

Two Studies on News Diffusion of the Missing Malaysian Plane

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Abstract

Methodology is one neglected area in studying news diffusion. Studies on news diffusion require speed in the conduct of their research for fear of memory loss and poor recollection on the date and time of occurrence of the significant event. Diffusion of news is about tracing the flow of news of a significant event from the time of news announcement in the media to the audience and from them to other members in society. Several studies have been made on the flow and rate of flow in the transmission of significant events, given different incidents, different time and different places but the discussion on methodology has been minimal. This study focuses on the problem of methodology in conducting news diffusion in two different areas related to a significant event, namely the airline tragedy of the Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370 that went missing in March 2014. The two studies were conducted to know whether there would be differences in knowing by time and place. One study was made in Kajang, in the suburb of Kuala Lumpur two weeks after the event. A second study was conducted nation-wide two months later. The study found no marked differences in time and date of recall or in the nature of news transmission, suggesting that audience members could recall time and date of the significant event. One possible reason could be the news of the missing plane continued to be a news item even two months after it was found missing and this might have affected respondents recall of the time and date.

Keywords: News diffusion, MH370, Methodology

Difusi Berita: Kajian terhadap Insiden Kehilangan Pesawat MH370

Abstrak

Metodologi kajian adalah suatu perkara yang kurang mendapat perhatian dalam kajian difusi berita. Penyelidikan tentang difusi berita menekankan tentang aliran dan kepastian maklumat mengenai sesuatu peristiwa yang penting itu tersebar sebaik pengumuman berita melalui media kepada khalayak dan seterusnya daripada khalayak kepada masyarakat umum. Isunya adalah sama ada responden mengingati masa dan tarikh sesuatu insiden jika kajian lambat dilakukan berbanding kajian yang dilakukan segera. Untuk itu, kajian telah dibuat terhadap insiden kehilangan pesawat MH370 pada bulan Mac 2014. Kajian pertama dijalankan di Kajang, sebuah bandar berhampiran Kuala Lumpur pada tempoh dua minggu selepas peristiwa tersebut. Kajian kedua dibuat di seluruh negara dalam tempoh dua bulan kemudian. Tujuan kajian ini ialah untuk mengetahui sama ada terdapat perbezaan dalam mengingati insiden tersebut di kalangan responden pada kajian pertama berbanding dengan responden dalam kajian kedua. Kajian mendapati tidak banyak perbezaan dalam dua kajian dari segi mengingati masa dan tarikh mengenai laporan kehilangan MH370. Suatu kemungkinan ialah peristiwa itu masih dilaporkan media massa walaupun ianya sudah berlaku dua bulan lepas yang menyebabkan responden mudah mengingatinya.

Kata Kunci: *Metodologi kajian, Difusi berita, MH370*

Introduction

Studies on news diffusion continue to attract the interest of scholars on the transmission rate and speed of significant events. One neglected area is on the methodology which is not given due emphasis despite the problems faced by scholars in conducting research in news diffusion. Scholars claimed that they need to conduct research immediately for fear of memory loss, namely respondents may not be able to recall details of the event if the study is conducted much later. Scholars interested in memory recall acknowledged that the setting and the presentation of methodology pose problems in the findings. Can respondents for example recall with ease the answers to the questions posed by the

researcher? Are respondents able to remember the time and date of the event? Would respondents be able to provide better answers if they were asked very much later?

Diffusion of news is about tracing the flow of a news event or incident from the time of news announcement in the media to the audience and from them to other members in society. It appears simple in tracing the flow of news through social networking, but the diffusion of a news event sheds light on a complex process through which the mass media of communication transmits stories to the audience and how audience members from thereon decide to share the news with their friends and family members.

This article focuses on the problem of methodology in conducting news diffusion studies. Other aspects of news diffusion are not the concern of writer on the discussion of methodology. In this study the issue of knowing the event is an issue of methodology. Would two studies conducted several weeks apart provide similar answers to the same questions posed by the researcher on the same event? The assumption is that respondents studied away from the event would not be able to recount accurately the answers asked due to the problem of memory recall compared to the respondents who were asked earlier. The two studies apart would tell which respondents were able to recall the time and date of the event more accurately. This paper is about the diffusion of news regarding Flight MH370, the Malaysian airlines that went missing on 8 March, 2014. MH370 with 227 passengers and 12 crew members departed from the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) at 12.41 a.m. to Beijing and was reported to have disappeared from the radar screen about an hour later over the South China Sea. The plane is yet to be recovered. An earlier study on the diffusion of news on MH370 was conducted by Idid (2016; 2015).

The study investigates the diffusion of news about the missing plane in two selected Malaysian community. The first study was conducted in a town called Kajang, nearby to Kuala Lumpur in two weeks after the event while the nationwide study was made two months later. Hence the concern was whether there would be differences in the answers the

respondents in the two areas at two different time would provide based on the memory they had of the event.

The objectives of this study therefore are to investigate for differences in terms of:

1. Memory recall;
2. Selection of media; and
3. Communication behaviour

Literature Review

Wright (1986) as cited in Heningham (2000) defined news diffusion as “how the news gets around” using both mass media and interpersonal communication. News diffusion studies are being used to examine how, why, and where people receive information and how the news later influences their behaviours (Idid, 2016, 1994; Rosengren, 1987; Rogers, 2000). In brief, news that have more value with the public will spread more quickly.

The first classic study on news diffusion was on the death of Franklin Roosevelt, the President of the United States (Miller, 1945). The small scale study, which was done in a college population, found news of the event spread fast whereby a majority of the respondents (90%) heard the news within the first hour of the event. It was found that more people learnt the event from word of mouth rather than from the media, although initial receipt of news was from the radio. Since the Miller study, news diffusion gained interest and found its presence in journals and conferences. Scholars have tried to discover patterns of news diffusion and to offer a theoretical insight into the dynamics of news distribution.

It was only in the 1960's that more studies on news diffusion began to emerge. News diffusion studies on the death of Kennedy (Banta, 1964; Greenberg, 1964) and the attempted assassination on Reagan (Gantz, 1983) illustrated how fast news was spread via interpersonal communication. The news on the assassination of Kennedy was omnipresent, with a high percentage of people knowing about the event within an hour of its occurrence. For example, Hill and Bonjean

(1964) found that within 60 minutes, 93% of the people in Dallas heard of the incident, only a minority heard the first news directly from radio or television sources (Banta, 1964). The assassination of Kennedy is an example of a communication message being transmitted during a time of crisis. News was transmitted fast, it was pervasive, and it was the first loss of an American national leader being reported in such detail in the picture tubes of the nation. Scholars determined that person-to-person communication played the largest role in news diffusion. The greater the news value of an event, the more important interpersonal communication is in the diffusion of news than the mass media.

News diffusion on the bombing of Iraq was said to be “extensive and rapid” (Gant & Greenberg, 1993: 179). News diffusion studies were given a new perspective when scholars gave due attention to the spread of the news on the September 11, 2001 incident. Greenberg, Hofshire and Lachlan (2002) found interpersonal communication to be the first source of news, but Stempel and Hargrov (2002), investigating the use of the internet, found television to be the primary source of information. Irrespective of the media, diffusion studies found that significant events spread fast to other members of society.

In other words, the greater the news value of an event, the more rapid the diffusion of news will be. Other findings on significant events were to unearth similar results. An overall analysis of news diffusion studies was given by several scholars. Rosengren (1973) did an analysis of the diffusion studies in the United States during the last 20 years and made a summary as follows:

1. The more important the event, the higher the rate and amount of diffusion
2. The higher the rate and amount of diffusion, the less the proportion that has learned the news from the newspapers and the larger the proportion that has learned it from personal communication;
3. The more important the event, the larger the proportion that has learned the news from personal communication;
4. The larger the proportion that learns the news from personal communication, the smaller the proportion that learns it from the newspapers.

Rogers (2000) in his analysis of several studies called for a pre-planned methodology so as to allow researchers to gather data from respondents within a day or two of the event. The unexpected nature of the news event in news diffusion studies would not win scholars research grants because the study need to be carried out within the immediate days of occurrence.

Initially news of significant events was carried by the mass media, the electronic media in particular, then interpersonal communication would take over in ferrying out the news to others. This suggested the dynamics of interpersonal communication in spreading the news on significant events and the limitation of the media in playing such a role. This therefore helped scholars to postulate the Regularity Hypotheses (Hill & Bonjean, 1964). Later studies on news diffusion found television or the mass media to activate the event rather than interpersonal communication (Idid, 2016).

Time of occurrence is another important variable in the news diffusion process. The time the event happened is critical in the news diffusion process as receiving the news is highly determined by the audience overall life situation, social behaviour, and media habits. Americans' awareness of the assassination of John Kennedy and attempted assassination of Ronald Reagan was an instance of salience-driven rapid diffusion. Weibull, Lindahl and Rosengren (1987), however, submitted that it took nine hours for the same percentage of the respondents to be acquainted with the assassination of Olof Palme, the Swedish Prime Minister. While the two American events occurred at midday, Olof Palme died just after midnight. The assassination of Egyptian President, Anwar Sadat was also another example when the news reached Malaysia at night (Idid, 1983). Timing of the event also interacts with daily schedule of the audience to determine differential role of the media diffusing the news. The timing of the event could be moderated if it was anticipated. Studies on the diffusion of news on the September 11, 2001 found the news of the event to have spread very fast. For example, Kanihan and Gale (2005) found 97% of the sampled population heard of the event within three hours.

Both the nature and the timing of the event affects the role by the different media in communicating the news. Events that happened during the day invited more attention than others. It was rather easy to explain why this should be. According to Henningham (2000), the spread of news about Diana's death started when people picked up the news from the broadcast media in mid-morning. A total of 66% heard the news within three hours. Some who had been out all day and away from the broadcast media did not hear the news until mid-evening. The interpersonal communication of the news was at the high level.

News spreads fast among those who were at home rather than among members of the audience who were at work or were in other social situations. It is only at home that the social networking would enable the transmission of news. It is from home that members of the audience would then communicate with others within and through the telephone or over the fence to talk to their neighbours. Hence significant events are spread rapidly among members of the audience when they were at home. Situational factors, salience of the event and time were factors that made the news event to be quickly diffused in society (Rogers, 2003).

Present Study

A Malaysian airline left the Kuala Lumpur International Airport as a scheduled flight from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing but lost contact with air traffic control on 8 March, 2014 at 1.20 a.m., less than half an hour after take-off. At 7.24 a.m, Malaysia Airlines (MAS) reported the flight missing. The aircraft, a Boeing 777-200ER, was carrying 12 Malaysian crew members and 227 passengers from 14 nations consisting among others 152 Chinese nationals and 38 Malaysians.

A multinational search effort, reported to be one of the largest and most expensive in history, began in the Gulf of Thailand and the South China Sea but was later extended to the Straits of Melaka and Andaman Sea. On March 15, based on military radar data and radio "pings" between the aircraft and an Inmarsat satellite, investigators concluded that the aircraft had diverted from its intended course and headed west across

the Malay peninsula. The search in the South China Sea was abandoned. On 17 March 2014, the Australian Maritime Safety Authority took charge of coordinating the search when it shifted the search to the southern part of the Indian Ocean. On 24 March, the Malaysian Government confirmed independent analyses by the British Air Accidents Investigation Branch (AAIB) and Inmarsat, which concluded that the flight ended in the Southern Indian Ocean.

Malaysia Airlines issued a media statement at 7.24 MYT, one hour after the scheduled arrival of the flight at Beijing, stating that contact with the flight had been lost at 2.40 a.m. It later emerged that Subang Air Traffic Control had lost contact with the aircraft at 1.22 a.m. and notified Malaysia Airlines at 2.40 a.m. Neither the crew nor the aircraft's onboard communication systems relayed a distress signal, indications of bad weather or technical problems before the aircraft vanished from the radar screens.

The Malaysian government mobilised its civil aviation department, air force, navy and requested international assistance. Within two days, many countries responded by sending more than 34 aircrafts and 40 ships. Countries that actively participated included Australia, Bangladesh, Brunei, Cambodia, China, France, India, Indonesia, Myanmar, New Zealand, Norway, Philippines, Russia, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States, and Vietnam.

The Boeing 777, introduced in 1994, is generally regarded by aviation experts as having a very good safety record. Since its first commercial flight in June 1995, there have been only three other serious accidents (British Airways Flight 38 in 2008; a cockpit first of Egypt Air 777-200 in 2011, and Asiana Airlines Flight 214 in 2013).

Methodology

There were several criticisms made on news diffusion studies. A frequent critique by scholars was that the sample was small, served

a very specific purpose, and it suffered an inbuilt weakness of being a Fire House Research (Deutschmann & Danielson, 1960; Rogers, 2000; and Greenberg, Hofschire, & Lachlan, 2002). Researchers had to be on standby to move to the research ground once an announcement of a significant event was made. As the nature of the research was characterised by speed, the size of the sample was small and the number of questions posed was limited. The speed in which research had to be mounted was done at the expense of context. The inadequacy was expressed by Rogers (2000: 560), where “investigators cannot adequately prepare a survey instrument, train interviewers and gather data from audience individuals, let alone apply for a research grant.”

News diffusion studies have focused on the sudden and the dramatic but such events rarely happen. When such significant events happened, then scholars are confronted with preparation. This preparedness in efforts and time and action as an immediate signal is required for the further development of the news diffusion studies. Such a suggestion was made by Rogers (2000) over the study made by Deutschman and Danielson (1960) who provided a paradigm for later research. He suggested a method to be prepared although it would be feasible on paper than in reality.

Telephones were normally used but studies were also conducted using face-to-face interviews (Danielson, 1956; Fine, 1975). O’Keefe (1969) used mailed questionnaire for his study on the first recorded human heart transplant performed by Dr. Christian Bernard from a hospital in South Africa. The respondents were medical doctors and the study took place four days after the event. Budd, MacLean, and Barnes (1966) interviewed 320 residents from Iowa City by telephone on the resignation of the Russian Prime Minister, while Larsen and Hill (1954) personally interviewed the academics and the labouring class on the death of Senator Taft. Telephone interviews were conducted on the tragedy of September 11, (Greenberg, Hofshire & Lachlan, 2002; Jones & Rainie, 2002; Stempel III & Hargrove, 2002) while others used personal interviews (Kanihan & Gale, 2005).

Bantz et. al. (1983) conducted a face-to-face non-probability study on 289 respondents in a Mid-West Metropolitan within two hours on the attempted murder of Reagan incident. In another study, Quarles, Jeffres Sanchez and Neuwirth interviewed 261 respondents in Cleveland, Ohio, by random dialling within 48 hours after the announcement. A total of 105 respondents were interviewed in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv on the death of Itzhak Rabin on 4 November 1995, four days after the incident.

Another observation is the population of study. The majority of studies were conducted among students or in the campus community. Ibrahim et. al. (2008) obtained 222 undergraduate students from a large Southwestern University a week after the incident relating to the Columbia Shuttle tragedy. The undergraduate students from the southeastern United States answered a questionnaire a week after the incident that Osama Laden was killed on 2 May, 2011 (King, Glascock & Levitt, 2014).

All the diffusion studies in Malaysia (Idid, 2016) were carried out using the questionnaires administered face-to-face except for the study on the death of the second Prime Minister, Abdul Razak Hussein, when Idid (1976) conducted the interview through the use of telephone.

Bantz, Petrino, and Rarick (1983) commented that event proximity (measured in terms of time away from the event) and Interview Time (Time of Day study was conducted) might cause an artefactual study. Event proximity as postulated by Bantz et. al. (1983) would predict that the event would be relayed by interpersonal communication because recorded nearer to the event, the respondents would continue to report in sound memory that their first source of information was through interpersonal communication. Studies have shown that event proximity did not affect the findings on diffusion studies (Rogers, 2003; Weaver-Lariscy, Sweeney & Steinfalt, 1984). The Malaysian studies did not find a difference whether field work was conducted nearer the date of the event or slightly away from the event. For this discussion, two studies need to be conducted, one near the time of the event and another a time distance away to evaluate memory recall.

A concern in diffusion studies is on time recall and date of the events. The challenge would be to understand whether respondents could recall the time and date of the events at a later date. In most cases diffusion studies had incorporated the importance of time in making the interviews. The dramatic events require scholars to rush out of the campus to conduct the interview with the shortest possible time. Fine (1975) conducted his study two days after Spiro Agnew announced his resignation (10 October 1973) and another study was done two weeks later. A total of 80 undergraduate students of Harvard University each were involved at both period of time. Result showed that there was hardly any difference in recall with due regard to time of knowing of the event and the place in which they learnt of the event.

Present Study

Two studies were conducted on the MH370 missing plane incident. Studies were done at two different places and at two different times. The first study was done in Kajang, the capital town of Hulu Langat, two weeks after the incident was first made known and another, a nationwide study, was made two months later. Uppermost in our mind was whether there would be a difference in recalling the date and time between the two studies. This study expect that there would be differences due to the sampled population and due to the date when the two studies were conducted. What was held constant was the news on the missing plane was still highlighted in the Malaysian media even during the second study. Previous studies on significant events would have seen an end of the event reported within a matter of days. But in the case of the missing plane, the news was still maintained over several months, perhaps not high in salience as in the first few weeks of the event.

Findings

The research took place during the time of a by election study when the incident happened on 8th March. Our study on the by-election was from 29 to 31 March, 2014. The second study was conducted nationwide from 25 April to 11 May 2014. In both studies, respondents were personally interviewed.

Demographic Profile

Kajang town is the capital of the District of Hulu Langat, situated about 40 kilometres away from Kuala Lumpur, the capital city of Malaysia. A total of 619 respondents, 53% being females, were interviewed. A total of 45 enumerators were involved in the face-to-face interview of respondents who were selected based on quota sampling. A total of 44% each were Malays and Chinese and 12% Indians, with 36% of the respondents having basic degrees.

The second study was conducted nationwide in May 2014, two months after the tragic Malaysian airline event. A total of 1,512 Malaysians participated in the study; 50% of them were males. A majority of the respondents were Malays/Bumiputras (47%), followed by Chinese (42%), and another 11% were Indians. A high 48 % of the respondents graduated from high school.

News Diffusion

Figure 1 compares the day and time of news diffusion in Kajang and nationwide. The news on MH370 diffused in the same manner for both the studies. There was no difference in learning about the news. A total of 36% of the respondents in Kajang knew the event from 7 to 11 a.m. compared to 28% nationwide. But when a comparison was made to the news updates on national television channels (7.00 a.m., 1.00 p.m., and 8.00 p.m.), it was found that 18% heard the news in Kajang within the first hour of announcement, compared to only 4% nationwide. The diffusion rate rose again when 4% from both studies heard the news during the midday news update at 1 p.m. Only 2% in Kajang learnt of it during the 8 p.m. prime time hour compared to 8% in the nationwide study. Such different results may be due to memory recall as shown by the first study in Kajang two weeks after the event, when the memory of the news may be fresh among the respondents, as opposed to the second study which was done two months after. Neither the Kajang nor the nationwide study showed a rapid diffusion of news as in prior diffusion studies on significant events (see Figure 1).

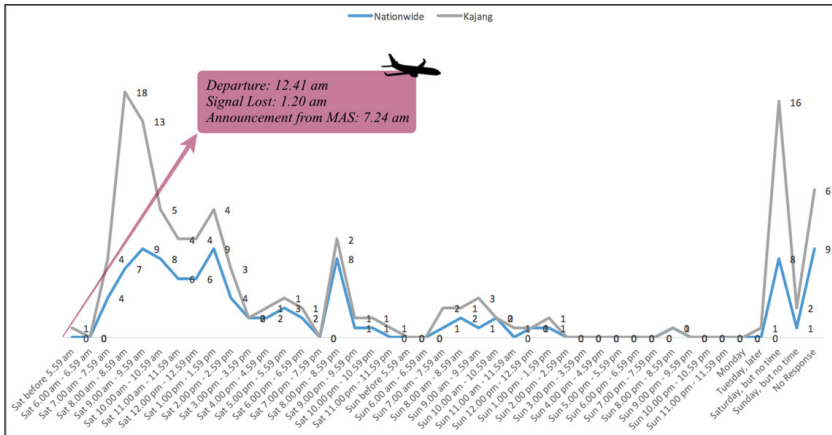


Figure 1: Day and Time of Information Received

Sources of News

Diffusion of news by first source of news did not show much difference for the two studies. A total of 63% from the first study cited the mass media as their first source of news with the majority citing television (46%). In the second study, the percentage of those citing the mass media as the first source was 58%, with 47% saying television was the major medium they first heard the news of the missing plane. Hence in total sum, there was little difference in citing the traditional media as the first source of information.

Table 2 suggested that traditional media was also cited as the first sources of information on the first day and on the second day (Saturday) for both the studies. In the first study a total of 65% heard of the event from the traditional media and 67% on the second day in the first study. In the second study, it was found that 59% heard of the event from the traditional media in the first day and 62% on the second day.

Table 2: First Source of News

Items	Kajang (Mac 2014)		Nationwide (May 2014)	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Television	286	46	715	47
Radio	51	8	91	6
Newspapers	54	9	89	6
Facebook	85	14	206	14
Twitter	29	4	44	3
News Online	39	6	35	2
Phone calls	10	2	18	1
SMS	20	3	122	8
Word of mouth	42	7	177	12
No response	3	1	15	1
Total	619	100	1512	100

The differences in citing the first source of information on the air disaster was however more evident when an analysis was made by race. All the race groups cited the media as the main source of information on the first and second study. While it was true for the Malays and Chinese for the two studies on the first and second day, it was different for the Indian group on the second day of the first study. Most of the Indians stated television as their first source of information (83%) on the first day, followed by 40% on the second day. But in the nationwide study, the result was different whereby different types of media channels were the Indian's first source of news, including television (36%), radio (15%), word of mouth (15%), and Facebook (14%). By the second day, television and word of mouth remained at 36 and 14%, followed by newspaper coverage (23%) which the event splashed across all covers.

Personal transmission seemed to be most popular among the Chinese compared to the Malays and Indians. A total of 14% (a combination of telephone, SMS and word of mouth) of the Chinese heard it from personal sources on the first day of the first study, compared to 9% among the Malays. On the second day of the first study, a total of 40%

of the Indians cited word of mouth, compared to only 11 % among the Malays (see Table 3).

Table 3: First Source of News by Race

Day of learning the news for first time	Source	Kajang (Mac 2014)				Nationwide (May 2014)			
		Race				Race			
		Malay / Bumiputera (%)	Chinese (%)	Indian (%)	Total (%)	Malay / Bumiputera (%)	Chinese (%)	Indian (%)	Total (%)
Saturday	Television	63	23	83	47	62	37	36	49
	Radio	1	15	8	8	4	5	15	6
	Newspapers	4	13	8	9	4	4	3	4
	Facebook	10	20		14	12	20	14	16
	Twitter	8	4		6	2	5	2	3
	Online News	4	10		6	2	3	3	2
	Telephone		3		1	0	2	3	1
	SMS	1	7		4	7	11	10	9
	Mouth to mouth	8	4		5	7	13	15	10
	No response		1			0	0		0
	Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Sunday	Television	63	20	40	40	37	23	36	31
	Radio		33		13	6	8	9	7
	Newspapers	4	33		14	23	25	23	24
	Facebook	15	7		8	4	9		6
	Twitter		7		3		5	9	3
	Online News	7			3		5	9	3
	Telephone			20	5	0	6		3
	SMS	7			3	6	3		4
	Mouth to mouth	4		40	12	25	16	14	20
		Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Informing Others

In the study of news diffusion there would always be a relaying of information. People are keen to tell others what they knew. Besides being informed by others, there would always be a tendency for those having the information to inform others. There was deep concern among

Malaysians by noon when they began to realise that there was more than what was announced that the plane was missing from the radar. The respondents began to inform others. A total of 82% had informed friends, shared conversations with their spouses and told family members. It was an exchange of feeling that something abnormal was happening to Malaysians as they speculated about the missing plane. The first time that a Malaysian plane had met with an accident was several years ago. In several studies on significant events there was a lot of relying on information among friends and family members to release feelings or to gain more information or in the words of Rogers (2000) to boast to others that they had information assuming that others did not. There is an element of egotism when someone releases information to others on the assumption that he is one up in possessing the vital ingredient called information. The active exchange of information among family members and friends normally takes place within the context of acute uncertainty. Either one wants to release and share information with others or to find more information through such an undertaking deserves further investigation. Information from the media is only unidirectional: the media informs the audience. Therefore, the audience seeks information from the media. There is no exchange of information as in personal communication or as emerging with the new media (see Table 4).

Table 4: Informing Others

Items	Kajang (Mac 2014)		Nationwide (May 2014)	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Friends	197	32	400	27
Spouses	120	19	230	15
Family members	189	31	544	36
Officemates	43	7	91	6
Others	13	2	42	3
Total	619	100	1512	100

The figures did not suggest much difference in informing others. In both of the studies, a majority seemed to have informed family members and their own spouses in both of the studies. In the first study, a total of 50%

told family members and spouses while the percentage escalated to 51% in the second study. Informing friends was the second biggest group followed by informing family members in the first study (32% and 31%) compared to informing family members (36%) and informing friends in the second study (27%).

Discussion

This study focuses on the methodology of news diffusion, precisely on whether there was a time difference in dates and relevant information from two studies conducted at two different time. Two studies were conducted on the news diffusion of the missing plane, MH370, one located in Kajang in March 2014 and the other, a nationwide study two months later, in May 2014.

The findings on the diffusion of news on the missing plane illustrated some interesting points to be considered while reinforcing the patterns of regularity in the spread and transmission of news. Several studies were reported on the diffusion of news studies. One was mentioned by Rogers (2000) illustrating the point that diffusion of news was still carried out in the 1990's and beyond as some scholars (DeFleur, 1987) had expressed pessimism over its future development. A note to be mentioned is that articles on news diffusion in the developing world is seldom noticed though they do contribute to the literature on the subject (Idid, 2016).

In our case we were on the ground conducting a study during the Kajang by-election and by chance the incident of the missing MH370 plane happened two weeks earlier. We took the opportunity to include the relevant questions on diffusion of news as we had earlier conducted similar studies on the subject (Idid, 2016). Two months later, another study was conducted nationwide on a larger population in which we included some questions on the diffusion of news about the event. We were drawn to ask questions of the missing plane as the incident continued to draw attention some two months later.

There were several salient points to be learnt from the diffusion study on the missing plane. The incident was most unfortunate and the plane

remains to be found. One of the important ingredients on the diffusion of news of significant event is that the audience must be able to regard the event as significant or not. But the missing plane was totally different. The first news splash was that the plane had lost contact with the ground authorities. And it remained so until so many hours later. But when the plane did not arrive at its destination in Beijing and might possibly had crashed, all hopes were dashed. A significant event must be announced as such and media must be prompt in reporting the incident. If the audience is not being told on the precise nature of the event then, by theory, social networking of such significant event would not be activated. The audience members would still speculate but would not report that the plane had crashed unless the authorities were to have said so.

In this paper, when comparison is made with both studies, it was found out that there was little difference in the time and date of recall and from the media that they first learnt of the news. The respondents were able to recall the time that they learnt of the event. The respondents in the two studies were not different in informing their families followed by their friends. In terms of media selection, many heard of the event through television and Facebook, which indicated the importance of mass media in the dissemination of news. But, despite such media choice, interpersonal or word of mouth, communication was still an important feature in news diffusion.

Therefore, it is suffice to say despite the difference in the amount of respondents and time in data collection, both studies showcase a similar pattern when it comes to the diffusion of news on a significant event. Conducting a study slightly later did not blind the respondents to the time that they learnt of the significant time. Having said that one must be cautioned on this incident. The missing plane continued to be reported more than two months after it was first reported. This meant that respondents were reminded about the missing plane two months after the incident, the time that the second study was conducted. The respondents were reminded perhaps at the significant news event over a period of time.

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