

## A Comparative Study on Political Propaganda Messages and the Use of Mass Media during Covid-19 in Malaysia

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### Abstract

Media plays a central role in functioning democracy, paving the way for politics to be represented by the media. At some point, both fields significantly need each other to develop for the betterment of an informed society with transparent and unbiased political information. However, the mass media is widely and radically being used by political candidates or parties as their tools and channels to spread their political propaganda messages, especially during elections. The purpose of this study is to understand how political candidates or parties use mass media to persuade their potential voters and promote their manifestos for election campaigns during Covid-19 because during the pandemic, few tighter restrictions were implemented such as physical gatherings and walkabout. A content analysis on news about Melaka state election in two free-on-air Malaysia broadcasters i.e. *Buletin TV3* and *Berita Perdana Radio Televisyen Malaysia (RTM)* were employed and their recorded prime time news bulletin from Youtube were collected and analysed from six days before the polling days (November 20, 2021). Findings revealed that Barisan Nasional keeps dominating the coverage by both broadcasters while less proportion of coverage was given to other parties. This study also found that candidates made it use of mass media to spread their propaganda to the voters due to Covid-19 restrictions to campaign.

**Keywords:** *political propaganda, election, Malaysia, broadcast news*

### 1.0 Introduction

The dissemination of political propaganda has been widely communicated via a variety of mass media channels such as television, radio and newspapers [1]. To some extent, mass media has been used as a vehicle by certain political parties to spread their political propaganda messages to the voters, especially prior to any elections or during the campaign period. As such, mass media is also used as a medium to downplay certain issues, portraying the image of a political personality and updating the contestants' manifestos in order to inform the public, especially those who are among the potential voters for the election. However, in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, the situation has significantly changed the way the election is conducted. In Malaysia, few restrictions and standard operational procedures were set up by the election commission and health ministries in order to contain the spread of virus among the communities [2]. Based on the issue highlighted, the present study aims to analyse how political parties use mass media to spread their political propaganda messages for the Melaka state election campaign during Covid-19. The research objectives related to the present study are:

RO 1: To study the coverage of political candidates/parties during Melaka state election by Buletin TV3 and Berita Perdana RTM in their premier air time.

RO 2: To examine the political candidates/parties' messages used during Melaka state election news coverage.

RO 3: To explore issues highlighted by political candidates/parties use on mass media to persuade their potential voters on their manifestos in Melaka state election.

The present study is also being illustrated on the conceptual framework as shown in Figure 1.

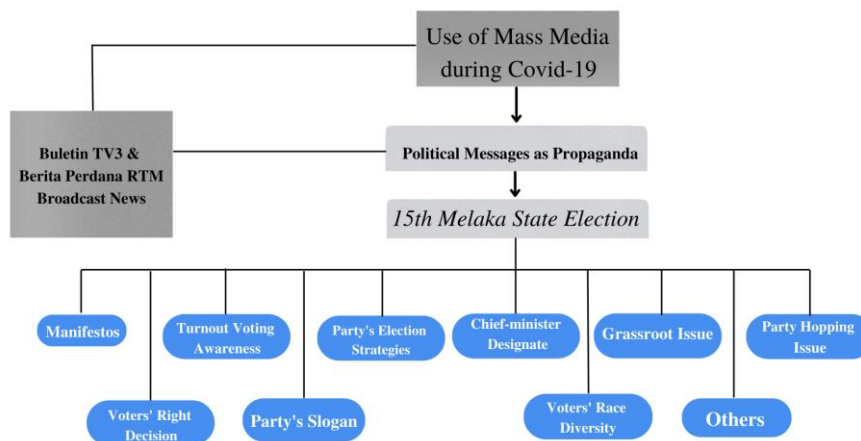


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Next section will further explain the several studies in the past that investigated the political propaganda messages used in mass media, especially during the health crisis like Covid-19. The next section also will shed light on the key operational definition or necessary terms to be used throughout this current study.

## 2.0 Literature Review

### 2.1 Political Propaganda on Mass Media

Nowadays, a lot of modern media can be used to convey propaganda to its target audience, such as television, radio, and film posters as well. The survival of individuals or states in 21th century depends on the amount and quality of information received to influence other states, and to do this they often employ propaganda. Propaganda is any attempt to persuade persons to accept a certain point of view or to take a certain action.

Mass media is used as a system for spreading information to the public. In addition, mass media becomes the main platform and output for carrying out acts of propaganda and agendas. Propaganda among developed countries is not a recent phenomenon. Significantly, propaganda creates conflicts among society's differing classes. Amila [3] stated that the media is a tool for propaganda rather than information in the world's politics. Information is power and power is the prediction of intended effect. Media propaganda is not only between the developed and developing states. It also involved intra state and inter developed states.

## 2.2 Mass Media and Election News

The relationship between politics and mass media is closely related for the reason that media is a source in shaping public opinion and political beliefs. The mass media is important to the safeguarding transparency of democratic processes which is called the 'watchdog' role. Meanwhile, the elections are the centerpiece of democracy. Through voting, people can voice their opinions, express their hopes and aspirations, as well as ultimately control their nation's destiny. Elections are the public's source of power, but in order to use it effectively it has to know where candidates and parties stand on public policy issues [4]. Candidates and parties have an explicit right to provide the information regarding their political propagandas and proposed plans. Nonetheless, the mass media has a role to report thoroughly and accurately what the candidates or parties stand for. This role is to be a major challenge to the mass media, meanwhile, the campaign coverage is crucial because of its capacity to empower the electorate. In order to fulfil their roles, the mass media need to maintain a high level of professionalism, accuracy and impartiality in their coverage [5]. A key role of the media in campaigning is balanced reporting, ensuring that candidates receive fair coverage. This is one reason why media monitoring is so important toward ensuring fair and free elections.

According to Stanley [6], the mass media transmit campaign propaganda to large numbers of people. They sell campaigners time and space to deliver their political propaganda. Furthermore, the mass media transmit propaganda selectively, in certain conventional formats and present campaign propaganda in the context of materials they themselves originate. In local context, a study on Malaysia online news and print during 13th General Election revealed that both outlets strive to deliver accurate and reliable information to assist Malaysian citizens in making informed election decisions [7]. Therefore, it is supported that mass media play a greater role in covering election news because the public depend on mainstream media as reliable information to make decisions in casting their votes in election.

## 2.3 Malaysia Broadcast News

Broadcast news in Malaysia can be categorised into few mediums, such as the mainstream media (e.g. Astro AWANI, Media Prima, Radio Televisyen Malaysia (RTM), Alhijrah Media Corporation, Malaysian National News Agency (BERNAMA) or alternative and segmented audiences' media (e.g. TV Pertiwi, TV Sarawak, KiniTV). According to Shafizan [8], there are predominantly three categories of media ownership in the country, including governmental or government-funded media conglomerates, private media conglomerates, and independently-owned small businesses. However, broadcast news is usually being dominated by these big media corporations that also sometimes own a few different channels and primetime news. They also have significantly garnered big crowds, audiences and high-ratings. This can be proven from the audience rating report and their annual transformation plan report [9][10][11]. Moreover, adapting to the shifting digitalisation phenomenon created by social media also has allowed them to broadcast their news bulletin into their social media platform such as YouTube [12]. The main issues and events presented in the broadcast news vary according to different media corporations, especially when it comes to political and public affair issues.

### *2.3.1 Buletin TV3 (Sistem Televisyen Malaysia Berhad) and Berita Perdana RTM (Radio Television Malaysia)*

Sistem Televisyen Malaysia Berhad (STMB) or better known as TV3 is one of the results from an initial effort to transfer media ownership from the government to the private sector [13]. TV3 received its license in 1983. After going through a series of ownership history brand changing, STMB is now prominently known as Media Prima Berhad after being bought in 2004 [14]. Media Prima Berhad is categorised as a private media conglomerate since they are enormous corporations that are made up

of many smaller corporations [8]. TV3 is popular for its news channel, named as Buletin TV3. The prime time bulletin is aired at 8.00 p.m. every day. According to the digital news survey by Reuters [15], TV3 news is among the top 10 most trusted brands in the country.

Meanwhile, Radio Television Malaysia or better known as RTM is a government owned television network. It broadcasts from its headquarters in Angkasapuri, Kuala Lumpur. RTM owns and operates a number of radio and television stations. At present, it runs six national, two international, 17 states, 11 district radio stations and two television channels – TV1 and TV2 [14]. RTM is the country's oldest and most renowned media outlet, and it is the country's largest media organisation [8]. Berita Perdana is RTM prime time bulletin, one of the segments allocated in their Berita RTM shows. Channeled through TV1, Berita Perdana is aired every day at 8.00 p.m. According to its website [16], every information conveyed through their news channel has been screened for authenticity. RTM is also in the list of top 10 most trusted brands in Malaysia [15].

## 2.4 15th Melaka state election

Formally called as the 15th Malacca state election, the election was meant to elect 28 members of the Malacca State Legislative Assembly after its dissolution was announced on 5 October 2021 [17]. The snap election was triggered following the political turmoil in the state. According to Bernama [18], on 4 October 2021, four Melaka assemblymen declared that they had lost confidence in Chief Minister Sulaiman Md Ali's leadership, causing the state government led by Barisan Nasional (BN) to collapse. The assemblymen were former Melaka Chief Minister Idris Haron (BN-Sungai Udang), Nor Azman Hassan (BN-Pantai Kundor), Norhizam Hassan Baktee (Independent-Pengkalan Batu) and Noor Effandi Ahmad (Bersatu-Telok Mas). Prior to this, the BN-led government held 17 seats in the 28-seat Assembly, namely 14 from Umno, two from Bersatu and one independent, while the opposition had 11 comprising DAP (seven), PKR (two) and Amanah (two). Drawing from previous search from online news, the timeline of Melaka polls pre-events can be viewed in the following figure:



**Figure 2:** Melaka Polls Pre-event

As for the election results, BN won the Melaka state election after securing enough seats to form the new state government with 21 seats in the legislature and a two-thirds majority. Pakatan Harapan suffered a major defeat, winning just 5 seats, with the Parti Keadilan Rakyat losing all its contested seats. Meanwhile, PN won 2 seats [19]. Notably, after going through an episode of political turmoil due to losing confidence issues, BN was re-elected to power, meanwhile, Perikatan Nasional (PN) came up short in nearly every seat.

## 2.5 Election during Covid-19

Democratic country, conducting an election is a must to ensure the system is in line with the rule of law [20]. In Malaysia, to-date, four elections have been held since the outbreak of Covid-19 [21]. These include two by-elections were due because of the death of the member of Legislative Assemblies in Chini, Slim constituencies, state election due to political crises which led to the dissolution of Sabah state legislative assembly and the other one is Melaka state election which become the subject of this current study. Despite being condemned with regards to its worrisome consequences and urged for postponement by many pundits and health experts, the election seems unavoidable [22]. Hence, this led to the tight Covid-19 measures to be planned and set up by the election commission. Election Commission of Malaysia (EC), better known as Suruhanjaya Pilihan Raya Malaysia (SPR) has issued

a standard operating procedure (SOP) to protect the health and safety of all parties, including voters [23]. Among the procedures include voters' body temperature screening, voters will be required to sanitise their hands and wear face masks, anyone with symptoms or fever with a temperature above 37.4°C will be barred from entering the polling station and will be taken to a special station manned by health ministry staff [23], [24]. Therefore, there are few elections conducted recently that have been held with tighter SOP could be the precedence cases for the health ministry to allow the citizen casting their votes. This is despite the challenges the country has to face in order to contain the spread of virus among the community.

### *2.5.1 Asian Countries*

Elections postponed due to the outbreak of Covid-19 span the globe. In Asian countries, one of the cascading effects of the pandemic has been its impact on democracies. Adhy [25] stated that among more than 50 countries that have gone ahead to hold elections during the pandemic, nine of them were in Asia. Several countries have pushed ahead with elections. For example, Sri Lanka postponed legislative elections on August 5, 2020. Days before that, Hong Kong postponed its Legislative Council elections by a year, citing the impact of Covid-19. Regional (local) elections, Indonesia which were originally scheduled 23 September 2020 moved to 9 December 2020. According to Supriyadi and Aminuddin [22], the spread of Covid-19 in Indonesia was quite high.

In Malaysia, for example, parliamentary by-elections, Batu Sapi, which was originally scheduled 5 December 2020 were postponed. Meanwhile, parliamentary by-election for Gerik in Perak and the state by-election for Bugaya in Sabah also were postponed. It shows that the pandemic highly affects the electoral process and 2020 would be the most impactful year for Malaysia's political system. Saleena [26] concluded that for the first time in postcolonial Malaysia's history, the sitting government was one that was not chosen by the people. Not only did this undermine the government's legitimacy as the socio-economic pains of the Covid-19 pandemic prolonged, but it also left the government vulnerable to the ensuing power struggles between rival parties.

Elections during Covid-19 may affect electoral participation in many aspects. This includes voter turnout, challenging the cleanliness of the elections and particularly in its administration. It also affects the participation of certain voters, for those who stay overseas and who are vulnerable or sick. Other than that, it affects the way political parties operate in the campaign period, for instance, no rallies allowed and affects the legitimacy of the result through low voter turnout and state emergency situations [25]. Thus, health and safety concerns remain as the dominant factor in deciding whether or not elections should be conducted during the pandemic.

### *2.5.2 Western Countries*

Meanwhile, the electoral process in Western countries such as the United States of America, United Kingdom, and Ireland are also affected by Covid-19 pandemic. Those countries adopt a democracy system. As cited by Eltaj [27], democracy is considered as a good form of government because the ruler is directly elected by people and the government is ruled by people for the people. This means that common people can either become country leaders through the electoral process or elect leaders who represent their core values and beliefs. In terms of the number of democratic countries in the world, as of 2018, there were 99 democracies globally [28]. Furthermore, it secures the fundamental rights of its citizens, and increases citizen's responsibility and brings equality before the law. Therefore, it should be the only form of government as different forms sometimes give so much power to an individual and the result of concentrating power on one person could be seen.

The United States of America is a representative democracy. U.S Citizenship and Immigration Services [29] stated that the United States is a representative democracy. The government is elected by citizens and they vote for their government officials which represent the citizens' ideas and concerns in government. Voting is one way to participate in their democracy because it is one important right and responsibility of the United States of America citizens. Furthermore, voting in an election and contacting their elected officials are two ways that Americans can participate in their democracy. According to Sloat [30], as Americans debate the wisdom of continuing primary contests for the Democratic presidential nominee, European leaders are struggling with scheduled local, regional, parliamentary, and presidential elections. Rahel [31] mentioned that during most election years in the United States, polling day marks the beginning of the end of what is usually a long and contentious political season. Apart from that, a vast majority of American voters line up at their local polling stations to cast their ballot for the next president. Generally, the winner is announced the same day or by the next morning in the case of a particularly close race. Nevertheless, the coronavirus Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 has upended nearly every aspect of this election cycle, from how presidential campaigns are conducted to how the country ultimately votes. The pandemic spawned an election year like never before. In 2021, with just days to go before the US' Election Day, more than 90 million Americans have already either voted by mail or early in-person. A majority of states across the country are reporting record early voting turnout [31].

As reported by Gov.UK [32], Ministers have said that democracy should not be cancelled because of Covid-19. Therefore, May 2021 elections took place and in a Covid-Secure way. Hence, all those involved in the electoral process must ensure public health is protected. Political campaigners must show social responsibility, and parties, agents and candidates ensure that their campaigners understand the rules. Due to that, the United Kingdom government proposed to allow for two months of outdoor campaigning in the run up to May 2021 polls, to support free and fair elections. In addition, it is important that campaigning be allowed in the run up to the polls on May 6, 2021. An informed electorate is vital to ensure that voters can make a reasoned choice for whom to vote through online campaign events.

Meanwhile, Irish politics entered a dramatic new phase in 2020 but the political convulsions were put in the shade by the Covid-19 pandemic. This crisis collided with electoral change, the formation of a historic coalition government. As stated by The Irish Times [33], the coalition leaders showed more competence in dealing with the big issues, but with the virus still surging, they will undoubtedly face further enormous challenges in the coming year. The pandemic affected much of the political atmosphere, and also occasioned the physical relocation of Parliament, challenging the institution's operation and culture [34].

James [35] mentioned that there are three main political parties in Ireland include Sinn Féin (led by Mary Lou McDonald), Fianna Fáil (led by Micheál Martin) and Fine Gael (led by Leo Varadkar). Due to different ideologies, these parties did not want to work together. However, the global pandemic situation put them positively back into the public spotlight. Furthermore, according to various opinion polls, the general election could be held again in which Sinn Féin would dominate [35]. Hence, while there is a great threat to this country, there just might be enough pressure on them to make it happen. This pandemic could be the first truly major crisis to this country and will greatly challenge both the Irish people and the competency of their elected leaders. This will encourage the Irish people to consider more carefully what they really stand for, what they really hold dear and what they really want out of their political system.

## 2.6 Theory Guiding the Study

The studies on propaganda and politics provides a framework for understanding how mass media were used by political parties to spread their agenda and ideologies, especially in the run up to an election [36]. Robinson [37] argued that the field of propaganda studies is well-positioned to address ethical concerns about democratically acceptable kinds of persuasive communication. This study analysed news on Melaka state election broadcasted by Buletin TV3 and RTM through the use of propaganda theory. This is due to the fact that mass media can be a huge platform for political parties to propagate their political messages during the election campaign. Propaganda theory was first introduced by Harold D. Lasswell in 1927 where he postulated propaganda as the management of the attitude of others through the manipulation of symbols. Zamri [38] redefined it as the manipulation of a group's predisposition to behave based on the propagandist's gestures. In Malaysia election context, mass media like television and newspapers has ever since become a propaganda tool used by the ruling coalition to impress voters, condemn rival parties as well as to win an election [38] [39] [40]. Thus, in order to support the evidence from the content analysis, it is also significant to understand how political parties benefit mass media as their medium in an election conducted amid Covid-19. Propaganda theory will contribute to guiding this study in understanding the results demonstrated by the content analysis of broadcast news.

## 3.0 Methodology

In order to meet the research objectives, two mainstream Malaysia broadcast TV prime bulletin i.e. Buletin TV3 and Berita Perdana Radio Televisyen Malaysia were sampled. These broadcast television stations were also selected because they have a very prominent online presence and represented diversity in viewership. Many of the older generation who do not have access to the internet, television is still a primary source of news with 53% of Malaysia media users watching TV3 news followed by RTM among the top 4 at 23% [15].

**TABLE 1**

Description of the Sampled Broadcast News

Broadcast News	Numbers of Youtube Subscribers	Total of Melaka State Election News	Average of Viewers per News	Average of News Duration
Melaka State Election				
<b>Buletin TV3</b>	<b>1.38M</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>37,000 - 59,000</b>	<b>60 min</b>
<b>Berita Perdana RTM</b>	<b>592K</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>500 - 3800</b>	<b>50 min</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>60</b>		

*\*The broadcasters' number of Youtube subscribers, viewers and news duration were recorded on the first day of data collection*

This study employed content analysis to collect the data. The data was collected from 14 November until the polling day on 20 November 2021. The six days prior to the polling day were selected. The periods were during the formal campaign period and were assumed to be the most important days for candidates to be noticed by their voters and being featured in the mass media scenes. A standardised coding sheet was used to suit the research objectives. The following section presents the findings and discussion of this study.

## 4.0 Findings

### 4.1 The Coverage of Political Parties/Alliances during Melaka State Election by Buletin TV3 And Berita Perdana RTM In Their Premier Airtime

**TABLE 2:**  
Political Parties/Alliances Coverage Frequencies by Buletin TV3 and Berita Perdana RTM

Broadcaster	Political parties/alliances	Frequency (n)
Buletin TV3	Barisan Nasional	17
	Perikatan Nasional	7
	Pakatan Harapan	5
	Independent	2
	Parti Bumiputera Perkasa Malaysia	1
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>32</b>
Berita Perdana RTM	Barisan Nasional	12
	Perikatan Nasional	10
	Pakatan Harapan	5
	Parti Bumiputera Perkasa Malaysia	1
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>28</b>

The analysis for this section is mainly to state the frequency of broadcast news covered by Buletin TV3 (TV3) and Berita Perdana RTM (RTM) based on the political parties or their alliances being featured throughout the study period. This study amassed a total of 60 news on Melaka state election being slotted into both broadcaster's premier airtime, which implied a significant production frequency relating to the state election.

Table 2 above shows that TV3 contributed the highest number of news (n = 32) followed by RTM (n = 28). Barisan Nasional (BN) was heavily covered and received more attentions from TV3 (n = 17) and RTM (n = 12). The result is reasoned because before the election was triggered, Melaka was the BN-led state government [41] which explains why both broadcasters choose to pay attention to the party. This is consistent with the observations of the previous studies where BN continued to be popular in the suburbs and rural areas due to their dominance of conventional media such as television [42]. In fact, Nizah and Abu Bakar [43] mentioned that both broadcast stations frequently appears and perceived as BN and UMNO 'official news'.

Meanwhile, second and third highest coverage were given to the Perikatan Nasional (PN) and Pakatan Harapan (PH). From both broadcasters, there is an obvious disparity of the number of appearances in broadcast news between PN and PH parties. For record, PN is the current ruling coalition while PH is the main opposition bloc. This result appears to be reasoned due to the fact that opposition parties are tend to be given less opportunities by mainstream media. This is evidently found by Nadzri [44], and Ali and Abdul Manan [45] where they affirmed that there were inequities in the mainstream media's coverage of the opposition parties. It might also explain why they went to alternative media such as the blogs and online news portal to deliver their political messages.



Interestingly, despite being not affiliated with any political parties, TV3 dedicated the airtime to the news that favourable to Independent candidates ( $n = 2$ ) while none of the Melaka state election news on the non-partisan candidate was covered in RTM. On the other hand, both broadcasters were giving the highlights to Parti Bumiputera Perkasa Malaysia (PUTRA) despite its fresh participation in country's political scene since 2018 ( $n = 2$ ) [46].

#### 4.2 Types of Political Messages Used by Political Candidates/Parties in Melaka State Election News Coverage

**TABLE 3:**  
Political Messages Used by Political Candidates/Parties and Its Frequencies

Broadcaster	Political Messages	Frequency
Buletin TV3	Manifestos (M)	14
	Chief-minister designate (CMD)	5
	Turnout Voting Awareness (TVA)	4
	Voters' Right Decision (VRD)	4
	Party's Slogan (PS)	4
	Party's Election Strategies (S)	3
	Party Hopping (HOP)	2
	Voter's Race Diversity (RACE)	1
	Others	1
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>38</b>
Berita Perdana RTM	Manifestos (M)	13
	Party's Election Strategies (S)	12
	Turnout Voting Awareness (TVA)	1
	Chief-minister designate (CMD)	1
	Grassroot Issue (GR)	1
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>28</b>

Table 3 demonstrates the political messages that were broadcasted during the study period. A total of 38 news items on the political messages were highlighted by TV3, followed by 28 news covered by RTM. The result shows that both broadcast TV stations were focusing heavily on political candidates or parties messages that appeared to be their manifestos (M) as their promises for their potential voters. The findings are pre-expected due to the fact that the study was conducted during the election campaigning period. Another possible explanation for the big number of manifestos messages covered because citizens are significantly more likely to rate parties' competence in government or opposition based on news [47]. Hence, it is important for the candidates to make use of mass media as the channel in informing their pledges to reach more voters.

As for TV3, less than ten news were reported on other types of political messages including chief-minister designate, turnout voting awareness, voters' right decision, party's slogan, party's election strategies, party hopping, voter's race diversity and others (e.g. cast voting day). Interestingly, the result found a slot of news that the political parties highlighted about race where Malaysia Chinese Association (MCA), a component party of BN, urged the Chinese voters in Melaka to vote for BN. The following transcriptions clearly illustrate this finding:

Pengundi Cina dalam pada itu diajak untuk terus memberi sokongan kepada Barisan Nasional untuk kestabilan dan kemakmuran. Ketua Menteri Datuk Seri Sulaiman Md Ali berkata ia bagi meraikan kepelbagaian suara dalam struktur pentadbiran kerajaan negeri kelak, jika diberi mandat [48].

*Translated from Buletin TV3: Chinese voters, meanwhile, are urged to continue to support the Barisan Nasional for stability and prosperity. Chief Minister Datuk Seri Sulaiman Md Ali said it was to celebrate the diversity of voices in the state government's administrative structure, if given a mandate.*

Based on the result, it could be justified that BN tried to reach the voters among Chinese community simply because it is the second highest population in Melaka after Bumiputera, according to Department of Statistic Malaysia [49].

Meanwhile, RTM featured a significant concentration on the political messages about party's election strategies (n = 12). The highlight on this political message might be due to the fact that campaign strategies are generally mediated through sociotechnical affordances, as asserted by Stier, Bleier, Lietz and Strohmaier [50]. It is also apparent that the government-owned television network paid lesser attention to the political messages of turnout voting awareness, chief-minister designate and grassroots issue.

#### 4.3 Main Issues Highlighted by Political Candidates in Their Manifestos through Mass Media during Melaka State Elections

**TABLE 4:**  
Main Issues Highlighted in Manifestos and Its Frequencies

Broadcaster	Main issues in manifestos	Frequency
Buletin TV3	Public Welfare (PW)	8
	Socioeconomic (SECO)	8
	State Government Policies (SGP)	4
	Gender Equality (GEQ)	1
	Youth Empowerment (YE)	1
	Others	1
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>23</b>
Berita Perdana RTM	Public Welfare (PW)	11
	Socioeconomic (SECO)	6
	Youth Empowerment (YE)	5

State Government Policies (SGP)	2
Gender Equality (GEQ)	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>26</b>

In this study, it is also important to assess what are the main issues highlighted by political candidates in their manifestos covered by both broadcasters. From the Table 4, which is the breakdown data from Manifestos (Section 4.2) which appeared as the top political messages covered, it is apparent that political candidates declared public welfare and socioeconomic issues as their main intentions and promises to be catered if they win the state election. Likewise this result, Baumann, Debus and Gross [51], in their studies on the election campaigns in nine European countries also found that welfare and economic policies were considered as salient category in a party's campaign. Hence, this also could be the leading factor of how the political candidate tried to attract their voters by pledging to fulfil such promises.

Others issues such as state government policies, youth empowerment and gender equality were also highlighted but with less than five news items covered by both broadcasters. Such issues could have direct and indirect target audiences which are segmented to reach certain demographics of voters like gender and age.

#### 4.4 Political Messages Slant brought by Political Candidates

**TABLE 5:**  
Political Messages Slant brought by Political Candidates

Broadcaster	Political messages slant	Political parties/alliances	Frequency
Buletin TV3	Positive towards own parties	Barisan Nasional	16
		Pakatan Harapan	4
		Perikatan Nasional	3
		Independent	1
		Parti Bumiputera Perkasa Malaysia	1
Buletin TV3	Negative towards contenders	Barisan Nasional	3
		Independent	1
Berita Perdana RTM	Positive towards own parties	Barisan Nasional	9
		Perikatan Nasional	7
		Pakatan Harapan	3
		Parti Bumiputera Perkasa Malaysia	1
	Negative towards contenders	Pakatan Harapan	1

In terms of political messages slant informed by the political candidates, majority of the news reported by both broadcasters were positive towards own parties (Table 5). The news highlighted were primarily supporting their parties' manifestos, promises, pledges, aspirations and new ideas that the candidates tried to fulfill should their parties be given the mandate to form the state government.

Apart from that, it is found that there is a small number of TV3 and RTM coverages that highlighted negative slant of political messages spoke by political candidates and leaders against the other contenders. As for TV3, the negative slanted message was delivered by BN candidate. For example, there were two reports - first, it was about a BN candidate mentioned his manifesto to resolve the issue on abandoned development projects which was related to the former ruling government (i.e. Pakatan Harapan). Second, there was a news featured a BN political leader who clearly giving the negative references towards its contenders (i.e. Pakatan Harapan and Perikatan Nasional), which is evident in the following news transcription:

Selain Bandar Hilir, Klebang juga terkenal sebagai lokasi pilihan untuk dikunjungi pelawat di Melaka. Justeru, pelbagai perancangan sudah diatur dan digerakkan, tetapi ada yang tergendala kerana dibatalkan kerajaan terdahulu [*negative towards contender*] [52].

*Translated from TV3: Apart from Bandar Hilir, Klebang is also known as the location of choice for visitors to visit in Melaka. Thus, various plans have been arranged and mobilized, but some have been disrupted due to the cancellation of the previous government.*

“Rakyat negeri Melaka telahpun dihidangkan dengan kerajaan PH, dihidangkan dengan kerajaan PN...saya yakin pengundi negeri Melaka boleh menilai semasa BN mentadbir, semasa PH mentadbir dan PN mentadbir. Saya harap supaya rakyat negeri Melaka membuat keputusan yang bijak. PH tiada apa-apa pun [*negative towards contender*], janji menggunung tapi satu pun tak buat. PN satu kerajaan yang gagal [*negative towards contender*] [53]

*Translated from TV3: “The people of Melaka have been served with the PH government, served with the PN government... I am sure the voters of Melaka can judge when BN is in power, when PH is in power and PN is in power. I hope that the people of Melaka make a wise decision. PH is nothing, only promises but none (they) do. PN a failed government.*

Besides, as for RTM, news on PH candidate messages was also highlighted. The candidate, however, did not specifically mention any contenders but training the gun towards other parties' former performances in administrating the state.

## 5.0 Conclusion & Discussion

With over 476,000 Melaka citizens [54] eligible to vote, the 15th Melaka state election has become the second election in the country to be conducted during the pandemic. Based on the analysis, both broadcast TV stations allocated more news airtime positively to Barisan Nasional. As for TV3, the outcome is logical as recent research proved that the Media Prima TV channel received share acquisitions by former BN second finance minister, Johari Abdul Ghani [15]. Another explanation that implies to both broadcasters is based on the previous observations that proved that BN continued to be popular in the suburbs and rural areas due to their dominance of conventional media such as television and they frequently appears and perceived as BN and UMNO 'official news' [42] [43]. However, it would still consider to be predominantly given to the party because other parties such as Pakatan Harapan and Perikatan Nasional also were given the highlights and slots. This is despite result of this study was confirmed by previous research revealed that the opposition parties tend to receive minimal coverage as compared to dominant political parties or state ruling parties [55]. Pauline [55] also asserted that traditional media have clearly failed to fulfil their responsibility in providing a political arena for

citizens to make educated political judgments because they only broadcast one-sided governmental propaganda. It is evidently discovered from this study that found the disparity of news coverage frequencies among the parties.

Apart from that, both broadcasters devoted more attention to the manifestos pledged by candidates as part for their political messages in the state election. The finding is relevant as after all, it was during the election campaigning period. Hence, political parties were depending on the mass media to spread their messages to the voters as part of their propaganda. At the same time, media also were performing their functions to help build contested parties' positive image among the Melaka eligible voters. In addition, it is also found that main issues touched in candidate manifestos were significantly highlighting more on public welfare and socioeconomic. Other minor yet important issues such as state government policies, gender equality and youth empowerment were fairly emphasised which deemed to be also salient to the people.

Thus, the current study helps to educate voters by understanding the pattern of political parties' activity and analysing further what manifestos are presented and how the media plays a significant role in disseminating the political candidates to win throughout election. The phenomenon supports the information dissemination theory in dissemination political information [56]. Last but not least, it is apparent that the broadcaster which has favorable tendency towards certain party, reflected by its attention given, tend to portray or highlight the positive slant messages towards own parties while featuring the negative slant messages from the party against its contenders.

## 6.0 Recommendation

There is some limitation found in this study which provide ways for future research to explore. First, as the sample size is relatively small, it would be better if future studies can extend to bigger size of sample by including other mainstream broadcast TV stations or online media across different language platform or nature such as Bernama TV, RTM TV 2 and KiniTV. Besides, future studies should also consider to look at how political messages were employed in mass media based on the seven techniques of propaganda recognised by Institute of Propaganda Analysis [57]. This method would be more precise in order to guide the researcher to see how media being used as tools in disseminating political propaganda. Apart from that, the study in the future could be improved in terms of its methodology. It is worthwhile for future researchers to adopt in-depth interview with the personnel of media organizations such as journalists or editors in order to understand from different perspective of how the selection of political parties and leaders as their news sources were done. Besides, as the current study only focused on the political messages slant, it would be significant for future researchers to investigate the framing by looking at the perspectives of news slant (e.g. pro-Government, anti-Government, balance), news sources or by analysing the news component thematically. Other than that, a different perspective of the study could be done by assessing the public perception on the news covered on broadcast stations related to state election. Finally, in the perspective of media and propaganda studies, future studies may consider analysing the propaganda techniques employed by media that is mainly owned by political parties such as Harakah and The Star newspapers or state government owned media like Melaka Hari Ini.

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