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# A QUANTITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS OF *UTUSAN MALAYSIA* AND *THE STAR*'S REPORTING ON A CONTROVERSIAL THANKSGIVING DINNER IN DAMANSARA UTAMA METHODIST CHURCH

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## ABSTRACT

Recently, religious conflicts that happened in Malaysia are gaining attention from the mass media. Issues related to the threat of Muslims' faith are increasingly becoming a hot topic in Malaysia even more so after the last 12th General Election. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine and compare between two mainstream newspapers in Malaysia with different languages—*Utusan Malaysia* and *The Star* on their reports concerning a controversial religious issue relating to the matter of faith and beliefs among Muslims, which was triggered during a multiracial Thanksgiving dinner at the Damansara Utama Methodist Church (DUMC), organised by Harapan Komuniti on 3<sup>rd</sup> August, 2011. The objectives of this study are to determine the (a) visibility/prominence given by both newspapers; (b) type of news used by both newspapers; (c) news sources used by both newspapers and (d) inclination of the newspapers articles towards the parties involved in the conflict. The results had shown that *Utusan Malaysia* had given more prominence and visibility on the issue than *The Star* newspaper.

**Keywords:** *Agenda setting, Media agenda, Controversial issues, Malaysian media, Religious conflict*

## INTRODUCTION

Media in Malaysia especially after the political tsunami that occurred in 2008 after the 12th General Election, is so enthusiastic in reporting on controversial issues involving religion, race and politics which seems to be getting the attention of the society. The political parties also try to manipulate these issues to gain the people's votes. Hasrina and colleagues (2013) stated that politics and ethnicity are two factors that are very influential in shaping the landscape of media reporting in Malaysia, especially the printed news media.

Looking at the religious demography, it can be said that religion has a close relationship with racial identity in Malaysia. The majority of the Malaysian population about 14million people (60.4%), are of the Islamic faith. A vast majority of the *Bumiputeras* are of the Islamic faith whereas about 9.1% are Christians under the category of ‘miscellaneous’ Bumiputeras who live in Sabah and Sarawak. Christianity is a religion that grows across races.

Sino-Malaysians are mostly of the Buddhist faith (19.2), practitioners of Confucianism and Taoism (5%) or other traditional teachings. Hinduism (6.3%) is widely practised among Indians though there are Sino-Malaysians and Indians who are Christians (Asma and Pederson, 2003; Mohd Farid, 2012).

Thus, it is not a surprise when there are numerous cases involving ethnic and religious tension in Malaysia’s history like the Kampung Medan Incident, the cow head desecration in Shah Alam, the debate regarding the National Civics Bureau (BTN), the dispute about the use of the word “Allah” in Christian publications, the “Negarakuku” fiasco by Namewee, the controversy regarding the use of higher education textbooks in the subject of Ethnic Relations, the Kris debacle, the controversy over the *Suqiu* issue, the racial equity issue, attacks on the church and many more (Yong and Md Sidin, 2010; Carmen Nge, 2012).

Another case that stole media attention nationwide was the conversion of Lina Joy into Christianity. This case created religious tension and caused a chronic imbalance on the ethnic relationship front in Malaysia. She changed her religion and wanted to change her religious status on her Identity Card, and this stimulated a heated debate in the Malaysian media (Yong dan Md Sidin, 2010).

According to Mustafa (2010), religion, ethnicity and related issues are always difficult to be reported in a multicultural society. If religious issues are often judged and featured by the press, a wrong impression would be built in addition to being disrespectful to the various devotees of any religion. Furthermore, such reports can act as the ‘fuel’ to instigate raging conflict especially in a community that has historically been divided according to race and cultural difference.

In a democracy, the media plays a role as the primary source of mass communication and the press is a leading medium among the various mediums of mass communication. This means that media organisations and its members such as reporters, journalists, writers and editors are given the trust to responsibly ensure the dissemination of accurate and correct information so that the public can make wise decisions in their lives. This is important because the media has a huge social responsibility and can impact the whole community positively or adversely (Md Sidin, 2006).

According to Schramm (1964), mass media alone or together with other institutions can perform a number of roles as follows:

- As a provider of information, quick and on time as expected by society.
- As a decision maker in consultation with the group that will clarify the problem being discussed.
- As an educator to can provide guidance so that people can think and help in the development and advancement.

Mass media especially newspapers often have equal access in terms of facts and information about any given issues, but they still give different reports as they interpret the data obtained in their own view and manner respectively. The highlighting of only some aspects in an issue so as to be biased towards a certain party causes readers to have a biased view towards an issue and the readers will then interpret a certain issue based on inconclusive and incomplete truth.

However, newspaper readers are often not aware that whatever they actually read is an interpretation. In addition, most readers do not compare different reports of the same issue to gain a different and wider perspective which will only bring them closer to the truth of a matter (Saran Kaur Gill et al., 2012).

Saran Kaur Grill et al. (2012) also noted that the audience or general readers are simply accepting what are presented to them by the media. Not suspecting that the information presented goes through a screening process where choice facts are retained and emphasised and the rest are ignored. This practice does not allow the general readers to get a balanced report. This is due to editorial adjustments, limitations and restrictions that some news agencies have in the context of reporting an issue. In effect, the media shapes public opinion through a constructed reality that is published by them.

Through the process of agenda setting, framing and gatekeeping, journalists will also determine the context of choosing a particular subject and a particular style of presenting the said issue. Through their methods and style of reporting one can deduce the stance of the media on a particular issue.

## CASE STUDY

The incident that occurred during the month of Ramadan, August 3, 2011 had sparked a variety of reactions in the mainstream media. It was reported that the Selangor Islamic Affairs Department (JAIS) along with a team of the Royal Malaysian Police (PDRM) carried out an inspection on the church in Damansara Utama on receiving a tip-off (*Utusan Malaysia*, 5 August 2011).

Based on the information received by a tip-off, there were 12 Muslims attending a dinner to break their day-long fast at the church and there were also some elements of suspicion. For example, words such as “Quran” and “pray” were used during the Church’s public address session in addition to attempts made to prevent the search from being carried out and disposing of evidence (*Utusan Malaysia*, August 5, 2011).

Actions were taken in accordance to Section 10 of the Syariah Criminal Enactment 1955 (State of Selangor) which is contempt against or the degrading of Islam in general. The investigation was carried out in accordance to the Selangor Non-Islamic Religion Enactment 1988 (Control of Propagation Amongst Muslims).

The Church was suspected of conducting a celebration of Muslim devotees on breaking their fast and encouraging them to celebrate Thanksgiving. The raid operation was accompanied by 13 Religious Enforcement Officer from JAIS and assisted by the PDRM force team of 20 from IPD Petaling Jaya and Sea Park.

The case raised new conflicts particularly towards the former Islamic affairs executive councillor Datuk Dr. Hassan Ali, who was sacked (thrown out of the political party) by the Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS)<sup>1</sup> and also the issue of the suspension of an academician,

<sup>1</sup> In 2008, Hasan won the Gombak Setia state seat in Selangor. PAS went on to form a coalition government with Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) and the Democratic Action Party (DAP), and Hassan was appointed as a state executive councillor (EXCO), holding the Islamic Affairs, Malay Customs, Infrastructure and Public Amenities portfolio. In 2011, he broke ranks with the Pakatan Rakyat state government again after speaking out in support of a raid on a church event. On 8 January 2012, the PAS central working committee sacked Hassan from the party for persistently going against its stand.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Abdul Aziz Bari who disputed the Sultan's ruling on this issue.<sup>2</sup> This case had also sparked the idea of "*Himpunan Sejuta Umat*", an assembly which aimed to promote awareness regarding apostasy throughout Malaysia.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

Since this study focuses on the agenda setting theory, framing and gatekeeping, the main purpose of this study is to analyse how two mainstream media of different languages, *Utusan Malaysia* and *The Star*, reported on the JAIS inspection issue of DUMC.

In particular, the objective of this study is to analyse the pattern of coverage of the said issue including analytical aspects like frequency of news, size of the news, presence of pictures in the news, news location, type of news, news sources used and the bias of the news articles reporting on this controversial issue.

Through this study, we are able to identify and distinguish how Malay and English language newspapers reported on the issue. It is common knowledge as well that the ownership and target groups of this newspaper are different, thus the comparison that is being done by this research is highly relevant.

Results from this study can thus help researchers and students in the future to better understand the relationship between the agenda setting theory, framing and gatekeeping that are often used in newspapers without the realisation of readers. In addition, newspaper organisations can use this study as a guide to work towards becoming printed news providers who are objective, fair and truthful when reporting news.

## WHY IS THIS ISSUE VERY SENSITIVE?

In the context of multi-ethnic and religious groups in the country such as Malaysia, the legislature is the most important aspect of creating harmony throughout the community. Thus, the Constitution as the supreme law of the country has allocated Islam as the official religion of the country without denying the rights of other religions (Article 3 of the Constitution). This is referred to in Article 3 (1):

"Islam is the religion of the Federation, but other religions may be practiced in peace and harmony in any part of the Federation."

Interpretation of 'Malay' is synonymous with 'Islam' is also clearly stated in the Federal Constitution in the sense that "Malay" means a person who professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language, conforms to Malay custom (Article 160 of the Constitution). Thus, in the Constitution clearly states that being Malay must be a Muslim and it is strictly prohibited profess a religion other than Islam (Johana Mohd Taib et al., 2010: 92-93).

Article 11 of the Constitution also provides for two cases: (1) every person has the right to profess and practice his religion and, subject to Clause (4), to propagate it. Clause (4) stated that the State law and in respect of the Federal Territories of Kuala Lumpur and Labuan,

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<sup>2</sup> Nine of the states of Malaysia are constitutionally headed by traditional Malay rulers called Sultan. The nine states are collectively referred to as the Malay States. State constitutions limit eligibility for the thrones to male Malay Muslim of royal descent.

federal law may control or restrict the propagation of any religious doctrine or belief among persons professing the religion of Islam (Johana Mohd Taib et al., 2010: 96).

Again, in terms of the constitution, it is forbidden for any attempt to spread the religion or religious doctrine other than Islam in Malaysia, but it is still happening thus creating uneasiness among the Malay Muslims.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Most people tend to rely on the media, especially the news media to know what is happening in their environment and to further build public opinion on issues under review. The media determines which news must be given concern and which news should be known and should be considered important by the public (Sei-Hill Kim et.al, 2002).

Agenda setting occurs when the media needs to be selective in reporting the news. News producers are the gatekeepers of information and they are the ones who select and decide what should be reported through a screening process and how to report an issue. Anything received by the general readers is largely a product of this media gatekeeping screening (Littlejohn and Foss, 2008).

It operates with a bias in the delivery of cognitive information to the public and subsequently instill in them specific agendas and at the same time generating a bias against a certain party pertaining to issues of public importance (Hallahan, 1999).

According to Lang and Lang (in McCombs and Shaw, 1972), the mass media forces the general readers' attention on to certain issues. The mass media also constructs ideal images in the general readers' minds by using pictures of politicians and often presenting objects that suggest to the audience through the power of suggestion, what to think, what things should be known and what should be felt.

McCombs and Shaw (1972) stated that the media is not so effective in influencing the mind but is very effective in influencing readers on what to think. They also propose the notion that there is a very close relationship between mass media coverage and the topics of current public discussion. Issues highlighted by the mass media as a media agenda, has close ties with the issues discussed by the public, which is respectively known as the public agenda. McCombs and Shaw (1972) also noted that the media has a strong impact on readers in general and determines which events are more important to be focused on by readers while justifying why an issue deserves that attention.

The agenda setting theory has proven that the media can influence public opinion, but the question that arises is 'how can the media influence the public?' In this study, a newspaper can be assumed to influence the reader by the method of expression of selected news and the orientation of a newspaper when reporting on an issue.

Portrayals in the press can affect and influence the reader's formation of thoughts, opinions, and feelings toward an issue. When readers read news displays, they immediately perceive that the news in the press is the recording of the exact facts that have occurred (Wrinn, 1977 in Abul Nafi, 2006: 33).

Subsequently, after the readers view the newspaper article with its photos and interesting colours as well as headlines that increase the curiosity of the readers regarding the issues coupled with the factual portrayal of the news and brief explanations on the editorial pages

and articles. Psychologically speaking, this indoctrinates the thinking pattern and opinion formulation of readers to form personal perceptions and opinions on the facts that have been reported on an issue.

This is the base agenda of the media which is to disclose information to the readers and subsequently the agenda of the public which is to acquire the facts. This means the news display supplied by the press has been and is able to influence the public cognitively in their daily lives as they read the newspapers (Abdul Nafi, 2006).

The agenda setting theory and the concept of gatekeeping is very closely related to each other. The gatekeeper has the responsibility to determine the expression of a form of communication that defines the media agenda to the public. Either we are aware or not, this task of gatekeeping causes different media to highlight on different information or minimise some information or even shut down certain aspects from the public's view. Arguably, none of the media in this world has a neutral attitude and a clear objectivity. Media will not escape from being bias as it is associated to ideology, politics, economy, social and even religious cultures (Eriyanto, 2002).

The concept of framing is also an important component of the study on the selection and interpretation of the news. Framing affects how a story is presented and in turn influence public's perception as it is very 'powerful' in which the public are often not aware of the ongoing framing process. Thus, it will influence the public's assessment on responsibility and causality (Bullock et al., 2001).

## **METHODOLOGY**

Media agenda is often measured using the content analysis method of the news media to find out the amount of news on a particular issue. The total amount of news on an issue shows the degree of focus put on specific issues in the media agenda. Readers often interpret the importance of an issue based on the extent of the reports on that issue (Rogers and Dearing, 1996: 18).

Therefore, in this study, the researchers use a quantitative method of research. The method of content analysis is a method long used by communication researchers to study almost all forms of communication. The content analysis study is actually more descriptive and inductive in nature compared to studies that tests a hypothesis. However, the content analysis method also uses a consistent categorisation method.

There are various definitions of content analysis. Berelson (1952) defines this method of research as a technique of objective, systematic and quantitative material research on communication. Berelson encourages researchers to study all aspects of the content namely the pivotal substance, material content and form (as it was described). Systematic methodology refers to an orderly arrangement or a set method. That is, the researcher must use the same set of procedures for the entire unit of content analysis.

On the other hand, a quantitative method suggests that the survey results should be recorded and categorised according to the set amount and specific figures. According to Keyton (2006), the coding system allows content analysis to identify frames that have a high score in a study. He added that the encoded data can be analysed by looking at the frequency of occurrences by category. Consequently, the frequency can be considered an important measurement.

*Utusan Malaysia* and *The Star* were selected for this study because they are both mainstream newspapers which have their own target groups. As we know, *Utusan Malaysia* (Malay language newspaper) targets a group of readers who are ethnic Malays and *The Star*'s (English newspaper) target readership consists of various races and the middle class. A point to be noted is that though *Utusan Malaysia* is one of the popular Malay language newspapers in Malaysia, it is said to often instigate ethnic tensions between the Malays and non-Malays (Yong and Md Sidin, 2012).

According to a recent report by ABC (from January to June, 2012), *Utusan Malaysia* experienced a slight decline in the number of readers than in previous years with an average recorded net sales of 181, 356 copies, close behind *Harian Metro* and *Kosmo*, each with an average net sales of 394, 026 and 224,518 copies. However, *Mingguan Malaysia* still holds the top spot with an average net sales of 371, 529 copies (<http://abcm.org.my>).

*The Star* newspapers, according to the latest ABC report (from January to June, 2012), continues to out-perform other newspapers in its league in terms of average net sales with a net sales of 290,566 copies and Sunday Star net sales of 292, 606 copies.

The time period for this study is from August 3, 2011 (the date of inspection and highest point of the researched issue) until October 17, 2011; a week after the Sultan of Selangor ruled on this issue and ordered no action be taken against any of the parties involved in this issue due to the lack of evidence.

However, the Sultan ordered that the people involved (the 12 Malays) should be given counseling and a warning be given to the others involved and that there are to be no more efforts in spreading other religions to Muslims, particularly in the state and Malaysia in general.

The units of analysis for this study are seen by the featured news articles and their forms which include regular news, editorials, columns, public opinions and letters from readers. These articles are sought and collected through a library with copies of daily newspapers for both of the analysed newspapers. From the searches performed, 186 article samples were collected.

This study will use a census sample method that examines all the units of analysis. Many scholars affirmed that the census sample method is very useful in the study of a particular event or series of events (Neuendorf, 2002; Riffe, Lacy & Fico; 2005 in Yong and Md Sidin, 2012).

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **News Frequency**

The result of this study is the analysis of the case study (JAIS search on the DUMC) during the 10 weeks of which the issue was reported. About 186 news articles from both newspapers, *The Star* and *Utusan Malaysia* were successfully collected. Of the 186 news articles, *The Star* published 62 (33.3%) news articles and *Utusan Malaysia* published 124 (67.7%) of the news articles.

From these findings, we can see that *Utusan Malaysia* published more news articles on this issue compared to *The Star* by a relatively large amount. These findings demonstrate that *Utusan Malaysia* allocated a greater priority on this issue than *The Star*.

**Table 1:** Frequency of Pertaining Articles in Analysed Newspapers

	Frequency	Total (%)
<i>The Star</i>	62	33.3
<i>Utusan Malaysia</i>	124	66.7
Total	186	100.0

**Presence of Pictures**

In the aspect of picture inclusion and presence in featured articles, the research findings are as follows:

**Table 2:** Presence of Pictures in Both Newspapers

			Presence of pics.		Total
			Shown	N/A	
Analysed Newspapers	<i>The Star</i>	Frequency	55	7	62
		% between analysed newspapers	88.7%	11.3%	100.0%
	<i>Utusan Malaysia</i>	Frequency	63	61	124
		% between analysed newspapers	50.8%	49.2%	100.0%
Total	% between analysed newspapers	63.4%	36.6%	100.0%	

$\chi^2 = 25.6, p = .000$

Pictures can produce an array of different interpretations by readers and are an important part of the modern newspapers. Pictures can replace many words and express news concisely. Pictures can also express any given situation in an accurate, clear and simple manner, in addition to provide a more interesting pattern to the press as well as making it easier to read. It is undeniable that pictures are an important element in the design of a newspaper. Using images is very important in a news report as they not only strengthen the news report but also highlight the facts in the news report which attract the interest of the readers(Vilashini Somiah et.al, 2010: 65).

By referring to Table 2, it shows that there is a significant difference between the two newspapers where the value of  $p < 0.05$ . It can be concluded that that *UtusanMalaysia* gave a higher priority to this issue than *The Star*.

**Size of Column**

The column size analysis in this study is divided into four categories: (1) 1-100 sq cm, (2) 101-200 sq cm, (3) 201-300 sq cm and (4) 301 cm sq cm and above. The findings are as follows:



**Table 3:** Difference of Column Size in Both Newspapers

		Analysed newspapers		Total	
		<i>The Star</i>	<i>Utusan Malaysia</i>		
News column size	1-100 sq cm	Frequency	7	8	15
		% between analysed newspapers	11.3%	6.5%	8.1%
	101-200 sq cm	Frequency	26	41	67
		% between analysed newspapers	41.9%	33.1%	36.0%
	201-300 sq cm	Frequency	19	28	47
		% between analysed newspapers	30.6%	22.6%	25.3%
	301 sq cm and above	Frequency	10	47	57
		% between analysed newspapers	16.1%	37.9%	30.6%
Total		% between analysed newspapers	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

$\chi^2 = 9.562, p = .023$

By referring to table 3, it shows that there is a significant difference between the two newspapers where the value of  $p < 0.05$ . As *Utusan Malaysia* used more large-sized columns compared to *The Star* newspaper in the reporting of the said issue it can be deduced that *Utusan Malaysia* placed more importance in reporting the said issue compared to *The Star*.

### Placement of News Articles

In regards to the analysis of the news article placement, the table below explains the different placements of news articles by both *The Star* and *Utusan Malaysia* in the reporting of this issue.

From table 4, it was found that there was no significant difference in the placement of news articles by both newspapers where the value of  $p > 0.05$ . It can be concluded that both newspapers published more articles in the newspaper inserts than the front page.

**Table 4:** Differences of News Article Placement in Both Newspapers

		Analysed newspapers		Total	
		<i>The Star</i>	<i>Utusan Malaysia</i>		
Placement of news	Front page	Frequency	7	22	29
		% between analysed newspapers	11.3%	17.7%	15.6%
	Inserts	Frequency	55	102	157
		% between analysed newspapers	88.7%	82.3%	84.4%
Total		% between analysed newspapers	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

$\chi^2 = 1.307, p = .253$

However, in this issue, the two newspapers published articles on the front page about the said issue during its emergence and climax which were specifically during the first week of the issue's occurrence and the climax of the issue (10<sup>th</sup> week) when the Sultan of Selangor declared his ruling. Given these issues involved the Malay community and the Islamic faith, it is highly relevant to the principles and ideologies of *Utusan Malaysia* and so it is given that *Utusan Malaysia* published more news articles on the front page than *The Star* to attract readers to read about this issue.

### Type of News

The analysis of the types of news in this study is eased by the classification of specific typological categories which are (1) regular news, (2) editorials, (3) feature articles, (4) columns, (5) letters from readers and (6) interviews. The findings on the overall comparison of news types used by both newspapers are shown in the following table.

**Table 5:** Difference in Type of News in Both Newspapers

		Analysed Newspapers		Total	
		<i>The Star</i>	<i>Utusan Malaysia</i>		
Type of News	Regular news	Frequency	53	94	147
		% between analysed newspapers	85.5%	75.8%	79.0%
	Editorial	Frequency	2	3	5
		% between analysed newspapers	3.2%	2.4%	2.7%
	Column	Frequency	4	12	16
		% between analysed newspapers	6.5%	9.7%	8.6%
	Feature articles	Frequency	2	9	11
		% between analysed newspapers	3.2%	7.3%	5.9%
	Letters from readers	Frequency	1	5	6
		% between analysed newspapers	1.6%	4.0%	3.2%
	Interview	Frequency	0	1	1
		% between analysed newspapers	.0%	.8%	.5%
Total		Count	62	124	186
		% between analysed newspapers	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

$\chi^2 = 3.476, p = .627$

From the table 5, it was found that there was no significant difference in the type of news used by both newspapers where the value of  $p > 0.05$ . In conclusion, an analysis of the various types of news found that the regular news form is popularly used by both newspapers and is often the majority form of news published by these newspapers. The regular news on the

issue of the JAIS inspection on the DUMC is often the focal interest point of readers and is the way in which readers learn further about the issue.

However, *Utusan Malaysia* published more articles in the form of columns, letters from readers and feature articles in their reporting. Furthermore, *Utusan Malaysia* even published a news article in the form of a special issue interview with Datuk Hassan Ali. This finding demonstrates that the *Utusan Malaysia* was trying to fully and critically flog the said controversial issue for the readers' benefit compared to *The Star*.

## News Sources

Excellent news sources play an important role in the reporting of a newspaper. It reflects the direction in terms of development and bias of a newspaper and there will be no news if there are no news sources. Yong and Md Sidin (2012) stated that sources play an important role in determining the reporting and further development of a news story.

**Table 6: Difference of News Source Used in Both Newspapers**

			Analysed Newspapers		Total
			<i>The Star</i>	<i>Utusan Malaysia</i>	
News Source	Ruling government Leaders	Frequency	12	24	36
		% between analysed newspapers	19.4%	19.4%	19.4%
	Opposition leaders	Frequency	18	22	40
		% between analysed newspapers	29.0%	17.7%	21.5%
	Islamic NGO representatives	Frequency	5	28	33
		% between analysed newspapers	8.1%	22.6%	17.7%
	Christian NGO representatives	Frequency	3	0	3
		% between analysed newspapers	4.8%	.0%	1.6%
	JAIS representatives	Frequency	6	15	21
		% between analysed newspapers	9.7%	12.1%	11.3%
	Church representatives	Frequency	6	0	6
		% between analysed newspapers	9.7%	.0%	3.2%

Editor/ author's opinion	Frequency	8	19	27
	% between analysed newspapers	12.9%	15.3%	14.5%
General public	Frequency	1	11	12
	% between analysed newspapers	1.6%	8.9%	6.5%
Sultan/ Sultan's representative	Frequency	2	2	4
	% between analysed newspapers	3.2%	1.6%	2.2%
Cross-bencher	Frequency	1	3	4
	% between analysed newspapers	1.6%	2.4%	2.2%
Total	Frequency	62	124	186
	% between analysed newspapers	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

$\chi^2 = 29.74, p = .000$

From table 6, we can see a significant difference in the type of news sources used by both newspapers as the value of  $p < 0.05$ . From the above findings, it can be concluded that although both newspapers were owned by the ruling parties, they provided sufficient space to the oppositions and allowing them to clarify on a few things about the JAIS search issue.

These findings are in line with the research done by Yong and Md Sidin (2011) whereby TheStar, though categorised as pro-government press, had given some space, if not too much, in sourcing contribution to parties who were not like-minded with the government in a study done on the case of Lina Joy (Yong and Md Sidin, 2011). *The Star* has always been more liberal in its reporting since it was established in 1971 (Randhawa et al., 2005).

It was also found that *Utusan Malaysia* does news sourcing from the government regularly, which is also in line with a research done by Yong and Md Sidin (2012) and Mohd Asri (2002) on the issue of racism in Malaysia which affirmed through their findings that the press in Malaysia, especially Malay language (ethnocentric) newspapers prefer to use news sources relative to the ruling party, specifically the UMNO leaders.

### News Article's Slants

The slant of news articles were reviewed to determine whether the coverage done is only in favour of one party or the other (Kenny and Simpson, 1993; Wang, 2003 and Cenite et al, 2006). The bias of news articles is categorised as:

- 'Supportive'
- 'Critical'
- 'Neutral'

'Supportive' refers to articles that reflect positively on the actions carried out by the JAIS and 'critical' refers to articles that reflect positively towards the church's innocence and its position as a victim and reflects negatively on the actions done by the JAIS.

In other words, the articles that are biased toward the action of the JAIS have more paragraphs that give or feature positive statements in favour to the JAIS whereas articles that are critical toward the actions of JAIS have more paragraphs featuring the Church in an innocent or positive light while giving negative statements on the actions of the JAIS.

'Neutral' refers to articles that do not indicate a bias towards any of the parties involved be it the JAIS or the Church (DUMC). For example, a six-paragraphed article with four of the paragraphs in favour of the action taken by the JAIS is classified as 'supportive' and vice versa for 'critical'.

**Table 7:** Difference in the Bias of News Articles in Both Newspapers

			Analysed newspapers		Total
			<i>The Star</i>	<i>Utusan Malaysia</i>	
Slant	Supportive	Frequency	10	48	58
		% between analysed newspapers	16.1%	38.7%	31.2%
	Critical	Frequency	16	0	16
		% between analysed newspapers	25.8%	.0%	8.6%
	Neutral	Frequency	36	76	112
		% between analysed newspapers	58.1%	61.3%	60.2%
Total	Frequency	62	124	186	
	% between analysed newspapers	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

$\chi^2 = 38.83, p = .000$

From table 7, it can be concluded that *The Star* is more moderate in its reporting compared to *Utusan Malaysia* as they published 16 news articles (which is 24.2% of the total news articles published) that was biased towards the Church, whereas *Utusan Malaysia* did not publish any articles biased towards the Church.

The point that needs to be emphasised here is that these two newspapers can be called practitioners of balanced reporting as both *The Star* and *Utusan Malaysia* published a high number of neutral news articles in their reporting of the said issue. This findings show that the press in Malaysia is still reliable in terms of reporting and are not biased to one party only.

## CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, it can be concluded that both newspapers, *Utusan Malaysia* and *The Star* reported on this controversial issue in line with their own principles, guidelines and ideologies. The

two newspapers also reported on the issue of the JAIS inspection according to the ethnic needs respectively.

A point to note, a characteristic of vernacular newspapers in Malaysia is that they tend to focus on events that involve the importance of their own specific communities. Therefore, it is not surprising to see that each of them concentrates on issues related to their ethnic group respectively (Halimahton et al., 2006). They have been brought up by the British to fight for their own interests, rights and focus on problems involving their own race regardless of the troubles of other ethnic groups (Ahmad Sebi, 1991 in Mohd Asri, 2002).

The same view is expressed by John A. Lent (1977: 33 and 40 in Mohd Asri, 2002) stating that the ethnocentric press reports are geared to strengthening the rights and focus on respective ethnic group problems. He gives the example of the Chinese newspapers at the time which was only created to promote and defend the language, customs and culture of the Chinese community which is a minority among the majority Malay community. Similarly, the emergence of ethnocentric vernacular Malay newspapers is only concerned with Malay sentiment in each of their reports.

A review of the reports of ethnocentric newspapers that discussed many racial issues has raised many questions about the role and goals of ethnocentric vernacular newspapers to readers and its interests towards the readers. This is seen as favourable to the interests of specific ethnic groups that are being fought for. Thus, this only inhibits ethnic enrichment and racial integration in this country (Mohd Asri, 2002).

When discussing on the ideology of the press, we cannot escape from the problem of ownership of a newspaper. In Malaysia, a newspaper ownership cannot be separated from the political and business people who have had close contact with political leaders and a close symbiotic relationship that directly impacts the freedom of the press and how the press sets its policies, agenda and how the newspaper frames a certain news issue (Jeniri Amir, 2005).

Anyone who has the power of ownership over a newspaper will dominate the press. The content and form of the message is in accordance with the requirements of a particular newspaper specifically the interests of the owners who hold the power of the press (Jeniri Amir, 2005; Wang, 2001). Ownership plays an important role in the organisation of the media and the content control through hiring and promotion practices. For example, the press always verifies truths and complies with the owner's and publisher's political tendencies and this thus influences the editorials, columns and press coverage (Wang, 2003).

Mohamad Bahtiar et al. (2004) stated that a newspaper's reporting style relies heavily on the newspaper company's approach or in-house style. Thus, a newspaper editorial holds an important role in determining the direction or bias of the news that will be published. Mohd Azizuddin (2005) also noted that partisan media will cause people to be divided in terms of information that is deemed racist while misleading the public and subsequently causing national problems such as racial conflict and civil wars if not taken seriously.

The question of religion and ethnicity is something that is very sensitive in Malaysia and is able to cause disharmony if this matter is not dealt with wisely either by the government or the media. As such, Malaysians are discouraged to discuss the issue of religion and ethnicity in provocation, failing which the government can take action against those who try to raise this matter in accordance to the Internal Security Act (ISA), which was recently repealed (Yong and Md Sidin, 2010).

Thus, journalists in this country have to report a religious conflict with moderation and not by taking an extreme stance in addition to ensuring that all parties involved in a conflict are given the opportunity to express their views (Loo and Mustafa, 2010).

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