MEDIATIZATION OF POLITICS IN DEVELOPING NATION: AN ANALYSIS OF YOUTUBE POLITICAL REPORTING IN MALAYSIA

(Political Communication, Online Media, Mediatization)

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to understand mediatization of politics in the context of a developing nation by looking into content of Malaysia's Youtube local news channels, *KiniNews* and *Media Rakyat.* Three objectives of this paper are, i) to describe the media content of the two Youtube channels to understand the dominance of media logic and political logic in the content, ii) to contribute to operationalizing a measurement of mediatization that can be applied on online media, and iii) to compare the level of mediatization between the two most subscribed Youtube local political news channels, *Media Rakyat* and *KiniNews.* Quantitative content analysis was applied to study 118 video clips posted by both channels for the month of December 2014. The findings indicate a process of negotiation between political logic and media logic by both channels with balanced framing making up more than 20% of the overall dominant frame. Political logic however remains the dominant frame for both channels in comparison to media logic. The researchers are optimistic that measurement of mediatization from the traditional broadcast media can be applied on Youtube channels to ensure that the theory of mediatization remains relevant with the current media technologies development.

Keywords: Mediatization of politics, Political logic, Media logic, Media content, Youtube.

1.   INTRODUCTION

Mediatization is a key research concept that is widely used in developed nations such as United States and Germany to evaluate the impact of media on political, societal and economical processes. The term was first introduced two decades ago by Asp (1986) to illustrate the power of media on political institution. Although it is used widely, it is only in recent years that scholars begun to revive and develop this concept into a systematic research approach (Hjarvard, 2008; Stromback, 2008, Livingstone, 2009; Lundby, 2009; Hepp, 2013).

Stromback (2008) suggested that mediatization is multidimensional and process-oriented. It however can be categorized into four phases. The first phase is the phase where media constitute the most important source of information in a country. Media dominates and steer political discourses within the public sphere rather than being a mere facilitator. The second

phase is when media institution becomes more independent of political bodies and is governed by media logic rather than political logic.

Heavy dependency on the media as source of political information and increasing independence of the media soon makes political and social actors having to adapt to media logic in terms of newsworthiness, and that is the mark of the third phase. To put it simply, the third phase is when the media logic decides the content of news. The fourth phase of mediatization happens when politicians internalized media logic and are governed by it. Political actors not only adapt media logic, they adopt it and media logic becomes an in-built part of governing processes.

Media logic is defined as various media formats, production processes, and routines that shape how the media interpret and cover public affairs. The media's own formats and needs become the main guide of news reports. Political logic on the other hand refers to the process of decision making by authority and the implementation of that decision (Stromback, 2008). Meyer (2002) further defined that political logic dimensions would be problem solving through policies and processes as well as efforts to gain support for a chosen programme by politicians. The main focus of political logic is therefore social issues and solutions (Patterson, 1993).

The theory of mediatization is hotly debated that it remains an "ambitious umbrella concept that target society and culture as a whole" lacking operationalization or key measurements to it (Ampuja et.al, 2014: 112). It is often spoken as a "culture" (Hepp, 2013) and the blurred distinction between "mediatization" and "mediation" of politics makes the discussion even more complex.

Deacon and Stanyer (2014) highlighted their concerns on the causal processes and concepts design of the theory. The question has always been if mediatization would remain just a buzzword or it can be used to make sense of the digital and media-centered world we are living in. Kho Suet Nie et. al. (2014) argued that while the theory lacks conceptualization, it can be a practical fresh approach to media studies to understand the power struggle between political institution and media institution once quantifiable indicators are defined.

Many scholars therefore attempted to conceptualize and operationalize mediatization research. Schulz (2004) discussed attempts to reconstruct mediatization as an analytical concept through the relay function, semiotic function and economic function of media. Stromback (2008) distinguished mediatization into four phases as mentioned earlier. Stromback and Dimitrova (2011) further refined the measurement of the third and fourth phases by looking into media interventionism indicators. Cohen et. al. (2008) refined the fourth phase of mediatization by looking at indicators of influence of the presumed media power among Israeli politicians.

For the context of this paper, it must be elaborated that Stromback and Dimitrova (2011) underlined six indicators for the third phase of mediatization, when media content is decided by media logic. According to the scholars, the six indicators are i) the length of politician soundbites in news, ii) journalistic visibility in the news, iii) wrap-up or final words in the news by journalist, iv) length of lip flaps or imagebites (that is when journalist's voiceover

narrates or summarize what had been said with the visual of politician speaking), v) framing of politics as a strategic game and vi) journalistic style whether it is interpretive or narrative.

There were many efforts to understand and compare mediatization in the context of different countries that are perceived to be highly mediatized (Stromback & Dimitrova, 2011; Zep & Hopmann, 2013; Ciaglia, 2013). These researches are mostly done in developed countries such as United Kingdom, Germany, Italy and United States. While there are attempts of understanding mediatization in other parts of the world such as Israel (Cohen et. al., 2013), these efforts are scarce.

This is not surprising as mediatization is interrelated with the process of modernity such as globalization, individualization and urbanization (Hjarvard, 2008; Hjarvard, 2012). More mediatization studies must be done in the context of developing countries as the political system and media system are unique compared to developed countries. Mediatization is highly contextual and specific systems must be addressed to have a deeper understanding of the theory.

The study of mediatization has always been focused on traditional broadcast media especially television (Stromback & Dimitrova, 2011; Ciaglia, 2013; Zep & Hoppman, 2013). Mediatization of the online media is an area that must be addressed in order to ensure that the theory remains relevant in current times. Stromback (2008) stated that Internet's effect of mediatization of politics was minimal and acted as a supplement of the traditional media as the Internet was at its infancy. However, in recent years, the media landscape had been changing rapidly from strong dependency on traditional broadcast media to faster and convenient mobile outlets. How do Internet, and more specifically online political news impact the independence of media system from political institution? Methodologically, how do we measure mediatization in the online media seeing that it is a digital platform with such fragmented sources and logics?

This study attempts to make sense of mediatization of politics in Malaysia with the focus on Youtube political news channels. It is important as Malaysia's political happenings in recent years had been heavily linked to the role of media especially the online media. The role of the media was strongly highlighted during the general election in 2008 and 2013 (Tan & Ibrahim, 2008; Usha Rajaratnam, 2009; Mohd Sani & Zengeni, 2010). In a country where it has its own interpretation and framework of media freedom, the study of mediatization should take central importance.

2.   THE RELATIONSHIP OF POLITICAL INSTITUTION AND MEDIA INSTITUTION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

In a region as disparate as Southeast Asia, there seems to be common themes of media development that can be observed. The online media is gaining strong grounds in all countries with the exception of Laos (Wagstaff, 2012). Blogs, social networks and online news portal are the new business model. Bloggers and online political news journalists are fast gaining credibility and trustworthiness in their reports as their traditional media counterparts. Technologically, smartphones and Internet users have seen sharp increase in all countries.

Wagstaff (2012:7) observed that "Southeast Asia has been long the region most willing to embrace mobile technology".

Overall, across the region, political institutions are adapting to the strong presence of Internet. In Malaysia, Internet is a free digital platform. All political parties had been using the social media very actively and online news portal such as *Malaysiakini* and *Free Malaysia Today* are seen as model of subscription-based journalism.

In Vietnam where media are tightly regulated, Vietnam.net and Vnexpress are prominent online news portals managed by private media groups (Nguyen Anh Tuân, 2008). In 2009 alone, there were 400,000 visitors browsing these websites for information. In Indonesia, Tempo Interaktif in Indonesia remained the most accessed Internet publication. Thailand has seen a large Facebook community of 14.2 million with famous politicians such as Abhisit Vejajiva and Yingluck Shinawatra joining the bandwagon. Myanmar has exile media such as the Mizzima and Irrawaddy using the online platform to reach out to the Myanmar community (Wagstaff, 2012).

Observed closely, there had been clashes between the political institution and the online news institution. On 9th March 2007, coup-appointed Surayud government temporarily blocked Youtube access for Thai Internet users due to a mocking parody clip insulting the King. Access to Youtube was resumed in August 2007, but the incident garnered much attention locally and internationally and eventually led to the drafting of Computer Crime Act 2007. During the March 2010 Red Shirt protest in Central Bangkok, there were live tweeting of the event from citizens themselves (Paireepairit, 2012).

Myanmar with a very restrictive media system under the junta rule shut down the Internet during the 2007 uprising. Websites critical towards the government such as the exile media *Irrawaddy* were blocked. There were occasions where bloggers who reported on the government were arrested. However, blocks on more than 30,000 websites were lifted since September 2011 and in January 2012, one of the bloggers arrested was released. (Steinberg, 2013)

In Malaysia, in year 2007, Wee Meng Chee, a Malaysian undergraduate nearly lost his citizenship after parodying Malaysia's national anthem on Youtube. One of the most famous arrests of online journalists would be the arrest of Raja Petra, the owner of *Malaysia Today* in 2008. The government censorship of The Economist's reports that the Malaysian government was "overzealous" during Bersih 2.0 in 2010 caused concern and catalyst a series of reformation by the Prime Minister, Dato' Sri Najib Razak for more press freedom (Mazwin Nik Anis, 2011).

It can be derived that the online media is embraced by the region and its presence has unsettled the political institution. The clashes as well as the improvisation of media law and regulation proved that the online media is emerging as main source of political information and is becoming more independent of the political institution, fulfilling the first two phases of mediatization (Stromback, 2008).

3.   PROBLEM STATEMENT AND OBJECTIVES

This paper adopted Stromback's (2008) four phases of mediatization and Stromback and Dimitrova's (2011) measurement to understand mediatization of politics in Malaysia on two Youtube local political news channels, *KiniNews* and *Media Rakyat*. Malaysia is chosen as it is a good model of developing nation that is aiming to be a fully developed nation in 2020. The online media has often been attributed to the drastic changes of political landscapes in Malaysia since the general election in 2008 and 2013.

This paper focused only on the third phase of mediatization, which is the phase when media content is decided by media logic rather than political logic. The first objective of this paper is to describe the media content of the two Youtube channels to understand the dominance of media logic and political logic in the content. In order to achieve this objective, Stromback and Dimitrova's (2011) measurement on media logic was replicated although not fully. This brings us to the second objective.

The second objective of this paper is to contribute to operationalizing a measurement of mediatization that can be applied on online media, especially Youtube that has similar feature with television channels. Stromback and Dimitrova's (2011) six indicators to measure media logic and political logic were used to measure traditional broadcast television news. For the purpose of this study, only one of the indicators, that is the framing of politics as a strategic game is used. The rationale of only using one of the six indicators is that although Youtube channels has similar features as a television channel (in that it is news oriented and categorized by channels watched by those who subscribed to it), Youtube channels have different formats of reporting (does not necessarily has a news anchor, encourage comments and feedbacks). The researchers acknowledged that there is a weakness in only looking at one of the indicators. This paper however is only an exploratory research that is intended for further development and analysis.

The third objective of this paper is to compare the level of mediatization between the two most subscribed Youtube local political news channels, *Media Rakyat* and *KiniNews.* This objective is to provide insights if different channels might have different levels of mediatization and why it is so. It is often hard to know the organization behind Youtube channels. *Media Rakyat* joined Youtube since March of 2007 and its description in its channel is that it is a channel "to improve freedom of information in Malaysia". The name *Media Rakyat* however indicated that the channel is most likely run by people from the Opposition Coalition of *Pakatan Rakyat. KiniTV* joined Youtube since January 2007 and described itself as "an internet TV where viewers play an active role in shaping the news agenda and disseminating news items, revolutionizing the delivery of independent, accurate and timely news." The name of the channel indicated that it belongs together with the online news portal, *Malaysiakini* which claim to be independent and free of any political affiliation. However, for the purpose of this study, in the case of *KiniTV,* the researchers would only look at clips from its main playlist, *KiniNews* as *KiniTV* comprises of different segments in different languages. This study is only focused on Malay and English news clips which are languages that can be understood nationwide.

4.   METHODOLOGY

Descriptive quantitative content analysis was employed in this study on two most subscribed Malaysia political Youtube channels during the month of December 2014 namely *Media Rakyat* and *KiniNews.* At the time of writing, *KiniTV,* the main channel of *KiniNews* garnered 268,470 subscribers while *Media Rakyat* has 196,042 subscribers. For the channel of *KiniTV*, a total of 268,470 video clips were uploaded. However, the researcher is only concentrating on *KiniNews* playlist, as *KiniTV* also has other playlists in other languages such as Tamil and Chinese which is not the concentration of this study. *KiniTV* has uploaded 2302 videos on its *KiniNews* playlist while *Media Rakyat* posted 4,894 videos in total.

Each video clip uploaded during the month was counted as one unit of analysis. 18 video clips were posted by *Media Rakyat* with each video averaging about 15 minutes and total of 4.4 hours. *KiniNews* on the other hand posted 100 video clips in December with each video averaging about two minutes totaling to 3.7 hours.

The main instrument used for the content analysis was the coding book and the coding sheet. The coding book acted as a manual for coder's reference as they coded the 118 video clips. Stromback and Dimitrova's (2011) stated that in order to measure framing politics as a strategic game, there are four items tapping the framing of politics as strategic game (media logic) and in contrast, four items tapping the framing of politics as issues (political logic). The dichotomous nominal variables required the coders were to answer yes or no for each variable. The same variables were used to guide the coders qualitatively to see any emerging themes from the video clips.

4.1 Operationalization

The four items tapping the framing of politics as issues or substances are i) does the story deal extensively with substantive public policy issues, problems, and solutions? ii) Does the story provide descriptions of politicians' stance or statements about substantive policy issues? iii) Does the story deal extensively with general implications or impacts of legislation or proposed legislation for the public? And iv) Does the story deal extensively with real-world problems, situations, or processes (i.e reality) that explicitly or implicitly have policy implications?

The four items tapping the framing of politics as strategic game or horse race are i) Does the story deal extensively with politicians or parties winning or losing elections, legislative debates, governing negotiations, or winning or losing in politics generally? ii) Does the story deal extensively with politicians' or parties strategies to winning election, negotiations, or issue debates, i.e. campaign tactics, legislatives maneuvers, and the way they campaign? iii) Does the story deal with the implications or consequences of elections, governing negotiations, legislatives debates or other news events for politicians or parties, i.e., how politicians or parties might be affected by the elections, governing negotiations, legislative debates, or other events? iv) Does the story deal extensively with polls and politicians' or parties' standing in the polls?

Five coders who were undergraduate students with good understanding of English were trained and did the coding independently. 56 out of 118 of the data were randomly selected for intercoder reliability and it averaged at 0.70.

5.   FINDINGS

For the month of December 2014, *KiniNews* yielded 84.7% (N=100 video clips) of unit of analysis, while *Media Rakyat* provided 15.3% (N= 18 video clips) of the unit of analysis. However, as mentioned, the total time length of *Media Rakyat* video clips are 4.4 hours which is comparatively longer than *KiniNews* video clips at 3.7 hours.

Media Rakyat and *KiniNews* have very different formats which explained the different length of the videos posted and amount of video posted. *Media Rakyat* are more likely to post videos of *ceramahs*, forums and talks while *KiniNews* often give tidbits or highlights of news. These different formats must be taken into consideration as background to understand the data.

To investigate dominant logic used in the news, four items that indicated framing of politics as strategic game and four items indicating framing of politics as issues were computed. The results were as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: The framing of politics in Malaysia's Youtube Political News (percentages)

Dominant frame	All	*KiniNews*	*Media Rakyat*
Issue dominant (political logic)	60.2	58.0	72.2
Balance framing	26.3	28.0	16.7
Strategic game frame dominant (media logic)	13.6	14.0	11.1
N	118	100	18

The findings showed that overall; emphasis on issue in the news stories is more dominant in Malaysia's local Youtube political channels, making up 60.2% of the news stories. Framing of politics as a strategic game constitutes only 13.6% of the news stories. However, the findings prove interesting that balance framing made up 26.3% of the news stories.

Comparing the two different channels, it is apparent that *Media Rakyat* used political logic (72.2%) more than *KiniNews* (58.0%). What is interesting to note, *KiniNews* used balance framig at 28.0% which is much higher than *Media Rakyat* at 16.7%. *KiniNews* also used media logic (14.0%) more than *Media Rakyat* (11.1%).

The researchers then looked separately into presence of frames in the news rather than which frame is more dominant. The presence of frames is indicated by scores of "Yes" for each items indicating media logic or political logic. Each "yes" received score of 1 while a "no" received no score. Therefore, a full presence of media logic or political logic would have the score of 4. The mean and standard deviation of the frames are reported as Table 2.

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of frames

Logic	Channels	Mean	Std. Deviation
Issue dominant (political logic)	*KiniNews*	1.87	1.50

	Media Rakyat	2.94	1.16
	Total	2.03	1.50
Strategic game frame dominant (media logic)	*KiniNews*	.59	1.29
	Media Rakyat	1.11	1.41
	Total	.67	1.31

The findings showed that although both *KiniNews* and *Media Rakyat* used political logic, the presence of political logic was comparatively stronger for *Media Rakyat* (M = 2.94, SD = 1.16) than *KiniNews* (M = 1.87, SD = 1.50). Although media logic frame dominance was more applied by *KiniNews* as per Table 1, *Media Rakyat* appeared to have stronger presence of the frame (M = 1.11, SD = 1.41) in comparison to *KiniNews* (M = .59, SD = 1.29).

Table 3 below crosstabulated each items for media logic with the news channel. The results showed a 60.8% of overall news stories deal with public policy debates and 50% of the news described the stands of politicians with regards to these issues. Comparatively emphasis on these two items is much prominent on *Media Rakyat* (88.9% for both items) in comparison to *KiniNews* (55% and 43% respectively).

Table 3: Crosstabulation of items and news channels (political logic)

Items	*KiniNews* (%)	*Media Rakyat* (%)	Overall (%)
Does the story deal extensively with substantive public policy issues, problems, and solutions?	55	88.9	60.8
Does the story provide descriptions of politicians' stance or statements about substantive policy issues?	43	88.9	50.0
Does the story deal extensively with general implications or impacts of legislation or proposed legislation for the public?	48	66.7	50.8
Does the story deal extensively with real-world problems, situations, or processes (i.e reality) that explicitly or implicitly have policy implications?	41	50	42.4

Table 4 showed crosstabulation of political logic items with the news channels. Stories dealing with politicians winning or losing a debate or negotiation garnered the highest percentage overall (19.5%) followed by news stories on political parties or politicians' strategies in the negotiation (18.6%). Interestingly, *Media Rakyat* garnered the same percentage (33.3%) for the first three items as per Table 4.

Table 4: Crosstabulation of items and news channels (Media logic)

Items	*KiniNews* (%)	*Media Rakyat* (%)	Overall (%)
Does the story deal extensively with politicians or parties winning or losing elections, legislative	17.0	33.3	19.5

debates, governing negotiations, or winning or losing in politics generally?			
Does the story deal extensively with politicians' or parties strategies to winning election, negotiations, or issue debates, i.e. campaign tactics, legislatives maneuvers, and the way they campaign?	16.0	33.3	18.6
Does the story deal with the implications or consequences of elections, governing negotiations, legislatives debates or other news events for politicians or parties, i.e., how politicians or parties might be affected by the elections, governing negotiations, legislative debates, or other events?	15.0	33.3	17.8
Does the story deal extensively with polls and politicians' or parties' standing in the polls?	11.0	11.1	11.0

KiniNews also have a good spread between all four items ranging from 11% to 17%. It is interesting to note that items that garnered top three percentages for *Media Rakyat* is also similar for *KiniNews*. "Dealing with polls and politician or parties standing in the polls" gathered 11% for both *Media Rakyat* and *KiniNews*.

6. DISCUSSION

Drawing from the findings, few conclusions can be made. For the first objective of this paper, it can be concluded that third phase of mediatization of politics is present within the two Youtube news channels studied although political logic remains the most dominant frame. Media logic played a role in the news stories as well.

Comparison made to previous researches results yield interesting insights. Stromback and Dimitrova (2011) saw in their studies low percentages of balanced framing being used in comparison to dominant political logic or media logic. However, in the case of *Media Rakyat* and *KiniNews*, balanced framing made up 26.3% of the overall news stories. This suggests a negotiation process or a competition between political logic and media logic within the media itself.

Looking into details, the researchers also concluded that there must be a clear separation between "dominance" of frame and "presence" of frame. The findings showed that while a frame may not be the most dominant, but it is nevertheless present in the news stories. For example, *Media Rakyat* yielded mean of 1.11 ($SD = 1.41$) for the presence of media logic although media logic may only constitute 11.1% of the dominant news frame. On the other hand, although *KiniNews* have 58% of news stories where political logic was the dominant frame, the mean score for the strength of the frame was only at 1.87 ($SD = 1.50$).

For the second objective of this paper, some measurements of mediatization of the traditional broadcast media can be transferred to look into mediatization of Youtube. However, more indicators would have to be developed for Youtube. The researchers recommend looking into

details such as numbers of likes, comments and comparison of time length, which are among some unique features of Youtube. Qualitative analysis can also be done with the headlines, descriptions and discourses of the comments.

For the third objective, the findings showed similarities and differences between the two Youtube channels. Both channels used political logic as the dominant frame more than media logic and used balanced framing more than media logic per se. Both channels seem to have grasped the idea of media logic and use it. The findings indicated a sense of awareness of media format and how to use the media.

Media Rakyat is a channel that seems to be sourced directly from the opposition coalition, *Pakatan Rakyat* although the channels do not indicate the people behind the channel. Therefore the channel naturally uses political logic more than *KiniNews* that appeared to be more commercialized.

7.   SUMMARY

To conclude, more researches need to be done to look into Youtube as the potential news channels of online media in comparison to the traditional broadcast media. Youtube channels are now gaining reputation as political news archive that is more transparent and free of gatekeepers.

The different logics that are at work within the channels should be studied to give better insight and contribute to the theory of mediatization of politics on operational level. This paper has shown that political logic remains dominant even in the online media. The online media as a game changer to political scenario is something that remains to be seen.

This paper is not a conclusive study, but rather an exploratory study into mediatization of the online media. Future researches should include looking into comparison of online media and traditional media in Malaysia as well as interviews with political and media actors to gain insights into mediatization in Malaysia.

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