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**INFORMATION PROCESSING THROUGH FRAME SETTING  
TOWARDS AUDIENCE COGNITION ON LGBT ISSUES**Julia Wirza Mohd Zawawi (a)\*, Hamisah Hasan (b), Kho Suet Nie (c),  
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**Abstract**

The process of processing information around the environment is closely related to the psychological processes that psychologists have long practiced. Information processing studies show that each individual has their own cognitive structure known as the scheme. This scheme responsible for managing what the individual thinks. This individual scheme will retain every belief, value, attitude and preferences that indirectly provides relevant information, interprets and evaluates each information. Therefore, this study focuses on how discussions related to information processing as a major role in the theory of framing effects in selected issues that are LGBT. The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) is a currently issue discusses among Malaysian community. It began when these minorities group began to demand their rights from the Malaysian government. And according to Malaysian Islamic law and constitution, LGBT certainly does not have any rights and privileges in Malaysia. As this is a taboo issue, wide of discussion on this issue has become more frequent on the mass media as well as on social media. Audience has begun to discuss the issue openly and this indirectly influence the thinking of the Malaysian audience on this taboo issue. Using some experimental pilot data, we will discuss in-depth how the information processing through framing theory discuss on LGBT issues. The results of this study show how the interpretations and reactions of Malaysian audiences on LGBT issues in turn provide a preliminary picture of how the effects of media exposure indirectly influence the psychology of individuals.

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## 1. Introduction

Discussions related to LGBT or also known as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender are issues related to gender disorder. Gender is related to behaviour and thought, individuals' personality and identity related to masculinity and femininity. Man and woman refer to the sex sentiment. Sex is different with gender because it refers to chromosome, hormone, genitals and others. LGBT is synonym to gender disorder. Gender disorder refers to acknowledgement and acceptance in their identities. The group that belongs in gender disorder is known as LGBT (Mohd. Arif et al., 2018).

Discussion on LGBT is actually not a new issue in Malaysia. The development is seen as aggressive due to the active recent media coverage. As we know, LGBT is a taboo issue that is seldom discussed openly in Malaysia due to two main things namely (i) religion and (ii) law.

According to Haridi et al. (2016), Islam clearly rejects LGBT and Islam sees it as a major sin based on the verse in al-Quran and hadith that reprehend this act. Malaysian law itself stipulates that the group involves with LGBT is against the law. This is because the law stipulates that the sex is either man or woman.

Problems related to LGBT needs to be seen holistically, due to LGBT especially in Malaysia is seen actively demanding equal rights. This group is also seen as a minority group who is often oppressed and mistreated. In Malaysia, among the individual who is actively demands for the rights of this group is Ambiga Sreevanasan until the struggle in LGBT is acknowledge internationally (Mohd. Khairul, 2015; Abdullah et al., 2005; Ghazali, 2012).

In parallel with liberalism culture, Malaysia is of the target countries by the minorities to demand for their rights. Mahfuzah (2015) explains that LGBT starts with the existence of pansy and sissy around 1980s. In the beginning, these groups of pansies and sissies were in contrary with Malaysian society because they were against Malaysian religion and cultures.

## 2. Problem Statement

### 2.1. Media and LGBT

The role played by media makes it one of the dominant agents in influencing the audience's thoughts and perceptions. Mass media becomes the most frequent space for the audience to spend their times. Overall an individual spend 25 hours a week watching television and spend other times listening to the radio, watching movies, reading magazines and newspapers. Children spend most of their time watching television, as the time they spend in schools (Hakim et al., 2014). This situation clearly shows the mass media influence towards the audience. Therefore any issue discussed by the media especially social media becomes lively and the impact towards the individuals' thought and cognition will mutate fast.

The mass media's views on LGBT issue has made it a hot issue to discuss over time. This is coupled with the development of social media technologies such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and others. According to Md Ismail & Nasri (2019) based on the previous studies, news on LGBT issue

initially did not get media attention. The news, either positive or negative, once telecast will get the society's attention and will be one of the hot issues to be discussed.

There are various different views displayed by the mass media either in positive or negative forms. For example, an issue of a tahfiz school principal who was arrested due to committing sexual crime on nine tahfiz school students under his care (Azrin, 2018). Each of information delivered will determine what audience will think either positive or negative. And if the views delivered by the mass media are negative, the audience will perceive that the news is negative.

Apart from the negative issues condemning the LGBT minority group, there are positive perspectives being discussed. Among them is Kuala Nerus Member of Parliament, Datuk Dr. Khairuddin Aman Razali who praised former Malaysian Prime Minister Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamed's stand who rejects LGBT act in this country considering Islam is the official religion of Malaysia (Badrul, 2018). This news report especially for taboo issue like LGBT should be broadcasted by the mass media to give a different perspective to the audience, help the audience to practically evaluate the news content message.

## **2.2. Framing and LGBT**

### **a. Frame Setting Studies**

Since 1980s, media has a dominant role to the large audience groups and also individuals, moreover with existence of the internet indirectly gives big impact to the individuals. Media effect is seen directly on individuals. The increase in the context of individual and personal by the mass media is known as mass self-communication (Castells, 2007). Mass self-communication shares the mass media concept which is giving a perception that a message content sent to a large group of audiences and message acceptance is chosen individually. Media users choose media content to fulfil their needs, depend on the suitable needs. This situation is synonym with the concept brought by the communication scholars which is media effect. Framing is a context where the mass media will project certain news content to be viewed by the audience. The projection of the news content will affect the audience to be thought of, or known as media effect.

Media effect is the exposure by the media that cause changes to the individuals' behaviour or belief. And to know whether there is a significant correlation between exposure and variation in behaviour and belief. Media effect started from the media effect studies since 1898 in Spain. It started after the Congress declared a war in Spain when a producer named William Randolph Hearst played an important role. His illustrator sent a memo from Havana stated that their situation was good and no war. One of the reasons the congress declared war was due to an article issued by Hearst's New York Journal that was believed trying to form a general view. The power of this newspaper is believed to spread and has its own effect that caused the Congress to declare war in Spain (Sparks, 2002).

### **b. Information Processing in Framing Setting**

Frame setting studies is a media effect study involving individual thought, becoming part of the framing study and then will go through human schemata process to be evaluated the effect on the audience cognition. Human schemata are always used by the humans to picture a situation or issue happening around them. The information acquired through media is stored and processed by human

schemata from time to time. This everlasting process happens in human schemata without their knowing. Each thought process is known as information processing. Entman (1989) also explains information processing study shows that individuals have cognitive structure named schema. This schema will organize their thought. Schema system will store belief, behaviour, value and choice in parallel with diversity of ideas. This schema has direct observation with the related information, evaluation and interpretation guideline, provide signal when the acquired information is ambiguous or lost from the cognition.

With the definition by the psychology scholar on how two related synonym between psychology and communication is interrelated. Mass media will channel the information to the audience and the acceptance is evaluated in individual context. The effectiveness of information delivery by the mass media is actually not the value in a large group but evaluated by the individuals and later in the context of a large group. This situation then supports and shows the importance of framing determination effect study element being carried out.

### **3. Research Questions**

Hence, this research is aiming to answer the research question of the study as stated below:

- How does information processing occur from the perspective of the framing theory that discusses LGBT issues?

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

This study focuses on how discussions related to information processing as a major role in the theory of framing effects in selected issues that are LGBT. The Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transgender (LGBT) is a currently issue discusses among Malaysian community.

### **5. Research Methods**

This study has utilized the experimental pilot study. Three types of LGBT videos, which were positive, negative and neutral were used as indicator to measure individual views towards the news when that were broadcast. Three groups of students aged between 18 to 25 years were divided into three random groups watched the videos and answered the questions. However for this article there was a section of an open-ended question. The question allowed the opportunity for the participant to give their own views based on the videos shown. The open-ended question was evaluated as an observation.

#### **5.1. Positive News Frame**

A form of video showing how this minority group tried to demand their rights and how they were oppressed and reprehended by the surrounding due to media broadcast. Newspaper clippings highlighted the difficulty of returning to the causeway due to repression by the surrounding community.

## **5.2. Negative News Frame**

A form of video showing all negative views related to LGBT, including newspaper clippings of the negative impact of spreading same-sex relationship such as sexually-transmitted diseases, rallies that oppose the acceptance of LGBT group in Malaysia and others.

## **5.3. Neutral News Frame**

A form of video showing information and concept of LGBT without presenting either negative or positive views.

## **6. Findings**

As explained earlier, framing media study or framing effect is closely related to human psychological aspect. Therefore, it is very subjective when it comes to discuss about the positive or negative a media frame is. It depends on the individuals' thought and psychological to determine whether the media frame is good or bad.

McClure et al. (2009) explained that the most important aspect in communication is giving feedback to message framing. He explained that framing effect occurs when there are two phrases or messages but logically produce positive or negative response. The same situation with this study, the individual response produced based on the message depend on their psychological capacity.

### **6.1. Positive News Frame produce Positive Perception**

The individuals who received positive news or message content and gave positive impression. For example from the pilot study data a few participants were exposed to the positive frame and gave positive impression. Among them are:

“In my opinion, the video showed that the LGBT group should not be the oppressed group. LGB has their own reason for being them. For me, the religious people are right. LGBT needs to be approached and we need to listen to their explanation. From there, the approach and self-change can be done and advice accordingly.”

(Participant 1)

“In my opinion, LGBT is a minority group that did not wish to be born that way. As humans, we should not wrong them and should treat them without discrimination. This group also eligible to receive other rights like a human.”

(Participant 2).

### **6.2. Negative News Frame produce Negative Perception**

Besides positive frame, negative frame also able to give negative perception to the audience thoughts. For example:

“In my opinion the issues related to LGBT need to be eradicated in Malaysia because I feel that this is wrong. When this issue is seen by 10 years old and older children, they will be curious. I feel that LGBT should be eradicated in Malaysia.” (Participant 3).

“In my opinion, there is a drastic increase for the LGBT group. This action is not only harmful to health but also wrong in human nature. I hope that the society especially Muslim to strongly oppose the LGBT request to be openly accepted in Malaysia.” (Participant 4).

### **6.3. Negative News Frame produce Positive Perception**

“Informative video, full with news. The clips shown focused on LGBT in Malaysia, but not the world. This video only took LGBT perspective from Islamic point of view. Hopefully this video can provide LGBT perspective from other religions too.” (Participant 5)

“I think everyone has his own right to choose what he wants.” (Participant 6).

### **6.4. Positive News Frame produce Negative Perception**

“In my opinion, LBGT should be abolished in Malaysia to keep Islam which has the most number of followers and the future generations to be the useful people.” (Participant 7)

“My opinion, LBT should be oppressed and abolished so they will not be in Malaysia. It will make the outsiders feel uneasy to see them.” (Participant 8)

## **7. Conclusion**

One of the studies from communication scholars named Tversky and Kahneman (1981) explained that the term media framing refers to a choice between two strategies for a risk, profit and loss. If the framed scenario is a profit then the individuals will prefer risk and more keen to the fixed option. If the framed scenario is a loss then the individuals prefer the loss. Levin (2005) also explained in detail the concept of profit and loss (positive and negative). He introduced the goal framing concept, where two messages suggest the same action to achieve different goals. Positive goal pictures reasonable outcome from an action (for example when exercise is good for health). While negative goal frame pictures an action to prevent the unwanted outcome (for example exercise to prevent illness).

Based on the study findings, the individuals who receive parallel news form display, which is positive/negative news and give positive/negative perception firstly because of the individuals thought. Communication and psychology scholars see the media effect study happens due to different elaboration level (knowledge level) from one another. In the study findings discussed, the individuals who are exposed to the negative/positive news frame and give the same perception due to low cognitive elaboration level (Mohd. Khairul et al. , 2015; Abdullah et al, 2005; Ghazali, 2012).

Druckman & Nelson (2003); Lecheler & De Vreese (2011); Lecheler & de Vreese (2012) explained that knowledge level is without doubt has a synonym relationship with the framing determination study. Every content message received by the individuals is different between one another. This is because of the existing level of persistent in their cognitive. The individuals who have high level of knowledge have enough mental storage system to process and understand the news. While the individuals who have low knowledge level are more exposed to the media effect due to their inability to analyse the news they received. This situation is the same of the above, where the individuals who receive negative news form will give negative views or contrary because of low cognitive level on the issue. This is supported by Shiv et al. (1997) and Lecheler and de Vreese (2012) which low individual knowledge level, heuristic related to framing cannot be accessed and processing focus is more on the message only. If the message demand focuses to only one frame (for example negative frame), then negative frame is more convincing than positive frame.

For the next study findings, the individuals who receive positive news exposure and give negative views and perceptions, and vice versa. This situation is due to the individuals' cognitive usability and accessibility. Lecheler and de Vreese (2012) explained that accessibility refers to a function that enables the individuals make consideration to more salient issue in their thoughts to create opinion. The basis of accessibility is not to alter cognitive capacity in the individuals' thought but rather to emphasize the existing belief. This situation supports the study findings acquired because the individuals who are exposed with negative LGBT news (vice versa) but give positive views (vice versa) due to accessibility effect, meaning that their previous existing schemata relates to LGBT. With the existing schemata content helped them to think and make different decisions. They are able to think deeply and meticulously towards the news issues received.

In conclusion, from the findings of this study, some important facts are known and able to be the factors to media effectiveness, among them are knowledge level and the individuals' schemata accessibility level. Both of these factors act as guidance for today's media studies needs that able to give more relevant news content for today's audience views.

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