

THE CONSTRUCTION, DECONSTRUCTION, AND RECONSTRUCTION OF CRIME NEWS: A CASE STUDY OF MALAYSIAN NEWSPAPERS

Azman Azwan Azmawati, Muhammad Raqib Mohd Sofian, Shuhaida Md Noor & Juliana Abdul Wahab

ABSTRACT

Mass media has become an important agent of socialization by reproducing dominant and other social norms, beliefs, discourses, ideologies, and values. Although the media can be considered as an educator, most of the transmission of norms, beliefs, ideologies, discourses, and values occur in an unconscious manner. In essence, the media will select and process facts for the public. Because they do this so systematically, they can affect the way their audience is influenced by the delivered information. Thus, the portrayal of crime in the news media has played a crucial role in creating public awareness and planting seeds of concern regarding crimes in Malaysia. How crime is presented in the media and how the media capitalizes on crime news can affect how society perceives crime. The presentation of crime news in the media is the result of a complex process of news gathering and news production. Hence, it is crucial to understand how crime news is produced and presented, and the impact this type of news has on society. It will in turn help to shape public opinion and public policy, which could consequently become a national concern. This paper presents an analysis of the hidden messages that the media is forwarding to society and the priorities given in constructing crime news in the local media. This study has analyzed news texts to understand how different types of crimes are covered and reported. An analysis of news narratives is also presented to understand how crimes are constructed and portrayed by the Malaysian media.

Keywords: Crime reporting, framing, Malaysian newspapers, mass media, crime news

INTRODUCTION

As a medium of communication, mass media is an important agent of socialisation in that they reproduce dominant (and other) social norms, beliefs, discourses, ideologies, and values. Although the media can be a source of knowledge, most of the transmission of norms, beliefs, ideologies, discourses, and values happen unconsciously. The mainstream media draws upon a wide range of taken-for-granted assumptions about the social world; assumptions that, more often than not, go unchallenged by media professionals and audiences alike (Deverux, 2003: 10).

Mainstream and alternative media sources, such as social media and weblogs, play a large role in how members of the society are informed of events that may directly or indirectly affect them. Mass media has arguably become the main source of news, entertainment, recreation, and product information in the whole wide world. For many people, the media informs them about events that may or may not affect their lives.

In essence, the media will select and process facts for the public. Because they do this so systematically, they can affect the way information is interpreted. Apart from informing

the public of the latest news, the media can also shape the public. To fully understand how this process works, readers need to become literate in the various languages of the media. Media literacy means more than just responding to media messages. It also means understanding how they work, how they differ from personal experiences, and how they differ from each other. It means learning about their dominant style and being able to, when necessary, use them (Hart, 1991:8-9).

Moreover, the portrayal of crime in the news media has played a crucial role in creating public awareness and inciting concern regarding crimes in Malaysia. How crime news is presented and capitalized by the media can affect how society views crime. The presentation of crime news in the media is a result of complex news gathering and news production. Hence, it is crucial to understand how crime news is being produced and presented, and the impact it has on society. It will, in turn, help shape public opinion and public policy in which the end result could become a national concern.

In the Malaysian context, the number of crimes is steadily increasing (Sidhu, 2005; Sidhu, 2006; Habibullah & Baharom, 2008; Tang, 2009; Rueben, 2019). This observation is supported by the increasing crime index and the decreasing Public Safety Index, as reported by the Malaysian Quality of Life Index (MQLI). According to Sidhu (2006), the Malaysian mass media are reporting more crimes and violent acts, such as theft, sexual violence and abuse, assault and murder cases, abuse of foreign workers, abductions, and fatal road accidents. This onslaught of negative news has steadily spread unease and dread among the public of a bleak future full of crime that could affect their quality of life.

Public interests in crime and justice systems are fuelled by the media (Dowler, 2003), in the form of movies and TV series, printed materials, such as books and magazines, and online information that get included in daily conversations. Similarly, public awareness of victims, criminals, and law enforcers can be influenced by their representation in the mass media. The media has the ability to decide on the type of crime to feature and the way these crimes are reported can affect the general perception of criminal incidents in the area.

The publication of news adheres to a hierarchy of editors and assignment editors selecting and deciding stories that will be reported and who will cover it. Next in line is assignment desks and producers, who choose the kind of information to publish for each crime, the experts to quote, and placement of the story in the layout. The journalists will then conduct site visits and interviews with the parties involved, while media managers will determine the priority to give the story to be published.

The mass media can shape the way the public views crime by increasing the reporting of certain types of crimes and their presentation of the perpetrators and victims. For example, society may view the crimes and the perpetrators based on the extent of reporting done. Perpetrators and victims alike might be overrepresented or underrepresented in the news based on their demographics or involvement in the crime. Thus, when the media keep painting certain gender or ethnicity as perpetrators, this would spread gender or racial stereotypes among the public and build their resentment for these groups (Bjornstorm et al., 2010).

Therefore, a study of news reporting in newspapers was conducted to understand the nature of crime reporting by Malaysian media. This research seeks to answer the following questions: i) what are the crime reporting patterns in Malaysia; ii) what messages are the media forwarding to the society; and iii) what are the priorities given in constructing crime news on local media.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework - Gatekeeping and Framing

News items are not simply selected, they are also constructed (Schudson, 1989). The term 'gatekeeper', coined by social psychologist, Kurt Lewin, is still in use and provides a handy, if not altogether appropriate, term for the relationship between news organizations and news products. As a gatekeeper, a journalist gets to decide which pieces of prefabricated news will be allowed through and therefore this makes the gatekeeper's job necessarily quantitative (Schudson, 1989). On the other hand, as a gatekeeper, the communication of news is heavily based on an editor's set of experiences, attitudes, and expectations, making it highly subjective (Schudson, 1989). When selecting reports to print, a news editor once admitted that he preferred stories that are 'slanted to conform to our editorial policies' (Reese & Ballinger, 2001).

Other than the gatekeeping process, framing also comes into play when producing news to the audience. Framing is an approach that provides a better understanding of how perspectives are used by reporters, particularly when selecting issues and writing news (Sobur, 2001:162). Framing can be regarded as the principle of selecting, emphasizing, and presenting news by journalists (Gitlin, 1980: 6). According to Tuchman (1978), framing is one of the key features of news selection, which is also part of the everyday reality that takes place in society. Framing happens on various textual features, such as news headlines, audio-visual components, metaphors, the deliverance of the story, and other framing functions (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008).

On a more important note, Scheufele (1999) stated that most individuals prefer facts that are provided to them through the news frames. Apart from that, the way an issue is reported and framed by the media can influence the public's understanding of the incident. This can be consciously or unconsciously performed by emphasizing or ignoring some information related to that incident. In other words, it should be understood that any undisclosed information can be as important as the information reported in a news article.

According to Eriyanto (2002: 69), there are two aspects of framing. The first aspect refers to the selection of the facts based on assumptions considering that journalists are unlikely to see events without perspective. In other words, an event is seen from certain angles by the journalists. Therefore, the understanding and construction of news can be presented in different manners by different media channels. The second aspect describes how the selected facts are displayed to the audience, including word selection, themes, photos, and the position of the news, as well as the headlines by considering either the stories are published on the front page or the inside pages.

On another note, Eriyanto (2002) and Tankard (2008) highlighted several characteristics that illustrate news framing indirectly, which include news headlines, descriptions of titles, pictures, picture descriptions, and news leads. More importantly, these features play a crucial role in making the framing of the news more prominent. This fact-oriented element is related to the realization of reality because a highlighted aspect will become more apparent, thus providing more room or attention compared to any other aspects. Note that the reality that is presented prominently in the news has a greater chance of being observed, thus further influencing the audience to understand/believe the reality (Eriyanto, 2002: 70). This view is consistent with the scholarly view of Entman (1993), who stated that the element of selection

and the salience of an issue are very important in the framing of news. In this regard, Entman (1993) described framing as:

“to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient, in such a way in a communicating text, to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.”

Overall, the core assumption of framing theory is that the media draws the attention of the audiences to a particular topic, and then determines the perception of the audience based on the role played by the journalists and the gatekeepers. Therefore, framing can be described as the way media and media gatekeepers organize and present current issues to a wide range of audiences.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research was focused on two mainstream newspapers, namely, Utusan Malaysia (UM) and The Star (Star), and two tabloids, which were Harian Metro (HM) and The Malay Mail (MM) to answer the research questions. Each newspaper represents a different targeted readership.

Media Prima is an investment wing under the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO). In the fourth quarter of 2013, Media Prima was reported as having the largest readership and circulation in Peninsular Malaysia through several major newspapers, namely, the New Straits Times (English newspaper), Harian Metro, and Berita Harian (Malay language newspapers). In addition, as the prominent party in the Barisan National coalition, UMNO owns controlling shares in the Utusan Group that publishes Utusan Malaysia (widely known as a mouthpiece for the party), Kosmo, and several weeklies in Malay (Lansner, 2014). Apart from reporting news, Harian Metro also features entertainment and lifestyle segments, which attract 3.8 million readers daily, while Metro Ahad (weekend edition) is read by 4.2 million readers, which is an increase of readership by 11% and 15%, respectively (Nielsen Consumer and View, July 2013-June 2014 in Lansner, 2014).

Harian Metro distributed 313,690 copies daily, thus making it the number one newspaper for nine years among all the Malay dailies in 2014. Readership increase of their digital circulation at 18.2% and 16.9% were also reported for Harian Metro and Metro Ahad, respectively (Audit Bureau of Circulation, January-June 2014 in Lansner, 2014). Lansner (2014:12) further reported that the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) also owns a newspaper company, known as Star Publications, with two major English newspapers, namely, The Star and the Sunday Star. From 2013 to 2015, circulation figures showed that these government-controlled newspapers were the leading daily newspapers in Malaysia (Lansner, 2014). Previous research showed that most BN-controlled newspapers are used more as an extension of Barisan Nasional propaganda than as news vehicles. Utusan Group has gone bankrupt following the General Election in 2018, while UMNO lost control of Media Prima soon after they lost the 2018 election to Pakatan Harapan (Ibrahim, 2019).

The Malay Mail (the longest surviving newspaper) was established on December 1, 1896. Since then, it has been known as ‘The Paper that Cares’. It became a free afternoon daily starting from May 5, 2008, when it was relaunched by Media Prima Bhd. It was later bought by Redberry Media Sdn. Bhd. in 2012 (owned by Siew Ka Wei). Redberry Media took out a multi-million ringgit loan to expand its coverage. The company has partnered with Malaysiakini and the pro-government blog, The Mole to share their content. The CEO of Malaysiakini, Premesh Chandran, said that this move was part of the editorial strategy to

revamp the Malay Mail, which will offer readers different perspectives regarding the published news (Malay Mail buys content from Malaysiakini, 2011). In 2018, after 122 years of service in Malaysia, the newspaper stopped the printed version and went fully digital due to lack of revenues (Tan, 2018).

The first part of this research involved a quantitative approach that mapped out crime reporting patterns. At this stage, different types of crime reports were reviewed, as well as the frequency of reporting throughout the first week of the month data collection period for the selected newspapers, which was from February 1 to February 7, 2015.

The second part of this research applied a qualitative approach to study the nature of crime news coverage by the local media. This included looking at news texts in the newspapers to understand how different types of crimes are covered and reported. An analysis of news narratives was conducted to understand how crimes are constructed and portrayed in the Malaysian media.

This time frame was chosen to study the differences in terms of news reporting regarding two controversial cases. In one case, a female student was murdered by a man believed to be her boyfriend. In another case, a policeman used his power against a couple who were arrested on the suspicion of them having had sex in a car.

RESEARCH FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

In terms of the quantitative content analysis, several categories were studied, namely, the frequency of news, news placement, the use of pictures, type of crimes reported in the news, and the sources.

News Frequency

This research was able to collect 458 news articles. Of the 458 news articles, Harian Metro published 205 (44.8%), Utusan Malaysia published 126 (27.5%), The Star with 88 (19.2%), and The Malay Mail with only 39 (8.5%) news articles. These findings showed that the Malay newspapers, Harian Metro and Utusan Malaysia, allocated a greater priority on crime news than the English newspapers. Previous studies have also shown that Malay language newspapers in Malaysia put more focus on news about crime as a strategy to increase the number of sales. They would also use elements of sensationalism to attract more readers to read their newspapers (Zanuddin, Yassin & Sern, 2012; Sannusi & Ibrahim, 2018).

Table 1: Frequency of newspapers

Newspaper	Frequency	Percentage (%)
The Star	88	19.2
Utusan Malaysia	126	27.5
Harian Metro	205	44.8
The Malay Mail	39	8.5

Presence of Pictures

Table 2: The usage of photo in news reporting

Newspaper	Photo		Percentage (%)	
	Frequency news with photo	Frequency news without photo	% News with photo	% News without photo
The Star	34	54	38.6	61.4
Utusan Malaysia	78	48	61.9	38.1
Harian Metro	135	70	65.9	34.1
The Malay Mail	18	21	46.2	53.8

Pictures and diagrams are essential inclusions in a news report, which can be interpreted differently by each reader. These inclusions can reinforce the news and highlight facts that might draw the readers' interest (Somiah et al., 2010: 65). According to Borah (2009), pictures can affect the portrayal of the news and readers' perceptions. However, they should be appropriate for the content and should add value to the news (Asli, 2010). Table 2 shows that Utusan Malaysia and Harian Metro publish more news with pictures and give a higher priority to crime news.

News placement

The placement of news can also be an indication of the priority given by a newspaper about an issue. The more important an issue is according to the editor, the higher the chances of the news being reported in the front page of a newspaper. Eriyanto (2002) and Tankard (2008) pointed out that the placement of news plays a key role in framing an issue. McQuail and Windahl (1981) similarly stated that audiences not only learn about issues and matters through the media, they also learn how much importance to attach to an issue or topic based on the emphasis that the mass media places upon it.

Table 3: News placement

Newspaper	Frequency		Percentage (%)	
	Front Page	Inside Page	Front Page	Inside Page
The Star	7	93	6.8	93.2
Utusan Malaysia	6	120	4.8	95.2
Harian Metro	14	191	6.8	93.2
The Malay Mail	18	21	46.2	53.8

Based on Table 3, news of crimes are not given much prominence as they usually appear in the inside pages, thus giving the impression that such stories are not important enough to merit a front-page coverage. However, The Malay Mail published the most crime articles (46.2%) on the front page.

Type of Crimes

The findings on the overall type of crimes reported by the newspapers are shown in the following Table 4:

Table 4: Type of crimes

		Newspapers				
		The Star	Utusan Malaysia	Harian Metro	The Malay Mail	
Type of crimes	Drugs	Frequency	7	13	16	2
		Percentage (%)	8.0	10.3	7.8	5.1
	Murder	Frequency	26	21	28	17
		Percentage (%)	29.5	16.7	13.7	43.6
	Robbery	Frequency	7	13	27	1
		Percentage (%)	8.0	10.3	13.2	2.6
	Bribery	Frequency	2	6	4	1
		Percentage (%)	2.3	4.8	2	2.6
	Sexual Assault	Frequency	5	7	16	5
		Percentage (%)	5.7	5.6	7.8	12.8
	Abuse	Frequency	4	9	13	0
		Percentage (%)	4.5	7.1	6.3	0
	Kidnapping	Frequency	3	3	5	1
		Percentage (%)	3.4	2.4	2.4	2.6
	Intimidation/threatening	Frequency	3	0	5	1
		Percentage (%)	3.4	0	2.4	2.6
	Theft	Frequency	4	6	25	2
		Percentage (%)	4.5	4.8	12.2	5.1
	Cyber crime	Frequency	0	0	1	0
		Percentage (%)	0	0	0.5	0
Fraud	Frequency	5	6	10	1	
	Percentage (%)	5.7	4.8	4.9	2.6	
Illegal immigrants	Frequency	2	7	6	0	
	Percentage (%)	2.3	5.6	2.9	0	
Violent	Frequency	10	14	23	3	
	Percentage (%)	11.4	11.1	11.2	7.7	

Terrorism	Frequency	3	3	2	3
	Percentage (%)	3.4	2.4	1.0	7.7
Prostitution	Frequency	0	4	7	0
	Percentage (%)	0	3.2	3.4	0
Snatch thief	Frequency	0	3	1	1
	Percentage (%)	0	2.4	0.5	2.6
Escaped prisoner	Frequency	0	1	0	0
	Percentage (%)	0	0.8	0	0
Illegal gambling	Frequency	2	3	7	0
	Percentage (%)	2.3	2.4	3.4	0
Human trafficking	Frequency	0	0	1	0
	Percentage (%)	0	0	0.5	0
Illegal logging	Frequency	0	1	0	0
	Percentage (%)	0	0.8	0	0
Seditious act/comments	Frequency	3	3	1	1
	Percentage (%)	3.4	2.4	0.5	2.6
Mockery to the Sultan	Frequency	0	2	1	0
	Percentage (%)	0	1.6	0.5	0
Illegal racing	Frequency	0	0	2	0
	Percentage (%)	0	0	1	0
Illegal smuggling	Frequency	0	1	3	0
	Percentage (%)	0	0.8	1.5	0
Possessing guns	Frequency	1	0	1	0
	Percentage (%)	1.1	0	0.5	0
Pirated products	Frequency	1	0	0	0
	Percentage (%)	1.1	0	0	0

Table 4 shows that these newspapers reported 26 types of crimes. All four newspapers extensively reported the many murder cases that happened during the period of this study, such as the Altantuya murder trial, the murder trial of a millionaire named Sosilawati, and other isolated cases. Other than murder cases, drug-related crimes were also covered extensively by the newspapers, in addition to violent behaviour. A lot of fights and domestic violence perpetrated by husbands towards their wives and children were included. In a study

on juveniles and crime, Jessica and Charis (2007) concluded that “If it bleeds, it leads” based on their findings that a violent crime will make it into the news.

News Sources

News sources play a very important role in the formation of a story. However, the use of sources in a news story may reflect a newspaper’s bias on a given issue (Fong & Ishak, 2012; Wilson, 2010). The use of sources will often be aligned to the ideology and interest of those who own the news media (ibid). The following Table 5 lists the sources used by the selected newspapers:

Table 5: News sources

		Newspapers				
		The Star	Utusan Malaysia	Harian Metro	The Malay Mail	
Source of news	Police	Frequency	51	71	88	29
		Percentage (%)	58.0	56.3	42.9	74.4
	Victims	Frequency	5	9	27	0
		Percentage (%)	5.7	7.1	13.2	0.0
	Lawyer	Frequency	1	0	0	1
		Percentage (%)	1.1	0.0	0.0	2.6
	Facts only	Frequency	18	22	39	5
		Percentage (%)	20.5	17.5	19.0	12.8
	Government officials	Frequency	4	12	15	1
		Percentage (%)	4.5	9.5	7.3	2.6
	Family members	Frequency	4	2	9	2
		Percentage (%)	4.5	1.6	4.4	5.1
	Anonymous source	Frequency	2	4	23	0
		Percentage (%)	2.3	3.2	11.2	0.0
	NGO	Frequency	0	1	0	0
		Percentage (%)	0.0	0.8	0.0	0.0
	Crime analyst	Frequency	1	0	1	0
		Percentage (%)	1.1	0.0	0.5	0.0
	The accused	Frequency	0	1	0	1
		Percentage (%)	0.0	0.8	0.0	2.6
	Journalist's investigation	Frequency	0	1	2	0
		Percentage (%)	0.0	0.8	1.0	0.0
	Websites	Frequency	0	2	0	0
		Percentage (%)	0.0	1.6	0.0	0.0
Neighbours	Frequency	2	0	1	0	
	Percentage (%)	2.3	0.0	0.5	0.0	
Personal Assistance	Frequency	0	1	0	0	
	Percentage (%)	0.0	0.8	0.0	0.0	

Table 5 shows that these newspapers relied heavily on police sources when reporting crime news. The police are often referred to as having the authority to express their views and are also involved in making official announcements, especially in cases involving serious

crimes (Wilson, 2010; Fong & Ishak, 2012). According to Rob (2010), the police have a mutually beneficial relationship with the news media. The police force collaborates with news media by being transparent with their information and this practice help to assure the public and portray a positive image for the police. They would also gain the trust and support of the public in solving crimes. Nonetheless, most newspapers would only report facts in crime news, especially the background of the cases, without referring to any sources, such as court proceedings of major cases involving high profile politicians and popular figures. It is interesting to note here that Harian Metro used the most anonymous sources in its reporting. Such reporting can somehow affect the credibility of the news reported. Martin-Kratzer and Thorson (2007) studied newsroom practices and discovered that editors would sometimes forgo verifying the authenticity of their sources. By citing an anonymous source, the media are making the audience trust them inexplicably regarding the integrity of their source (ibid). However, newspapers in Malaysia do not have to abide by a specific code that can stop journalists from citing anonymous sources in their reports, which could affect the trust among the public for the media (Wilson, 2010).

Case Studies

This section will discuss two case studies in terms of how these cases were reported by the selected newspapers. The differences in the reporting practice by these four newspapers are examined and described in the following Table 6 for better understanding.

Case study 1: Coverage of the murder of Nursyuhada Johari

A UiTM Permatang Pauh student, Nursyuhada Johari, 20, had her throat slit by a man believed to be her boyfriend, at the North-South Expressway on Monday, February 2, 2015. The news headlines are as follows:

Table 6: Headlines of four newspapers on the Nursyuhada Johari murder case

Newspapers	Headlines
Utusan Malaysia	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. UiTM student died after throat slashed (<i>Pelajar UiTM mati selepas leher dikelar</i>). 2. Nursyuhada threatened with a knife, forced to go out (<i>Nursyuhada diugut pisau, dipaksa keluar bersama</i>). 3. Suspect who slashed student has a mental health treatment card, remanded for seven days (<i>Suspek kelar pelajar miliki kad rawatan mental, Direman tujuh hari</i>). 4. Wish to see best friend thwarted (<i>Hasrat temui kawan baik tidak kesampaian</i>). 5. Slashed victim was not kidnapped (<i>Mangsa kelar tidak diculik</i>).

Harian Metro	<p>6. Why were you cruel to my daughter – Mother (<i>Kenapa kejam terhadap anak saya- Ibu</i>)</p>
The Star	<p>1. Student slashed by the highway, THE ROGUE! (<i>Pelajar disembelih tepi lebuhraya, JANTAN KEPARAT!</i>)</p> <p>2. Obsessively in love, suspect has harassed the victim since high school until her family had to make a police report (<i>Taasub tagih cinta, suspek ganggu mangsa sejak sekolah hingga keluarga lapor polis</i>).</p> <p>3. Received psychiatric treatment every month (<i>Terima rawatan psikiatri setiap bulan</i>).</p> <p>4. UiTM denies victim was kidnapped (<i>UiTM nafi diculik</i>).</p> <p>5. Father made a verbal police report of the record (<i>Bapa lapor polis secara lisan tanpa rekod</i>).</p> <p>6. Disappointed with statement by UiTM (<i>Kesal kenyataan UiTM</i>).</p>
The Malay Mail	<p>1. Girlfriend tossed onto busy expressway, Cook slits student throat after quarrel in car.</p> <p>2. ‘He harassed my daughter for years’, Dad: Jilted man who killed my girl has violent nature</p> <p>1. Suspect harassed her for years, says victim’s father.</p>

Based on Table 6, Nursyuhada Johari’s murder case received more coverage from the Malay newspapers compared to the English newspapers. This could be since Malay newspapers are meant to cater to the Malay community, they were trying to draw interest from Malay readers regarding the case as the victim was a Malay Muslim. The cited sources became more diverse when immediate family members were sought out by the Malay dailies in reporting this case. From the aspect of news placement and size, both Harian Metro and Utusan Malaysia reported two articles regarding this case on the front page, which took up a huge portion. Meanwhile, the English-language newspapers had only placed this case on the inside pages. This finding is supported by similar findings by Shaari, Hua and Raman (2006). They found that vernacular newspapers in Malaysia would focus more on issues that directly affect their communities. Thus, it was understandable when each newspaper paid more attention to issues that are relatable to their ethnicity.

Other than that, the Malay newspapers tended to report this case with details that could invoke anger and sadness in the minds of the readers. For example: ‘*Dia belum mampus lagi ke?*’ - *suspek* (She’s not dead yet? - the suspect); ‘*Hanya Tuhan tahu perasaan saya ketika itu...*’ - *Ibu* (Only God knows my feelings when it happened...’ - Mother); ‘*Anda fikir saya mampu memaafkan suspek dan keluarganya?*’ - *Ibu* (You think I can forgive the suspect and his family?’ - Mother) and ‘*Pelajar disembelih tepi lebuhraya, JANTAN KEPARAT!*’ (Student slayed by the roadside, THE ROGUE!). On the other hand, English newspapers had only reported facts released by the police and snippets of conversation between the father and the victim. This finding is in line with previous studies that showed Malay-language newspapers in Malaysia as putting more focus on news about crimes in order to increase their sale and use the elements of sensationalism to attract more readers (Zanuddin

et al., 2012; Sannusi & Ibrahim, 2018). Senior Special Writer for Harian Metro, Tuan Asri Tuan Hussein said that a crime report is often written covering all aspects of the crime, including the modus operandi. This is practiced by media personnel so that the public would be aware of the techniques used by criminals and not just as a sensationalistic practice (Zaini, 2016).

Case Study 2: Coverage of power abuse by policemen

Two patrolmen were arrested following an allegation by a 19-year-old student that she was sexually harassed, extorted, and raped on Monday morning, February 2, 2015. The news headlines are as listed in Table 7 below.

Table 7: Newspaper headlines on cases of power abuse by policemen

Newspapers	Headlines
Utusan Malaysia	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Policemen who commit crimes will not be protected (<i>Polis buat jenayah tidak akan dilindungi</i>). 2. Cop allegedly raped and blackmailed student (<i>Anggota polis didakwa rogol, perat ugut pelajar</i>).
Harian Metro	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Serious charges! Lance Corporal denies accusation of rape, sexually assault, and blackmailing student (<i>Tuduhan berat! Lans koperal nafi dakwaan perkosa, melakukan seks luar tabii dan ugut pelajar</i>).
The Star	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cop detained over rape and blackmail of teenage girl. 2. Cop on rape, extortion charges.
The Malay Mail	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sex-in-car nightmare! Blackmailed, raped and extorted by cop. 2. Probe into student's rape and extortion claim. 3. IGP: No cover-up in alleged college student's rape case. 4. Cop claims trial to rape and extortion charges.

Based on the previous table, it can be said that this case received the most coverage from The Malay Mail, which is an independent newspaper. They published two front-page stories on this case and allocated large spaces for it, while giving very detailed information on how the crime occurred. The other three newspapers, owned by governmental political parties, might have wanted to hide a case of misconduct involving government officials, which could undermine the credibility of the police force. They merely reported statements by the Inspector General of Police and the proceedings in court. They also mostly published the stories in the inside pages. This finding is in line with a study conducted by Azweed et al. (2017). It was stated that The Malay Mail, as a newspaper free from government control, is very bold in reporting alternative news and questioning the actions of Malaysian authorities. For example:

“The officer turned up at her hostel and forced her to get into his car, he drove towards a shopping mall and parked his car at a secluded area, the source said.

He then blackmailed the student and told her to perform oral sex on him or he would inform her parents of what she did earlier and also threaten to take her to the police.

The student gave in and while she was performing the act, the policeman panicked over whether someone would spot them.

The source said the officer then took her to one of the men's toilets in a nearby mall and raped her (Prakash, 2015)".

Both the Malay dailies were seen as defending the police and stated that the police will not defend its members if found guilty of committing crimes. For example, Harian Metro used the headline, 'Heavy charges! Lance Corporal denies accusations of rape, sexual assault, and blackmailing student'. This headline implied that the Lance Corporal was innocent. Meanwhile, Utusan Malaysia published an explanation from the police stating that they will not defend their member if found guilty in this case by using the headline 'Policemen who commit crimes will not be protected'.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings of this quantitative content analysis showed that Malay language newspapers published more crime news than the English language newspapers in Malaysia. All four newspapers also referred the most to the police as they have the authority to issue statements regarding crimes in Malaysia. All four newspapers reported more homicide cases, either the ones which are being tried in court or isolated cases that occurred during the period of the study.

The findings of this analysis also showed that the Malay language newspapers had given more focus on elements of sensation and provided in-depth reporting of the murder of a Malay female student by her boyfriend. As for the case involving misconduct by a policeman, the findings showed that the mainstream newspapers, which were controlled by the government, did not report the case extensively. They only reported statements by the IGP without elaborating more on the incident. Meanwhile, The Malay Mail, which is an independent newspaper, provided in-depth information regarding the case and placed the news in the front pages. These findings showed that control and ownership of the media had also affected news reporting on crimes in Malaysia.

These archival analyses offer a better understanding of crimes in Malaysia. Information from these analyses can be used to differentiate crime incidents and types of crimes that persist in Malaysia. The knowledge derived from this study can be used by the criminal justice system to figure out and implement solutions and risk-based crime preventions. Therefore, it is anticipated that the results of this study would be beneficial to determine the typology of crime in Malaysia, in line with Malaysia's National Key in crime reduction (Dawood et al., 2016).

Thus, it can be concluded that the mass media, such as newspapers, can affect and shape the opinions of the public regarding specific issues. This is due to the publication process practiced by these newspapers, as described above in the introduction. Thus, the mass media should be more objective in reporting news. They should also include relevant information and cover all aspects of the conflict to encourage the public to be more mindful of the issues in their surroundings.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research was supported by CRI Liberal Arts & Social Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia. We thank Professor Ruslan Rainis who provided insight, support and expertise that greatly assisted the research.

REFERENCES

- Asli, T. (2010). Mediated Justice: Turkish Newspapers' Coverage of Controversial Criminal Cases, *Turkish Studies*, 11(4), 643-661.
- Azweed, M., Radzuwan, A.,R., Kamariah, Y., Shireena, B.,A.,R., Saadiyah, D., Razali, M., Kamarul, S., M.,T. (2017). Discourse analysis on newspaper reports of apostasy cases, *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, Vol.16 (48), 96-111.
- Bjornstorm, E., E., S.; Kaufman, R., L.; Peterson, R.,D; and Slater, M.,D., (2010), Race And Ethnic Representations Of Lawbreakers And Victims In Crime News: A National Study Of Television Coverage, *Social Problems*. 57(2), 269–293.
- Borah, P. (2009). Comparing Visual Framing in Newspapers: Hurricane Katrina Versus Tsunami, *Newspaper Research Journal*, Vol. 30 (1), 50-57.
- Dawood, M., F., Z., Adnan, H., M., & Sarmiti, N., Z., (2016). A Study of Crime Reporting by Two Malaysian English Newspapers, *Jurnal Pengajian Media Malaysia*, Vol. 18 (1), 56-65.
- Devereux, E., (2003). *Understanding the Media*, London: Sage
- Dowler, K. (2003), Media Consumption and Public Attitudes toward Crime and Justice: The Relationship between Fear of Crime, Punitive Attitudes, and Perceived Police Effectiveness. *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture*, 10(2), 109-126.
- Eriyanto (2002). *Analisis Framing: Konstruksi, Ideologi dan Politik Media*, Yogyakarta: LkiS.
- Fong, Y., L., and Ishak, M., S., A., (2012). Framing Interethnic Conflict in Malaysia: A Comparative Analysis of Newspaper Coverage on the Hindu Rights Action Force (Hindraf). *International Journal of Communication* 6, 166–189.
- Gitlin, T. (1980). *The whole world is watching: Mass media in the making and unmaking of the new left*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Habibullah, M., S., & Baharom, A., H., (2008). *Crime and economic conditions in Malaysia: An ARDL Bounds Testing Approach*, MPRA Paper 11910, University Library of Munich, Germany.
- Hart, A. (1991). *Understanding the Media: A Practical Guide*. London: Routledge
- Ibrahim, J. (2019, 4 Julai). Syed Mokhtar kuasai Media Prima. Utusan Online. <https://www.utusan.com.my/>
- Jessica M. Pollak & Charis E. Kubrin (2007), Crime in the News: How Crimes, Offenders and Victims Are Portrayed in the Media, *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture*, 14 (1), 59-83.
- Lansner, T.R (2014). *Monopolizing the Nation: Soft Censorship Malaysia*, Paris: WAN IFRA.
- Littlejohn, S. W., Foss, K. A. (2008). *Theories of human communication (9th ed)*. Belmont, Calif: Thomson/Wadsworth.
- Malay Mail buys content from Malaysiakini (2011, 10th December). *Malaysiakini*, <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/183473>

- Martin-Kratzer, R., & Thorson, E. (2007). Use of Anonymous Sources Declines in U.S. Newspapers. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 28(2), 56–70.
- McQuail, D., & Windahl, S., (1981). *Communication Models for the Study of Mass Communication*. New York: Longman Group.
- Prakash, G. (2015, 2nd Febuary). College girl claims raped, extorted and blackmailed by cop, *The Malay Mail*.
- Reese, S. D. & Ballinger, J. (2001). *The Roots of a Sociology of News: Remembering Mr. Gates and the Social Control in the Newsroom*. J&MC Quarterly, vol 78 (4), 641-658.
- Rob, C. M. (2010) Police corporate communications, crime reporting and the shaping of policing news, *Policing and Society*, 20 (1), 124-139.
- Rueben, A., S., D., (2019). Crime Trends and Patterns in Malaysia. *Kyoto Reviews of Southeast Asia*. <https://kyotoreview.org/trendsetters/crime-trends-and-patterns-in-malaysia/>
- Sannusi, S., N., & Ibrahim, H., M., (2018). Peranan Perekonomian Media dalam Survival Penerbitan Akhbar Berbahasa Melayu di Malaysia. *Jurnal Komunikasi*, Jilid 34 (4), 42-57.
- Scheufele, D., A., (1999). Framing as theory of media effects, *Journal of Communication*, Volume 49 (1), 103–122.
- Schudson, M. (1989). *The Sociology of News Production*. Sage, Media Culture & Society, Vol 11, 263 – 282.
- Shaari, H., Hua, N.,T., & Raman, V., (2006). Covering Race and Religion: The Moorthy and Nyonya Tahir Cases in Four Malaysian Newspapers. *Kajian Malaysia*, Vol. XXIV (1 & 2), 185-201.
- Sidhu, A.S., (2005). The Rise of Crime In Malaysia: An academic and statistical analysis, *Journal of the Kuala Lumpur Royal Malaysia Police College*, No. 4, 1-28.
- Sidhu, A.S., (2006). Crime Levels And Trends In The Next Decade, *Journal of the Kuala Lumpur Royal Malaysia Police College*, No. 5, 1-13.
- Sobur, A (2001). Analisis Teks Media: *Suatu Pengantar untuk Analisis Wacana, Analisis Semiotik, dan Analisis Framing*. Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Somiah, V., Hamzah, A., Ariffin, M., Y., A., & Aziz, A., A. (2010). Liputan Berita tentang Indonesia di Malaysia: Analisis Kandungan Utusan Malaysia dan Berita Harian. *Malaysia Journal of Media Studies*, Volume 12 (2), 53-67.
- Tan, V. (2018, October 25th). Malay Mail to stop print edition and go fully digital, one third of staff affected. *The Star Online*. <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/>
- Tankard, J. W. (2008). The empirical approach to the study of media framing in Reese, S. D., Gandy, O. H., & Grant, A. E. (Eds.). *Framing public life: Perspective on media and our understanding of the social world* (pp. 95-105). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Tang, C.F. (2009), The Linkages among Inflation, Unemployment and Crime Rates in Malaysia, *International Journal of Economics and Management* 3(1), 50 – 61.
- Tuchman, G. (1978), *Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality*. The Free Press, New York.
- Zaini, S., M. (2016, November 13th). 'Bukan nak sensasi berita'. MyMetro. <https://www.hmetro.com.my/>
- Zanuddin, H., Yassin, Y., M., & Sern, T., J., (2012). Peranan Perekonomian Media dalam Survival Penerbitan Akhbar Berbahasa Melayu di Malaysia. *Prosiding Konvensyen*

Kebangsaan Pengukuhan Kepimpinan Isititusi Pengajian Tinggi Dalam Transformasi Kesejahteraan Sosial Negara. 121-138.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

AZMAN AZWAN AZMAWATI

School of Communication, Universiti Sains Malaysia
azwan@usm.my

MUHAMMAD RAQIB MOHD SOFIAN

School of Communication, Universiti Sains Malaysia
raqibsofian@gmail.com

SHUHaida MD NOOR

School of Communication, Universiti Sains Malaysia
shuhaida@usm.my

JULIANA ABDUL WAHAB

School of Communication, Universiti Sains Malaysia
julia@usm.my