

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF MALAYSIAN RADIO AND TELEVISION COVERAGE DURING THE ELECTION OF 1990

by

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INTRODUCTION

The campaign for the 1990 general elections started from the nomination of candidates as from 11th October to 20th and 21st October 1990, that is the election days. A content analysis research of Malaysian radio and television coverage was undertaken during the process of election.

The objective of this research is to determine what are the main issues that are highlighted in the campaign of the parties that were competing during that time and how the coverage of the campaign is broadcast to the public.

METHODOLOGY

1. The sample of recorded material is used in the research to be the main topic and issue to be broadcast by radio and television media during the process of the election.
2. The recorded materials are those from chosen news programmes by radio and television including the ones that are broadcast during the programme.

Other than that political campaign talks recorded by the candidates were analysed for the research. RTM had also given the opportunity to the parties competing to use the radio medium to explain their manifesto and their agenda. For that 6 talks by the Barisan Nasional representatives and 7 talks of the opposition parties were analyzed.

3. Recorded news covered 12 news recorded in Bahasa Malaysia and 13 news in English broadcast starting from 12th to 21st October 1990.

4. Television news recorded covered 19 in Bahasa Malaysia broadcast and 9 in English from RTM1, RTM2 and TV3. The programmes are English news (RTM 30'). Seven O' clock news (TV3, 30'), Buletin Utama (TV3, 30'), and Berita Perdana (RTM1, 30)' and Menjelang Hari Mengundi (TV3, 30'). 28 programmes were broadcast for a total of 840 minutes whereby 96% were broadcast in prime time. Overall releases is 546 minutes (65%) in Bahasa Malaysia and 35% that is 294 minutes in English language.
5. This research is limited only to the recorded materials which were broadcast by radio from 12th to 21st October and television from 10th to 20th October 1990.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The content was analysed with a few variables such as language used in the communication message, news sources, main news tendency, purpose, parties support, theme and persuasion that were used during election broadcasts.

1. **Language Used in Broadcasts**

The analysis showed that the majority (68%) in both broadcasts 75% in Bahasa Malaysia and 61.6% in English language, showed the "incidence" factor. It is followed by the overall showing on the "policies and issues" factors 20% and the "image constructing" (12%).

It is compared to the coverage of television releases news overall emphasis on the "image constructing" factor which is 20% whereby 43% is in Bahasa Malaysia and 7% in English. Further television shows "incident" factor 25% followed by "policies and issues" factor 21% from the content analysis.

2. **Communication message**

Analysis showed that the communication message related to the election was clear and broadcasted live in radio medium. Same as in television medium where the overall is 100% from Bahasa Malaysia (68%) and 32% in English language.

3. **Coverage Sources**

The coverage sources in broadcasted radio election messages in both languages is from radio journalists. Whereas from television medium it is also 100% from journalists.

4. **Tendency to take sides in news headlines**

The analysis showed that the headlines of radio news are leaning more towards a party in this case Barisan Nasional parties in both languages (60%) which is 66.7% in Bahasa Malaysia and 53.9% in English language.

The same situation happens in television broadcasts which shows an overall 61% main headline taking sides of the Barisan Nasional parties, and only 39% neutral headlines.

5. **Tendency to take sides in the content of the news**

The analysis found that the overall material of the content of radio news which was broadcast are more towards Barisan Nasional parties (72%) in which 91.7% are in Bahasa Malaysia and 53.8% in English languages.

The same situation occurs in the television broadcasting, whereby it is 90% taking side of the Barisan Nasional.. They found that the news material is less critical towards the party that is Semangat 46, only 18% and other opposition parties 25%. It means that the overall of 57% material are not being critical from any party. In this case, Barisan Nasional is not getting the criticism at all.

6. **The level of headline support**

As a whole, the headlines of radio news shows that the level of the average support towards a party, 40% for Barisan Nasional whereby 66.7% is found in Bahasa Malaysia broadcast and 15.4% in English language. As a whole, the support towards Barisan Nasional is 24% which is 25% in Bahasa Malaysia and 23% in English.

The same situation happens in television broadcasting in which is the average support as a whole towards Barisan Nasional is 60% whereas the strong support is 36%.

7. **The Credibility of a leader**

Radio election news coverage broadcasts in languages is centered on the credibility of the Prime Minister that is 68% whereby mention of the Prime Minister is 83.4% in Bahasa Malaysia broadcasts and 53.8% in English.

For the television broadcast, the same situation applies where mention of the Prime Minister is 47% compared to mention of government ministers.

8. **Special coverage accorded to parties**

The analysis of radio news broadcasts found that the broadcasting favoured the Barisan Nasional which is an overall 40% of which 38.9% is in Bahasa Malaysia and 41% in English. This is followed by 15% for S46 party's name, DAP (8%) and PAS only 3%.

The analysis of television broadcast shows all broadcasts in two languages emphasise a support for the Barisan Nasional party candidates that is 88%, whereby support for S46 candidates is only 8%, compared to 4% for other parties.

9. **The main political personality in broadcasts**

Regarding the main political personality in broadcasts Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad has a very high coverage in the broadcasts for radio news that is an overall of 80% whereby 100% is in Bahasa Malaysia and 61.5% in English. This is followed by En. Ghafar Baba's mention that is 8%.

In the television news broadcast 81% mention Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad and this is followed by Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah with 8% and En. Ghafar Baba with 7%.

10. **The objective of broadcasts**

The research shows that the broadcast for election campaign of radio news are more motivated towards "actual report" which is 45.9% compared to 33.3% which shows the image of Barisan Nasional party. Only 8.4% broadcasts contain criticism material of the opposing parties.

From the television broadcast, this research shows another conclusion. The television news broadcasted more focused on the image of the party leaders which is 43%. This is followed by 11% for the "actual report", 10% is about the leader of the opposing parties, while 7% shows campaign for the leader and 7% constitutes criticism towards the party leader.

11. **Direct portrayal of candidates of the government party**

The research shows 96% of material from broadcasts directly support and praise the ruling party's leaders and party candidates. This is different from the news materials analysis whereby the material broadcast do not directly highlight the ruling party candidates [which is 89%] and only 11% constitutes material which shows direct portrayal of the ruling party.

12. **Theme of campaign material**

The radio news channel uses stability and prosperity of nation' as the theme (25%) in all their programmes compared to the theme of "democratic system" (18.4). Besides that, the theme on ability to rule, as well as stability are important too (10%).

Television programmes during the election campaign period give priority to the theme of "stability and prosperity" (60%). "Opposition parties leadership" as a theme is only 10%, "community characteristics of others races" 8% and the "rescue Malaysia" theme is only 4%.

13. **Agenda Setting vs Gate Keeping**

From this aspect, this research found that radio news uses both of the approaches in news programme (84%).

Overall television programmes use the gatekeeping and filter approach (28%) and the agenda setting approach is 8% only. Overall, both approaches constitute 26%, while the balance is unclear and unsure.

14. **Appeals**

The analysis of the radio news in terms of persuasive approach is not clear (44%). While critical appeal (24%) is more important, appeals "to fulfill the promise" based on previous performance is 20%.

For the television broadcasts, appeals are not widely used and not clear. Only the "positive promise" appeal based on previous performance is more important (36%) compared to 14% persuasion on criticism or to assault.

15. **Major campaign activity**

The major campaign activity that has been reported are meetings (20%) and speech activity (20%) compared to other activities such as interviews with the candidates (16%) and "press conference" (8% only)

The situation is different with regard to activities in television which give more concentration to "interviews with candidates" (22%) compared to 18% to public assemblies. The biggest amount is 46% based on other activities, 4% for "rally activity", 4% for visiting election place and 4% for unconventional campaign.

16. **Analysis of radio speeches**

There are six BN speeches for 77 minutes 45 seconds and 7 opposition speeches for 87 minutes that have been analyzed. It has been found that 100% of BN candidates emphasized on creation of image while opposition speeches emphasize more on "issues and policies" (71.4%) compared to "creation of image" factor, which is only about 28.6% of the speech content.

From the aspect of "speech objective" it was found that 86% of the opposition used its speeches to criticize the ruling government while 100% of BN candidates used the speeches to strengthen the image of their party.

Specific themes and subjects of the BN parties speeches that were found in the radio channels emphasized more on the theme of "stability and prosperity" (33.4%), "democratic practice" (27.8%) and "racial intergration" (27.8%). While the opposition side gave more concentration on "corruption issues" (33.4%), and "BMF scandal" (23.8%).

For the aspect of "agenda setting" vs "gatekeeping", the Barisan Nasional representatives are more inclined towards "gatekeeping" (83.3%) compared to the opposition representatives who are more concentrating on "Agenda Setting" that is 53.8%.

CONCLUSION

To understand the ownership, control and the role of the electronic media in the government and private sector in Malaysia, this research explains that the electronic media function in accordance with the audience and the public tastes.

The research shows that the electronic media have not been irresponsible in carrying out their social obligations towards the community and society during their coverage of the 1990 general election campaign.

Overall the purposes of these functions are to preserve the peace, political stability, prosperity and racial integration of this nation.