

News Reporting on Religious Issues: Malaysian Media Practitioners' Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The nature of a multiracial and multireligious community is all about concern and awareness from all levels in the society. The differences of thoughts, beliefs and understanding requires tolerance over almost all factors including political and economic sectors. While the people agreed to the contents of the Federal Constitution, conflicts on race and religion continue to happen from time to time. Being the watchdog of the ruling party, it is not new for the Malaysian media practitioners to be in a dilemma in shaping the content in reporting controversial issues. Hence, this paper intends to study the perspectives of the media practitioners in Malaysia in shaping the content when reporting on religious issues such as the apostasy case of Lina Joy and the translation of 'God' to 'Allah' issue. Using a qualitative method, in-depth interviews were conducted with the media practitioners; journalists and editors of two mainstream newspapers, The Star and Utusan Malaysia. The results show that all of them have a mutual understanding of what they should and should not write in their reporting considering the background of Malaysian society. This is also understood when they are aware of the rules and regulations restricted in the contents of their reports for national security purposes.

Keywords: *Race, religion, media, news reporting, plural society.*

INTRODUCTION

Sustaining peace in a plural society is not an easy task. Although the people understand and obey the rules and regulations made by the government, a simple issue sometimes could become a harm to the national peace with or without intention. As reported in the media, a number of 86 cases were being filed to the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commissioner from the year 2018 until August 2021 (Amir, 2021). The cases involved content from a variety of online platforms relating to insults of religion, race, and the royal institution.

As for the normal practice of the media practitioners, the content was being filtered through the normal filtering process by the gatekeepers. In some cases, Nagi (2019) stated that certain newspapers and television have been controlled by mostly nameless, faceless people through the decision of what should and should not get published and broadcasted. In certain circumstances, religion matters were being used as a form of political agenda (Welsh, 2020). The nature of ethnicity-based ownership that has been a practice in Malaysia too may contribute to unexpected disaster from the content of news without realising it.

The Ministry of National Unity Malaysia in its policy outlines continuous efforts to foster, strengthen and preserve unity among the people. This is to ensure the people live in peace and to strengthen the relationship with each other based on National Principles (Rukun Negara). With the multi background of the people, there is a need in restoring the original aspiration of unity.

From the effort, the media practitioners play an important role as a medium to convey the vision and mission of the National Unity Blueprint 2021-2030. The media in a democratic country too becomes the agent of socialisation (Wan & Luan, 2020). By providing the necessary information on this, at the same time, the media will always have to be in precaution mode when shaping a story particularly in reporting on religious issues.

LITERATURE REVIEW OR RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Plural Society

The nature of a multiracial and multireligious country or also known as plural society like Malaysia is different from other societies. It involves differences from all aspects especially on the perspectives of culture and religion. Unity requires mutual understanding as well as huge tolerance among the people. Migration and population mobility are also contributing factors in reshaping and redefining how the governments and the plural societies understand and respond to the citizenship demands (Merry, 2012).

However, being in this unique nature, understanding and respecting could become complicated due to the differences that exist among the people. Although in studies like Mohd Anuar and Mohammad Aizat (2012) which suggested several solutions to the differences of thoughts between them such as through dialogues approaches, in certain circumstances, the chances could be thin and remain uncertain to one extent.

As for Malaysia, the Federal Constitution in Article 3 states Islam as the official religion of the Federation; but other religions may be practiced in peace and harmony in any part of the Federation (Constitution of Malaysia). On one hand, all citizens must respect the rules and regulations made, but on the other, conflicts and debates on religious issues continue to emerge from time to time.

For instance, religious cases that have been brought to Courts for hearings such as apostasy cases, insults of religions, *hudud* law, the usage of certain words and others are among related examples that happened continuously over time even until today. Such conflicts can be considered as normal considering the people's different backgrounds which adhere to what they believe and understand from their culture and religion.

Although these cases managed to be solved over the rules and regulations, the potential to harm the harmony in the society is always open. This, too, has become a prolonged challenge particularly when reporting on religious issues for the media practitioners due to their role in disseminating information to the public. In ethical reporting, journalists need to prioritise honesty and have the courage in gathering and interpreting information (Wan & Luan, 2020). This should be practiced in the same manner when reporting on religious issues, but putting sensitivity of the plural society is vital.

Using the Hierarchy of Influence Model by Shoemaker and Reese (1996), all the factors of influences in the society including social systems, social institutions, media organisations, routine practices and individuals, this paper looked at two case studies that relate to religious reporting in Malaysia, namely; the Lina Joy case and the translation of 'God to Allah' case. Both issues were two examples of racial and religious controversies that happened in Malaysia that became a debate from in and outside of Malaysia and widely reported in the local and international media.

a. The Lina Joy Case

Apostasy cases in Malaysia have always become a highlight in the media, either internal or at the international level. Other than Lina Joy, Nyonya Tahir and Juli Jalaludin were among other

famous apostasy cases that have caught the world public attention. Although these cases happened in a different time basis, they have given a similar impact specifically to the landscape of the justice system in Malaysia (Azweed et al., 2017). At the same time, these cases have created social tension among the Muslims and the non-Muslims in the country.

Back in 2007, the Lina Joy case was widely debated throughout the country. Lina Joy or her former name Azlina Jailani was born a Muslim in 1964, but converted from Islam when she was 26. The case started when she applied to register for her marriage with a Christian and that the word 'Islam' on her identity card was the barrier in the legal system of the country between a Muslim and a non-Muslim. Although this is not a problem when it involves other religions to do so, the situation occurred due to the definition of a Malay that is stated under the Constitution of Malaysia.

According to Article 160 under clause 2 of the Constitution, a Malay is defined as a person who professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks Malay language, and conforms to Malay custom (Barnard, 2004). The case became complicated in making it legal too due to the dual legal systems that exist in Malaysia which refers to civil law and the Islamic law (Azweed et al., 2017). Her case in fighting for her rights had brought attention not just from local, but international media organisations too.

Her case began from the Magistrate Court to the High Court and to the Court of Appeal. After not meeting what she intended to do, she brought the case to the Federal Court and which finally, too, rejected her intention to remove the word 'Islam' and change her name. Although many parties argued her rights to freedom of religion, but many Muslims acknowledged that conversion is wrong in the teachings of Islam. The case was not only reported in local media, but also being debated in international organisations especially those related to human rights (Azweed et al., 2017).

Due to her case, the country witnessed a huge argument when *Utusan Malaysia*, one of the mainstream media reported a controversial front-page headline of '*Malaysia Negara Kristian?*' or translated as 'Malaysia, A Christian Country?' ("*Malaysia Negara Kristian?*," 2011). Obviously, the ethnic-based ownership of the mainstream media had focused on their own preference or interests in reporting on Lina's famous apostasy case.

Fong and Ahmad Ishak (2017) stated that the case had made the religious minorities in Malaysia feel that the Court decision had tarnished Lina's rights while the Muslims were satisfied with the decision. Directly or indirectly, this case has proven how religion and culture are considered sensitive issues that could harm the national peace. Although there were no clear rights and wrongs in doing so on paper, both Muslims and Christians have their own justifications for their acceptance or vice versa.

In dealing with this matter, the Malaysian media faced another challenge in shaping the content and as much as possible reported by focusing only on what had been announced in the Courts to avoid creating tension among the Muslims and Christians in the country. From the Lina Joy case, some may tend to have their own perceptions and it became a lesson for the media in reporting on such sensitive issues.

b. 'God' to 'Allah' Case

The former case obviously referred to the faith one holds in identifying the individual with her personal intention and belief. However, the usage of certain words could also become an issue in claiming the rights of a certain religion in the country. This is just another example of

the implication of what has been stated in the Constitution of Malaysia with her plural society background.

Not claiming that it is wrong, but this issue has again raised up debates against a subjective matter. According to Article 11 of the Constitution, every person has the right to profess and to practice his or her religion and (subject to applicable laws restricting the propagation of other religions to Muslims) to propagate it.

In Malaysia, culturally, the Malay, who are also defined as Muslims under Article 160 of the Constitution of Malaysia, speak Malay language. Meanwhile, most of the non-Muslims speak either their mother-tongue languages such as Tamil, Mandarin, Cantonese and English. Subject to that matter, most of the Bibles are also written in English which are used by the Christians.

On January 2, 2014, the Bible Society of Malaysia was being forcefully raided by the Selangor Islamic Religious Council. The raid was due to their aims of more or less 300 Bibles written in Malay language and in a native language of Iban. Although it is a matter of fact that there has been no jurisdiction over non-Muslims or no legal basis in doing that, they insisted on entering the premises (Neo, 2014).

The triggering issue was the use of the word 'Allah' by Muslims from all over the world. However, it actually became an issue when the Malay version of a weekly Catholic newsletter named *Herald*, used the word 'Allah' as the translation of the word 'God'. As reported in Malay Mail on 22 August 2013, an article with the title 'When, why and how Christians use the word 'Allah' – CFM' stated that although questions of substituting the word 'Allah' is 'Tuhan', the translation of 'Allah' is 'God' in English while 'Tuhan' means 'Lord'. The Ministry of Home Affairs has ordered the magazine not to use the word through the legal system (Neo, 2014).

This seems to violate the Catholic Church's constitutional right to profess and practise its religion and to educate its congregation. On another point of view, the Muslims interpreted the publication could create confusion among Muslims, especially the younger generations if by any chance they would come across the publication. This could possibly be related to what has been stated under Article 11 of the Constitution.

The word 'Allah' issue started back in 1986, when the Home Ministry banned the use of the word in all Christian publications, claiming it as a threat to public order (Anand, 2021). The legal battle has gone through years with different decisions by the Courts until the latest was to allow the Christians to use the word 'Allah' with three other words, namely; 'Baitullah', 'Solat', and 'Kaabah'.

The case caught the global attention, too, and some even added that the word 'Allah' is also used by the Christian Arabs, who live in the Islamic heartland (Thomas, 2001). In a foreign news portal, it was reported that while the controversy of the word has continued since 2010, 11 churches and five mosques were firebombed or vandalised (Anand, 2021). Although there has been no evidence to relate these cases with the word 'Allah' case, some readers might interpret them wrongly or make assumptions. This could reflect a bad reputation and image of the plural society in handling controversies on race and religion.

Media Practitioners' Dilemma

Considering the multi-background of race and religion of the society, reporting in a plural society like Malaysia is not an easy task, especially when reporting on racial and religious issues. In Halimahton et al. (2006), the media must continuously bare on the precarious

ground in balancing on what they should write and what they should not (p. 185). A simple mistake of careless reporting could end up being caught in a legal command.

The pressure of the media practitioners not only came from reporting sensitive issues alone, but also in considering the ethnicity-based ownership, particularly the mainstream media agencies such as *Utusan Malaysia*, *The Star*, *Berita Harian*, *Sin Chew Daily*, *Tamil Nan Ban* and many others. Reporting in different languages, (Halimahton et al., 2006) it was found that different newspapers seem to 'favour' the subject they covered according to their ethnicity. This can be seen through their reporting in their newspapers through the different angles they preferred to portray in their stories.

Considering this, the dilemma also involves the media's role as to disseminate information to the public, but at the same time, were placed in a situation to select as to what is more important for the ownership's interest. In safeguarding this, the final say will always be owned by the gatekeepers of what to publish and vice versa as a normal practice in news publishing process. Because of this, many people shifted to referring to online information which then, make them exposed to the risk of fake news or misinformation (Rani & Ibrahim, 2013).

The existence of rules and regulations made for the media also contributed to the dilemma of the Malaysian media practitioners. For example, in a recent case from *Malaysiakini*, an online news portal was fined an amount of MYR500,000 over comments left by their readers which were notified as problematic for 'unwarranted' and 'demeaning' attacks on the judiciary under Section 114A of the Evidence (Amendment) (No. 2) Act 2012 (Hidir, 2021).

The Malaysian Communication Multimedia Commission (MCMC) has revealed the statistics of 48 cases of abusing the usage of social media in the one third of year 2020 which showed an increment of 66% cases compared to year 2019 (Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission). This shows that although monitoring the contents of the print media may seem under control, the existence of social media has opened up new challenges that need more supervision by the authorities.

Meanwhile, *Utusan Malaysia* itself has once published a caricature claimed to be an insult towards Islamic teachings on 'hudud' law on September 26, 2011 as shown in Figure 1. The caricature received negative comments from many online bloggers, especially Muslims claiming that the law should not be made into a joke by *Utusan Malaysia*.



Figure 1: Caricature published by *Utusan Malaysia* on September 26, 2011

This scenario proved that although the main intention was to create a joke out of a current issue at that time, it ended up being a disaster to the media practitioners involved as well as the media organisation itself. This is what is meant by the media practitioners must expect things that are unexpected for the sake of their reputation and their sustainability to be relevant to the public and that filtering news processes by the gatekeepers is vital.

On the other hand, The Star newspaper has apologised for a controversial front-page lead story 'Malaysian terrorist leader' that was placed above a photo showing Muslims praying in a mosque during the first Ramadhan ("The Star Issues Apology," 2017) as shown in Figure 2. Wrong placement of story too could become an issue for the Malaysian due to the sensitivity of race and culture aspects.



Figure 2: Controversial front-page by The Star newspaper

Referring to the issue, five editors and a photographer from the newspaper were investigated under the Sedition Act and the Penal Code for publishing seditious content and accused of creating religious hate. This is another supposed to be a simple mistake of placement of stories, but ended up in Courts and had become a lesson for other media practitioners to be more careful in their reporting. As mentioned by Muhammad Raqib and Adnan (2013), unexpected consequences will serve as a reminder to the audiences.

In another case, the portrayal of an international female singer, Erykah Badu with the word 'Allah' tattooed on her body was also another controversial issue. It ended up with the cancellation of her concert schedule, which was planned to be held in Malaysia back then in 2012 (Mohamad Tajuddin, 2012). As a result, two senior editors of The Star newspaper who were responsible for the filtering process of news content were suspended.

These examples are clear evidence in showing that reporting on race and religion is a dilemma for the media and that they need to be extra careful and concerned over what they are writing and showing on their platform, either in print or digital.

Zalina (2021), in her article 'Media Law in Malaysia: Time for a Makeover?', stated three situations when the media laws in Malaysia were made in the pre-independence period; '(1) inheriting the British common law ethos, structure and constraints to regulate the print and broadcast media, (2) no written English constitution detailing a bill of rights, freedom of speech is a residual right if the speech does not infringe any law, and (3) they restrict freedom of expression and limit the sharing as well as receiving of information.' From this, it is learnt that the freedom in speech and expression have the tendencies towards creating unwanted situations.

There has been a continuous series of debates and arguments on the freedom of speech and freedom of press not only locally, but also at the international level. This is due to what is stated under Article 10(1) of the Constitution that 'Subject to Clauses 2, 3 and 4 – (a) every citizen has the right to freedom of speech and expression.'

As much as how important the media laws should be updated to address the impact of modern communications and its effects on the society, free speech offers a contributing factor of the development at one hand, and on the other, a potential reason for chaos, violence, and massacre in an imperfect world (Zalina, 2021). This has continuously happened from then to now and became worse with the existence of social media and other new communication technologies.

METHODOLOGY

Since the study was made to identify the perspectives of the media practitioners on reporting religious issues, this paper applied a qualitative approach in obtaining the data. Using the in-depth interview method, 10 main questions were built to be in line with the subject matter before adding other following questions if needed when interviewing the respondents.

Serving two of the mainstream newspapers with different ethnic ownerships, a total of 10 media practitioners which include five from *Utusan Malaysia* and another five from The Star have been identified from a purposive sampling considering that they must have been working as journalists or editors for more than three years. This is to ensure that they have first hand experience in reporting such issues.

Other than that, both newspapers were chosen as they represent two different ownerships which include the Malay and Chinese which also represent the Muslims and the non-Muslims, specifically the Christians. At the same time, *Utusan Malaysia* reports in Malay language while The Star uses English as their language medium as another comparison with different visions and missions of their organisations. As *Utusan Malaysia* upholds Islam, Malays and Bumiputera rights in their mission and vision, *The Star* could provide a different insight into the two cases from a different ethnic perspective due to their ownership.

After an intercoder reliability test was held, the interview sessions were scheduled based on the respondents' agreements of time and venue and were done face to face. After transcribing the recorded sessions, the data was analysed using NVivo software version 12 in building themes and patterns before placing their excerpts in the matching categories.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Over a careful analysis of the in-depth interviews, the responses received from both newspapers were almost similar. Based on the Hierarchy Model of Influences, both newspapers' respondents agreed that above all, they have to consider the political-economic,

socio-cultural, gatekeepers and rules and policies aspects of Malaysian context in shaping the contents of religious issues particularly.

A. Political-Economic

(i) *Utusan Malaysia*

From the political-economy aspect, all respondents from *Utusan Malaysia*, UM1, UM2, UM3, UM4 and UM5 agreed that when they first started working, they were emphasised on the company's visions and missions. For example, UM2 stated, "All of us were always reminded of the company's visions and missions that we should obey our owners' interests and know our audiences' interests..." This also happens during the elections where the direct or indirect involvement of the media ownership would sometimes prevent the newspapers' independent role as watchdog (Wan & Luan, 2020, p. 58). Besides a normal list of visions and missions, one of them touches on the vision to uphold Islam and the rights of Malays.

This is something that they will always have to hold to especially when shaping the contents to consider whether or not they are upholding Islam and protecting the rights of the Malays at the same time. This is also agreed by all respondents that it is due to the ownership of *Utusan Malaysia* then, the United Malays National Organisation or UMNO, which is one of the ruling party alliances of National Coalition or also known as Barisan Nasional, as stated by UM1, "Whatever it is, we will put Islam and the Malay rights first as being part of our company's visions and missions..."

In Wan and Luan (2020, p. 62) findings have mentioned that journalists highlighted that they carry difficult tasks due to the power of editors, political leaders and advertisers that affect their news reporting. Although they have to carry their responsibilities to inform the public, they must prioritise the visions and missions but at the same time, try to balance the stories. Noting that they know that they are the watchdog of the ruling government, they also need to report content that is pro towards the government as part of their responsibilities.

However, some of the respondents stated that there were times that they have to use religion as part of their agenda considering that they have to uphold the religion of Islam. They also agreed that this is not just about their duty responsibilities, but also the responsibility as Muslims.

(ii) *The Star*

Respondents from *The Star*, TS1, TS2, TS3, TS4 and TS5 agreed, too, that they have to know the companies' rules and policies as well as what is right and wrong in news reporting. They mentioned that they always have to consider what is stated under the Constitution and that there are rules that they are regulated to.

Being one of the alliances parties of the ruling party Barisan Nasional then, the respondents are aware that they are considered a pro-government media agency knowing that the role of the mainstream media is to become the voice of the government as mentioned by TS5, "At the end of the day, it goes back to what the bosses have to stay... their interests, their stakeholders, the government..."

In reporting race and religious issues like apostasy cases or the word 'Allah' issue, all respondents mentioned that *The Star* will hold to reporting a balanced story to avoid biases. Due to this, TS2, TS3 and TS4 said that *The Star* provides an equal platform for their sources when it relates to race and religious matters.

TS1 and TS5 also said that they also were taught to write impactful stories in educating the public rather than sensationalising them. TS5 said, "It is our duty to educate them... it is not just sensationalising the stories...". However, they did mention that sometimes this is a subjective matter when looking at who they refer to as their sources.

B. Socio-Cultural

(i) Utusan Malaysia

As for the socio-cultural aspect, the respondents, UM1, UM2, UM3, UM4 and UM5 highlighted the diversity of the plural society Malaysia has. However, they also mentioned that above all, they are aware of the identification of them being the citizens of Malaysia. Hence, they will have to respect the differences that they have among their readers or audience.

However, from this aspect, *Utusan Malaysia* still uses religion as part of the agenda especially when reporting on religious issues such as the Lina Joy case and the translation of the word 'Allah' issue. They also responded that they are aware of that too as UM1 mentioned that "It is not using religion, it is about holding our stands in protecting Islam."

From this point of view, the interpretation of using religion is partly because of their visions and missions of the company as upholding Islam and the Malay rights are included. According to three of the respondents, because of this, many readers might think that the newspaper practices an imbalance reporting when it comes to race and religion which they must agree on that matter as UM5 stated that "Sometimes people forgot that our visions and missions will uphold Islam and Malay rights first before others as that is our responsibility working in the company, which goes the same with other newspaper companies..."

In another point of view, they also stated that compared to other media organisations, they reported in a similar way following the interests of the ownership too. This practice is considered normal even in any other media organisations in or outside the country.

(ii) The Star

The Star shows a similar pattern of how the *Utusan Malaysia* respondents responded. The Star respondents, TS1, TS2, TS3, TS4 and TS5 too emphasised on the multi-racial and multi religious background of the society. At the same time, they also said that it is important that the media practitioners know their identification as Malaysian citizens.

However, all of the respondents also emphasised on the concept of moderation The Star is holding to as TS2 said, "We are now campaigning on the moderation... everything has to be moderate and giving equal space for all to voice out..." This is totally different from the practice in *Utusan Malaysia*. In The Star, being moderate in reporting is one of their strategies of not trying to sensationalise issues and that it is considered the best way in keeping the society at peace.

Most of the respondents too gave examples of giving equal opportunities for different background of sources to voice out in certain sections and that they will not make judgments from their sources' opinions as TS4 stated, "Everybody has their rights to speak up their opinions, but we will still have to filter them out to avoid touching the sensitivities of any parties..."

Due to this, The Star has been organising campaigns from time to time in promoting moderation in all aspects of life especially in news reporting claiming that everybody has the rights to point out what they want to say, but still, with the condition of not containing any harmful statements in their writing.

C. Gatekeepers and Rules and Policy

(i) Utusan Malaysia and The Star

The last aspect is on gatekeepers and rules and policy of the media company. All respondents from both *Utusan Malaysia* and The Star are aware that for whatever they have initiated in their first draft, will have to be checked or amended first, if needed, by the gatekeepers, which in the news publishing process, known as editors.

However, there were other aspects that can be considered as gatekeepers. Starting with the editors, the UM1, UM3, UM4, TS1, TS2 and TS4 said that the editors themselves will have to prioritise the ownership interest which also include the stakeholders.

From a personal view, UM1, UM3 and UM4 stated that sometimes reporting on a race and religion issue is also based on their own personal beliefs. Even though it may sound that there is a little bit of bias, they still have to go along with the normal procedure of filtering their news by the gatekeepers first before being published. UM3 stated, "It may sound biased if we look at our own faiths and beliefs, but then again, it is up to the gatekeepers and usually there is no problem about it..."

On the other hand, TS1, TS4 and TS5 said that this is one of the most challenging parts when the ownership interest is not the same as their personal beliefs, especially those working under the different ethnicity of ownership. At certain times, they were caught with their emotions to agree with the editors and accept whatever outcomes of their final stories look like when they are published as what TS1 said, "Sometimes it is difficult when we have our own faith and it is different with what the company believe, but along the time, we'll get used to it..."

This matter could always create the possibility of bias in their reporting. Some of the reporters needed time to adapt and accept the norm practised in their media organisations. However, considering that it could lead to negative outcomes, they will always consider sensitivity first before shaping the contents of their reporting.

From a legal perspective, all respondents expressed that they are aware that the role of the media is to inform and educate the public on what is happening. But at the same time, they are abided by certain rules and regulations regulating their contents such as defamation and blasphemy. In this matter, most of them agreed that there should be a form of limits in the content of their reporting considering the plural society that Malaysia has.

TS5 added that there was once an editor and a journalist who were suspended for reporting on an uncertain content that involved a prominent leader and they took the incident as a lesson every time they reported on sensitive issues including race and religion. Although he said that this has obviously shown that there is no freedom for the press, however, he agreed that both editor and journalist were practising unethical reporting and that they should be punished for their doings.

As for online content, The Communications and Multimedia Act 1998 (CMA) regulates the electronic media industry by the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC). Although some of the respondents claimed that this regulation is still uncertain in certain circumstances, they will just follow as best as they could in ensuring that their news content does not contain anything against the law.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings clearly showed that the media practitioners' perspectives in Malaysia in reporting on race and religious issues cover the aspects of political-economic, socio-cultural and gatekeepers and rules and policy. On top of that they prioritise most on ethical reporting considering the multiracial and multi religion of the people in the society they live in.

From these perspectives, they have to consider many other aspects relating to them in order to provide a balanced and careful writing when they cover sensitive issues like race and religion. This is to ensure that their reporting will not create panic or chaos if some parties get hurt or feel insulted or humiliated as these are considered sensitive to most people.

Although most of the respondents felt that they wanted to fight for freedom of press, however, all of them agreed that freedom of press could become a threat to the harmony of the plural society, especially in the digital era of information as maintaining peace in the society is one of their priorities in playing their roles as media practitioners.

Agreeing that it is a norm of practice in any media organisations, they acknowledged that all media organisations will prioritise the content based on their ownership interest that might include the political party, as well as other stakeholders, but however, abide by the rules and regulations made for them.

At a different point of view, maybe the readers should understand the differences of visions and missions the media agencies have first before making judgments specifically on the contents due to the ownership of the media organisations. Above all, the public too, must understand why Malaysian media has been practicing careful writing when it comes to reporting on race and religious issues.

BIODATA

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