



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**SATISFACTION WITH THE GOVERNMENT AS A MEDIATOR IN
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ONLINE NEWS GRATIFICATION AND
ELECTION VOTING CHOICES**

MUMTAZ AINI BINTI ALIVI

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By

MUMTAZ AINI BINTI ALIVI

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra
Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of
Philosophy**

May 2019

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to

My mother

Zubaidah Kunju Mohd

and

My father

Alivi Mohamad

Thank you for the love and care you showered on me and for being by my side through thick and thin in life until I reached this path. Thank you for all the prayers and numerous sacrifices you made which made me what I am today.

For all the success I have achieved today, I owe you both.

Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in
fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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May 2019

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Faculty : Modern Languages and Communication

Media plays an important role in shaping a country's democracy by feeding the public with relevant and purposeful information. Usage of media is crucial for the public before they could make decisions about the political landscape of the country by voting. In recent years, online news sites have played a key role in influencing vote choice, the hallmark of democracy. Likewise, the emergence of online news is recognized for its importance in shaping the political discourse in Malaysia. However, previous studies on online news have not dealt with the relationship between online news gratifications and vote choice. Studies on online news are scarce and research on the impact of online news gratification on vote choice in Malaysia is inconclusive. Therefore, the general objective of this study is to investigate the relationship between online news gratifications in determining vote choice. Specifically, this research aims to understand the motive for using online news and the gratification sought and obtained from it in influencing vote choice. The study is guided by the combination of Uses and Gratification and Rational Choice theory. Using the quantitative approach, the study was carried out by engaging a total of 700 respondents who were registered voters living in Klang Valley. Apart from using purposive sampling, snowball sampling was also employed to select respondents from different races. The data was analyzed using IBM SPSS for descriptive statistic and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) using SmartPLS for modelling. The finding revealed that online news plays a vital role in shaping the opinion of citizens which is translated through vote choice. In addition, the study also indicated that the motive to use online news and the gratification obtained are significant in determining vote choice. However, gratification sought was found to be insignificant in determining vote choice. Meanwhile, satisfaction with the government were also found as an important indicator that determines the relationship between online news gratification and vote choice. This study provides crucial practical implications that can benefit the media industry. In

terms of policy implication, government can capitalize on the effectiveness of the online medium to reach the public and rationalize major policy decisions. This study also contributes to theory development by adding the element of satisfaction with government as a mediating construct in the theoretical framework. In terms of methodological implication, this study contributes to the literature by expanding the usage of PLS-SEM analysis in social science, generally and mass communication field, specifically.



Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**KEPUASAN TERHADAP KERAJAAN SEBAGAI PENGANTARA DALAM
HUBUNGAN ANTARA PEMUASAN BERITA DALAM TALIAN DAN
PEMILIHAN PENGUNDIAN PILIHANRAYA**

Oleh

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Media memainkan peranan yang penting dalam mencorak pendemokrasian sesebuah negara melalui penyaluran maklumat bersesuaian dan tertentu kepada masyarakat. Penggunaan media oleh masyarakat adalah penting sebelum mereka membuat keputusan mengenai landasan politik di dalam negara melalui pengundian. Dalam beberapa tahun kebelakangan ini, berita dalam talian telah memainkan peranan utama dalam mempengaruhi pilihan pengundian, yang merupakan penanda aras proses demokrasi. Di landasan yang sama, kewujudan berita dalam talian diiktiraf kepentingannya dalam mencorak wacana politik di Malaysia. Bagaimanapun, kajian lepas bagi berita dalam talian tidak mengkaji mengenai hubungkait antara kepuasan pembacaan berita dalam talian dan pilihan pengundian. Kekurangan kajian mengenai berita dalam talian dan kajian mengenai kesan kepuasan berita dalam talian dan kesannya terhadap pilihan pengundian tidak dapat disangkal. Justeru, objektif umum mengenai kajian ini ialah untuk mengkaji hubungkait antara kepuasan berita dalam talian dalam membentuk pilihan pengundian. Secara khusus, kajian ini bermatlamat untuk memahami motif untuk menggunakan berita dalam talian dan juga kepuasan yang dicari dan dikecapi dalam membentuk pilihan pengundian. Kajian ini berlandaskan kombinasi teori Penggunaan dan Kepuasan serta teori Pilihan Rasional. Menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif, kajian ini melibatkan sejumlah 700 responden yang merupakan pengundi berdaftar yang tinggal di kawasan Lembah Klang. Selain menggunakan kaedah persampelan bertujuan, teknik bola salji turut diaplikasi untuk mencari responden berbilang bangsa. Data kemudiannya dianalisis menggunakan perisian IBM SPSS bagi statistik deskriptif manakala Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) menggunakan perisian SmartPLS bagi membina model. Hasil kajian mendapati bahawa berita dalam talian memainkan peranan penting dalam mencorak pandangan masyarakat yang seterusnya direalisasikan melalui pilihan pengundian. Kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa motif menggunakan berita dalam talian dan kepuasan yang dikecapi

adalah signifikan dalam menentukan pilihan pengundian. Bagaimanapun, kepuasan yang dicari dilihat tidak signifikan dalam menentukan pilihan pengundian. Dalam pada itu, kepuasan terhadap kerajaan juga dilihat sebagai penunjuk penting dalam menentukan hubungkait antara kepuasan berita dalam talian dan pilihan pengundian. Kajian ini juga memberikan pelbagai implikasi yang boleh dimanfaatkan oleh industri media. Dari segi implikasi polisi, kerajaan boleh memberikan tumpuan dalam meningkatkan penggunaan berita dalam talian secara efektif dalam mendekati masyarakat dan menjelaskan polisi-polisi penting. Kajian ini juga menyumbang kepada pengembangan teori dengan menambah elemen kepuasan terhadap kerajaan sebagai kontrak perantara dalam kerangka teoritikal. Dari segi implikasi methodologi, kajian ini menyumbang kepada literatur dengan mengembangkan penggunaan analisis PLS-SEM dalam bidang sains sosial secara umum dan bidang komunikasi massa secara khusus.



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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

1MDB	1Malaysia Development Berhad
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
BERNAMA	Malaysian National News Agency
BN	Barisan Nasional
CB-SEM	Covariance-based Structural Equation Modelling
CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
CR	Composite Reliability
CMV	Common Method Variance
DAP	Democratic Action Party
GST	Goods and Services Tax
HTMT	Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio of Correlations
ISA	Internal Security Act
JKEUPM	The Ethics Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects
OSA	Official Secret Act
PAS	Parti Islam SeMalaysia
PH	Pakatan Harapan
PLS-SEM	Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling
PKR	Parti Keadilan Rakyat
PPPA	The Printing Presses and Publications Act
PR	Pakatan Rakyat
RTM	Radio Televisyen Malaysia
SA	Sedition Act
SEM	Structural Equation Modelling
UGC	User-Generated Content
VIF	Variance Inflation Factor

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the topic of the study. It explains the role played by the media and online news in feeding information to the public and its influence towards vote choice. The chapter highlights the background of the study, statement of the research problem, research questions, research objectives, significant of the research, scope of the research, limitation, keywords definition and summary.

1.2 Research Background

Media plays an important role in shaping the country democracies by feeding the public the relevant information they need. Usage of media is crucial for the public before they could determine the political landscape of their country by voting. Media is known as one of the key players in a democratic society (Idid & Chang, 2012; McQuail, 2005; Street, 2010), principally in improving many aspects related to political phenomenon and democratic performance.

News from the media is the main source of acquiring information regarding government policies and many other issues which can help the voters decide and choose the best candidate from a particular political party to serve the nation. Brundidge (2010a) identified that news has a pivotal role in association with a higher percentage of political discussion and updates. News has been used as a tool to collect as much as information needed by the nation, especially when it comes to political issues.

The usage of online news has been rising among users lately. It offers not only digital version of the newspaper, but it actually provides a combined form of print media, television and radio. The role played by the media through communication activities which are presented in various forms carry the potential to shape voter's decision (Danaher & Rossiter, 2011). The flood of information made available on online news platforms provides the public with many choices in accessing related information.

As a key social institution, new media in the form of online news functions as a baton to disseminate information to the public (Banerjee, 2004). It is hence important to understand if the information provided may lead to people's satisfaction with the government and whether that, in turn, determines vote choice.

Information feed disseminated to the public can impact how they evaluate the political landscape of the country and finally, influence their decision in choosing the right candidate as their representative in the government. In democratic countries, the power of the ruling government is gained by winning elections (Louw, 2010) where both the political party and the political candidate depend greatly on the media to influence citizens to support them.

Online news sites in recent years have taken part in influencing vote choice, which is a hallmark of democracy. For example, in Malaysia itself, during the 2008 General Election, BN has lost its power in five states as a result of the information provided on online medium which positively steered an inclination for the opposition coalition to win the election (Rahim, 2010).

The following 2013 General Election witnessed an overwhelming loss of popular votes for BN. BN also ruled a reduced number of parliamentary seats by winning only 133 seats from 222 parliamentary seats, 5 seats less than 138 seats won in 2008 General Election (Noh, 2014).

Online news enables citizens to obtain information on government policies or achievements and become active citizens of a democracy. Some citizens might even be willing to pay for online news (Goyanes, 2014; Lee, Kim, & Koh, 2016), which they perceive as a more trustworthy news source (Song, Jung, & Kim, 2016).

The power of news to implement the nation's agenda is widely practiced in many countries around the world. Public gets most of the information about the political arena through news updates relayed in various channels such as television, radio, print media and also online media. Media organizations has been playing a great role in disseminating news which covers political and social issues that are essential for the development of the country (Vraga et al., 2012).

Media and news provide reports on the latest development in the country. Priority is given to key public issues which will benefit the public and the nation. Public relies on news not only to gather information which is factual; the news itself molds the thinking of the public by shaping their opinion towards particular issues. The satisfaction towards the actions taken by the government on various issues fueled by news gratification will influence voters' opinion in voting.

News provides citizens with most of the information on government issues and policies. Citizens utilize news in various ways. Some just read it as information, while others go deeper in terms of evaluating if they are satisfied with the government when they read about its achievements reported in the news. They might build their own cognitive map of the political discourse in

the country. Citizens nowadays are also more expressive on online platforms about anything related to the actions of the ruling government and opposition (Pandian, 2014).

In modern democracies, the voters heavily depend on the news content for their evaluations of the political trends while choosing the right political party or political candidate which they believe can serve them better. These evaluations will be manifested by voting on the day of election. Voters in a democratic country may choose a candidate which they believe can represent their needs. Meanwhile, potential candidates compete for votes and will act strategically based on the demands of the citizens.

The younger generation is more attracted to online news sources compared to traditional media (Matsa & Lu, 2016) where their decision-making process is influenced by the assessment of the online news they have read. In particular, Malaysian younger generation has been reported to be using the online platform to gather information about politics (Wok, Tamam, Bolong, & Ahmad, 2011). At the same time, the generation is technology savvy and is always engaged on online platforms during the information seeking process. However, their level of acceptance on the information provided through the online medium depends on the credibility of the news (Ahmad Ghazali & Nurdin, 2016).

Information such as news on politics, economy, education, health and other various segments attract the attention of the people to use the media as a channel to access the news. Information provided in the online news boosts public's knowledge and gratify them by providing the notion of particular issues before they could form their own opinions towards the issues. The public uses the media to identify whether the action taken by the government on various issues fulfill their needs.

Mainstream media in Malaysia is controlled by the government through a number of policies, media laws and regulations such as Internal Security Act (ISA) 1960, Sedition Act (SA) 1948, Official Secret Act (OSA) 1972, The Printing Presses and Publications Act (PPPA) 1984, among others. All these acts have limited the power of media and controlled press freedom in Malaysia for many decades. The control is applied directly and indirectly by the government to regulate media organizations. Direct control is applied through restricted laws such as ISA, SA, OSA and PPPA, while indirect control is implemented through share ownership.

For example, free-to-air television channels such as Radio Television Malaysia (RTM) is under the purview of Ministry of Communications and Multimedia. Before the 14th General Election, private television channels under Media Prima were also controlled by the organization which has strong linkages with the previous ruling government, Barisan Nasional (BN). Based

on this, it is clear that the content of the news highlighted in the mainstream media are controlled by the government (Suffian, 2010). Mainstream media has been manipulated to mold people's perception by agenda setting to favor the ruling party.

Nowadays, citizens bypass the traditional media gatekeeper to gather information related to various issues on politics, social and economy (Press & Williams, 2010) in online sources by directly connecting to information newsfeeds from the government, political parties as well as political leaders (Negrine, 2008).

During the rule of BN party, opposition party's news is often given very limited coverage unless they support any action taken by the government. In other words, the opposition party was not given a fair share of coverage in the mainstream media to disseminate their political agenda and aspirations.

The growth of online news is also triggered by the tight control of traditional media, whereby media organizations have less freedom in reporting political issues (Kenyon, 2010). Most of the time, they are more inclined to publish pro-government issues (Samani, Maliki, Rahim, Abdul Rahman, & Mustaffa, 2015). Due to this development, Malaysians turned to online news to seek for an alternative point of view, mainly on political issues (Sani & Zengeni, 2010).

Before the 2018 general election, all the mainstream media channels in Malaysia were directly or indirectly controlled by the government through certain rules. The rules are either set by the government or by the media organization itself. Lim (2007) indicated that the nature of media control in the country has never changed since media exists in Malaysia. The trend continues until today whereby Malaysia is ranked 145th among 180 countries around the world in World Press Freedom index for the year 2018 (Reporters Without Borders, 2018).

However, in recent years, there has been an increasing interest towards online news in Malaysia. Things changed with the birth of online news media where more freedom has been gained in reporting news content as not much control were exercised on online news, especially for independent news portal and blogs. However, the online version of mainstream media is still subjected to the control of the government.

The extensive accessibility derived from technology creates high-choice media availability through the online environment which enables people to access political news from different media outlets (Dubois & Blank, 2018). This is evident from the fact that mainstream media in Malaysia shows a drop in readership since 2004 (Mohd Yahya & Noor Ismawati, 2009) and points toward the gradual slow death of print media each year (Keat, 2014) due to

the domination of new media which attracts the citizen. The switch of choice from newspaper to online media is substantial in Malaysia (Freeman, 2013) since it offers many attractions such as two-way communication, immediacy and convenience (Yoo, 2011).

In explaining news content, a clear documentation exists to describe the difference between what the news journalist writes and what the public digests and shares (Boczkowski, 2010). A journalist needs to fulfill and follow the ethics of journalism and balance it with the public interest. This leads to a different version of news pattern in online news which exercises more freedom compared to traditional media (Tandoc, 2014).

A number of studies have been conducted by scholars to determine how online media transformed the political arena in Malaysia by providing a platform for political discourse (Liow, 2012; Lopez, 2012; Subramaniam, 2011). The studies revealed that the usage of online news gives a different perspective of information to the public compared to their traditional media counterpart. Most of the news contents that are often hidden in the traditional media are published in online news sites.

At the same time, the opposition party especially maximizes the online news medium to share their version of the information, and this slowly gives some impact to the Malaysian political discourse. The outcome of the 2018 General Election in Malaysia has also demonstrated the impact of new media, especially social media as the most dominant medium for communication among the electorates to engage with the particular political parties (Sani, 2018).

Online news provides a lot of benefits too due to their various characteristics such as the high capacity of memory, high selectivity and greater information accessibility around the world (Schweitzer, 2012). These characteristics of online news make it as a more preferred channel to spread news more widely.

Online news may gratify readers by linking them to the information they need. Gratification is identified as a factor in choosing computer-mediated communication (Ku, Chu, & Tseng, 2013). Citizens may gain gratification by reading online news, and this is beneficial for them. They might surf on online news mediums to get further information on issues that attract their attention. Online platform also provides many sources of information on the same issue which allows a reader to compare and collect more information on the same topic from various sources online.

Online media in Malaysia is observed to be positively related to information which is freely written without much filtration, where it enables the public to

post anything without being concerned about the ruling government (Kenyon & Marjoribanks, 2007). Most of the information given on online news platforms such as independent news portal, social media or blogs are fueled by negative feelings about the government policies or misconducts which are hidden in the mainstream media.

However, the online version of mainstream media provides the same credible news because they still have a gatekeeper. Almost a decade ago, Benkler (2006) studied how online news creates more reflexive news development; but it revealed that the domination of traditional media still wide from the perspective of political news.

Most of the members of the younger generation prefers to access information from online media rather than television and print media (Schafer, 2010). The growth in the communication world allows the maximum use of the tools to widen the access for the traditional media to go online. As a result, the public can now access the traditional media online too. Most people in turn, especially the younger generation have begun to use multiple media sources to gather information needed (Jeong, Fishbein, & Jordan, 2007).

A previous study also showed that public use different types of media channel to get various information they need (Danaher & Rossiter, 2011). Both traditional media and new media can be fully utilized by the public to get some information related to various issues, at the same time to consider which leader or political party they want to choose (Curran, Iyengar, Lund, & Salovaara-Moring, 2009).

Numerous independent online news portals have sprung up in the last few years in Malaysia and they are widely accessed by the public for news updates. *Malaysiakini* is now known as one of the most important and influential online news portals in Malaysia (Smeltzer & Lepawsky, 2010). Another online news portal which is equally popular among Malaysians is *Malaysian Insider* which began its operation since 2008. *Malaysia Today* is also another favorite online news portal which operates independently.

This research explores the ability of online news to determine the vote choice of the people based on the influence of the news they have read from online medium. The rise of online news in Malaysia has helped to deepen a healthy democracy in the country. In order to have an effective political communication, coherent communication practice should apply (Ordeix & Ginesta, 2011). The research aims to explain why news published in online media could have an impact on how voters make their decision and implement it through voting. It also explains why the issues highlighted in the media satisfy the need of the public based on public's evaluation of a candidate and a party. This understanding is important because citizens use

different media channels to get information about various issues before they make their final voting decision (van der Wurff, 2011).

The study investigating voting decision and identifies to what extent the people rely on their predispositions to vote based on the information they have received from online news messages. News has been used as a tool to deliver political messages; at the same time, it controls the mindset of the people towards certain agenda (Andaleeb, Rahman, Rajeb, Akter, & Gulshan, 2012).

Democracy allows the citizen the ability to voice out their choice and shape public policy by electing the political leader and the political party which they believe can serve them the best. A previous study pointed out that people have different opinions on how they see the political world based on their attitudes towards the news they have read (Ladd, 2004).

In Malaysia, the development of the many sectors in the country is always given priority during any political campaign as development achievements and plans are key factors that the nation draws upon in deciding their choice (Mersat & Sanggin, 2011). In the past, the public viewed and believed that BN party is able to provide continuous development throughout the country (Hussain, 2010).

However, the trend of support from public to the political party witnessed a pattern of change in every general election (Ghazali, Othman, Abdul Rahman, & Fauzi, 2010). Drastic changes happened in 2018 General Election where the support for the BN party collapsed and for the first time, and the opposition party won the general election held in Malaysia.

Citizens who are interested in politics follow political news information closely compared to those who are not interested and would not be affected by the short-term campaign influence (Dassonneville, 2012; Kuhn, 2009; van der Meer, van Elsas, Lubbe & van der Brug, 2015). For many decades, scholars have firmly proven that citizens will mold the political view and determine their vote choice based on the information they have gained, especially from traditional news. So, this study seeks to establish the importance of online news which is still new in Malaysia and how it may shape citizens' vote choice.

1.3 Statement of the Research Problem

Lately, public have an option to get information from various sources such as online media which is widely used compared to few decades ago where news sources were entirely accessible only on the traditional media. The

usage of internet, smartphones, television, radio and newspaper has offered the public more choices to access news updates. In a study conducted by Quandt (2012), public was found to show the trend of turning to the internet as a source of information as they believe it to be more trustworthy. This is due to the increased transparency and freedom offered in the news content.

The vast development in the media industry has changed the domination of traditional media in delivering news messages to the public. The combination of traditional media and online media creates various platforms for news to be delivered to the public (Minami, 2011). Thus, the citizen will have a more comprehensive news coverage on any particular issue they would like to know further.

Nowadays, the public is more interested in sourcing for news from online media. Online news consists of independent news portals, blogs, social media and the online version of traditional media. Gong (2011) found that online news can give an impact to the political landscape while helping to facilitate the process of democracy in a country.

New media can become a vehicle for democratic discourse in a country, but unabridged voice of citizen in pointing their point of view without control is dangerous (Marien, 2006). This scenario is crucial because certain online news platforms, especially blogs and social media do not have gatekeepers to review the news content and evaluate its suitability before it goes online. Information and facts provided in this platform could be questionable because they are not subjected to ethical guidelines and standards of journalism. Scholars argue that online news may generate the impact of creating further distortion of information (McChesney & Pickard, 2011; Starr, 2011). Namely, the lack of regulation and news standards may lead to the spread of false information, rumors and defamation.

This scenario is seen as alarming and worrying in Malaysia to the extent that the previous government, BN introduced the Anti-Fake News Act. The bill, which is a measure to control the fake news dissemination on online platforms, received parliament's approval on 2nd April 2018. The implementation of this Act was perceived as vital in preventing the spread of false news as the government saw that it might cause detrimental outcomes to the people and country. The previous prime minister, Najib Razak said that nowadays, many people tend to become journalists without the proper formal journalism training, and they spread news which may jeopardize national security based on their own perception without verifying them (Reduan & Karim, 2018).

The overload of information on the online news platforms is also believed to lead to rampant misinformation (Silver, 2012). The world of information becomes diverse and complex over time. Human brain is believed to have

the capability to store three terabytes of information. Therefore, overloaded information produces a greater sectarian tendency to slant towards a certain party without knowing the truth of the information provided.

News from the internet are efficient in propagating information and spread unscrupulous ideas which may lead to disproportionate effects (Silver, 2012). This phenomenon needs to be studied further, especially in understanding the impact of online news towards vote choice because political stability is very important in any country. The discussion which is widely discussed in online forums provides a perfect opportunity for citizens to exchange their points of view on certain issues. This is possible as online news is not restricted by licensing and circulation control (Wok & Mohamed, 2017).

So, based on all this discussion, it is crucial to know whether news sourced from online platforms gives an impact, particularly to Malaysian political landscape. However, the ability of online news gratification to determine vote choice remains unclear. Hence, this study is important in order to identify if information published on online news sources can shape voters' opinion. Citizens has the right to get the accurate and truthful information before they could make their voting decision.

It is important to address this issue in order to find out how the gratification sought and obtained from online news can give an impact on vote choice. At the same time, it is also important to recognize if the motive to use online news can also shape vote choice. A study conducted by Gallego and Oberski (2012) indicated that news which is believed by the people can contribute to the result through the actions they take. Online news is known for boosting the engagement in political discourse in the country (Dimitrova, Shehata, Stromback, & Nord, 2014)

However, previous studies of online news have not dealt with the relationship between online news gratifications and vote choice. Empirical research that focuses specifically on the influence of online news gratification on vote choice in Malaysia has never be done before. In Malaysia, studies on online news, namely pertaining to the impact of online news gratification on vote choice are limited, while existing research findings are inconclusive. Most of the research focus on the gratification for using new media without relating the gratification impact on vote choice. No convincing empirical study has been conducted yet to understand why the public discourse in online medium will mold their opinion towards their vote choice.

This parameter of research received very little attention from scholars of the communication field in Malaysia. Previous studies focused more on the usage of internet for online communication, with little evidence on the impact of new media on real-world act of voting (Coleman, Lieber, Mendelson, & Kurpius, 2008), especially in Malaysia. To the best of the researcher's

knowledge, no studies has been conducted so far on how the gratification achieved by the voters by reading online news can influence their vote choice in Malaysia. Only a handful of prior research is found, and they are limited specifically to impact of social media such as Facebook and Twitter on political participation. Thus, this is the research gap this study aims to fill. It focuses on the gratification achieved by the people upon reading online news in order to evaluate the development of the country and the resulting sense of satisfaction with the government before they determine their vote choice.

This study differs compared to other studies which examined only the influence on social media in gratifying the needs of the people. In this study, a model is developed to understand the impact of online news in determining vote choice. The new construct of “satisfaction with the government” is also added to the model as a mediating construct to understand why it will influence the relationship between online news gratification and vote choice.

Numerous studies have been conducted, mainly on the role played by traditional media such as television, radio and newspaper in providing information during political campaigns, and they have been found to have an impact on vote choice (Kim & Johnson, 2006; Towner & Dulio, 2011). The studies also focused on the role of traditional media in offering favorable news to the BN party, the former ruling government, which was the recurring trend in the general elections conducted in 1990, 1995 and 1999. Thus, scholars have suggested that the study on new media should be given more attention, considering that for many decades, studies in this field were only focused on traditional media studies using agenda setting theory (Idid, 2017).

Another scope of past studies was to identify the role of social media during the election period. For example, in Malaysian context, Samad (2013) indicated that one of the opposition parties, PAS heavily relies on social media to disseminate their information to the public.

Many studies were also conducted to understand the usage of the internet during general elections and voters' turnouts in local or global contexts (Geys, 2006; Marcelo, Lopez, Kennedy, & Barr, 2008; Simon, 1996). Other studies focused on new media and social media and their link to voting behavior or voter turnouts (Gibson, 2013; Hellweg, 2011; Muniandy & Muniandy, 2013; Supli, 2013).

This study seeks to identify if online news can gratify the reader and if this will finally lead them to choose a particular political leader or the particular political party based on the gratification achieved. Previous studies indicated that the candidate plays a better role in determining the vote choice compared to the party (Mair, 1987; King, 2000). The candidate's influence on vote choice is higher because of their individual persona, who they are and what they are going to do for the nation, compared to the party which they

represent. In the electoral system, the candidate has the ability to shine and stand out from the others in the party and develop their own personal following (Carey & Shugart, 1995). In Malaysian political landscape, this element is made obvious by the success achieved in the 14th General Election in 2018 by the then opposition party, primarily due to the aura and influence of the Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad who represented the party. This is how the candidate element is important in shaping vote choice. There are also few other elements that can contribute to voting analyze, such as loyalty to the particular party and also personal affiliations (Shawar & Asim, 2012).

Nowadays, people around the world are exposed to the internet and news is at their fingertips. It was reported that there are around 3.2 billion internet users in the world (World Bank, 2018) and 24.5 million of them are in Malaysia, as reported by the previous minister in Prime Minister's office, Nancy Shukri (Povera, 2018). Thus, it is deniable that a great number of people in Malaysia engage online sources for news update, which provides a strong justification for conducting the present study due to the high usage of online news and its impact on vote choice.

The political landscape in Malaysia has been in the limelight in recent years due to drastic changes of political power in few states of the country which were dominated by the ruling government, Barisan Nasional (BN) for decades. The 2008 General Election witnessed the radical change that has occurred in the country's politics when the opposition party captured 37% of the parliamentary seats; it eliminated the two-third majority domination of the ruling BN party's political power (Guan, 2010).

This scenario shows that the voters are not inclined to remain attached to a particular political party anymore and they want to see some changes in the administration of certain states by voting for another party. They want changes to take place in various issues to achieve a better quality of life. This is witnessed in the state government after the 2008 General Election when Pakatan Rakyat, the opposition party at that time won in Selangor (Othman & Ghazali, 2013) and demonstrated good administration practices compared to earlier BN government. The efficiency of the state government brings a lot of improvement in Selangor.

Thus, it is important to understand if the news highlighted in online media can gratify voters in aiding them to decide their vote choice. The finding is essential to understand the importance of online news in shaping voters' choice. To examine this key issue, the following research questions and research objectives are established.

1.4 Research Questions

- i. Do voters' motives of using online news have an effect on their political vote choice?
- ii. Do voters' motives of using online news have an effect on their satisfaction with the government?
- iii. Do voters' satisfaction with the government has an effect on their political vote choice?
- iv. Do voters' gratification sought from online news has an effect on their political vote choice?
- v. Do voters' gratification obtained from online news has an effect on their political vote choice?
- vi. Does satisfaction with the government mediate the relationship between motives to use online news and political vote choice?

1.5 Research Objectives

1.5.1 General Objective

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between online news gratifications and its influence on political vote choice in Malaysia.

1.5.2 Specific Objective

- i. To determine voters' motives of using online news and their influence towards voters' political vote choice.
- ii. To determine voters' motives of using online news and their influence towards voters' satisfaction with the government.
- iii. To determine voters' satisfaction on the government and its influence towards voters' political vote choice.
- iv. To determine voters' gratification sought from online news and its influence towards voters' political vote choice.
- v. To determine voters' gratification obtained from online news and its influence towards voters' political vote choice.

- vi. To know the relationship between satisfaction with the government on motives to use online news and its influence towards political vote choice.

1.6 Significance of the Research

The significance of the present study can be observed in four different contexts which include contributions in terms of practical, policy, theory and method.

1.6.1 Practical

The findings of the present research can help online media practitioners to have in place a better presentation of their news updates. If the issues highlighted in online news medium can gratify and influence vote choice, media practitioners should be presenting the news in a more responsible and presentable manner in their efforts to inform the public. At the same time, more freedom should be given to media practitioners to openly disclose certain issues. Most importantly, media should be neutral and should not favor any political party.

Online media practitioners should also make sure that the news they publish is accurate because it can mold the mind of the people, especially those who are not attached to the mainstream media.

1.6.2 Policy

Most of the news stories highlighted in the media cover various issues. By understanding the relationship between online news gratification and vote choice, the ruling government would be aware of the key issues that they need to work on to ensure that the public is satisfied with their quality of life. The findings can also give some input for the government to implement suitable policies which can benefit the development of the country.

Further actions can be taken based on the study's findings, for example, by knowing if more press freedom is given, especially to the mainstream media which are pro-government. Online news is part of the mainstream media nowadays because most of the mainstream media sources have an online service as well. By being more transparent, the public can gain all the information needed before they could do their evaluation by voting. Currently, not much press freedom is given to the mainstream media, whether in printed or online version. The finding in this respect will indicate the importance of gratification from online news and how it might influence vote choice.

This research can also be helpful to political leaders to understand what they need to do for the nation. They can chart strategies in their political party to gain more support from the public by fulfilling the needs of the nation. By doing so, the party's policies can be more nation-friendly which in turn will foster and generate better support from the people to the party. A stable political environment in the country will enhance the development in various sectors.

1.6.3 Theory

Most studies on news and vote choice involved traditional media and voter's turnout. In the Malaysian context, the impact of online news is still new. Therefore, understanding the factors that can contribute in forming vote choice is important through online news presentation.

The finding will be useful in adding to the existing literature on the influence of online news and gratification in affecting vote choice. This is a significant step which can enhance the theory of uses and gratification in terms of gratification achieved by reading online news.

The usage of rational choice theory in this research will also expand the theory in understanding the relationship between online news gratification and vote choice. At the same time, it can suggest relevant insights for future study under the same approach.

The combination of uses and gratification theory and rational theory will generate new results to test the new variables applied in this research to offer an alternative solution to the raised issues based on the existing theory. Finally, this research offers contribution to the body of knowledge in building a new model for the study.

1.6.4 Method

The added new variables will enhance the methodology used in previous studies or similar studies in this field by offering a more comprehensive method. The contribution towards the knowledge on online news and its impact on vote choice in Malaysia will be further enriched as the instruments applied in this study were adapted to suit the Malaysian perspective.

This analysis was also done by utilizing Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) using SmartPLS. This will contribute to the empirical literature in Mass Communication field which applied SEM analysis. Therefore, the usage of PLS-SEM analysis for this study will contribute specifically in providing guidelines for its application in studies involving online news.

1.7 Scope of the Research

The main scope of this study is to understand the relationship between online news gratification and its influence on political vote choice in Malaysia. Specifically, this study was conducted to understand the relationship between the motives to use online news, the online news gratification sought and obtained and their influence on political vote choice.

The study was carried out using quantitative method, namely an online survey. The survey instruments were adopted and adapted from past literature to suit the Malaysian milieu in similar contexts. The respondents who participated in this study were registered voters living in Klang Valley.

Since the topic of the study might be deemed as sensitive by some respondents, the snowball sampling technique was employed, apart from using the purposive sampling technique because it only involved registered voters. Snowball sampling helps to gather more respondent, and at the same time, it helps to reach respondents from different ethnic backgrounds so that appropriate numbers of respondents can be obtained to represent the composition of different ethnic groups in Malaysia.

1.8 Limitations of the Research

This study focuses on online news gratification in influencing vote choice based on uses and gratification theory and rational choice theory. The news sources cover dominant media platforms in Malaysia, including the mainstream media which publishes the online version of the news, as well as independent news portals and blogs.

In conducting any research, some limitations should be expected. Similarly, this study encountered a challenge in forming the best interpretation of the data collected.

The first limitation of this study would be the unit of analysis. The respondents constituted of Malaysians who are 21 years old and above, living in Klang Valley and registered with Election Commission of Malaysia (EC). Only respondents living in this area were allowed to take part in the study due to the limited fund and time constraint to expand this research to all the states in Malaysia. A sample collected from diverse geographical location from the whole country will offer better understanding of the relationship between online news gratification and the vote choice of the people in the country. The inclusion of registered voters from other parts in the country will yield more interesting insights.

Secondly, the utilization of a cross sectional study to conduct this study limits the possibility to capture the changes in online news gratification and vote choice over time. The cross-sectional approach was used in this study, also because of the time constraint and limited fund. Hence, a longitudinal study should be considered in future in order to further investigate the impact of online news gratification towards vote choice to observe if there are changes over time rather than collecting data only once as applied in the cross-sectional study approach. The longitudinal approach will add value in terms of examining the changes in online news gratification towards determining vote choice over a period of time.

1.9 Keyword Definition

1.9.1 Media

Media is communication channels through which news, entertainment, education and information are disseminated. It includes newspapers, magazines, TV, radio and Internet. Media is identified as the technology for the mass distribution of messages to public (Wilke, 2010).

1.9.2 News

News is information about recent events or happenings, especially as reported by newspapers, websites, radio, television and other forms of media. It includes various information derived from newspaper, television, radio and internet (Shoemaker, 2006).

1.9.3 Online News

Online news is an online version of a newspaper, either as a stand-alone publication or as the online version of a printed periodical. It is a computer mediated communication platform where news messages can be retrieved and controlled by the user (Danowski, 1982). Online news is also referred as hybrid media that serves news by incorporating the characteristics of both print and video forms (Swamy, 1997). Online news also refers to an informative and dynamic situation characterized by interactivity, hypertext and multimedia which provides the public with latest information in various segments, from local to international events (Opgenhaffen, 2011). For this research, online news covers all the independent news portals, including the online version of traditional media news as well as social media and blogs.

1.9.4 Gratification

Gratification is defined as the satisfaction achieved by a user based on an active use of a particular medium (Shin, 2011). This research employed the uses and gratification approach to understand the gratification achieved by voters by reading online news before they decide on their vote choice. Gratification is divided into gratification sought and gratification obtained. Gratification sought is known as the needs that user expect to obtain from a particular medium, whereas gratification obtained refers to the gratification that a user experience by using a particular medium (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010).

1.9.5 Voters

Voters are identified as registered citizens who vote or who have the right to vote in an election (SPR, 2008). Voters are also defined as registered citizens who have a right to be involved in the decision-making process for the selection of the government (Mohd Yunus, 2001).

1.10 Summary

This chapter explained the essence of this study by providing the components in elaborating the topic, namely the role played by the media and online news in feeding information to the public and its influence towards the political vote choice. The components were the introduction, background of the study, statement of the research problem, research questions, research objectives, significance of the research, limitations of the research and definition of keywords. Simultaneously, this chapter also exposed the research gap that the researcher intended to fill.

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BIODATA OF STUDENT

Mumtaz Aini Alivi is a Mass Communication PhD student at Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia. She has obtained Masters in Corporate Communication and Bachelor of Arts (Hons) with double major in: i) Language and Malay Linguistic and ii) Journalism, from the same university.

She is currently working as a TV news editor/news producer at the Malaysian government TV station, known as Radio Television Malaysia (RTM) with 20 years of experience as a media practitioner. Working in the industry has exposed her to many opportunities for career development and knowledge expansion.

Her experience in media industry began as an intern in System Television Malaysia Berhad (TV3), before she was offered the position of Broadcast Journalist in RTM. Upon joining RTM, she was given the opportunity to undertake various important tasks under RTM News and Current Affairs Department, including working as a newscaster, news editor and news producer as well as providing live reports from the parliament and live coverage of important events in the country, among many other responsibilities. She was also engaged in international assignments by following the prime minister and other country leaders abroad to provide news coverage of their events. In addition, she gained some experience from Malaysian National News Agency (BERNAMA) from the staff exchange programme between RTM and BERNAMA.

In 2002, she was conferred the Best Broadcast Journalist award for the national level.

Her research interests include political communication, new media, journalism, broadcasting and media study. She has contributed articles in a number of journals and has also presented in a conference. She has also reviewed article for journal.

Her wide experience and intense passion in media industry, especially news, has sparked her interest to deepen her academic knowledge in this field. She hopes that the combination of the experience she has gained from the industry and the knowledge she has acquired from her PhD will enable her to offer meaningful contributions to the nation's development.

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

Journals

- Alivi, M. A., Ghazali, A. H. A., Tamam, E., & Osman, M. N. (2018). A review of new media in Malaysia: Issues affecting society. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 8(2),12-29. (Published-ERA Indexed)
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Conferences and Proceedings

- Alivi, M. A., Ghazali, A. H. A., Tamam, E., & Osman, M. N. (2018). *Gratification motives in using online news and their impact on vote choice*. Paper presented at the 12th Biennial Convention of the Pasific and Asian Communication (PACA), Universiti Malaysia Sabah. July 2018.



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