Image Repair Theory to the Image of United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) as Proposed by Malaysian Political Scholars

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Abstract

Malaysian politics have been dominated by the United Malay National Organization (UMNO), which was formed to represent and protect the rights of Malaysia's indigenous Malay community. Together with its junior coalition partners, MCA (the Malaysian Chinese Association) and MIC (the Malaysian Indian Congress), UMNO-led coalitions, known as the Alliance until 1973 and BN since then, have never held fewer than 60% of parliamentary seats. The image of UMNO had badly tarnished since 2008 during the result of 12th general election (GE12) on 8 March 2008 when the four states Penang, Selangor, Kedah and Kelantan loses to the opposition and lost the two-third majority in the parliament. This drastic image tarnished continue increase in 13th General Election (GE 13) on 5 May 2013 when UMNO, the core party of BN lost by popular vote to the opposition parties. The results of the 13th general election marked a political phenomenon which saw BN lead by UMNO "losing victory" while the PR "won in defeat". This study aims to understand the application of Image Repair Theory to the image of UMNO as proposed by Malaysian political scholars.

Keywords: Image Repair Theory, UMNO, Image tarnished, Malaysian political scholars.

Introduction

The images of UMNO are influenced by issues and problems that they are facing from time to time. Many factors contribute to the images of political parties such as the behaviour of their leaders, their mistakes, their contribution to the society and others. Even UMNO win majority seat in places they contest but their popularity was decreased. UMNO won in 78 out of the 99 rural Malay constituencies. Its performance in the urban areas was poor. BN's win in rural areas may also be attributed to the cash incentive in the form of BR1M initiative.

In 13 General election result shows that Barisan Nasional (National Front) coalition experienced its worst showing since it began its reign after independence in 1957, although it retained control of Parliament. The Pakatan Rakyat (People's Alliance) opposition coalition,

comprising Parti Keadilan Rakyat (People's Justice Party), the Chinese-dominated Democratic Action Party, and Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS), won eighty-nine of 222 seats, up seven from the 2008 election. For the first time, the PR also won a majority of the nationwide popular vote (50.87 percent versus the BN's 47.38 percent) following an unprecedented voter turnout of 84.84 percent.

Problem Statement

The image of UMNO had badly tarnished since 2008 during the result of 12th general election (GE12) on 8 March 2008 when the four states Penang, Selangor, Kedah and Kelantan loses to the opposition and lost the two-third majority in the parliament. This drastic image tarnished continues increase in 13th General Election (GE 13) on 5 May 2013 when UMNO, the core party of BN lost by popular vote to the opposition parties. The results of the 13th general election marked a political phenomenon which saw BN lead by UMNO "losing victory" while the PR "won in defeat".

UMNO image was blemish when they faced unexpected defeats in the 13th general election (GE13). A good example is the Bukit Katil and Temerloh parliamentary. In Bukit Katil seat contested by former Malacca chief minister, Mohd Ali Rustam who was highly popular in the state suffered a shock defeat. The PR candidate who beat him was Shamsul Iskandar, the PKR youth leader, who won with a majority of 5447 votes. Again the image of UMNO was tarnished in Temerloh parliamentary seat where Saifuddin Abdullah was the UMNO/BN candidate and Nasrudin Hassan was from PAS/PR, Saifuddin Abdullah was known as a leader and liberal and likeable by people of all races, still lost to the PAS youth leader who is known to be a fundamentalist cleric. This result shows the public's is sending the message of rejecting UMNO.

Image refers to how the individual or organisation is perceived by its publics or stakeholders. The image has become an important asset both to individuals and to organisations. When image is threatened, we are compelled to do repair work to help us save face. Benoit has developed an encompassing theory of image repair, guiding us through the different options available to organisations and individuals involved in a crisis.

The image of UMNO also has been tarnished because public believe that UMNO leaders involved in issues that might have tarnished the image of Barisan National (National Front) during the 13th general election (GE 13). There are several factors contribute to the image tarnished of UMNO such as UMNO/BN leaders' integrity, LYNAS project, the soaring house prices, and lastly the Corporate National Feedlot (NFC) issue.

Therefore, this study will seek an understanding of the application of Image Repair Theory coined by Benoit (1995) towards United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) images as perceived by Malaysian political scholars through several research questions as stated below:

RQ 1. How the strategies of denial can contribute to UMNO image repair as perceived by Malaysian political scholars?
RQ 2. How the strategies of evade responsibility can contribute to UMNO image repair as perceived Malaysian political scholars?

RQ 3. How the strategies of reduce offensiveness can contribute to UMNO image repair as perceived by Malaysian political scholars?

RQ4. How the strategies of corrective action can contribute to UMNO image repair as perceived by Malaysian political scholars?

RQ 5. How the strategies of mortification can contribute to UMNO image repair by Malaysian political scholars?

This study will focus on Image Repair Theory by Benoit's towards UMNO image tarnished as proposed by Malaysian political scholars. When UMNO image been tarnished, it will create an opportunity to the oppositions in the election.

Methodology
A qualitative approach is used for this study because the researcher wants understand and explore how Image Repair Theory can restore UMNO images from Malaysian political scholars perspectives. As mention by (Merriam, 1995, 2009) qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world.

This argument supported by (Creswell, 2013) mentioned that the few reason why we use qualitative study because of the need to present a detailed view of the topic and to study individuals in their natural setting. This involves going out to the setting or field of study, gaining access, and gathering material. If participants were removed from their setting, it leads to contrived findings that are out of context.

The Study Setting
The study setting for this study will be based on appointment and the place is based on conducive to ensure a positive outcome from both informant as the respondent and the researcher. As for the venue and time of interview in this study, it will be subject to a consensus between the researcher and informants.

Informants Selection
The researcher use purposive sampling because the idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants or sites (or documents or visual material) that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question

The informant for this study is Malaysian academicians (hereafter refers as Malaysian political scholars) that are directly or indirectly involved in Malaysian political scenario. The choice of purposive selection criteria is influenced by a review of the aims of the study and the lines of enquiry being pursued. The academician was selected because they can provide in-depth information in explaining Malaysian political scenario based on their experiences and research that had been conducted. The researcher believes that in the qualitative research purposive sample is selected precisely in order to understand the study in depth, not to find out what is generally scenario.

Conclusion

This study is very significant in public relations and political communication field in providing new input or information and to discover how the Image Repair Theory can really help the political public relations and political communication experts restore the tarnished image of political parties.

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