

## THE IMPLICATIONS OF MPB STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION ON TV PROGRAMMING

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### Abstract

This paper focuses on the transformation of media organisations in Malaysia and the implications on media content through the debate of the political economy of media and globalisation of media content. The objectives of this study are to look at the aftermath of Media Prima Berhad's structural changes since the 1998 economic crisis and the transformations that occurred in the local broadcasting and content industries. Additionally, the identification of the implications of MPB transformation on its content, particularly the television programming of its four television stations will be discussed. Semi-structured interview and content analysis of TV programming approach were used to gather data. Two main findings were identified. MPB's corporate expansion had concentrated the local television market. The adoption of a cost-saving strategy and sharing of resources have been the keys to success. MPB is an integrated media organisation that has performed horizontal and vertical integration to strengthen its performance within the local broadcasting industry. Repositioning of 8TV and TV9 has transformed the stations' programming since conglomeration, whilst Chinese and religious programming emerged from the corporate expansion strategy.

**Keyword:** *Political economy, media content, media organisation, globalization, television programming*

## IMPLIKASI TRANSFORMASI STRUKTUR MPB KEPADA PENJADUALAN TV

### Abstrak

Kertas kerja ini menfokus kepada transformasi organisasi media di Malaysia dan implikasinya terhadap kandungan media, melalui kerangka politik ekonomi dan globalisasi kandungan media. Kajian ini menggariskan dua objektif iaitu untuk melihat perubahan struktur Media Prima Berhad (MPB) semenjak krisis ekonomi 1998 dan transformasi yang berlaku dalam industri penyiaran tempatan dan kandungan. Implikasi kepada transformasi MPB terhadap kandungan, terutamanya penjadualan rancangan di empat buah stesen TV MPB juga dibincangkan. Temubual separa berstruktur dan analisis kandungan penjadualan TV digunakan untuk mengumpul data. Dua hasil kajian utama diperolehi. Pengembangan korporat MPB telah mengecilkan pasaran televisyen tempatan kepada pasaran tertumpu. Aplikasi strategi penjimatan kos dan perkongsian sumber merupakan kunci utama kejayaan. MPB adalah sebuah organisasi media yang telah melaksanakan integrasi secara melintang dan membujur untuk mengukuhkan prestasi mereka dalam industri penyiaran tempatan. Penyusunan semula 8TV dan TV9 telah mengubah penjadualan rancangan stesen-stesen berkenaan sejak penubuhan gagasan. Manakala penjadualan rancangan Cina dan keagamaan muncul hasil daripada strategi pengembangan korporat.

*Kata kunci: Ekonomi politik, kandungan media, organisasi media, globalisasi, penjadualan TV*

## INTRODUCTION

The concept of media conglomeration highlights the feature of multiple business involvement in various media-related businesses apart from its main business activity (Bunce, 1997, 230). It is generally a concept that has already been implemented by many global businesses in countries that apply capitalism as their economic system. It relates to the development of small businesses that expand into a large corporation with many affiliations. TV3 had already begun to apply the concept in its business platforms since inception, an approach that had already been implemented to manage government patronage of companies related to UMNO since the 1970s.

TV3 began operations under Fleet Group in an era dominated by two close friends, Mahathir Mohamad and Daim Zainuddin. The mid-80s recession plunged Fleet into huge debt (Searle, 1999:106), pressuring for corporate restructuring between Fleet and Renong. In April 1990, Renong executed a takeover of Fleet's entire equity including prominent public listed companies such as TV3. The Malaysian Resources Corporation Berhad (MRCB), diversified its core business into print and electronic media businesses including NSTP and TV3 in 1993. The effects of the 1998 financial crisis pressured MRCB to perform major corporate restructuring, which involved demerging of its media entities. The detachment of TV3 and NSTP from MRCB impelled the government to fix and refurbish the media entities with a new facelift. In October 2001, TV3 were placed under a new company known as Profitune Berhad. It changed its name to Media Prima Berhad (MPB) after a year in operation. Since its inception, TV3 has undergone a long series of ownership transformations under Fleet, Renong, Realmild and MRCB.

MPB was listed in the Main Board of Bursa Malaysia on 23 October 2003 (MPB Annual Report, 2004), took over Metrovision in 2004, NTV7 in 2005 and Channel 9 in 2006. MPB adopted horizontal expansion as it possessed three

problematic TV stations mainly because of financial constraints. MPB bought Synchrosound Studio Sdn Bhd on 30 December 2005 and established HotFM as part of the Channel 9 buyout deal. HotFM rapidly became one of the most popular national radio stations, focusing on Malay listeners aged 35 years and below. On 29 April 2005, MPB acquired another radio license from Max Airplay Sdn Bhd (MAX) which operates a radio station under Malaysia Airports Sdn Bhd. The new brand, FlyFM, is an English station aiming at listeners aged between 18 and 30 (MPB Annual Report, 2009:74). The OneFM, was introduced in January 2009 and positioned as a Chinese station. It was known as 'Radio Wanita' (Woman Radio) after 2005. MPB strengthened its position in the outdoor advertising business through the acquisition of Big Tree and Right Channel. Kurnia Outdoor Sdn Bhd (Kurnia) was acquired in October 2009 (MPB Annual Report, 2009:74). These radio networks and advertising wings strengthened the marketing and distribution mission of MPB products. The approach confirmed MPB's vertical integration strategy. Owning advertising companies and radio networks was seen as an application of forward integration. It multiply their platforms for brand marketing as well as extending media coverage.

Grand Brilliance is a platform specializing in films and drama productions as well as marketing and distribution of its in-house productions. Primeworks Studio's emergence has assured MPB content production guarantee for its television networks. The approach has increased the company's market power (Jung and Chan-Olmsted, 2005:185). It however increased market members' concerns over their business opportunities in the local media landscape. Primeworks Studio Sdn Bhd (Primeworks) was established in April 2009. It handles all MPB content creation tasks as well as Grand Brilliance's function of producing media content, for its internal television platforms. Alt Media Sdn Bhd operates online portals, namely [gua.com](http://gua.com) and [tonton.com](http://tonton.com). TV3 Ghana started operations on 1 October 1997 under TV3 Network Limited and has since been under the supervision of TV3 (Malaysia) as part of the mutual agreement.

## **RESEARCH BACKGROUND**

The implications of media concentration and conglomeration have been incredible and diverse as they portray the behaviour of commercial television. Nevertheless, the commercial perspective is lacking in moral aspects when fulfilling audience demand. The worrying influence in television content has raised media scholars' awareness of the morality of media choice. Croteau and Hoynes (2006:156-157) promotes the public interest media content model in comparison with the market model which worships profit-making. The issue of media content, they say, can be assessed from the perspectives of content diversity, innovation, substance and independence. Content diversity is primarily influenced by concentration of media ownership and joint ventures, which reduce the total number of product suppliers (Croteau and Hoynes, 2006:159). Although joint ventures offer the advantage of learning and knowledge transfer, the limited number of suppliers produces limited product diversity or differentiation. This is apparent in a concentrated market in which product homogeneity emerges due to high dependence on imitation media products. In the attempt to reduce market risks, firms increase the barriers to new market entry and aim at creating synergy to maximise profit. The condition causes a higher amount of imitation products, which further limit efforts to create innovative products as they have already established a comfortable platform with less competition. Imitation occurs as a result of globalisation which promotes television programmes in other parts of the world (Keane, Fung and Moran, 2007:54).

Popularity is also a firm's major formula, encouraging them to reproduce and re-run similar products for greater efficiency and profits (Croteau and Hoynes, 2006: 160-161). The trend facilitates large integrated media conglomerates to gain efficiencies in economies of scale and scope. However, when a highly influential firm produces dominant products it increases marketing challenges for smaller media firms (Croteau and Hoynes, 2006: 160-161). Localism is another primary implication of media concentration that produces homogenised media output (Croteau and Hoynes, 2006:162). Concentration of media ownership delivers local market control and local content identity into the conglomerates' hands. Media owners cater to the local

audience interest by localising media product in various forms that contain local identity, normally through ‘dubbing or subtitling’ which are popularly implemented by non-English-speaking nations (Thussu, 2006:166). Dubbing does not change the majority of the content; it merely reproduces the same product in a new language medium. Nevertheless, localisation of television content in a popular language may generate higher profitability as a result of the economy of scale.

The public interest model also evaluates the substance of media content. Sensationalism and trivialisation in homogenised products guarantee product advantage in market competition, carrying ‘shocking values’ whilst boosting audiences’ and advertisers’ interest (Croteau and Hoynes, 2006:162). Corporate firms utilise the shock value of sex, violence and spectacle, and low-cost productions as the rationale for the highest revenue (Rampal, 2007:35). The liberalisation of global media corporations has resulted in the proliferation of cheap, impactful genres such as variety shows, popular talk-shows and reality genres. They include popular talents, low-cost studio or outdoor production and a tendency to the raw, bizarre and sensational (Kraidy, 2005:100-101). Bagdikian (in Croteau and Hoynes, 2006:164-165) argues that the problem with television content did not merely originate from the behaviour of television stations, but may have emerged from the audience and their demands. He argues that informative programmes are avoided by audiences as they remind them of societal problems. Audiences are likely to watch television programmes for leisure. Entertainment programmes highlight entertaining elements that are mainly produced for amusement (Hansen, 1983:9). As a result of commercialization and audience demand, entertainment programmes dominates most global television programming.

Advertisers appreciate entertaining programmes, including the latest programme genres, daytime talk shows and reality TV. Although talk shows are information-based content (Hansen, 1983:4), the format has been commercialised by employing popular hosts, thus triggering amusement and reality features. Reality TV has emerged as the new trend in the television production industry globally, along with the commercialisation of news content (Croteau and Hoynes, 2006:166). It has been

proved that the global strategic growth of the infotainment industry is flourishing, from developed countries to the third world nations. In Asia, privatisation of the media develops audience interest in Western programming which is primarily entertainment-based in news and non-news TV formats (Thussu, 1997:393). Although some nations offer alternative local programming and entertainment programming, those that are unable to do so adopt Western entertainment programming based upon demand (Thussu, 1997:394). Lack of expertise increases dependency on Western cultural products. In India, format adaptation into the Hindi and Tamil languages has become the easiest path to filling television schedules. Cloning and copycatting seem lawful as ways of generating new ideas for local television content (Thomas and Kumar, 2004: 136-137).

Nain (in Thussu, 1997:395) asserts that Malaysian television networks import 'non-controversial' and marketable TV content from the Western experts. The local content mainly imitates popular Western formats that portray the interests of 'pro-Western' groups of media elites and practitioners. Thus, it is not surprising that media consumption studies in Malaysia have confirmed a higher volume of Western-oriented television programmes that were either 'imported wholly or adapted locally' (Latifah et al., 2009:23). In a comprehensive study of television programme adaptation and co-production in 11 Asia countries, Keane and Moran (2005:4) argue that high exposure to Western formats was identified in India, Malaysia and Singapore in comparison to the Philippines and Indonesia. However, the latter two countries have been quick to adapt foreign popular programmes for their TV industry. Conversely, Japan, Korea, Taiwan and China exhibit greater local culture and values in their television programming. The television industry in Singapore is strategised from targeting local popular television content to a 'customised formatting' which caters for the taste of local audiences rather than copycatting the popular international formats of the West (Lim, 2004:105,108). Singapore is positioned as the Asian platform of many transnational media conglomerate assets such as ESPN Star Sports, MTV South East Asia and HBO Asia (Lim, 2004:111) which target the geographical distribution of cultural products.

In view of globalisation's impact on electronic media, Thussu (2006) warns about the social impact of hybridisation and localisation of Western culture in television programmes which are powerful in extending Western hegemony in a nation. Kraidy (2005:1) refers hybridity as 'the remains of a culture related to race, language and ethnicity.' Hybridity is popular in media text studies which 'illustrate the symbols of cultural pluralism over cultural imperialism' (Kraidy, 2005:5). In Indonesia, the local content production increased in all television stations in the mid-90s. Nevertheless, Indonesia has adapted a significant amount of Chinese drama scripts for television programming as a result of liberalisation; this causes tension among local scriptwriters fearing for their employment prospects (Keane and Moran, 2005:7). Siriyuvasak (1997: 74) indicates that liberalisation of the media in Thailand only benefits large corporations and small media companies face stiff competition with high entry barriers. Deregulation elevates foreign programming in Thailand's cable TV and the absence of adequate policies and regulations to uphold local programming weakens the local cultural industry. Nevertheless, majority of audience in Thailand prefer local programmes (Somkiat, 1998). Imported programmes from the West had significantly reduced and were replaced by local programmes mostly of entertainment and news. Chinese programmes are among the popular content in Thailand.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Data collection was executed using semi-structured interviews among media managers and producers in MPB, Astro, RTM and small production houses. Content analysis of MPB's TV programming was adopted to identify the form of programming transformation in MPB's four TV networks' and their implications. The method was used for analyzing the networks' television formats before and after conglomeration particularly those of related to local and imported programming as well as entertainment and informative programming.

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

This study was significant for several reasons. Most studies on media conglomeration and implications were focused on established television markets. These markets are prominent regional markets in the US, Europe, India, Japan and Korea (Thussu, 2006; Hafez, 2007). However, there are limited studies in small broadcasting markets (Chambers, 2003). Although Chambers (2003) argued that deregulation of small media markets may reduce market competition, the implications in a small market might be of greater challenge compared to large media markets. What kinds of transformations have taken place in the local television and content industry since MPB conglomeration?

### **Transformation of MPB's Business Strategies**

This study demonstrates that MPB corporate expansion was assisted by its government-link status (Juliana, 2013:161) in managing the scarcity of various resources in Malaysia's broadcasting industry. The key findings from the interview analysis showed MPB experienced structural transformation, which was driven by economic factors. Privatisation is the foundation to the development of broadcasting industry in Malaysia and the corporatisation of MPB. MPB's transformation was driven by commercialisation and economic tension during the 1998 economic recession. Diversification of non-media related entities and integration of media-related entities enabled MPB to strengthen the business as a corporation (Mosco, 2009; Allan, 1996). MPB diversified business in education, properties, integrated radio, television and newspaper assets. The expansion had increased MPB's strength in Malaysia broadcasting industry as it widens their business portfolio (Wasko, 2005:33) and elevates efficiencies (Gershon, 2009:35). Cost-saving strategy, shared resources and streamlining management were the formulas for long-term corporate survival and growth. These formulas were the key business advantages for the 'sharing of production content and transmission across platforms' (Doyle, 2002:31). This study also identifies how MPB's consolidation concentrated the Malaysian television industry. The local television industry was transformed from an oligopoly market to an

integrated market that developed stiff competition between three large integrated media corporations. The transformation caused a reduction of market players, similar to Doyle's (2002:8) perception of market concentration. Apparently, in this case, the concentration of the deregulated media market did not reduce market competition, which contradicts with Chambers' (2003) argument. Instead, limited market players in Malaysia had contrarily intensified the pressure to produce the best successful content among these large integrated media corporations. MPB bought three problematic television stations for economic survival and repositioned them under the same roof to bolster its corporate growth sustainability.

MPB's structural transformation had also altered the programming of two out of four MPB TV stations via repositioning. This study conforms to the communication means of market structure transformation (Gershon, 2009:6). It does however, slightly differ from Kunz's (2009:637) evidence that a shift in policy triggers a re-organisation of media ownership. MPB's case differs in the sense that it is the economic pressure that challenged the government to suggest the re-organisation of media ownership in Malaysia. This case visualises Noam's (2009:15) definition of media organisation and how it performs 'environmental adjustment and adaptations' in managing media organisations, particularly in a crisis. The Malaysian broadcasting industry has been driven by socio-economic factors than politics since the early inception of private television. Historically, technological pressure, spillover of content from neighbouring nations and unsatisfactory local programming impelled the government to improve television content (Rahmah Hashim, in Megat al-Imran Yasin, 2000). Arguments in this study had identified similar causes of poor resources and how they remain crucial to the progressive development of the local broadcasting industry. Economic factors were the key objectives to rescue MPB business empires and the local broadcasting industry.

### **MPB'S TV PROGRAMMING**

Findings from content analysis approach revealed that MPB's television programming is dominated by foreign and entertainment content. It conformed to Varis's (1993:8)

argument that imported programming distribution has been elevated since privatisation. This study reveals that foreign programmes in MPB television stations were higher in the pre-conglomeration period than during the studied period after the post-conglomeration of MPB. This confirmed that foreign content mostly came from the US-based syndicators during the pre-conglomeration period. Nevertheless, a variety of the US-based syndicators and regional-based producers filled up MPB programming in the post-conglomeration period particularly in the programming of the repositioned TV stations TV9 and 8TV. This evidence confirms that, apart from broadcasting local programmes, foreign content functions as a supplement to television station programming. Foreign content is vital as it is functioned to balance with the expensive local content. The evident conforms to Steemers' (2004:24) notion that foreign content is necessary for balancing the procurement of content resources. However, while this study did not successfully look into the resources of programme importation, Western media syndicators' content is evident in the list of imported content.

Importation of programmes was high because of a shortage of resources in terms of experts, limited facilities and capital, and limited skillful manpower. Governance and transparency challenges, and the instability of government policy, are other forms of weakness that have been highlighted. Weak enforcement of content quota policy and inefficient industry monitorisation tools had occasionally encouraged the ignorant attitude of market players towards television content guidelines. This shows the importance of improving existing monitoring tools, regulations and policies that shield the public audience from the negativities of television station operations that prioritise commercialisation, particularly in terms of issues related to entertainment. This is one of the aspects of evidence that is highly concerned with the implication of media from the political economy paradigm.

Foreign content has been the major attraction in the commercialisation of television stations since privatisation. The market system offered programme alternatives from the government stations for the local public. It reduces economic and political pressure on the local broadcasting industry through the liberalisation of a

'monopolistic and authoritarian approach' (Karthigesu, 1994). Privatisation improved the non-Malay interests in local television programming. It was implemented mainly to increase the viewership of the non-Malay ethnic groups especially the Chinese due to unattractive and low quality local television programmes. This study found that negative perceptions towards the local programming still existed. The Chinese were highly exposed to international entertainment content from Hong Kong and Taiwan (Megat al-Imran Yasin, 2004) and the inception of TV3 as the first private station was set to focus on entertainment content as well as increase content varieties in the local television programming (Megat al-Imran Yasin, 2000). Their exposure to Chinese content was significantly related to the globalisation of Chinese movies (Zhao, 2004) and cultural diaspora studies in India (Thussu, 2006), which enabled the local Chinese ethnic groups to extend various communications means via their origin traditions.

Nevertheless, based on the result of the interview, the repositioning of two television stations for a Chinese niche audience had increased Chinese viewership on MPB TV programming. The content analysis approach of this study confirmed the high amount of international Chinese programmes in 8TV and NTV7. The findings conformed with Megat al-Imran Yasin (2004) and Zhao (2004) notions of high Chinese international entertainment content. These means that the Chinese were given greater access to strengthen their connections to their traditions and stay better informed of current issues. As one of the issues of government patronage, MPB's business strategies fulfilled the political pressure towards the government with the aim of providing a balance informative platform for the key races in Malaysia. With the majority of the citizens being Malays, and non-Malays mostly represented by the Chinese and Indians, the local television viewing patterns have been a combination of local and international content since privatisation was mostly focused at Malay, Chinese and Indian programming under one television station. This means that the socio-economic factor had also pressured MPB to dedicate two television stations for the Chinese due to their strong disposable income.

## **FACTORS INFLUENCING MEDIA CONTENT**

Economic factors are key to the development of the broadcasting and content industries in Malaysia, particularly in dealing with the scarcity of resources. Content for television programming was sought through various economic means by trading global cultural products and international bilateral cooperation. It conformed to the globalisation of the cultural product paradigm that develops new geo-regional media centres and eases the distribution of media products in various countries (Mosco, 1996; Hafez, 2007). Mosco (1996:179) stressed that globalisation pressures international media organisation to export cultural products and set up new marketplaces overseas.

Collaborative efforts within the East Asian regions established beneficial policies that diversified local TV content. Regional trade collaboration such as bilateral agreements and economic alliances enhanced the penetration of cultural products and their exchange activities between regional Asian nations. ASEAN is a coalition that engages the South East Asia countries with various socio-economic policies and forms strong international networking including in the broadcasting industry (Hasmah, 2009; Samsudin, 2011). The coalition set up multiple exchange programmes to nurture mutual understanding among the members. Entertainment programmes were often established to engage members of ASEAN countries in order to strengthen mutual understanding as well as form cohesive relationships between different cultures, religions and nationalities within the region. Television programmes is one of the platforms that exposed Malaysians to more influences as they contain varieties of cultures and values from the ASEAN members along with other economic strategies to boost the economies of ASEAN members. Although language is one of the barriers that can make it difficult for media content to penetrate oversea markets (Doyle, 2002) the impact of linguistics is rather limited in ASEAN countries. Strong government bilateral relationships through multiple political and socio-economic platforms had increased the exchange of resources related to the media industry namely in terms of content, cultures, experts, manpower, talents or even as an economic model. These factors had diversified the international identity in Malaysia television programming in relation to how it contributes to the higher percentage of foreign programming in

Malaysia. The interview and content analysis approach adopted in this study confirms the active broadcasting of regional content in the local TV programming. The majority of the programmes are of an entertainment format imported from Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei and the Philippines. The multicultural coalition within Asian nations had apparently improved the diversity of cultural values in the local TV programming.

The strong bilateral relationship of ASEAN also means that the reduction of barriers through strategic economic alliances can be one of the factors that eases penetration of multi-cultural media content into the local television industry. This situation was portrayed by Thusssu (2006:166), who stated that the liberalisation of national policies and transnational exports of cultural products eased the in-flow of foreign products to developing countries and forced transnational media conglomerates to set up regional hubs (Thusssu, 2006:166) in order to foster effective promotion and market distribution. These are the factors that added a greater international pattern of the local media content industry in Malaysia. Nevertheless, the barriers in terms of corporate deals for content penetration remain strong, as in the case of MPB's business ventures into the Philippines' broadcasting industry. Evidence in this study found that MPB had failed to expand its business ventures overseas. It attempted international expansion through media consultation and ownership in the Philippines. Unfortunately, strict ownership regulatory restrictions hindered MPB from extending its first international corporate venture post-conglomeration.

There have been limited internationalisation opportunities by MPB since the structure transformation. It was somehow constructed through government-initiated collaborative projects with international trade agencies like the WTO, as in the case of TV3's internationalisation in Ghana, where TV3 offered consultation and localised Malaysian content. Joint-venture initiatives with international syndicators in Singapore were also apparent. Limited local popular religious and entertainment content were exported to selected Arab nations. Nevertheless, evidences showed that TV3's business model is currently the most successful model in the Malaysia broadcasting industry.

The 'Look East' policy nurtured local entrepreneurs and public interest towards Eastern markets and reduced product dependency on the West. Under this policy, the Malaysian government encouraged business cooperation within ASEAN and East Asia countries, particularly with Korea, Taiwan and Japan (McDaniel, 1994:81), which increased trade agreements among ASEAN alliances including content exchange for the local television industry. The Look East policy elevated penetration of Japanese and Korean programmes into Malaysia media markets. Malaysia also imports a significant number of programmes from ASEAN nations due to their cheap price (Juliana, 2013:163) and competitive audience demand, based on high TV ratings for specific drama series from ASEAN particularly sinetron or Indonesian drama slots .

Chinese, Indian and Indonesian language programmes were among the imported content supply sought from regional business deals. This paper highlights that MPB structural transformation significantly increased the importation of Chinese programmes from Asian exporters, mainly from Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore. Repositioning of NTV7 and 8TV towards Chinese niche audiences elevated the demand for Chinese-language content in the local television programming. The importation trend confirmed the 'contra-flow of cultural distribution' paradigm (Thussu, 2006). This study confirms his view that the distribution of cultural products is no longer monopolised by the West, particularly the US, but that some key Asian nations, mainly India, China, Korea and Japan became a significant marketplace and supplier of media content. This means that Malaysia's imported television programming is dominated by both syndication and Asian content.

Similar to the conditions in Malaysia, low-budget programmes are also highly in demand in China because of product scarcity (Zhao, 2004:191). In China, these contents were primarily imported from the West and regional markets and reproduced according to local tastes (Keane, Fung and Moran, 2007). Factors involving the limitation of experts, a cost-saving strategy, content innovation, infrastructure and a lack of creativity were still apparent in the local broadcasting industry since privatisation and conglomeration, which increased industry tension. This study proves

that economic constraints have pressured television stations to seek replacement of US content by importing Asian cultural products, from Hong Kong, Japan, India and Korea. Repositioning television stations and balancing production costs turned the local station toward these regional markets. They are mostly centres that have grown as Asian transnational media hubs for product development and the distribution of cultural products for the region, as Lim (2004) highlighted, except for Indonesia. Malaysia also imports products because of cultural proximity, particularly linguistics and traditional values as in the case of Malaysia and Indonesia. Language is a tool of bridging cultural proximity in a regional context (Hassan and Ahmad, 2009:101). Both countries shared similar values that intensified the cultural economies of both nations, Language similarity had increased Indonesian drama, popularly known as 'sinetron', in MPB programming through content exchange and cooperation.

Adaptation and localisation are evident in Malaysian broadcasting stations. Format adaptation is one of the approaches that fulfills market demand. Localisation of foreign content is apparent in the local television programming. Localisation of media content enables the adoption and transformation of foreign elements into local programmes, similar to Juliana's (2010:27) notion of Malaysia TV programming, which contains 'adapted and domesticated programmes for local consumption'. Importation of TV programmes to Asian countries develops the localisation of television content practices among broadcasters, which has hybridised the formula for TV content production based on the Western formula. In the process, transformation occurs in the path of searching the successful ways of producing a fresh adapted local programme for the local communities. It absorbs the originated first country culture to the second country, which will reformulate the Western model programme genre. This formula and culture are later be transferred to another country through programme importation. The first localisation phase re-model and re-modernised the understanding of the imported nation. Importation of the re-formulated and re-modernised content of the second nation by the third country will repeat the re-formulation of the first and second countries culture into the third nation. Hafez (2007) refers the situation as 'dynamic cultural development', which has an indirect impact on society. With such

re-modernised culture, Malaysian societies do not only expose themselves to the traditional Western and Asian cultures. They are further exposed to modern transformed cultures that are merely a modern hybridised culture created by the media. However, the findings in this study are insufficient to verify the assumption of the re-modernising state of Asian cultures.

Localisation is usually done through the subtitling and dubbing of a foreign product. In Malaysia, these approaches have been evident since the inception of TV3. Evidence shows that syndicated programmes were localised by making changes in terms of engaging local hosts and participants in a local environment. A similar localisation approach was also practised in the Chinese-speaking nations namely China, Hong Kong and Taiwan (Keane et al., 2007). Lee explains that localisation in Hong Kong is either wholly adopted or partially adopted (Keane, 2007:77). Dong Jon Lee identified 3 types of adaptation in South Korea (Keane et al., 2007:75) with similar categories. Homogenised programmes were also evident in MPB TV programming through content franchisors from Western transnational media content syndicators.

Multicultural values and mutual understanding is unique in Malaysia and that preservation of multicultural heritage is the key formula for the Malaysia content industry. Although there has been effort placed on in emphasizing the television format quota as a monitoring tool, governance flaws have seen Malaysia risk its traditional values and cultural heritage in the attempt to gain access to commercialisation opportunities. The imposition of format quota may physically control the penetration of foreign content but does not prevent the in-flow of foreign values into local programmes and communities. Many scholars had warned on the social impact of hybridization that could extend Western hegemony in a society. Media producers often adopt entertainment elements to increase the popularity and ratings of a programme. I suggest that media producers should also filter the origin of the values, the elements in such value, its suitability and the implication on local societies. Self-filtration with ethical awareness will enhance a greater sense of responsibility among members of the broadcasting industry. It will channel credibility that will eventually improve TV

ratings. As this study looks from the political economy framework, it is therefore of the utmost important to highlight the implication of media content on society by carefully analysing the process of producing it.

### **TRANSFORMATION OF MPB TELEVISION PROGRAMMING**

It is found that imported content has dominated MPB TV programming since privatisation. The findings support the arguments on higher foreign content since privatisation given by Nain (in Thussu, 1997) and Latifah Pawanteh (2009). This explains the popularity of foreign programmes in MPB's TV programming. Although findings showed that current total of foreign programmes gradually subsided, the local television industry and society remained exposed to international values both directly and indirectly. Foreign content is also used as a tool for business competition as it can generate fresh and innovative content. Most imported content was of successful programmes overseas that attracted local television stations because of local audience demand. The domination of imported content occurs as the consequences of the repositioning of NTV7 and 8TV since MPB's structural transformation. Importation of cultural products was vital to resolve the limitation of resources for media content production, particularly in relation to Chinese programmes. Domination of imported programmes from the Asian nations in NTV7 and 8TV television programming was caused by station repositioning with the aim of focusing at the Chinese audience.

The pattern of programming in terms of language has slightly changed, giving greater opportunities to Chinese-language programmes particularly on 8TV and NTV7. Since the post-conglomeration, English-based content has become the highest imported content in MPB TV programming whilst the Chinese content is the second highest. The Malay content is placed third. The commercial strategy developed a fragmented audience market based on ethnicity in Malaysia, focusing on the Malay and the Chinese audiences mostly through an English medium. The findings further support the arguments on the impact of globalisation of cultural product distribution by international media conglomerates (Croteau and Hoynes, 2006:160-161). Adoption of popular elements to improve sales and attract audience attention is evident in

Malaysian television programming and is similar to Hollywood's strategy in television production (Rampal, 2007:35). This importation is vital for the industry's progressive development as it generates knowledge transfer, which cultivates new ideas and creativity. The localisation of Chinese content in Malaysia is made through subtitling and translation in order to ease the pressure, as highlighted previously. Additionally, collaboration efforts through joint-venture projects is also evident, and is another form of localisation in television production. The portrayal of local talents and locations or a combination of both techniques were observed especially in reality TV projects.

The post-structural transformation of MPB had also influence its entertainment and informative programming. Entertainment content is exceptionally high in 8TV and NTV7. Informative content is slightly lower than entertainment but has been progressively improving in TV3 and TV9 programming since conglomeration. The majority of the importations have entertainment-based content, mostly drama series and musicals. Based on studies in Thailand (Somkiat, 1998) and Singapore (Lim, 2004), entertainment-based content gains high ratings. These content formats are also popular in China (Keane, Fung and Moran, 2007:30). This suggests that the Chinese prefer watching entertainment content compared to other genres. Evidence suggests that the popularity of Chinese programmes has also intensified in non-Chinese speaking countries within Asian regions, including Malaysia. Consequently, it proves the dominancy of entertainment programming in Chinese niche audience television stations, namely NTV7 and 8TV.

Religious programming has significantly apparent since the repositioning of TV9 towards a traditional Malay audience. The format offers more informative content such as talk shows and documentaries that discusses faith and religious issues. Nevertheless, hybrids of religious-entertainment content are also obvious since the repositioning of TV9, which is mostly based on the reality TV format. These reality TV shows were developed based on syndicated programmes within the local media content parameters. Entertainment elements that incorporate Islamic entertainment guidelines were embedded into the religious content in order to foster higher ratings

(Rampal, 2007:35). Hybridisation of religious-entertainment television content, however, contains limited 'low-denominator' elements as it contradicts with religious teachings. The values may be dominant in entertainment programming but it is restricted for religious content. Portrayal of popular figures in religious content, however, is approved in order to garner TV ratings.

## **CONCLUSION**

The implications of media conglomeration on television programming in the small Malaysia market are similar in many ways to the cases in the larger media markets. MPB has performed a structural transformation in order to survive economically in the Malaysia broadcasting industry. The transformation concentrated on the local media market, reducing the total amount of markets from seven to only three. The transformation however increased market competition within a small market creating stiff competition within large media corporations (RTM, Astro and MPB). MPB performed horizontal integration when they bought three problematic television stations. The integration strengthened MPB's competitiveness and they continued to be influential as the market leader in the local content and television industry.

Structural transformation had also influenced their television programming. Results highlight that imported and entertainment programming are key content in Malaysia. Imported content is greater than local content, whilst entertainment programmes rate higher than informative programmes. The imported programme resources consisted of the Western and regional content. The evidence conformed to Thussu's (2006:166) notion of the regionalisation of cultural products sought from the Asian region as alternative content. Although the Indians is the third largest community in Malaysia, findings from the interview approach perceived that Indian programmes are uneconomical and receive limited demand. One important distinctive finding of this study is that Chinese and religious content has been elevated in MPB's TV programming post-conglomeration, having been very limited in the pre-conglomeration period. Importation of foreign programmes from the Eastern and Western media markets allowed programmes containing international cultural values in

Malaysia to develop, which illustrates the multicultural society's tastes for local television programming. Adaptation and localisation occurred as an economical method to fill TV content gained from various countries.

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