. Public still feel that the news they read (from the newspaper) are the most reliable ones, the stories they watch on television are the most entertaining ones. In politics, public are now more knowledgeable to distinguish between facts and rumours communicated through the social media. In it important to note that news, regardless if they were factual or fiction, presented especially in the social media during a month before the 13th General Election were substantial. In the most crucial time just a month before the election, some

campaigners were seen to fully utilize the media unethically by propagating rumours to create panic given the time constraint. This probably has an effect to the voters' doubts about the social media and in return has posted a major challenge for it. Issues related to lack of confidentiality and danger of non-verified information are common and these communication strategies can be the fear that too much information too soon will create panic (Currie, 2009).

8.0 Limitations and Future Research

As mentioned earlier, researchers who used limited-parent population could only justify the dimensions explaining the research framework without generalizing the findings and drawing conclusions about the overall public attitude towards political advertising. In this particular study, any conclusion drawn from this limited-parent population sample (Malaysian voters) would be misleading because the sample basis does not represent the total population despite the justifications as mentioned above. The findings represent responses from respondents' perceptions from a sufficiently diverse background, however collected from a short period of time (one month period). Future research may consider using a more general and representative population of voters (i.e. raising the sample size).

9.0 Conclusions and Implication

Hirschman and Thompson (1997) opined that issues in vast areas of advertising must be tackled with a deeper understanding of consumers' relationships with advertising and the media. This present study fully supports this notion and, in addition, has discovered that any generic issues, such as what were uncovered in this study, must be seen from a specific media frame of reference (i.e. the traditional media and the modern media). In this study, advertising perceptions such as product information and hedonic/pleasure have great effects on the attitudes towards political advertising delivered through the traditional media but not through the modern-day media like Facebook. From the findings of this research, the political parties, campaigners and advertising practitioners need to understand and pay more attention on how the consumers perceive the function of these advertising media when making decisions, especially in the selection of media to propagate political issues, before jumping on the social media bandwagon.

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