

Available online at [www.sciencedirect.com](http://www.sciencedirect.com)**ScienceDirect**

Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 91 (2013) 461 – 474

**Procedia**  
Social and Behavioral Sciences

PSU-USM International Conference on Humanities and Social Sciences

## Media coverage on religious conflict in Malaysia : A preliminary study on how *The Star* and *Utusan Malaysia* framed the attempts to subvert the faith and believe of Muslims in a multiracial thanksgiving dinner at DUMC

**Muhammad Raqib B Mohd Sofian, Adnan Hussein\****A Master Candidate in School of Communication, USM, 11800, USM, Malaysia**A Professor in School of Communication, USM, 11800, USM, Malaysia*

---

**Abstract**

This study proposes to examine and compare how two mainstream newspapers in Malaysia with different languages – The Star and Utusan Malaysia reported one of the most controversial religious problems encountered in Malaysia's history which was the attempts to subvert the faith and belief of Muslims in a multiracial Thanksgiving Dinner at DUMC in Jalan 13/1, organised by Harapan Komuniti on 3rd August, 2011. The actions taken by the Enforcement Division of the Selangor Department of the Religion of Islam (Jais) which carried out a search at the Thanksgiving Dinner attracted a great attention from the mainstream media. Considered as a sensitive issue among Malaysians, it is an interesting case to examine and compare how major local media represented this conflict. The Star and Utusan Malaysia were analyzed with the objectives determining (1) the pattern of coverage of this issue; (2) the predominant news sources used by both newspapers; (3) the news framed used by the newspapers; and (4) slant of the news articles towards the parties in conflict.

© 2013 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. Open access under [CC BY-NC-ND license](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).  
Selection and peer-review under responsibility of Universiti Sains Malaysia.

Keywords: Framing, Apostasy, DUMC,

---

---

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +604-653-3602; fax: +604- 657-7736  
E-mail address: [raqibsofian@gmail.com](mailto:raqibsofian@gmail.com)

## 1. Introduction

As human beings, there is a need to believe in an ethereal being or God is “a part of our nature, built into our neuron mainframe” (Shermer, 2000, p. 47 in Douglas, 2004).[1] Human beings want to believe in a greater power, and, at the same time, want to share this religious experience. This experience allows humans to integrate spiritually into their personal and professional lives (Schneiders, 1989 in Douglas, 2004).

In recent decades, given the emergence of so many new religious bodies which make strong demands on the loyalty of their members, instances of apostasy have become matters of considerable attention for the mass media. The apostate’s story, in which he is usually presented as a victim, is seen as good news-copy for the media, particularly if he offers to “reveal” aspects, and perhaps secrets, of the movement to which he formerly belonged. (Wilson, 1994, p.2) [2]

Malaysia, a country of multi-ethnic community, religious affiliations and beliefs, language and customs of different practices, is resided by three main ethnics. The Malays, the Chinese and the Indians together with local minority ethnics form the multi-racial citizens of the nation. It is estimated that there are about 80 different ethnics speaking not less than 60 languages and dialects in Malaysia (J.S. Furnival in Muhammad Agus, 1993 in Mohd Asri, 2002). [3] Thus, religious and ethnic tensions are likely to occur if not controlled and properly handled.

Former Prime Minister, Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said that ethnic and religious issues had divided the people of Malaysia and had almost caused the nation on the brink of disaster even though it has been more than five decades since Malaysia obtained its independence from the Great Britain (Tun Abdullah Badawi in Jha, 2009).[4]

Conversion of religion among non-Muslims has always been a sensitive issue in Malaysia. Despite the government trying to balance off the different aspirations of religions among the people of Malaysia, it is often influenced by the interests of the religion majoritisation (Jha, 2009).

History has accorded several cases involving ethnic tensions, such as chaos and fights in Kampung Medan, cow head protest in Shah Alam which was a controversial issue debated over National Civics Bureau (BTN), a dispute about the use of the word “Allah” in Christianity’s religion material publication, the “Negarakuku” incident by Namewee, the controversy over the use of higher education textbooks in Ethnic Relations subject, the keris-raising incident, controversy over the Suqiu issue which involved the distribution of equity capital to various ethnic groups, attacks on churches and many others (Yong dan Md Sidin, 2010; Carmen Nge, 2012). [5]

In a separate case, Lina Joy created religion imbalance in Malaysia when she wanted to convert to other religion and modify the religious status on her identity card. This issue had caught major attentions of the media, blogs, mainstream press and online press (Yong and Md Sidin, 2010; Carmen Nge, 2012).

Islam has become a prime symbol that reflects the Malays in Malaysia and an entity that cannot be separated from the ethno-cultural heritage of the Malays. The unity gap among the Malays and non-Malays has widen causing differences and negative awareness among each other. As a result of this incident, the rift between the ethnic communities of Malaysia has turned from bad to worse (Lee, 2002; Lee, 2004; Neo, 2006; Ooi, 1991 cited in Yong and Md Sidin, 2010).[6]

According to Mustafa (2010) in (Loo and Mustafa, 2010) [7], it has always been a problem for issues related to religion and ethnicity to be reported in a multi-cultural society because religious news are always judged and framed by the press, even inadvertently, will cause misinterpretation and disrespectfulness towards a particular religion. Religious news are metaphorically labelled as “fuel” which will further ignite a conflict among the people of different ethnicity and culture.

The media add to the difficulty of the situation by commonly categorizing apostate groups among sects and cults in a way that can make them be perceived as deviant (Witham, 1998 in Douglas, 2004). Witham said this editorial treatment resulted from news media logic that seeks to draw attention to unusual behaviour that results in social conflict.

It also resulted from input by family and friends of religious group members who pressure media to expose alleged wrongdoing by dissenters. The process is exacerbated by mainstream religious groups that “add the aura of established religious authority to criticism of small groups” (Witham, 1998 in Douglas, 2004).

## **2. Case Study**

The case study is based upon an event which took place on the holy Ramadhan month, 3rd August 2011. The event sparked various reactions in the mainstream media when it was reported that 13 JAIS officers and 20 local police from Petaling Jaya and Sea Park districts invaded a church in Damansara Utama after receiving information (Utusan Malaysia, 5 Ogos 2011). Initially, the programme held by the church was to celebrate the breaking-fast among the Muslims and Thanksgiving. (<http://umno-online.com/?p=43432> ).

According to the source, there were 12 Muslims who attended the breaking fast dinner in the church and there were elements which caused suspicious such as usage of the words “Quran” and “pray” during a speech. Besides that, there was an attempt to obstruct the officers from carrying out spot-check and getting rid of the evidence (Utusan Malaysia, 5 Ogos, 2011).

As a result of that, the suspects were charged under Section 10 Syariah Criminal Enactment (Selangor) 1955 which allows anyone suspected of discriminating or disrespectful towards Islam to be charged under this law. Investigation was also carried out according to the non-Muslim Enactment on prohibition to spread other religions to the Muslims.

This incident had led to another conflict when Datuk Hasan Ali, former Selangor State Executive Councillor for Islamic Affairs was sacked from the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) and suspension of Professor Dr. Abdul Aziz from duty for questioning the decree of the Sultan on this issue. As a sequence to this event, “Himpunan Sejuta Umat” was held to explain apostasy throughout Malaysia.

## **3. Objectives**

As this case study focuses on the framing concept, this study was carried out to analyze the media coverage of two mainstream media of different languages, The Star and Utusan Malaysia, frame the inspection of JAIS officers on DUMC.

In general, the objectives of this study are to analyze the coverage pattern of this issue, to identify the news sources used by these press, to analyze news frame used by these press and to identify the stand and inclination of the news articles towards the individuals involved in the conflict.

This study is important because it compares the frame commonly used by The Star and Utusan Malaysia in reporting news about the DUMC incident.

From this study, we can identify and differentiate how the Malay press and English press report this incident. As we all know, the ideologies and target groups of each press are different, thus a relevant comparison is needed to be carried out.

The result of this study will be able to help researchers and students to further understand the framing concept commonly used in our local press without us realizing it. On top of that, press organizations can apply this study as a guideline for their press publications to be more objective and liberty in reporting news in the future.

#### **4. Theoretical Framework**

Media practitioners such as editors, staff and broadcasters play a very important role in shaping political reality in readers' mind in terms of how much importance to attach to an issue from the amount of information in a news story and its position. (McCombs and Shaw, 1972)[8]

In other words, agenda setting establishes the salient issues or images in the minds of the public and it occurs because the media must be selective in reporting the news. News outlets, as gatekeepers of information, make choices about what to report and how to report it. What the public knows about the state of affairs at any given time is largely a product of media gatekeeping. (Littlejohn and Foss, 2008,p.293) [9]

Framing was first introduced by Baterson in 1955. Tuchman (1978 in Lai and Lee, 2007) [10] stated that framing of news is commonly carried out by the media to be set as a reference to the society when it comes to viewing an event. Entman (2007) emphasizes that the theory of agenda-setting, priming and framing is a set of theory which serves as a powerful tool which he then relates the theory with a clear definition of unbiased tendency report.

Framing is one of the most important tool in the analysis of news content. Gitlin (1980) once said that, a person must ask the following when he or she analyzes any media content:

What frame is used in this content?

Why is this frame used but not the others?

What patterns are being shared by the framing of an event through different media framing and different occasion (as contained in Xiaofang, 2008) [11]

In addition, Griffin (2003)[12] regarded framing as the process of calling attention to some aspects of reality while obscuring others, which might lead to different reactions.

According to Entman (1993), [13] framing involves selection and projection towards a certain issue. Frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and or treatment recommendation for the item described (p. 52)

In terms of news production, framing is a process in which communication resources, such as news organizations, create impact and political issue or even political controversy (Nelson, Clawson & Oxley, 1997, p. 567 in Xiaofang, 2008).

Gamson in Yong and Md Saidin (2010) mentioned that the value of a news leads a reporter to exhibit an issue in a particular frame, more often than not reflecting wide and narrative cultural themes which helps the audience to define their thoughts on certain issue.

The framing used in the media in reporting an issue brings a large impact to how the public receives and interprets the issue. McCombs and Shaws (1993) [14] demonstrated a strong correlation between the degree to which an issue is framed and emphasized with the public's perception. Entman (1993) stated that the messages brought by the media influenced the awareness and thoughts of the public and the elite groups. He also added that even a single un-illustrated appearance of a notion in an obscure part of the text can be highly salient, if it comports with the existing schemata in a receiver's belief systems" (p. 53).

We can conclude that a frame is an emphasis in salience of different aspects of a topic. While agenda-setting theory deals with the salience of issues, framing is concerned with the presentation of issues. This brief definition is generally applied to studies of news frames and makes more intuitive sense than applying a narrow definition of frames as 'question wording'. (de Vreese, 2005, p.53) [15]

## **5.Methodology**

Content analysis was used as the research method for this study. Quantitative approach was employed in this research study. Content analysis method had been used by communication researchers to study almost all forms of communications. The content analysis method is a descriptive and inductive way to test a hypothesis. However, this method still uses the consistent method of categorization.

In fact, there are a few ways to define content analysis. Berelson (1952) [16] provided a classic definition of content analysis method as a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication. Berelson encouraged researchers to study all content aspects. Systematic, means that a set of procedure is applied in the same way to all the content being analyzed. Quantitative means simply the recording of numerical values or the frequencies with which the various defined types of content occur.

According to Keyton (2006) [17], coding in content analysis allows a higher score frame to be identified in a study. He added that the encoded data can be analyzed by observing the frequency of the incident category. Thus, the frequency is considered as an important measurement tool.

The two newspaper chosen are Utusan Malaysia and The Star due to the reason that both these mainstream press have their own target group. Utusan Malaysia is one of the top Malay newspapers in the country targets Malay readers while The Star, an English-language daily, targets multi-ethnic and middle-class readers. More importantly, Utusan Malaysia always has been singled out for evoking racial tension between the Malays and

non-Malays (Kua, 2010; Lee, 2010; Lim and Har, 2008 in Yong and Md Saidin, 2012) [18]. Both these daily newspapers have a huge number of readers.

According to the Audit Bureau of Circulations Malaysia and Ac Nielsen, the 2008 average daily circulation of Utusan Malaysia was 186,994 copies with 94,700 readers while Mingguan Malaysia accorded 455,893 copies with 1,612,000 readers, thus, making it the highest number of daily circulated in the country (source: <http://www.utusangroup.com.my/services/publishing>).

As for The Star daily, Nielsen Media Index (2011) revealed that The Star Daily and The Sunday Star recorded the highest number of readers in Malaysia with 1,024,000 and 973,000 readers respectively.

The sample of this study was drawn from 3rd August 2011 (starting date of this issue) until 14th December 2011 (two months after the Sultan of Selangor issued a decree on this issue). However, no action was taken against any party in this issue as there was lack of evidence. After the decree of Sultan Selangor, there were some new issues appeared involving the DUMC incident.

The unit analysis of the study was the article which included news, editorials, columns, features and letters. The articles were pulled from the respective newspaper's online archives.

This study chose the census sample because scholars say a census often makes the most sense for research that examines a particular event or series of events (Neuendorf, 2002; Riffe, Lacy & Fico, 2005 in Yong and Md Saidin, 2012).

## **6. Operational**

The extent of coverage was studied from three angles: (1) number of news items; (2) size of news items (measured by word count); (3) type of news items. The categories for news sources were (1) the ruling party; (2) opposition leaders (3) NGO representatives; (4) religious departments and churches representatives; (5) civilians.

This study adopted and modified five most commonly used news frame identified by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) [19] and Yong and Md Sidin (2010). The following are the frames used in this study with their operational definitions:

- Conflict—emphasizes conflict among and between individuals, groups, parties, or institutions as a means of capturing audience interest; reflects disagreement among and between individuals, groups, parties, or institutions; an individual, group, party, or institutional reproach; dichotomizes or labels the good and bad; news item refers to two sides instead of more than two sides of the issue/problem; news items refer to winners and losers.
- Consequences—reports an event, issue or problem in terms of the consequences on individuals, groups, parties, institutions, or the country; reports the outcome of a court case.
- Responsibility—presents an event, issue or problem in such a way as to attribute responsibility for its cause or solution to either the government or to an individual, group, party or institution; news items suggest the issue or problem requires urgent action.

- **Morality**—puts the event, issue or problem in the context of religious tenets or moral prescriptions; emphasizes collaboration and fellowship.
- **Human interest**—brings a human face or an emotional angle to the presentation of an event, issue or problem; refers to an effort to personalize the news, dramatize or emotionalize the news in order to capture and retain audience interest; employs adjectives or personal vignettes that generate feelings of outrage, empathy-caring, sympathy, or compassion; emphasizes how individuals and groups are affected by the event, issue, or problem; news items go into the private or personal lives of the actors.
- **Others**- any other frames that do not fall into the above categories.

The scheme that is used to encode the framing follows the format check “yes” or “no” to the attributed statements which are relevant to the unit of analysis. This study adapted the format of Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) in scrutinising framing. For statement with the answer “yes”, “1” is recorded whereas “0” is recorded for a “no” answer. The scale is designed for each of the six frames using average value of the frames’ statements. The value starting from “0” indicates the absence of the frame until “1” which indicates the full presence of the frame. Several rounds of reliability tests among the coders were carried out to ensure a high reliability of the research before the data collection is carried out.

To ensure the reliability of this study, two individuals advocated random selection of content samples for inter-coder reliability testing. The inter-coder reliability for this study was established by randomly selecting 30 news items. It was found that the inter-coder reliability for news frames was 0.70 or more.

In this study, the salinity of the text articles was studied to identify whether any of the coverage favours only one side or the other (Allen and Dalessio, 2000, pg 133; Kenny and Simpson, 1993; Scammell, 2005; Money, 2003 in Cenite and colleagues, 2008)[20]. Each article is categorized as “supportive”, “non-supportive” or “neutral” on the action taken by the JAIS. For instance, a six paragraphs article consisting of four paragraphs in supportive of the action taken by JAIS is classified as “supportive” regardless of the less attended focus of the article.

**7. Preliminary Result (Pilot test) & Previous Findings**

TABLE 2 : Extent of Coverage (n = 179)

| Type of article        | The Star | Utusan Malaysia |
|------------------------|----------|-----------------|
| News                   | 38       | 104             |
| Editorial              | 2        | 5               |
| Columns                | 4        | 5               |
| Opinions               | 2        | 16              |
| Letters                | 0        | 3               |
| Overall articles       | 46       | 133             |
| Number of words (size) | 17,368   | 48,650          |

TABLE 2 : News sources for each article

| Types of sources      | The Star (%) | Utusan Malaysia (%) |
|-----------------------|--------------|---------------------|
| Ruling party          | 13.3         | 35.2                |
| Opposition leaders    | 36.7         | 17.6                |
| NGO representatives   | 13.3         | 23.5                |
| Religious departments | 26.7         | 17.6                |
| Editors               | 6.7          | 6.1                 |
| Civilians             | 3.3          | 0                   |

TABLE 3 : News Frames

| Frames         | The Star (%) | Utusan Malaysia (%) |
|----------------|--------------|---------------------|
| Conflict       | 30.5         | 23.7                |
| Human Interest | 6.1          | 13.2                |
| Consequences   | 17.1         | 13.2                |
| Responsibility | 20.7         | 25                  |
| Moral          | 17.1         | 10.4                |
| Others         | 8.5          | 14.5                |

TABLE 4: Slant of articles

| Slant          | The Star (%) | Utusan Malaysia (%) |
|----------------|--------------|---------------------|
| Supportive     | 26.7         | 53.3                |
| Non-supportive | 20           | 0                   |
| Neutral        | 53.3         | 46.7                |



Media coverage on religious, ethnical and racial issues in Malaysia were carried out by several local researchers. Among them are Hallimahton et al. (2006) [21], Yong and Md Sidin (2010), Yong and Md Sidin (2011) [22] and Yong and Md Sidin (2012). The studies carried out by them discussed about the controversial issue regarding apostasy and related problems faced by the minority ethnics in Malaysia.

A study carried out by Halimahton et al. (2006) on the media coverage of two deceased, M. Moorthy and Nyonya Tahir in which problems arose regarding allowing the deceased their rights to receive proper final rites. In the case of Moorthy, he was said to have converted to Muslim before his death without the knowledge of his family members. On the other hand, Nyonya Tahir was born as a Muslim but had practises Buddhist teachings throughout her life and was buried in a Buddhist resting place upon her death.

There were about 112 articles covered Moorthy's case and 29 articles on Nyonya Tahir's case from various daily such as *Utusan Malaysia*, *New Straits Times*, *Malaysia Nanban* and *Sin Chew Daily*. In these case studies, analysis were carried on coverage involving the final rites performed on the two deceased. Moorthy's case was more controversial as it dragged on almost a month after he was buried.

In the study, the news articles were categorized into, news, articles, editorials and others. Letters were categorized as others in this case. According to Halimahton et al. (2006), the letters were useful to the readers as the readers are able to voice out their opinions and views and at the same time giving them the opportunity to interact with each other. However, these opinions and views were delivered when the conflict was still happening. For instance, a letter questioning the verdict of the Syariah Court and High Court did not helped to solve this problem.

Halimahton et al. (2006) stated that *Utusan Malaysia* and *New Straits Times* were not keen to lend their hands in helping to reduce the tension. On the other hand, they kept using the words, "anxiety", "swizzle", "pressure" and "bickering" which seem to promote deeper tensions. *Utusan Malaysia* made an irresponsible coverage on Moorthy's next of kins who were still in mourning during the court's proceeding at that time.

In the case of Nyonya Tahir, most news articles were published by *Sin Chew Daily*, *New Straits Time*, *Utusan Malaysia* and *Malaysia Nanban*. The findings of this case clearly showed that the Chinese daily gave more attention to cases involving a Chinese while *Malaya Nanban* daily provided less attention and coverage as the case did not involved a member of their ethnic. *Utusan Malaysia*, on the other hand, did not emphasize on this issue even though it involves a person converting from Muslim to Buddhism.

Yong and Md Sidin (2011) had also carried out another case study which involved an apostate Muslim, Lina Joy, who wanted to convert from Muslim and change her name in her national identity card. Articles from *Sin Chew Daily*, *The Star*, *Utusan Malaysia* and *Malaysiakini* were studied and *Sin Chew Daily* was found to have published the articles with the most words, 655 words, while *Malaysiakini* had published the most articles regarding this issue compared to other daily.

The sources used exhibits a variety of difference. *Utusan Malaysia* was seemed to adopt more opinions from UMNO leaders and professional bodies such as representatives from Bar Council. *The Star* and *Sin Chew Daily* also emphasized news sources from professional bodies while *Malaysiakini*, being the only press, which adopted its sources from the public.

*Utusan Malaysia* portrayed the frame "conflict" and "consequences" the most. For example the frame "conflict" was exhibited when former Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi was reported to

have urged the public to accept the Federal Court's ruling and acknowledge the Syariah Court's verdict. The frame "consequences" was exhibited when Utusan Malaysia reported that majority of the ruling of the Federal Court prohibited Lina Joy's application to remove her Muslim name from her national identity card.

Utusan Malaysia also applied the frames "moral" and "responsibility" in their reports. For instance, Utusan Malaysia published articles from former Mufti of Perlis, Associate Professor Dr. Asri Zainul Abidin, who discussed the need for Muslims to change their attitude towards non-Muslims. He advised Muslims to be more tolerance and allow non-Muslims to enter the mosque's compound (Utusan Malaysia, 22 July 2007 in Yong and Md Sidin, 2011). In a separate article, Dr. Asri advised the Muslims not to put the blame on others if there is any Muslim who decided to convert into other religion. He urged Muslims to build a fundamental understanding about Islam and try to understand the reason for apostasy (Utusan Malaysia, 3 June 2007 in Yong and Md Sidin, 2011).

With regards to this issue, The Star had applied the most "conflict" frame in its reports. For example, it was reported that the Secretary General for Malaysia Church Council, Rev. Herman Shastri, accepted the ruling of the Federal Court, with worries and dissappointments. Rev. Herman mentioned that the country's constitution that allows freedom of religion had been sidelined (The Star, 1 June 2007 in Yong and Md Sidin, 2011).

The frames of "responsibility" and "consequences" are also applied by The Star. For instance, it was reported by The Star that the ruling of the court had affected an individual's freedom of religion as stated by the Federal Constitution, especially to those who wish to convert from Islam to other religions (The Star, 30 May 2007 in Yong and Md Sidin, 2012).

From the frame "responsibility", The Star had always shown initiatives to resolve the conflict to the government. For instance, Bishop Paul Tan Chee Ing, stated that the government and lawmakers in the country need to review existing laws so that a protection which is equal and fair is given to all Malaysians in their freedom of religion as stated in the Article 11 of the Federal Constitution (The Star, 31 May 2007 in Yong and Md Sidin, 2012).

In this case, "human interest" frame was least used by The Star. Benjamin Dawson, lawyer of Lin Joy, stated that he was very disappointed with the Federal Court's ruling which did not allow his client to change the religious status in her national identification card. According to Dawson, the Federal Court had deny the freedom rights of all Malaysians (The Star, 31 May 2007 in Yong and Md Sidin, 2011).

In another case, Yong and Md Sidin (2012) carried out a study on the media coverage of Hindu Right's Action Force (Hindraf) who organized street demonstration demanding for their rights which according to them were sidelined. A total of 1,205 articles on Hindraf were collected from four newspapers; Sin Chew Daily (513 articles), Malaysiakini (342 articles), The Star (185 articles) and Utusan Malaysia (165 articles).

The mainstream newspapers used leaders of the ruling party, Barisan Nasional (BN) which is a coalition of the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC), Malaysian People's Movement Party (Gerakan), etc. as their dominant news sources. In contrary, Malaysiakini turned to the public as its most important news source.

The findings of Yong and Md Sidin (2012) showed that the most salient frame found in all the newspapers was conflict. An example of report showing conflict is the report on Uthayakumar, a lawyer representing

Hindraf, that the enemy of Hindraf is not Malay but the UMNO party as a whole, who neglected the Indian community in the process of development.

In response, Awang Selamat, a columnist for *Utusan Malaysia*, noted that the centre point of national security in Malaysia lies within the Malay community. He warned that it would be a real threat if the Malays' security was challenged. He wrote that the demand made by Hindraf to abolish Malay privileges and its declaration to be an enemy of UMNO were efforts to threaten the Malays because UMNO had represented the Malays since independence. (Bisik-bisik, 2007 in Yong and Md Sidin, 2012).

All of the newspapers except for *Utusan Malaysia* reported criticisms towards the government and MIC party in their conflict frame. Toh Kin Woon, a leader from GERAKAN party asserted that the government should look into the Indians' woes rather than condemning the Hindraf rally.

An analysis of the slant of the articles revealed that supportiveness toward the Hindraf movement was most apparent in *Malaysiakini*. *Utusan Malaysia* was most critical in its coverage of Hindraf while *Sin Chew Daily* appeared to be the most neutral.

## 8. Discussion and Conclusion

It can be concluded that most ethnic-based newspapers provide more coverage to events involving their own community. A characteristic of vernacular newspapers is that they tend to focus their attention on events involving their niche community only. Therefore, it is not surprising that *Utusan Malaysia*, *Sin Chew Daily* or *Malaysia Nanban* to focus on issues involving their respective ethnic groups (Halimahton et al., 2006).

These newspapers were shaped by the British colonial to fight for the benefits and rights and paying more attention to their own ethnic community rather than for all other ethnic groups (Ahmad Sebi, 1991 in Mohd Asri, 2002).

John A. Lent (1977, pg. 33 and 40 in Mohd Asri, 2002) had the same opinion stating that reports by ethnic-based newspapers are more inclined to strengthen the rights and focus on the problems faced by their respective ethnic only. According to him, Chinese-based newspapers at that time were published to promote and defend the mother-tongue, culture and tradition of the Chinese who are the minority in Malaya. Same goes for Malay-based newspapers that focused on Malay sentiments in their reports.

A thorough study on the ethnic-based news reports showed that these newspapers discussed racial issues which led to uncertainties about the roles and vision of the ethnic-based newspapers towards their readers and the nation. The response of the newspapers that are more inclined to the benefits of their own community may be one of the reason that inhibits the progress of national integration in the country (Mohd Asri, 2002).

From the studies, it is obvious that most pro-government newspapers obtain their sources from the ruling party, the *Barisan Nasional* and other contradicting sources are rarely used. *Utusan Malaysia* for example, ousted UMNO leaders as the major news source. On the other hand, *The Star* and *Sin Chew Daily* which can also be categorized as pro-government newspapers do provide spaces, not much, to parties who have different thoughts from the ruling party (Yong and Md Sidin, 2011). *The Star* is always more liberal in its reports since 1971 (Article 19, 2005). [23]

The sources used by the newspapers also depend on the mentality of the newspapers. In Malaysia, this mentality cannot be separated from politicians and businessmen who have strong relationship with the political leaders. This strong symbolic relationship has directly affected the freedom of press and the agenda policy set by the press. In turn, it will determine how the newspapers will frame a particular issue. (Jeniri Amir, 2005). [24]

Anyone who holds power in the selection stage of a newspaper will be in control of the whole newspaper. The content and message of the newspaper are determined by the individual who controls the newspaper for his own sake and benefits.

Ownership plays an important role in a media organization with its contents controlled through staff recruitments and promotions. Newspapers confirmed that they need to follow the instruction by their superior and the publisher's political affiliation. This will influence the editorials, columns and media coverage of the newspapers (Wang, 2003). [25]

In conclusion, religious and ethnic issues are very sensitive in Malaysia and are able to cause disharmony and racial tensions if they are not handled wisely, regardless by the government or the media (Yong and Md Sidin, 2010).

Therefore, Malaysians are not encouraged to discuss religious and ethnic issues. The government is to take action against those who provoke this issue through acts such as the Internal Security Act (ISA) which has been abolished recently (Yong and Md Sidin, 2010).

Journalists in the country are required to report religious conflict issues moderately and not to the extreme. They need to ensure that the parties involved in the conflict are given the chance to express their thoughts (Loo and Mustafa, 2010).

Vitug (in Loo and Mustafa, 2010) urged that all journalists should think of the unexpected consequences including psychological and emotional consequences from a particular conflict. Having reports that take into consideration the above consequences will serve as a reminder to the audiences that they are also involved in a conflict regardless whether it is personal, family, social, economy or politic.

## References

- [1] Douglas J. S. (2004), The Framing of Contemporary Christian Apostasy on the World Wide Web, *Journal of Media and Religion*, 3:1, 1-20
- [2] Wilson, B.R (1994), *Apostates and New Religious Movements*, Los Angeles : Freedom Publication, 6pp.
- [3] Mohd Asri bin Mohamad (2002), Pengaruh Golongan Elit Pemerintah Dalam Pemaparan. Berita-berita Etnik. Analisis Kandungan Terhadap Pelaporan Berita Akhbar Utusan Malaysia dan Berita Harian Sejurus Sebelum dan Selepas Pilihanraya Umum Ke-10 Malaysia, Thesis M.A, Universiti Sains Malaysia.
- [4] Jha P.K (2009): Religious Assertion in Malaysia: Constrained or Conflagrated?, *Strategic Analysis*, 33:6, 890-902

- [5] Carmen Nge (2012), *Melapor tentang 'Kaum' dan Etnisiti : Buku Panduan untuk Wartawan Malaysia, Selangor : Centre For Independent Journalism*
- [6] Yong Lai Fong dan Md Sidin Ahmad Ishak (2010), 'Covering Religious Conflict in Malaysia : How Sin Chew Daily Framed the Lina Joy Controversy', *Jurnal Pengajian Media Malaysia* Jilid 12, *Malaysian Journal of Media Studies* Volume 12, Vol.12, No.2.
- [7] Loo, E. G., & Mustafa, K. A. (2010). *Journalism in good faith: Issues and practices in religion reporting*. Selangor: Marshall Cavendish (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd
- [8] McCombs, M.E & Shaw, D.L (1972). *The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media*. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36, pp.176-85
- [9] Littlejohn W.L and Foss K.A (2008), *Theories of Human Communication*, Belmont, Calif.:Thomson Wadsworth.
- [10] Lai Che Ching @ Abd.Latif & Lee Kuok Tiung (2007), *Kasus Ambalat : Reaksi Media Indonesia : Framing dan Komunikasi Antarabangsa*, *Jurnal Komunikasi, Malaysian Journal of Communication*, Vol 23: 14-27
- [11] Xiangfao, Ma (ed), *Extra Media Influences on the Issue Attention Cycle : A Content Analysis of Global Warming Coverage in the People's Daily and The New York Times, 1998-2007*, MA thesis, Ohio University, *Journalism (Communication)*.
- [12] Griffin, E. A. (2003). *A First Look at Communication Theory*. San Francisco: McGraw-Hill.
- [13] Entman, R. M. (1993). *Framing : Towards clarification of a fractured paradigm*. *Journal of Communication*, 43 (4), 51-58.
- [14] McCombs, M.E. & Shaw, D. L. (1993). *The evolution of agenda-setting research: twenty- five years in the marketplace of ideas*. *Journal of Communication*, 43 (2), 58-67
- [15] de Vreese, C. H. (2005). *News framing: Theory and typology*. *Information Design Journal + Document Design*, 13 (1), 48-59
- [16] Berelson, B., (1952), *Content Analysis in Communication Research*. Gleancoe, IL : Free Press.
- [17] Keyton, J. (2006). *Communication Research : Asking Questions, finding Answers* (2nd edition), Boston : McGraw Hill.
- [18] Yong Lai Fong dan Md Sidin Ahmad Ishak (2012). *Framing Interethnic Conflict in Malaysia: A Comparative Analysis of Newspaper Coverage on the Hindu Rights Action Force (Hindraf)*, *International Journal of Communication* 6 (2012), 166–189
- [19] Semetko, H.A and Valkenburg, P.M (2000). "Framing European politics: a content analysis of press and television news", *Journal of Communication*, Spring, pp. 93-107

- [20] Cenite M., Chong Shing Yee, Han Teck Juan, Lim Li Qin & Tan Xian Lin (2008): Perpetual development journalism? Balance and framing in the 2006 Singapore election coverage, *Asian Journal of Communication*, 18:3, 280-295
- [21] Halimahton S., Hua. N.T. and Raman, V. (2006). "Covering race and religion : the Moorthy and Nyonya Tahir cases in four Malaysian Newspapers", *Kajian Malaysia*, Vol. XXIV, No.1 & 2, pp.185-201.
- [22] Yong Lai Fong dan Md Sidin Ahmad Ishak (2011), Framing Religious Disputes: A Comparative Analysis of the Lina Joy Controversy Reported by Malaysian Newspapers, *The Journal of the South East Asia Research centre for Communication and Humanities*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2011, 21-37
- [23] Article 19 and SUARAM (2005), *Freedom of Expression and the Media in Malaysia*, Kuala Lumpur : Article 19 and SUARAM Publication.
- [24] Jeniri Amir (2005), *Agenda Akhbar dan Agenda Politik MCA*, *Jurnal Pengajian Media Malaysia*.
- [25] Wang Lay Kim (2001), Media and Democracy in Malaysia, *Journal of The European Institute of Communication and Culture* 8(2) : 67-68

### **Websites**

- [www.utusangroup.com.my](http://www.utusangroup.com.my), accessed on 7th August, 2012 at 5.00 pm.
- [www.thestar.com.my](http://www.thestar.com.my), accessed on 7th August, 2012 at 5.00 pm.
- <http://umno-online.com/?p=43432> accessed on 7th November, 2012 at 6.00 pm.
- [www.Malaysiakini.com.my](http://www.Malaysiakini.com.my), accessed on 7th August, 2012 at 5.00 pm.