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 campaign #CampurLGBT as portrayed by Malaysian Netizens' response on social media. In analysing this, the aim of the campaign and Malaysian Netizens' awareness of the #CampurLGBT campaign are also investigated. The AIDA model for marketing communications and advertising is used to discover to what extent Malaysian Netizens are engaged with the campaign. Netizens' response to the campaign, such as their comments, discussions and even pictures posted under the hashtag #CampurLGBT, are analysed to also 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. This is mainly because those who responded to the campaign are mostly concerned with the practice being prohibited in Islam. Those who are against the campaign are also concerned with health implications that the culture might bring if it is legalised and accepted as a norm.

Keywords: public engagement; AIDA model; LGBT; #CampurLGBT

1 Introduction

In February 2018, a local Malay daily, *Sinaran Harian*, published an infographic inset that outlined several points that the public can use as a guide in identifying members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community. The publishing of the inset had sparked outrage and drawn criticisms, especially from the LGBT community and its supporters, as they deemed the crosscheck reference points "offensive" due to it allegedly generalising and stereotyping LGBT people based on their traits and choice of clothing (Why #CampurLGBT is the Twitter thread we need from now until acceptance for all is realized, 2018). This then resulted in members of the LGBT community, together with those who support them, sharing their own personal experiences and views on the LGBT issue on social media under the hashtag #CampurLGBT on Twitter, a micro-blogging site where users can "tweet" about any topic within the given character limit (Kwak, Lee, Park, & Moon, 2010). The online campaign essentially highlights how people can show support to LGBT people even without having to agree with their lifestyle and sexual orientation.

1.1 Problem statement

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 once 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 concerns as the issue of LGBT is still perceived as a taboo in the Muslim-majority country (Joles, 2018).

Despite numerous attempts by activists who advocated for equality and fought for the rights of the LGBT community, there are still cases of violence and discrimination towards the LGBT people being reported (Ending Violence and Discrimination Against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex People, 2015). The United Nations (UN) reported that LGBTI persons in general face the risks of being assaulted – including rape, murder, abuse, abduction, rape, sexual violence, as well as unfair treatment and torment in institutional and other settings.

The same issues too are faced by the LGBT community in Malaysia, which then led to the emergence of the hashtag campaign known as #CampurLGBT on social media. The use of hashtags is made popular by social media platforms like Twitter and Instagram. Salazar (2017) defined hashtags as short words or phrases that follow the hash sign (#) and are used as information labels to categorise messages. Cumberbatch & Trujillo-Pagán (2016) highlighted that hashtags are often used to boost awareness and initiate public discussions on specific social issues and show support for a cause. As such, the #CampurLGBT campaign, which literally means "mix LGBT", was started to highlight the issues plaguing LGBT persons in Malaysia, as well as to end the stigma against them and normalise the LGBT lifestyle so that it is accepted as a norm.

1.2 Research objectives

- To discover the features of the #CampurLGBT campaign on social media that attract the attention of Malaysian Netizens.
- To examine Malaysian Netizens' interest in relation to the #CampurLGBT campaign.
- To discover Malaysian Netizens' desire towards LGBT initiatives after being exposed to the #CampurLGBT campaign
- To examine the effectiveness of the #CampurLGBT campaign by analysing Malaysian Netizens' response (action) towards it.

1.3 Research questions

- What are the features of the #CampurLGBT campaign on social media that help attract the attention of Malaysian Netizens?
- How does the #CampurLGBT campaign trigger the public's interest in its breastfeeding advocacy messages?
- What kind of desire towards breastfeeding advocacy messages is created among Malaysian Netizens after they are exposed to the #CampurLGBT campaign?
- What does Malaysian Netizens' response (in action) tell about the effectiveness of the #CampurLGBT campaign in promoting the LGBT lifestyle?

1.4 Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework of this study is modelled around three variables, which are: (i) public engagement (with the #CampurLGBT campaign); (ii) the #CampurLGBT campaign and, (iii) Malaysian Netizens' response towards the campaign. The three variables are discussed considering the main demographic of this study – Malaysian Netizens who are exposed to the #CampurLGBT campaign.

The four levels of public engagement observed were: (i) attention, (ii) interest, (iii) desire, and, (iv) action. They are part of the AIDA model for marketing communications and advertising that 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, Ahmad Nadzim, & Shiratuddin, 2014). The conceptual framework that depicts the relationship between the variables is as illustrated in the next page.
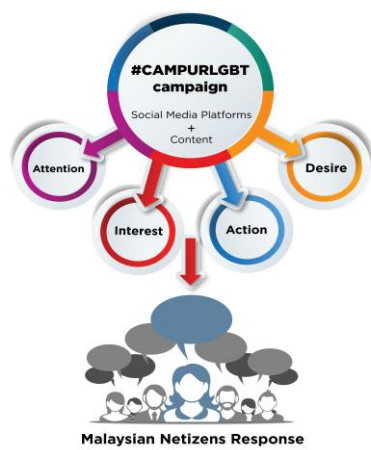
Figure 1: Conceptual framework for public engagement with #CampurLGBT Campaign

2   Literature review

2.1 Public engagement and the AIDA model

Public engagement can best be defined as "a two-way process, involving interaction and listening, with the goal of generating mutual benefit" to the public in general (What is public engagement?,, 2018). Public engagement is deemed an effective way to boost the people's interest in a topic or cause (Why public engagement is important, n.d.) To engage the targeted audience with a message on social media (in this case, the #CampurLGBT campaign that carries LGBT advocacy messages), the AIDA model for marketing communications and advertising is used. The hierarchy of the model was first developed in 1898 by St. Elmo Lewis and at the time, it was only known as AID (referring to attention, interest and desire) (Fazal , Nawas, Ilyas, & Hyder, 2014). Lewis then added the fourth step, action, to the model to create the AIDA model. The model is widely used in studies related to advertising.

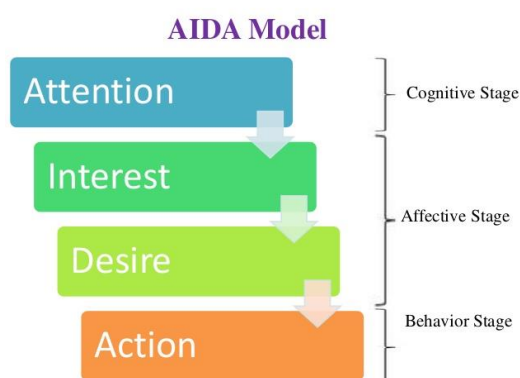The model's hierarchy of effects sequence is as follows:

Figure 2: The Aida Model (Reddy, 2015)

Lee, Song, Lee, & Petrick (2018) and Gharibi, Seyed Danesh, & Shahrodi (2012) noted that the AIDA model classifies four phases of behaviour, namely i) to attract people's attention (at this stage, attracting the people's attention is important to create awareness about something that is being promoted to the public), ii) to engage the people's interest (that is to get people interested in the thing that is being promoted, be it a product, service or even a message), iii) to instil 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) and iv) to inspire action such as purchase (the last stage or phase of this model highlights that when targeted audience decide to act based

on the desire created earlier, it will conclude the advertising or marketing communications process that is taking place). In short, the AIDA model shows how persuasive communication or advertising can alter consumers' behaviours and attitudes (Egede, 2013).

2.2 LGBT in Malaysia and the #CampurLGBT Campaign

The issue of LGBT in Malaysia has raised concerns especially among the Muslims in the country. Ali Muhammed & Amuda (2018) highlighted that this is because Malaysia, just like any other Muslim countries, deems the LGBT lifestyle unacceptable due to it being against the Islamic teachings, culture and tradition. Those who practise such a lifestyle can be punished under both Malaysian penal and shariah law.

Teh, Ee, & Pua, (2016) quoted a survey by the Pew Research Centre in 2013 that showed that 86 per cent of Malaysians rejected same-sex. They pointed out that the LGBT culture is rejected by society in general as it is perceived as deviant. Among efforts to address the issue of LGBT in Malaysia are setting up a gay rehabilitation centre, caning of those who have been found guilty of practising the LGBT lifestyle and even holding competitions to help "cure" LGBT folk (McKirdy, 2018; USM holds contest on how to 'convert' gay students, 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.

The #CampurLGBT campaign is a hashtag campaign that advocates for the LGBT lifestyle to be accepted in Malaysia. It started on Twitter and later spread to other social media platforms. The movement, which was started by Malaysian LGBT community, aims to promote inclusion and acceptance of the LGBT culture among Malaysians (Thiagarajan, 2018).

2.3 Malaysian Netizens

The word "Netizen" was first invented by Michael Hauben in 1995 by combining the words "Network" and "citizens" (Suzuki). It is a term used to refer to citizens of the digital network. Netizens are those who use the Internet as a digital network to interact with other people, to obtain information or to share their ideas. They are the people who strive to make the digital world a better place for other Netizens.

Malaysian Netizens too use the digital network for the purposes mentioned earlier. In 2016, the percentage of Internet users was 76.9%, or 24.5 million people. It indicated that three-quarter of the population can be considered as Netizens (Internet Users Survey 2017, 2017).

Wok & Mohamed (2017) stated that almost 90% of Malaysians have social media accounts, adding that Malaysians are considered as sociable online as they have among the highest average number of friends on social networks in the world. Due to this, it is very likely for them to have come across the #CampurLGBT campaign on social media.As this study focuses on examining the public engagement with the #CampurLGBT campaign on social media, hence it is important to note that the response in this context refers to Malaysian Netizens' social media response that indicate their attention, interest, desire and action towards the studied campaign (based on the four aspects of the AIDA model).

3   Literature review

3.1 Study population and subject

The sample of this study consists of Malaysian Netizens, both men and women, aged 20 and above, and their response to the said campaign. The minimum expected sample size for this study is 30 for the analysis of content of postings under the hashtag #CampurLGBT.
However, the sample size depends on the concept of saturation. Bowen (2008) highlighted that data saturation, as a concept, "entails bringing new participants continually into the study until the data set is complete, as indicated by data replication or redundancy. The basic assumption in the selection of the sample is that all social

media response analysed for the purpose of this study are from Malaysian Netizens who have been exposed to the #CampurLGBT campaign.

3.2 Research instrument

The chosen research instrument for this study is content analysis. It is one of analysis methods used in qualitative research (Burnard, 1995). The risk of confusion regarding philosophical concepts and discussions is minimal as this type of research instrument is not tied to any specific science, meaning there are fewer rules to abide by. In content analysis, the texts meant for the data of the study are coded, meaning they are broken down into manageable categories such as word, word sense, phrase, sentence or even theme. This is so that the researcher can identify any prevalent theme that correspond with the four aspects of the AIDA model used as the study's framework.

3.3 Data collection

The data for this study was collected using a single method that is by analysing the content of Malaysian Netizens' response to the studied campaign on social media. The data obtained was analysed and translated into findings which correspond with this study's objectives. After taking into consideration the nature of this study, it is best to use the qualitative method to analyse the three variables studied. This method emphasised "a naturalistic, interpretive approach as a way of understanding the meanings individuals attach to phenomena based on their actions, beliefs, values, decisions, etc. within their social contextualities" (Flick, 2013).

3.4. Data analysis

For the purpose of this research, postings by Malaysian Netizens that include the use of the hashtag #CampurLGBT were gathered from social media platforms like Instagram and Twitter. From the analysis of the postings, the researcher managed to identify several themes which fulfilled the research objectives and answered the research questions. A qualitative research analysis software known as NVivo was used to help the researcher identify and list down the themes, or variables, in a coding sheet.

3.5 Sampling procedure

The most suitable method for this study is purposive sampling, which is a type of non-probability sampling. This type of sampling is also known as judgment sampling. Selection of sample for purposive sampling is based on the researcher's decision on what needs to be discovered in the study (Lopez & Whitehead, 2013). Purposive sampling is the best method for this study as this study aims to examine Malaysian Netizens' response to the #CampurLGBT campaign (to determine the extent of public engagement with the campaign). As such, it correlates with the study by (Tongco D. C., 2007), who added that purposive sampling is used to study a certain group of people (and in this case, the specific group of people studied for this research comprises Malaysian Netizens). Participants selected for this study's sample were identified based on two criteria, namely they are social media users and they know what LGBT is.

4   Result and discussion

4.1 Features of the #CampurLGBT Campaign that Attract the Attention of Malaysian Netizens

The studied social media postings, such as tweets and even Instagram posts, which included the use of the hashtag #CampurLGBT showed that Malaysian Netizens were triggered to the hashtag 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, coded tweets used as part of the study's data highlighted that Netizens generally stated that the issues highlighted using the hashtag #CampurLGBT helped attract their attention to the campaign's cause. In a way, by drawing people's attention to the messages that the movement has been trying to convey to

the mass public, it then created awareness about the campaign's core issue, which is to seek equal rights for the LGBT community, among Malaysian Netizens.

As for Instagram, Netizens mainly responded to the posts mainly due to the nature of the pictures posted as part of the campaign. Most of the pictures featured images of LGBT persons or supporters with the "rainbow" flag, which is a symbol of the LGBT pride movement. The colourful flag attracted their attention to respond to the #CampurLGBT campaign. Apart from that, another reason that the campaign managed to catch people's attention is because most of the postings too included other well-known LGBT-related hashtags, such as #pride, #LGBT #LGBTQ, #gayrights, #glamouRISE, #queer, #trans, #nohate and many more.

However, it is noted that such postings too caught the attention of those who do not support the campaign. The study found that the campaign caught the attention of those who are against it because the campaign itself highlights an issue that they perceived as a "social ill". Majority of those who are against the campaign expressed their concern about 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 Malaysian Netizens to it.

4.2 Malaysian Netizens' Interest in Relation to the #CampurLGBT Campaign

Another theme identified from the study of the data is "interest". This study also found that response to the #CampurLGBT campaign showed that the campaign has succeeded in triggering Malaysian Netizens' interest in LGBT issues. Most of the social media postings with the hashtag #CampurLGBT highlighted problems faced by LGBT persons in Malaysia, such getting ill treatment from other people, being judged and discriminated, losing job opportunities, being victims of assault and even sexual harassment and many more.

Some of the response also indicated that the #CampurLGBT managed to trigger the interest of urban Malaysian Netizens -- who are not members of the LGBT community -- in its cause, as a result of their being 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 "countered" the efforts to normalise the LGBT lifestyle by replying to such posts with excerpts taken from religious books, as well as articles or comments that highlighted LGBT as a sin or the lifestyle having health implications on the public's wellbeing and health.

4.3 Malaysian Netizens' Desire towards the #CampurLGBT

The studied data revealed that "desire" is also another prevalent theme of the study that can help examine public engagement with the #CampurLGBT campaign. 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 folk are not marginalised and discriminated and also by being more understanding, as well as having more empathy towards LGBT persons in general.

Indications of "negative desire" towards the #CampurLGBT were also recorded as part of the findings for this study. Malaysian Netizens who responded negatively to the campaign can be said to 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.

4.4 Effectiveness of the #CampurLGBT Campaign as Shown by Malaysian Netizens' Response (Action) Towards it

Lastly, the researcher found 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 – i) positive action by those who support the campaign and ii) negative action by those who are against it.

Malaysian Netizens can be said to have acted positively when they encourage others to stop discriminating LGBT persons and accept the latter as part of society. They too acted positively by stating that they fully support the #CampurLGBT campaign and consider themselves as advocates of the movement to normalise the LGBT culture in Malaysia. Another indication of positive action taken by Malaysian Netizens as a result of being exposed to the campaign is when they share postings (with the hashtag included) that contain LGBT advocacy messages with other social media users.

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 show support to anti-LGBT movements on social media such as the #TolakLGBT campaign. They publicly declared their rejection of the #CampurLGBT campaign and condemned efforts to normalise LGBT in Malaysia.

5   Conclusion

To conclude, the #CampurLGBT campaign 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 too managed to engage those who do not support the campaign's cause. Those who responded positively to the campaign are mostly members of the LGBT community itself, hence showing that the campaign is especially well received among LGBT persons. 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 mentioned in some of the tweets and Instagram posts).

The campaign too can be said to have engaged those who are against it because a huge number of Malaysian Netizens also went through the four phases of the AIDA model in responding to the campaign. Their social media postings showed that they are attracted to the campaign because of the "negative messages" that the campaign propagates (which they believe go against their religious and cultural beliefs), interested in the campaign because they feel the need to counter efforts to normalise the LGBT culture, have desire towards the campaign because they declared their intention towards the campaign after being exposed to it and lastly, because they took action to reject the campaign. Their rejection of the #CampurLGBT movement is based on two factors – i) religious and cultural beliefs (especially most of them are Muslims) and ii) health implications that the LGBT culture might bring if it is accepted as a norm in Malaysia.

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