Cognitive viewing, television news, and rural women in Malaysia

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Abstract
This article serves as a qualitative analysis of the relationships between the consumption of television news and political participation in rural Malaysia during 2013 General Election (GE13). The debates following the results of GE13 raise the awareness of rural-urban divide, which is associated with the differences of news engagement between rural and urban voters. Analysts point out that the oppositional parties won in so-called urban seats, granted by the favours of new media-savvy voters, while the winning party Barisan Nasional (BN) retained more seats in rural constituencies where the voters are said to be the loyal followers of government-controlled mainstream media. Considering audience’s cognitive media engagement, this article argues that rural people, especially women, use their lifelong experiences as the cognitive verification in order to understand news messages. The results of ethnographic study in Sabak Bernam, Selangor proves that rural women deploy experiential and forethoughtful attention to television news about political issues and public affairs, which substantially influences their voting decision towards maintaining the status quo.

Keywords:
Television news, cognitive viewing, political knowledge, rural women, Malaysia

Abstrak
Kertas kerja ini merupakan sebuah analisis kualitatif mengenai hubungan penontonan berita televisyen dan penyertaan politik semasa Pilihan Raya Umum ke-13 (PRU13) dalam kalangan wanita Melayu luar bandar di Malaysia. Perdebatan mengenai keputusan PRU13 memberi pendedahan mengenai idea tentang rural-urban divide, yang dikaitkan dengan perbezaan penggunaan media berita antara pengundi bandar dan luar bandar. Segelintir pandangan politik menyatakan bahawa parti pembangkang boleh memenangi banyak kerusi bandar kerana sokongan pengundi yang celik media, manakala kemenangan Barisan Nasional (BN) di kebanyakan kawasan luar bandar disokong oleh pengundi yang hanya terdedah kepada media arus perdana. Dengan menggunakan konsep penggunaan media kognitif oleh penonton, kertas kerja ini berhujah bahawa penduduk luar bandar, terutamanya wanita Melayu, menggunakan pengalaman seumur hidup mereka sebagai pengesahan kognitif untuk memahami mesej berita. Hasil kajian etnografi di Sabak Bernam membuktikan bahawa wanita Melayu luar bandar memberikan tumpuan kepada berita tentang isu politik dan hal-ehwal awam berdasarkan...
Introduction
Using an ethnographic approach, this article explores the complex interpretation of television news in relation to political knowledge and voting decision among women in a selected Javanese kampung in the Sabak Bernam district, Selangor. The outcomes of General Election 13 (GE13) in Selangor electoral constituencies show that Barisan Nasional (National Fronts, henceforth referred to as BN) retained its majority in Sabak Bernam, Sungai Besar, Tanjong Karang, Hulu Selangor and Kuala Selangor (spr.gov.my, 2013). It is a well-known fact that the majority of the dwellers in these constituencies are rural Malays of Javanese descent. Although the presence of PAS (Parti Islam Se-Malaysia/Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party) seems to pose a strong challenge to BN’s primary component party, UMNO (United Malay National Organisation), the Javanese descendants remain loyal to the party and largely contribute to BN’s victory in the state. The question is what makes them maintain their support to the federal government, despite the powerful influence of the opposition-led state government through alternative media, especially the Internet?

In the aftermath of the GE13, some analysts (Chin, 2013; Choong, 2013; Kessler, 2013; Welsh, 2014) point out the existence of rural-urban divide, emphasising that BN retains the seats in rural constituencies while Pakatan Rakyat (People Alliance, PR) dominates so-called urban seats. As quoted by The Malaysian Insider, the social media research firm PoliTweet reported that BN won only 20 urban seats compared to 34 seats gained by the coalition between PKR (Parti Keadilan Rakyat/People’s Justice Party), DAP (Democratic Action Party), and PAS (Zuraiiri, 2013). Based on the report, the prominent opposition’s media Harakah Daily dubs BN as a “rural entity” as it represents the majority of rural voters, especially the Bumiputra (sons of the soil) in Sabah and Sarawak (Harakahdaily.net, 2013). It is believed that the less informed rural voters prefer to cling to the incumbent as they have a stronger connection to the representatives of their constituency (Choong, 2013; Welsh, 2014). The appeal of ethnic politics disseminated by UMNO leaders through mainstream media influences the conservative voters in the countryside, especially the Malays (Kessler, 2013). Conversely, the cosmopolitan urban voters, particularly in Kuala Lumpur and Penang, who have access to a variety of information sources, including the less controlled Internet are more open to issues pertaining to economic development, national policies and social justice (Choong, 2013).

The massive internet penetration in Malaysia, which concentrates in urban areas, has favoured PR campaigning strategies for more than a decade (Ling, 2003; Nain, 2002; Nain and Wang, 2004; Sani and Zengeni, 2010). Despite positive coverage
about BN campaigns on online news media (Lumsden, 2013), PR’s online campaigns seem to be more successful (Chin, 2013; Gomez, 2014). Ultimately, the so-called internet democracy that appeals to the urban, young generation greatly assisted PR to hinder BN from winning two-third majority of parliament seats in the latest two elections (Chin, 2013; Sani and Zengeni, 2010). This scenario tries to emphasise that the mainstream media, including the government-controlled television channels and newspapers, which serve to project the ruling government’s achievements in socioeconomic development (Anuar, 2005; Nain and Wang, 2004; Sani and Zengeni, 2010), effectively captivate BN supporters, especially rural communities. However, despite the powerful mainstream news media, rural voters appear to have their own reasoning in maintaining the status quo.

Notwithstanding the potential of the internet in influencing political participation and outcomes, this article argues that television news remains as a credible source of information that encourages viewers to improve political knowledge and cognition. Evidently, many scholars have stressed out that the cognitive process of watching television news or reading newspapers significantly assists citizens to enhance political knowledge and participation (Boulianne 2011, Eveland and Scheufele 2000; Livingstone and Markham 2008). Drawing upon the Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986; 2001), this article contends that rural women actively use their experiential verification and forethoughtful observation to make sense of political issues and public affairs on television in order to decide their votes. The notion of experiential verification and forethoughtful observation refers to the cognitive engagement of news media, which explains how audience use and interpret the news messages for their own satisfactions. This argument seeks to bring the rural voice in the landscape of public debates on the relationships between media use and voting patterns in Malaysia.

**Women, television news, and political knowledge**

News is assumed as a masculine and “high status” television genre as it stimulates discussion and conversation (Fiske, 2011: 283). In the early age of television, news belonged to “men’s world” while drama, comedy, and other entertaining programmes attracted female audience (Hobson, 1980). Studies in the 1980s revealed that American homemakers found news boring and depressing, and they watched in accompaniment with their husband (Hobson, 1980; Morley, 1986). Morley (1986) points out that women’s presence in front of the television was merely to supervise their children while the husband focused on the news. They only paid attention to the news that focused on community safety (Morley, 1986: 163). However, as more women become involved in the public sphere, they become interested in mainstream news, including political issues and public affairs.

A myriad of researchers have studied the representation of women in news (Ross, 2007; Ross and Carter, 2011; Sutcliffe et al., 2005) but not many explore how women engage with news. Some surveys take account of women’s attention to news media in relation to their political knowledge, but these studies primarily focus on the knowledge gap between men and women (Eveland and Scheufele, 2000; Fraile, 2014; Kern and Just, 1997; Lizotte and Sidman, 2009; Nash and Hoffman, 2009;
According to Eveland and Scheufele (2000), gender is one of the gaps in political knowledge, emphasising that men and women have different levels of interest in political news and participation. It is predictable that women are less knowledgeable in politics (Delli-Carpini and Keeter, 2005) as women have different concerns and attitudes towards certain public issues (Dolan, 2011; Fraile, 2014; Kern and Just, 1997; Wolak and McDevitt, 2011). Women engage less in political news compared to men, but they learn about politics from their parents and pay more attention to issues pertaining to civic responsibilities as citizens (Wolak and McDevitt, 2011: 520). They also enjoy political news concerning women’s issues (Dolan, 2011). In addition, women tend to be aware of negative campaigns in electoral news and give comments based on their own and family’s experiences (Kern and Just, 1997: 110).

Another crucial point that predicts women’s lower degree of political knowledge is their tendency to answer “Don’t Know” in surveys concerning politics (Fraile, 2014; Lizotte and Sidman, 2009). In contrast to men who often take a risk to guess, women demonstrate risk aversion by simply giving “Don’t Know” answers whenever they feel uncertain (Lizotte and Sidman, 2009: 5). Fraile (2014: 279) points out that men and women respond differently to the same predictors of political knowledge, but those who claim to have a high level of political interest and exposure to news give less “Don’t Know” answers. This suggests that media use significantly influences the acquisition of political knowledge and reduces the gender gap among lower educated citizens (Fraile, 2014; Liu and Eveland, 2005), including rural women.

Exposure to news media has a positive impact to increasing political knowledge and participation (De Vreese and Boomgaarden, 2006; Liu et al., 2013; Livingstone and Markham, 2008; Moy et al., 2005; Zhang and Chia, 2006) but it depends on audience’s cognitive functioning. Cognitive factors such as viewers’ levels of education, need for cognition (NFC) and motivation (Liu and Eveland, 2005) as well as attention and elaboration (Wei and Lo 2008, Eveland, 2001, 2002) give more significant effects to acquisition of the knowledge. Liu and Eveland (2005: 917) highlight that education, campaign interest, and NFC (or an individual’s personality) appear to be important influences on how people use news media for learning politics. Such factors underlie news information processing which requires attention and elaboration (Wei and Lo 2008, Eveland, 2001, 2002). According to Eveland (2002: 29), news attention which refers to “the tendency to focus mentally on specific content during exposure to news” and elaboration or interpretation of news, represent cognitive mediation that leads to learning process. In fact, exposure to electoral news derives news attention and elaboration, which contribute to acquisition of political knowledge (Wei and Lo, 2008: 358).

It is argued that watching television news has lesser impact on political efficacy compared to newspaper or internet use (Brians and Wattenberg, 1996; Kenski and Stroud, 2006; Shah et al., 2007; Tolbert and McNeal, 2003). However, it does not deny that the use of television news significantly contributes to the acquisition of political knowledge, especially among citizens of lower educational background (Grabe et al., 2009; Prior, 2006; Shehata and Strömbäck, 2011). Prior (2006: 662)
points out that less-educated Americans tend to tune to local channels to know their district representatives. In addition, the audiovisual presentation of television news facilitates the audience to activate their cognitive processes in order to understand the political environment better (Grabe et al., 2009; Graber, 2001). For its credibility, television news remains to be a primary source of political knowledge (Boulianne 2011, Gurevitch et al., 2009; Livingstone and Markham 2008; Strömbäck and Shehata, 2010; Wonneberger et al., 2011). Contrary to Putnam’s *Bowling Alone* (1995) that blames television for the decline in civic participation, Livingstone and Markham (2008: 367) suggest that television news “does not appear to undermine political interest or voting”. In fact, compared to other media uses, television consumption during electoral campaigning periods can stimulate political interest and conversations among citizens across levels of education (Boulianne, 2011: 155).

In the contexts of Malaysia, audience still appreciate television as a credible source of information (Azmah and Samsudin, 2013; Samsudin, 2012; Syed Arabi and Saodah, 2012). Television use among citizens aged over 30 is positively correlated to their acceptance of the media credibility (Azmah and Samsudin, 2013: 153). Despite declining, television remains to be the most credible medium of political learning, particularly for primary educated voters who still have faith in the ruling party (Syed Arabi and Saodah, 2012: 24-25). In fact, television and newspaper become the main reference of electoral information for voters of any ethnic background (Samsudin, 2012: 9). For this reason, this article believes that rural women whose primary source of political information is television might make a genuine use of television news for their political learning and participation. As a credible medium, television might influence their attitudes towards a certain political party, but, more importantly, their cognitive use of the medium should be taken into account.

**Cognitive use of news media**

Watching the news is a complex meaning-making process, which requires the viewers’ capacity to decode symbolic information into knowledge. Arguably, news seeking or any other media use is not as a mere behavioural exercise (Hall, 1999). As Hall (1999: 509) argues, reception of information can be as well understood as production because it is “the point of departure for realization” of the message. In that sense, decoded messages shall in turn have an effect to “influence, entertain, instruct or persuade which comes with very complex perceptual, cognitive, emotional, ideological or behavioural consequences” (Hall, 1999: 509). Apparently, a decoding process works simultaneously with cognitive functioning.

In the process of understanding news messages, an audience member tends to interlink the content of the news to the knowledge she or he has in mind (Harris, 2009; DeFleur, 2010). When a person watches a newscast, her or his memory compulsively replays a schema, that is “a personally organized structure of perceived and remembered experiences” of lifetime social interactions with social institutions and media content (DeFleur, 2010: 79). This constructive process of understanding proves that individuals are “active audience” who comprehend news messages in accordance with their interest, knowledge and experiences.
(Livingstone, 1998). Precisely, cognitive functioning takes place in the audience’s process of understanding news (Eveland, 2002; Fiske, 2011).

Human cognitive capacity of communication consists of four interwoven capabilities, according to Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986, 2001). These capabilities include “generative symbolization”, “evaluative self-regulation”, “reflective self-consciousness”, and “vicarious capability” that intertwine each other in reciprocal interaction of personal, behavioural, and environmental factors (Bandura, 2001: 2).

Firstly, members of audience have the capability to symbolically imagine the wealth of information in order to develop knowledge (Bandura, 2001: 3). Secondly, they also have self-regulatory competence to use their own standards of morality and generate self-satisfaction in order to deal with external expectations (Bandura, 2001: 3).

Thirdly, those valued standards can guide them to evaluate, judge and verify the propriety of actions and thoughts performed by others through self-reflective means (Bandura, 2001: 4). Lastly, as television news provides images of reality, viewers construct their social reality by experiencing it vicariously through “what they see, hear and read” (Bandura, 2001: 6). In other words, audience interact with news information in an active mode by exercising their internal motivation and personal standards of values to construct the symbolic imagery of their social world in reflective and vicarious ways.

Cognitive functioning takes place in different ways, depending on the medium and the content that the audience members are focusing. Drawing upon the social cognitive theory as elaborated above, this article seeks to explore the complexity of cognitive engagement of Malaysian rural women in the news. Their sole cognitive engagement with television news is particularly undermined in terms of political efficacy, as they are perceived not to have exposure to a larger range of political information. Though watching television news needs a lesser cognitive capability compared to reading newspapers (Liu and Eveland 2005, Brians and Wattenberg 1996), or browsing online news (Shah et al., 2007; Tolbert and McNeal, 2003), this article argues that in fact such little degree of cognitive engagement carries complex negotiation in the meaning making process. For rural women who are strongly attached to traditional norms and values, news engagement during electoral period can be an engaging platform to stimulate symbolizing, self-regulatory, self-reflective and vicarious capabilities in order to improve their political knowledge and make voting decision.

Research methods
The data presented in this article is part of the findings from the ethnographic fieldwork in Kampung Parit Tujuh Sungai Leman in the District of Sabak Bernam, Selangor. The fieldwork conducted between April 2013 and August 2014 focuses on how Malay women of Javanese descent in the kampung watch and interpret television in relation to the construction of their hybrid identity in their daily lives. During the peak of GE13 campaigns, the women were intensively following electoral news and involved in the campaigns. Therefore, it is crucial to consider their use of television news as well as political participation as a substantial contribution to the advancement of the country’s democratic values.
This study employs interview and participant observations as the methods of data collection. A group of ten respondents were interviewed in their house for one to two hours, depending on their convenience. The interview questions range from television viewing patterns, everyday culture, historical background, to their understanding of the country’s governmental institutions and values. This study also selected two respondents to be under special focus for participant observations. They were observed on a regular basis and followed wherever and whenever they were convenient. Particularly, they both were involved in BN door-to-door campaigns and jaga undi (inviting votes on the polling day) to secure the party’s vote gain.

All the respondents were selected through a snowballing technique to participate in the preliminary fieldwork. This convenience sampling (Wallinam, 2006) led to a recruitment of available 43 to 71 year old women who come from the same social networking whose daily activities revolved around family and community. Most of them only attended primary level Islamic schools. Despite the lower education, they are actively involved in several organisations, including the kampung branch of Wanita UMNO. As the grass roots of the women’s wing of the ruling party, they are obviously inclined to supporting the government. However, it should be noted that this article focuses on the cognitive processing of political information and the political attitudes of rural women, and the findings from this study are expected to improve current literatures on cognitive viewing among women.

**Rural women’s news viewing: An experiential verification**

Television has become a part of everyday life of the rural women in this study. Most of them reveal that they usually watch religious programmes in the morning, dramas in the afternoon and news in the evening. All of them admit that they routinely watch the primetime news—particularly *Buletin Utama* on TV3 and *Berita TV9* on TV9—to know about the current issues pertaining to the country and the government. At the time of GE13, they intensely watch the news for the purpose of surveillance with cognitive considerations.

Though they are exposed to positive news about the government, they cognitively relate the information with their personal experiences in family and community. As said earlier, they are indeed the supporters of BN government and their favourite newscasts belong to the government-linked television channels (Anuar, 2005). Obviously, they are inclined to give positive comments about the news, but they have their cognitive rationales. The women in this study find the source as credible and believe in the news because their reception of the news represents what this study calls as an experiential verification.

Firstly, they verify the news messages about the ruling party achievement in maintaining political stability based on their lifetime experience of national security. They pay serious attention to issues pertaining to freedom of religion and public
safety. Among the issues that they remember for their reference include the Lahad Datu standoff that occurred in Sabah in early February 2013.

What is told in the news is right. The ruling government is indeed doing well. Since the beginning until now, the BN government has been the one helping us. We are safe under BN (government). We can pray, observe our religious practices, go everywhere freely (Housewife, 65, interview, 24 April 2013).

I do endorse the ruling party because I feel satisfied with their governance. It is not because of the TV (news) but that is the reality. I mean, the prevailing national security proves it right. We know that the party has been in power for decades and everything seems just fine. The country has developed into a modern, safe nation, yet Islam is still well-preserved (Housewife, 43, interview, 29 April 2013).

The current government has the capability to cope with difficult situations. They always resolve the issues quickly. I feel grateful to live in Malaysia because the nation has never been in disarray unlike the other nations that deal with wars every day. If something clashes, the government solves it efficiently, like the current case (standoff) that happened in Sabah (Seamstress, 56, interview, 17 April 2013).

Secondly, their reception of news represents an experiential verification in terms of economic reassurance. They appreciate the BN practice of good governance in providing economic structures and incentives that they themselves benefit from. Most of the respondents are fulltime homemakers whose husbands work as peasant farmers or they themselves grow next-to-home gardens. Definitively, economic aids such as BR1M (Bantuan Rakyat 1Malaysia or 1Malaysia people aid) and agricultural utilities mean a great deal to them.

The current government maintained good governance. They care about the rural farmers. They give a lot of assistance such as fertilisers and pesticides. Unlike in the past, farmers now are so fortunate because they get so many kinds of incentives (Farmer, 61, interview, 18 June 2013).

It is exciting when I hear that the government is giving aid, BR1M, and so forth. Who doesn’t like hearing such news? (Housewife, 61, interview, 14 April 2013)

When I watch the news and it tells about (government) aids, I am so excited. For poor people like my family, it is very useful. Alhamdulillah, so
far the government has helped a lot, giving fertiliser for paddy field, BR1M, and many more (Housewife, 50, interview, 13 June 2013).

From the observation in the field, during the campaigns of the GE13, rural women received several kinds of aids from the federal government and nothing from the oppositions-led state government. They were presented with a set of gardening tools, two bags of paddy fertilisers per family, and a sum of 500 Ringgit BR1M from the BN government. Prior to the GE13, they also benefited from UMNO’s recurrent advancement programmes such as cooking and crafting workshops, and weekly Koran learning class. For the community, UMNO occasionally gives financial assistance such as the sponsorships of utilities for rewang—the practices of cooperation in time of preparing for communal ceremonies.

The Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 2001) suggests that media users discern information based on self-values and experiences, which stimulate them to regulate and reflect on what they watch, read, and listen to. This study proposes that experiential verification is part of the cognitive engagement of news media, which explains how audience use and interpret the news messages for their own satisfactions. For the rural women in this study, engaging in news about politics and public affairs is not mere behavioural exercise, but a means of reinforcing trust in the ruling government. Their political stand to continue supporting the incumbent regime comes from their personal opinions, which originate from their own experiences in benefiting from the government achievements in maintaining national and economic stability.

Rural women’s news viewing: A forethoughtful observation
The experience of news viewing for the rural women in this study represents a cognitive observation. Their interpretation of the news follows their self-regulative needs. As women, they tend to think of their family members and their generations; and as Muslims, they are more likely to defend Islam and its sustainability. In fact, family and religious matters become the crucial aspects of life that they take into account in interpreting news messages.

Watching news is a means of increasing political knowledge and a forethoughtful observation for the rural women in this study. It makes them aware of the current situations of their country, and at the same time, stimulates them to contemplate regarding future generations. In this matter, they pay serious attention to negative news about opposition parties, which they perceive as threats to their family, religion, and country.

Women are more likely to react to negative campaigns compared to men (Kern and Just, 1997). Similarly, the women in this study also identify negative attack messages in the news during the electoral campaign period and beyond. They are mindful of the negative reporting about opposition parties, especially pertaining to political concord and discord between PAS and DAP in Pakatan Rakyat coalition.
However, they choose to believe in the news messages, which symbolically highlight UMNO’s Malay and Islamic supremacy under the flag of UMNO.

Two concerns influence the respondents to accept BN’s negative representations of the oppositions. First, they consider the prosperity of their future generations, as they perceive that PR are not capable to maintain the national stability, which BN has achieved in the past 57 years if the oppositions take the government. Naturally, they reject the oppositions which they perceive of as a menace to Malay hegemony.

I follow the news every day, especially these days. The election is near. I like listening to the menteri (electoral candidates) giving their speeches. They invite us to vote. I vote for the current government lah. I am not pleased with PAS because they ally with Cina Kafir (non-Muslim Chinese). I am afraid they will ruin our country, creating riots. What will happen to our future children (if PAS and oppositions take over the country)? (Housewife, 70, interview, 17 April 2013).

During electoral campaigns, I watch the news every day to listen to the (BN candidates’) speech. They say they will continue helping the rakyat so they want us to vote for them. For me, it is no problem. I am indeed voting for BN. If not, who is going to take care of our (future) children? The current government has been doing well (Seamstress, 58, interview, 14 May 2013).

Second, they foresee the possibilities that can happen to Muslims if the multi-religious coalition of Pakatan Rakyat takes Putrajaya. For this reason, they regard UMNO as the sole protector of the religion, even though BN coalition also embraces non-Muslim-based component parties, MCA (Malaysian Chinese Association) and MIC (Malaysian Indian Congress). As Islam in Malaysia is viewed as a complex subject due to different political ideologies, the women in this study observe the Islamic teachings and practices as promoted by UMNO.

Some said that Allah would not accept the prayers of UMNO members. How can an ulama (Muslim scholar) say such thing? When I watch the news, I feel like giving a (phone) call to the TV (station) to ask what kind of ulama he is. … (Therefore) we support UMNO because we do not want Islam to be ruined (Housewife, 71, interview, 18 April 2013).

They say that PAS represents Islam, but for me their “Islam” is false because they join DAP kafir (non-Muslims). I definitely won’t support them. … BN also accommodates (non-Muslim) Chinese, but they prioritise Malays (Housewife, 57, interview, 17 April 2013).
During the campaign period, the households in Kampung Parit Tujuh received a set of campaign brochures from both the government and opposition parties. Each set contains negative attacks towards each other. Surprisingly, the rural women rejected such form of campaigns. From the observation in the house of some respondents, the printed campaign materials were left untouched outside their house or thrown directly to a trash bin once the dispatcher left. The respondents also regularly receive Selangor Kini—a monthly bulletin from the state government—but they report that they cannot relate to the news in the paper.

Audience have the capabilities to self-regulate and generate self-reflective consciousness in the process of understanding news, information and predict the outcomes projected into the future (Bandura, 2001). Similarly, the rural women in this study also use their own standards of life expectations to discern the messages in political news by considering the future of their generation and religion. Their prudent consideration in making voting decisions, which is derived from their cognitive interpretation of the news and life experiences, represents a forethoughtful observation.

**Conclusion**

This article presents that television news remains to be a crucial source of political and public affairs information for rural women. It is argued that television news contributes lesser impact on citizens' political efficacy in contrast to the use of printed and online media (Brians and Wattenberg, 1996; Kenski and Stroud, 2006; Shah et al., 2007; Tolbert and McNeal, 2003), but this study reveals that the broadcasting medium is still significant to stimulate political engagement and participation among the rural community in Malaysia. Women are seen as less knowledgeable in politics compared to men (Delli-Carpini and Keeter, 2005) because they have different political interests and attitudes (Dolan, 2011; Fraile, 2014; Kern and Just, 1997; Wolak and McDevitt, 2011). In fact, the women in this study show that matters pertaining to family and religion become their cognitive considerations in understanding the messages in political news.

Despite their inclination toward the ruling government, the rural women engage in cognitive viewing in order to discern the political messages on television. They generate experiential verification and forethoughtful observation in their cognitive process of the political information. Precisely, their lifetime experiences of socio-political and economic stability as well as their prevision on the future of young generations and the religion become their concerns in the interpretation of the news, which leads to their voting decision. As UMNO supporters, it is not surprising that they are apt to continue supporting the BN government, but their cognitive reasoning for such consideration should be taken into account. After all, their political voice and attitudes represents a part of the democratic values and structures in the present Malaysia.

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