



Barisan Nasional's GE14 campaign materials: A reversed third-person effect

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ABSTRACT

The third-person effect theory postulates that respondents would deny media's direct effect on themselves but would perceive the same media as having a greater effect on others. A "reverse" third-person effect happens when the intended influence is perceived to be desirable or intelligent on oneself. This perception is sometimes referred to as the "first-person" effect claiming that people perceive greater communication influence on themselves than on others. The third-person effect has been studied on cross sections of populations but it is not clear what the effects would be if examined on a longitudinal basis. Applying this paradigm to the Malaysian voter scenario in the 2013 general elections, Idid and Souket (2014) studied the influence of *Barisan Nasional's* (BN) political campaign literature on BN voters under two categories- "self" which included themselves, their family, and like party supporters and "others" that included opposition supporters and undecided voters. The study found that BN supporters displayed a positive confidence on the influence of BN's campaign materials on self (88%) and on others (77%). Hence, a reversed third-person effect, that is, a first-person effect was observed for the perceived level of influence of BN's political communication materials on BN voters. This finding was attributed to the confidence and positive sentiment of BN voters towards their own party communication materials, finding the materials desirable and favourable. The present study investigated the effect of BN's political campaign literature on BN voters and opposition voters in the recent 2018 general election. The findings of Idid and Souket (2014) study on the 2013 election were then compared to the current study. The study posits that voter confidence is an important factor in predicting voter influence and perceived effect on others that may result in a third-person effect or a reversed third-person effect given two different contextual situations. This longitudinal study addresses the issue of the third-person effect during the periods when BN was strong (2013) and when it lost its dominant position in Malaysian politics (2018).

Keywords: *elections, media effects, third-person effect, politics, voter behaviour*

INTRODUCTION

The third-person effect was introduced by sociologist W. Phillips Davison to describe the perceived behavioral influences on unintended targets. The theory involves the evaluation of influence on oneself as well as influence on others. According to the theory, people tend to perceive that others are more influenced by media messages more than themselves. Davison (1983) called this perception as an overestimation of effects. He began to notice the presence of this effect as early as 1983 when he studied the influence of Japanese leaflets on a military unit that consisted of African-American troops and later confirmed the third-person effect in a number of small experiments often dealing with politics (Davison, 1983). This basic finding has been replicated several times on voter perception and behaviour and in political situations (Idid & Wok, 2010; Idid & Souket, 2014; Banning, 2006; Salwen, 1998; Johanssen, 2002). This theory contributes significantly to the field of political communication by providing insights on voter's perception of media influence and voting behaviour. Alternatively, positive messages or media contents that are deemed to be socially acceptable such as public service announcements which promote a public good demonstrates a "reverse" third-person effect or a first-person effect (Day, 2006). Duck, Terry and Hogg (1995) claimed that the third-person effect can be reversed when the intended influence is perceived to be desirable or intelligent. This was also called as the "first-person effect" by Perloff (1999). Several researches have shown a reversed third-person effect in their studies. These studies and many more over the recent years have attempted to further ascertain third-person effects and its broader implications, often focused on a cross section of a population. To date, there has been no study done on a longitudinal basis. The present study intends to add to the literature on third-person effect and longitudinal study of *Barisan Nasional's* (BN) political campaign materials influence on BN voters in the 2018 Malaysian general elections. Retrospectively, the study hopes to posit that voter confidence is an important factor in predicting voter influence and perceived effect on others that may result in a third-person effect or a reversed third-person effect given two different contextual situations. This longitudinal study addresses the issue of the third-person effect during the periods when BN was strong (2013) and then when BN lost its dominant position in Malaysian politics (2018).

THE THIRD-PERSON EFFECT/ REVERSED THIRD-PERSON EFFECT

The basic premise of the third-person effect is that individuals are prone to compare their responses to a message with the perceived responses of other people to the same message. In this process, the main individuals (respondents) expect themselves to be differently affected by the message as compared to others. The third-person effect theory proposes that if the messages are not favourable, the respondents will perceive that they are not affected by the message while the others maybe affected. The theory also hypothesizes that the respondents would identify themselves to be affected in the same way as those closest to them. According to Andsager and White (2007), people who are socially close to the main respondent in terms of age, political orientation, area of residence or other relevant traits (p. 2) are assumed by the main respondent to be on a par with their thoughts and reactions to a message. While those who are socially distant in terms of age, live far and have opposing political orientations are perceived to react in a different manner compared to the main respondent. Hence if the messages are not favourable, the respondents will perceive that they and those close to them are not affected while the others (those distant) maybe affected negatively or positively, thus indicating a third-person effect.

Several researchers have attempted to justify the occurrence of the third-person effect by using psychological theories. Some researchers have used the attribution theory to understand the third-person effect (Gunther & Thorson, 1992; Duck et al., 1995). This theory explains that “people assume that others do not take account of situational factors regarding a message and are likely to be influenced by it” (Conners, 2005, p. 11). Some researchers have used the involvement of ego in explaining the third-person effect. Perloff (1989) in his study on news coverage on a non-partisan control group versus that on pro-Israeli/ pro-Palestinian groups found ego involvement as an important part of self-identification and in predicting the third-person effect. Certain other researchers speak of biased optimism as possible explanations for the third-person effect (Gunther & Mundy, 1993). Biased optimism is understood as the “tendency for people to think they are less likely to have negative or undesirable experiences than others” (Gunther & Mundy, 1993, p. 60). Hence, socially undesirable messages (like pornography) is perceived to influence others more than the self (resulting in third-person effect), whilst socially desirable messages (such as public service announcements) are perceived to influence oneself more than others (reversed third-person effect/ first-person effect). Other factors affecting the third-person effect include self-identity, self enhancement and self-esteem (Hoorens & Ruiter, 1996; Gunther & Thorson, 1992). These factors relate to the positive self-image and confidence of the person or message.

Alternatively, several researches have shown a reversed third-person effect in their studies. Lewis, Watson and Tay (2007) explored the third-person effect and impact of road safety advertising in depicting physical threats on male and female drivers and found a reversed third-person effect when the individuals (female drivers) perceived themselves to be more influenced by the messages than other drivers (male drivers). On the other hand, the male drivers depicted a classical third-person effect. In the study on a sample of 175 player opinions pertaining to electronic games and addiction, Ivory (2004) found that heavy video games players admitted addictive potential for themselves more than for others mainly because they viewed addictive potential as a positive attribute. Spinda (2009) found National Football League (NFL) fans to exhibit a first-person effect or reversed third-person effect when comparing perceived media influence on themselves than on other groups of comparison (i.e., other fans around the NFL, the average person). Duck et al. (1995) found that when judging the influence of high-quality AIDS advertisements, participants tend to perceive that they are more easily influenced by the positive advertisements (with a common message encouraging safe sex) than others. They concluded that a classical third-person effect was found to decrease the likelihood that an individual will adopt a message while a reversed third-person effect may likely increase persuasion as individuals would adopt messages that are more relevant. In the political arena, in a more recent research on televised programming, Hoffman (2013) used an online survey on 198 respondents to examine the differential effects of program type on perceptions of bias and effects among politically attentive adults. This research suggests that programming like a political interview with a potential presidential candidate could increase perceptions of first-person effect (or reversed third-person effect). Lewis, Watson & White (2008) examined the impact of negative and positive emotional messages on self-reported speeding behaviour. On comparing past speeding behaviour (post exposure) of road users to the speeding behavior after exposure to positive and negative message, they found that the positive emotional appeals had greater impact on the behavior of road users (especially male users) compared to the negative emotional appeals.

Thus, when a message is considered to be credible or positive, people attribute more effects to self because of the notion “I am smart enough to recognize the value of the message” (Huh, Delorme & Reid, 2006). Positive content is expected to be more influential and to provide more beneficial outcomes for the individual (like health messages) than

negative content that is perceived as unbeneficial and undesirable by the individual (like pornography, violence) (Duck et al., 1995). These positive messages or media contents that are deemed to be socially acceptable demonstrate the reversed third-person effect or a first-person effect (Day, 2006). Thus, using Banning & Sweetser's (2007) ideology that the third-person impact increases as credibility decreases, we could say that the third-person effect decreases as credibility increases and thus results in a reverse-third-person effect.

Many reasons have been attributed to the perceived first-person effect or reversed third-person effect. Golan and Day (2008) have explored this hypothesis and have uncovered some psychological mechanisms for the occurrence of first-person effects. These include differential impact, elaboration likelihood and optimistic bias. Differential impact proposes that media messages have an influence on self if the message is personally relevant (Golan & Day, 2008). The elaboration likelihood model explains that a message can have an effect if it is based on logical argumentation or if it is based on peripheral cues (a person's natural reactions to stimuli) (Andsager & White, 2007). Andsager and White (2007) speak of in-group and out-group categorization whereby individuals identify themselves to be psychologically or socially different from others based on social distance. In-group is the group that a person identifies with strongly (through similar ideas, language, style etc.). In political situations, in-groups are associated with a political category or party and are differentiated from those who do not support the particular political party (out-groups). Thus, "it is easier to make self-enhancing decisions when there is a group to whom we feel superior" (Andsager & White, 2007, p. 61). They claim that "political parties provide instant, clearly delineated out-groups (p. 61). The current study identifies Barisan Nasional (BN) voters, their families and other BN supporters as in-group (i.e. closely linked to BN political communication materials), while the opposition voters (inclusive of PAS voters, Pakatan Harapan (PH) voters, unlikely voters) as out-groups. Social psychologists, Callaghan and Lazard (2011) confirmed Davison's (1989) claim that the person questioned in the third-person effect study often overestimates the effect on others and usually underestimates the influence on self and own attitudes.

Petty and Brinol (2008) asserted that a receiver engaged in any form of persuasive communication is mediated by the source, message and audience. They further explain that the receiver is also mediated by "own confidence". Thus, "we tend to doubt our own judgment and thus result in reading a persuasive message differently if we tend to have greater confidence in our own discernment" (Callaghan & Lazard, 2011, p. 77). Simply put, people who are exposed to a persuasive message, are not only influenced by own judgments but also by the confidence they have in communication and judgments. So to say, BN voters who are exposed to BN political communication materials are influenced and make judgments of impact on others and self, based on their confidence in the BN political party and communication. The current study posits that voter confidence is an important factor in predicting voter influence and behaviour and perceived effect on others that may result in the third-person or reversed third-person effect. The study is also compared with the findings of Idid & Souket (2014) to reflect on the BN voter behaviour in the recent election. Thus, based on the wide-ranging perspectives of the third-person effect theory, this study was undertaken in the context of understanding support for the BN party in the 14th general election in 2018. Retrospectively, the study hopes to contribute to the longitudinal study literature on third-person effect in political communication as part of its electoral studies.

THE THIRD-PERSON EFFECT MODEL

The third-person effect hypothesis constitutes two main components—the perceptual component and the behavioural component. Perception can be understood as how you look at others and the world around you (Hybels & Weaver, 1998). The perceptual component indicates that people assume that communications influence “others” more than the “self”. These perceptions of media effects on others are measured by averaging the self-reported individual’s perceptions of effects on other people (Jeong, 2005). The second hypothesis which is the behavioural component suggests that people’s expectations of media impact on others leads them to take ‘action’. Basically, the focus is on what the third person (i.e. other) does. The behavioural exploration of the third-person effect can be noted in many researches (Banning, 2006; Perloff, 1999). For example, some researchers have tested the behavioural component in censorship and advertising (Shah, Faber & Youn, 1999; Salwen & Dupagne, 1999).

Based on the perceptual component research of the third-person effect, Andsager & White (2007) proposed a model to better understand the third-person perception. The perceptual component puts forth the assumption that communications influence “others” more than the “self”. The self is considered as the first person or respondent, the ‘other’ refers to people like them (sibling, family) and the distant others referred to as the third person (Chapin, 2008). Literature shows that the third-person effect is obvious when a message has low likelihood or is undesirable (Shah et al., 1999). The third-person effect model (Figure 1) illustrates the impact of an undesirable message on self, others and distant others. The level of message impact runs along a continuum ranging from positive influence to negative influence.

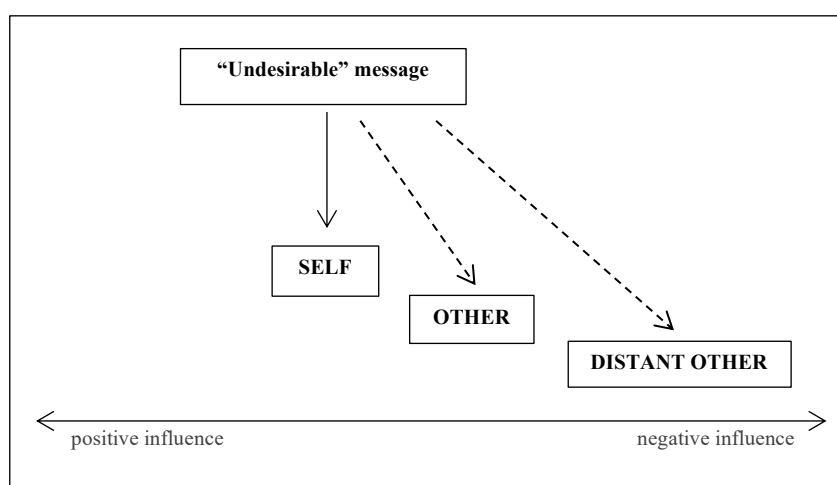


Figure 1. Third-person effect on self and others
(Andsager & White, 2007, p.17)

Andsager & White (2007) explained that the solid line to self indicates an individual’s self-report on influence following exposure to the undesirable message (p. 3). The broken lines from the undesirable message to others represent the individual’s perception of the influence that the same content has on others. The continuum runs from positive influence (reacting in a positive way to a positive message like donating) to a negative influence (reacting in a negative way to a message). The self (respondent) in a third person scenario is positioned in the center of the continuum (balanced between positive influence and negative influence) indicating a lack of perceived influence of the message on themselves. The larger

the social distance between self and the other, the greater the perceived influence. Thus, from the model, it can be understood that an undesirable message has limited effect on self, a moderate negative impact on others and a greater negative impact on the distant others. Overall, this model states that a message has a greater influence on others compared to self, thus perfecting the third-person theory hypothesis.

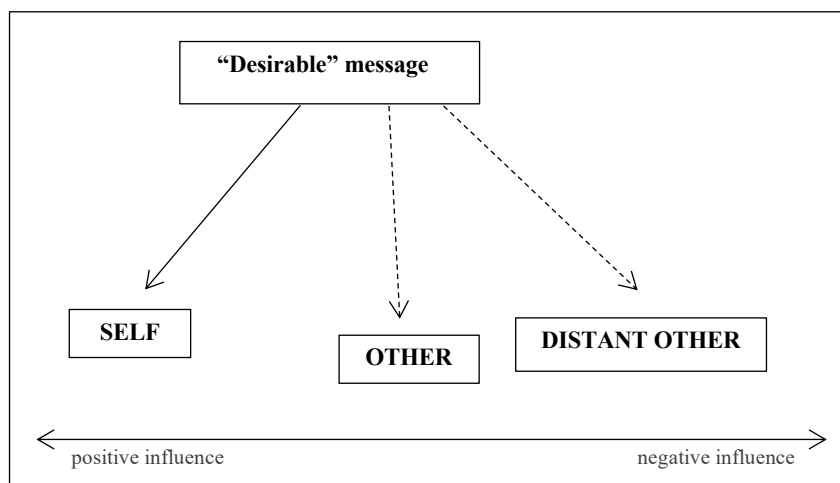


Figure 2. “Reverse” third-person effect on self and others
(Andsager & White, 2007, p.1)

A similar model is presented in Figure 2 in the event the message is a desirable message. Thus if the message is desirable, individuals will perceive themselves to be more affected by the positive message than others. Andsager & White (2007) claimed that a “reversed third-person effect” was possible when the individuals perceived themselves to be affected by a desirable (positive) message. The solid line from the “desirable message” to the respondent or self indicates self-report and the broken lines from the message to others indicate the estimation of influence. In this context, the self reacts to the message in a positive way and perceives the others to be either slightly positively influenced, negatively influenced or not influenced at all. This model compliments the theory that a positive or desirable message has a greater impact on the respondent compared to others. In order to better understand the application of the third-person effect in the political scenario of Malaysia, let us examine first the political background of the Malaysian general elections.

POLITICAL SCENARIO IN MALAYSIA

The past three elections of Malaysia (12th General Election in 2008, 13th General Election in 2013 and 14th General Election in 2018) have marked an interesting turn in Malaysia’s political development. Prior to this, Malaysia had concluded its general election in March 2004 with a landslide victory for *Barisan Nasional* (BN), “one of the most successful victories since Malaysia’s independence in 1957” (Tamam & Govindasamy, 2009). The 12th General Election which was held in March 2008, turned out to be the exact opposite, with BN losing its two-thirds majority in the Dewan Rakyat for the first time in history. This shift in electoral outcome marked a significant period in Malaysia’s political development. Many reasons were attributed to this phenomenon. The 2013 general election also saw BN losing its two-third majority parliamentary seats with a winning of 133 seats while the opposition

(Pakatan Rakyat) won 89 seats. The main reason for this outcome was the uprising of better-informed Malaysian voters that resulted in the highest voter turnout in Malaysia's history (84.4%) (Idid & Souket, 2014). Fast forward to the 2018 elections, for the very first time, BN lost to the opposition coalition, led by former prime minister Tun Mahathir Mohamed, which secured a majority of 122 seats in the 222-member parliament. The 14th Malaysian General Election was arguably the most competitive election ever seen and many owed the loss of the BN political party to the rising inflation, cost of living, debt in the country, coupled with the massive 1MDB financial scandal and mismanagement of government-linked companies. Furthermore, due to the large role played by the social media, political communication messages took a different turn. Idid (2018) claimed that there has been an ongoing decline in the trust of traditional media both among the general electorate and also party supporters.

Political communication is a field of study that looks at factors influencing voters' preferences (Idid & Wok, 2010). For the current study, the impact of BN political communication materials that included brochures (pamphlets, publications, leaflets), ceramah (speeches, lectures) and BN publications and reports on the BN voter was studied. BN's political campaign materials in 2008 was premised upon the country's progress report and manifesto themed "Security, Peace and Prosperity". The key campaign messages were disseminated in the form of brochures, political talks, banners, buntings etc. to influence potential voters (Idid & Wok, 2010). In 2013, BN's political campaign unveiled a people-centric manifesto focusing on an action plan to raise the quality of life for all Malaysians in the next five years. Unlike previous manifestos which provided a broad overview of the coalition's policies, the new manifesto was themed "A Promise of Hope". The opposition coalition then was called Pakatan Rakyat and consisted of three parties: *Parti Keadilan Rakyat* (The People's Justice Party, PKR), the Democratic Action Party (DAP) and Islam Se-Malaysia Party (Pan Malaysian Islamic Party, PAS). The most recent general elections in 2018 witnessed BN launching its most inclusive general election manifesto containing 364 pledges and carrying the theme "With BN for a Greater Malaysia". The first chapter of the manifesto tackled the issue of living cost which was the greatest concern for Malaysians in the wake of 2018. One of the promises in BN's lavish election manifesto was the promise of cash benefits targeting rural ethnic Malays. The opposition coalition called *Pakatan Harapan* (PH)—comprising the People's Justice Party (PKR), the Democratic Action Party (DAP), and two new parties—Malaysian United Indigenous Party (PPBM) and National Trust Party (Amanah) and led by former Prime Minister Tun Mahathir Mohamad—unveiled its own manifesto called "Book of Hope: Building the Nation, Fulfilling Hopes" to tackle the rising inflation, cost of living and debt in the country. PH's 10 pledges were promised to take place within 100 days of its governance (abolishing the goods and services tax (GST), reintroducing petrol subsidy, introducing Employees Provident Fund subscription for housewives, abolishing debts of FELDA settlers, giving leeway to PTPTN loan borrowers by not blacklisting defaulters, increasing monthly wages and annual subsidies for low income family and setting up a special committee to review the 1MDB financial scandal as well as other controversial projects and to review the Malaysia Agreement 1963). Thus, the 14th General Election witnessed, on one hand, the opposition's political campaign messages focusing on "hope" while on the other, BN's political campaign messages focusing on the theme "Make Malaysia Great".

THE REVERSED THIRD-PERSON EFFECT IN THE 13TH MALAYSIAN GENERAL ELECTION

The 13th Malaysian General Election was held on 5 May 2013. Idid and Souket's (2014) study sample comprised of 1463 voters (BN= 768, PAS=169, DAP=365, PKR=234) collected nationwide through quota sampling. In their study, BN supporters were asked to estimate the influence of BN party materials on its own supporters (themselves, family party voters) and on opposition supporters as well as unlikely or undecided voters. The findings demonstrated the presence of a first-person effect or reversed third-person effect (Idid & Souket, 2014) as BN supporters claimed to observe a greater influence on self (88%) compared to others (77%) (Table 1). The main reason attributed to this finding was the presence of a desirable message (BN's political communication messages) for BN respondents and as a result, they were confident of its impact on others (77%) too. The findings are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Perceived influence of BN's political communication materials on self and others

2013 Elections (N = 1463)	
BN Respondents (N = 768)	Influence of BN Materials (%)
Self	88 (self) 88 (family) 91 (like)
TOTAL	88
Others	78 (Opposition) 76 (unlikely voters)
TOTAL	77

(Source: Idid & Souket, 2014)

THE REVERSED THIRD-PERSON EFFECT IN THE 14TH MALAYSIAN GENERAL ELECTION

The current study was conducted with 2077 voters (BN (743), PAS (307), PH (867) and undecided voters (157)), drawn nationwide before the 14th General Election that was held on 9 May 2018. Questionnaires were distributed to test the influence of BN's political communication materials (brochures/pamphlets/leaflets, ceramah (speeches/lectures) and (BN) publications/reports) on the self, others and distant others. The respondent is considered as the "self" (voters who are recognised as a BN supporter), the others include those closest to the respondent (family, other BN supporters) and the distant others (includes non-BN supporters and supporters of other parties). The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1= not influenced at all, 2= not influenced, 3= slightly influenced, 4= influenced and 5= greatly influenced for statements about the effect of mass media on oneself and others. These scores were then compared to identify significant differences between effect on oneself and effect on others. The questions asked in the present study were to test the extent of influence the BN political communication materials had on BN voters. The influence refers to the degree to which political communication materials are perceived to have an impact on self, family, supporters, non-supporters and non-supporters of other

parties. The main objective of the study was to test the presence of the third-person effect amongst BN voter behaviour in the 14th General Elections.

The study is further illustrated based on the third-person perception model proposed by Andsager & White (2007). BN's political communication materials are perceived to have a "desirable" impact on BN respondents. The level of impact is tested along a continuum ranging from positive influence to negative influence. A positive influence refers to the voter's desirability in showing support for the BN political party (through voting), while a negative influence indicates not supporting the BN political party (by voting or showing support for the opposition party). The influence of BN's political communication materials can also be a positive extreme or a negative extreme. The center of the continuum is considered as neutral or no influence. The arrow towards the self indicates the BN voter's self-report on some measure of influence following exposure to BN's political communication message. The broken lines from the messages to others represent the BN voter's estimation of the influence that the same content will have on those others (opposition party supporters). An application of the model in the present study is displayed in Figure 3.

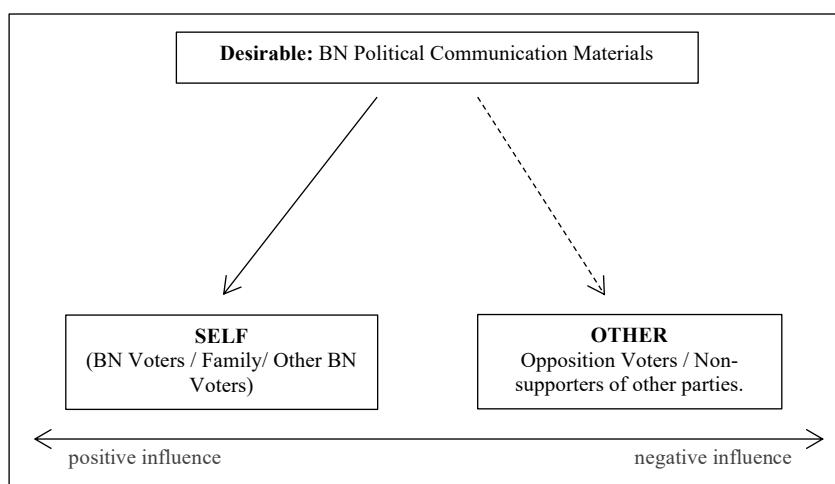


Figure 3. Third-person effect model on BN's political communication materials (Andsager & White, p. 17, 2007)

FINDINGS

The current study asked voters who are considered as BN supporters on their perceived influence of BN's political communication materials on themselves (self), on their family, on other BN supporters, on opposition supporters (PAS, PH) and unlikely voters. The perceived influence was divided into two categories. BN supporters inclusive of themselves, their family and fellow BN party voters were categorized as "Self" (in-group) while the opposition party supporters and undecided voters were categorized as "Others" (out-group). Self refers to "people who seem similar in terms of age, political orientation, area of residence, or other relevant traits and are more likely to respond the way we do than those people who are distant from us" (Andsager & White, 2007, p. 2).

The summary in Table 2 shows the cross tabulations of the demographics of respondents. In total, respondents were made up of 36% BN supporters and 64% opposition party supporters. The opposition party supporters were made up of 42% Pakatan Harapan supporters, 15% PAS supporters and 8% undecided voters. In terms of ethnicity, nearly half of the total respondents were Malay (Bumiputera) (56%), while about two fifths comprised of

Chinese (37 %) and about less than ten were Indians (8%). Most of the respondents belonged to the age group of 21–50.

Table 2. Demographics of respondents (N = 2077)

Respondents' Demographics (%)		
Gender	Male	51
	Female	49
Race	Malay/ Bumiputera	56
	Chinese	37
	Indian	8
Age Group	21-35 years	43
	36-50 years	38
	More than 51 years	18
Choice of Party	BN supporters N = 743	36
	PAS supporters N = 307	15
	PH supporters N = 869	42
	Undecided supporters N = 158	8
	Total opposition supporters N = 1334	64

Based on the literature discussed, the hypothesis that a reversed third-person effect is observed when a message has a high likelihood or a perceived positive influence was formulated. Further, these desirable messages are expected to exert a stronger impact on self than on others. In other words, the message will have the greatest influence on “me” (the first person i.e. BN party supporters and a lesser influence on “them” (the opposition party supporters). A past study confirmed that BN party supporters agree that the BN political campaign would influence them and that the opposition supporters (inclusive of PAS, DAP and KeAdilan) would be influenced by their respective party campaigns and messages (Idid & Wok, 2010). Undoubtedly, each party’s campaign messages are regarded as desirable messages by their own respective parties and undesirable to the opposition. Thus based on this notion, the study hopes to investigate the possibility of a classic reversed third-person effect when a message is perceived to be desirable (when people infer that the message may be good for me) (Duck et al, 1995). In this context, the present study tested the influence of BN’s political campaign messages on BN voters only and looked for the presence of a reversed third-person effect. We had chosen to focus on BN’s political communication considering it is the national coalition which has been the ruling party in Malaysia since the country’s independence in 1957. The BN’s political communication materials considered for this study were limited to the use of brochures (that includes pamphlets and leaflets), *ceramah* (speeches / lectures) and BN publications or reports.

The current study ascertained whether people will accept the effects of agreeable messages that are in line with their cognitive needs (Idid & Souket, 2014). Thus, BN voters would claim that BN's campaign materials will have an effect on themselves because the messages would be acceptable to them. The first hypothesis was formulated as follows:

H1: BN party supporters would perceive that BN's political communication materials to have greater influence on **themselves than on non-BN supporters**.

Idid and Souket (2014) reasoned in their findings that BN respondents shared a similar sentiment of confidence on their "others". They concurred with the argument posited by Huh et al. (2006) that a BN voter would feel "smart enough to recognize the value of the message" and thus will predict the message to have a strong impact on others (Idid & Souket, 2014). Petty and Brinol (2008) claimed that a receiver engaged in any form of persuasive communication is mediated by one's "own confidence". Thus, this study assumes that BN voters who are exposed to a persuasive message (BN's political communication materials) are not only influenced by their own judgment but also by the confidence they have in the BN communication materials and the BN party, thus predicting the influence of the BN messages on self and others based on this confidence. The second hypothesis is formulated as follows:

H2: BN party supporters would display a stronger confidence in BN's political communication materials in 2018 by predicting a **greater influence** on others as compared to the previous election in 2013.

The respondents were tested on the influence of BN's political communication materials on themselves. Of the total 2077 responses, unexpectedly, an almost equal number of respondents (48%) claimed to be not influenced by BN's political campaign messages, while 47% claimed otherwise (minus the no response percentage). A greater influence on self would indicate a greater probability of the reversed third-person effect and a lesser probability of the third-person effect. The summary of the findings is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Perceived influence of BN's political communication materials on BN respondents (BN respondent, family and other BN supporters)

	On BN Respondent (N= 743)	Perceived Influence (%)
BN	Self	83
	Family	85
	Other BN supporters	87
	TOTAL	85

Influence (3= slightly influenced, 4= influenced, 5=highly influenced)

For the current study, only BN respondents were taken into consideration, thus focusing only on BN respondents (N=743) and their perception of influence on self and others. This study understands self as the voter and those closest to him in terms of political affiliation and living together (e.g. family and like party voters), while others are considered as opposition voters or supporters (e.g. PH voters and PAS voters and undecided voters who are distantly far from the BN voter). From the findings (Table 2), it is clear that 83% of BN voters claim to be influenced by BN's political materials, thus supporting the first hypothesis that BN's political communication materials will have an influence on its own party supporters. Additionally, BN voters also perceive that BN's political messages will also

have a similar influence on their family (85%) and a greater influence on other BN supporters (87%). This percentage of perceived influence of BN party supporters (total on Self= 85%) indicates the possibility of a reversed third-person effect or a first-person effect. This may be due to the perceived desirability of BN's message content as being credible or positive and thus people attributing more influence to self (Huh et al., 2006).

Similarly, the influence of BN's political communication materials on others or the "third" person was also tested. The others include opposition voters (PH supporters and PAS supporters) and the undecided voters. It was expected that the perceived influence on others would be lesser than the perceived influence on self.

The present study categorizes 'self' as BN voter and any person who is closely associated with the BN voter which includes their family, friends and those with similar traits and political orientation. This is based on the perception that people who have similar attributes are likely to respond in the same way that the self does. In order to justify this perception, the 'others' in the current study are also categorized as those socially distant from the BN voter, their family and similar party voters who are distant from BN party supporters. Thus, the perception of the BN respondent on the family members and friends of their opposition party supporters was also calculated. Table 4 presents the perceived influence on others by the BN voter.

Table 4. Perceived influence of BN's political communication materials on others (PAS supporters, PH supporters, undecided voters)

	BN respondent (N = 743)	Perceived Influence on Opposition Voter (%)	Perceived Influence on Opposition Voter's Family (%)	Perceived Influence on Opposition Voter's Same Party Voters (%)	Total on OTHERS (%)
BN	PAS supporters	25	26	24	25
	PH supporters	36	43	40	40
	Undecided voters	60	47	65	57
	TOTAL	40	39	45	41

Influence (3= slightly influenced, 4= influenced, 5=highly influenced)

The findings indicate that BN supporters perceive a total influence of 25% on PAS voters, on the family members of PAS voters (26%) and on other PAS voters (24%). Additionally, BN respondents perceive a slightly higher influence on PH supporters (40%) (PH voters (36%), family members of PH voters (43%) and other PH voters (40%)). The greatest perceived influence amongst the others was on the undecided supporters (57%) (undecided voters (60%), family members of undecided voters (47%) and other undecided voters (65%)). In order to comprehend the implications of the reversed third-person effect theory, the three groups of others (opposition party supporters and the undecided voters, their families, similar party voters and themselves were merged into one variable as others (Table 4). In summary, the BN respondent's perception of the influence of BN's political materials on others (opposition voters & undecided voters) (Table 3) was 41%. This signifies a lesser influence on others compared to the self. This finding can be attributed again to the undesirability of BN's message to opposition party respondents and accordingly on their families and like party voters.

DISCUSSION

The current study is an expansion of an earlier study on the 2013 General Election by Idid and Souket (2014) whereby BN voters demonstrated a strong confidence in predicting the influence of BN's campaign materials on themselves (88%) and on others (77%) (Table 5).

Table 5. Comparison between perceived influences of BN's campaign materials on self and on opposition party supporters (others)

(2013 Election & 2018 Election)

Perceived Influence (%)	BN supporters on Self	BN supporters on Others
2013	88 Self = 88 Family = 88 Other BN Supporters = 91	77 Opposition = 78 Undecided Voters = 76

Influence (3= slightly influenced, 4= influenced, 5=highly influenced)

Their findings supported the reversed third-person effect whereby positive "message desirability" led to a stronger impact on self (88%), family members (88%) and other BN supporters (91%). Their study also found BN voters to be overly confident in their party messages and thus obviously perceived others (opposition supporters) would be considerably influenced as well (77%). Using Andsager and White's (2007) model, Idid & Souket (2014) illustrated their findings (Figure 4). The findings indicate that BN voters (inclusive of the BN respondent, family members and other BN supporters) perceive themselves to be highly influenced (self/family: 88%, other BN supporters: 91%) by BN's political campaign materials. Likewise, BN voters perceive that the BN political campaign materials also influence others (opposition, 78% and undecided supporters, 76%). The results indicate that on the continuum proposed by Andsager and White's (2007), the distance between the self and the others is very close thus indicating a close association between the self and the others. This can be associated with the BN voter's confidence in indicating that others are also strongly influenced by BN's political campaign materials.

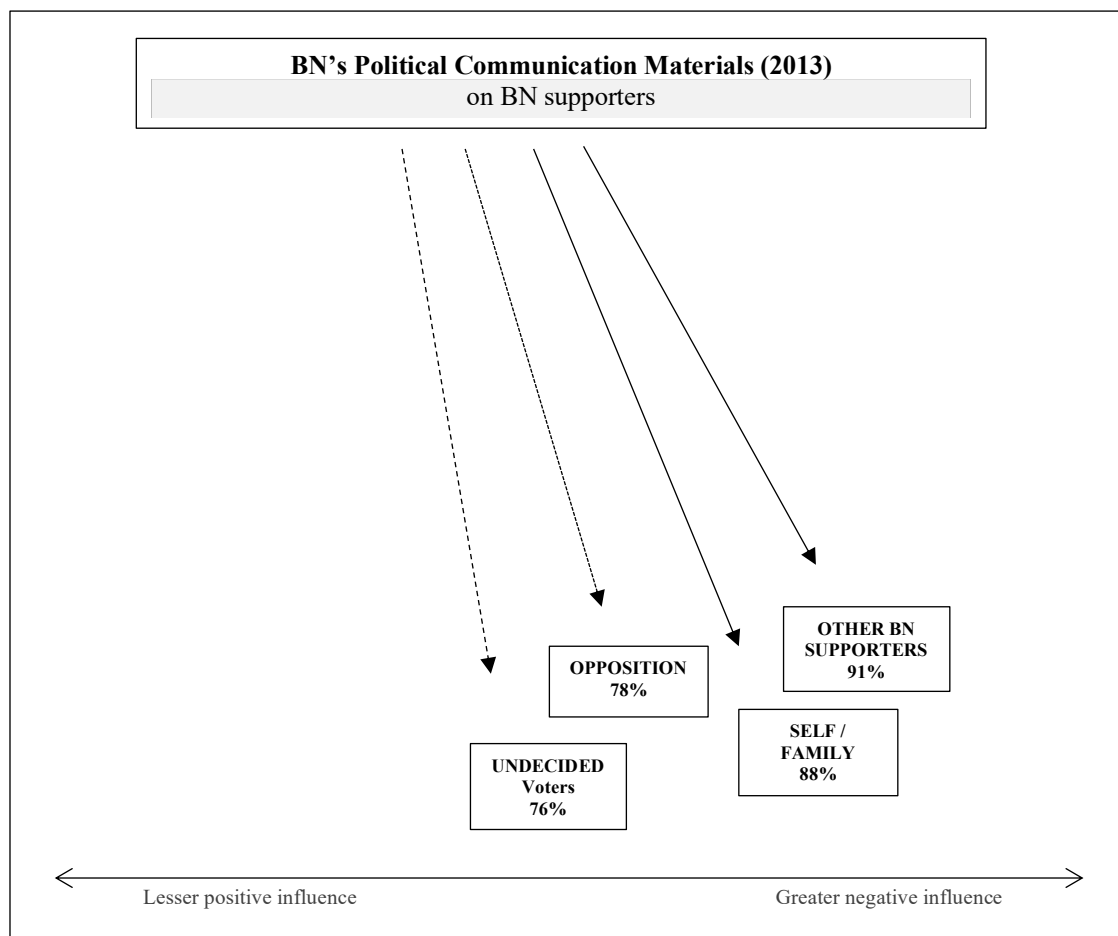


Figure 4. Third-person effect of BN's political communication materials
Adopted from Andsager (2007) and from Idid & Souket (2014, p. 29).

The current study (2018) also found BN voters to depict a strong confidence in predicting the influence of BN's campaign materials on themselves (83%) and on others (41%) (Table 6).

Table 6. Perceived influence of BN's campaign materials on self and on others (2018 Election)

Perceived Influence (%)	BN supporters on Self	BN supporters on Others
2018	83 Self = 83 Family = 85 Other BN Supporters = 87	41 PAS = 25 (Self = 25, Family = 26, Other PAS Supporters = 24) PH = 40 (Self = 36, Family = 43, Other PH Supporters = 40) Undecided Voters = 57 (Self = 60, Family = 47, Other undecided voters = 65)

Thus, the findings confirm the presence of the reversed third-person effect whereby the “self” (BN respondent) is more receptive to the desirable message influence (BN’s political messages) while others are perceived to be influenced to a lesser degree than the self. This can be attributed to the display of confidence and trust for BN’s political messages by BN voters. Table 7 compares the findings of the 2013 election studies (Idid & Souket, 2014) and the current study.

Table 7. Comparison of the perceived influence of BN’s campaign materials between the 2013 election and 2018 election

Perceived Influence (%)	BN supporters on Self	BN supporters on Others
2013	88 Self = 88 Family = 88 Other BN Supporters =91	77 Opposition = 78 Undecided Voters = 76
2018	83 Self = 83 Family = 85 Other BN Supporters =87	41 PAS =25 PH =40 Undecided Voters= 57

The current study (on 2018 election) shows that BN respondents were influenced by the political communication messages by a considerable percentage (83%) though slightly lower than that found in the 2013 elections (88%). For the 2013 election, BN respondents predicted that BN’s campaign materials to have the greatest effect on other BN supporters (91%), followed by themselves and their family (88%). Similarly, in the current study, BN respondents predicted BN’s campaign materials to have the greatest effect on other BN supporters (87%), followed by their family (85%) and on themselves (83%). Looking at the perceived influence on opposition party supporters and undecided voters, BN respondents had predicted a strong influence of 77% in 2013. However, for the recent election, that level of confidence seems to have dropped drastically and BN respondents predicted a low level of 41% only. This is directly related to the drop in confidence for BN’s campaign materials to influence opposition party supporters and thus irrevocably acknowledging the strength of these opposition party voters. Another important finding of this study is the role of the undecided voters. In the earlier study on the 2013 elections, BN voters relayed their confidence in predicting a high influence on unlikely or undecided voters at 76%. In contrast, for the 2018 election, that percentage of perceived influence dropped to 57%, indicating less certainty on the influence of the BN political materials on undecided voters. Surprisingly, BN voters seem to be less confident of the influence of BN campaign materials on PAS supporters (25%) compared to PH supporters (40%). The BN voter seems to have a greater level of confidence on the undecided voters (57%). Using the Andsager & White (2007) model, the findings of the current study is presented in Figure 5.

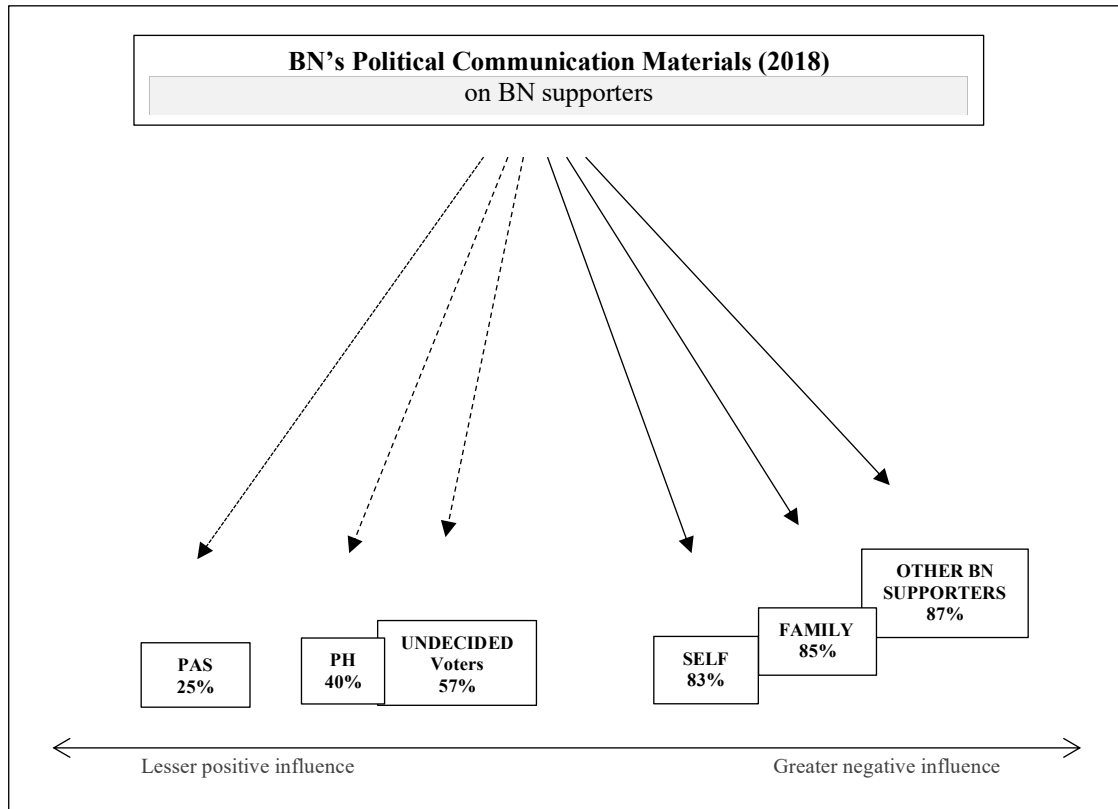


Figure 5. Third-person effect on BN’s political communication materials
Adopted from Andsager & White (2007).

Using Andsager & White’s (2007) model to test the influence of BN’s political campaign materials on BN party supporters, we find that the respondent’s level of perceived influence on self, others and distant others (Figure 4) are positioned at different levels of positive influence. Surprisingly, the findings illustrate that BN party supporters believed that BN’s political campaign materials have a positive influence on them (self), their family (self) and also a significant level of positive influence on distant others (non-BN supporters, non-supporters of other parties). However, the significance given to self, others and distant others are derived based on comparing the different levels of positive influence yielded. The model illustrates that BN party supporters (the self) are positioned further towards positive influence in the continuum and the arrow to the self indicates a greater perceived level of positive influence following exposure to BN’s campaign materials. The broken lines from the message indicate the respondent’s estimation of influence from the same content on others (family) and distant others (opposition party supporters and the undecided supporters, their families and similar party voters). The current findings indicate a broader difference in perceived effects between the “other” category (opposition party supporters, undecided voters) and the “self” category (BN voter, BN voter’s family & other BN supporters). In other words, it depicts a lesser confidence of influence on opposition voters (41%) as compared to the earlier findings (77%) by Idid and Souket (2014). The confidence of influence on the BN voter (self) in the current study (83%) is also slightly lower than the earlier finding by Idid and Souket (2014) (88%). While the findings confirm the final hypothesis on BN voter’s confidence in their party’s political campaign messages, they also reveal that the BN voter is less confident in its influence on opposition party supporters or the undecided voters. The reverse third person model indicates that BN party supporters perceive

their campaign materials and messages to be credible and positive and thus increase the likelihood of their influence on self and those closest more than on the distant others. In summary, the findings of this study concur with earlier research on the reversed third-person effect notion that message desirability plays a key role in persuasion and exerts a positive influence on self and others (Duck et al., 1995; Day, 2006; Lewis et al., 2007; Spinda, 2009; Lewis et al., 2008).

CONCLUSION

The paper concludes that BN party supporters are persuaded by the positive and credible message communicated by BN's political campaign materials and subsequently the voters feel "I am smart enough to recognize the value of the message" (Huh et al., 2006). The first person or BN respondent feels proud and content with their own party campaign materials. This demonstrates the reversed third-person effect amongst BN voters or supporters with regard to the influence of BN's political communication materials. This finding could be attributed to a number of reasons. First, this could be due to the presence of a differential impact as proposed by Golan & Day (2008) whereby it is possible that BN's political message is embraced by BN respondents for its relevance. Using the elaboration and likelihood model, BN voters can be influenced by their party messages based on logical argumentation or their natural instinct to the party in power (peripheral cues). Optimistic bias or overestimation of influence for BN's campaign materials (Gunther & Mundy, 1993) can result in the tendency of the voter to view the BN message as a positive message and overestimate the influence on themselves. The current findings also confirm that voter confidence plays an important role in predicting influence and voter behavior. In comparing with the earlier study on the 2013 General Election (Idid & Souke, 2014), the current study is able to show the downward shift in BN voter confidence. In this context, BN supporters were more confident of themselves and their party during the 2013 General Election than they were during the 2018 General Election.

This study adds to the corpus of longitudinal studies on BN voter behaviour in Malaysian elections. The findings provide a basis for understanding BN party support in the 2018 General Election and the loss of its political power for the first time in history, thus revolutionizing Malaysian general elections.

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