

**UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA**

**ONLINE JOURNALISM: CHANGING  
PUBLIC MINDSET AND POLITICAL  
CONFLICTS**

**ZIININE ABDESSELAM**

Thesis submitted in fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
**Master of Arts**  
**Mass Communication**

**Faculty of Communication and Media Studies**

June 2017

## ABSTRACT

Online journalism has a powerful influence in reshaping public's beliefs, thoughts, and perceptions. Public mindset change is a central factor that drives political mobilization and conflicts. In light of the Malaysian public power revolution (Bersih4 and 5 rallies 2015-2016), this study explores the role of online journalism in changing public mindset towards the regime and norms and its relationship to political turmoil and conflicts. To meet these research objectives, the researcher employs a set of questionnaires that evaluate local netizens' perceptions of government, besides an exploratory content analysis of online newspapers published to date, and several in-depth interviews that analyze important views and perspectives. The results reveal that online journalism, particularly online independent journalism is becoming not only a popular medium of political communication but an influential arena for public brainwashing, mobilization, and political struggle. The new technology (online media) is creating a new generation with a different kind of thinking that clashes with conventional constitutions and norms. Its combination, revelations, portrayals, critical reports, and the spread of new ideologies and propagandas are reshaping and changing public mindset towards traditional mechanisms and norms. Those who often read online independent media news are found to become more political savvy, outspoken, yet racist, cynical and rebellious. Online journalism happens to be a double-edged sword. On one hand, it stimulates minds and changes beliefs, ideas, and perceptions, leading to general conflict with existing rules and authorities. On the other hand, it helps to create awareness, produce well-informed citizens with a growth mindset, and enforce democracy and freedom of expression, which paves the way towards democracy and development.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Alhamdulillah, praise be to Allah, I have effectively completed this thesis, one of the hardest explorations I have ever done. Thanks to God for giving me persistence and aiding me to overcome all obstacles to achieve my aspiration. However, I would like to acknowledge those who have assisted me. This thesis would not have been completed without their help, guidance, and support.

I would like first of all to put across my sincere gratefulness to my supervisor Dr. Zulkifli Abd Latiff who has devoted his time and knowledge in guiding and evaluating this academic research project.

I would also like to express my special thanks to all the informants and respondents who have participated and contributed their knowledge to this study.

My appreciation also goes to each member of my family for supporting me emotionally and financially. Their support and encouragement have been instrumental in overcoming several obstacles in my life.

Finally, this thesis is dedicated to the memory of my late mother and father who strived so hard throughout their life to bring me up and educate me.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
<b>CONFIRMATION BY PANEL OF EXAMINERS</b>	iii
<b>AUTHOR'S DECLARATION</b>	iv
<b>ABSTRACT</b>	v
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</b>	vi
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b>	vii
<b>LIST OF TABLES</b>	x
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b>	xi
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</b>	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Background of the Study	2
1.3 Problem Statement	6
1.4 Research Questions	8
1.5 Research Objectives	10
1.6 Hypothesis	10
1.7 The Significance of the Study	11
1.8 Scope of the Study	13
1.9 Chapter Summary	15
<b>CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	16
2.1 Online Journalism	16
2.2 Changing Public Mindset	21
2.3 Political Conflicts	24
2.4 Conceptual Framework One	27
2.5 Conceptual Framework Two	28
2.6 Chapter Summary	29
<b>CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY</b>	30
3.1 Research Design	30

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Online journalism changing public's mindset has a significant impact on the political environment. Malaysia, as many other countries across the world, has witnessed severe anti-government rallies and protests that gave rise to serious political turmoil and conflicts, over the last few years, due to the influences of this phenomenon.

In light of the Malaysian public power revolution (Bersih or the so-called Yellow T-shirts rallies 2015-2016) that demanded the removal of the Prime Minister Najib Razak and the reformation of the political system, this study explores the role of online journalism in changing public mindset towards the regime and its relationship to the political mobilization and conflicts.

Research reveals that online journalism plays an instrumental role in mobilizing political activism and uprisings (Oates & Owen, 2004; Storck, 2011; Simon, 2012; Kahne, Middaugh & Allen, 2014; Mabweazara, & etc, 2014). However, the literature shows only a few studies have been focused on the role of online journalism in reshaping public mindset (beliefs, thoughts, and perceptions of government and norms), even though public mindset change is a central factor that drives political mobilization and conflicts.

This study is based on the assumption that online journalism changing public's mindset toward hegemonic regimes and norms plays a significant role in political turmoil and conflicts that engulfed Malaysia, as many other developing nations, these last few years. Citizens turned against their leaders or regime when online media raised doubts and negative perceptions in their minds. As Abraham Lincoln (1858) famously stated, "communication is a tool to build trust and shape perceptions." Trust in government is closely related to confidence in institutions (Bardes & W. Oldendick, 2012). "The dimension of trust in government runs from high trust to high distrust or political cynism...Cynism refers to a statement of the belief that the government is not functioning and producing outputs in accord with individual expectations" (Mitter, as cited in Bardes & Oldendick, 2012:5). The flow of ideas, the capacity to make