

Psychological Warfare through New Media: Framing Political News Media Contents to Understand Student's Psychological Emotion in Malaysian Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract : *The emergence of Internet as the 'fifth estate' with the introduction of new media has changed the landscape of political communication. The media audiences connect through the Internet in obtaining the information are in the midst of transition from relying on the traditional mainstream media to the alternative media, especially on the political news contents. The engagement with these political media contents stimulate the psychological emotion of the media audiences. The paper's main objective is to understand students' psychological emotion based on the political news media contents framed by the 'independent' News Portals. The political media contents were selected based on the salience of news highlighted in the new media for the months of November and December 2019. The participants for the studies were divided into TWO (2) Focus Group sessions, comprising eight (8) participants in each session. Eleven (11) selected specimens – political media contents framed in the various independent News Portals were vetted by the experts to be used in the evaluation procedures for the studies. The studies used the International Positive Negative Affective Schedule Short Form (I-PANAS- SF) as the references for the participants to express their psychological emotions triggered from the selected specimens. From the evaluation, a new 69-items Emotion Words (EWs) were compiled, consisting of both positive and negative EWs. Based on the analysis of findings from the Repertory Grid (RepGrid) Form filled by the sixteen (16) participants, the study managed to capture five 'constructs': confusing historical facts, leadership credibility of the politicians, knowledge to handle sensitive issues, appreciation on War History and accurate historical facts that triggered the psychological emotion of these participants. Subsequently, from the specific objectives, the studies managed to develop TWO additional new outcomes, (i) The Affective Lexicon and (ii) RepGrid Form based on the political media contents framed in the new media. All the data were managed in the ATLAS.ti Software. Finally, the findings from the study are recommended to be applied for the future studies as a basis for better understanding of the psychological warfare in the new media that triggers human emotions in politics.*

Keywords: *Psychological Emotion, New Media, News Portal, Politics, Higher Education*

1. INTRODUCTION

It is inevitable to acknowledge the reality that new media provides a platform for a better accessibility of the news to the media audiences. The term new media indicates the multimedia contents which includes photo, texts, audio and video obtainable on the Internet. The diffusion of technologies with the development of Internet offers an approach in disseminating news information in engaging with the media audiences. New Media incorporates what has commonly been known as multimedia, literally the convergence of text, sounds and images in the same medium (Pratt, 2000). It is seen superior as compared to the traditional media platform because it is networked, interactive, enables two-way communication and allows the masses to be both producers and consumers of the contents. New Media has changed the 'paradox' perception that the flow of news information is controlled solely by the state- media ownership. However, a study of on agenda-setting in the new media in Malaysia conducted by Abdul Rahman Abdul Razak Shaik (2009) revealed the element of psychological warfare in the independent news portals (not a state-owned) in 'framing' the political news media contents to capture the heart and mind of voters during the campaign period of General Election (GE) 2004. Framing involves 'packaging' of the news media information, which include social and political issues in a unique context in order for the news to construct a 'meaning' in line with the 'gatekeeper' agenda in influencing the media audience's psychological mind. The gatekeepers control the flow of media contents to the media audiences, they decide what are to be published and how those media contents are to be published (Dearing & Roger, 1996). Thus, this 'gatekeeper' is responsible for shaping the perception to the media audiences mind on 'what issue to think about'. The interpretation and construction of the meaning of media contents occurs through the engagement of visual, image, audio and text. The engagement with these media contents stimulate the psychological emotion in the mind of media audiences. Studies on framing offer psychological mechanisms for explaining framing effects (Brewer et al., 2003). In Malaysia, there are 28.7 million Internet users representing 87.4 percent of total population and from that percentage, the large portion of Internet users, which is 30 percent, is the young users at the age of 20. 85.5 percent of their online activities is to get information (MCMC, 2018). The higher percentage of the Internet Users depict the importance to grasp the view of this group of youth in order to better understand their psychological emotion reflected on the issues framed by the new media.

2. EMERGENCE OF INTERNET IN POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

Malaysia as a developing state is not laggard in adopting the latest and advance technologies in communication. The higher rate of Internet Users in Malaysia indicates that new media plays a pivotal role in disseminating useful media contents. The Internet represents the latest technology, widely discussed and the most significant manifestation of new media (Flew, 2014). Internet creates opportunity to improve communication and reconnects the users with the others around the globe. It offers the platform for a hitherto unseen volume of communication and information, this is very much the case for communication about politics (Moe & Larsson, 2012). The emergence of Internet with the introduction of new media has changed the landscape of political communication. The media audiences that connect through the Internet in obtaining the information on daily news is in the midst of transition from relying on the traditional mainstream media to the alternative media, especially on the political news contents. The characteristics of easy to use, access and search for information attract the popularity of new media (Rusli, 2001).

Political communication has changed dramatically with the emergence of Internet, McNair (2003) emphasized that political communication research tries to understand and explain all forms of purposeful communication about politics. Further, McNair (1999) clarifies political communication includes all the communication done by the politicians or those related with them with the purpose to advance their objective, the communication about politician by non-politicians for example the voters and communication about politician and their activities published or broadcasted in the news media, editorial or any other form of media that related with the politics. Faced with unprecedented competitive pressures from new challengers and new technology, network news media organizations are adjusting to the fact that a growing audience for news relies primarily on the Internet rather than television and younger audiences are more likely to turn to the Internet for news (Bucy, 2003).

The study on online political participation among the youth in Malaysia conducted by Nadeya and Rugayah (2017) highlighted that Internet continues to become the most powerful platform for the youths to voice out and raise their concerns on public, political and youth related issues. According to Amelia (2011) Internet as a 'fifth estate' has become the medium for the young generation to voice out their opinions towards the government policies and actions. Further she explains, in politics, communication and information are used to effectively gain public trust and support for the government policies.

2.1 Emotion and Communication in Media

Wirth and Schramm (2005) explained that emotion is conceptualized as a psychological construct, inspired by the cognitive shift in psychology. In the years in between 1960s and 1970s, research in communication increasingly focused on the psychological processes and emotion effects during media reception. The emotion that develops during media reception is similar with the daily situation 'without' influence by the media. The investigation into emotion-related constructs in media research continues to develop. In the study of effects of emotion in media content, Bucy (2003) examines how the respondents reacted to a different emotional report about terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center as well as to interview with politicians, and according to him, in time of crisis, news is regarded as a type of survival -relevant information. The findings demonstrated that the respondents reacted much more emotionally to strongly emotional reports about a terrorist attack than to more cautious, less emotional reports.

Bucy (2003) also suggested news exposure has a differential effect on students and adult perception of news credibility. Cupchik, Oatley & Vorderer (1998) examined emotional response on the text investigated from the respondents' perspective. The study indicates that emotional texts evoked both 'fresh emotions' and 'emotional memories'. According to Jiawei, Wenjun & Yueheng (2016), Internet has become one of the most effective platforms for people to access information and express their views on the news websites and forums in a real time and they are increasingly paying attention to news which are relevant to the country and their lives, thus, understanding psychological emotion of these people is vital for public opinion monitoring.

2.2 A Repertory Grid (RepGrid) Technique

The Repertory Grid (RepGrid) was developed by the psychologist George Kelly based on his Theory of Personal Construct in order to understand and interpret what triggers emotions. A RepGrid elicits the underlying constructs that people use to interpret what is going on around them and that inform their decision-making (Rogers & Ryals, 2007). The RepGrid evolves in many domains. For example, in the study of politics, Fransella & Bannister (1967) applied RepGrid to investigate the political attitudes. The results of their

studies successfully forecasted the ‘predictor variables’ on the voters’ attitudes. Since the RepGrid technique was introduced by Kelly in 1955, numerous modifications had been made by the researchers. However, there are three core features of the RepGrid techniques that are common and remain constant that include a set of elements (people or objects that are evaluated), a set of construct (respondents’ descriptions of perceptions about elements) and respondents’ evaluation of elements based on the constructs (Bauman, 2015). Therefore, a few studies from various domains have applied RepGrid in order to better understand the psychological aspect and predictable variables that induce the psychological emotion of the human being.

2.4 *Emotion Words (EWs) and The Affective Lexicon*

Emotions are transitory social roles (socially constructed syndromes) that are based on an individual’s appraisal of the situation and that are interpreted as passions rather than actions. The term ‘passion’ derived from the Latin ‘*pati*’ meaning ‘to suffer’ or ‘undergo change’. Passions thus include those behaviors which seem to happen to a person, or over which person has no control (Averill, 1980). A list of emotion words have been compiled in the Affective Lexicon is the compilation lists of the Emotion Words (EWs) (Clore & Ortony, 1988). Emotion can be distinguished as having a Positive Affect (PA) and Negative Affect (NA). Various criteria are used in drawing the distinction between positive and negative emotions, it is suggested that positive and negative emotions respectively involve a favorable or unfavorable assessment of the situation or else a propensity to approach or avoidance (Green, 1992). The confusion of past studies in expressing the emotion into word was highlighted by Clore & Ortony (1988). For example, the word ‘neglected’ indicates the emotion, however, some studies tried to depict the emotion word in the context of ‘being’ instead of ‘feeling’. Linguistic studies highlighted that the two are different in meaning. ‘Feeling neglected’ conveys emotion but being ‘neglected’ doesn’t represent emotion; it simply refers to a fact about an individual’s situation. Emotion enables people to react to significant stimuli with complex patterns of behavior involving multiple modalities- facial muscle movements, vocal cues, bodily movements, gesture, posture and so on (Keltner et al. 2019). Hence, in the evaluation of psychological emotion, the expression from the implicit (feeling within) ‘express’ into explicit (reaction through psychical or verbal) requires the studies to capture the affective indicator of the participants’ feeling, in the studies expressed explicitly through the Emotion Words (EWs).

The development of a diverse range of affect measures of psychological emotion continue to be necessary and useful in confirming that PA and NA affection in human psychological emotion in order to constitute universal dimensions of trait affect (Thompson, 2007). Further, Thompson (2007), who developed International Positive and Negative Affect Schedule Short-Form (I-PANAS-SF) to investigate the cross-sample stability, internal reliability, convergent and criterion-related validities of the scale, the findings revealed that the scale to be psychometrically acceptable to evaluate the expression of human emotion.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The research objectives for this study are to explore on how the political news media contents ‘framed’ by the ‘independent’ News Portals trigger the psychological emotion of the media audiences, namely, students from the Malaysian Higher Education Institutions. The specific objectives are:

- i) To identify the students’ psychological affective emotion triggered from the political media contents in the News Portals.

- ii) To determine the factors that trigger the students' psychological emotion based on the political media contents framed in the News Portals.

4. METHODOLOGY

The study selected and used Political Media Contents in the News Portal. The news that attracted the Malaysian politicians to make the comments or press statements in the media that are highly 'framed' by the New Portals were monitored within the duration of TWO months, from November 2019 until December 2019. In the initial stage, fifty (50) articles were selected as a specimen. However, after undergoing the 'vetting' procedure by the experts from the domain of history and education, psychology, linguistics and strategic studies, eleven (11) articles were chosen for the RepGrid evaluation. Sixteen (16) undergraduate students from Malaysian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) voluntarily participated in the study. The participants were then divided into TWO Focus Groups comprising eight (8) undergraduate students from history studies and another eight (8) from another cluster of social science studies.

4.1 Selection of Specimens (Political Media Contents)

Below are the two (2) reference articles as sample of the news 'framed' by the News Portals that were said to be 'politized' in the months of November and December 2019.

- (i) News Portal : South China Morning Post
Date : 27 November 2019
Title : In Malaysia, politician spar after return of communist leader
Chin Peng's remains



- (ii) News Portal : Malaysiakini
Date : 3 December 2019
Title : Issue of Chin Peng's ashes 'deliberately politised'



Thus, from the two reference articles ‘framed’ in the News Portals – South China Morning Post based in China and Malaysiakini based in Malaysia, the studies narrowed the scope of potential specimens (political media contents) to ‘returning of Chin Peng’s ashes’ that obtained the reaction of Malaysian politicians ‘framed’ in the new media. The political media contents used in the studies are the combination of National Language, Bahasa Melayu (Malay Language) and English Language.

Table 1: Selected Specimens (Political Media Contents)

Code	Date	News Portals	Titles
001	4 Dec	Malaysiakini	Waytha Pesan MP Jangan Besarkan Isu Abu Chin Peng
002	3 Dec	Malaysia Today	Ronnie Liu Akui Datuk dan Abangnya Pejuang Komunis
003	27 Nov	Free Malaysia Today (FMT)	No Comment, Mat Sabu Says on Chin Peng’s ‘Homecoming’
004	27 Nov	The Stars Online	Muhyiddin: Government Has Never Allowed Return of Chin Peng’s Ashes
005	27 Nov	The Straits Times	DPM: Bringing Back Chin Peng’s Ashes is Sensitive Matter
006	4 Dec	The Malaysian Insight	Deputy Minister to Lodge Report Over Blog Post on Chin Peng Ashes
007	6 Dec	Malay Mail	At UMNO Assembly, Zahid Keeps Up Pressure on DAP over Chin Peng’s Ashes
008	26 Nov	Sinar Harian	Kenapa Abu Chin Peng Di Bawa Masuk Secara Senyap, Soal Najib
009	27 Nov	The Star Online	Big Mistake to Bring Back Chin Peng’s Ashes, Says PAS
010	27 Nov	Sinar Harian	PAS Persoal Motif Pilih 16 September Bawa Abu Chin Peng
011	28 Nov	Sinar Harian	Abu Chin Peng: Hormati Keluarga Mendiang, kata Annuar

4.2 Investigation Steps

The research was divided into TWO (2) Focus Group sessions, eight (8) participants in each session. Eleven (11) selected specimens – political media contents (refer to Table 1) ‘framed’ in the various independent News Portals, were vetted by the experts to be used in the investigation for the study. The participants then were given the schedule of International Positive and Negative Affect Schedule Short-Form (I-PANAS-SF) (Refer to Table 2) to

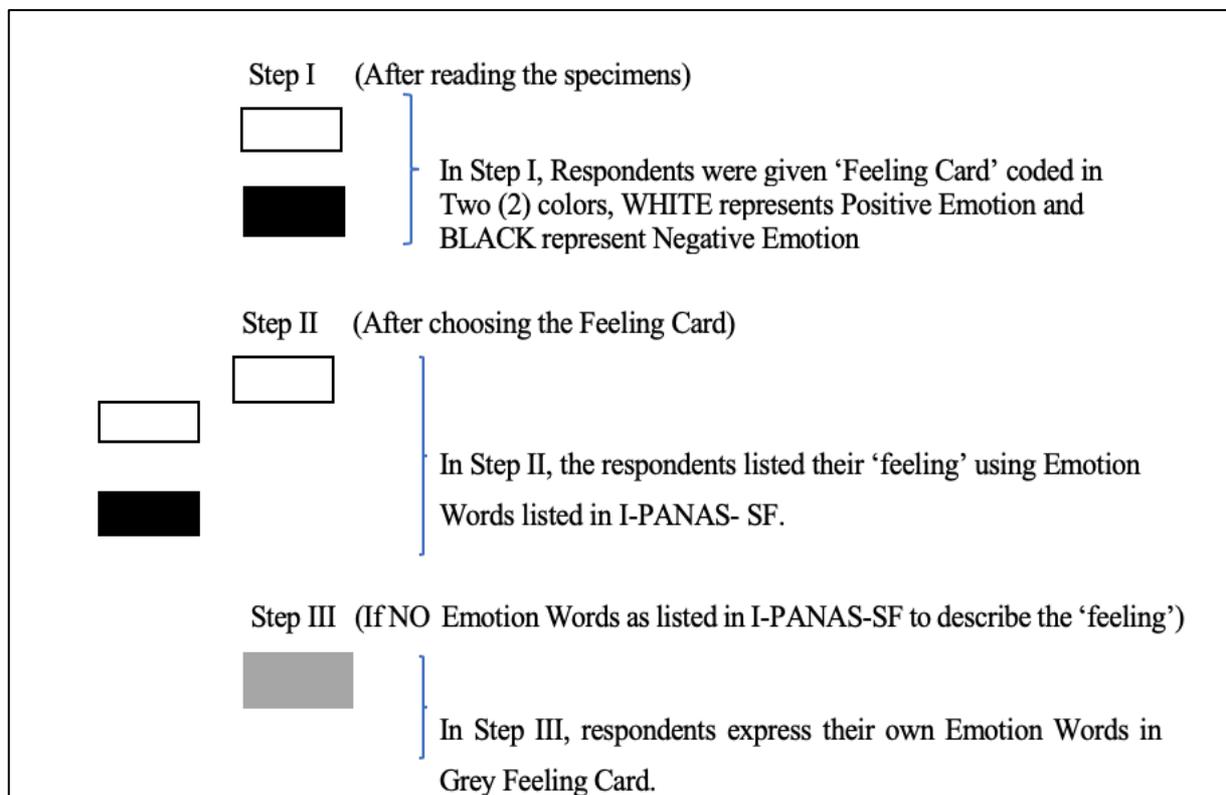
express their feeling using the Emotion Words (EWs) once they finished reading the specimens. Nevertheless, they can choose to express their feeling using words others than the EWs listed in I-PANAS-SF.

Table 2: EWs listed in I-PANAS-SF

POSITIVE (PA) EMOTION WORDS	NEGATIVE (NA) EMOTION WORDS
Active	Afraid
Determined	Nervous
Attentive	Upset
Inspired	Hostile
Alert	Ashamed

Adopted from Thompson, 2007

Figure 1: Investigation Steps to Construct ‘The Affective Lexicon’



The next step in the research was to identify the ‘constructs’ for RepGrid Technique from the participants through the interviews. Each session with the participants was conducted for the duration of ten (10) minutes. To identify the ‘constructs’ for the RepGrid Technique, the participants were asked throughout the interview sessions to compare three elements (for this study, the elements are the 11 (eleven) selected specimens from various News Portals) chosen at random, and comment how they are similar and how there are different. This step is called ‘triading’. The respondents were also asked follow up questions to elicit more explanation about their constructs, a step commonly known as ‘laddering’ (Rogers & Ryals, 2007). All the data extracted in all the interview sessions were managed using ATLAS.ti.

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Construction of the Affective Lexicon based on the Political News Contents ‘frame’ in the News Portals

Through the Investigation Steps using the ‘Feeling Cards’, the study managed to compile a list of Emotion Words expressed by the participants. In the First Focus Group (Undergraduate Students from History Studies), there are thirty-three (33) new EWs (written in the Grey Feeling Card). For the Second Focus Group (undergraduate Students from various Social Sciences Studies), there are thirty-six (36) new EWs shared by the participants. There are a total of **Sixty- Nine (69)** compilation of EWs. Altogether, the study managed to develop The Affective Lexicon based on the Political News Contents Frame in the News Portals (refer to Table 3). However, the study found that of the total that were traced during the assessment, the expressions of positive emotion, twenty-six (26), are fewer than the expressions of negative emotion, forty-three (43).

Table 3: The Affective Lexicon with **69-Items** based on Political News Contents ‘frame’ in News Portals

Chill	Nostalgic	Love	Melancholic	Petrified	Hate
Alert	Amused	Glad	Sad	Miserable	Panic
Happy	Heroic	Anger	Gloomy	Fed-up	Displeasure
Inspired	Calmed	Provoked	Tense	Tearful	Regret
Relaxed	Pride	Despair	Mad	Dazzled	Cheated
Satisfied	Awesome	Anxiety	Impatient	Confused	Embarrass
Strong	Appreciated	Pain	Blinded	Upset	Unhappy
Sentimental	Excited	Pity	Ashamed	Betrayed	Awe
Patriotic	Pleasure	Sorrow	Irritated	Nervous	Fear
Enjoy	Relief	Scared	Sorrow	Hostile	
	Proud	Gratitude	Afraid	Curious	Frustrated
	Delight	Joy	Annoyed	Sarcastic	Disappointed

5.2 Identify Respondents’ Constructs for RepGrid Technique using Word Cloud by ATLAS.ti

How did the political news contents trigger the participants’ psychological emotion and why? From the interview sessions with the twelve participants in order to seek their feedback on the specimens (political media contents) given to them, there are 10 (ten) ‘constructs’ that were highlighted by the respondents. However, the five most emphasized by the participants were selected after the procedures of (i) ‘triading’ and (ii) ‘laddering’.

Figure 2: Respondents' Constructs for RepGrid Technique



Extracted from the series of interview sessions with Sixteen (16) participants in the study

Table 4: Five (5) Constructs that Trigger Psychological Emotion

CODE	CONSTRUCTS
A1	Impact
A2	Proximity
A3	Interests
A4	Prominence
A5	Timeliness

Table 5: Eliciting Constructs using 'Laddering'

Constructs CODE	Construct Level	Poles	Sample Participant Explanations
A1	Confuse on the fact of National History	1. Confusing 2. Historical Fact	'They are <u>confusing us</u> with the <u>history</u> of the country, they should explain more on this issue instead of avoiding to provides a useful statement...'
Why is that confusing? A2	There are politicians, doubt on their credibility in handling Chin Peng's remains	1. Doubt 2. Credibility	'After went through all specimens, not all but some of these politicians showing their lack of knowledge in history of Malaysia, <u>doubt on their credibility to lead....</u> how to manage important issues for the country...'
Why doubt on some of them? A3	There are policy-makers should be knowledgeable in history matters, this	1. Knowledgeable 2. Sensitive Issue	'The news attracted our interests as these people in the news are <u>our policy-maker</u> , if they are <u>not knowledgeable</u> , they <u>can't manage and lead properly on sensitive issues</u> in a multiethnic

	issue is sensitive		society...'
Why does this sensitive issue trigger psychological emotion? A4	War history is important to young generation, appreciation to past generation	1. War History 2. Appreciation	'This sensitive issue related on <u>War in Malaysia</u> , young generation lacking of knowledge in history.... That why <u>most of us didn't appreciate</u> what happened to our country in the past...'
Why not appreciate? A5	Need more factual historical facts than merely 'sensational' news	1. Factual historical fact	'More <u>factual</u> on <u>history facts</u> to the media audiences instead of highlighting only on sensational and provocation news...'

The sixteen (16) participants were then asked to fill the '**RepGrid Form**' designed from the study (refer to Figure 3: Repertory Grid (RepGrid) that Trigger Psychological Emotion based on the Political News Contents 'frame' in the News Portal). The Repgrid technique can be either in Quantitative or Qualitative. For this paper, focus was given to qualitative approach to gather the rich data.

POSITIVE PANE /	001	002	003	004	005	006	007	008	009	010	011	NEGATIVE PANE x
Not Likely Confusing Historical Facts	x	x	x	/	/	x	/	/	/	/	/	x
Not Likely Doubt in Leadership Credibility	x	x	x	/	/	x	/	/	/	/	/	x
Not Likely No Knowledge to Manage Sensitive Issue	x	x	x	/	/	x	/	/	/	/	/	x
Not Likely No Appreciation on War History	x	x	x	/	/	x	/	/	/	/	/	x
Not Likely No Accurate Historical Facts	x	x	x	/	/	x	/	/	/	/	/	x

Figure 3: **Repertory Grid (RepGrid) Form** that Trigger Psychological Emotion based on the Political News Contents ‘frame’ in the News Portal Extracted from the Interview Sessions with the respondents
example of **RepGrid Form** in the Figure 3 filled by Respondent No 1.

Based on the findings analyzed from the RepGrid Form filled by the sixteen (16) participants on a what triggered their psychological emotion after went through all the specimens, the study captured five ‘constructs’ that include confusing historical facts, leadership credibility of the politicians, knowledge to handle sensitive issues, appreciation on War History and accurate historical facts.

6. CONCLUSION

The study seeks to understand students' psychological emotion on the news that are published in the Internet. The political media contents were selected based on the salience of news highlighted in the new media for the Months of November and December 2019. The issue of the former General Secretary of Party Communist Malaya (CPM), Chin Peng's ashes brought to Malaysia as claimed on 16 September 2019 attracted much response by the masses and the Malaysian politicians as 'framed' in the new media.

Sixteen (16) undergraduate students from Malaysian HEIs were voluntarily to be involved in the study. Eight (8) were from the history studies and another eight (8) from other social science domains. Eleven (11) political media contents from various News Portal were gathered and vetted by the experts to be the specimen in the study. For the first objective, the study used the International Positive Negative Affective Schedule Short Form (I-PANAS-SF) developed by Thompson (2007) as the references for the participants to express their psychological emotions trigger from the specimen given to them. From that, a new 69-items Emotion Words (EW) which consists of twenty-six (26) EWs and forty-three (43) EWs were compiled to develop The Affective Lexicon based on the Political News Media Contents.

For the second objective, the study managed to capture the variables based on the specimens-political media contents. The 'triading' and 'laddering' procedures were used to understand what triggered the participants' psychological emotion based on the political media contents that 'frame' by the News Portal. From the 10 minutes interview sessions with each of these sixteen (16) participants, and the 'laddering' procedure used to further understand more in-depth what really trigger participant' psychological emotion, they study found five 'constructs': confusing historical facts, leadership credibility of the politicians, knowledge to handle sensitive issues, appreciation on War History and accurate historical facts that triggered the psychological emotion of these participants.

Based on the two objectives discussed above, the study managed to develop TWO additional new outcomes, (i) **The Affective Lexicon** and (ii) **RepGrid Form** based on the political media contents 'framed' in the new media. The findings from the study are recommended to be applied for the future studies as a basis for better understanding of the psychological warfare that triggers human emotion in public policies and politics.

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