A Study on the Decision Making Process in Public and Private Broadcast Newsrooms in Malaysia

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Abstract

The decision making process in the newsrooms based on interpretation, influence and pervasiveness of the news from different media organizations is unarguable. This study examines the decision making process in the public and private newsrooms of three major broadcasting houses namely TV1 and TV3 to determine the process of how this happens. The objectives of this study is to identify the changes that have taken place in the editing policies, to explore the internal and external factors that have influenced the decision making process and to study if news programming patterns have changed since Najib’s reign as Prime Minister and which government policies have influenced the network’s programming. This study engages in several qualitative methodologies specifically in-depth interviews and document analysis. Notable editors, chief editors and group editors gave in-depth interviews on their decision making process and issues that ‘dampen’ the process of nation building in shaping the trajectory of the news. The findings showed that the decision making process in these three newsrooms are made through consensus by a specific group of people. Two daily meetings are conducted on a daily basis to determine news coverage and headlines. Although it sounds simple but there are internal and external factors that influence the decision making process. While government broadcast newsrooms predominantly runs on the government model, the private broadcast newsrooms follow the professional model but with different approaches. Media organizations give coverage to all government policies as and when it happens and not as a daily routine. The study implies that decision-making made under policy considerations are more stringent in terms of control, procedures and protocol in Malaysia.

Key Words: decision making, broadcast newsrooms, internal factors, external factors, government policies

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Introduction

Author and news executive Jack Fuller writes: “The central purpose of journalism is to tell the truth so that people will have the information that they need to be sovereign” (Gans, 2003). This statement is true as we rely on news media especially in times of crisis. A good example was during the September 11, 2001 disaster where journalists responded quickly and professionally. The horrifying details of the terrorist attacks on New York’s World Trade Center and the Pentagon in Washington D.C. was conveyed rapidly to a global audience in print, the Internet, by radio and by vivid color in television. Virtually the same horrific footages were seen and shocking reports were heard as in the States.

Although the news media in Malaysia may seem lacking in coercive power as they cannot literally draft journalists to war torn nations or do coverage on crisis nations but this has changed considerably in recent years. This was proven recently during the attacks on Sabah. As we deployed our police and army personnel, we also deployed our team of journalist to cover news on the ground. Their influence and pervasiveness are indisputable. Yet there are still disagreements and conflicting views about just how the public is influenced by the media in general by the news written by the journalist in particular and the stories produced by the editors specifically.

Journalism is often called the news business – the gathering, the processing and delivery of important and interesting information and further developments or follow-up stories by newspapers and broadcast media or vice versa – is inextricably entangled in that giant, whirling entity often referred to as the media (Hachten, 2005). And when the gathering process is complete or semi complete, the stories goes through a process known as story selection done by the editors or gatekeepers.

Often thought to be glamorous and powerful individuals, journalists in general are hard-working, often harried people with little time for and even less patience with, the glamour of being on television (for the broadcast journalists). They are dedicated professionals ever conscious of their responsibilities to the job and their audience. They have more power than the rest of us mainly because they express and often subscribe to, the economic, political and social ideas and values which are dominant to Malaysia.

Conceptualization of Key Concepts

Identifying Story Selection

Story selection is a decision-making and choice-making process albeit a hurried one. As a result, the considerations must be quickly and easily applicable so that choices can be made without too much deliberation (Gans, 1980). Many theories have been put forth about how the selection of stories is routinized. Gans (1980) puts forward five theories of story selection. They are journalist-centered, routinization based on organizational requirements, event-
centered, technological, economic and ideological determinants, and external factors.

Story selection for broadcast news in Malaysia depends on a few considerations and the suitability of the stories for the day’s transmission. It has always been a policy in newsrooms to carry news of the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister in the first block of the news bulletin regardless whether it is a 30 minute or an hour’s bulletin. The rest of the news bulletin will follow the line-up in terms of importance and news worthiness. The build-up of the line-up has been described by editors as a ‘train’ where the main stories act as the head of the locomotive while the other stories hook-up and make the rest of the bulletin. This would generally be the main news, business news, foreign news, sports news and the closing.

Other considerations include either adding stories or dropping them depending on the latest breaking news. According to Gans (1980) this consideration must also be easily rationalized so one story is replaced by another and an acceptable reason for doing so is always at hand. These considerations are also designed with the efficiency so as to guarantee the necessary supply of suitable news with the least amount of time, effort and if possible expenditure. Gans (1980) further describes ‘the news’ as the picture of America as nation and society that appears in the national news media. The same definition can be used for the Malaysian scenario of news.

**Conceptualizing Decision Making**

There are many concepts of decision making. Morris (1964) and Simon (1992) although years apart, define decision making as a model or logical structure which is used to bring some conceptual order out of the endless variety of observations that steers the course of society and its economic and government organizations – is largely work of making decisions and solving problems. It is work of choosing issues that require attention, setting goals, finding or designing suitable courses of actions and evaluating and choosing among alternative actions.

Gans (1980) description of the decision making process is story selection and choice, notwithstanding a hurried one. Gans quotes Edward J. Epstein’s research at NBC News, that if journalists had to treat the hundreds of choices they make every day as formal decisions, they would be unable to complete their work. They instead act on the basis of quick, virtually intuitive judgments which some ascribe to “feel” or “gut feelings”.

Zey describes the theory of problem solving and decision making as centrally concerned with how people cut problems down to size: how they apply approximate, heuristic techniques to handle complexity that cannot be handled exactly (Zey, 1992).

A decision may be defined most simply as a choice between two or more alternatives. In practice, more than two alternatives are often involved but all the typical problems of decision making arise when at least two alternatives typically leads to some form of behavior that is consistent with the choice, a decision does not requires such consistency. Finally the choice between
alternatives need not be based on any rational process of assessment and evaluation even though there is much to be said in favor of such rational processes. A group decision then is naturally defined by means of preceding definitions as a choice between two or more alternatives made by group members or by a group leader in consultations with the membership. If neither of these conditions is satisfied, then even though a group exists and decision has been made, we will not characterize such a choice among alternatives as a group decision (Group Decision Making, 1984).

Background of Selected Media Organizations

The two media organizations that are studied in this paper are TV1 from Radio Television Malaysia (RTM) and Sistem Television Malaysia (TV3). We simply cannot dwell further into this research without taking a look at the background of these organizations and more importantly the question of ownership as it is obviously an effective way to affirm control over any entity including the media establishment.

Radio Television Malaysia (RTM)

Radio Television Malaysia or better known as RTM is a government owned television network. It broadcasts from its headquarters in Angkasapuri, Kuala Lumpur. RTM owns and operates a number of radio and television stations. At present, it runs 6 national, 2 international, 17 states, 11 district radio stations and 2 television channels – TV 1 and TV 2 (RTM, 2010). When it started transmission on 1\textsuperscript{st} April 1946, RTM was established as Radio Malaya operating out of Singapore. On 31\textsuperscript{st} August 1957 when Malaya received its independence, Radio Malaya was split into two with the original studios in Singapore taken over by a new station called Radio Singapura while Radio Malaya moved to Kuala Lumpur going on air from the new location on 1\textsuperscript{st} January 1959 (RTM, 2010).

Radio Malaya was later named Radio Malaysia on 16\textsuperscript{th} September 1963 with its signature transmission trademark words \textit{Inilah Radio Malaysia} (This is Radio Malaysia). Services rendered under Malaysia Television (Malaysia TV) started on 28\textsuperscript{th} December 1963 in the Klang Valley and Selangor. The 10 month old Television Singapura which was launched on 16\textsuperscript{th} February 1963 became part of Malaysia Television till 1965 when Singapore broke away from Malaysia (Penyiaran, 1987). Radio Malaysia later became Rangkaian National (National Channel) on 1\textsuperscript{st} January 1971 and became the nation’s first 24 hour radio station. In 1978 Rangkaian Satu (Network One) was renamed Malaysia Television Satu. A year later Rangkaian Dua was renamed Malaysia Television Dua. New separate logos for both networks were launched in the same year. The following year, Malaysian Television and Radio Malaysia merged to become Radio Television Malaysia, RTM (Penyiaran, 1987).
As of 2007, RTM controlled 17 per cent of television viewing market in the country behind Media Prima with 54 per cent. But of late, RTM has not made the top 20 television programmes (AC Nielson, 2011).

**Sistem Television Malaysia Berhad (TV3)**

While privatization is a goal in the business sector, a free press without government restrictions is not. The government controls the press, broadcasting houses and the publishing enterprises throughout Malaysia. Strong political and economic ties between the government and the media are relationships that have been in place since the beginning of the reporting era in Malaysia. One of the initial efforts to transfer media ownership from the government to the private sector was to privatize Sistem Television Malaysia Berhad (STMB) or better known as TV3. TV3 received its license in 1983. Fleet Group which was UMNO’s holding company held 40 per cent of stock making it the only single entity that had control over the station and that also gave them the right to select the remaining ownership partners. TV3 in turn owned MEGA-TV (now a defunct sister company) and Multichannel Multipoint Distribution Service (MMDS formally known as Business Radio Service (BRS)) or Wireless Cable, a cable provider that came in tandem with the deal.

In 1994 a television broadcast license was issued to Melewar Corporation and Utusan Melayu (M) Berhad to operate Metrovision. Tunku Panglima Besar Tunku Tan Sri Abdullah ibni Tuanku Abdul Rahman was Melewar’s Industrial Group Chairman at the time. Five years into operations, Metrovision was struggling and was ‘temporarily’ off-air by 1 November the same year (1999). In 2002, the Ministry of Finance owned 30 per cent of the consortium that operated Mega TV while a subsidiary firm, Sri Utara, an investment arm of the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC), a political party in the coalition government, owned another 5 per cent of Mega TV (Lee, 2001). They resumed broadcasting on Thursday 1 January 2004 as 8TV after being bought by Media Prima Berhad.

All political parties in the coalition government and their investment companies have also interest and control in the major mainstream newspapers in Malaysia. When TV3 was issued the country’s first and only private television broadcasting license in 1983, their major shareholders then included the Fleet Group, UMNO’s (UMNO is the main ruling political party headed by the Prime Minister) holding company, the UMNO-controlled Utusan newspaper publishing group, MIC’s Maika Holdings, Daim Zainuddin (Minister of Finance then), and the now bankrupt Syed Kechik group. Fleet Group and later Renong, took control over the then Daim-controlled New Straits Times group. In 1993 a management buy-out through the Malaysian Resources Corporation Berhad (MRCB) took over of the then lucrative TV3 from the other main minority shareholders. This was done with considerable help from the Hong Leong group’s Quek Leng Chan which then placed both TV3 and the NST group firmly in the camp of Finance Minister Anwar Ibrahim at the time. He in turn effectively deployed it to become
UMNO’s Deputy President, Deputy Prime Minister, and clearly in line to succeed Mahathir as Prime Minister (Gomez, 1990, 1994).

Ownership is obviously an effective way to affirm control over any entity including media establishment. The Malaysian media is controlled by the government through a series of enactments and draconian laws such as the Printing Presses and Publication Act (1984), The Broadcasting Act of 1988 and its successor, Multimedia and Communication Act (CMA) 1998 (amended 2002), The Sedition Act (1948), and Official Secret Act (1972) and the famous Internal Security Act (1960), which is now non-operational. All these media establishments are controlled through ownership externally and within the media itself all media companies practice self-censorship for all news before print and before broadcast.

Media Prima Berhad, which now owns TV3 and several TV station under its wing, is a company listed on the Main Board of Bursa Malaysia and is the leader in Malaysia’s integrated media investment group. It currently owns 100 per cent equity interest in TV3, 8TV, NTV7 and TV9. In addition, Media Prima now (as of 2013) owns more than 98 per cent equity interest in The New Straits Times Press (Malaysia) (NSTP) Berhad, one of Malaysia’s largest publisher which prints the New Straits Times, Berita Harian and Harian Metro, three highest circulated national newspapers. It also owns three radio networks, Fly FM, Hot FM and One FM (Media Prima Berhad, 2010).

Content creation, event and talent management are also other cross media interests of Media Prima. They are also the group’s leadership position in the Outdoor business represented by Big Tree Outdoor Sdn Bhd, UPD Sdn Bhd, Right Channel Sdn Bhd, Kurnia Outdoor Sdn Bhd and Jupiter Outdoor Network Sdn Bhd. A strong online presence is also seen through its digital communications and broadcasting subsidiary, Alt Media, via the Lifestyle Portal gua.com.my and the newly launched TonTon.com.my, a cutting-edge video portal with HD-ready. This service not only offers quality viewing experience but customized content and interactivity of social networking. Outside of Malaysia, Media Prima has a controlling stake in TV3 Network Ltd, Ghana’s leading private television station (Media Prima Berhad, 2010).

Natseven TV Sdn Bhd (NTV7) also needs to be mention here that it was licensed in 1998 to Datuk Dr. Effendi Norwawi the Chairman of ENCORP group, which not only owned NTV7 but served as its Chairman. What was the main concern then was that Norwawi was also serving as the Minister of Agriculture at that time. To date, NTV 7 now belongs to the Media Prima Group and known as TV7.

Literature Review

Although there has been scholarly interest in journalistic ethics during recent decades and much of the resulting literature describes the ethics, values, responsibilities, stress levels or roles of particular types of journalists, almost
no work has assessed the decision making process in the newsrooms with regards to ownership and government policies. In the many literature reviewed, researchers have done portions of this study in different research projects. This paper is an attempt by this researcher to consolidate those parts to fill the gaps of this research.

Many decision making studies have given focus on ethical matters alone. For example, digital photo manipulation is often treated in the literature as a problem that occurs when individuals stray from a set of ethical standards. The newsroom comprises various groups, each with unique norms and values and each seeking to shape newsroom decision making. Lowrey (2001) says that photo manipulation should result from subgroups’ perceptions of, and reactions to this plurality of newsroom norms.

In-depth interviews reveal the existence of various sets of norms; these include integrative norms, which reflect the needs of the organization, art norms, and journalistic norms. Journalistic norms are perceived as dominant, but where art norms are stronger, photo manipulation is slightly more likely. Findings also suggest photos are more likely to be manipulated when newrooms are large and complex and when visual journalists strain to fit visuals with story theme. This is not very different that the newsrooms that deal with content as more often than not, the content of the newreels will also take on a theme depending on happenings of the day.

In a recent study, Henningsen & Henningsen (2007) defined two features of the decision making process. Although the decision making process was not done in the newsroom per se, the researchers came up with two important factors. First, group members should recognize that the information is missing. That is to say, group members should be able to identify certain items of decision-relevant information that were unavailable to them. Second, missing information should carry no weight in the final decision. Ignoring information indicates that groups choose to make a decision using a diminished information set.

Faridah (1995), quoting Herbert Simon (1965) on the same aspect that argues that organizations can never be perfectly rational because their members have a limited capacity to obtain and process information. In her findings, it is clear that firstly, the management makes decisions in the newsroom while the second, the management consults journalists but makes the final decision nevertheless. The ideal state according to the researcher is where the journalist has greater autonomy in decision making but this rarely happens in the Malaysian newsroom scenario. However, decisions regarding the length of the story, news suggestions, editing and rewriting the news, postponing a story, visual suggestions and long range news plans involve some consultations by management with the journalists, even though the final say are in the hands of the management.

Given that the newsrooms often work on daily schedules, decision making is a vital skill. However, the very routine that demands sound decision making also hinders development of that skill. Overby (1995) observed that newsroom personnel often lack time to think and discuss basic decisions; the impetus to
deliver news decreases the chances for pertinent thought and dialogue. For the most part, communication scholars have taken a macroeconomic approach to decision making effects. They generally view such effects as a static entity that can be packaged and plugged into any theoretical construct and measured and described via discussion of market structure alone. Heretofore, scholars have largely ignored the organizational context of newspapers, despite the widely acknowledged notion that there are direct, organizational, social and cultural causes of media content as well (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). In short, decision making requires additional perspectives. A greater understanding of the process by which editors make decisions needs to take place.

In terms of production decision making, Mossig (2004) and Walle (2007), examines two aspects in order to obtain a deeper understanding of how localized production networks arise and how they function but with different findings. Mossig looks first at the role of the founding of new firms within localized production network analyzed in detail and second, the decision structures within the production network. At the first level of decision-making the TV station is the main authority compared to the TV production company. At the second level, the TV production company decides on the filling of the subsequent key positions, while the TV station participates in this procedure in an observatory way. At the third level, the TV station is no longer involved in decisions. The main decision-making powers lie with those in the key positions, and the TV production company merely monitors these procedures.

Another aspect of this study is about the ownership and how it effects the decision making process of the newsrooms. Napoli, Philip & Zhaoxu Yan (2007), takes stock of this issue in their research when they examine the relationship between television station ownership characteristics and local news and public affairs programming through an expanded analysis of data from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC's) study of Big Four broadcast network affiliates. The results indicate that the FCC’s conclusion is that network-owned and operated stations provide more local news and public affairs programming than other affiliates, and that stations with newspaper holdings provide more local news and public affairs programming than stations without newspaper holdings up only when these two program types are analyzed in combination. When these two program types are analyzed independently and when additional explanatory factors are taken into consideration, these ownership characteristics are positively related to news programming, but not to public affairs programming. The researcher’s findings reveal that while financial resources and competition provided stations with greater incentives to produce local news programming, several factors related to station ownership did not. In terms of the quantity of local news provided, once the decision to provide any news was reached, none of the ownership variables were positively related to the quantity of news programming provided.

Locally, Zaharom Nain & Mustafa K. Anuar (1998) in their research on ownership and control of the Malaysian media discusses the history of the mainstream press and broadcasting in Malaysia which has been one stringent
political, legal and more recently, economic controlled. From the emergence of the first newspaper, *The Prince of Wales Gazette*, in 1806, the introduction of state-run television, TV1 in 1963, the emergence of commercial television, TV3 in 1984, and the launching of Malaysia’s first broadcast satellite, Measat 1, in 1996, the state's role in the overall scheme of things has been central. They conclude that there are many stark realities of the Malaysian mainstream media and the low level it has reached in terms of ownership. First, by and large and for a long, long time now, the Malaysian mainstream media have never aspired to be the guardians of freedom of speech.

Very few would argue with the observation that, thus far, the mainstream Malaysian media have been nothing more than government mouthpieces. The trial by media of the sacked Anwar is indicative of this. Second, and in relation to the first point, despite all the talk about 'democracy ala Malaysia', 'freedom with responsibility', unlimited, we need to remind ourselves that all of the major Malaysian media organizations - including TV3, TV3, MegaTV, MetroVision, NTV7, Astro, *Berita Harian*, *Utusan Malaysia*, *New Straits Times* and *The Star* - are owned and controlled by *Barisan Nasional* (government political coalition parties) parties or those closely associated with these parties. To a large extent, this allocative control helps to explain why these media organizations rarely - if ever - break ranks. Third, to reinforce such economic controls further, *Barisan Nasional* has laws at its disposal - the *Printing Presses and Publications Act*, the *Broadcasting Act*, the *Control of Imported Publications Act*, the *Internal Security Act*, the *Official Secrets Act*, the *Sedition Act* and the *Defamation Act* just to name a few - to control the media.

In a more recent study on the public (TV1) and private pay television (Astro Awani) (Roslina & Faridah, 2012), the researchers also found that while RTM has different influences in terms of decision making, as from supra-organizational (ownership dictates content) to industry level of inter-organization relations (competing organizations) to societal influences (government influences), Astro Awani has one additional influence, which is community or market influence (advertising). As RTM sees itself as an information provider or mouth piece to the rakyat, advertising although important would not be the top priority. Astro on the other hand is just the opposite since advertising contributes a substantial amount to the prolonged livelihood of this organization.

Theories of story selection for Astro Awani is very much journalistic centered as the structure is bottom up and very dynamic. The other theories such as event centered and technological determinants play a major role in the news outfit as the news is well integrated with the social network entity via Facebook and Twitter. The news is also shared between different channels in the organisations, radio included. RTM still follows the standard regiment of routine centered news line-up (local, business, foreign, sports). On certain occasions, event centered news also takes precedent depending on news worthiness.
Methodology and Data Collection

Data for this research was derived from in-depth interviews with the respective key personnel from both organizations under study. The identities of the informants are kept confidential, and they will be referred to as alphabetical informants only. Four informants were interviewed from News & Current Affairs Radio & Television Networks, Media Prima Berhad namely Informant A, Informant B, Informant C and Informant D. While from TV1, Informant I, Informant J, Informant K and Informant L.

When developing the purposive sampling for this research, it was important to look at and understand the hierarchy of the newsrooms under study. The organization structure for each and every organization was difficult to secure as the organization structures are high security priority. Based on the basic structure in the newsrooms, purposive samples were selected to fulfill the research needs of this study.

For this research, data collection will be done through in-depth interviews or semi structured interviews with chief news editors of the main newsrooms in TV1 and TV3. The justification for this is because with every time Prime Ministers change, CEO’s or COO’s or General Managers of the newsrooms also change, get transferred or given the golden hand-shake to leave. The ones that have remained through the storms of change have been the Chief Editors.

In-depth interviews focused on the questions that would provide information on the topic of research and were guided by the decision making process from the editors point of view from both different media power houses factoring in government policies and stringent acts. The main reason is to identify the stages of decision-making in the production of news and how they have affected by the policies introduced. From the main questions formed, supplementary questions were asked in order to get more information to complete this study.

The news sections gave valuable time for this research. The in-depth interviews were based on a few research questions:

a. Research Question 1: Who makes decisions at different levels of production – pre-production, production and post-production in the making of news?

b. Research Question 2: What forces (internal/external) have influenced the decision making process in the newsrooms of the broadcasting system?

c. Research Question 3: What government policies influenced the network’s programming.

The data from the in-depth interviews were coded for topics on decision making and also for frequency of talking about a topic while providing examples based on real events. Topics of discussion covered a range of topics covering experience, duration of work in newsrooms, pre-production, production and post-production decision making.
Data Findings: Decisions in Different Stages of News Production

Both media organizations work differently in terms of the decision making process at different stages of production. The Group Managing Editor, Group Deputy Managing Editor, Head of News, Chief News Editor, Editors and Sub-editors at TV3 determined the first round of selection for the news in terms of local, regional and international. TV3 has an edge since they have regional offices everywhere so there would be an abundance of news to cover their main Buletin Pagi at 7 am (30 minutes), Buletin 1.30 (30 minutes) and their main newsreel Buletin Utama for the Malay news at 8 pm (1 hour) and Nightline for the English News at midnight (30 minutes). This is interspersed with Berita Terkini at 10 am, 11 am, 12 noon, 4 pm with the 5.30 pm slot dedicated to Business News. During the weekend there’s a sight change in the Berita Terkini with the news aired at 11 am, 12 noon, 4 pm and 6 pm. The duration of Berita Terkini is from 10-15 minutes depending on stories highlighted.

TV1 also has the same set-up similar to TV3 where they have regional offices everywhere or better known as Biro’s but on a bigger scale. This is also to facilitate news to cover their every hour bulletins from 9 am to 1 pm, 3 pm, 5 pm, 8 pm, 10 pm, 11 pm and 12.30 am. Likewise, the decision making process for the news line-up, is also done collectively as a group and deem the same stages as important which is the pre-production stage.

In terms of decisions made for the news line-up, both organizations do it collectively as a group and deem the same stages as important which is the pre-production stage.

“At 10am every morning, we have an editorial meeting that is chaired by (Informant A). So that is when we discuss the events on the day. That is when we give suggestions and follow-ups. The editors will also brief us on the assignments they have for the day. Then the reporters go out and come back and they report to the desk on what stories they have. And then 6 o’clock every day we have another meeting also chaired by (Informant A) or in his absence one of us and that is when we discuss what are the main stories of the day”

[Interview with Informant B - 26th June 2012]

“It depends on what happens on that day. There are days when we decide to use certain stories but all the while, almost all the while it comes from the suggestion of the (news)desk because they know better. For example, ‘for story of the day’ they know what is the strongest story so they will suggest the headlines in the meeting. At our level we have a look and okay the story and we proceed”

[Interview with Informant A - 26th June 2012]

“Most of the time it’s consensus”

[Interview with Informant B - 26th June 2012]
“Pre-production. I feel that the pre (production) stage is the more important since this is where the decision is most crucial. It will determine the direction of our program especially news. If we make a mistake regarding what news goes on air and something goes wrong, then we would face the consequences of summons or other penalties. Those are consequences that we have to face. So, it’s important that we make the right decision before the news goes on air”.

[Interview with Informant I - 9th April 2012]

Factors that Affect the News Decision-making Process

Forces that influenced the decision making process in the broadcasting system are numerous. There are several factors that have been identified that influences the decision making process in the newsroom in the broadcasting system for these two stations. These factors can be further broken into internal and external factors.

Internal Factors in TV3

a. Staff performances

Staff performance could be looked at something minor if the company is young but after 28 years being in the business, there is the need to better and stronger in terms of presentation and production.

“After 28 years of being in operation, there shouldn’t be mistakes especially minor ones like wrong graphics, wrong spelling of names (during supering), readers yang still make mistakes when reading or cough while the vt (footages) are rolling). They need to take ownership and responsibility for their job”

[Interview with Informant D – 5th May 2012]

b. Self-censorship

Self-censorship has always been practiced in TV3. This would generally cover sensitive issues like religion, race and multicultural sensitivity.

“Of course we believe in self-censorship. Self-censorship means that we know what we are doing and what we cannot do. We brief our reporters, producers and editors (so everybody is on the same page). It is company policy”

[Interview with Informant A - 26th June 2012]

c. Company’s KPIs

The company’s KPIs and the newsroom’s KPIs in terms of revenue also need to be factored into the news process and the overall makeup of the line-up
of the news as it will impact other external factors such as ratings and advertisements.

“We have to balance up or we will be in a dilemma. Of course we have our KPI and they include the editorial part, which is editorial content and everything else because is not only about quantity but quality news”

[Interview with Informant A - 26th June 2012]

External Factors in TV3

a. Guidelines from the Government

Although this situation doesn’t happen often but it is highlighted as one of the internal factors that causes stress and affects the process of the news decision making process.

“Yes and no. It doesn’t happen all the time. Sometimes it happens but sometimes it doesn’t. It’s not like the political master’s micro manage us. It’s just that there are guidelines that we follow”

[Interview with Informant B - 26th June 2012]

“That’s a tricky question. If you’re talking about policy, we have policy. It’s a verbal policy, not a written policy la. We support the government of the day, so based on that one, our stories are generated accordingly”

[Interview with Informant A - 26th June 2012]

“(laughs) Of course there are some political affects. We have to know who owns us those kinds of thing, goes back to that problem question of who owns. I think as a journalist we see there’s a positive morale. I think the Najib’s administration understands the fact that otherwise we will see a premature death of the tv news and the newspapers. People don’t want to, they just go to the Internet for balanced news, I think its human nature that people go for the juicy kind of stories”

[Interview with Informant B - 26th June 2012]

“There will changes with every new PM, there always seems to be the need to prove ourselves every time. It can sometimes be stressful and tiring”

[Interview with Informant D - 26th June 2012]
b. Advertisements
Advertisements are also another factor that effects the duration of the news line up but not so much of the news decision making process per se.

“That’s our constraint; it gives us 45 minutes, those paid advertorial, so giving us hard news something like 30-40%”
[Interview with Informant A - 26th June 2012]

“We don’t have enough time. We have one hour but the airtime is so limited because of the commercial. We have about; maximum commercial is about 15 minutes”
[Interview with Informant C - 26th June 2012]

c. Ratings
Ratings are also an important factor in the broadcasting business. The higher the ratings, the better the chances for the programme being ‘sold’. It also helps to determine the ‘rates’ of a certain band. If a programme’s ratings fall, there will also be consequences towards the selling power.

“There is a fluctuation. If it is the school holidays, everybody goes on holiday then that’s a problem (because no one is watching the news)”
[Interview with Informant B - 26th June 2012]

“Our ratings are accumulative, meaning it doesn’t depend on one bulletin only but is an average of seven days. A.C. Nielsen accumulates, and averages it out, (so it is a weekly ratings and not just one transmission)”
[Interview with Informant A - 26th June 2012]

d. Complaints & Legal Action
Viewers complaints and legal action, although seems to be the playground of the newsroom. it’s not something that is ‘fun’ to indulge in as it take up many man hours, court presence and legal fees.

“Sometime we overlook things like deadlines. Deadlines can sometimes hog our production, let’s say, there’s a PM’s assignment at 6 or 7pm. The story will come in late and we really need to process the story fast in order to enter the line-up so it’s a bit of a problem for us. At times deadlines also dampen the process in terms of production because when the stories come in late and it’s a big story, you need to process the story fast. Sometimes when it goes to graphics or to the different production stages, there are some glitches; they’re bound to make mistakes like spelling, wrong graphic or wrong pictures. This is not a major concern but of course one of those”
[Interview with Informant A - 26th June 2012]
Internal Factors in TV1

As TV 3, for TV1 the decision making process is also an ongoing process till the news goes on the air. These decisions will be determined based on the issue at hand or updates or new developments. It was the same scenario with a current affairs programme that was supposed to be done ‘live’ but due to the sensitivity of the subject discussed; the programme was done as ‘live-recorded’. This would eventually give the editors and producers the opportunity to make certain ‘cuts’ to the programme before it actually went on air ‘live’.

“We had already made our decision before that. We planned the programme early and we constructed our panelist. We even had a confirmation of the transmission date but during the recording we found that the discussion became very sensitive. So, we had to make a decision whether to put the programme on air or not because we foresee consequences. But since we had already committed to our panelist, we went ahead with the programme. That was our decision.”

[Interview with Informant I - 9th April 2012]

The first round of decision making in the newsroom is done by the sub-editors. The sub-editors “will receive the news from the reporters, then they will decide how the introductions to the stories would be. Sometimes our reporters do not write based on the inverted pyramid but the opposite so it is up to the sub-editors to edit the news.” (Informant K). Therefore the first level of decision making happens at the Sub-editors level to look at “news of the day” (Informant L).

If the staff is a more senior reporter that knows the tricks of the trade then they the editors and sub-editors would trust them with the stories, even Prime Minister’s stories. But if the reporters are still new, they did to be guided appropriately.

“... sometimes when they come back from an assignment, there are many angles. When PM announces something, it’s not only a single issue but several issues, so we will ask the reporter to highlight what we deem as important. That’s how we guide the reporters because sometime they will bring back a bigger story or a smaller story form what we have planned in the line-up. So they have to come back and tell us what they have.

[Interview with Informant K – 14th March 2012]

a. Inexperience and New Staff

As the newsroom at RTM is understaffed as they need to cater for the hourly news bulletins, there are many new staffs that have been employed from Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM), from reality shows that are very new to the broadcasting world, hence a lot of guidance is needed. And under deadline
pressures, some of these stories have to be re-written and re-edited that sometimes do not meet the specific deadlines for the news.

In terms of manpower, RTM has a strong of 18 editors, 7 sub-editors and 60 reporters to cater for the four different desks (Malay, English, Mandarin and Tamil). Even that is not enough according to the Editors that I spoke to as they need to cater for the many news bulletin on a daily basis, hence they also taken staff on contract basis to fulfill this manpower need.

“We clearly have a staff shortage problem. We have no choice but to take staff on a contract basis because there is much news to process hourly. We’re working non-stop. For me, I start work at 8.30 am and at 8.30 pm, I’m still here. It’s so difficult to get good staff especially at this time when the elections are drawing near. It is so difficult to get people that you don’t have to train. Very difficult.”

[Interview with Informant K – 14th March 2012]

Informant L also reiterates the same issue. Not only are they new and inexperienced, they also lack the understanding of sensitive issues like race and religion.

“... they don’t understand sensitive issues like race and religion. This news staffs do very direct reporting. For example, stories that have issues like ‘a pig’s head found in mosque grounds’, they will send the story to us as it is. So we need to do the needful and manage the sensitivity.”

[Interview with Informant J - 14th March 2012]

b. Minister’s Interference

Although this is not the current situation but this was highlighted as one of the internal factors that causes stress and affect the process of the news decision making process. The information minister in question was Datuk Seri Zainuddin Maidin (17th Februari 2006 – 8th March 2008).

“For example, during Datuk Zam (Zainuddin Maidin) reign, it was different because he was a newsman himself, so knew everything and he wanted to be close to the newsroom operations. But he always interfered. He always wanted to be directly involved and he kept in touch with us constantly. Because news is fast, he always inquired whether we had all our materials on time because he was a newsman. That’s the biggest difference.

[Interview with Informant L – 14th March 2012]

“He would call us directly at the newsroom. To that extend since he was a newsman himself. It was very stressful.”

[Interview with Informant K – 14th March 2012]
External Factors in TV1

a. BERNAMA stories

BERNAMA is a government news agency that provides news stories for all broadcast, print and online news agencies. Reporters are known to check with BERNAMA stories in order for the introduction of the news to be, at least in tandem with the news stories. BERNAMA has been known throughout the years to be ‘efficient’ in terms of churning out the news. Of late that does not seem the case.

“The BERNAMA stories are sometimes not update. We are very disappointed that the stories are late. They give the stories to Utusan, Berita Harian and every news organizations, we’re always the last. So we don’t depend on them so much.”
[Interview with Informant J - 14thMarch 2012]

b. Government as Stakeholders

As the government is the main stakeholder for RTM, it’s not surprising that the coverage of news has a slant towards that end although according to the editors, there are no directive received at their level. Most decisions are done at their level with the ‘okay’ from the Deputy Director of News and Current Affairs.

“It’s the same with RTM, especially nowadays. The concept is the same – a directive to cover stories for government projects, government policies, explain to the public what they are and how the public will benefit from these projects. I feel the concept is the same for all newsrooms, especially now (gearing up for elections).”
[Interview with Informant J - 14thMarch 2012]

However, sometimes there will be ‘advice’ from the management of the stories are sensitive issues. “If we feel we can re-angle the story then we will, but if we cannot because the story is straight forward then we would drop the story based on ‘advice’.

c. Advertisements

Advertisements are also another factor that effects the duration of the news line up but not so much of the news decision making process per se as making money is not the main priority in RTM. But there are exceptions to this rule.

“Let’s say one company has bought air time for 10 minutes during the Olympic Reports in the sports section and they also want to promote their product. So we have to follow and allow for the 10 minute duration, that’s the decision.”
[Interview with Informant I - 9th April 2012]
Practices - Decision Making and the Gatekeeper’s Mission

When analyzing the various responses to the reasons how these two news organizations derived on the decision making process, these are the three themes that emerged. The decision making process in the Malaysian newsroom could be unique to this country but they are also characteristics to other newsrooms studies done worldwide (Gans, 1980, Joseph, 1982, Lowrey and Chang, 2010) and in the local vicinity (Faridah, 1995, Khattab, 2004 and Faridah, 2012). The assumption is that it is traditional practice within the media organization that most editorial and other newsroom decisions lie in the hands of the management and it is proven to be true.

It doesn’t really matter where the research is done, whether newsrooms in China, Russia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Zimbabwe, the US, Philippines or even in Malaysia, the ‘authoritative sources’ are also the power structure and the privileged elites who feed it. It is also accurate to say that the mainstream media refers and defers to them as they influence the way news is reported, interpreted and decided what will go un-reported or not followed up (Pereira, 2007).

A few matters come to point in this study. The reporter and the editor’s personal and professional news judgement, organizational news-gathering routines that establish the working relations between reporters and their bosses, the economic constraints on news production, the flow of information, communication technologies and most importantly the ideological factors that define the limits of time and space in news gathering. Research by Lippmann (1965), Rivers and Matthews (1988) and Bennett (2003) also confirm this notion.

It is correspondingly accurate with what Gans (1980) reiterates as how considerations in decision making are done. In these Malaysian newsrooms, these elements are division of power and labor of news staff decreases according to lessening of rank and power. On the top levels are the policy makers, followed by top editors (or producers in broadcasting), section heads and reporters and these are the important gatekeepers that make decisions on a day to day basis.

News format and presentation is the final stage in the presentation of news which exerts ultimate control over the product in all news organizations. Producers view and review stories, instruct editors and reporters on how to construct, ‘play’ and narrate the news. If editing fails to conform to organizational values, the producer or editor can kill the story with ease but with justifications.

Organizational rules and editorial policies are also taken into consideration to coordinate the efforts of individual journalist, editors, and producers into a news product that meets a certain standard and preset schedule. The guided rules act as guidelines for editors and reporters in filtering and evaluating information and making decisions in these media organizations. Personal set of news values, interests, needs, biases, etc. likewise play a part in determining

The adage of editorial independence therefore is non-existent as found in this study as there are underlying issues between editors and their superiors, sideways (between departments) and downwards (with reporters acceptance or otherwise of editorial change). Notwithstanding these news organizations continue to pursue the aim of objectivity in news reporting - of disinterested, unbiased and factual reporting of the news (Green, 1999).

Findings of this research similarly indicate that the editor controls not only news topics but also the number of news items; editors as well as top management do have their own prejudices and favorites in terms of news items due to guidelines imposed. The most important characteristic of news is ‘consequence’ (importance) to the news consumer and the news people try to be balanced, which means that they do not want to be influenced by individual prejudices since their professional norms, including journalistic objectivity, prevent news selection from being affected by their own subjective news values as echoed by Gutierrez (1995), Bai Sang (2006) and Faridah et al. 2012.

**Pegs - Broadcast Governance and Regulation**

It is clear that TV 1 follows the government model in which public broadcasting is controlled directly by the government or by the political majority. This system is similarly practiced in France, Western Europe, Greece, Portugal and Spain. TV 3, on the other hand uses the professional model as epitomized by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), where a strong tradition has developed that broadcasting should be largely insulated from political control and run by broadcasting professionals. This model is also characteristic of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), Irish Public Broadcasting, some Scandinavian countries and public broadcasting in the United States (Mancini and Hallin, 2005).

Past researchers (Mustaffa, 2000, Netto, 2002, Umi Khattab, 2004, Lacy et. al., 2004 and Ramanathan, 2008), have derived conclusions for research done locally and internationally and at different times that the political motivated media curbs have denied the Malaysian public their rights to a full range of viewpoints. This is not entirely true for this study as TV1, although being a government television station, reports news as is, bias towards the government, no doubt but still reports news directly.

TV 3 on the other hand, uses the professional model but operates differently as the study suggest. TV 3 is more stringent in terms of their decision making process because of the guidelines and the presence of the Putrajaya Appointee, that has a hand in the decision making process.

Although in many previous research by Zaharom Nain & Mustafa K. Anuar (1998) and Yesudhasan and Wong (2010) state that the ruling government has a list of laws at its disposal namely - the Printing Presses and Publications Act, the Broadcasting Act, the Control of Imported Publications Act, the Internal Security Act, the Official Secrets Act, the Sedition Act and Defamation Act just to name a few - said to reinforce economic control and
also on the media. The latest development was the abolishment of the Internal Security Act.

The Malaysian media to a certain extent is pressured by the structure and the people who make up the structure, to be biased and virtually silent on issues critical of the government and those deemed sensitive to the general public, especially on issues concerning race and religion. With all this going on in the media industry in Malaysia and people who assume the on goings in the newsroom, it is not surprising then it is ranked amongst the most stringent in the world. The key to this dominance is the legislative restrictions mention combined with corporate and beaucratic control by government parties and ownerships (Yesudhasan and Wong, 2010).

One piece of good news however, starting 15th July 2012, the press and broadcasting licenses will not need to be renewed to stay in operations. When the editors were asked of this, they didn’t seem to be affected very much. Work is “business as usual” (Informant A & C) because that is how they have been operating. Revoking the license does not mean that they can say bad things about the ruling government. The consensus at these organizations is simply “respect for the government of the day.” (Informant E, F & G).

Based on the research, it is clear that a lot of deliberations take place in these newsrooms of power broadcasting houses especially for what they term as ‘big stories’. These could range from political, economy, events or even sports. But on some occasions, a few editors also do judgments based on what they describe as ‘feel’ or ‘news sense’ (Gans, 1980 and Shultz, 2007).

Proxies - Ownership Links

The results of these in-depth interviews also agree with Zaharom Nain & Mustafa K. Anuar (1998) that by and large the Malaysian mainstream media act as government mouthpieces because of ownership issues. But the difference is some of them do not have a choice. But the ones that do have a choice, they see themselves as partners with the government in tandem with nation building.

Saying that critical reports with the multi-layered nature of controls on the day-to-day basis at the operational level of news production that invariably prevent such reports from seeing the light of day is not entirely true. There are many ways for a certain issue to be discussed. The approach taken by Awani (the pay tv) seems to work nicely. Having a 360 degree tactic gives more than one side of an issue but more importantly it rather looks at issues that affect people the most so the government has no choice but to listen, and they do.

As oppose to Papandrea’s (2006) research that only discusses issues of plurality and the diversity of views, media markets and the effects of the ownership controls, this study dwells further into how it effects the organization and the news content. While the news at TV 1 is pretty straight forward, the public feels that the news from TV 3 is slanted towards the government and this causes disaffection among some of the viewers. There is even a Facebook group called ‘Kami Boikot Bulletin Utama TV 3’ (We boycott the TV 3 news bulletin). This might be one of the reasons for the fall in ratings
(2.4 -2.5 million) besides the reason of too many advertisements that breaks the news momentum.

While Schudson (2002) finds it hard to determine the link between ownership of news organizations and the character of news coverage, for the these three news organization it is clear what the news treatment is like although the focus for this research was only the ten new policies under the current Prime Minister. No doubt as Schudson highlighted, it is a mix and blend of a commercial system while serving the growing interest of the public.

These broadcasting houses also actively produce current affairs programmes that are issues picked up from the news bulletin itself. These initiatives are identical to the findings in Napoli, Philip and Zhaoxu Yan in 2007.

So in a nutshell, transformation in the newsrooms as the transformation programs is inevitable and demands agility, adaptability and efficiency from communication professionals. While TV 3’s and TV 1 stakeholders are clear cut and there has been much change in terms of decision making and news presentation with the change of Prime Ministers, especially in TV 3. Nevertheless having said that, Informant B feels that the powers that be “do not micro-manage the newsroom”.

In general, as reported in several newsroom studies internationally by Gans, 1980; Joseph, 1982; Gaziano and Coulson; 1988 and locally by Liew, 1990; Faridah 1990; Faridah, 1995 and Faridah et al. 2012, it is a traditional practice within the media organizations that most editorial and other decisions lie in the hands of the management. And when the management’s hands are tied by the policies that camouflage the practices, pegs and proxies, which in turn dictate the decision making process in the newsrooms, it becomes less democratic. Most often than not, not adhering to these ‘guidelines’ would mean treading on thin ice.

Changing Patterns of Television and News Programming

In general the news programming patterns have not changed very much since Najib took office. Although the duration when the interviews took place was from 14th March – 19th July 2012, was a time where the elections timeline was supposed to take place, the programmes that took shape were the old programmes which were given a new lease of life in TV1. These were the existing documentaries, special reports, pointers for the radio DJ’s, news and capsules (30-60 second segments).

TV3 however did not want to give any information ‘on record’ for reasons they did not want to disclose.

TV3

Although the news line-up looks typical of a routine centered story selection on a daily basis (local, business, foreign, sports, closing), but according to Informant B “if there is a big earthquake somewhere, the foreign
news will pick up as news of the day” and then for that particular day it turns into event centered. Event centered news would mean news breaking for example earthquakes, major accidents, sports and outstanding achievements, just to name a few.

“It’s more on segmentized (the content), so more comfortable to the viewers, so they know that the business stories will come in later.”

[Interview with Informant C - 26th June 2012]

“So we know when to break off.”

[Interview with Informant A - 26th June 2012]

Given the technology that they have for example the OB (Outdoor Broadcasting) trucks/vans, studios, links and manpower that covers the ground crew, the technical producers, the location producers and the host or the reporter on location, technological determinants are not a hindrance for production. The newsroom can manage a few crossovers in a week when the assignments are big, notwithstanding the overseas assignments.

What is lacking though is the coverage of technology news for the bulletin unless its “earth shattering” (Informant B). A few examples that were quoted were the story on reverse osmosis and another on a sand cleaning process in Qatar.

In terms of economic determinants, the story which molds the national economy that carries a lot of weight and given prominence for almost the whole bulletin is of course the budget. When the Prime Minister delivers his budget speech, then the first and second block of the news bulletin will carry budget stories.

Ideological determinants also play a role in the news as it is the belief that journalists align the news to the political ideology of those holding power in the country. So far this is in tandem with the government of the day.

External centered happens when groups in society are powerful enough to create what they call ‘public events’ and to gain access to journalists and a very good example would be the ‘Bersih’ rallies. Reporters and cameraman go on the ground to cover these events to report and see for themselves what is happening. But on more than one occasion, they have been denied access because they are termed as mainstream. The opposition leaders often talk about “freedom of the press and yet at times they don’t let us cover, that is another problem. No Utusan, no TV 3, I mean you’re talking about freedom of the press and yet you fault us from coming to your function” (Informant A).

TV 3 is not so much journalistic based unless they are senior reporters that are capable of delivering their own stories without much hassle and monitoring. Normally these are special reports on ongoing issues.

TV 1

TV 1, like TV 3 also follow a routine based news bulletin starting with general news, economy, foreign and sports. So if a “sports event dominates the
“news” then, it will be event centered for the day. The same goes for “economic stories like the tabling of the budget” (Informant J). On occasion, ‘human interest stories (for example peculiar weddings) also play a part in the general news just to break the monotony of the heavy news or can just be used as the closing” (Informant K). TV 1 also has a weather segment called ‘Infocuaca’ as part of social obligation to the public.

In terms of the other determinants – technological, economic and ideological are almost the same as TV 3 although given the duration that they have been in the business, they also boast of experience staff and technology knowhow. The budget story was the same example that was given in the course of the interview to all Informants and they agree holistically that that would be the obvious economic determinants. In terms of ideological determinates, it goes without saying as TV 1 is government owned, therefore everybody and anybody tows the line with the government of the day.

TV 1 tries to take on new perspectives by inviting opposition leaders for their talk shows and according to Informant I, they have a pretty balanced make of guests for their talk shows but sometime the discussion becomes heated as the subject matter is sensitive to begin with, for example Lynas. So when topics discussed are sensitive, they take precautions to record the programme rather than to transmit it live (Informant I). These external factors are not external centered for the news per se but are derived from the issues pick up from the news.

TV 1 is not journalist centered for obvious reasons as many of the staff are new, not experienced in writing and many of them do not have the proper background in terms of academia as some of them were taken from reality shows (Informant K). So it is understandable why it is not journalistic centered.

Prominence of Government Policies

TV3

Overall view for TV 3 is to cover the ten policies that were launched by the Prime Minister when he held office. Events on the policies are covered as it happens and sometimes when Najib announces achievements that have been accomplished on RTM. All television stations will also transmit the announcement via “Ehsan RTM” an understanding that the feed is free of charge.

The ETP’s is a policy that has been frequently highlighted in the TV 3 news. “Never before have we reported so many stories on government policies – the ETP, the political transformation program, the government transformation program, everything” (Informant A & B).

In terms of programmes, the only one that is under the umbrella of the newsroom is Aduan Rakyat. Another programme is “Soal Jawab which is not directly under the newsroom but we still give the current affairs team input, we still guide them” (Informant B). Soal Jawab is a talk show that discusses issues that are used in the news bulletin.
Having the ability to provide different sections with input, ironically the same idea is not used for the radio stations under Media Prima. They (the management) feel that radio is “non-political and more for entertainment so we cannot be putting serious news... But don’t know, coming election, probably we have to” (Informant A & C). According to Informant B, over the years and over the research that they’ve done over and over again, they have come up with the findings that the radio business is not really for newsy kind of people. News is not their cup of tea.

Asked whether they were playing with the idea of injecting news on radio during the elections, the answer was “of course when the time comes - follow ups on campaigns probably” (Informant A).

TV1

Overall view for TV 1 is to cover the policies based on the events as they unfold. There are a few policies that are given focus depending on the announcements made by the Prime Minister during the intervals of achievements accomplished from the policies.

“... of course 1Malaysia is the main government policy that we cover. Although sometimes I feel that 1Malaysia it’s just a re-branding, just a name. It’s just Wawasan 2020 and the Rukunegara merged into one to form this re-branding. The other reason is 1Malaysia is our Ministry’s KPI and it is our duty to give explanations so that the rakyat understands what it’s all about and so far I think we have achieved more than 60%.”

[Interview Informant L - 9th April 2012]

“Other policies like the GTP, we have to show its effects. Let’s say the NKRA on crime, we show the statistics that crime has actually gone down. Same goes for the FDI investments. For the NKRA, the crime index needs to be related to the tourist confidence and foreign investments. These are sometimes made into special reports to show the implications towards programs and government policies that are introduced.”

[Interview Informant K- 14th March 2012]

Another policy that was highlighted was the BRIM and 1Malaysia. Our concentration was more towards “government concerns for the rakyat and unity elements” (Informant K). All these government policies are ongoing projects that will be covered in terms of launches of the policy, transformation programs and positive outcomes. There are “no specific guidelines as to how we do the coverage, what to highlight or special programmes. How we want to do it is up to us. There is no directive, what we plan for the coming election is ongoing from our own initiative.” (Informant J). A few examples that were cited were ‘Tahukah Anda’, ‘Nur Alert’, ‘Titik Sentuhan’ and ‘Bicara Rakyat’ which are all programmes that highlight problems of the people and what were
the initiatives done to help them (Informant I). Another ongoing programme is ‘Hari Ini Dalam Sejarah’.

The interviews with informants from TV 1 were done in the months of March and April 2012, when stormy rumors of the 23rd General Elections were blowing. The obvious question to ask was if there were ‘extra’ programmes done based on Najib’s policies for the elections.

“No, there are no extra stories about Najib. As and when he gives a statement that is the news we carry. Even our special reports are based on government announcements, for example the NGPP transformation programme. We get somebody to explain so the rakyat understands. We also do special reports for special days like Hari Tentera, but other than that it’s business as usual.”

[Interview Informant K- 14thMarch 2012]

Besides that Informant K also mentioned that they only do live crossovers for the Prime Minister when there are special announcements as stated above. Nevertheless, this informant’s personal opinion is that, there is no pressure from the government as it is part of the editor’s job but not sure if the Pengarah is pressured to do so. Since it’s a top down decision, the editors feel that it’s a normal occurrence for them. Events like “Bertemu Rakyat, Prime Ministers announcements on the outcome of the GTP & ETP, PEMANDU projects are normally done via ‘live’ or crossovers and most often than not it are the initiatives of the editors and producers.”

Having said that, on the flip side, Informant K had this to say:

“It’s not calm, we are not calm, sometime we work our a*** off (laughs). We are always tense. 80% of our staff here have heart problems”

[Interview Informant K- 14thMarch 2012]

Table 1. Summary of In-Depth Interviews Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RQ 1 Who makes decisions at different levels of production - preproduction, production and post-production in the making of news?</th>
<th>RQ 2 What forces (internal / external) have influenced the decision making process in the newsrooms of the broadcasting system?</th>
<th>RQ 3 What government policies influenced the network’s programming?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Informant A</td>
<td>Decisions are made collectively, twice daily. Once in the morning meeting at 10 am and 6 pm to determine the headlines.</td>
<td><strong>Internal:</strong> Self-censorship Company’s KPIs <strong>External:</strong> Government guidelines Advertisement Ratings Complaints and legal action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Informant B</strong></td>
<td><strong>Informant C</strong></td>
<td><strong>Informant D</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decisions are made collectively, twice daily. Once in the morning meeting at 10 am and 6 pm to determine the headlines. If Informant A is not around then Informant B will chair the meetings.</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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**External:** Government guidelines Advertisement Ratings Complaints and legal action | **Internal:** Self-censorship Company’s KPIs  
**External:** Government guidelines Advertisement Ratings | **Internal:** Staff performance  
Self-censorship Company’s KPIs  
**External:** Advertisement Ratings | **Internal:** Inexperienced and new staff  
**External:** Government stakeholders Advertisements | **Internal:** Inexperienced and new staff  
**External:** Government stakeholders | **Internal:** Inexperienced and new staff  
Minister’s interference  
**External:** Bernama stories Government stakeholders | **Internal:** All policies, as and when it happens | **Internal:** Economic transformation program, political transformation program Government, transformation program, everything | **Internal:** All policies, as and when it happens | **Internal:** 1Malaysia, Economic transformation program, political transformation program, PEMANDU projects, NKRA Government transformation program. | **Internal:** 1Malaysia, Economic transformation program, political transformation program, PEMANDU projects, NKRA Government transformation program. | **Internal:** 1Malaysia, Economic transformation program, political transformation program, PEMANDU projects, NKRA Government transformation program. |
Informant L: Decisions are made collectively, twice daily. Once in the morning meeting at 9 am and 5 pm to determine the headlines. Meetings are chaired by Informant J.

Internal: Inexperienced and new staff
Minister’s interference

External: Bernama stories
Government stakeholders

1Malaysia, Economic transformation program, political transformation program, PEMANDU projects, NKRA Government transformation program.

Table 2. Commonalities and Disparities among Media Organizations (From In-depth Interviews)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Similarities/Commonalities Between Media Organizations</th>
<th>Differences/Disparities Between Media Organizations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Who makes decisions at different levels of production - preproduction, production and post-production in the making of news?</td>
<td>Decisions are made collectively, twice daily. Once in the morning meeting and once in the evening to determine the headlines.</td>
<td>The difference is only in terms of time as the Awani and TV 1 newsrooms have their meeting at 9am and 5pm while TV 3 has theirs at 10am and 6pm.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 2 What forces (internal / external) have influenced the decision making process in the newsrooms of the broadcasting system? | Internal: Staff performance
Censorship
External: Government guidelines
Stakeholders
Advertisement | Internal: Company’s KPIs
Minister’s interference
External: Ratings
Complaints and legal action |
| 3 What government policies influenced the network’s programming?                      | All policies – 1Malaysia, Economic transformation program, political transformation program, Government transformation program, NKRA | PEMANDU Projects |

Conclusion

Data from this study suggest the news selection decisions were based on several considerations in addition to news value. News content is built from information that is easy to explain, that would provide a good audience draw (ratings) and that could be assembled with efficiency of effort (the three stages of production - pre-production, production and post-production) (Berkowitz, 1990). News people also rely on their gut feelings or instincts to what makes a good newscast (Dunn, 2011). What are important in terms of decision making framework in specific terms are interest, importance and visual impact (Berkowitz, 1990).
The structure of the newscast format has a lot to do with story selection as did news merits of the potential stories. This helps explain why gatekeepers do not always agree on specific stories but they do tend to agree on the kinds of stories that constitute a balanced news mix (Stempel, 1985). The news cast format often calls for an approximate quota of stories from a variety of categories - national, business, foreign, sports and weather. TV 3 and TV 1 follow this format and their story selections varies from event centered and routine centered most of the time as practiced in the Mexican newsrooms of the spot news (nota del dia) model which prioritizes news reported on events as they happen (McPherson, 2012).

In conclusion, different newsrooms are run differently based on different stakeholders. TV3 in general have different influences in terms of decision making, from industry level of inter-organization relations (competing organizations) to societal influences (government influences) and community or market influence (advertising). As this company see itself as an information provider or mouth piece to the rakyat, advertising as an important and top priority as advertising contributes a substantial amount to the prolonged livelihood of this organization.

TV 3, like TV 1 also follow a routine based news bulletin starting with general news, economy, foreign and sports. So if a “sports event dominates the news” then, it will be event centered for the day. The same goes for “economic stories like the tabling of the budget” (Informant J). On occasion, 'human interest stories (for example peculiar weddings) also play a part in the general news just to break the monotony of the heavy news or can just be used as the closing” (Informant K). TV 1 also has a weather segment called 'Infocuaca’ as part of social obligation to the public.

Both TV1 and TV3 still follow the standard regiment of routine centered news line-up (local, business, foreign, sports). On certain occasions, event centered news also takes precedent depending on news worthiness.

This study has also shown that while working in the newsrooms can be eventful with a lot adrenalin running on days where there is a big story, it is also fraught with difficulties and challenges, not least of which is the problem of communication between newsroom staff. Therefore, irrespective of which decision making model used in the newsrooms - the government model or the professional model, the communication or lack thereof when policies change, must be communicated clearly.

So in a nutshell, transformation in the newsrooms as the transformation programs is inevitable and demands agility, adaptability and efficiency from communication professionals. While TV 3’s and TV 1 stakeholders are clear cut and there has been much change in terms of decision making and news presentation with the change of Prime Ministers, especially in TV 3. Nevertheless having said that, Informant B feels that the powers that be “do not micro-manage the newsroom”.

In summary, as reported in several newsroom studies internationally by Gans, 1980; Joseph, 1982; Gaziano and Coulson; 1988 and locally by Liew, 1990; Faridah 1990; Faridah, 1995 and Faridah et al. 2011, it is a traditional
practice within the media organizations that most editorial and other decisions lie in the hands of the management. And when the management’s hands are tied by the policies that concealment the practices, pegs and proxies, which in turn dictate the decision making process in the newsrooms. Most often than not, not adhering to these ‘guidelines’ would mean treading on thin ice.

But on a different note, if professionalism in this industry is to be rationally refined, maintained, protected and advanced, then the reporters, editors and management in the position to do so must begin to reliably and systematically assess their own performance.

References


Interviews


