

# Digital Media and Public Diplomacy: Analysing Bernama's Twitter News Framing During Malaysia's GE-15

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.9010245>

Received: 14 January 2025; Accepted: 22 January 2025; Published: 15 February 2025

## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship between digital media and public diplomacy focusing on Bernama's Twitter (now X) coverage during Malaysia's 15th General Election (GE-15). Bernama's Twitter account acted as a critical tool for disseminating information and framing political events, reinforcing government messaging while engaging with a diverse audience. By using a mixed-methods approach, this study combines quantitative content analysis of tweets tagged with #PRU15Bernama and qualitative interviews with Bernama's digital desk editors to explore media framing techniques, news tone, source selection and coverage slant. The quantitative analysis uses the framing framework established by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), systematically categorizing tweets based on frame analysis, sentiment assessment and political bias evaluation. In contrast, qualitative interviews provide insights into editorial decision-making, framing rationales and the challenges faced in politically-sensitive content management. The complementary nature of the mixed-methods approach enriches the understanding of Bernama's election coverage, revealing patterns such as the distribution of coverage across political parties and the predominant story types. By integrating quantitative findings with qualitative insights, this study explains how government-linked media navigate the complexities of digital platforms, maintaining journalistic integrity amid institutional pressures. Ultimately, this study contributes to the discourse on media's evolving role in public diplomacy and its impact on shaping political outcomes in the digital age.

**Keyword:** Digital Media, Twitter, News Framing, GE-15, Bernama

## INTRODUCTION

The relationship between digital media and public diplomacy has become increasingly prominent in contemporary political communication, especially during critical electoral events. This study focuses on Bernama's Twitter (now X) coverage during Malaysia's 15th General Election (GE-15), highlighting the strategic role of digital platforms in shaping public discourse and influencing political narratives. As Malaysia navigates through a complex political landscape characterized by fragmentation and shifting of alliances, how state-affiliated media engages with the electorate through social media becomes crucial in understanding the broader implications for public diplomacy. In the context of GE-15, Bernama's Twitter account emerged as a significant tool for disseminating information and framing political narratives. The agency's coverage not only reflects the realities of the electoral process but also serves as a mechanism for reinforcing government messaging and managing public perception. By strategically leveraging digital media, Bernama aimed to connect with a diverse audience, foster engagement and promote governmental narratives while navigating the inherent challenges of political bias and accountability.

This analysis explores how Bernama used various media framing techniques and source selection strategies to influence public perception and contribute to the ongoing dialogue surrounding the election. Furthermore, the study investigates the implications of Bernama's editorial choices on the tone and slant of its coverage, examining how these factors align with broader trends in media influence on public diplomacy. By analysing Bernama's Twitter coverage during GE-15, this research aims to elucidate the evolving role of digital media in shaping political outcomes and the significance of public diplomacy in a rapidly changing media landscape.

Ultimately, this study contributes to the understanding of how state-affiliated media can effectively engage with the public in the digital age while balancing the complexities of political influence and journalistic integrity. This research explores the intricate relationship between media framing, public diplomacy, news tone, sources and slant in Bernama's Twitter coverage during GE-15, using a mixed-methods approach, the study combines quantitative content analysis of tweets tagged with #PRU15Bernama and qualitative interviews with editors from Bernama's digital desk to uncover overarching patterns in digital media coverage during electoral periods.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### The Malaysia's 15th General Election (GE-15)

The 15th General Elections (GE-15) in 2022 continued to reflect Malaysia's evolving political landscape marked by significant realignments and a hung parliament. The election results reflected the fragmentation of the political landscape with no single party or coalition achieving an outright majority (Aziz, 2023). This led to complex negotiations and the formation of a unity government. Media framing during GE-15 played a crucial role in shaping public perception and political narratives with Bernama's Twitter account used strategically to influence the public discourse and strengthen public diplomacy (Shafie, 2024). The role of social media continued to be prominent, reflecting its growing importance in contemporary political campaigns and public diplomacy (Saranisri, 2023).

The election results highlighted the continuing challenges of political stability and governance in Malaysia, as well as the evolving role of media in influencing and reflecting political developments (Ibrahim, 2024). The literature on Malaysia's general elections from GE-12 to GE-15 reveals significant shifts in political dynamics, media influence and voter behaviour. Each election cycle has contributed to a deeper understanding of Malaysia's democratic processes and the evolving role of media in shaping political outcomes. The findings highlight the importance of both traditional and digital media in influencing public perception and electoral outcomes as well as the ongoing challenges facing Malaysia's political system.

### From Goffman to Digital Media: The Evolution and Impact of Framing Theory

Framing theory, originally conceptualized by Erving Goffman in 1974, explains how media organizations construct news stories to shape audience perceptions. It advances that the framing of information influences how people interpret events and issues. Goffman suggested that frames act as interpretive structures guiding individuals in understanding reality, while later scholars like Robert Entman emphasized the strategic selection and omission of information to create a specific narrative. Entman described framing as highlighting certain aspects of reality to enhance their significance in communication, thus shaping public discourse (Entman, 1993).

Recent research has highlighted the impact of media frames on public opinion, particularly in political communication during election campaigns, where frames related to responsibility, conflict, and economic consequences can significantly influence voter perceptions (de Vreese, 2019). Framing theory has found applications across diverse contexts, including health communication and international relations. Gitlin (1980) highlighted the goal of framing news to align external realities with audience experiences, suggesting that different media types frame messages in ways that resonate with audience schemas. In the digital age, Reese (2020) said that social media platforms facilitate more dynamic forms of framing, allowing influencers and non-state actors to actively shape narratives. Weaver (2007) emphasized the theory's broad applicability across various messages and contexts, underscoring its relevance in understanding how information is interpreted and understood in an increasingly interconnected media landscape.

### Understanding News Source Bias

The categorization of news sources generally falls into two main types: official and unofficial. Official sources, such as government officials, corporate executives, and institutional leaders, are often prioritized in news reporting due to their perceived authority and credibility (Coddington, 2021). However, this reliance on elite perspectives can result in a skewed portrayal of events that aligns with dominant power structures,

effectively marginalizing alternative viewpoints (Anderson & Schudson, 2020). Unofficial sources, such as eyewitness accounts, grassroots organizations and social media users, often provide valuable alternative perspectives that may not be captured by traditional media. However, these sources can also lead to the distortion of facts, as they may be subjective, unverified, or prone to bias. Relying solely on unofficial sources can result in misinformation, as they lack the rigorous fact-checking processes typically employed by official sources. In contrast, official sources like government agencies, reputable news outlets and academic institutions provide more accurate, reliable information, often backed by research and evidence. However, official sources can also be influenced by political agendas or institutional biases. Therefore, a balance between official and unofficial sources is crucial. Unofficial sources can offer important counter-narratives, while official sources provide credibility and verification, ensuring a more complete and accurate understanding of events.

The rise of social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook has broadened the range of unofficial sources, allowing journalists to incorporate real-time updates and diverse perspectives into their reporting (Murthy, 2018). Nonetheless, the inclusion of these sources raises concerns about credibility, as misinformation can easily proliferate through unverified channels (Vosoughi, Roy, & Aral, 2018). Media bias is closely tied to the selection and prioritization of news sources, with research indicating that reliance on elite voices perpetuates biases favoring the status quo while sidelining alternative perspectives (Shoemaker & Vos, 2022).

This is especially evident in political reporting, where journalists often turn to political elites and government spokespersons, resulting in coverage that may be biased or imbalanced (Bennett, Lawrence, & Livingston, 2021). The credibility of news sources is critical in shaping public trust in the media, as audiences tend to trust information from sources they perceive as knowledgeable and reliable (Karlsson, Clerwall, & Nord, 2017). However, the digital media landscape complicates the assessment of source credibility, as the prevalence of unofficial and user-generated content can facilitate the spread of misinformation and disinformation ultimately undermining public trust in journalism (Zhuravskaya, Petrova, & Enikolopov, 2020).

### **Slanted Coverage: The Role of Media in Shaping Political Narratives**

A critical aspect of the news slant is how political candidates are portrayed, particularly through negative coverage that can damage a candidate's image and diminish voter support. Negative slant, characterized by critical or unfavourable reporting, often leads to increased voter cynicism and decreased trust in political institutions (Iyengar et al., 2019). For example, during the 2008 U.S. election, Hillary Clinton experienced a notably negative slant in media coverage compared to Barack Obama, with reports focusing on her perceived flaws rather than her policy proposals (Falk, 2009). Such slanted coverage can undermine a candidate's prospects by shaping public opinions unfavourably regarding their leadership abilities. Conversely, a positive slant, which favours a candidate or party, can enhance electoral success. Cohen (2020) suggests that positive news coverage bolsters a candidate's credibility and promotes a favourable public image, as demonstrated during the 2020 U.S. election when Joe Biden's response to the COVID-19 pandemic received positive coverage, portraying him as a competent leader in contrast to his opponent (Arceneaux et al., 2021).

In Malaysia, news slant significantly influences political narratives, especially during elections. Media outlets have historically been tightly controlled or influenced by the government, resulting in biased reporting that favors the ruling coalition. Government-owned and government-linked media, such as Utusan Malaysia and RTM, have often been criticized for presenting news that positively portrays the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition while marginalizing opposition voices (Tapsell, 2018). This selective emphasis on certain political narratives or the underreporting of dissenting perspectives exemplifies the impact of news slant in shaping public discourse. Additionally, Bernama, as Malaysia's national news agency, has been scrutinized for its role in election reporting, reflecting the broader trends of media bias in the country.

### **News Tone and Its Influence on Voter Behavior During Elections**

News tone plays an important role in media coverage, especially during political events like elections, as it significantly shapes public perception of candidates and influences voter behavior. The choice of news tone—whether positive, negative, or neutral—depends on various factors such as editorial biases, media ownership, and the political context surrounding the election (Strömbäck & Dimitrova, 2011). Understanding the

motivations behind media outlets' selection of specific news tones is essential for assessing the broader impact of media on political outcomes.

The tone of election coverage greatly affects how candidates are viewed by the public. Positive coverage can enhance candidate's image, presenting them as competent and favourable, while negative coverage often focuses on scandals, policy failures, or personal shortcomings. Geer (2006) notes that a negative news tone is prevalent in political reporting due to its ability to attract more viewers and readers, but it can also foster public cynicism toward the political process. Furthermore, the growing polarization among news outlets has exacerbated this trend, with conservative and liberal media frequently adopting contrasting news tones for the same political events or candidates (Patterson, 2016).

## METHODOLOGY

This research uses a mixed-methods approach to examine Bernama's coverage of Malaysia's 15th General Elections (GE15) on Twitter. By integrating quantitative content analysis with qualitative in-depth interviews, the study aims to provide a thorough understanding of the electoral coverage practices of this prominent news organization. The quantitative component of the research focuses on tweets tagged with #PRU15Bernama during the election period. Using the framing framework developed by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), the content analysis systematically categorizes and evaluates the tweets, concentrating on three key dimensions: the frame analysis of news stories, sentiment analysis (positive, negative, or neutral tone) and political bias assessment in coverage.

To ensure the reliability and validity of the research findings, a thorough coding protocol was implemented establishing clear criteria for consistent analysis across all content. Complementing the quantitative analysis, the qualitative component consists of in-depth interviews with key personnel from Bernama's digital news desk. These semi-structured interviews facilitate both systematic data collection and exploratory discussions. This study investigates various aspects, including editorial decision-making processes, story-framing rationales, operational challenges in election coverage and the management of politically- sensitive content.

The strength of this mixed-methods methodology lies in its complementary nature. The quantitative analysis reveals patterns in Bernama's election coverage, such as the distribution of coverage across political parties, predominant story types and frames and overall coverage trends. Meanwhile, the qualitative interviews provide context and explanations for these observed patterns, offering valuable insights into the institutional, professional, and practical factors that influence content decisions. For instance, when interview subjects' detail specific editorial policies or constraints, these can be directly correlated with the patterns identified in the Twitter content analysis. This mixed-methods approach provides a detailed understanding of how a government-linked news agency manages the complexities of election coverage on social media platforms. The methodology enables an examination of both the explicit content of Bernama's election coverage and the underlying factors that influence this coverage. By combining quantitative metrics with qualitative insights, the research presents a comprehensive view of how Malaysian media organizations adapt to digital platforms while balancing their journalistic responsibilities with institutional pressures during election periods.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The coverage of Malaysia's 15th General Elections (GE-15) by Bernama on Twitter offers a rich field of study for understanding the relationship between media framing, source selection, political coverage and editorial decision-making in the context of a government-linked media organization. This analysis reveals significant findings regarding how Bernama navigates its role as a state-affiliated media outlet while addressing the complexities of electoral reporting on a digital platform.

The research highlights key focus areas, including media framing approaches which shed light on how stories are constructed and presented to shape public perception of the electoral landscape. Through the lens of framing theory, the analysis explores how Bernama selects and emphasizes particular narratives around political parties, candidates, and issues, influencing the audience's understanding of the election. Source selection emerges as another critical area of examination, as it reflects the extent to which Bernama includes



diverse voices and perspectives in its reporting. The choice of sources significantly impacts the overall narrative and can reveal potential biases or leanings in the coverage, raising questions about the fairness and comprehensiveness of the information disseminated to the public.

The findings reveal that Bernama adopts a nuanced approach to political coverage, balancing its obligations as a state media entity with its journalistic responsibility to inform the electorate. While Bernama often reflects government perspectives, it also strives to present a more balanced view by incorporating opposition viewpoints and public sentiment. This approach ensures that citizens are equipped with the information necessary to make informed decisions, fulfilling the crucial role of media in a democracy (Couldry, 2015). However, the influence of state priorities may still present challenges to impartial and comprehensive coverage (Lee, 2019).

The research assesses the nature of political coverage provided during the election period, identifying patterns of news slant and the implications these have for the portrayal of different political parties and their agendas. Additionally, the analysis delves into the tone of news reports, investigating how the emotional language and framing of content may reflect underlying political influences. The tone not only shapes the audience's emotional response but also plays a pivotal role in reinforcing or challenging political narratives. This investigation into Bernama's Twitter coverage during GE-15 provides a comprehensive overview of how media framing, source selection, political coverage, news slant, and editorial decisions intertwine to influence public discourse in a pivotal electoral context. The findings contribute to a broader understanding of the evolving role of Malaysian media in the digital age, particularly concerning the challenges of delivering impartial and balanced reporting in an environment marked by political sensitivity and institutional pressures as discussed below.

### Media Framing Approaches

Bernama's framing strategies during Malaysia's GE-15 reveal a complex balancing act characteristic of a state-linked media outlet. This data was extracted from the 20 attribute statements by Semetko (2000). According to Table 1.1, the dominant human-interest frame (72.6%) personalizes political narratives, fostering audience engagement and promoting social cohesion while enhancing the agency's positive governmental image. The responsibility frame (32.8%) underscores a commitment to journalistic accountability, allowing Bernama to advocate for transparency without overtly challenging the ruling party. Conversely, the minimal use of the conflict frame (4.7%) indicates a deliberate effort to mitigate political tensions and avoid public dissent, positioning

Table 1.1: Percentages of Bernama's Tweets on Frames in GE-15.

Frames	Percentage (%)
Human Interest	72.6
Responsibility	32.8
Conflict	4.7
Morality	1.7
Economic Consequences	0.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

Bernama as a stabilizing force in a fragmented electoral environment. The negligible representation of the morality frame (1.7%) and the economic consequences frame (0.9%) further highlight a strategic avoidance of contentious topics, steering clear of issues that could provoke criticism or instability. Bernama's approach to framing demonstrates its ability to adapt to the challenges of electoral reporting, allowing it to shape political narratives while managing institutional pressures. The analysis of interviews reveals a significant shift in reporting strategies, with a growing emphasis on incorporating "*story rakyat*" (human-interest stories) into political and election coverage.

This evolution signifies a move from a predominantly political focus to a more nuanced and engaging narrative style, highlighting the emotional and cultural resonance of these stories. By weaving personal narratives into election coverage, journalists not only underscore the cultural significance of voting but also enhance audience engagement through relatable individual experiences. These stories create a deeper connection with viewers, reflecting broader societal values and cultural practices in a way that resonates emotionally and culturally. The journalist stated:

*“There is a story about this makcik who was following the reporter during PRN Sungai Bakap. Following the Minister's campaign, she said, "I can't wait to vote and wear my kebaya." After covering the event, the reporter went back and covered the makcik's story. Then we found out that this makcik never missed voting. In the olden days, people used to wear beautiful clothes to vote because it was a big event. Stories like that resonate with the people”.*

### Source Selection and Political Coverage

Based on Table 1.2, the description of news sources shows that the BN component reveals that UMNO is the leading party within this coalition. It is evident from the data that UMNO accounted for the highest number of tweets in Bernama during GE-15, with a total of 252 tweets, representing 22.8% of all news about BN. Following UMNO, the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) contributed 98 tweets, which constituted 8.9% of the overall BN news coverage. Despite being smaller in comparison to UMNO, MCA maintains a significant role in shaping policies concerning the Chinese community in Malaysia. Additionally, the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) and Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah (PBRS) had 95 and 85 tweets, respectively, making up 8.6% and 7.7% of the BN news coverage on Bernama's Twitter platform. Both the MIC and PBRS play important roles in representing the interests of the Indian and Sabah communities, which hold substantial importance within the Malaysian political and social landscape. Inclusively, Bernama exhibited the highest percentage of BN-related news delivery, with 530 news stories on Twitter with the hashtag #PRU15Bernama throughout GE-15. Although during this period, the PN-BN coalition was governing, this illustrates the dominance of BN as the most influential political group in Malaysia during GE-15. This can also be attributed to the fact that the country was primarily governed by the Barisan Nasional, with the deputy president, Datuk Sri Ismail Sabri Yaakob, also serving as the Prime Minister of Malaysia. Consequently, the sources of Bernama's statements may have strong affiliations with BN, particularly UMNO and the government.

The use of news sources from PN is seen to be in the second position, reported 23.6% of a total of 259 tweets. PN is a significant coalition of political parties in Malaysian politics that serves as a major competitor to BN in the GE-15. According to the collected data, Bersatu appeared most frequently on Twitter, constituting 8.1% of the overall news coverage with a frequency of 90 tweets. Bersatu, the largest party in PN, holds significant influence on Malaysia's political landscape during GE-15 due to its leader, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, who is an opponent of BN and has substantial support. The presence of PAS further bolsters the efficacy of PN, as indicated by its 88 tweets, which account for 8% of all news broadcasts on Bernama Twitter. Despite not being a part of the government, PAS holds considerable popularity and influence in national politics. Meanwhile, Gerakan and SAPP contributed 37 and 35 tweets, representing 3.3% and 3.2%, respectively. Although the influence within PN is not as strong as that of PAS, the presence adds diversity to Malaysia's dynamic political landscape. However, the STAR platform has a lower frequency of tweets with only 9 tweets accounting for a mere 0.8% of the total news coverage. In general, the analysis of the frequency of news on Bernama Twitter and the proportion of parties in PN indicates a broad range of support, suggesting their sustained presence in the Malaysian political sphere.

Table 1.2: Frequencies and Percentages of Bernama's Tweets on News Sources in GE-15.

News Source	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Barisan Nasional (BN)		
UMNO	252	22.8
MCA	98	8.9

MIC	95	8.6
PBRIS	85	7.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>530</b>	<b>48.0</b>
Perikatan Nasional (PN)		
BERSATU	90	8.1
PAS	88	8.0
GERAKAN	37	3.3
SAPP	35	3.2
STAR	9	0.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>259</b>	<b>23.4</b>
Pakatan Harapan (PH)		
PKR	80	7.2
AMANAH	34	3.1
DAP	42	3.8
MUDA	32	2.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>188</b>	<b>17.0</b>
Gerakan Rakyat Sabah (GRS)		
PBS	14	1.3
BERSATU	14	1.3
SAPP	12	1.1
STAR	12	1.1
USNO	12	1.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>5.9</b>
Gerakan Tanah Air (GTA)		
PEJUANG	18	1.5
PUTRA	5	0.5
BERJASA	5	0.5
IMAN	5	0.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>3.0</b>
Others		
WARISAN	13	1.2
BEBAS	9	0.8
PBM	5	0.5
PSM	2	0.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>2.7</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1103</b>	<b>100</b>

PH played an important role as a political party in the Malaysian government during GE-15. The emergence of a joint opposition party led by Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, who returned to politics after being released from prison, acquired significant attention. The PH coalition comprised PKR, AMANAH, DAP and MUDA aimed to make an impact in GE-15 with the combined strength of its constituent parties. PKR, the largest party within PH received the most coverage by Bernama on Twitter with 80 news posts, reporting for 7.2% of all news. The substantial presence of PKR contributed to the overall support for PH. As the oldest political party in the PH coalition, DAP had a total of 42 tweets or 3.8%. The DAP's importance cannot be understated as it provided stability and support for PH. Amanah followed with 34 tweets, representing 3.1% of news coverage. Despite a lower number of posts compared to PKR, AMANAH's presence added range and strength to PH. Finally, the new entrant in Malaysian politics, MUDA, reported 32 tweets, representing 2.9% of the total coverage. Despite its status as a newcomer, MUDA offered significant promise to the PH coalition, particularly in its potential to attract support from the younger generation. Overall, the PH coalition gained a total frequency of 188 tweets, representing 17% of all 188 news deliveries. This emphasises the continued significance of PH in Malaysian politics and its solid backing from major parties. With such united support, PH remains a crucial player in the country's political landscape.

During GE-15, data from Bernama's Twitter feed highlights the prominent role of the Gabungan Rakyat Sabah (GRS) coalition in the political discourse. Leading the pack are PBS and BERSATU, each gathering 14 tweets and boasting a value of 1.3%. This is indicative of robust activity or support. Following closely behind are SAPP, STAR and USNO, with 12 tweets and values of 1.1%, suggesting commendable, although slightly lesser, engagement. In total, the coalition amasses 64 tweets and a value of 5.9%, highlighting its significant collective impact throughout GE-15. This distribution highlights a balanced leadership dynamic between PBS and BERSATU within GRS, while SAPP, STAR and USNO maintain a supportive yet slightly less dominant role. Ultimately, this data underscores GRS's strong and well-rounded performance during the electoral proceedings. Meanwhile, Gerakan Tanah Air (GTA) emerged as a rookie political party despite its leader, Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohammad. The total number of tweets for this coalition was 33, comprising 3.1% of total coverage. However, Bernama's data on Twitter regarding GE-15 indicates a different performance for the GTA coalition. The most prominent party within the coalition, PEJUANG, received 18 tweets, representing 1.5%, indicating a higher level of activity or support in this new wave. In contrast, PUTRA, BERJASA and IMAN each received five tweets with a 0.5% share, reflecting similar but lower levels of engagement. This analysis provides a clear depiction of how the new parties, including GTA are striving to establish themselves in the political arena of GE-15. Despite all the component parties contesting in GE-15, Bernama also highlights other independent parties who are contesting the election. An analysis of data from Bernama's Twitter during GE-15 highlights WARISAN as a significant player, amassing 13 tweets with a value of 1.2%, indicating a robust presence and support. Following closely, BEBAS contributes 9 tweets with a value of 0.8%, showcasing notable engagement but slightly less than WARISAN. PBM shows moderate activity with 5 tweets and a value of 0.5%, while PSM trails with 2 tweets and a value of 0.2%, indicating relatively lower levels of activity or support. In total, these coalitions collectively contributed 29 tweets and a value of 2.7%, portraying a diverse political landscape during GE-15, with WARISAN leading while various other entities make distinct contributions.

Overall, Bernama's news source bias at the time leaned toward BN which was the ruling government. However, the outcome of GE-15 was not influenced by media coverage. Even though BN news was the most reported by the media especially Bernama, BN itself received the lowest number of votes, winning only 30 seats, while PH secured 81 seats, PN 73 seats and other parties a total of 34 seats (Election Commission, 2022). The GE-15 in Malaysia led to a unique situation in the nation's political history, with no party or coalition securing a sufficient majority to form a government. This resulted in a hung parliament, where the decision to appoint the Prime Minister and establish the government had to be entrusted to the Yang di-Pertuan Agong (YDPA). The GE-15 results reflected a divided political preference among the people, leading to multiple coalitions striving to achieve a moderate majority. Without any coalition reaching the required 112 seats, YDPA assumed the role of mediator to ensure that a government could be formed in the interest of the people and national stability. During this process, YDPA appointed a Prime Minister from the PH component party who was believed to command the majority support of the Dewan Rakyat members.

In the interview with the editor, she clearly stated that the Bernama was primarily influenced by BN as their



preferred source for political coverage during GE-15. The journalist explained:

*“BN has been in power for a long time because it was the government at that time. It’s just orders from above. As far as I know, we can’t decide. If today we release something about PH (before GE15), we can’t. We really can’t, unless it’s something important like a candidate passing away or getting sick, then it’s allowed”.*

This disparity in coverage reflects the broader challenges faced by state-linked media in Malaysia, where the need to balance government interests with public information requirements often results in uneven representation. The emphasis on visual content and platform-specific strategies demonstrates Bernama's adaptation to modern digital media practices, particularly in engaging younger audiences, while still operating within political constraints.

### News Slant and Editorial Decisions

Analysis of Bernama's news slant reveals a multifaceted approach to opinion shaping with persuasive content dominating at 61.4% of the coverage. This high percentage of persuasive content, combined with measured criticism through attack content (17.8%) and defending content (15.4%), suggests a carefully calculated strategy to influence public opinion while maintaining an appearance of neutrality. The limited presence of appealing content (5.4%) further indicates a preference for rational engagement over emotional appeals.

Table 1.3: Frequencies and Percentages of Bernama's Tweets on News Slant in GE-15.

News Slant	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Persuaded	677	61.4
Attacked	196	17.8
Defended	170	15.4
Appealed	60	5.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>1103</b>	<b>100</b>

Bernama has taken noticeable measures to address self-censorship, such as implementing fact-checking systems like MyCheck, demonstrating its commitment to accuracy. However, the agency's operations remain significantly shaped by political considerations. Stories that may portray government allies unfavourably often go unreported, highlighting the persistence of self-censorship aligned with government narratives. This dynamic is especially evident during major political events, where top-down directives can limit coverage of certain political figures, further challenging the agency's editorial independence. Despite these efforts, political influence continues to restrict the full impartiality of its coverage. The editor enlightened:

*“Of course, we will do fact-checking. At Bernama, we have our own MyCheck system. All stories will be validated before posting. For example, on polling day, a viral photo showed a primary one student throwing a ballot paper into a box. This photo went viral, and the SPR (Election Commission) faced criticism for supposedly allowing an underage child to vote. After MyCheck, it was determined that the photo was a simulation taken in a school a few weeks before the election, intended to raise awareness about voting among students”.*

### News Tone and Political Influence

The predominance of a neutral tone in Bernama's coverage (73.9%) initially suggests a commitment to impartial reporting. However, a deeper analysis reveals this neutrality often serves as a veneer for pro-government bias. The strategic use of a positive tone (23.2%) to highlight specific achievements while maintaining narrative control, coupled with a minimal negative tone (2.9%), indicates deliberate editorial choices aimed at avoiding political controversy.

Table 4.4: Frequencies and Percentages of Bernama's Tweets on News Tone in GE-15.

Tone	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Neutral Tone	815	73.9
Positive Tone	256	23.2
Negative Tone	32	2.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>1103</b>	<b>100</b>

The evolution of government control tactics, shifting from simply minimizing negative coverage to actively blocking content and disabling social media comments, raises important questions about audience engagement and media freedom in Malaysia. The use of expert opinions to maintain an appearance of neutrality, while supporting pro-government positions, demonstrates the sophisticated nature of modern media control mechanisms. The journalist said:

*“We do not want to trigger further issues in the future. However, the public needs to understand what is happening based on various viewpoints, not just the government’s perspective. Even if we receive comments from experts, sometimes we can’t publish them due to conflicting policies. So, for me, there is a bit of freedom that is blocked because of this”.*

## CONCLUSION

This comprehensive analysis highlights Bernama's delicate balancing act between digital media innovation and political constraints during GE-15. The agency's strategic use of framing, selective source representation, managed slant, and controlled tone illustrates the complex interplay between journalistic practice and political influence in Malaysia's evolving media landscape.

The findings illustrate the intricate dynamics of media framing, source selection, political coverage, and editorial decision-making within a government-linked news organization. The study reveals how Bernama strategically navigates its role as a state-affiliated media outlet while addressing the challenges of electoral reporting on a digital platform. The analysis of media framing approaches shows that Bernama primarily employed a human-interest frame, which dominated a significant portion of its tweets. This strategy effectively humanized political figures and fostered emotional connections with the audience, while also steering clear of potentially controversial issues. The responsibility frame further highlights the delicate balance Bernama maintained in emphasizing governmental accountability without overtly criticizing the ruling party. The limited use of conflict, morality, and economic consequence frames indicates a conscious choice to prioritize narratives that align with government interests and promote social harmony.

In terms of source selection and political coverage, the findings reveal notable disparities in representation among political coalitions, with Barisan Nasional receiving the lion's share of attention. This imbalance raises important questions about media bias and the challenges state-linked media face in providing equitable coverage. Bernama's use of visual content and modern digital strategies demonstrates its adaptability to the changing media landscape, but it also underscores the constraints imposed by political affiliations. The analysis of news slant and editorial decisions highlights a predominance of persuasive content in Bernama's coverage, suggesting a calculated approach to shaping public opinion while maintaining an appearance of neutrality. However, the presence of self-censorship and the impact of top-down directives illustrate the challenges to editorial independence and the influence of political considerations on news reporting.

Finally, while the neutral tone prevalent in Bernama's coverage may suggest impartiality, it often masks a pro-government bias, reflecting deliberate editorial choices aimed at controlling the narrative. This nuanced understanding of Bernama's electoral coverage on Twitter contributes to the broader discourse on the role of Malaysian media in the digital age, particularly in balancing journalistic integrity with institutional pressures. Overall, the findings highlight the need for media organizations like Bernama to strengthen editorial independence, ensuring political considerations do not unduly influence coverage during critical electoral

moments. Recommendations include enhancing transparency in fact-checking processes, promoting diverse political perspectives, and establishing independent oversight bodies to monitor media practices. Additionally, encouraging media literacy among the public can help citizens critically engage with political content and make informed decisions. These steps are essential to maintaining journalistic integrity and ensuring the media fulfills its role in a democratic society.

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