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**Local Broadcast Journalists: Journalistic Autonomy And Level Of Job Perception  
In Their Workplace**

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### Abstract

The study attempts to identify the level of commitment in reporting the news by broadcast journalists in the local TV stations namely in RTM1 of Radio Television Malaysia, a government station and two private TV stations, TV3 and ntv7. The study examines the level of their commitment based on their professional roles, attitudes and behaviour that are influenced by the culture of their workplace. The notion of whether these individuals have their journalistic autonomy in news reporting is wholly depends on the working environment in the different TV newsrooms they are working in. This notion of being controlled may lead to these news workers not doing their job with full commitment. Data of the study is obtained from participation-observation done at the TV stations and in-depth interviews conducted with selected participants. The findings indicate that the TV broadcast journalists of the three stations have shown the desired characteristic of being journalists. There is also a strong positive correlation on job performance among them. It is found that commitment to the duty as journalists bind them to stay and to comply with the requirements of the workplace. However, they seek only to reveal and to convey to the audience news items that are influenced and shape by the supra-organization level. Organization rules, editorial policies and other influences as well as pressures forced them to adhere to these needs. Hierarchical organization control happens to override in RTM1 that resulted to shape the news more on government activities rather than reports on the public on actual incidents. Thus, a lesser degree of journalistic autonomy given to TV broadcast journalist in the station. In the case of TV3 and ntv7, journalistic autonomy among its their TV broadcast journalists still exist due to the trust given by editors in handling the news items they are assigned to. The news in TV3 and ntv7 is also shape by the imperialism of the business side of the media organization that is Media Prima Berhad. On job perception, the TV broadcast journalists have continuous positive attitude in doing their job as journalists in spite of the constraints they face. They are optimistic and do their work according to the journalistic practice.

The profession of broadcast journalists in Malaysia is in great demand today due to the proliferation of television stations in the country (Kamarulzaman 2006). The urgency to know the latest news developments make the public rely increasingly upon these journalists to make sense of the overwhelming amount of information available to them. At present the electronic media as a source of communication play a vital role in disseminating information (Zainuddin 2006).

As such, news gathered and reported by these professionals will continue to be a valued commodity (Beer and Merrill 2004:89). This implies that there is a strictly positive but constant level of contribution in which an individual, here the broadcast journalists, take the action which will maximize social utility if it is followed by everybody in this kind of situation.

Today, the Malaysian audience gets up-to-date news faster from television than getting it from the print media, which will only report the news the next day (Kamaruzaman 2006). This notion of immediacy of getting up-to-date news has resulted in TV stations competing with each other to broadcast the latest news events and developments of the day.

The battle goes on and on because Malaysians nowadays spend more time in front of their television set than anything else. In broadcasting news events and up-to-date happenings, the local television networks adopt the norms, styles of production; professional codes and expectations inherited from the Western systems and are adopted according to the needs of the Malaysian society in presenting the news (Rahmah Hashim & Samsudin Rahim 1994).

In this context, broadcast journalists who performed well in their job not only make the station popular but can also contribute to the increased revenue of the television station (Sukardi 2006). This implies that work dedication shown by journalists is measured by observing the way they accept the tasks given to them.

Nevertheless, internal mechanisms within a news organization such as the division of power, authority, labour and status, organizational rules, news format, leadership and degree of autonomy given to journalists (Gans 1980; Joseph 1985; Cooks and Banks 1993) as cited in Faridah (1995:44) may affect the role behaviour exhibited by journalists in the newsroom. The question of journalistic autonomy and participation in decision-making as well as factors that influenced decisions in the newsrooms which were highlighted could be traced in many newspapers and electronic media organizations in other countries (Epstein 1973:42). The Malaysian newsroom is without exception (Faridah 1995:48).

On the other hand, the type of news coverage in a guided democracy country like Malaysia is also quite similar to other countries that practice democracy (Kadir 1998:2). However, in the case of guided democracy that is practised in Malaysia, the government tends to argue that Malaysia cannot be allowed to have full-blown democracy as it is still a developing nation (Anil 2002:179) and the media have an important role in defending and building the society. The mass media in Malaysia are not only required to inform, educate and motivate the masses toward development goals stipulated by the government, but are also expected to go hand in hand with the government's policies in order to remain viable (Faridah 2003:57).

In other words, the functions of the media in developing nations like Malaysia have been reoriented and adjusted to local needs and the roles are tied closely to the government's objectives. Malaysia, like so many other Southeast Asian countries, has put aside the freedom of expression guarantee and several of the reasons given have to do with the internal sensitivity resulting from Malaysia's multi-racial background and also for the sake of national security and nation building ( Anil:2000:17).

Several studies found that the personal characteristics and value of journalists are most often constrained by organization routines and higher level power organization routines and higher level power arrangements (Becker 1982; Blankenburg 1982; Dimmick and Coit 1982; Karthigesu 1995; Anil 2000; Murad 2001; Faridah 2003). A survey by Asian American Journalist Association (AAJA) (2007:1), for example, found that most of its members who are journalists have positive feelings about the work they do, but they worry the media consolidation and newsroom cutbacks will weaken the profession's commitment to diversity. Upper management decisions on allocation of resources for instance, would certainly affect how reporting is carried out. These include the allocation of journalistic time, the allocation of news hole as well as the allocation of budget to reporting topics (Detjen 2002:2).

The recognition of the TV news reporting in Malaysia as a beat in news media grew in the early 70s in the wave of rapidly increasing political, social, economic and environmental reporting. The proliferation of TV stations in the later part of the 20th century, that is, between early 1980s and 1990s in this country, made the profession of TV broadcast journalists to be of great demand. Nevertheless, TV broadcast journalists did not attract much attention in previous local scholarly research. Doing the study would add some knowledge to electronic news reporting and the profession of TV broadcast journalists by revealing their professional identity and the changes as well as challenges of the profession.

Knowing the background of the broadcast journalists is thus important to understand how they go about with their work. Their job is classified difficult and different from the print media and they do not cover stories from their point of view while adopting a consistent pattern of cultural neutrality. Along the line they face constraints. A comprehensive description of these journalists' personal experience in news reporting and how they perceive their job should be addressed.

Thus with this view in mind and in relation to broadcast journalism in Malaysia, the objectives of the research are as follows:

To explicate the level of commitment of local TV broadcast journalists in performing their tasks;

To identify the constraints faced by TV journalists in doing their job;

To examine the different working environments TV broadcast journalists work in.

Based on the objectives, the following questions are addressed in the study:

RQ1: How do the local TV broadcast journalists of today perceive their job in terms of their commitment in doing news reporting?

RQ2: What are the constraints that they actually face in doing their job?

RQ3: What are the TV broadcast journalists' views of their professional role as journalists?

The focus of the study is on TV broadcast journalists who serve the three TV stations in the country namely Radio Television Malaysia (RTM), which is a government-owned electronic station and two private TV stations, Sistem Televisyen Malaysia Berhad (TV3) and Nat Seven Sdn. Bhd. or ntv7. Also focused are their professional roles, attitudes and behaviours, as well as their commitment and constraints in doing their job. The choice of RTM for this study is largely due to its premier role in broadcast journalism and television news. Besides that, RTM also has considerable experience in this industry and in the news industry in Malaysia when it introduced television news in 1963.

Sistem Televisyen Malaysia Berhad or TV3 which was launched in 1984 is the first private television station. Its existence marked a new era of television news as its approach is more focused on public issues that attracted viewers, thus giving the industry a new perspective (Kamarulzaman 2006). RTM and TV3 are regarded by Malaysians as the media that play the most significant role in providing information for decision makers and the attentive public (Lent 1974, Mean 1991) cited in Faridah (2001:124).

Nat Seven Sdn. Bhd. or ntv7 is another private TV station which is also a free-to-air TV formed in 1996. It is the first television channel that uses Digital Technology and has a 100 percent urban coverage (Mohsein 2006).

The location of the study is the Klang Valley since all the TV stations are located in the area. Informants are of Malay, Indian and Chinese descent and are between 24 and 40 years old.

### **Literature Review**

A research on the news product of the broadcast industry particularly television which is distinct from the news production of the print news industry was done by Waade and Schramm in 1969. A number of similar research was conducted by Robinson (1977a); Clarke and Frelin (1978); Becker, Sobowate and Casy (1979); Becker and Friut (1979) and Becker and Whitney (1980). Becker and Dimmick (1980), for example analyzed underscored differences between television and radio personnel needs, resulting primarily from the emphasis on visuals in television and the sole use of audio messages in radio. Powers (1977) similarly noted differences in the ways the national television networks and the local television stations in the United States handled news. Another study by Golding and Elliot (1979) noted that the cross-national comparisons of broadcast news operations in the United States can serve to illustrate similarities and differences in the ways news is handled by organizations.

As in the case of Malaysia, media organizations shared common interest and beliefs with its government to safeguard the nation's interest also apply different approach in handling the news. More often than not these media play the role of educators and informers, exploring a wide spectrum of issues and fields such as health and healthcare, science, economics, education, environment, welfare, culture and therapy-physical, mental, emotion and spiritual (Zarina 2004:48).

Becker (1982) in his research entitled "Print or Broadcast – How the Medium Influences the Reporter" found that the influence of organizational type of commitment might be indirect, working through sentiments about the specific job. His finding is consistent with Tuchman's (1969) observation of a newspaper organization and a television station that gave the picture that television reporters are capable of handling the editing of their own work particularly the visuals compared to newspaper reporter who do

not handle the picture directly in any of their coverage. The study also noted that it is easier, faster and cheaper for an editor to rework a newspaper news story than to reedit a segment of television news, film or tape.

Hence, Becker (ibid.) and Tuchman's (ibid.) findings are consistent to the situation in the television stations in Malaysia whereby TV broadcast journalists have and must understand how a newsroom operates in order to work effectively within it as a member of a workplace and ready to respond well especially in handling the equipments from editing visuals, doing voice over and producing the news item in a package (Yazid Naim 2007).

However, most studies of television news and broadcast journalist yielded evidence that leans toward the notion that profit motives have an impact on news stories which is nearly as great as journalist's perceptions. Studies on journalists' perception can be seen way back in the 70s. For example, Drew (1972) observed three television beat reporters and found that each perceived his journalistic role differently, so much so that each produced somewhat different news stories.

Buckalew (1969, 1970) studied twelve television news editors and found that news selection preferences varied mainly due to "environmental factors" such as community size. Editors from smaller communities favored proximate stories while those from larger communities placed greater emphasis on timeliness. Other studies of news work point out how news organizations, professional training and socialization as well as individual differences result in journalistic beliefs that should be homogenous within work roles (Bantz 1985; Tuchman 1978).

What is also traced from past research is that, scholars studying news work have long focused on either journalistic roles or journalistic values rather than integrating the two as a better way of understanding the internal forces that drive reporters and editors.

Commitment to the occupation of journalism is another significant study among scholars. The reason for this is that commitment to this profession has been declining during the past twenty to thirty years. Many studies show that the percentage of journalists planning to leave the field nearly doubled from 1971 to 1982 and nearly doubled again in 1992. More than one-fifth of these journalists reported that they were likely to change careers (Weaver and Wilhoit 1996).

Despite all this, experiences in news organizations have an important impact on journalist's perceptions of their occupation. Journalists are socialized to the norms of the profession through subtle critiques of managers and conversations with workplace colleagues, and they commonly define their goals by using those most immediately around them as a reference group. News workers often generalize conditions of their field from conditions of their specific workplace, a shortcut pursued because of constraints on time and the relative lack of audience information.

Plaisance and Skewes (2003) explored the link between the journalist's value and roles. Their study questioned assumptions regarding commitment to work by applying theories of social psychology in order to get a better understanding of how journalists operate. The resulting "profile" of journalistic values produced by a nationwide probability-sample survey of 600 newspaper journalists and an analysis of the links between ranked values and role conceptions showed the great influence of newsroom socialization on journalistic values. The analysis also showed more linkages between the

adversarial role of the press and values, suggesting that adversarial function is more significant.

In the Malaysian context, the local television networks have also been targets of public criticism over the choices of news coverage which are shaped by the regulators and policy-makers (Rahmah Hashim 1995). She identifies that there are various ministries and agencies that regulate and control the Malaysian media environment that cause news content to be more government oriented. Along similar lines, Ahmad Murad (2001:10) asserted that pseudo-events and pseudo-news is events and news which are planned and staged precisely for the purpose of entry into the newspapers and to gain television coverage. Stories which have no true news value but are important for image purposes are carried.

Das (1990:29) discusses the manipulation of the media which is basically done in three ways. They are: 1) control of ownership; 2) legislation and 3) escape journalism. Control of ownership of newspapers is the most obvious and easiest way in the media manipulation and significantly, there is no coincidence that the biggest circulation newspapers in Malaysia are owned by the political parties of the Barisan Government. The New Straits Times group for example is owned by UMNO, The Star is an MCA newspaper. As for the MIC, it controls the Tamil newspapers. Control of ownership of newspapers by these political parties which want to promote their own side of the picture does not allow for integrity of journalists. The ownership of newspapers by political parties allows for other kind of manipulation that is the manipulation of a more direct manner. For example, papers print not only stories which the party would like, but even propaganda written by party officials. Speeches which are completely political fill the editorial pages. The second form of manipulation of the media described by Das is done by legislation where apart from the Printing Presses and Publication Act, there are other laws like the Internal Security Act and the Official Secrets Act.

Deuze's (2002) study on journalists and journalism in the Netherlands, which closely followed the design of Weaver and Wilhoit's (1996: 255 -277) research, is taken into account for this literature review. This is because it is found that the purpose of his study has similarities to this research, that is, a study on which journalists are in the context of their work and how they give meaning to their work. Even though this research is on broadcast journalists, the first purpose is similar to Deuze's. His study focused on two research purposes: to describe and explain the basic, occupational characteristics of Dutch journalists and to analyze the findings in comparison to similar research projects in other western democracies of recent years.

The most interesting part of Deuze's (2002) project is that he follows an international tradition of journalism survey research conducted throughout the twentieth century. A great number of such research was conducted in the United States namely by Johnstone, Slawski and Bowman (1976), in Germany by Kepplinger (1979) and in Great Britain by Tunstall (1970). These projects focused on the characteristics of news workers, the organization of labour and on the journalists' role perception and goals in news making.

Even though Deuze's (2002) study focuses on print journalists, nevertheless, whether in print or electronic, journalists share the same values and characteristics. Golding and Elliot (1979) and more recently Kovach and Rostentiel (2001) described these characteristics as:

- Journalists are impartial, neutral, objective, fair and thus credible;
- Journalists must be autonomous, free and independent in their work;
- Journalists have a sense of immediacy and speed; and
- Journalists have a sense of ethics, validity and legitimacy.

These characteristics can also be traced in research on journalism done by Nordenstreng (1989); Schudson (1996); Shoemaker and Reese (1996); Weischenberg (1997); Winch (1997); Morgan (1998); Cottle (2000a) and Loeffelholz (2000). These studies closely followed the study design set out by Weaver and Wilhoit (2002) their questionnaire and definition of journalists. Deuze (2002) adapted Weaver and Wilhoit's (1996) methodology in his research and found that Dutch journalists think of themselves as an all-rounder, doing a vast array of job descriptions, titles and functions in the newsroom.

Another interesting finding in Deuze's research is that Dutch journalists do not seem to interact a lot with members of the audience. The finding however is not similar to several previous studies regarding Dutch journalists, which shows that, on one hand, the audience is important to the work of journalists – but on the other hand, journalists do not feel inclined to actively pursue communication with their public, nor do they deliberately change their ways because of audience criticisms and complaints. Deuze also found that the “static” group of journalists and reporters working at regional dailies rate their regular discussions with members of their audience most important. These journalists tend to live in the communities they serve.

#### **Methodology**

Data collection for this study involves three strategies that are observing, interviewing and analyzing documents. On-site investigation involves observing what is going on by using the field observation method which is participation-observation, talking informally and formally with people or more precise, in-depth interview conducted with TV broadcast journalists and gatekeepers of the three TV newsrooms of the local television stations and examining documents and materials that are part of the context. The methodologies chosen are to provide a better understanding of the study.

The qualitative approach through these three methodologies, give the researcher the ability to participate in the events and this add reality to the study, which is not found in a survey or experimental research. It provides a different perspective (Hocking, Stacks and McDermott 2003:212).

In participation-observation, it demands firsthand involvement in the social world chosen for the study. Immersion in the setting allows the researcher to hear, see and begin to experience reality as the respondents do while in-depth interviews allow the researcher to understand the people that are studied. It affords the researcher the chance to dig information and “get under the skin” of the people who lived in the event or occasion (Marshall, Rossman 1999:108).

Through it, the respondents are evaluated on their worthiness. This method is useful in gaining access to respondents that would otherwise be difficult to observe and examine (Wimmer and Dominick 2003:117). It is the most direct way to describe the behaviour of a person by viewing the act from the viewpoint of the actor (Hocking, Stacks and McDermott 2003:195). Therefore, participation-observation is where the researcher “becomes one” with her research and that the elaboration of the first methodology chosen is on the following:



A particular place in the organization (the TV newsroom);  
 A specific group of people – the TV broadcast journalists  
 Activity of the broadcast journalists

Adler and Adler (1994:380) call this as “active membership role” as the researcher gains familiarity with the phenomenon being studied. The researcher begins as a spectator and gradually become involved in the activities being observed. What is observed is determined by several factors. The most important is the problem or the questions of interest that determine what is to be observed. Checklist of things to get into the activity of observation as presented by several writer like Goetz and LeCompte (1984); Borg and Gall (1989); Bogdon and Biklen (1992); Patton (1990); Taylor and Bogdon (1984) in Merriam (1998:97) is found to be an important operational strategy in mapping out the structure of this study. The checklists of elements presented by these scholars are adapted to this study and are as follows:

*The physical setting:* What is the physical environment like? What is the context? What kinds of behaviour is the setting designed for? What objects, resources, technologies are in the setting? The newsroom which varies in physical attributes as well as in anticipated behaviour.

*The respondents:* Describe who is in the scene, how many people and their role. What brings these people do their job as TV journalists in a television station (in this case RTM1, TV3 and ntv7). What are the relevant characteristics of the respondents? What is in their mind? What is their perception on their work and the workplace they are attached to?

*Activities and interactions:* What is going on? Is there a definable sequence of activities? How do these people interact with the activity and with one another? How are people and activities “connected or interrelated – either from the respondents’ point of view or from the researcher’s perspective” (Goetz and LeCompte 1984:113). What norms or rules structure the activities and interactions?

*Conversation:* What is the content of the conversations in this setting? Who speaks to whom? Who listens?

*Subtle factors:* Less obvious but perhaps as important to the observation such as:

Informal and unplanned activities  
 Symbolic and connotative meanings os words  
 Non-verbal communication such as dressing

The researcher’s own behaviour: The researcher is as much a part of the scene as participants. How is the researcher’s role, whether as an observer or an intimate participant, affecting the scene the researcher is observing? What does the researcher say and do? In addition, what thoughts is the researcher having about what is going on? These become “observer comments” , an important part of field notes.

While taking note on these checklist elements, the next step taken is to plan the process of collecting data through the observations, and it is done in three stages: getting entry to the newsroom, data collection and lastly, exit. Gaining entry into each site begins with gaining the confidence and permission of those who can approve activity as pointed out by Merriam (1998:98).

Respondents of the study consisted of 12 TV broadcast journalists of the three TV stations namely RTM1 of RTM, TV3 and ntv7. Six respondents in RTM1 agreed to take part for the study while TV3, four and ntv7, two. The six respondents in RTM1 were

chosen and identified by the newsroom management team who are also the top level gatekeepers in the newsroom. In TV3, the researcher managed to get four respondents only, even though many of TV broadcast journalists were looking forward to take part in the study. The reason that they had to decline was because of the tight schedule, their involvement in the production activities and their involvement in news reading. As for ntv7, the management permits the researcher to choose only two of its TV broadcast journalists because the news workers there are working in a pool system which means they have to handle other jobs as well besides being journalists. Lack of staff leads them to do magazines programmes as well.

The twelve identified journalists from the three TV stations who were assigned on the beat news coverage were observed along these lines: how each of them handles the assignment given, their interactions with others (the senior editors, the news editors, chief reporter, other journalists and reporters) and news sources. For this purpose also, interviews were conducted both before and after observations of the work.

Similarly, in-depth interviews are crucial for this study; face-to-face interviews with the TV broadcast journalists and gate keepers are done in order to get a clearer picture, feedback, ideas and subjective perspectives regarding their profession, expectations and challenges when doing their jobs. Preference and usage of these two methods are appropriate based on the fact that real-world behaviour is the major concern of the researcher. According to Hocking, Stacks and McDermott (ibid.), the most direct way to describe the behaviour of a person is to view the act from the viewpoint of the actor, to be part of the occurring behaviour, as it exists in the natural world.

The following are the twelve specific areas that respondents were asked:

- Do you have positive (or negative) feelings about journalism profession?;
- What is your strong willpower that contributes to your intuitiveness as TV broadcast journalist;
- Do you have discipline in meeting deadlines?;
- Do you think as a journalist, you should be knowledgeable?;
- What is your opinion on being a hardworking news worker?;

To respondents of TV3 –the issue of trust from editors that make them capable of doing an impact news story and allowing them to have journalistic autonomy;

To respondents of ntv7- ad-hoc news as the priority news style of the station and journalistic autonomy;

The respondents' response on personal characteristics impacting on coverage;

Questions regarding complying to regulations;

To respondents of RTM1 – their responses on role perception and journalistic autonomy and their expectation as news workers in a government station;

To respondents of TV3 on their role perception and their expectation as news workers in a private TV station;

To respondents of ntv7 on their role perception.

During the interviewing process, the researcher tried to maintain neutrality as noted by Merriam (1998:84) where the interviewer must be aware of his or her stance toward the interviewee. Merriam (ibid.) also suggested that an interviewer should also assume neutrality with regard to the respondents' knowledge; that is, regardless of how antithetical to the interviewer's beliefs and values the respondents' position might be, it is crucial for the success of the interview to avoid arguing, debating, or otherwise letting

personal views be known. For this, Patton (1990) cited in Merriam (1998:84) distinguishes between neutrality and rapport where he said, rapport is a stance vis-à-vis the person being interviewed while neutrality is a stance vis-à-vis the content of what that person says.

Application of the interpretive question format which consisted of semi-structural and open-ended style of questions yielded meaningful insights and descriptive notes on the behaviour of these respondents on their attitude as well as their perception of their job.

On the other hand, documents are ready-made sources of data to help support facts on the findings of the study. Their existence is usually produced for reasons (Merriam 1998:113). It is sometimes minor facts or additional in-depth information acquired for this research. Selltiz, Jahoda, Deutsch and Cook (1959) in Merriam (1998:121) observe that findings pertinent documents hinges to some extent on the investigator's ability to think creatively about the problem under study. The usage of such data demands a capacity to ask many different questions related to the research problem. For instance, for this study, cause effect of TV broadcast journalists' reaction towards writing the story has connection with written rules and directives as found in the confidential documents produced by gate keepers in the workplace.

Bureaucratic organizations have reputations for producing a profusion of written communications and files (Bogdon and Biklen 1992:135). Policy documents, codes of ethics and official directives were materials viewed by the researcher to get an understanding on how each TV newsroom that was studied defined their news style and approach for their news items. These official perspectives have connection on how TV broadcast journalists behave and work for their workplace. The materials were useful because they reveal information about the official chain of command based on internal rules and regulations. Access to these documents was satisfactory due to the rapport that was established with the gatekeepers and the library department in each TV station.

#### *Data Analysis*

Analysis began as soon as the researcher returns from each observation, interviews and other research sessions. The researcher writes out what happened by rendering a description of the respondents, events, activities and conversations. This information was from the field notes that is, the written accounts of what the researcher hears, sees experiences and thinks in the course of collecting and reflecting on the data in a qualitative study as suggested by Bogdon and Biklen (1992:107). The successful outcome of a participation observation study in particular, according to Bogdon and Biklen (ibid.) relies on detailed, accurate, and extensive field notes, a term refers to collectively to all the data collected in the course of such study, including interview transcript, official documents, official statistics and other material.

The data from the field notes which consisted of descriptive kind of materials is the main concern of the study in capturing a word-picture of the setting, people, actions and conversation. The descriptive aspects of the field notes encompass the following areas:

*Portraits of the respondents:* This include their physical appearance, dress, mannerism, and style of talking and acting;

*Reconstruction of dialogue:* The conversations that go on between respondents and researcher are recorded. Words and phrases that are unique to the setting or have special use in it are written down;

*Accounts of particular events:* The notes include a listing of who was involved in the event, in what manner, and the nature of the action;

*Depiction of activities:* For this category, detailed descriptions of behaviour, trying to reproduce the sequence of both behaviours and particular acts.

Data analysis for this study was also from the conceptualization of the categories of variables that were explained in chapter two. The concepts were based in the context of the study and are as follows: i) reporting the news; ii) commitment; iii) constraints; iv) journalistic practice; and v) broadcast journalists.

These concepts were linked to the theories that were used for the study. The theory of experiences and interpretation relates to the “works” of human experience. The theory helps to the understanding of the working culture of TV broadcast journalists in their work in each newsroom under study. The gate keeping theory on the other hand, explains the information control in the selection of news in the newsroom and due to this control, TV broadcast journalists without choice have to assimilate themselves with this culture and do their work in accordance with the requirements of their workplace. Through the participation-as-observer, immediate notes and recorded materials from the in-depth interviews were analyzed based on the conceptual categories. It also include on the subjective feelings of the respondents.

Example of analysis made:

Analysis 1 - Descriptive Aspect of Respondents.

## I INDIVIDUAL BACKGROUND

Respondent's name: MS

Age : 33 years old

Profession : TV broadcast journalist / Assistant Assignment Editor for economic desk

Workplace : RTM1

Education B/G: LLB, University Buckingham, United Kingdom

Character through observation: Energetic, positive, knowledgeable, very fast, tactful, analytical, good PR skills, very accommodating, friendly, sociable, likes to be broadcast journalist.

Job Perception: First person to know something newly happens; Middle person who has very important role to play – dissemination of information, proud to be a TV broadcast journalists and positive that job of a TV broadcast journalist is dynamic.

## II FIELD WORK

Assignment: Press Conference of Tun Mahathir Mohammad on Global Peace conference

Time of event: 11.30 a.m.

Venue : Yayasan Perdana, Putrajaya

Date of assignment: 7 June 2006

First Observation of field work

In the news room – MS checked her assignment as soon as she arrived to the newsroom at 8.00 a.m., double checked its details and showed readiness to go for the assignment.

Approach the chief reporter who told her that booking of transport and cameraman was already processed. Dashed to her seat, took two digital video tapes, went to check them at

the preview monitor and put slugs on the tapes. Make a phone call to the transport unit, took her notebook and handbag, and straight away left the newsroom. It was then 9.30 a.m. The researcher walked with MS to the transport unit. Waited for 10 minutes for the cameraman while transport was already waiting and after the cameraman came, crew shoot off to Putrajaya for the job. During the journey, the researcher got acquainted with MS and conversation picked up some information on job perception.

Second Observation of field work

Accounts of the particular event in Putrajaya

Before event started:

Arrived at the venue at approximately 10.25 a.m.

MS prefer to arrive early at the location and wait for the event to start rather than be late and miss something important. Saw her socializing with print journalists and TV broadcast journalists from other TV stations including from Reuters, AFP and Al Jazeera.

Cameraman went into the press conference room and begin to set his equipment

20 minutes before event started, all journalists (print and electronic media) took their seats waiting for Tun Mahathir

During the event:

Press Conference by Tun Mahathir on global peace conference which was to be held in Kuala Lumpur

MS enthusiastically jotting down nearly everything said by Tun

Listened attentively

Active participant in news gathering

Question and Answer session – among questions asked to Tun:

i. Malaysia's stand on the Palestinian issue by Reuters.

ii. Tun's opinion whether he regretted stepping down as Prime Minister

MS jotted down all information in her notebook. Event ended and Tun Mahathir left the venue. Reporters, Journalists and Radio / TV broadcast journalists including MS sat together and discussed what to highlight for the story. MS preferred to highlight the global conference story and not on the question asked by AFP (regarding his stepping down as Prime Minister).

MS's clarification based on the interview obtained during the journey back to office:

Constraints -

- Gatekeepers in RTM1 would not allow such issues (on Tun Mahathir – whether he regretted resigning as Prime Minister) to be aired in RTM1 news;

- Have to focus and do the news story based on the event that was covered

- Have decided on what the lead of the news story should be.

III Back at the Newsroom

Saw the rushes (visuals) at the preview monitor

Listened to Tun Mahathir's actuality on global peace conference

Set time codes on Tun Mahathir's actuality for the purpose of "up sound"

Jotted down some points

Viewed the cutaway visuals and set duration for the whole news item which is one minute thirty seconds (1:30)

Went to the sub-editor, discussed the visuals

Sub-editor agreed to the news story proposal  
 Went to the visual editor with the tape and joined him for editing purposes  
 All done, went back to her seat  
 Started writing the news story. Took twenty minutes to complete it and send the story to editors via the terminal link for subbing  
 Story cleared  
 Note: - MS is very serious when doing her work  
 - Attentive at all times  
 - Serious and objective  
 - Hardworking / perseverance  
 - Positive attitude

The above analysis format was implemented on all respondents of the study. It is a descriptive analysis and is done one day after the observation. This record is important and it has to be done systematically so that the data develops as the study continues, that is, from the field work to the in-depth interviews as well as on the analysis of documents obtained from gate keepers. The approach helps certain discoveries as to why TV broadcast journalists acted in different ways in order to get their work done based on the gate keepers orders as well as requirements of their workplace. What is written down or mechanically recorded from a period of observation becomes the raw data from which a study's finding eventually emerges (Merriam 1992:104).

*Transcription from the Taped Interviews*

A coding system to organize data was also applied for this study. For this purpose, Bogdon and Biklen's (1992:166) suggestion on searching through the data for regularities and patterns as well as for topics the data cover and then write down words and phrases to represent these topics and patterns was followed. These words and phrases are coding categories. They are a means of sorting the descriptive data that has been collected so that the material bearing on a given topic can be physically separated from other data. Developing a list of coding categories after the data has been collected and the interviewer is ready to mechanically sort them as a crucial step in data analysis (Bogdon and Biklen *ibid.*). Figure 3 is an example of excerpts from interviews during the study.

Figure 3: Coding System used for coding interview with Respondents

Interview with MRS (RTM1) 8 June 2006 8.00 p.m.	Coding
Researcher: When do you join RTM1 Answer: The year 2000	C
Researcher: Why choose this career? Answer: I did my practical training in RTM1 and found that this career suits me. Moreover, I am a journalism student before and this career is what I want even before I graduated.	PF
Researcher: Your positive feelings / negative feelings about journalism profession?	



behaviour in a contextual framework and to present a holistic interpretation of what is happening.

### **Research Findings**

All of the respondents in this study are graduates who possess a bachelor's degree in journalism, mass communication, law, accountancy and social science from both local and foreign universities. They are among those journalists in the TV newsrooms who are attentive as they are careful, comprehensive and make judgment accordingly. They also can assimilate easily and adapt themselves into the culture of the working environment. They are alert to the fact that their job is not only to deliver the message of information but also to educate and inform the public any news that happen and the latest development of any phenomenon. In addition, the content of the news must be straight to the point, logical and accurate.

The study also discovers that they are individuals who anticipate, which means, always working in a hurry because events that occur would not wait to be covered. As journalists, they have to cover the events assigned to them and to meet immediate deadlines. News coverage that comes into the newsroom has to be included in the next closest news bulletin of the day.

Observation also gathered that they spend more time outside the organization covering events and beats and contacting sources for extra information or statement besides getting visuals for their story. The work is tedious but they enjoy their job with the principle that they uphold that is, as TV broadcast journalists, they must be able to do the news report effectively. More than half of the respondents said they are interested in the career and have positive feelings about the journalism profession as they showed devotedness in the work as TV broadcast journalists.

#### *Readiness to cover assignments given*

All respondents demonstrate dedication to their work. They significantly showed readiness to cover the assignments given to them. As every assignment is a different situation altogether, respondents handle it in a tactful manner so that they would get the best story out of the event. The most important mission is to gather information they need for each coverage and later deliver it in the form of news story supported by good visuals. The readiness in covering assignments is significantly strong among respondents. It is discovered in two different aspects of their work as follow:

#### *News Gathering:*

Evidence of preparedness in doing the duty starts before going for any assignment where these news workers would do some research on the topic of assignment in order to find any related information or issues to get a clearer understanding on what to do for the assignment. Construction of questions would be prepared, if necessary, based on suggestions and discussions with the editors.

#### *News Processing:*

As soon as respondents arrive at the newsrooms, they would first view the visuals taken at the coverage. These include listening to the actuality and the shots that are taken for the news items. The viewing of the various shots or rushes would help them to get the idea of the lead of the news story as well as on the decision of duration for the news item. Submission of news stories to editors is through the system used in each of the newsroom.



The working environment in each of the TV newsroom, its facilities as well as the trust from the superiors is also contributing factors that led respondents to have confidence in doing their news reporting.

#### *Knowledgeable*

Respondents showed that they are knowledgeable in the areas that they go for the coverage. Since it is a routine duty to go for assignments, respondents significantly are at par with the happenings of events. The researcher noticed that if respondents were not too abreast with the event, they would take efforts to find out about it. They either do some research regarding the matter or discuss it with other journalists who have more experience and done a similar coverage. Thus, knowledge is an important element that guides these respondents to strive better in their work.

#### *Reporting the news in an ethical manner according to the needs of the workplace:*

Respondents managed to perform by working around the laws and not against them. They accept that both the freedom and constraints are contextual. This is similar to Zarina's (2004:208) assertion in her study that the "Smart Partnership" does give these news workers the avenue to highlight malpractices, proposing solutions, proposing solutions to rectify existing problems and fighting the rights and welfare of Malaysians without stepping on sensitive grounds. Unlike many other professions such as medical, engineering and legal that are regulated by the government and professional bodies, journalism is self-regulated with guidance from the Canons of Journalism and RUKUNEGARA. The Home Ministry and Information Ministry watch over the overall practices of the electronic media organizations and advise them from time to time. There is no penalty for being unethical unless the journalists committed other offences such as plagiarism, stealing of confidential information, defamation and seditious (Mohsin 2006). Despite these limitations, all the three TV stations where these respondents are working, place high emphasis on ethical practices to safeguard their integrity and minimizing risks of legal implications. Delivering of the news stories is accordance with the requirements as indicated below.

#### *Journalistic Autonomy*

It is evident that all respondents do not have journalistic autonomy in doing their assignments. They cannot choose what assignment they want to do nor making decisions on the content they are going to write. They do assignments based on orders of gatekeepers. In every station that involved in this study, the ideology of the proprietors and managers set the parameter for discussion of issues and selection of news coverage.

Respondents in RTM1 for instance, do not have the ability to simplify complex matters and try to make the news meaningful to the viewers. This is because they are tight down with decision rules made by gatekeepers in a hierarchical manner. RTM1 is a government-owned news channel. Its operation and its news coverage should always be in line with national building that emphasizes on establishing and maintaining racial and religious harmony besides inculcating national pride and prestige. As a government TV channel, RTM1 is under political control to determine which news items deserved airing in order to inject national identity consciousness. Avoidance of sensitive issues that relate to racial matters is noted and news must conform to unity. For example, severe racist issues based on public complaints that go beyond the boundaries are scrapped off as news items. In the STAR, 14 October 1979, Deputy Minister of Information, Dr. Ling Liong Sik said that the government could only afford to hear voices of dissent and was therefore

in a better position to provide a more balanced picture of issues on development. Referring to RTM, he outlined the objectives of RTM:

To give the widest-possible coverage on government policies and activities so as to get maximum understanding from the public;

To promote civic consciousness and Malaysian arts and culture; and

To provide suitable materials for general knowledge, information and entertainment.

These outline stands until today and more than 80 percent of the channel's news coverage projects government activities. The communal nature of the ruling parties is reflected in the concept of news items broadcasted by this station.

In TV3 and ntv7, gatekeepers also dictate assignments to respondents. They must accomplish the task according to the directives given especially on how the coverage should be in line with the TV stations' objectives. TV3 and ntv7 are still subject to government pressures on media policy. Because of this, all respondents lack journalistic autonomy in the news content because the influences of the hierarchical power are significantly strong. Therefore, the daily agenda of news reports produced are the results of crucial decisions made within the respective news organizations.

Three factors that are manipulating the product of news in the three TV stations are evident:

control of ownership of media by political parties;

connections with business individuals; and

Self-censorship exercised by editors and journalists themselves.

The correlation of the factors above is significantly strong. From the government viewpoint, there is the need for these television networks to serve the interest of the political development of the country. As Jaafar and Lowe (1982) asserted, these interests are seen firstly, as establishing and helping to maintain racial and religious harmony and secondly, to inculcate national pride and prestige. This is because politics in Malaysia consists of a delicate balance between the racial communities; the media de-politicizes rather than politicizes issues so that racial polarization could be reduced. All this is achieved in the context of the government aims to try to forge a national community (Jaafar and Lowe *ibid.*). The widespread ownership and control on media organization in this country points to the importance of the relationship between individual organizations and higher-level decision units. On the other hand, connections with business individuals influence the organizational policy and its media executives. This influence exerted on the news content because the role of the electronic media is only to suit the demands of the ownership by political parties and the connection with the business individuals that are influential in the government.

#### *News for RTM1*

RTM1 is a government-owned TV station whereby its function is to disseminate governmental news. Therefore, TV broadcast journalists have to do governmental type news reporting. Nevertheless, about 10 percent out of the total news bulletin are news on public affairs and another 10 percent are news on spontaneous events like crimes, accidents and disaster.

For news coverage in RTM1, priority is given to news coverage at the supra hierarchical level of the government and on government's stand on issues relating to national interest including its benefits to the nation. Coverage is also on the higher

government officials that have power to create events, from decisions and activities to ceremonies. In addition, as a government-owned TV station, it is the prerogative of RTM1 to cover this hierarchical group. RTM1 Input Editor, Adnan Ghailan (2007) noted that it is the duty of the TV broadcast journalists of the TV station to deliver governmental news messages to the public because it is in accordance with the requirements of RTM. TV broadcast journalists of RTM1 also should disseminate the news in a professional way and deliver it effectively. Being journalists of RTM, respondents have to understand these requirements and to accomplish this mission. They must respond to these required directives besides demonstrating willingness to do their duty without any doubts.

#### *News for TV3*

For respondents in TV3, delivering the news story at best is their target. Puspavathy (2006), Azmah (2006) and Saiful Nizam (2006) asserted that there is no reason why they should not perform as instructed because it is a matter of responsibility and conscience of being journalists. The trust by the editors and the higher officials at Media Prima give them the confidence and freedom to commit to their job. As TV3 choice of coverage depends on news value, the station seldom covers the hierarchical level of the government unless there is a national agenda involved. News on public agendas is the station priority that includes coverage on social issues. This sort of news coverage makes up more than sixty percent of news for TV3 while coverage on governmental policies, economy, sports, foreign and human interest is only 20 percent. Assignment editor Sukardi (2006) concurred that TV3 has no obligation to any ministers for news coverage. Nevertheless, TV3 covers events on the Prime Minister and his deputy. TV3 also has direct approach in doing its news and the TV broadcast journalists have to do their assignment in accordance with such directives.

#### *News for ntv7*

News makes up sixty-five per cent (65%) of ntv7 airtime (Mohsin 2006). News bulletins of My News Network (MNN), the umbrella brand give viewers an in-depth view of current affairs coverage by providing a hundred per cent on chosen stories with comprehensive reporting. MNN also provides news coverage on ad hoc events and happenings in the country to suit target audience, which are the urban adults. Assignment editor Charles Mohan (2007) classified urban adults as people of 24 to 40 years of age. Urban in terms of news in ntv7 is any news related to the urban people who have the tendency to watch English news that focus more on business and overseas news segments. To gatekeepers, the content of the news in ntv7 must be different from other TV stations. It includes the style of approach of the news stories that should portray the trademark of the TV station as follows:

News for ntv7 should be mass relevant because the focus is more on the public and public interest point of view;

Ad-hoc events is topmost choice of its news coverage;

Approach of lead for news stories should be more story telling than direct; and

News content should uphold the principles of RUKUNEGARA and policies of Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission 1998.

#### *Limitations when performing news reporting*

The finding show that respondents face constraints in their work, as they have to follow the orders of gatekeepers in every single assignment they do. They have limited

authority in making decisions on the content of the assignments. News coverage in all TV stations is accomplished under the instruction, directions and orders of the higher-level hierarchy of the organization (Dato Kamarulzaman (2007); Yazid (2007); Adnan 2007). Every TV station has its own guidelines, regulation and policies that have connections to the account of the coverage. These limitations and restrictions are pressures from different levels of power and authorities that shape the news each day.

*Rules and Regulations as Guidelines in RTM news*

Respondents in RTM1 have to ensure that news items for RTM1 are on these arrangements as shown below, as the station is responsible to prominent figures of the government according to their positions:

Hierarchical Arrangements

The Prime Minister / Agong;

Deputy President of UMNO;

Vice Presidents of UMNO;

Chairman of the National Front Party;

Menteri Besar;

Chief Ministers;

State Assembly Exco;

Public (coverage depends on the news values and phenomenal situations).

(Source: Haji Monshi Abdullah 2006)

*Decision Rules*

Coverage on events in RTM 1 is also depended on explicit written rules by the designated functions of the department. These include decisions conveyed orally that are decided during formal meetings at which comments are passed on about the suitability of submitted ideas and the themes. Together these form the sum total of the organization's rulings as to what is acceptable or not for transmission. The word "sensitivities" has an impact among personnel in Radio Television Malaysia (RTM) which describe not just rules but also a wide range of reasons on these decisions.

News preferences that are also in the attention of RTM1 include:

The Prime Minister's Department;

Minister of Information;

Director general of Radio Television Malaysia (RTM);

Director of News and Current Affairs RTM;

Director General of the Ministry of Information;

Post Cabinet Meetings; and Directorate meeting chaired either by the Minister of Information or by the Director General of the Ministry ( source: Haji Monshi Abdullah ibid.).

Based on the findings no matter what it takes, RTM1 respondents have to work according to the rules and regulations. They are also aware of the list of Acts, Legislations and standards that surrounded them in doing their duty. The list of Acts, Legislation and standards are as follows:

Administration Regulations;

Broadcasting Department's Policies ;

Cabinet Decision and Decisions of relevant Cabinet Committees;

Communication and Multimedia Act 1998;

Copyright Act 1969;

Defamation Act 1957;  
 Federation Constitution 1948 (Amendments 1999);  
 General Orders (Chapters A,B,C,D,E,F, & G);  
 Guidelines on the Broadcasting of TV news;  
 Government Security Regulation;  
 Indecent Advertisements Act 1953;  
 Internal Security Act 1960;  
 National Anthem Act 1968;  
 Official Secret Act 1972;  
 Penal Code;  
 Printing Presses and Publication Act 1984;  
 Public Services Code of Ethics;  
 Public Administration Development Circulars;  
 Service Circulars;  
 Service Regulation Chapter 4 & 5; and  
 Sedition Act 1948.

*Guidelines for TV3 and ntv7 news*

TV3 and ntv7 are under the largest media group in Malaysia that is Media Prima Berhad. Contents of news items therefore are based on the mission of the policies of the following entities:

Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission 1998 (MCMC);  
 Communication and Multimedia Act 1998 and the Malaysian Communication;  
 Multimedia Content Code 2004.

Besides these policies, TV3 and ntv7 are also directed to fulfil the national aspiration of the country in achieving Vision 2020 besides upholding the principles of the RUKUNEGARA (Wee 2007). In order to cater to audience demands, program ratings, consumer interests, advertising interest, national interest corporate image as well as network financial investments, TV3 projects news content that are more on humanity, environment, sports and current events while ntv7 provides news content for the urban audience between the ages of 24 to 40 years old. The news content includes business and overseas news items (Charles Mohan (2007); Sukardi 2007).

The findings reveal that TV3 has to conform to the regulations of MCMC too. Nevertheless, these policies change from time to time based on the changing phenomenon that happened in the country. However, TV3 focuses more on to issues and problems of the public (Sukardi 2006). The TV station minimised coverage on ministers unless the issue covered has connection with the public. The station has no obligation to any ministers (Sukardi *ibid.*). On ad-hoc directives, it is evident that it gives limited time to editors to explain to their TV broadcast journalists regarding the assignments they have to do. To gatekeepers, the respondents must know their job as TV broadcast journalists. Working for a commercial television station, they must possess entrepreneurial skills in handling news coverage, which means they must acquire good judgment based on the critical thinking qualities in choosing the right angle of news coverage.

The chief news editor and assignment editors are in charge of the assignments for TV3 produces news programmes based on the logic of profit maximisation. This means prioritizing the demands of the news segments that have strong purchasing power. Editors will check and edit the news stories based on the house style practised. It also

must be in accordance with the MCMC (1998) regulations. At the same time, editors have to ensure Value and Lifestyles (VALS) of media audience as it is an important index in determining effective media reach (Sukardi *ibid.*). The director of news and current affairs is the person who controls the strategies. He is also responsible to ensure that all staff of the newsroom follow each term and condition of the MCMC (1998). This is to create a good working culture in the organization.

After Media Prima Berhad took over ntv7 in November 2005, the station is wholly independent and rather structured like TV3 as compared before (Charles Mohan 2006). The taking over had also drawn a line between news and business (Mohsin 2007). Since that time, assignment editors are freer and independent in making decisions on the topics for coverage as long as it is in line with the concept of news that ntv7 prefers.

Nevertheless, the Director of News and Current Affairs whose office is at TV3 has the autonomy to decide and give directives to the editors the angle and choice of news to cover from time to time. Due to the changes, ad-hoc news content becomes topmost choice of ntv7 news coverage. In other words, if other TV stations cover the same news item, ntv7 will ensure its angle of the news would be different. The angle of news should capture public interest. For this reason, ntv7 role is similar to that of “Malay Mail” which emphasizes on the urban outlook (Ghani 2006).

#### *Comply to Regulations*

The assumption that the local commercial stations (TV3 and ntv7) are freer in decision-making process is arguable because being a part of the Media Prima group of companies; it has linkages to Malaysia’s ruling party, UMNO (Wee; Mohsin 2006). TV3 and ntv7 are owned, controlled and managed by companies or individuals closely aligned to the ruling parties. Thus, government policies, directives, guidelines and decisions of the editorial group (the gatekeepers) are directly responsible for the news bulletins of the two TV stations. Respondents have to abide with such requirements and regulations of their workplace. Restrictions are due to the imperatives of their paymasters. However, they viewed the enforcement of ethics, regulations and laws as positive measures to safeguard their functions as TV broadcast journalists. They persist to the orders of the gatekeepers. Respondents noted that they are invulnerable to the orders because they like their work and are willing to encounter the constraints that they referred as positive challenges.

#### **Conclusion**

The findings in chapter four signify some important conclusions which should be taken into account. One of it is that all respondents assess dedication to their journalistic duty based on three reasons: personal involvement when doing the assignments given, identification with the relevant target during coverage of the news and value congruence of job performance. The commitment force imposed by the newsrooms made these TV broadcast journalists to a course of action that is relevant to a particular target which is, delivering the news that they are assigned according to the workplace requirements.

The study also distinguishes that there are different level of perception of organizational commitment among respondents and that these perceptions have different implications on their behaviour. Thus commitment for this study is an energizing force with implications for respondents’ behaviour. It binds them to a course of action. Nevertheless, regardless of what the TV broadcast journalists face at work, their strong

commitment to journalism has enabled them to be professionally responsible according to their perceived importance of journalistic work.

The study also found that respondents have little say in day-to-day newsroom task. They have only some autonomy in these tasks such as how to cover news stories, amount of time spent on writing the news and determining the length of the news. Management has the final say in most of the newsroom tasks. The assignment editor has the most direct influence on story ideation with the assignment desk being the focal spot in the flow of information to the journalists and the cameraman. The assignment editor's work is circumscribed, however, once an assignment was made.

Thus, the journalists' responsibilities are only to gather and structure materials with occasional responsibility for assembly and presentation. The TV broadcast journalists' lack of control over the final product is apparent and only contributes to the material gathering and structuring. Finally, the appearance of the news segment is under the control of the producer and director, rather than the TV broadcast journalists themselves. As for unclear instructions, it is significantly evident in RTM1 whereby the news workers act responsibly within the accepted boundaries and simultaneously, the regulatory forces take the "individual autonomy" out of their hands.

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