

THE ARTS OF SOCIAL REALITY (RE) CONSTRUCT INDIVIDUAL MINDSET OF POST-INDEPENDENCE COMMUNITY VIA HISTORICAL DOCUMENTARY

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Abstract

Purpose of the study: The aim of this study is to analyse the meaning construction of the post-independence communities based on a historical documentary “Big Kitchen (1952)” which focuses on the literacy aspect of how an individual construe, implement and adapt technology in constructing meaning in line with the rapid development of the country.

Methodology: A focus group discussion was conducted which involved twenty-one informants from an Institute of Higher Learning in Malaysia. The discussion focuses on how the post-independence communities collectively construct their institutional knowledge by linking these three main areas; literacy, meaning construction and technology based on the historical documentary which consequently reveals the social reality of the community.

Main Findings: Findings revealed that there is a culture change (in Malaysia) due to migration, technological advancement, and rapid urbanization based on the meanings constructed by the post-independence communities. The combination of migration, technological development, and rapid urbanization have caused the informants to not be influenced by media materials that are shown but assess material based on the understanding and withholding long underlying themselves over the years.

Applications of this study: Since the media and communication studies is an established academic discipline in today's digital era, this study is beneficial in contributing to the development of mass media and communication field specifically in the area of media literacy/ broadcasting literacy as the study covers the art of scientific investigation of the media.

Novelty/Originality of this study: This study justifies how media research and the technological shift in the media landscape affects the arts of social reality and the meaning construction of the post-independence communities in Malaysia via the “Big Kitchen (1952)” documentary. Findings revealed in this study contribute to the current debate of the current media issues, and to the development of mass media and communication field.

Keywords: *Communication Technology, Historical Documentary, Post-Independence Community, Technological Development, The Arts of Social Reality*

INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia, the society is often times exposed to an abundance of information which has been rapidly increasing with the emergence of technology. The arrival of digital technologies contributed to the unimaginably large amounts of information and today, the society is living in the Information Age, where information is accessible at the tip of their fingers. In today's media-driven world, it is thought-provoking to examine the media system knowledge of the post-independence community by analysing how they navigate their mind and construct meaning in the media-saturated environment based on the historical documentary “Big Kitchen (1952)”.

According to [Mohammadyari and Singh \(2015\)](#), the role of an individual towards technology is considered an ability or a skill, which is currently known as digital literacy skills. As the 21st century is set to be conquered by the digital era ([Gasinger & Kole. 2016](#)), it is not a surprise that the post-independence communities should be able to construct meaning due to technological factors. Media and technology are strongly interrelated, thus the process of literacy and meaning construction is dependent on technology ([Potter, 2015](#)). Furthermore, the society today interacts with technology through

the availability of smart phones, and social media which consequently, has become a culture ([Bort-Roig et.al., 2014](#); [Page, T. 2013](#)).

Social media defined by [Kaplan and Haenlein \(2010\)](#) as “a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technical foundations of Web 2.0, and that allows the creation and exchange of user generated content”. The increasing interaction through social media does not only attract users but also the interest of researchers from various disciplines to investigate the social changes brought through YouTube, Wikipedia, Facebook, Twitter, and other social media platforms. Scholars have studied social media in terms of participation, collaboration, and democracy among the digital communication technology audiences or users ([Collin, 2013](#); [Ramachandran Ponnann & Mohd Nor Shahizan Ali. \(2015\)](#)). Aside from changes in social norms and the establishment of new values (Levinson, 2009), culture of hedonism ([Landau 2018](#)), epistemic symptoms ([Baran, 2013](#)), there are other studies that look into the overall social capital in social relations that enable collaboration in action ([Potter, 2015](#)).

The study of social media showed that a large majority of social media users are youth ([Harrison & Thomas 2009](#); [Zettl, H. 2016](#)). A study found that the use of social media is to bring behavioural change including its impact on learning among youth ([Sheldon, 2008](#)). The situation was the catalyst and the formation of social reality that is different from that existing in the society ([Tettegah, 2016](#)). The rapid pace of technology added with the changing trends of the society has led to the emergence of documentary films using historical facts as the content. According to [Mohd Nor Shahizan et al. \(2014\)](#), the documentary producers’ have grabbed the opportunity to use social media as a platform to accommodate their documentaries since social media would be one of the recommended platforms by the social media opinion leaders ([Turcotte, 2015](#)).

Difference in social reality, in turn, led to a clash of views that are not only different but also contrary to the norms of the society, thinking, and also their social reality before the advent of social networking sites. In other words, the development of social structure allows opportunities to evaluate the evolution of culture across time. Cultural change is not negatively defined, but it can be measured and potentially identified ([Harrison, & Thomas, 2009](#)). These studies revealed that cultural changes because of technology. Technology affects the changes of an individual’s social life as technology introduces to variety of new applications and platforms which are tailored to match individual’s current needs.

The interpretation generated by each individual display identity and social reality that is constructed by the owner ([Harrison, & Thomas 2009](#)). Construction of view or understanding is made possible due to computer-based communication ([Rabiger, 2016](#); [Tedeschi, 2017](#)). [Humphries, \(2018\)](#) argued that the social media enables individuals to construct and reconstruct their views on certain issues. In fact, a view or understanding is formed based on the use of technology presented in the form of a repeatedly modified and adjusted according to circumstances and situations ([Sheldon, 2008](#)).

Various issues have been widely discussed online by using existing applications as a medium for discussion. The discussions also included a discussion about an interpretation of documentaries that used historical facts ([Mohd. Nor Shahizan et al. 2014](#)). Online interaction occurs because each individual has their role. The role refers to any form of behaviour involving the rights, responsibilities, and duties of individuals which are dependent on the social situation experienced by the individual ([Harrison, & Thomas, 2009](#)).

Due to this, this study offers a contribution to the phenomenon of meaning construction (mindset) among the post-independence communities specifically based on the historical documentary “Big Kitchen 1952”. The particular focus is on the post-independence communities and the recent developments in technology which have placed significant emphasis and played a huge role in the process of meaning construction. Thus, this study is a critical assessment which focuses on the process of an individual among the post-independence communities on how technology affects their meaning construction or interpretation of the historical documentary “Big Kitchen 1952”.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A focus group discussion was conducted in three groups A, B, and C with twenty-one informants (post-graduate students from Malaysia, comprising nine males and twelve females from all races who are studying at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia) and have watched the historical documentary “Big Kitchen (1952)” produced by the Malay Film Unit, which premiered at the Library Tun Seri Lanang (PTSL), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM).

The selection of informants was based on the frequency of Internet usage. The frequency of internet usage was evaluated based on the number of hours spent in a day. Informants who spent more than six hours a day are placed in regular groups (A), four to six hours are placed in the medium group (B), while informants who used the Internet less than four hours were placed in the lower group (C).

The study involves descriptive analysis which assesses some interesting aspects related to cognitive and narrative message from a historical documentary on the construction of their views on the realism in daily life. This article focuses on three key votes on the construction (mindset) of the educated youth of the historical documentary "Big Kitchen (1952)". The evaluation is the reaction of the post-independence community informants to the narrative message delivered in the historical documentary.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

First Assessment Analysis

The documentary has become one of the media channels to convey information which is promoted as propagandas ([Potter, 2015](#)). An example is the difference of opinions about the greatness of the British. Although both focus groups thought that the great British documentary is based on the exposure, the majority of the informants said that not all of the elements shown in the documentary about the British are all great as stated by informant A3. Informant B4 has also clearly stated that the local people (indigenous) are more powerful than the British.

A3: "We had already established the perception that all white people (western) were terrific on the films screened. In fact, I saw in my courses, the white skin is not great, exalted. I do not see white people (western) as terrific"

B4: "Cool, it should be local people, local people are all great. But, the truth is that, I personally, all the same. There are strengths and weaknesses of each, but in this case, seems like only white people (western) alone can solve the problem".

This suggests that not all successful documentary films could influence the public mindset as a whole. The majority has also stated that the freedom of production and printing in the colonial period is one of the agenda brought by the British to Malaya to sway the public who was not fully literate and does not know about the evils of British. In such a similar case to s what has been said by informant C3, the British authorities are covering up the truth.

C3: "So first, the British then occupied Malaya, so that those in Malaya is not affected, so the truth of what they see, so British that regulate what they should and can be, and what they do not know. So that they may remain colonized Malaya including colonizing the minds of people today".

On the other hand, differences also occur between the role of the British and the role of local communities in the process of facing the communist placement. The majority of informants agreed that in the past, the British are considered better than the local communities. This is according to one of the informants who pointed out that the British had the authority to disclose such perceptions.

A1: "Because they have the power. Moreover, people we used to be do not quite understand about education, so they only know that British have power, so look at the actions taken by the British, it is something very great, compared to the local community which is described only able to rely only on the British to act the placement of communists".

According to [Mohd. Nor Shahizan Ali et. al. \(2011\)](#), all strived to improve the message in order for it to reach the target group or audience. It can really be achieved if the arts of social reality and the audience at that time are in line with what is indicated by the party that issued the message. Obviously, the narrative techniques used and the issuance of a documentary have managed to bring the message to be conveyed as a propaganda to obtain support from the people to eliminate the communists at that time.

However, the experience of migrating and traveling to many places allows people to refer to other materials which cause them to reject the British greatness as illustrated by the documentary film. In this case, according to the informants, the experience of traveling to other countries has given the understanding that the disclosure of British greatness will find it to be no more than a matter of history. This explanation is reinforced by statements from the informants as follows:

B5: "According to my own experience of seeing foreign countries during my studies; have much difference with what is portrayed through films and documentaries in English. So, the story is trying to influence the audience to establish an identity as required by them".

B6: "Because of the documentary at the time did not seem to expect that the public in due course will be exposed to a real situation when they go and see for themselves to places that are told".

Second Assessment Analysis

A majority of the informants stated that this documentary portrayed the British authorities in the colonial times and free to colonize Malaya. The impact of technological development has enabled society to reassess every trace of colonialism which is based on information from sites from the Internet. The same opinion was expressed by informants A2 and B7 where they discussed that the British are just taking profits from Malaya. Local communities are oppressed, forced labor, and are directed to work as laborers. The profits were taken and enjoyed by the British.

A2: "When reassessing all information through open access technology, certainly Malaya only be a place for making profits".

B7: "Because we are an occupied country, his name certainly more colonized and oppressed. The British took profit only. For the younger generations, with help and reference existing technology. We feel deceived by all kinds of British propaganda".

These findings revealed that individuals rejected the rule of the British and they argued that the British have taken advantage of the Malay community in order to gain control of the raw material to be brought back to their country. They (informants) were exposed to the current technology that enabled them to make interpretations. According to [Whiting \(2011\)](#), the film can serve as a technique for government propaganda, education, and dissemination of ideas to educate people on various topics. However, in this case, the film cannot provide a comprehensive effect on the audience because there are informants who said that the British as taking advantage rather than providing assistance.

Third Assessment Analysis

There are some effects that are debated by the audience after watching this documentary. Among these effects are the effects arose from the development process after a period of colonization by the British for more than 50 years which has led to social changes affecting the mindset of the current community. One of the informants said that the colonization can only influence the society after a certain period and not forever due to the country's development since it will encourage a change in thinking. This opinion is supported by the informant as follows:

A5: "I know the impact of the arrival of the British colonization is not long, but the longer colonization mindset so impressed in the minds of people about the greatness of the British. But now it is getting lost due to the effects of the rapid development of the country".

The second effect was made by the British colonization which has also resulted in the rapid development that has been shaping a new identity to the building up of society as highlighted by the majority of the informants.

C7: "As a result, during colonization is priceless period. But for the long-term effects, give a very big impact on the development of the country and further build modern identity within the community".

Discussions that have been conducted have also discovered that there are two informants who compared the advantages and disadvantages between the British and the Dutch. Both of the informants stressed that the British and Dutch as colonizers gave different effects after the occupation. Both of the informants considered that British is better than the Dutch in terms of the impression left.

A7: "I see the countries of the British colony more prosperous. The occupation of the Netherlands usually does not develop. If the British colonies, such as Australia, Malaysia and other countries that prospered and will be more advanced. Singapore was a British colony. So much nicer British in charge. British more responsible in streamlining the education, economic systems, and the relationship between the two countries to become better".

C1: "Better colonized by the British, right? Because there is no longer good. Portuguese evil, evil Japanese, British alone. But there is no good colonization. I mean it. As a result, it can be seen from now. If our generation right now. If the previous generation, they may think that colonization was not good, and if we look from the British, who colonized the country had risen and is more advanced".

[Baran \(2013\)](#) and [Tedeschi \(2017\)](#) said that a person's experience could affect the interpretation of a documentary. The effect has enabled the audience to view the British colonialism from a positive perspective. Individuals can construct meaning (mindset) based on second thought after technology and current situation ([Baran, 2013](#); [Rabiger, 2016](#); [Tedeschi, 2017](#)). Results from the focus group analysis showed that personal experience, rapid changes in technology, and the rapid development of the country has promoted each individual to construct meaning differently based on the construction of their own mindset and not influenced by the history of the documentary. The analysis showed that the changes in the environment, either formal or informal have created an impact in shaping individuals' second thoughts after constructing the meaning of a historical documentary.

CONCLUSION

Social and cultural are strong aspects in determining the individuals thought patterns ([Humphries, 2018](#); [McErlean, 2018](#)). Among other things, according to [Baran, \(2013\)](#), most of the material can be interpreted in several ways, but the message issuer generally intends to influence the audience to make interpretations based on their views when they deliver the message. However, the fact that the audience can interpret differently without being influenced by the social status, they may not agree or may make a wrong interpretation on certain aspects of a message, hence, producing an alternative interpretation which is different from the view expressed by the producer ([Baran, 2013](#)).

[McQuail, \(2010\)](#) also expressed the same opinion which introduced a range of interpretation that emphasizes the assumptions and adjustments to the content of the media interpreted by the audience. The original message through the media will have the interpretation and construction of meaning in connotative and denotative forms. Hence, it is not a surprise that this study shows the combination of migration, technological development, and rapid urbanization have caused the informants to not be influenced by media materials that are shown but assess material based on the understanding and withholding long underlying themselves over the years.

[Potter, \(2015\)](#) stated that the message of the media has many elements that affect the audience (read: the post-independence community) on the state of the real world, but it also has elements that cause the audience to depart from the real-world situation. Television and movies are not interesting visual waive such as thinking for themselves, reading, walking and other activities that create static in their daily life. Understanding and interpretation are dependent on a starting point which is to incorporate critical view as media scholars have traditionally ignored the understanding process.

The cognitive psychologists have revealed the socio-cognitive approach is traditionally employed for understanding but has ignored the processes that produce the interpretation. The arts of social reality should be emphasized as the interpretation of the viewer (the post-independence community) is a process which varies and not automatic ([Baran, 2013](#); [McErlean, 2018](#)).

LIMITATION AND STUDY FORWARD

In general, this study is confined to one particular historical documentary "Big Kitchen 1952" among the sampling selected. Thus, the sampling for this study only focuses on the post-independence communities in Malaysia. Overall, the results from this study are dependent on the answers provided by the post-independence communities and the analysis conducted. The accuracy and completeness of this study largely depends on the validity of the research instrument based on the honest, sincere, and complete answers provide by the post-independence communities. The study procedures in terms of research design, research methodology, sampling selection and data analysis have limited the findings in this study as it focuses on the relation between the post-independent communities, technology and the media "Big Kitchen 1952". This study is also based on informant's perceptions and answers at the time the focus group was conducted. Factors such as psychology, emotion, and environmental could be the probability in influencing the accuracy of the answers given, and this was unavoidable. Thus, the results of this study are also influenced by the situation and the current situation of this study and may not represent the actual validity.

This study has provided an overview of the phenomena of the arts of social reality and the mindset of the post-independence community in Malaysia via the historical documentary "Big Kitchen 1952". Since the study revealed that there is a "culture change" in Malaysia, further researchers could expand the knowledge by identifying, evaluating, and analysing to contribute to the development of mass media and communication field.

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