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EDITORIAL POLICIES ON ELECTION NEWS

A study of the pre-1978 General Election news  
in the New Straits Times and the Utusan Malaysia

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I wish to express my thanks to En. Osman Abadi, the Assistant Chief Editor of the Utusan Melaya Press, for information gathered in my study.

A free press is not a privilege but an organic necessity in a great society.

Walter Lippmann

Professor of Mass Communication, En. Mustafa Kasal Anwar, a lecturer in Journalism and my advisor, Miss [Name], a lecturer in Development Communication, all at the Universiti Sains Malaysia, for their guidance and help given to me at one time or another.

## ABSTRACTS (ABSTRAK)

Kajian ini terbit daripada saya dalam keadaan kewartawanan di negara kita. Ini merupakan satu kajian analisa kandungan tentang polisi-polisi penyunting akhbar terhadap berita-berita parti Barisan Nasional dan parti Perikatan.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my thanks to En. Osman Abadi, the Assistant Chief Editor of the Utusan Melayu Press, for information gathered in my study.

Tujuan kajian ini ialah untuk mengkaji kecenderungan akhbar Utusan dan Malaysia terhadap parti-parti tersebut, melalui polisi-polisi penyunting mereka seperti ruang

yang dibagikan kepada berita parti-parti, muka surat berita itu; Professor of Mass Communication, En. Mustafa Kamal Anuar, a lecturer in Journalism and my advisor, Miss Khor Yoke Lim, a lecturer in Development Communication, all at the Universiti Sains dan Malaysia, for their guidance and help given to me at one time or another.

komentari dan gambar foto parti-parti. Perhatian saya juga tertumpu kepada implikasi keputusan kajian itu, iaitu bagaimana kecenderungan akhbar-akhbar itu sebayangkan tanggungjawab sosial mereka terhadap pembaca mereka.

Keputusan kajian ini menunjukkan satu kecenderungan yang amat ekstris daripada kedua-dua akhbar terhadap parti Barisan Nasional, seperti yang dibayangkan dari peratus-peratus berita Barisan Nasional untuk variabel-variabel kecenderungan di atas, dan juga dalam lidah rencana, komentari dan gambar foto. Peratus itu ialah dari 60% dan atas secara umumnya.

Untuk sesiapa yang ABSTRACTS (ABSTRAK) itu akhbar bebas dan nilai-nilai demokrasi, mereka patut memberi perhatian kepada kajian ini daripada minat saya dalam keadaan kewartawanan di negara kita. Ini merupakan satu kajian analisa kandungan tentang polisi-polisi penyunting akhbar terhadap berita-berita parti Barisan Nasional dan parti Pembangkang. Akan menahan hak-hak pembacanya. Ia akan memberi maklumat-maklumat perTujuan kajian ini ialah untuk mengkaji kecenderungan akhbar New Straits Times dan akhbar Utusan Malaysia terhadap parti-parti tersebut, melalui polisi-polisi penyunting mereka seperti ruang yang diberikan kepada berita parti-parti, muka surat berita itu; letakan berita di atas lipatan akhbar atau di bawah; kepala berita itu; taip muka kandungan berita itu; persertaan gambar berita itu dan samada 'berita itu 'berita pemimpin' di muka surat satu. Selain daripada itu, saya juga mengkaji lidah pengarang, rencana, komentari dan gambar foto parti-parti. Perhatian saya juga tertumpu kepada implikasi keputusan kajian itu, iaitu bagaimana kecenderungan akhbar-akhbar itu membayangkan tanggungjawab sosial mereka terhadap pembaca mereka.

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Untuk sesiapa yang mempercayai satu akhbar bebas dan nilai-nilai demokrasi, mereka patut memberi perhatian kepada keadaan yang tidak sihat dalam profesyen kewartawanan itu.

#### INTRODUCTION

Suatu sistem demokrasi amat bergantung kepada satu akhbar bebas yang bertanggungjawab. Sebuah akhbar yang bertanggungjawab akan menahan hak-hak pembacanya. Ia akan memberi maklumat-maklumat penuh kepada pembacanya tanpa berat sebelah kepada mana-mana pihak, terutama sekali dalam hal-hal pilihanraya, iaitu satu ciri yang penting dalam sistem demokrasi.

Jadi, diharapkan kajian ini boleh digunakan sebagai satu asas untuk lain-lain kajian yang lebih lanjut lagi. Semungkinnya, penyelidik-penyelidik yang serious boleh memberi perhatian mereka kepada topik kebebasan akhbar di negara kita, iaitu, satu topik yang jarang dikajikan.

Robert M Hutchins who headed the Commission on the Freedom of the Press in the mid-1940s in United States said, the responsibility of the press is to provide "a truthful, comprehensive, and intelligent account of the day's event in a context which gives them meaning"; to serve as "a forum for the exchange of comment and criticism, to give a representative

## CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

picture of the constituent society; to help in the presentation and clarification of goals and values of society; and to provide full access to the days intelligent."

It is also the responsibility of the press to act as a watchdog of the government, to sound the alarm when the people's rights have

been infringed. However, the press cannot perform his responsibility well, if instead of watching, he is being watched. Information is essential to us. We need information for decision making from day to day. The press, whose function is to

put the information in our hands, to be effective, should supply the information regardless of party affiliation or self interest. This, the responsibility of the press and freedom of the press encompasses each other. The press cannot perform its

responsibility if there is no free press. There is no freedom of the press if the press does not exercise its responsibility. When a newspaper follows a party line, its function of serving the public also ceases as it is no longer able to provide an

accurate, objective, fair and balanced account of the news to its readers. A socially responsible press seeks to serve his readers, not his own self interest and not the government. His responsibility is to interpret the news to his readers and to provide a forum of debate or discussion so that his readers will be able to get access to all divergent views and formulate their own view points. A truth that means not being controlled or unduly

influenced either by big business, big labour or big government. A truth which encompasses telling fairly and intelligently what the

Robert M Hutchins who headed the Commission on the Freedom of the Press in the mid-1940s in United States said, the responsibility of the press is to provide "a truthful, comprehensive, and intelligent account of the days event in a context which gives them meaning"; to serve as "a forum for the right to know. That is the first eternal job and responsibility. 2 exchange of comment and criticism, to give a representative

picture of the constituent groups in society; to help in the presentation and clarification of goals and values of society; and to provide full access to the days intelligent." However is not explicitly forbidden by law, including the wisdom of any. It is also the responsibility of the press to act as a watchdog of the government, to sound the alarm when the people's right have been infringed. However, the press cannot perform this responsibility well, if instead of watching, he is being watched. include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart. Thus, the responsibility of the press and freedom of the press encompasses each other. The press cannot perform its responsibility if there is no free press. There is no freedom of the press if the press do not exercise its responsibility. or for maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary." 4.

Roy A. Roberts, the President of the Kansas City Star, in his Seventh annual William Allen White Memorial Lecture on Feb 10, 1956, concluded that responsibility of the press is indivisible from the freedom of the press. He reduced them to simple term, which means truth in the news that tempered with mercy, decency and humility; a truth that means not being controlled or unduly influenced either by big business, big labour or big government. A truth which encompasses telling fairly and intelligently what the news means. A truth which does not slavishly follow either a party line, or an economic cult. A truth which encompass hatreds of intolerance and oppression. A truth which is dedicated to high ideals, community service and a first obligation to his reader's right to know. That is the first eternal job and responsibility. 2

According to the Canon of Journalism, American Society of Newspaper Editors, "Freedom of the press is a vital right of mankind, it is the unquestionable right to discuss whatever is not explicitly forbidden by law, including the wisdoms of any restrictive statute."<sup>3</sup> Propaganda bills to attack the DAP and discredit DAP leaders...

The European Convention on Human Right, Article 10, says "Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority... The exercise of these freedoms may be subject to restrictions as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society, for the protection of reputation or rights of others, or for maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary."<sup>4</sup> Even to the most trivial and frivolous Barisan statements while... Freedom of expression, the fundamental human right is a universal concept. It applies not only to the citizens of the developed countries, but also to the citizens of the developing countries. It lies in finding out whether Mr. Lim's accusation is true or whether, it is a groundless accusation based on emotion.

The above information is vital to the understanding of my study. The study aimed to find out the partisanship of the local national newspapers and the implication of the findings were discussed in relation to the social responsibility of the press.

Before I conceptualized my study, I was spurred by some statements made by Mr. Lim Kit Siang, from the Democratic Action

Party (an Opposition party), in his book, Time Bombs in Malaysia, "The 1978 general elections was the most unusual general elections for it appeared to be an election without issues. Everyday, Malaysians read in the press the fairy tales and fictions churned out by the National Front propaganda mills to attack the DAP and discredit DAP leaders..."

2. To compare the New Straits Times and the Utusan Malaysia's

"The National Front suppressed these great national issues by the ban on rallies and control of the mass media. As a result, the DAP found it virtually impossible to raise, let alone crystallise issues in the election campaign." 5

5. Questions to the problems if necessary.

Mr. Lim further alleged that New Straits Times was hand-in-glove with the National Front by giving great prominence to the most trivial and frivolous Barisan statements while blacking out DAP news and activities or dismissed them in a few paragraphs. 6. This is a half truth which needs careful considerations. A great deal of value can come from stating My interest lies in finding out whether Mr. Lim's accusation is true or whether, it is a groundless accusation based on emotion.

It is also hoped that the study would serve the purpose of documentation. When some action is called for, it is always more effective if we can say: Look, this is the situation, and this is the proof, it is time that we sit down and do something about it.