Tun Mahathir Mohamad's Leadership Communication as the Essence of Social Change: What the Malaysian Hindus' Opinion Leaders Say?

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ABSTRACT

Past transformational leadership communication literature shows that leadership communication from the contextual perspective is still limited. The scenario in Malaysia shows that Tun Mahathir Mohamad is respected for bringing social changes to the society including the Malaysian Hindus, playing the role of a transformational leader. However, some research indicates that Mahathir's leadership communication merely focused on the majority community (Muslims) and neglected the Malaysian Hindus (minority). Therefore, this research embarks on an investigation to explore whether Mahathir's leadership communication has brought significant social changes to Malaysian Hindus. It adopts a qualitative research design to describe the phenomenon under study using the purposive sampling method where in-depth interviews were carried out on 23 informants who are the opinion leaders for the Malaysian Hindus. Data analysis of this study is conducted using thematic analysis method and suitable themes were identified. The results of this study discovered that Mahathir Mohamad's leadership communication skills have stimulated social changes among the Malaysian Hindus where it is evident that Mahathir was a transformational leader who has brought significant and indisputable development to the Hindus including identifying issues pertaining to the Malaysian Hindus. Nevertheless, there are weaknesses found in his leadership communication.

Keywords: *Transformational leadership communication, social change, opinion leader, Malaysian Hindus, minority.*

INTRODUCTION

Holding the fort as the fourth Prime Minister from 1981-2003, Mahathir has brought social changes for the people (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1996). According to Milne and Mauzy (1999), Mahathir has provided rationale for all his actions to stimulate satisfaction and understanding among followers. This is evident in the communication process between Mahathir and his followers. During his premiership, Mahathir urged Malaysians to safeguard or preserve Asian values based on Malay-Islamic culture. He also urged Malaysians to preserve "Malayness"; feudalism, Islam, and '*adat*' (traditional customs). Consistent with the idea, in his book "*The Malay Dilemma*", he highlighted the stigma in the Malay community to create awareness among Malays on the areas they lack and motivated them to overcome them (Barr, 2002). In general, Mahathir has initiated the concepts of Asian values due to international democratisation, extensive economic activities and political stability in the 1990s, before the economic turmoil in July 1997 which affected most Asian countries (Naisbitt, 1997; Innoguchi & Newman, 1997). This shows that Mahathir has a rationale for each of his actions and has

communicated his decisions to the people. Consistent with the idea, literature highlights that the core ideas of Mahathir's leadership approach were authoritative, but at the same time importance was given to close relationship-based communities (Milne & Mauzy, 1999).

In February 1991, 'Wawasan 2020' (Vision, 2020) was introduced by Mahathir to ensure a better future for Malaysia. Mahathir also emphasised on the notion of '*Bangsa Malaysia*' which was aimed to establish a common identity for all Malaysians (Hassan, 2005). Mahathir put effort in establishing vision, guiding and motivating Malaysians to achieve the visions. To further discussion, the notion of '*Bangsa Malaysia'* which was a part of Vision 2020 was seen as a step to foster unity among Malaysians. Mahathir tried to create a stronger bond and shared identity among Malaysians regardless of different ethnic groups. This is a significant step taken by Mahathir to create a harmonious environment in Malaysia by avoiding conflicts between ethnic groups. Thus, it shows that he tried to create a united Malaysia. It is very clear that Mahathir's efforts attempted to reduce the racial gap between Malaysians and foster unity by communicating vision effectively to all.

In a speech in 1992, Mahathir highlighted two steps for the process of national building. One, he promised to fulfill his moral duties for the people. Two, he assured to rectify the socio-economic imbalance among ethnic groups. Mahathir assured his people that mother tongues of each ethnic group will be preserved (Mahathir & Ishihara, 1992). Thus, Mahathir's leadership communication clearly shows that his ideas, policies and vision were well transmitted and communicated with people. Interestingly, the two elements highlighted above by Mahathir and Ishihara (1992) strongly can be associated with the discussion of Indian culture which emphasises on the moral duties and role of a leader in accommodating the needs of the people.

Gomez (in Ahmad, 2010) also stated that Mahathir has strategically communicated his ideas to the people. In terms of Mahathir's leadership communication towards the Indian community in Malaysia, two impacts can be seen. Firstly, Mahathir's leadership communication has contributed to the achievements of the Malaysian Hindu and he was supported by the Malaysian Hindu (Ahmad, 2010). Secondly, studies conducted by various researchers showed that Mahathir's leadership was also criticised for causing marginalisation among the Malaysian Hindu (Ganesan 2002; Willford, 2007; Lahiri, 2008; Singh, 2013; Cangi, 2014).

Literature indicates that developments in a society happen if the cultural understanding between a leader and the followers is good (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Blair & Bligh, 2018). This ensures the leadership communication of a leader is able to fulfil the followers' cultural needs and requirements. Therefore, culture has been seen as an important criterion that facilitates leadership communication for social change. To support the claim, Lord, Brown and Freiberg (1999) with Hofstede and Minkov (2010) explained in their studies that the process of leadership communication from a leader to the followers could contribute changes among followers by influencing their values. Therefore, Mahathir was accepted as a transformation leader who has transformed the society including the Malaysian Hindu (Suppiah, Ahmad, Nirubagunasekaran, 2018; Suppiah, Ahmad, Yusof & Velloo, 2019).

Transformational leadership theory explains that social change happens when there is a good intercultural communication sensitivity between a leader and his/her followers. The intercultural communication sensitivity between a leader and his/her followers could be reflected through the communication between a leader and his/her followers (Barrett 2014; Miftari, 2018). In contrast, past literature on transformational leadership theory indicated

that there is a sufficient conceptual gap in understanding the functionality of transformational leadership theory (Yukl, 2006; van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013). However, it was found that research investigating transformational leadership theory from a contextual perspective is not fully explored, specifically focus on the intercultural communication sensitivity between a leader who is from the majority community and his followers who come from the minority community (Ayman & Korabik, 2010; Lynn-Sze, Yusof & Ahmad, 2017; Lynn-Sze, Yusof, & Ahmad, 2014; Panda & Gupta, 2007; Lamm, Carter, Lamm, & Lindsey, 2017; Suppiah, Ahmad, Nirubagunasekaran, 2018; Suppiah, Ahmad, Yusof & Velloo, 2019). Hence, this study aims to explore the Malaysian Hindus' Opinion Leaders' responses towards Mahathir Mohamad's leadership communication.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership Communication for Social Change

According to Holladay and Coombs (1994), the content and delivery of a leader affect the followers' perception towards a leader. This is also consistent with the study conducted by McCroskey (1966) which indicated that the ways of communication play an important role in leadership. Furthermore, it is consistent with the study conducted by Bennis and Nanus (1985), Conger and Kanungo (1998), Locke et al. (1991) and Berson et al. (2001), which stated that leaders are able to create and disseminate messages to followers effectively through his or her effective personal communication skills; and different leaders use different ways to persuade their followers to accept their ideas (Bass, 1999). Ryan, Myers and Mooney (2021) indicated that in order to influence the followers towards actions, a leader needs to communicate his or her ideas effectively to his or her followers. Thus, it was evident that a good content and delivery of messages are needed to influence the followers' attitude and behaviour which will contribute to social change or development.

Furthermore, a study carried out by Fairhurst (2014) also asserted that effective communication of a leader will significantly affect the perception of the followers especially, in motivating them towards social change or development. Therefore, it can be concluded that communication is the essence of effective leadership (Vries, Bakker-Pieper, & Oostenveld, 2010). The core idea of communication for social change can be seen significantly in the work of Freire (1970), a Brazilian educator who perceived communication as a tool in creating cultural identity, trust, commitment, ownership and empowerment. This is consistent with the notion that communication is the main substance of leadership communication which leads to changes (Barrett, 2014).

It was evident that communication and social changes are interdependent (Servaes, 2021). According to Serveas (2021), communication is a process of discussion between people which leads to social changes in the community. In a different study, McCall (2011) highlighted that interpersonal communication between people which are in accordance with the cultural norms of the people determines the social change. Importantly, the communication process should be facilitated by a social change agent who triggers the social change in the community (Suzina & Tufte, 2020; Pavarala, 2020). The communication process creates mutual understanding between people which provides empowerment and promotes participation among the community members. The importance of communication during planned change was also discussed in literature (Lewis, 1999). Literature indicates that poor leadership communication can lead to gossip and resistance to change, leading to opposition to change (DiFonzo & Bordia, 1998). As evidence, based on the study conducted by Lewis (1999),

communication that is effective will ensure a smooth flow in the changing process in a society. Poor communication of a leader will result in ineffective social changes (Serveas, 2021). Therefore, it supports the point that leadership communication and the changes that take place are interdependent. Freire (1970) also stressed on the importance of cultural identity and the participation of the community towards social changes through communication. To support this, in his study, Serveas (2021) discussed that social changes could only be possible if there is continuous communication which is relevant to the culture of the community. Serveas (2021) clearly indicated that there should be effective communication between the social change providers and the community. Importantly, it was highlighted that the communication process should be socially and culturally relevant to the community.

In another study, Fraser and Restrepo-Estrada (1998) indicated that social changes are determined by two main factors which are communication and people's participation. These two factors are crucial to encourage people's participation at all levels and enhance people's understanding towards social change. It also serves as a tool to strengthen the relationship between people, understand people's culture and the needs of the community. To support, sufficient studies highlighted that communication is the main component in the development process (Srinivas & Steeves, 2015; McMichael & Weber, 2020; Serveas & Malikhao, 2020). Poole (2011) also argued that explicit communication acts of a leader provide followers a direction, purpose and identity to change. Therefore, it was an evidence that effective leaders enact competent communicative behaviour that has to be consistent with the context to create social changes in a community (Manyozo, 2017)

Past studies indicated that Mahathir's leadership communication played an important role in bringing social change among Malaysian Hindus in Malaysia (Suppiah, Ahmad & Gunasekaran, 2018; Suppiah, Ahmad, Yusof, & Velloo, 2019). It was found that Mahathir does not only set visions to be achieved by Malaysians, but also articulated his visions well. For instance, the introduction of Vision 2020 which was planned by Mahathir aimed to turn Malaysia into a developed country by 2020 gave hope for the people to progress and move forward.

Mahathir's Leadership Communication and Impact on Malaysia Hindus

In Malaysia, 'leadership' has always been a topic of discussion and Mahathir as a prominent leader not only in Malaysia, but also at international level has always been used as an example. Based on literature reviews, it is known that Malaysia has succeeded in many sectors. Malaysia has shown economic growth which is not practical without effective leadership communication of Mahathir. Taher (2005) stated that the younger generations should always learn from the past leadership in propelling Malaysia towards success. This assertion reflects Mahathir's vision to transform Malaysia in various fields. The present study argues that a nation's success relies upon leadership communication skills of a leader.

According to Mayfield and Mayfield (2017), leadership communication is a core principle of the effectiveness of an organisation. This is because leaders who unite followers in achieving goals are perceived as role models. Thus, in such a situation, a leader needs to provide clear guidance to his/her followers (Bratton, 2020). In this sense, Mahathir showed his leadership communication qualities through his ideas, vision and policies that he introduced. Mahathir believed that universalism ideas could affect the identity of Malaysian culture and religious values held by Malaysians (Mahathir & Ishihara, 1995). To preserve Malaysian values, Mahathir launched the "Look East" policy in 1982 which was aimed to

prevent the influence of Western culture (Khoo, 1995). Past research showed that Mahathir has exhibited high determination to transform Malaysia. His leadership communication capability is reflected when he justified the policies which were implemented during his premiership. Such situations reflect Mahathir's effort to defend the implementation of his policies by explaining their importance to the people.

In order to understand Mahathir's leadership communication, this section examines past studies related to Mahathir. One of the studies related to Mahathir, focused on "Mahathirism". According to Milne and Mauzy (1999), Mahathirism is a process of providing rationalisation for all actions to stimulate satisfaction and understanding among followers. This is evident in the communication process between Mahathir and his followers. During his premiership, Mahathir urged Malaysians to safeguard or preserve Asian values related to Malay-Islamic culture. He also urged Malaysians to preserve "Malayness"; feudalism, Islam, and "adat" (traditional customs). Parallel with the idea, in his book *"The Malay Dilemma"*, he highlighted the stigma among the Malay community members to create awareness among Malays on the areas they were lacking and motivated them to overcome those weaknesses (Barr, 2002). In general, Mahathir has initiated concepts incorporating Asian values due to international democratisation, extensive economic activities and political stability in the 1990s, before the economic turmoil in July 1997 which affected most Asian countries (Naisbitt, 1997). This shows that Mahathir had a rationale for each of his actions and had communicated his decisions well to the people. Consistent with the idea, literature highlighted that the core ideas of Mahathir's leadership approach were authoritative, but at the same time importance was given to close relationship-based communities.

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In a speech in 1992, Mahathir highlighted two steps in striving through the process of nation building. One, he promised to fulfil his moral duties for the people. Two, he assured to rectify the socio-economic imbalance among the ethnic groups. Mahathir assured his people that the mother tongue of each ethnic group will be preserved (The Star, 11 September 1995). Thus, Mahathir's leadership communication clearly shows that his ideas, policies and vision were well transmitted and communicated to the people. Interestingly, the two elements highlighted above by Mahathir (1992) can strongly be associated with the discussion of Indian culture which emphasises the moral duties and roles of a leader in accommodating to the needs of the people.

Although Mahathir's leadership communication contributed to tremendous development in Malaysia, his leadership communication was criticised for only focusing on the majority group that he represented while neglecting the Malaysian Hindus in various sectors including social aspect, economy, etc. (Chakraborty, 1996: Raman, 2009; Cangi, 2014).

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative research design because it provides a perspective of a specific situation and a detailed description which shows the ability of a researcher to describe the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2013). Furthermore, qualitative research is a dynamic method focused on getting an insight of the meaning of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). This study attempts to explore the descriptions of the life experience of the Malaysian Hindus and how meaning is built within their cultural context (Cole & Knowles, 2001). Therefore, the qualitative design assisted the researcher in exploring Mahathir's leadership communication from the cultural context based on inputs from the Indian community. This study involved 23 informants or interviewees in the data collection process. The informants were selected using the purposive sampling method based on the recommendation by Patton (2015). Semi-structured interviews were carried out to gather textual data which were organised into themes. Data analysis of this study was conducted using thematic analysis method (Clark & Braun, 2017).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Using NVivo 8 software, the collected data were computed and the following themes were identified as below (Figure 1). Based on the thematic analysis, two themes were identified that explain Mahathir's leadership communication. Firstly, the attributes of Mahathir's communication as the essence of social change among Malaysian Hindus. Secondly, limitation of Mahathir Mohamad's leadership communication.

Attributes of Mahathir's Communication as the Essence of Social Change Among Malaysian Hindus

This section discusses Mahathir's leadership communication in the social change context. A study conducted by Figueroa, Kincaid, Rani and Lewis (2002) indicated that effective leadership communication provides a foundation in community participation which is an important indicator of social changes. In another different study, Martiskainen (2017) stated that to ensure effective leadership communication, there are a few elements that a leader should take into consideration. Firstly, a leader needs to be a community developer who is able to provide a positive environment for the people. They clearly stated that leaders should use a storytelling approach to convey their trust and visions to the people. Furthermore, it was stated that a leader needs to project honesty and transparency, which are important in leadership communication.

Secondly, the leader needs to provide a clear direction for the people to achieve visions or goals. Thus, past studies indicated that a leader should not only explain the goals, but also persuade the people towards achieving the goals. In short, a leader should ensure he or she gains the empathy of the people (Mayfield, Mayfield & Sharbrough, 2014; Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017). Lastly, a leader should also create a positive environment that encourages communication between people, specifically an environment that allows people to discuss the changes that would happen. With regard to leadership communication for social changes, this section discusses Mahathir's leadership communication in the context of social changes from the Malaysian Hindus' cultural perspective. This study also discovered that Mahathir Mohamad's leadership communication skills have stimulated social changes among the Malaysian Hindus.

In analysing Mahathir's effective communication skills based on the transformational leadership, it was discovered that Mahathir's leadership communication strongly related with the transformational leadership communication dimension of inspirational motivation. This dimension involves the process of communication, including construction and articulation of appropriate visions to people (Burns, 1978). It was discussed that right visions would motivate and inspire followers to be committed in achieving the visions introduced by their leader. In this process, a leader has to provide a clear guideline on how to achieve the visions through his effective communication. Consistent with the idea, it was evident that Mahathir as a leader has introduced many visions consistent with the needs of Malaysian Hindus. Furthermore, Mahathir communicated his expectation with the people to motivate and inspire them.

According to Kearney et al. (2019), visionary refers to the process of communicating vision which is an integral component of leadership communication and it is culturally relative. And without effective communication, a leader is unable to communicate visions to his or her followers (Kim et al., 2022). The current study discovered that Mahathir not only established various policies for the nation, but also communicated the policies well to the people. In addition, it was found that Mahathir has motivated people through his visions and policies which can be seen throughout his 22 years of leadership.

His efforts were discussed by scholars such as Gomez (Ahmad, 2010), who argued that during his leadership, Mahathir well-packaged government ideologies, policies and concepts in a form of public campaigns to gain support from both general and segmented publics. Based on the findings of the study, the informants consistently indicated Mahathir as a leader who is futuristic and provided a hope for the society for the future. As a leader he was found to be duty-oriented. In addition, this idea is also relevant to the discussion of Bhagavad-Gita which pointed out about ethics of actions and speech. Karma-Yoga (Duty-oriented) is given in the Bhagavad-Gita (Radhakrishnan 1948/1993) Chapter 2, Verse 47, which indicated that one should perform his or her duties without expecting reward. Bhagavad-Gita has also indicated that one must ensure his action and speech, or communication is truthful and secondly, fault finding attitude should be avoided (Radhakrishnan 1948/1993). Consistent with the idea discussed in the Bhagavad-Gita, this study found that the Malaysian Indians are influenced by Mahathir's leadership communication as he provided facts and reasonings in his speeches, and he is perceived to be an ethical leader who performed his duties well which enabled the Malaysian Indians to rationalise and accept his ideas.

Informant 12 and 13 indicated that Mahathir's speech was consistent with the needs of the people. In the interview session, informants 12 and 13 explained that Mahathir has his way of addressing the audience to explain his actions which seems logical and satisfying for the society. This sounds satisfying, however further research is required to explore the above. Besides that, informant 13 asserted that he preferred certain development plans initiated by Mahathir. He believed that infrastructure development such as the North-South Expressway and a base-port for Kuala Lumpur International Airport were needed.
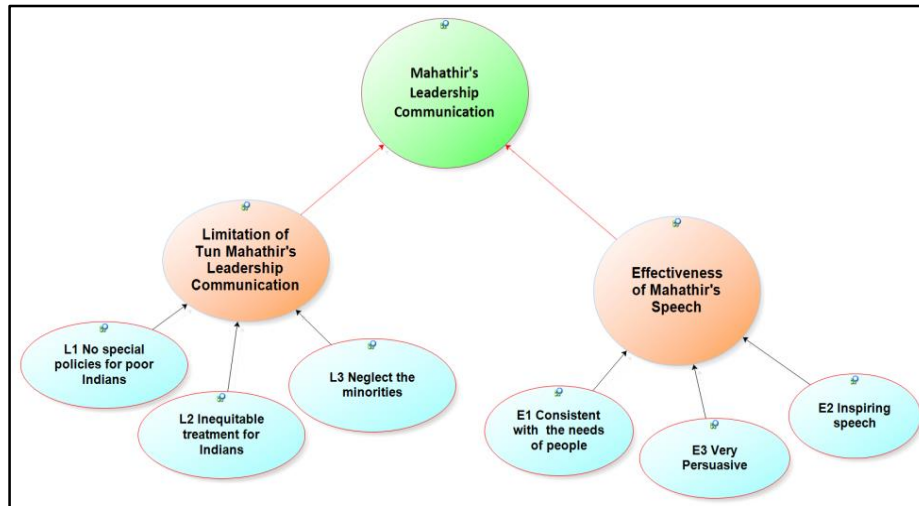
Figure 1: Mahathir's leadership communication

Furthermore, informant 1 classified Mahathir's speech as an inspiring speech. He said that he loved to listen to Mahathir's speech. Besides that, most informants labeled Mahathir's speech as very persuasive. They have strongly indicated that Mahathir possesses effective communication skills. In the interview sessions, the informants said that Mahathir knows how to persuade people by his rhetorical skill and during his tenure, his speech was new to people, but he knew what he was talking about, and it was very clear. The informants highlighted Mahathir's vision for the future of Information Technology, for instance, which was very clear too.

In addition, informant 11 said that:

> …Yes, it was when he was the Prime Minister for 22 years and it is still effective where he technically forms the opposition now. In Mahathir's era, people called him a leader where everyone listens to him when he speaks because of his calibre. I found that when he spoke, people listen not only because of the message he sent but the way he presented them, and these are the leadership qualities. The moment he became the Prime Minister, his leadership communication, whether verbal or non-verbal made people listen to him… (R 11).

> …he is well prepared when he delivers his speech. He doesn't just deliver, but he communicates his speech. The message is very clear, he comes prepared. He has leadership communication qualities, style, body language, and individuality. He is a Kedahan and when he speaks, the element (dialect) or '*Bahasa Kedah*' is there and that makes him unique and that uniqueness makes him a good leader. And another thing, I am sure that he practises and doesn't just give an impromptu speech… (R 11).

> …His speeches are excellent. His pronunciation and language are fluent. The delivery mechanism itself is very good. When he speaks, we can see his tone, he knows when to use high pitch and low pitch. His voice is practically very

attractive. Then, he provides facts which flow along his speech. He knows how to construct messages based on what he wants to send across. Thus, even a layman can be attracted to his speech… (R 19).

…Mahathir's speech was effective because he was very confident and able to articulate messages very well to the general public. The public with a feudal mentality were easily convinced by his strong speech. Yes, Mahathir's speech was really effective. This is because the content of his speech was in-depth… (R 21).

Furthermore, according to informant 5, Mahathir is a man who can give effective speeches. He can deliver speeches in a simple and straightforward way. He is able to convey ideas convincingly. He is an opportunist that takes advantage of people's needs. Informant 14 also highlighted that Mahathir can talk without a script and stated that to speak like Mahathir is difficult because Mahathir can speak for hours without a script. To support, informant 3 further elaborated that Mahathir spent his time drafting his speeches with powerful messages and informant 3 stressed that Mahathir's message and delivery were very powerful.

Limitation of Mahathir's Leadership Communication
Based on the interview sessions, the researcher has identified some limitations of Mahathir's leadership communication.

Firstly, the informants have pointed out that special policies were missing for poor Malaysian Hindus in Malaysia under the premiership of Mahathir. Informant 10, 16 and 23 conceded that:

…In that aspect, I think he failed because he only communicated with Malayan Indian Congress and its leader Samy Vellu. He never communicated with any other Indians. Samy Vellu wasn't really a qualified person and the party never had vision for Malaysian Hindus. Tun Mahathir only relied on him (Samy Vellu) to develop the Indian community. Whether he sincerely cared about the result was another story. I would say he failed to contribute towards Malaysian Hindus… (R 16).

…Mahathir ignored the cultural aspects of Hindus in Malaysia. He didn't aim to uplift the Hindus economically. There is no policy for Hindus under the leadership of Mahathir. The only policy that was implemented for the Hindus was the Malaysian Blueprint under the Third Malaysia Plan… (R 23).

…He only highlighted good (positive) things about the Hindus by saying many Malaysian Hindus were professionals. Even in MIC annual meetings, he ignored the social life of Malaysian Hindus. He developed Malay plantations, but ignored the estates of Malaysian Hindus. There were no initiatives for Malaysian Hindus by Mahathir… (R 23).

Informant 10 also indicated that there is no special policy for the Malaysian Hindus. The development of the Malaysian Hindus was a result of the own initiative of the Indian community. He mentioned in his speech, there were more Indian professionals such as doctors under his leadership which was a result of the own initiative of the Indian community.

Secondly, most of the informants of this study indicated that Mahathir's leadership communication serves as an inequitable treatment for the Malaysian Hindus in Malaysia. Informant 1 explained that as a Prime Minister, Mahathir got all the power, but he did not deliver and he marginalised the Indian community compared to Datuk Seri Najib bin Tun Abdul Razak who did more for the Malaysian Hindus. To support, other informants explained that:

> … Why I am disagreeing is because a large number of estate workers' displacement took place during Mahathir's time. A study conducted by the Centre of Policy Change confirmed that from 1970 to 2000, 600,000 Indians were displaced from their estates. This is the largest displacement in the Asian region. But it went unheard. When a community is displaced, you need to provide land, training, houses, schools and temples… (R 10).

> …As I mentioned before, he wants to be known as a Malay. In Malaysia, Malay means Islam. That's why he tried to instil Islamic values in the government sector. For instance, *Bersih, Cekap, Amanah, dan Jangan Ambil Rasuah*. All these were universal values, but he labelled them as Islamic values. He wanted to use the Islamic label which is equal to Malay supremacy. He had to implement them to show his Malay identity…However, there were some negative impacts. In the process of modernisation, the Malaysian Hindus were left out. To build Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA), six estates were used. The people were relocated to Dengkil. They were relocated to five storey flats and until now they are suffering without proper necessities. They were affected due to the relocation… (R 11).

> …There was no proper plan to displace the Malaysian Hindus. For example, the houses of the Malaysian Hindus (in estates) were taken away. Among Malaysian Hindus, only 20% do better than the Chinese and Malays. The middle class, about 40%, are struggling. The remaining 40% are suffering as they fall under the lower income group. There should be a same policy for all poor people... (R 13).

> …He didn't neglect other cultures. He just left them to other leaders of the community, Chinese community to the Chinese leaders and Malaysian Hindus to the Indian leaders. He has never promoted other cultures. He has never attended Indian cultural events. He thought that the Malays needed more help than other races and left out the Malaysian Hindus. He had no vision for the Malaysian Hindus… (R 16).

…One of the things Malaysian Hindus lacked during Mahathir's era is job opportunities. Government sector opportunities were partially controlled by him. …Right up to the bottom like Majlis Daerah. He introduced a policy where for every five persons hired in the government, only one has to be a non-Malay… (R 2).

…in government services completely retrieved. This has limited Malaysian Hindus' job opportunities in government sectors. This situation led to social issues such as gangsterism among Malaysian Hindus. It also caused fragmentation of the estates. They have done good and bad. The good part is that those who bought some portions of the estates are doing well now. While those who left with the amount of money given to them went to cities and quarters and they are still struggling… (R 2).

… The Malaysian Hindus were not given enough job opportunities. The percentage of Indian workers in government sectors reduced from 20 percent to 5 percent in the local council. Those days, most council staff were Malaysian Hindus but now, you can see only one or two, or none… (R 2).

…Mahathir's leadership is very ethnic-centric. He wrote about the Malay dilemma in 1969. You need to understand his ideas about the Malays. He felt bad looking at the condition of his own community in Malaysia. He was a great thinker and tried his best to develop the Malay community, but slowly it affected other races negatively… (R 23).

In the aspect of leadership communication, the Malaysian Hindus expect an inclusive leadership style. The findings show that followers are looking for an inclusive leadership approach which allows the people to get involved in various decision-making process. The policies implemented should be more inclusive, by taking people's suggestions and needs of different communities into consideration. The followers want a leader who receives and considers feedback given by the people in the decision-making process. For instance, the informants highlighted the Indian (largely are Hindus) estate workers displacement which was massive under Mahathir's administration was executed without proper communication and studies on it. Thus, it resulted in a serious impact on the Malaysian Hindu community. The plights of the Indian estate workers were ignored during the displacement process. Besides that, the Malaysian Hindus also highlighted the need of a fair leader. The study found that marginalisation was one the major issues highlighted by the informants of the present study. Therefore, they are looking for a leader who is able to provide an equal treatment to all the communities in Malaysia. The Malaysian Hindus expect for a leader who includes them into the mainstream development which allows them to taste better and a more inclusive development. Although there is a significant development in the Indian community in various sectors under the leadership of Mahathir, the policies implemented by Mahathir have caused the demarcation of marginally poor Indians. The estate worker displacement was one of the major impacts of Mahathir's policies. It was found that the largest number of estate worker displacement occured under the leadership of Tun Mahathir. As evidence, in the Seventh

Malaysia Plan, the rubber plantation areas were reduced drastically, which saw declines in employment in rubber plantations from 163,577 in 1979 to 13,366 in 2004 (Raman, 2009). This caused displacement of more than 300,000 estate workers from 1980 to 2000 (Raman, 2009). The displacement brought negative impacts particularly to the displaced estate workers who lost their jobs and their houses and that led to many social problems in the Indian community (Raman, 2009).

CONCLUSION

This study explores leadership communication between the majority and minority communities in a multicultural framework, which is a unique addition. It provides extensive feedback on leadership from a multicultural perspective, particularly leadership involving two communities of different cultures, with the goal of enriching and contributing to a social change from the Hindu perspective. This study offers a fresh look at leadership communication from a diverse perspective, focusing on the leadership of majority-minority communities. Mahathir Mohamad represents the majority community in this study, while Hindus represent the minority. Hindu philosophy has been determined to be universal in nature and claimed to be appropriate in the present multicultural leadership situation. The current study's qualitative research design contributed to a better understanding of leadership communication among majority-minority populations in a multicultural context.

The current study's in-depth interviews allowed the informants to discuss their leadership experiences. This study presents proof of a minority community's lived experience with leadership, specifically Hindus who lived through Mahathir Mohamad's rule. Mahathir Mohamad was viewed as a transformational leader who contributed to social transformations among Malaysian Hindus in this study.

This study also shows that it is evident that Mahathir was a transformational leader who was able to bring significant and indisputable development to the nation. It was undeniable that the Hindus developed as the nation developed. Although the marginalisation issue pertaining Hindus was highlighted by the informants, and many studies classified Mahathir as an ultra-Malay (Khoo, 1995; Singh, 2013; Kailasam, 2015), this research discovered Mahathir's leadership communication was found to lead to social changes among the Malaysian Hindus. Consistent with that, some respondents strongly asserted that the Vision 2020 policy which was introduced by Mahathir was able to inspire them to improve themselves and set higher goals. They also did not deny that the Hindus also benefited from the policies introduced by Mahathir although the mentioned policies only favoured the majority community of the nation. For instance, they also highlighted that the National Development Policy benefited the majority community compared to the minorities. However, the middle class and rich Hindus benefitted through the implementation of the policy (Suppiah et al., 2018; Suppiah et al., 2019).

The investigation to further understand Mahathir as a transformational leader was based on the four components of transformational leadership. The four components or more commonly known as the four 'Is' (individual consideration, idealised influence, inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation) were used to explore Mahathir's leadership communication (Burns, 1978). Firstly, Mahathir proved to have established relationships with people. Past studies also show that Mahathir possesses effective communication skills which allow him to communicate well with the Malaysian Hindus and managed to establish a positive relationship with them (Lynn-Sze, Yusof, & Ahmad, 2014; Lynn-Sze & Ahmad, 2017).

Based on the findings of this study, it can be clearly seen that Mahathir was an effective communicator. Barrett (2014) further discussed that effective leadership depends on effective communication of a leader with his or her followers. In short, communication is identified as the substance of leadership. This means that interaction with followers lays the foundation of establishing a good relationship with the people. In general, Mahathir was identified as a leader who communicated his visions, ideas, and policies to the community effectively.

Secondly, this study discovered that Mahathir's leadership communication successfully identified issues pertaining to the Malaysian Hindus. In the leadership communication process, he was able to motivate and build confidence of the people to bring social changes in the society. This is evident through the social changes that took place among the Malaysian Hindus (see Table 7, Incidence of Poverty by Ethnic Group, Strata and State, Malaysia, 1970-2014, for details). Although there are critics about Mahathir's leadership communication, the Hindus in Malaysia recorded a significant improvement in various fields.

The results of this study discovered that Mahathir Mohamad's leadership communication skills have stimulated social changes among the Malaysian Hindus. It is evident that Mahathir was a transformational leader who was able to bring significant and indisputable development to the nation including the Hindus. It was also found that Mahathir's leadership communication successfully identified issues pertaining to the Indian community. However, it cannot be denied that there were weaknesses in his leadership communication.

In conclusion, this study found that three main components of Mahathir's leadership communication led to the social changes among the Malaysian Hindus:
  (i)   establishment of relationship through effective communication
  (ii)   motivation and confidence building
  (iii) development.

In a nutshell, Mahathir's leadership communication possessed effective communication that helped to establish relationships, motivate, build confidence and inspire people to develop.

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