

## Public Engagement with the #CampurLGBT Campaign as Portrayed by Malaysian Netizens' Response

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine public engagement with the hashtag #CampurLGBT campaign as portrayed by Malaysian netizens' response on social media. This study applies AIDA model, consisting of four levels, namely attention, interest, desire, and action. Netizens' response to the campaign, such as their comments, discussions, and even pictures posted under the hashtag #CampurLGBT are analyzed, in order to understand public engagement with the issue, also to determine how the campaign may influence their views on the LGBT lifestyle. This study finds that despite the campaign being successful in recruiting followers and supporters of the movement, the number of those supporting it is relatively small compared with those who are against it. Those who respond positively to the campaign are mostly members of the LGBT community itself, also urban Malaysian netizens who have been exposed to the LGBT culture through friends and family members. While the netizens who have shown their negative responses are mostly concerned with the practice of being prohibited in Islam, also with the negative health implications of the LGBT lifestyle. They feel attacked by the 'negative messages' of the campaign, and therefore need to do the counter campaign. They explicitly declare their negative desire towards the campaign, also take action to reject the campaign.

**Keywords:** *public engagement; AIDA model; #CampurLGBT; #TolakLGBT.*

### 1. Introduction

The lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) culture has slowly becoming a norm, especially since it is widely promoted by and accepted in the Western world. The LGBT lifestyle, which was considered immoral and unacceptable due to religious and cultural beliefs, has spread to many parts of the world, including Malaysia. However, the spread of the

LGBT culture in Malaysia has raised public concerns as the issue of LGBT is still perceived as a taboo in this Muslim-majority country (Joles, 2018). Muhammed & Amuda (2018) highlighted that this is because Malaysia, just like any other Muslim countries, deems the LGBT lifestyle unacceptable by Islamic teachings. Those who practice such a lifestyle can be punished under both Malaysian penal and sharia law.

Despite numerous attempts by activists who advocate for equality and fight for the rights of the LGBT community, there are still cases of violence and discrimination towards the LGBT people (UNICEF, 2015). The United Nations (UN) has reported that LGBT persons, in general, face the risks of being assaulted, including rape, murder, abuse, abduction, sexual violence, as well as unfair treatment and torment in institutional and other settings.

The similar issues are also faced by the LGBT community in Malaysia, which then led to the emergence of the hashtag campaign on social media known as #CampurLGBT. It was started on Twitter and later spread to other social media platforms. The #CampurLGBT campaign, which literally means 'mingle LGBT', was started by Malaysian LGBT community, aims to promote inclusion and acceptance of the LGBT culture among Malaysians. It has tried to highlight the issues plaguing LGBT persons in Malaysia, to end the stigma against them, as well as to normalize the LGBT lifestyle so that it is accepted as a norm (Thiagarajan, 2018).

Recently, in February 2018, a local Malay daily, *Sinaran Harian*, published an infographic inset that outlined several points that public can use as a guide to identify members of LGBT community. It has sparked outrage and drawn criticisms, especially from the LGBT community and its supporters. They deemed the crosscheck reference points as 'offensive' due to allegedly generalizing and stereotyping LGBT people based on their traits and choice of clothing (Coconuts, 2018). It has then resulted in members of the LGBT community, together with those who support them, sharing their personal experiences and views on the LGBT issues on social media under the hashtag #CampurLGBT. The online campaign essentially highlighted how people can support LGBT people even without having to agree with their lifestyle and sexual orientation.

This study aims to: 1). Discover the features of the #CampurLGBT campaign that attract the attention of Malaysian netizens; 2). Examine Malaysian netizens' interest in relation to the #CampurLGBT campaign; 3). Discover Malaysian netizens' desire towards LGBT initiatives after being exposed to the #CampurLGBT campaign; 4). Examine

netizen's action to the #CampurLGBT campaign.

## 2. Theoretical framework

The conceptual framework of this study was modeled around three variables, which are: (i) public engagement with the #CampurLGBT campaign; (ii) the #CampurLGBT campaign; (iii) Malaysian netizens' responses towards the campaign. The three variables were discussed considering the main demographics of this study, namely Malaysian netizens who are exposed to the #CampurLGBT campaign.

Public engagement in this study is defined as a two-way process with the goal of generating mutual benefit to the public interests. Public engagement is deemed an effective way to boost the people's interest in certain topics or cases. Nowadays, social media are becoming important tools for gaining public engagement to certain public issues (Bruns & Burgess 2011).

In order to understand the public engagement with the issue of #CampurLGBT campaign, this study applies the AIDA model, which is originally developed for marketing communications and advertising. This model is used to evaluate the impact of advertising by "controlling every step of the psychological transformation that starts from the individual level to see an advertisement up to the purchase made by the individuals involved" (Hassana, Nadzim & Shiratuddin, 2014).

Thus, based on this model, this study has differentiated four levels of public engagement, namely attention, interest, desire, and action (Reddy, 2015). First, attracting people's attention. At this stage, attracting people's attention is important to create awareness about something that is being promoted to the public. Second, engaging people's interest. This stage is to get people interested in the thing that is being promoted, be it a product, service or even a message. Third, instilling desire for the product or service. At this stage, the advertiser must know how to make the targeted audience enthusiastic about the thing that is being advertised. Fourth, inspiring action. It happens when targeted audience decide to act based on the desire created earlier..

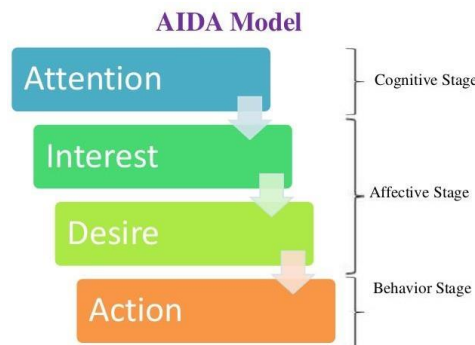


Figure 1. The AIDA Model (Reddy, 2015).

### 3. Method

The respondent of this study consisted of Malaysian netizens, both men and women, and their responses to the said campaign. The most suitable sampling method for this study was purposive sampling, which is based on the researcher's decision on what needs to be discovered in the study. The sample size for the content analysis of postings under the hashtag #CampurLGBT depended on the concept of saturation, emphasizing the completeness of the data, as indicated by data replication or redundancy. The basic assumption in the selection of the sample is that all social media responses analyzed in this study were from Malaysian netizens who have been exposed to the #CampurLGBT campaign.

The chosen research instrument for this study was qualitative content analysis. The data for this study was collected using a single method that is by identifying the content of Malaysian netizens' responses to the studied campaign. To obtain the data, the researcher searched for the relevant postings, using both Twitter and Instagram's search bars. The researcher typed "#CampurLGBT" in the search bar and the system then displayed all the postings that come together with the hashtag. Relevant postings that the researcher think correspond with the study's objectives were filtered out and selected. After analyzing the postings that are included in the hashtag, the researcher found that 35 of such postings were relevant for the purpose of this study. These postings were chosen because they somehow displayed Malaysian netizens' attention, interest, desire and action to the campaign, both in the positive and negative senses. Then, these

postings were coded accordingly, so that the researcher could identify any prevalent themes that correspond to four aspects of the AIDA model. At this stage, NVivo software was used to help the researcher identify and list down the themes or variables in the coding sheet.

### 4. Features attracting the netizens' attention

This study shows that Malaysian netizens were triggered to the hashtag #CampurLGBT campaign due to several factors. Among the reasons why they responded to the #CampurLGBT campaign is mainly because of the campaign's features that attracted their attention. For instance, netizens generally state that the issues highlighted using the hashtag #CampurLGBT helped to attract their attention to the campaign issues. In a way, by drawing peoples' attention to the messages, the movement has created awareness about the campaign's core issue, which is to seek equal rights for the LGBT community.

As for Instagram, netizens mainly respond to the posts due to the nature of the pictures posted as part of the campaign. Most of the pictures feature the image of LGBT persons or supporters with the "rainbow" flag, which is a symbol of the LGBT pride movement. The colorful flag has attracted the audiences attention to respond to the #CampurLGBT campaign. Apart from that, another reason that the campaign has caught peoples' attention is because most of the postings include other well-known LGBT-related hashtags, such as #pride, #LGBT, #LGBTQ, #gayrights, #glamourISE, #lovewins, #queer, #trans, #nohate, and many more.

However, it is noted that such postings also caught the attention of those who do not support the campaign. It is because the campaign itself highlights an issue that they perceived as a ‘social illness’. Majority of those who are against the campaign expressed their

concern that the LGBT culture being against their religious beliefs. As such, the ‘negative message’ highlighted by the #CampurLGBT campaign can also be said to be one of the features that attract the attention of Malaysian netizens.

**Table 1. Examples of Malaysian Netizens’ attention to the #CampurLGBT campaign**

Tweets	Instagram posts
<p>“The women who were whipped in Terengganu today – whose rights were grossly trampled on – made me feel ashamed and disgusted at all these homophobes that call themselves Malaysians. My heart hurts for them. We deserve better. #CampurLGBT”</p>	
<p>“Wallahi, bila kita #CampurLGBT Allah bila2 masa je boleh turunkan azab.. 😞 kisah kaum nabi Lut... dunia akhir zaman sungguh sekarang ni. Saya #TolakLGBT”</p> <p>Translation: “In the name of Allah, if we accept #CampurLGBT, Allah s.w.t can incur His wrath on us whenever He pleases... Just like the story of prophet Luke... the world is really ending. I #TolakLGBT (reject LGBT)”</p>	

**5. Netizens’ interest in the #CampurLGBT campaign**

This study also finds that responses to the #CampurLGBT campaign indicated that the campaign has succeeded in triggering Malaysian netizens’ interest in LGBT issues. Most of the social media postings with the hashtag #CampurLGBT highlight the problems faced by LGBT persons in Malaysia, such getting bad treatment from other people, being judged and discriminated, losing job opportunities, being victims of assault and even sexual harassment.

Some of the responses also indicated that the #CampurLGBT managed to trigger the interest of urban Malaysian netizens, who are not members of the LGBT community, to be aware of the inequality faced by their LGBT counterparts. Those who do not support the campaign, meanwhile, were found to be interested in the campaign mainly because they want to openly condemn the LGBT culture. To do so, some Malaysian netizens have countered the efforts to normalize the LGBT lifestyle by replying to such posts with excerpts taken from religious books, as well as articles or comments

that highlight LGBT as a sin or their lifestyle having bad implications to the public's wellbeing and health. Those who rejected this campaign

even came up with the anti-LGBT hashtag, #TolakLGBT.

**Table 2: Examples of Malaysian netizens' interest in the #CampurLGBT campaign**

Tweets
"#LGBTQ people deserve equal rights. They deserve to be safe from violence in public spaces for being themselves. They deserve a life free from discrimination. Fighting for #LGBTQ rights is fighting for the human right to be free. #CampurLGBT"
"Since I started LGBT activism work, I have heard or referred so many cases of domestic violence towards LGBT kids or kicked out from home. This is happening, we didn't make up stories, and this is never funny. #CampurLGBT"
"Sorry #CampurLGBT, but I'm interested to #TolakLGBT"
" <i>9 PERINGATAN ALLAH KEPADA GOLONGAN</i> #CampurLGBT #Tolak LGBT #SayNo toLGBT Surah Al-A'raf: 80-84 (Reminder to those who support #CampurLGBT)"

#### 6. Netizens' desire towards the #CampurLGBT campaign

The study reveals that Malaysian netizens who have been identified as showing interest in the campaign also displayed their desire towards the campaign through their social media response. Those who responded positively to the campaign stated their intention to support the LGBT community in Malaysia by fighting for equal rights for the LGBT, promoting inclusivity so that LGBT folks are not marginalized and discriminated, as well as having

more empathy towards LGBT persons in general.

Indications of 'negative desires' towards the #CampurLGBT were also recorded. Malaysian netizens who responded negatively to the campaign have shown their negative desire towards the campaign by publicly declaring their plan to continue rejecting #CampurLGBT, as well as condemning the actions of those who decided to support the LGBT community in the country.

**Table 3. Examples of Malaysian netizens' desire towards the #CampurLGBT campaign**

Tweets
"I couldn't care less if you were to mock me because of my views, I feel the need to voice them out to make sure these people aren't afraid. I stand with you, #CampurLGBT. I too was a homophobe, but there's a story behind what changed the way I looked at gay people."
" <i>Aku ok je kawan dgn gay.</i> #CampurLGBT" (I'm okay with being friends with gay people #CampurLGBT)
"The problem with anti-LGBT movements is arguably the lens we view these people with. We forget that they're human too, like us. LGBT shouldn't be glorified and upheld in positive light, nonetheless. I do support, however, reaching out in a dignified manner. #TolakLGBT"



### 7. Netizens' action to the #CampurLGBT campaign


This study also finds that some of the social media postings contained the theme 'action' as they highlighted the next course of action taken by those who have displayed their desire towards the #CampurLGBT campaign. In short, there are two types of action recorded, namely positive action by those who support the campaign, and negative action by those who are against it.

Malaysian netizens have generally acted positively when they encourage others to stop discriminating LGBT persons and accept them as part of society. They also acted positively by stating that they fully support the #CampurLGBT campaign and consider

themselves as advocates of the movement to normalize the LGBT culture in Malaysia. Another indication of positive action taken by Malaysian netizens is when they share postings, with the hashtag included, that contain LGBT advocacy messages.

On the other hand, postings by those who reject the #CampurLGBT campaign showed that some netizens went on to discourage others from supporting the LGBT community and even showed support to anti-LGBT movements on social media such as the #TolakLGBT campaign. They publicly declared their rejection to the #CampurLGBT campaign and condemned efforts to normalize LGBT in Malaysia.

**Table 4. Examples of Malaysian netizens' action towards the #CampurLGBT Campaign**

Tweets	Instagram posts
<p>“STOP MARGINALIZING. No more #TolakLGBT !!</p> <p>The LGBTQ community have done nothing to the rest of us. #CampurLGBT”</p>	 <p>67 likes</p> <p>oh hey! it's june so it's officially pride month 🌈 friendly reminder to the rest that loving who you want and being who you want are still criminalized and even punishable by death in a lot of countries. i'm so sorry the world isn't kinder to you, that they want to change you when all you want to do is spread love. i'm not lgbtq+ myself but i will iron your pride flag for you. #translivesmatter #campurlgbt</p> <p>malaysia, i'm looking at you.              song: paracetamol - declan mckenna</p>
<p>“I've come to a point in my straight life that I've gone all the way across from a modesty performing homophobic Muslim parent to being a parent 100% supportive of my child's happiness with whomever it may manifest as &amp; I'm glad I made this hijrah (transition) #CampurLGBT</p>	
<p>Step 1: <i>Tukar warna jalur gemilang</i>              Step 2: <i>Pakai baju Melayu</i>              (Step 1: change the color of the flag.              Step 2: put on the traditional clothes)              Nope. I'm against #CampurLGBT. This is too much. For me, silence implies consent. Hence, I choose to speak up #TolakLGBT”</p>	

In general, this study confirms a survey by the Pew Research Centre in 2013 which has shown that 86 percent of Malaysians rejected the same-sex (Teh, Ee & Pua, 2016). They pointed out that the LGBT culture is rejected by society as it is perceived as deviant. Among efforts to address the issue of LGBT in Malaysia are setting up a gay rehabilitation center, caning of those who have been found guilty of practicing the LGBT lifestyle, and even holding competitions to help 'cure' LGBT folk (McKirdy, 2018; Free Malaysia Today, 2018). Basically, attitudes towards LGBT persons in Malaysia are mostly influenced by media portrayal of the LGBT community, as well as religious and cultural beliefs.

## **8. Conclusion**

This study concludes that the #CampurLGBT campaign has successfully engaged Malaysian netizens with its LGBT advocacy messages. However, it must be noted that such engagement is not fully positive in nature, as the campaign has also engaged those who do not support the campaign. Those who

responded positively to the campaign are mostly members of the LGBT community itself. Non-LGBT people who showed support to the campaign are mostly urban Malaysian netizens who have been exposed to the LGBT culture through friends and family members who are also members of the LGBT community, as it is mentioned in some of the tweets and Instagram posts.

The campaign has also engaged those who are against it because a huge number of Malaysian netizens have shown their negative responses to the campaign. Their social media postings showed that they are feeling attacked by the campaign because of the 'negative messages' that the campaign propagates, which they believe go against their religious and cultural beliefs. They are interested in the campaign because they feel the need to do counter efforts to the campaign. They declared their negative desire towards the campaign, and they took action to reject the campaign. Their rejection to the #CampurLGBT movement is based on two factors, namely religious and cultural beliefs, and negative health implications of the LGBT culture.

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