

## THE ROLE AND IMPACT OF MASS MEDIA IN INCULCATING AND DISSEMINATING THE VALUES OF CARING AMONG MALAYSIANS

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### Introduction

Malaysia has established a vision to become an industrialised nation by the year 2020. One of the challenges stipulated in the vision is to create a just and caring society (Mahathir, 1991). Social scientists have observed that as a country becomes more industrialised, the complexity of people's lives and the physical as well as mental demands exerted on individuals would increase, resulting in the increase of breakdowns of people's ability to cope. The values, ideas and practices of caring need to be promoted through various communication channels to complement efforts to achieve the national aspiration. Rogers and Storey (1982) stated that effective communication strategy is needed to enhance awareness and understanding of social values and ideas.

### Objectives

The objectives of this study were: (1) To evaluate the content of mass media such as television and newspapers that have the caring values in their programs; (2) to determine the level of awareness among Malaysians on caring values; and (3) to determine the populations' perception of the role of mass media in inculcating the caring values. The study expects to submit recommendations for policy makers from media organisation and other relevant institutions to encourage and improve the role of mass media in helping to create a caring Malaysian society.

### Materials and Methods

Two types of researches were conducted. The first research method was a survey done with respondents from the northern, central, southern and eastern part of peninsular Malaysia. A total of 720 families in rural and urban areas of the respective regions were interviewed to determine the role and effectiveness of mass media in inculcating the values of caring among Malaysians. Another research method used was content analysis to analyse the content of television programmes and newspaper articles which contain caring values. Content analysis was used because it is a systematic technique for analysing message content and message handling - it is a tool for observing and analysing the overt communication behaviour of selected communicators (Budd, Thorp and Donohew, 1967).

### Results and Discussion

**Survey of Audience:** The survey on the 720 families revealed that television was the main source of caring society messages. The television programme in magazine format was mentioned by more than 82% of respondents containing caring messages. Television news, religious programmes, and television dramas were the next frequently mentioned programmes. The respondents obtained the highest score in terms of the effectiveness of caring messages on the statement that the senior citizens should be respected and given proper role in the society. T-test showed that there is no significant difference on the respondent's perception of the effectiveness of caring messages between the urban and rural population except for the statement that "I have better understanding on the need to establish a caring society".

**Content Analysis of Television Programme:** The content of TV1 and TV3 programmes were analysed. Among the programs analysed were News and magazines (Malaysia Hari Ini and Selamat Pagi Malaysia). For news program the main caring messages obtained were contribution to society and cooperation. For the magazines programmes the caring values projected were empathy, caring, discipline and responsibility.

**Content Analysis of Newspapers:** The content of four major daily newspapers was content analysed for caring messages. The findings showed that the daily Berita Harian contained the most number of articles that have the caring messages. This was followed by The Star, Sin Chew Jit Poh and Tamil Nesan. The main caring messages found in these dailies were: (1) To inculcate empathy, concern and sensitiveness, (2) To contribute to society, and (3) To be disciplined and ethical. Further it was found that the coverage of caring news were predominantly from the cities.

### Conclusion

Malaysians overall perceived that the mass media have been considerably effective in inculcating the values of caring. Television was mentioned as the main source of caring messages that it depicted through news, magazines and religious programmes. Generally television and newspapers carry a low amount of caring messages. Conscious and concerted efforts from mass media organisation are needed to creatively promote the values of caring in their content and programmes. National policy makers need to address the vision to create a just and caring society in more concrete efforts and creative strategy.

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