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Media Agenda in Politics: How Malaysian RTM Radio Stations Cover 14th General Election

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ABSTRACT

The media and communication technologies have changed media consumption for good, and traditional media publishers are struggling to integrate their businesses using communication technologies. However, when fake news is increasingly prevalent on social media, where everyone can be the prosumer-produce and consume news, the people seek to verify the facts through different media, and traditional media have therefore made a comeback. This research paper attempts to answer "What are the issues reported by the media". This study provides findings made during the 14th General Election campaigning period on the political issues reported by traditional media, in this case, radio. This study used a purposive sampling method, with the sample drawn from nomination day to the voting day (April 28 – May 9, 2018); a total of 12 days. The radio stations chosen for this study are operated by a national broadcaster-Radio Television Malaysia (RTM), which were Nasional FM (95.3 MHz), Ai FM (89.3 MHz) and Traxx FM (100.1 MHz). The findings showed that the news reporting patterns among the three radio stations were consistent throughout the examination period. Most of the news reported by the three radio channels were neutral but 10 RTM reports were still pro-Barisan Nasional (BN), which was the leading slant of the reports ahead of anti-PKR ones. Media-related issues (false news, imbalance news, inaccurate information) were received the second higher-ranked of issues reported by the radio channels.

Keywords: *false news, fake news, GE14, radio channel, traditional media*

INTRODUCTION

May 9, 2018, is the most intense and keenly fought elections in the history of Malaysia—a shock victory from Pakatan Harapan (PH) coalition that ended the 61-year reign of Barisan Nasional (BN) in the nation. Acknowledging the overwhelming growth of networked media and technological changes in information delivery systems such as the Internet and social media in providing valuable information to the public especially during the general election, Malaysians consumed "a lot more" news and information than before. The proliferation of social media has allowed searching for diverse information and thereafter make their choice to which information they think is reliable (Chang and Tham, 2016). The notable social media such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter, YouTube and blog, are among the most used, regardless of frequency.

According to the 2018 Global Digital suite of reports reveals that globally, *Facebook.com* is ranked as the world's third most visited website after *Google.com* and *YouTube.com*. As of January 2018, among 3.196 billion social media users in the world, 2,167 million are Facebook users, the top-ranked social media in the world. Similarly, Malaysians visit 76,100,000 times (per month) on *Facebook.com*, which is ranked after *Google.com* (164,700,000 visits per month) and *YouTube.com* (105,600,000 visits per month). Besides, there are 24 million active social media users in Malaysia, which 70 per cent of them use Facebook, followed by YouTube 69 per cent and WhatsApp 68 per cent (see https://wearesocial.com/blog/2018/01/global-digital-report-2018).

Since 2008, social media (especially Facebook) have been transformed into a new phase in politics. In Malaysia, previous research concurred that it was the advent of an era of "new politics", signalling the erosion of the ruling government's monopoly over information (Loh, 2009; Ooi, Saravanamuttu and Lee, 2008). The country experienced the greatest transformation from a blog election to a social media election, specifically from Twitter to Facebook election (Ismail and Hasmah, 2008). Since Malaysia's March 2008 general election, a plethora of research has been conducted to identify the significant contributor of social media to general elections and the media use patterns among the voters (Chang and Tham, 2017; Idid, Ahmed and Souket, 2017; Liow, 2012; Mohd Sani, 2014; Rajaratnam, 2009; Tham and Zanuddin, 2014). For example, Liow (2012) argued that the emergence of communication technologies and platforms which was capable of instantaneous transmission of messages around the world, either in text, audio or video form, offered extensive possibilities to effect political change. This also meant that traditional mainstream media might have lost its monopoly and control over information.

Chang and Tham (2016) found that social media especially Facebook was the prominent communication and entertainment tool as well as the source of information used by the majority of Chinese informants from the seven states in Malaysia. However, the majority of informants in the study also concurred that they are still using traditional media for information seeking mainly because they are concerned about the reliability and validity of news on social media, especially on Facebook. Therefore, they verify the information they receive or read from Facebook with other sources of information. Speaking of the media credibility, Idid, Ahmed, and Souket (2017) examined the relationship between media use and media credibility and political efficacy posting that trust in the media uses leads to trust in the political system. They found that television was the most preferable medium among the respondents followed by newspapers and radio. Furthermore, they found that television was the most credible among the respondents of the study.

While communication environment has become mobile, searchable, customisable and on-demand, people have more choices to select information and news from various sources. Moreover, people can also make their comments, express their thoughts and even become a "citizen journalist", playing an active role in collecting, creating and spreading the news to the mass. The additional built-in "Facebook Live Video" has created a new platform for both the media and politicians to have unprecedented rich, "real" and fast engagement with audiences. However, the emergence of real-time citizen journalism (Hermida, 2010) has led to the impact of both true and false information (Mendoza, Poblete and Castillo, 2010). People become confused and sceptical about which information should they believe (Chang and Tham, 2017). The Co-founder of Wired Magazine, Kevin Kelly said: *"Truth is no longer dictated by authorities, but is networked by peers"*. For every fact, there is a counter fact and all these counter facts and facts look identical online, which is confusing to most people". Fake news is, therefore, posing a threat to social media.

The media and communication technologies have changed media consumption for good, and traditional media publishers are struggling to integrate their businesses using communication technologies. However, when fake news is increasingly prevalent on social media, where everyone can

be the prosumer—produce and consume news, the people seek to verify the facts through different media, and traditional media have therefore made a comeback (Idid, 2018; Tan, 2018; "Telling real from fake", 2017). The Institute of Public Relations (IPR) revealed that across the world, traditional media was found to be the most trusted news source at 52 per cent (McCrary, 2017).

The present study sets the boundary to examine only the media agenda reported by selected radio channels, mainly national broadcast radio stations. The analysis of this paper will be mostly an attempt to explicate the political issues reported by the selected national broadcast radio stations. This cross-sectional study was part of a bigger project that was interested in testing the theoretical utility of agenda-setting in GE 14. There are a few researchers who concentrated on different types of media and examined the political issues reported by these media. These media include newspapers, television channels, WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook and Online News Portals. Instead of asking "What is the most important problem facing the country" developed by Gallup Polls, this research paper focuses on "What are the issues reported by the media (in this case, radio channels)"?

Agenda-setting and Politics

Political public relations and electoral communication strategies are vital in the success of candidacy in general elections (McKinnon, Tedesco and Lauder, 2001; Kiousis et al., 2006) where the political parties and candidates will highlight certain policy issues to the public with the objectives to influence them, drive their attention to the topics and put considerations which favour the party, and cast the votes to the candidates (Dragu and Fan, 2016). In other words, the political agenda aims to impact the salience of certain issues and positive images of candidates among the public with the help from the media (Kiousis et al., 2006). To sway the public opinion on political topics, Wolfe, Jones, and Baumgartner (2013) suggested that the government and the opposition have to formulate their policy issues selectively.

The presidential election in Chapel Hill by McCombs and Shaw (1972) was the classic study of agenda-setting in politics, in which the voters regarded the issues published by the news media frequently as important. Agenda-setting can also be understood through the relationships between the media placement and coverage frequencies of the issues and the perceived importance of an issue by the public (McCombs and Shaw, 1972; Ordaz, 2015; Searles and Smith, 2016). For instance, the media filter the issues and publish the selected news frequently, provide them prominent news spaces, and all these would lead the readers and the public to perceive the selected issues are more important than any others (Yang et al., 2016). To form public opinion about an issue, there must be attention given by the public (Tan and Weaver, 2013). According to McCombs, Shaw, and Weaver (2014), the transfer salience of the media agenda to public agenda is the first level of agenda-setting, in which how the media lead the public to think about an issue, political candidates, and parties or organisation (Kiousis et al., 2006). While the first level of agenda-setting emphasises on the saliency of an issue or topic, the second level focuses on the salience attributes of the issues (McCombs and Ghanem, 2001; McCombs and Shaw, 1993; Ordaz, 2015). The idea of the second level of agenda-setting is similar to the concept of framing (Yang et al., 2016), whereby the news media is not telling the public what to think, but how to think about (Ghanem, 1997; Kiousis et al., 2006) and how the issues being transferred to the public (McCombs and Ghanem, 2001; McCombs and Shaw, 1993; Ordaz, 2015). In other words, based on McCombs, Shaw, and Weaver (2014), the second level of agenda-setting is the influence of the media agenda on the public agenda in the attributes of the issues. Kiousis et al. (2006) opined that attribute could be the characteristics, property and quality of the issues. In politics, the most common attribute agenda used by the media is the images and integrity of the political candidates. As a result, the public will also emphasise and discuss the images and integrity of the candidates. Thus, the agenda-setting theory has depicted how powerful the media is in transferring both issue salience and issue attributes to the readers and the public (Chang et al., 2017).

The media play an important role in politics by showing the public about the political information of their country (Ahmad and Othman, 2014; Balaraman et al., 2015.) The media highlight the issues frequently to the readers and public, and to let them know, think, and feel about the issues (Chang et al., 2017; Lang and Lang, 1996).

Chang et al. (2017) opined that the news coverage by the media would affect the political voting decisions of the public during the general election. In Malaysia, the political parties are in control of the mainstream media they are used as the communication tool to transmit their very own political agenda to the readers (Anuar, 2005; Balaraman et al., 2015; Tamam and Abdullah, 2015). As such, the Malaysian mainstream media often portray positive news to their closely related political parties (Ahmad and Othman, 2014; Anuar 2000; Anuar 2005), write up bias reports to the political party coalitions, or also known as pro-government. Balaraman et al. (2015) opined that only those media that are not owned by the political parties have shown a more 'balanced' style of news reporting.

METHODS

The Selected Radio Channels

As Malaysia is a multi-language and multi-cultural country, there are different types of radio stations serving different sectors or readers. The radio stations chosen for this study are operated by a national broadcaster—Radio Television Malaysia (RTM), which were *Nasional FM* (95.3 MHz), *Ai FM* (89.3 MHz) and *Traxx FM* (100.1 MHz). *Nasional FM* is a Malay language radio station, *Ai FM* is a Chinese language radio station and *Traxx FM* is an English language radio station. According to Nielsen (2015), Malaysian radio listeners continue to increase with 95 per cent of people aged 10 years old and above in Peninsular Malaysia tuning in to their favourite radio station. Malay language stations climbed to an overall weekly reach of 56.3 per cent (10.5 million listeners) as compared to 54.9 per cent (10.2 million listeners) in the previous year (Nielsen, 2015). Nielsen revealed that English language stations in Malaysia had a weekly reach of 10.3 per cent (1.9 million listeners) as compared to the previous year which stood at 9.1 per cent (1.7 million listeners). The overall weekly reach for Chinese language stations remained stable at 21.8 per cent (4.1 million listeners) as compared to the previous year at 22.2 per cent (4.1 million listeners) (Nielsen, 2015).

Sampling and Coding Procedures

This study used a purposive sampling method, with the sample drawn from nomination day to the voting day (April 28 – May 9, 2018); a total of 12 days. The researchers recorded the news from three different time slots, which were 7 am, 1 pm and 5 pm. However, the researchers did not record 7 pm slot for *Nasional FM* and *Ai FM* but only for *Traxx FM*. The reason being that the news broadcasted on *Nasional FM* and *Ai FM*, at that time, were mainly business news, while news broadcasted on *Traxx FM* was prime news. The unit of analysis was the broadcast news (not news-in-brief which only last for five minutes), which the news was broadcasted for 10 minutes. The researchers used software and electronic gadgets to help in data collection. It is well-noted that PKR stands for Parti Keadilan Rakyat. Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (PPBM), Democratic Action Party and Amanah were not selected into the analysis due to the least number to none of the coverage by the selected broadcast radio stations at the point this study was conducted.

The intensity of coverage refers to the importance of news stories (De Vreese, et al., 2006). This study is framed to study the types of issues and valence/tone of the news broadcasted by the selected radio stations during Malaysian 14ᵗʰ general election campaigning period. Also, this study employed the inductive or emergent coding approach. The researchers used the Master Coding which contains several issues that the public was concerned about from previous election studies done by Syed Arabi Idid (Idid and Chang, 2012; Idid, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c; Idid, 2011; Idid, 1994). After that, the

researchers outlined additional coding categories to the existing coding categories in the Master Coding from the current data. The public concerned issues used in this study were: (1) Economy; (2) Education; (3) Politics; (4) Religion; (5) Social; (6) Crime; (7) Natural Disaster/Environment; (8) Foreign Affairs; (9) Unity; (10) Leadership; (11) National Security; (12) Nationalism; (13) Government Administration; (14) Sixteen categories of sources were identified in this study.

Valence/tone of the broadcast news refers to the attitude expressed towards any individual, group, party or institution by its user (Baumgartner and Wirth, 2012). This study used the categories of positive, negative, balanced and neutral for the analysis of attitude expressed towards the parties involved in the 14th general election (Budd, Throp and Donohew, 1967).

Data Analysis and Inter-Coder Reliability

The 941 broadcast news collected from the three radio stations were analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentage. To ensure the reliability of this study, two communication graduates were hired as second coders. Table 1 below shows that during the training session, the second coders coded 40 per cent for Nasional FM, 37 per cent for Ai FM and 44 per cent for Traxx FM of broadcast news that were chosen randomly using a mathematic formula (Lacy and Riffe, 1997; Riffe, Lacy and Frederick, 2005). In cases of disagreements, all disparities in data entries were resolved through discussion and reconciliation.

Table 1: *Content Units Needed for Reliability Test*

Radio station	Population Size	Sample of Content Units to be Tested	Total
Nasional FM	311	127	438
Ai Fm	367	135	502
Traxx FM	269	119	388
Total	947	381	1328

The inter-coder reliability for this study was established by randomly selecting the sample of this study as shown in Table 2. Using Holsti's formula (Holsti, 1969), it was found that the inter-coder reliability coefficient values for the three radio stations were 0.82 (*Ai FM*), 0.75 (*Traxx FM*), 0.75 (*Nasional FM*). See Table 2.

FINDINGS

Table 2: *Coverage of Items*

Radio station	Number of News
Nasional FM	311(32.8%)
Traxx FM	367(38.8%)
Ai FM	269(28.4%)
Total	947(100%)

Table 2 above shows the intensity of coverage, given a total 947 of news distribution from three examined national radio stations. *Traxx FM* contributed the greatest number of news items (39 per cent) followed by *Nasional FM* (33 per cent) and *Ai FM* (28 per cent).

Table 3 shows the news contribution according to time and radio station. As explained in the Research Method that the time slots selected for this study were 7 am, 1 pm and 5 pm for the three examined radio stations and an additional one slot 7 pm for *Traxx FM*. The result shows that *Nasional FM* contributed the most news among other radio stations (311 news items) for the major three-time slots (i.e., 7 am, 1 pm and 5 pm session respectively). As reported in the result, *National FM* reported most news at 5 pm.

Table 3: *News Contribution According to Time and Radio Station*

Radio station	Time Component				Total
	7 am	**1 pm**	**5 pm**	**7 pm**	
Nasional FM	94	107	110	-	311
Traxx FM	83	105	102	77	367
Ai FM	75	86	108	-	269
Total	252	298	320	77	947

In terms of news slant, a total of 671 news reported were neutral, contributing the highest percentage (70 per cent) among other news slants (Table 4). Two hundred and two pieces of news were pro-BN, contributing 21.3 per cent out of all news. For example, there was a piece of news which reported how BN was concerned about the public welfares by providing BR1M to those who are in need. The news reported were mainly supporting Barisan Nasional and promoting their election manifesto as in what policies and initiatives that they would implement if they won the 14th General Election. There is a disparity of the number of news reported as compared to other types of news slants. Five per cent of news was anti-PKR and only one per cent of news was balanced news. Less anti-PAS news was reported (0.2 per cent). News about anti-PKR and –PAS slants were news in which Barisan Nasional defamed the manifesto proposed by both parties. Barisan Nasional would say that the manifestos of the two opposition parties were exhaustive and unrealistic, leading the news to be classified as anti-PKR or anti-PAS. For example, there was a piece of news in which the Pakatan would take less from Malaysians by introducing tax cuts and lowering living costs, but at the same time give them more with greater financial aid and higher spending on facilities and infrastructure. Barisan Nasional slammed the manifesto as another litany of promises that the Pakatan could not fulfil eventually. This leads the news to be classified as anti-PKR or anti-PAS.

Table 4: *News Slant*

News Slant	Frequency	Percentage
Pro-BN	202	21.3
Anti-BN	6	0.6
Pro-PKR	5	0.5
Anti-PKR	46	4.9
Pro-PAS	4	0.4
Anti-PAS	2	0.2
Balanced	11	1.2
Neutral	671	70.9
Total	947	100

Traxx FM contributed the greatest number of neutral news among other radio stations. Two hundred and thirty-five news or 82.8 per cent of news was classified as neutral (Table 5). In comparison, *Ai FM* recorded more pro-BN news 35 per cent than any others. *Nasional FM* recorded 21 per cent pro-BN news, while *Traxx FM* recorded 11 per cent pro-BN news. Other than pro-BN, *Ai FM* also reported more anti-PKR news (10 per cent) compared to other radio stations.

Table 5: *Slant According to Radio Station*

Radio Station	Slant								
	Pro-BN	**Anti-BN**	**Pro-PKR**	**Anti-PKR**	**Pro-PAS**	**Anti-PAS**	**Balanced**	**Neutral**	**Total**
Nasional FM	65	0	0	3	2	0	6	235	311
	(20.9%)	(0%)	(0%)	(1%)	(0.6%)	(0%)	(1.9%)	(75.6%)	(32.8%)
Traxx FM	42	2	2	16	0	0	1	304	367
	(11.4%)	(0.5%)	(0.5%)	(4.4%)	(0%)	(0%)	(0.3%)	(82.8%)	(38.8%)
Ai FM	95	4	3	27	2	2	4	132	269
	(35.3%)	(1.5%)	(1.1%)	(10%)	(0.7%)	(0.7%)	(1.5%)	(49.1%)	(28.4%)
Total	202	6	5	46	4	2	11	671	947
	(21.3%)	(0.6%)	(0.5%)	(4.9%)	(0.4%)	(0.2%)	(1.2%)	(70.9%)	(100%)

Note: Values in parentheses indicate percentages within radio stations.

Table 6 and Table 7 showed the length of story of the news reported and news slant by *Nasional FM*, *Traxx FM* and *Ai FM*. Three hundred and thirteen news was broadcasted between 31s to 45s. Most of the pro-BN news were reported between 31s to 45s, considering more weight was given to the ruling government during the election campaigning period.

Table 6: Length of Story

Length of Story (second)	Number of News
< 15s	134
16s – 30s	303
31s – 45s	313
46s – 60s	109
61s – 90s	72
91s – 120s	14
121s – 150s	1
151s – 180s	1
Total	947

Based on our analysis, we found that speeches from the then Prime Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Najib, the then Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi and the then Minister of Transport Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai were often included in the news, and usually, their speeches could last between 16s – 45s. However, when it came to opposition news, the most the radio station would broadcast was 16s – 30s. It is very unlikely that the examined radio stations broadcasted opposition news, let alone news on anti-BN for more than 30s. See Table 7.

Table 7: *Length of Story According to News Slant*

Length of Story	News Slant				Total
	Pro-BN	**Anti-BN**	**Pro-PKR**	**Anti-PKR**	
< 15s	15	0	2	4	21
16s – 30s	62	1	1	14	78
31s – 45s	80	5	2	24	111
46s – 60s	25	0	0	4	29
61s – 90s	15	0	0	0	15
91s – 120s	5	0	0	0	5
121s – 150s	0	0	0	0	0
151s – 180s	0	0	0	0	0
Total	202	6	5	46	259

Table 8 and 9 show the source of news according to the radio station. Most sources of the news reported on the radio came from Barisan Nasional (242 broadcast news). *Traxx FM* has the greatest number of sources from BN, followed by *Ai FM* and *Nasional FM*. There were 165 pieces of news which the sources were unavailable. See Table 8.

Table 8: *Source of News*

Source	Number of News
SPR (Suruhanjaya Pilihanraya)	137
SPRM (Suruhanjaya Pencegahan Rasuah Malaysia)	3
PDRM (Polis Diraja Malaysia)	86
Jabatan Imigresen	1
Barisan Nasional (BN)	242
Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (PPBM)	1
UMNO (United Malays Nation Organisation)	22
MCA (Malaysian Chinese Association)	34
MIC (Malaysian Indian Association)	1
Gerakan	6
DAP (Democratic Action Party)	4
PKR (Parti Keadilan Rakyat)	11
Harapan	10
PAS (Parti Islam Se-Malaysia)	4
DCA (Department of Civil Aviation Malaysia)	2
Bersih	2
Not Available	165
Other	216
Total	947

Our analysis showed that although the news concentrated more on the election issues (as shown in Table 11), only 137 reported news coming from Suruhanjaya Pilihanraya (SPR) or Election Commission. Eighty-six news was from the Police (PDRM), providing the latest information on safety and security in the election, especially during the nomination and polling days. From the result, no much news (below ten pieces of news) came from Suruhanya Pencegah Rasuah Malaysia (SPRM) or Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission, Immigration Department, Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia, Malaysian Indians Congress, Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia, Parti Islam Se-Malaysia.

Table 9: *Source of News According to the Radio Station*

Source	Radio Station			Total
	Nasional FM	Traxx FM	Ai FM	
SPR	71	39	27	137
SPRM	0	2	1	3
PDRM	24	34	28	86
Jabatan Imigresen	0	0	1	1
BN	69	94	79	242
PPBM	0	1	0	1
UMNO	5	12	5	22
MCA	3	10	21	34
MIC	1	0	0	1
Gerakan	6	0	0	6
DAP	4	0	0	4
PKR	7	4	0	11
Harapan	0	0	10	10
PAS	1	0	3	4
DCA	0	0	2	2
Bersih	0	0	2	2
Not Available	46	93	26	165
Other	92	78	46	216

Note: SPR = Suruhanjaya Pilihanraya Malaysia, SPRM = Suruhanjaya Pencegarah Rasuah, PDRM = Polis Diraja Malaysia, BN = Barisan Nasional, PPBM = Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia, UMNO =

United Malays National Organisation, MCA = Malaysian Chinese Association, MIC = Malaysian Indians Congress, DAP = Democratic Action Party, PKR = Parti Keadilan Rakyat, PAS = Parti Islam Se-Malaysia, DCA = Department of Civil Aviation.

Table 10 presents the political issues that were reported during the study period. Overall, there were a total of 702 news items on the election, followed by 47 news on issues related to media. Our analysis shows that the radio stations were focusing heavily on the election, where they have reported the latest news on political campaigns, issues and updates during the polling day, election's manifesto, introducing new candidates, clarification of SPR on their duties, credibility and transparency, etc. The finding is logical. After all, it was during the election campaigning period. Surprisingly, the radio stations paid lesser attention to issues such as the economy, education, politics, leadership, national governance, country's growth and others. The result also shows less than ten news was reported on each issue on religion, social, crime, environment, national security, nationalism, traffic, health and mystery or paranormal.

Table 10: *Issues*

Issues	Number of News
Ekonomi (Economy)	29
Pendidikan (Education)	18
Politik (Politics)	43
Agama (Religion)	1
Sosial (Social)	8
Jenayah (Crime)	6
Alam Sekitar (Environment)	1
Kepimpinan (Leadership)	11
Keselamatan Negara (National Security)	3
Semangat Nasionalisme (Nationalism)	2
Pentadbiran Kerajaan (Governance)	11
Lalu Lintas (Traffic)	7
Pembangunan Negara (Nation Development)	20
Kesihatan (Health)	8
Pilihan Raya (Election)	702
Media (Media)	47
Misteri/ Paranormal (Mystery/Paranormal)	1
Lain – Lain (Others)	29
Total	947

DISCUSSION

This study was carried out to identify the political issues reported by selected radio stations during the 14th general election campaigning period. A quantitative content analysis was made on three selected national radio stations namely *Nasional FM*, *Ai FM* and *Traxx FM*. The finding showed that *Traxx FM* reported more political issues during the campaigning period as compared to the two radio stations. The news reporting patterns among the three radio stations were also consistent throughout the examination period. More news was reported in the morning and less news was reported at night. In terms of news slant, most of the news reported by the three radio channels were neutral but 10 RTM reports were still pro-Barisan Nasional (BN), which was the leading slant of the reports ahead of anti-PKR ones.

Speaking of the prominence of news reported by the radio stations, the result showed that on average, radio stations dedicated more airtime to the news which was favourable to Barisan Nasional. The result is logical, especially given support from previous research regarding the monopoly of main broadcasting stations in Malaysia which are under BN party ownership and the government whether directly or indirectly (Mohd Sani, 2014). The Ministry of Communications and Multimedia (KKKM) has direct control over the public channel, Radio and Television of Malaysia (RTM). RTM has been used by the ruling BN to spread the coalition's messages and propaganda. Annuar (2000, 2005) reported that Malaysian mainstream media focus primarily on positive stories for the benefit of the political elite. This outcome appears to be related, in part, to newsroom culture in Malaysia, where close links between political leaders, editors and publishers make it difficult for journalists to investigate political leaders. Therefore, it is not surprising that the examined stations favoured to BN news during the campaigning period. In measuring the visibility of sources on addressing political issues among the three selected radio stations, Barisan Nasional played a significant role in all three selected stations, followed by Election Commission (Suruhjaya Pilihanraya).

Looking into the salience of political issues reported by the radio channels, the result showed that all the stations gave prominence to election issues, such as new on candidates or parties, election's manifesto or campaign, party switching, etc. This finding is in line with previous findings done on social media (Tham and Zanuddin, 2014). Surprisingly, this time, media-related issues (false news, imbalance news, inaccurate information) were received the second higher-ranked of issues reported by the radio channels. All political parties and government agencies (the Police, the Ministry of Communications and Multimedia) kept reminding the public to be aware of fake news on social media. The reason being that we are living in a "post-truth era", where the development of networked media especially social media like Facebook has made it possible for constituents or supporters for a party to take in only the information that suits their position, and during the campaigning period, voters seem to value feelings over facts.

From the study, we understand that the usage of radio channels is still essential not only to disseminate information but also to be used as a tool to promote the ruling party's election manifesto, to gain supporters, to influence voters' decision, etc. The results served as supporting evidence to previous research (Netto, 2002), which suggests that the ruling coalition does have power in controlling the media, especially the traditional media such as radio, television to portray their positive image. Barisan Nasional (BN) has absolute control over mainstream media, also targeting people from rural areas where they have lower accessibility to the Internet and who rely more on television, radio and newspaper. Johnson (2001) wrote that talk radio was an essential agent for politics communications, especially for those who were left behind, and those whom their voice was left unheard. As the intensity of competition between BN and PKR increases, BN has utilised radio not only to promote their strength and injecting confidence among voters but also demoting their strongest rivalry and try to influence voters' decision.

The degree of neutrality, credibility and reliability of the news reported by all three radio stations is yet to be discovered. As there is too much contradiction to argue all the aspects as BN has absolute control over the national broadcast media. There are tendency and possibility of false news involving elements such as wrong accusation, bleaching of criminal acts, slanders are included in the news reporting. As opposition parties have no control on these media, social media have been used as the main platform for them to promote their manifesto, to alter perceptions especially among young voters, and to highlight, addressing scandals and issues from the ruling coalition. According to Chang et al., (2015) media landscape in Malaysia is changing due to the existence of social media. Therefore,

the balance and the effectiveness of the power between both traditional and online media is questionable, however many questions are being raised as for how BN is defeated after ruling the nation for more than 60 years, which is in Malaysian election history. The Internet has certainly weakened the absolute control by the ruling government as more people were to express their view and opinion more freely than the previous (Rajaratnam, 2009).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, BN-leaning reports dominated the radio stations. Of the three radio stations, Ai FM was the most pro-BN and anti-PKR stations. It also showed that the stations, on average, dedicated more airtime to news favourable to BN. Generally, during the election campaigning weeks, issues about the election were significantly highlighted by the radio stations. Other important issues such as the economy, health, national security, crime and education were not sufficiently highlighted which deemed to be also important to the people.

The research is not without its limits. As far as methodological perspective is concerned, this research examines only the media agenda reported by selected radio channels, mainly national broadcast radio stations. Because of the ownership and control by the previous government (Barisan Nasional), we were unable to access other radio channels for news. Besides, this research focuses only on how broadcast media report political issues during the campaigning period. In the future study, perhaps researcher can correlate issues reported in traditional media (print and broadcast media—radio and television) and social media (Facebook, Twitter or WhatsApp).

In-depth studies might also be required as the media landscape in Malaysia has experienced unprecedented changes after the defeat of Barisan Nasional in 14ᵗʰ General Election to understand if similar practices (such as controlling mainstream media) are held by the new government, or if there is more transparency and fair play when it comes to utilisation of media for the upcoming general election.

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