A Review of New Media in Malaysia: Issues Affecting Society

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Abstract
Growth of new media plays a great role in society and political landscape in Malaysia. Thus, it is imperative to understand the main issues arising from development of new media, which affects the society. This paper therefore aims to explain how issues pertaining to new media has affected Malaysia. Three key issues will be discussed, namely, credibility, influence in the political landscape, and effectiveness in providing information to the public. Review of past literature and studies showed that credibility of online news is crucial whereby demand for reliable information is rising to compete with traditional media, which has been proven to be a credible source many decades ago. Moreover, in recent years, new media through online news has been influencing the political discourse in Malaysia with the help of many interesting features offered by that medium.
Keywords: New Media, Online News, News Credibility, News Influence, Political Discourse

Introduction
Development taking place in the media industry has changed domination of traditional media as the only platform for news channel to introduction of various platforms with integration of digital version of newspapers (Minami, 2011). Media organisations play a vital role in delivering news that are accountable and responsible for a country's development by covering and reporting political and social issues (Vraga et al., 2012).

The Internet has triggered the rise of new media to spark cybersphere; the form and content of information can be done simultaneously. Cybersphere is enhanced by creation of applications or multimedia machines such as Podcasts, QuickTime, Windows Media Player, RealPlayer, and Winamp that disseminate information based on attitude and appearance of content. This includes a form of new media highlighting its ability to capture media enterprises in the future, namely, weblogs or blogs. Furthermore, the system operational form has changed to surpass those of traditional media.

In Malaysia, there are more than 21 million Internet users with 68.5% penetration (Malaysian Digital Association, 2016). Here, the government has supported the growth of new media technologies. A new environment is created by digital media and its availability is borderless; hence, communication is allowed to spread widely (Agil & Hamzah, 2008). A previous study has shown that Malaysians utilise new media to obtain latest news updates compared to traditional media such as television, radio or print newspaper, especially among those who are highly educated (Mustaffa, Ibrahim, Samani, & Abd. Rahim, 2010).

New media brings a fresh dimension in conveying messages to the public. Birth of new media through the existence of Internet in the communication field, boosts up the method of delivering information. It provides an alternative way to gather information rather than just depending on traditional media. Moreover, the landscape of media has transformed from being dominated by traditional media to something with a wider perspective due to usage of new media. This change has affected the way people think (Chrisman, 2008). In addition, online news is expected to grow by offering interactive support and breaking news facilities, and via multimedia content, enable experience of immediacy of news consumption (Omar, 2017).

Citizens in a country have a choice in getting information from a channel that offers more variety. A past research highlighted that presence of a new medium that supplies information will affect the existing media (Liu, 2003). Hence, this is how new media has complimented or replaced the function of traditional media in recent years.

Media's role in society is undeniable in terms of influencing the public whereby media is an agent for social changes (Fiske, 1993). Moreover, domination of media in shaping public opinion has diversified with birth of new media. Drastic developments in the communication field provide ample sources for public to search information. For instance, new media through various platforms provides mushrooming information with just a click.

In an alert society, feeding information is no longer a simple one-way communication. New media via online news provides an interesting two-way communication for a more comprehensive coverage. People are engaged in online news for more information, which they might not get from traditional media. This medium is fast, interactive, and interesting. News are information broadcast or written in media to deliver latest updates of happenings around the world. The public will decide which channel they want to refer for acquiring news (Harrington, 2008). Political news has always attracted people, whereby they constantly search for updates. Thus, impact on political discourse arising from online information is undeniable from the perspective of political society setting (Demertzis, Milioni & Gialamas, 2013).

Public interest has moved from reading news on printed newspaper to scrolling for news online (Makaruddin, 2006). An earlier study has shown that nowadays, unlimited access to the Internet or online news is the trend chosen by people to get information (Sidlow, 2008). Rahim (2010) explained how information in traditional and new media can be differentiated. It is based on the true form of information, whether real and unedited information is given compared to information already filtered and rewritten from the lens of journalists.

The objective of this paper is to reveal the influence of new media in Malaysia in the recent years which shows a clear change in political discourse. The news information that is published online shows a great impact in changing the minds of people based on the influence of the content that they read online which is finally translated into the vote choice and thus changing the political landscape. This scenario can be seen from the results of the last two general elections held in Malaysia where the ruling government failed to maintain their power in a few states. The general election result in Malaysia since 2008 shows a powerful influence of new media in shaping the people's decision by voting.

Thus, it is crucial to understand whether the information highlighted on the online news is credible because it is an important element to make sure the public gets reliable information. It is fundamental in shaping the democracy of a country which can be accessed through online news. It will lead to a democratic decision-making. Online news provide transparency in the journalism platform by enabling instant news report via online (Karlsson, 2011).

Not many studies focus on the impact of new media to the society in Malaysia compared to traditional media because it is still new in the country. The influence of new media in the political discourse started just a few years ago. Thus not many attempts has been made to explain the possible factors of new media usage and the impact on the society. Most Malaysians, especially the younger generations in recent years prefer to get news from the online medium as a main source of news (Freeman, 2013).

After an intensive literature review in the next section, this paper highlights this problem statement and the gaps in order to understand the impact of new media in Malaysia.

Credibility of Online News to Provide Reliable Information

Flanagin and Metzger (2008) discovered that credibility of media highly depends on messages highlighted in the media. Moreover, it also hinges on sources or the journalist from a particular media organisation who wrote the news story (Golan, 2010). The public has numerous sources to gain information from and credibility of media becomes one of the main issues they consider to obtain trustworthy news. Priority of getting credible information is a factor that contributes towards forming public perception on a particular media (Mehrabi, Hassan & Ali, 2009).

Many decades earlier, people relied only on traditional media such as television, radio, and print media to gather needed information. They did not have much options and thus depended on traditional media as their source of information. Nonetheless, with the advent of new media, this situation changed. People no longer depended only on traditional media for news. Instead, they now have an alternative way to get information.

Nevertheless, the issue of online news credibility, which is important, has drawn the public's attention. People have begun comparing credibility of online news and news from television, radio, and print media (Lu & Andrews, 2006). In the Malaysian context, media credibility was not widely studied (Oorjitham, 2000) until the 1990s (Mustaffa et al., 2010). Credibility of online news is crucial, whereby a lot of information is channelled through various approaches using new technology (Schweiger, 2000). Online news basically consists of a few major issues such as

credibility, liking, quality, and representativeness (Sundar, 1999). Nevertheless, issue of credibility is more serious and widely studied in many countries compared to other aspects.

Currently, online and traditional media have started to compete in delivering reliable and credible news. Hence, the public must decide which medium they believe is trustable, credible, and transparent. Many people believe online news is more trustworthy because the information is not shaped by a ruling party, as what has been done for traditional media in Malaysia. However, from another perspective, a previous study has shown that news credibility is linked to how frequent a media is used or discussion conducted on the news (Kiousis, 1999).

Credibility of online news can be questionable since not much procedure is followed before a news is flashed or published online. Furthermore, information from Internet sources can be uploaded without much scrutiny (Johnson & Kaye, 1998). Besides that, free access of Internet can affect online news or information that was uploaded. The scenario is totally different for traditional media whereby verification will be done before any information is released to the public (Flanagin & Metzger, 2000). Occasionally, certain information in new media are deemed not credible because of public's perception that it might not be true or accurate and moreover if the source of information is also questionable (Choi, Watt, & Lynch, 2006).

People have become more educated and intelligent; they always seek for information that are true. Therefore, the media should take certain initiatives and steps to make sure they do not lose the trust given by the public. It is important for the media to maintain their credibility as they play a vital role in disseminating information. Most people who surf new media are the younger generation (Wilson, Leong, Nge & Ngerng, 2011). They are highly educated and exposed to globalisation, thus, making them surf the Internet for more detailed information compared to being complacent with what traditional media offers. The characteristics of online news, which are free, flexible, convenient, and easy to access, also play a significant role in attracting the younger generation in Malaysia to use that medium to search for information (Tiung, Nayan & Othman, 2016).

Trust is viewed as the most important element for credibility. Media performance became a highlighted topic due to decline in public trust (Haan & Bardoel, 2011). Moreover, many studies revealed that journalists or the media organisation they work for manipulate news. This scenario made the public turn to new media such as the Internet to obtain further details on topics they are interested in (Quandt, 2012).

Various scholars and researchers have used different elements to measure credibility of media. For example, Flanagin and Metzger (2000) used believability, accuracy, trustworthiness, bias, and completeness to measure credibility of news on the Internet. Other elements include trust, dependability, and credibility itself (Andaleeb, Rahman, Rajeb, Akter, & Gulshan, 2012).

Competition in the communication and media line makes media practitioners compete to become the first to report on certain issues. Due to this, a lot of errors or incorrect information in news stories can be published online (Cassidy, 2007). Mistakes made can tarnish the image

and credibility of the reporting media. Such errors are commonly found in online news where less filters are applied compared to traditional media, which involves a lot of procedures before a news can be published. Nonetheless, this problem is excluded for the online version of traditional media that goes through the same process.

Some online news is published without proper information from reliable sources. In addition, hearsays are reported without getting proper clarification from trustworthy sources. Such issues arise among user-generated media websites such as personal websites like blogs, which tend to become popular by giving false, manipulated, and negative news. The scenario becomes worse when people easily trust those news and react according to reports that might not be true. Internet, which can be easily accessed, has thus become a tool to spread news without much filter (Johnson & Kaye, 1998).

Believability is one of the elements associated with credibility that should be given consideration and something every media practitioner should have. Some studies have shown that students prefer to conduct research on the Internet because it is easier and more convenient. Students have not made credibility of information a priority, as long as they get the needed information.

The Digital Journalism Credibility study suggested that information is gained through online version of traditional news source by experienced internet users. In Malaysia, there are a few online versions of traditional newspapers such as *New Straits Times, Utusan Malaysia, Berita Harian, The Malay Mail*, and *The Star*. Credibility of these online versions of newspapers is equal to the printed ones.

Past research discovered that credibility of certain media is defined by its level of daily use (Johnson & Kaye, 2002). This means a higher number of people using a medium to obtain information causes it to be categorised as more credible. The trend in Malaysia shows that more readership goes to the online version compared to printed newspapers. This is based on decline of printed newspapers in recent years.

Besides that, lack of editorial checking and gatekeeping for online news is worrying. When content of news is not checked properly by an editorial team that has knowledge on credibility of news, the news' validity can be questioned. Most people in new media tend to write anything as they please without knowing the possible impact the write up could cause; for instance, influencing people to react negatively.

As such, the most important thing to keep in mind is to make sure credibility of media is not compromised. News produced with full responsibility, especially in new media that is widely used now, will allow the public to decide about an issue based on news they assume are credible (McCracken, 2011).

Influence of Online News in the Malaysian Political Landscape
Development of media in Malaysia began in 1805 in various languages (Saman, 1983). In those days, the role of media was to function mainly as a tool for strengthening colonialism. The media

gradually focused more on enhancing the growth of Malay literature besides debating about topics related to social, politic, and economic conditions in Malaya to boost spirit of independence and nationalism (Saman, 1983). In the earlier stage, media was used to expand the Malay culture and as a platform to debate issues related to people's socio-politic-economy matters. Moreover, newspapers were used as a tool to develop spirit of nationalism in the heart of the people (Saman, 1983).

These days, media's role has expanded to various objectives. Then, media was a powerful tool used to spark nationalism among the multiracial people in Malaysia. Nowadays, the role of media has diversified into various fields that benefit the country. Media organisations take into consideration a few aspects before they decide the pattern of media usage (Chan-Olmsted, 2006).

On the other hand, Internet usage in Malaysia started around 1992, while usage of online news grew in a rapid pace around 10 years ago. Malaysia is a country where multiracial people have lived peacefully for many years. However, occasionally, online news tends to ignite tension among the multiracial people when certain issues are not tackled professionally. This is what certain online newspapers such as *Malaysiakini* has done. *Malaysiakini* is regarded as one of the widely used and important new media channels in Malaysia (Smeltzer & Lepawsky, 2010). They tend to highlight controversial issues on their website that can create uneasy feelings among the people. This could then lead to arguments between different groups of people with different points of view on certain issues, creating tense situations.

In Malaysia, political news has always captured the attention of people interested to know what is happening in political discourse. Messages highlighted by the media become salient in shaping people's opinion and how they behave towards it. Hence, media plays a key role in shaping the public's mind. In Malaysia, news published in traditional media are always portrayed as being favourable towards the ruling party, *Barisan Nasional* (BN). Furthermore, media is said to have been used as an instrument by BN to maintain their power for more than half a century (Hilley, 2001). Similarly, online news generally favours the opposition party due to limited access to opposition party news in traditional media controlled by the government.

Online news started to play a major role in Malaysia's political landscape since most traditional media in Malaysia are owned by a component party of the ruling government. News highlighted in traditional media mostly favours the ruling government with minimum reporting of issues highlighting any lack from the government.

One of the main component parties of BN is *United Malays National Organization* (UMNO). UMNO is the party for Malays, who form the majority of the Malaysian population. UMNO has influence in mainstream media via *New Straits Times Press*, *Utusan Malaysia*, *Radio Television Malaysia* (RTM), *BERNAMA*, and *Media Prima Berhad*.
On the other hand, *The Star* newspaper is influenced by another component party of BN, which is the *Malaysian Chinese Association* (MCA). MCA party consists of Chinese people, who form the second largest population in Malaysia.

Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) is a party for Indians, who are the third largest population in Malaysia. This party controls the Tamil mainstream media content such as *Tamil Nesan* and *Tamil Osai* (Idid & Safar, 1993).

In addition, newspapers published by the opposition party include *Harakah* controlled by *Parti Islam Se-Malaysia* (PAS) and *Suara Keadilan* by *Parti Keadilan Rakyat* (PKR)*.* Even though the opposition party can publish their own newspapers, its distribution is limited among supporters only.

Involvement and influence of political parties in the media have led to a lot of implications. People have their own perceptions about a report written, which they believe will favour a certain party, especially news related to political issues. Some issues that will have negative consequences for certain political parties will not be highlighted in mainstream media. Even if such issues do get highlighted, it will be edited prior to publication. Hence, traditional media are controlled and do not have much freedom to be more dynamic in playing their role (Jankowski & Selm, 2007).

Therefore, the public has an opportunity to fully utilise both traditional and new media to ponder on political issues, particularly in deciding which leader they would like to elect (Curran, Iyengar, Lund, & Salovaara-Moring, 2009). In recent years, Malaysian citizens have actively used both traditional and new media to obtain comprehensive news coverage before they evaluate the current situation in their country.

All these scenarios give a clear indication that the government and politicians use mainstream media for their interest and propaganda. This is where online news functions to deliver news messages that do not favour any party or group of people, with the objective of providing a wider aspect of an issue for the benefit of the nation. Online news sources claim that their information is true and transparent. They supply further details on issues reported less or not at all in traditional media. Besides that, new media are free to comment on anything they like. Thus, this has raised a lot of questions among Malaysians about certain issues. Some topics published by new media are credible and true; nevertheless, some issues are not accurate. However, members of public who cannot differentiate between true and false news will trust whatever they read in news portals. Then, they will begin to react negatively towards the government, which can shake the stability of the country.

Numerous past research has demonstrated that people seek extra information in new media because traditional media has failed to provide detailed information on certain issues. Alternative media gives a clearer picture and fuller coverage compared to traditional media, particularly for controversial issues. Moreover, new media has a different approach in delivering news via a different style of writing that can easily capture the attention of people, especially the younger generation. There are several reasons as to why people are attracted to use new media (Brandtzaeg & Heim, 2009). One of them is availability of more information. Thus, new media is an alternative media that allows people to obtain needed information (Tsfati, 2010).

In Malaysia, new media has become more credible and trustable after 2008 (Abu Hassan, 2008). The 2008 Malaysian general election reflects on how the "political tsunami" hit the country whereby the opposition party captured 37% of parliamentary seats, ending the two-thirds majority domination of BN (Yeoh, 2010). This was the first elimination of two-thirds majority since the first federal election in 1959. Hence, BN party lost five states to the opposition party.

This depicts how new media changed the political landscape in Malaysia in which new media was fully utilised to critique the ruling government. The younger generation prefers using new media to get news updates and simultaneously to decide which party to vote for (Abdullah, 2008). There are many reasons the 2008 election losses happened. Among them are leadership problem, failure of government to tackle increase in prices for certain basic needs, and issues related to performance between ruling and opposition parties (Idid, 2011).

Majority of people who read news via new media are the younger generation and most of them are educated. Thus, mushrooming new media was widely used by the opposition party to capture people's heart during 2008 election. As a result, five states in Malaysia fell to the opposition party. This proves media's power where it can influence people to act based on highlighted objectives. New media through blogs and independent news portals such as *Malaysiakini* played a great role in changing the mindset of people towards the government.

The results of the 12th general election proved that new media has affected society. Outcome of the general election held on 8th March 2008 left a very big impact on both media and society. The results indicated that the public do not trust reports watched or read in traditional media. Therefore, it can be argued that the loss of a few states to the opposition party was due to new media development in Malaysia.

New media had influenced the public to act through their vote. This gave a big shock to BN leaders. Political communication through Internet transformed the political wave, involvement of people in politics, and methods used for campaigning during election. It can create a thought that is free and democratic (Liu, 2012). New media was used as a magnet to gain more support from people, especially by the opposition party in Malaysia.

News highlighted in online media channels can do wonders in informing public about missions set by the country or a particular politic party. Media can shape people's mind by determining how popular or related certain aspects will be in public discourse. The way media portrays an issue is the spectrum of reflection on public perceptions (Graber, 2010). Phenomena discussed in media may sharpen the attitude of public to act towards the highlighted issues. Media not only explains what the public should think, but also teach how they should think about certain issues (McCombs, 2004).

New media has a significant role in terms of shaping trend of votes among Malaysians. Negative aspects of the ruling government such as corruption is constantly highlighted in new media. People are no longer attracted to old news presentation; instead they are hungry for new inputs. New media, especially blogs, are more interested to publish issues related to politics. Even

though new media is used as a channel to voice out ideas or viewpoints, sometimes it can tarnish the unity among the multiracial people in Malaysia and spark anti-government feelings. In addition, issues raised in blogs can ignite anger amongst people because it is not filtered or edited accordingly by considering issue of sensitivity. Not only that, blog content can confuse people because it will contradict with what mainstream media reports.

Nevertheless, traditional media is not trustable and only portrays good efforts taken by the government and hide negative issues. Thus, new media practitioners decided to report issues that are against the government or highlight wrongdoings hidden by the government.

Development of new media has allowed the public to critically argue on provided political information via two-way communication instead of being a passive receiver of political propaganda (Loader & Mercea, 2011). They can actively voice out their point of views and share them, which can also influence other readers. New media is a channel seen as actively transmitting news messages and becoming a more useful source of news (Pepitone, 2010). Numerous observations have explained the phenomena of how the internet has transformed the Malaysian media to play their part in disseminating political news (Liow, 2012; Lopez, 2012; Subramaniam, 2011).

Most new media, especially blogs, have shown preference in publishing news on politics. Instead of focusing on nation development, they have shown more keenness to enhance anti-government feelings among people. News published in new media are always seen as lacking established genres with poor editorial screening, which might make the news difficult to be trusted. Those getting acquainted with new media or websites and blogs will face difficulties in differentiating news that they can trust from ones that are not true. Study by McCombs (1997) showed that media not only guides people on which issues they need to think about, but also how to think about it, which has a great implication in shaping the opinion of a nation.

Online News Assists the Community to get Information

Power of new media in society is enhanced when most equipment applies latest and advanced technology that can easily help penetrate information. Smartphones play a vital role for news access, regardless of location. For example, a study has shown that 46% of smartphone users access news while they are on bed compared to while commuting to work (Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, Levy & Nielsen, 2017).

Utilisation of equipment or gadgets such as mobile phones, smartphones like iPhone, iPod, and PDA makes communication process easy. For instance, news broadcast in Malaysian television stations like RTM can be watched through a smartphone. People around the world too can watch the same RTM news online if they have internet connection. In this scenario, technology is helping traditional media to deliver messages. This is possible when traditional media goes online as well.

Physically, new media products are smaller, lighter, and portable. Moreover, new media has assisted the growth of efficiency and fairness of communication, which has affected society.

Nowadays, it is very common to see people using latest technology to communicate or get information via new media. People can access information anywhere and anytime with just a click.

Social media are widely used (Lee & Ma, 2012) for news dissemination, for example, through Facebook. People are addicted to Facebook, which is used to communicate with each other. Users play "journalist" role when they post visual or written comment on latest news. For instance, before news about an accident is reported via traditional media, people are informed about that incident from messages posted on Facebook by their friend who was present at the location of the accident. People can just snap a picture of an accident and upload it to Facebook using their smartphone. This is how new technology, through new media, helps spread news. Besides that, WhatsApp is also seen as growing on par with Facebook in disseminating news in Malaysia (Newman et al., 2017). In addition, people actively use mobile news applications (Weiss, 2013) for personalisation of news (Thurman & Schifferes, 2012).

Characteristics of new media has made the medium popular in recent years as a method to gain information by the public. Banerjee (2008) discovered that new media might affect the public's mind to opt for alternative media, which is seen as more interesting and fast, with free flow of information.

Most people prefer to surf online news not because they want to read blogs but to peruse official websites of traditional media (McCracken, 2011). Updates are easy to get with just a click, from any device and news can be surfed anytime. Moreover, the public is more interested in reading news via traditional media's online news channel because of its fast update (Azizah, 2009).

There are a few mediums used on the Internet to encourage people to take part in communication and exchange of ideas. People can maximise the use of Internet to talk openly without interruption from any source. The channels used for this purpose include forum, video conferencing, "newsgroup", and e-mail (Gomez, 2002). These mediums can be used by the public to freely participate in political discussion without any disruption. Furthermore, these alternative channels give more options for interactive communication and it works fast. In the new paradigm, news coverage is based on human interest story for the public's benefit (Gans, 2011).

Conclusion
New media will not only take over and change society's perception on traditional media such as newspaper and television, but also transforms the structural in a human being. Theorist Jurgen Habermas highlighted this as the impact reflected due to innovative technology in new media. "The Internet weakens the achievements of traditional media", since in the online environment, "contributions by intellectuals lose their power to create a focus". (Habermas, 1989, p. 201)

The pace of new media development increases every year in Malaysia. It is reported that almost 41% of Malaysians online are bloggers (Microsoft, 2006). They write about their viewpoints on various issues or fields, such as politics, economy, social, education, science, sports, and personal

daily activities. Sometimes the facts published by them is accurate, however, at times content credibility can be questionable.

Society is attracted to new media because new media practitioners offer more interactive communication that is not available in traditional media. For example, if an individual wants to comment about an issue on the Internet, he or she can quickly make a remark the moment a news is posted. Online media allows the public to critic anything they do not agree on besides providing a platform for them to debate regarding their criticism. This allows different point of opinions from various perspectives to be made.

To conclude, this is an important study for media practitioners because they play a great role in shaping the minds of the people through media power. Since new media becomes the choice of the people in recent years for news update, it is essential to understand that news must be credible. From here, the public will gain reliable and accurate information about the political candidates, political parties, and their policies. It will give them overall picture about the performance of the ruling government in the country. Finally, they will be able to make the best decision to choose the political party that they believe can serve them better.

At the same time, it will give feedbacks to the political party, as well as to understand the needs of the people by providing a two-way communication which is possible through new media compared to traditional media. The root problem of the public can be understood better via interactive platform which is being offered by the online medium.

It is undeniable that new media plays a vital role in delivering information to Malaysians. Nevertheless, priority should be given to credibility of information to gain society's trust. New media practitioners should try to earn people's trust by providing reliable content to compete with traditional media. Furthermore, it is also undeniable that new media has affected political discourse. Hence, it is crucial to make sure information provided in new media is credible. This is because it shapes the political point of view among Malaysians via interesting features provided by new media. Engagement of citizens on new media platform offers fragmented input and variety in mode of communication, which is identified as a significant element for nation-building (Kersting, 2013). In short, rise of new media has made people from every part of the world connect easily through Internet. This revolution has changed the world of communication that helps create a global society.

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