

A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF “MALAYSIAN-LAHAD DATU” CRISIS AND CRISIS RESPONSES IN ETHNIC NEWSPAPERS IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract: *This research was to examine the portrayal of crisis response strategies in Malaysian local vernacular printed dailies in covering terrorism crises which is the Lahad Datu crisis in Malaysia. The researcher relied on Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) and Framing theory to identify the news coverage and appropriate solutions through newspaper framing. Five variables were identified by the researcher in examining crisis response strategies such as news category, news slants, news framing, news sources and portrayal of visuals. Through quantitative content analysis, data revealed that solution category was portrayed by Nanban daily, but Sin Chew focused on the problem category. For the news slants, Sin Chew daily framed negative slants of news most but Nanban daily portrayed issues in positive slants. In measuring the news frame, both dailies focused more on the attribution of responsibility frame. In examining the crisis response strategies, the researcher found, justification crisis response was portrayed predominantly but there is a significant difference between two different vernacular dailies in the portrayal of justification crisis response followed by concern crisis response. Kruskal Wallis’s test revealed that there is a significant difference in the portrayal of concern response between two dailies however, both newspapers having significant associations in portraying compensation crisis response.*

Keywords: *Crisis, Crisis Response Strategies, Lahad Datu, Vernacular Newspapers, Malaysian Government*

Introduction

The word crisis has been used widely in many contexts. There are many different types and causes of a crisis due to the sources of crisis. Crisis is well known with Coomb’s definition

which is any sudden incidents and always creates negative impacts to an organization or country (Coombs, 2014).

Crisis reporting, especially terrorism crisis which is Lahad Datu crisis is a new phenomenon in developing countries like Malaysia. Therefore, this study focused on portrayal of crisis responses through media coverage in vernacular printed newspapers in Malaysia. In this research, researcher simplified organizational crisis into terrorism crisis perspective and crisis manager will be represented by government (Coombs, 2009).

Terrorism crisis refers to the terrorist operation to attack innocent people to get something via immoral events such as bombings, creating physical damages, psychological harm to the public and so on (Zhang, Shoemaker & Wang, 2013). Terrorism crisis suited well to Lahad Datu crisis because the nature of Lahad Datu crisis was an incursion by an armed group from Sulu Sultanate claimed territory from Malaysia over the state of Sabah through many unwanted actions such as produced physical and mental damages and harmed innocent people at Sabah (Zhang et al., (2013).

This study was to identify and examine the crisis response strategies for Lahad Datu crisis through newspaper reporting between two different ethnic orientation of newspapers in Malaysia. Researcher constructed few research questions as stated below in examining the crisis response strategies for Lahad Datu crisis:

1. What are the coverage of Lahad Datu crisis in two different ethnic orientation of newspapers in Malaysia?
2. What are the similarities and differences between two different ethnic orientation of newspapers in Malaysia for few selected variables such as Category of News, News Slants, News Sources, News Frames, Visual Portrayals and Portrayal of Crisis Response Strategies?
3. How does two different ethnic orientation of newspapers in Malaysia portrayed suggested crisis response strategies for Lahad Datu crisis?

Literature Review

In this subtopic, researcher defined and explained few key terms such as introduction to Sabah and Lahad Datu crisis followed by news and ethnic newspapers in Malaysia. Two theories were discussed in this topic as well such as Situational Crisis Communication Theory and Framing Theory.

Introduction to “Sabah” and “Lahad Datu” Crisis

Sabah a part of Malaysia is well known for the unique beliefs and varsity of ethnicity. In February 2013, Sabah was gained media attention from the entire of world by the serious security incident initiated by an external armed from the Southern Philippines. Lahad Datu invasion is an aggression by an armed group from Sulu Sultanate in Lahad Datu. On 9th February 2013, a conflict between Sulu and Malaysian security forces continued to grow, threatening the peace of the people of Sabah. A total of 100 people from the Sultanate of Sulu from southern Philippines have been smuggled into Lahad Datu, Sabah on the ground of taking back their land. They challenged Malaysia's alleged ownership of Sabah. This negotiation has evolved into a clash of weapons of up to ten armed Malaysian personnel. The incidences of aggression by terrorist groups in Semporna and Lahad Datu have enormous impact on the political, social and economic sectors, particularly Sabah (The Star, 2013). This triggered a fierce battle that left up to 71 dead (Ten of the dead were Malaysian security personnel) at Felda Sahabat 17, Kampung Tanduo in Lahad Datu (The Star 2013).

News and Ethnic Newspapers in Malaysia

News especially content in newspapers and television news are powerful because media have the potential to shape and influence the public's opinions and behaviors (Reese, Gandy, & Grant, 2001; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007; Entman, 2007). Stories in media are used by the public to gather appropriate and updated information. The way information is transferred into news report can affect reader perceptions about the covered issue. So, it is important for any organization, people or parties to use framing process in informing and suggesting responses for a crisis through media (Entman, 1993 & Coombs, 2007).

Traditional newspapers in Malaysia are owned by private shareholders and political parties in Malaysia and seriously controlled by government through printing press and publication. Restriction were used to control any censor content in Malaysia to avoid irrelevant disruption for the national security.

Mass media freedom in Malaysia are controlled by the "Printing Press" and "Publication Act 1984". *Utusan Malaysia* to represent Malay community in Malaysia is produced by Utusan Melayu (M) Berhad, which is link to United Malaysia National Organization (UMNO) (Yang and Md. Sidin, 2012). The Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) also control a substantial portion of the mainstream media. MCA, through Star Media Group Berhad owns *The Star*, representing English daily newspaper readers (Yang and Md. Sidin, 2012). In Malaysia, there are two Tamil newspapers namely *Tamil Nesan* and *Malaysia Nanban (Nanban Daily)*. Both newspapers are owned by MIC president in Malaysia (Brown, 2005). Chinese newspapers such as *Sin Chew*, *Guang Ming Daily*, *Nanyang Siang Pau* and *China Press* are owned by business and media tycoon, Tiong Hiew King, while *Oriental Daily* is owned by Lau Hui Kang (Yang and Md. Sidin, 2012). *Sin Chew* (formerly known as Sin Chew Jit Poh) is a leading Chinese-language newspaper in Malaysia.

Different language of newspaper served to fulfil their own ethnic readers of newspaper but directly and indirectly it's control by government. Through framing analysis, respective newspaper can provide a thematic meaning in providing necessary information through the selection of news, headlines, pictures and so on (Entman, 1993). Thus, this study investigated the portrayal of responses for Lahad Datu crisis through vernacular newspapers coverage in selected dailies and examined differences in framing crisis via two main different ethnic newspapers in Malaysia.

Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)

SCCT is established from Image Restoration Theory (IRT) in 1995. The idea of SCCT is to identify which crisis response strategies were used in the case and draw relevant responses about the effectiveness of the crisis response strategies. Crisis response strategies proposed three objectives in protecting company reputation such as shape attributions of the crisis, change insights of the organization in damage and reduce the impact caused by the crisis (Coombs, 1995).

Coombs (1995) introduced a crisis communication response model to suggest responses for a crisis. Strategies that were included in these models are:

- a. *Denial* is a response for a crisis manager or government said that there is no crisis.
- b. *Distancing* strategy is when crisis manager handovers the blame for the crisis to other people.

- c. *Ingratiation* is a strategy to gain favour from various publics through three tactics such as *transcendence*, *bolstering* and *praising others*.
- d. *Mortification* involves using form of apology.
- e. *Suffering* is a strategy that admits that a crisis manager or government suffered from crisis impact.

Coombs (1998) categorized the crisis response strategies into seven types such as:

- a. *Attacking the accuser*: Crisis manager denies and blaming the accuser.
- b. *Denial*: Crisis manager decline on the information about crisis.
- c. *Excuse*: Crisis manager admitted to crisis but relating it to other factors.
- d. *Justification*: Crisis manager tried to reduce damage connected with the crisis.
- e. *Ingratiation*: Crisis manager reminds their publics about the organization's past good work and services.
- f. *Corrective action*: Crisis manager tries to repair the crisis damage by introducing new ideas or changing the policy.
- g. *Mortification*: Crisis manager represented their company's public claim that it is their responsible for the crisis.

The proper way in addressing the crisis type is to give suitable response for a crisis. It can help crisis manager to select the best crisis response in providing solutions for a crisis.

Framing Theory

Entman (1993) said "frame can be observed through certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, source of information and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing cluster, facts or judgment" (p.52). Gamson and Modigliani (1989) identify framing devices such as symbol, examples, catch-phrases, illustrations and visual images that provide information for an issue.

In addition, Tankard (2001) suggested "few framing instruments for examining news frames such as captions, shots, leads, sources, quotation, logos, statistics and charts" (p. 101). The selection of any particular framing instrument can determine how the mainstream vernacular dailies in Malaysia framed the Lahad Datu crisis.

Framing is doing its job effectively in mass media while emphasizing an issue's importance through the selection of photos, interesting texts, portrayal of actors, attractive headlines and so on to define the problems and find solutions for the problems (Entman 1993 & De Vreese 2005). Applying this framing analysis to the Lahad Datu crisis can help media and government to identify the coverage of crisis along with suggested response through newspaper reporting to overcome the crisis. Media coverage is an appropriate source of crisis response because the public's primary source of crisis information is the media (Coombs 2007 & Fearn-Banks 2011).

Frames also play an important role as a source for a reporter for any news reports. Reporters usually used frames to effectively define issues in favour of their preferred results and also to influence their readers to act as per their needs and expectations. To do this, journalist will attach the news with any quote or reliable source to convince their readers and to frame and slant the news with editor's goals (Gamson & Modigliani 1989 & Hallahan 1999). If crisis managers respond quickly for any crisis then they can manage to fill the information void and shape the news framing of the event as per their agenda (Scheufele, 1999 & 2009). This will be an important measurement to measure the effectiveness of crisis response strategies through newspaper framing for Lahad Datu crisis.

Frames suggest that the mass media's function is on selecting what to contain and what to omit from a story (Iyengar & Kinder, 1982). Semetko & Valkenburg (2000) identified five news frames such as attribution of responsibility, conflict, economy, human interest, and morality. The frame on human interest explains on emotional perception among readers of an event or issue. During crisis, this frame can stimulate psychological reaction among readers.

The second type of frame is conflict frame. Conflict frame is used to portray quarrel or disagreement among individual, groups, society or country. Most of the news issue portrays conflict to grab a reader's attention. Morality frame will direct issues or problems in the context of creating sympathy and to behave rationally. Followed by the economic frame of reporting on issue that impacts the overall economic sector to individuals, groups, society or country. Finally, the attribution of responsibility frame discusses about finding solution and recommendation for a problem.

Methodology

This study employed quantitative content analysis by selecting census samples of newspapers from two different vernacular and ethnic orientations which have widespread readership and large circulation to meet the objectives of this research. Two selected Malaysian vernacular mainstream newspapers were chosen for this study based on their circulation in the Audit Bureau Circulation Malaysia. The focus of this research was on printed media which are newspapers. The rationale in choosing printed media is because, sources are most often quoted in the print media, and the print media reaches out to the mass audience (Chang, P. K. 2009). Unit of analysis were the news articles contain the keywords "Lahad Datu", "Lahad Datu Invasion" or "Lahad Datu Conflict" in full text and headlines in the two selected newspapers during the study period from 9th February until 31st March were being analyzed by the researcher. Time period for this study is within one month of when each crisis happened because news is having timeliness news values during the beginning period (Kyoung and Gower 2009).

Sin Chew daily and *Nanban* were chosen for this study due to their highest circulation for two different ethnics in Malaysia which were Chinese and Tamil ethnic as per recorded in Audit Bureau of Circulation Malaysia. Circulation of the newspapers as of June 2013- per year is depicted in Table 1:

Table 1: Circulation of Vernacular Mainstream Newspapers in Malaysia

Sin Chew	383, 259
Nanban	55, 000

Source: (<http://abcm.org.my/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Jan-2013-to-June-2013-ABC-Circulation-Figures-PM-Price-Band.pdf>)

In this study, 10% of the articles were taken to test the reliability from the overall 202 articles for data as suggested by Wimmer and Dominick (2006). From the two selected newspapers, 74 test units for the *Sin Chew* and 63 test units for *Nanban* dailies were tested to measure the agreement for the inter-coder reliability test. The test revealed that the agreement of inter-coder reliability coefficient for this study of both coders was 0.82 on average.

In the method of text analysis, a coding protocol was developed to capture the variables under investigation. This study adopted the deductive approach through the selection of few independent variables such as news category, news slants, news sources, news frames and portrayal of visuals to determine relevant crisis response strategies (Matthes & Kohring, 2008).

Finding

This study has found 202 news of Lahad Datu crisis throughout four newspapers namely *Sin Chew* and *Nanban* from 9th February until 31st of March 2013.

Table 2: Frequency of Newspapers

Newspaper	Frequency	Valid Percentage
Sin Chew	113	56
Nanban	89	44

Table 2 indicated the number of articles and percentage of news based on the type of the newspapers and news report on the Lahad Datu crisis during 2013. It was found that *Sin Chew*-113 (56%) carried the largest coverage followed by *Nanban* – 89 (44%). For the first week of the peak coverage which is started from 1st March 2013 until 10th March 2013, researcher found out that, *Sin Chew* which is representing Chinese language community were revealed most of the articles on the problem faced by local citizens from Sulu attacks and also exposed more on the severity and pain faced by security officers compared to *Nanban* daily.

Data from Table 3 was used to relate to the category of news with the respective newspapers. *Sin Chew*'s main coverage of category was on informing people that the situation is dangerous and immediate solution is needed because 45 news articles revealed the problem category. and highest category for *Nanban* was on providing solution for 33 news articles.

Table 3: Category of News and Newspapers

News Category	Problem	Solution	People	Neutral
Sin Chew	45	28	32	8
Nanban	21	33	26	9

In portrayal of the news slants of crisis with respective newspapers, as revealed in Table 4, for *Sin Chew* daily, the highest slants were slanted in negative slants with 51 articles. There was a difference in the portrayal of slants in news among two newspapers because *Nanban* portrayed the highest coverage of *positive* slants as compared to *Sin Chew*.

Table 4: News Slants and Newspapers

Newspaper	Positive	Negative	Neutral
Sin Chew	28	51	34
Nanban	52	28	9

In examined the comparison between two vernacular dailies in portrayal of the Lahad Datu crisis news coverage, researcher conducted Kruskal Wallis's test. The Kruskal Wallis test indicated no significant difference between two dailies in portraying the news sources for Lahad Datu crisis because of the significant value of .112 ($P > .05$), to add credibility to the news (Table 5). Government was cited the most to represent news sources during a crisis. Dominant news sources appeared in all the two dailies such as Prime Minister Malaysia Najib Tun Razak, Home Minister Malaysia Hishammuddin Hussein and Deputy Chief Minister Malaysia Datuk Seri Yahya Hussin.

Table 5: Kruskal Walli's Test for News Sources and Newspapers

Newspaper	N	Mean Rank	Assump-sig
Sin Chew	113	231.91	
Nanban	89	241.85	.112

To conclude, in determining the portrayal of news sources in selected dailies during the Lahad Datu crisis, the researcher was able to conclude that the selected vernacular dailies in Malaysia were able to provide trustworthy news to get readers' attention and support from reliable news sources such as government.

Table 6: News Frames and Newspapers (%)

News Frames	Sin Chew	Nanban
Conflict	3.6%	2.1%
Human Interest	1.3%	2.4%
Morality	1.3%	1.1%
Attribution of Responsibility	13.1%	10.3%
Economic consequences	4.9%	3.2%

News frames is used to know how the selected dailies will select the text, sentences and words to slant the news according to the dailies news agenda. Finding in this research for news frames of Lahad Datu crisis revealed that the most dominant frame appeared in selected dailies was *attribution of responsibility* for *Sin Chew* and *Nanban* daily. The reason why *attribution of responsibility* frame covered the most is because, both dailies wanted to portrayed solution for the crisis and to make a stable situation in the country rather than admitting that there is a crisis After the *attribution of responsibility* frame, *economic consequences* frame portrayed the second most in the four dailies. *Economic consequences* frames provide details of losses of people and victims from crisis impact (Table 6).

Table 7: Portrayal of Visuals in Newspapers

Newspaper	N	Mean Rank	Assump-sig
Sin Chew	113	250.11	
Nanban	89	219.72	.001

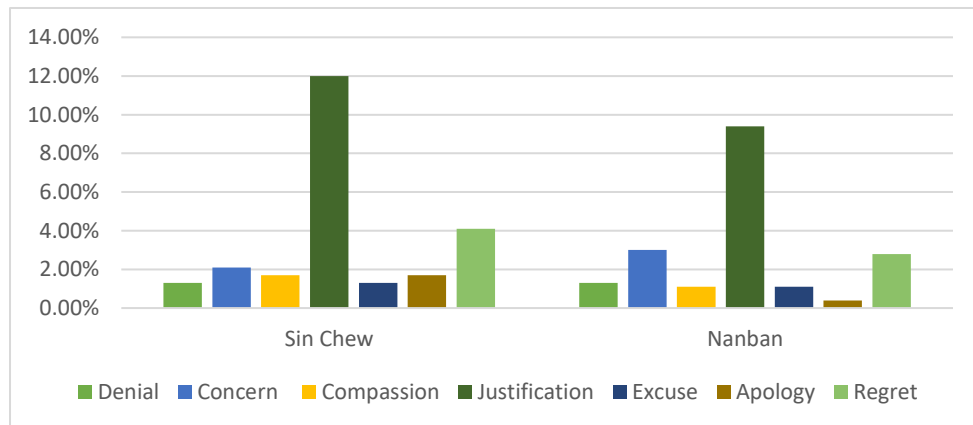
Table 7, revealed mean rank and significant value between selected dailies and portrayal of visuals. The highest mean rank in portraying Lahad Datu crisis images were portrayed by *Sin Chew* (250.11), and for *Nanban* (219.72). Data above revealed that there was a strong significant difference in portrayal of Lahad Datu crisis visuals among two dailies with the value of ($P < .05$). The dominant pictures by *Sin Chew* were on visuals of militants and soldiers. However, visuals of decision makers displayed most in *Nanban* daily.

In identifying the crisis response coverage, referring to table 8, from total of 202 articles on Lahad Datu crisis, *justification* responses were displayed most by all the dailies at (53%) articles followed by *concern* response which had (17.4%) articles, *compensation* in (10.1%), *excuse* in (7.3%) articles, *regret* for (6.9%) articles and *denial* and *apology* at (3.2%) and (2.1%) articles.

Table 8: Percentage of Crisis Response in Newspapers (%)

Crisis Response	Articles (%)
Denial	3.2
Concern	17.4
Compensation	10.1
Justification	53.0
Excuse	7.3
Apology	2.1
Regret	6.9

Based on figure 1, the selected crisis coverages were *justification*, *concern* and *compensation* crisis responses based on the highest coverage in newspapers. Among the dailies, *Sin Chew* – (12.0%), portrayed more *justification response* compared to *Nanban* (9.4%). Whereby for concern crisis response, *Nanban* daily portrayed most for (3.0%) compared to *Sin Chew* (2.1%).

**Figure 1: Crisis Response Strategies and Newspapers****Table 9: Portrayal of Justification Crisis Response in Selected Dailies**

Newspaper	N	Mean Rank	Assump-sig
Sin Chew	113	157.79	
Nanban	89	192.92	.000

Kruskal Wallis's test indicated a strong significant difference between two dailies in response to the *justification* crisis response for the value of .000 ($P < .05$). The highest mean rank was portrayed by *Nanban* (192.92) and the lowest mean rank was (157.79) covered by *Sin Chew* (Refer to Table 9). The *Nanban* newspaper revealed more news coverage of solution through texts and photos in combating the crisis as compared to *Sin Chew*.

Table 10: Portrayal of Concern Response in Selected Dailies

Newspaper	N	Mean Rank	Assump-sig
Sin Chew	113	148.19	
Nanban	89	194.30	.000

Concern crisis response is known as showing and expressing sympathy for the victims. For the *concern* crisis response, Kruskal Wallis's test indicated a strong significant difference

between two dailies for the value of .000 ($P < .05$). The highest mean rank was portrayed by *Nanban* (194.30) and the lowest mean rank was (148.19) covered by *Sin Chew* for the concern crisis response (Refer to Table10).

Table 11: Portrayal of Compensation Response in Selected Dailies

Newspaper	N	Mean Rank	Assump-sig
Sin Chew	113	217.86	
Nanban	89	225.67	.075

Compensation crisis response strategy is about crisis manager offers financial and psychological support to the victim and victim's families such as offering money, gifts, expressing confidence and providing motivation to the affected people (Coombs, 1999; 2007). Based on Table 11, Kruskal Wallis's test showed no significant differences between compensation crisis response and the selected dailies in Lahad Datu crisis coverage.

The test showed significant value of .075 ($P > .05$). The findings from Kruskal Walli's test proved that the two dailies in Malaysia were doing their jobs effectively in informing the public that the crisis manager or government is caring for the victims in providing sufficient compensation to neutralize their feelings of sadness.

Conclusion

This study was to examine the coverage of Lahad Datu crisis and portrayal of crisis responses through news framing from two different ethnic orientation of newspapers. Results in this study found 202 news about Lahad Datu crisis from *Sin Chew* and *Nanban* daily through quantitative content analysis. In providing responses for Lahad Datu crisis, few independent variables were created by researcher such as News Category, News Slants, Portrayal of Visuals, News Frames and News Sources. Data from this study proved that, news category of solution used more in combating the impact and severity of crisis however, most of the crisis coverage in other studies focused and concentrated on problem category (Coombs, 1995 & 1999).

In revealing the news sources for the Lahad Datu crisis, finding revealed that government sources were used mostly. The finding is similar with Dimitrova and Ahern, 2007 studies, revealing that the most quoted sources are government sources to add credibility for the crisis responses suggested by crisis manager (Chang, Faridah, Fauziah et al., (2012); Yang & Md. Sidin, 2015).

In portrayal of visuals to alert their audience about the urgent decision taken by government, data revealed that visuals of militants and soldiers were portrayed most. Portrayal of militants and soldier visuals revealed that government is in urgent and take situation seriously in providing solution (Dimitrova & Ahern, 2007; Dimitrova & Stromback, 2012). For the slant of news, data concluded that positive slant is used most in the coverage of Lahad Datu crisis. This finding is contradictory to other crisis coverage because Dimitrova & Stromback in (2005), research on coverage of Iraq war used neutral coverage. Portrayal of positive slant concluded that government as a crisis manager portrayed Lahad Datu crisis in a positive slant to indicate that government is providing solution for the crisis.

For the selection of frames, data revealed that attribution of responsibility frame is used most to provide solution for the crisis. Most of the crisis coverage revealing using attribution of responsibility frame (Kyoung & Gower 2009). This is proved by the crisis response strategies

through news reporting in Malaysia. In measuring government crisis response strategies comparing with Coombs (2007) where the focus of crisis more on problem category however, through this research, crisis response strategy by Malaysian government focusing more on solution category. In comparing with news sources model proposed by Dimitrova & Ahern (2007), finding in this research showed a similar news sources which is government as the main and dominant news sources for the Lahad Datu crisis. In comparing with the news slants, government's crisis response strategies for Lahad Datu crisis are more focused on positive slants. The significance of this study revealed that government's slant through news reporting is on positive slants. Showing and revealing to publics that government as a crisis manager is effective enough in portrayal of solution for the crisis.

However, researcher able to figure out an interesting difference for framing attributes proposed by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) because most of crisis framing portrayed in *conflict* frame but throughout in this research, *attribution of responsibility* frame and *economic consequences* frame used more in news framing. For the visuals portrayal of Lahad Datu crisis, finding shown as similar results as per suggested by Dimitrova & Ahern (2007) and Dimitrova & Stromback (2012) which focused on the portrayal of militants, soldiers and decision maker's images. The selection of independent variables in this study concluded that responses is fast and adequate responses were taken by crisis manager from Malaysia through news reporting in Chinese and Tamil dailies in Malaysia.

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