

# AI poised to dominate General Election

## TECHNOLOGY

Friday, 22 Dec 2017 12:35 PM MYT

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CYBERSPACE played a critical role in both the 12th and 13th General Elections back in 2008 and 2013. It paved the way for the making of professional "cyber troopers" largely working for BN in return for a fee while opposition "cyber troopers" do work on a voluntary basis.

As the 14th General election approaches, "old fake news" now being recycled and then broadcast on WhatsApp groups and on various social media platforms continue to affect sentiments.

The silent majority somehow choose to believe anything that is critical of the government. Fact verification does not work for this segment of the society. In fact, anything negative about the government-in-waiting is being seen as the ruling party's propaganda, victimisation and suppression of the opposition.

Policies are the province of logic, not emotion. Politics, on the other hand whether it is wilful or

unintentional, is mostly about emotions.

In our own backyard, political leaders from both sides of the divide are good at surviving even if they are not listening to the voices that are not the usual suspects, saying what everyone wants to hear.

For political parties and politicians to survive in the upcoming GE, it goes beyond using technology and data streams to predict and identify patterns. They should really begin to question conventional wisdom and move away from any potential meddling when it comes to tough and critical issues.

As the saying goes, tell the same story 100 times and it will become real. I've been wondering what would one day make the Malaysian audience start checking facts before digesting or disseminating them further.

Should we introduce cyber policing by having a website for the masses to cross-check and authenticate everything or will AI eventually help us identify the fake news?

When President Barack Obama was running for his second term, the Democrat campaigners were using AI to locate fence sitters. The technology utilised is believed to be able to profile voters and predict voting patterns based on their lifestyle and behaviour.

With the help of technology, campaigners managed to design targeted messages for specific audiences and it was proven to be successful in securing votes. Today, the AI technology is certainly more developed and sophisticated, to the extent that it is able to detect fake news and emulate a person's way of writing, and be part of the campaigning team to help real cyber troopers campaign online.

Since the 2016 US presidential campaign, Facebook has introduced the fact checkers campaign in an effort to weed out false or misleading news by labelling them. However the effectiveness of this effort remains questionable today.

Just as we are hoping for AI to help us detect fake news, there are also controversies. The recent incident where 900 book reviews on Amazon were deleted under suspicion of being bogus – thanks to AI – has drawn its fair share of debate.

Nevertheless, we will see cyber campaigns on social media run by machines in the years to come.

I hate to admit that machines can do a more precise job in many domains and areas. I worry that even paid cyber troopers will soon be out of a job in Malaysia as we embrace the 4th Industrial Revolution.

It is really not that difficult for machine learning to churn out responses on social media platforms to sway public opinion. It would be just a matter of time before AI is used to automatically churn out messages that sound human enough to convince the audience that they are genuine.

It will then be a test of sophistication and limits as to who can churn out more half-truths that are convincing. And who would be faster in responding to messages that were crafted to spread fear.

Imagine one day when our political strategists and campaigners begin to turn wholly to AI for the most part of the campaign. Whoever has the deeper pockets and better technological know-how to develop more sophisticated algorithms and better artificial neural networks to generate or detect what's genuine and what's not will have the upper hand.

Fortunately, or unfortunately, Malaysia is a multi-lingual country and we tend to mix languages in a sentence; I believe that AI and machines would need a much longer time to decipher what we really mean when we write about something.

I feel that the ultimate fight against half-truth must be won in public.

I too wonder if the advancement of artificial neural network will one day define our belief systems and ideologies? And what about those people in the far-flung interior who are not yet online?

What would be the impact of AI technology in framing public perception have on those who are not online, or those who are online but are not active on social media?

It would be interesting to see political parties having to juggle multiple campaign tools for the tech-savvy and non-tech voters. This will complicate campaign strategies and, certainly, the financial investment in winning elections will spike.

At the end of the day, the war in cyber space is just one of the many campaigning tools for politicians to garner votes.

Politics remains a fight between ideologies, execution of policies and the ability to capture the imagination of the people. Skillful leaders will still need the right environment to succeed.

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