

Sy e d A r a b i I d i d

SCHOLARSHIP

IN TRANSFORMATION

Syed Arabi Idid
SCHOLARSHIP
IN TRANSFORMATION

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Media and Democracy Research Group
(Politics and Security Research Niche)

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CHAPTER 6

MEDIA CREDIBILITY: A LONGITUDINAL PERSPECTIVE

INTRODUCTION

Question of source credibility has attracted the attention of scholars over the past two decades. They were interested to understand, how credibility was conceptualized, measured and how it was then related to other variables of interest.

Both electronic and print media play a vital role in disseminating of instrumental information. As more people use the mass media as their main sources of information, the media must maintain their credibility of what they present to the public. The basic assumption of studying source credibility is that the credibility of a source influences the effects of the message it presents (Lee, 1978). Therefore, the audience media exposure and information seeking habits are guided by their perceived media credibility.

This study aims to investigate the degree of credibility Malaysians have on their media. The results of this study formed the basis of this chapter. In several studies conducted over the past three elections, it was found that Malaysians have some amount of incredulity over their media. The degree of what they perceived of their media credibility changed over a period of years.

This study could be regarded as a continuation of studies that were conducted over the previous years, with the exception that this study was done during the period when no elections were held on the question of media credibility.

The previous studies were conducted before the general elections of 1986, 1990 and 1995 when respondents rated the credibility of their media. The present study would present data on findings made in two states, namely, Kedah and Selangor. Findings from the two states would serve to gauge how credibility has changed over a period of time in the Malaysian context.

Media credibility is the degree of believability of the source of information by the audience. Credibility is the quality of a report, broadcast, or an individual that allows them to be worthy of belief. A number of factors contribute to being a 'credible' source of information, namely, objectivity, accessibility, freedom to report, currency of the report, and relative expertise. These factors should be considered when assessing the credibility of information received from media sources.

MEDIA CREDIBILITY AND MEDIA EXPOSURE

Several studies have reported that the majority of the public put little faith in the media with little distinction between newspaper and television credibility (Burgoon, Burgoon and Wilkinson, 1981). Moreover, many feel that the news they obtain from the press is biased. Nevertheless, newspapers are perceived as more credible than television.

Other studies have found television to be more credible than either the print media or radio. Westley and Severin (1964) had suggested that the credibility assigned to a medium is not uniform but is dependent on the individual's preference for and use of the medium.

Television news and public affairs viewing have been shown to be positively associated with political interest, knowledge and opinion holding (Atkin and Gantz, 1978). However, when subjects were compared in terms of being reliant on television or newspapers (Clarke and Fredin, 1978), newspapers use was more strongly associated with political knowledge and with discriminating perceptions about politics. Apparently, newspapers provide more political information than television and the information is learned better and held longer by readers than by TV viewers (Miro, 1983). McLeod, Bybee and Durval (1979) found that newspaper reading was a primary factor in generating knowledge about political issues and the candidate's positions during a political campaign.

A sample survey of Wisconsin adults conducted in late 1961 and early 1962 by the Wisconsin Survey Research Laboratory found that 927 out

of 1057 respondents responded adequately to the credibility question (Westley and Severin, 1964). The result generally shows a tendency for persons of high socioeconomic status to give higher credibility to the newspaper and lower credibility to television.

A cross-sectional survey was conducted in Grand Rapids, Michigan with a systematic sample of 428 respondents drawn from the most recent telephone directory (Reagan and Zenaty, 1979). Out of the 266 adults interviewed, 213 (80.1%) used both the daily newspaper and a local TV station as a regular source of news. However, they regarded television as more believable and truthful than newspaper in presenting news (Reagan and Zenaty, 1979).

In a recent survey by Scripps Howard News Service and Scripps Survey Research Center at the Ohio University School of Journalism, results showed that less than 15 per cent of all Americans think that newspapers are very reliable (Jaben, 1999). Little more than half think newspapers and television are fair in their reporting, while three-quarters or more think reporters are biased, inaccurate, and prying. Simultaneously, more than 40 per cent have lost at least some faith in the media.

In another study, an effort to define changes over the past decade is illustrated by 'Respect Ratings'. It is a series of charts designed to compare the highest scores 'very favorable' (1985) and 'Grade A' (1995) among newspapers, network TV news and local TV news (Hess, 1995). Results of the study showed that in 1985 all three types of news presentations had about the same percentage of enthusiasts with local TV programs leading in every demographic category except for college graduates and the 18-to-29 age group, where newspapers get the approval, while local TV and newspapers are tied among high-income people, Republicans and Midwesterners. Preference for local TV news is most pronounced among African Americans, senior citizens, low-income people, Southerners and Democrats (Hess, 1995).

The Pew Center for Civic Journalism has launched a study to examine the perceived lack of fairness in the media (Marks, 1997). In 1989, 34 per cent of Americans thought that the press dealt fairly with all sides in political and social issues. Today, the number is down to 27 per cent, with 67 per cent believing that the media tend to favor one side or the other. Americans also believe that the press too often invades people's privacy and the coverage of personal and ethical behavior by political leaders is excessive. That is coupled with an increasing lack of

trust in the media's reliability. In 1985, 55 per cent of the Americans believed that the media got their facts straight most of the time. Today, that is down to 37 per cent.

In Malaysia, not many studies have been conducted on how the people perceive credibility of the media. In the 1970s, Grenfell once noted that if Malaysians did not believe the electronic media, they would switch off their television sets. There was hardly any continuation done after the study.

It was later in the 1980s that some questions were raised over the issue of media credibility. Studies were done in 1990, 1995 and 1999 at the time when Malaysians were going to the polls. The respondents were asked what they perceive of the media. It was then assumed that the media played an important role in disseminating information to the people to enable them to make up their minds as to whom they should vote. Data were also collected on the amount of coverage given by the media to the respective political parties during the election campaigns. While media credibility was measured through survey research, the amount of coverage was measured using content analysis.

General elections in 1990, 1995 and 1999 were watershed years for the opposition in Malaysia. The emergence of two overlapping opposition coalitions in the former and one unified opposition coalition in the latter helped the parties win more seats in Parliament. The ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition got the greatest share of coverage in both 1990 and 1999 election campaigns. However, surveys on the credibility of political news in the local media gave a surprising result (Oorjitham, 2000).

PRESENT STUDY

A study was conducted in the state of Selangor in May 2001 and in Kedah in April 2001. The two studies were interested to know how the people in the two states perceived credibility of the media. The credibility of media was measured by asking respondents the extent to which they believed the newspaper, television and radio.

The survey managed to obtain data from 1453 respondents in Kedah and 1969 respondents in Selangor. The two states were randomly selected. The areas in Kedah include Kubang Rotan, Pantai Merdeka, Jeneri, Sala, Air Itam, Kulim Bandar Baru, Derga, Kupang, Lunas, and Merbok. In Selangor, the areas are Hulu Kelang, Selayang, Sabak, Sungai Panjang, Subang, Kampung Tunku,

Permatang, Perlabuhan Kelang, Sungai Burung, Dusun Tua, Seri Kembangan, Batu Laut, and Meru.

The present study involved all the main races. For Selangor, 57 per cent were Malays, 33 per cent Chinese and 10 per cent Indians and others. In Kedah, the respondents consisted of 80 per cent Malays, 14 per cent Chinese and the rest were Indians and others. The demographic composition reflected the composition of the residents in the two states. There were 62% males in Selangor and 63% males in Kedah.

We began by analyzing exposure of the respondents toward television, newspaper and radio by asking them how many times in the past week did they read the newspaper, watched television or listen to the radio. For the purpose of this study, we categorized respondents' exposure as low (0 to 2 days in a week), moderate (3 to 5 days in a week), and high (6 to 7 days in a week).

We also categorized credibility as low and high. We asked respondents their idea of credibility on a four-point scale. For the purpose of this study, low credibility was obtained among those who obtained 1 to 2 points and high credibility was assigned to those having 3 to 4 points. The scale of 1 indicates - 'do not believe at all', 2 indicates - 'do not believe', 3 indicates - 'believe', and 4 indicates - 'believe totally' on the mass media, that is, the newspapers, the television, and the radio.

In this study, an additional analysis was made to predict for media credibility based on race, age, income and education. The relationship between media exposure and selected demographic characteristics (education, age and income) with perceived credibility were also looked into accordingly while controlling for race and sex.

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS STUDIES IN MALAYSIA

The respondents in the 1990 study made up of 2847 Malaysians (N 1 = 1384, N2=1463) while the respondents for the 1995 study were comprised of 1882 (N 1=903, N2=979).

In 1999, radio ranked first followed by newspapers and TV. But, in April this year, TV got the highest rating, followed by print and radio while the Internet finished a poor last. Analysis of the results by race shows that Malay respondents now believe less in all three mainstream media than 10 years ago. During the last polls, at least half of the Malays voted for the opposition. In 1990, 9 per cent of

the 782 Malays interviewed trusted 'very much' the political news they heard on the radio and 78 per cent said they trusted it 'much'. For newspapers, the figures were 11 per cent and 74 per cent, respectively. TV came last with 13 per cent and 73 per cent. The positions of the three media changed in the recent April survey. Malays trusted all of them less, with 5 per cent of the 398 interviewed believing very much what TV reported and 64 per cent believing 'much' (Oorjitham, 2000).

FINDINGS OF THE PRESENT STUDY

The present study encompassed 3422 respondents. A total of 1969 respondents were interviewed in Selangor while in Kedah 1453 respondents were gathered. The demographic characteristics of the respondents in both states are described accordingly.

Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

The respondents comprise of all male and female from all the major races in Malaysia (Table 1). There is a comparable proportion of male to female in both states, approximately in the ratio of 2:1, respectively. However, in terms of race, the percentage reflects the actual composition of the races in the two states. In Kedah, the majority of the population is Malays (80%). Unlike Selangor, the Malays made up slightly more than one-half of the population in the state. Nevertheless, the Chinese remains the second prominent race in both states while the Indian and the others made up less than 10% of the population in the two states. With regards to education, the two states are represented by a comparable composition of the various levels of education achievement except for the diploma and degree holders that is prominent more in the state of Selangor (29%) than in Kedah (21%). Slightly more respondents in Kedah (30%) received primary education than in Selangor (22%). The mean age of respondents for both states stands at 37 years. This age group is considered young. The detailed presentation of the age is in Table I. There is a distinct income bracket for the two states. The mean income for the respondents in Kedah is RM800 that is higher than the poverty line while the mean income for Selangor respondents is RM1500, almost double the amount of those in Kedah. Nevertheless, it does not mean that Kedah has 'poor' respondents while Selangor has 'rich' respondents. The environment reckons that the Selangor respondents to get more income to survive in a demanding situation. The label poor or rich is relative and subjective.

Regardless of what are their demographic characteristics of the

respondents, the main intention of the study is find out their perceived media credibility based on their exposure to the traditional mass media (newspaper, radio and television).

Media Exposure

The respondents were asked: "On the average, how many times in a week do they read newspaper, listen to radio and watch television"? There is no specific programme asked. The respondents were not asked about their frequency of exposure and duration of exposure.

Table 2 shows the results on media exposure to news in Kedah and Selangor. It is found that the respondents in Selangor (Mean=4.70, SD=2.44) were more exposed to newspaper than the respondents in Kedah (Mean=4.25, SD=2.65). The respondents in Kedah, on the other hand, tended to listen more to radio (Mean=4.30, SD=2.63) and watch TV (Mean=5.62, SD=2.00) compare to the respondents in Selangor (Radio: Mean=3.96, SD=2.57, and TV: Mean=5.44, SD=2.00). Nevertheless, on the whole, they are comparable in terms of the exposure to news in the mass media by looking at the percentages across the various levels of media exposure for each medium. However, on the whole exposure to TV is comparatively more than to radio and newspaper. This is reflected by the high media exposure to TV in both states.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents According to Selected Demographic Characteristics by States

Demographic Characteristics	Selangor (%)		Kedah (%)	
SEX				
Male	1217	(61.8)	912	(62.8)
Female	752	(38.2)	541	(37.2)
Total (N)	1969	(100.0)	1453	(100.0)

HIGHER LEVEL OF EDUCATION

Darjah 6 ke bawah	419	(22.0)	419	(29.9)
Tingkatan 1-3	258	(13.6)	214	(15.3)
Tingkatan 4-5	666	(35.0)	481	(34.3)
Tingkatan 6/Diploma	347	(18.2)	209	(14.9)
Ijazah	214	(11.2)	80	(5.7)
Total (N)	1904	(100.0)	1453	(100.0)
	Mean: 5.00	SD: 3.00	Mean: 4.00	SD: 1.22

AGE (YEARS)

18-25	341	(17.5)	302	(20.9)
26-35	654	(33.5)	418	(29.0)
36-45	505	(25.9)	345	(23.7)
46-55	366	(18.8)	241	(16.7)
More than 55	86	(4.4)	177	(9.4)
Total (N)	1952	(100.0)	1453	(100.0)
	Mean: 37.0	SD: 8.00	Mean: 37.00	SD: 2.32

FAMILY INCOME PER MONTH (RM)

Less than 500	125	(6.7)	301	(20.7)
RM1001-1500	375	(20.2)	310	(21.3)
375				
RM1501-2000		(14.8)	121	(8.3)
RM2001-3000		(15.0)	157	(10.8)
RM3001 and more	380	20.4	-	-
Total (N)	1861	(100.0)	1543	(100.0)
	Mean: 1500.00	SD: 175.00	Mean: 800.00	SD: 196.0

RACE

Malay	1131	57.4)	1158	(79.7)
Chinese	642	(32.6)	197	(13.6)
Indian	188	(9.5)	75	(5.2)
Others	8	(0.4)	23	(1.6)
Total (N)	1969	(100.0)	1543	(100.0)

Table 2: Frequency of Media Exposure to News by States
Media Exposure

Media/ States	Selangor					Kedah				
	Low	Mod.	Hi	Mean	SD	Low	Mod	Hi	Mean	SD
Tele- vision	10.4	29.6	60.0	5.44	2.00	10.1	24.2	65.6	5.62	2.00
News- paper	21.9	29.8	48.3	4.70	2.44	30.9	26.6	42.5	4.25	2.65
Radio	31.5	33.2	35.3	3.96	2.57	29.7	26.8	43.5	4.30	2.63

Low = (0-2) Moderate = (3-5) Hi= (6-7)

Media Credibility

Media credibility is looked more at the degree of believability of the media as sources of information. There is no specific newspaper asked neither is there any specific radio station or TV channel asked. It is a general statement encompassed the generic name newspaper, radio, and TV. The rating for the media credibility is based on a 4-point scale where 1= do not believe at all, 2=do not believe, 3= believe, and 4=believe totally. Even though the percentages of respondents who have high believe of all the media ranges between 75% to 79% (Table 3), the overall average is in between not believe and believe (Selangor: Mean=2.77, SD=0.56, Kedah: 2.81, SD=0.60). The believability for all the media can be implied that there exists some degree of reservation for believing the media. Definitely, news needed to be questioned for its authenticity and validity. The believability among the

respondents in Kedah is slightly higher than those in Selangor with respective to all media.

The results on the media exposure and media credibility were further analyzed using correlation analysis against the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The selected demographic characteristics are education, age and income.

Table 3: Credibility of Malaysian Mass Media by States

Media/States	Selangor				Kedah			
	Low	Hi	Mean	SD	Low	Hi	Mean	SD
Daily Newspaper	25.5	74.5	2.77	0.56	24.2	75.8	2.78	0.61
Radio	24.8	75.2	2.77	0.55	20.6	79.4	2.83	0.57
Television	25.4	74.6	2.78	0.58	22.5	77.5	2.83	0.63

Low= (1-2)

Hi= (3-4)

Media Exposure with Education, Age and Income

Table 4 presents the results pertaining to media exposure relationships with education, age and income of respondents. Even though the relationships are small, since the sample is large, the significance is still being observed. It is found that age is directly related with media exposure in both states. This means that the educated respondents tend to be more exposed to the three established media. It is observed that the relationships between education and exposure to the TV, newspaper and radio are comparable in both states.

There is a different scenario with regards to the age. The tendency is that the younger respondents are more exposed to TV, newspaper and radio in both states. Specifically, the younger age group is more exposed to the newspaper and radio in both states. The correlations are comparable.

With rise in the price of print material, the newspaper buying habits of the readers have reduced. Therefore, only those with high income are able to buy the newspaper without feeling the pinch from their pocket. The present situation is supported by the results in Table 4 where income is positively related to newspaper reading (Selangor: $r=0.32$, $p=0.0001$, Kedah: $r=0.078$, $p=0.003$).

The results alert us the possibility of the radio being the medium for news among the low-income group, even though it is not significant. This is being observed in Kedah ($r = -0.03$, $p = 0.239$).

Table 4: Correlation between Media Exposure with Education, Age and Income by States

Demographic Characteristics	Television		Newspaper		Radio	
	r	p	r	p	r	p

KEDAH

Education	0.11	0.0001	0.30	0.0001	0.19	0.0001
Age	-0.02	0.494	-0.087	0.001	-0.19	0.0001
Income	0.02	0.428	0.078	0.003	-0.03	0.239

SELANGOR

Education	0.14	0.0001	0.30	0.0001	0.18	0.0001
Age	-0.02	0.310	-0.09	0.0001	-0.16	0.0001
Income	0.07	0.004	0.32	0.0001	0.06	0.011

Media Credibility with Education, Age and Income

The study also explores the possibility of the selected demographic characteristics to be related to media credibility. Table 5 shows the relationships between media credibility of TV, newspaper and radio with education, age and income.

Surprisingly enough, the media credibility is not related to the demographic characteristics. The only exception is that the educated respondents in Kedah tended to believe the newspaper ($r = 0.05$, $p = 0.045$) as a source of information. However, the relationship is comparatively small.

Table 5: Correlation between Media Credibility with Education, Age and Income by States

Demographic Characteristics	Television		Newspaper		Radio	
	r	p	r	p	r	p

KEDAH

Education	0.05	-0.045	0.01	-0.710	-0.01	0.752
Age	0.01	-0.880	0.01	0.778	0.02	0.405
Income	0.01	0.644	0.01	0.883	0.02	0.457

SELANGOR

Education	0.03	-0.168	0.02	-0.428	0.04	-0.132
Age	0.03	0.182	0.01	0.899	0.03	0.207
Income	0.01	0.955	0.02	0.351	0.01	0.967

Media Credibility with Media Exposure

Finally, the study explores the relationship between media exposure and media credibility. Regardless of education, age and income, we can say that those who are exposed more to the media tended to rate the respective media low in their credibility scale even though the relationships between exposure and reliability are considered negligible.

From Table 6, we can say that credibility of media is not influenced by the exposure but by other factors.

Table 6: Correlation between Media Exposure and Media Credibility by States

Media Exposure	Television		Newspaper		Radio	
	r	p	r	p	r	p

KEDAH

Newspaper	-0.06	0.028	-0.08	0.004	-0.04	0.152
Radio	-0.12	0.0001	-0.04	0.113	-0.12	0.0001
Television	-0.05	0.074	-0.07	0.009	-0.12	0.0001

SELANGOR

Newspaper	-0.04	0.079	-0.04	0.105	-0.01	0.624
Radio	-0.06	0.023	0.02	0.368	-0.04	0.076
Television	-0.06	0.014	-0.019	0.419	0.004	0.881

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Reflecting the previous longitudinal studies while at the same time looking at the present study, we can summarize and accordingly conclude that:

Over the years the exposure to the media has increased, however, the preferred medium varies with location. The availability of the medium coupled with the education level of the audience enhance the possibility of the appreciating the medium as a source of information. Nevertheless, most of the respondents are very critical of the medium that they are more accessible to. Most of the respondents are exposed to all the three media. Therefore, their evaluations are about the same. There is not much variation to really distinguish the three established media for their information presentation. This situation is prominent in Selangor.

However, the scenario is slightly different in Kedah. Since the respondents there are less educated and receive less income than those in Selangor, so they tend to prefer the radio than TV and newspaper. This is related to the demand for reading ability and buying habit of the respondents on the media especially the

newspapers. The exposure to radio is more compared to TV and finally newspaper. Compared to 1999 survey, radio was most preferred, followed closely by newspaper then finally TV. The longitudinal report in 1990 and 1995 on the decreased rating of TV credibility compared to newspaper and radio is supported by the present study. The degree of believability has decreased from about 86% previously to only about 75% across the three established media. Therefore, the media ranking depends on issues covered and environmental change besides global situation.

The media exposure tends to give a suppressing effect rather than a moderating effect on media credibility. This is reflected by the negative relationships between media exposure and media credibility. Therefore, there are other factors that affect media exposure and media credibility separately.

The demographic factors affect the media exposure and media credibility. The study found that educational level directly related to all mass media exposure (newspaper, TV and radio). Income is an indicator of the exposure to newspaper per se. However, income is inversely related to hearing radio. The trend is that the young generation is more tempted to listen to radio, watch TV and read newspaper than the older people. The younger generation is more educated than the older generation they are able to read and appreciate the newspapers. Thus, newspaper credibility rating is the highest presently.

Based on the findings, some suggestions are put forth. These suggestions emerged as the result of wanting to expand the study on media credibility so that concrete and comprehensive findings are obtained for the nation. The suggestions are theoretical and practical in nature. They are:

The study should be extended to other states as well even though the sample size for each state is large enough to represent the population of Malaysia statistically. In fact, the present study has the largest sample size compared to the 1990 study and 1995 survey so far. Nevertheless, it is good to hear from the rest of the Malaysians pertaining to media exposure and media credibility. Then, the policy makers should be able to plan strategies in promoting Malaysian policies through the most exposed medium and the most credible medium besides disseminating the information through other complementary media that are less used and less credible.

Future studies should also concentrate on looking at the exposure of the media according to race and sex since the distribution of the population in Malaysia is more pronounced in terms of race. Chinese is concentrated in the

town/urban areas in selected states, such as, Penang, Wilayah Persekutuan, Selangor, and Perak The Malays, on the other hand, are found in the rural areas especially concentrated in Kelantan, Terengganu and Kedah. Then, the race should be the discriminating factor for studying media exposure and media credibility.

Government policies should be placed in the right capsule for the consumption of the masses. The right information with the right dosage at the right time and to the consumers will ensure acceptability and believability of the media. Otherwise, the audience would be repelled by the excessive coverage of boring, unappealing, outdated, and unethical news. Excessive may lead the people being turned-off by media itself. Therefore, the right-mix of entertainment and instrumental news is encouraged.

The mass media is meant for increasing the awareness of the audience on certain topics, current issues, new technologies and innovation. Therefore, the mass media can increase audience knowledge and to a certain change the audience attitude. Rarely, any of the can the media is able to change the behavior of the audience. In this case, the use of interpersonal communication (IPC) should be emphasized. Nothing can replaced the IPC but the mass media can act as an impetus for the information seeking behavior to confirm the meager acquired knowledge that the audience have assimilated. The complementary effect of the mass media and new communication technologies coupled with the use of IPC make the policy and news more acceptable to the audience at large.

A particular medium has its own advantages against the other media. Therefore, use the selected medium appropriately while the other media will support the existing news. Some most people will turn on the TV or listen to the radio for current news while for in-depth news coverage, the people would resort to newspapers.

Future research should be more detail in studying-media exposure and media credibility. Researchers should also include new concepts such as media penetration, cyber culture, and Internet (other new communication technologies) besides testing the dimensions of credibility. Media penetration goes beyond the media exposure itself. Cyber culture includes the digital domain in the global village without any frontiers in this new technological age. Internet incorporates the digital capability in supporting the mass media website to the audience. A more detail questions on media credibility should be carried out so that the dimensions of credibility are explored. Such dimensions include among others the

competence factor (relative expertise), dynamism factor, professionalism factor, trustworthiness factor, objectivity, accessibility, freedom to report and currency of report. Then a more advanced statistical analysis can be applied. Such analyses include factor analysis, discriminant analysis and/or multiple regression analysis using general linear model.

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