

Revisiting Research on Malaysian Media and Communication

Tan Huey Pyng,
Ang Siew Mun,
Edwin Michael Muniandy,
Michelle Wong, Ong Sheau Wen

Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman

Abstract:

The institutionalization of media and communication studies in Malaysia began with the University of Science Malaysia (USM) in 1971. Local universities and scholars accepted the fact that the mass media are the most influential and continuously growing interdisciplinary field of study and research (Idid, 2016; Hamzah, 2016). The development of media and communication studies in Malaysia have never been freed from the political, social, legal, and institutional changes Idid (2016). Evidently, the idea of educational democratization and making Malaysia a regional higher educational hub in 1990s has seen changes in local media and communication educational landscape, which media and communication departments or programmes were set up in most of the private institutions as well as the public's. Due to the drastic growth, a phenomenological shift happened in the local social science academe that the number of communication scholars had outnumbered all the other social science fields (Firdaus, 2014). However, the high quantity did not seem to ensure high quality; local media and communication scholars were said are lacking or having no concern about problems that plague in communication related researches, publications, and education (Firdaus, 2014; Mustafa, 2008; Idid, 2014). This paper revisits local and international academic publications on Malaysian media and communication, which publication years range from 1955 to 2016. Researchers gathered a total of 1,083 media and communication related titles and publications from 34 renowned local and international journals, 65 books, and curriculum vitae of 7 renowned local scholars. Out of those, 418 titles were identified to be journalism-related and were coded into 16 categories. Based on the findings, it is evident that media and communication researches in Malaysia are mostly focus on result-oriented papers, local scholars inclined to study media in the context of political economy, there is a noticeable shift into studying Internet-related topics, and Malaysian media and communication scholars need to emphasize and elevate in terms of research depth and research quality.

Keywords: Media and Communication, Research, Journalism, Malaysia

Acknowledgement: This research paper was made possible by a grant from the Star Media Group. We gratefully thank the Star for the financial support.

Please do not cite or distribute without permission of the authors.

Introduction:

Communication study was first institutionalized in the United States in 1940s. The rising of electrical communication technologies and the political or war factors were among the reasons that had brought communication studies into higher educations. Three scholars who pioneered the communication studies were Paul F. Lazarsfeld from the Columbia University who was involved in the Radio Research since 1939; Harold Lasswell from the University of Chicago whose research focus was on the media effects and formation of Public Opinion, and Wilbur Schramm, a renowned scholar for mass media as agent of national development (Pooley, 2008). Being a comparatively young practical discipline, communication study that was formed borrowing ideas and theories of other scholarly disciplines such as psychology, sociology, and political science was perceived to be unnecessary, especially by traditional humanities scholars (Eadie, 2008).

Similarly, the advancement of technologies and development in politics are the two main contributive factors that led to the establishment of media and communication studies in Malaysia in 1971. The communication technologies, or more accurately the print journalism was linked closely to the rise of nationalism and series of social and economic development. Thus, there was strongly felt need for manpower and trained journalists and allied communication practitioners in advertising, broadcasting, and public relations (Mustafa, 2008; Idid, 2014). As what happened in the United States, disapproval of mass communication education took place in Malaysia's universities too, where University of Malaya (UM) turned down the offer to establish a journalism school with the reason that a 'trade school subject' or 'skilled course' is not suitable to be taught at the university level. Nevertheless, the University of Science Malaysia (USM) took up the challenge and the first communication programme in the country began its operation in June 1971 (Idid, 2014; Merican, 2016) The programme was assisted by the US scholars, John Lent and Leslie Sargent who later joined as programme director and coordinator.

Nevertheless, the government and scholars were quick in accepting that mass media development is highly significant that the mass media are the most influential and continuously growing interdisciplinary field of study and research (Idid, 2016; Hamzah, 2016). In fact, as claimed by Idid (2016), the growth and development of media and communication studies in Malaysia are affected by political, social, legal, and institutional changes. For instance, the legislative changes in the higher education policies in the 1990s had posed a challenge to public universities' dominance over communication studies. The educational landscape changed when more public and private colleges and universities were established along the idea of educational democratization and making Malaysia a regional higher educational hub. Eventually, most public and private institutions were set up with media studies or communication schools, and various skills-based mass communication courses were tailor made to produce graduates for the industry. Such phenomenological shift had affected the local academe, which in the social science field for instance, the number of communication scholars had increased that they out-numbered all the other social science fields (Firdaus, 2014).

A few distinctions can be drawn between the communication courses offered by public and private higher education institutions. While the courses were taught in the national language, i.e. Malay language in public universities, English becomes the medium of instruction in the private universities. As compared to courses in public universities that were difficult to change and comparatively inflexible, the private universities were more responsive to curriculum changes and driven by market demands. The latter also actively establish international linkages with the US, UK, and Australian universities that allow students to get a degree at a reduced cost. As more and more public and private higher education institutions were encouraged by the Ministry of Higher Education to offer postgraduate programmes in communication, coupled with Malaysian students' loss of interest in pursuing studies in the US after September 11 tragedy, a new dimension has emerged in the development of communication studies. It saw a diminished role for the US in dominating the communication discipline but "the blending of American and British/Australian communication scholarship in Malaysia, which is an exciting phenomenon to observe" (Idid, 2016, p.12).

The increase in the number of media and communication programme, department, or faculty in the local academic ecosystem and the rise in local scholarly community had motivated researches, conferences, and publications of books and journals. Local universities and academics became increasingly persistent and focused in scientific research and academic presentations and publications since the last decade when the government, through the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) showed interest to list local universities within the top 200 or preferably lower than that in the global ranking of the world-class university. In order to ensure competitiveness, academic staff are evaluated their performances based on criteria termed as the key performance indicators (KPI) that were developed into five main aspects, which are teaching, research, service, supervision, and consultancy (Masron, Ahmad, & Rahim, 2012).

Nevertheless, there were comments that the afore-mentioned do not seem to have alleviated local scholars' concern about problems that plague research and education (Firdaus, 2014; Mustafa, 2008; Idid, 2014). The main problem confronting the research and education is that the functionalist approach 'risks an unusual academic pitfall' (Firdaus, 2014, p. 67). She notes that the large body of media studies researches is locally-confined and non-specialized but there is a lack of published work available to international research community. The bulk of researches undertaken have been more descriptive rather than analytical, quantitative in nature, and less concerned with developing theory. The burgeoning evidence of lacking in intellectual rigor for the bulk of local media research warrants further attention. Yet there has been little effort to scrutinize the academic content and research trends of extant studies.

Moreover, there have been repeated calls by scholars to carry out revamp project. For example, Mustafa (2008, p. 132) notes that journalism curricula require 'a concerted and systematic revamping.' Firdaus (2014, p. 64) also saw a need to promote Malaysia as a 'glocal research site in order repositioning Malaysia's local media research agenda while simultaneously positioning Malaysia on the global research agenda. Similarly, Idid (2014) envisions the coming communication journey in Malaysia will contribute to 'ferment in the field'. Idid's (2016) proposal about rewriting Media and communication studies at intervals is necessary because as time passed,

things changed, and events developed, there would be new materials found to provide different perspectives. Standing by his proposal and observing the development of Malaysian media education over the past decades, this paper revisits local and international academic publications on Malaysian media and communication from 1959 to 2016 and focuses to categorize and study the trend of journalism-related research with concrete evidence.

The Impact of Political Development on Media and Communication Studies

Malaysia has long adopted a developmentalist approach towards the mass media, that is, the Malaysian government sees the media as a tool for nation-building and this means that it is to support rather than be critical of the government. Its political elites also use the media as a tool to legitimize their hegemony. Furthermore, national security/unity and economic development are still regarded as interlinked and interchangeable in Malaysia. The political events which unfolded in Malaysia over the years since its independence in 1957 has had a cascading effect on its media and communication studies. For example, media control in the country is achieved via government-linked ownership of media stations and/or newspapers, patronage as well as legal constraints such as Malaysia's Sedition Act 1948, the Official Secrets Act 1972, and the now-abolished Internal Security Act 1960. Meanwhile, the Printing Presses and Publications Act (PPPA) 1989 covers the licensing of newspapers and magazines in the country while the Broadcasting Act 1988 controls the licensing of broadcast media in Malaysia. These three factors and coupled with commercial imperatives (of the media stations or newspapers) ensured that the media would remain tame and practise self-censorship.

Such control of the media meant that the media and communication studies in Malaysian varsities would be 'pro-government' at its worse or 'neutral' at its best. Moreover, according to Wang (2008),

“...teaching and research in the field of communication have invariably focused on the role of the media in national development...[Moreover]...development communication taught in local universities have not problematized the notion of development. Development has been conceptualized in terms of [only] material and physical growth” (p. 77)

In terms of research and publications in the universities, media and communication academics like Mustafa (1992) and Wang (2008) stated that research in varsities must be relevant to the society. Therefore, following Mustafa's earlier approach, Wang (2008, p. 81) did an analysis of *Jurnal Komunikasi* which is a locally produced journal by the Communication Department of UKM. It was found that research and publications in that said journal generally fell into two categories which are service-oriented or administrative research and critical research. Moreover, it was also found that 'Out of the 13 articles published in *Jurnal Komunikasi* 1997 [volumes 13 & 14] only one of them is critical' (Wang, 2008, p. 82)

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that Mahathir as the fourth prime minister (1981-2003) had championed 'Asian values' which rejected 'the universality of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, and the right to freedom of opinion and expression' (Woodier, 2008, p. 95).

Moreover, Mahathir ‘...insisted [that] economic and social rights were more important than civil and political rights’ (Wong, 2000, p. 117 as quoted in Woodier, 2008, p. 95). In this context, social scientists such as Khoo (1995), Hilley (2000), Maznah (2002) and Azizuddin (2008) have articulated their different definitions of *Mahathirism*, a so-called ideology which combines nationalism, Islam, capitalism, ‘Asian values’, authoritarianism and populism. This concept of *Mahathirism* informs us on how Dr Mahathir had governed and overcome local as well as international challenges, especially in terms of media censorship and democratic participation in the country.

In view of his more authoritarian leadership style in Malaysia during the first Mahathir years (1981-2003), the autonomy of universities was also a talking point amongst academics. The BN government under Mahathir was able to exert control on the universities’ autonomy via appointments of ‘BN-friendly’ vice-chancellors who head and run the varsities. Moreover, the government through the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) and its accreditation arm, Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA), could dictate and influence the syllabi of the media and communication studies in the country. As a result, there is sometimes discrepancy between what is taught in the varsities (such as championing media freedom) and what is practised and allowed in the media industry.

Technological Advancement and the Digital Free-Flow of Information

As mentioned earlier, the Malaysian government was quite successful in its control over the mainstream media but soon after, when the Internet was introduced in Malaysia in 1995, this cyberspace became a contested ‘ground’. Globally, the rise of the Internet and computers as well as the increasing globalization processes had also spawned a new generation of media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Tumblr etc... which are collectively known as ‘the social media’. In Malaysia, one of the earliest people to use social media was the opposition members because the cyberspace was not governed by the restrictive Printing Presses and Publication Act (PPPA) and other laws. Moreover, Mahathir had pledged to keep the Internet censorship-free. Such a policy has had a positive impact on the political scene in the country and on the syllabi of the universities, especially private ones, offering media and communication studies. For example, university lecturers (such as those in UTAR) have been asked to teach multimedia and how news could be incorporated into multimedia by its external examiner. Moreover, increasingly, the mass media are transforming itself into a content provider which not only provides texts (for readers to read) but also videos and TV.

Politically, it was in this cyberspace arena that the opposition had gained much political grounds and this was proven by the results of the 12th General Elections in 2008. For the first time in Malaysian history, the *Pakatan Rakyat* opposition coalition of DAP, PAS and PKR (Justice Party) were able to form government in five states in the Peninsula. Moreover, the BN lost its two-thirds majority in the Parliament. The editorial of MySinchew.com termed this a ‘political tsunami’ (Mysinthew.com, 2008). In yet another surprise, the Malaysian voters, in the 14th General Elections (GE14) on 9th May 2018, had given a mandate to the *Pakatan Harapan* coalition of opposition parties consisting of PKR, DAP, *Amanah* (a PAS splinter group) and *Parti Pribumi*

Bersatu Malaysia (Pribumi) to run Malaysia for five years. Mysinchew.com and other news analysts attributed this to the ‘Malay tsunami’ of support (M. Jegathesan, 2018).

The UMNO-dominated BN government lost its 61-year grip on the nation despite its leaders’ earlier confidence of winning and Tun Dr Mahathir is, once again, leading Malaysia as its 7th Prime Minister and the world’s oldest Prime Minister at 92 years old. As for his former protégé, ex-premier Najib Razak, he could now, ironically, only rely on the social media to reach out to his supporters where he once ruled over the mainstream media. Finally, Mahathir and his new *Pakatan Harapan* government has also pledged to review and/or abolish, among others, the Anti-Fake News Act 2018 which was hastily passed in the Parliament right before the GE14. How will this ‘new’ Malaysia be different for the media and communication studies in our varsities, both public and private? As a forecast, it will still be true that Malaysia is no longer confined to its own borders due to increased globalization and technological advancement. Students pursuing Media and Communication Studies may well have to learn IT skills to cope with an increasingly ‘small’ but networked world.

Methodology

This paper gathers media and communication related articles from 34 renowned local and international journal, 65 books and curriculum vitae of 7 most prominent Malaysian scholars in media and communication field. The period of study is between 1955 and 2016; 1955 is the year when the *International Communication Gazette* volume 1 was published, which is the earliest of all materials gathered and studied. Among the local and international journals are *Akademika* (UKM), *Malaysian Journal of Communication* (UKM), *E-Bangi* (UKM), *Malaysian Journal of Media Studies* (UM), *Journal of Malaysian Studies* (USM), *Pertanika* (UPM), *Journal of Media and Information Warfare* (UiTM), *Jurnal Komunikasi Borneo* (UMS) and *SEARCH* (Taylor’s University), *Asian Journal of Communication*, *Communication Culture and Critique*, *Communication Director*, *Communication Research*, *Communication Theory*, *Digital Journalism*, *Global Media and Communication*, *Human Communication Research*, *Information, Communication and Society*, *International Communication Gazette*, *International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics*, *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication*, *Journal of Communication*, *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, *Journal of Media Practice*, *Journal of Public Relations Practice*, *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, *Journalism Practice*, *Journalism Studies*, *Media Asia*, *Media, Culture and Society*, *Political Communication*, *Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*.

The process of collecting journal articles was done through two methods; first through the GOOGLE search of journals published by local universities and the second, through the UTAR E-Journal Database for the international journals. In the process, researchers browsed through titles of every issue of the identified media, and communication related journals. For each journal manuscript the preliminary relevance was determined by title and abstract if the content seemed to discuss the Malaysian media and communication. Through these effort, a total of 782 and 141 titles were obtained respectively from the local and international journals.

In the aspect of books; they were also identified via GOOGLE search, using the keywords “Media”, “Journalism”, “Malaysian media” and “Malaysian Press”. Synopsis and content page of each title were surveyed and studied carefully to ensure in term of relevancy. A total of 65 books, which publication years’ range from 1974 to 2016 were identified through this effort. As for the curriculum-vitae (CV); they belonged to seven renowned local experts of the field, Professor Syed Arabi Syed Abdullah Idid, Professor Dr. Md. Sapar @ Mohd. Safar Hasim, Prof Dr. Ahmad Murad Merican, Professor Zaharom Nain, Associate Professor Dr. Mus Chairil Samani, Associate Professor Dr. Mustafa Kamal Anuar, and Wang Lay Kim. From the CVs, a total of 95 titles categorized under project, journal, book, chapter, conference paper, media input were identified.

Full reference of a total of 1,083 titles of media and communication related titles, including author, year, title, and abstract were downloaded and recorded for the coding analysis. At every stage of coding process – open, axial, and selective coding, the data was coded by all the five coders (researchers of this paper) to ensure the credibility of this process is maintained. At the stage of open coding, the coders identified keywords or key concepts in article titles and abstracts separately, after that all coders met to cross-check and discuss the keywords identified until achieving unanimous consensus. Upon completed the open coding, a total of 418 journal articles were identified as journalism-related titles. The decision was made with reference to journalism-related keywords such as, ‘newspaper’, ‘journalism’, ‘news’, Bernama and other local news organisation’s and company’s names, agenda setting, and framing theory.

Then, the 5 coders proceeded to work individually on the axial coding, which they skimmed through at least the abstracts of all titles again with account of the identified keywords of the 418 journalism-related titles that consist of 206 local journals, 52 international journal articles, 65 books, and 95 titles from the expert’s CVs. The coders met again after that to discuss and finalize on categories and relationships among categories. As a result, they had successfully grouped all titles under 16 categories based on keywords and remarks as shown in table below.

No.	Category	Keywords & Remarks
1	Framing	Framing, Stereotype, Portrayal, Symbol & Label, Presentation and Representation, Construct
2	Journalism Practice	Objectivity, Ethics, News Source, Decision Making, News Production, Credibility, Social Responsibility, Gatekeeping, Reporting, Professionalism
3	Media Coverage	Coverage, Account, Dissemination, Diffusion of News, research on how an issue or event was covered or reported on news medium
4	ICT & New Media	ICT, New Media, Social Media, Internet, Online, Citizen Media, Digital, Website, Blogging, Globalisation
5	History & Development	History, The beginning of..., Remembering the past, Revisiting, Changes in newspaper industry, Evolution, Trend and development, Historical and Contemporary
6	Audience Studies	Audience, Effects, Youth, Perception, Preference, Readers, Public Attitudes, Consumption, Implication
7	Media & Election	By-election, General Elections, Votes, Voters, Political Campaign
8	Policy & Regulation	Law, Policy, Regulation, Press Freedom, Freedom of Speech, Control, Transparency and Authoritarian, Constraints and Opportunity, Security and Humanitarian, Crisis and Hegemony, Public Sphere, Liberty
9	Agenda Setting	Agenda Setting, News Selection

10	Media Roles	Functions, Roles, Entertainment, Social Obligations
11	Women in Media	Women, Gender, Women Journalists
12	Nation Building	Nation Building, Malaysia, National Development, National Stability, Ethnicity and Unity, Constructing Identity
13	Journalism Education	Journalism Education, Studying Journalism, Media/Communication Study
14	Information Flow	Concentration, New Information Order, Information, Multinationals, News Exchange, Usage of Foreign News
15	Politics & Leaders	Mahathir, Media and Democracy, Media and Politics,
16	Control & Ownership	Political Economy, Ownership, Conglomeration, Concentration, Power

Additionally, the coders had also managed to identify four main themes upon analyzing the 16 categories above with reference to the methodologies adopted and results generated in all 418 research articles.

Finding and Analysis

Researchers identified relevant book titles through online and library search. Keywords used were ‘Media’, ‘Journalism’, ‘Malaysian media’, and ‘Malaysian Press’. Synopsis and content page of each title were surveyed and studied carefully to ensure in term of relevancy. A total of 65 books, which publication years ranged from 1959 to 2016 were identified through this effort.

Malaysia and JR Related Books (1974-2016)	Total		Remarks
Local Publisher	30	65	<i>Total equals to number of books identified</i>
Foreign Publisher	35		
Whole Book	38	69	<i>Total more than 65: 31 JR-related chapters found in 27 books (65-38=27)</i>
Book Chapter	31		
Local Author	49	91	<i>Total more than 65: There are books written by more than one author</i>
Foreign Author	42		

For local journals, researchers surveyed academic journal titles published by all public and private universities in Malaysia and the focus and scope of each journal was studied. 9 journals, which cover areas in media, communication, ICT and globalization, social and cultural studies, and Malaysian studies in general were identified. Then, researchers studied the content page of each issue to identify all communication- and /or media-related articles. Researchers also studied the abstract of each article to confirm the selection. As a result, a total of 782 communication- and /or media-related articles were identified. Next, the 782 titles and the abstracts were again studied and the data was reduced to 206 articles that are related to journalism area. Table below shows details of articles identified according to academic journals.

No	Journal (Publisher/Year covered)	Media & Comm.- Related Article	JR-Related Article (%)
1	Akademika (UKM / 1972-2016)	9	8 (88.89)
2	Jurnal Komunikasi (UKM / 1985-2015)	417	95 (22.78)
3	e-Bangi (UKM / 2004-2012)	24	1 (4.17)
4	Jurnal Pengajian Media Malaysia (UM / 1998-2016)	201	42 (20.90)
5	Kajian Malaysia (USM / 2000-2017)	11	5 (45.45)
6	Pertanika (UPM / 1993-2016)	11	6 (54.54)
7	Journal of Media and Information Warfare (UiTM / 2008-2016)	60	32 (53.33)
8	Jurnal Komunikasi Borneo (UMS / 2014-2016)	30	7 (23.33)
9	SEARCH (Taylor's University / 2009-2016)	19	10 (52.63)
TOTAL		782	206 (26.34)

Researchers had also identified and surveyed 25 International Academic Journals subscribed by the UTAR library, under the subject name, ‘Communication, Journalism, and Public Relations’, which research focus and scopes encompass media, communication, journalism, and regional social and cultural issues. Firstly, researchers browsed through the content page of all issues of each journal to identify articles related to media and communication in Malaysia. Out of the 26 titles of international journals researched, only 141 relevant articles located in 7 journals. Then, researchers proceeded to study the abstracts and confirmed that 52 of the articles are related to journalism field.

No	Journal (Publisher/Year covered)	Media & Comm.- Related Article	JR-Related Article (%)
1	Asian Journal of Communication (Routledge/1990-2016)	18	6 (33.33)
2	Global Media and Communication (Sage/2005-2016)	1	0 (0.00)
3	Information, Communication & Society (Routledge/1998-2016)	2	0 (0.00)
4	International Communication Gazette (Sage/1955-2016)	7	4 (57.14)
5	Journal of Asian Pacific Communication (John Benjamin/2000-2016)	20	4 (20.00)
6	Journalism Studies (Routledge /2000-2016)	2	2 (100.00)
7	Media Asia (Routledge/1974-2016)	85	30 (35.29)
8	Political Communication (Routledge/1980-2016)	3	3 (100.00)
9	Public Relations Review (Elsevier/1975-2016)	3	3 (100.00)
TOTAL		141	52 (36.88)

Apart from books and journals, researchers also contacted and studied curriculum vitae (CV) of 7 renowned Malaysian scholars who are recognized as media and communication experts. Their academic achievements were consists of research projects and publications, which the latter were divided into 5 categories, such as book, book chapter, journal article, conference paper, and mass media / magazine article. Overall, 95 titles from the 7 CVs were confirmed to be journalism-related academic works.

Name	Project	Journal	Book	Chapter	Conf. Paper	Media	TOTAL
Syed Arabi Idid	4	3	1	2	7	-	17
Mus Chairil Samani	1	6	1	-	-	3	11
Mohd. Safar Hashim	3	1	10	-	-	-	14
Ahmad Murad Merican	-	7	3	-	1	-	11
Wang Lay Kim	-	2	-	3	1	-	6
Mustafa Kamal Anuar	-	15	1	5	-	1	22
Zaharom Nain	-	6	4	-	-	4	14
TOTAL	8	40	20	10	9	8	95

After all the published titles (book, local and international, and expert's publication titles related to journalism field) were confirmed, the three-stage coding process: Open, axial, and selective coding was carried out. The coding process was conducted separately by the 5 researchers in the team, whose ultimate aim was to group all published titles into common categories and to form themes that could best explain the trend and patterns of Malaysian Journalism Studies in the academic research.

	Framing	Journalism Practice	Media Coverage	ICT & New Media	History & Dev.	Audience Studies	Media & Election	Policy & Regulation	Agenda Setting	Women in Media	Media Roles	Nation Building	JR Education	Information Flow	Politics & Leaders	Control Ownership	TOTAL
Local Journal	39	27	28	25	18	17	13	12	8	7	7	3	2	-	-	-	206
Internat. Journal	5	4	7	4	3	1	1	12	-	-	1	2	2	10	-	-	52
Book	-	-	2	8	6	-	3	9	-	2	2	3	2	-	19	9	65
Expert's Publications	4	17	2	3	9	1	13	16	2	1	3	2	12	-	4	6	95
TOTAL	48	48	39	40	36	19	30	49	10	10	13	10	18	10	23	15	418

Table above shows distributions of journalism-related literature sources according to categories identified. Based on the articles published in the local academic journals, a total of 13 categories were formed (Framing Studies, Journalism Practice, Media Coverage, ICT & New Media, Media History & Development, Audience Studies, Media & Elections, Policy & Regulations, Agenda-setting, Women in the Media, Media Roles, Nation-building, and Journalism Education). Besides that, 3 other categories: Information Flow, Politics & Leaders, and Control & Ownership were added on due to significant number of relevant international academic journal articles and book titles under these categories were also identified.

Out of the 65 books found, almost one third (19) of the books published focused on politicians and their regimes in Malaysia, particularly on Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad. The early books on Mahathir talked about his contributions as well as the changes he has brought to the field ever since he became the prime minister. After his reign as Malaysia's Prime Minister, the books published reflected on Mahathir's legacy in politics and the media. The nine books under the "Policy and Regulation" category revolved around the legal system and how it has affected the media landscape in Malaysia. The next category, "Control and Ownership" shares the same amount of books published under the second category. The books focused on the ownership

patterns of the Malaysian media, mostly discussed from the perspective of political economy widely practised in the country. These books also call upon a change so that the media can operate freely as expected in a democratic country. A total of eight books under the “ICT and New Media” theme. With the advancement in technology, books on new media started to come up in 2002. Meanwhile, there were six books grouped under the “Media History and Development”. Majority of the books gave an overview of the media industry in Malaysia in selected time periods. Tracing back to the one of the oldest book published in 1974, “The print and broadcasting media in Malaysia” exposed to readers on what the press was like back in the days. Jumping to a more recent book in 2012 titled “The Global Journalist in the 21st Century” was about how the new media is still being silenced in this era. Unlike the previous categories discussed, there were only three books published relevant to “Media and Election and “Nation Building”. The books discussed primarily on identity construction in the media. This in return affects the process of nation building of Malaysia. The remaining four categories; “Women in the Media”, “Media Coverage”, “Journalism Education” and “Media Roles” shared the same spot as they each have two books published.

A total of 206 local journal articles were categorized under 13 umbrella categories. The highest number of articles was in ‘Framing’ (39 articles) while the second highest was in ‘Journalism (JR) practice’ with 27 articles. ‘Framing’ has the highest number of articles. This seems to show that in writing Communications- or Journalism-related articles, framing is a popular theory to use amongst authors. Under the umbrella ‘JR practice’, a total of 27 articles were found, including issues such as ethics and professionalism in the JR industry. Authors also wrote about many other topics such as HIV/AIDS, the Olympics and education. All these topics have been lumped under ‘media coverage’. Online blogging and research on the new media were also popular among authors and there were a total of 25 articles under ‘ICT & New Media’. Under the category of ‘Media History & Development’ there were articles related to longitudinal studies of the media, for example, the past and the present. A total of 18 journal articles were categorized under this umbrella. Topics concerning ‘Audience studies’, ‘Media & Elections’ and ‘Policy / Regulations’ were also popular topics of writing for authors.

The search yielded a total of 52 journalism-related articles published in the international academic journals. Authors of the articles are not only local scholars but also foreign researchers who have a keen interest in the media system of Asia in general, and in Malaysia’s media system specifically. Focus of these studies spans across twelve research areas. “Policy and regulation” received the most scholarly attention with nearly a quarter of the articles (23.1%) focusing on the existing regulatory mechanism and its implication for press freedom. The second largest contribution was from “Information flow” (19.2%). It emphasized on the concerted effort by news media in developing countries to exchange information and ideas in response to the imbalances in the flow of information and domination of media resources by Western nations. The “media coverage” research also prevailed in 13.5% of the published articles. A body of literature points to such topics as the Egyptian president’s death, Islamic affairs, global financial crisis, ethnicity issue, and MH370 disaster. Other research areas included “Framing studies” (9.6%), “ICT and new media”, “Journalism practice” (7.7%), “Media history and development” (5.8%), “Journalism education”, and “Nation-building” (3.9% respectively). The least prioritised research areas were “Media and elections”, “Media roles” and “Audience studies”. Only one article was devoted to these areas respectively.

Unlike findings obtained for the other literature sources, the experts showed higher concern on categories like “Journalism practice” and “Journalism education”. Respectively 35.42% and 66.67% of publications in the afore-mentioned categories were contributed by the experts. For instance, Ahmad Murad Merican was concerned on the design of journalism curriculum and relevance of philosophy in the wisdom of journalism schools. Besides, it is worth mentioning that the experts’ contributions in “Policy and regulations” (32.65%) and “Media and elections” (43.33%) are the highest amongst all literature sources; they shared the rank with local journals for the latter category. This may be due to the fact that the experts produced more conceptual or theoretical articles discussing on phenomena in media environment that cover wider research scope generally, compared to publications on local journals that focused mainly on framing and specific issues. Meanwhile, the experts also had published significant numbers of academic works related to “Media history and development” (17.31%) and “Control and ownership” (11.54%).

Discussion

As illustrated by the findings above, the results on Malaysian Media and Communication Research can be categorised into four themes, which are (1) Mostly focus on result-oriented papers, (2) Studying media in the context of political economy, (3) Noticeable shift into Internet-related topics, and (4) Lacking of research depth and research quality.

Mostly focus on result-oriented papers

The first theme discusses the types of research papers published. Communication research in Malaysia mostly focus on result-oriented papers such as studies on framing, media coverage and audience studies. It is noteworthy that numerous studies compared newspapers from the mainstream and alternative media. These two channels were always pit against each other in order to see the kinds of media representation of certain issues or people due to the different patterns of ownership. Other than conducting comparative studies, the findings also showed many studies favoured simple content analysis as well. It is safe to say that whenever the media is concerned, there is a need to address the political landscape in the country.

Ever since the political affiliations between the mainstream media and the then ruling party, it is difficult to separate the former and the latter. With the addition of political turmoil, the people turned to the alternative media who provided online news with different perspectives. News were also reaching the public in faster way which creates high competition for the mainstream media. In fact, researchers seem to favour very specific topical or seasonal case studies which explains the number of small scaled research conducted in Malaysia.

Studies involving elections, ethnic conflicts, religious issues and political crises are quite popular in local journals. Because these studies are small scaled, the findings were usually quite predictable as they conclude the studies as a “mainstream vs. alternative media” ending. Perhaps there is more to that, rather than just focusing on the role of the mainstream media as government mouthpiece and how the alternative media are more fair and diverse. Moreover, it is definitely less challenging to write result-oriented papers rather than theoretical or conceptual papers which consumes more time to produce. Therefore, researchers might want to look at other topics which would give fresher insights to the communication research.

Studying media in the context of political economy

It was found that due to political and legal constraints, scholars took interest in studying the media in the context of political economy. Various political economy topics such as control and ownership, journalism practice as well as policy and regulation were amongst the popular research conducted. These research were done mostly in the 80s and 90s during Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's previous tenure as prime minister. Thus, leading us to the biggest theme found under books on Malaysian media in which almost one third of the books found during this study focus on politicians and their regimes, particularly on Mahathir.

In the early years of him being the prime minister, authors wrote about Mahathir in a positive light. However, when he detained his critiques under the Internal Security Act 1960 (ISA) and shutting down newspapers during the Ops Lalang 1987, many books call upon a change in promoting freedom of the press and freedom of speech. After Mahathir's 22 years in office, he was succeeded by Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. He possessed a softer personality as compared to Mahathir. Even so, the media were still closely affiliated with politicians who use the media according to their interest. Thus, it is not surprising when local books talk about control and ownership in the media.

However, recent studies still adapts similar studies from the past. They failed to breakthrough findings presented in the 90s by scholars such as Mustafa K Anuar, Zaharom Nain, E.T. Gomez, K. S. Jomo, Francis Loh and Khoo Boo Teik. The literature review in these studies are also quite predictable as it is hard to discuss the media without the aspect of political economy. Therefore, the existing literature review always include the same old historical and chronological landscape of the Malaysian media.

Noticeable shift into Internet-related topics

The third theme revolves around the existence of Internet where this is a noticeable shift in the studies conducted by local researchers. The effect of the Internet has on the media is considered revolutionary as it reduces the limitations the media once had. For instance, the cost of disseminating information to the public is significantly lower now that the media can reach the mass audience at their fingertips.

The level of gatekeeping is also lessen because there is almost no boundary when it comes to the Internet. Endless source of information online also helps transform how journalists do their reporting. Social media especially Facebook, Twitter and Youtube remains relevant as journalism education constantly revamps their syllabus to stay updated with the current scenario. It is undeniable that social media is important as the presence of the youth is mostly online. This leads scholars to study how technology has impacted the media landscape in the country.

However, findings of this research showed that methods used in their studies were mainly of survey, content analysis and quantitative. Topics that received much attention from local researchers include studies on Internet usage, influence, impact and perception on platforms such as online media and social media particularly on Facebook as well as Twitter. Similarly, they also tend to link various new inventions to the political, social and economic topics of the day.

Lacking of research depth and research quality

The fourth theme pays attention to the number of published journal articles. It was found that there were more journal articles published locally as compared to internationally published articles. This finding resembles Idid's observation in 2014 that although communication scholars constitute the biggest number among social scientists in Malaysia, the studies were not as in depth as expected. This could be due to the increasing demand of papers published by academics in the education sector as well as the requirement needed to be met in the field. Perhaps there is lack of abilities in producing higher quality papers among the local researchers. It is also getting difficult for papers to be published because the existing journals require attention to methodology and results obtained. This explains why there is lack of conceptual and theoretical based papers.

Besides, some journals tend to prefer quantitative methods compared to qualitative methods as the results may be more objective and can be generalised. And because of that, many academics opt to collaborate and share papers among each other to help ease their burden. In fact, the introduction of KPI in the 2000s contributed to a spike of co-authored papers. Back in the 1980s, the number of co-authored papers in *Jurnal Komunikasi* was evidently lower than in the 2000s. The KPIs set by universities pushes academicians to publish papers in local and international journals might have contributed to this pattern. And because of that, many academics opt to collaborate and share papers among each other to help ease their burden. In fact, In an article, Mustafa (2017) had highlighted how academics were occupied in chasing KPIs and regurgitating lessons rather than doing real research. Thus, the need to develop our own conceptual framework is more than ever. Researchers should go beyond studies on media usage and representation and contribute on enriching knowledge in their field of interest.

Comparatively, researchers found evidence that the experts studied in this research showed more concern about journalism practice and education in Malaysia. In fact, Mustafa (2005) urged journalism educators in Malaysia to aim at graduating educated journalists with attributes and ideals that they can make a difference to the way journalism is currently practised in local newsroom. Students need to be aware that journalism education is not just about teaching them to skills just so they can secure a job. More could be done, especially when journalism education has been around for at least 40 years. Another expert such as Ahmad Murad Merican himself also showed concern on journalism curriculum and how philosophy should be embedded in journalism schools. Practical skills for journalism studies are indeed necessary, but educators should impart knowledge to help students develop critical thinking and how they can contribute to the country as the public watchdog. The ultimate goal for journalism courses should not focus solely on producing journalists but journalists who can practice critical thinking and dare to question the status-quo in the society.

Conclusion

With Mahathir assuming power in Malaysia as the new prime minister, this will mark the beginning of a new era in the media landscape. During the pre-election period, then-opposition leader Mahathir himself was investigated under the anti-fake news law. In one of his manifesto, Mahathir pledged to repeal several laws if his party wins the election (*The Star*, 3 April 2018). To name a few, the Anti-Fake News Act, Sedition Act, Printing Presses and Publications Act as well as any law with mandatory death sentences will be repealed. This opens new opportunity for the

media to function as the fourth estate. However, it is questionable as to how much one can do to reshuffle the media system which has already become part and parcel of a capitalist society. Zaharom and Wang (2001) reminds us that any attempts to reform media ownership would almost certainly not go down well with the current circle of media owners in Malaysia. Moreover, their affiliation with political figures remains a challenge if the media wish to act independently.

Nonetheless, Mahathir took a bold move in electing his ex-foes to be part of his Council of Elders in advising the new government during the transition of power. The five elders includes businessman Robert Kuok, former Petronas president Tan Sri Hassan Marican, former Bank Negara governor Tan Sri Zeti Aziz, former Finance Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin and prominent economist Prof Dr Jomo Kwame Sundaram. Seeing that an academician such as Jomo was elected, there should be hope for academic freedom as well. Other than that, PKR leader Nurrul Izzah also reaffirmed her commitment to press freedom in the country (*Malaysiakini*, 11 May 2018). This paves way for current and future media practitioners in fulfilling their duties as the public watchdog.

Therefore, a new era has just begun. Local scholars can now revisit the new Malaysian media landscape especially on ownership and control. This topic was heavily debated in local journals as well as local books since Mahathir's previous tenure as prime minister. It is even more interesting to study the change in media landscape now that Mahathir is using a different approach in his new government. Scholars should re-evaluate the functions of the media especially under this new regime. It also raises question on the definition of mainstream and alternative media in Malaysia. At this stage, the country needs more theoretical and conceptual research rather than skill based research. Let us move on from the existing discussion since the 1980s and go towards a new path that will enrich the communication field. Scholars shall think about how they can contribute new ideas in their research. However, it is understandable that the education system also faced limitations and constraints in the past which shaped the system. Now that the country is going through major changes, it is hoped that scholars can pursue better research in the field.

References

- Ahmad Murad Merican (2016). Demystifying skills: The early Years of journalism education in Malaysia. In Azizah Hamzah & Amira Firdaus (Eds.), *Malaysian Media Studies* (pp. 17-24). Kuala Lumpur: Universiti of Malaya Press.
- Amira Firdaus (2014). 'Glocalizing' Malaysian media research: Positioning Malaysian on the global research agenda and repositioning Malaysia's local research agenda. *Malaysian Journal of Media Studies*, 16(2), 63-79. Retrieved from <http://jpmm.um.edu.my/index.php/JPMM/article/view/9004>
- Azizah Hamzah (2016). Media Curriculum as a Panacea for Malaysian Society. In Azizah Hamzah & Amira Firdaus (Eds.), *Malaysian Media Studies* (pp. 25-38). Kuala Lumpur: Universiti of Malaya Press.
- Eadie, W. F. (2008). *Communication as an Academic Field: USA and Canada*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Haque, M. S. (2003). The role of the state in managing ethnic tensions in Malaysia: A critical discourse. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 47(3), 240-266. doi: 10.1177/0002764203256186
- Hilley, J.W. (2000). *Contesting the Vision: Mahathirism, the Power Bloc and the Crisis of Hegemony in Malaysia*. Retrieved from <http://theses.gla.ac.uk/960/1/2000hilleyphd.pdf>
- Human Rights Watch. (2004, May 24). *Malaysia: Detainees Abused Under Security Law*. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2004/05/25/malaysia-detainees-abused-under-security-law>
- Khoo, Boo Teik. (1995). *Paradoxes of Mahathirism: An intellectual biography of Mahathir Mohamad*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Malaysiakini. (2018, May 11). *Nurul Izzah reaffirms commitment to press freedom*. Retrieved from <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/424250>
- M. Jegathesan. (2018). *Malaysian Opposition Bets on 'Tsunami' of Muslim Support*. Retrieved from <http://www.mysinchew.com/node/119585>
- M.S.M. Azizuddin. (2008). *Mahathir Mohamad as a Cultural Relativist: Mahathirism on Human Rights*. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/241044174_MAHATHIR_MOHAMAD_AS_A_CULTURAL_RELATIVIST_MAHATHIRISM_ON_HUMAN_RIGHTS
- Mustafa, K. A. (2005). Journalism, national development and social justice in Malaysia. *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, 16, (63-70). Retrieved from <http://ro.uow.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1033&context=apme>
- Mustafa, K. A. (2006). "Cue journalism": Media should stop playing follow-the-leader. *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, 17, 97-101. Retrieved from <http://ro.uow.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1023&context=apme>
- Mustafa, K. A. (2008). *The writing on the wall: Some observations on journalism education in Malaysia*. In A. M. Merican (Ed.), *Blinded by the lights: Journalism and communication study in Malaysia since 1971* (pp. 119-134). Shah Alam: University Publication Center.
- Mustafa, K. A. (2017, November 17). *Academics lament 'glorified high school teachers' at varsities*. Retrieved from <https://www.themalaysianinsight.com/s/24865/>
- Mysinchew.com (2008, March 9). *The Political Tsunami Changes Malaysian Politics*. Retrieved from <http://www.mysinchew.com/node/8364>

- Pooley, J. (2008). The new history of mass communication research. In D. W. Park & J. Pooley (Eds.). *The history of media and communication research* (pp. 43-70). New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Santhiram, R. R. & Tan, Y. S. (2010). Ethnic segregation in Malaysia's education system: Enrolment choices, preferential policies, and desegregation. *Paedagogica Historica*, 46(1-2), 117-131. doi: 10.1080/00309230903528496
- Simonson, P., Peck, J., Craig, R. T. & Jackson, J. P., Jr. (Eds.). (2013). *The handbook of communication history*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Syed Arabi Iddid. (2014). The past and coming communication journey in Malaysia. *Malaysian Journal of Communication*, 30, 1-16. Retrieved from <http://ejournal.ukm.my/mjc/article/view/14998>
- Syed Arabi Iddid. (2016). Factors affecting communication studies in Malaysia. In Azizah Hamzah & Amira Firdaus (Eds.), *Malaysian Media Studies* (pp. 1-16). Kuala Lumpur: Universiti of Malaya Press.
- The Star Online. (2018, April 3). Dr M: Pakatan to repeal controversial laws, including fake news act. Retrieved from <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2018/04/03/dr-m-pakatan-to-repeal-controversial-laws-including-fake-news-act/#qZGiCM9ZeiX8d7AE.99>
- Wan, C. D. (2007). Public and private higher education institutions in Malaysia: Competing, complimentary, or crossbreeds as education providers. *Journal of Malaysian Studies*, 25(1), 1-14. Retrieved from [http://web.usm.my/km/25\(1\)2007/KM%20ART%2025\(1\)_1.pdf](http://web.usm.my/km/25(1)2007/KM%20ART%2025(1)_1.pdf)
- Wong, K. K. (2004). Asian-based development journalism and political elections: Press coverage of the 1999 general elections in Malaysia. *Gazette: The International Journal for Communication Studies*, 66(1), 25-40. doi: 0.1177/0016549204039940
- Woodier, J. (2008). *The Media and Political Change in Southeast Asia: Karaoke Culture and the Evolution of Personality Politics*. Cheltenham, U.K.: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited
- Zaharom, N. & Wang, L. K. (2001). Ownership, Control, and the Malaysian Media. In Pradip, N. T. & Zaharom, N (Eds.). *Who Owns the Media: Global trends and local resistances* (pp.). London and New York: Zed Books.