

## **JOURNALISM AND NEWS INDUSTRY IN MALAYSIA: NEW MEDIA, NEW CHALLENGES**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The development of advanced communication technologies emerged from the fourth industrial revolution has forced print media such as newspapers to evolve and adapt in the new digital media environment. The rise of online journalism for example, has radically impacted journalism profession in Malaysia particularly on how news is made. A fully digitized news content is the new frontier for 21st century journalism. The news industry landscape in Malaysia and other countries too have undergone similar significant changes and serious challenges as the news industry making the big leap into the age of digitization. Evidently, digital media, internet new media and so forth is here to stay. The adoption of the Internet by news organizations offers a new platform for reaching strategic mass audiences. The decentralization of media has enable audience to become highly selective when it comes to read any news. and to understand this has become a critical part in newsgathering and news-processing routines. The new media environment that characterized by its interactivity and flexibility provide the digital sanctuary for partisan bloggers and citizen reporters to thrive and creat their own version of news. Such phenomena presents a set of issues and opportunities that extend beyond traditional boundaries that is familiar to most journalists. As the Internet offers bigger storage, faster and expand in unpredictable directions, it raises an array of new questions about practices and values, some of which go to the declared defining essentials of journalism. With more and more people consuming news digitally, the future of journalism is constantly changing and journalists of the future will face a number of challenges. The results elaborate some of the tensions between traditional journalism, rooted in old media, and the new perceptions, expectations and pressures of digital journalism in an increasingly interconnected media system.

Keywords: journalism, new media, challenges, interactivity, citizen reporters

### **INTRODUCTION**

Journalism is another name for propaganda. Propaganda is one of the psychological warfare element use by super power nations to win the heart and mind of the global audience. Prominent American scholars in the field of media and propaganda studies such as Garth Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell (2012) who wrote a book titled *Propaganda and Persuasion* stated, "Propaganda has been studied as history, journalism, political science, sociology and psychology, as well as from an interdisciplinary perspective." In term of justifying journalism as propaganda, Jowett & O'Donnell (2012) suggested that: "To consider propaganda as

journalism is to understand how news management or ‘spin’ shapes information, emphasizing positive features and downplaying negative ones, casting institutions in a favorable light”.

To accept that journalism as propaganda or journalism is propaganda remain subjective. However, if one studied the American media and communication approach and its historical context, they would accept the idea that journalism is propaganda. Generally, journalism is the science of processing raw information into news for the consumption of the mass audience. In any sovereign nations, news is a weapon used to propagate policy which enforce opinion control and perception management. According to Winfield (2017), The "news" is one of the most elaborate, pervasive and omnipotent forms of propaganda in our modern lives, and even those who think it is slanted, biased or a purveyor of misinformation, have no idea how much it still controls their thoughts.

In 1927, Harold Laswell published one of the first scholarly analyses of modern media manipulation entitled *Propaganda Technique in the World War* (Schwartz, 2008). American propaganda during World War II was also more effective and complex (Schwartz, 2008). Based on the citations given above, it is evident that journalism was instrumental during the World War, which it functioned as the propaganda tool for the warring factions such as the Nazis, the Allied Forces and the Soviet Union. Journalism as propaganda is a tool that have the function to disseminate and power ton control the public discourse and global audience perception via news production. To some extent, radio news for example, was used to instill motivating and positive news for frontline troops to keep them informed and at the same time replenish their fighting spirits. Historical accounts also proved that, journalism was used as a primary tool in psychological warfare operations. Intelligence community from Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Russian Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti (KGB) for example, are known to plant their intelligence officers to work undercover as reporters in various news agencies. A war-time old school tactic that is still being use today by various nations in the name of national security.

Historically, journalism is a well established profession prevalent in a society that regard media as the source of information. However, the rise of social media over the last ten years has been a significant influence on the way in which journalist reports news. The consumption of news today is not the same as pre-satellite news when people waited for their morning papers or sat down at an appointed time for the evening television news. More and more readers, viewers and listeners are going online for their news. Television, newspapers and radio are still here but there is a growing competition. To succeed in the practice of journalism, contemporary practitioners and media organizations have no choice, but to keep abreast with the fourth industrial revolution technologies that have encroached and impacted on traditional journalism practice.

Besides that, cheaper high performance smartphones and lowest rate for internet data plans offered by telecommunication companies in Malaysia nowadays are the reasons why more and more people able to engage the social media to get their news. In fact, journalists themselves have to rely on social media too to keep an eye on the latest news worthy events circulating among social media users. However, in Malaysia, political news are the main dish for many Malaysians. Social media platform such as Twitter and Facebook are flooded with political news. The only way to avoid being expose political news is to ‘unfollow’ or ‘unlike’ social media news accounts. Which some may find it uncomfortable and therefore expose them to relentless political news.

Today, the news industry is in a period of transformation where an old media system is disappearing and a new media system is encroaching to replace everything. An age where the passive-watcher culture is giving way to a participatory culture and where a society previously hooked in traditional media is giving way to a much more complicated media

landscape where the ordinary citizen has the ability to control media technologies and tell their own stories in powerful, innovative and creative ways. This is an era where our social, cultural and technological ways of life intersect.

The news industry is continuously changing and trying to keep up with the web 2.0 technologies that just came out in the past few years and the new ones that are still being rolled out. While social media networks and web 2.0 applications open new opportunities for the news industry, they also raise the possibility of a professional crisis for journalists and media organizations.

### **New Media And Journalism In Malaysia**

Malaysiakini.com was the first online newspaper in Malaysia. This multilingual internet news provider launch its debut online publication on 20 November 1999. In the following years, the trend of providing online news by other news agencies started to flourish. Fast forward today, almost all media organization either owned by the government or private entities have an online news portal. This scenario proved that new media impact on journalism is profound and the evolution from print news to digital news is inevitable.

The establishment of internet in 1990 has paved way to the digital era in Malaysia. This is also mean, the rise of new digital media, which consist of physical platform such as computers and smartphones to the emergence of cheaper internet connection and free-to-use social media platforms. This reality has opened new possibility for people on how to get their news. Social media platform for example, allow users to personalize the information appear in their 'timeline'. News media organization may promote their page but they can never force people to 'like' or 'follow' it. Olds school sensationalized news may temporarily attract certain users but if they cannot maintain the momentum and starting to publish news that of non-interest to their 'likers' and 'followers', the news provider may lose its readership.

The Internet grew in large part of the world, but its value depends largely on how people use it. In Malaysia, the new media landscape has changed the news industry since Malaysians gained access to the Internet in the middle of 1990s. The Internet has expanded the space and shifted the character of the public sphere. The Internet functions increasingly in Malaysia as elsewhere not just for communication, but also as a social setting, lends it potential to redistribute power and open debate across ever more decentralized networks (Gong 2009).

The current number of consumer growth is also reported to rise almost similar to the use of new media technology such as hardware, especially smartphones and other gadgets like MP3 players, Play Station and more. In addition, as is the case in the United States and Europe, Internet growth has had an impact on the publishing industry in Malaysia. Websites, blogs, and social networks, especially those related to news and entertainment are becoming more Internet user-focused. According to Alexa.com a web audit site, websites such as Malaysiakini, YouTube, The Star, Facebook, and Google are major choises among Internet users in the country since 2008 (SN Sannusi, N. Mustaffa 2015).

As we may know, technology has exerted a fundamental influence on how journalists do their jobs (Stovall 2004; Pavlik 2001), and the Internet has had a revolutionary impact on journalism (Garrison 2003). Many journalists are starting to work in strictly online environments, publishing news and information in a just-in-time format with interactive capabilities that requires new skills for journalists. New media are transforming how journalists and other communication professionals do their work.

For the journalist, the new equation is about doing a lot more with a lot less. Reporters are now required to submit stories for multiple platforms via television, radio, print and online. For a journalist in today's media landscape, it is essential to be multi-skilled. The birth of social media in the newsroom also raises questions about the future role of editors: will they soon be doing less journalism and more facts checking? One thing is for sure, the power structures are changing. Media organizations do not have the monopoly on journalism anymore.

Curran and Gibson (2013) point out that the anarchical character of the technologies it utilizes, signifies reinvention of media and manifests the reality of highly sophisticated mediated communication ruling the globe at the moment. In analyzing the ways in which journalists' jobs change as they increasingly use new media, Koch (1991) argues that online resources such as search engines, blogs, social networking platforms, and cloud encyclopedias, provide journalists with more information than that possessed by the public or private officials they are assigned to interview. Koch (1991) contends that intelligent use of these resources does not amount to the same old journalism, but has the potential of altering fundamentally the rules of the public information game.

The widespread use of new media also benefits journalists from a vast array of resources and endless technological possibilities. Their introduction has speeded up the news gathering process, sometimes even allowing journalists to spend more time at their office desks than in doing fieldwork (Deuze, 2003). However, more than two decades after the adoption of new media by news organizations and newsrooms, journalism in Malaysia is still coming to terms with its implications.

Most Malaysians still get their news from conventional media like newspapers and television. This does not mean, however, that newspapers in Malaysia can sit back and do nothing while expecting their readership to be maintained or increase (Yap 2009). People go online where they get to read newspapers for free. For example, one can go to Malaysian newspapers online (<http://onlinenewspapers.com/malaysia.htm>) and read almost all the Malaysian newspapers. This has drawn away some of the readers who used to buy print newspapers. Despite all these developments, newspaper in Malaysia will not cease to operate.

## **The Impact of New Media on Journalism**

The Internet and social media have only increased the ability to bring many different kinds of news to its audience, and significantly faster than had before been possible (Steensen 2011). While the current technological landscape shows tremendous promise and present numerous opportunities for news and its practitioners, there are also potential impact on journalism. Pavlik (2001) proposed four impacts of new media on journalism. The four impacts focuses on how do journalists do their work, how new media transforming news content, how news media influencing the structure of news organizations and how new media affecting the relationship between journalism and its various publics. However, this article will only examines the impact on how journalists do their work and how new media transforming news content.

### **a. How journalists do their work**

Gunter (2003) associates the role of the journalist in the new media environment as related to the freedom of the reader in choosing what to read and when to participate in the construction

of news. The traditional top-down model of communicating with readers does not apply any more to the online spaces. The interaction between journalists and sources can be skipped, with information being spread directly by sources on online pages. Thus, the role of the journalist as a mediator between the external world and the audiences is withdrawn from the professional world of journalism.

#### **b. How new media is transforming news content**

New media not only made news content ubiquitous, but they are also transforming the news itself. In the old days, a reporter was given a lead or went out to find a story. Today, many stories are received third hand (sometimes even fourth or fifth hand) through Facebook posts or Tweets so that by the time a story is assigned to the reporter, the story in some form or another is already out there in the social media universe. The reporter now has to take that into consideration and find some angle to the story that is not yet being talked about.

As to the notion of scoops and breaking news, a lot of tips or leads these days are from the web or what's "trending" in social networks like Twitter, Facebook or its popularity rating based on search volume patterns in search engines like Google or Bing. This is radically changing the industry's concept of what a scoop or breaking news is. Journalists are forced to accelerate the traditional journalistic process because people now want real time information. People want the information as soon as the journalist or the media outlet receives it. So to sit on a story until it is complete is to risk being out-scooped by competitors or even worse to be dubbed slow by the public.

It is now a necessity to give the audience bits of information at a time, as soon as the information is available. No media outlet can afford to wait. Why? Traditionally, media outlets compete to out-scoop each other but today if they hold on to a story too long, they run the risk of being out-scooped by amateurs such as bloggers, citizen journalists and twitters.

## **CONCLUSION**

To conclude, the reality in Malaysia now is, few newspapers companies is shrinking or worst, closing down. Social media could be blame but the underlying weakness that these companies did not understand is to evolve and adapt to this new media environment. Generally, it is illogical to say that people no longer read news, it just that modern society of today prefer what is convenience to them. Their smartphones and the news that is available and accessible from their smartphone for free play a vital role in diminishing their interest to buy printed media such as newspaper. New media, social media, the internet and advanced telecommunication technologies emerging from the fourth industrial revolution is coming and here to stay for good. The idea is to accept and immerse in this new media environment.

Newspapers in Malaysia are facing economic pressure due to the presence of the Internet and the widespread use of social media. The relationship between the audience and news is in the midst of a paradigm shift and what it will ultimately take is difficult to predict. One thing is certain: tomorrow's audience will have access to much more news and information than any previous generation. Whether it will be high quality of news and information will depend not only on developments in new media, but how news organizations adapt and apply these news tools.

In journalism, no matter how much the world changes, some things should never change, among them, checking facts rigorously; relying on reputable, known sources; presenting facts impartially; asking tough questions; and adhering to the highest ethical standards. But some things must change, or will inevitably change, for better or worse, things

like the tools of the modern journalist (Pavlik 2001).

Conclusively, the new media is here to stay. New media technologies that empower social media platforms has become the first choice for many users. The impact of the fourth industrial revolution will radically transform everything that we know today. Even communication technologies of today will change and improve for the better. Therefore, news organization should remain vigilant on the technological changes that take place in the world now. Furthermore, they need to understand how it will affect journalism profession in the end. Nevertheless, reading news remain relevant to any society but the difference is how a news are produce and disseminate in the future, or the question one might want to consider is who is the news maker of the future? Will government remain as the powerful entity that decide what news is important to the public? Alternatively, is the future of news making is in the hands of the public? If the latter, then what any government can do now is to educate their people on how to produce good quality news on social media.

Besides that, maybe, one day, news organizations need to have a journalist that only write for specific audience. Instead of traditional journalistic approach that divide news into several sections of crime, politics, entertainment or world news, journalist in the digital age write news for specific audience. For example, the same news may have two version that have different style of writing and dissemination channel but at the same time, it retain the same information of facts, figures, location and so forth. Except, the writing style contain words that is familiar and closer to the specified target audience. Perhaps, journalism of the future should consider a propaganda-istic approach in making news. This mean, instead of writing news just to inform, journalist are task to write news with the intention to persuade and propagate anything positive. The power of public sharing and citizen journalist is overwhelming even if all journalists from all media organizations combined. As we progress and celebrate the fourth industrial revolution, the strength of citizen journalist will grow due to the participation of internet users on news publication, particularly as commentary that discredit the news before one could click and read it. News has become an option because social media users prefer to read the comments section rather than clicking the news and have their smartphone screen fill with unwanted advertisements.

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