# Chapter 12
# #KitaJagaKita: (De)legitimising the Government During the 2020 Movement Control Order

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**Abstract** On 18th March 2020, the Malaysian government enforced a movement control order (MCO) that required everyone to stay in their homes until 4th May 2020 to slow the spread of the COVID-19 virus. During this time, social media became not only a source of information for citizens but also the main space for their mediated social and public lives. Besides the hashtags #stayhome and #dudukrumah, the hashtag #KitaJagaKita started trending as netizens and civil society took the initiative to champion the proper enforcement of the MCO and safe distancing, as well as to find solutions for the shortage of medical safety equipment. This chapter presents findings from a discourse analysis on the discourses surrounding the hashtag #KitaJagaKita on Twitter and its use to (de)legitimise the Perikatan Nasional government and its leader, Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin. Pro-government netizens use the hashtag to represent the government as protecting citizens through its policies and guidelines, and fellow citizens, who adhere to the MCO, as partnering in this effort. Netizens who are less supportive of the government, however, argue that the government is not doing enough to protect citizens and healthcare workers. They use the hashtag to criticise government policies and a lack of decisiveness and speed in properly implementing the MCO. They also use the hashtag to rally citizens to take care of each other by fundraising and finding "better" solutions for healthcare workers.

## 12.1 #KitaJagaKita and the Movement Control Order

The COVID-19 pandemic led to state action to bring the infection rate under control. It effectively quarantined citizens at home on an unprecedented global scale. Although the measures carried out by individual governments ranged from relaxed, such as in Sweden, to more restrictive, such as in China, millions of people were affected

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by physical distancing and quarantine measures. In Malaysia, the newly formed government, Perikatan Nasional, led by Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin, took a restrictive approach to deal with the pandemic. On 18th March 2020, a movement control order (MCO) was introduced, restricting citizens to their homes for the next two months. Subsequently, as the infection rate started coming down, the restrictions were lifted in stages but at the time of writing, Malaysia was placed again under a less restrictive MCO due to a spike in cases nationwide.

During the early stages of MCO, the Internet and social media became not only sources of information for citizens but also the main space for the mediated social and public life of its users. Netizens were preoccupied with news on the movement of citizens for the first few days of the MCO and the distressing shortage of medical safety equipment for frontline healthcare workers screening potential COVID-19 patients. The hashtags #stayhome and its Malay version, #dudukrumah, were used by government and healthcare bodies as well as citizens to encourage people to adhere to the MCO. The hashtag #KitaJagaKita (*We take care of each other*) also started trending on social media on 18 March as a general response of gratitude by the public to healthcare professionals for their services and sacrifice during this time (Rodzi, 2020). The genesis of #KitaJagaKita as a call for advocacy was first mooted by Malaysian author, Hanna Alkaf, on Twitter, which then quickly developed into an initiative by a group of concerned citizens and activists through the hashtag and the website kitajagakita.com (#KitaJagaKita, n.d.). Netizens and civil society started taking the initiative to champion the proper enforcement of the MCO and social distancing as well as finding solutions for the shortage of medical safety equipment. The hashtag was also used by government ministries, especially the Ministry of Health, to encourage responsible physical distancing practises during the pandemic. To date, the #KitaJagaKita movement has successfully facilitated numerous partnerships between NGOs and citizens.

The significance of the #KitaJagaKita hashtag was heightened by what came just prior to the enforcement of the MCO, namely, the formation of the government under a new coalition, Perikatan Nasional (PN) on 1 March 2020. The political stability of the country was in doubt weeks before as rumours of defections from the previous government, Pakatan Harapan (PH), started circulating on social media. PH's collapse after only 21 months in power was triggered in part by Muhyiddin's own defection from his party and he then formed a coalition government consisting of United Malays Nasional Organisation (UMNO) and Parti Islam se-Malaysia (PAS) (Ostwald, 2020). Most Malaysians were still trying to understand what had happened when the COVID-19 pandemic hit Malaysia. Thus, the sentiments expressed in the #KitaJagaKita movement inevitably included social commentary on this newly formed government and the pandemic only added to the scrutiny.

Social and political activism online is not a new phenomenon in Malaysia and has its roots in the convergence of the advances in digital technologies in the mid-1990s and the grassroots anti-government movement that began with the *Reformasi* movement in 1998 (Brown, 2005). Without access to state-controlled media, opposition political leaders, anti-government movements and ordinary citizens used the opportunities found online to create and sustain alternative discourses to long-standing and

hegemonic political rhetoric (See Kow & Khoo, Chap. 6). The alternative media, pioneered by *Malaysiakini*, *Harakah Daily*, *Aliran*, amongst others that exists until today is testament to the emancipatory role of the Internet in Malaysian political discourse (George, 2005). Social media has also enabled grassroots movements to assemble and mobilise advocacy efforts more rapidly and extensively (Leong et al., 2015; Tim et al., 2018; Tye et al., 2018).

## 12.2  Hashtags and Social Activism

Hashtags (#), historically associated mainly with the social media platform Twitter, has since been increasingly used on various platforms, such as Facebook and Insta-gram. It was originally created as "channel tags" or metadata tags that allowed users to search for specific tweets and participate in particular conversations (Salazar, 2017), a form of "searchable talk" (Zappavigna, 2015). Its uses range from predomi-nantly functional, such as collecting and indexing information and facilitating discus-sions on topics (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015; Small, 2011), to publicly symbolic, such as encouraging and publicising activism surrounding social issues (Bruns & Burgess, 2011). Wang et al. (2016) posited that the choice of specific hashtags was driven by two interrelated processes: grabbing the attention of certain users and increasing visibility by achieving virality. As such, users can autonomously choose to partici-pate in decentralised conversations (Majchrzak et al., 2013) that are located within large-scale information sharing amongst certain communities. Because hashtags are searchable, they enable users to access conversations and communities outside their natural social network, although it is unlikely that their relationship would progress beyond their engagement with the topic at hand. The kind of participation amongst users can range from more passive, such as informative, namely, seeking or giving information, to "digital convergence" (Shaw et al., 2013) that involves positioning themselves within the site, event or conversation in question. The online community that develops around hashtags has been described as an "ad-hoc commu-nity" (Bruns & Burgess, 2012) or "ambient affiliation" (Zappavigna, 2011), which describes "a co-present, impermanent community" (ibid.) separated by time and space that congregates around a hashtag and shares common views and ideologies.

Taking their participation one step further, users have also used hashtags to engage in hashtag activism or hashtag-related activism, which can be defined as the "activity of using hashtags to bring attention to social issues and mobilise communities for action" (Ofori-Parku & Moscato, 2018). For users, hashtag activism is a kind of *participatory culture* (Jenkins, 2006) that enables them to form online connections and social support with other like-minded users over particular events or topics. Again, the hashtags can have a more informative function, such as being a medium for raising awareness and creating discussions (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015) or allowing users a more active role in facilitating policy and social changes (Ofori-Parku & Moscato, 2018; Saffer et al., 2013). There have been numerous studies on hashtags used in protest and political movements, such as the Arab Spring revolution (Harlow &

Johnson, 2011; Kharroub & Bas, 2016), #BlackLivesMatter (Freelon et al., 2016; Ince et al., 2017) and #MeToo (Bogen et al., 2019; Dejmanee et al., 2020; Manikonda et al. 2018; Xiong et al., 2019). Research has also shown the effectiveness of hashtags to encourage political commentary and engagement across various demographics and societal levels (Bruns & Burgess, 2011; Journell et al., 2013; Ross, 2019).

This chapter aims to explore the discourses surrounding the hashtag #KitaJagaKita on Twitter during the first ten days of the MCO that (de)legitimised the newly formed government, Perikatan Nasional, and its leader, Muhyiddin Yassin. Of particular interest here is the observation of the competition over meaning or "politics of representation" (Holquist, 1983; Wodak, 2001) between pro- and anti-government Twitter users. It was observed that pro-establishment individuals were less likely to use social media to air their views as they had ample access to mainstream media outlets and may not want to engage in counter opinions online, whilst anti-establishment users were more active on social media (Shen et al., 2020). However, this chapter will argue that social media no longer belongs mainly to anti-establishment or pro-democracy movements as it did in the past.

## 12.3   Legitimation in Political Discourse

Political discourse is a genre that involves the act of public engagement and authors of these discourses can present their political agendas or views in subtle or more assertive ways (Reyes, 2011). Enacting their symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1991) through language, political actors often present these arguments using legitimation to achieve their political goals (Chilton, 2004; Fairclough, 2002). Legitimation involves any kind of discourse or argumentation that explains, justifies, or gives accreditation to a particular type of social behaviour or activity (van Dijk, 1998). Habermas (2006) argued that the "deliberate legitimation process" in society involved political discourses on three levels—institutionalised, mass media and civil society discourses—and these levels are dialogic, constituting and being constituted by each other. Social media crosses all three levels but has increasingly become a powerful tool for civil society to engage more actively in political discourses. Yet considerable work has been done on legitimation of political discourses from top-down approaches involving government authorities and the mass media, whilst bottom-up approaches, i.e. how civil society uses legitimation to comment on political discourses, have remained largely neglected (Sundström & Obenius, 2020). It is important to include grassroots voices instead of merely giving space to elite voices if we are to understand how legitimation functions in political discourse (Abulof, 2015).

Discursively, legitimation can be accomplished in a number of ways. Van Leeuwen's proposed four legitimation strategies (2007, 2008) have already been described by Rajandran (Chap. 3), Perumal, Govaichelvan, Sinayah, Ramalingam & Maruthai (Chap. 5), and Yoong (Chap. 10). It is a useful tool for exploring how legitimation functions. Reyes (2011) expanded this work to introduce five categories, including three that overlap with van Leeuwen's. According to him, legitimation

can be achieved through the appeal to emotions, particularly the negative emotion of fear, which has the power to skew opinions through the identification of in- and out-groups. Related to this is legitimation through a hypothetical future that is seen as threatening and requiring urgent action. The next two categories are similar to van Leeuwen's. Legitimation through rationality is based on argumentation grounded in evidence and reliable sources, whilst voices of expertise are realised when interlocutors defer to the authority of official and institutional discourses. The final category, altruism, involves legitimation that is motivated by utilitarianism or the common good and a system of values, somewhat similar to van Leeuwen's moral evaluation category. These strategies can be used individually or in combination with others.

## 12.4  Data and Method

The data consists of tweets collected using NCapture with the hashtag #KitaJagaKita between 18 and 27 March 2020. This period is significant as the MCO coincided with the start of the new government's ruling period whilst many Malaysians were still coming to grips with both these situations and expressing their thoughts and emotions online. The initial collection was done through sampling by theme (Androutsopoulos, 2013) of all tweets using the hashtag during this period and yielded over 100,000 tweets. There was a need to filter out irrelevant tweets, such as those using the hashtag to promote content or products and posts that were unrelated to politics, so a secondary search was carried out using the hashtag in combination with the keywords found in Table 12.1. This yielded 5821 tweets that formed the dataset for this study. Although this sampling method was suitable for this study, it is important to acknowledge that the limitation of sampling by theme is the possibility of missing out on collecting other relevant tweets within the same period because the specific hashtag or lexical items were not used.

**Table 12.1** Number of tweets with #KitaJagaKita and keywords

| Keyword + Hashtag | No. of tweets |
| --- | --- |
| *government* | 2,352 |
| *kerajaan* (Malay word for "government") | 2,035 |
| *gomen* (slang word for "government") | 71 |
| *PM*  (Short for "Prime Minister") | 982 |
| *Muhyiddin* (First name of the Prime Minister) | 202 |
| *TSMY* 56230.(PM's full title, "Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin") | 100 |
| *Prime Minister* | 79 |
| *PN* (Perikatan Nasional) (PN) | 173 |
| Total | 5821 |

The dataset consisted of tweets written in English, Malay and a mix of English and Malay. The preparation stage included obtaining general information about the tweets, including demographic information about the users, type of tweets, and mapping of other hashtags used in combination with #KitaJagaKita. At the coding stage, all tweets and retweets were first grouped into clusters of semantically similar tweets to get an overview of the content of the dataset. The dataset was further cleaned by removing all retweets and this brought the number of tweets analysed in the dataset to 605 individual tweets.

These were then sorted according to the political sentiments expressed, namely, if they were supportive or critical of the government or merely neutral. This process involved gathering information about the socio-political context of the tweets that usually included hyperlinks or references to a specific event to understand what the user was referring to. The tweets were also analysed based on the internal linguistic context for the types of words, phrases, and sentences that were used. From this process, more specific themes were derived within the pro-, anti-, and neutral stances of the users. The relevant tweets under these themes were then analysed according to legitimation strategies introduced by van Leeuwen (2007, 2008) and Reyes (2011). Whilst some tweets clearly contained one legitimation strategy, most tweets consisted of more than one strategy and thus, needed to be coded multiple times.

The analysis process needed to consider some significant events that took place during this data collection period as they impacted the content of the tweets and provided much needed context. These events were:

- The new Health Minister, Adham Baba, claimed during a WHO teleconference that warm water could help wash away the COVID-19 virus (19th March 2020).
- Announcement from the government that citizens could withdraw RM500 per month from their Employees Provident Fund (EPF) account to buy essential goods (23rd March 2020).
- Announcement from the government of the MCO extension until 14th April 2020 (25th March 2020). It was significant to note that the Prime Minister cried on the live telecast of this announcement during his prayer for the nation.
- The government announced a pay cut for 70 cabinet members (including the Prime Minister) that would be channelled to the COVID-19 fund (26th March 2020).

## 12.5   Main Topics and General Political Sentiments

A preliminary analysis of the dataset revealed clustering of the tweets around five main topics: (i) news issues and official statements, (ii) business and service-oriented tweets, (iii) support for and defence of government action, (iv) criticism of the government and (v) advocacy and appeal for civic-minded behaviour and social action. Table 12.2 presents an overview of frequency and percentage of the tweets categorised according to the five clusters. The tweets in the advocacy cluster were further categorised into the sentiments expressed with regards to the government: anti-, pro-, and neutral stances.

**Table 12.2** Frequency and percentage of tweet clusters

| Cluster | Frequency | % |
| --- | --- | --- |
| News & official government | 143 | 23.6 |
| Business | 20 | 3.3 |
| Anti-government | 175 | 28.9 |
| Pro-government | 158 | 26.2 |
| Advocacy<br>Pro-government ($n = 43$; 39.5%)<br>Anti-government ($n = 2$; 1.8%)<br>Neutral ($n = 64$; 58.7%) | 109 | 18 |
| Total | 605 | 100 |

The first cluster included posts and tweets from news outlets and government-affiliated bodies on the latest updates and measures on COVID-19. The second cluster consisted of tweets from businesses giving operational information or advertising products and services. However, most of the tweets in the dataset were delineated along political lines, with users either supporting or criticising the government and/or its actions in relation to COVID-19 and the MCO. As such, this chapter will focus on the pro-government, anti-government, and neutral clusters as they are relevant to the study at hand. The tweets in the neutral cluster, which performed a more advocative or appellative function, were either politically neutral or overlapped with the other two clusters. Here, users employed the hashtag as a form of activism to either encourage citizens to practise safe health and social practises or to appeal on behalf of the needy.

Over half of the tweets in the dataset (55.1%) clearly expressed either pro- or anti-government sentiments, whilst 18% were appellative in nature. The number of pro- and anti-government tweets were not vastly different, at 26.2% and 28.9%, respectively. Of those that focussed on advocacy, 58.7% did not express political sentiments, 39.5% expressed support for government and the law, whilst only 2 tweets were more critical of the government.

## 12.6 Anti-government Sentiment

The anti-government tweets were directed mostly at the government collectively but also specifically at the Prime Minister, Muhyiddin Yassin, and occasionally at government ministers. Moral evaluation was used most frequently by users, specifically in 139 tweets, to delegitimise Muhyiddin and his government. This kind of legitimation usually leans heavily into value systems that are presumed to be collectively shared by both the text producers and recipients (Reyes, 2011), often as existing in the binary of "good" and "bad" in a generalised way (van Leeuwen, 2007, 2008). Legitimation by moral evaluation is marked by evaluative language, such as the use of evaluative adjectives and references as well as comparison with another person or subject.

### 12.6.1  Evaluative Language

Evaluation was accomplished in the tweets through explicit and implicit means. Whilst explicit evaluations often function as inscriptions or overt expressions of the author's own values and opinions, implicit evaluation are often presented as factual tokens, requiring knowledge of the context for more precise interpretation of its meaning (White, 2006). Naturally, there are more positions available to the authorial voice to express evaluation, which fall between both extremes. The following extracts illustrate the use of explicit evaluation by means of adjectives or noun phrases (**bolded**) attributed to the government or the Prime Minister.

Extract 1:  I so agree with you. This cabinet is **an utter disgrace**. It is **not a working** government. **Illegitimate, bloody selfish and incompetent**.

Extract 2:  Can you accept the truth? Do not just *syiok sendiri* (indulge yourself) and end up being a **self-serving bastard** in a **pathetical** [sic] **lame** government!

Extract 3:  Basically, it is #KitaJagaKita la because our government *tak boleh pakai* (cannot be relied on).

Extract 4:  So how **dumb** do you have to be in order to be health minister under PN gov?

Extract 5:  Still this ***haram*** (illegal) government not giving any. So, *betul* (really) la #KitaJagaKita

Extract 6:  *Memang* (really) literally #kitajagakita. ***Bodoh punya*** (dumb) **backdoor gomen** (a clipped version of "government").

The government was frequently evaluated for its competency in carrying out its duties as seen in Extracts 1–4. Here, it was evaluated as incompetent and unreliable, two qualities that "good" governments are not expected to possess. Extract 4 singled out the incompetence of the "dumb" Health Minister for his non-scientific recommendation of washing away the virus by drinking warm water. The legitimacy of Muhyiddin's government was often called into question as seen in Extracts 5–6 and this was a major talking point in the early days of PN's rule because of the way they came into power without going through an election. In Extract 5, the adjective *haram* (illegal) was used, whilst in Extract 6, the government was evaluated as both dumb and illegal through the nominal phrase "backdoor gomen". The hashtag #backdoorgovernment and its Malay version #kerajaanpintubelakang was also widely used on social media at the time and is still being used as a derogatory name for Muhyiddin's government.

The choice of references to people is another explicit way that speakers can express their opinion and evaluation of someone else. Although the slang word "gomen" is commonly used in spoken Malaysian English, it only appeared in anti-government tweets in this dataset, thus acquiring a more derogative quality especially when collocated with "backdoor". The reference to the backdoor government was embedded in the tweets in-text or as hashtags as seen in Extracts 7–8.

Extract 7:   *#KitaJagaKita adalah hasil usaha rakyat yg bantu rakyat lain dise-*
*babkan ahli politik aka menteri2 tak guna kerajaan pintu belakang yg tak*
*buat keje…jadi apabila menteri2 guna hashtag sama, gelilah …* (#KitaJa-
gaKita is a result of the citizens' efforts in helping other citizens because
of politicians a.k.a. useless ministers of the backdoor government that are
not working. So, I am disgusted when ministers use the same hashtag…)

Extract 8:   Well, @MuhyiddinYassin & his #kabinetpintubelakang is staying true
to @perikatan_my style. #KitaJagaKita by tapping into whatever funds
we have to survive cause the PN government ain't gonna *jaga* (care for)
it is [sic] own rakyat during this #COVID-19 pandemic.

Some users employed a play on the acronym of the government's name to nega-
tively refer to them as seen in the extracts below. Here, the acronym PN is embedded
into the Malay words "penyakit" (disease) and "penipu" (liar) in extracts 9 and 10
respectively (**bolded**), which has both a semantic as well as visual function.

Extract 9:   *Sebab semua tengah stress **Kerajaan PNyakit** gagalis. Meh kami*
*hiburkan anda dengan video ini.* (Because everyone is stressing over
the loser **disease government**. Meh (Come), let us entertain you with
this video.)

Extract 10:   *Hastag #KitaJagaKita tu untuk negeri pembangkang yang tidak*
*dijemput mesyuarat bersama **PM PNipu**.* (The hashtag #KitaJagaKita
is for the opposition states, who were not invited to the meeting with
**the liar PM**.)

Evaluation of the government was also often less explicit and accomplished here
through verbal phrases (**bolded**), namely, when describing what the government has
or has not done.

Extract 11:   This is 2017 [sic], that's why now we have to put high pressure to the
current government. ***Jgn cakap je demi rakyat, demi rakyat**… **buat keje***
***buktikan korang boleh handle masalah2 frontliners ni**.* (**Do not just**
**say it is for the sake of the people**… **do the work to prove you can**
**handle the frontliners' problems.**)

Extract 12:   *If betul government nak bail out, bail out peniaga-peniaga kecik yang*
*sewa premis, food court, goreng pisang tepi jalan, pomen workshop*
*yang hilang pendapatan sebab kena tutup kedai sepanjang RMO.*

***Bukannya bailout airline companies**!!!! **Bukan jaga crony**!!!*

(If the government really wants to bail out, bail out the small businesses
that rent premises, food courts, the banana fritters stall at the roadside,
car workshops that lost income because they had to close throughout the
RMO. **Not bail out airline companies**!!!! **Not take care of cronies**!!!)

Extract 13:   @myksm It shows to us that **PN never mean to walk the talk** …
#SocialDistancing is meant for their own protection also not intended
to carry out after claiming; would you really think they will perform any
for the sake of Rakyat with the promises claimed? Do not be foolish.

Both tweets in Extracts 11 and 12 address the shortcomings of the government in helping those struggling during the MCO, the medical workers and small businesses. The government is evaluated as only giving lip service without action through two imperative sentences (in Extract 11) and having the wrong priorities when giving financial aid to large companies and cronies (in Extract 12). Extract 13 also critiques the government for not "walking the talk" when it came to practising social distancing.

Analogies or comparisons almost always have a (de)legitimatory function (van Leeuwen, 2007) as comparisons to another person(s) or social practise invites negative or positive evaluation. In the tweets, the PN government was often compared to citizens, private individuals or companies and other governments by anti-government users (**bolded**) to put the PN government in a negative light.

Extract 14:   I am seeing more **average Malaysians** contribute to helping each other more than the so-called Government and the country's T20 rich. We all share what little we have, because really…. #KitaJagaKita

Extract 15:   This is what happens when the **people** get together with **private sectors** to help the people. The government should be doing this. What a shame.

Extract 16:   **Thai government** gives out free mask and hand sanitizer to the public. Ours increase the price from RM0.80 to RM2. *Bestnya* (How great).

Extract 17:   *Jenis Bantuan Mengikut PM:* (The type of aid according to PM)

   (1)   ***Kerajaan BN**, guna duit kerajaan (BR1M)* (BN government, uses government money)
   (2)   ***Kerajaan PH**, guna duit kerajaan (BSH)* (PH government, uses government money)
   (3)   *Kerajaan PN, suruh rakyat keluarkan duit simpanan KWSP* (PN government, asks the people to withdraw their EPF savings)

In Extract 14, the government was collectivised with the country's elite as not helping the rest of the country in comparison to "average Malaysians", whilst in Extract 15, the collective effort of citizens and hotel companies to provide free accommodation for COVID-19 medical workers was highlighted to argue that it was something the government should have been doing. A comparison to the Thai government's altruistic action over masks and sanitisers was put in contrast with the Malaysian government in Extract 16. Finally, in Extract 17, PN was compared to the previous two governments, Barisan Nasional (BN) and Pakatan Harapan (PH), who both used government funds to help citizens, in comparison to PN's move to let citizens withdraw their savings from the national retirement fund.

### 12.6.2   The Use of Rationalisation with Emotions

In contrast to legitimation through moral evaluation that prioritises values above rationale and logic, rationalisation explains how social practises are marked by thoughtful

and measured procedures. Morality is backgrounded in this case but still plays an influential role (van Leeuwen, 2007, 2008). Here, anti-government Twitter users employed a form of rationalisation that van Leeuwen referred to as effect orientation, which legitimises social practise based on the outcome of particular actions. The users legitimised their use of the #KitaJagaKita hashtag and their political stance by constructing argumentation that centred on the effects of the PN government's actions and decisions. One such extract can be seen below, where one user argues that Malaysian citizens could not rely on the government by providing a list of extracts of the government's "politicking".

**Example 18:**
*Kerajaan pintu belakang sibuk berpolitik.* (The backdoor government is busy politicking.)

- *Peruntukan MP PH dibekukan* (PH MPs' allocation frozen)
- *Muhyidin sibuk pecat YB Marzuki sebagai SU Agong PPBM* (Muhyiddin is busy firing YB Marzuki as Secretary-General of PPBM)
- *Harga topeng muka dinaikkan* (The price of masks was increased)

Itu sebab kita kena jaga diri sendiri. (This is why we need to take care of each other.)

The tweet starts off with the statement, "The backdoor government is busy politicking", and proceeds to give a list of extracts of how the government was neglecting its duties. This supports the argument that consequently, Malaysians need to look out for one another. Extract 19 employs a similar strategy for delegitimising the government:

Extract 19:  *Lagipun EPF tu kan retirement plan punya lagi - lagi yang swasta tak de pencen nie. Pokoknya, your new unelected gomen tak tolong you pun.* 🤷 🤷 🤷 (Moreover, the EPF is the retirement plan, is not it—what's more, those in the private sector have no pension. The conclusion is, your new unelected government is not even helping you.)

Here, the government's actions are posited to have resulted in citizens losing their retirement savings and the causal phrase "The conclusion is…" links these actions to the argument that the government was not helping its citizens. Note the use of the adjective "unelected" that reveals the author's evaluative stance towards the legitimacy of the PN government. A similar evaluation occurred in Extract 18 above as well, using "backdoor government".

Extract 20:  *Kesian rakyat, terpaksa #KitaJagaKita, terpaksa harapkan sesama sendiri sebab apa? Sebab kerajaan lembab. Rakyat sibuk nak cegah wabak, PM sibuk main golf, lepas tu sibuk isi borang pencalonan parti.*

*Dah ada 2 org mati, kerajaan sibuk berpolitik, pecat sana sini. Bangang.*

(Have pity on the citizens, #KitaJagaKita, we must depend on one another, because? Because the government is incompetent. The citizens are busy fighting this outbreak, the PM is busy playing golf, and

then busy filling out party nomination forms. 2 people have already died, the government is busy politicking, sacking here and there. Idiots.)

A mixture of strategies is used in Extract 20. There is an appeal to emotions at the start of the tweet in the imperative sentence, "*Kesian rakyat*" (have pity on the citizens), and an evaluation of the government at the end ("*Bangang*"). But the main part of the tweet again provides a list of the government's "sins", including not displaying any urgency despite two people having already died (it was early in the pandemic at this point). This supports the antagonistic stance taken and the need for the hashtag. As seen in this tweet, the use of emotive language can also be used to delegitimise the government's governance.

Extract 21: The government is basically saying to all Malaysians:

> "You are on your own, folks.
> If you do not have EPF or savings, then that's your problem, not ours."
> IOW, we have been left to fend for ourselves.
> Again.

Extract 22: Somehow I think that basically, the Government just said: "Look mate, you are on your own."

In Extract 21, the government's voice is intertextually embedded alongside the author's own voice, with the latter offering this hypothetical quote to provide an interpretation of the government's motivation for making the decision on the EPF withdrawal, seen in the use of the phrase "IOW" (in other words). The phrase "left to fend for ourselves" is particularly emotive when used with the intensifier "again", which was placed alone on the next line, implying that this is not the first time that the government has abandoned the people. In Extract 22, a similar strategy of hypothetically voicing the government was used albeit in a more flippant way to play on the fear of abandonment.

Another fear that users touched on was the fear of loss of personal money as seen Extracts 23–24:

Extract 23: So the government are giving nothing. Basically we use our money to save ourselves.

Extract 24: Literally #KitaJagaKita measures taken by the government for allowing Rm 500 to be taken from OUR OWN EPF account.

Both these tweets work on the assumption that the citizens' expectations of the government's responsibility for their material well-being have not been fulfilled. The use of the verb "save" (in Extract 23) in place of more neutral options is particularly emotive as it creates a heightened sense of urgency in what citizens have to do for themselves, in contrast to the government, who is "giving nothing". The emphasis through capitalisation of "OUR OWN" (in Extract 24) expresses the author's incredulity towards what was assumed to have originally been the government's responsibility.

## 12.7  Pro-government Sentiment

The pro-government tweets consisted of those performing one or both of the following functions: political commentary supporting the government ($n = 158$) and advocating for citizens to follow government-issued safety and health guidelines ($n = 43$). The overwhelming legitimation strategy employed by users in the former ($n = 77$) and latter ($n = 39$) categories was authorisation. However, users in this category generally drew on a much wider range of legitimation strategies in their tweets about the government compared to the anti-government users.

### 12.7.1  Subscribing to the Authority of the Government

One of the most common ways users showed their support of and submission to government authority was through the use of the imperative, which functioned as a call to their fellow citizens to also submit to the government. The imperative is led by a form of verbs that are used to give orders and, the most frequently used verb in imperative form was "follow" and its Malay equivalent "ikut". Extracts of this are found below:

Extract 25:  *Mari kita **ikut** saranan PM kita @MuhyiddinYassin demi #Malaysi-aBebasCovid19 dan bersama #KitaJagaKita semua.* (Let us **follow** our PM's @MuhyiddinYassin counsel for the sake of keeping #Malaysi-aFreeFromCovid19 and together #KitaJagaKita all.)

Extract 26:  Just stay at home. Just **follow** the rules of government, they know what the best for our country. 14 days only!

Extract 27:  Today 172 new case … Still continue #StayHome … To All Malaysian … Let us stay health and be strong … Let us trust our PM KKM PDRM & ARMY to handle the situation … We **follow** the instructions …

Here, the government is legitimised through reference to their undiluted personal authority (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 106) as the government of the day. In Extract 25, we see how the Prime Minister is specifically mentioned as having this authority and that by following his counsel, citizens can work together to combat the virus. The next two extracts urge citizens to follow government-issued rules and instructions and display complete trust in the government for knowing what is "best for our country" (Extract 26) and how to "handle the situation" (Extract 27). This personal authority is extended to the police and armed forces (PDRM & ARMY) and the Ministry of Health (KKM) in Extract 27 as legitimate representatives of the government. This extension can be further seen being attributed to individual police officers and security guards in Extract 28.

Extract 28: *Ikut je la cakap kerajaan pakai topeng muka tu. Kau beli je yang jenis kain boleh basuh tu. Takpayah gaduh dgn konstabel polis atau security guard tunjuk screenshot statemen KKM. Diorg ikut arahan saja, bukan boleh tukar sistem. Kesian la kat diorg…* (Just follow what the government said by wearing the face mask. You can just buy the washable cloth type. No need to argue with police constables or security guards by showing the screenshot of KKM's statement. They are only following orders, they cannot change the system. Have pity on them…)

The authority of the government is unquestioned here and the police and security guards are represented as doing their duty in carrying out the government's orders. Citizens are urged not to resist this authority but are expected to sympathise with them. Other similar tweets in Malay employed the imperative on citizens using verbs such as *patuh* (obey), *akur* (abide by), *sahut* (respond to), and *dengar* (listen to), which all have the same effect as "follow" and "ikut". In these extracts, the citizens were placed in a passive role compared to the government, who was placed in a position of authority. This was not always the case as some tweets placed citizens in a more active role despite still using the imperative forms of "help" / "bantu" and "bagi kerjasama" (give cooperation to) that are bolded below.

Extract 29  Come on Malaysia! We can beat Covid-19! Let us stay home! **Help** government to defeat Covid-19!

Extract 30: *Jadi mari kita **bagi kerjasama** yang sepatutnya kepada kerajaan!* (So, let us **give the** cooperation that they deserve to the government!)

Here, the government is still ascribed authority, but responsibility is also given to citizens to play their part by helping and cooperating with the government. In Extract 30, the tweet goes so far as to declare the government's assumed right to receive cooperation from its citizens (underlined).

## 12.7.2   Displays of Emotion

Some tweets (n = 28) consisted of emotive language to express (1) gratitude to the government, (2) familial attachment to the government, 3) empathy with the Prime Minister, and 4) pride in the government. An extract of a show of gratitude can be found here:

Extract 31: *Terima kasih* (thank you) PM @MuhyiddinYassin for your hard work ♡ □ ♡ □ you did well even its a difficult decision and difficult situation ♡ □ ♡ □ Malaysian will stand with you #KitaJagaKita Malaysia will *kembali pulih* (recover again)

Extract 32: *@MuhyiddinYassin YAB! terima kasih ya. Kami sekeluarga sangat berbangga dengan kepimpinan dan kerajaan YAB!* (@MuhyiddinYassin YAB! thank you, yea. We as a family are very proud of your leadership and government!)

According to Reyes (2011), people react to emotions through the process of index-icality, which are associations to semiotic resources (socio-political, historical) found in any given speech. In Extract 31, the user expresses gratitude to the Prime Minister and positively evaluates him for his "difficult decision" to extend the MCO to 14th April 2020 (the first extension of many to come) during his televised speech. This emotion is further established visually with the use of four heart emoticons. The user in Extract 32 also expresses gratitude with pride. Emotion was also evident in tweets that referred to the Prime Minister as "tok ayah" (grandfather) in Extract 33 or "abah" (father) in Extract 34, which are Malay kinship terms that connotatively show respect and affection.

Extract 33:   ***Tok ayah*** *(YAB PM Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin) telah mengumumkan lanjutan Perintah Kawalan Pergerakan (PKP) sehingga 14 April 2020.*

*Beliau sebak. Kita juga sebak. Ini cabaran besar yang perlu kita hadapi bersama.*
*Semoga Allah SWT memelihara kita semua.* ♡

(**Grandfather** (YAB PM Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin) has announced the extension of the MCO until 14th April 2020. He cried. We also cried. This is a big challenge that we need to face together.

May Allah SWT sustain us all. ♡)

Extract 34:   *Allah sedih nya. Part nie paling sedih. Pm kita ni mcm* ***abah2*** *kita. Moga kita semua dilindungi. Keadaan pulih.* (Oh man, this is so sad. This is the saddest part. Our PM is like our **fathers**. May we all be protected. Things to recover.)

Apart from referring to the Prime Minister as "tok ayah" in Extract 33, the Prime Minister is also titulated with his full title, indicating deep respect. Furthermore, both users here empathise with the Prime Minister's show of emotions by either crying (Extract 33) or expressing sadness (Extract 34). There were many other similar tweets from this cluster that displayed an outpouring of emotion as a reaction to the Prime Minister's speech. For these users, the Prime Minister crying on air was received positively as it showed them that the Prime Minister was human and deeply cared for his country.

### 12.7.3   Moral Evaluation and Altruism

The government was evaluated positively by pro-government users for i) their personal qualities (Extract 35) and ii) actions or decisions made (Extract 36) (**bolded** below).

Extract 35:   *Suka dengar PM bagi ucapan.* ***Rasa macam atok*** *bagi nasihat dekat cucu.* (I like listening to the PM' speeches. **It feels like a grandfather** advising his grandchildren.)

Extract 36:   This is the 1st time a Prime Minister prayed for the safety of the people at the end of the speech, **like how a leader was supposed to**.

Extract 37:   **Thanks @MuhyiddinYassin for early announcement.** Looks more prepared and way better than 1st one on 16/03. Plenty of time for people to plan. Maybe you are PM that we do not want. **But PM that we need.**

The act of comparing the Prime Minister to a grandfather ("atok") in Extract 35 evokes a sense of familiarity and the nurturing nature of family relationships, whilst in Extract 36, the Prime Minister is explicitly evaluated as a good example of an ideal leader. Extract 37 evaluates not just the Prime Minister's decisive action positively but also acknowledges that he is the right person for the job, an emphasis on utilitarianism (need) over personal feelings (want).

The government also received praise because of their decision to cut the salaries of the Prime Minister and entire Cabinet and channel it to the national COVID fund.

Extract 38:   *@helahhidup Alhamdulillah. Mereka sanggup potong gaji untuk rakyat.* (Praise be to God. They were willing to take a pay cut for the people.)

Extract 39:   *Subhanallah! Jemaah Menteri Malaysia potong gaji 2 bulan untuk Tabung Covid-19. Terbaik! Ini lah Kerajaan Malaysia* ♡ (Praise be to God! The Malaysian Cabinet is taking a 2-month pay cut for the COVID-19 fund. Best! This is the Malaysian Government.)

Altruism legitimises actions based on the principles of utilitarianism, i.e. for the benefit of others, and was used in pro-government tweets to show support for the government and urge citizens to cooperate with the government.

Extract 40:   *PKP itu satu keperluan. bantuan menghadapi kesan PKP itu juga satu keperluan. Ramai yang kerja gaji hari. bila PKP dilaksana terus takde kerja & gaji. golongan macam ini most likely takde KWSP, SOCSO, &amp; EIS. ya #KitaJagaKita, tapi Kerajaan ada sumber untuk bantu mereka semua.* (The MCO is a necessity. Aid to tackle the effects of the MCO is also a necessity. Many are day workers. When the MCO was enforced they lost their jobs and salary. This group most likely has no EPF, SOCSO, etc. yes #KitaJagaKita but the Government has resources to help them all.)

Extract 41:   *Dilanjutkan. Bacaan doa dr TSMY mendalam sangat. Stay safe semuanya. **Ini demi keselamatan semua.*** (Extended. TSMY's prayer was very profound. Stay safe, everyone. **This is for everyone's safety.**)

The tweet in Extract 40 fully supports the government and its decisions, acknowledging that whilst having citizens care for each other is important, ultimately the government is the one that is able to help everyone. In Extract 41, support for the Prime Minister can be seen through titulation (TSMY is the acronym for the Prime Minister's full title, Tan Sri Muhyidin Yassin) and in positive evaluation of his prayer. But the tweet ends with the reminder that the government is working for everyone's safety.

## 12.8  The (De)legitimising Effects of a Hashtag

The findings in this chapter revealed how Malaysian Twitter users presented themselves as legitimised to evaluate and comment on the government's performance during the COVID-19 crisis and in turn enabled them to show partisanship. The hashtag #KitaJagaKita served as a means for them to gather and align around shared beliefs and values and even opened up the potential for belonging and group membership (Zappavigna, 2012). Chouliaraki (2006) described three ways that audiences of media and news are able to engage with an event, namely as (1) the involved spectator (expressing empathy), (2) the omnipresent spectator (demanding justice and call to action), and (3) the distantiated spectator (removed emotionally from event but using it as an opportunity for self-reflection). This can be applied to the study at hand and it was observed that the Twitter users positioned themselves with regards to #KitaJagaKita as involved and omnipresent spectators. The involved spectator presented her or his political commentary, which consisted of opinions and reactions but also at times, feelings regarding the events that occurred during this time. The omnipresent spectator was far more active and often mixed commentary with either advocacy for healthcare workers and those in need, in the case of anti-government users, or advocacy for following government rules, as in the case of pro-government users.

Evaluation was a useful way for users to (de)legitimise the government and was accomplished in various ways as discussed above. The focus on the government's incompetence and its illegitimate rule enabled anti-government users to delegitimise the Prime Minister and his government's actions. In contrast, pro-government users used evaluation to highlight the government's positive qualities and the effect of their decisive and thoughtful actions, which had a legitimising effect as it bolstered support for the embattled Prime Minister and his government. Tweets regarding the Prime Minister specifically were significant and points to the important role political or state leaders have in generating continued legitimacy for the state as a whole (Strong & Killingsworth, 2011). In other words, if Muhyiddin was presented in a positive and acceptable way, by proxy, his government would be legitimised too. Similarly, Ross (2019) explored how the #secondcivilwarletters hashtag was used satirically to delegitimise President Trump for his rhetoric and leadership style and the Republicans as irrational and incompetent.

The use of emotive language was another interesting finding of the study and was employed very often by both sides for different effects. Studies on legitimation in political discourse have demonstrated how politicians have often used negative emotions, such as guilt, insecurity, amongst others, to prey on their audiences' fears (Chilton, 2004; Reyes, 2011; van Dijk, 2006). Fear has been used to legitimise anti-immigration policies (Charteris-Black, 2006; Gale, 2004; Rojo & van Dijk, 1997) and economic policies (Fonseca & Ferreira, 2015). On social media platforms, fear has been used to propagate "fake news" and influence the behaviour of citizens and voters (Igwebuike & Chimuanya, 2020) but such studies are still scarce. Anti-government users, as noted in this chapter, used the fear of abandonment and fear

of losing personal finances to delegitimise the government and its decisions. Pro-government users, however, employed positive emotions, highlighting the Prime Minister and government's caring nature by using references to family and kinship, whilst also positioning themselves as involved spectators in the Prime Minister's show of emotion. As far as the author is aware, the phenomenon of citizens displaying empathy towards political leaders has not yet been studied from the perspective of legitimation.

The discourses found under #KitaJagaKita as presented in this chapter reflect larger discourses surrounding the global shift in views on governance and state responsibility for citizens' welfare. Scholars have noted a shift in governance in Western states that places more emphasis on active citizenship, whereby citizens are expected to learn to depend less on state welfare and support and take more responsibility for achieving their own socio-material well-being (Joseph, 2013; McClelland, 2002; Verhoeven & Tonkens, 2013). Many users that engaged with #KitaJagaKita, particularly the pro-government users, positioned themselves as involved spectators in this regard as they took responsibility for the welfare of others by advocating health and safety practises in line with government circulars. This produced an interesting tension between submission to the government and an active attempt to influence the behaviour of other citizens. Anti-government users engaged less with advocacy in general but used the hashtag to put forth arguments for why the Malaysian people had to depend on themselves instead of the government.

In conclusion, this chapter has demonstrated how Twitter users on both sides of the political divide were able to use #KitaJagaKita to discursively (de)legitimise the PN government. From a methodological angle, the integration of van Leeuwen's and Reyes' frameworks was useful for studying how civil society engaged with political discourses. As the political situation in Malaysia continues to develop in unpredictable ways and citizens continue to use social media to engage in political commentary, further research into other hashtags on other social media platforms would provide insights into how governance and citizenship are negotiated and contested at different societal levels.

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