A Content Analysis of News on H1N1 Influenza in Selected Newspapers in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

The spreading of the H1N1 flu popularly known as "swine flu" is a deadly threat to human life. However, unlike the typical "swine flu," H1N1 flu spreads quickly and easily as it contains genetic materials from human, swine and avian flu viruses. In June 2009, when the infections widen worldwide, the World Health Organization declared H1N1 flu a global pandemic. Malaysia recognized its risk as one of the countries with a high probability of an epidemic as it borders countries such as Thailand, Singapore, Cambodia and etc.. These were the countries that were experiencing the outbreak at that time. Therefore, this research is aimed to examine how issues attached to H1N1 flu are conveyed to or by the three leading Malay newspapers (Utusan Malaysia, Berita Harian and Sinar Harian). A content analysis was conducted on 150 randomly selected news articles published from May to October 2009. The study focused on the concepts of agenda-setting and framing. The Agenda Setting theory hypothesizes that there is a correspondence between the order of importance given in the media to 'issues' and the order of significance attached to the same issue by the public and the government. Likewise, media framing suggests that the media not only set the agenda on specific issues, events, or candidates but also transfer the salience on specific attributes belonging to those potential objects of interest. The findings revealed the need for awareness and intervention campaigns to improve the Malaysian

public's H1N1 knowledge and subsequently their preparation for facing the pandemic in the community. The analysis of the newspaper coverage of H1N1 offers insight into the social understanding of the risks and policies related to this pandemic.

INTRODUCTION

The environment for communicating about health has changed significantly. These changes include dramatic increases in the number of communication channels and the number of health issues vying for public attention as well as consumer demands for more and better quality health information (Piotrow et.al, 1995), and the increased sophistication of marketing and sales techniques (Northouse, & Northouse, 1998), such as direct-to-consumer advertising of prescription drugs and sales of medical devices and medications over the Internet. The expansion of communication channels and health issues on the public agenda increases competition for people's time and attention; at the same time, people have more opportunities to select information based on their personal interests and preferences. The trend toward commercialization of the Internet suggests that the marketing model of other mass media will be applied to emerging media, which has important consequences for the ability of noncommercial and public health-oriented health communications to stand out in a cluttered health information environment (Maibach & Parrott, 1995).

In April 2009, the world was shocked by the presence of a new strand of virus that rapidly destroyed a lot of lives throughout the world. The first three countries to be striked by Influenza A (H1N1) also known as the swine flu epidemic, according to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2010), were Ghana, Veracruz dan Mexico. Subsequently, it continued to spread causing several deaths in New York, Canada, New Orleans and Israel. The H1N1 pandemic has presently spread to more than 170 countries worldwide.

During late April and early May 2009, the first cases of pandemic influenza A(H1N1) 2009 in the Western Pacific Region were reported in Hong Kong (China), New Zealand and Republic of Korea, countries located in the northern, southern and tropical parts of the Region, respectively. All cases were imported from Mexico. These cases and those that followed were

reported to the Regional Office through International Health Regulations (IHR) (IHR, 2005) notification mechanisms. During epidemiologic weeks 18 to 29, most countries and areas reported aggregate data on cases and deaths daily through IHR focal points. In addition, many countries and areas submitted additional case-based clinical and epidemiologic data on laboratory-confirmed cases and case deaths. In the first issue of the Influenza and Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 Bulletin, the Regional Office provided feedback to Member States by publishing a summary of submitted data through early August, results from the epidemiologic analysis of the data, a pandemic risk assessment and recommended pandemic response strategies (WHO, 2010).

The influenza A (H1N1) virus is not a new brand of disease, it is believed to have existed in the late 1918 in Spain and had killed milions of people. Nevertheless at that time it only infected individuals engaging in the swine industry and a few from outside of it. According to the statistics from the World Health Organization (WHO, 2010), at least 296,471 people worldwide were positively infected with the killer virus and 2,047 died from it. Malaysia experienced 77 deaths from the H1N1 virus making the country the nineth most affected in the world (WHO, 2010). What worried the Malaysians was the considerable number of deaths caused by H1N1 compared to countries with larger populations like China, India, Indonesia and the United Kingdom.

In fact the disease dangerously multiplied in inadequately managed communities where a number of victims experienced complications from the infection, frequently followed by death. This virus unfortunately spread among the humans through droplets passed-on through conversation, coughing and sneezing. Individuals physically close (about a meter) to another individual with symptoms of a flu (fever, sneezing, coughing, running nose, shivering, body ache and etc), risk infection with the disease (WHO, 2010).

Therefore to seriously curtail the pandemic, reponsible institutions were adviced to straight away implement preventive measures. They were to take steps to ensure that cases with risk were identified and early preventive precedures were executed to avoid future complications. The public were also recommended to engage in the preventive dealings to overcome the pandemic.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The Malaysian public is informed of various important issues by the selected newspapers. The importance given to an agenda by the media, influenced public opinion of what is important and thus help in setting policy agenda (McCombs, 2005). Agenda-setting is a process of how the media tell the public what issue to think about from the way agenda is set in the media (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Certain aspects of an issue emphasized in the news can influence policies and also shape opinions of the public (Dorfman, Wallack, & Woodruff, 2005). Therefore, news is an important source of 'framing.' Framing refers to the concept where the media tells the public "how to think about" an issue presented by the media (McCombs & Shaw. 1972).

According to Entman (1993), "to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and, or treatment recommendation for the item described". Thus, framing is a process in which certain aspect of a story line is selected, highlighted and reported in a news media such that it influences readers and triggers their thought process into thinking about it in a certain way (Entman, 1993). McCombs relates the concept of framing with media agenda and explains that media select and control the coverage of an issue and set agenda for discussion (McCombs, 2005).

Though some are aware of the threat of this virus, however the definition of threat is perceived as not critical among the public. In fact only a few people wore masks in public places, clean their hands frequently, reduce travelling in public transport and avoid flying with airplanes to infected countries or even took the H1N1 vacine as preventive procedures. Is this because the media failed to play their role in bringing awareness to the society regarding the issue? Or the society is immune to the information related to this killer disease? How effective are the media in agenda setting and framing the information regarding H1N1 to the community via the newspapers so as to alert the public of its urgency?

This study is based on agenda-setting and framing theories (McCombs and Shaw; 1972, and Erbring, Goldenberg and Miller; 1980). The purpose of this study is to examine the framing of H1N1 articles from three Malaysian daily newspapers from May 2009 to October 2009 through the use of content analysis. Since news media's portrayal of avian flu influenced public's

awareness, this study tries to examine whether the newspapers' portrayal of H1N1 also influence public perception of H1N1.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main research objectives are:

1. To study the frequency of news related to H1N1 published in the newspaper,
2. To identify the types of news published in the newspaper,
3. To examine the frequency of issues connected to H1N1 being forwarded in the newspaper,
4. To study the value of news related to H1N1 published in the newspaper,
5. To detect the sources of the materials published in the newspaper,
6. To distinguish the news slant published in the newspaper.

ASSUMPTIONS

This study was based on the agenda-setting theory and the concept of framing. The agenda setting theory hypothesizes that the issue placed as important in the media agenda becomes important on the public agenda and helps set policy agenda as well (McCombs, 2005). Framing refers to the concept where the media tells the public "how to think about" an issue presented by the media (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Results from this study gave insight into the media's attitude towards H1N1 from their news coverage in the newspapers. The inferences from the content analysis can be used to design awareness and intervention campaigns to increase the capacity for preparedness in public policy and with the general public. The study contributes to the understanding of how the Malaysian newspapers communicate information on H1N1 to the public.

Agenda-setting theory was first formally introduced in 1972 by McCombs and Shaw who attempted to answer the question of how the media agenda influenced the public agenda. While agenda setting theory is

frequently used and operationalized to show the power of the media with regards to political issues, it has many more practical applications, such as determining the media agenda regarding crime as asserted by Tankard et al (1991). According to them, the increased salience of crime was driven by the media that features crime stories often and prominently. Virtually any issue covered by the media can be compared to the public's perceptions, attitudes, or beliefs about that issue to determine if the media do have the power to set the public agenda. There are two basic types of agenda setting research – hierarchy studies and longitudinal studies (Lowry, Nio, and Leitner, 2006). The hierarchal studies examine several issues and their salience at one point in time, whereas longitudinal studies examine one issue and the change in its salience over time.

According to Erbring, Goldenberg, and Miller (1980), "differential media treatment is but one factor among the many that determine the salience of issues" (p.18). Other factors include personal experience and present circumstances which also have an impact on salience. Walgrave and Aelst (2008) claimed that not all media outlets carry the same agenda setting power. Researchers have debated the differences in the power each type of media has on the public's agenda. Furthermore, Eilders (2002) asserts that the public agenda is only influenced if many different media outlets cover the same issue. There are several concepts involved in agenda setting theory: media agenda, public agenda, issue and salience. Cook et al. (1983) define the media agenda as "the media's capacity to shape the general public's policy priorities by leading the public to view certain issues as more important" (p. 16).

Weaver (2007 p. 72) attempts to more clearly define media salience in terms of agenda setting. He touches on the many ways in which salience has been defined in agenda setting literature. At times it has been used "interchangeably with concepts such as awareness, attention, concern, popularity, and importance," but it has also been used to indicate awareness and involvement. Overall Weaver (2007) states that the salience of a particular issue tends to be most often viewed in relation to other issues. Agenda Setting Theory explains the relationship between the media agenda and the public agenda. Specifically, it posits that the more the media cover a particular issue, the more salient it will be to the public.

STUDY DESIGN

The study applied the *content analysis* method of research on 150 published news selected randomly from three mainstream Malay newspapers: *Utusan Malaysia, Berita Harian dan Sinar Harian* including online printed news from (*Utusan Online, Berita Harian Online dan Sinar Harian Online*) with 50 news from each newspaper. The 50 news extracts from each of the three newspapers are used to answer the three (3) research questions to fulfill the research requirements.

RESEARCH SAMPLE

The study is based on three mainstream newspapers published for readers in the Klang Valley with a population of 600,000 people. The first newspaper is *Utusan Malaysia* (for ordinary days, Monday-Saturday – 190,000 printed copies) and *Mingguan Malaysia* (Sunday edition – 420,000 copies printed), followed by *Berita Harian* (Monday to Saturday – 196,000 copies printed) and *Berita Minggu* (Sunday – 270,000 printed copies), and also *Sinar Harian*, with 150,000 printed copies daily (only four years in the market) (Synovate Media Atlas Q2, 2009). The study looks at the frequency of news reporting associated to the H1N1 from the three daily newspapers beginning from 12 April 2009 to 1 October 2009 (six and a half months).

INSTRUMENTATION

A code book with the list of framings and their descriptions were created for the study.

Additional framings were added during the study. Each framing was treated as a binary variable with a yes and a no for the presence or absence of the framing.

OPERATIONAL DEFINITION

Agenda-setting theory:
A theory by McCombs (2005) stated that the importance given to an agenda by the media is also perceived important in the public agenda and also policy agenda.

Framing:
Framing involves a communication source presenting and defining an issue.

Codebook:
A codebook contains detailed descriptions of codes and a list of criteria that are included or excluded in a research or study (Cotrell & McKenzie, 2005).

Content analysis:
Content analysis is defined as a research technique used for analyzing the characteristics of the content of media communication to understand its effect (Berelson, 1971).

Month:
What sort of news are published in the month. The question is intentionally specified to search for response about the month that has the most newspapers' reports on H1N1.

Newspaper:
The brand of newspaper that published articles related to H1N1 from (1) Utusan Malaysia (UM), (2) Sinar Harian (SH), or (3) Berita Harian (BH).

Category:
Category is related to the mode of news published in newspapers: (1) Current affairs, (2) Editorial, (3) Features, (4) Opinion Column/ Forum, (5) Newsphoto, (6) Poster, and (7) others.

News Column:
The positioning of published news in the newspapers; (1) Front page, (2) Back page, (3) Page 2 – 10, (4) Page 11 – 20, (5) Page 21 – 30, (6) Page 31 – 40, (7) Page 41 – 50, and (8) more than page 50.

News Form:
The form of news published in the newspaper: (1) Text only, (2) Photo only, (3) Text and photo, (4) Caricature, (5) Statistics/ Graphs, and (6) others..

Main issues:
Nature of issues given attention to by the newspapers: (1) Death, (2) Infection, (3) Closed, (4) Quaratine, (5) Information, (6) Reminder, and (7) others.

News source:
The source of the news/articles published in the newspaper: (1) Guess Writer (2) News reporter in the country, (3) AFP (4) CNN, (5) AP, (6) Reuter, (7) BERNAMA, and (9) others.

Purpose of News:
The purpose associated to the news; (1) Informative, (2) Persuasion, (3) Education, and (4) Awareness.

Personality:
Personalities in the news: (1) Prime Minister, (2) Deputy Prime Minister, (3) Minister of Health, (4) Deputy Minister of Health, (5) Director General of Health, (6) Deputy Director General of Health, (7) Head of Police, (8) Deputy Head of Police, (9) State Assemblymen/ Member of Parliament, and (10) others.

Countries:
Countries in the news: (1) Middle East, (2) United States of America (3) Mexico (4) Brazil (5) Australia (6) Great Britain (7) Canada (8) France (9) Malaysia (10) Thailand (11) Singapore (12) Cambodia and (13) others.

News slant:
Look at the news slant portrayed in the news: (1) Positive, (2) Negative, (3) Neutral, and (4) Balance News.

FINDINGS

News Collection and Analysis

News articles were randomly picked from the three Malay mainstream newspapers from May to August 2009. Altogether there were 150 news articles with 50 news articles from each newspaper. All the news selected were content analysed.

The Frequencies of the News/articles Published

Table 1 shows the frequency of news articles on the H1N1 virus from the three newspapers. The news were mostly published in the month of August 2009, 33.3%, followed by the month of September, 23.3%, the month of October, 18.7% and June, 10%. The data showed that the month of May has the lowest H1N1 news articles frequency, 6%. This is because that was the month when the virus was just discovered in the country and was still perceived as 'not dangerous.' On the contrary, in the month of August, there was an increase in the news portrayed in the newspapers related to H1N1 cases as the disease was spreading vigorously and more number of death cases appeared.

News Categories

The three newspapers chosen are the main stream newspapers whose writings mostly deal with the country's current affairs, 86%. The issue of H1N1 is portrayed as important by the newspapers and that each information received is rapidly channelled to the public according to the relevancy of the issue involved. Whereas other news column that is also highly functioning is the feature column, 11.3%, and also the forum /opinion column, 2.7%.

News Positioning

All three newspapers are perceived to have salient their news and then channelled the information to the public. This is evident through the portrayal of news which are mostly positioned on the first few pages, with a whopping 54.7% (page 2 to page 10) in the newspapers studied. The actual front page itself has a frequency of 6% but only when it was related to the value of the news channelled.

Page 11 to 20 are also among the position the articles related to the H1N1 issue are placed, 24%. This is followed by page 31 to page 40; usually in the world segment (*Berita Harian*), foreign countries (*Utusan Malaysia*) and global (*Sinar Harian*). The issue is also published in the very front page of the newspapers, 6%, but only with the intention to increase the value of the news channelled and so it is not executed frequently.

Table 1: Content Analysis of the News

News Items	Frequency	Percent
Month		
May	9	6.0
June	15	10.0
July	13	8.7
August	50	33.3
September	35	23.3
October	28	18.7
Newspaper		
Utusan Malaysia	50	33.3
Sinar Harian	50	33.3
Berita Harian	50	33.3
News Category		
Current affairs	129	86.0
Feature news	17	11.3
Opinion columns	4	2.7
Page Positioning		
Front page	9	6.0
Back page	1	.7
Page 2 – 10	82	54.7
Page 11 – 20	36	24.0
Page 21 – 30	9	6.0
Page 31 – 40	13	8.7
News Form		
Text only	116	77.3
Text with pictures	32	21.3
Statistics/ graphs	2	1.3
Main issues		
Death	26	17.3
Infection	32	21.3

School/closed premise	2	1.3
Quarantine	4	2.7
Latest information	73	48.7
Reminder	13	8.7
Total	**150**	**100**

Table 1 also shows that on the whole the majority of news/ articles published are in the form of text, 77.3% followed by text with photos, 21.3%. Statistics published in the news related to the disease are aimed to facilitate understanding among the public, though this type of portrayal is only minimum, about 1.3%.

Main Issues

Based on the 150 articles/news excerps, 48.7% of data analysed confirmed that most of the articles/ or news exhibited by the three newspapers have the tendency to carry news about H1N1 as the main issue. The issue of 'infection continuously widen' is also given the attention in the news studies with 21.3%, followed by the 'increase in death toll' at about 17.3%, quarantine news at about 2.7% and the locations of the virus spread, for example schools, institutions of higher learning etc. at about 1.3%.

News Source

The findings show that 50% of the materials published were sourced from the country like from the Ministry of Health. About 17.3% were sourced from BERNAMA (Malaysia News Agency), 10% from foreign countries for example from the Health Department of the countries infected with H1N1. Information from AFP (Agence France-Presse), Reuters (London news agency providing international news reports) was 6.7%, Associated Press (an essential global news network), 4.7%, and others at 2.0%. On the other hand, the information from guess writers was about 9.3%.

News Purpose

The data in Table 3 reveals that all the three newspapers have played their role in dispersing information to the public (78%) as the majority of the news are informative, and 19.3% was aimed at stimulating the public

awareness. The overall news scarcely provided information on education (1.3%) or used persuasion (1.3%).

Personality in the News

The value of news published in the newspapers is intensified when statements from a well known or worthy personality associated to a related field are attached to the news articles. In Table 4, the personalities which were most mentioned in the news (38%) were the leaders; state assemblymen, members of the Parliament and village heads. The Director General of Health is the personality whose statements on H1N1 were given the second most coverage in the news articles (34%). This is followed by the Minister of Health, 19.3%. The Prime Minister provides only 4% of the overall statements and his deputy, 3.3%. This was understandble as the tasks of handling H1N1 cases and making related statements should be coordinated by the Ministry of Health and the Health Department. Although this was so, the little statements prearranged for the Press by the top leaders of the country indicated their intervention when there is a critical situation such as the H1N1 pandemic in the country.

Table 2: News Source

News Source	Frequency	Percent
Guess Writer	14	9.3
News reporter in the country	75	50
AFP	15	10
AP	7	4.7
REUTER	10	6.7
BERNAMA	26	17.3
Others	3	2
Total	**150**	**100**

Table 3: News Purpose

Content of News	Frequency	Percent
Informative	117	78.0
Persuasion	2	1.3
Education	2	1.3
Awareness	29	19.3
Total	**150**	**100**

Table 4: Personalties in the News

Personalities	Frequencies	Percent
Prime Minister	6	4.0
Deputy Prime Minister	5	3.3
Minister of Health	29	19.3
Deputy Minister of Health	2	1.3
Director General of Health	51	34.0
Others	57	38.0
Total	**150**	**100**

Table 5: Country in the News

Country	Frequency	Percent
Middle Eastern Countries	4	2.7
United States of America	14	9.3
Mexico	8	5.3
Brazil	7	4.7
Australia	15	10
Great Britain	10	6.7
Canada	8	5.3
France	5	3.3
Malaysia	55	36.7

cont.

Thailand	6	4
Singapore	4	2.7
Cambodia	12	8
Other foreign countries	2	1.3
Total	**150**	**100**

Table 6: News Slant

News Slant	Frequency	Percent
Positive	96	64.0
Negative	52	34.7
Neutral	2	1.3
Total	**150**	**100**

Country in the News

The most frequently covered countries portrayed in the news are from the ASEAN region (Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and Cambodia), mainly the news was from Malaysia, with a substantial amount of 36.7%, followed by the United States of America, 9.3% and other countries, 3.3% and lastly countries from the Middle East, 2.7%. Generally, the majority of the news concerned the rapid spreading of the illness in Malaysia itself. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that H1N1 related issues from other countries were also published as additional information for the public.

News Slant

The news published during the period of the five months study revealed the tendency of the news to positively slant, with a high 64%. This is followed by the negative news slant, i.e. 34% and only a 1.3% neutral news slant. This explains that the actual intention for the portrayal of the news is mainly to inform the public regarding the virus H1N1 so that the people can be vigilant against it.

The Relation Between the Month and the Main Issue

In Table 7, the cross tabulation from the study evidently shows that August carried the highest amount of news linked to the virus H1N1. The collective amount of news from the three selected newspapers in the month of August shows an enormous amount of information about a 100% in the news selected for the study on the issue connected to the H1N1 pandemic, and the issue on 'the death toll' is responsible for 17.3% of the overall news News reporting on the other issues such 'infection' is about 21.3%. The news on the issue of H1N1 in general, are seen to increase almost steadily on each consecutive month from May – 6%, June – 10%, July – 8.7%, August – 33.3%, September – 23.3%, and October – 18.7%. And news tailored more as a 'reminder' to the public concerning the H1N1 issue, are about 8.7% .

Table 7: The Month of News Published and Main Issues

Month	Newspapers			Total / %
	UM / %	SINAR/%	BH/%	
May	6	0	12	6
June	0	0	30	10
July	12	4	10	8.7
August	28	**38**	34	**33.3**
September	32	28	10	23.3
October	22	30	4	18.7
Total	100	100	100	100

The Relationship Between the Brand of Newspapers and the Source of News

Looking at the cross tabulation of the brand of newspapers with news source, it is found that the information from inside the country monopolised the published news in the selected newspapers, which collectively is a total of 150% with Sinar Harian conveying about 38%, *Berita Harian* 34% and *Utusan Malaysia,* 28% of the news about H1N1 for the month of August. As observed, BERNAMA is the source that is responsible for supplying 17.3% of the news to the selected newspapers. *Sinar Harian* assigned 40% of the 50 news to the country's internal news.

Table 8: The Relationship of Newspapers and News Source

Newspaper	Percentage							Total
	Guess Reporter	Reporter in the country	AFP	AP	REUTER	BERNAMA	Others	
UM	16	44	6	14	10	6	4	100
SINAR	6	40	4	0	6	44	0	100
BH	6	66	20	0	4	2	2	100
Total	**9.3%**	**50%**	**10%**	**4.7%**	**6.7%**	**17.3%**	**2%**	**100**

The data shows that 10% of the overall news are from AFP. The source from all the news outside the country (AFP, AP, and Reuter) is about 21.4 % which make up the second largest supplier of news to the selected newspapers. From the statistics, *Berita Harian* is above others in transmitting news on H1N1 to the public throughout the research period. This is to affirm that the public agenda is influenced by the different media outlets covering the same issue.

Brand of Newspaper and Personality

Based on the data in Table 9 on the cross tabulation between the brand of newspapers and personality as source of news published, it is discovered that the majority of news are from the category of 'others' in personalities. As many as 38% respondents or individuals such as state assemblymen, members of parliament village head and etc. from the overall news, gave statements to reinforced the H1N1 issue and for that matter, *Sinar Harian* in this category 'others' conveyed 42% of its news selected, followed closely by *Berita Harian*, 38%. The second highest number from the category of personality is from the Director General of Health Malaysia who frequently provide announcements, with 40% printed in Sinar Harian selected news, followed by 38% in *Utusan Malaysia* for the purpose of adding values to the news. Next on the personality list is the Minister of Health Malaysia, who on the whole, contributes 19.3% of the news in *Berita Harian* related to the issues of the pandemic.

Table 9: Brand of Newspapers and Personality

Newspapers	Personality						Total
	Prime Minister	Deputy Prime Minister	Minister of Health	Deputy Minister of Health	Director General of Health	Others	
UM	4	6	18	0	38	34	100
SINAR	2	0	14	2	40	42	100
BH	6	4	26	2	24	38	100
Total	4%	3.3%	19.3	1.3	34	**38**	100

Brand of Newspapers and the Countries Portrayed

Analysis on the 150 news relaying information on the H1N1 issue shows that there is a link between the brand of newspapers carrying the news and the amount of information about the countries that need to be transmitted. The ASEAN region exceeded other countries with 52.7% of news/articles published. The ASEAN countries means news mostly from Malaysia itself, followed by neighbouring countries like Thailand, Singapore, Cambodia etc. By and large, Sinar Harian top the other newspapers in focusing 60% of its news to ASEAN countries, followed closely by Berita Harian, 54% and Utusan Malaysia carrying 44% of the news.

Other countries most frequently featured in the newspapers throughout the data collection period is the news from Foreign countries (United States of America, Mexico, Brazil, Australia, Great Britain, Canada and France) in total 44.7% of the news. Other countries include countries from the Middle East, 2.7%.

Table 10: Brand of Newspapers and the Countries Portrayed

Newspapers	Country			Total
	Foreign Countries F /%	Middle East F /%	ASEAN F /%	
UM	27/54	1/2	22/44	100
SINAR	18/36	2/4	30/60	100
BH	22/44	1/2	27/54	100
Total	**67/ 44.7%**	**4/ 2.7%**	**79/ 52.7**	**150/100%**

Brand of Newspaper and the News Slant

Looking at the answers from the analysis of the 150 articles or news published in the three mainstream Malay newspapers, the data shows that the news portrayed are usually slanted positively, 64 %. The slanting in the information diffused to the public is to produce awareness and persuasion so that the society is heedful about the spread of the H1N1 virus. *Utusan Malaysia* is the highest in positively slanting from its 50 selected news reported, 70%, followed closely by *Berita Harian*, with 64% of news positively slanted and *Sinar Harian* 58%.

On the other hand the negatively slanted news are also enormous which is about 34.7% with *Sinar Harian* collectively contributing 42% of the negatively slanted news. These news are 32% about 'infection,' and 26% concerns the news of 'death.' The portrayal of negatively slanted news is not as aggressive in Utusan Malaysia and *Berita Harian* comparatively with *Sinar Harian*, perhaps to prevent chaos and disturbances in the country during the H1N1 epidemic. If the H1N1 issue is blown out of proportion, it might threaten the harmony of the country. However differential media treatment is but one factor among the many that determines the salience of issues.

Table 11: Brand of Newspapers and the News Slant

Newspapers	News Slant			Total
	Positive / %	Negative / %	Neutral /%	Percent
UM	70	26	4	100
SINAR	58	42	0	100
BH	64	36	0	100
Total	**64%**	34.7%	1.3%	100%

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The media is expected to deliver information and educate the public as well as be the medium in a society. This statement means it is only proper that the media should clearly bears the responsibility as a catalyst to distribute information and to professionally frame the news for the public.

This study focuses on the portrayal of news related to H1N1, from the three Malay mainstream newspapers selected randomly during the period of five months (May to October 2009). Analysis on the 150 articles / news selected from *Utusan Malaysia, Berita Harian* and *Sinar Harian*, shows that all of the three newspapers have played their role in carrying out their responsibility given to them, that is to be the medium and the conveyor of information and to intentionally identify the importance of these news to the society through framing and agenda setting. It has also been proven through the analysis on the cross tabulation of the month and brand of newspapers, that the duty of the newspapers to provide information has been carried out. In general, all the newspapers relayed 33.3% of their news about the pandemic to the public in the critical month of August with *Sinar Harian* publishing 38% of its news in the issue. By increasing the frequencies is also a way to salient the news especially during the most crucial month of August.

On the geographical sketching of the newspapers coverage, the analysis from May to October 2009 on the whole registered the highest number of articles/news about H1N1, 52.7%, is about ASEAN countries. *Sinar Harian* allocated 60% of the its news for ASEAN countries narrowly followed by *Berita Harian,* 54%. The purpose of the newspapers was more about proximity that is to direct the readers to the issue locally.

When more people in foreign countries were also infected by the virus the three newspapers studied also carried stories about seven foreign

countries like U.S., Mexico, Brazil, Australia, Great Britain, Canada and France. The coverage of all the countries also salient the news to be perceived as a pandemic by the readers locally. The situation reached its climax when WHO (World Health Organization) finally declared the world was experiencing a stage five pandemic.

The H1N1 issue is a serious issue as it sucessfully unnerved the population of the world including our country. Everyday news from the media about the development of the problem are received pathetically by the public world wide. Consequently, Table 1 shows that in the current affairs category received the greatest coverage, about 86% regarding the H1N1. The media believes that the more the media covers a particular issue, the more salient it will be to the public.

The 'feature' column is the other section to give attention in the form of information published. Whereas the 'reminder' column is more on information related to the history of the virus and the chronology of its development. The public also took the opportunity to give comments and suggestions etc., related to the issue in the 'forum' (*Berita Harian*) / 'opinion column' (*Utusan Malaysia*). This is a testimony to the fact that not all in the society are oblivious to the issue. However not all population categories are susceptible to media cues (Stefaan *et al.,* 2006). According to Berelson (1971) , "on any single subject many 'hear' but few 'listen'" (p. 177).

The pages carrying the news provide opportunities to the researchers to analyse the importance of the issue to the media. From the study, pages 1 to 10 relayed 60.7% of the news and the current affairs segment portrayed 86% of the news. In the segment of news 'in the country' *Berita Harian* alloted 66% of its news on this category.

Largely the news studies are in the form of text only, 77.3%, followed by text and photos/pictures, 21.3%. News on the issue of H1N1 with statistics or graphs barely reach 1.3% for the attention of the readers. The moderate amount of visuals inculcated in the news was assumed to be sufficient for the readers to absorb the reality and seriousness of the situation.

The data from the randomly chosen 150 news shows that 48.7 % suggested that the articles/news, for the most part, confirmed that all of the three newspapers that published information about H1N1 (21.3%), are more concern about 'infection' and 17.3% emphasized on 'death.' This indicates that the media is continually responsive to the issue and at all times tried to direct information to the general public to alert and make them understand the danger of the H1N1 virus. The major assumption is that people who

consume mass media gain knowledge from it. The newspapers are optimistic that the knowledge individuals gain can help them make decision and also to take action to protect themselves against the pandemic. Consequently, the positively slanted news reports (information on the governments efforts to deal with the problem) perhaps caused the increase in the production of masks and this benefited the factories producing the comodity. The damaging part is when some retailers sold the mask way above the ceiling price as demand exceeds the supply.

The news published are incomplete without news value. Therefore the news are supported by elements essential to generate news value. The analysis on the cross tab of the brand of newspapers and the source revealed that 52.7% of the news studied are from the ASEAN countries mostly from Malaysia, accentuating the proximity of the disease. The framing of the news in this state of affair again aimed to attach value to the news. In addition, the source of the news related to the 'infection' category is mainly articulated by personality from the Ministry of Health Malaysia, once more, gave credibility and also value to it.

The source further reinforced the news with statements and endorsement from particular personality strongly associated to the issue. The cross tabulation of the brand of newspapers and personality also demonstrated that 38% of the news are from the category 'others' notably from state assemblymen, members of parliament and the village heads or people who closely serve the public. On the other hand 34% of news are from the Director General from the Department of Health Malaysia thus increase the significance and value of the news reported. The story which scores highly on value is also certain to make the first few pages of a newspaper such as 60.7% in pages 1 – 10.

Looking at the news slant, the findings shows, 64% of the news are positively slanted meaning the news mostly comprised of information, persuasion and knowledge for the public regarding the killer virus H1N1. Whereas the negatively slanted news are more salient and capable to urgently alert the public to the danger of the situation.

From the analysis the researchers conclude that the newspapers have fulfill their responsibility to help check the spread of the H1N1 pandemic and have saliently guided the readers to the urgency of the condition. The question is why do the public appeared as though they are insensible or uncautious of the virus? Perhap like what Berelson (1971) says, "on any single subject many 'hear' but few 'listen'

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

The analysis of the coverage of H1N1 in Malaysian Malay newspapers offers insight into the social understanding of the risks and policies related to this potential pandemic. The study also investigated how was the H1N1 news framed in the Malaysian newspapers. The researcher summarized that the news were framed through 1) positioning of the news in the first few pages of the newspapers; 2) by increasing the frequencies of the news; 3) reported more local news and also happenings of countries in close proximity to Malaysia; 4) by endorsements and statements from personalities with credibility; and 5) through news slant. All the 5 framing techniques applied added values to the news reported and furthermore transfer the salience on specific attributes belonging to these components of interest for the readers' consumption. The researchers are aware that this is the first research conducted to study news framing on the coverage of H1N1 by the Malaysian newspapers.

The weakness in the study is that it is based on the portrayal of H1N1 by only Malay leading newspapers in Malaysia. The result could not be compared with other influential newspapers in Malaysia when investigating how the framing differed between the different publications. Even though *Utusan Malaysia, Berita Harian* and *Sinar Harian* are leading newspapers in the country, its targeted readerships' geographical sketching and leaning perception might be different from other influential newspapers and hence might not be representative enough to give an insight of how the public in Malaysia perceived news on H1N1.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PUBLIC HEALTH POLICY AND PRACTICE

Malaysian reporting on H1N1 issue centered mainly on national, governmental and regional policies and responsibilities, with little focus on grassroots prevention and public awareness. The inferences from the content analysis highlighted the need for awareness and intervention campaigns to increase the capacity for preparedness among the general public. In order to get the public ready for a potential pandemic, newspapers should include information on the symptoms of H1N1 and provide protective measures vital to safeguard themselves.

In terms of coverage of H1N1, Malaysian newspapers should focus on giving substantial information to the public on what to expect in a pandemic circumstances, what to do, and what kind of antiviral drugs and vaccines available. Human interest stories should not only include the focus on victims but also on societies. The H1N1 coverage should focus on groups of people with information on how to prevent exposure to the virus, reduce risk, and know the symptoms to report an outbreak.

Malaysia coverage on the H1N1 issue should highlight the consequences of not reporting an outbreak accompanied by specific public health messages. Thematically presented coverage on the issue of H1N1 increases awareness among policy makers and the public about the need to focus on the groundwork in case of a potential pandemic. Awareness of this issue can lead the public to support the government's effort to prevent an outbreak.

Future studies should include the coverage of H1N1 virus in other Malaysian newspapers. A comparative study on media coverage in the country with human cases of H1N1 could give a clearer picture of media portrayal. Further research can be constructed based on the result of this study i.e. to identify how the portrayal of H1N1 in newspapers affects the perception of the general public towards H1N1.

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