

## FRAMING 'BERSIH 3.0' BY MALAY PRINT AND ONLINE MEDIA

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The mainstream media are alleged for constantly reporting positively about the ruling political party, and adversely about the opposition. Journalists always play a vital role in delivering information to audiences. This is because they are responsible for delivering the latest information known to the public. News in the mass media makes important information to readers and this in turn becomes a source for them to think about when making decisions during elections (Syed Arabi, 2011).

With the recent emergence of the new media or the Internet, this channel of communication is said to have become a major player in politics. The development of the Internet is transforming the political situation worldwide, including Malaysia. The General Election in March 2008 saw the failure of certain parties in utilizing this technology which is subsequently regarded as important and influential. A number of experienced veteran leaders fell to the opposition candidates who have been capitalizing on the sophistication of the Internet during and also off election campaign periods. According to Tremayne (2007), bloggers are not just regarded as journalists, but also opinion leaders cum shapers nowadays. Political participation through new media appears to have posed challenges to the Malaysian ruling political party. However, audiences now are expected to give feedback, responses and also their views without any restrictions. The development of Internet media such as online news portals is seen to complement this interactive effort. In this respect, 'Malaysiakini' that was founded on 20 November 1999 has been widely accepted by the netizens as the source of most popular news and information on Malaysia, especially in relation to politics.

The 'Bersih 3.0' rally that was held on 28 April 2012 at Dataran Merdeka Kuala Lumpur had received wide coverage from both mainstream and online media. It was a continuation of 'Bersih' that was held on 10 November 2007, a few months prior to the 12th General Election; and subsequently, 'Bersih 2.0' that was held on 9 July 2011. Both 'Bersih 2.0' and 'Bersih 3.0' are lauded by certain quarters for the attempt put forward by non-governmental organizations for a clean, transparent and fair 13th General Election. As a country that practices democracy, the ruling political party in Malaysia is always finding itself surrounded by watchdogs in the society, such as the opposition, the public and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) whenever policies are implemented or changed.

The participation of citizens is important as 'citizens will help define community goals, develop agendas, develop strategic initiatives, participate in and review the implementation of procedures, actively participate in the measurement of progress, and in assessing impacts of programs' (Gibson, Lacy & Dougherty, 2005: 2). The power of these watchdogs is not to be neglected as it can make or break the process of policy-making. This paper aims at scrutinizing the Malay print and online media on reporting this significant issue prior to the 13th General Election. With the focus being the news coverage before, during, and after the 'Bersih 3.0' rally, the study examines how the mainstream daily *Utusan Malaysia* and the *Malaysiakini* news portal frame the story. The media framing process with five generic frame dimensions developed by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) covers responsibility, human interest, morality, conflict, and economic consequences, is applied to this research study. Consequently, this study identified the frame dimensions most highlighted in both print and online media during the pre-rally and post-rally periods.

## PREVIOUS FRAMING STUDIES

In political communication research, especially in relation to the formation of public opinion, framing is often used to describe a phenomenon in which the messages are conveyed by the media to