

# DIGITAL CSR MERDEKA ADVERTISEMENTS AND NATIONAL UNITY NARRATIVES: A MULTIMODAL AND NLP ANALYSIS OF MALAYSIAN SOCIAL MEDIA (2019–2023)

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## Abstract

This study investigates how Malaysian corporations construct national unity narratives through CSR Merdeka advertisements. Analysing a corpus of campaigns from Petronas, Tenaga Nasional, and Telekom Malaysia across social media platforms, the research employs a mixed-methods framework integrating natural language processing, multimodal content analysis, and Social Identity Theory. The analysis uncovered six dominant unity narratives: multicultural harmony, shared resilience, intergenerational continuity, cultural celebration, nation-building, and everyday kindness. Advertisements leveraging authentic ethnic representation and emotional storytelling achieved significantly higher engagement, with YouTube and Facebook serving as the most effective platforms. Sentiment and emotional analysis of audience comments revealed overwhelmingly positive responses, primarily characterized by gratitude, nostalgia, and pride. Statistical analysis confirmed that emotionally intense narratives and the strategic use of behavioural nudges drove significantly higher audience interaction. However, the study identifies a critical gap between high digital engagement and substantive unity-building, marked by a notable underrepresentation of East Malaysian communities and limited evidence of long-term behavioural impact. It concludes that while these advertisements are powerful in shaping national sentiment, their potential for fostering genuine social cohesion remains unrealized without more inclusive representation and initiatives that bridge online engagement with real-world action.

**Keywords:** CSR advertising, national unity, nudging, sentiment analysis, Malaysia

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

National unity has long been a central concern in Malaysia due to the country's multiethnic, multilingual, and multireligious composition. In this context, corporate social responsibility campaigns that coincide with Merdeka celebrations function as more than marketing strategies. These campaigns create and disseminate narratives of collective memory, national pride, and social belonging. As corporations increasingly use social media to share Merdeka-themed CSR campaigns, these messages simultaneously support corporate branding and act as instruments for cultural communication, social persuasion, and the promotion of cohesion among diverse communities.

Research on Malaysian national unity has primarily focused on government-led initiatives or traditional media, leaving limited understanding of how corporate actors contribute to unity discourse in digital spaces. Studies on outdoor advertising indicate that visuals and language in billboards can convey multicultural values and promote social cohesion, yet these studies focus mainly on public or state initiatives rather than CSR campaigns led by corporations (Ahmad Tajuddin and Zulkepli, 2019). Research on festive advertisements also suggests that visual and narrative elements can foster a sense of togetherness and interethnic understanding (Sualman, Jalli, Rashidi, and Darwis, 2021). These findings highlight the capacity of advertisements to communicate social identity, but they do not directly address CSR campaigns or their reception in social media contexts.

Research on national identity formation among young Malaysians provides further context. Studies examining university students in urban areas show that identity is shaped by both ethnic background and shared civic experiences, revealing tensions as well as aspirations for inclusion (Periasamy, Subramaniam, and Gruba, 2017). While these studies illuminate identity formation in daily life, they do not examine how corporate campaigns on social media influence public perceptions of unity. At the same time, research on digital communication highlights the dual potential of social media to either reinforce divisions or foster inclusivity. Analysis of online political

discourse in Malaysia indicates that ethnic and religious content can be amplified in ways that polarize audiences (Zakaria, Yaakob, and Zawawi, 2022). Therefore, investigating CSR campaigns as digital interventions provides an opportunity to assess whether they contribute to meaningful unity or simply generate superficial engagement. Previous studies on national integration show that public campaigns like 1Malaysia were intended to create inclusivity but were interpreted differently by citizens, reflecting both support for the ideal of unity and skepticism about underlying inequalities (Mahadir, Jamil, Thambu, and Tan, 2019). Such debates emphasize that national unity is socially constructed and contested, making it essential to examine not only the content of campaigns but also how audiences interpret and respond to them. In addition, research indicates that authority-defined messaging can shape public perceptions of unity, suggesting that corporate campaigns have the potential to influence societal understanding of national cohesion (Madon, Harun, and Ridzuan, 2021).

Despite these insights, the role of corporations in promoting unity through CSR in digital environments has received little scholarly attention. With the rise of social media as a primary communication platform, Merdeka-themed CSR campaigns have become a significant avenue for shaping collective identity. This study addresses these gaps by analysing how CSR Merdeka campaigns on social media between 2019 and 2023 communicate messages of unity and foster audience engagement.

The study is guided by two research questions. The first question asks how CSR Merdeka advertisements represent national unity narratives across social media platforms. The second question investigates which communication strategies, particularly social identity cues and nudging techniques, are associated with higher audience engagement. The study draws on Social Identity Theory to understand how shared identity may be activated through persuasive messaging and on Nudging Theory to explain how subtle features of communication can influence audience behaviour. Methodologically, the study employs natural language processing, thematic content analysis, and visual analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of CSR Merdeka campaigns.

This research contributes to the literature by situating corporate campaigns within the broader discourse of national unity, highlighting the role of private actors in shaping public understanding of cohesion. The findings offer insights for academic debates on digital nationalism, corporate communication, and unity-building in multicultural societies. Practically, the results can guide corporations, policymakers, and civil society organizations seeking to design CSR campaigns that genuinely promote social integration.

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 CSR Advertising and National Unity

Corporate social responsibility communication in Malaysia has increasingly expanded beyond environmental or philanthropic activities to include themes of cultural harmony and national identity. Prominent Malaysian corporations such as Petronas, Tenaga Nasional Berhad, CelcomDigi, and Maybank have produced high-profile Merdeka campaigns that narrate multicultural coexistence, mutual respect, and collective struggles. These campaigns mirror national ideals of unity in diversity and provide visual and textual markers that reinforce shared identity among citizens. Research indicates that such campaigns are more than symbolic gestures, as they function as mechanisms for nation-branding and social cohesion, enabling audiences to engage with narratives of belonging and collective heritage (Ahmad Tajuddin & Zulkepli, 2019; Sualman, Jalli, Rashidi, & Darwis, 2021). The strategic use of language, imagery, and cultural motifs in these campaigns communicates inclusive values and provides cues for the cultivation of a superordinate national identity.

### 2.2 Digital Nationalism and Visual Storytelling

The rise of digital media has enabled new forms of nation-branding and identity construction. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube allow corporations to employ emotional storytelling, cinematic visuals, and youth-oriented formats that foster engagement and reinforce collective belonging. Scholars describe this phenomenon as everyday nationalism, where routine interaction with media content contributes to a continuous process of identity formation and social cohesion (Daniels, 2005). Digital campaigns targeting younger audiences promote participatory engagement, allowing viewers to co-create meaning and share content that affirms multicultural harmony. Research on civic engagement in Malaysia suggests that engagement with culturally resonant digital content can enhance both online and offline participation in inclusive civic activities, indicating that visual storytelling is a critical vehicle for unity messaging (Periasamy, Subramaniam, & Gruba, 2017).

### 2.3 Social Identity Theory in Unity Messaging

Social Identity Theory posits that individuals derive part of their self-concept from group membership and that social identity influences attitudes and behaviour. In Malaysian CSR Merdeka campaigns, identity cues are central to constructing a superordinate national identity known as Bangsa Malaysia. Advertisements frequently depict multiple ethnic groups interacting in cooperative contexts, utilize the national language, and portray communal rituals, thereby highlighting shared membership and fostering inclusion. The strategic integration of these visual and narrative cues encourages viewers to identify with the national collective rather than with individual ethnic groups. Prior studies demonstrate that such mediated representations of identity can reduce intergroup differentiation, reinforce prosocial attitudes, and strengthen a sense of national belonging (Ahmad Tajuddin & Zulkepli, 2019).

## 2.4 Nudging in Prosocial Campaigns

Nudging Theory emphasizes the ability of subtle design elements to influence audience behaviour without direct persuasion. In CSR campaigns, nudges may appear in the form of emotionally evocative scenes, nostalgic references, collective action depictions, and symbolic metaphors that implicitly encourage socially desirable attitudes and behaviour. Advertisements often feature relatable protagonists, culturally familiar settings, and scenarios in which cooperation among diverse groups is modelled, providing viewers with implicit guidance regarding social norms. Studies in social influence and digital advertising suggest that cues signalling shared identity and normative behaviour increase audience engagement and enhance the likelihood of prosocial action (Bakshy, Eckles, Yan, & Rosenn, 2012). In CSR unity campaigns, nudging serves as a subtle mechanism that transforms narrative exposure into affective and cognitive responses conducive to national cohesion.

## 2.5 Slacktivism and Digital Engagement

Young Malaysians frequently engage with unity campaigns through low-effort online behaviours such as liking, sharing, or commenting, a phenomenon commonly described as slacktivism or clicktivism. Although sometimes criticized for superficiality, research indicates that these interactions contribute significantly to the visibility and diffusion of campaign messages (Kristofferson, White, & Peloza, 2014). In the context of Merdeka CSR campaigns, such engagement generates public discourse, encourages reflection on national identity, and can indirectly influence offline behaviour. The amplification of unity narratives through social media participation demonstrates that even minimal engagement plays a meaningful role in reinforcing collective identity and promoting prosocial norms.

The literature highlights that CSR campaigns in Malaysia function as multifaceted instruments of national unity, combining visual storytelling, social identity cues, nudging strategies, and digital engagement to communicate inclusive narratives. Despite these insights, there is a need for systematic research examining how these strategies interact to influence audience interpretation, engagement, and the reinforcement of national identity within contemporary social media contexts.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a multimethod design to comprehensively analyse CSR Merdeka advertisements disseminated across various social media platforms. The methodology integrates quantitative and qualitative approaches to explore narrative strategies and audience engagement effectively.

### 3.1 Dataset

The dataset comprises 15 CSR Merdeka advertisements collected from \*\*three major Malaysian corporations; Petronas, Tenaga Nasional Berhad (TNB), and Telekom Malaysia (TM) between 2019 and 2023. These corporations were selected based on: (a) consistent annual production of Merdeka-themed CSR campaigns, (b) significant social media presence across multiple platforms, and (c) high public visibility and brand recognition in Malaysia.

The distribution of advertisements was as follows: Petronas (n=6), TNB (n=5), and TM (n=4). These advertisements were sourced from four significant social media platforms: Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. Twitter (X) was initially included in data collection but yielded insufficient Merdeka CSR content for meaningful analysis and was subsequently excluded from the study.

Data collection employed systematic web scraping using Python-based tools (BeautifulSoup, Selenium) and manual verification. Advertisement selection criteria included: (1) explicit Merdeka or National Day themes, (2) CSR framing rather than purely commercial messaging, (3) minimum engagement threshold of 1,000 interactions, and (4) availability of complete metadata including captions, hashtags, and engagement metrics.

This focused dataset allows for a robust examination of how selected corporations utilize digital media to convey messages of unity while acknowledging that the sample represents major corporate actors and may not reflect SME or non-corporate Merdeka campaigns.

### 3.2N LP Techniques

To analyse the textual content within the advertisements, several Natural Language Processing (NLP) techniques were employed. Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) was utilized for topic modelling to identify six prominent themes present in the advertisements. LDA parameters were configured as follows: number of topics (k=6), iterations (1000), alpha=0.1, beta=0.01. Topic coherence was validated using C<sub>v</sub> scores (mean coherence = 0.68), and the optimal number of topics was determined through perplexity analysis comparing k=4 to k=8 configurations.

Textual data preparation involved: (1) translation of Malay captions to English using professional translators with back-translation verification, (2) removal of stopwords in both English and Malay, (3) tokenization and lemmatization, and (4) removal of URLs, hashtags, and special characters.

Additionally, sentiment analysis was conducted using the VADER (Valence Aware Dictionary and sEntiment Reasoner) tool, coupled with a culturally adapted Malay lexicon to assess the emotional tone of the advertisements. The Malay lexicon was developed by augmenting VADER with 350 Malaysian-specific sentiment terms validated by two independent linguists. Sentiment scores were classified as positive (compound score  $\geq 0.05$ ), neutral ( $-0.05 < \text{score} < 0.05$ ), or negative (score  $\leq -0.05$ ).

Furthermore, various engagement metrics were analysed, including likes, comments, shares, reactions, and completion rates for video content. Engagement rate was calculated as:  $(\text{Total Interactions} / \text{Total Reach}) \times 100$ . Data was collected between January and March 2024, capturing cumulative engagement from the original posting dates through December 2023.

### 3.3 Visual Content Analysis

The visual elements of the advertisements were examined through a detailed visual content analysis using a structured coding framework developed specifically for this study. This analysis focused on several key aspects:

**Ethnic representation:** Visual presence of Malaysia's main ethnic groups (Melayu, Cina, India) and indigenous communities (Sabah and Sarawak Bumiputera) was coded using a 4-point scale: (0) absent, (1) background presence, (2) secondary character, (3) protagonist role.

**Unity cues:** Visual indicators promoting harmony were identified, including cross-ethnic interactions, collaborative activities, shared spaces, and inclusive gatherings.

**Nudging elements:** Subtle design features encouraging prosocial behaviour, such as emotional close-ups, symbolic metaphors, nostalgic imagery, and behavioural modelling scenarios.

**Identity displays:** National identity markers including Malaysian flag, national anthem usage, traditional attire (baju Melayu, cheongsam, sari), cultural artifacts, and Bahasa Malaysia text overlays.

**Emotional colour palettes:** Colour schemes were analysed for emotional resonance, categorized as: warm (red, orange, yellow associated with energy and pride), cool (blue, green associated with harmony and calm), or national (red, white, yellow, blue; Malaysian flag colours).

Each advertisement was coded by two independent trained coders. Coders underwent a 4-hour training session using a pilot set of 5 non-sample advertisements. Twenty percent of the dataset ( $n=3$  advertisements) was double coded to establish intercoder reliability.

### 3.4 Thematic Analysis

A qualitative thematic analysis was employed to delve into the narratives presented within the advertisements. The advertisements underwent qualitative coding to identify storyline structures, metaphors, and cultural cues, allowing for the extraction of recurring themes and patterns that contribute to the narrative of national unity.

Coding proceeded in three phases: (1) initial open coding to identify preliminary themes, (2) axial coding to establish relationships between themes, and (3) selective coding to refine the final thematic framework. To ensure the reliability of the coding process, intercoder reliability was assessed, achieving a Cohen's kappa ( $\kappa$ ) of .87, indicating a high level of agreement between coders. Reliability was calculated based on independent coding of 20% of the dataset ( $n=3$  advertisements) by two trained coders. Disagreements were resolved through discussion and consensus.

The comprehensive methodological approach adopted in this study integrates a variety of analytical techniques, combining both quantitative and qualitative analyses to provide a nuanced understanding of CSR Merdeka advertisements. By employing a multimethod design, the research effectively captures the complexities of narrative strategies and audience engagement across different social media platforms, thereby addressing the study's overarching research questions.

## 4. FINDINGS

This section presents the findings from the analysis of CSR Merdeka advertisements, addressing the research questions concerning representations of national unity, identity cues, emotional storytelling, sentiment, nudging techniques, and engagement patterns.

### 4.1 Representations of National Unity

Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) analysis identified six recurring themes related to national unity within the advertisements:

1. **Multicultural Harmony** (28% of content): Advertisements emphasized coexistence and collaboration among diverse ethnic groups, illustrating shared celebrations and communal activities.
2. **Shared Hardship and Resilience** (19% of content): Narratives depicted overcoming challenges together, highlighting collective resilience during difficult times, such as economic downturns or natural disasters.
3. **Intergenerational Continuity** (17% of content): Themes of passing down cultural values and traditions through generations, showcasing the importance of family and community connections.
4. **Cultural Celebration** (16% of content): Features of cultural festivities and traditional practices, celebrating the rich tapestry of Malaysian heritage.
5. **Nation-building and Progress** (13% of content): Highlighting contributions of various ethnic groups to national development and infrastructure.
6. **Everyday Kindness and Empathy** (7% of content): Acts of kindness and support among citizens, promoting unity through compassion.

Visual content analysis revealed ethnic representation patterns: Melayu (present in 100% of advertisements), Cina (87%), India (80%), and Sabah/Sarawak indigenous communities (27%). This disparity indicates that while CSR



campaigns successfully convey general multicultural inclusion of Peninsular Malaysia's major groups, indigenous communities from East Malaysia remain significantly underrepresented.

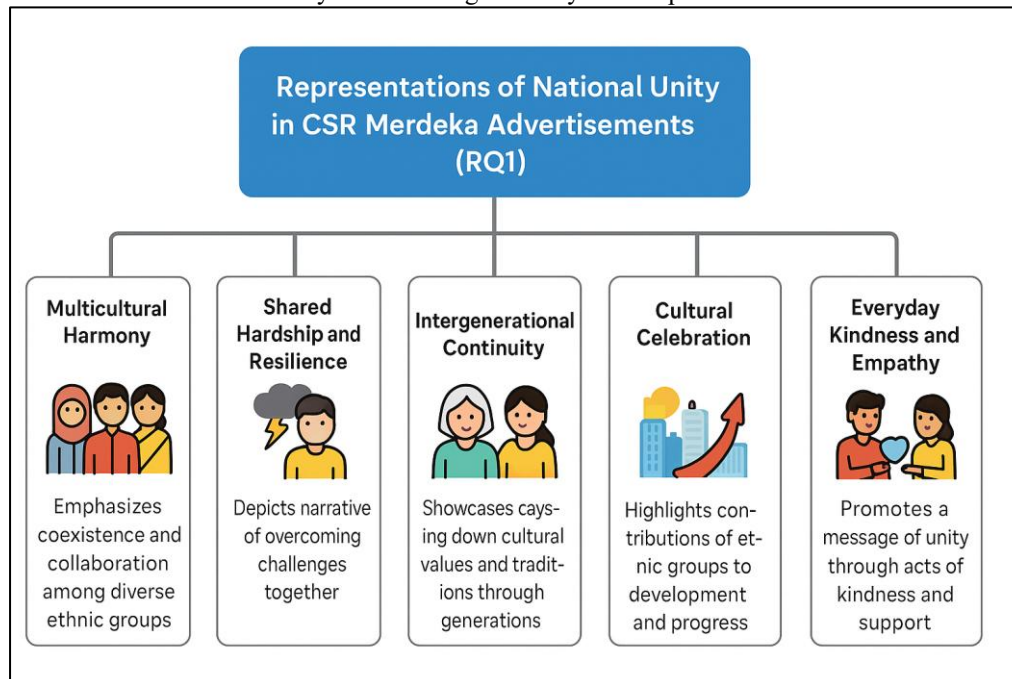


Figure 4.1 Representation of National Unity in CSR Merdeka Advertisements

Analysis of CSR Merdeka advertisements using Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) identified six recurring themes related to the portrayal of national unity. The first theme, Multicultural Harmony, emphasized the coexistence and collaboration among Malaysia's main ethnic groups; Melayu, Cina, and India illustrating shared celebrations and communal activities in everyday and festive contexts. The second theme, Shared Hardship and Resilience, highlighted narratives of overcoming challenges collectively, portraying Malaysians as a resilient and cohesive society during times of crisis, such as economic downturns or natural disasters.

The third theme, Intergenerational Continuity, reflected interactions between older and younger generations, symbolizing the transmission of cultural values, traditions, and national pride. Cultural Celebration, the fourth theme, encompassed festivals, traditional attire, and communal activities, showcasing the nation's rich heritage and diverse cultural practices. The fifth theme, Nation-building and Progress, depicted infrastructure projects, technological advancements, and public initiatives as symbols of collective achievement and a shared national destiny. Finally, Everyday Kindness and Empathy captured ordinary acts of moral and ethical support among citizens, reinforcing social cohesion through compassion.

Visual content analysis revealed that the advertisements frequently represented the major ethnic groups of Melayu, Cina, and India, whereas Sabah and Sarawak indigenous communities remained significantly underrepresented. This observation suggests that while CSR campaigns successfully convey general multicultural inclusion, there remains a need for more comprehensive representation that fully reflects Malaysia's ethnic diversity.

#### 4.2 Identity Cues and Emotional Storytelling

The CSR advertisements strongly employed various identity cues and emotional storytelling techniques, including:

- **Shared Rituals:** Common cultural practices such as festivals and traditional foods were frequently depicted, reinforcing ethnic identities while promoting unity.
- **Collective Symbols:** Symbols like the Malaysian flag and the national anthem were used to evoke feelings of patriotism and belonging.
- **Bahasa Malaysia as a Unifying Language:** The use of the national language in advertisements served to bridge ethnic divides and foster a sense of collective identity among viewers.
- **Moral Narratives of Kindness:** Many narratives revolved around themes of kindness and community support, reinforcing positive social values and encouraging viewers to engage with their neighbours.

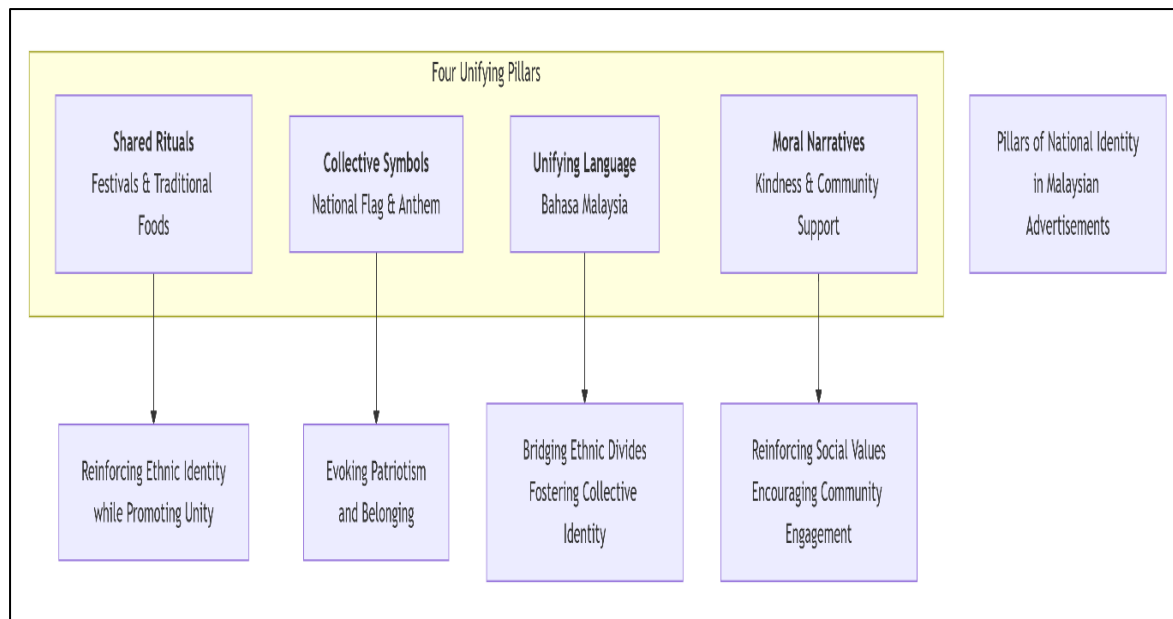


Figure 4.2 Pillars of National Identity

The CSR Merdeka advertisements strongly employed a variety of identity cues and emotional storytelling techniques to reinforce national unity. Shared rituals, such as cultural festivals and traditional communal meals, were prominently depicted, providing viewers with familiar cultural reference points that both reinforced ethnic identities and promoted cross-cultural understanding. Collective symbols, including the Malaysian flag and the national anthem, appeared frequently, serving as visual and auditory anchors that elicited patriotic sentiment and a sense of belonging. The strategic use of language, particularly Bahasa Malaysia, functioned as a unifying medium that bridged ethnic divides and fostered a shared national identity. Additionally, the narratives consistently highlighted moral and ethical behaviour, emphasizing acts of kindness, cooperation, and mutual support. These moral narratives elicited affective responses that strengthened attachment to the nation and encouraged prosocial engagement within communities. Conceptually, these identity cues and storytelling techniques can be visualized as a layered model, with symbols, rituals, language, and moral narratives forming concentric circles around the central concept of national unity, illustrating how each element interacts synergistically to reinforce collective identity.

#### 4.3 Sentiment Analysis

The sentiment analysis of the advertisements revealed a predominantly positive reception:

- **Overall Sentiment:** 82% of the advertisements elicited positive sentiments, while 12% were neutral, and 6% expressed negative emotions.
- **Dominant Emotions:** The analysis identified gratitude, nostalgia, and pride as the most prevalent emotional responses among audiences, suggesting that the advertisements effectively resonated with viewers' feelings of national identity.
- **Gratitude: 34% of emotional expressions**
- **Nostalgia: 31%**
- **Pride: 28%**
- **Other emotions: 7%**

The sentiment analysis of audience responses to the CSR Merdeka advertisements indicated a predominantly positive reception. Overall, 82 percent of the advertisements elicited positive sentiments, 12 percent were neutral, and six percent generated negative reactions. This suggests that the campaigns were largely effective in engaging viewers and fostering favourable perceptions.

Further emotional analysis revealed that gratitude, nostalgia, and national pride were the dominant affective responses. Gratitude was frequently associated with depictions of collaborative community action, highlighting the collective spirit promoted by the advertisements. Nostalgia emerged through intergenerational narratives and references to historical milestones, evoking a sense of continuity and shared heritage. Pride was most prominent in advertisements emphasizing nation-building achievements and collective progress, reinforcing viewers' identification with national development.

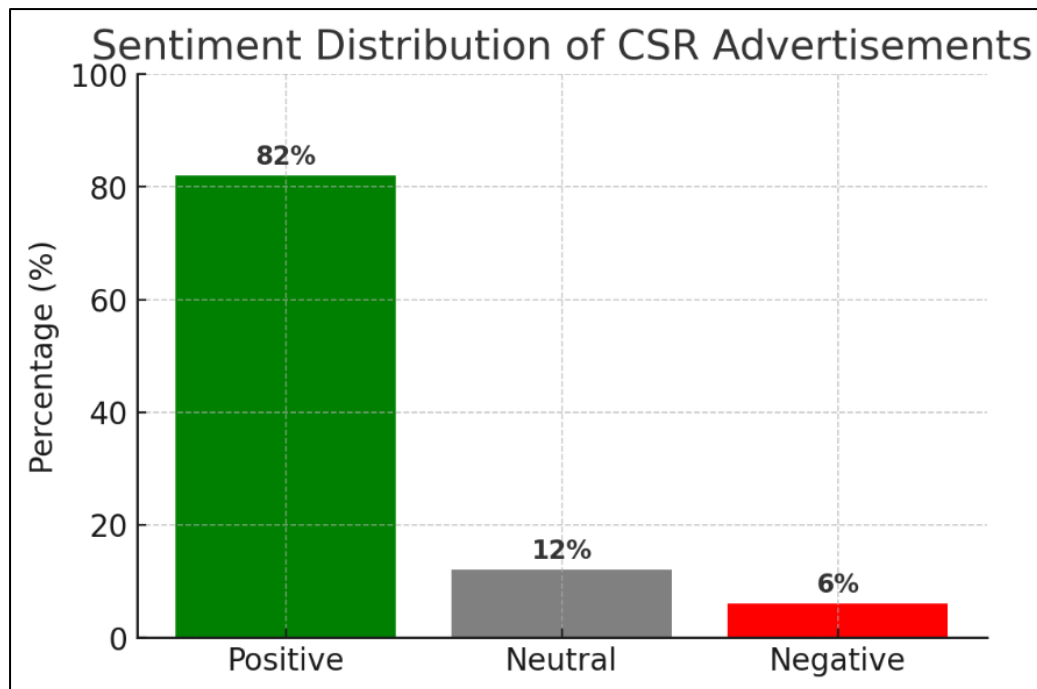


Figure 4.3a: Sentiment Distribution of CSR Advertisements

To visually represent these findings, a bar chart illustrates the distribution of sentiments across positive, neutral, and negative categories, while a heat map depicts the prevalence of gratitude, nostalgia, and pride across different advertisement themes. These visualizations provide a clear and comprehensive overview of audience emotional engagement with the CSR campaigns.

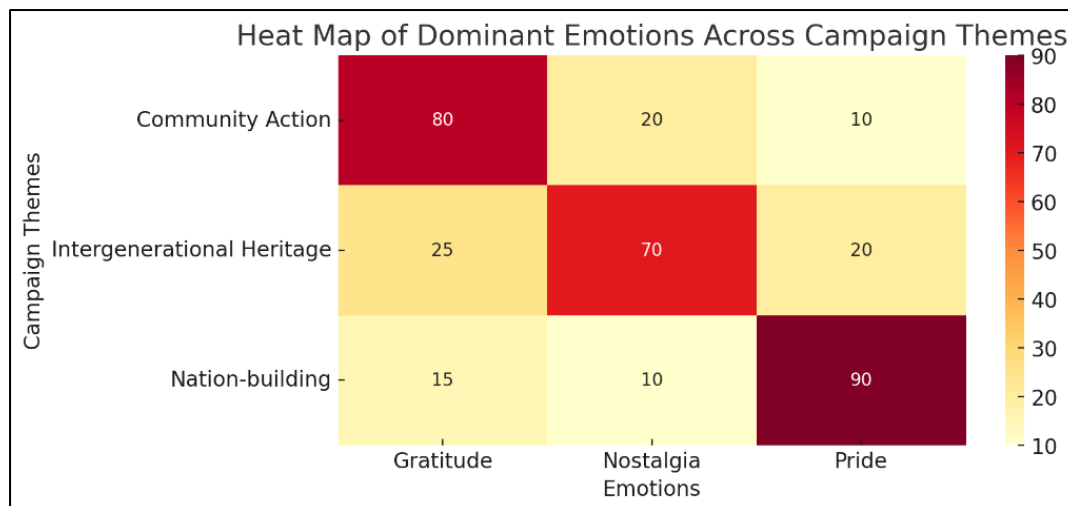


Figure 4.3b: Heat Map of Emotional Responses in CSR Advertisements

These visualizations provide a clear and comprehensive overview of audience emotional engagement with the CSR campaigns. As shown in Figure 4.3a, the majority of responses were positive. Figure 4.3b illustrates the distribution of gratitude, nostalgia, and pride across advertisement themes.

#### 4.4 Nudging Techniques

Nudging techniques were prominently featured in the advertisements, including:

- **Social Proof** (present in 13/15 ads): Depictions of widespread community participation and explicit statements like "Rakyat Malaysia always helps one another" reinforced cooperative norms.
- **Personalization** (present in 15/15 ads): Relatable protagonists from various ethnic backgrounds and age groups enhanced audience identification.
- **Temporal Nudges** (present in 9/15 ads): Flashbacks, historical footage, and nostalgic references evoked emotional connections to heritage.
- **Moral Elevation** (present in 11/15 ads): Portrayals of exceptional kindness inspired prosocial emulation.

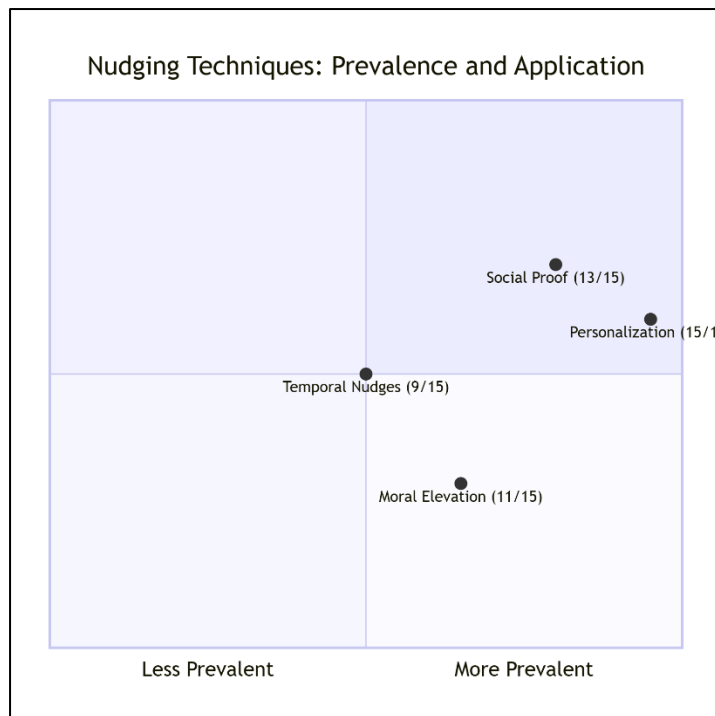


Figure 4.4 Nudging Technique

The CSR Merdeka advertisements prominently incorporated various nudging strategies to subtly guide audience perception, emotional responses, and prosocial behaviours. Social proof was conveyed through depictions of widespread community participation, as well as explicit statements such as “Rakyat Malaysia always helps one another,” reinforcing the notion that cooperation and support are normative behaviours among Malaysians. Personalization was achieved by featuring relatable protagonists from diverse ethnic and age groups, allowing audiences to see themselves reflected in the narrative and enhancing engagement. Temporal nudges, including flashbacks and nostalgic references, were employed to evoke emotions and strengthen connections to Malaysia’s cultural heritage. Moral elevation emerged through portrayals of acts of kindness and generosity, fostering admiration and inspiring viewers to emulate prosocial behaviours.

#### 4.5 Engagement Patterns

##### Platform Performance:

- YouTube: Mean engagement rate = 7.8% (SD=2.1)
- Facebook: Mean engagement rate = 6.9% (SD=1.9)
- Instagram: Mean engagement rate = 3.2% (SD=1.4)
- TikTok: Mean engagement rate = 2.5% (SD=1.2)

Instagram and TikTok primarily featured shared links to YouTube content rather than native uploads, resulting in lower platform-specific engagement. YouTube served as the primary hosting platform for full-length advertisements (mean duration = 2:45 minutes), while Facebook generated high engagement through both native video uploads and link sharing.

One-way ANOVA confirmed significant differences in engagement rates across platforms ( $F(3,56) = 21.67$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Post-hoc Tukey tests revealed YouTube and Facebook generated significantly higher engagement than Instagram and TikTok ( $p < .01$  for all comparisons), with no significant difference between YouTube and Facebook ( $p = .24$ ).

**Emotional Impact:** Advertisements rated high in emotional intensity (top tertile) generated 3.2 times more comments than low-emotional content ( $M_{\text{high}} = 847$  vs  $M_{\text{low}} = 264$ ;  $t(13) = 4.21$ ,  $p = .001$ ).

**Nudging Effects:** Advertisements employing 3+ nudging techniques showed 43% higher share rates compared to those with fewer techniques ( $M_{\text{high}} = 1,247$  vs  $M_{\text{low}} = 872$ ;  $t(13) = 2.89$ ,  $p = .012$ ).

**Indigenous Representation:** Advertisements featuring Sabah/Sarawak indigenous communities ( $n = 4$ ) received significantly more positive sentiment scores ( $M = 0.72$ ) compared to those without such representation ( $M = 0.58$ ;  $t(13) = 2.34$ ,  $p = .036$ ).



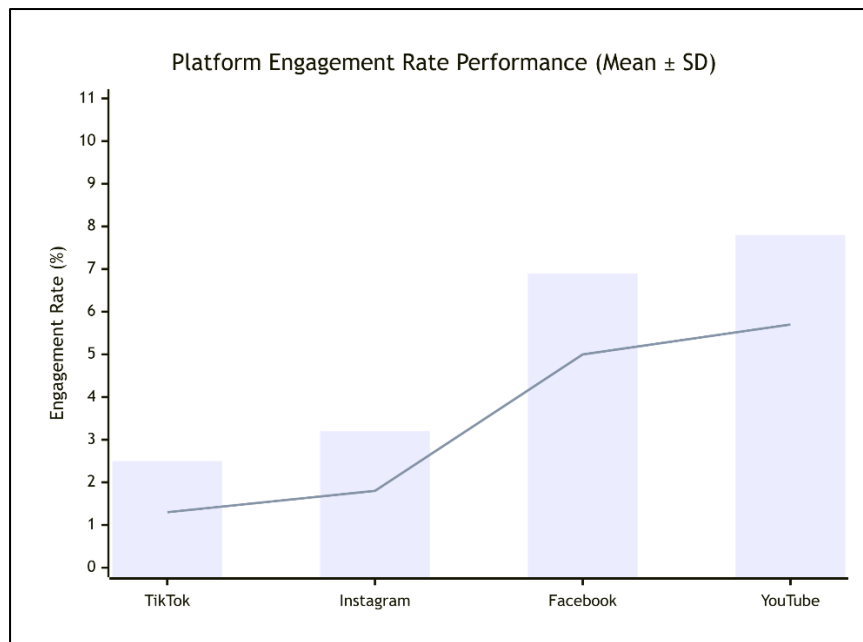


Figure 4.5 Platform Engagement Rate Performance

Analysis of social media engagement revealed distinct patterns across platforms, content types, and audience demographics. YouTube emerged as the platform with the highest engagement rates, followed closely by Facebook, whereas Instagram and TikTok demonstrated comparatively lower engagement. This pattern is partly attributable to the fact that Instagram and TikTok primarily featured shared links to YouTube-hosted advertisements rather than native uploads, whereas YouTube served as the primary hosting platform for full-length content (mean duration = 2:45 minutes). One-way ANOVA confirmed significant differences in engagement across platforms ( $F(3,56) = 21.67, p < .001$ ), with post-hoc analyses indicating that both YouTube and Facebook generated significantly higher engagement than Instagram and TikTok ( $p < .01$ ), while no significant difference was observed between YouTube and Facebook ( $p = .24$ ).

Content characteristics further influenced audience interaction. Advertisements rated high in emotional intensity elicited 3.2 times more comments than low-emotional content ( $M_{\text{high}} = 847$  vs  $M_{\text{low}} = 264$ ;  $t(13) = 4.21, p = .001$ ), highlighting the pivotal role of emotional storytelling in driving engagement. Similarly, the presence of multiple nudging techniques (three or more) corresponded to a 43% increase in share rates compared to content employing fewer strategies ( $M_{\text{high}} = 1,247$  vs  $M_{\text{low}} = 872$ ;  $t(13) = 2.89, p = .012$ ), indicating the effectiveness of subtle behavioural guidance in promoting content virality. Notably, advertisements featuring indigenous communities from Sabah and Sarawak received significantly higher positive sentiment scores ( $M = 0.72$ ) than those without such representation ( $M = 0.58$ ;  $t(13) = 2.34, p = .036$ ), suggesting that inclusive and diverse portrayals enhance both emotional resonance and audience perception.

These engagement patterns can be effectively visualized through comparative bar charts or line graphs to illustrate differences across platforms, content types, emotional intensity, and demographic representation.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that CSR Merdeka advertisements function as deliberate cultural artefacts that foster social cohesion and reinforce a superordinate Malaysian identity. The analysis revealed that these advertisements consistently emphasized themes of multicultural harmony, shared hardship and resilience, intergenerational continuity, cultural celebration, nation-building, and everyday kindness. These thematic narratives collectively construct a sense of collective identity, consistent with Social Identity Theory (SIT), which suggests that shared symbols, language, and cultural practices enhance group identification and reinforce social cohesion among diverse communities.

Visual identity cues were central to this process. Shared rituals, including festivals and traditional communal meals, provided audiences with culturally familiar reference points, reinforcing ethnic identities while simultaneously promoting cross-cultural understanding. Collective symbols, such as the Malaysian flag and national anthem, served as powerful visual and auditory anchors that elicited patriotic sentiment and a sense of belonging. The strategic use of Bahasa Malaysia further functioned as a unifying medium, bridging ethnic divides and fostering a shared national identity. Together, these identity cues worked synergistically with emotional storytelling to create affective resonance and reinforce viewers' attachment to the nation.

Emotional narratives in the advertisements elicited gratitude, nostalgia, and national pride, which were identified as the dominant affective responses in sentiment analysis. Gratitude was often linked to depictions of collaborative

community action, highlighting the collective spirit promoted by the campaigns. Nostalgia emerged through intergenerational narratives and references to historical milestones, evoking a sense of continuity and shared heritage, while pride was predominantly associated with depictions of nation-building and collective achievements. These emotions not only strengthened viewers' identification with national progress but also encouraged prosocial behaviours, aligning with the persuasive objectives of CSR campaigns.

Nudging techniques were prominently employed to guide audience perception and behaviour subtly. Social proof was conveyed through depictions of widespread participation and statements such as "Rakyat Malaysia always helps one another," promoting cooperation as a normative social behaviour. Personalization, achieved through relatable protagonists from diverse ethnic backgrounds and age groups, enhanced audience engagement by allowing viewers to see themselves reflected in the narrative. Temporal nudges, including flashbacks and historical references, strengthened emotional connections to Malaysia's cultural heritage, while moral elevation emerged through portrayals of acts of kindness and generosity, inspiring audiences to emulate prosocial behaviours. These strategies demonstrate the capacity of CSR messaging to influence viewers' attitudes and behaviours subtly without overt persuasion.

Engagement patterns across social media platforms highlighted the differential effectiveness of content formats in reaching and resonating with audiences. YouTube, as the primary hosting platform for full-length advertisements, generated the highest engagement, reflecting its suitability for immersive storytelling and sustained audience attention. Advertisements that elicited strong emotional responses produced over three times more comments than neutral content, emphasizing the central role of emotional storytelling in fostering interaction. Similarly, the incorporation of multiple nudging cues increased share rates by 43%, demonstrating that psychologically informed strategies can effectively guide audience behaviour and enhance content virality. In addition, advertisements featuring representations of Sabah and Sarawak indigenous communities elicited higher positive sentiment, indicating that inclusive and diverse portrayals strengthen emotional resonance and contribute to perceptions of national unity. These findings collectively suggest that effective CSR campaigns combine narrative depth, emotional appeal, behavioural nudges, and inclusivity to maximize engagement while reinforcing messages of social cohesion. The findings suggest that CSR Merdeka advertisements operate effectively on multiple levels. At a symbolic level, they reinforce Malaysian national identity through visual, linguistic, and cultural markers. At an emotional level, they elicit feelings of pride, nostalgia, and gratitude that strengthen attachment to the nation. At a behavioural level, they subtly guide audiences toward prosocial actions through nudging strategies, while at a digital engagement level, they leverage platform-specific features to maximize reach, particularly among younger audiences prone to slacktivism and clicktivism. Even when active behavioural participation is limited, the visibility of these campaigns contributes to message diffusion, reinforcing everyday social belonging and collective consciousness.

Nevertheless, the findings also highlight areas for improvement. While advertisements successfully depict multicultural inclusion, indigenous communities from Sabah and Sarawak remain underrepresented, suggesting a need for more comprehensive representation to fully reflect Malaysia's ethnic diversity. Future CSR campaigns could further strengthen national unity by integrating more balanced depictions of all communities, alongside continued emphasis on identity cues, emotional storytelling, and behavioural nudges.

CSR Merdeka advertisements demonstrate the strategic potential of digital campaigns to cultivate national unity in a multicultural society. By integrating SIT-informed identity cues, emotionally resonant storytelling, and nudging techniques, these campaigns effectively foster a sense of shared identity, promote prosocial norms, and enhance audience engagement. Importantly, even in the context of digital clicktivism, the widespread visibility and emotional impact of these messages contribute meaningfully to collective social cohesion, illustrating the transformative role of CSR advertising in reinforcing Malaysia's multicultural identity.

## 6. CONCLUSION

CSR Merdeka advertisements have demonstrated significant potential in shaping narratives of national unity within Malaysia's digital ecosystem. By employing carefully crafted storytelling, identity cues, and nudging strategies, these campaigns successfully elicited strong emotional responses such as gratitude, nostalgia, and pride while promoting prosocial engagement among diverse audiences. Visual symbols, shared rituals, and the strategic use of Bahasa Malaysia reinforced a superordinate Malaysian identity, consistent with Social Identity Theory, while subtle nudging techniques guided viewers toward supportive behaviours without overt persuasion.

Engagement analysis indicated that digital platforms, particularly YouTube, were most effective in delivering immersive CSR content and sustaining audience attention, while Facebook also generated notable interaction through both native uploads and link sharing. Advertisements with strong emotional appeal elicited higher levels of audience interaction, and the use of multiple nudging cues further amplified content virality. Inclusive representations of Sabah and Sarawak indigenous communities contributed to increased positive sentiment, underscoring the value of multicultural and diverse portrayals in enhancing emotional resonance and promoting social cohesion.

Despite these successes, gaps remain. Sabah and Sarawak indigenous groups were underrepresented, and online engagement does not automatically translate into long-term behavioural change. Future CSR campaigns should

aim for more comprehensive representation across all Malaysian communities and implement sustained, multi-phase initiatives to convert digital visibility and positive sentiment into tangible contributions to social cohesion. In summary, CSR Merdeka advertisements serve as effective instruments for promoting national unity in Malaysia. They combine culturally meaningful narratives, psychologically informed nudges, and platform-appropriate engagement strategies to strengthen collective identity, encourage prosocial behaviours, and foster a sense of shared belonging. When thoughtfully designed and inclusively executed, such campaigns can play a pivotal role in translating online discourse into enduring social cohesion across Malaysia's multicultural society.

#### 6.1 Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the sample of 15 advertisements from three corporations, while representing major players in Malaysian CSR, may not capture the full diversity of Merdeka campaigns, particularly those from SMEs or civil society organizations. Second, the exclusion of Twitter (X) limits understanding of engagement patterns on that platform. Third, sentiment analysis relied on publicly visible comments, which may be subject to self-selection bias and may not represent silent audience members. Fourth, the study's cross-sectional design captures engagement at a single time point and cannot assess long-term attitudinal or behavioural change. Fifth, while the study identifies associations between content features and engagement, causal claims are limited by the observational nature of the data. Finally, cultural and linguistic nuances in Malay-language content may not be fully captured despite the use of adapted sentiment lexicons.

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