

**LEVERAGING SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT
TOWARDS FOSTERING NATIONAL UNITY IN
MALAYSIA THROUGH CORPORATE SOCIAL
RESPONSIBILITY (CSR) ADVERTISING**

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RESPONSIBILITY (CSR) ADVERTISING**

by

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AI	Artificial Intelligence
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
GLC	Government-Linked Company
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
SIT	Social Identity Theory
NLP	Natural Language Processing
NEP	New Economic Policy
LDA	Latent Dirichlet Allocation
TM	Telekom Malaysia
PETRONAS	Petroliam Nasional Berhad
SM	Social Media
NUTP	National Unity through Promotion
RO	Research Objectives
RQ	Research Questions
ML	Machine Learning

**MEMANFAATKAN KANDUNGAN MEDIA SOSIAL KE ARAH MEMUPUK
PERPADUAN NASIONAL DI MALAYSIA MELALUI PENGIKLANAN
TANGGUNGJAWAB SOSIAL KORPORAT (CSR)**

ABSTRAK

Memupuk perpaduan nasional dalam masyarakat berbilang kaum seperti Malaysia merupakan cabaran yang berterusan, namun penting untuk keharmonian sosial jangka panjang. Pengiklanan Tanggungjawab Sosial Korporat (CSR) di media sosial semakin dikenali sebagai strategi yang berkesan dalam membina identiti bersama dan perpaduan rakyat. Kajian ini menggunakan pendekatan kaedah campuran yang melibatkan analisis kandungan, perbincangan kumpulan fokus (FGD), dan soal selidik untuk meneliti lima objektif utama: (1) menganalisis representasi tema perpaduan dalam iklan CSR, (2) menilai pengaruh Teori Identiti Sosial (SIT) terhadap persepsi dan penglibatan khalayak, (3) menilai keberkesanan strategi komunikasi dan teknik nudging, (4) mengukur tahap penglibatan dan sentimen khalayak di platform media sosial, dan (5) mencadangkan rangka kerja pengiklanan CSR yang memfokuskan kepada perpaduan nasional. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa iklan CSR yang menggabungkan penceritaan emosi, simbol budaya yang relevan, dan teknik nudging yang halus lebih berkesan dalam menarik perhatian dan membina rasa kebersamaan. SIT turut memainkan peranan penting apabila mesej yang disampaikan seiring dengan identiti budaya khalayak. Teknik nudging seperti nudging perseptual, motivasional dan afektif didapati mampu meningkatkan resonans mesej dan interaksi pengguna. Kajian ini menyumbang kepada wacana CSR dengan membangunkan satu rangka kerja praktikal bagi merancang pengiklanan CSR yang menyokong perpaduan nasional melalui media sosial. Ia menawarkan panduan berguna kepada syarikat dan

pengamal komunikasi dalam membina naratif inklusif yang dapat merapatkan jurang budaya dan memperkukuh kohesi sosial dalam masyarakat majmuk.

LEVERAGING SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT TOWARDS FOSTERING NATIONAL UNITY IN MALAYSIA THROUGH CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (CSR) ADVERTISING

ABSTRACT

Fostering national unity in Malaysia's multicultural society remains a critical yet complex challenge. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) advertising on social media has emerged as a promising strategy for strengthening shared identity and cohesion across diverse communities. This study investigates how CSR advertisements, especially those launched during Merdeka celebrations, utilize social media content to promote national unity. Employing a mixed-methods approach that integrates content analysis, focus group discussions (FGDs), and surveys, the study explores five key objectives: (1) the representation of unity themes in CSR advertisements, (2) the influence of Social Identity Theory (SIT) on audience perception, (3) the use of communication strategies and nudging techniques, (4) levels of audience engagement and sentiment across platforms, and (5) the development of a framework for unity-driven CSR advertising. The findings indicate that advertisements which combine emotional storytelling, culturally relevant symbols, and subtle nudging strategies are especially effective in engaging audiences and fostering a sense of unity. SIT plays a significant role in shaping audience responses, particularly when messages resonate with in-group cultural identities. Nudging techniques such as motivational and affective cues were found to improve audience receptiveness and interaction. This research presents a practical and theoretical framework for CSR advertisement design that supports national unity efforts. It offers valuable insights for communication professionals and corporations, demonstrating

how strategic media content can enhance social cohesion and build inclusive narratives in multicultural societies.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the study on leveraging social media content to foster national unity in Malaysia through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) advertising. It explores the strategic use of CSR initiatives to promote national unity within Malaysia's multicultural society. The chapter highlights the evolution of CSR advertising, with a particular focus on its transformation through digital platforms and social media channels. The research problems, objectives, and questions are outlined, with a focus on the representation of national unity in CSR advertisements and the effectiveness of these advertisements in engaging diverse audiences on social media. The chapter underscores the significance of this study in the context of Malaysia's increasing digital engagement and the growing influence of social media in shaping public perceptions. Additionally, the theoretical frameworks guiding this study, including Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Nudging Theory, are introduced. These frameworks provide insights into how social media users perceive and engage with CSR advertisements aimed at fostering unity. Lastly, the scope and significance of the study are discussed, highlighting gaps in existing literature and the study's contribution to understanding the role of CSR advertising in promoting national unity through social media platforms in Malaysia.

1.1 Introduction

National unity remains a cornerstone of Malaysia's social and political framework, particularly within its multi-ethnic society comprising Malay, Chinese, Indian, and indigenous communities (Zaaba et al., 2023). It serves as a foundational

element of national stability and identity, as evidenced by various government policies aimed at strengthening social cohesion (Gabriel, 2021). The 1969 racial riots highlighted the risks of fractured inter-ethnic relations, prompting the introduction of initiatives such as the Rukun Negara, a national philosophy designed to foster unity (Heng, 2017). Despite these efforts, challenges persist due to historical inequities, socio-political tensions, and economic disparities, resulting in a state of stable tension where the pursuit of national unity remains ongoing (Mangiarotti, 2023; Shamsul & Yusoff, 2011). To address these divides, the design and adoption of innovative, inclusive, and culturally resonant strategies to foster unity, particularly among younger digitally engaged demographics, is necessary, with Corporate social responsibility (CSR) recognised as a dynamic tool in promoting national unity.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) refers to the voluntary actions undertaken by companies to address social, environmental, and economic issues in a way that contributes to societal well-being while also aligning with their business goals. CSR goes beyond mere philanthropy, encompassing efforts to integrate social and ethical considerations into core business strategies (Carroll, 2021). In the context of advertising, CSR involves campaigns that highlight a company's commitment to addressing societal needs, often through initiatives that foster inclusivity, sustainability, and community engagement.

CSR advertising, particularly during Merdeka celebrations in Malaysia, has emerged as a dynamic tool for promoting national unity. Companies such as Petronas, Celcom Axiata, and Telekom Malaysia TM have produced iconic Merdeka-themed videos, including “UNI” (Petronas, 2019), “Getaran Pertama” (Celcom Axiata, 2019), and “Jalur Lebar, Jalur Gemilang” (TM, 2019), which creatively convey messages of

togetherness and shared pride. These advertisements form an integral part of broader CSR campaigns, leveraging the extensive reach of social media to create inclusive narratives that resonate with Malaysia's multicultural society.

By incorporating cultural symbols such as the Jalur Gemilang (national flag), traditional attire, and multilingual greetings, along with collective memories tied to significant milestones like Malaysia's independence, these CSR advertisements foster emotional connections across communities (Periasamy, Subramaniam, & Gruba, 2017). Such advertisements align with corporate objectives that focus on enhancing brand reputation, building consumer trust, and contributing to national priorities, particularly in fostering social unity.

During Merdeka celebrations, CSR advertisements often feature prominently on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly known as Twitter) and YouTube. These advertisements emphasize diversity, inclusivity, and shared values, reinforcing corporate branding while advancing Malaysia's national objectives to promote social cohesion and strengthen the sense of collective identity. Through these efforts, CSR advertising demonstrates the potential of business-driven initiatives to contribute meaningfully to societal goals.

The evolution of CSR from traditional philanthropy to socially engaged initiatives highlights its increasing significance in addressing societal challenges, including the promotion of national unity. Businesses have increasingly recognized the potential of CSR advertisements to shape public discourse and facilitate integration efforts (Bernama, 2023; NST, 2019). The advent of social media has further amplified the reach and impact of these advertisements, particularly among digitally native

younger audiences. Social media platforms enable brands to engage directly with users, influencing public perceptions and fostering shared values. Emerging research highlights that brand loyalty, trust, and identity are critical factors shaping how younger audiences interact with CSR advertisements on social media (Guèvremont & Dubé-Beaudin, 2023).

New forms of digital engagement, including slacktivism and clicktivism, have also emerged as significant drivers of social media interactions. Although often criticized for superficiality, low-effort actions such as liking or sharing posts possess the potential to amplify unity-driven messages and stimulate broader participation in national initiatives (Dennis et al., 2019). CSR advertisements during Merdeka celebrations strategically utilize these behaviors to foster collective identity and encourage greater public involvement in unity efforts.

Additionally, CSR advertisements increasingly incorporate behavioural strategies such as nudging, which subtly guide individuals toward prosocial actions, and Social Identity Theory (SIT), which examines how group affiliations shape self-concept and behaviour (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This study investigates the ways in which Merdeka-themed CSR advertisements from 2019 to 2023 apply Social Identity Theory (SIT) and nudging techniques on social media to engage audiences and promote national unity. By critically analysing the intersection of psychological frameworks (SIT) and behavioural science approaches (nudging techniques) with audience engagement behaviours such as likes, shares, comments, and views, this study aims to identify effective strategies for fostering cohesion within Malaysia's diverse digital landscape.

The findings, presented later in Chapter Four, explore CSR's transformative role in leveraging strategic communication through emotionally resonant narratives, cultural symbolism, and persuasive cues to promote national unity in the digital era. These insights emphasize how CSR advertisements can harness both theoretical and practical approaches to create a meaningful impact on audience perception and engagement.

1.2 Background of Research

Malaysia's demographic diversity has long been recognized as both a source of national strength and a driver of societal complexity. Since independence, the government has implemented initiatives such as the Rukun Negara to cultivate a shared national identity and foster unity among its multi-ethnic population (Muslim et al., 2023). However, despite these long-standing efforts, persistent ethnic and cultural divisions highlight the challenges of achieving a truly cohesive national identity. These divisions often become more pronounced during politically sensitive periods or times of economic instability, such as the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis and more recent political uncertainties (Ostwald & Chew, 2021). The enduring nature of these challenges stresses the ongoing need for innovative, targeted, and culturally sensitive approaches to fostering unity.

In the context of fostering unity at the national level, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has been identified as a powerful mechanism to enhance social cohesion (Rahim et al., 2021; Periasamy, Subramaniam, & Gruba, 2017). CSR refers to corporate initiatives aimed at addressing societal challenges while aligning with business objectives, thereby creating shared value for both companies and

communities. Over the years, Malaysian corporations have strategically integrated themes of diversity, inclusion, and unity into CSR initiatives, particularly during national celebrations such as Merdeka Day and Malaysia Day (Rahim et al., 2021).

CSR advertisements often aim to bridge divides across Malaysia's diverse cultural and ethnic groups by emphasizing shared identity and collective memory. For instance, advertisements by companies like Petronas and Celcom have depicted iconic Malaysian symbols such as the Jalur Gemilang (national flag), traditional cultural practices, and historical events that resonate with all ethnic communities (Shaiful et al., 2021). These efforts underscore the role of CSR in reinforcing unity by invoking a sense of belonging and pride in Malaysia's multicultural identity.

However, the effectiveness of CSR in fostering unity largely depends on its alignment with national narratives and the extent to which its messaging resonates with audience values and perceptions. These values include mutual respect, cultural appreciation, and the desire for a harmonious society, while perceptions may reflect how audiences view the authenticity and sincerity of the campaigns (Abdulrazak & Ahmad, 2014). For example, campaigns that highlight inter-ethnic collaboration or showcase real-life stories of unity tend to resonate more deeply with Malaysian audiences, creating a lasting impact on their attitudes and behaviours.

A key element within these campaigns is CSR advertising, particularly Merdeka-themed advertisements, which serve as focal points for unity-driven narratives. Unlike broader CSR campaigns, which may include diverse initiatives such as community outreach or charity drives, CSR advertising focuses on delivering targeted messages through visual storytelling. These advertisements often incorporate

culturally resonant symbols, national heritage, and emotional appeals to evoke a sense of belonging and pride among viewers. By weaving these elements into branding strategies, companies leverage CSR advertising to create emotional connections that strengthen public perceptions of unity and harmony (Periasamy, Subramaniam, & Gruba, 2017).

The integration of social media has further transformed how CSR advertisements are disseminated and engaged with. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (now known as X), TikTok, and YouTube enable companies to reach diverse audiences rapidly while fostering interactive engagement (Kapoor et al., 2018). Social media enhances the accessibility and inclusivity of CSR advertisements by enabling real-time participation and dialogue among audiences. Participatory features such as polls, challenges, and comment sections encourage more personalized interactions, creating opportunities for audiences to co-create meaning and share experiences.

Additionally, online behaviours such as slacktivism and clicktivism, where individuals support causes through low-effort actions like liking, sharing, or commenting, amplify the visibility and impact of these advertisements (Muhammad Al Hafizh and Sutopo, 2017). Despite criticisms of superficiality, these actions can significantly broaden the reach of CSR advertisements, particularly among younger, digitally active demographics (Dahl et al., 2018). This evolving landscape features the dual role of social media as both a channel for dissemination and a space for community-building around unity-focused messages.

Although previous studies have explored the broader impact of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) on social cohesion (Carroll, 2021; Maignan & Ferrell, 2004), there is limited scholarly focus on how CSR advertising specifically fosters national unity in Malaysia. For instance, while studies like Periasamy, Subramaniam, and Gruba (2017) have highlighted the role of CSR in promoting inclusivity and shared identity, research that delves into the targeted use of CSR advertising particularly Merdeka-themed advertisements to strengthen unity remains scarce. This study aims to address this gap by critically examining how these advertisements leverage cultural symbols and shared narratives to engage diverse audiences and contribute to national cohesion.

This gap is particularly significant considering Malaysia's multicultural context, where the interplay between CSR advertising, social media, and audience engagement remains underexplored. The application of Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Nudging Theory offers valuable frameworks for understanding how CSR advertisements can drive unity. SIT emphasizes the role of group identity in shaping individual behaviour, making it particularly relevant for designing advertisements that foster collective national belonging (Tajfel & Turner, 2003). Nudging Theory, on the other hand, provides insights into how subtle cues, such as culturally relevant visuals or emotionally compelling narratives, can influence audience behaviour and attitudes toward unity (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008; Wagner, 2023).

Together, theories such as Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Nudging Theory provide a comprehensive lens for analysing the psychological and behavioural impacts of CSR advertisements on national unity. These frameworks help in understanding

how advertisements shape audience perceptions, foster a sense of belonging, and encourage actions that support collective societal goals.

Overall, this study examines CSR advertisements associated with Malaysia's Merdeka celebrations from 2019 to 2023, focusing on the use of SIT and Nudging Theory to promote national unity. It also investigates how digital behaviours like slacktivism and clicktivism enhance the visibility and engagement of these advertisements, particularly among younger, digitally native audiences. By analysing themes, narratives, and audience interactions, this research aims to provide actionable insights into maximizing the effectiveness of CSR advertising in fostering national unity. Ultimately, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how CSR advertising can serve as an impactful vehicle for unity-driven narratives within Malaysia's increasingly digitalized and socially complex landscape.

1.3 Problem Statements

Fostering national unity in Malaysia, a culturally and ethnically diverse nation, has remained an enduring challenge. Despite numerous efforts, both state-led and community-driven initiatives have faced difficulties in effectively resonating with the rapidly evolving dynamics of society, particularly among the digitally native younger generation. Within this context, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) advertising has been increasingly recognized as a potential mechanism for fostering inclusivity and belonging, particularly during significant national events such as the Merdeka celebrations. However, the literature highlights critical gaps in knowledge, methodology particularly in the use of advanced digital tools such as natural language

processing (NLP) and sentiment analysis and practical implementation, which limit the ability of CSR advertising to fully achieve its objectives.

Globally, other multicultural nations like Canada and Singapore have leveraged CSR initiatives and national messaging campaigns to promote unity. In Canada, for example, CSR-driven campaigns around Canada Day have emphasized Indigenous reconciliation and multicultural identity through digital storytelling platforms (Johnston & Packer, 2021). Likewise, Singapore has employed public-private partnerships during its National Day campaigns to deliver unity-based messages across racial lines, often utilizing emotional narratives and youth-focused digital media (Tan, 2022). These examples show that CSR, when aligned with culturally inclusive strategies and digital innovation, can play a pivotal role in fostering national cohesion. However, Malaysia has yet to adopt a similarly systematic, theory-informed, and data-driven approach to assess the emotional, cognitive, and social impact of CSR advertisements across its diverse population.

This study seeks to address these gaps by examining the strategies and frameworks such as Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Nudging Theory applied in CSR advertisements to promote national unity. It also introduces methodological innovation by integrating NLP and sentiment analysis to evaluate how audiences emotionally and cognitively engage with CSR content. By focusing on Merdeka-themed advertisements from 2019 to 2023, the research explores how these campaigns engage diverse audiences, resonate with their values, and contribute to a shared sense of identity.

1.3.1 Persistent Challenges in Fostering National Unity

Malaysia's multicultural identity serves as a foundation of the nation's heritage, but it also creates inherent complexities in achieving lasting unity. National programs such as Rukun Negara and 1Malaysia were designed to instil shared values and foster cohesion. However, these efforts often prove insufficient in addressing socio-political divides, economic disparities, and cultural misapprehensions, which persist over time (Abd Muis et al., 2012). Studies have revealed that ethnic polarization and unequal access to resources continue to undermine meaningful integration among diverse communities (Shamsul, 2020; Cheu, 2020).

Furthermore, younger Malaysians, who represent a critical demographic for fostering long-term unity, often display disengagement from traditional approaches, such as state-organized parades, formal speeches during national celebrations, or conventional media campaigns on television and radio. While historically effective, these methods may no longer resonate with digitally savvy younger audiences who are more engaged with interactive, visual, and user-generated content on platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. These methods tend to rely on outdated delivery strategies that fail to resonate with the experiences and perspectives of younger audiences. A study by Maszlee (2022) highlights that Malaysian youth are increasingly seeking more inclusive and participatory platforms, indicating a shift away from conventional top-down communication methods.

The lack of engaging and inclusive narratives highlights a practical-knowledge gap that requires innovative approaches, such as CSR advertising, to address.

Moreover, there is a need to examine how digital audiences emotionally respond to such messages, an area best explored using sentiment analysis and NLP tools.

1.3.2 Underexplored Role of CSR Advertising in National Unity

CSR advertising, particularly during symbolic national celebrations like Merdeka, demonstrates significant potential to foster unity. These advertisements often showcase shared values and cultural pride, making them powerful tools for promoting inclusivity and collective identity (Zhao et al., 2023). However, much of the existing research has focused on the economic and ethical dimensions of CSR, while the role of CSR advertising in fostering social cohesion has received limited attention (Hartmann et al., 2023).

Although organizations such as Petronas, Telekom Malaysia (TM), and Celcom Axiata have produced Merdeka-themed advertisements, limited empirical evidence exists to demonstrate the impact of these advertisements on shaping audience perceptions of belonging or bridging societal divides (Wu & Overton, 2022). This knowledge gap highlights the need for more comprehensive studies on optimizing CSR advertising as a vehicle for national unity. In particular, there is a lack of methodological depth in analysing emotional and perceptual impacts through digital sentiment analysis and audience-level textual interpretation areas that this study addresses through NLP-enhanced content analysis.

1.3.3 Challenges of Leveraging Social Media for Unity-Driven CSR Advertising

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (now known as X), TikTok, and YouTube have increasingly dominated as channels for disseminating

CSR content. These platforms provide unprecedented reach and interactivity (Yang et al., 2020), particularly during national events like Merdeka celebrations. However, challenges also arise in promoting meaningful audience engagement for CSR advertisements aimed at fostering national unity, particularly in capturing the attention of diverse audiences and sustaining their interest in culturally inclusive narratives over time.

One significant issue involves the prevalence of slacktivism and clicktivism, where users engage in superficial interactions such as likes, shares, or brief comments that rarely translate into deeper discourse or active participation (Smith et al., 2023). While these behaviours amplify visibility, such actions often fail to foster meaningful dialogue or collective identity. Addressing this practical gap requires strategies to transform passive engagement into meaningful contributions, such as incorporating participatory storytelling and user-generated content. This study further enhances this analysis by using NLP and sentiment analysis to uncover the quality and emotional tone of such interactions, moving beyond surface-level engagement metrics.

1.3.4 Limited Integration of Social Identity and Nudging Theories in CSR Advertising

Theoretical frameworks such as Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Nudging Theory offer valuable insights into shaping attitudes and fostering collective belonging; however, these frameworks are rarely applied to CSR advertisements. SIT highlights the importance of group identity in reducing intergroup tensions, while Nudging Theory emphasizes subtle interventions to guide socially desirable behaviours (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Thaler & Sunstein, 2008).

Despite the relevance of these theories, few studies have explored how these frameworks can enhance the design and evaluation of CSR advertisements (Stadlthanner et al., 2022). The absence of theoretical integration creates a significant gap, leaving CSR advertisements without structured approaches to achieving objectives. This study addresses this gap by combining SIT and Nudging Theory with computational techniques, such as NLP and sentiment analysis, to create a multidimensional framework for evaluating unity-driven advertisements.

1.3.5 Insufficient Understanding of Audience Engagement and Sentiment

Traditional metrics for evaluating social media content, such as likes, shares, and views, often provide limited insights into the emotional and cultural impact of CSR advertisements (Sánchez-Núñez et al., 2020). On the other hand, advanced tools like sentiment analysis and thematic visualization are underutilized in understanding how audiences engage with unity-driven campaigns (Sethurajan & Natarajan, 2024).

Additionally, the digital-native audience, which forms a significant portion of Malaysia's population, has been scarcely explored in the context of CSR studies in Malaysia. Their behaviours, preferences, and emotional responses to Merdeka-themed advertisements remain underexplored, creating a notable empirical gap. This study employs advanced analytical methods, including sentiment analysis and natural language processing (NLP), to investigate these emotional and cognitive responses at scale, offering a richer understanding of how national unity is perceived and felt within digital environments.

1.4 Research Objectives

To explore how CSR advertisements can foster national unity in Malaysia through social media platforms, the following research objectives are formulated:

RO1: To analyse the representation of national unity themes in CSR Merdeka advertisements on social media platforms.

RO2: To assess the influence of Social Identity Theory (SIT) on audience perception and engagement with CSR Merdeka advertisements.

RO3: To evaluate the effectiveness of communication strategies and nudging techniques in promoting unity through CSR advertisements.

RO4: To measure audience engagement and sentiment toward CSR Merdeka advertisements across social media platforms.

RO5: To recommend a framework for CSR advertising that promotes national unity on social media.

Each objective corresponds directly to a specific research question, which further guides the methodological and analytical focus of the study.

1.5 Research Questions

To achieve the research objectives outlined above, the study is guided by five corresponding research questions. These questions are designed to translate the broader aims of the study into focused lines of inquiry that examine how CSR advertisements represent unity, engage audiences, and influence perceptions across

various digital platforms. The alignment between objectives and questions ensures a coherent framework for both data collection and analysis.

RQ1: How are themes of national unity represented in CSR Merdeka advertisements on social media platforms?

RQ2: How does Social Identity Theory (SIT) influence audience perception and engagement with CSR Merdeka advertisements?

RQ3: What communication strategies and nudging techniques are most effective in promoting unity through CSR advertisements on social media?

RQ4: What are the levels of audience engagement and sentiment toward CSR Merdeka advertisements across social media platforms?

RQ5: What elements should be included in an effective framework for CSR advertising on social media to foster national unity in Malaysia?

1.6 Hypotheses

These hypotheses are structured to test various factors that influence audience engagement, sentiment, and perceptions of national unity in CSR advertisements:

H1: CSR Merdeka advertisements that prominently feature themes of national unity will generate significantly higher levels of audience engagement on social media platforms, as measured by likes, shares, and comments, compared to those without such themes.

- H2:** Audience perception of CSR Merdeka advertisements is positively influenced by principles of Social Identity Theory (SIT), particularly through the representation of collective identity and shared values, leading to stronger identification with the message.
- H3:** CSR Merdeka advertisements employing nudging techniques, such as emotionally resonant storytelling or the inclusion of culturally symbolic elements, will achieve higher positive sentiment scores in social media comments compared to those without such techniques.
- H4:** A positive correlation exists between higher levels of audience engagement with CSR Merdeka advertisements and the expression of positive sentiments in social media comments, indicating a strong interplay between interactive behaviours and emotional responses.
- H5:** CSR Merdeka advertisements that utilize storytelling techniques featuring relatable narratives, such as intergenerational experiences or the use of local cultural symbols, will be perceived as significantly more effective in promoting national unity compared to advertisements without such elements.

1.7 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its scholarly originality, interdisciplinary methodology, and real-world relevance to both corporate communication and nation-building efforts. It offers multifaceted contributions to the fields of corporate social responsibility (CSR), advertising, communication studies, and national unity within Malaysia's multicultural context. By analysing CSR Merdeka advertisements through

novel theoretical and computational lenses, this study provides one of the first in-depth examinations of how strategic media content can serve as a catalyst for social cohesion.

This research is particularly valuable in four key dimensions:

1.7.1 Theoretical Contribution

This study advanced the field by integrating Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Nudging Theory into the discourse of CSR advertising, a combination seldom applied in Malaysian media and communication research. The integration of these theories facilitated a deeper exploration of the psychological and behavioural mechanisms influencing audience engagement with CSR advertisements. It established a robust theoretical framework to explain how CSR advertisements represented cultural identities and fostered a sense of belonging among diverse groups.

SIT was employed to analyse the representation of cultural markers, while Nudging Theory uncovered the use of subtle cues in CSR advertisements that encouraged engagement and behavioural change. This dual-theoretical model offers a new lens for scholars studying communication in multicultural settings. By addressing a critical gap in the application of these theories within Malaysia, the research broadened academic understanding of their relevance in multicultural societies.

More importantly, this study developed a localized, culturally sensitive model for interpreting CSR communication in diverse societies, contributing to the global literature on identity, persuasion, and inclusive communication strategies.

1.7.2 Practical Contributions

The findings offered actionable insights for corporations and marketers in designing CSR advertisements that resonate with Malaysia's diverse cultural and ethnic groups. By emphasizing inclusive storytelling, strategic nudges, and the unique dynamics of social media platforms, the study demonstrated how CSR advertisements effectively promoted values of unity and mutual understanding.

Practical strategies included crafting narratives that reflected shared cultural experiences and employing participatory approaches that encouraged deeper audience involvement. The study provided a set of practical guidelines and media design principles for CSR campaigns targeting youth and multicultural audiences. Specific recommendations highlighted the use of interactive formats such as YouTube videos, Instagram reels, and hashtag-driven campaigns to amplify the reach and emotional impact of unity-focused messages.

This guidance serves not only private corporations but also government agencies and NGOs aiming to foster civic values through digital platforms.

1.7.3 Methodological Contributions

This research demonstrated methodological innovation through its triangulated approach, which incorporated advanced tools such as Natural Language Processing (NLP), sentiment analysis, thematic analysis, content analysis, surveys, and focus group discussions. The use of triangulation ensured the reliability and depth of the findings by capturing multiple perspectives on CSR advertising.

The study's integration of NLP and sentiment analysis into communication research represents a cutting-edge contribution, offering scalable and replicable tools for evaluating emotional and thematic impact across large datasets. NLP proved particularly instrumental in analysing sentiment and identifying thematic patterns across social media posts related to CSR Merdeka advertisements. This methodological design provided comprehensive insights into how CSR advertisements engaged audiences across platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (X), TikTok, and YouTube.

The study thus sets a precedent for interdisciplinary research at the intersection of communication, psychology, computer science, and cultural studies, an increasingly important area in the digital era.

1.7.4 Societal Impact

In the context of Malaysia's evolving multicultural dynamics, this study highlighted the potential of CSR advertising as a strategic tool for fostering social cohesion. It explored innovative strategies to engage younger audiences, particularly those characterized by behaviours such as slacktivism and clicktivism, as active participants in promoting messages of unity.

The study addressed a crucial gap by demonstrating how CSR advertisements effectively counteracted the superficiality often associated with digital interactions, transforming them into meaningful avenues for collective action. By illuminating the link between user-generated content, emotional resonance, and shared identity, the research showed how digital platforms can be harnessed for national unity objectives.

This approach demonstrated how CSR Merdeka advertisements transformed passive digital engagement into meaningful contributions toward national unity, thus offering policy makers and communication strategists evidence-based strategies to strengthen national identity through inclusive digital media. Ultimately, this study contributes to the broader societal goal of building a more cohesive, participatory, and united Malaysia.

1.7.5 Novelty of the Study

This study presents several novel contributions to the academic and practical discourse surrounding Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) advertising and national unity. Firstly, it is the first known study to integrate Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Nudging Theory in the context of CSR Merdeka advertisements in Malaysia, providing a new theoretical lens through which national unity campaigns can be conceptualized and evaluated. Secondly, it demonstrates methodological innovation by applying Natural Language Processing (NLP), sentiment analysis, and thematic visualization tools to examine public responses across major social media platforms.

This interdisciplinary approach blending psychology, communication studies, and computational linguistics offers a comprehensive and data-driven way of understanding digital audience engagement. Thirdly, by focusing on digitally native Malaysian youth and the phenomena of slacktivism and clicktivism, the research captures an underexplored behavioural dimension within unity-driven CSR messaging. Finally, the study contributes context-specific insights into how national identity, inclusivity, and collective belonging can be effectively communicated in

multicultural societies through CSR campaigns, especially during symbolically significant events like Merdeka celebrations.

1.8 Scope of Research

The scope of this study focuses on examining the role of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) advertisements in promoting national unity in Malaysia, specifically during the Merdeka celebrations, through social media platforms. This study encompasses several key components, including organizational sampling, CSR advertisement video analysis, and geographic and temporal scope, to offer a comprehensive understanding of how CSR advertisements influence audience perceptions, engagement, and the broader discourse on national unity. The research explores the strategies used by prominent organizations and evaluates the effectiveness of CSR advertisements in fostering a sense of unity and patriotism among Malaysian audiences.

1.8.1 Organizational Scope

The study focuses on three prominent organizations in Malaysia: Petronas, Celcom Axiata, and Telekom Malaysia (TM), which were purposively selected for their consistent and influential CSR advertisements related to the Merdeka celebrations between 2019 and 2023. These organizations represent diverse sectors, including energy, telecommunications, and information technology, each contributing significantly to national unity through their CSR initiatives. By analysing the CSR advertisements from these companies, the study investigates the strategic alignment of the communications with themes of national unity, diversity, and patriotism. These

organizations were chosen based on their visibility, the impact of their advertisements on national discourse, and their influence on Malaysia's socio-economic landscape.

1.8.2 Content Analysis Scope

The content analysis in this study is confined to 15 CSR Merdeka advertisements produced by the selected organizations from 2019 to 2023. The content analysis focuses on identifying and interpreting the thematic elements, visual content, and narrative structures within the advertisements, specifically those promoting national unity. The study examines recurring symbols, language, and national identity discourses embedded in the advertisements, providing insights into how these campaigns represent Malaysia's multicultural society and foster national cohesion. This analysis also explores how these advertisements engage with the values of unity, diversity, and patriotism, reflecting the evolving social and political context in Malaysia.

1.8.3 Video Sampling Scope

The study's video sampling includes five CSR Merdeka advertisements from each organization, totalling 15 advertisements. These videos are critically analysed for their portrayal of national unity themes, societal values, and the effectiveness of the communication strategies. By including a variety of campaigns from different sectors (energy, telecommunications, and IT), the research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how national unity is conveyed through CSR media across diverse industries. This sampling ensures that the study captures a broad spectrum of approaches to CSR communications and offers valuable insights into the evolving tactics used by organizations to communicate national identity through video content.

1.8.4 Geographic and Temporal Scope

The geographic scope of this study is limited to Malaysia, with a focus on university students and social media users within the country. The temporal scope covers CSR Merdeka advertisements from 2019 to 2023, ensuring that the study reflects the most current trends in CSR advertising, national identity discourse, and digital communication practices. This timeframe also allows for a close examination of the impact of societal events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and political changes on CSR messaging. By focusing on this period, the study captures the evolving strategies and engagement with national unity themes during a dynamic socio-political landscape.

1.9 Conceptual Definitions

The conceptual definitions in this thesis aim to provide clarity on key terms and concepts central to the study of CSR advertising, CSR campaign advertising, and their relationship to national unity. These definitions help establish a consistent foundation for interpreting core ideas, ensuring alignment with the research objectives.

1.9.1 National Unity

National unity refers to the sense of belonging, solidarity, and collective identity among members of a diverse society. Omar et al. (2022) define national unity as the shared emotional commitment to a common identity and future. Norazlan and Kamarulzaman (2019) emphasize peaceful coexistence across ethnic and cultural lines. Rahim and Dawam (2020) describe it as mutual understanding and interethnic harmony that sustains national cohesion. For this study, national unity is defined as the