

HOW TO SPOT HYPERLOCAL NEWS: COMPARISON OF NEWS PORTAL ON FACEBOOK

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Abstract: Coverage on local news may influence community beliefs about local issues and events. By employing framing theory, it helps to guide the researchers to explore and understand media patterns on framing headlines of hyperlocal news on Facebook in Malaysia. This study aims to explore and identify the framing pattern of hyperlocal news on Facebook pages. This is a comparison study between two hyperlocal news portals on Facebook. Data were gathered through content analyses of the portals' Facebook pages. The study considered news reports (the whole article including headlines, number of likes and shares, and comments). By exploring and identifying the patterns of hyperlocal news on Facebook, it allows journalists and media organisations to see the popularity of local news and enable them to use the most relevant news to appeal to a focused audience in even smaller geographic areas.

Keywords: hyperlocal news, framing theory, content analysis, online news portal

Introduction

The rise of online journalism has drastically changed the nature of journalistic reporting, especially local news on Facebook. Facebook works as a signal to an issue or information that is being sensationalised on the social media to which it is being discussed among Facebook users (Farmer, 2012). It changes media ecology and especially the scope for reconfigured public communication afforded by interactive media technologies (Firmstone & Coleman, 2014). According to Ewart (2014), hyperlocal news is an increasingly globalised media market, as it generates valuable perspectives on the future of news and the importance of excessively

local news in this globalised world (Hess & Waller, 2015). For example, several popular websites are genuine hyperlocal or local news aggregators (e.g., Topix, Fwix, EveryBlock, and Outside.in) that impose a topic category on news articles, such as Jobs, Politics, Photos, and Events. Each news article is a separate headline linked to the original news source (Kavanaugh et al., 2014).

The transition of hyperlocal news has caused researchers to explore and understand how hyperlocal news are framed on Facebook. Framing is the second level of agenda setting. According to West and Turner (2018), news framing aims to look at how media depictions of events influence and constrain the way consumers can interpret those events. Framing is concerned about the presentation of media contents and with such premeditated organisation of information, framing aims to lead the audiences' evaluative perception of a particular issue (Chee Khiang, Ahmad, Ibrahim, & Peng Kee, 2012). The understanding of how framing works for the hyperlocal news on social media will help researchers and practitioners alike to understand the pattern of the news on social media that is favoured by the local population.

Hyperlocal media is used to promote alternative voices (Williams, Harte, & Turner, 2015). Previous studies on hyperlocal media focused on business models and advertisements. Limited studies have been conducted on news making and production, especially on the content in hyperlocal journalism. Prior studies looked at media ecology (Nygren, Leckner, & Tenor, 2018), media dependency theory (Müller, Schneiders, & Schäfer, 2016; Chen et al., 2017), channel complementarity theory (Bobkowski, Jiang, Peterlin, Rodriguez, 2018), communication infrastructure theory (CIT) (Gerson, Chen, Wenzel, Ball-Rokeach, & Parks, 2017; Liu, Chen, Ognyanova, Nah, & Ball-Rokeach, 2018), and subculture theory (Hess & Waller, 2015), among others. However, to the best of the author's knowledge, no study has been conducted on framing.

This study compares two hyperlocal news portals framing on Facebook pages, namely *Media Selangor* and *Penang Kini*. The researchers identify the news frame on these two hyperlocal news pages and how the news are geographically distributed.

Framing on Hyperlocal News

According to Ghanem (1997) and Takeshita (1997) as cited in Miller (2005), the concept of framing is central to the consideration of a second-level agenda setting. In the discipline of communication, framing is a process through which the media emphasise some aspects of reality and downplay other aspects, and it can be achieved through the consideration of particular size and placement of news item, the narrative form and tone of the presentation, and specific details included in the media coverage (Miller, 2005).

The framing of hyperlocal news on Facebook serves as a medium for people who seek information, social utility, and entertainment (Go, You, Jung, & Shim, 2016). Such a theory has been used to understand the relationship between news proximity and news sources (Rafeeq & Jiang, 2018). However, the study of the hyperlocal news on Facebook has elements that may be aroused by the number of clicking based on curiosity and emotions (Tenenboim & Cohen, 2013). Furthermore, the framing on hyperlocal news looks at ownership, regional distribution content and the chains (van Kerkhoven & Bakker, 2014), news topics, hyperlocal news values, and sources of hyperlocal news (Paulussen & D'heer, 2013).

The Internet has reshaped the news side of the news content. The transition of the Internet and digital journalism has made news more personal and more related to the users' own life and locality (Westley & Rulyono, 2017). A prior study by Paulussen and D'heer (2013) showed

that the content available on hyperlocal pages consists of a mix of hard and soft news that is quite similar to community journalism. However, the framing of hyperlocal news consists of geographic elements, community orientation, and original reporting that are indigenous to the web and civic engagement (Metzgar, Kurplis, & Rowley, 2011).

Social media have become the ‘go to’ platform for news gathering (Johnston, 2016) and global trends show that social media continue to grow as a channel for news discovery with Facebook being the most popular social network of news consumption (Westley & Rulyona, 2017). The impact of these changes is complimentary towards the citizen frame, which means that citizen journalists seem to be more motivated to share news stories when those stories are directly connected with their own lives and interests, or when they are personal witnesses as compared to professional journalists (Paulussen & D’heer, 2013). Through citizen journalism, hyperlocal news can improve their site by carrying out more “community engagement work” and “encouraging the audience to participate more by publishing breaking news, gathering news and generally interacting with the audience (Harte, Williams, & Turner, 2017).

Methodology

In this study, content analysis was the chosen method for comparing two hyperlocal news portals framing on Facebook pages, which provides online news stories of “What” is the best answer (Schreier, 2012). The two hyperlocal news portals on Facebook selected for this study were Media Selangor and Penang Kini. The sample was collected systematically by day from posts on the Facebook pages of Media Selangor and Penang Kini between 11 March 2019 and 15 March 2019. In this study, Media Selangor and Penang Kini Facebook pages were coded based on the headlines of the news and which had been shared on local news on Facebook.

Research Question

This study was primarily intended to identify only news content that excludes images, audio, video, animation, and hyperlinks. The following research questions have been formulated to guide the research:

- a) What kind of hyperlocal news stories are reported in *Media Selangor* and *Penang Kini*?
- b) What source of information is frequently used by *Media Selangor* and *Penang Kini*?

Sampling

The study adopted purposive sampling that identified hyperlocal news within a specific time frame from two hyperlocal news Facebook portals, namely *Media Selangor* and *Penang Kini*. These portals were selected due to the number of their followers on Facebook.

Table 1: Shows the Information About Media Selangor on Facebook Pages

Local Media on Facebook	Likes	Followers
Media Selangor	283,425	306,243
Penang Kini	928,474	991,131

Researcher as the Instruments

In this study, the researchers were the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the human instrument has the advantage of being immediately responsive and adaptive.

Categories

Content analysis requires a set of categories that coders will use to assign numeric values to media texts. This study adopted a set of categories from previous research conducted by van Kerhoven and Bakker in 2014. The study focused on the news categories in the local context (politics (all subjects), crime and accidents, human interest, business and organisations, culture, sports, non-local and others.)

Codebook

Coders were given a codebook before data collection and the coding exercise. The codebook contains explicit instructions and guidelines that are useful for the coders. The codebook specifies components, key concepts in news items that should be analysed, and the way to code them. In this study, coders were assigned to code news in *Penang Kini* and *Media Selangor*. The researchers went through a practical exercise by identifying news from *Media Selangor* and *Penang Kini* for several days.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Table 2: Shows the Pattern of Media Selangor on Facebook Pages.

Patterns Portal	Media Selangor	Penang Kini
Political	5	0
Local/ metro	46	10
Education	11	1
Environment/ weather	9	2
Sport	7	0
Crime / Tragedy	3	6
Economy	13	2
National	45	0
Info Traffic/ Accident	0	4
International	8	2
Advertisement / Events	17	21
Religion	2	0
Health	4	0
Technology	1	0
Entertainment	2	0
Press Release / Notis	11	1
Others (infographic, etc)	8	0
Total	192	49

Table 3: Shows the News Sources

Sources	Media Selangor	Penang Kini
Internal Sources	141	26
News Agency	50	6
Citizen Journalism	1	3

The study found 46 local or metro news reported in *Media Selangor* and ten in *Penang Kini*. In terms of news sources, 141 of *Media Selangor*'s news sources were the internal source while 50 of the news were from news agencies such as Bernama, AFP, Reuters, BH Online, BBC, and UEFA Champions League as well as one from a citizen journalist. Meanwhile, *Penang*

Kini's internal source provided 26 news items while only six were obtained from news agencies such as *Harian Metro*, *Utusan Online*, and *Berita Harian*.

Issues related to the environment secured high ratings due to the time that the study was conducted, which was during the issues of dumping of tonnes of chemicals in Sungai Kim Kim in Johor and pollution of a portion of Sungai Klang with a chemical substance. The *Media Selangor* news portal covers the geographical areas outside of Selangor as well as within the state, which explains the higher number of news patterns recorded for national news. The data revealed that the number of advertisements and event stories was 21 in *Penang Kini* and 17 in *Media Selangor*. These are the categories where the portals target local people in specific geographical areas.

Discussion

Hyperlocal news on Facebook do not follow regular working hours. Space and time emerged as a real challenge to the coders as news were changed, added, and deleted continuously at any time of the day. During the data collection period, the news were published as early as at 7.15 a.m. Therefore, the coders monitored the news portal at three regular intervals, i.e. in the morning, afternoon, and late evening so as not to miss out on any of the news.

In terms of the topics covered by the hyperlocal publishers, the researchers found that the largest category of news in the sample related to local community activities, with 46 news items for *Media Selangor* and 10 for *Penang Kini*. This category includes stories about local non-political events, civil society, and groups as well as stories about community events. In a prior study, van Kerkhoven and Bakker (2014) found that politics were the most popular topic.

It was also found that many local stories were obtained from the main sources instead of citizen journalists. Prior studies also showed that the topicality of recentness of events is an important criterion for news selection by professionals, and citizen reporters do not seem to feel pressured by (perceived) deadlines or a 24-hour news cycle but tend to post stories as soon as they are ready (van Kerkhoven & Bakker, 2014).

Conclusion

The future of journalism is reflected in the growing number of hyperlocal news websites. The characteristics of hyperlocal news are continually changing. Hyperlocal news on Facebook in Malaysia has a rosy picture in terms of its ability to foster the interest of the local community on news production and provide professional journalists with numerous news sources to gather the raw materials of news. It is hoped that this paper adds to the existing theory to suit the ever-changing feature of hyperlocal news.

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