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Proximizing Fear: Multimodal Racial and Religious Threatoric in Malaysia's 15th General Election TikTok Videos

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Abstract

This chapter examines the linguistic mechanisms underlying threat rhetoric (threatoric) in TikTok videos during Malaysia's 15th General Election (GE15), focusing on how conditional structures in proximization strategies frame racial and religious anxieties. Drawing on Proximization Theory (Cap, 2006, 2017), it analyses how TikTok videos leveraged historical trauma, particularly the 13 May 1969 riots, to construct speculative yet urgent crisis narratives. Through conditional threats, multimodal coercion and religious intertextuality, these videos compressed historical fears into present political choices. The findings reveal three key threatoric strategies, (1) temporal compression, collapsing past ethnic conflicts into imminent dangers; (2) moral deixis, framing political dissent as religious transgression; and (3) multimodal proximization, amplifying fear through visual and auditory cues. Conditional structures positioned the Democratic Action Party (DAP) as existential threats to Malay-Muslim dominance, reinforcing entrenched social-hierarchies

that privilege Malays while structurally marginalizing non-Malay communities. By framing the out-group as a catalyst for political instability or ethnic violence, these narratives legitimized exclusionary ideologies and deepened societal divisions. Such threatoric normalized fear-driven politics, undermining multiracial cohesion and perpetuating a two-tiered citizenship model. This chapter critically deconstructs these narratives, revealing how conditional threats serve to sustain power imbalances. It encourages critical reflection on the broader societal impact of such rhetoric, calling for a re-evaluation of political narratives that perpetuate division and hinder the development of a more inclusive and equitable Malaysia. © The Author(s), under exclusive license to Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2025.

Author keywords

Conditionals; Malaysian TikTok election; Politics of fear; Proximity Theory; Racial and religious threat rhetoric

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