Words of 'keyboard warriors': Comparing the use of harsh language in two Facebook pages

Authors:
N. H. Hanani Mohd Kadri, Siti Zobidah Omar, Rusli Abdullah, Nor Azura Adzharuddin
Universiti Putra Malaysia

Abstract

The use of harsh language during interaction is rife on local Facebook pages. Its use can mostly be seen on viral contents posted by two top tabloid media Facebook pages with the most followers in Malaysia. While studies focusing on online incivility and flaming on the internet are increasing, literature on harsh language use on Facebook among Malaysians are scant. Due to that, little is known about the use of harsh language in viral content interactions on Facebook particularly in the commentary section among Malaysians. This study compares the differences between the use of harsh language in users' comments in two tabloid media Facebook pages in Malaysia. 5,025 comments were collected from 4 viral posts on these two Facebook pages and analysed for the use of harsh languages. The findings identified a 25.04% difference in the frequency of comments containing harsh language use between both Facebook pages. Contents that depicted violence were also found to have higher usage of harsh language in the users' comments.

Keywords: Content Analysis, Facebook, Harsh Language, Incivility, Viral Content

Introduction

Facebook and several other social networking sites (SNS) have rapidly grown over the last decade. With the rapid expansion of SNS, internet users have found new ways to generate and disseminate information (Su, et al., 2018). However, despite its popularity, the pervasive use of harsh language online is becoming prevalent. It was demonstrated that at least one in every five comments made online was found to be uncivilised (Coe, Kenski, & Rains, 2014). This has caused a rising concern over the use of harsh language in the commentary section particularly on Facebook as online commenting is now predominantly focused on the platform (Su, et al., 2018).

Some scholars agree that the rising frequency of harsh language use on SNS was due to its contagious nature (Coe et al., 2014; Kwon & Cho, 2015). Others criticise the lack of regulation for contributing to the extensive use of harsh language on SNS (Anderson, Brossard, Scheufele, Xenos, & Ladwig, 2013). One study demonstrated that service providers have indeed set up some regulations for the users – but only to some extents (Kwon & Cho, 2015). Despite these regulations, however, the use of harsh language is still rampant (Oz, Zheng, & Chen, 2017).

The Malaysian Communications Multimedia Commission (MCMC), the agency responsible for regulating abusive comments and online harassment reported a total of 1,776 complaints regarding the misuse of SNS in 2015. 1,040 of the complaints received were categorised as offensive/menacing and obscene/indecent (MCMC, 2015). In the year of 2016 however, the

number increased up to 69.6% with a total of 3,323 complaints received regarding the misuse of SNS. Complaints categorised as offensive/menacing and obscene/indecent also increased to a total of 1,121 complaints.

With the use of harsh language in online discourse becoming increasingly prevalent, it is not surprising that the number of complaints received by MCMC is high. Admittedly, literature on the issue of harsh language use in online comments is growing. However, past research has mostly focused on the linguistics and the use of harsh language during face-to-face conversation (Baudin & Paramasivam, 2014; David, Kuang, & Tayyebian, 2016; Tian, 2014). Meanwhile, others focused more on incivility in online news sites and on political discussions (Anderson et al., 2013; Chen & Ng, 2016; Cho & Kwon, 2015; Coe, Kenski, & Rains, 2014; Kwon & Cho, 2015).

This paper examined the interaction of users in the comments of viral content posts on two top tabloid media Facebook pages from Malaysia which were labelled as PM and SK. Its focus was specific to the use of harsh language used in the comments of PM and SK. Therefore, this paper investigated whether the PM Facebook page or SK Facebook page has a higher number in the use of harsh language use in the comments of viral content posts.

Harsh Language use on Facebook

The advent of social networking sites (SNS) has given the public new means to interact and socialise with each other. With the adoption of platforms such as Facebook, users now have the freedom of choosing how they want to communicate with others. Ever since Facebook went global in September 2006, its number of users has grown rapidly. With more than 2 billion users per month, Facebook now is the most popular SNS worldwide (Statista, 2018).

Statista (2018), a database company based in Hamburg, Germany recorded that almost 12 million Facebook users originated from Malaysia in 2017. The MCMC (2016) in their Internet Users Survey 2016 also reported that Facebook, as a social networking site, has the highest number of account ownership among Malaysians. It was also found that about nine (9) out of ten (10) Malaysians owned a Facebook account and more than half of them access their Facebook account daily (MCMC, 2016).

Facebook generates a huge amount of information through users' interactions every day (Weng, et al., 2013). It also gives the users the freedom of choosing which information they want to retrieve and what information to share with others (Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2006). This shared information is often able to attract a large amount of attention from the users especially if it went viral (Bandari, Asur, & Huberman, 2012). However, recently there has been an increase in making provocative comments online. These comments can often be found in viral contents. Because of its provocative and offensive nature, they tend to trigger negative emotional response from other users such as anger and frustration (Kwon & Cho, 2015), exacerbating the situation further.

Researchers discovered that the use of offensive comments online could potentially be "contagious" and influence other people to react in a similar way (Kwon & Cho, 2015, p. 2). When emotionally triggered, users have the potential to react aggressively and retaliate using offensive words online (Kwon & Cho, 2015). This process is what scholars call emotional contagion; a

process where people are influenced by other people's emotions or behaviour (Barsade, 2002; Schoenewolf, 1990). Emotional contagion usually happens when users' expression of opinions trigger other people's emotions (Kwon & Cho, 2015).

Kramer (2012) found that when users post on Facebook, they can affect their network of Facebook friends. He explained that users may influence their network of friends on Facebook to use the same words to express their opinions. Particularly when users use emotionally expressive language (Kramer, 2012). This is further proven by Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan (2012) who found that emotionally stimulating contents tend to become more viral than others.

Emotional expressions on Facebook

Using Facebook to express opinions and emotions is not something new. However, when the content of a post is emotionally stimulating, it may cause emotional contagion (Kwon & Cho, 2015). It often happens subconsciously and is a form of "social influence" (Barsade, 2002, p. 645). Emotional contagion may encourage users to be more aggressive in expressing their opinions (Kwon & Cho, 2015). In one study, Kramer (2012) found that Facebook posts are subsequently able to affect the posts of others within the users' network. He explained that people who use emotionally expressive language may influence those around them and influence them to express their opinions using the same emotionally expressive language.

Often, negatively charged emotional expressions on the SNS such as anger are more contagious (Kwon & Cho, 2015). In a study by Kwon and Cho (2015), they found that the use of harsh language in the comments on online news sites tend to receive more public attention. Harsh language is considered as a form of high-arousal emotional expression. However, they are still unable to explain whether the use of swear words could motivate other users to use harsh language within the same discussion topic. Kwon and Cho (2015) also identified that insulting comments from users may cause a split in users' opinions. SNS users tend to be influenced by the sentiments created within the contents based on positive or negative opinions of others (Berger & Milkman, 2012).

Even when the use of harsh language is becoming increasingly common in the virtual setting, there is still relatively small body of literature that focuses on the use of harsh language in the context of users' online discussion (Kwon & Cho, 2015). This is because swearing may be deemed as a violation of public communication (Kwon & Cho, 2015) and most research on SNS tend to focus on the relationship of the users as their main element (Thelwall, 2008).

Harsh language in viral contents

Harsh language is a very broad and general term on the use of words that are considered as taboo in the society (Thelwall, 2008). Those words include subjects belonging to religious beliefs, attributed to "sex" and "sexuality"; racial and "ethnic group" along with "nationality"; "political affiliation"; words that are degrading; attributed to less fortunate group and the disabled; "stupidity; undesirable behaviour and disease" (Thelwall, 2008, p. 86).

Harsh language has been labelled by scholars as a part of an uncivilised act. According to Smith, Philips and King (2010) the act of using harsh language is considered as an act of incivility. In their study, they found that people consider the act of swearing, using bad language

and making sexual remarks as rude and uncivil (Smith et al., 2010). An act of incivility can cause discomfort in a casual or professional setting (Coyne et al., 2011; Smith et al., 2010). Incivility can happen both in real life and online. However, in this digital era, Weber Shandwick (2013) highlighted that the internet and SNS are among the main causes of incivility. The act of incivility on the internet – dubbed as 'flaming', is considered as irritating by the majority of SNS users (Moor, Heuvelman, & Verleur, 2010).

Emotions have often been associated with the use of harsh language. Scholars believe that harsh language is used as a form of emotional expression (Thelwall, 2008). Previous studies reported that contents with high emotional arousal elements such as provocation, nudity, and violence (Porter & Golan Guy, 2006) may trigger the need for users to share and disseminate the content (Berger, 2011). Emotional arousal plays a significant role in initiating the diffusion of viral contents (Berger, 2011; Porter & Golan Guy, 2006). Users may not realise it, but they may inadvertently express their opinion regarding the topic being discussed when they comment or interact on Facebook using harsh language (Anderson et al., 2013).

Anderson and colleagues (2013) found that using harsh language in the comments may influence other users' opinions. Users often like to make an initial judgment of the discussed topic based on other users' comments rather than referring to the information given in the content. Misinformed users who make judgments based on just the comments may end up being influenced and have their perceptions altered. Users may also end up being divided and may not receive the intended message from the writer of the content (Anderson et al., 2013). Often, people will consider other users' interaction before participating in an online discussion (Anderson et al., 2013).

While it is agreed that using harsh language might attract more users to interact, it would create distrust among the users (Anderson et al., 2013) as harsh language use is considered offensive and pointless (Coe, Kenski, & Rains, 2014; Cho & Kwon, 2015). In one study on incivility in a newspaper website comments, Coe and colleagues (2014) found that the use of harsh language online may have a domino effect on the users. In their research, harsh language use could influence other users to act the same way especially since they discovered that harsh language use in online interaction may attract more negative feedback from other users.

Methodology
Sampling selection

This study aims to identify which of the two top tabloid media Facebook pages from Malaysia has a higher frequency of harsh language use in their viral content comment section. These two Facebook pages are labelled as PM and SK. Being the top two tabloid media Facebook pages, PM and SK have high number of followers and high use of harsh language. PM started out as a personal blog. As it starts to gain traction from followers, the blog was moved to a proper website and transformed into a tabloid media. PM then started its Facebook page by sharing posts from its web portal. Now, they claim themselves as "the cheapest viral marketing agency in Malaysia". Like PM, SK too started out as a blog. Following the footsteps of PM, they created a more professional looking web portal and recognised themselves as an "Entertainment Website".

To meet the objective of this study, the content analysis method was employed to retrieve and analyse the data from SK and PM Facebook pages (Socialbakers, 2018). These two Facebook

pages were selected due to the sheer number of fans and followers. The high number of followers also meant that it is easier for their Facebook posts to go viral. Viral contents were chosen as they can acquire a sizable number of interactions among Facebook users.

Up until July 2018, the SK Facebook page has over 5.4 million number of fans whereas PM Facebook page has over 7.8 million fans. Socialbakers (2018), a social media monitoring platform highlighted a significant number of fan growth on both pages during the month of April 2018 (see Table 1). Due to this significant growth, viral contents from 1 April 2018 to 30 April 2018 were retrieved and analysed for this study. However, the PM Facebook page had been taken down somewhere in September 2018 and was replaced with a new page which now has lesser followers than it used to have previously. While the data collected from the PM Facebook page is no longer available, it is still valid up to September 2018 before the Facebook page was taken down.

Table 1: Fan growth and total users' comments for SK and PM

Facebook page	Number of fans	Fan growth in April 2018	% of fan growth	% of users' comments
SK	5,444,226	62,235	1.14	56.20
PM	7,894,447	205,615	2.60	43.27

Content virality is not usually just spread by a single mechanism. It usually requires both messages to be broadcasted by a single entity before it is adopted and then spread through peer-to-peer diffusion (Goel, Anderson, Hofman, & Watts, 2016). Goel and colleagues (2016) also found that there is no specific structure on how a content could go viral. However, it was indicated that when a content receives a minimum of 100 shares, it often has a higher chance to spread further (Goel et al., 2016). To ensure the virality of the sampling, this paper focused on posts that have more than 1,000 shares with more than 1,000 comments. Posts with sensitive topics focusing specifically on social issues were chosen as sensitive topics tend to be emotionally contagious and may contain "more controversial elements" (Oz et al., 2017).

The viral posts from both Facebook pages were retrieved using the Facebook search function. To narrow down the results specifically to the timeline of the sampling, the 'Filter Results' function was used so that only posts from 1st April 2018 to 30th April 2018 from both Facebook pages are listed. This process had to be done individually for each page. The 'Filter Results' were sorted using the Top Posts selection. However, the posts that were retrieved seemed to appear randomly and were not sorted according to the selected format. Hence, to narrow down the results, each post was then analysed manually according to these specific requirements: (1) The viral post/content should have more than 1,000 shares, (2) The viral post should have more than 1,000 comments and, (3) The post/content topic must centre around sensitive topics that highlight on social issues.

Determining the scope of social issues is not easy as there is no universal definition and it varies between literature. However, Eitzen and colleagues (2011) defined social issues as act or situations that "violate the norms and values present in society" and social condition that cause

suffering towards the general population, be it physically or mentally that needs to be improved. Therefore, to determine whether a post or content is considered as a social issue, the content needs to have one of these two characteristics; (1) violation of the societal norm and values or; (2) social conditions that cause physical or mental suffering.

A total of 5,025 comments were retrieved from all 4 posts. However, only comments on the main post on the page were collected. Each post contains more than one video and photo that were uploaded onto the page. With Facebook's dynamic function, each of these videos and photos may contain their comments, shares and likes. Since this study only focused on the main posts' number of comments and shares, these separate comments and shares were not included in this study.

Comments that were collected were sorted into a table. These comments were then individually and manually analysed to find the use of harsh language. Each post and comment was counted as one unit while every use of harsh language was quantified as an item each. Comments were then re-read to ensure the right number of harsh language used was quantified. Comments with memes or photos uploaded depicting obscenity were also counted as using harsh language.

The ethical guidelines for internet-mediated research highlight that individuals' behaviour observed in a public space where they do not expect any form of privacy requires no consent (British Psychological Society, 2017). Since these comments were posted on a Facebook page, it is "public and can be viewed by everyone who can see the Page" (Facebook, 2019, para. 17). Facebook (2019) also considers content uploaded in the public domain they provided as available for the public to use freely. Therefore, this research was considered to have met this ethical standard.

Inter-coder reliability

Inter-coder reliability was tested using the inter-coder reliability formula by Holsti (1969). Two coders were engaged for this test to ensure the researcher remains on neutral ground when coding the data of this study. The coders were tasked to code the comments from the viral content. They were given coding sheets to observe the use of harsh language and indicate the harsh languages used in the comments. Coders were then instructed to quantify the number of harsh language that was used in the comments. The test was then performed using the inter-coder reliability formula by Holsti (1969) as below:

$$CR = 2M / (N1 + N2)$$

2M stands for the total number of categories that was agreed by both coders whereas, (N1 + N2) is the number of categories that was given to the coders. The total number of harsh language that was agreed upon between both coders was 35 whereas the total number of harsh language that was given was 42. The calculation for this study's inter-coder reliability test is as below:

$$CR = 2M / (N1 + N2)$$
$$CR = 35 / 42$$
$$CR = 0.83$$

The result for the inter-coder reliability test was 0.83 which is considered as an acceptable result according to Mouter and Noordegraaf (2012). Mouter and Noordegraaf (2012) regard results with more than 0.80 as an acceptable result in most situations. Whereas, anything below 0.80 will be considered as having too many disparities between the coders.

Results

The Facebook search function yielded a total of 214 viral posts retrieved from 1st April 2018 to 30th April 2018. A total of 91 posts were collected from the SK Facebook page whereas 123 posts were retrieved from the PM Facebook page. However, only two (2) posts fit the criteria of this study for SK and after filtering the viral posts according to specific requirement for this study, PM yielded two (2) posts as well. Hence, the total number of viral posts highlighting sensitive topics regarding social issues that were collected for this study is four (4) in total.

The first post collected from SK Facebook page was labelled as SK1. The post, which depicted public harassment was categorised as uncivilized behaviour. SK1 contained a combination of videos and photos. However, it has since been deleted from the SK Facebook page. SK1 portrayed the public harassment towards some shopping mall staff in Southern Malaysia. The aggression happened after a Royal Crown Prince decided to treat shoppers at a mall on a shopping spree. After the news of the treat went viral, people started flooding the mall. Despite the staff closing the supermarket, people still demanded that they open the shutters prompting the aggression to happen as displayed in the video stills in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Video stills from SK1 taken from SK Facebook page
portraying the public harassing shopping mall staff through
the small looking glass on the door

The video stills displayed a hoard of people banging on the door of a supermarket inside a mall believed to be in Johor Bahru, Malaysia. In the video, there was a commotion as several people were seen harassing the staff by shouting harsh words and banging on the door of the supermarket. SK1 was regarded as viral because it garnered a total of 6,588 interactions. 3,711 of the interactions were made up of reactions (or as previously called, 'likes'). The reactions itself make a total of 56.33% from the whole interactions of the post. The comments from SK1 were

collected and analysed. 14.12% out of 1,183 comments were found to contain the use of harsh language (see Table 2).

Table 2*: Viral posts from SK and PM with sensitive topics highlighting social issues from 1 April 2018 to 30 April 2018*

Label	Post category	Type of post	No. of shares	No. of comments (N=5,025)	No. of comments with harsh language (N=1,166)
SK1	Uncivilised behaviour	Videos & photos	1,694	1,183	167
SK2	Public property vandalism	Photos	3,598	1,656	562
PM1	Bullying	Videos & photos	5,482	1,088	249
PM2	Female teenage brawl	Videos & photos	3,161	1,098	188

Source: www.facebook.com (3 July 2018)

The second post collected from SK Facebook page was labelled as SK2. The post contained several still images from a CCTV footage of an elevator. The screenshot of the post in Figure 2 shows two (2) girls vandalising the elevator's button panels with a caption translated as "New PPR lift that's just been replaced… But when you get a new one?". PPR is short for *Program Perumahan Rakyat*, a public housing program. It is a low-cost housing project initiated by the government for low-income group of people. The caption suggested that the lift at the PPR housing has just been replaced recently before being vandalised by the two (2) girls.

Figure 2: Images from SK2 taken from SK Facebook
page portraying two (2) girls vandalising a lift

SK2 had received a total of 7,412 interactions among Facebook users, which easily made it a viral content particularly, when the number of users sharing the post was more than 3,000 (see Table 2). According to Table 2, 22.34% of the interactions were made of user's comments on the Facebook post. These comments were then analysed and SK2 was found to have received a higher number of harsh language use in the comments than SK1 with 70.28% difference. SK2 was also recorded as having the highest number of harsh language use in comments among all the viral posts collected (see Figure 4).

Next, posts from PM Facebook page were collected and analysed. Labelled as PM1, PM's first post was categorised as bullying. The post contained a video and images of a smaller student being confronted and beaten by two other school students who appeared to be bigger than him. Figure 3 shows a still from the video where the victim was confronted by two (2) bigger students. These students then proceeded to beat the victim while the others just watched the scene unfolds including the person who was recording the video.

Figure 3: A video still from PM1 portraying a confrontation
between the victim and the bullies before being beaten

PM1 contained a total of 11,289 interactions from the users. The high number of interactions made it easy for the post to go viral with the shares making up almost half of the interactions at 48.56% (see Table 2). However, despite the high number of shares, the post only amassed a total of 1,088 comments (see Table 2). These comments were analysed, and it was found that 22.89% of the comments contained the use of harsh language from the fans and followers of PM Facebook page.

PM's second post which was labelled as PM2 was categorised as a female teenage brawl. The post has been removed since the deletion of PM Facebook page. It displayed videos and an image of female teenagers in a physical brawl with their group of friends watching. Despite the fight getting out of hand, only a few of their friends went to help dissolve the fight. The two teens were then seen rolling on the ground on a field and getting further away from their friends. The fighting went on until a few adults who happened to pass by the field came over to help and separate the two girls.

This second viral post from PM Facebook page amassed a total of 7,521 interactions from Facebook users. The post shares were made up of 42.03% out of the total of interactions which made the content viral during the month of April 2019. There is not much difference in terms of the number of comments between PM1 and PM2 with only 0.46% difference (see Table 2). However, from the analysis of the comments, 17.12% of the comments contain the use of harsh language.

The analysis shows that despite having fewer fans and lesser fan growth than PM (see Table 1), SK has a higher number of comments from the users than PM with a 13% difference. Comments from SK1 and SK2 were analysed for the use of harsh language and it was found to have a higher number of harsh language use than PM (see Table 2). With a total of 729 comments containing harsh language, SK surpassed PM in the number of comments containing harsh language with 25.04% difference. Based on Figure 4, SK recorded an overall 14.50% use of harsh language while PM recorded 8.70% use of harsh language in the comments of their viral contents.
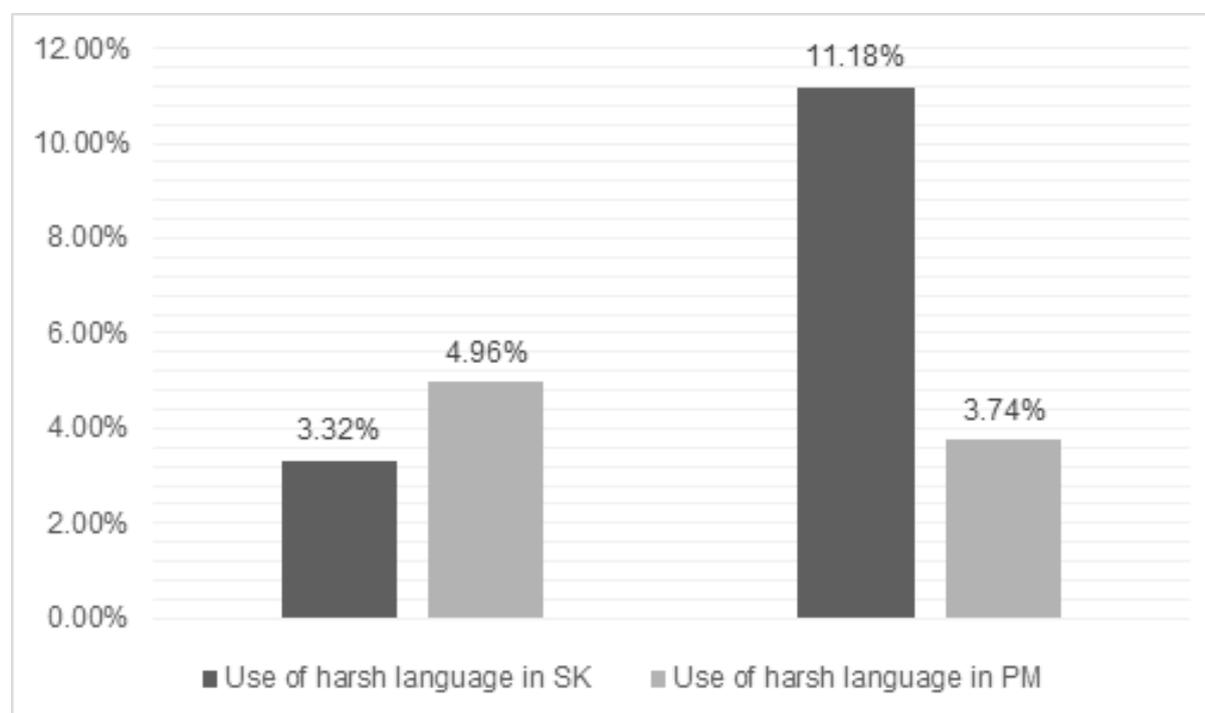

Figure 4: Total of comments with harsh languages used from viral content posts on SK and PM Facebook pages

Discussion

The findings from the results offered limited early evidence on the number of harsh language used between both pages. They showed that despite having a lower number of fans and fan growth, SK has a higher number of users' comments than PM. This also explains why SK has 25.04% higher number of difference in the number of harsh language used in the comments than PM does in their viral content posts.

The most notable differences between SK and PM was the categorisation of both pages. According to Socialbakers (2018), SK falls under the Media category while PM falls under the Celebrity category. The "About" tab on their Facebook page also offers different categorisation for both pages, with SK being categorised as a Media/News Company and PM being categorised under Personal Blog. This differentiation of categorisation shows that each page may have different sets of target audience.

Since it is not a part of this study's objective, how this differentiation of categories may contribute to the different frequencies between SK and PM is unfortunately unavailable. This limitation is also due to the unavailability of the Facebook page insights data. Browsing the pages as a normal Facebook user and page follower could not afford the researchers on the pages' insights data. The issue on how the differences between Facebook page categorisation and target audience may produce varying results in terms of commenting frequencies between the pages could be further explored in future research.

Overlapping of posts and viral content could also contribute to the varying difference in the number of comments containing harsh language. Through analysis and observation of the viral contents posted on both pages, SK's posts were found to be more emotionally arousing. Berger and Milkman (2012) discovered that provocative contents often receive more attention from users than less provocative contents. As discussed previously, contents that are emotionally stimulating are more likely going to receive users' attention and interaction (Berger, 2011). However, there could also be other differences within the contents of the posts from each page which this study could not account for.

It was also discovered that SK and PM often has users commenting using harsh language more than once within one comment. Taken from the post SK2, the highest number of harsh language used per comment from SK Facebook page were 20 (see Figure 5). The highest number of harsh language used per comment for PM were taken from the PM2 post. In this comment from PM2, the comment contained use of 10 harsh languages (see Figure 6). However, both comments from each page differ in terms of their use of harsh language.

The comment from Figure 5 contains harsher words than the comment from Figure 6 with sentence structure that made it overall insulting and violent. The comment (see Figure 5) also contained threats, curse and death wishes. Aside from the obvious choice of harsh language, the comment from Figure 5 also included racial slur targeted to a specific race, the use of pig emoji which also depicts racial sentiment and a middle finger emoji. It is unclear how the user managed to identify the girls' race from the images as there was no indication of it in the

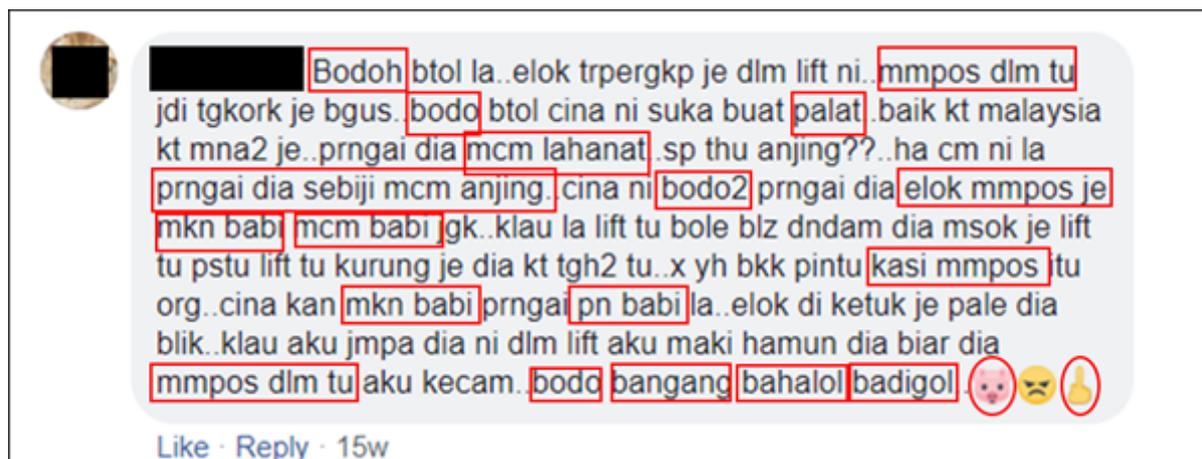comment, nor was the information given in the post itsel.

Figure 5.
Screenshot of the comment with the highest number of
harsh languages used per comment taken from SK2, SK Facebook page

The comment from Figure 5 is translated as below:

This is stupid. You should get trapped in the elevator and left to die there and become a skeleton. Stupid Chinese likes to cause shit in Malaysia and everywhere. . You should be cursed. Do you know what mutts are? Yes, this is how you are, you're like a mutt. Chinese are stupid and deserve to die. You're just like the pigs you eat. If the elevator can seek revenge, it should just trap you in there until you die. Since you eat pigs, you're behaving like a pig. Someone should just hit them in their heads. If I find them in the elevator, I would hurl insults at them until they die in there. Stupid idiot dumb brainless. (pig emoji) (angry emoji) (middle finger emoji)

As the SK2 post only consist of still images taken from a video, not much information was available that could explain why SK2 received a significant amount of harsh languages used in the comments. It did, however, portrayed the act of vandalism. This corresponds with Berger (2011) who mentioned contents that are characterised with "conflict, crisis or catastrophe" are often able to stimulate users' emotions. Being in a state of highly aroused emotions may have been the cause of the user's anger and for the user to develop hostility (Berger & Milkman, 2012).

Despite having used 10 harsh languages, the comment from Figure 6 has a softer tone to it. The comment, which was taken from PM2 post was less violent as it is not a targeted insult like the comment from SK2. While there was use of harsh language present in the comment, it sounded less violent and was more of a lecture than violent threats and insults such as those displayed in Figure 5. It was identified that the person who commented in Figure 5 was a male and the person commented in Figure 6 was a female. There could be a correlation towards the harsh language used between different genders which could be explored further in future research.
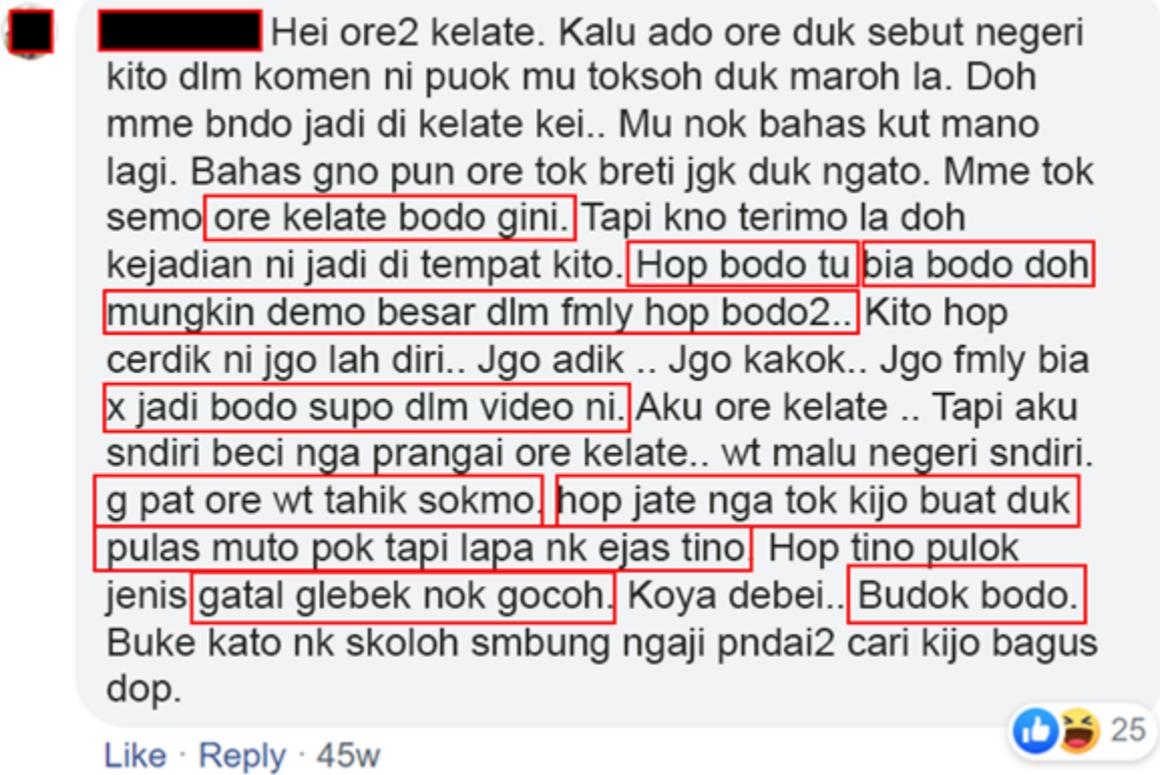
Figure 6.
Screenshot of the comment with the highest number of harsh languages
used per comment taken from PM2, PM Facebook page

The comment from PM2 was written in a Kelantanese dialect. However, the use of harsh language was still apparent as the following translation:

> *Hey, Kelantanese people. . If someone mentions your state in this comment, you can't be angry as this happened in Kelantan… You can't argue anymore. Even if you try to, it will not stop others from talking bad. Of course, not all Kelantanese people are this stupid. But we need to accept the fact that this happened at our place. We should just let those idiot people in the video remain stupid. Maybe they grew up in a stupid family… If we are smart enough ,we'll take care of ourselves, sisters, family so they don't become stupid like them in the video. I'm Kelantanese too but I hate Kelantanese attitude. They are a disgrace to their own state. They always cause trouble outside Kelantan. Kelantanese men are jobless, only know how to ride their father's motorcycle while busy hunting for women's attention. Meanwhile Kelantanese women keep getting involved in fistfight, acting like a gangster... Stupid kids, you are supposed to study well at school and look for good jobs, but you are doing the other way round.*

Through the analysis, the number of harsh languages used to comment on the viral posts found is worrying. One viral post managed to amass no less than 160 of comments containing harsh language. There would also be a significantly high amount of harsh language use in the comments especially when the viral content depicts violence that can be seen in SK2, PM1

and PM2 (see Table 2). This demonstrates that there is certainly a worrying number of harsh language use on Facebook platform. This finding supports the premise that using harsh language in online interaction is contagious and may influence other users to do the same (Anderson et al., 2013; Coe et al., 2014).

Among other limitations faced by the researchers was the deactivation of the PM Facebook page after September 2018. While the page was replaced by a new one, the data that was once available on the page was now missing and could not be traced back to be further analysed. The PM Facebook page also has lesser followers now than previously. For a while, the PM Facebook page could not be found as it did not exist on Facebook after it was taken down. However, there are ample tabloid journalism pages that are still available on Facebook and an extensive amount of data available to be studied.

Conclusion

This study examined the number of harsh language use in the comments among Facebook users in two top tabloid journalism Facebook pages. It aimed to identify which of these two pages has a higher number of harsh language use in the comments of viral content posts. It compared the use of harsh language in the comments of viral contents in these two pages; SK and PM. Based on the comparative analysis of these two pages, the aim of this study was met.

It was identified that SK has a higher number of users commenting with harsh languages in their viral content compared to PM. The results also found that SK has a higher number of users' comments. In one of the findings from the content analysis, the ones with content of violence displayed a significantly higher number of harsh language use among the users. The use of harsh language in the comments also attracted higher interactions among the users and influenced other users to behave in the same way. The results also identified a worrying level of harsh language use within just one viral content post when the content depicted use of violence. Future studies could explore how service providers such as Facebook could control or reduce the number of harsh language use on their platforms.

Nevertheless, this study only focused on sensitive topics highlighting viral social issues. Hence, it could not account for the use of harsh language in non-viral contents and on non-sensitive topics. Results of this study could also be different if it were conducted on other SNS platforms such as Twitter or Instagram.

Finally, future studies could explore what are the other factors that contribute to the use of harsh language in Facebook comments. From the findings of this research, it is highlighted that harsh language is being used as a tool to harass other users on Facebook. The results will hopefully be able to assist the local governing bodies to improvise current bylaw and develop a more stringent regulation and policies in the context of online content dissemination. This may possibly also prevent further abuse of SNS such as Facebook and reduce cases of harassment, libel and defamation on the said platform.

Acknowledgements

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