

Source Usage and News Credibility in Two Malaysian Crime Cases

Penggunaan Sumber dan Kredibiliti Berita dalam Dua Kes Jenayah di Malaysia

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ABSTRAK

Penggunaan sumber yang boleh dipercayai sering menjadi kontroversi dan para editor sering cemas dengan penggunaan sumber. Mereka bimbang sekiranya para wartawan terlalu bergantung pada sumber sehingga semakin meruntuhkan kredibiliti akhbar. Namun, berita tanpa sumber bukanlah berita. Sebelum pihak wartawan menerbitkan berita, editor dan wartawan harus merujuk berita dengan sumber untuk menentukan ketepatan. Walau bagaimanapun disebabkan tekanan 'deadline' wartawan dihalang daripada menunggu sumber rasmi untuk mengesahkan berita dan terus menggunakan sumber yang tidak dinamai. Di sinilah konflik wujud terutamanya apabila sesetengah pihak mengkritik penggunaan sumber yang tidak dinamai sebagai tidak boleh dipercayai dan menggugat kredibiliti berita. Namun begitu, para wartawan menganggap sumber sedemikian sebagai penting, terutamanya dalam mengemukakan berita terkini. Kajian telah dijalankan untuk mengenalpasti tanggungjawab dan penggunaan sumber dalam dua kes jenayah di Malaysia. Selain daripada analisis tekstual, pengkaji juga menggunakan temuramah terperinci untuk mengenalpasti impak sumber terhadap kredibiliti berita, terutamanya yang berkaitan dengan berita jenayah. Soalannya adalah apakah yang menentukan kredibiliti sumber berita? Adakah sumber berita begitu tidak dipercayai malah tidak boleh digunakan sama sekali? Berdasarkan penemuan awal dan hasil pencarian sumber sekunder daripada kajian sebelumnya makalah ini membincangkan andaian am tentang penggunaan sumber, jenis sumber yang digunakan dan impak penggunaan sumber tanpa nama terutamanya dalam berita jenayah dalam konteks Malaysia.

Kata Kunci: Sumber tidak dinamai, kredibiliti berita, wartawan meja jenayah

ABSTRACT

The use of credible or trustworthy sources has been controversial and editors have also constantly been distressed over the use of sources, fearing that they were depending on them too heavily and damaging the press credibility. Nevertheless, news without sources are not news. Before journalists publish stories, editors and journalists strongly favour checking the story with sources to ensure accuracy. However, because of deadline pressure, journalists are prevented from waiting for sources to review the whole story and use anonymous sources instead. Here is when conflict arises as some critique anonymous sources as unreliable and effecting news credibility and yet newsmen consider them essential, vital especially in breaking news items. A research was conducted to uncover the use and roles of sources in two particular crime cases in Malaysia. Besides textual analysis, intensive interviews were employed to explore the impact that sources bring towards news credibility especially where crime news is concerned. At the same time there researcher puts forth questions fro the reader to ponder such as what determines news source credibility? Are they that unreliable that they should never be used? Based on the preliminary findings and secondary findings from a research done previously, this article discusses the general assumptions of using sources, the types of sources used and the impact of using anonymous sources especially in crime reporting in the Malaysian news context.

Keywords: Anonymous source, news credibility, crime reporter

INTRODUCTION

The role of a reporter has become more challenging today as the audience have a choice in determining the type of information they would consume and the medium they would use. In this regard, reporters are challenged into writing stories, which are timely, relevant and updated.

One of the ways of doing this is to ensure information gathered by the journalist is reliable. According to Strentz (1989) a reporter's credibility is determined not by how news is gathered or the quantity of news gathered but by the thoroughness and accuracy of news and the only way of ensuring this is through the use of sources. In the Malaysian context even though efforts are done to

balance the flow of information, there are still critiques by government officials that the media is biased or sensational in its reporting. Nevertheless, the use of sources in news stories in the Malaysian press can increase objectivity in journalistic writing (Faridah Ibrahim & Rajib Ghani 2000). News without sources will usually not be published by the Malaysian press as official sources confirm a story and ensure information is as per situation or event and without it the story is as good as invalid. Generally choosing a source relies heavily on quotability, accessibility, responsibility and trust. This is even so where crime stories are involved where reporters (crime) are required to look for stories and look for sources that will be able to provide information.

In reporting about crime, the reporters are required to gather information from various individuals who are directly involved in the story and who are in many ways considered official sources (Faridah Ibrahim & Mohd Safar Hashim 2005). In the reporters exuberance in reporting these stories they are required to get as much information as possible to ensure their news stories are concise and have more details compared to their counterparts. Because of this they (the reporters) are sometimes criticised for their portrayal of crimes as being too sensational or too subjective. This was clearly seen when the then Deputy Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak (The Star 2006), stressed that journalists having greater freedom should not sensationalise their stories to boost sales without thinking about the repercussions on the people. Meanwhile, former Malaysian Inspector General of Police, Mohd Bakri Omar warned local dailies (The Sun 2004:3) which published details and pictures of suspects who were still in remand ... 'They (local dailies) should be more responsible in their reporting or face any consequences that may arise as a result of this ...' he said over the coverage of the Noritta Samsuddin's murder. These comments suggest that the authorities are concerned with how reporters handle stories, especially those which can embark on a trip of sensationalism and to ensure that information are not taken out of context or worse, misquoted.

The Malaysian Inspector General of Police Tan Sri Musa Hassan also reminded the media that they could highlight crime stories but should not sensationalise it as it could make a bad impression to tourists and potential investors (The Star 2009). He also urged the media to stop speculating and write reports based only on facts given by authorised police officers (The Star 2006). Police also warned the media against speculating about the murder of Mongolian model Altantuya Shaariibuu. Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Musa Hassan criticised press reports on the case, saying it amounted to ... 'trial by media' (*Asian Media* 2006). The former Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi himself urged the media to not sensationalize sex and

crime reports saying that this could raise false public alarm (New Straits Times 2004). It is assumed that reporting and reporters can sometimes become overwhelmed with the amount of information received and with the rise of competition from other newspapers, and that the lack in sensitivity is detrimental to how the public or those involved will be perceived.

What is interesting to note is that as much as authorities have criticised the media for their reporting of news as inaccurate or sensational, these reporters are sometimes called up by the authorities to reveal their sources of information when the sources used are clearly mentioned in the study. The fact is, news cannot be conjured up by some unseen dark force. Neither can news reports be published without being confirmed by an official. In this regard who are the sources used in the news reports? Are they insignificant sources, which should not be quoted? To a certain extent, it is the news source and not the journalists who are responsible for the accuracy of the facts. However, it is always the media organisation and the journalists who will be blamed whenever there is a misreporting of facts (Faridah 2005: 2) It can be seen that the reporter is responsible for his source and the source is equally responsible for information given out to the reporters.

Therefore, the primary purpose of this article is to look at the types of sources used in crime news and explain the relationship between reporters and sources. In view of the limited research efforts regarding the impact of sources towards news credibility in the Malaysian mainstream newspapers, more research is required to determine the relationship between using sources and its impacts on news credibility. The focus being the use of anonymous sources. The research will help mainstream newspapers understand the impacts of using sources in news reporting, and how the sources can reflect positively or negatively on the credibility of their publications. As the credibility of news reporting improves, confidence of readers in newspapers can be boosted too, and mainstream newspapers are able to maintain their position as the leading news providers in the country.

This article will explore the use of sources by crime reporters and determine the importance of sources in crime stories. It will also investigate the use of anonymous sources as well as official sources in determining the credibility of crime news stories. The study questions the type of source the reporters quoted most often and if the source selection determines the credibility of the news. Using some preliminary findings (textual analysis methodology) and secondary data from a completed research, this article will focus on two crime stories, Razak Baginda and Noritta Samsuddin in three local newspapers The Star (*S*, English Daily), *Utusan Malaysia* (*UM*, Bahasa Malaysia Daily) and *Sin Chew Daily* (*SCD*, Chinese Daily).

UNDERSTANDING NEWS SOURCES

A source is a person, publication or other record or document that gives information. These sources include officer record, publication, government officials or organisations, witnesses in crimes and people involved who are affected by news events. Much of the information printed in a newspaper comes from what might be called official sources. These sources are thought to have some amount of expertise in the area being discussed. These would be called 'official sources' and they would have a large amount of credibility with the readers (Stovall 2005:201). In this case the official source would be a police officer. Sources and reporters share what is typically described as a symbiotic relationship. They depend upon each other to create the news. Studies by Hallin, Manoff and Weddle (1993); Brown et.al (1987); Faridah Ibrahim & Safar Hashim (2005); and Wright (2007) have shown that source dependency plays an important role in reporters sourcing patterns. Reporters depend heavily on reliable and repetitive sources as they are trustworthy and dependable compared to reporters having to seek and develop new news sources. A study by Geiber (1964) indicated that as much as journalists work independently, finding information and investigating their own stories, they rarely behave independently of their sources. Instead they 'generate stories based on information from sources who stood to benefit from the transaction as much as the journalist' (O'Neil & O'Connor 2008).

This potential of sources – journalist relationship is not problematic if it does not affect the journalist or sources ability to act in the public's interest. However, a journalist does not rely on one sole source. They check and re-check information and many time they are required to use their own investigative methods and resources to verify the facts given. Nevertheless, given time journalists will turn to those sources more eager to provide information and such sources will in turn be regular sources.

In their study of the role of reporters and the use of sources, Carpenter, Lacy and Fico (2004) explored the use of anonymous sources, the transparency of sources cited and the use of multiple viewpoints. Using content analysis data to answer the research questions in the network news coverage of high profile cases, it was found that the morning news edition of high profile crime stories have more transparent sources compared to other significant stories and were more likely to have only one viewpoint and contain anonymous sources. Sources are important to journalists. They are knowledge. They provide the basis of stories. The credibility of sources is established through institutionalised forms of authority and knowledge. Sources are typically predetermined as authorised knowers by the source organisation itself, within its own hierarchy of credibility.

Journalists often turn to those with expert knowledge in the field in question and to official bodies without a direct stake in a conflict (Erikson 1998). Public officials' access to information makes them credible. According to Hansen (1991: 475) officials are favoured by reporters because they provide regular, credible information. At the same time Ericson, Baranek and Chan (1989: 14) mentioned that sources are chosen based on how they are recognised socially to be in a position to know. News stories are most useful to news organisations when they are easily gathered from credible sources and for this reason policing agencies like law enforcement have become the principal suppliers of these stories. Sources are also seen as credible when they are transparent that is, name, position and role are clearly defined in the news story. This not only verifies information in the story, but ensure that readers understand that the story comes from an expert or person-in-charge in the field. Although this is a standard practice among Malaysian crime reporters to ensure that source 'confirms' a story, there is also a large amount of the use of anonymous sources.

ANONYMOUS SOURCE

The use of anonymous sources by mainstream print media in news reporting is controversial, but yet is commonly practiced by journalists and their respective publications today. The main reasons for concealing the identities of sources in news reporting are to protect their privacy and safety (Smith 2007; Crary 2005; Davidson 2004). However, the credibility of this type of news reporting is often questioned, as readers do not know who the sources are, and whether their information are reliable and trustworthy. Only journalists and editors are aware of the identities of these sources, and their statements are not official. If journalists were to wait for official announcements, their respective publications may lose competitive advantage to their rivals who emphasise on timeliness in news reporting by using anonymous sources (Smith 2007). These unnamed sources provide information but typically 'off the record' (Rich 2005). According to Abramson (2008) these are people who fear losing their jobs and get retribution and this is why they ask to be covered in anonymity. Meanwhile, anonymous sources are also whistleblowers or informants who wish to remain unknown to the public, in order not to jeopardise their personal safety or jobs (Shepard 1994).

Nevertheless, the word anonymous has many shades of meaning depending on the interpretation of different people. Some find that it is best used to describe someone that does not have a name. However, unnamed sources have a different definition from anonymous sources. The term indicates that the reporter knows who the source

is, but for some reasons declines publishing his or her name (Cherniak 2008). Meanwhile Buttry (2005) defined anonymous sources as confidential sources. They are not anonymous to the reporter, just unknown to the readers. In the Malaysian context journalists use the term unnamed sources and anonymous sources to mean the same when these source are known to the journalists, but they do not want their names to appear in the news stories rather to remain in anonymity. Despite continuous arguments that anonymous sources put the credibility of news in a bad light, they remain important in gathering news in major publications.

There are many factors to consider when journalists and editors of mainstream newspapers decide to have anonymous sources as their informants. Although editors find that anonymous sourcing is less believable and may affect credibility, it is still widely used because of stiff competitions among publications. However, various parties, in other countries, including media professionals have called for a ban on using anonymous sources in the media as they find anonymous sources hurting the credibility of media. Neuharth (2004) the founder of USA Today and president of the Freedom Forum, who in an interview described anonymous sources as the evil of journalism, strongly opposed the use of anonymous sources and called for journalists of all levels to discard the use of all anonymous sources. He claimed that the public will not trust the press anymore with the existence of anonymous sources. However, it is said that as competition for readers has become greater, more and more publishers and editors have allowed the use of anonymous sources. Reporters who are allowed to use such sources sometimes write more than they hear, as editors often let them get away with it.

Meanwhile, Jenkins (2008) too found that the tendency for media of all types to use anonymous sources is troubling, more so when it involves bending or even breaking the ethical guidelines of media professionals in the process of using anonymous sources. The use of anonymous sources not only hurts media credibility (Howell 2006), but also causes readers to ask where the information comes from without providing the answer to that question. Moreover, it is also strongly believed that readers have the right to know who is speaking and who is providing information. Hiding the identities of sources may lead to public distrust of newspapers (Jenkins 2008).

By naming the sources, it allows readers to make informed judgment about particular news reporting, whereas the use of anonymous sources may cast doubt in the public's mind about the nature of the story. Although there is a consensus that anonymous sources weaken news credibility, very few news organisations absolutely prohibit their use; this is true for Malaysia as well where

journalists still use anonymous sources especially when official sources are unable to reveal certain information.

To minimise the harm of anonymous sources on news credibility, many organisations have policies in written or unwritten form, stressing anonymous sources should be used only as a last resort (Shepard 1994). Citing a case in 2003 where a reporter from The New York Times repeatedly made up stories and attributed it anonymously, Neuharth (2004) felt that anonymous sources are prone to overuse and misuse by journalists, hence should be banned to spare media industry of further embarrassment. Washington Post had in 2004 begun its efforts to clamp down the use of anonymous sources. It came out with a policy that emphasised its reporting as transparent to readers as possible, so that the readers may know how and where the newspaper got the information from, and assess for themselves to what extent they are going to believe the news articles published (Howell 2006). This differs with the situation amongst journalists in Malaysia where the National Union of Journalists Code of Conduct, states clearly that ...“He shall respect the confidentiality of the source of information” which in turn means that the journalist is allowed to attribute his information to an anonymous source. As much as this code is aptly followed by local pressmen, there are instances where pressmen were picked up by police and requested to reveal sources, but pressmen have denied revealing sources using this code as a premise for this refusal.

When media are using them as information providers, it is synonymous to asking readers to take an extra step to trust the credibility of the information. According to Smith (2007), the impact of using anonymous sources can be huge, and it spreads beyond readers of a particular article, especially when it involves media with huge readership and circulation. Even though editors agree that anonymous sourcing damages the credibility of news reporting, readers give similar credibility ratings to named and unnamed versions of a whistle-blowing story. Anonymous sources have provided some of the most significant contributions to the field of journalism, but they have embarrassed the print media too. As mentioned by Pitts (2005) when anonymous sources are handled carefully and properly, they may lead to interesting, effective and accurate news reporting, leaving news credibility intact.

SOURCE ATTRIBUTION TO NEWS CREDIBILITY

With the thought that reporters need various types of sources to enhance their writings of news, there in develops the need for a solid reliable relationship. To the extent that this development of the relationship becomes a two-way dependable relationship, which amounts to the ‘piggyback’ concept as, mentioned earlier. Journalists develop sources

among the people whom they contact regularly. Reporters find people who have information and are willing to talk with them about it. Reporters find out whom they can trust amongst their sources and once they find reliable and trustworthy sources, they develop a bond, which serves them well in receiving vital information to the growth of news. Reporters develop sources among the people whom they regularly contact. Reporters find people who have information and are willing to talk with them about it. In terms of crime reporters and sources, it can be said that crime reporters rely on the police rather than criminals for the vast majority of their information. In the context of crime news, sources are those that come primarily from journalists' everyday dealings with the police (Wright 2007; Fishman 1981; Sherizen 1978). In fact researchers Schesinger, Tumber and Murdock (1991:413) found that police officials are among the most frequently cited sources in crime news.

Relationships involving news organisations and policing agencies allow the collection of news about common crime (Sacco 1995). Their increasing contact with the police and the cultivation of these personal contacts ensure not just the survival of the crime reporter, but ensure that the information flow as sources are the primary gatekeepers of information and the selection of appropriate sources is a central concern for the reporter as this determines the quality of the accounts. Source reporter relationship is cultivated over time while working on the same case. The crime reporter invests considerable amount of time to ensure long-term gains. This relationship between police and crime reporters are what is called a symbiotic relationship. However, does this relationship determine news credibility? Some news organisations have specific rules. Naming the source is part of telling the whole truth that is known to journalists. It confirms that the reporter gleaned information from specific person. It makes the flow of information to the public more direct.

There are scholars who have defined credibility by what audiences consider when assessing the believability of a source (Berlo et.al 1969; Singletary 1976; Graziano & McGrath 1986). In determining source and news credibility Berlo et al. 1969:574) found that participants judged source credibility mainly by three criteria's which is safety, qualification and dynamism. Singletary (1969) meanwhile found six elements of a credible source through factor analysis, which are knowledge, attraction, trustworthiness, articulation, lack of hostility and stability. While Graziano and McGrath (1986) considered fairness, bias, completeness of statement, accuracy, treatment of others privacy, extent to which the source watches out for the public's interest, separation of fact from opinion, trustworthiness and profit motive as some of the criteria for credibility of sources. Journalists establish factuality using

credible sources that make statements that can be quoted as fact without further investigation. The journalist must establish the fact value of a story on the basis of a source's face value as a normative witness to events.

In the readers' mind, credibility is defined as accuracy, fairness and balance. In the media industry, a credible person is an expert and trustworthy. Credibility is context-dependant and can change from day to day, from story to story and often depends on who is being questioned. Although there has been much discussion on the misuse or overuse of anonymous sources, Schlesinger (2008) mentions that anonymous sources are exceptional cases even though it is credible information from a trusted source with direct knowledge of the situation, but in the end it's what the readers think because readers are the ultimate judge of journalist credibility.

Nevertheless, defenders say that without the sources, many important stories will never be told (Shepard 1994). It is also claimed that occasional granting of anonymity appears to continue to be acceptable practice in investigative reporting, especially in stories on government wrongdoing. Media outlets allowing reporters to protect sources' identities are plentiful, but a fraction of editors entirely ban the use of anonymous sources, claiming they lack reliability and that readers will lose trust in publications if the sources are being used. However, if anonymous sources are used properly, they are important for breaking stories and are also tools towards effective and accurate reporting. Some editors even say that good stories would be missed if there were a prohibition on anonymous sources. Hence, it is strongly believed that anonymous sources still play an integral part in news reporting. Some editors acknowledge that shunning anonymous sources caused them to miss stories that they consider important (Neuharth 2004). Nevertheless, there is a very important issue for practicing journalists, which is the balancing act. There is a great need to include both anonymous sources as well as named sources as readers would be able to get a full idea of what is going on and know more.

Anonymous sources are bound to stay as far as journalism is concerned, and journalists' role is to present readers with correct information that they need. Journalists should also set their goal of using anonymous sources only when they are completely necessary, and when there are no other ways to get the story. The most important thing when using anonymous sources is to make sure that they are trustworthy, reliable and in a position to provide accurate information that can serve the interest of the public. Jenkins (2008) claimed that newspapers did not use anonymous sources, except in the most limited circumstances, and only when the circumstance meets certain rules set by the news organisations. On the other hand, the media occasionally needs to use anonymous sources to get stories that need to

be told, and it is understandable that sources are not willing to be quoted by name in some explosive stories. This is when the media should behave responsibly and confirm the accuracy of the story. Failing to do so, the information provided by anonymous sources should not be published at all, unless the initial sources are willing to find more sources for journalists with supporting evidence to their claims (Pitts 2005).

Jenkins (2008) also identified that only when a reporter and at least one editor know the identity of the source, as well as understands the source's reasons for requiring anonymity, only then can they agree to keep the name out of the story. Also, an anonymous source cannot be the only source in news reporting. Any information from an anonymous source must be confirmed by someone willing to attach his or her name to that information. However, though uncomfortable with the use of anonymous sources at times, media professionals do recognise that in very limited cases, the use of anonymous sources allows reporters to report news that might not otherwise be reported. Although the use of anonymous sources in news reporting is controversial, a research done by Smith (2007) found that unnamed sources in general do not influence readers' perception on news credibility and believability. It also indicates that readers are equally satisfied with the credibility of a story whether it has name or unnamed sources. According to Associated Press (2008), transparency is critical to its credibility with the public and its subscribers. Whenever possible, it pursues information on the record as anonymous sources will undermine its credibility and affect the public's confidence in it. Transparency here reflects on the background of the source in terms of his or her credibility and function in the news story and determines the expertise to the information provided.

ANALYSIS OF TWO CASES FROM MALAYSIAN STUDY

As mentioned earlier crime reporters rely on the police rather than criminals for the vast majority of their information. Sources are primary gatekeepers of information and selection of appropriate sources is a central concern of the journalist as this determines the quality of the accounts.

For the purpose of the discussion two high profile criminal cases of Noritta Samsuddin (SC) and Razak Baginda (SC) are analysed. In December 2003, a young successful and beautiful 22 year old Malay woman, who was an account executive at a construction company and believed to be a part time model was found naked, strangled with her legs and hands bound with a bra and wires, mouth gagged with a piece of cloth and the post mortem revealed

that she had sex and had also been sodomized before she died. News reports also mentioned that she had multiple partners. The element of sex infused with crime led the story to be sensationalised and created interest amongst the readers. The second case which occurred in November 2006 and which held public scrutiny and interest was about a Mongolian model who was murdered and her body was blown up with C4 explosives. The case garnered extra attention as it was linked to the national political analyst Razak Baginda and policemen from the Malaysian police force.

In both stories on Noritta Samsuddin (SC) and Razak Baginda (SC), taken during crime reporting until suspects are charged in courts it was found that in 58 (SC) and 65 (SC) number of stories analysed, of which the number of sources used were 67 (SC) and 59(SC) the number of anonymous sources used were 40 percent (SC) and 42 percent (SC). Stories analysed showed that the police were relevantly referred to confirm the details of the case. It was found that all stories were confirmed or comments were given by high-ranking police officers. Most times official sources confirmed the case or the issue at hand.

In Noritta Samsuddin's case they were:

City CID Chief Senior Asst Comm II Kamaruddin Mat Desa (The Star 7 December. 2003)

Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim (translated as Chief Minister Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim) (The Star 14 December. 2003)

Pengarah Jabatan Sisatan Jenayah Bukit Aman, Datuk Salleh Mat Som (Utusan Malaysia 9 December 2003)

While in Razak Baginda's case they were:

Selangor police chief Deputy Commissioner Datuk Ismail Omar confirmed that police had recovered the remains... (The Star 7 November. 2006);

Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Musa Hassan (Sin Chew Daily 7 November 2006);

Menteri Luar, Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar (Utusan Malaysia 15 November 2006 (translated as Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar);

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi (The Star 10 Nov. 2006)

Other named sources which were used to ensure validity to the information includes:

'Ketua Jabatan Siasatan Jenayah Kuala Lumpur Senior Asisten Komisioner II Kamaruddin Mat Desa' (Utusan Malaysia 6 December 2003) (translated as City CID chief Senior Asst Comm II Kamaruddin Mat Desa)

Brickfields Deputy OCPD Supt Mohd Kuzi Minai (Sin Chew Daily 5 December 2003)

Pengaruh Siasatan Jenayah Bukit Aman, Datuk Christopher Wan Soo Kee (Utusan Malaysia 8 November 2006) (translated as Bukit Aman CID Director Datuk Christopher Wan Soo Kee)

In this case source transparency was clearly used where it deals with how much detail is provided about a source's identity (Carpenter et al. 2004). Transparency here applies to sources that have some information provided about their background. In this case it is the Prime Minister, Chief Minister or Inspector General of Police or Chief Inspector. As much as named sources were used to ensure reliability of the stories published, it was also found that there was a large amount of usage of anonymous sources where it prevents the readers from being able to evaluate a source's qualification.

The anonymous sources were referred to among others as: In Noritta Samsuddin's case:

'Salah seorang kenalannya yang enggan dikenali' (Utusan Malaysia 8 December 2003) (translated as an acquaintance who declined to be named);

Jurucakap makmal forensik HKL, (Utusan Malaysia 11 December 2003) (translated as Hospital Kuala Lumpur forensic lab spokesman)

'A family member who did not wish to be named' (Sin Chew Daily 8 December 2003),

In Razak Baginda's case:

'a former Universiti Kebangsaan Lecturer'... (Star 9 November 2006).

'The Mongolia Embassy in Bangkok' or 'An embassy official'... (The Star 8 November 2006)

'Sumber polis' (Utusan Malaysia 11 Nov. 2006) (Translated as police source)

It is clear that most of the sources used in both stories and in all three newspapers were a combination of official sources as well as anonymous sources. Official sources were transparent in that readers were given information on the identities of the source in terms of name and position and it can be seen that most of the official sources were police officers whose reference to rank ensures information from them are credible and with no hint of a doubt in the readers' mind.

It is also clear that there is a wide range of anonymous sources used to help journalists in gathering information and building the news story but they (the anonymous source) were not referred to as a proverbial source of the story. The researcher found that the use of these types of sources were used especially in confirming a minor detail, but the use did not alter or question believability of the information put forth. Although the number of anonymous sources used are less than a half of the amount of sources

used, nevertheless the fact that some important information were given to a journalist by an anonymous source is in itself debatable and needs much thought to the need for such approach as it is believed that some pressmen who opposed to anonymous sources argue that the use of anonymous sources undermines the credibility of the news (Neuharth 2004). Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the Malaysian press does not have a written code, which prevents journalists from attributing their stories to an anonymous source.

In the secondary findings (Chan 2009) it was found in an interview with five pressmen (Phua, Yin, Won, Tay, & Liew from four different local dailies (named A, B, C and D) all agreed that the reason for sources being anonymous apart from safety reasons is the fact that ... 'They do not want to assume responsibility or get in trouble when information given by them turns to be untrue'.

This is to protect themselves from any legal actions once their statements are found to be incorrect. They can also be spared of any defamatory suits too. They also agreed that anonymous sources are much needed when it is a high profile or controversial case. One of the informants, Won, claimed that the anonymous sources are needed because they can provide information on sensitive issues so that newspapers can publish it quickly. Her statement is supported by Phua and Yin, both of whom are senior reporters with between 10-13 years of experience in editorial, at the time of interview, who consider anonymous sources as an outlet for immediate information so the media do not have to wait for the official announcements which are frequently released later ... 'Mainstream newspapers are depending on them to get sensitive, exclusive and in-depth information immediately, as waiting for official information will cost us a lot of time.'

When it comes to the importance of anonymous sources, all informants unanimously agree that they are important as the accuracy of information provided by them is high ... 'They are important in a sense that how much they can contribute to our news values. If the information is accurate and of great impact, then it is important while news with little relevance to readers is not so important...' mentions Tay who is from newspaper B and has 4 years editorial experience

In terms of the importance of using anonymous source it was found that they are an integral part of news and as Yin mentions ... 'if they are the only source for news, then they are the primary source...' All of them agree that anonymous sources are as important as the accuracy of information provided by them is high. All but one informant (Liew from newspaper D with three years experience) agreed that the relationship between media practitioners and anonymous sources is a two-way relationship. Firstly they come forward to the media and

offer information voluntarily and secondly, the media practitioners actively seek information from them because they have knowledge about certain issues and are essential for media to uncover the truth with further verifications.

In terms of news credibility, it was found that all informants agree that the use of anonymous sources will affect news credibility, but agree that it is not high. According to them, every newspaper must professionally ascertain the credibility of the sources including background checks and taking the public into consideration before using and publishing the information to avoid misleading readers with the article ... 'Without any credible sources, the news content is rarely true'.

Yin meanwhile mentions that ... 'we rarely get reader feedback on the use of anonymous sources, nor do we frequently use them, meaning the use of them is acceptable without jeopardising news credibility...' All informants also agreed that revealing the identities of the source could greatly improve news credibility. This is because where there is identity then there is evidence.

According to all informants, anonymous sources are an important asset to news publications and chances are they will never be banned in the future as they play a vital role as informants in news production. Furthermore, the sources will not be held accountable because they blanket themselves behind anonymity and the media are obliged to protect their sources, unless being ordered by the courts to reveal them. However, using these sources is sometimes encouraged because of the media's need for exclusivity and the need to compete for circulation and readership.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, sources are the primary gatekeepers of information. The selection of appropriate sources is a central concern of the journalist as this determines the quality of the accounts. Nevertheless, the use of anonymous sources is controversial, yet inevitable in major media such as newspapers. They are important sources for newspapers because they can provide information for quick publishing, even before the official announcements made by the concerned parties. Besides, news organisations may gain competitive advantage over their rivals with interesting, accurate and more in-depth reporting with the information provided by anonymous people. If used carefully, anonymous sources will certainly not hurt the credibility of newspapers. If they are used without caution, the consequences may prove disastrous.

The use of anonymous sources attracts mixed reactions too. Judging from their constant use in publications, it can be perceived that using them is acceptable from the perspective of readers, as well as media professionals.

However, anonymity also makes it more difficult for readers to believe the news content, as they cannot obtain clarifications from anonymous sources when a doubt regarding the accuracy of news is raised. Based on the outcome of research, anonymous sources have long been important informants to leading newspapers in Malaysia, especially when there are issues concerning controversies like party elections. They can be just about anyone at any levels of the society, whose identities are either known or unknown to media professionals. Even though they are essential according to media professionals, their use is generally not encouraged because they hide behind anonymity. If they reveal their identities, they can greatly help to improve the credibility of news reporting as the people can get verification from the sources in case they doubt the credibility of news. Hence, before anonymous people become sources of publications, media must always attempt to persuade them to have their names published in newspapers.

However, due to some reasons like personal safety and the sources' wish to stay in jobs, they decline to expose themselves to the public eye. This is understandable as no one likes to be harmed by exposing themselves to the public. However, media should be careful not to be used by unscrupulous parties who provide information to them. Furthermore, the fear of providing incorrect information also prevents the sources to have their real identities in newspapers. They do not want to get into troubles like being tangled in court battles. Media professionals should be aware of these people because they may provide information that they are unsure of. Anonymous sources are vital to publications such that no media professionals think they will be banned in the future. Moreover, the high percentage of accuracy in information given makes them an integral part of journalism.

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