SPECIAL ARTICLES ON AGENDA SETTING

GE 13: The Influence of Ethnic Newspapers in Shaping the Opinion of Indian and Chinese Voters

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to assess the role of Tamil and Chinese newspapers in exerting influence on Indian and Chinese voters, before and after Malaysia's 2013 General Election (GE13). This study employs both content analysis and survey to examine media agenda and public agenda specifically the Chinese and Indian ethnic groups. In total, 4,951 news items were obtained from two major language newspapers comprising *Sin Chew*, *Nanyang Siang Pau*, *Tamil Nesan* and *Malaysia Nanban*, during the election campaign period. These news items have been coded according to seventeen categories. A total of 754 Chinese and 183 Indians had participated in the public opinion survey conducted before the general election, and a total of 618 Chinese and 122 Indians responded after the general election. This study found that both Tamil and Chinese newspapers did not influence the agenda of the Chinese and Indian respondents nationwide. Politics appeared as the top issue reported in both ethnic newspapers while crime appeared as the most important issue of concern to both Chinese and Indian respondents.

Keywords: *Chinese newspapers, Tamil newspapers, GE13, media agenda, public agenda*

INTRODUCTION

This paper attempts to assess the role of Chinese and Tamil newspapers in exerting influence on Chinese and Indian's public agenda, before and after Malaysia's 2013 General Election. The study has adopted an agenda setting approach in which content analysis and survey were employed to examine media agenda of the selected newspapers and public agenda of the two ethnic groups. Agenda setting is not a new theory. The waves of agenda-setting

tradition have extended its dimensions consistently since the seminal publication of Chapel Hill study over four decades ago. Its theoretical staple of salience has remained consistent (Ragas & Roberts, 2009). Similarly, one area of agenda-setting function of the media that has been re-conceptualized and being given attention in recent years are media agenda and public agenda (Colistra, 2012). Though scholars have long established that attributes and agenda from the media go a long way in influencing the attributes and agenda that members of the public link to the newsmakers (Kiousis, 2005; Wanta, Golan, & Lee, 2004), yet less attention has been directed at understanding what and the extent of role of the media during elections (Idid & Chang, 2012).

In a society where ethnic dynamism plays up in the scheme of things such as election, there is a probability for robust public agenda and media agenda influencing each other. Idid and Chang (2012) for instance note that due to the impressive economic growth and literacy increase in Malaysia along with the well-endowed good press, the demand for information from the media and media use have increased. Therefore, this chapter attempts to assess the influences as well as the relationship between media agenda and public agenda during and after the 13th general election in the country. The study has chosen ethnic newspapers, to be specific the Indian and Chinese newspapers, and their influence on Indian and Chinese public opinion. The stream of research on media agendas revealed less attention is being paid to the relationship between ethnic group agenda and the communal interest of the press agenda on national issues such as the country's general election. More so that in a multi-ethnic society like Malaysia, unlike the mainstream media, ethnic group interest newspapers usually pander to the communal interest (Faridah, Chang & Kuik, 2012). The imperative of this was earlier confirmed by Shaari, Ngu, and Raman (2006) that the ethnic direction of the local vernacular newspapers – where they set agenda and cater predominantly to readers of the same ethnic group - has not changed much from the colonial days. The Mandarin newspapers are generally read by the Chinese, the Tamil and Punjabi dailies by the Indians and the Malay newspapers cater for the Malays. On the other hand, the English language newspapers are usually read by the "elites" and English-educated readers who are mostly concentrated in the urban areas.

Against this background, this chapter will measure the role of Tamil and Chinese newspapers in exerting influence on Indian and Chinese public agenda before, during and after Malaysia's 2013 General Election (GE13).

This article is divided into five main components. The initial part is an introduction followed by a literature review that includes the current social landscape, an overview of newspapers in Malaysia, a brief background of selected ethnic newspapers; Sin Chew daily, Nanyang Siang Pau, Tamil Nesan and Malaysia Nanban. The literature review also covers agenda setting research. Next, the paper addresses on the research objectives and hypotheses. It continues with methodology adopted and findings. Finally, it presents the discussion and conclusion of the study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The social landscape

Malaysia social landscape composes of three major ethnic groups; the Malay, Chinese and Indian. Despite of the plural societal make-up and the inherent challenges, Malaysia has experienced peace and prosperity through much of its history. The dominant group in the country is the Malays, who are predominantly Muslims that make more than 60 percent

from the entire population. The Chinese and Indian occupy 24.5 percent and 7.3 percent of the social landscape respectively (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2016). Beside Islam, there are other religions embraced by the multi-ethnic populations, namely Buddhism, Christianity and Hinduism. Malaysia multi-ethnic composition was the result of the mass migration of Indian and Chinese during the British colonial period. It was part of the British strategic plan to accumulate wealth and sustain their power in the country.

The overview of newspaper in Malaysia

The history of newspaper in the country started with the publication of an English newspaper known as the Prince of Wales Island Gazette in 1806 during the British colonial period (Mohamed Hashim, 2006). The newspaper was mainly published to serve the colonists and expatriate in Malaya. The first Malay language newspaper that was written in Jawi script was published seven decades after the publication of the Prince of Wales Island Gazette. Since then, newspapers from other ethnic groups' languages had commenced publication.

The first Chinese language newspaper was published in 1815 by the British missionary William Milne in Malacca known as *Chinese Monthly Magazine* (Lent, 1974). According to Lent (1974), the *Chinese Monthly Magazine* was published to aid the Christian missionary efforts in China and South East Asia.

Singai Varthamani was the first Tamil newspaper published in Malaya. It was in circulation in 1875 and edited by an Indian-Muslim, C.K. Makhdoom Sahib (Tschacher, 2013).

Most mainstream newspapers are owned directly by the government or owned by the component parties of the Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition government. For example, Media Prima Berhad is a leading integrated media investment group in Malaysia in which government is the majority shareholders. The group owns several mainstream newspapers such as the News Straits Times, Berita Harian and Harian Metro. Besides, it's also operates Free to Air televisions stations and radio stations (Annual Report, 2016). Other influential newspapers that largely controlled by the ruling elites are Utusan Malaysia, Kosmo and the Star. At present most mainstream newspapers have an online version. This transformation is essential to secure newspapers' survival in the long term. Scholars alluded that such transformation would offer a great advantage to traditional mainstream newspapers as they have more space to promote their offline agenda via online news media (Mus Chairil, Jamilah, Mohd Helmi, Mat Pauzi & Normah, 2015). Furthermore, other traditional media have also expanded to online that include television and radio. In addition, the Internet with the advancement of Web 2.0 technology has enabled the rise of social media such as Facebook, blogs, Twitter and etc.

It is not only the government that has full control of the media, the opposition parties namely Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) and People's Justice Party, Malaysia (PKR) to name a few also published their own newspapers. Harakah was published in 1987 as an official mouthpiece for PAS (Jeniri Amir & Hamedi Mohd Adnan, 2013). The newspaper was originally published twice a week. Close to the general election in 1999, PAS has introduced its first web newspaper known as *Harakahdaily* to provide frequent updates (Shamsiah & Ahmad Sauffiyan, 2014). Beside newspapers, PAS now owned web TV and used multiple online platforms to provide daily news. Since then the social media has been at the forefront of setting the political agenda particularly from 2008 General Election (GE) (Salman, Mustaffa, Mohd Salleh & Ali, 2016).

On the basis of multi-ethnic and multi-cultural background, the structure of newspapers in Malaysia is strongly influenced by the multi-lingual nature of the nation's population. Newspapers are published in different languages to cater to the respective major ethnic groups. According to Media Planning Guide (2014) almost 56 percent or 9.1 million adults read a daily newspaper everyday. An important characteristic of the vernacular newspapers is their tendency to concentrate on events important to their respective communities (Shaari et al., 2006; Yang & Ishak, 2011). Therefore, it is not surprising to see the Malay-language newspapers like Utusan Malaysia focus on the Malays, the Chinese-language newspapers, for instance Sin Chew Daily highlight the Chinese issues and the Tamil-language newspapers for example Tamil Nesan concentrate on the issues relating to Indians.

At present, the newspapers serving the interest of Indians and Chinese have become stronger and carry a profound impact on their audiences. The Chinese press is synonymous with Sin Chew Daily and Nanyang Siang Pau, while Tamil is the medium for Indian newspapers such as Tamil Nesan and Malaysia Nanban (Idid & Chang, 2012). These vernacular newspapers have been largely concerned with the transfer of issue salience for both Chinese and Indian communities respectively in Malaysia. At present there are 11 Chinese language newspapers and six Tamil language newspapers in Peninsular Malaysia (Media Planning Guide, 2016, p. 69). In terms of newspapers' readers, research found that the usage of newspapers particularly among young voters has dwindled over the years. Idid (2014) reported that 36 percent of Malay young voters used newspaper daily in 2008. However, the numbers have decreased to 30 percent in 2012 (pp. 245). On the other hand, 44 percent young Chinese read newspapers daily in 2008 and 2012 respectively. This study among others aimed to determine the influence of ethnic newspapers specifically Indian and Chinese newspapers on the respective community's opinion during and after GE13. This study examined two Chinese newspapers namely Sin Chew Daily and Nanyang Siang Pau and two Tamil newspapers, Malaysia Nanban and Tamil Nesan and their influence on readers.

Background of Sin Chew Daily

Sin Chew Daily (formerly known as Sin Chew Jit Poh) is a leading Chinese-language newspaper in Malaysia that has been in circulation for more than 80 years. It was formed during the British colonial period in 1929 and recorded as the largest circulating newspaper in South East Asia (Sin Chew Daily, 2017). The government has acknowledged the influence of Sin Chew Daily on the nation political landscape (Jocelyn, Ibrahim & Chang, 2011). In 1987, the publication license of Sin Chew Daily was suspended by the government, along with other newspapers such as the Star, and the weekly papers the Sunday Star and Watan for allegedly stoking racial tension (The Rocket, 2015). Sin Chew resumed publication after six months and acquired by the Media Chinese International Limited. In the early 1990s, Sin Chew Daily emerged as the best-selling Chinese newspaper and eventually became the first newspaper to go online. Sin Chew Media Corporation Berhad was listed on Bursa Malaysia in 2004 (Rita Sim, 2015). According to a report from the Audit Bureau of Circulation for the period ending 31 December 2013, Sin Chew Daily has an average daily circulation of almost 462,000 copies (Media Planning Guide, 2014). It maintained its position as the highest circulation of daily newspaper in Malaysia even though the number has dropped to 365,000 in 2015 (Media Planning Guide, 2016).

Background of Nanyang Siang Pau
Nanyang Siang Pau was first published on 6 September 1923 (Ngiam, 2017) in Singapore. It was one of the leading Chinese-language newspapers in the country. The newspaper was operated in Singapore and had ceased publication in 1942 during the Japanese occupation. The newspaper resumed publication on 8 September 1945 (Goh, 2013). Nanyang Siang Pau published in both Kuala Lumpur and Singapore from August 1962 (Ngiam, 2017). Until the late 1980s, it was Malaysia's highest-selling Chinese newspaper before overtaken by Sin Chew Daily. On 28 May 2001 Huaren Holdings, the investment arm of the political party Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), bought over Nanyang Press in a controversial transaction that led to mass boycotts of the newspaper by the Chinese community. Huaren now owns 42% of Nanyang Press (Goh, 2013).

Background of Tamil Nesan
Tamil Nesan was first published in 1924 (Vinesh, 2013). The newspaper started as a weekly newspaper and later became a daily newspaper 1937 (Sathisan, 2008). Tamil Nesan has a wide readership over the weekends with a circulation of 120,000 compared to weekdays where the circulation is only 60,000 (Shanmuganathan & Ramasamy, 2009). At present, Tamil Nesan owned by the family of the former MIC president, Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu (Kumar, 2013).

Background of Malaysia Nanban
Malaysia Nanban is a relatively young as compared to its counterpart; Tamil Nesan. The newspaper was owned by the family of former Malaysian Indian Muslim Congress (KIMMA) president, the late Sikandar Batcha Bin Abdul Majeed that was first published in 1986 (Kumar, 2012). Since then, Malaysia Nanban has become top-selling Tamil language newspaper in this country. Unlike other Tamil newspapers in Malaysia, the newspaper is free from interference of any political parties. Malaysia Nanban has stood to its fundamental principal of being non-partisan and its people-oriented style of reporting has made the daily popular and the leading Tamil daily in this country.

Agenda setting research
Systematic study of agenda setting was attributed to the Chapel Hill presidential election campaign initiated by Mc Comb and Shaw in 1968 (1972 in Severin & Tankard, 2010: 220). The study hypothesized that the mass media set the agenda of the political campaign and subsequently determined issues perceived salient by the publics. Subsequent to the Chapel Hill study, agenda setting study has been constantly published and the growth has been steady since then (McCombs & Shaw, 1993). Syed Arabi Idid a renown Political Communication scholar in Malaysia has adopted agenda setting approach since 1986 General Elections (see Idid, 1994; Idid & Buyong, 1995; Idid, 2011; Idid & Chang, 2012) till the 13th general Election (Idid , 2014). The underlying reasons for agenda setting study among others were to understand the role and direction of the media during election campaigns. In addition, agenda setting also examined voters' behavior, issues that they perceived important and its relationship with media agenda (Idid, 2011). Earlier studies affirmed that electorates were dependent upon television and newspapers (Idid & Buyong, 1995). Similarly, the Pew Research (2007) showed that Malaysians' largely relied on both television and newspapers for information.

Agenda setting research of newspaper often generate mix-result. Idid (2011) found that newspaper agenda and public agenda were very much identical in the General Election 2004 (Idid, 2011: 150). However, he argued that this was not the case for General Election in 2008. In a study of ethnic newspapers, Idid & Chang (2012) found Malay newspapers had no influence on the Malay public agenda. However, Chinese newspapers have a significant rank-order correlation with Chinese readers.

The role of the Internet in election can be traced from the 1999 General Election (Idid, 2011). The Internet has found to assume a role in providing information to voters particularly among oppositions. Since then, there have been more studies conducted to examine the role of the new media during election that include online news portal (see Mus Chairil, Jamilah, Mohd Helmi, Mat Pauzi & Normah, 2015; Azahar & Azizuddin 2016) and social media (see Hasmah Zanuddin & Tham 2013; Mohd Faizal Kasmani, Rosidayu Sabran & NorAdzrah Ramle, 2014). Despite the proliferation of the new media and their usage in political campaigns, this study argues that the traditional media in particular newspapers still have a role during election. This study focuses on traditional newspapers of two major ethnic groups in Malaysia; Chinese and Indian.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES

This study aimed to address four important objectives: (a) to determine the relationship between issues that Indian community perceived important and the actual content of Tamil newspapers; (b) to assess the relationship between issues that Chinese community perceived important and the actual content of Chinese newspapers; (c) to determine the relationship between Chinese newspapers' agenda and Tamil newspapers' agenda and (d) to measure the role of selected ethnic newspapers in influencing the opinion of the Indian and the Chinese community after the GE13. Parallel with these objectives, three hypotheses have been developed to support the study:

H1: There is a relationship between Tamil newspapers' agenda and issues that the Indian community perceived important before and after the election.

H2: There is a relationship between Chinese newspapers' agenda and issues that Chinese community perceived important before and after election

H3: There is a significant relationship between Chinese newspapers' agenda and Tamil newspapers' agenda.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in order to examine the influence of ethnic newspapers in shaping the opinion of two ethnic groups in Malaysia, namely the Indian and the Chinese in the 13th General Election held in 2013. Idid and Chang (2012) affirmed that ethnic newspapers could be setting the agenda for various ethnic groups during the election. Their findings from the 12th General Election in 2008 revealed that the Chinese media agenda strongly correlated with Chinese public agenda. Thus, working on the same premise, this study aimed to evaluate the influence of newspapers' agenda on public agenda of specific ethnic groups namely the Indian and the Chinese. Like other Agenda Setting project, this study employed content analysis and public opinion survey to determine the influence of media agenda on public agenda.

This study specifically focused issues that were largely reported in Tamil and Chinese newsprints. Almost five thousand news item (N=4,951) were collected from two Tamil

newspapers (Tamil Nesan and Malaysia Nanban) and two Chinese newspapers (Sin Chew and Nanyang Siang Pau). The news items coming from the Chinese newspapers (N=3,642) outweigh the Indian news items (N=1,309). These news items have been coded according to seventeen categories. Next, public opinion surveys were carried out throughout Malaysia before and after GE13 to determine the public's views on politics in the country. The study has adopted a stratified random sampling to reflect the population distribution in the country. A total of 754 Chinese and 183 Indians had participated in the public opinion survey conducted before the general election. Whereas, a total of 618 Chinese and 122 Indians responded to the second phase of the survey which was conducted after GE13 between 16 June and 7 July 2013. Respondents were asked to rank the issues according to their importance to them. A total of 100 trained enumerators took part in the surveys. Questionnaires were properly coded prior to transferring into the SPSS.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This section discusses the media agenda during GE13 by looking at the frequency of news coverage given by Indian and Chinese newspapers on certain issues and their level of emphasis. Next, results from two surveys conducted before (April 2013) and after the election (July 2013) to determine issues perceived important by the public were also discussed.

The results of content analysis in Table 1 reveal the Tamil and Chinese newspapers' different emphasis on certain issues during the election. However, politics appeared as the top issue reported in both ethnic newspapers. Crime and leadership were ranked second and third by the Chinese media. In contrast, Tamil newspapers emphasized on economy and religion. Some issues received poor coverage during the election period. For example, health issues, international relations (IR) and immigrants were among the least reported in both newspapers.

Table 1: Ranking of issues in mainstream newspapers

No.	Issue	Overall (N=8096)	Malay (N=1783)	English (N=1362)	Tamil (N=1309)	Chinese (N=3642)
1.	Politics	1	1	1	1	1
2.	Religion	2	2	2	4	5
3.	Crime	3	6	10	14	2
4.	Leadership	4	4	3	8	3
5.	Development issues	5	7	4	8	5
6.	Government administrations	6	5	8	8	6
7.	National security	7	3	6	4	8
8.	Social	8	15	11	14	7
9.	Environment	9	11	10	14	9
10.	Traffic woes	10	8	8	8	10
11.	Economy	11	9	6	2	11
12.	Education	12	13	13	8	12
13.	National unity	14	11	13	14	15
14.	Nationalism	14	15	16	14	13
15.	Health issues	14	13	14	14	14
16.	International Relations	16	17	16	14	16
17.	Immigrants	16	16	16	14	17

The results of public agenda before the election (April 2013) is presented in Table 2. The table shows that crime appeared as the most important issue of concern to both Chinese and Indian respondents. Economy was rated as the second issue for Chinese community while Indian community ranked economy at the 6th place. Instead, Indians rated national security as their second important issue, which was also a concern among Chinese respondents (number three). Social, immigrants and political issues were rated as the fourth, fifth and sixth important issues respectively for the Chinese community. However, the Indian community rated political issues as their fourth important issue, social as fifth and immigrants issue not important at all to them. As for the religious issues, both communities agreed that this is not an issue for them. Government administration, education, nationalism and traffic woes were not important to the Indian community. However, the Chinese community was somewhat concerned about these issues.

Table 2: Comparison of Chinese public agenda and Indian public agenda before election (April 2013)

No.	Issue	Chinese Public Agenda (N=754)	Indian Public Agenda (N=183)
1.	Crime	1	1
2.	Economy	2	6
3.	National security	3	2
4.	Social	4	5
5.	Politics	6	4
6.	Immigrants	5	12
7.	National unity	9	7
8.	Environment	7	10
9.	Election	8	8
10.	Leadership	11	9
11.	Health issues	16	12
12.	Education	12	16
13.	Development issues	12	11
14.	Religion	17	15
15.	Government administrations	10	14
16.	Traffic woes	14	13
17.	Nationalism	15	17

Table 3 presents public agenda after the election period. It is noticeable here that there was a decline in some issues after the election period whereas others maintained their importance and ranking. As this Table suggests, crime was still the most important issue to both Chinese and Indian communities followed by social and economic issues. However, the two communities had different concerns regarding other issues. For example, Indian community rated politics as their fourth important issue and natural disasters (environment) as their fifth important issue, whereas the Chinese community rated environment and national unity as the fourth and fifth important issues respectively.

In contrast, both communities had some least important issues before the election period. For instance, election and traffic woes were not so important to both communities as only 1% of the respondents were concerned on these issues. The Indian community has reported several issues (immigrants, leadership, health, development, government issues, and nationalism) as not important at all and they were not concerned about these issues. However, the Chinese community were somewhat concerned about these issues that the

Indian community was not concerned at all albeit a small percentage (1-2%). Surprisingly, religion was not a concern for the Chinese community.

Table 3: Comparison of Chinese public agenda and Indian public agenda after election (July 2013)

No.	Issue	Chinese Public Agenda (N=618)	Indian Public Agenda (N=122)
1.	Crime	1	1
2.	Economy	3	3
3.	National security	7	7
4.	Social	2	2
5.	Politics	6	4
6.	Immigrants	11	
7.	National unity	5	6
8.	Environment	4	5
9.	Election	10	10
10.	Leadership	13	
11.	Health issues	14	
12.	Education	12	9
13.	Development issues	8	
14.	Religion		8
15.	Government administrations	9	
16.	Traffic woes	15	11
17.	Nationalism	16	

On the other hand, a Spearman rank correlation was conducted to see the strength and magnitude of the relationship between Chinese and Tamil media. The results suggested a strong positive relationship between Tamil and Chinese newspapers (r=.509, p=.018). It meant that both newspapers emphasized on issues in somewhat similar direction and strength. In this context hypothesis that postulates a significant relationship between Chinese newspapers' agenda and Tamil newspapers' agenda is supported.

Another Spearman rank correlation was conducted for the public agenda to see whether there was a relationship between issues of concern to both communities (Chinese and Indian). The results suggested a positive strong correlation between public agenda for the Chinese community and public agenda for Indian community (r=.726, p=.000). This indicated that both communities had common concerns before the election (April 2013). However, the results of the Spearman correlation suggested insignificant relationship between Chinese media agenda and Chinese public agenda (r=.167, p=.536). This finding did not lend support to previous study conducted by Idid & Chang (2012) that found Chinese media agenda influenced the Chinese readers on what to think about (pp. 111). Similarly, the relationship between Indian media agenda and Indian public agenda was also found to be insignificant (r=.057, p=.834). This indicates that the Chinese and Indian newspapers' agenda have no effect on issues that audience personally perceived important and influence their opinion during and after election. Therefore, the study rejected the first two hypotheses:

H1: There is a relationship between Tamil newspapers' agenda and issues that Indian community perceived important before and after the election.

H2: There is a relationship between Chinese newspapers' agenda and issues that Chinese community perceived important before and after election

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The 13th General Election held on May 5th, 2013 was Barisan Nasional's worst nightmare when it lost two third majority in Parliament. It was first dubbed as the *Chinese Tsunami* by the politicians but alternatively interpreted as urban tsunami by election analysts. In this case, urban voters had provided their support and trust to the opposition.

This study was carried out to understand what issues were mainly covered by the media before election and issues perceived salient by the Chinese and Indian community before and after election from agenda setting perspective. In this study, a content analysis was made on two Chinese newspapers and two Tamil's newspapers respectively. The issues were grouped into 17 categories. The results showed that both Tamil and Chinese newspapers covered somewhat similar issues on equal strength before theelection. By nature, newspapers incline to cover newsworthy elements. During election campaign period, political issues are timely to be reported. At the same time, mainstream media that largely linked to the ruling elites or pro-any political party would provide news coverage that aligned with their political interest groups. In view of this media structure, there is a tendency for these media to promote similar agenda (Mus Chairil, Jamilah, Mohd Helmi, Mat Pauzi & Normah, 2015). Subsequently, issues highlighted by the mainstream media are somewhat uniformed.

Interestingly, there was a relationship between issues of concern to both communities (Chinese and Indian). The results indicated that both communities had common concerns irrespective of their religious, cultural differences and media consumption.

Furthermore, surveys were carried out before and after election to identify issues that perceived important by Chinese and Indian respondents. When a comparison was made with the issues ranked important by the Chinese and Indian respondents, the results showed that there were differences between respective media and readers of these two ethnic groups. The Indian and Chinese respondents ranked crime as the main issue that they perceived important. However, crime was among the least covered by the Indian newspapers. Economy was perceived salient by the Chinese respondents before and after election. However, economy was not widely covered by the Chinese media. This study revealed that both Tamil and Chinese newspapers did not influence the agenda of their readers. In other words, there were no significant correlations between media agenda and public agenda. Drawing from Agenda Setting perspective, the ethnic newspapers have not been successful in influencing their readers on what to think about.

This study argues that there are several possibilities that contributed to this phenomenon. At present, the mass media are not the only channels that people relied on for political information. The new media and social media have provided alternative views and have gradually become the main source of reference for voters during the election. Similarly, political parties have taken a proactive approach by adopting new media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, blogs and online newspapers to reach voters. At the same time a massive amount of political information may be circulated at the same time, 24/7 via the social media. Tham & Hasmah (2014) found that Facebook has a significant role in the 13th General Election. Besides, opposition parties used YouTube to upload public speeches that could be easily shared and re-shared by the publics. Unlike traditional media, social media allow timely update and interactivity that enable alternative views to spread among multiple types of voters. In addition, the new media enable oppositions to make their voice heard,

repeated and shared with many. Mus Chairil et al. (2015) affirmed that the rise of the new media may have ended the monopolization of the traditional media in espousing any agenda (p. 54). In this context, political leaders should understand the influence coming from the new media that could possibly win or challenge public opinion. Similarly, political leaders should optimize the usage of traditional and new media to ensure their message and voice remains consistent and dominant in both offline and in the virtual sphere.

At the same time, the presence of myriads of media has generated a fragmented audience. In this context, the audience has more choice and select a medium that suits their interest. Contemporary media audience are actively seeking for information and selective on issues. They choose to be exposed to issues that they perceived important to them. This study suggests that media owners or political parties that wish to use the media to their advantage should incorporate issues that the publics perceived important in their political messages. In other words, they may use these issues as focal points or a strategy to influence voters.

The practical implication of this study is its ability to understand the effect of media agenda on public agenda that hardly provide a consistent result. This study among others demonstrates that major ethnic newspapers in Malaysia did not set the agenda for ethnic groups. Despite a high newspaper readership (in the case of Sin Chew Daily) and disassociation from the ruling elite ethnic newspapers may not be able to exert influence on the public opinion about any particular issues. This is because the newspapers did not project the right issues in their publication. Subsequently, the media may have succeeded in creating ample awareness about issues but did not appear to influence readers' agenda. Therefore, a continuous study on public opinion is essential to identify the right issues are covered by the media. This helps political leaders to promote relevant issues and subsequently received support from the publics.

BIODATA

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