

News Framing by Mainstream Media on Political Parties

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Abstract: The results of GE14 marked an interesting time for Malaysians as to the direction of mainstream media and how they will frame news of the new ruling coalition and the new opposition. This discussion paper examines the context of mainstream media in Malaysia in relation to their ties to selected political parties and presents a case to study the post-GE14 media using framing theory. Several studies on past political news that have used the theory will be cited as supporting evidence.

Keywords: Barisan Nasional, framing theory, General Election, ownership of mainstream media, Pakatan Harapan.

INTRODUCTION

After Malaysia's 14th General Election (GE14), the result marked a historic moment in Malaysia; Barisan Nasional (BN), the ruling party for more than 61 years, was ousted from power by the opposition coalition of Pakatan Harapan (PH). This was unprecedented as BN lost all federal states in Peninsular Malaysia except for Perlis and Pahang (Azizuddin, 2014). PH consisting of the Democratic Action Party (DAP), People's Justice Party (PKR), National Trust Party (AMANAH), and Malaysian United Indigenous Party (PPBM), had won 121 seats, an increase from 68 back in the 13th General Election (GE13), while BN only won 79 seats, a drop from 133 seats in GE13. The other notable party in contention, Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) obtained 18 seats while United Sabah Alliance obtained only one and the remaining three seats were won by independent politicians. Being the majority in the House of

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Representatives, it was the first time PH could form the federal government and also the first time BN would be competing to earn the people's trust as the new opposition coalition.

This swapping of roles marks an interesting phase in Malaysia's mainstream media such as *New Straits Times*, *The Star*, and *Utusan Malaysia*. In Malaysia, the mainstream media has often focused on positive stories for the benefit of the political elite (Anuar, 2000). This is due to the ownership structure of the media that has ties with certain political parties. Long regarded as a state apparatus of the government (BN), it has been used to limit the access to opposition parties (PH) (Azizuddin, 2014), but they are in new grounds. As BN takes on the role of opposition coalition, how will *Utusan Malaysia*, *The Star*, and *New Straits Times* report on them? Furthermore, it will be interesting to note if the mainstream media will be the state apparatus of the Pakatan Harapan (PH), albeit with close ties to BN. This discussion paper is divided into three parts to understand this social phenomenon. Firstly, Malaysia's media ownership will be highlighted. This unique relationship would provide sufficient background to how and why the media operate so in Malaysia. Secondly, an explanation of framing theory will be provided to study how mainstream media portray the nation's political parties. Lastly, past studies that used this theory will be analysed to provide support and stir interest in this discussion.

OWNERSHIP OF MAINSTREAM MEDIA

Media can never be examined in a vacuum as they are social creations which are heavily influenced by the economic base. Employing a holistic approach to media and communication is crucial as media policies, institutions, and professionals need to be studied within and as part of wider processes within societies, which, in turn, are principally by-products of and driven by capitalism, and are full of contradictions and inequities (Zaharom, 2002). Thus, it is imperative to study the media within their ownership to develop an understanding in the Malaysian context.

In 1961, the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), a key party within BN, had already successfully acquired *Utusan Melayu*. This newspaper was an advocate of the Malay rights and had supported

UMNO's efforts in opposing Malayan Union. However, infighting within the organisation happened when an UMNO man, Ibrahim Fikri, was appointed director of operations to influence the medium as a supporter of the ruling coalition. After a strike by the journalists over the appointment, a significant amount of the company's shares were bought over by UMNO, enabling the party to have full allocative control over the newspaper (Mohd Safar, 1996). After Malaya's independence, this was the first time a political party took over a newspaper, but more was to come. Since then, *Utusan Malaysia* (renamed in 1967) has always been affiliated with UMNO.

Another key incident that affected the landscape of media indirectly was the racial riots in 1969. On 13th May, there was a racial riot between the Malays and Chinese and a state of emergency was declared throughout the country. All publications were suspended temporarily in an attempt to curb further spread of ethnic violence (Zaharom & Wang, 2004). As a result of the racial riot, the New Economic Policy (NEP) was implemented in 1971. As the main reason for the ethnic enmity in 1969 was believed to have arisen from the socio-economic imbalance between the ethnic groups, the NEP was set up to address the imbalance with a two-pronged strategy as:

‘...to reduce and eventually eradicate poverty; and to restructure society so that the identification of economic functions with ethnicity could be reduced and eliminated...’ (Zaharom & Wang, 2004).

What resulted however, was the start of the ruling coalition's (BN) investment in major newspapers. The Malayan Chinese Association (MCA), through its official holding company Huaren Holdings, ventured into Chinese and English-medium newspapers. According to Azizuddin (2014), MCA bought a 42.4% share in *The Star* in 2010 as a desire to ‘reorganise its investments and allow its investment arm, Huaren Holdings, to seek other assets. The Chinese daily *Nanyang Siang Pau* was also acquired in 2002, thus strengthening the ruling coalition's hold on other newspapers. Another party of the ruling coalition, the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) also dominated a portion of the Tamil press through Maika Holdings Bhd., again another investment arm of the

political party (Zaharom & Wang, 2004). Thus, the NEP began a series of ownership and control structure over various newspapers with different languages. This ownership has changed the mainstream media to evolve to become a state apparatus, which is most evident during an election campaign where the opposition parties with their limited access to the mainstream media would turn to social media – Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, news portals and blogs—to communicate their reformist policies and counter the government’s campaign on state-controlled television, radio and newspaper, (Azizuddin, 2014).

FRAMING THEORY

Framing theory is a suitable theory to tie in the complex relationship between the media and state and how news is written in general. According to Entman (1993), the concept of framing offers a way to describe the power of communicating text because it ‘illuminates the precise way in which influence over human consciousness is exerted by the transfer (or communication) of information from one location – such as speech, utterance, news report, or novel – to the consciousness.’ The framing theory typically involves selection and salience which is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient (a piece of information becoming more noticeable, meaningful or memorable) in the communicating text. This is done to perform any four of the framing functions - to define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies. For example, the ‘cold war’ frame used by the U.S news highlighted civil wars as a problem, identified communist rebels as the cause, offered moral judgements (atheistic aggression), and recommended a solution in the form of support for the other side (Entman, 1993),

‘Frames’ work by highlighting bits of information about an item, which leads to elevating them in salience. This then leads to the increased probability that receivers will ‘perceive the information, discern meaning and thus process it, and store it in memory’ (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). In an experiment conducted by Kahneman and Tversky (1984) to investigate the power of framing and the way it operates, they concluded that framing selects and calls attention to some aspect of reality described while also simultaneously ‘direct attention away from other aspects’. This

highlights the point that framing has a two-fold effect - to focus attention on an issue as it is reported while drawing attention away from another issue as it receives less attention. Thus, framing is commonly applied for political communication as it 'plays a major role in the exertion of political power' (Entman, 1993).

In Malaysia, framing in the mainstream media naturally tended to become tools of Barisan Nasional to convey information regarding their ideologies due to ownership through investment arms (Wong & Lean, 2011). According to Cohen and Young (1973), this form of control has resulted in manipulative news where reality is distorted by journalists and editors to safeguard interests of certain political parties. Therefore, framing theory is a suitable theory to be used in analysing the way the mainstream media frame news to influence the readers' perception of different political parties.

PAST STUDIES

Many scholars have analysed the mainstream media in Malaysia and their portrayal of the political parties. These analyses centre around political news around the time of General Election to investigate how they were written to gain votes. Typically, these studies have used framing theory as a backdrop to analyse the political news chosen. The selected articles are "*Vote for me!*": *A Content Analysis of News Reports Leading to the 12th General Election Political Communication* by Wong and Lean (2011), *Framing Islam-related issues during GE13: An analysis of Malaysian mainstream newspapers* by Aini and Nerawi (2015), and *Political Partisanship in the Mainstream Print Media* by Azizuddin (2014).

"*VOTE FOR ME!*": A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF NEWS REPORTS LEADING TO THE 12TH GENERAL ELECTION POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

Wong and Lean analysed political news reported by *The Star* in the days leading to GE12 in 2008. Firstly, one of the reasons *The Star* was selected was due to its readership among all English dailies in Malaysia. It ranked the highest with approximately 1.08 million readers (Nielsen

Media Research, 2008). All political news were analysed between 13 February and 7 March as it was the allotted campaigning period by the Election Commission. Out of the 192 news articles that were published, 155 articles consisted of issues raised by BN while only 34 articles were raised by Pakatan Rakyat (PR) which consisted of People's Justice Party (PKR), Democratic Action Party (DAP), and Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) and the remaining 3 articles discussed the issues brought up by the independent parties.

What stands out in this study is the wide disparity of coverage given to different political parties which Wong and Lean opined 'might give the impression to the reader that BN is the most influential party of the three parties' (Wong and Lean, 2011). Thus, the readers might perceive that news of the other two parties should not be given more attention compared to news of the BN party. This framing falls in line with McCombs (2002) argument that media consumers learn about the degree of importance to be conferred for an issue based on the emphasis placed on it in the news. Due to their ownership of the daily, it was no surprise as political figures from BN used *The Star* as a channel to communicate. Furthermore, the one-sided coverage indicates that the newspaper functioned to highlight information about BN, and in doing so, elevated them in salience.

FRAMING ISLAM-RELATED ISSUES DURING GE13: AN ANALYSIS OF MALAYSIAN MAINSTREAM NEWSPAPERS

In a study conducted by Aini & Nerawi (2015), they analysed how the ruling government (BN) in 2013 utilised the mainstream media to gain the support of Malay voters. In this study, they only picked out political news that touched on Islam, a religion practised by the majority in the country. In analysing *New Straits Times*, *The Star*, *Utusan Malaysia*, and *Berita Harian*, they looked at how Islam-related issues were framed. These newspapers were selected because of their large circulation and readership, being considered to be among the most important source of information among many Malaysians. Over a period of 17 days from April 20 to May 6 2013, Islam-related news that appeared in selected printed newspapers were recorded and analysed based on what were thought to influence the voters' decisions. As Malays

constitute the majority of Malaysian voters, the remark given was that ‘for the first time in the Malaysian election history, the battle between the pro-government (BN) and opposition (PR) political parties were dominated by the Malays’.

Out of the 178 news and feature articles gathered, the majority came from the Malay-medium newspapers *Utusan Malaysia* and *Berita Harian*, which correlated to the dominant Malay-Muslim readership. The three most dominant themes found were *hudud* (prescribed punishments which the Qur’an or *Sunnah* have determined for a handful of offences), *Negara Islam* (Islamic State), and *Kalimah Allah* (the word ‘Allah’). As the *hudud* issue was a hotly-debated topic then, it constituted about 46% of the news gathered. Due to the country’s multi-religious background, the way of framing this issue would affect the voters’ decisions. A negatively framed *hudud* could cause the voters to reject an opposition party like PAS and end up choosing BN. In the same vein, a negatively framed *hudud* could also cause discomfort and anger among non-Muslim Malaysians (Aini & Nerawi, 2015). In many occasions, PAS’ *Hudud* was constantly framed as a negative concept that did not fit the country’s societal context. When it came to the topic of Islamic State, PAS’ agenda was criticised as backward and underdeveloped as found in this quotation in *The Star*:

Malaysians accept the twin affirmations that Islam is the country’s official religion and that individuals are free to practise the religion of their choice, said MCA Young Professional Bureau Chief, Datuk Chua Tee Yong. Therefore, hudud law is not suitable for Malaysia because of the country’s multi-racial nature (“Hudud not suitable for Malaysia,” 2013).

In response to the debate between Muslims and Christians on the usage of the word ‘Allah’, Muslim political leaders of BN tried to portray themselves as the real guardians of Islamic teachings in Malaysia as demonstrated in this excerpt:

A professor has questioned the DAP for its real motive in not using its rocket symbol when the Register of Societies and Election Commission did not bar it.... “Are they trying to keep their rocket

symbol out of sight, in order not to remind Muslim voters of the ‘Kalimah Allah’ controversy?” (Tan et al., 2013).

Another aspect that was examined in Islam-related issues was the news slant taken by the mainstream media. News slant refers to whether the article is framed positively, negatively, or neutrally in regard to a political party. This is also crucial as framing ‘provides’ suggestions on passing moral judgments as well as solutions. As such, the results showed that the majority of Islam-related news across all newspapers were framed negatively towards opposition political parties. This was undoubtedly done in a bid to win Malay votes for BN while fostering public hatred of Pakatan Rakyat (PR). Further research showed that the tone used was one that favoured BN as shown in this excerpt in *The Star*:

A video of former political aide, Saiful Bukhari Azlan in Mecca carrying out a sumpah laknat in connection with his sodomy claim was shown for the first time to the media. This followed the retraction on Tuesday by his father ... he had “repented” and “wanted to return to the path of truth”. (Shagar, 2013).

POLITICAL PARTISANSHIP IN THE MAINSTREAM PRINT MEDIA

Lastly, in a research conducted by Azizuddin (2014), he sought to understand the extent of mainstream media bias towards certain political parties during GE13. Unlike Aini, he looked at news coverage in general to see if the domination of media coverage had translated to positive election results. He also expanded his research scope to 10 newspapers that were published in Malay, English, Mandarin, and Tamil. While Aini only focused on Islam-related issues, Azizuddin was more concerned with whether political parties received a positive coverage, negative coverage, or neutral coverage, which is essentially news slant. Positive coverage as defined by him would be ‘praising, supporting or mere reports on policy and activities’ of a particular party.

The data collected revealed interesting statistics about how mainstream media framed news slant of BN and PH. For example, *Utusan Malaysia* had 329 articles categorised as BN+ while PR had 385 articles that were negatively framed. This huge difference affirms

Azizuddin's (2015) claim that *Utusan Malaysia* has always operated as a mouthpiece of UMNO. Generally, the news slant for English and Malay-medium newspapers were heavily biased in BN's favour. Further analysis showed that issues on race and religion were something exploited by both coalitions during the campaign, thus affirming Aini and Nerawi's research on Islam-related issues.

However, *Sinar Harian* and Chinese newspapers like *China Press* and *Sin Chew Jit Poh* were the only media to provide a balanced coverage on both BN and PR. While PR were in 81 negatively-framed news in *Sinar Harian*, there were also 145 PR+ news, with a small difference the 154 positively-framed news for BN. This difference by *Sinar Harian* can be traced back to an interview with Chief Editor Abdul Jalil Ali who said, 'we believe if the news newspaper is government-friendly, it won't be reader-friendly. Our readers determine our survival.'

CONCLUSION

The discussion of mainstream media in terms of how they frame political news has contributed to the existing literature as set on the agenda of the media. This also sheds 'a better picture of the relationship between the news media and political figures' while 'increasing awareness over the media's power' (Wong and Lean, 2011). Having a better understanding of the context in Malaysia's media - namely the ownership of media by political parties, this post-GE14 study could provide a new insight as this is the first time BN and PH have switched roles. How would the mainstream media, long heralded as the ruling coalition's spokesperson, report on the new ruling coalition and new opposition? As Malaysia enters an uncharted territory, such a research at this time would provide an interesting insight to Malaysia's mainstream media.

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**Keramat Tahfiz Tragedy:
A Content Analysis of Media Framing
in the New Straits Times (NST)**

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Abstract: The study was carried out with the purpose of identifying the types of frames used by the New Straits Times (NST) when reporting on the fire tragedy that hit Darul Quran Ittifaqiyah religious school. A total of 23 students and teachers were killed in the disaster which was dubbed as the worst in the country's history in the past 20 years. The study found that the newspaper had used at least six different frames to help readers form their opinion on the issue. Scholars had also found that the use of frames may have influenced the decision-makers. These were proven when the newspaper's recommendation to prevent the incident from re-occurring was taken into consideration and the fact that the school management managed to escape from being punished for operating illegally and without installing fire safety equipment.

Keywords: Media frame, framing, types of frame, methods of framing, Keramat Tahfiz tragedy, Darul Quran Ittifaqiyah school

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INTRODUCTION

1.0 OVERVIEW

September 14, 2017 would be the day that would be remembered by all Malaysians. This was the day when the nation' mourned the tragedy that saw 23 young souls perished in a fire that burned down the Darul Quran Ittifaqiyah school in Kampung Datuk Keramat, Kuala Lumpur. The early morning blaze which was said to be the country's worst fire disaster in the past 20 years gained much attention from the government as well as the public.

The fire which started on the second and higher floors of the school, spread quickly thus preventing its occupants from escaping. It was also reported that the religious school was operating illegally. And it was not equipped with any firefighting equipment. The emergency staircase, which was located in the centre of the religious school building was also blocked.

The incident received extensive coverage from not only the local media but the international media as well. Most media organisations appeared to be in a race to produce the most updated, sensational story in their bid to attract the readers' attention. Among the strategies used by the media was to frame their stories according to the news agencies' stand. This, however, would also indirectly affect the mood or the perception towards the issue.

This study was conducted to look into the use of framing in stories related to Darul Quran Ittifaqiyah fire and how it may have influenced public opinion on the issue and affected decision-making. A research field highly relevant to understanding media effects on information processing is referred to as "news frames". The media play a key role in forming opinions by influencing people's understanding and perception of a topic. News frames explain how the media present information in a way that emphasises certain aspects of a topic, making those informational aspects more salient than others (Otieno et al., 2013).

Framing is a crucial practice in journalism – it gives meaning to events and issues when it is used appropriately, they instigate the readers' attention and interest. By giving emphasis to certain aspects and downplaying others, they can capture and retain readers' attention to the news (Tankard et al., 1991; Zillman et al., 2004).

Tiung & Hasim (2009) in their study noted that the opportunity to frame any political problem emerged from the media's ability to pick and decide which information is to be offered following pressure from certain groups and politicians. They added that the media have the ability to drop all message inputs given by other parties and create a debate fully moulded by them. This shows that the realities that we access through the media might be the realities that were created by the media.

There are quite a number of framings that the media use to influence their readers. The placing of the story and tone including the use of words are some of the example of frames. At the end of the study, the researcher aims to explain how the New Straits Times (NST) frames their stories and how they may have influenced the authorities in making their decision.

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The study was conducted within the context of media framing. The researcher aims to highlight the idea that each media have their own way in framing their stories and the differences in the frames used by a media organisation which will affect views of the public on the issue.

Gamson and Modigliani (1987) defined media frame as a central organising idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events. The frame suggests what the controversy is all about and the essence of the issue. The scholars believed that frames were formulated based on the journalist's norms and practices and the influence of interest groups. Frame is deemed to be important as it helps to turn a meaningless and non-recognisable happening into a discernible event. Tuchman (1978) noted that "The news frame organises everyday reality and it is part and parcel of everyday reality... (it) is an essential feature of news. Gitlin (1980) believed that media frames help the journalist to quickly identify and classify information and package it for efficient relay to the audiences.

Neuman et al. (1992) said they (the media) skimmed over or ignored irrelevant or uninteresting content. This explains the use of framing by the media to either directly or subtly influence their targeted audience. Kehneman and Tversky (1979) believed framing helps to determine how people will evaluate and decide to act on a problem and issue. Media may

omit certain things to cover certain aspects or give emphasis on some other things in order to show their significance.

Entman (1993) claimed that framing was used to shape and alter the audience's interpretations and preferences by introducing or raising the salience or apparent importance of certain ideas, activating schemas that encourage target audiences to think, feel and decide in a particular way.

The researcher has selected a number of past studies to guide this study. These past literatures were selected based on the keywords – Media Frame, framing, types of frames, methods of framing, Keramat Tahfiz tragedy and Darul Quran Ittifaqiyah school.

At the end of the study, the researcher attempts to identify the types of framing used by the selected newspaper and how it may have influenced public opinion and the authorities in their decision making. Content analysis was used to analyse news articles gathered from the New Straits Times.

(1) OVERVIEW ON DARUL QURAN ITTIFAQIYAH RELIGIOUS SCHOOL

On September 14, 2017 a fire broke out at Pusat Tahfiz Darul Quran Ittifaqiyah religious centre located at Jalan Keramat Ujung, Kampung Datuk Keramat around 5.15am. The blaze was said to have started in one of the dormitory rooms on the second floor of the three-storey building. There were a total of 36 students and six teachers in the building during the incident. The religious school which was built from contributions from the local "surau" had only operated for about a year.

The students were asleep when the blaze broke out. It was reported that the building's windows were fitted with grills which could not be opened from the inside and there was only one door to enter and exit the building. The fire exit was also blocked, thus preventing the victims to escape. Firemen who entered the building found the charred remains heaped on top of one another. They were found at several locations, all near the windows on the third floor. The survivors escaped from the building by breaking open a window on the third floor and jumping on to a first-floor awning.

On the day of the event, the Kuala Lumpur Fire and Rescue Department was alerted by a distress call at about 5.41am. Earlier on

the day, some media reported that the department was only alerted after almost 30 minutes when the blaze started. However, it was later clarified that nine fire engines arrived three minutes upon receiving the distress call and managed to rescue five students using a ladder.

Besides the updates on the search and rescue efforts, the media also played on stories predicting what could be the cause of the fire. Among the possible cases include a short circuit, as well as mosquito coils. Another key element that was highlighted by the media on the day of the incident was the fact that the religious school was operating illegally and its failure to install safety measures. The Fire and Rescue Department said the school had submitted its building plans in 2015. The authorities had briefed the school management on the necessary fire prevention methods. The school, however, did not submit its mechanical and engineering plans for approval before constructing the building. The building was instead built without the mechanical and engineering plan approval and inspection by the Fire and Rescue Department. Interior renovations were also made, with more dividers built. One exit was also closed off. Authorities also believe that the dorm beds were arranged too closely that may have prevented a swift escape of the victims.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Media play an important role to not only disseminate information to the public but also to shape their perception on certain issues. However, each media has its own ways of framing the news. The use of different frames would cause the public to also have various impressions on an issue. According to Auerbach and Bloch-Elkon (2005), lack of awareness, among the public, along with their reliance on media for information and decision making would make them more vulnerable to be influenced by the media. Placing stories in specific frames would project different meaning to the news. This also helps to increase or reduce the salience of the issue and allow the public to remember and make judgements on issues.

Entman (1993) said framing was used to shape and alter the audience's interpretations and preferences on certain ideas which then encourage target audiences to think, feel and decide in a particular way. This raises concern especially since the media have the power to

influence public perception. The way a particular news is portrayed is as though it could determine the reactions of the public.

This study will also look into some of the frames used by the New Straits Times (NST) and how they may have affected the public opinion as well as the authorities' decision-making.

This study is deemed important as neglecting the impacts of news framing may affect the trust of the public on media. The media might also end up losing their readers or viewers if they fail in framing their news interestingly. The government might lose one of the useful means to gain public support. Gross (2008) noted that different journalistic news frames are known to exert different emotional responses, thus when providing many different angles to a story, it might also create dissonance to the public. Anything that challenges already formed frames creates a discomfort among people thus making them resistant to change since they become reluctant in accepting new information (Ooko; 2014).

The researcher attempts to identify the types of framing used by the New Straits Times (NST) when reporting on the Darul Quran Ittifaqiyah religious school fire and how it may have affected public opinion and the authorities in making their decision.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- RQ 1: What are some of the frames used by the New Straits Times (NST) when reporting the Darul Quran Ittifaqiyah fire?
- RQ 2: How does the New Straits Times (NST) attract their readers to read news with regard to the Darul Quran Ittifaqiyah fire by using frames?
- RQ 3: What are the effects of the frames used by the New Straits Times (NST) when reporting the Darul Quran Ittifaqiyah fire?

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- RO 1: To identify the frames used by the New Straits Times (NST) when reporting the Darul Quran Ittifaqiyah fire?
- RO 2: To explore how the New Straits Times (NST) uses frames to attract readers to read news with regard to the Darul Quran Ittifaqiyah fire.

RO 3: To study the effects on the use of frames by the New Straits Times (NST) when reporting the Darul Quran Ittifaqiyah fire

1.5 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

The study uses the qualitative research technique. A content analysis would be conducted on the New Straits Times (NST) reporting on the tragedy. Data gathered would then be analysed for the results.

1.6 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF STUDY

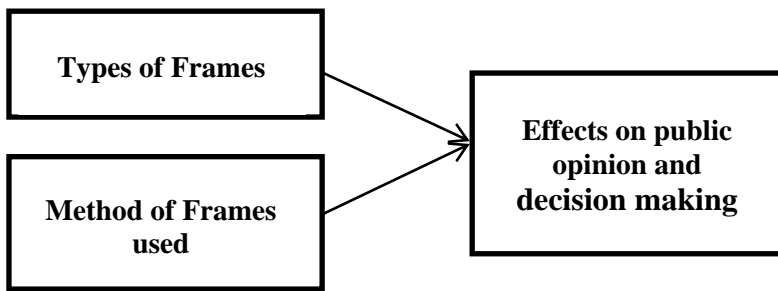


Table 1.1: Conceptual framework

1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The researcher believes that the study will bring contribution or significance to several parties in several ways which include:

- i) **Government:** Findings of the study would assist the government especially in understanding the power of the media to shape public opinion, it will bring some ideas to the government on how they can utilise the media to disseminate vital information on the government policy and finally gain the support of the public.
- ii) **Media practitioners:** The study will assist media practitioners by sharing some of the useful methods to frame or influence the public. The successful use of framing will also help the media organisation to boost the number of audience.
- iii) **Future researchers:** The study will also help other researchers who are interested in conducting similar studies in this field. Future scholars could also expand this study by rectifying the limitations of this study.

1.8 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

- i) The study will look into identifying the types of media frames used by the New Straits Times (NST) in their recent coverage on the Darul Quran Ittifaqiyah fire tragedy.
- ii) An analysis on the New Straits Times (NST) coverage from September 15 until 18 2017 will be carried out. There were altogether 27 stories that were explored.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 OVERVIEW

This section provides the analysis of the past literatures related to this study. The chosen past literatures provide explanation on the selected keywords which are, Media Frame, framing, types of frames, methods of framing, Keramat Tahfiz tragedy and Darul Quran Ittifaqiyah school.

2.1 MEDIA FRAMING

Framing theory was initially introduced by a sociologist Goffman (1974) who explained how the mass media were framed by journalists in their efforts to give context on information that they tried to relay and help people to understand, locate, perceive, identify and label (the issue).

Entman (1993), however, came up with an updated definition on framing. He described it as the process where several elements perceived to be accepted, would be chosen and it would be assembled in the form of a narrative piece that would promote a particular idea or interpretation. Entman believed that frames would perform four functions – problem definition, causal analysis, moral judgment and remedy promotion. Framing, he said, was used by the media to shape and alter the audience's interpretations and preferences by introducing or raising the salience or apparent importance of certain ideas, activating schemas that encourage target audiences to think, feel and decide in a particular way.

Wilson and Sinnappan (2014) believed media does not only have the capabilities to tell the public what is important and newsworthy but they also have the capability to shape public opinions, tell them how to interpret and define any controversial issue. Andsagar (2000) said one of

the most important reasons why media use framing is to construct opinion. To frame a story, journalists sometimes omit certain elements which can cause public to receive different perspectives and trigger different sentiments upon receiving the information. Their selection on whom to quote, what to quote and where the quotation will be placed in the story, are among the ways framing was used in a story. Others include the choice of keywords, phrases and images that would reinforce a particular representation of the reality and a specific emotion toward the particular issue (Ngwainmbi, 2017). Framing was done based on a journalist's belief, working conditions, editorial stand, journalistic practices in his organisation, economic environment, political climate, broader ideologies and cultural conditions prevalent in the society.

Public are restricted to only the information made available to them on the mass media and other sources. Ngozi & Kennedth (2012) noted that the public lack awareness in addition to their reliance to the media for information and decision-making that had caused them to be more likely to be influenced by the media frame.

Scholars also suggested that the media have the ability to persuade and influence audiences (Price & Feldman; 2009) and this was made possible due to the fact that audience are passive and they themselves allow the media to influence their views. Chi & McCombs (2004) said every media often reframe the story by emphasising different attributes of the event, consciously or unconsciously in order to keep the story alive and fresh. It is often the case that various media outlets have differing viewpoints on high-profile news stories.

Framing works through priming – which was conducted by introducing or raising the salience or what seems to be important in certain ideas, activating schemas that encourage target audiences to think, feel, and decide in a particular way (Gross & D'Ambrosio, 2004; Iyengar & Simon, 1993; Kim et al., 2002; Price et al., 1997).

Nagel (1975) said the elites want the people to behave in certain ways, supporting and tolerating their activities. They opt to give limitations in time, attention and rationality, getting the people to think and behave in a certain way by selecting some things to tell them about and efficiently cueing them on how these elements should mesh with their own schema systems.

Edelman (1993) in highlighting the impacts of media frames on the public perceptions and responses to policy issues stated that the character, causes and consequences of any phenomenon become radically different as changes were made on what is prominent and what is repressed. Giving only the fact of the event alone would not give any meaning, instead it is only through the placement of the fact into some context by giving emphasis or focus on certain part that, the fact would take on relevance (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989).

Responsibility frames emphasise the responsibility of an individual or a group for a certain event or outcome

2.2 TYPES OF FRAMING

Wilson & Sinnappan (2014) highlighted the use of several types of framing used by the local media which include the information and affirmation frames. An information frame refers to the explanation of the process of something or how something works and a focus on exploring policy and its impact. Local media play their role in being purveyors of information and have been used as a tool for the dissemination of public policy. Affirmation frame refers to the need to re-affirm and assure the audience on the information which was first introduced. The frame was used to reinforce the existing attitudes. The scholars also introduced successful and conflicting frames. A success frame was used to indicate the success of a policy which was introduced by the government. A conflicting frame however helps the media to report on distinguishable odds or disagreement in any event.

Okoro & Odoemelam (2013) listed several different types of frames used by the media to report on the Boko Haram insurgency. There are response frame, political frame, economic frame and ethnic frame. Response frame helps the media to focus on the approach adopted by the government in a crisis or security threat situation like the Boko Haram activities. It emphasis as the government response on the situation. Political frame emphasised the escalation of political tension by focusing the conflict of interest for power and scarce among geo-political regions, parties and groups. Ethnic framing was used to portray the crisis and targeting a particular tribe on the news reports, while, economic frame relates to the economic consequences of events on an individual, group, institution, region, or country (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000).

Iyengar (1991) proposed two types of framing, -the episodic framing and thematic framing. The episodic framing was commonly used to give stories from the perspective of an individual or event, while the thematic framing was used when the stories were written based on a broader, societal perspective.

Another type of frame that is commonly used by the media is the human-interest frame. This frame is used by the writer to emotionalise and dramatise information and accentuate individual affectedness. It uses specific features to catch audience's attention by using dramatising or emotionalising vocabulary or lend the story of an individual, personalised touch. There is also the Responsibility frame which was used to emphasise on the responsibility of an individual or a group for a certain event or outcome (Otieno et al., 2013).

2.3 THE METHODS USED TO FRAME STORIES

Wilson et al. (2014) noted the uses of sources to help give negative or positive comments in explaining an issue. Citing the Government Transformational Programme (GTP) as an example, the scholar said the media interviewed several sources that gave comments and highlights on the effectiveness of the policy. The use of words such as "bearing fruit", "on the right path" and "driving the nation forward" give readers the impression that the programme has positive effects and is making a headway.

Dunan and Adnan (2014) in their study "Is Malaysia Little Brother of Indonesia? A Framing Analysis of Ambalat Conflict" explained how the Indonesian media use framing to paint a negative perception against Malaysia. Their media used non-verbal framing with the help of graphics, sound bites, intonation and atmosphere to influence their audience. Malaysia was quoted as bad though graphics, super imposed title "Malaysia claims" from the beginning to the end of the news reporting.

Cissel (2012) explained the use of "Tone of Downplay or Dismissal" – where a dismissive tone of the article was highlighted from the journalist's point of view. The use of terms such as "festival of frustrations", "a leaderless resistance movement" gave negative tones to report on the Occupy Wall Street.

Freyenberger (2013) said the tone, story placement, and page placement and the tone of the stories was categorised as negative, neutral,

or positive while story placement will be measured as a body, paired with a graphic or photo, lead, or headline. Giving prominence through the story placement on a page can help to influence media consumers on the level of significance that the story holds. Page placement will be recognised as insides, section front, front page, or not applicable.

Gitlin (1980) said frames provided repetition and reinforced words in the news and images that support certain ideas and not others. This emphasis on or exclusion of information may be either intentional or unintentional. The information which are de-emphasised or omitted can be just as important as the information presented in an article.

Andsagar (2000) stated that among the tactics of framing that journalists could use include developing rhetoric with a strong appeal or effectively manipulating symbols, such as catchphrases or ideograph-special words or phrases that express public values. Gamson and Modigliani (1989) said incorporating and condensing a set of metaphors, visual images, moral appeals, and other symbolic devices could be used to draw on a popular culture that they share with their audience which were also some of the means to frame stories.

2.4 THE EFFECTS OF MEDIA FRAMING

Bradley (2010) said framing effect is the idea of manipulating the way information is presented through the use of images, words or presenting the general context around the information, to influence and alter decision making and judgement on an issue. Framing is common in politics. The context in which information is delivered helps the media to shape public assumptions and perceptions about that information.

People reach conclusions based on the framework within which a situation is presented. Positive frames would help to evoke positive feelings, which resulted in risk taking and proactive behaviour while the use of negative frames would evoke negative feelings and risk aversion and reactive behaviour. Being exposed to multiple and conflicting frames would cause cognitive dissonance, and in some cases the framing effects would be reduced causing the people to rely more on their own internal frames that have been created over time (Bradley, 2010).

Journalistic news frames would not only influence people's emotions and perceived risk over a situation, it would also affect what and how much people learn from the information presented (Otieno et al.,

2013). Scholars who studied the effect of using human-interest frame noted that though it helps readers to learn more, the frame would also emphasise the negative aspects of the information and lead to the (mal-) prioritisation of these aspects. Such prioritization would be detrimental when learning about topics that contain conflicting evidence because learners would fail to develop a balance view. This would then lead to the formation of radical positions (Otieno et al., 2013).

Entman and Rojecki (n.d) in their study on the U.S anti-nuclear movement suggested that the frame used by journalists who filtered news on the event have affected the movement ability to build consensus and mobilise participation. Their choices on frames were believed to be heavily influenced by elite sources and they appear with by an underlying professional ideology ambivalent toward public participation.

METHODOLOGY

3.1 OVERVIEW

In this chapter, the researcher illustrates the research methodology that is proposed for the study. In this chapter the researcher chooses to use a qualitative research design and content analysis on the New Straits Times (NST).

3.2 RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

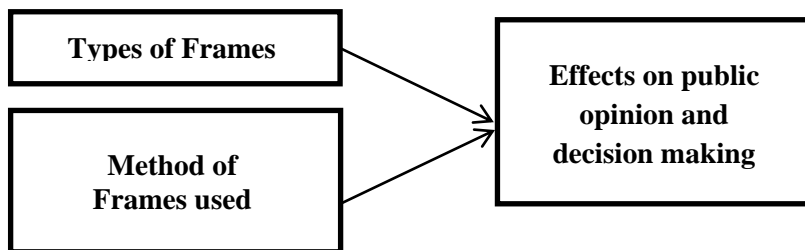


Figure 3.1: Research Framework

The study aims to understand how people's perception can be affected through the use of various frames. There are a few types of framing which the researcher had identified from the past studies. These

frames would be adopted in this study and would be used as a guideline for a researcher to analyse New Straits Times (NST) way or technique of framing stories on the religious school fire incident. The study would also look at how the use of framing by media may have influenced decision-making.

The researcher has decided to use qualitative research design which is deemed to be more suitable for this study. Qualitative research involves finding out what people think and how they feel or at any rate, what they say they think and how they say they feel. This kind of information is subjective and it involves feelings and impressions rather than numbers (Rambocas & Gama, 2013).

In this study, the researcher believed that the writers' attitude and belief in addition to the media organisation's stand will influence their way of writing and framing which is deemed to be subjective and cannot be identified by the quantitative research design.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design is the main outline of a research which guides the researchers on how to conduct the research according to the research procedure (Burns & Grove, 2003). For the purpose of this study, the researcher decided to use the qualitative research design. A content analysis would be conducted on 27 articles taken from the New Straits Times (NST) from Sept 15 until 18, 2017. Data gathered would then be analysed.

Data gathered from the past literatures especially on the types of frames by the media to frame their stories would be used as a guideline for the researcher in conducting this study. The types of frames used to frame stories related to the religious school fire tragedy are as presented in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Types of framing according to previous literatures

Types of Frames	Description
Responsibility frame	Responsibility frames emphasise the responsibility of an individual or a group for a certain event or outcome.

Types of Frames	Description
Response frame	Puts government's response in the spotlight.
Political frame	Emphasises the escalation of political tension and points at conflict of interest for power and scarce means among geo-political regions, party and groups.
Economic frame	Relates to the economic consequences of events on an individual, group, institution, region, or country
Ethnic frame	Crisis situation is portrayed as being targeted at a particular tribe.
Episodic framing	Provides stories from the perspective of an individual person or event
Thematic framing	Story is written based on broader, societal perspective.
Information frame	The frame is used to explain the process of something or how something works and focuses on exploring the government policy and its impact.
Affirmation frame	Affirmation frame refers to the need to re-affirm and assures the audience of the information which is first introduced. This is a reinforcement of existing attitudes.
Success frame	Indicates the success of the policy and takes readers on a closer look into the veracity of a statement made or information given.

Types of Frames	Description
Conflict frame	Discusses the issues or uncovers distinguishable odds or disagreement in relation to the project at hand.
Human-Interest frame	Uses specific features to catch the audience’s attention by using dramatic or emotional vocabulary, or lends the story an individualised, personal touch.

3.4 RESEARCH METHOD

(1) METHOD

The researcher uses content analysis as a research method. Based on the findings of previous literature, the researcher has identified some of the frames used by the media when reporting the Darul Quran Ittifaqiyah school fire. Employing research methods qualitative provide more comprehensive data compared to quantitative research design. Adopting qualitative research design would be more suitable for the study, since the researcher is identifying the types of frames used and how they may have affected the decision making of which frames to use. This design seems to be the most suitable method of data collection and analysis since the study is looking at gathering non-numerical data.

(2) UNIT OF ANALYSIS

Burns & Grove (2003) explained that a unit of analysis is the matter that a researcher aims to study. It can be an individual, a group of people, artefacts, or printed media and literature. The unit of analysis for this study would be the selected mainstream and alternative media of focus. In this study, the researcher has conducted content analysis on stories featured in the New Straits Times, which relate to the Darul Quran Ittifaqiyah school fire.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

As mentioned in the previous section, 3.4.2 method, the researcher used content analysis to gather as much information on the types of framing used by the New Straits Times (NST) when reporting on the Darul Quran Ittifaqiyah school fire. The study focuses on 27 news articles dated from Sept 15 until Sept 18 2017. The reason why the researcher has chosen to study news articles published within the range of this time period is the incident happened. On September 15, 2017 a press conference was held by the police to explain the relevant details surrounding the event. Seven youngsters were arrested for their involvement in causing the fire.

4.1 NEW STRAITS TIMES - SEPTEMBER 15

(1) FRONT PAGE

Responsibility frame: The newspaper includes three bullet points, highlighting the failure of school authorities to ensure safety of its occupants and the fact that the institution was operating illegally as the building plan was not approved by the relevant authorities of the Fire and Rescue Department.

Human-interest frame: the picture of a woman crying, pointing at the religious school helped to attract the readers' attention to read the newspaper.

(2) PAGE TWO

First story: "23 Die in Tahfiz School Fire"

Information frame: The story explained the details of the event, such as the location of the fire, the number of casualties, the situation on the ground when it broke out and also information on the possible cause of the fire.

Human-interest frame: The content of the article was based on one of the survivors' testimonies. Muhd Izzarudin Roslan, 15, narrated the events that took place situation from the moment that he woke up. The writers of the article also include perspectives of the eyewitness.

Responsibility frame: The writer narrated the story in a persuasive way to influence the reader who could proceed to question the credibility management of the religious schools. The writers described "the other burning question that has since been raised which was why the religious school was allowed to operate when the premises had yet to be given the approval from the authorities"

Second story: "PM: Ensure students study in safe environment"

Response frame: The story highlighted the government's response to the incident, where Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak called on the Urban Wellbeing, Housing and Local Government and the Fire department to ensure the safe and conducive environment of students.

(3) PAGE FOUR

Leader: "Enough is Enough"

Information frame: This article was published in the opinion section. It not only that it provides information about the incident, but also brings to mind a similar fire incident which took place in 2015. The article also highlights some of the measures that the writer believes should be looked into to prevent the incident from re-occurring.

"Preventive measures will be put in place"

Response frame: This article explained the government's plan to streamline safety requirements at all religious schools. This plan was part of the government's response to prevent such incident from re-occurring.

(4) PAGE FIVE

Information and human-interest frames: The writer wrote a story based on interviews with the survivors as well as some of the victims' parents. The story highlights the fact that these survivors

were forced to jump out of the building, leaving behind their trapped friends. There were also strong quotes from the parents of the victims such as "I've lost a son, but Allah has saved another". This inclusion of such questions create an emotional response in the reader.

(5) PAGE SIX

"Ustaz grieves for children"

Human-interest frame: The article started with the writer's description of a "one" figure who was waiting at the Hospital Kuala Lumpur mortuary. The man described as victims waiting for the bodies of the victims. The writer described how he was sobbing as he stood over the bodies while praying for them, with and swollen eyed.

"Mufti: Vital to monitor private religious schools"

Responsibility and episodic framing: The article focused on the importance of monitoring the number of private Islamic religious schools that has mushroomed. It uses episodic framing because the article was written based on the perspective of the Perlis Mufti Dr Mohd Asri Zainul Abidin.

"Will I go to heaven if I die?"

Human-interest frame: The beginning of the news feature focuses on the question posed by Muhammad Hafiz Iskandar one of the fire victims who died. The title is catchy as it certainly dramatises the incident attracting the attention of readers.

(6) PAGE SEVEN

Information and human-interest frame: The title, "Victims found huddled together" would certainly attract readers and evoke sadness. The story also provides information on how the victims were found in their dormitory and they tried to escape but failed due to the permanent grill's that were fitted at all windows.

Affirmation frame: This page comes with a graphic, representation of the locations within the school where the charred remains were found and the escape route the survivors used.

(7) PAGE EIGHT

“KL fire is Deja Vu for Kedah school”

Information frame: The article featured an interview with a religious school principal Azizah Yahaya who lost 21 students also due to a school fire in 1989.

Affirmation frame: a graphic representation of fore cases involving religious schools is featured to prove that this incident is nothing new. It has happened so many times before. This relates to the Leader’s section, which called on the government to take action and stop similar incidence from happening again.

“Mum says unconscious son being treated in ER”

Information frame: The story basically explained the physical injuries of one of the victims, who suffered a broken leg, broken ribs and burns to his face, following the fire incident.

4.2 NEW STRAITS TIMES - SEPTEMBER 16

(1) FRONT PAGE

Human-interest frame: The headline "Was it Arson" would help to attract readers so that they can look for more information and make their own judgement on the possible causes of the incident.

(2) PAGE TWO

Information frame: The writer provided information about the burial process in this news story. Other than that, the writer also focused on the investigation carried out by several enforcement agencies which have led them into believing that foul play may have been at work. This included the fact that the investigators found a few gas cylinders outside the door to the dormitory on the second floor of the building. It was reported that CCTV recordings from a

nearby building showed that there was an "intrusion" into the school compound several hours before the fire started.

(3) PAGE FOUR

Information frame: The article explained the funeral rites of the burials, which took place in several states.

(4) PAGE SIX

"New lead may point to arson"

Affirmation frame: This article explained the theory that the fire incident was not an ordinary event. The article explained the significance of CCTV recordings of a man entering the premises hours before the fire started and the fact that they found traces of petrol in front of the door to the dormitory, where the victims had been trapped. Quoting sources, the writer also explained the possible motive behind the event.

"Victims died of smoke inhalation"

Information frame: The article explained in detail the cause of death for all 23 victims and how the process of identification was carried out.

Identify high-risk schools

Response frame: The article emphasised the efforts that would be taken by several states to ensure all tahfiz schools met the safety requirements and were registered with the Ministry of Education.

(5) PAGE 10

"New task force to meet soon"

Response frame: A task force was set up to investigate the fire at Darul Quran Ittifaqiyah tahfiz school. It would revisit suggestions and recommendations by the Royal Commission of Inquiry which was set up in 1989, to investigate the fire that killed 27 students of Sekolah Agama Rakyat Taufikiah Khairiah Al-Halimiah.

“Ministry registering religious schools, tahfiz”

Response frame: The Education Ministry was registering tahfiz and religious schools in the country to make sure they followed the safety and security inspections conducted by government agencies under the ministry. The move came in light of the fire that hit the Darul Quran Ittifaqiyah tahfiz school.

4.3 NEW STRAITS TIMES – SEPTEMBER 17

(1) FRONT PAGE

Information frame: The front page provided information on the number of suspects arrested in regard to the fire incident. It also provided information on the motive behind the incident, which was said to be an act of revenge.

(2) PAGE 10

School Fire suspects arrested

Information frame: The article provided detailed information on the reason of seven teenagers aged between 11 and 18 year-olds, who decided to burn down the Darul Quran Ittifaqiyah religious school. The writer also provided information on how the culprits started the fire.

“14 Fire survivors in secret shelter”

Information and response frames: The article described how the survivors had to be placed at a temporary shelter, where the location is unknown. It also reported that the Women, Family and Community Development Ministry would provide counselling to the survivors of the fire tragedy.

4.4 NEW STRAITS TIMES – SEPTEMBER 18

(1) FRONT PAGE

Human-interest frame: The title, “I won’t forgive. Give them the death penalty”, together with a picture of a women in tears, were

among the ways the newspaper framed the story. The title and the image of the lady were used to grab the attention of the readers.

(2) “SORRY WON’T BRING MY SON BACK”

Human-interest frame: Again, the title “Sorry won’t bring my son back” is a very strong quote that explained the anger and pain that the victim’s mother was suffering after losing her son.

(3) NAJIB, AND WIFE VISIT SCHOOL BLAZE SURVIVORS

Information frame: The article gave information about Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak’s visit to the hospital. It also provided details on the conditions of the four survivors who were undergoing treatments.

(4) “SLAP OTHER CHARGES ON THEM, TOO”

Responsibility frame: The article focused on Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi’s call for the perpetrators to be slapped with other charges to reflect the severity of their crime as a deterrent to others. He was actually commenting on calls by many quarters for the minors to be charged and tried as adults based on their actions and the tragic outcome of the incident.

(5) SUSPECTS SHOW NO REMORSE

Information frame: The article described how the suspects who allegedly set fire to the Darul Quran Ittifaqiyah religious school had not showed any sign of remorse, even after being picked up by the police.

(6) TEACHER: “STUDENTS QUARRELLED WITH TEENS OVER FUTSAL COURT”

Information frame: The story explained the possible motives that could have led the teenagers to burn down the religious school.

(7) 7 TEEN SUSPECTS SIGN OF DEFECT IN SOCIETY

Response and responsibility frames: The actions of the seven teenagers showed that there is a serious defect in the Malaysian society. Malaysian Crime Prevention Foundation (MCPF) chairman,

Tan Sri Lee Lam Thy said Malaysians should step out of their “bubble” and discard the “denial syndrome” as violence among teenagers was alarming. He added that action should be taken against parents who allow their children to be out late at night, causing them to be involved in crimes.

4.5 DISCUSSION

Table 4.1: Types of frames used by the New Straits Times (NST)

Types of Frames	Frequency
Information frame	15
Human-interest frame	9
Response frame	7
Responsibility frame	5
Affirmation frame	3
Episodic framing	1

The New Straits Times (NST) was found to have been using the information frame in most of their reporting on the fire tragedy. The newspaper used this frame 15 times. However, scholars believe that the most important use of this frame can be seen when the journalist wrote a commentary on the issue.

The Leader column which was published on Sept 15 2017 on page 4, had a compelling title "Enough is enough", which basically explained the frustration of the citizens for having to see this tragedy happen again. The writer noted that 211 tragedy fires involving tahfiz schools have been reported since 2015 yet no action has been taken to safeguard the lives of the students. The writer also provided a brief history of a similar incident which took the lives of 27 students in 1989. Most importantly, the writer also highlighted the need for the government to take two specific measures in order to prevent such incidents from happening again. First is to have the Fire and Rescue Department to conduct checks on all tahfiz

schools in the country, adding that a coordinating body comprising representatives of the Fire and Rescue Department, the religious department and Ministry of Education should be able to help in the process. Secondly, the Ministry of Education should ensure that tahfiz schools nationwide are registered under them, or at the very least, allow the ministry to be given a role to oversee the safety of the schools.

The writer's recommendation may have been taken into consideration as the Ministry of Education announced on Sept 16 2017 that they were looking into making registration compulsory for tahfiz schools.

The second most commonly used frame was the human-interest one. The human-interest frame was widely used on September 15 2017, the day after the incident took place. The newspaper made use of information gathered from the survivors and victims' parents, in addition to pictures to better illustrate the sadness felt by relevant parties. Another prominent frame that the newspaper used in the first day of reporting the fire incident was the responsibility frame. The newspaper posed several "burning questions" which included, the issue of the credibility of the religious school, and how the religious school was allowed to operate when the building plans had yet to be given an approval stamp. The New Straits Times (NST) also highlighted the fact that the students failed to escape from the building, which had its fire exit blocked and windows, fitted with permanent grilles. There were also news that focused on the government's response toward the issue. The response frame was used since day one.

From focusing on the school management's "faults" for their failure to ensure a safe and conducive environment for the students, the newspaper started to shift its focus on September 16 2017 when new leads showed that the incident may have happened due to arson. While other media played on stories quoting non-governmental agencies or highlighted sources who demanded the school management to be punished, the New Straits Times (NST) focused on the fact that there could be foul play.

On September 17 2017, the newspaper provided detailed information on the incident, the motive as well as brief information about the seven suspects who were arrested for causing the fire. Meanwhile, on September 18 2017, the media played on human-interest to push for

heavy deterrence against all perpetrators. Stories with headlines such as "Sorry won't bring my son back", "Slap other charges on them, too" and "Suspects show no remorse", are evidence that the media shifted the blame to the suspects instead of focusing on the weaknesses of the school management who also failed to ensure safety of the students.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The study was conducted to look at how the media could influence readers' perception as well as decision-making. In the case of the Darul Quran Ittifaqiyah school fire incident, scholars found that the newspaper used at least six different frames to report the issue. The newspaper uses information frame the most for 15 times, human-interest frame (9) and response frame (7). The New Straits Times (NST) front paged the story for three consecutive days –September 15 until September 18 2017. This shows the emphasis given by the newspaper on the issue and it gave the readers the impression of how important the story was.

As discussed earlier in this study, the media plays an important role to not only disseminate information to the public but also share their perception on the issue. Entman (1993) said framing was used to shape and alter audience's interpretations and preferences on certain ideas which then encouraged target audiences to think, feel and decide in a particular way.

This study showed how the New Straits Times (NST) had subtly attempted to influence readers to have a negative impression of the school management, when it highlighted the failure of the school to ensure safety requirements were met. On September 15 2017, a day after the incident took place, the New Straits Times (NST) not only provided extensive information on the incident but also posed several "burning questions" which among others included. The issue of "how the school was allowed to operate when it had not been given the approval by the local authorities to use the building". It also focused on the fact that the students were trapped inside the building, and could not access the fire exits which were later being reported to have been blocked. The news also failed to escape from the windows as they were fitted with permanent grilles.

However, on the second day of the news report, research found that the newspaper had started to shift the blame to other parties. The title "Was it arson" shows that the New Straits Times (NST) was focusing on looking for a scapegoat that should be blamed instead of highlighting tragedy. The newspaper had no longer highlighted the school management's failure.

Gross (2008) noted that different journalistic news frames were known to exert differential emotional responses, thus when providing many different angles to a story might also create dissonance to the public. While other media focused on putting the blame on both sides, the school management as well as the perpetrators, the New Straits Times (NST), however, opted to influence its readers to focus more on the fact that the incident was a foul play.

Not only that the New Straits Times (NST) was no longer focusing on the school management's failure to ensure safety requirements were met, stories with headlines such as "Sorry won't bring my son back", "Slap other charges on them, too" and "Suspects show no remorse" are evidence that the media were not shifting the blame to the suspects.

5.1 THE POSSIBLE EFFECTS OF MEDIA FRAMING

The Leader column which was published on Sept 15 2017 highlighted on page 4 the need for the government to consider taking two measures in order to prevent such incidents from re-occurring. First, to have the Fire and Rescue Department to conduct checks on all tahfiz schools in the country and second, to have the Ministry of Education ensure tahfiz schools nationwide are registered under them or at the very least for the ministry to be given a role to oversee the safety of the schools. Though scholars could not possibly say that it was the writer who successfully influenced the policy-maker, the recommendations were later being put to thought. The Ministry of Education on September 16 2017 announced that they were considering making it compulsory for all tahfiz schools for be registered under the ministry. The government later had also given the instruction for the Fire Department to conduct checks at all tahfiz school in the country. The Fire and Rescue Department of Malaysia found that in the past month, as many as 50% of 956 tahfiz centres throughout the country were found to be unsafe.

Since the media were more focused on the fact that the incident was caused by arsons, the school management had somehow managed to escape being held culpable for their negligence. The school had been operating for the past one year without getting any approval and it was also reported that the building was not equipped with firefighting equipment. The negligence of school management also possibly due to the fact that the newspaper is more focused on portraying the fire was not an accident. However, it is almost impossible to prove that this was solely due to the choice of frames used by the New Straits Times (NST).

5.2 FUTURE RESEARCH

In order to better prove the effectiveness of media frames, future research could consider expanding the unit of analysis and examine several newspaper reports on similar issues. Future research may also opt to study issues championed by one newspaper only. This would make it easier to study the effectiveness of the frames.

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