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Separating 'Us' and 'Them' in Front Pages' Headlines of Malay-Language Newspapers during Malaysian 14th General Election

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Abstract

The study uses socio-cognitive approach from Van Dijk (2000) to examine main headlines on newspaper front-pages of *Utusan Malaysia* and *Berita Harian* during the campaigning period of Malaysian's 14th general election in 2018. For this analysis, 47 news headlines were chosen to highlight the discursive strategies used by the two dailies and how language and power were manipulated within Malaysian population. For many decades, ruling government of Barisan Nasional (BN), controlled the mass media and had justified the act as ensuring the national development and security of the country. These were obvious during general elections when the government expects the Malaysian press to help upholding the state's influence over the society. The in-depth representational analysis suggests that the headlines were written positively when the news were about 'us' and the headlines were treated in negativity when the reports were about 'them'. Thus, this confirms that the Malay-language newspapers are inclined to serve their political masters' interests so that they are able to stay in power.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Ideology, Power, Journalism, Election

Introduction

For decades, newspapers are one of the most reliable sources of news. A free flow of news is essential for society, especially for those living in a democratic country. As Reah (2002) explains, news is different from any other information available because it is disseminated to the public and it may influence them. It is now widely understood that journalists' report significant events and highlight the public to consider issues or happenings that would otherwise be neglected before.

Moreover, a newspaper not only reports on the latest events or issues discussed in the society, but newspapers also indirectly injected some homegrown ideologies and perspectives on their readers. Thus, the language used in newspapers can have a tremendous impact on readers and society on many levels.

An ideological analysis is one of the analyses that for so many years received attentions by journalism scholars due to the influence of newspapers that may affect its readers. In a country where democracy is frail, strong ties between the state and the mainstream media have become questionable and indirectly threatened media freedom and credibility. In Malaysia, for instance, this relationship becomes more toxic during general elections when the ruling party's political hegemony requires urgent protection and promotion from the media.

Anuar (2005) concludes that the Malaysian press has strongly supported the government in office and were found guilty for their biased reporting while providing very little coverage and demonising – the Opposition parties. He later explains that the BN government justifies its interference over the mass media so as to ensure national stability and security of the country. However, the Malaysian mainstream media are expected to exercise their social responsibility to collaborate with the government for nation-building purposes (Hasim, 1996). As a result, the mainstream media continued to provide positive coverage on BN while the opposition was ignored during elections. Thus, the relationship has resulted in the media supporting the government efforts and discourage criticisms of its developmental policies and projects (Anuar, 2005).

During the previous general elections, it is common to see that the government expects Malaysian mainstream media to promote BN government achievements intensely (Abbott, 2011) especially in socio-economic development. These have resulted some exaggerated public announcements of the government's achievements, and at the same time, it limits the access for other contesting political parties. As a result, voices of the Oppositions were rarely heard, or worse – the coverage of the Oppositions often reported negatively, which then contributed to uninformed choices made by Malaysian voters during the election days (Anuar, 2005).

It is now commonly accepted that politicians and political parties run their electoral campaigns to woo voters so they will be elected for the next term. The contesting parties pursued the electoral campaigns to convince the masses that they will champion the cause of the electorates if they win the office.

This paper applies van Dijk (2000) socio-cognitive approach to untangle ideological complexes manifested in Malay-language news headlines during general elections. Based on this interest, the study examines the language used in constructing the news headlines and attempts to identify underlying ideological bias in the headlines.

Background

This article is concerned with the relationship between the previous Barisan Nasional government and the mainstream media – how the ideologies and agenda in political campaigns produced and reproduce during general elections through skewed reporting and distorted coverage. The study delves into the previous Malaysian 14th general election campaign in 2018, when the political landscape in Malaysia had changed. During this particular election, BN succumbs to the Opposition coalition, Pakatan Harapan (PH) after losing power for the first time in 60 years.

Since GE12 in 2008, the Opposition started to receive its popularity and at the same time BN losing support and began to polarising tactics to hold power. United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), relied on its racialised rhetoric to stay relevant to voters (Welsh, 2018). During GE14 in 2018, the interethnic partnership within BN coalition that was forged for more than 60 years was deformed as non-Malays electoral support shattered. Moreover, staggering numbers of corruption charges have severely tainted BN coalition and prime minister in the office, Najib Razak since 2015 due to the 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) financial scandal. As a result, rhetoric over race and religion always came into play and was found excessively in the mainstream Malay-language newspapers to distract readers from discussing on other important issues especially on the kleptocracy case. (University of Nottingham Malaysia, 2020).

Meanwhile, there have been some turning points in Malaysian political landscape since 2014. To name a few, the increasing numbers of discriminatory policies and issues shadowing Najib Razak's administration, the return of Mahathir Mohamad to Malaysia's political arena, the ruling party's split in 2015, and the establishment of a new and stronger opposition coalition – the Pakatan Harapan (Nadzri, 2018). Najib's administration and many other political observers had downplayed all these tell sign events which then resulted in to the exceptional general election results in 2018.

Mahathir Mohamad, a former BN prime minister for 22 years made a political comeback with the Pakatan Harapan (PH) during GE14 and he had proved that his political strategies worked. He led Bersatu, a new Malay race-based party, alongside Muhyiddin Yassin, former deputy prime minister who was terminated for questioning the government's action on 1MDB case in 2015. Nationwide protests on Najib's administration helped to outweighed the dissenting issues over ethno-religious matters. Numerous campaigns to remove Najib were planned, especially from non-Malay supporters in urban areas who anticipate a fairer electoral system. The "New Malaysia" slogan was used in almost every political campaign site, and Mahathir was announced to lead the PH coalition as prime minister candidate, and this time without UMNO (Welsh, 2018). Based on this interest, the study focuses on the discussions engaged in the news headlines of Malay-language front pages regarding how the in-group and out-group of social actors were represented. This study aims to unmask underlying ideological biases as demonstrated in Malay dailies' news headlines during GE14.

The study employs the ideological square introduced by van Dijk (1998). Ideology, according to van Dijk is "the social representations that a social group can share. They may be positively or negatively (or not) valued depending on a person's perspective, membership of a group, or ethics" (1998). Van Dijk explains that the ideologies are cognitive and social properties because it will be stored in long-term memory and it is not an individual's ideologies. These ideologies are social representations of a social group and served as a group knowledge and social attitudes which will be represented either positively or negatively depending on the group's perspectives, values, and membership. Each ideology can only be obtained for years and then will be reproduced socially by various social conventions in general and the group discourses. Thus, it is important to note here that ideologies recognise the social struggles, conflicts, and other feuds within the group. For this reason, they are polarised in discourse between "us" and "them". Consequently, van Dijk (1998) proposes the ideological square, which is the focus of this study, in which ideologies can be revealed by knowing the positive and negative representation of an event to state the underlying ideologies between "us" and "them".

Thus, this study is specifically focusing on the following research questions:

1. How are the ruling government and the opposition coalition represented in the newspapers' headlines by using the ideological square?
2. What strategies did UMNO used to influence their Malay-speaking readers to ensure their dominance during the campaigning periods?

Review of Literature

Theoretical Framework on Socio-Cognitive Model by Van Dijk

According to van Dijk (1998), critical discourse analysis (CDA) is "a field that focuses on studying and analysing written and spoken texts to unveil the discursive sources of power, dominance, inequality and bias." CDA examines how these communicative materials are sustained and replicated within specific social, political and historical contexts.

The socio-cognitive model suggested by van Dijk (1998) analyses grammatical, phonological, morphological and semantic micro-structures and deals with some "higher level properties" such as the local coherence, overall themes, news topics, schematic structures, and rhetorical dimensions of texts. His analysis focuses on the "production processes" mainly in journalistic and news-making institutions which loaded with economic and social conventions involved with the creation of media discourse. On his analyses, van Dijk highlights the "reception processes" that links to comprehension, memorisation, and reproduction of news information (van Dijk, 1988: 2). By analysing the macrostructure of selected news reports, van Dijk explores "the thematic and schematic structures" identified in the news texts.

Discourse analysis is observed as an ideology analysis because, van Dijk believes that "ideologies are typically, though not exclusively, expressed and reproduced in discourse and communication including non-verbal semiotic messages, such as pictures, photographs and movies" (van Dijk 1995). In his defence, ideology analysis builds up from society, discourse and cognition (van Dijk 1995: 30). While social analysis examines the "overall societal structures" (the contexts), discourse analysis is mainly found to be text-oriented (syntax, lexicon, local semantics, topics, schematic structures, etc.). The difference between van Dijk's model and all other CDA approaches is the cognitive component. Van Dijk believes that social and personal cognition from the socio-cognitive aspect of discourse always interceded between society and discourse (van Dijk, 2008, p. 126). Hence, van Dijk suggests that ideology should be viewed from a cognitive perspectives, and he defines ideology as "the overall, abstract mental systems that organise [...] socially shared attitudes" (van Dijk 1995: 18). Van Dijk suggests that Ideologies "indirectly influence the personal cognition of group members" and they understand the discourse among other social actions and interactions (van Dijk, 1995, p. 19). By discourse, he implies that "(spoken and written) verbal structures and any semiotic (interpretable) aspect of the communicative event that directly sustains the event, such as relevant sound structures and visual (writing, print) structures, face work and gestures" (van Dijk, 2008).

Van Dijk offers a neutral definition on ideology, as he positions the definition to either be positive or negative, totally in a contradictory view from what Engels and Gramsci, who reiterate a Marxist definition and treated ideology negatively (Vincent, 2010). Furthermore, van Dijk presents a general impression of ideology as the "system of beliefs" (van Dijk, 1998a, p. 4). Thus, he confirms that ideology, in its negative sense, can be taken as a mechanism for legitimising the dominance (such as the dominating ideology in totalitarian systems). In contrast, in its positive sense, it may be used as legitimising the resistance against dominance and social inequalities (such as the anti-racist ideology) (van Dijk, 1998a).

Van Dijk classifies “mental model” to the individuals' mental representations involved in social actions and interactions; “models” specify the individual's actions, speech and writing and characterise the way the person's perceives others' social interactions (van Dijk 1995: 2). Mental representations, according to van Dijk “are often articulated along 'us' versus 'them' dimensions, in which speakers of one group generally tend to present themselves or their group in positive terms, and other groups in negative terms” (Van Dijk, 1995, p. 22).

Evidences from van Dijk's works (1988, 1995, 1998a, 1998b) are dominated with analysis on the polarisation of “us” and “them”. The concept of ideological square (van Dijk, 1998b) consists of the four principles: “Emphasise positive things about Us. Emphasise negative things about Them. De-emphasise negative things about Us. De-emphasise positive things about Them” (Van Dijk, 2000, p.44).

The semantic macro-strategies of “positive self-representation” apply to how an individual present themselves as favourably as possible or collective purposes by focusing on the positive aspects of one's group, and “negative other-representation”, which links to using offensive terms and focusing on the negative characteristics of out-group members (Van Dijk, 2000).

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Ideology

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) has recently become an approach for “critical-qualitative communication” scholarship. The approach is helpful in investigating the roles mass media played in the social construction of reality. The focus to power analysis, historicity, and cultural context make this approach more distinguishable than other qualitative analysis tools (Reynolds, 2018). In journalism studies, discourse were analysed on several layers, including news headlines, graphic elements, and story framing (Philo, 2007; van Dijk, 1998a). As Carvalho (2008) defines journalistic discourse as “media representation of social issues,” which includes “the discursive construction of events, problems and positions by social actors” and “the discursive strategies that they employ” (p.161). It is worth to note here that journalistic discourse is only relevant for a limited period and functions as mass disseminated social surveillance. It is injected with power relations based on reportorial practices, interview sources, and production methods (Tuchman, 1978; Van Dijk, 2013b).

Thus, by analysing journalistic discourse, critical topics such as power, dominance, and inequality (Van Dijk, 1988) can be found to highlight the use of language in the discussion. Van Dijk (1998) puts a model to interpret the discourse of media called a socio-cognitive model where a media discourse represented the underlying ideologies of news makers. The discourse relies on cultural, political, and social experiences. By evaluating newspaper coverage, he found that news producers are requested to develop ethnic relations. In this case, ideology is a social cognitive form that social groups can share using the discourse of news. According to van Dijk (2005), media discourse functions as an exploration to social group members' social representations and practices. Therefore, printed media were used excessively to disseminate the underlying ideologies, where the ideological desire of a social group supported through political language to interpret events or issues. Newspapers, for example, use different discursive techniques, for instance, for being persuasive to spread certain ideologies to the readers (Philips, et.al., 2004). Reath (1998) believes that printed media is a tool that can be used to “(re)produced attitudes”. Readers not only received information from newspapers they read, but it can also be the guide to reader's ideological attitudes. Fowler (1991) revealed that news does not convey only facts for free; however, every news that was disseminated carries hidden ideologies.

Moreover, numerous studies on political ideologies, power and discursivity in discourse clearly attempted to unmask implicit meaning in every word and power hidden in the text to reveal the character of a social leader. These studies significantly show that power is often relates to controlling behaviours and limiting the engagements of the non-powerful members in the society as this frequently happens between the power holder and the powerless (Ramanathan & Tan, 2015). Thus, “powerless” members are restrained from voicing out their opinions. Power dominance makes it possible to mask noncritical discourse in various ways from imposing a belief. Thus, studies on the “positive self-presentation” and “negative other-presentation” strategies were frequently employed.

Structures and Features of News Headlines

The headline in a newspaper is written mainly to attracts readers to pick up the paper or pause at the page. Headline is a line appearing on top of news story, which tells the reader what the news is all about (Harrower & Elman, 2013). It usually consists of a phrase or a sentence which guides the reader to the news content and indicates the essence of the news. The reader may be persuaded to continue reading the news further or they can just ignore it and skip to other news contents (Badii & Ghandi, 2004).

Headline writing is considered as an art in any newsroom, because it requires a careful balance to creatively informing the readers and simultaneously to spark their curiosity to continue reading the whole news. It is always written based on the key points of newsworthiness, by choosing the specific words to address the story by, or under the supervision of, an editor and are sometimes addressed as the most challenging task of journalistic writing (Bakhshandeh & Mosallanejad, 2005, p. 29). The attraction and relevancy of the headlines are among the reasons why readers choose to scan headlines first, then decide which story they want to read.

In a news components, headlines are read widely compared to the actual news articles since all those potential readers will peek at the headlines first before they decide to buy or consume the news stories. The front-page headlines are the striking evidence which work to attract readers to quickly conclude the importance of a particular issue. Editors give special attentions to the front pages’ headlines and they keep writing and rewriting headlines until they find the winning headlines that they think could be displayed on the front pages. By using puns, alliteration, emotive vocabulary and rhetorical devices may further make the headlines become more memorable and impactful (Bell, 1991).

Headlines also play a role by navigating the reader's interpretation of the article's subsequent 'facts'. They steer the reader through complex material. They, too, “summarize” the content and “perspective” that the readers should bring to their understanding of the article (Reah, 2002). In a newsroom practice, the headline for stories subscribed from external news agencies will be rewritten so it has to be distinctive individually, as competitors will also use the same “mass-produce product” on their newspapers. Often enough, the roles of “summarising” the content and “commenting” on it are guilty of “ideological implications” (Xu, 2009).

Furthermore, the headlines are arranged with a “hierarchy of importance”: an arrangement from top to bottom of the page; based on various sizes of headlines and its font, and through news placements on the newspaper from front to back (Harrower & Elman, 2013). Finally, repetition through synchronicity (co-occurring headlines within one newspaper issue) and diachronicity (repetition over time) “teaches” the reader to develop certain expectations and

impose certain connections and interpretations. Thus, we often spot specific recurring references that relate the headlines to previous events and situations (Reah, 2002).

Headlines are loaded with information of cultural references. It may “stand-alone” without explanation or definition; they depend on the reader to recognise instantly the issues and cultural references necessary to identify the actual content. The elements of cultural knowledge, representations and models of reality are necessary for the headlines to have meanings for its readers to understand. Shorthand in headlines within a national framework such as references to the 'PM', 'Tun M', 'Putrajaya', and other essential of political and general knowledge help readers to understand the text, since they must assume that the 'PM' referred to is of their prime minister. Nevertheless, textual, and visual information from mass media refers to the common understanding of the public because it is by definition produced for these unlimited masses. Therefore, a certain level of detailed knowledge is always necessary to understand a text correctly (Bell, 1991).

The advantage of analysing headlines is that they are so dependable on extensive cultural knowledge to be understood by readers. Hence, the headlines are depiction and interpretation of ideas of the news. They may play passive or active role, depending on and mobilising the information it carries, but also “help to disseminate and reinforce the messages; they create new associations and networks of meanings” (Bell, 1991). Finally, they also exploit representations for practical effects. In this case, headlines written during a political campaign may sway voters' perceptions of contesting political parties.

Headlines diffuse their power and meaning from a shared cultural, political, and general knowledge on which they draw. Headlines may captivate and stoke readers' curiosities, and finally reward the reader through “the intellectual satisfaction” they gained by successfully figuring out their meanings (Smith & Higgins, 2020). Nevertheless, headlines emphasize the concept of consensus, both through the references to one's country and through generalization of others. Due to its diffusion, visual and linguistic effects – headlines are capable of maintaining the ongoing mental representations in our daily lives. Thus, for this study, the selected headlines were analysed to identify the representations of the ruling government and the opposition on the front pages of Malay-language newspapers.

Materials

All 47 news headlines were collected from the main and second headlines of front pages of Utusan Malaysia (Mingguan Utusan for weekend edition) and Berita Harian (Berita Ahad for weekend edition) during the GE14 campaign period within 28 April to 9 May 2018. During this campaigning period, the Malay-language dailies were aggressively running their campaigns to woo the Malay voters. These newspapers were chosen because both enjoyed the highest circulation in the Malay-language newspaper categories for many years (ABC Malaysia, 2016). These headlines were selected based on its large size. The bigger the headline, the more prominent and important it is in terms of newsworthiness (Harrower & Elman, 2013).

Moreover, news headlines are the most read items in any newspaper (Khodabandeh, 2007: 92). News headlines are considered influential because they summarise and make comments on the story contents and carry underlying ideological implications (Xu, 2009). Therefore, this study analyses news headlines as independent textual products since, as discussed here, the headlines may play independent roles of their own. The selected data were analysed using van Dijk (2000) ideological square, to examine how the two dailies represented the semantic macro-strategies of positive self-presentation by focusing on the positive aspects of one's

group, and negative other-presentation which is related to the use of derogatory terms and focusing on the negative characteristics of out-group members.

This article highlights the key points that require urgent attention be given to headlines on newspaper front pages, namely because headlines are among the first item that a reader will look at; the roles of headlines in determining the interpretation of the reader; and the shared cultural context they conjured.

Sample Selections

We choose the mainstream Malay-language newspapers because these newspapers have been circulated in Malaysia for decades, these newspapers are read widely throughout the country.

Utusan Malaysia was first published in 1939 as Utusan Melayu and become the mouthpiece for Malays community to express their opinion on British colonial rule. The newspaper was first published in Singapore, and then moved to Kuala Lumpur in 1958 following Malaysian independence. The two newspapers, Utusan Malaysia and Berita Harian were rivals and they were competing for circulation and readership numbers, since both cater for Malay speaking readers. From 2004 until 2018, this challenge mellowed. Utusan Malaysia is of particular interest because the UMNO largely owned it. It was always regarded as being both overtly pro-government and actively linked to Malay nationalists. This daily advocates specifically on Malay rights, interests and developments. During the 2008 election, Utusan Malaysia and its Sunday edition, Mingguan Utusan had attracted a national uproar from the country's opposition parties and liberal scholars for inciting hatred and racism with provocative rhetoric, columns, and its headlines (Abbott, 2011). Indeed, to reiterate to such racial sentiments, Pakatan Harapan-led government in 2018 launched a boycott against Utusan Malaysia. With other financial reasons, the paper slowly lost its circulations and officially closed its door in October 2019.

The rival newspaper, Berita Harian and Berita Ahad (or formerly known as Berita Minggu) are published by the New Straits Times Press (M) Bhd (NSTP) and is owned by Media Prima Berhad (MPB), and related to UMNO shareholders (Mustafa, 2014). Berita Harian was first published on 1 July 1957, a month before Malaysia gained its independence, as the first mainstream romanised newspaper in Malay-language. The paper was published as a translated edition to New Straits Times. The newspapers were published in a broadsheet format before it changed the size to tabloid in July 2008.

Findings/Analysis

During the GE14, 13 member parties were contesting under Barisan Nasional coalition for the parliamentary seats. Ironically, only the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) party and its politicians, particularly Najib Razak, the prime minister-cum-UMNO president, are frequently mentioned in the headlines and news stories. As a result, overall media coverage of elections prioritized stories on political parties and politicians, rather than discussion on policies and national issues. The national narratives were packed with stories of top political leaders in both newspapers. Najib Razak was portrayed positively, while Mahathir Mohamad labelled negatively. Almost every day during the campaigning period, issues on political parties and politicians dominated the front pages, mostly regarded as attacking and criticizing the opposition. The public voice was minimal, and most headlines on the front pages tended to be male-dominated. Progressive and public interest voices were underrepresented. Moreover, political headlines frequently highlights on how issues affect politicians or political

parties, rather than those directly affected by the issues, especially on education, employability, minimum wage rates, etc.

Furthermore, trust was an essential issue in discussion. It dominated the front pages when half of the election campaign period were about the government urging the public to be cautious on the spread of slanders and fake news circulated to the masses. Thus, these confirmed that the Barisan Nasional government was directly affected by scandals and alleged cover-ups. The newspapers' ability to report these issues somewhat is also in question. Nevertheless, the Anti-Fake News Law was prematurely drawn up a few months before the election. Feedback from appropriate experts or civil society was not consulted. The new law was criticized as vague, being too general on definition of fake news and allows tough penalties for the offender. This act, however, was criticized and viewed as a "shield" for the government to counter defence on corruption and misappropriation allegations made by the opposition coalition.

As elections are about the choices people make about the government or representatives they want, news headlines hardly featured sources from the public. Instead, they mocked and highlighted politicians with unreasonable amount of publicity. As anticipated, Barisan Nasional policies and manifestos gained the most coverage on the front pages. Pakatan Harapan's manifesto received criticisms from UMNO.

Representation of the Govaernment

Based on the analysis, there are 18 news headlines primarily quoting Najib Razak on government policy, election campaigning, and political parties. Both newspapers tried to represent the ruling government as one united coalition instead of as individual parties and show that members in the coalition are united regardless of the ethnic-based parties they are in. However, excessive discussions on UMNO achievements and lack of appearances of other members in the coalition, while positively representing the government, may also indicate the opposite signal on the dominancy of a particular group, the Malays, the sole supporter of UMNO. This difference manifests an ideological complex in which UMNO's 'Malay Agenda' has always been rooted in the society when UMNO has been in power since independence. UMNO prides itself upon the idea that it is the only party fighting for the Malays' survival, welfare, and progress (and Bumiputeras). UMNO promised that the interests of their supporters are always their top priorities, which then warranted assumptions of Malays' supremacy in Malaysia (Welsh, 2018). Thus, discussions on UMNO commitments to protect Islam and Malay rights were repeatedly received front-page coverages. Although the UMNO-led government is always portrayed as the one that fights for all races, the exaggerations on fear of change and loss of privileges of the Malays are clear. Sources from muftis and former chief justice (all were public servants) were quoted and represented on the front pages mostly on these issues:

UM13: Najib: BN continues to safeguard the interests, status of UiTM (Najib: BN terus pertahan kepentingan, martabat UiTM)

UM18: ULAMA CALL: GE-14 Do not jeopardise Islam for power, Muslims must reject the slanderers (SERUAN ULAMA: PRU-14 Jangan gadai Islam demi kuasa, umat Islam perlu tolak penyebar fitnah)

BH24: OPPOSITION AGREEMENTS THREATEN THE POSITION OF ISLAM (PERJANJIAN PEMBANGKANG GUGAT KEDUDUKAN ISLAM)

These referential specifications in UM13, UM18 and BH24 of Malays and Muslims show how the ruling government or specifically UMNO, represented itself as the “protector” which taken cares and monitors the protected (the people), and the people are dependent on the protector for its feigned dominance.

Representation of the Opposition Coalition

The news headline on the front pages of these two Malay-language dailies were packed against a constructed and delegitimized Other. The opposition coalition were constantly represented as disorganized and always in brawls. On the contrary, the ruling government is always represented as united and working in team. The opposition is generally referred to as individual parties in the coalition, i.e. PKR, DAP, Amanah, Bersatu and Warisan instead of as Pakatan Harapan (Hope Coalition) or the opposition coalition. Most headlines were always painted the opposition coalition like the one that spread fake news, lies and ‘fitnah’ (slanders) on social media. The front pages of Utusan Malaysia coverage of politicians is an excellent example of the disparity between being talked about and opportunities to be heard. Almost half of the selected news headlines were on PH leaders, especially Mahathir Mohamad and Lim Kit Siang were represented unfavourably, and painted as untrustworthy persons, spin doctors, slanderers, and liars. As election day nears, more headlines on politicking and personality attacks were employed on the front pages to influence the readers. Utusan Malaysia especially attacked and blamed Lim Kit Siang earlier on the reported racist remarks made by two DAP candidates, Nga Kor Ming and Hew Kuan Yau during the election campaigns which offended the Malays. The paper accused Lim Kit Siang of purposely keeping mum about the two candidates' speeches, which the paper claimed as stoking the racial harmony in the country. Ironically, Lim Kit Siang and his two candidates were not even given any chance to counter all their accusations.

UM05: Kit Siang urged to act (Kit Siang digesa bertindak)

UM06: WHY IS KIT SIANG SILENT? (KENAPA KIT SIANG DIAM?)

UM11: Are Kor Ming and Kuan Yau voice out what DAP thinks? (Kor Ming, Kuan Yau terjemah apa DAP rasa?)

UM21: DAP is an extremist, consents to racist remarks made by Kor Ming, Kuan Yau (DAP melampau, restu sikap biadab Kor Ming, Kuan Yau)

On the other hand, Berita Harian was found guilty of attacking Mahathir Mohamad unreasonably throughout the campaign period. Mahathir Mohamad was represented as vicious and vile when during a rally, he left a hurtful comment on the Memali Incident that happened in 1985 during his premiership. During a live interview with a local television station, Najib Razak denied that Mahathir Mohamad acts as PH leader, and repeatedly saying that he was merely an instrument for DAP to win the Malay votes and incapable of being a good leader to the country.

Closely related to the negative representation of the opposition, DAP was always associated with negativity. Some headlines here were guilty for using the dichotomy of ‘us’ versus ‘them’, and DAP was described as untrustworthy and challenging Islam and Malays in general:

UM12: BEWARE OF DAP TRAPS: DAP is willing to do anything; the Malay tsunami is only a trick (WASPADA JERAT DAP: DAP sanggup lakukan apa sahaja, tsunami Melayu hanya helah)

UM19: DAP a 'slander factory' (DAP 'kilang' fitnah)

BH13: DAP threatens the Malays, Islam (DAP ancam Melayu, Islam)

BH17: DAP uses dirty tactics (DAP guna taktik kotor)

BH19: DAP a 'slander factory' (DAP 'kilang' fitnah)

These headlines intensified the need to be cautious with DAP's shady and defamatory propaganda and at the same time threatening national unity. All the allegations made on the front pages were in the form of opinions and sentiments from UMNO politicians and supporters without clear facts and evidence to back up their allegations.

What were not Reported or Buried from the Front Pages

During the GE14 campaign period, UMNO was fighting for survival during GE14. Najib Razak, UMNO president, was fighting for his political life and pinned down with scandals like 1MDB. There were no direct mentions of the scandals on the front pages of the Malay dailies during the campaigning period. Most discussions on the 1MDB case were buried inside other pages. The government was trying to cover up from discussing it further. Most discussions on 1MDB were masked as fake news, and the majority of reports were repetitive of the government's statements or reported briefly without further investigation. As evidence, a senior local journalist and the group editor of the News Straits Times, Mustapha Kamil, resigned from his post and claimed that the Barisan Nasional government had restricted the mainstream newspapers from covering the 1MDB story (Wright, 2016). These restrictions further poorly affected the readership numbers of *Berita Harian* and *Utusan Malaysia*. The local readers have to browse alternative media platforms on the Internet as a source of discourse on the scandal.

Conclusion

This study has proven that the use of discursive techniques is a significant feature in the dissemination of different ideologies to the readers. There are hidden ideologies "injected" in newspaper reports especially in news headlines that may shape and reshape the mindset of the readers. The study has also shown that newspapers are responsible for producing and reproducing beliefs, prejudice and domination over the social context as newspapers tend to marginalize others and failed to report accurately. This is evident especially during election campaign periods, where the ruling government dominated the political narratives in the mainstream media and left the opposition helpless without a chance to defend themselves, except in other media forms – alternative online news websites. Barisan Nasional managed to remain in power until 2018 due to its control in the mainstream media. During the campaign period, the concept of a 'caretaker government' has clearly been lost as the BN government allegedly used the mainstream media for party mouthpiece and spread propaganda to the public. Ironically, the newspaper reports could be blamed for deceiving the BN with a sense of complacency or security. The Malay-language newspapers clearly failed the BN because they unintentionally ended up only reporting what the BN wanted to hear and making the ruling coalition incapable of knowing the truth from the people and lost the elections. As a result, it is always crucial to the government and the mainstream media to treat the public with more maturity and respect. It has often been pointed out that while the Malaysian general elections may be relatively free, they are hardly fair and balanced (Welsh, 2018). Due to this, fair media coverage continues to be one of the contentious issues raised by scholars

and civil society. Based on the findings here, it can be concluded that the only way for us to find the truth of the events around us is by evaluating every possibility into account, examine the truth and information which we encounter on daily basis. It is important to be media-literate users, before we exercise our rights as responsible citizens to Malaysia during the election day.

Limitations and Future Research

There are a number of gaps that follow from the findings of the study and would benefit from further research. For a start, this study focuses specifically on front pages of the Malay-language newspapers' headlines and do not analyse other part of the newspapers, like news, analysis, editorial or opinion columns. Thus, by analysing the whole component of newspapers will probably give in-depth understanding on how the newspapers operated. Further research should explore other mainstream newspapers or other newspapers with different languages to investigate their reporting and news coverage during Malaysian general elections. It is because different newspapers may have different preferences and it is important to investigate the lot for better understandings. On the other hand, the alternative media should be explored too to see the diversity of viewpoints that have been muted from the mainstream media and to see how discussion on general elections, for instance, may benefit and encourage the public to think wisely before they go out and vote. Moreover, it would be meaningful to capture the differences in narratives and opinions discussed in multi-faceted media platforms.

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