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Theme:

METHODOLOGY IN ELECTORAL AND MEDIA STUDIES: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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ELECTORAL STUDIES: UNDERSTANDING SOME RESEARCH PROBLEMS

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the problems researchers experience in conducting electoral research**.** One approach researchers use in conducting electoral studies is quantitative with the use of empirical data while another approach would be qualitative**.** Researchers show preference for mixed methods, incorporating both the quantitative and qualitative approaches as the research areas have become more complex. A proper method selection is required and the nature of the research problem identified. The methods used would depend on the objective of the study, the resources and the expertise available. One research area using quantitative research is Agenda Setting that used survey and content analysis. Agenda setting studies the effects of the media on public opinion to explain for political behaviour. Public opinion would require the use of survey as a form of methodology to seek what people perceive of current issues and what issues were deemed important when making voting decisions. Using scales in conducting longitudinal research would obtain a more meaningful perspective.

Keywords: agenda-setting, content analysis, democracy, electoral studies, survey, mixed-methods

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to discuss the problems researchers experienced in conducting research in political communication. Admittedly political communication is a big subject inviting scholars to provide various research methods such as surveys, content analysis, focus group methods, experimental and field methods. Generally one can group the methods into two, the quantitative and the qualitative, the former requiring some deep knowledge of statistics while the latter a deeper analysis and insight of the subject. Of late another research approach is advanced, namely the mixed methods, which incorporate elements of both quantitative and qualitative (Creswell, 2014). The mixed methods approach has become popular in the United States and Europe due to its ability to address the research problem comprehensively. Scholars have found that contemporary issues have become more complex to be examined from the quantitative and qualitative perspectives (Ivankova, 2015). The problems may appear different by other scholars in other parts of the world, but there are common grounds that Malaysians can learn from their foreign colleagues.

METHODS

Several approaches are inherent in conducting research. Research approaches are ideas, plans and procedures from the initial stage of assumptions to data collection, analysis and interpretation (Creswell, 2014). Consideration is made on the proper selection of method used and in the nature of the research problem that has been identified. The methods used would depend on the objective of the study, the resources and the expertise available.

The method is the "how to" conduct the research but the important objective in the research component is why it should be conducted initially. One need to have a clear objective to begin a research project. Once the objective is explicit then the researcher can decide on the appropriate method to conduct his research.

Scholars posit many reasons for conducting research, but there must one core purpose. A statement must be made to establish the intent of the entire research study.So studies could place statements indicating the objective, the purpose or the aim of the study so that readers know what areas of research would be covered. The general purpose of research is to gather information. It can be a research to gather information for someone, an authority, or a commercial organisation. It can be a research to provide such information for the scholar's own benefit. It is therefore clear that research can be conducted for a third party or is conducted for our own personal consumption. For example, the government is interested to know the effects of Goods and Services Tax (GST) on consumer spending and therefore asks that a research be conducted by a certain university. The researcher therefore conducts the research on behalf of the government.

On the other hand, the researcher with academic issues to be solved knows that they are only of interest to him and his academic colleagues. So he laboriously does research to answer the questions that he has given to himself to answer. A scholar who conducts a research in a particular area is self driven, propelled by an academic curiosity that he and his learned colleagues know the academic outcome.

Various forms of research exist. The first form of conducting research could be descriptive.It would provide a picture on how families spend their income, or how much time families spend time in watching television or how the young is found to be spending time with their smart phones. It could be a baseline study to gather basic information.

Many social enquiries in the form of research are conducted to explain rather than to describe. Explaining events go beyond describing the occurrence of such events by suggesting some relationships. Their function can be theoretical - to test some hypotheses or to be practical (to understand why voters reject certain issues or voters identify issues with certain parties).The overall purpose is to provide an explanation as to why there is a relationship between or among a number of variables.

Another form of research is merely to provide an understanding of events that happened in society. There could be a relationship of two variables but the relationship was provided for an understanding, not the reason for such an occurrence.

Research findings come from well thought of research designs. Fact collection is no substitute for a thought of or a well-planned research. It is has to begin with an objective in mind, a time schedule and a strategy to be executed.

Surveys have their own usefulness in formulating and testing hypotheses. Their function in a given research depends on how much is already known about the subject and the purpose for which the information is required.

Researchers face numerous problems when they conduct research. Early researchers may face problems that are far different from the problems faced by senior researchers when they are confronted with complex issues over the years.

Having conducted research over a period of years, this paper would highlight some of the problems in conducting research in Malaysia. It would highlight some of the problems in using different measurements on concepts. There is also the call for a more longitudinal research over the commonly held cross sectional studies.

BACKGROUND OF SURVEY RESEARCH

Survey research on the audience is not a recent phenomenon. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) had a Listener Research Department to collect information about the listening habits and tastes of the British audience in 1936. Not far behind is Malaysia which also had some sort of an audience survey way back in 1936. So Malaysia had joined the ranks of countries that were concerned with obtaining feedback from the radio programmes aired to the people.

In the United States, public opinion polls were well associated in market research and in audience research. Social Surveys (Gallup Poll) founded in 1936 as the British Institute of Public Opinion conducted monthly polls and made forecasts of general and public opinions. So having opinion polls of the general public is not a recent phenomenon. The difference between now and in the past is the number of marketing and public opinion companies that are engaged in conducting surveys to gauge the opinion of the British population and the frequency in the conduct of polls.

In Malaysia, the feedback for the government is obtained from several sources. The Information Department is one of the sources for supplying information to the Ministry on the reactions of the public on government announcements. Of and on, the government does conduct surveys or commission agencies and universities to conduct surveys on specific matters to gauge and to understand the feeling of the general public.

Having noted the background of research, this paper will move on to other issues. We will discuss the issue of (1) coverage; (2) the problems in conducting interviews in a multi racial society; (3) measurements; and (4) the benefits of a longitudinal research.

Research on politics and on elections is not recent. Ratnam (1965) is an early researcher who studied and analysed the first general election in 1959, followed by another study on the 1964 elections (Ratnam& Milne, 1967). The method focused on the institutions (political parties) and an analysis of their voter outcome. It was only in later years that survey methods and content analyses were made (Idid, 2011).

Coverage

Surveys differ in covering a given population. Thus one can be interested in the adults who are eligible voters or on those who use the social or on line media for commercial transactions. Identification of the survey population is important to make inference from the sample. The collection of a survey can range from a few case studies to a more greater enumeration. Hence the researcher must first settle the extent to which he wishes to generalize his findings. There are surveys in which representation is of minor concern but in other circumstances, it is of major importance.

We have conducted several research projects but the interest has always been nationwide in understanding the Malaysian voters. We were interested to know voter acceptance of parties, leadership and issues. But there were occasions when a research was confined to analysing voter perception of issues at the state level or even at the constituency level. Recently we chanced to do three studies on what voters in Sarawak perceived of the issues, their concerns and their thinking of the future of the state. So the interest was state wide rather than nationwide.

The number of respondents at the nation level would be higher than the number of respondents of studies conducted at the state level. For example our nationwide studies would invite 1,400 to 2,000 respondents coming from various constituencies throughout the country. In the study that we did in Kedah in 1999 we had more than 1,200 respondents while our recent study in Sarawak had about 1,200 respondents coming from various state constituencies. The number of respondents was affected by the terrain of the constituencies. In Sarawak, access to the rural areas were challenging, with the enumerators having to go by boat and, at times, with no access road, they had to walk for several hours to interview their respondents that were assigned to them.

The coverage has to understand the characteristics of the population, taking into consideration various characteristics like race, religion, gender and occupation. So nationwide, our studies would lay emphasis on race and religion, gender and income, but in Sarawak, the ethnic communities, religion (Muslims, Non-Muslims), income, gender and occupation had to be considered. In a study in Kelantan, the composition of race and religion may not be that critical as nearly all the voters were Malays and were Muslims.

The study using Agenda Setting as the theoretical framework necessitated two types of methods, namely survey and content analysis. Agenda setting requires studying media effects on public opinion to explain for political behaviour. Public opinion requires the use of survey as a form of methodology as researchers seek to know perception of current issues and what issues were deemed important when making voting decisions. Content analysis is to examine the issues and the prominence raised by the media. The researcher would then have to correlate the findings between the two methods to suggest media effects on public opinion.

In a majority of our studies, the public opinion was gathered from the voters generated country wide, while the content analysis was made on different types of language–based newspapers such as English language (The New Straits Times, The Star); Malay language (Utusan Malaysia and BeritaHarian); Chinese language (Sin Chew and Nanyang Siang Pau) and the Indian language newspapers (Nanban and Tamil Nesan) (see Idid & Chang, 2012; Idid, 2011; Idid, 1999). We had conducted studies using agenda setting way back in 1999 to have a general idea that media do not really have a strong effect on the audience.

In our agenda setting studies, common issues had to be tabulated and categorised to understand the common issues raised by public opinion and in the news reports. A ranked correlation is therefore made between the public issues and news reports. It has been a challenge for us to come out with common issues for the two component populations. We were able to derive common issues in the coding sheet when we code the issues raised by the public and the issues as reported by the press in the discussion held in 2012. The common issues were then made available to members when we conduct the research on agenda setting for the 2013 General Election.

The recent issue (see special articles of *Jurnal Komunikasi*, 33 (2)) carried several articles on Agenda Setting conducted during the 2013 elections (Idid, 2017; Aini Maznina et al., 2017; Chang et al., 2017; Zeti Azreen et al., 2017; and Hasmah Zanuddin et al., 2017). The findings showed agenda setting among the general population and another series analysed agenda setting for the various race components (Malays, Indians and Chinese). It suggested that agenda setting issues were raised differently among the race component groups than the general population.

Response

Response here covers response rate and the nature of response itself. The response rate has been affected by the method and the questionnaire used, and the quality of the enumerators. Training is important for the enumerators as they have to make contact with respondents from different backgrounds of race, occupation and education.

For decades, survey research has provided trusted data about political attitudes and voting behaviour, the economy, health, education, demography and many other topics. But political and media surveys are facing significant challenges as a consequence of societal and technological changes. These changes are affecting the validity of data collection.

It has become increasingly difficult to contact potential respondents and to persuade them to participate. The percentage of households in a sample that are successfully interviewed – the response rate – has fallen dramatically. At Pew Research, the response rate of a typical telephone survey was 36% in 1997 and is just 9% in 2012 (Pew Research Center, 2012). The response rate using the interpersonal survey is still at a high rate as respondents are able to see for themselves the enumerators and be convinced of the research project.Using quota sampling would be a better way to maintain a higher level of response rate than using selection through simple random sampling.

The higher response rate found among face to face surveys is in contrast to the response rates for internet surveys that have been reported to have a low response of 6 percent to 75 percent (Hewson et al., 2003). Thus different methods invite different response rates due to varying factors.

The general decline in response rates is evident across nearly all types of surveys, in the United States and abroad. At the same time, greater effort and expense are required to achieve even the diminished response rates of today. These challenges have led many to question whether surveys are still providing accurate and unbiased information. Although response rates have decreased in landline surveys, the inclusion of cell phones – necessitated by the rapid rise of households with cell phones but no landline – has further contributed to the overall decline in response rates for telephone surveys.

Overall Scenario and Training

There has been no or minimal discussion on research methodologies in Malaysia because such a discussion would open up areas for researchers to learn from one another to enable them to conduct better research in the future. What can we learn from our research experience in Malaysia? There are several aspects in conducting research in Malaysia that can be taken as lessons for others to follow or to avoid.

The first factor is in the overall scenario of research in Malaysia. Collecting data from Malaysians is not new. The colonial administrators had collected numerous kinds of data, ranging from medical habits to spending beliefs among the natives as they had expressed interest in the administration of the native land. Universities have been conducting research since the founding of Universiti Malaya in Singapore and in Malaya (Tham, 1981).

Political questions could be more sensitive than asking questions on eating or medical habits among the Malaysians. Matters though have been changing. Malaysians have become more willing to answer politically sensitive questions than before. Way back in the 1980s when we conducted our survey on party choice, people then were either reluctant or were very suspicious when asked about their voting choice. Which party would you choose? It was difficult for them to provide an answeras they would not like to disclose their choice of party claiming it should be kept a secret.

But matters have changed since 1990sdue to several factors. One factor was with the formation of new political parties such as *Semangat 46* and later with the formation of *Barisan Alternatif* where voters expressing their support for new parties precisely because these were new. It could also be because of the political maturity that was setting in the country with more Malaysians receiving education than before. Political competition was evident among the voters when the fight to gain the Malay votes became more keen.The Malay mind opened up. The younger Malays and the rural Malays realised that besides UMNO there could be another party for the Malays. Yusoff Kassim in his book termed the development to be "politik baru", but the political atmosphere had seen a change. One did not realise that political development had repercussions on the manner in which voters were willing to respond and make known their views to others even among strangers as evidence when we conducted our surveys.

The second factor in opening up the mind in Malaysia is the rise of a new crop of voters whose party identification is rather loose. The new voters are not attached to any party or to the party of their parents but chose to have an independent mind. They might not even affiliate with the party of their parents. Political theorists in America based their predication on party identification, predicting voting would be similar to the party of their parents. The Malay elders had only two parties of choice: UMNO and PAS, but the new generation is less connected to the two parties and also had other parties to choose.

Party supporters were suspicious of our enumerators. If they were PAS supporters they were suspicious that we were government agents asking for information on their following. If they were BN supporters they were suspicious that from the university, we were assumed to be working for the opposition on the assumption that students and lecturers were mainly not pro BN.

Among the Malays, those who reside in the rural areas, the uneducated Malays are more forthcoming. They are willing to answer questions. They are also patient with the enumerators perhaps time was on their side. But the time given for the interview would be more compared to the urban respondents who are always busy. The *kampong* respondents were willing to talk even though the interview was over.

The Bumiputras in Sabah and Sarawak are also willing respondents as they treated the enumerators as their guests. They were willing to give the answers as best they could. There were also occasions when they were suspicious but generally the rural voters were more forthcoming.It was also easier to interview the Indians. They were frank in giving their answers.It wasmost difficult to obtain answers from the Chinese as they are very suspicious of anybody, mainly those who do not speak their own dialect. Suspicion would be high if the enumerators were from another race, especially the male Malays. If race based suspicion is one factor it is also confounded by another fact that Malays as the enumerators were mainly regarded as government officials (perhaps from the police) to tap their political inclination.

Urban respondents from all race groups are more difficult to obtain than those from the rural areas. The main constraint was on the location. Respondents living in the gated community, in the condominiums or in the housing areas were more difficult to be interviewed. We also had difficulty in reaching them as they were also not at home, either spending time in the malls, or in

the market during the week ends. As our interviews would be conducted in the weekends, respondents, if located, were keen to complete as fast they could so that they could have the time to spend time with their family.One can also say that it was easier to obtain cooperation from an educated young than the educated elders.

One has to understand these factors as it became necessary during the training session with the enumerators everytime we begin our new project. Malaysians are sensitive so many precautions had to be told to the enumerators to abide. Interviewer-interviewee interaction is important to enable the enumerators to obtain accurate answers.

Question Wording

Words used were important to elicit answers from the respondents. Given the multiracial community, surveys have to be sure that words convey similar meanings to respondents from different race or religious backgrounds. Discussions on the different understanding or misunderstanding of words in the questionnaire need to be thoroughly discussed among academics in Malaysia.

Sometimes, it is not clear how a question should be worded. In 1987 a Gallup poll was conducted with 4,244 American adults to get their opinions about American politics. One of the questions inquired about each respondent's concern for the outcome of the 1988 election. The question was asked in two different ways, each to half the respondents. Onehalf asks on party and the other asks on the candidate. The question wordings and results are below:

Table 1: Alternate question wordings

Alternate Question Wordings	
Version 1: "Generally speaking, would you say that *you personally* care a good deal which party wins the presidential election in 1988 or that you don't care very much who wins?"	
Care a good deal	54%
Don't care very much	40%
Don't know	6%
Version 2: "Generally speaking, would you say that *you personally* care a good deal who wins the presidential election in 1988 or that you don't care very much which party wins?"	
Care a good deal	76%
Don't care very much	20%
Don't know	4%

Source: Ornstein et al. (1988)

Question wording is also important. Words and sentences have to be simple for respondents to understand. At one time we had knowledge based questions but we found them to be sensitive to the low educated. They felt that they had been humiliated when they were unable to answer questions posed by the student enumerator.

Measurements and Scales

In measurement, researchers assign numbers to object or events by obeying certain rules and procedures. Kerlinger (1973) discusses at length the problems of applying measurements in social sciences. Numerical labeling in terms of scales have been used by researchers to measure intensity. It is relatively easy to ask a respondent whether he agreed or disagrees with a statement regarding an issue as the nominal answer would answeredwith ease. But try it with a four scale or use a Likert or Likert -like scale. Or increase it to a measurement on a 1 to 100 or use the Osgood Semantic differential scales. Psychologists and statisticians would prefer a more intensive scale.

Changes in scale may invite changes in the answer given by the respondents. An example is given when we used to measure voter agreement with the 1Malaysia concept. The concept 1Malaysia introduced way back in 2009 was a very strong appeal with many Malaysians welcoming it as a slogan to unite the community toward nation building. Eventually through an overuse by many quarters, the concept lost its appeal. When we measured the strength of the appeal at the early stage, we used a four point scale 1. Disagree very much; 2. Disagree; 3. Agree; and 4. Agree very much.
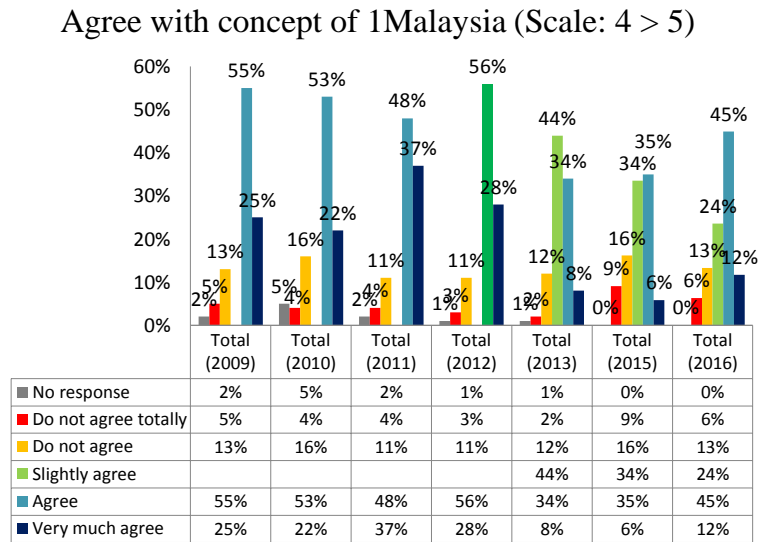
Agree with concept of 1Malaysia (Scale: 4 > 5)

	Total (2009)	Total (2010)	Total (2011)	Total (2012)	Total (2013)	Total (2015)	Total (2016)
No response	2%	5%	2%	1%	1%	0%	0%
Do not agree totally	5%	4%	4%	3%	2%	9%	6%
Do not agree	13%	16%	11%	11%	12%	16%	13%
Slightly agree					44%	34%	24%
Agree	55%	53%	48%	56%	34%	35%	45%
Very much agree	25%	22%	37%	28%	8%	6%	12%

Figure 1: Agree with concept of 1Malaysia

From 2009 to 2012 we used a four point scale, ranging from "Do not agree totally" "Do not agree ", "Agree" and "Very much agree". If you add the score of those who agree and strongly agree, it is 80 percent in 2009, 75 percent in 2010, 85 percent in 2011 and 84 percent in 2012.

In 2013 to 2016 the scale adopted was five with the addition of "Slightly agree" introduced after "Do not agree". The percentages for "Agree" and "Agree very much" fell to 42 percent in 2013, 41 percent in 2015 and 57 percent in 2016. The response to "Slightly agree" had taken away some 44 percent in 2013, 34 percent in 2015 and 24 percent in 2016.

Adding an additional scale is at times needed but one must be cautious in the introduction. If we had used a nominal measurement 1: Yes and 2: Disagree, then we would be inclined to believe that voters would be swayed to say 1: Yes than 2: No.

Longitudinal Studies

Most of the studies are cross sectional. We would suggest longitudinal studies, preferably panel studies. We were fortunate to obtain funding that gave us some lee way to conduct longitudinal studies. A case in point was the studies we conducted to measure voters' acceptance of 1Malaysia (and also the concept of Vision 2020) over a long period of time from 2009 till 2017. The answers gave us a good understanding of the changes to the acceptance of 1Malaysia (and Vision 2020).

Longitudinal studies enable us to understand the changes, but the disadvantage is that we could not tell who had changed unless panel members had been used. This was rectified with the analysis made of subgroups. If subgroups changed one can suggest the changes best occurred at certain sub groups.

Take the study we made on people's satisfaction with the democratic system of government in Malaysia over a period of time, which is from 2006 to 2012. We were able to ask voters what they thought of the democratic system in that they were; 1. Strongly dissatisfied; 2. Dissatisfied; 3. Can be improved; 4. Satisfied; or 5.Strongly satisfied.
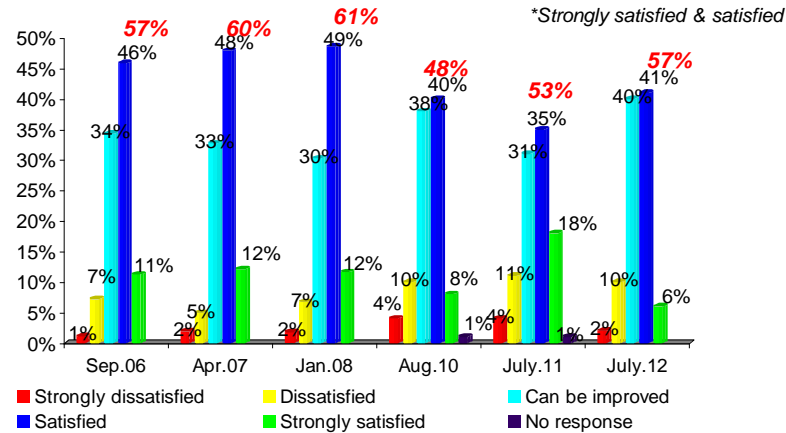
Figure 2: Satisfaction with the democratic system in Malaysia

The answers suggested that from 2006 to 2008, Malaysian voters were satisfied with the democratic system in Malaysia, but this slowly fell to 48 percent in 2010 and 53 percent in 2011 but rose again to 57 percent in 2012 (similar to the percentage in 2006). But it can be noted that the answer to "Strongly satisfied" fell from 11 percent in 2006 to 6 percent in 2012.

Mixed Methods to Be Considered

A new thinking now is to combine empirical research with qualitative research called mixed methods. I was moved with the idea of having focus groups way back in 2008 when we did a study on "Belia Tidak Berpersatuan" (*Youths Not belonging to Any Society*). We conducted several focus groups among the young and had these findings with the survey that we did among the respondents. We found that the mixed method provided a better perspective than just the quantitative survey.

When do you use qualitative and quantitative research? We combined both the methods as we more or less did the two at around the same time.

One has to understand the context of the research project. In exploratory project, we would recommend the qualitative research be conducted here to extract the relevant concepts and provide some ideas on measurement for the survey questionnaire. Even then we need to conduct a pilot study before the actual study is conducted. When we conducted the study on the public servants we had the focus groups to give us ideas for inclusion in the questionnaire.So by the time we constructed the questionnaire we had good understanding of the thinking and feeling of the public servants toward the numerous issues they faced.

CONCLUSION

Empirical study has its role, but it is not the only method. Although empirical survey is popular in Malaysia, there are some developments that one must take into consideration. The scenario has changed in the country to enable political surveys to be conducted among the voters, but one must be cautious that the various communities still harbour prejudices against enumerators whom they suspect to be playing different roles rather than the role of an enumerator. Some respondents regard the enumerators as government officials out to know their party choice. Some toldus that they fear the enumerators to be sales people out to get them to make a purchase.

Question wording, and measurements need to be well taken care of when surveys are being conducted. Different measurements may provide different answers in different categories compared to the answers previously.

A case is made that researchers should conduct longitudinal research to understand the changes that are happening in our society. Panel studies are recommended to understand the dynamics of change happening, giving an idea who had changed over the period of time. In the absence of panel studies, an analysis of subgroups would indicate the changes that had happened in society.

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CONTENT ANALYSIS OF ONLINE NEWS PORTAL: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

Content analysis is a well-established research technique that has been used to examine myriad type of texts including political messages. In the field of media research, it is a popular method to examine media contents systematically. At present, researchers continue to apply the established content analysis technique that was originally designed for traditional media on Web-based media and social media. However, the application of an established content analysis in the digital environment was claimed to be problematic by many scholars in view of the liquidity of online content. The paper is based on an empirical work conducted during the general election campaign period in 2013 that examined type of political news reported in a news portal; Malaysiakini. We argued that analysing online news using content analysis requires a different procedure especially in terms of capturing the ever changing content of the news portal. The paper also highlighted issues and challenges of adopting established content analysis technique on online news.

Keywords: content analysis, Malaysiakini, method, liquidity, online news, political news

INTRODUCTION

Three years ago, we have attempted to examine political news content of a popular news portal during the general election campaign 2013. Our concerned was primarily on how to keep track of online news manually? All these while, we have applied content analysis on traditional newspapers in which the content is fixed. On the other hand, online news subject to constant revision, deletion and content's update. Our main question was how to deal with a continuous flow of information from a news portal? Will the same protocol used for traditional newspaper apply to the news portal? This study is primarily guided with an overarching question; what would be the procedure to examine online news particularly in capturing the news, archiving, coding and analysis? This paper described the experience of conducting content analysis on online news portal. It also addressed the challenges that transpired during the research process.

The growth of the Internet and the advancement of Web 2.0 technology have transformed how people socialize, communicate and seek information. This phenomenon includes how people access to news. In 2015 there were approximately 24.1 million Internet users in the country (Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission, 2016). In a similar year, the Department of Statistics revealed that the percentage of Internet usage among Malaysians aged 15 and above has increased to 71 percent from 57 percent in 2013. Among popular activities on

the Net were participating in social networks (84.3 percent), getting information about goods and services (79.6 percent), playing and downloading games (76.1 percent), emails (68.4 percent) and reading and downloading newspapers, magazines and books (61.1 percent) (Department of Statistics, 29 July 2016). The Internet has primarily affects the journalism practices, news distribution, news consumption and how news diffused in the social system. Freeman (2013) found that most Malaysian particularly young adults choose the Internet as their main source of news as compared to other media. In recent years, most mainstream newspapers in Malaysia have introduced digital version of their respective dailies in order to meet audience current lifestyle and reading habit. This transformation is vital for news organizations' long term survival.

In the area of research, researchers have shifted their focus to online content and this includes Web sites, online gaming, social media and online news. Content analysis is a popular methodology used to study a wide range of media text. Unlike traditional media, digital media appear in different format, frequency and speed. Besides, online media owned unique features such as audio, visual, images, hypertext, hyperlinks and interactive system that are part of the media text. In view of this distinctive attributes, the application of an established content analysis in the digital environment was claimed to be problematic by many scholars (see McMillan 2000; Kuljis and Kim 2010; Karlsson 2012; Sjovaag and Karlsson, 2016). Drawing from this premise, we argued that analysing online news using content analysis requires a different procedure especially in terms of capturing the ever changing content on the news portal. This study illustrates the process of examining political content on online news portal namely Malaysiakini during the GE13. It also highlighted issues and challenges that transpired during the study.

This article comprises of three major parts. The first part presents literature reviews that explained about newspaper and freedom of the press in Malaysia. The literature also provides information on the development of online newspaper in the country and Malaysiakini's background. It later elaborates on content analysis of online news. The second part of the paper covers on methodology adopted prior to discussion and conclusion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Newspaper and Freedom of the Press in Malaysia

A survey conducted by Freedom House (2003) rated Malaysian media as not free (Mohd Azizuddin, 2005). The ruling government; the National Front or Barisan Nasional (BN) that reigns in power since independence has maintained a close relationship with the mainstream press either through ownership or close association. This is evident when Media Prima an investment company of the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) (a major key component of BN) owned three mainstream newspapers; Harian Metro, Berita Harian and The New Straits (Reuters Institute, 2017). In addition, The Star is largely owned by Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) another political component of BN. This symbiotic relationship enabled BN to use the press exclusively for their political advantage. Mohd Azizuddin (2005) in his study affirmed that Malaysian government controlled over the press is mainly to maintain national security and political survivability. It has been observed that pro-government news was made more explicit during general election campaign period to influence voters. A study on news

coverage during the 2004 general election showed news items that were positive toward BN dominated the mainstream dailies (Mustafa K. Anuar 2005). Furthermore, a content analysis of the Star newspaper showed BN acquired more than 80 percent in terms of news coverage during the general election period in 2008 (Mun & Li 2011). In this context, the press performed a major role in helping to sustain political hegemony of the ruling party.

At this juncture, it is worth to note that controlling the press may no longer be an added value to strengthen a political party but invites more resistance among publics who keen to seek alternative views. Literature affirmed that a strong government's controlled over the mainstream media tend to be a primary factor for the arrival of alternative press including an online news portal in the country. The growth of the Internet has offered wide opportunity for opposition parties to have their own media online. It has been observed that alternative media such as HarakahDaily (previously known as Harakah) and Malaysiakini were gaining popularity during the general election campaign in 2013 as they were viewed as providing more space to the non-ruling elites and presenting issues that were not published in the mainstream media. In other words, alternative press has existed in response to imbalance coverage given by the mainstream media. The symbiotic relationship between the mainstream press and the state has given the ruling government an upper hand to control the content of the press. The mainstream media provide extensive pro-BN news coverage particularly during election campaign period that was unlikely received by the oppositions. Subsequently, the voice of the opposition parties has been marginalised. This imbalanced reporting has weakened the press freedom thus deprived Malaysians from making informed choices in casting their votes (Mustafa K. Anuar 2005). This study argues that online newspaper served as a medium used by the non-elitists to report news from their perspectives that are often suppressed or taken for granted by the mainstream media.

The Development of Online Newspaper in Malaysia

Reuter's Report 2017 revealed that online news portal including the social media have become Malaysians' choice for news. The reported stated that 86 percent of Malaysian used online sources for news (Reuter's Institute, 2017). In view of this encouraging trend the Media Guide 2016 has started to incorporate digital newspaper's circulation in their report. The history of online newspaper in Malaysia started in the early 90s. The NSTP Online was opened for subscription in 1993 and later launched its interactive news services in 1997 (NSTP, 2013). Furthermore, the Utusan Malaysia Online was officially launched in full text and visual in the same year. Chung, Kim & Kim (2010) recognized three types of online newspapers that include the (i) mainstream that offers a second distribution of the printed version such as Utusan Online, Star Online and, (ii) the independent online newspaper that is available on a media outlet's online site only (e.g. Malaysiakini). Finally, (iii) the index online newspaper generally refers to online search engines or portal internet news services that provide a collection of the news content from other newspapers.

Malaysiakini.com is the first independent online newspaper that makes its marked in 1999 to provide balance coverage by revealing information that often remains undisclosed in the mainstream press. Zaharom (2017) in his report affirmed that the declined credibility of mainstream media has made news portal become a medium as choice besides the growing

Internet penetration (cited in Reuters Institute, 2017). Similarly, a study conducted in South Korea showed that independent web-based newspapers were considered more credible for political information than traditional media (Kim & Johnson 2009). Idid (2014) explained that press credibility is achieved when the public perceived the reporting as objective, balance and truthful. However, this study exclude credibility dimension of Malaysiakini as it was only interested to examine what frequently reported in the medium.

Malaysiakini Background

It is well accepted that the mainstream media including the newspapers in Malaysia remained as the government mouth-piece that primarily published pro-BN news. The inception of Malaysiakini, an independent online press was dubbed timely as Malaysians were looking for an independent medium that has increased popularity in covering political news in Malaysia over the years. This section provides some background of Malaysiakini.

Malaysiakini; an independent political news portal was a brainchild of Seven Gan and Premesh Chandran both were former journalists of the *Sun* newspaper (Steele 2009). Malaysiakini reached 100,000 visitors a day only after eight month of its establishment and rated as the country most popular website during the 2008 election period (MDIF, 2013). The news site received more than 4.3 million unique visitors on the election night 2013 (Kuppusamy, 17 October 2013). The underlying motive of Malaysiakini was to bring independent and balance reporting to Malaysians. In this context, independence in reporting signifies being critical to ruling coalition and opposition parties, providing documentary evidence and offering voice to the voiceless (Steele 2009, p. 94). In a similar account, Steele (2009) argued that the values of independent journalism practised by Malaysiakini appear as a threat to government authorities. The establishment of Malaysiakini has challenged the media hegemony in Malaysia (Lumsden, 2013). The online newspaper was awarded the International Press Freedom award by the New York based committees to Protect Journalists (see Pang 2006). Malaysiakini sustains its operation by selling advertisement space and subscription fees. According to Pang (2006) Malaysiakini journalists experienced constraints in getting access to government officials as it was labelled as the opposition media. In this context, the journalists used old contacts and friends from the mainstream media as most of them were working with mainstream news organizations to obtain news (Pang 2009; Steele 2009).

The online news portal also gives voice to the voiceless by giving space to opposition members and whistle blowers to express their views. The high number of readerships achieved by Malaysiakini particularly in the last two general elections makes it one of the most influential political news website that worth to be examined. A strong reliance on independent web-based news sites was also evident in South Korea during its 2004 general election (Kim & Johnson 2009). This paper aims to explore major political issues covered by Malaysiakini and how these issues were being covered during the 13th general election in Malaysia. Besides, the study also

examines to what extent online news coverage influenced voters' behaviour based on the GE13 result.

Content Analysis of Online News

Content analysis is a classic and widely used research technique to examine myriad of texts including political messages (Bennoit, 2012). Among early scholars who had introduced and refined content analysis as a systematic method to study mass media content was Harold Laswell (1927) in his analysis of propaganda in 1920s (Macnamara, 2005). At the outset, content analysis technique was mainly used for quantitative research. Early scholars of content analysis had emphasized on the objectivity of the analysis (see Berelson 1952, Holsti 1969, Roffe, Lacy and Fico, 2005). In his book, Berelson (1952) defined content analysis as, 'a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication (p.18). Likewise, advocates of qualitative content analysis also emerged almost at the same time (see Kracauer 1952 in Schreier, 2012, p.13) and offer multiple interpretations from media texts. This paper concurred with Kripendoff (2003) as he affirmed that content analysis is not confined to quantitative approach but is largely useful for qualitative analysis. In addition, we also argued that media texts are to be analysed and interpreted within a specific context. In his second edition, Krippendorff (2003) refined his definition as follows, content analysis is a 'research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (*or other meaningful matter*) to the context of the use' (p. 18).

In the past, content analysis was primarily used to study texts from traditional media such as newspapers, television and radio programs, interview transcripts, and official documents. At present researchers continue to analyse texts obtained from the new media that include the World Wide Web, digital version of mainstream newspapers, blogs, Facebook, Youtube and many more. In recent years, there has been an increase of newspaper available online or in a digital version. This also include independent news portal that has been established to serve a specific journalistic purpose. It is worth to note that online news endow with different features thus applying the established content analysis technique to measure these news should be adopted with certain adjustment. Unlike analogue media, online text is depicted as fluid and short-lived (Karlsson 2012). He then emphasized on the liquidity of news and defined it as,

> 'Liquid news can therefore be defined as an erratic, continuous, participatory, multimodal and interconnected process that is producing content according to journalistic principles. This involves liquid news stories being published in different drafts, created in cooperation with users, told in multiple modalities, having hyperlinks to different sources, documents and organizations and essentially consisting of ever changing and unruly processes that, in theory, never find a truly finite form' (2012, p. 388)

Scholars affirmed that applying established content analysis to Web-based content imposed several challenges (Kuljis & Kim, 2010; McMillan 2000) that should not be taken for granted. In his later article, Karlsson and his associates argued that the established content analysis is designed for analogue media thus may not be a suitable tool to measure a new form of medium (Karlsson and Sjovaag, 2016).

The following section presents the steps in examining political related news from an online news portal, Malaysikini during the GE13. Following McMillan (2000) the methodology section addressed five primary steps of conducting data analysis for the Web-based content.

METHODOLOGY

(i) Research questions

Unlike the print version, online news portal is updated frequently and has unique components such as hyperlinks, audio, video. McMillan (2000) argued that each individual may interact differently towards a content of a web site thus affects the research question. However, this study only intended to primarily examine news content that exclude images, audio, video, animation and hyperlinks. The following research questions have been formulated to guide the research:

a) What kind of political issues being reported in Malaysiakini?
b) What news slant has been adopted towards Barisan Nasional (BN), opposition and NGOs?
c) What source of information frequently used by Malaysiakini?
d) Which individuals/organizations often quoted in news article

(ii) Sampling

The study adopted a purposive sampling that examined political news within a specific time frame from an online news portal; Malaysiakini. This newspaper was selected in view of its establishment as the oldest and a well sought after online news portal that has now reached over 2.5 million readers monthly (About Malaysiakini, n.d). Previously, the news site was rated as the most popular website in the country in the 2008 general election (Malaysiakini, 8 July 2008). The study was carried out from the first day of official campaign period (April 20th 2013) until a day after election (6th May 2013) where 872 political related news was drawn.

(iii)Categories

Content analysis requires a set of categories that coders will use to assign numeric values media texts. This study adopted a set of categories from previous research conducted by a group of researchers from the National University of Malaysia (UKM) headed by Profesor Syed Arabi Idid. In other words, the categories were obtained deductively. There were eighteen main categories adopted that include economy, politics, leadership, national security, religion, national unity and election. There were sub-categories under each main category.

(iv) Coders' training and codebook

Four coders were appointed to examine political news from Malaysiakini's portal for 16 days. Coders were given a codebook prior to data collection and coding exercise. Codebook entails a clear instruction and guidelines that were useful for coders. The codebook specifies components, key concepts in news items that ought to be analysed and how to code them. According to Benoit (2011) the main function of codebook is to specify the procedures that will allow researchers to accomplish the purpose of conducting the study. Training the coders and checking the reliability of their coding skills is essential. Krippendorff proposed at least to use two coders to determine the reliability of the coding scheme (cited in McMillan, 2000, p. 88). In this study, two coders were assigned to code Bahasa news and another two to code English news. All coders were first briefed face-to-face about the nature of the research, the research objective and research question. Next, we explained to them about the importance of the coding exercise. They went through practical exercise by examining news from Malaysiakini (for both English and Bahasa versions) few days before the election campaign period.

(v) Data analysis and interpretation

The study found 45 percent political news reported in Bahasa and 55 percent was reported in English. In terms of news sources, Malaysiakini relied on other news agency and mainstream newspaper such as BERNAMA, Reuters, Malay Mail and others just like other mainstream media. Issues related to election and politics secured high rating due to 'timeliness' – the study was conducted during the general election campaign period. Election issues mainly include political party manifesto and credibility of political party and candidates. It is common to use manifesto as a tool to influence votes. Therefore the role of media in promoting manifestos should not be underestimated (as media do have a role to promote political parties manifestos directly or indirectly). Besides, credibility of party and candidates were dominantly covered. Candidate here refers to who is the candidate/personality rather than a political party to represent the constituency. The data revealed that more than 50 percent of political news in Malaysiakini was balanced toward the government. News that balanced towards opposition and pro opposition only scored 3 percent and 15 percent respectively. However, despite a balanced coverage towards the government the numbers did not translate in the result of the recent GE. As we all aware BN still failed to win $2/3^{rd}$ of the majority.

DISCUSSION

Unlike traditional newspaper, online news production did not follow a normal working routine. Space and time appeared as a real challenge to coders as news constantly changed, added, deleted at any time. During the election campaign period, news was published as early as 1.00 am in the morning. In order not to miss out any news, coders have monitored the news portal at three regular intervals; morning, afternoon and late evening. At the same time, news related to political issues range from 15 to more than 30 news within 24 hours. Karlsson (2012) asserts that online news is not a product but a process that has no specific beginning or ending. This unique element of 'liquid news' imposed challenge particularly when a research technique that was originally designed to measure traditional media content was used on new media. He stated this challenge as follows,

'The principle problem is that liquid news changes erratically and therefore poses a challenge to traditional content analysis, which treat content as definite' (Karlsson, 2012, p.391-392)

Karlsson and Sjovaag (2016) caution that online news are not 'frozen entities' thus demand real time observation from the analyst. In order to overcome the issue of rapid changes of online news, coders have copied-and-saved the all political related news item in Words file. Beside the news, actual time published and dates were also recorded. In order to facilitate the coding process, all identified news was printed out and compiled according to their respective dates and time. Later, all news was examined and coded using the coding sheet provided. Likewise, McMillan (2000) suggested coders to evaluate sites that have been downloaded as an alternative to ensure coders are coding identical data at the same time. In this case coding online news appeared to be no different from coding the traditional news. The same technique adopted by Kuljis & Kim (2010) when they downloaded profile page of selected blogs posted by users from South Korea and United Kingdom. These downloaded blogs' content are 'frozen in time' to preserve the content from any changes and facilitate coding process (McMillan 2000;Kuljis & Kim 2010). At present, there is no standard protocol on how to archive online news. However, the process of capturing the news in a timely manner, archiving news item for coding was rather tedious. This study concurred with Karlsson (2012) that content analysis of news on online platform is a demanding tasks as analyst need to capture real time news and alert with constant flow of information that appear at any time of the day.

CONCLUSION

Krippendoff (2004) affirmed that methodology is all about the research process. He argued that content analysts should strive to explicate the process and describe how they derived at certain judgments so that others can replicate results. Therefore, it is essential for researcher to follow systematic steps and procedures to achieve this purpose. However, applying an established content analysis on online media is indeed a demanding task and posed a unique challenge. Scholars affirmed that in view of online news liquidity 'it needs to be studied on its own evasive terms rather than on those of print-biased journalistic research' (Deuze, 2008b; Mitchelstein and Boczkowski, 2009; Shoemaker and Vos 2009 cited in Karlsson, 2012, p. 398).

This research has adopted a standard approach of conducting a content analysis. It has been guided with a clear research questions that primarily aim to explore type of political news reported and their slant towards the ruling government and opposition parties. In this research sampling was rather straightforward as we focused on specific time frame to collect data. The unit of analysis was any political related news that was reported within the period of the general election campaign. An independent news portal has been identified for this purpose. Categories were obtained deductively from previous research. The study also took into account on the coding protocols; preparation of the coding booklet, training of coders, coding sheet prior to the coding exercise. Unlike traditional print media, online news content is not fixed. The process of monitoring and identifying news is laborious. In this context, coders were expected to keep track of emerging news within 24 hours and to archive identified news both in soft-copy and hard-copy

prior to coding exercise. Skalski, Neuendorf and Cajigas (2017) in their recent work have identified several ways used by researchers to archive Web based content including online news. However, till now neither standard protocol nor clear guideline to archive news in the digital environment has been deliberated. Based on empirical work conducted on political news coverage in Malaysiakini, we found data collection and coding appear to be a real challenge in the research process. The role of content analyst was indeed instrumental as they need to closely monitor news emerging from the sites and make the right selection. This paper concurs with Karlsson and Sjovaag (2016) when they proposed that 'liquid content analyst' (p.187) should consider themselves as part of research tool akin to qualitative approach.

The characteristics of online media are constantly changing. More features are added to improve their function and usability. Online media offer more text (beyond written texts) to be analysed and thus adjustment to an established content analysis protocol is necessary. This paper urged for far-sighted and creative researchers to improve the existing methodology that suits the ever changing feature of online media.

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MIXED METHOD IN POLITICAL COMMUNICATION RESEARCH: THE STUDY OF MEDIA USAGE AND VOTING BEHAVIOUR AS A CASE ANALYSIS

Aini Maznina A. Manaf & Tengku Siti Aisha Tengku Mohd Azzman

ABSTRACT

The study of political communication has expanded in recent decades, concurrent with the emphasis on examining the state of the field, but neglecting the examination on the research methodology employed in the field. While previous work in this area has mainly utilised a particular single methodology of either a quantitative or a qualitative approach, this paper discusses the application of mixed methods in political communication, by reviewing an example from the authors' empirical study conducted on media usage and voting behaviour among youth in Malaysia. This paper discusses the advantages of using the mixed methods approach in political communication research, processes as well as challenges related to mixed method in relation to media and voting behaviour study. Implications of mixed method in political communication research are also discussed.

Key words: interview, media usage, mixed method, political communication, survey

INTRODUCTION

Political communication research has sparked attention among scholars and is widely covered in literature. However, previous works by scholars provide little focus on the research methodology employed in political communication. The discussion in the existing literature concentrates mainly on either building or testing new theories, neglecting methodologically oriented approach.

Since 1970s, research of political communication is dominated mainly by one particular research methodology (Karpf, Kreiss, Nielsen & Powers, 2015). Generally, quantitative researchers mainly employed contents analysis and survey in their studies. On the other hand, qualitative researchers prefer to use in-depth interviews or focus group interviews in their attempts to study about media and political behaviour. The utilisation of a single of either qualitative or quantitative methodology, which obviously has its own weaknesses, limits our understanding of a holistic political communication phenomenon. Apparently, mixed methods in political communication research covers the disadvantages offered in single method. In this paper, we will highlight the promise of field research—in combination with quantitative ones— by highlighting the crucial role it plays as an integral part of empirical work and theory-building in an older tradition of political communication research, which will expand our knowledge on political communication methodology.

In recent years, the explosion of new media besides the existing traditional media has changed the landscape of politics in Malaysia. Apparently, past studies highlighted that the results of general elections in the country since 2008 demonstrates the powerful influence of media in people's decisions regarding voting. Election results were not much determined solely by social media, but it was political issues related to the high cost of living, government corruption, regardless of race or ethnicity, that are more important than the medium itself (Gomez, 2013). This paper discusses the application of mixed methods in political communication research with special reference to the study of media and political behaviour conducted by the authors and team in 2015.

POLITICAL COMMUNICATION STUDIES AND THE MIXED METHODS APPROACH

Only a handful of studies on political communication have utilized the mixed methodology approach. This may be due to the fact that mixed method approach is imposing in terms of challenges, as well time- consuming and demanding in terms of time and resources (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). One such study that utilized the mixed methods approach is a study by Marland and Giasson (2013). A main objective of their research was to examine political marketing campaign in Canada. The quantitative data on political marketing spending activity was validated through the use of semi-structured interviews with practitioners who held senior campaign positions in major political parties. Some of the major advantages in using mixed method mentioned by the researchers were they were able to balance, and substantiate data obtained from interviews (which may have been biased or less reliable) with more objective quantitative data, such as the campaign spending data, and vice versa. This is supported by other scholars, who have argued that using mixed method is advantageous and offers insight into richer data, as the advantages of each method will compensate the weakness of the other method so they provide a more comprehensive and complete set of data (McMillan, 2004).

Another study by Parmelee, Perkins and Sayre (2007) also used the mixed method approach; their research used the sequential transformative mixed methodology approach in examining the perceptions of college students on political advertisements. A focus group

discussion was held to examine college students' interpretation of the value of political advertising, while the quantitative approach utilized a content analysis of more than 100 advertisements in the 2004 US presidential election.

Finally, a more recent study by Lee (2016) examined Twitter use and citizen's political information behaviour in Korea during the 2014 Seoul mayoral election, from the theory of information world's perspective. The qualitative approach utilized the in-depth interview technique using thee different modes (i.e. face-to-face interviews, e-mails and voice over Internet protocols) with 13 opinion leaders on Twitter were interviewed about their perceived social norms, and perception on the value of information that led to certain information sharing behaviours. The quantitative technique adopted the content analysis method, using the social network analysis by examining Tweets exchanged during the election period, to examine what information they shared and exchanged, and what types of collaborative information sharing behaviour they engaged in. A major rationale for choosing the mixed approach in this study is due to the complex nature of big data available on social media such as Twitter. Further, although social network analysis is useful for understanding Twitter users' position and relationship with other users' in terms of information behaviour, using SNA solely to interpret political information behaviour was not comprehensive, as SNA could not uncover, in greater detail, users' intentions, perceptions, and evaluations of the political information behaviour they employed in their interaction with others.

Taken together, these studies appear to demonstrate the usefulness of using mixed method in studying perceptions and attitude towards politics, as well as political behaviour. The mixed method approach seem to provide a more comprehensive picture of the data involved in studying political communication, and each method can be used to substantiate or offset the weaknesses of the other. However, because it is time consuming, and arduous in terms of time and resources, not many research in political communication choose to adopt the mixed methods approach.

A LOOK INTO THE STUDY OF MEDIA USAGE AND VOTING BEHAVIOUR USING MIXED METHODS

In 2015, the authors and several other researchers conducted a study on political communication in Malaysia. The study investigated media usage and voting behaviour among youths in Malaysia. The researchers conducted the study to explore how youths in Malaysia used traditional and new media; and to what extent that their exposure to media influences their perception about political parties, political leaders and their voting decision. A mixed method approach, combining both the qualitative and qualitative methodologies was employed in this research.

The combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies in this study allows for a comprehensive understanding of how youths used media and the extent to which media influences their voting behaviour, as the two methodologies were "integrative and reciprocal" (Keyton, 2000, p. 394). The use of mixed methods "can neutralize or cancel some disadvantages of certain methods" (De Vaus, 2005, p. 252). The obvious advantage of using qualitative research is that it can be effectively used to study "subtle nuances in attitudes and behaviours" (Babbie,

2008, p. 312); while the disadvantage of this method is that, unlike the findings obtained by a quantitative method, the findings obtained from a qualitative method cannot be confidently generalised to a larger population (Babbie, 2008). Thus, a combination of these two methodologies increases the validity of the findings.

In addition, the utilisation of mixed methods was necessary due to the exploratory and descriptive nature of this study. Among the common forms of mixed-method designs used by researchers are parallel, sequential exploratory and sequential explanatory mixed-method designs (Hesse-Biber, 2010). The utilisation of a particular different mixed-method design is usually determined by the purpose of a study. Parallel mixed-method design is commonly used when both qualitative and quantitative methodologies are given an equal emphasis in a study. Sequential mixed-method design is used when either qualitative methodology or quantitative methodology is given more emphasis than the other. This study was aimed at understanding media usage patterns among youth and their voting behaviours. As such, the sequential exploratory mixed-method design was utilised. In general, this study relies heavily on the survey findings while focus group discussion was used to develop the survey questionnaire. A summary of this design is illustrated in the following figure (Figure 1).
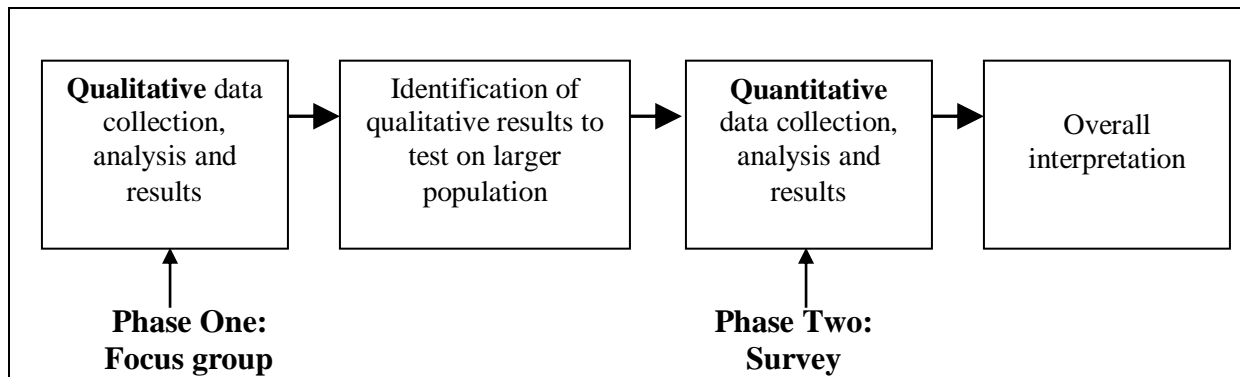

Figure 1: Sequential explanatory mixed-method design (Adapted from Hesse-Biber, 2010, p. 459)

The qualitative method (i.e. focus group discussions) was employed in the study to gain "in-depth information and insider perspectives" (Oetzel, 2002, p. 133) in an attempt to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of media usage among youths, their perceptions and attitudes towards politics ranging from national issues, political leaders, political parties as well their voting behaviour. The results of the focus group were then tested on a larger sample through a survey. Basically, the findings gathered from FGD were used to assist researchers in constructing items in the survey questionnaire. In addition, the quantitative method (survey) was carried out to examine the respondents' patterns of media usage and to determine their voting behaviour in a larger population. The survey findings allow researchers to see the overall picture of the media usage and voting patterns among youth in Malaysia.

Qualitative Methodology

In the study, focus group discussion (FGD) was employed. Focus group discussion (FGD) is a convenient method in understanding an issue or a topic as "it essentially involves in engaging a small number of people in an informal group discussion (or discussions) focused around a particular topic or set of issues" (Wilkinson, 2004, p.177). Notably, the use of FGD in the study saves time, as researchers are able to collect data from multiple individuals simultaneously. Essentially, social science researchers often employ FGD as a mean to assist them in developing draft survey questionnaires (Freitas, Olieveira, Jenkins & Popjoy, 1998).

Role of Researchers in Data Collection

During this research, all researchers acted as moderator of FGD. We assigned each researcher with group/s based on his/her place of origin and his or her ability to conduct FGD using the dialects of the respondents' groups. Having similar place of origin and able to speak the same dialects of the respondents gave several advantages. Firstly, it helped to facilitate trust and confidence in the researcher-participant relationship and allowed rapport to be established with the participants during the data gathering process, providing access into their experiences in relation to media usage and political behaviour. A significant challenge faced in the study is to conduct FGD with non-Malays. Significantly, the main problem for ethnic diversity studies is the use of jargon, which may create difficulties to non-members to understand the language used by a specific group (Fontana & Frey, 2000; Patton, 2002). However, as all interviews were conducted in English and Malay, language difficulties did not exist. In addition, with the experience of being an academic and also a Malaysian, it was easy to understand the language and cultural referents the participants used, which provided greater access to their world without the need to constantly ask for clarification. However, realising the risk of attributing meanings to certain words or jargon on which participants diverge (Minichiello, Aroni & Hays, 2008), hermeneutic alertness (van Manen, 1997) was applied during the data gathering process. At this juncture, it was important to be "out of the participants' box" to truly reflect on the meanings rather than putting preconceptions and interpretations on the issues explored.

Therefore, reflexivity was prevalent in designing this research and was practised during the data collection processes. Throughout research, it is suggested that to learn participants' meanings, researchers need to be reflexive about their own meanings and at the same time make an effort to step back so that an eye is cast on how everyday realities are experienced (Arber, 2006). Therefore, in order to gain a balance between researcher bias and the real participants' experiences, the FGD were audio recorded and a quantitative survey was conducted. Survey was considered as an appropriate method to avoid researcher bias as the respondents were anonymous and their personal identities were not available.

FGD processes

Focus group discussions were conducted in this study aimed to generate themes as a basis to develop survey instruments. As this study is exploratory, FGD were used as the primary method of data collection due to the reason that they provide in-depth information on the issues explored. The main purpose of FGD in this study is to explore and understand perceptions, attitudes and the

views of youth regarding politics in the country, which are somehow shaped by their media usage. The reasons for conducting FGD in this study were to explore the experiences of Malaysian youth on media usage, to examine their perceptions about the current government, current issues of the country and issues related to politics and political leaders as well as their attitudes towards election in the country.

According to the Ministry of Youth and Sports of Malaysia, youth are those aged between 15 to 40 years old. But for this study, the threshold is confined to 18 to 35 years old. The study is interested in finding two categories of youth based on their work/study location or their place of living; rural and urban. The key definition of rural is that they live/work/study outside city. On the other hand, the key to defining urban is that they live and work/study in the city. Their experience living in the city and their corresponding exposure to high-speed internet is vital in understanding new media use. Urban also means that they have specific lifestyle that is associated to modern living such as familiarity with commercial and fast paced lifestyle. At the same time, to understand the urban youth, the demographic makeup must also include the different racial groups. As such the study was able to gather Chinese and Indian youth from the urban sample. The participants were gathered via purposive sampling. As the study has specified that it is focused on urban youth in Selangor and Kuala Lumpur, and rural youth in Kelantan, and Penang (mixture of rural and urban), the researchers had set out looking for participants that fit the requirements. They were identified through personal acquaintance, Facebook and phone calls for participation.

The focus group was conducted via a group interview. The round table interview was conducted in an informal manner whereby the participants were given the freedom to share and respond at anytime. Two moderators and a research assistant were there to ensure that everyone had the opportunity to participate and that the discussion was in line with the research theme. At least one of the facilitators moderated discussions in each FGD. To ensure reliability of data, moderators used a predetermined set of interview questions when conducting the discussions. The interview was guided by the research objectives that were interested to understand – 1. Media use, 2. New media experiences, 3. Political behaviours and 4. Opinions on issues. Prior to FGD, a pilot study and several discussions were conducted to develop a reliable set of interview questions.

Focus group discussions were carried out at meeting rooms at hotels, restaurant and university, and the researchers were the ones who determined the venues. Despite being a passive observer, research assistants helped out the researchers in conducting FGD. The discussions began with moderator introduced themselves, the researchers and research assistants, informing the purpose of FGD, the rules of interviews and also the roles and rights of the participants. Each FGD session took between 80 minutes to two hours. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim by the research assistants to prepare raw data for the analysis. Researchers read the transcripts and analysed the data thematically based on the research objectives.

Overall, the study comprised of six FGD groups in which two of them were conducted in Kelantan, another two in Kuala Lumpur, and one each in Selangor and Penang. The numbers of respondents in each group range from six to ten. In total, the number of respondents for FGD is

50. To facilitate a comfortable discussion environment, researchers encouraged respondents to bring with them another one of their family members or friends to participate in the same group. In almost all FGD, respondents brought their wife, colleagues and friends along. FGD was held on 11 June 2015 in Penang, 12 until 13 Jun 2015 in Kelantan, 13 Jun 2015 in Selangor, and 14 Jun 2015 in Kuala Lumpur. (Refer Table 1):

Table 1: Respondents of focus group discussions

Location	Malay	Chinese	India	Total
Selangor	5	3	0	8
Kuala Lumpur	5	3	2	10
Kuala Lumpur	6	0	0	6
Pulau Pinang	5	1	2	8
Kelantan	8	0	0	8
Kelantan	10	0	0	10
TOTAL	39	7	4	50

Quantitative Methodology

Apart from focus group, a survey was also carried out in the study. The purpose of the survey was to crosscheck focus group findings in a larger sample. A survey research is appropriate to test the data obtained from interviews on a wider population. It allows a researcher to reach a large number of respondents in the population and at the same time, information about the same characteristics or variables of two or more cases can be compared (De Vaus, 2002; Babbie, 2010). Survey research design is considered as one of the most utilised methods by researchers in studies of group dynamics (Burn, 2004). This design enables researchers to tap into members' cognitions and attitudes about their communication practices (Poole, Keyton & Frey, 1999) as well as their perceptions about other group members' communication practices.

The quantitative methodology of this study was carried out using cross-sectional survey involving respondents in several states in Malaysia and a total of 1229 surveys were distributed to respondents, using the purposive sampling technique (refer to Table 2).

Table 2: Respondents for survey based on location

Location	Number of respondents
Selangor	229
Kuala Lumpur	194
Kedah	200
Penang	200
Johor	200
Kelantan	206
TOTAL	1229

Similarly to the focus group discussions, the survey was carried out in the six states: Johor, Selangor, Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Kelantan and Kedah. These states were divided to represent

both rural and urban areas in each state. Research assistants were selected to represent each state, and to distribute the survey questionnaire in their designated areas. Prior to the data collection, these research assistants were trained on how to approach their respondents, and briefed on each item in the questionnaire. In selecting the survey respondents, the research assistant were instructed to select them based on specific demographic criteria, such as age group, gender, race, and location, i.e. whether urban or rural. The data collection period took place in the month of August 2015. After the data collection period ended, the data was then keyed in using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. The data analysis of the study utilized both inferential and descriptive statistics.

The survey questionnaire was designed based on feedback obtained from the focus group discussions. The survey questionnaire was divided into four major sections including demographic background (i.e. age, gender, race, occupation, marital status, education level, religion, monthly income), media usage (i.e. usage of old and new media, reasons for using old and new media), perceptions on media and politics, as well as perceptions on the government and leadership.

From the 1229 respondents, more than half were male (59%). From the findings, almost three quarters of the respondents were aged between 18-32 years old. In line with the racially diverse Malaysian population, about half of the respondents were Malays (54%). Based on the data, the Malaysian youths selected for this study were relatively well educated; 38% had at least a degree, while 23% had completed From 6 and/or had a diploma. Based on their occupation, 36% of them worked in the private sector, 15% worked in the public sector, while 7% was self-employed. The respondents, although mostly gainfully employed, due to their young age, did not earn high incomes. About one third of them obtained a monthly income of below RM 2000 (34%), and only 22% earned more than RM4000 in a month.

The quantitative approach using the survey methodology was not without some problems and challenges. Although the focus group discussion had assisted the researchers in forming more succinct items in the survey questionnaire, some respondents still complained that the survey was too long. Also, because of the relatively young age of the respondents, some did not want to entertain the research assistants due to their busy schedule, i.e. work and/or study. In certain areas (i.e. Penang), it required research assistants to master local dialects (either Chinese or Tamil), as not knowing the local dialect may impede the data collection process. Thus, in certain areas it required research assistants that are not only familiar with the survey questionnaire, they also had to be bilingual. Further, as with any other social sciences research that utilized survey questionnaire, respondents were also subject to social desirability bias. Social desirability bias is a "response determinant that refers to the tendency of people to deny socially undesirable traits or qualities and to admit to socially desirable ones" (Phillips & Clancy, 1972, p. 923). Therefore, the survey respondents may have been giving inaccurate responses, as they were susceptible to pleasing the research assistants, and may not have been completely truthful in answering certain questions (for example, which political party they support, or perceptions on certain political leaders). Because politics is also a sensitive topic in Malaysia, in which some people maybe reluctant to discussing, as it's a conversational taboo, their perceptions on politics and perceptions on the current government may not have been completely accurate, or may have been

greatly exaggerated. Additionally, items on media usage may also have been subject to recall issues; respondents were just giving an estimate of their media habits and consumption based on their memory.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In summary, based on our experiences in conducting a mixed methods study, the mixed methodology has been particularly useful in expanding our understanding of methodology employed in political communication research. From previous studies employing the use of mixed methods, it is also apparent that the mixed method approach allows for deeper understanding and a more comprehensive picture of political attitude and behaviours, such as voting decisions, information exchanged, and perceptions towards political campaign.

Also, with the rapid development in media and communication technology, it maybe necessary to adopt the mixed method approach in studying political communication, as using solely the quantitative approach (i.e. such as surveys) may not be adequate as the qualitative approach may help supplement the quantitative approach in terms of obtaining information that is below the surface.

Further, politics is a sensitive topic in many cultures, thus respondents maybe reluctant to reveal or disclose their views on the topic. As such, using the mixed method approach managed to overcome this problem. In addition, the utilisation of mixed methods in political communication studies in general, and the study of media and political behaviour conducted by authors, in particular, allows for the researcher to gain a more complex understanding of the topic, rather than just a quantitative approach to political issues and how it affects communication behaviours.

In this paper, the analysis was only confined to one political communication study. Therefore, the case analysis cannot possibly be generalised to other context. As such, further analysis could be applied in different contexts. Additionally, results in this particular election year could differ significantly with future election results, depending on the political climate in Malaysia, and as such further comparative analysis could be drawn from the upcoming 14th general election. Besides, this paper only discusses the sequential exploratory mixed methods design in the analysis. Further study could benefit using the mixed method approach by using other designs in the mixed method approach.

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POLITICAL COMMUNICATION THROUGH A QUALITATIVE LENS

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ABSTRACT

With the growth of the political communication discipline as the goal, the qualitative inquiry, in a field that is dominated by the quantitative inquiry, has been recommended to be placed alongside quantitative research in some literature. This is not a novel recommendation. The mixed methods approach in the pursuit of theoretical understanding is emulating the traditional political communication research practices of previous scholars. The discipline's growth should be spurred by answering new research questions, developing old theories, innovating new theories and making new recommendations that would benefit from the interpretive paradigm of the qualitative inquiry. There is greater engagement between political actors with the advent of social media, an inevitable importance of image and identity in political brand communication, inequality in obtaining political messages, the interdisciplinary nature of political communication and the political public sphere – all these characterise political communication. Political communication benefits from the interpretive paradigm by allowing an examination of perspectives from participants encompassing insider information obtained from political parties

and the discourse analysis of political actors on social media that underscores the profoundness of qualitative interpretations.

Keywords: qualitative research, political communication, political public sphere, political actors, political brand communication

INTRODUCTION

As we think of political communication, we are possibly reminded of the images of election campaigning, the scenes of political debates commonly found in the United Kingdom where politicians put forth facts and opinions, political news stories on the media and politicians who passionately sell themselves as evident through their tone when communicating to voters in Malaysia. The evolving definition of political communication and the qualitative inquiry surrounding it is intriguing. By understanding the development of the current inquiry, it is hoped that future inquiries in the endeavour of expanding the field could be planned for. New theories have to be created, old theories developed, new research questions answered and recommendations made; these goals quench the thirst for acquiring new knowledge on political communication and meet the need to make it more effective for politicians and voters. The paper commences by defining political communication, then it proceeds to the discussion on qualitative research methodology and political communication research from the qualitative research lens.

UNDERSTANDING POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

It is apt to commence the paper by defining political communication due to its various definitions. There is the mentioning of political communication as being deemed notorious to define with precision as 'political' and 'communication' in political communication have several definitions (McNair 2011). Nevertheless, a better understanding of political communication is attempted by this paper. The first part of the paper begins by examining the evolution of political communication, the flow of information involving political actors in political public spheres, political brand communication, the interdisciplinary nature of political communication, inequality in the acquisition of political information, and, the political public sphere.

Evolution of Political Communication in Postwar in Many Democracies

The once simple political communication messages conveyed through mass media that were satisfying to voters at first have been affected by complex media developments and globalisation putting countries less able to function in silo.

In the past, political communication scholarship focused its attention somewhat narrowly on publicly visible forms of mass communication featuring organized actors who are addressing core political issues in the setting of liberal democratic nation-states. These conditions are no longer tenable. Today, political communication is in many ways characterized by a mix of public and personalized communication, mass media and social media, established and non-established communicators, blurred boundaries between political seriousness and entertainment, a frontier that extends to non-western political systems, and increasing globalization, all of which affect the

status of the nation-state as a default variable in comparative research (Esser and Pfetsch August 2006, p. 2).

The changes in the degree of loyalty to political parties from being very loyal to the loosening of this, the underscoring of the populist culture for voter engagement and the proliferation of media messages were evident in the three-phase evolution of political communication. Political communication has passed through three phases in many democracies during the postwar period (Blumler and Kavanagh 1999). According to the writers, during the first age, the political system was regarded as the main source of initiatives and debates for social reform and several voters associated themselves to politics by identifying political parties that they were loyal to against the background of debates. The second age emerged during the 1960s with the advent of limited-channel television, less group loyalties, non-partisan norms (fairness, impartiality) impressed through political communication, higher audience penetration with television, and personalised presentations by leaders. The third age saw the proliferation of the key means of communication comprising radio, television, and computers amongst them marking the need for professional help by politicians for campaigning, increased competition for the attention of gatekeepers and voters, the need for a popular idiom in communication with the lack of a top-down approach from politicians to voters, a "pick and choose" culture by audience members of the abundant media messages and fragmented audiences.

It is apparent that the political communications ecology is changing with the emergence of the Internet. Some have argued that the Internet has changed the ecology by replacing television in the United States and increasing the variety of political sources leading to fragmented audiences resulting to less audience members to each media vehicle and interactive audiences who need arresting content (Gurevitch, Coleman et al. 2009) while others have mentioned the media mix of traditional and digital media political communication sources that have extended globally and affected the definition of the nation-state (Esser and Pfetsch August 2006). The relevance of examining traditional media in political communication is apparent as traditional media does play a complementary role with digital media here (Jungherr 2015).

The contribution of television to political communication is also stressed in other literature. In the past, television played a big role as it took centre-stage as it produced with politicians, messages on politics that changed from being issue-based to personality-based and penetrated households thus increasing audience members (Gurevitch, Coleman et al. 2009). The Internet penetration rate per household would affect its usefulness in political communication; a lower penetration rate would ensure that traditional media (newspapers and television) takes centre-stage. Other than the penetration rate, the education level of voters could also be an influence on the media choices of audience members. Television remains to be the main source of political communication for lower educated readers as several newspapers are written in a manner that is considered abstract (Jerit, Barabas et al. 2006) hence seemingly too complicated.

Social media is an important communication channel in politics represented by the past few years that encourages political institutions to interact with one another however, it is marred by the politicians' lack of knowledge of current topics (Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan 2013). The lack of knowledge coupled by the lack of quality in political communication beckons for further

inquiry centred on ideals. It is found that the quality of the abundance of media content from a variety of sources has also alleviated with the expanded media landscape that focuses on celebrities, rumours and attacks as politics transforms into a disparaging game (Gurevitch, Coleman et al. 2009). The ideals of quality political information, better engagement, and appropriate changes brought about by politics to making a better life for citizens could be recommended by further qualitative inquiry that focuses on examining profoundness in concept development.

Flow of Information, Exchange of Messages, Political Actors, Citizens and the Media in Political Public Spheres

Political actors, citizens, the media and political public spheres are components of political communication. 'Political communication refers to the flow of information and the exchange of messages among political actors, citizens and the media. All three participants contribute to the creation of political public spheres' (Esser and Pfetsch August 2006, p. 2). Political actors are described as engaging in the production of messages in the form of government communication, parliamentary communication and election communication but it is not immediately clear as whom they comprise.

'Political actors' is defined by Habermas (2006) as journalists and politicians who are at the centre of the political system as they write and address public opinions together. Other political actors in the public sphere are named as lobbyists representing special interest groups; advocates representing general interest groups or marginalized groups with no effective communication opportunities; experts in an area offering advice; moral entrepreneurs who focus on neglected issues and intellectuals like writers or academics who engage in public discourse to uphold general interests. The agreement between all political stakeholders or political actors is important to attain for effective changes to be made in society and effective political communication should be used for this goal. A discourse analysis that examines not only the spoken word (text) but also the production process of the text makes for its profound understanding (Fairclough 1989) from a qualitative perspective.

Political Brand Communication

What comes to mind at the mere mention of political communication are images of the elections with politicians selling themselves as they attempt to pull voters to their side. There is an apparent larger definition of political communication that is all-encompassing as it goes further than the euphoric happenings during the campaigns before the election days themselves. The notion of branding is brought into the picture as political image and political identity are put forth in defining political communication.

…all political discourse is included in our definition. By political communication, therefore, I, like Graber, have in mind not only verbal or written statements, but also visual means of signification such as dress, make-up, hairstyle, and logo design, i.e. All those elements of

communication which might be said to constitute a political 'image' or identity' (McNair 2011, p. 4).

The definition associates a politician or political party with the idea of products and branding. Political branding encompasses political images, political identities, brand cues, and product differentiation. Branding is now commonly associated with political parties and political personalities in the discourse on politics with the example of the 'Trudeau brand' from the previous Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau who in 1968 had the brand image that was exciting, progressive and modern to son, Justin Trudeau (Marland 2013). Voters are regarded as consumers who need to perceive a positive political brand image. Brands are important in politics as they simplify the choices that voters have, they maintain a good relationship through marketing for 'repeat sales' through votes and personal brands promoted by party leaders that focus on a few key characteristics making them stand out as with Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan's association with a period of smaller governments, lower taxes, individual self-sufficiency and a strong defence policy (Needham 2006).

Politicians paint a political identity through the use of brand cues such as taglines, logos, colours, personalities that would provide political products with a more profound meaning than what they would stand for by themselves on a superficial and literal level. Political branding is put forth as a consumer model of political communication; it marks a consumerised paradigm of political communication where politicians have to listen to voters, be more personal and interactive with electorates, and practise sending out brand messages that are both hard (policies) and soft (emotional) (Scammell 2007). According to the writer, branding is evident in political campaigns; in former Prime Minister, Blair's rebranding by connecting him with disgruntled voters (consumers) before the 2005 U.K. General Election and also in communications by the U.K. government over the previous fifteen years.

Political communication conveys the different identities of politicians and political parties underpinning the marketing strategy of product differentiation that is used to distinguish a political candidate from others when selling themselves to voters. Product differentiation refers to focusing on product differences that is attractive to the target market (Moriarty, Mitchell et al. 2015). In this case, the expectations of voters like other types of consumers have to be known first before political communication can be effectively created and disseminated in terms of product differentiation. Product differences are communicated in a manner that is persuasive as evident in political advertising that uses mass media to 'differentiate' political products (i.e. parties and political candidates) and give the brand meaning akin to the manufacturer of soap that endeavours to distinguish its brands of detergent from another in a competitive market (McNair 2011). Other than the brand cues in the form of taglines, logos, colours, a distinguished political candidate could be associated ideally with charisma as a powerful human quality that differentiates successful personal brands by connecting to voters emotionally and stirring interest in disenchanted non-voters (Marland 2013). Political candidates are not lifeless products hence an attractive charisma is appealing to voters.

Another thread of political communication is branded political communication that is found by linking political issues to a brand to obtain awareness from the public deemed as a

creative way activists use to communicate on political issues like Nike and the issue of sweatshops (Bennett and Lagos 2007). The writers mention that reach would be less if a well-known brand were not linked to the political issue. Commercial brands have also entered into image politics (Hartley 2012) with examples found in The Body Shop's Stop Sex Trafficking campaign (2012) and the EU Animal Testing Ban (2013) with its website promising a new campaign in 2017.

Political Communication is Interdisciplinary

Political communication is influenced by multiple disciplines encouraging more research studies from several perspectives. Despite political communication having its roots in classical studies by Aristotle and Plato, modern political communication research is characteristically an interdisciplinary field of study that is influenced by communication, journalism, political science, history, sociology, psychology, rhetoric, and other fields (Kaid 2004).

The pioneers of the political communication field, Harold Lasswell, and subsequently Murray Edelman, adapted perspectives from intellectuals in sociology, anthropology, psychology, linguistics, journalism, public relations, and economics (Bennett and Iyengar 2008) marking the influence of other fields on political communication. The writers mention the influence of political science on political communication as diminishing and believe there is more inclination to sociology, psychology and economics. A framework has been created for the examination of online political discussion spaces that involves operationalisation derived from a body of interdisciplinary studies also comprising efforts by Jürgen Habermas and Lincoln Dahlberg (Freelon 2010). Qualitative research studies from different disciplines would encourage the growth of political communication contributing to a more multidimensional perspective.

Inequality in the Acquisition of Political Information

Political information is not attained in equal amounts with the abundance of media choices and imbalanced technological experience. Greater consumer media choices equates to an unequal scenario in the acquisition of political messages (Bennett and Iyengar 2008). The writers claim that despite the advent of technology and the allowance for an abundance of information, audience members are categorised into the "haves" and "have-nots" reflecting the various levels of demand for political information; the "haves" would access political information from favoured sources and the "have-nots" would elude them. The implication of this is a higher cost of producing political communication (that is effective) and waning media effects.

The "digital divide", coined by Lloyd Morrisett, former president of the Markle Foundation, differentiating between the information "haves" and "have-nots" as categories of audience members (Hoffman and Novak 1998). DiMaggio and Hartgittai (2001) and Tapscott (1996) allude to the digital divide in their writings. DiMaggio and Hartgittai (2001) call audience members who are more likely to access the Internet as the "haves" (the online) and those who would not prefer to access the Internet as the "have-nots" (offline). They blame the imbalance on new technology that aggravates inequality than improves it. The digital divide also describes the "haves" as those who have access to technology and the "have-nots" as those do not have access

to technology; the gap between them is growing and will cause problems to society in future (Tapscott 1996). Consumer insight could be obtained through qualitative research in the pursuit of understanding target audiences on a more profound level so as to encourage selective attention to political communication messages and in the formation of creative concepts apt for more effective political advertisements.

Political Public Sphere in Political Communication

The political public sphere is underscored in the definition of political communication by Esser and Pfetsch (August 2006). Public sphere is a place where politics meets specific goals and reinforces group values, ideals, and belonging (Dahlgren 2005). Dahlgren further describes this as having three dimensions: the structural dimension (media organisations, their ownership, control, regulation and legal frameworks defining freedom of expression), the representational dimension (mass media messages and "minimedia" messages such as newsletters and promotional materials), and the interactional dimension (citizens' interpretation of the media output and interactions between citizens themselves). The public sphere is also mentioned as a realm of our social life where individuals come together to form a public body where they express themselves freely and influence others using means such as the media and political public sphere (Habermas, Lennox et al. 1974). The writers define the political public sphere as a place where discussions take place by the public on the state's activities in which the state does not participate. The young voters have become more discerning in Malaysia as they are accessible to information from several political parties in the public sphere on social media before making their choices as to which political party and political figure to vote for (Mokhtar 2017). From these understandings of the political public sphere, it is apparent that freedom of expression is underlined in a realm where group values are reinforced upon one another in citizens' interactions to a discerning audience.

On the other hand, there are people nowadays who are remote from the public sphere against the backdrop of the media explosion marring political influence. This perhaps foreshadows the emergence of a minimal effects era marking a time when people are disconnected from institutions such as public schools, political parties, and civic groups that previously provided a shared situation of interpretation (Bennett and Iyengar 2008). The group values said to be reinforced before are affected by the disconnection of people from these institutions. The opposing scenario is raised by the writers where there is disinterest by people to media messages with the media becoming more proliferated and individualised and thus, giving birth to audience fragmentation and isolation from the public sphere.

RESEARCH FOR POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

More political communication research studies should be carried out inspired by the wide definition of the concept that is interdisciplinary in orientation. Most political communication research has been quantitative (Nielsen 2014). The predominantly quantitative research tradition has encouraged new generations of researchers to be trained and socialized in this tradition (Karpf, Kreiss et al. 2015). The next part of the paper defines qualitative research studies and examines political communication research from the qualitative tradition.

Defining Qualitative Research Studies

Akin to political communication, it has been pronounced that a comprehensive definition of qualitative research is difficult to attain (Ormston, Spencer et al. 2014). Nevertheless, an attempt is made here by drawing from several literature. It is determined that qualitative research is driven by words not numbers, philosophical debates are important to comprehend, there are several features of qualitative research and the research questions are distinguished from quantitative research.

Qualitative research generates non-numerical data as opposed to the generating of numbers in quantitative research (Patton and Cochran 2002, Bryman 2008, Babbie 2012). Qualitative research relates to meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions whereas quantitative research refers to numbers and experiences that could not be articulated through numbers (Berg and Lune 2012). There could be many interpretations of text as evident through a semiotic analysis of political advertisements. The words of documents and interviewees are central to qualitative research marking their interpretation of phenomena.

Qualitative researchers adopt various approaches and in order to comprehend these better, it is imperative to know of the philosophical debates related to ontology (the nature of the social world and what there is to know of it) and epistemology (how we could learn of the social world and the basis of our knowledge) that support the development of social research in general (Ormston, Spencer et al. 2014, Merriam and Tisdell 2016). There are two ontological positions: realism and idealism (Ormston, Spencer et al. 2014). According to the writers, realism posits that there is an external reality that exists independently of people's beliefs or comprehension of it and idealism explains that reality is understood through the minds of humans whose meanings are socially constructed and no reality exists by itself. The epistemological perspective is related to the nature of knowledge (Merriam and Tisdell 2016) and the means of acquiring knowledge about the world and how we could learn about reality with key issues dominant: induction (theories are generated from data) and deduction (hypotheses are developed and data collected supports or rejects them) (Bryman 2008, Yin 2011, Ormston, Spencer et al. 2014).

There is seemingly the absence of exclusivity that defines qualitative research with regards to inductive and deductive approaches as although it may seem that induction fits well with qualitative research; a deductive approach may also be used in qualitative research (Yin 2011). This could be demonstrated by some qualitative research studies where the researcher collects data using a theoretical framework as a form of parameter that determines what data should be sought. The assumptions about the grounds of knowledge; how to understand the world and convey this to others; forms of knowledge obtained; how to categorise whether true or not is related to the epistemological approach (Burrell and Morgan 1979). The writers proceed by explaining about the two poles with regards to social research: subjectivism and objectivism and the four paradigms associated with them: radical humanist, radical structuralist, interpretive and functionalist. Of concern here are the interpretive and functionalist paradigms.

Interpretive research is the most accepted type of qualitative research that is with the assumption that reality is socially constructed and there are multiple observable realities (Merriam and Tisdell 2016, p. 9). The interpretive paradigm is about comprehending the world through the participants' perspectives than the observers'; they tend to be nominalist (idealist) and anti-positivist (Burrell and Morgan 1979). The positivism and anti-positivism debate is raised to demonstrate the types of epistemologies; positivism pursues to explain and predict what happens in the social world by looking for regularities and causal relationships between its variables whereas with regards to anti-positivism, the social world is essentially relativistic and can only be comprehended from the point of view of individuals involved in the activities that are examined. It is further explained that the functionalist paradigm represents the objectivist point of view and examines issues from a realist and positivist standpoint.

Qualitative researchers are attentive in comprehending how people interpret their experiences, form their worlds, and the meaning that they associate to their experiences (Merriam and Tisdell 2016). The role of the researcher is also important in qualitative research. The human, interpretative aspects of knowing about the social world and the importance of the investigator's own interpretations and understanding of the phenomenon being studied is imperative to qualitative research (Ritchie and Lewis 2003). As the meanings raised by participants is important to qualitative researchers, the researchers perform an activity that transforms the world that is studied in a natural setting into data collected represented by field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos in an attempt to interpret phenomena in view of the meanings people associate with them (Denzin and Lincoln 2005).

There are several common features of qualitative research that have been mentioned in previous literature are the natural setting of the qualitative research and the perspectives of participants. The features of qualitative research are: studying the meaning of people's lives in the real world, examining the opinions and perspectives of participants, scrutinising the contexts within which people live, conjuring insights into existing or emerging concepts used to explain social behaviour of humans and using many sources of evidence than depending on one source (Yin 2011). According to Ormston, Spencer et al. (2014), the common characteristics of qualitative research are: in-depth and interpretative aims and understanding of the social world through the perspective of research participants; non-standardised methods of generating data that are sensitive to the social context of the study; data that are elaborate, rich and complex; data analysis that preserves data complexity and respects the individualism of each participant; openness to new theories emerging from the data; detailed outputs; and a reflexive approach underlining the role of the researcher.

According to Berg and Lune (2012), there are several assumptions in relation to qualitative research approaches: active individuals, worlds of meaning from the participants' perspective and multiple truths. With regards to active individuals, the writers claim that qualitative researchers perceive the world as composed of active, interpreting individuals who carry out actions every day. Meaning has to be understood by researchers because behaviour follows meaning, the idea of shared meaning is sought by researchers so as to comprehend human behaviour and meaning should also be understood in terms of the meaningful objects in

the minds of the audience. There are multiple truths to those who believe in them as a result of shared beliefs and shared realities.

Other than the use of words in qualitative research and its common characteristics, the research questions of quantitative and qualitative research studies are also different. Qualitative research understands the experiences of participants by asking: 'what', 'how' or 'why' of a phenomenon rather than 'how many' or 'how much', which are used by quantitative methods (Patton and Cochran 2002). Research questions that focus on 'what' and 'how' are best answered through qualitative research and research questions that examine how many should be answered by quantitative survey research (Morrison, Haley et al. 2002, Ritchie, Lewis et al. 2014). In political communication research studies, the political campaign objectives could be best understood by interviewing politicians leading campaigns. There is no one research tradition that is superior to another, each answers different questions and contributes differently to the field.

POLITICAL COMMUNICATION AND QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

For the political communication field to flourish, it is essential to conduct research studies to form new theories, develop old theories and make recommendations that would allow more effective communication to voters by improving the image of politicians or political parties image and increase votes. In view of this, the question - What is the responsibility of a political communication scholar? – is posed.

The political communication scholar is expected to improve readers' comprehension of communication dynamics that influences political outcomes in terms of the range of effects (exposure and attention), political behaviours (voting and other types of political participation) and post-behaviour (perception to the campaign, vote count accuracy) (Holbert and Bucy 2011). It is evident that political campaigns have phases and outcomes that need to be examined for them to be more effective. Research studies examining the awareness of campaigns and the reasons for them, examining communication that leads to political behaviours and the concepts of credibility and perception post campaign could be carried out in a qualitative manner through focus groups and interviews from an inductive perspective. The weaknesses in achieving the campaign goals of establishing awareness, changing behaviour and maintaining credibility post campaign could be understood better through lengthy explanations from research participants after which recommendations could be made for improvements in political communication to take place.

However, most political communication research studies are quantitative. A content analysis was carried out of 258 articles published by *Political Communication* spanning over the last 12 years from 2003 to 2015 and it found only 43 of the articles qualitative based mainly on interpretative, historical, critical, and rhetorical analyses and qualitative fieldwork (16.7 percent) (Karpf, Kreiss et al. 2015). This is further supported by the fact that most political communication research studies are dominated by the survey method (Holbert and Bucy 2011). The survey research studies employed for political communication are used for examining attitudes, cognitions, and behaviours in politics and communication (Hoffman and Young 2013). Prominent qualitative techniques like grounded theory, emergent category designation, analytic

induction, conversation and discourse analysis are less common in political communication but more common in sociological studies and cultural and critical cultural works (Jarvis 2011). There are several recommendations in the literature that encourage the use of mixed methods or qualitative research studies instead of purely quantitative methods with the predominant use of social media for political communication and the limitations of current quantitative social media monitoring (SMM) tools.

As the political ecological transformation involves social media at centre-stage; it is important to study the platform in terms of public opinion on policies and political positions. Of course research studies on social media should be carried out without disregarding traditional media because of the complementary role it plays in political communication. Examinations of the interaction in politics online and offline have to be conducted in order to understand today's politics (Jungherr 2015). A study finds that newspapers generally did not mention issues that were perceived to be important by the different ethnic groups in Malaysia during the elections and this discrepancy is important to address for better engagement between politicians and voters (Idid and Chang 2012).

Social media is likely to increase political participation and discussions among citizens as Twitter, Facebook, and other social networking sites are ideal platforms for users to communicate their political opinions online (Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan 2013). Twitter is widely used in political campaigns globally with posts and interactions between political elites, journalists, and the general public that constitutes a political communication space (Jungherr 2015). With the popular use of social media in politics, there seems to be an abundance of public opinion on social media that could be examined by researchers. Social media is the ideal platform to measure public opinion on policies and political positions for politicians, political parties, and governments and encourage community support for individuals pursuing public office (Zeng, Chen et al. 2010).

SMM is described in the literature as a process having several steps such as preparation, data collection, data analysis and reporting; there are dashboard services that provide a synopsis of online activities such as Hootsuite, Netvibes and Trackur (Ruggiero and Vos 2014). The tool is observational, passive and quantitative as it collects opinions on brands and analyses in an automated way using software but in-depth interviews should be carried out due to their strengths (Branthwaite and Patterson 2011). The writers argue that there are limitations of the quantitative SMM due to the issue of validity, social media culture questioning how closely it represents the lives of everyday people, and whether bloggers attitudes and opinions reflect real life, the benefits of in-depth interviews are:
These are: the direct, interactive dialogue or conversation between consumers and researchers; the facility to "listen" and attend to the (sometimes unspoken) underlying narrative which connects consumers' needs and aspirations, personal goals and driving forces to behaviour and brand choice; and the dynamic, interactive characteristics of the interview that achieve a meeting of minds to produce a shared understanding. Philosophically, it is this "conversation" that gives qualitative research its validity and authenticity which makes it superior to SMM' (Branthwaite and Patterson 2011, p. 430).

Other than interviews, SMM has been made more qualitative with the emergence of a software package like Issuecrawler that is for researchers who are qualitative or from the humanities (Jungherr 2015).

The nature of politics itself and the limitations of examining social media from a quantitative perspective motivate the need for more qualitative research in political communication. Politics is an instrumental activity used to achieve specific goals, it is an expressive activity, and a way of affirming values, ideals and belonging in the public sphere supporting the use of qualitative research rather than quantitative research (Dahlgren 2005). The writer raises the lack of certainty with regards to the numbers of people participating on social media and this beckons us to question the credibility of response in terms of intention, role and duplication. There could be participants who have been paid to disseminate political campaign information and the same person could be having several social media accounts.

A new era of qualitative research is put forth as the method of the previous and mixed-method tradition of political communication research supported by the older works of Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Gladys Engel Lang and Kurt Lang that employed mixed-methods to examine the interaction of citizens, journalists and political elites in political communication as it has since narrowed in our understanding of the field; qualitative research is deemed excellent at answering questions for developing new theoretical comprehensions (Karpf, Kreiss et al. 2015). The importance of obtaining further theoretical understandings for the development of the field is central to the collaboration of qualitative and quantitative inquiries.

The political brand could be examined using qualitative research approaches. The first reason being that academicians have not established an agreed way to gauge personal brands and leadership, this should move the academic scene to concept development and qualitative research gesturing the need for inside information from interviews so as to understand further the management of the Trudeau image, for instance (Marland 2013). Brand research is also well-known as qualitative in nature diving beneath the surface of quantitative polling (Scammell 2007). Qualitative research provides more depth to the understanding of the political image and political identity in the pursuit of product differentiation by politicians.

Political communication research could also be inspired by audience research and journalism studies that use more an assortment of theories and methodological tools (Nielsen 2014). According to Blumler and Kavanagh (1999), there is the need for more observational research on the evolving political communication scene by examining how political communicators and media organisations change, redefine their purposes and solve their conflicts; research that pursues agenda setting in the various outlets of political communication; tracking research that looks at a political communication with undefined boundaries in several matters such as public and private concerns for one; research on what citizens think of the new political communication system; and research on the flourishing forms of populist communication and how they affect the perception of politicians and the like. These could be carried out in a qualitative research orientation to give the outcomes more depth.

Other literature has supported the combination of qualitative and quantitative research approaches for political communication as the field is said to reach an intellectual passé and is too focused on quantitative research (Nielsen 2014). Political communication research could go further in scope helped by its interdisciplinary orientation. Research studies in political communication have to go beyond social psychology, some parts of political science and mass communication research on effects to explore into other areas:

…parts of the field's problems are rooted in the way in which political communication research has developed since the 1960s. In this period, the field has moved from being interdisciplinary and mixed-methods to being more homogenous and narrowly focused, based primarily on ideas developed in social psychology, certain strands of political science, and the effects-tradition of mass communication research (Nielsen 2014, p. 5).

CONCLUSION

The paper commenced by examining the expanding definition of political communication and proceeded by defining qualitative research and subsequently, political communication and qualitative research. The sole use of quantitative research has been said to be creating an intellectual passé. There is the need to include qualitative research for political communication to flourish. For the growth and sustainability of the political communication field, it is essential that public opinion is examined through an interpretive lens in addition to the functionalistic lens that allows the richness of data to be collected and analysed. New theories have to be churned, old theories developed, new research questions answered and a bigger scope pursued in political communication qualitative research.

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FIELDWORK AND THE QUALITATIVE - INTERPRETATIVE ANALYSIS

Che Mahzan Ahmad

ABSTRACT

Fieldwork is scholarly and professional research work that requires first-hand observation, recording or documenting what one sees and hear in a particular setting with the aim to understand and to know what people under the study are doing from their perspectives. Fieldwork is a study of conceptualisation as much as observation. In qualitative fieldwork, the researcher is the instrument of inquiry. With that notion, the ontological (nature of being, becoming and/or reality), epistemological (nature of knowledge) and axiological (values) underpinnings related to the researcher are paramount importance in making the research acceptable. With an emphasis on the importance of recovering and reading meanings, beliefs and preferences or practices of the people in the field, the researcher is expected to perform hermeneutical action, with Collaizzi's help, where the knower and the known are inseparable, interacting and influencing one another in shared interpretation. In this regard, semiotic as a device of knowing is an asset. Specifically, the researcher must get engaged with hermeneutical process of circular understanding that celebrates *vorurteil* ('prejudices'). In that appreciation, *verstehen*, instead of *erklaren*, as a method of interpreting human action must be employed. Meanwhile bracketing is becoming a prerequisite for research trustworthiness. As fieldwork is a situate activity, metaphorically, turning oneself into a bricoluer makes fieldwork as an engagement a worthwhile journey. In the nutshell, as the field is a terrain of alterity that lives on 'otherness', fieldwork concerns with deep understanding via thick description on 'local interpretation' and 'local knowledge'.

Keywords: Bracketing, Bricoluer, Fieldwork, Hermeneutics, Qualitative Inquiry.

INTRODUCTION

Fieldwork or field research is basically a practical research work done by a researcher in the 'field', outside the comfort zone of a laboratory or office. Qualitatively speaking it is an action of collecting data about people and culture within a natural environment. Specifically, fieldwork is a process of collecting primary data using face-to-face interview or observation methods. A fieldwork is about 'mapping' data whereby the observational dimension of social science is highly appreciated. Here, the importance of walking, looking and gazing around in the world, in and of itself, is important. Sumser (2001) posits that the goal of fieldwork is to understand what that people are doing from their perspectives. Thus this makes fieldwork as much a study of conceptualization as observation.

As a method, fieldwork provide the following advantages: it is a source of data not available elsewhere and is often the only way to identifying key individuals and core processes; it gives voice to groups all too often ignored or marginalized; it allows access to the 'the black box' or internal processes of groups and organizations; and, it permits to recovering the beliefs and

practices of actors. Indeed 'being there' in the field gets us to the below and hear the 'back region' accounts which is more 'real' and rich than the official accounts (Rhodes, 2007). Crucially, fieldwork allows and admits of surprises, of moments of epiphany, which can open new research agendas. In fieldwork, the researcher is a professional stranger that look and search for mystique that can be described as communication problem (Agar, 1996, pp. 57-58).Among recommended texts on fieldwork are as follows: Bryman (1999/2012); Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, 1983) and Wolcott (1995). My favourite is James Scott's (1985) fieldwork at Sedaka. In the context of research with political slant, fieldwork is now gaining hot currency (Joseph, 2007).

The Researcher

In the qualitative fieldwork the researcher is the instrument of research (Pezalla, 2012). Within this epistemological understanding, the research is being seen as an 'engagement', a meaningful energetic involvement of self with all participants. The researcher-in-the-field could be a 'naturalist' or 'interpretivist'. In the former, the researcher take the human sciences should strive to develop predictive and causal explanations as that similar to the natural sciences. For the naturalist doing fieldwork is just as a method for collecting data whereby the emphasis falls on systematic data collection, validating that data, avoiding observer bias, and writing up in the third-person. At times naturalist go to the field to test certain theories. In general, a naturalist is more concerned with generalization. Meanwhile qualitative - interpretivist emphasis on the importance of recovering and reading meanings, the beliefs and preferences or practices of the people as embedded in social reality at the site. This approach is more concerned on speaking about everyday life dramas (Rhodes, 2015). Practically, qualitative - interpretivist is doing a hermeneutical action. The knower and the known are inseparable, interacting and influencing one another which resulted in shared interpretations (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Here, the knower and the known are interacting and influencing each other. Hence writing reports means 'writes our own construction of other people's construction' (Geertz, 1973).

In relation to the above, qualitative - interpretivist must acts as a bricoluer who understands that research is an interactive process shaped by personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity, and by those of the people in the setting (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003/2018; Creswell, 2018). As such bricoleur research activities give provision to abandon 'fit into' a prescribed research engagement framework (Robinson-Aberdeen and Markless, 2012). In that continuum, it permits the researcher to submit to the contextual constraints inherent in the field. The bricoleur, in the spirit of Claude Levi-Strauss (1962) memorable term, moves with complex work of weaving and interconnecting stories, images and representations (Lincoln and Denzin, 2003); 'piecing together a patchwork of ideas (Weinstein and Weinstein, 1991) into 'emergent construction' as a comprehensible bricolage. In this fluidity process, the bricoleur may change and take new forms or use different tools, methods and techniques for greater insights into the phenomena under scrutiny. In this freedom the bricoleur do a diverse tasks ranging from interviewing to observing, to interpreting personal and historical documents, to intensive self-reflection and introspection. Indeed the central concern of the researcher as bricoleur is to achieve 'rigor, breadth, complexity and richness, and depth to any inquiry (Flick, 2014).

Designing Qualitative Fieldwork

This is about the overall shape of data collection and materials needed for the field. How to approach data collection? What sample that could give rich and factual data? As deep understanding is the aim of a fieldwork, purposive sampling is often being adopted. Not to be forgotten is the method applied, whether the humanistic methods or the mechanistic one. Both methods are often being used in a fieldwork. The researcher tried their best to be 'invisible' (Lune, 2017) --- 'a-fly-on-the-ceiling/wall' (Malinowski, 1961) --- but at the same time work hard to develop 'rapport' with the informants. Indeed to 'hit the point' for a 'reliable picture', it is worth to turn interviewer and interviewee as 'peers or companions' (Rowan and Reason, 1981). In the said situation, the fieldwork is no more an intrusion but as part and parcel of native's life.

In qualitative fieldwork, if data are beans, researchers are going to answer three main questions: What is a bean? What does it mean to be a bean? What is the 'beanness' in the field? Similarly it conveys the idea that all beans are not alike, and doing the fieldwork is not to count beans.In dealing with 'beans', a division between the world or reality 'out there', and the claims made about it must be a clear cut case. A reflective on trustworthiness of the given information must be observed too. Similarly being pragmatic with the notion of truth and reality is an action of necessity. In that regards some beans may be 'indicators' or 'testimonies'.

Is the researcher going for 'thin or thick description'? Clifford Geertz (1973) described the practice of thick description as a way of providing cultural context and meaning that people place on actions, words, things, etc. Thick descriptions provide enough contexts so that a person outside the realm can make meaning of the behavior. Meanwhile thin description by contrast, is stating facts without such meaning as of the above. Surveys provide thin descriptions at best. The above choice is intimately linked with time spend in the field. Are you doing hit and run or deep hanging out (intensive) field work?

A point to note, experienced scholars suggest that walking about in the field is at best in pairs rather than in a large group. The aim is to avoid attention of informants toward the group that may create 'unreliable data-making'. A basic understanding of reading 'signs' and symbols or having knowledge on semiotics is useful while doing observation (Manning, 1987). Semiotics is an investigation into how meaning is created and how meaning is communicated. Often, this dimension of observation is often being neglected by novice researchers. Contextually, semiotic-fieldwork is able to reveal the underlying code system structuring the meaning of materials/artifacts and informants experiences in field sites. Semiotic provides access to an array of non-verbal codes in the field that reflect informants' lifestyles, mood states, and social life. In this regard, researchers can use projective tasks that invited informants to be associate their experiences with non-verbal symbols. Truly, knowing the native semantics (local dialect or accent) is a plus factor. In relation to the above my favourite semiotic starting point is the local grocery store. It is here that many indicators being deposited; reading habits via newspapers, drinking habit through type of coffee sold or even political indications as manifested on the shop walls.

Meanwhile in interviewing, topic guides (what subjects to be include) rather than questions should be the aide-memoire, that is on what should be explored (Marshall and

Rossman, 2011). Of equal important is ordering data collection for a smooth progression of sensibility. What enabling techniques to use? The term enabling technique refers to a technique for stimulating thinking and self-expression, thus 'enabling' participants to talk and discuss about topics further and deeply (Ritchie, 2014). What case examples and vignettes to be employed? What objects or artifacts that could be brought to the field discussions? These materials help 'to move beyond the initial general responses and to achieve greater level of depth and specificity' (p. 165). Do not forget expressions and metaphors used in the field. As said by linguist, the language sets up the world. What should be included in the field notes? How the data should be recorded? Jackson (1990) suggests field notes 'represent an individualistic, pioneering, approach to acquiring knowledge. "They symbolize the 'ordeal by fire' that is journeying to the field and the 'uncertainty, mystique and … ambivalence' of that journey'. In sum, it is worth to create visual of big oval (research purpose/research question), smaller ovals (relevant research dimensions) and rectangles (indicators or concepts that effectively will be engaged).

Practically advises given by Lofland and Lofland (1984) and Spradley (1980) are worth to be employed in note taking. The former list is as follows: Who is he? What does he do? What do you think he meant by that? What are they supposed to do? Why did he do that? Why is that done? What happens after _____? What would happen if _____? What do you think about _____? Who is responsible if _____? (p. 48). Meanwhile Spradley list includes: 1. Space: the physical place or places 2. Actor: the people involved 3. Activity: a set of related acts people do 4. Object: the physical things that are present 5. Act: single actions that people do 6. Event: a set of related activities that people carry out 7. Time: the sequencing that takes place over time 8. Goal: the things people are trying to accomplish 9. Feeling: the emotions felt and expressed (p. 78).

Data as Text

In field work engagement all verbal and visual data are transformed into texts by documenting them, and by transcription. Texts serve three purposes, namely as the essential data on which findings are based upon, the basis of interpretation and as medium of presenting and communicating findings (Flick, 2014). The collected data made into texts now become a substitute of reality and they are now being transformed into a life-world. As a concept in social sciences, life-world (German: *Lebenswelt*) refers to the world as lived prior to representation or analysis.

Hermeneutic Analysis

Nowadays, hermeneutics is being viewed as an assertion that understanding is an interpretation of texts. Historically, understanding via hermeneutics is deeply rooted in German tradition of 'sciences of the spirit' (*Geistwissenschaften*). Such action is done by taking the inner process of *verstehen* (the interpretive or participatory examination of social phenomena). As a term, *verstehen* is a systematic interpretive process in which an outside observer of (textual) phenomena attempts to relate to it and understand the meaning of action from the actor's (authors) point of view. In this research stance actors (characters) are subjects, rather than objects, of researchers' observations. The opposite of *verstehen* is *erklaren* (causal explanation).

Hans Georg Gadamer is the most forceful and coherent exponent of contemporary hermeneutics. Gadamer (1985) proposes, among others, that hermeneutical analysis must live on certain order, namely the hermeneutic rule: understanding the whole in terms of the detail, and the detail in terms of the whole. Here, the correct understanding means the harmony of all details with the whole (p. 291). In Gadamerian hermeneutics, data analysis begins with the following philosophical assumptions:

a)   There is no pre-suppostionless knowledge; the known and the knower are recognized to have their own conception and prejudices (*vorurteil*) about the life-world under study. The fusion of both x and y worlds makes understanding possible.

b)   In order to understand the researched life-world, the researcher must understand based upon the researched own light. Meanings in this regard are constantly shaped and re-shaped by both the known and the knower.

c)   Situatedness especially the historicity of various events and moments is at the centre of the understanding process.

d)   In understanding, a circular movement from the part to the whole and back again from the whole to its parts tied the known and the knower, the researcher and the researched, in a research engagement has become a method of interpreting data that being recognized as texts.
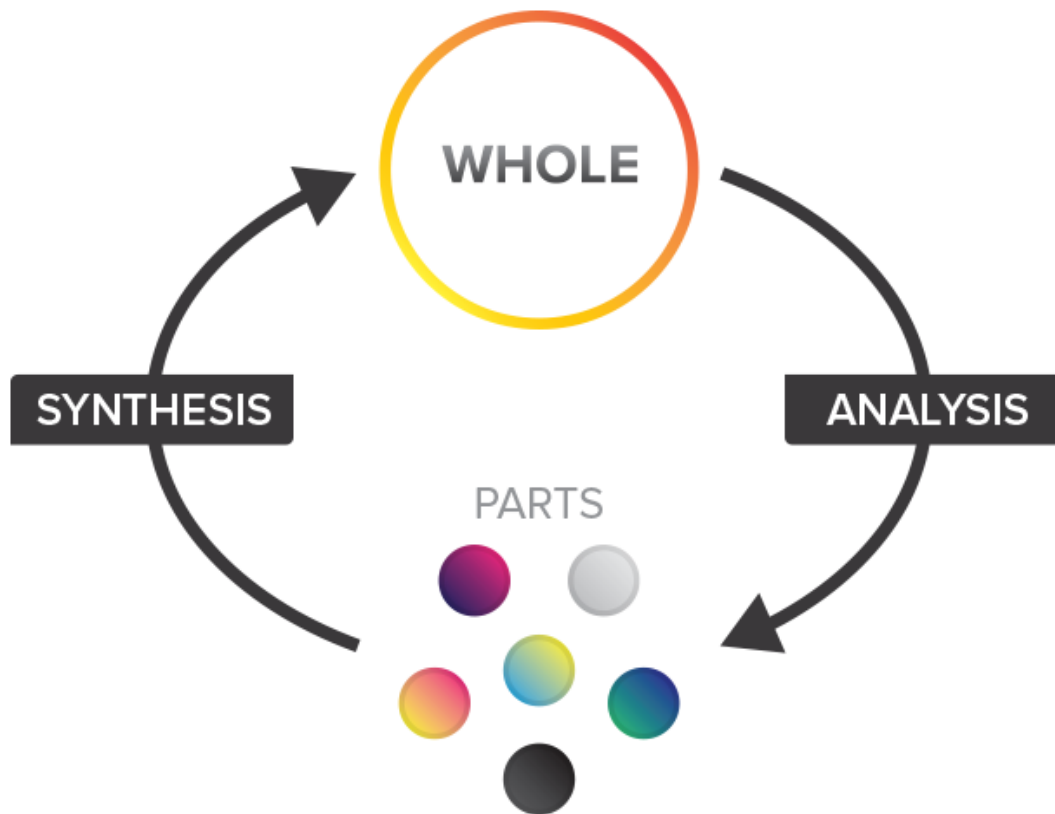
Simply, hermeneutical understanding is produced through systematic interpretation processes. These processes are known as a hermeneutic circle. Interpretation of details affects the interpretation of the entire phenomenon; reviews of these interpretations produce a deepening understanding of the phenomenon. The circle starts at any point of engagement, perhaps before entering the field work. For example, reading literature on the topic in the light of our prejudices --- previous experiences or events. Here, moving back-and-forth of iterating 'facts' is common and expected action. Pertti Alasuutari (1995) noted that the most basic of what being sought from this hermeneutic circle is to grasp the subjective sense of a way of life where latent/manifested *motives and meanings* are being floated before our eye. Making typologies should not be the result, but only a starting point for analysis and interpretation (p. 49).

Having said the above, supposedly going for hermeneutical analysis should be an action after doing Colaizzi (1978) process of data analysis. Sander (2003) summarizes Collaizzi method of reading textual data as follows:

1. Each transcript should be read and re-read in order to obtain a general sense about the whole content. 2. For each transcript, significant statements that pertain to the phenomenon under study should be extracted. These statements must be recorded on a separate sheet noting their pages and lines numbers. 3. Meanings should be formulated from these significant statements. 4. The formulated meanings should be sorted into categories, clusters of themes, and themes. 5. The findings of the study should be integrated into an exhaustive description of the phenomenon

under study. 6. The fundamental structure of the phenomenon should be described. 7. Finally, validation of the findings should be sought from the research participants to compare the researcher's descriptive results with their experiences.

In general, the interpretation of texts (the transcript of the interviews and field notes) should uncovers the internal logic of the data. As themes and common patterns emerge, the net of interpretation widened. Themes were those that came researcher's mind, intuitively (Macaulay, 2004), and it is supported by the 'individual' text after 'projecting' one's own before the constructed text. This first meaning emerges due to one's 'prejudices' toward the constructed text. A good discussion on this aspect of bias in qualitative research can be seen in Mantzoukas (2005) works. Indeed, such inclusion of bias and prejudices is a prerequisite for securing validity in the research. After all, in fieldwork the 'I-witness' not the 'eye witness' is at work. Surely, this 'inner prejudicial gazing' (Behalves and Strindberg, 2000) must be in the form of 'bracketing' as meeting in the horizon had not yet takes place. Bracketing is a kind of reduction that describes the act of suspending judgment. In other words, the metaphor of bracketing means one's must bracket *vorurteil* and personal commitments as meanings are with describing experiences. Zenobia Chan (2013) suggests "BRACKETING" strategies as follows:

Begin with a mentality assessment of the researchers' personality; **R**eflexivity helps the researchers to identify areas of potential bias; **A**nalyze data in IPA using Colaizzi's method; **C**omply with the prevailing gate-keeping policy when deciding the scope of the literature review; **K**eep a reflexive diary, helping to awaken the researchers' own pre-conceptions; **E**ngage participants in bracketing during the data collection process when indicated; **T**horough research planning before data collection; **I**nterview the participants using open-ended questions; adopt a **N**ot-knowing stand to maintain the curiosity in the participants; **G**enerate knowledge from participants via semi-structured interviews (pp. 6-7).

However, the above attitude should be acceptable when *verstehen* is not at work. Qualitatively, it is just a *vorurteil* that one must live with. At this point, reflexivity on biases must be celebrated even though the interpreter project on the text is going to be shaped by one's own assumptions and biases. The projects of meaning multiply with further readings, and some of them conflict with each other. The best solution is to go back to the text and commits oneself to *vorurteil* check via reflexivity.

One of the key for recovering meaning embedded in text is to embrace 'question'. Gadamer says that every text is an answer to a question, but the question is not always in the text. So the interpreter must seek "the horizon of the question" to which the text is an answer. As such the interpreter must go behind the text to find the meaning. Indeed the text is asking a fundamental question,' what do I mean?" This position is line with the principle of superfluity where every word is precise and significant. Perhaps the above performance can be realized by interrogating two interacting and interplaying leitmotifs (guiding motif) of hermeneutics --- language and historicity. "We live out our lives in time, but that who we are is through and through historical" (Wachterhauser, 1994). Similarly it is through language that 'the past is transported into the present and carried over into the future' (p. 9). Simply, the text must be

understood as an answer to the question, and it could be found in the fusion of two (of the known and the knower) horizons. Illustratively the phase toward the answer can be seen as below:
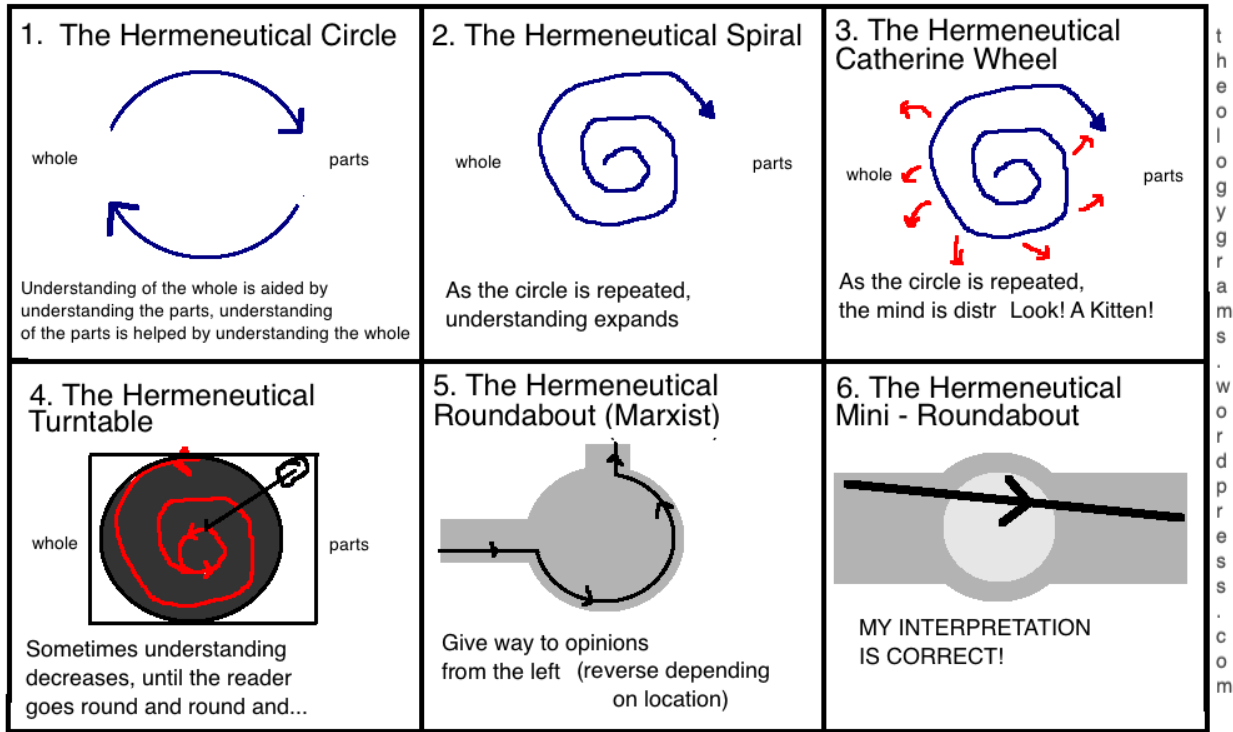
Whatever, the hermeneutical analysis is expected to give answers or extracting more from the material than is visible from the naked eye. It should give answers to question of why not merely answers to questions of what. Therefore researchers must go 'unriddling' (asking why) mysteries with the data collected (Alasuutari, 1995). Strategies include the following: cross comparison with other fieldwork, view contradictions with other cases of similar nature, relationship with artifacts and images as prevailing in the public sphere, identifying silences, internal contradictions within research materials, the search for normative conceptions, and search for umbrella concepts.

End Notes

Fieldwork concerns with 'local interpretation' and 'local knowledge' although it is by no means the end point of the study. It should be a departure of opening new theoretical ideas.
"I want to understand the world from your point of view. I want to know what you know in the way you know it. I want to understand the meaning of your experience, to walk in your shoes, to feel things as you feel them, to explain things as you explain them. Will you become my teacher and   help   me   understand?"
― James P. Spradley (1933-1982)

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