Emotional Arousal Drives Virality:
An Exploratory Study on the Social Sharing of Domestic Political Videos by Malaysian Urban Internet Users

Hardip Singh Rekhraj
Taylor's University, Malaysia

Sheila Yvonne Jayasainan
Taylor's University, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

This exploratory study endeavours to investigate human emotions as a probable determinant of virality on online social networking sites, specifically during the campaigning period of the 13th Malaysian General Election (GE) (3 April – 4 May 2013). While numerous studies have been dedicated to unfolding the contributing factors of online virality, this research focuses on viral politics which attempts to recognize the ways in which politically-related content, particularly videos, are disseminated and shared through social networks in cyberspace. Departing from the conventional content analysis method which determines the properties of a message that makes it viral, this qualitative study employed the online depth interview method on 31 temporal elites who assisted in achieving this study's objective of determining human emotions as an inducer of viral political videos. The respondents are known to be the drivers of viral politics – they are well-connected, educated and motivated individuals who play an active role in politics but not necessarily through their involvement in a political party or interest group. The online depth interview was made up of semi-structured questions and data collected were analysed using themes and sub-themes that emerged to discover patterns that support human emotions as a probable (sole) determinant of social transmission and virality on social networking sites. The findings indicated that Malaysian urban social network users actively viewed and engaged with political videos during the pre-GE13 period. In addition, the findings also revealed the tendency of human emotions being the sole determinant of social transmission and virality in cyberspace. Evidently, this research has debunked the myth that negatively-perceived political content triggers greater virality as the respondents indicated otherwise.

Keywords: viral politics, temporal elites, emotional arousal, online social networking, social presence theory, online disinhibition effect

Correspondence email: *HardipSingh.Rekhraj@taylors.edu.my; SheilaYvonne.Jayasainan@taylors.edu.my*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

Our lives revolve around social networks which consist of all the people – friends, family and others – with whom we share a social relationship. On a macro level, a social network demonstrates how a large group of people are connected to one another. According to Ellison et al. (2006), the study of social networks examines how people relate to one another – how people make friends, how many friends people have, types of information that are shared and levels of disclosure, as well as how people rely on those in their social networks for support. Evidently, sharing plays a pivotal role in building and sustaining our social networks.

With the proliferation of the Internet in recent years, online social networking - which refers to a class of web services that invites users to create an online profile of themselves, most commonly with a photograph, a listing of personal information (e.g. name, gender, geographic location, occupation, etc.) and interests (hobbies, favourite books, movies, television programs, and so on), has bloomed.

Regular Internet users as well as researchers have noted how people say and do things in cyberspace that they would not ordinarily say and do in the face-to-face world. They loosen up, feel less restrained, are more emotional (both positive and negative emotions) and are able to express themselves more openly. So pervasive is this phenomenon that a psychological term was coined to describe it – the online disinhibition effect (Suler, 2004).

All online social networking sites allow users to present themselves in cyberspace, articulate their social networks as well as establish or maintain virtual connections with other individuals. These sites can be oriented towards work-related contexts (e.g. LinkedIn.com), shared micro-blogging with global communities (e.g. Twitter), connecting those with shared interests such as music or politics (e.g. MySpace.com), or the college student population (the original incarnation of Facebook.com).

Dissociative anonymity is one of the principle factors that create the disinhibition effect. When people have the opportunity to separate their online actions from their in-person lifestyle and identity, they feel less vulnerable about self-disclosing and acting out. Whatever they say or do cannot be directly linked to their lives. In the process of dissociation, they do not have to own their behavior by acknowledging it within the full context of an integrated online/offline identity. The online self becomes a compartmentalised self (Suler, 2004).

Of the many online social networking sites, Facebook is tightly integrated into the daily media consumption of most people, where a typical user spends about 20 minutes a day on the site and two-thirds of its users log in at least once a day (Cassidy, 2006). As of March 2009, Facebook had 316,402,840 users and Malaysia accounted for 1.08% of the global market share with 3,425,300 users (Gonzalez, 2010). During the same period, Malaysia was also ranked the eight fastest growing country embracing Facebook with 236,840 new users joining every week. The majority of Facebook users

in Malaysia fall in the age bracket of 18 to 24 which makes up 39% of the Malaysian users (Phang, 2009).

In many online environments especially in social networking, people cannot see each other. This invisibility gives people, especially young adults, the courage to go places, do things, and express their emotions that they would not otherwise. Even when a person's identity is known, the opportunity to be physically invisible amplifies the disinhibition effect. People do not have to worry about how they look or sound when sharing potentially viral videos or commenting on postings. They do not have to worry about how others would perceive them in response to what they share online (thoughts, feelings and emotions).

In everyday relationships, people sometimes avert their eyes when discussing something personal and emotional. Avoiding eye contact and face-to-face visibility disinhibits people (Suler, 2004). Online communication offers a built-in opportunity to keep one's eyes averted.

Evidently, the usage of Facebook is widespread among Malaysians, particularly the younger generation who are predominantly students and young working adults. On a macro perspective, the likelihood of Malaysians in general owning a Facebook account is high, which makes Facebook socially relevant in contemporary times. Facebook could very well be the Internet phenomenon of this decade, and in fact, the term "phenomenon" is a frequent descriptor of this popular online social networking site (Bumgarner, 2006).

The utopian views of the Internet illustrate a world in which computer-mediated political communication facilitates grassroots democracy and brings people across borders closer. New media is often deemed to be inherently democratising and liberating, allowing the average citizen to put forward his/her views for public viewing and consumption (Nge *et al.*, 2012). Online anonymity obliterates real-life identity boundaries and enhances free and open communication, thus promoting a more enlightened exchange of ideas.

Recognising this social media phenomenon, numerous political leaders in Malaysia have hopped on the online social networking bandwagon. In February 2013, just three months prior to the 13th Malaysian General Elections (GE13), Prime Minister Najib Razak announced that the upcoming polls would be considered Malaysia's first "social media election" (Lim, 2013). The Prime Minister made references to viral content, particularly videos that are shared and re-shared repeatedly – they have the potential of reaching out to a vast audience beyond television and are seen as a potent tool in a political party's electoral machinery.

A growing body of literature attests to the potential of the Internet and its accompanying technologies in reviving political discussions. Scholars have discussed several examples of online communities that engage in political discussions as a new means of promoting democracy (Papacharissi, 2004). Nge et al. (2012) carried out a study on online news consumption amongst urban youth in Malaysia and discovered that two-thirds (64%) of their respondents indicated that they read *Malaysiakini* (an

established and well-known online news website focusing on sociopolitical news and issues in Malaysia). Respondents indicated they preferred real-time live coverage especially during the election period because they can get additional information that is not found elsewhere as well as timely news that presents different views (Nge et al., 2012). Thus, the lack of facts and/or substance in mainstream traditional media has been driving citizens towards online content.
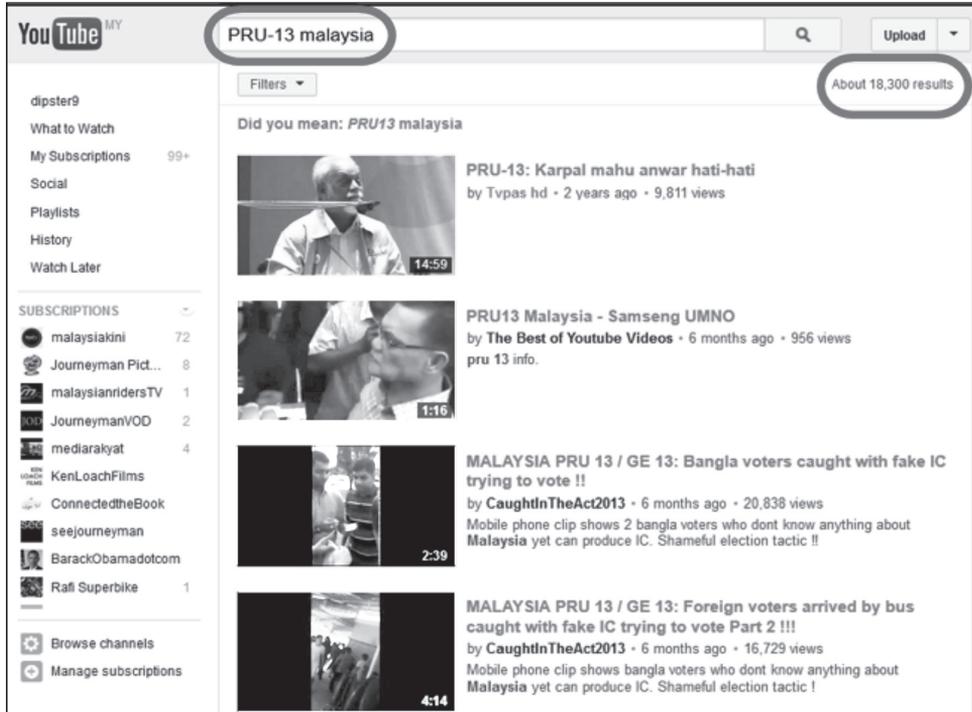
In recent times, viral videos have become a force to be reckoned with as they are capable of changing political landscapes and societal norms. Informed citizens understand that viral videos can be turned into a radically potent medium to advocate justice and promote democracy. Concisely, viral videos are capable of triggering a social media revolution, as witnessed in Egypt in 2011. Proponents of cyberspace promise that online discourse will increase political participation and pave the road for a democratic utopia.

On the local front, many Malaysian governmental leaders and politicians are gradually embracing social media to boost their ratings and credibility by posting status updates, photos and videos of every undertaking in their constituency, with hopes that it would go viral. As of 30th May 2013, YouTube alone hosted about 66,700 videos of GE13 (pre and post events), as illustrated in Figure 1 below. Most of the videos were viewed several thousand times, presumably directly from YouTube or through links on online social networking sites.

Continued from previous page

Figure 1. The keyword *GE13* alone revealed 48,400 user-uploaded videos and the keyword PRU13 had 18,300. The sheer number of political videos hosted and shared on YouTube is a testament to Malaysians being active online sharers.

Renowned New York-based digital media agency, We Are Social, reported that in the year 2011, Malaysian Internet users spent a staggering 41 million hours a month watching online videos from various sources on the web (Kemp, 2012). The agency also claimed that in the same year, 51% of the 16,902,600 Malaysian netizens owned an active YouTube account and have uploaded privately created videos and/or contributed to the mass sharing of publicly available videos.

Wellman and Hampton (1999) suggested that once a communication technology becomes pervasive, it becomes interesting from a research point of view, because this denotes the point at which the technology begins to have a real social impact.

1.2 Problem Statement
Although it is evident that Malaysians are active users of Facebook, YouTube and other online social networking services, there is no clear indication as to whether these users are consuming and engaging with the shared online content. In the context of political videos, it is evident that domestic Facebook and YouTube users have

been frequently uploading photos, videos and news articles as well as sharing their personal thoughts though status updates. However, little is known on whether they are active audience (thoroughly watching or reading and interpreting content) and proactively engaging with the content by means of liking, tagging, pinning, commenting, sharing, etc.

In the past, numerous studies have been dedicated to reveal the contributing factors of online virality, primarily focusing on the tone and impact of the message (text, photos or videos). While the content analysis method has been useful in determining the properties of a message that makes it viral, there appears to be a dearth of research in supporting physiological (biological) arousal as a co-driver of virality.

Lastly, if emotional arousal does trigger social sharing in cyberspace, would it be positive emotions (happy, excited, enthusiastic, etc.) or negative emotions (sad, angry, disappointed, etc.) that induces greater virality? This question is imperative to understand why a certain type of emotion triggers more social sharing than other emotions.

1.3 Research Questions and Significance of Study

According to Cashmore (2009), many claim online virality is a random occurrence. However, we attempt to debunk that perception by arguing that online social networking users are dynamically engaged in the exchange of information and content which predictably contributes to the virality of the content. As such, we posed the following research questions in this study:

RQ1: Are Malaysian urban online social networking users actively viewing and engaging in the social sharing of political videos during the pre-GE13 period (3 Apr –4 May 2013)?

RQ2: Are human emotions alone capable of triggering virality on social networking sites?

RQ3: To confirm the findings of Berger and Milkman (2012), do positive emotions trigger greater social sharing than negative emotions?

Malaysian politicians and their campaign managers will be the prime beneficiaries of this study as this paper attempts to make several contributions to the limited body of knowledge pertaining to why local Internet users share political content online and why some videos are more viral than others. The findings of this research are imperative for politicians who wish to increase the viral potential of their campaign videos – expanding the reach of their advocacies beyond the capabilities of the mainstream media.

Politicians dabbling in viral politics will also significantly benefit by means of understanding the existence of temporal elites, who are the prime drivers of viral videos on online social networking sites. Departing from the conventional way of targeting generic Internet users with political videos, politicians can achieve greater viral potential by wisely embracing this selected group of Internet users who have a vast social network, are educated and motivated to play an active role in politics but

not necessarily through their involvement in a political party or interest group.

While it is commonly understood that Internet users share content for a myriad of reasons (i.e. useful information for others to read, entertainment properties of the content, etc.), there is not much evidence to support emotional arousal as an inducer of virality. Most content developers primarily concentrate on ways of embedding their intended messages in a video, image or printed literature. This study is considerably important to politicians and political content developers as it attempts to shed light on audiences' reaction and their follow-up action, particularly investigating if emotion(s) alone is/are a probable determinant of online virality.

By going a step further to explore if positive or negative emotions trigger greater virality, politicians and political content developers can ensure their videos evoke the most appropriate emotion for it to ignite a mass circulation of the political party's manifesto and other advocacies on the Internet.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Interacting with others by means of email, online chat and forums, Internet telephone like Skype as well as online social networking sites is a form of computer-mediated communication (CMC). Networked computers are used as a communication mediator, which substitutes human face-to-face (F2F) interaction (Thurlow et al, 2004).

CMC may be synchronous or "real-time" which means users are able to respond simultaneously or it could be asynchronous, occurring only when users wish to respond. As CMC deals with technology which is ever evolving, numerous theories have been developed to illustrate the occurrence of non-face-to-face communication via computers. Traditional CMC studies often focused on how individuals develop ways of substituting F2F communication. On the other hand, contemporary CMC studies adopted a more optimistic approach, often claiming CMC perfectly emulates (or even improves) the synchronistic F2F human communication with minimal loss of details. According to Walther (2011), there are many methodologies employed in studying CMC and social-interactions but attempting to describe what people are doing interpersonally with CMC would invite obsolescence very quickly.

Yzer & Southwell (2008) suggested the most useful explanations of CMC may be those that rely strongly on robust theories developed in the traditional context. As such, this study is grounded on the social presence theory which asserts that different communication media enables varied levels of social presence experience and engagement.

The social presence theory is vital in explaining the influence of online interactions (Fabro and Garrison, 1998; McIsaac and Gunawardena, 1996; Rourke *et al.*, cited in Tu, 2002). Social presence impacts online interactions (Tu and McIsaac, cited in Tu, 2002), user satisfaction (Gunawardena and Zittle, cited in Tu, 2002) and the depth of online discussions (Polhemus, Shih and Swan, cited in Tu, 2002).

According to Rettie (2003), the definition of the social presence theory has inevitably evolved over the years and there is no clear agreement on a particular description. For this purpose, this study reverted to the traditional definition developed by Short,

Williams and Christie (cited in Keil & Johnson, 2002) who argued that every medium has a different capacity of transmitting verbal and non-verbal signals that are prevalent in F2F communication. If a particular medium supports fewer signals (e.g. email is only text-based), then users will experience lesser warmth and their involvement in the communication process with the other users will also be minimal. This can lead to depersonalised communication and a lower degree of sharing of information and emotions. In essence, this CMC theory can be equated to communicating with real people which leads to higher possibilities of engagement.

Therefore, social presence, which Garrison (cited in Yildiz, 2009) described as the degree to which each individual in the communication environment projects him- or herself, plays an important role in building interaction among members and developing a community that not only shares but also actively engages.

To illustrate the social presence theory from a CMC perspective, a video conference has higher social presence than an internet telephone service (e.g. Skype), simply because users are able to listen to each other's voice as well as observe the presence of the recipients. Preece (2000: 151) explained that visual and auditory aspects are cues that aid communication which explains why users tend to prefer a medium with higher cues for better interaction.

This theory is very relevant to this exploratory study as it weighed up an online social networking site (Facebook) and an online video sharing service (YouTube). Social presence is a feeling that others are jointly involved in a communication interaction. Like most new media technologies, both the online services studied in this research are capable of transmitting very high levels of verbal and non-verbal cues – Facebook and YouTube contains more than just text and static images. Apart from its ability to host videos, users can communicate through emoticons, share personal status updates and geo-locations, tag users on content as well as engage in synchronous chat. According to Flanagin and Metzger (2001), individuals prefer to utilise media that possess high social presence; the higher the social presence of a media is perceived to be, the greater the possibility of influencing people to use that particular medium.

According to Gunawardena (cited in Tu, 2002), attributes of CMC such as time independence, text-based communication and computer-mediated interaction create a unique social climate that affects and influences interactions and group dynamics online, thus providing the social presence necessary for more effective interaction and engagement in online environments. When the level of social presence is low, interaction is also low (Garramore, Harris and Anderson, cited in Tu, 2002). Social relationships, task types, confidence, choice and involvement (Blocher, cited in Tu, 2002) are some other attributes which have been reported to impact social presence.

The multi-featured Facebook and YouTube is fertile ground for users to experience an almost-physical presence of other participants and simulate real-time F2F conversations, which may lead to a greater sharing of information and emotions. As this study dealt with emotional arousal and sharing of political videos online, the social presence theory was crucial in enlightening us on how users are emotionally stimulated with a multi-sensory media that may result in the online content going

viral. A higher level of presence in a medium confers the attributes of being more sociable, more personal, more sensitive and more emotional.

As online social networking continues to pervade our daily media consumption, the possibilities of mass sharing of content is indisputable. Recognising that social transmission in cyberspace can significantly alter the political landscape of a country, Gustafsson (2010) argued that by investing one's personal interest in disseminating political information and encouraging like-minded friends in the online social network to participate politically, vital news and calls for action spread quickly.

In online communication, everyone has an equal opportunity to verbalise himself or herself. Everyone – regardless of status, wealth, race or gender – starts off on a level playing field. Although one's identity in the outside world ultimately may shape one's power in cyberspace, what mostly determines the influence on others is one's skill in communicating (including writing skills), persistence, the quality of one's ideas and technical know-how (Suler, 2004).

Suler (2004) further added that people are reluctant to say what they really think before an authority figure. A fear of disapproval and punishment dampens the spirit. But online, in what feels more like a peer relationship – with the appearances of authority minimised – people are more willing to speak out and misbehave.

The traditional Internet philosophy holds that everyone is equal; that the purpose of the Internet is to share ideas and resources among peers. The Internet itself is designed with no centralised control and as it grows with seemingly untold potential for creating new environments (Suler, 2004), it allows many of its active users to see themselves as innovative, independent-minded explorers and pioneers in sharing online content especially viral political videos. For example, if someone were to post a video clip (from YouTube) on Facebook about a politician making a sexist remark during a speech, the user has an option to engage with the video through many ways i.e. liking it, reposting, commenting, tagging or even blogging and tweeting about it – all of which would eventually boost the virality of the video. The action that is undertaken by online social networking users is very much dependent on his/her personal attributes, ethics and morality. While Gustafsson (2010) did not introduce emotions as a driver of virality, he did coin two very important concepts related to the development of political participation in the rapidly evolving uses of CMC – *viral politics and temporal elites.*

Viral politics is a frequently used term in CMC to denote a particular method of disseminating politically-rich content in cyberspace, particularly on online social networking sites. Gustafsson (2010) claimed that viral politics is an important ingredient in online political participation; politicians today are trying to grapple with finding new ways and means of positively promoting their advocacies to their respective constituencies to garner support. Another term developed by Gustafsson (2010: 16) was temporal elites which refers to the people behind viral politics: "a group of individuals, well-connected, well-educated and motivated to take an active part in politics but not necessarily through joining political parties or even interest groups".

These individuals spread information and media content by word of mouth to wider

groups of people through personal interconnectedness. If successful, the content or information will catch on and spread rapidly through the mechanism of viral politics, influencing the formal political system directly through personal contacts with representatives and indirectly through the feedback loop provided by the mainstream media (Gustafsson, 2010).

Breindl & Gustafsson (2011) illustrated the position of temporal elites in our society by means of using Putnam's (1976) pyramid of power (Figure 2):
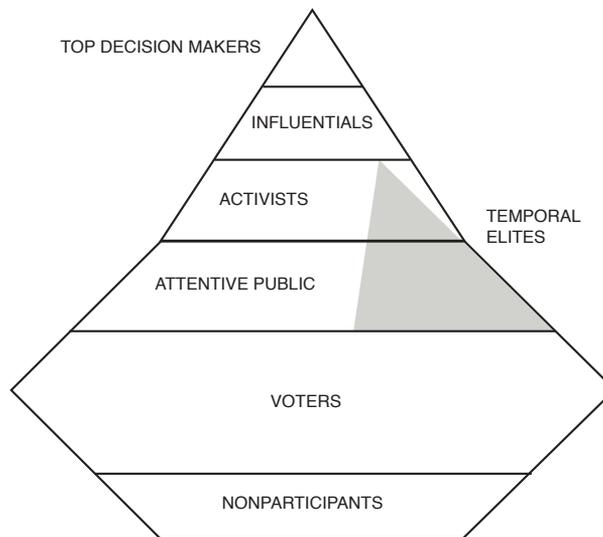
Figure 2. The position of temporal elites in the modern society
(Putnam, cited in Breindl & Gustafsson, 2011: 196)

These temporal elites formed the majority of this study's respondents which is further discussed in the sampling section. While most research on virality tend to be slanted towards viral marketing, one notable generic study on why people share online content was conducted by The New York Times Consumer Insight Group (*The New York Times Insights,* 2009). The quantitative study involving 2,500 respondents from New York, Chicago and San Francisco indicated that sharing is a part of an individual's relationship building process. Five primary reasons were cited for sharing:

1. To bring valuable and entertaining content to others
2. To define ourselves to others
3. To grow and nourish our relationships
4. Self-fulfilment; and
5. To get the word out about causes or brands

The indicators above were useful in the context of this study and were included in the data collection tool of this research to determine if Malaysian urban Internet users shared political content for similar reasons.

Lastly, this research was motivated by Berger and Milkman's (2012) study on understanding how emotions dictate content diffusion and virality on the Internet. The findings of the study were unexpected as the researchers discovered that Internet users use the Internet to disseminate and share positive content more than negative context. While it is common to assume that negative content may be more viral than positive content (presumably due to controversial and sensationalised news), the findings revealed otherwise. As such, this study investigated the possibility of the Malaysian urban Internet users sharing more positive political videos over negative content.

Evidently, emotions play a huge role in the sharing of online content. The emphasis is less about positive and negative emotions and more about arousal — the degree to which different emotions activate us or fire us up. Articles or videos that make us angry drive us to share because the emotion it evokes pushes us to pass things on. Some positive emotions are also considered high arousal; humor, excitement and even awe can activate us and cause us to share.

When people share, however, they care less about getting attention and more about what their audience would think of them. No one would want to always share negative content because it may show them in a negative light and so, they share positive things because it makes them look better.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Sampling
To fulfil the objectives of this study, a highly selective group (purposive sample) of respondents were sought; they were classified as temporal elites – the primary drivers of viral politics online. The following criteria which were based on Gustafsson's (2010: 16) definition of temporal elites - "a group of individuals, well-connected, well-educated and motivated to take an active part in politics, but not necessarily through joining political parties or even interest groups", were applied.

- **31 respondents**
  Bearing in mind that this was an initial exploratory study, the intended sample size was capped at 50. However, only 31 respondents consented to participating in the study, hence the odd number. 31 of the 50 (62%) respondents participated in the online depth interview. The ethnic mix was composed of 9 Malay respondents (29%), 12 Chinese (39%), 8 Indian (26%) and 2 others (6%). In a multicultural society, every citizen's opinion counts and these viewpoints provided insights, points of view and unusual opinions that can enrich this study.

- **Aged between 21 – 55**
  To meet the criteria of a temporal elite, respondents must be white-collar workers. This age range was chosen as it encapsulated the common age in the Malaysian

urban workforce. The breakdown of the age range of the respondents was as follows : aged 21 to 25 = 5 respondents (16%); 26 to 30 = 5 respondents (16%); 31to 35 = 15 respondents (48%); 36 to 40 = 5 respondents (16%) and 41 to 45 = 1 respondent (4%).

- **Almost equal distribution of male & female respondents**
  To eliminate the possibility of gender-biased results, quota-type samples were included in the characteristics for selection. 14 respondents (45%) were female and 17 (55%) male.

- **Legitimate voters who voted during the recent GE13**
  Voters tend to be politically motivated, favouring a particular party or candidate, and that would satisfy the criteria of a temporal elite. All the respondents voted during the GE13 elections.

- **Active on Facebook (shared at least 8 pre-GE13 campaign videos)**
  As temporal elites are Internet savvy and have a vast social network, therefore the respondents were active online social network users.

- **Balanced representation from both political coalitions (BN & PR)**
  To eliminate the possibility of politically-biased results, quota samples were selected as they were more representative than convenience samples. 15 respondents (48%) represented the government coalition, *Barisan National* (BN) and 16 respondents (52%), the opposition coalition, *Pakatan Rakyat* (PR).

As with all non-probability samples, results obtained with purposive samples are not generalised and the selected samples are not representative of the population under study. However, they do provide very specific and valuable insights into the research questions as these temporal elites are classified as experts on the issue studied.

We employed the snowball sampling method to identify and select the most appropriate respondents. According to Heckathorn (2002), a snowball sample is the appropriate non-probability sampling technique to use when it is difficult to locate members of the study population. This method entails identifying the initial few respondents who consent to be part of the study and thereafter tapping into their personal networks for referrals. Each potential candidate was briefed on the objectives of this research and the related ethical considerations (an undertaking of being truthful and accurate with the information that they will provide). This method was deemed the best and the only one available to identify suitable individuals with very specific and less common characteristics classified as temporal elites.

3.2 Data Collection Method

We conducted an online depth interview to collect data. According to Weerakkody (2009: 178), depth interviews are commonly used in media and communication research, generally have a semi-structured format and executed more formally than ethnographic conversations. Depth interview is used to obtain viewpoints of specific respondents across geographic locations on a particular issue or phenomenon through

the opinions that are shared either F2F or through a CMC method.

This is a prevailing method for understanding how people order and assess their world and their interactions in it (Fontana and Frey, cited in Keyton, 2011). By specifically using an online method to gather data in this study, the respondents were able to give themselves time before responding to questions that were asked. They were also able to interact in their natural setting in a casual manner. These were vital factors, not only in gaining the confidence of the respondents but also in allowing them to respond without feeling judged. This online data collection method is especially relevant since the topic under study was focused on electronic communication.

This method was also utilised because it was the least intrusive method. It allowed greater flexibility for the respondents to participate in the online interview according to their availability as well as without the pressure of a moderator who might influence their responses.

The online depth interview was conducted by means of administering semi-structured interview questions to the 31 respondents who consented to participating in this study. The questions were made up of an assortment of descriptive, structural and contrasting open- and closed-ended questions that served to meet the objectives and answer the research questions of this study. The online depth interview was administered one week after GE13 (5 May 2013) and the results were tabulated two weeks later.

We administered the online interview by providing an access link to the questions. The link was created and hosted by Google Drive, which is a user-friendly platform for online interviews and surveys. Once the duration for responding to a survey closes, there is an embedded feature to tabulate the results into simple charts and graphs for further analysis.

3.3 Data Analysis Method

The data obtained were analysed by using thematic analysis, sometimes identified as thematic interpretation, which is based on respondents' conceptions of actual communication episodes (Keyton, 2011: 313). The three criteria suggested by Keyton (2011), recurrence, repetition and forcefulness, were used in identifying the salient issues for the respondents and also in demonstrating the degree of salience for respondents.

The results of the depth interview were classified under themes and sub-themes with direct quotes from interviews to illustrate them and support any arguments, inferences and conclusions made by the researchers (Weerakkody, 2009: 178).

The initial descriptive close-ended questions served to investigate if Malaysian urban social network users were actively consuming and engaging in the social sharing of political campaigning videos during the pre-GE13 period (3 Apr –4 May 2013). The follow-up assortment of structural and contrast open- and close-ended questions attempted to determine if human emotions were a probable (sole) determinant of social transmission and virality on social networking sites as well as to confirm the findings of Berger and Milkman (2012), that positive emotions trigger greater social sharing than negative emotions.

Once the data were obtained, we cross-analysed them against all responses to draw
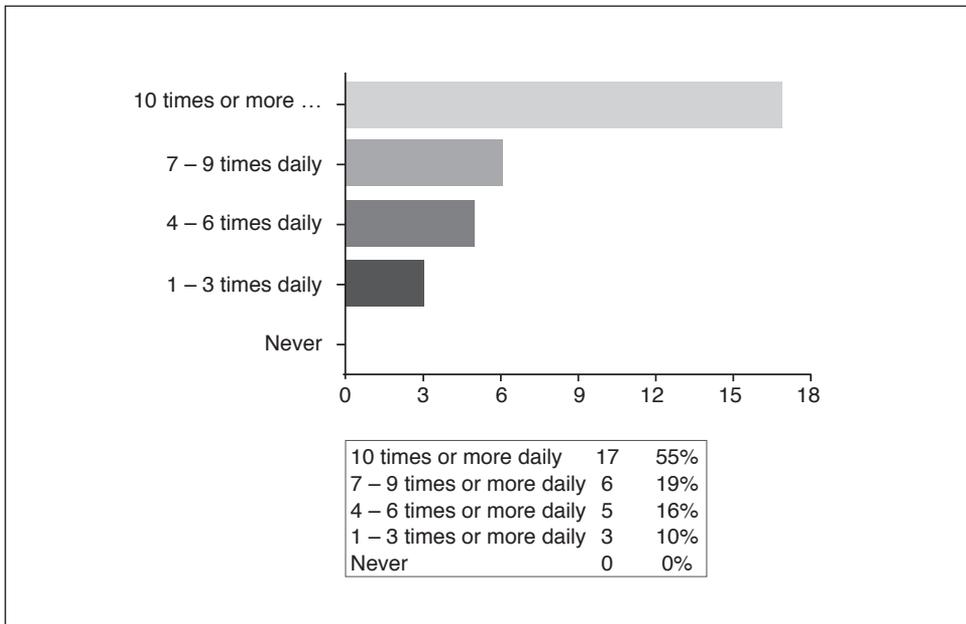
similarities and differences as well as other workable classifications that serve to fulfill the aims of this study.

It is worth noting that no matter how much time is spent classifying findings into themes and sub-themes, it does not "guarantee a sensitive reading of a life, a social ritual, or a cultural scene" (Lindlof and Taylor, cited in Keyton, 2011: 314). Thus, our interpretations were critical in analysing the data. Our past experiences, interests and values were clearly evident when analyzing the data obtained.
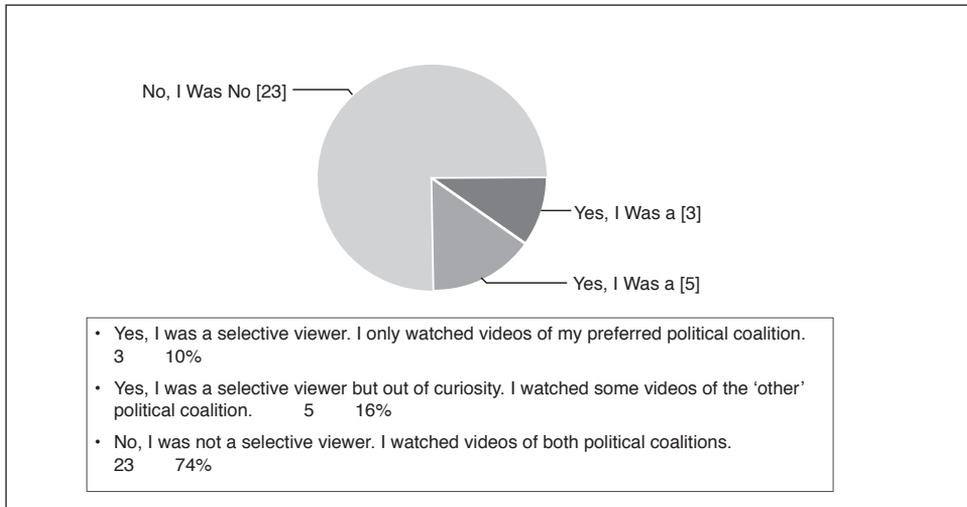
4.FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Viewing & Engagement
Firstly, the 31 temporal elite respondents indicated that they actively logged on to Facebook, which was their preferred social networking site, to gather information during the pre-GE13 period. As illustrated in Figure 3, 55% of the respondents indicated that they logged on to FB more than 10 times daily to receive GE13 updates.

|		
10 times or more daily	17	55%
7 – 9 times or more daily	6	19%
4 – 6 times or more daily	5	16%
1 – 3 times or more daily	3	10%
Never	0	0%

Figure 3. Frequency of logging on to Facebook to receive GE13 updates

Secondly, as illustrated in Figure 4, the majority of the respondents (74%) indicated that they were not selective viewers, preferring to watch videos from both political coalitions (BN & PR). This indicates that the respondents were not biased and treated content with equal importance, presumably to make an informed voting decision.

- Yes, I was a selective viewer. I only watched videos of my preferred political coalition.
  3   10%
- Yes, I was a selective viewer but out of curiosity. I watched some videos of the 'other' political coalition.   5   16%
- No, I was not a selective viewer. I watched videos of both political coalitions.
 23   74%

Figure 4. Comparison between politically selective viewers and non-selective viewers

Figure 5 below shows that there were mixed responses in terms of their viewing habits of GE13 political videos. However, a small majority (55%) claimed that they actually watched most political videos from start to finish. This clearly indicates that the chosen temporal elites were actively consuming political content on their preferred online social networking site.

|		
Yes. I watched from start to finish	17	55%
No. I did not complete watching most of the videos	14	45%
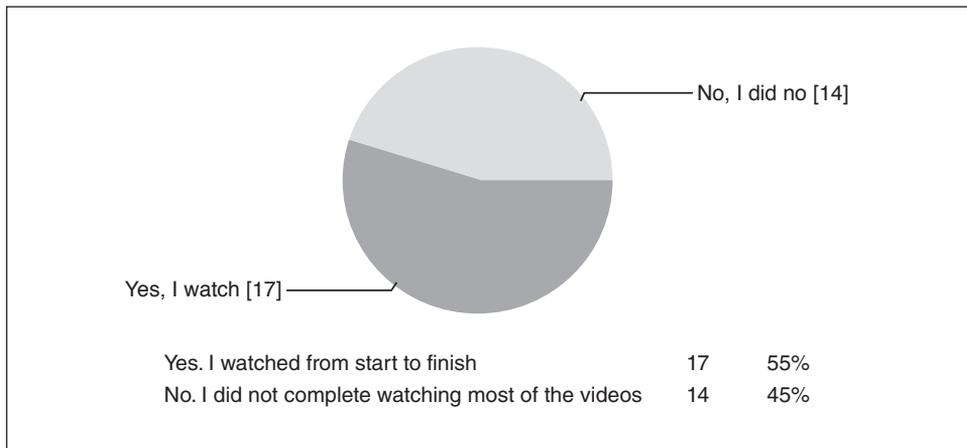
Figure 5. Comparison between respondents who watched all political
videos on Facebook from start to finish

Figures 6 and 7 below outline the breakdown of action demonstrated by the 31 active users of Facebook on GE13 political videos. Every respondent demonstrated more than one action (i.e. they shared and/or commented and/or viewed for personal consumption).


Frequently	9	29%
Moderately	12	39%
Rarely	6	19%
Never	4	13%
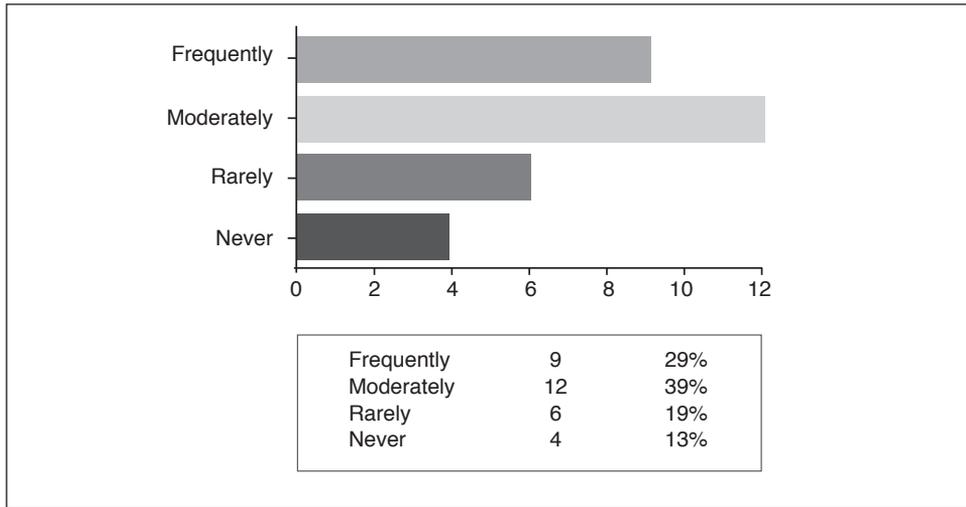
Figure 6. Frequency of sharing political videos by respondents on online social networking sites

Frequently	4	13%
Moderately	10	32%
Rarely	10	32%
Never	7	23%
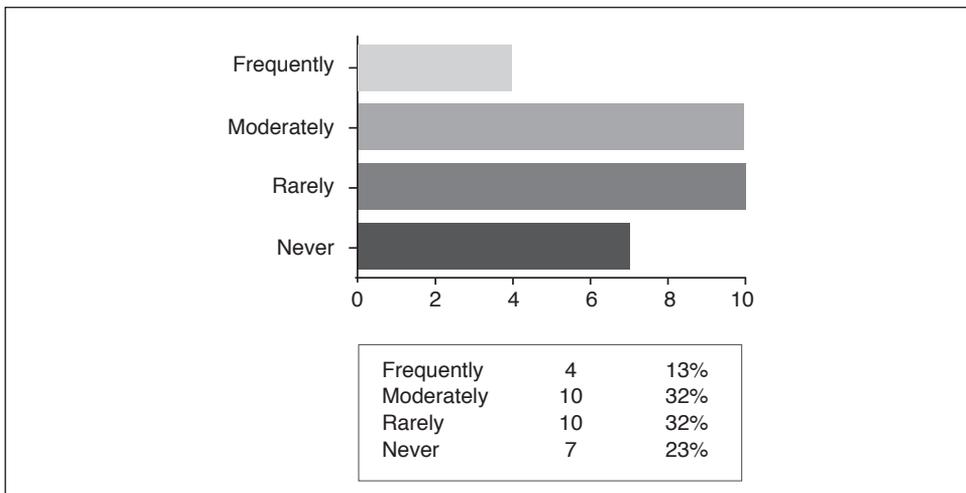
Figure 7. Frequency of commenting on political videos by respondents on online social networking sites

Figure 8 below shows the findings that were based on the NY Times study on the motivation for social sharing. 48% (24 out of 31) indicated that they shared pre-GE13 political videos to get the word out about the cause(s) they cared about.
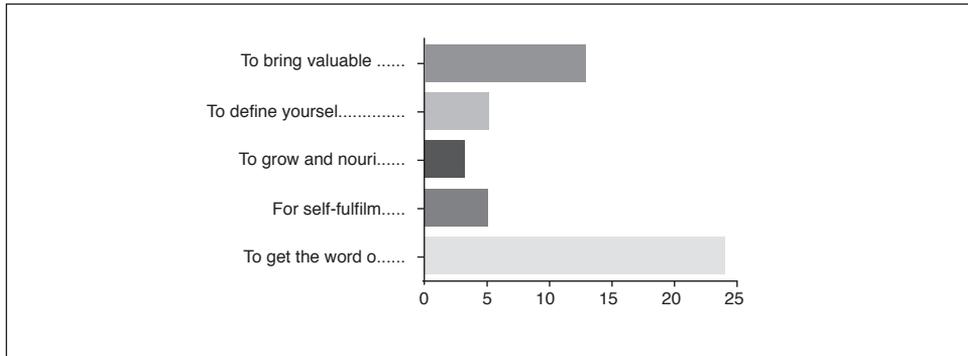

Figure 8. Motivations for sharing content online
[Refer to literature review for details on the N Y Times study.]

Based on the responses gathered above, we were able to address RQ1 which asked about Malaysian urban online social networking users actively viewing and engaging in the social sharing of political videos during the pre-GE13 period (3 Apr –4 May 2013). There is a clear indication that most respondents depended on Facebook as a source of information during the pre-GE13 period. Evidently, a majority of them performed a high degree of sharing and commenting on online political videos to spread the word on the cause (political agenda) that mattered to them.

4.2 *Human Emotions as a Probable Determinant of Virality on Social Networking Sites*

Figure 9 below illustrates that 58% of respondents (18 out of 30) indicated that they shared pre-GE13 videos purely based on their emotional state. This defining question substantiated the fact that the act of social sharing could solely be based on their emotional state.
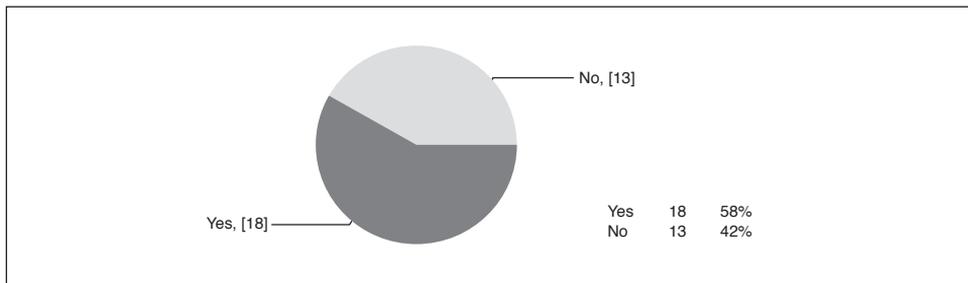
Figure 9. Sharing of political videos solely due to emotional state

A majority of respondents indicated (Table 1) that most of the GE13 videos they watched evoked some emotions, be it positive or negative. 52% (supporters of both political coalitions) claimed that they felt negative emotions when they viewed GE13 political videos.

Table 1. Respondents' emotional reaction after viewing political videos

Emotional state	No of respondents	% of respondents
Extremely Positive	1	3%
Positive	12	39%
Negative	16	52%
Extremely Negative	2	6%

The following were some of the common **negative emotions** described by the 31 respondents while watching GE13-related videos on their preferred social networking sites:

• "I like getting impartial and accurate information, hence I watched and read information from both sides of the election. Unfortunately it came to a point where I couldn't decipher which was which."

• "Mixture of disgusted of certain acts and displays, and happy that citizens are in one voice."

• "This made me upset because when I reviewed all the postings and videos of the discrepancies, it made sense and gave credit to the story."

• "Honestly? I felt quite disgusted. This GE just proved my notion that people in general are sheep, and tend towards mob/pack mentality."

In contrast, the 31 respondents also displayed mixed emotions while watching GE13-related videos on their preferred social networking sites:

• "Touched and united as a nation, but disappointed with fairness and equality."

• "Very mixed. It angers me more when every single negative post were being circulated without a second thought or checking of authenticity. There is always two sides of the story."

• "I felt proud when watching my preferred political coalition but angry when it's the opposition."

• "I was torn in the middle at some point as traditional media is what I have learnt to be credible media, is reporting somehow distorted views compared to what you get on the social media. I guess I felt confused and angry when there are bias in the traditional media."

Based on the responses gathered in this section, it is evident that human emotions alone can serve as a (sole) determinant of virality in cyberspace, particularly political videos in this context. This addressed RQ2.

4.3 Do Positive Emotions Trigger Greater Virality than Negative Emotions?

In relation to the GE13 videos watched by the respondents, we observed an interesting pattern. Regardless of whether watching pre-GE13 political videos elicited positive or negative emotions, the majority of respondents (over 70%) were most likely to share the videos they watched, as indicated in Figures 10 & 11 below.
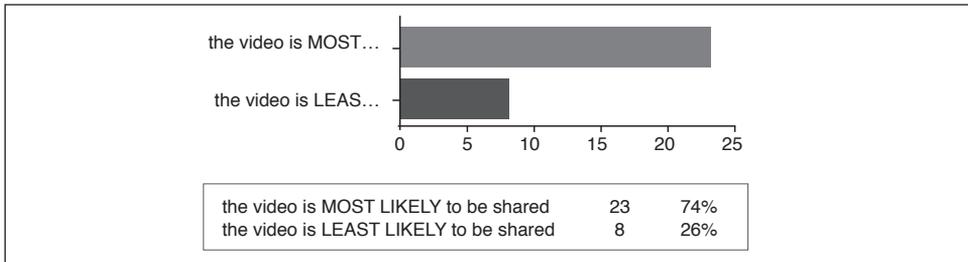

Figure 10. Action undertaken by online social networking user when
watching political videos elicited positive emotions
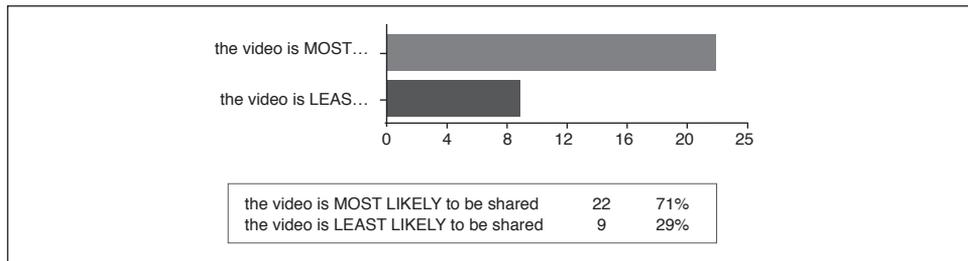
Figure 11. Action undertaken by online social networking user when
watching political videos elicited negative emotions

When asked if positive and/or negative emotions can trigger the sharing of other forms of content (besides videos) on the Internet, a whopping 97% indicated that emotions do play a role in social sharing.
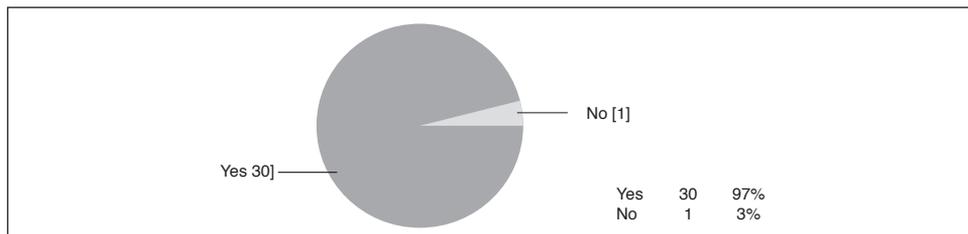
Figure 12. Emotion as a sole trigger of online social sharing

Since both negative and positive emotions can trigger virality, we asked the respondents what type of content they would most likely share if they were in a POSITIVE emotional state. Some common patterns in the responses observed were as follows:

• "Music videos, heartwarming stories, good status (updates)"

• "I share a lot of jokes / memes / interesting lines. I also share a lot of advertisements or campaigns I find interesting."

• "Articles on health improvements, music videos, and lifestyles."

• "Videos, pics, links that give out positive vibes and a sense of hope and good faith that is still around us funny, tickle your bone content to lighten up the daily mood"

• "News links, status updates, Twitter updates, pictures, videos."

In contrary, the respondents said the following if they were in a NEGATIVE emotional state:

• "no point sharing if its rubbish and based on hearsay and assumption"

• "I don't post when I am in a negative state (anymore). However, if I were compelled to I would most likely share content about the injustices of the world, highlighting the plight of a marginalized group or rally towards a social cause."

• "When I'm in a negative emotional state, I'm less likely to share anything on social media. Think of me as retracting into my cocoon."

• "I don't go on social media at all when I'm in a negative mood."

• "Don't post anything when I'm in a **negative** state. Scared it might hurt other people's feelings."

There is a clear indication that positive emotions trigger higher social sharing, as opposed to negative. This finding directly addressed RQ3.

5. CONCLUSION
Firstly, this study establishes the fact that Malaysian urban social network users (the temporal elites) were not just passively viewing pre-GE13 (3 April –4 May 2013) campaign videos but they were actively engaging in social sharing over their preferred social networking sites. This confirms that virality is not random, as argued by Cashmore (2009). Virality is a product of social sharing (sharing, commenting, tagging, pinning, etc.) motivated by a myriad of reasons.

Secondly, there is a high possibility that emotions could be a sole determinant of social transmission on social networking sites. The study suggests that there may not always be a logical reason to share online content.

And lastly, this study supports Berger and Milkman's (2012) findings that positive emotions trigger greater social sharing than negative emotions. When negative

emotions are evoked, content is less frequently shared (or even not shared at all), presumably because it may reflect negatively on the sharer. This could be linked to the social presence theory - people only share positive content because it may reflect on their personality and mental state. It is rational to assume that people would like to be associated positively and not negatively, based on the content that they share online.

REFERENCES

Berger, J. and Milkman, K.L. (2012). What makes online content viral? *Journal of Marketing Research,* 49(2): 192-205.

Breindl, Y. and Gustafsson, N. (2011). "Leetocracy: networked political activism or the continuation of elitism in competitive democracy". In: Araya, D., Breindl, Y. and Houghton, T. J. (Eds.), *Nexus: New Intersections in Internet Research,* pp. 193 – 212. New York: Peter Lang.

Bumgarner, B. (2006). *You have been poked: exploring the uses and gratifications of Facebook in emerging adults*. Unpublished honor's thesis, University of North Carolina, North Carolina.

Cashmore, P. (2009, December 17). "Why Do We Watch?" CNN.com. Accessed 9 Aug 2013 from *http://cnn.com/2009/TECH/12/17/cashmore.youtube/index.html*

Cassidy, J. (2006, May 15). Me media. *The New Yorker,* p. 50-59.

Ellison, N., Steinfeld, C. and Lampe, C. (2006). Spatially bounded online social networks and social capital: the role of Facebook. In *Proceedings of the Annual Conference of the International Communication Association.*

Flanagin, A. J. and Metzger, M. J. (2001). Internet use in the contemporary media environment. *Human Communication Research,* 27(1): 153–181.

Gustafsson, N. (2010). This time it's personal: social networks, viral policies and identity management. In D. Riha and A. Maj (Eds.), *Emerging Practices in Cyberculture and Social Networking,* pp. 3-24. Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Gonzalez, N. (2010). Facebook Marketing Statistics, Demographics, Reports, and News. Accessed 3 Aug 2013 from *http://www.checkfacebook.com/*

Heckathorn, D.D. (2002). Respondent-driven sampling II: deriving valid estimates from chain-referral samples of hidden populations. *Social Problems,* 49: 11-34.

Keil, M. and Johnson, R. D. (2002). Feedback channels: using social presence theory to compare voice mail to e-mail. *Journal of Information Systems Education,* 13(4): 295 – 302.

Kemp, S. (2012). Social, digital & mobile in Malaysia. *We Are Social.* Accessed 8 Aug 2013 from *http://wearesocial.net/blog/2012/01/social-digital-mobile-malaysia/*

Keyton, J. (2011). C*ommunication Research: Asking Questions, Findings Answers (3rd Ed)*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Lim, Y. (2013, February 27). PM: GE13 will be Malaysia's 1st 'social media election'. *The Star Online.* Accessed 5 August 5 2013 from *http://www.thestar.com.my/News/Nation/2013/02/27/PM-GE13-will-be-Malaysias-1st-social-media-election.aspx*

Nge, C. S. M., Wilson, S., Leong, P. P. Y., and Ngerng, M. H. (2012). The Internet and online news: a case study of urban youths in the Klang Valley. *SEARCH: The Journal of the South East Asia Research Centre*, 4(2): 41-59.

Papacharissi, Z. (2004). Democracy online: civility, politeness, and the democratic potential of online political discussion groups. *New Media & Society,* 6(2): 259-283.

Phang, L.A. (2009). Facebook increasingly popular in Malaysia. Accessed 18 February 2010 from *http://www.marketing-interactive.com/news/11863/*

Preece, J. (2000). *Online Communities: Designing Usability, Supporting Sociability.* UK: John Wiley & Sons.

Rettie, R. (2003). *Connectedness, awareness, and social presence.* Paper presented at the 6th International Presence Workshop, Aalborg, Denmark.

Suler, J. (2004). The online disinhibition effect. *CyberPsychology & Behaviour,* 7(3): 321-326.

The New York Times Insights. (2009). Psychology of sharing. Accessed 10 Aug 2013 from *http://nytmarketing.whsites.net/mediakit/pos/*

Thurlow, C., Lengel. L., and Tomic, A. (2004). *Computer Mediated Communication*. Thousand Oak, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Tu, C. H. (2002). The impacts of text-based CMC on online social presence. *Journal of Interactive Online Learning,* 1(2):1-24.

Walther, J.B. (2011). Theories of computer-mediated communication and interpersonal relations. In: M. Knapp and J.A. Daly (4th ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Interpersonal Communication,* pp. 443-472. Austin: SAGE Publications.

Weerakkody, N. (2009). *Research Methods for Media and Communication.* Victoria, Australia: Oxford University Press.

Wellman, B., and Hampton, N. (1999). Living networked in a wired world. *Contemporary Sociology,* 28(6): 648–654.

Yildiz, S. (2009). Social presence in the web-based classroom: implications for intercultural communication. *Journal of Studies in International Education,* 13(1): 46-65.

Yzer, M. C., and Southwell, B.G. (2008). New communication technologies, old questions. *American Behavioral Scientist,* 52: 8-20.

Hardip Singh Rekhraj served the public relations industry for more than a decade before migrating to academia. He started his career at a leading PR consultancy and rose from the ranks to senior public relations consultant. Armed with expertise in strategic PR counsel and leadership communication, Hardip spearheaded a myriad of successful public relations campaigns during his tenure and conducted scores of leadership and communication coaching programs for an extensive array of clients in industry sectors of telecommunications, oil & gas, property, finance, consumer services and technology. Today, his tried and tested PR skillsets hold him in good stead as a Program Director and lecturer at the School of Communication, Taylor's University Lakeside Campus. In 2012, Hardip was conferred the prestigious Taylor's University EMAS Award (Exemplary Meritorious Academic Staff) for his innovative teaching methods which resulted in significant improvement in student learning. In 2013, Hardip was awarded the Most Inspiring Lecturer of Taylor's School of Communication.

Sheila Yvonne Jayasainan is a highly resourceful and self-driven individual with over 12 years of experience in communications training and consultancy. Sheila served the industry in various capacities, from being a corporate trainer for multinational organizations to personal coach in the areas of business communication, professional writing and presentation skills. Client testimonials indicate that Sheila's spot-on training needs analysis and coaching programs have empowered many young managers to become more competent in generating and maintaining effective relationships, resulting in increased levels of trust and accountability in their respective organizations. Sheila's nifty approach to teaching and learning, coupled with her deep-rooted passion in tertiary education drives her to serve as Program Director and lecturer at the School of Communication, Taylor's University Lakeside Campus. Her research interests are in children and the media, as well as impact of new media technologies on the young.