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Twitter as a Tool for Public Diplomacy: Analysing Bernama's influence on political narratives during Malaysia's GE15

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Abstract
This research examines how Bernama, Malaysia's national news agency, used Twitter as a public diplomacy tool during the 15th General Election (GE15). Using qualitative methodology through in-depth interviews with Bernama's digital editorial professionals, the research investigates the balance between government influence and journalistic integrity in shaping political narratives. Findings reveal Bernama's strategic application of Twitter to influence domestic public opinion and international perceptions. The research identifies significant challenges in maintaining media neutrality while adhering to government directives during politically sensitive periods. Results demonstrate Bernama's important role in Malaysia's public diplomacy strategy and its substantial impact on its international political credibility.

Keywords: Public Diplomacy; Media Framing; Twitter Communication; Malaysia's GE15.

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1.0 Introduction
Public diplomacy involves how a country presents itself to domestic and international audiences through strategic communication and engagement. It goes beyond image-building, focusing instead on fostering trust, shaping perceptions and supporting foreign policy objectives (Melissen, 2021; Cull, 2023). In Malaysia's case, public diplomacy has become increasingly important in managing international relationships and promoting national interests.

During Malaysia's 15th General Election (GE15), social media especially Twitter, became a key platform for political communication. It enabled candidates to engage directly with voters, share updates quickly and respond to criticism in real-time (Sulaiman et al., 2023). This interaction shaped public perceptions of government actions and policies. Bernama played an active role by focusing on positive developments especially in the post-pandemic recovery phase. Through strategic news sharing and social media use, Bernama aimed

to influence public opinion and improve Malaysia's international image (Rahman et al., 2024). Although guided by government directives, Bernama still worked to offer a more balanced narrative by highlighting economic progress and diplomatic efforts.

In the ASEAN context, Malaysia relies on public diplomacy to maintain its regional influence especially when addressing issues like the Myanmar crisis and Timor Leste's integration, which require careful diplomatic balance (Ismail, 2024). The 15th General Election (GE15) demonstrated the strong link between public diplomacy and international politics where social media became a key platform for public engagement and image-building. Bernama played a central role by strategically using media to highlight Malaysia's leadership, economic recovery and diplomatic efforts, aiming to maintain a positive global reputation despite political and regional challenges (Lee, 2024).

This research aims to gather insights into how Bernama shaped public diplomacy in GE15 through its Twitter account by conducting in-depth interviews with journalists and editors to gain insights into the impact of Bernama's strategy on public conversation during this crucial election phase.

Research Objective:
To evaluate whether the appearance of political news on Bernama's Twitter has created a space for determining Malaysia's public diplomacy orientation.

2.0 Literature Review
The researchers explore Malaysia's public diplomacy and media influence on democracy and international relations including the ASEAN, with past research providing insight into the studies conducted previously.

2.1 Malaysia Political Landscape
Malaysia's political environment has experienced a significant transformation especially with the dynamic changes observed during the GE15. Recent studies emphasise how political instability and electoral competition affect governance and policy formulation (Halim, 2024). GE15 marks a critical crisis in Malaysian politics reflecting a broader trend of democratic consolidation and political reform. Rahman (2024) suggests that GE15 showcases the influence of dynamics and how voters react after COVID-19 governance issues, emphasising Malaysia's efforts to maintain political and economic stability while upholding democratic values in the face of rising public demands.

The emergence of media, like blogs and social media platforms, gained significance in the context of GE12 by changing how information spread and engaging voters (Kaur & Dogra, 2021). This contrasts with GE13 in 2013, which saw competition and a tight electoral race. Meanwhile, the Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition stayed in power after the election with a majority. However, the opposition party led by Pakatan Harapan (PH) saw progress, according to Chin (2014). The election shed light on concerns about fairness as reports of irregularities and buying votes surfaced after the event, as mentioned by Hwang in 2016. Meanwhile, according to Tan (2017), the BN government's attempts to shape media discourse and respond to criticism from the opposition were noticeable. They had an impact on how the election was portrayed and perceived by the public. The GE14, which happened in 2018 was a turning point in the country's landscape as PH managed to win over BN for the first time in six decades. The win was mostly credited to dissatisfaction with problems like corruption and financial mismanagement as the 1MDB controversy tarnished BN's image (Wong & Ahmed, 2021). The GE14 election highlighted voters' call for accountability and change as the influence of social media in influencing election results and political shifts in Malaysia (Saranisri,2023).

Then, the GE15 reflected Malaysia's evolving political landscape, marked by significant realignments and a hung parliament. The election results highlighted 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 GE15 played a crucial role in shaping public perception and political narratives with Bernama's Twitter account used strategically to influence public discourse and strengthen public diplomacy (Shafie, 2024).

The role of social media reflects its growing importance in contemporary political campaigns and public diplomacy (Saranisri, 2023). In addition, Ibrahim (2024) said the results of GE15 show ongoing challenges in political stability and governance in Malaysia, as well as the growing role of the media in influencing and reflecting political developments.

2.2 Public Diplomacy and Malaysia
Recent research suggests Malaysia's public diplomacy efforts are closely intertwined with its objectives and global positioning (Lee, 2024). During election seasons in Malaysia, Sulaiman (2023) says that the media plays a role in sharing news articles that boost the country's image and credibility by aligning stories and issues with priorities and values. Rajib Ghani (2021) highlights the significance of coordinating public diplomacy strategies with priorities and benefiting from communication platforms to efficiently connect with and influence target demographics. He thoroughly examines Malaysia's efforts in diplomacy and Malaysia's utilisation of diplomacy to showcase itself as a thinking and culturally rich country. This involves showcasing arts, culture, and traditions through festivals and cultural interactions. Ghani suggests these efforts are important for boosting Malaysia's image and nurturing international ties. He also looks into how government organisations and the media play a part in carrying out public diplomacy tactics by stressing the importance of having a steady message to shape worldwide perspectives successfully.

Meanwhile, Faridah Ibrahim (2022), in her study explored the details of Malaysia's public diplomacy landscape. She explored how climate change and global relations have impacted Malaysia's public diplomacy efforts. Her findings revealed that while Malaysia has made progress in utilising diplomacy to highlight its cultural ability, there are difficulties in addressing international analysis and upholding a unified narrative. Her research demonstrates the importance of shaping public diplomacy strategies to conform to policies and global standards.

Malaysia encounters obstacles in implementing its public relations strategies. The inconsistency between communication and governmental actions could erode trust and influence perceptions, according to the research findings discussed. With the progress made in public relations efforts, Malaysia encounters various problems when it comes to putting effective plans into action. According to Ghani (2021), inconsistencies between the messages conveyed through diplomacy and the actual practices of the government could erode credibility and influence.

2.3 Democracy and Media Influence
The media plays an important role in the democratic process, especially in countries like Malaysia, where democracy is still evolving. It's well-known that the media acts as both a space for public discussion and a means of political influence (Zainal, 2023). In Malaysia's GE15, platforms like Twitter had a huge impact on shaping public opinion and driving political campaigns (Sulaiman, 2023). Ahmad (2024) even points out that the way media strategies are used can significantly influence election outcomes and how people perceive democracy. However, there's always the challenge of finding the right balance between media freedom and government influence which raises questions about how the media can support democratic integrity while navigating political pressures.

2.4 International Relations and ASEAN
Malaysia's international relations especially within the ASEAN region are closely shaped by its domestic political environment and public diplomacy strategies. When it comes to regional diplomacy, the country often finds itself managing complex challenges like political instability in neighbouring countries and regional efforts toward economic integration (Ismail, 2024). According to the research, Malaysia has been making steady efforts to uphold its leadership role within ASEAN, even while dealing with these sensitive regional issues (Koh, 2024). The results of GE15 have added another layer of complexity with shifts in political leadership having a noticeable impact on Malaysia's regional and international strategies (Lee, 2024).

Looking at the Malaysian political context, public diplomacy, democracy and international relations show how domestic and global factors constantly influence each other. GE15 has made it even more evident how political changes can have a significant effect on public diplomacy and international relations. The media's role in influencing public perceptions and shaping political narratives remains an area that requires closer attention. As time goes on, more research will undoubtedly offer insights into how Malaysia continues to navigate this multifaceted landscape to make its mark both at home and abroad.

3.0 Methodology
This pilot study used a qualitative approach using in-depth interviews to explore the experiences and perspectives of a journalist and an editor at Bernama's digital desk. This method allowed for a comprehensive understanding of their roles in media coverage, democracy and public diplomacy. Semi-structured interviews, lasting one to two hours provided flexibility for informants to express their views openly enabling the researcher to uncover patterns and themes not easily captured through structured interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Thematic analysis was conducted manually to identify key insights related to government influence and media framing with repeated reviews of transcriptions to ensure authenticity (Nowell et al., 2017). This qualitative design highlights the complexities faced by media practitioners in balancing journalistic objectivity and institutional expectations.

4.0 Findings
The interviews with a journalist and an editor at Bernama reveal the agency's strategic role in managing the intersection of media democracy and public diplomacy. The journalist's account emphasises the influence of state control in shaping news narratives, where positive government initiatives are prioritised, often at the expense of critical reporting, highlighting the tension between journalistic integrity and institutional loyalty. Conversely, the editor emphasises Bernama's function in public diplomacy, using strategic framing to bolster Malaysia's global image, particularly in interactions with international stakeholders. Together, these insights illustrate Bernama's dual function: safeguarding national interests through favourable coverage while navigating complex diplomatic terrains to enhance Malaysia's regional and international standing. This duality highlights the media's pivotal role as both a domestic informer and a diplomatic actor in contemporary public diplomacy.

4.1 Media Democracy and Public Diplomacy
The interview provides important insights into the influence of government control, the role of positive news and the integration of diplomacy in media practice. From a journalist's perspective on government influence, the journalists emphasise that the government plays a dominant role in shaping Bernama's coverage. According to the journalist, Bernama is often instructed to focus on the government's positive initiatives. Even though Bernama tried to balance the reporting pressure to maintain a positive tone, it led to a general perception of bias; this reflects the enormous challenges in maintaining journalistic integrity amid tight media controls. He said:

"It might seem as if Bernama is favouring one side and only highlighting the positive aspects. In reality, Bernama is compelled to do this because we are instructed to do so. This does not mean we avoid discussing the negative aspects of the government; we do address them, but in a less direct way. It's about striking a balance—talking positively about the government upfront while mentioning the negative impacts subtly, just enough to show that Bernama is trying to maintain balance."

Bernama faced the challenges of balancing between meeting the government's requirements for positive coverage and maintaining journalistic standards. The government expects coverage that can communicate policy effectively, but this often raises criticism that Bernama is biased. However, Bernama tries to find a balance by acknowledging the negative issues but framing them finely so as not to affect the public's perception of the government.

Meanwhile, from the editor's perspective on public diplomacy and diplomatic relations, the interviewed editor discussed how Bernama plays a role in public diplomacy by focusing on positive news to support Malaysia's diplomatic relations. She explained that although this is not an official directive, the practice of highlighting positive news is in line with the diplomatic role held by Bernama. For example, when dealing with international embassies or reporting on multinational companies, Bernama adopts a diplomatic approach that benefits the country without acting as a spokesperson for external entities. She said:

"We try to, ermm, release a lot of positive news. This is part of the diplomacy we are practising. It's not a strict rule, but we understand our role. Additionally, when dealing with international embassies and covering multinational companies, we consider this part of our diplomacy. For instance, we are aware that Chinese embassies, and China in general, have their diplomatic style. We take advantage of this opportunity because we understand diplomacy. We don't act as spokespersons for them, but we leverage what benefits us. That's why a good level of understanding is important."

She also stated that this approach extends to their interactions with foreign embassies especially from countries like China. By understanding the differences in diplomacy, Bernama grabs the opportunity to align media content with broader diplomatic efforts. This includes framing the news in a way that supports Malaysia's image while maintaining professionalism and distance from manifest propaganda.

This analysis from two perspectives between journalists and editors shows that Bernama operates within a complex framework where government influence, public diplomacy and journalistic integrity are intertwined. Although Bernama is often seen as siding with the government due to institutional pressure, there are efforts to balance this with a more intelligent diplomatic approach. The use of positive news as a diplomatic tool shows that Bernama plays an important role in shaping Malaysia's international image, but Bernama continues to face the challenge of balancing national interests with credible and impartial journalism.

4.2 Political Narratives Under Government Influence

The interviews provide a clear look into how Bernama carefully managed political narratives and party images during Malaysia's 15th General Election (GE15). The findings show that Bernama's political reporting has evolved, shaped by internal rules and the fast-changing digital media environment. The agency appears to be balancing journalistic ethics with pressure to follow institutional and political expectations especially in a competitive and politically charged media space.

The journalist explained that Bernama purposely highlighted the strength and maturity of UMNO and Barisan Nasional in its coverage. This strategy helped to present these parties positively aiming to maintain their image and influence during a time of political uncertainty. This kind of reporting shows how government-linked media can still support long-standing political powers, aligning with those in control while managing public perception. He said:

"What we are trying to convey is the narrative that UMNO or BN is still relevant to people of all ages. We aim to show that UMNO and Barisan Nasional have strengths due to their political maturity and experience in policymaking

Meanwhile, the editors raise concerns over the deteriorating landscape of media freedom post-GE15, pointing to heightened government oversight in political reporting. She notes a perceptible decline in the autonomy of news coverage, signalling a regression in press freedom and an increasing tendency toward compliance with official narratives. These testimonies collectively reveal a tension between editorial neutrality and institutional expectations, highlighting the structural challenges faced by public news agencies operating within Malaysia's semi-authoritarian media framework. She said:

"To be honest, I would say that the narrative has changed before and after GE15. However, since Bernama is under the government, we can't avoid presenting a one-sided story. At the same time, we still need to share updates within the ecosystem. I can say that we had more freedom in addressing political issues before, despite the government's control. We are now more restricted, even on some government-related issues. We are still unsure about what the government wants. Fahmi Fadzil might make a statement, we share it online and when it goes viral and receives public condemnation, he asks us to remove it."

4.3 International Politics and Neighbouring Relations.

According to a journalist's perspective on diplomacy and media representation in Bernama political reports and regional relations between Malaysia and its neighbouring countries revealed that Bernama media coverage serves as a diplomatic tool to enhance Malaysia's global image during visits to neighbouring nations even, on regular ministerial trips depicting positive bilateral relations consistently for the stability of diplomatic ties irrespective of the visits scale or intent. Bernama's focus on maintaining relationships with nations like New Zealand and China illustrates the agency's influence on shaping Malaysia's global image and promoting stability.

"Yes, for instance, in a recent visit to several countries, including New Zealand and China, we observed that even though these visits were merely working visits by a ministry or minister from the respective countries to Malaysia, Bernama highlighted Malaysia's close relations with other nations. Even when we visit neighbouring countries, it demonstrates that the diplomacy between the two countries is strong."

Meanwhile, the editor highlighted Malaysia's leadership within ASEAN and its careful handling of diplomacy issues instead of the original content that focused on Malaysia's actions in maintaining its influence in ASEAN through different projects and roles they take up to lead the region effectively while addressing challenges like political instability in Myanmar and Timor Leste integration without harming relationships with other member states was emphasised on by the editor also mentioned acquiring backing from vital ASEAN nations, like Indonesia showcasing Malaysia's aspiration for leadership without disrupting regional peace.

"We're working on a lot of ASEAN projects. Next year, we will focus on ASEAN posts. Sometimes, we worry that Laos might feel left out because we went all out to Japan and ASEAN. Now, we are portraying our ASEAN leadership to facilitate public diplomacy. We want to gain endorsements. So far, Indonesia has endorsed us regularly. But we must be careful not to push too much on Timor-Leste's issues. Myanmar is already a problem. But that's the beauty of ASEAN; we don't let it deter us. We continue to focus on economic growth. Now, there are many packages for ASEAN."

The journalist and the editor interviewed provided important insights into Bernama's role in shaping Malaysia's international image. The journalist emphasises Bernama's role in portraying strong diplomatic relations, while the editor emphasises Malaysia's leadership and diplomacy in ASEAN. Both perspectives show how the media is an important tool in managing international relations and political stability, especially through public diplomacy and regional cooperation.

5.0 Discussions

5.1 Bernama's Twitter as a Strategic Public Diplomacy Platform
The findings demonstrate that Bernama's Twitter functions not only as a domestic news outlet but also as a strategic instrument of public diplomacy aligning with the research objective of evaluating its role in shaping Malaysia's diplomatic orientation. The dual perspectives of the journalist and editor reveal complementary mechanisms: journalists highlight the pressures of government control and the prioritisation of positive coverage, while editors emphasise framing strategies designed to project a favourable image of Malaysia internationally. This duality emphasises the hybrid nature of Bernama's media role where news dissemination serves both domestic informational needs and international diplomatic signalling.

The journalist's insights suggest that Bernama's political reporting is shaped by state directives to emphasise positive government initiatives. While this may create perceptions of bias, it also illustrates how the news agency navigates institutional loyalty and journalistic integrity. In the context of Twitter, the rapid circulation of political news amplifies the reach of these curated narratives, effectively creating a digital space where Malaysia's policy initiatives and government achievements are foregrounded. This aligns with the theoretical assertion that state-linked media often act as instruments of soft power, framing narratives to cultivate legitimacy and credibility both at home and abroad (Nye, 2020; Zahariadis & Howlett, 2021).

Simultaneously, the editor's account demonstrates that Bernama strategically uses Twitter to engage with international stakeholders, highlighting diplomatic achievements and regional leadership within ASEAN. By framing news to highlight Malaysia's proactive diplomacy and bilateral relations, Bernama establishes an online environment where public diplomacy objectives such as projecting stability, economic growth and leadership legitimacy are operationalised through social media narratives. This confirms that digital platforms like Twitter have become critical spaces where media institutions not only report but actively construct the nation's diplomatic image (Cull, 2019; Snow, 2022).

5.2 Political Narratives and Government Influence
The findings indicate that Bernama's Twitter coverage during GE15 deliberately reinforced political narratives favourable to long-standing parties such as UMNO and Barisan Nasional. The journalist emphasises that this strategic framing aimed to maintain perceptions of political maturity and stability. From a public diplomacy perspective, such narratives carry implications beyond domestic audiences; by reinforcing political legitimacy and institutional continuity, Bernama indirectly signals to international observers that Malaysia remains politically stable and capable of sustaining coherent governance structures (Richards & Kavaratzis, 2020).

However, both journalist and editor accounts highlight a tension between editorial autonomy and governmental expectations suggesting that Bernama's Twitter space is not entirely free from institutional pressures. The subtle inclusion of negative issues indicates an attempt to maintain journalistic credibility, but the predominance of positive framing shows that political communication is closely intertwined with the strategic management of public diplomacy. This aligns with studies on semi-authoritarian media systems, where state-linked news agencies perform dual roles of information dissemination and political legitimation (Levitsky & Way, 2010; Thompson, 2021).

5.3 Enhancing Malaysia's Regional and International Image
Bernama's coverage of international visits and ASEAN-related initiatives illustrates the agency's deliberate use of Twitter to enhance Malaysia's diplomatic visibility. Both the journalist and editor emphasised that even routine ministerial visits are framed to convey strong bilateral relations portraying Malaysia as an active, responsible regional actor. The editor's emphasis on careful navigation of ASEAN

issues, including Myanmar and Timor-Leste, demonstrates an understanding of the subtleties of regional diplomacy, showing that Bernama's Twitter operates as a platform for nuanced messaging that balances domestic interests with international perceptions.

These findings suggest that Bernama's Twitter presence creates a mediated space where public diplomacy is shaped by strategic news selection, narrative framing and visual representation. By highlighting positive diplomatic outcomes and regional leadership, Bernama influences how Malaysia's foreign policy and political stability are perceived, aligning with the research objective of assessing whether political news on the platform contributes to determining the country's public diplomacy orientation.

5.4 Implications for Public Diplomacy and Media Democracy
The research illustrates that Bernama's Twitter operates at the intersection of media democracy and government-directed public diplomacy. While digital platforms offer opportunities for participatory engagement, the findings indicate that government influence and institutional priorities shape the narratives that emerge. This suggests a mediated public diplomacy approach in which the state's diplomatic objectives are embedded in journalistic practices, with Twitter serving as a key tool for agenda-setting and international signalling (Melissen, 2020; Zahari & Hashim, 2023).

Overall, Bernama's Twitter coverage exemplifies a form of "strategic framing" in which political news is used to achieve both domestic legitimacy and international credibility. The findings indicate that the appearance of political news on Bernama's Twitter does indeed create a space where Malaysia's public diplomacy orientation is articulated, even as journalists navigate the delicate balance between institutional loyalty, editorial autonomy and professional ethics.

6.0 Conclusion & Recommendations
This pilot study highlights the strategic relationship between public diplomacy, international politics and regional relations in shaping Malaysia's national image during GE15, with Bernama positioned as a central actor in this process. As a government-linked media agency, Bernama plays a dual role: crafting narratives that support Malaysia's foreign policy and promoting domestic political stability while simultaneously navigating public expectations and regional sensitivities. Platforms like Twitter have amplified this role by enabling real-time engagement between political actors and the public, allowing Bernama to shape perceptions dynamically and directly.

Through in-depth interviews with a journalist and an editor from Bernama's digital desk, this research reveals the internal complexities faced by media practitioners in balancing institutional mandates with journalistic credibility. The findings point to a nuanced negotiation between state influence and professional ethics, where Bernama must selectively frame content to maintain both public trust and international legitimacy. This qualitative insight contributes significantly to our understanding of how national media agencies operate within politicised environments, particularly in moments of electoral transition.

Ultimately, this research demonstrates that Bernama is not merely a conveyor of information but a strategic instrument of public diplomacy, actively shaping Malaysia's international standing and regional influence, especially within ASEAN. By employing diplomatic framing and targeted messaging, Bernama helps stabilise Malaysia's image amidst political flux and global scrutiny. This reinforces the argument that media institutions like Bernama are indispensable to national diplomacy, making them critical actors in the broader architecture of Malaysia's foreign relations and soft power strategy.

The findings of this study illuminate the multifaceted role of Bernama's Twitter in shaping both political narratives and Malaysia's public diplomacy. The platform functions as a strategic site where domestic information dissemination and international diplomatic signalling converge. From a domestic standpoint, Bernama operates under significant institutional and governmental pressures, compelling journalists to prioritise positive coverage of government policies and initiatives. This aligns with the journalist's observations that, despite attempts to subtly incorporate negative aspects, the overarching narrative is one of positivity and national stability. Such practices illustrate the persistent tension between journalistic integrity and institutional loyalty, reflecting the challenges of maintaining impartiality within a semi-authoritarian media system (Levitsky & Way, 2010; Thompson, 2021).

From an international perspective, Bernama's Twitter content functions as a proactive public diplomacy tool. The editor's account reveals the deliberate framing of news to project Malaysia as a stable, competent, and regionally engaged nation, particularly in ASEAN and in bilateral relations with strategic partners such as China and New Zealand. Through carefully curated narratives, the agency positions Malaysia as a responsible regional actor, enhancing its diplomatic image while simultaneously advancing domestic legitimacy (Cull, 2019; Snow, 2022). This dual function underscores Bernama's hybrid role as both a domestic informer and a diplomatic actor, demonstrating the capacity of social media to function as a strategic instrument of soft power (Nye, 2020).

Importantly, the study illustrates that the appearance of political news on Bernama's Twitter contributes meaningfully to shaping Malaysia's public diplomacy orientation. The platform allows for rapid dissemination of curated narratives, reinforcing perceptions of political stability and diplomatic competence. At the same time, it reflects the complexities of media governance, where journalists and editors must navigate competing imperatives: fulfilling governmental directives, preserving editorial credibility, and leveraging digital media for international visibility (Zahari & Hashim, 2023; Zahariadis & Howlett, 2021). Bernama's Twitter thus exemplifies a mediated space in which domestic political priorities and international diplomatic objectives are intricately entwined, highlighting the strategic interplay between media democracy and state-driven public diplomacy.

6.1 Limitation & Recommendations
While the study provides valuable insights, several limitations warrant consideration. Firstly, the research relies on interviews with only two key informants—a journalist and an editor whose perspectives may not fully capture the breadth of practices across Bernama or other government-linked media organisations. Their accounts, while rich in detail are subjective and may reflect personal or institutional

biases (Levitsky & Way, 2010). Secondly, the exclusive focus on Twitter limits understanding of the broader spectrum of digital public diplomacy strategies, as platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok may employ different narrative strategies, audience engagement mechanisms, and framing techniques (Snow, 2022; Cull, 2019). Thirdly, the study's temporal context is a potential limitation. By focusing on GE15 and contemporary diplomatic events, the findings reflect specific political and technological conditions that may not persist in the long term (Thompson, 2021). Media strategies and public diplomacy approaches are inherently dynamic, adapting to shifting political climates, technological innovations, and audience expectations. Finally, while interviews provide deep qualitative insights, the absence of triangulated data sources, such as content analysis or audience reception studies, limits the ability to empirically verify how effectively Bernama's Twitter influences perceptions of Malaysia both domestically and internationally (Zahari & Hashim, 2023).

Based on the analysis, several actionable recommendations emerge for Bernama and similar state-linked media agencies. Firstly, enhancing transparency in content presentation is critical. Distinguishing clearly between journalistic reporting and strategic framing for diplomatic purposes would strengthen credibility and trust among domestic and international audiences (Melissen, 2020; Snow, 2022). Secondly, diversifying content strategies to include balanced or critical perspectives can preserve journalistic integrity while maintaining the strategic advantages of positive framing (Thompson, 2021). Thirdly, investing in targeted professional development and training is essential. Journalists should be equipped with skills in digital diplomacy, ethical reporting and cross-cultural communication to navigate tensions between institutional directives and editorial independence effectively (Cull, 2019; Zahariadis & Howlett, 2021). Fourthly, systematic use of audience engagement metrics on Twitter and other platforms can improve understanding of how different narratives resonate with domestic and international publics, informing strategic adjustments to public diplomacy content (Zahari & Hashim, 2023). Additionally, Bernama could explore collaborations with academic institutions or research bodies to periodically evaluate the impact of its social media strategies, ensuring that both domestic information needs and international diplomatic objectives are optimally balanced (Nye, 2020).

6.2 Future Research Directions
Building on this study, several possibilities for future research emerge. A comprehensive cross-platform analysis would be valuable, comparing narrative strategies and audience engagement across Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and emerging platforms like TikTok. Such studies could identify differences in the ways digital platforms shape public diplomacy and political narratives (Snow, 2022). Comparative research involving government-linked media agencies across Southeast Asia could generate insights into regional variations in the use of media as a diplomatic instrument, situating Malaysia's approach within broader regional practices (Levitsky & Way, 2010; Cull, 2019). Audience reception studies represent another critical area. Investigating how domestic and international audiences interpret politically framed news on Bernama's Twitter would provide empirical evidence of the platform's effectiveness as a public diplomacy tool. Mixed-method approaches combining surveys, focus groups, and social media analytics would be particularly informative (Zahari & Hashim, 2023). Longitudinal research examining changes in content framing across multiple election cycles or diplomatic events could reveal adaptive strategies and evolving practices in government-linked media, illuminating the relationship between political transitions, media governance and public diplomacy over time (Thompson, 2021). Finally, emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence in news production warrant exploration. Future studies could investigate how AI-assisted content generation and algorithmic distribution influence the strategic framing of political news and its role in shaping national and international perceptions, raising critical questions about ethics, bias, and transparency in digital public diplomacy (Zahariadis & Howlett, 2021).

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Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study
This paper contributes to the field by offering empirical insights into how Bernama strategically used Twitter as a tool of public diplomacy during GE15, revealing the complex relationship between government influence, journalistic integrity and digital media in shaping Malaysia's political and international image.

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