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Testing normative journalism models in the United States and Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Journalism is a vital part of public opinion formation in democratic countries. While ample studies exist in developed nations such as the United States, not much is known on developing nations such as Malaysia. Therefore, this study aims to compare the extent to which the normative models of journalism materialise in news reports from the United States and Malaysia. Using the six normative models of journalism (watchdog, loyal facilitator, interventionist, service, civic, and infotainment) as a theoretical framework, a quantitative content analysis of elite and popular newspapers from the United States and Malaysia was conducted. Results from our analyses show that the watchdog, interventionist, and civic models were more present in the U.S. newspapers compared to the Malaysian newspapers. On the other hand, the loyal facilitator and the service models were more present in the Malaysian newspapers compared to those from the United States. Consistent predictors for the normative models of journalism were the newspapers' country of origin, the number of years that a newspaper has been in existence, and the newspapers' circulation numbers. In essence, the normative models of journalism were present in both the United States and Malaysia, but to different extents.

Keywords: *journalism normative models, newspapers, content analysis, United States, Malaysia*

INTRODUCTION

In principle, there are as many normative theories of journalism as there are political systems (Benson, 2010). The political, religious, economic and cultural environments shape the way journalistic norms are conceived, practiced and interpreted. For example, in the United States (U.S.), normative theories were pushed after World War II and the Commission on Freedom of the Press 1947 put in a report that democracy depends on free flow of information and diversity of viewpoints (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2016, p. 3). In other words, the normative suggestions were closely tied to practical performances of the press: News stories should represent a diversity of viewpoints and that information can be gathered freely, that is without any governmental regulations or input on what journalists should report on. While this type of watchdog model oftentimes is celebrated as the global approach to journalism in more transitional democracies, it does not offer the response to practice that may sustain a stable political situation in certain countries that have undergone colonialism and are thus more exposed to external disruption (Waisbord, 2013). Mehra (1989, p.3, as cited in Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018) writes that “unlike the individualistic, democratic, egalitarian and liberal tradition of Western political theory, some societies value their consensual and communal traditions with their emphasis on duties and obligations to the collective and social harmony” (p. 3). Previous research has also shown significant differences between developed and developing countries in terms of value depiction in news reports due to diverse journalism practices (Waheed, Schuck, Neijens, & de Vreese, 2013).

To understand the limitations of the watchdog model, Malaysia offers an interesting country of comparison to understand whether certain political circumstances indeed produce different normative and practical goals of journalistic practice from what has been documented in mostly Western literature on journalistic roles and professionalism. Malaysia is a Southeast Asian multi-ethnic country with a long history of colonialism that was ruled by the same political party since 1959 till 2018. In order to maintain status quo and to ensure that the country progresses towards modernisation, the media was urged to practise development journalism.

The normative role performances of journalists are dependent on political and media systems. For example, in the United States, journalists are expected to work free of influences from the government as from a liberal media-system perspective, journalism has been conventionally expected to remain autonomous from business, political parties, and publishers (Esser & Umbricht, 2013). On the other hand, in Malaysia, the overarching expectations are to preserve social harmony that has historically been studied under the assumption of an ideal of development journalism to promote nation-building (Hanitzsch, Hanusch, & Lauerer, 2016; Hanitzsch et al., 2011).

To assess the state of press performance in regard to normative theories, this study relates normative theories in the United States and Malaysia to its actual performance in the press. In order to maintain peace and harmony among Malaysia’s multi-ethnic and multi-religion society, Malaysia’s Constitution provides its citizen with “the right to freedom of speech and expression” but allows for limitations on this right (Azlan, Rahim, Basri, & Hasim, 2012). The limitation states that any view or attempt that can allegedly harm the harmony of multi-ethnic relationships and the national stability must be eradicated to protect the citizens (Baharin, Waheed, & Hellmueller, 2017). This is also applied to the media, where journalism is made responsible to strengthen the relationships between ethnicities and shape a conducive political culture.

Since there exists evidence for alternative roles in non-Western contexts (Standaert, Hanitzsch, & Dedonder, 2019), this study offers an important contribution in how to

theorise the manifestation of those alternative roles based on the gatekeeping theory. The idea is that journalists adopt meaning systems from their cultural environment (Tameling & Broersma, 2013). The social-system level contextualises the meaning journalists give to certain roles and practices (Hanitzsch et al., 2011). In addition to the ideals and normative theories of the press, journalists work within a complex configuration of newsroom influences, routines and deadlines as well as influences from sources, social institutions and at some points, the government. Normative criteria do not always inform empirical practice but are important guidelines in a press system. We propose that normative journalistic roles on the social system level may impact the performance of journalistic roles on the organisational level (Mellado & Van Dalen, 2014), that is, journalistic roles can be assessed through their performances in the stories they write. Essentially, comparing journalistic performance between the United States and Malaysia offers important insights into the evolution of news journalism in non-Western systems juxtaposed against Western expectations as expressed by the U.S. media system. Since non-Western journalism contexts are often studied by applying Western measurements, important points are raised where comparison fall short because of the assumption that Western assumptions are indeed helpful in contributing to journalistic professionalism in non-Western contexts.

JOURNALISTIC ROLES AND RELATIONSHIP TO GOVERNMENT

It is a common understanding that the role of journalists is to gather information and present them through writing as an effort to keep citizens informed about the society in which they live in. In more academic terms, journalists' roles can be conceptualised as a set of ideas practised by journalists that legitimises their role in society, which brings meaning to their work (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018). Several scholars have indicated that the journalists' professional roles can be approached from several different perspectives (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018; Mellado & Van Dalen, 2014). This includes, but is not limited, to the presence and level of journalistic voice, the relationship that journalists have with authority figures, and the method in how journalists approach the audience. Since it is evident that there are several ways to conceptualise journalistic roles, Mellado (2015) distinguishes six dimensions/journalistic models that fall within three main domains for journalistic roles. The three main domains are the presence of journalistic voice, power relations, and audience approach. The interventionist model falls under the presence of journalistic voice domain. The watchdog and loyal facilitator models fall under the power relations domain. The service, infotainment, and civic models fall under the audience approach domain. While all these domains are important and may be present in all countries around the globe, some models can possibly be more prominent in certain countries compared to others. This is because journalists are members of the news agency or organisation that they work for which must submit to the country's economic or political contexts (Pfetsch, 2012). As a result, they must comply with procedures, constraints, and societal influences that effect journalistic roles (Hanitzsch et al., 2011).

While we will discuss all six normative models of journalism, the bulk of this study focuses on the power relations domain (i.e., the watchdog and loyal facilitator model). This domain explains the relationship between the journalists and authoritative bodies and/or figures in a country. On one hand, some journalists may perceive that their role is to monitor those with authority and denounce their wrongdoings (Mellado, 2015). Those with authority can refer to the government, corporations and institutions. This perception is akin to the watchdog model. It is believed to be the role of journalists in many mature democratic countries such as the United States.

On the other hand, some journalists may perceive that their role is to be a loyal spokesperson for authoritative bodies and/or figures in a country. They do so by placing importance and portraying only positive images of them. This role perception is akin to the loyal facilitator model that can be linked to the practice of development journalism. Development journalism is deemed to be a vital practice in many developing and/or budding democracies in Asia. According to George and Venkiteswaran (2019), the majority of the region's media functions in a semi-free political environment which affects journalism practices. This includes India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand. Additionally, research has also shown that the practice of journalism is dictated by country-level cultural traits in the neighbouring country of the Philippines (Bernardo, Lechuga, & Esguerra, 2019). This has caused a dilemma among journalists as they have to deal with clashing values from time to time.

The approaches towards development journalism may differ from one country to another. To an extent, its implementation is contextual as citizens of different countries have distinct needs (Chattopadhyay, 2019). It has also been noted that with this practice, citizens are better informed and focused on the government's policies and plans that positively impact their quality of life.

Watchdog journalism in the United States

"Western" or developed countries have been said to practise the watchdog model of journalism (Hanitzsch et al. 2011). The United States is a country that falls within this category and the application of this journalistic model has been deemed to be normative practice for decades. Investigative reporting became prominent among journalists during turbulent political times (e.g., Vietnam war and Watergate scandal) in the 1960s (Feldstein, 2006). The practice of this model of journalism is an indicator of progress and professionalism. Bennet and Serrin (2005) define the watchdog model as the role of journalists to scrutinise institutions with power by timely reporting on issues of importance to the public. Journalistic roles that are similar to the watchdog model are known to make visible hidden facts by authoritative figures (Hellmueller & Mellado, 2016). Under this model, journalists' primary role includes to question, criticise or accuse the *de facto* power. It seems as if there is a conflict between journalists and those in authority. As a consequence, journalists are required to ask people of authority, such as leaders in the government, critical questions that the general public do not have the opportunity to ask themselves. According to Willnat and Weaver (2014), most U.S. journalists still perceive their role as a government watchdog. However, in more recent times, the news coverage in the United States has been found to be shifting from the watchdog model to the civic oriented model. Despite this, the watchdog model still prevails in the coverage of hard news such as politics (Hellmueller, Mellado, Blumell, & Huemmer, 2016).

Development journalism in Malaysia

Malaysia is one of the many countries that practises development journalism (Baharin et al., 2017). This practice became popular within the region in the 1960s (Ali, 1996). The concept of development journalism posits that journalists are partners of those in the government and are nation-builders. They aid government's development efforts while preserving social harmony and strengthening national unity (Xu, 2005; Ramaprasad & Kelly, 2003).

Malaysia is a multi-racial and multi-religious country. In order to maintain peace and harmony in a diverse society, freedom of speech and expression is allowed in Malaysia's constitution with limitations to this right (Azlan et al., 2012). Malaysia's fourth Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad championed the practice of development journalism in

order to strengthen the relationships between the ethnicities as well as to maintain peace and harmony (Anuar, 2005).

The Malaysian government has also been known to control the media through ownership. To keep the media in check, there are several legislations that had to be observed by the media companies such as the Printing Press and Publications Act (PPPA) of 1984, the Sedition Act of 1948 and the Official Secret Act (OSA) (Mustafa, 2014). The underlying motivation of development journalism has been held firmly among Malaysian journalists for a very long time and their work is often seen as guided by fear. For instance, in the reporting of controversial issues, journalists are found to be mindful of their writing in order to stay clear from lawsuits, suspensions, and arrests due to the enforcement of the existing legislations (Murudi, 2019).

Equating values such as support for government and nation-building endeavours to the loyal facilitator model, this practice of journalism essentially promotes submissiveness, dependence, and protection towards those in power (Mellado et al., 2017). The employment of development journalism has previously caused Malaysia's press freedom scores to be negatively affected (Puddington & Roylance, 2016). Development journalism has been criticised for hindering development and has created a modern version of a traditional authoritarian approach (Wong, 2004). Despite this, its practice is deemed necessary. This is evident when the United Nations Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2007) recommended including Development Journalism as an elective course in journalism programmes for emerging democracies (Skjerdal, 2011).

IDEALS AND PRACTICES OF JOURNALISM

There are normative roles that journalists adhere to in each country. These roles refer to what is thought to be desirable for journalists to think or do in a certain context (Mellado et al., 2017). For instance, in the United States, journalists are expected to adhere to the values in the watchdog model (questioning, critiquing, and denouncing those in the position of power). In Malaysia, the normative role of journalists is to practice development journalism, which is synonymous to the loyal facilitator model (support institutional activities, promote national or regional policies, etc.).

To date, not much is known on the differences that exist between the United States, a democratic country that is known to practise watchdog journalism and Malaysia, a much younger democratic country that practises development journalism. Considering the different political practices and media systems, we pose the following hypotheses:

H1: The watchdog role performance is significantly more pronounced in news articles from the United States compared to those from Malaysia.

H2: The development journalism role performance is significantly more pronounced in news articles from Malaysia compared to those from the United States.

Due to previous literature on the nature of journalism in the United States and Malaysia, we are able to predict the differences for the power relations domain. However, there has yet been a study that tests the differences between the United States and Malaysia for the journalistic voice (interventionist model) and (service, infotainment, and civic models) audience approach domain. According to Mellado and Van Dalen (2014), these roles can be defined as follows. The interventionist model refers to the distance between the journalist and facts. This means that the more the journalist includes his/her opinion,

interpretation and values, the more he/she is practicing the interventionist model of journalism. The service model refers to journalism that treats the public as clients. In this model, the journalist focuses on news that are interesting for the public such as consumer advice. The infotainment model treats the public as spectators. They report on scandals or sensational news. Finally, the civic model refers to the education of the public on complex and controversial topics.

To explore the similarities and/or differences between the United States and Malaysia for these domains, we therefore pose the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the differences between the U.S. and Malaysian news reports for the presence of journalistic voice?

RQ2: What are the differences between the U.S. and Malaysian news reports for the presence of audience approach?

METHOD

To achieve the aim of this study, a content analysis of news stories published under the national desk was conducted.

Sampling

Despite the prevalence of other media formats, newspapers still tend to set the political agenda, assign more financial and human resources to the coverage of a wider range of news content, and provide more nuanced coverage of controversial issues (Skovsgaard & Van Dalen, 2013). The U.S. sample for this study consisted of *USA Today*, *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Wall Street Journal*. Criteria for choosing the newspapers were audience size and reach, ownership, and media orientation. The newspapers chosen for the United States are among the top 10 highest circulations in the country. We sampled three up-market news outlets (*New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *Washington Post*) as well as two mass-market news outlets (*Los Angeles Times* and *USA Today*).

The Malaysia sample for this study consisted of *Berita Harian*, *Harian Metro*, the *New Straits Times*, and the *Sun*. These newspapers were chosen because they are major publications in Malaysia. *Berita Harian* and *Harian Metro* publishes in Malay, while *New Straits Times* and *The Sun* publishes in English. *Berita Harian* and *New Straits Times* are categorised as elite newspapers, while *Harian metro* and *The Sun* are popular tabloids. The descriptive information for the samples from both countries are as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Samples from United States and Malaysia

Country	Newspapers	News articles (n)
United States (n=1421)	<i>USA Today</i>	193
	<i>Washington Post</i>	364
	<i>New York Times</i>	373
	<i>Los Angeles Times</i>	227
	<i>Wall Street Journal</i>	264
Malaysia (n=808)	<i>Berita Harian</i>	291
	<i>Harian Metro</i>	162
	<i>New Straits Times</i>	267
	<i>The Sun</i>	88
Total (N)		2229

Applying the constructed week sampling method (Riffe, Charles, & Stephen, 1993), news articles were selected for each newspaper between 2012 and 2013. Based on this method, there was a representation of news articles for every day of the week, every week in a month and every month in a year. If the publication of a certain newspaper for a particular day was not retrievable, the publication for the following day was sampled instead. This method of sampling ensures that a variation of content is covered while avoiding the possibility and/or tendency of covering certain types of topics only. Considering that the focus of this study is to test the normative journalistic role model between the United States and Malaysia, covering a wider range of topics ensures the representativeness of the journalism practice for each country. The focus of this study is on national news publication because they best represent the individual countries under study. Following this, publications in all other newspaper sections were not included.

Research instrument

The codebook was originally written in English. The researchers discussed the contents of the codebook to ensure that they would be applicable in both countries. While the original codebook (in English) did not pose a problem for coding to the Malaysian researchers (since English is a second language that is widely spoken in Malaysia), nevertheless, the codebook was translated to the Malay language and back translated to minimise discrepancies in meaning. The translated codebook was especially useful in coding the news that were published in the Malay language.

The codebook consisted of four main sections. The first section was designed to extract general information from the news stories such as coder ID, newspaper, date, journalists' names, story type, etc. The second section was designed to extract the story characteristics, namely topic of news article and geographic focus. The third section was to gauge information on sources and reporting methods. The final section analysed the models of professional role performance and reporting strategies taken by the individual countries. In the case of this study, the focus was primarily on the watchdog and loyal facilitator models. It is important to note at this juncture that the loyal facilitator model was used as a representation of development journalism in this study. These models were coded as 0 or 1 with 0 representing not present, and 1 representing present. The descriptive results for the content analysis are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive results of content analysis

	USA (N = 1421)		Malaysia (N = 808)	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Newspaper Orientation				
Popular newspaper	421	29.6	250	30.9
Elite newspaper	1000	70.4	558	69.1
Story Type				
Brief	286	20.1	36	4.5
Article	896	63.1	771	95.4
Feature/Chronicle	165	11.6	0	0
Reportage	73	5.1	0	0
Item Topic				
Government/Legislatures	227	16	119	14.7
Campaigns/Elections/Politics	212	14.9	152	18.8
Police & crime	185	13	85	10.5
Court	91	6.4	21	2.6

Table 2. (con't)

	USA (N = 1421)		Malaysia (N = 808)	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Defence/Military/National Security	44	3.1	21	2.6
Economy & business	114	8	48	5.9
Education	49	3.5	60	7.4
Energy, environment and climate	48	3.4	10	1.2
Transportation	19	1.3	12	1.5
Housing/Infrastructure/Public work	10	0.7	32	4
Accidents & natural disasters	93	6.5	51	6.3
Health	93	6.5	24	3
Religion & churches	17	1.2	21	2
Human rights	11	0.8	4	0.5
Demonstrations & protests	9	0.6	13	1.6
Social problems	50	3.5	13	1.6
Others	148	10.4	122	15.1

Intercoder reliability

In order to assess the coding reliability, coder training was first conducted, followed by an intercoder reliability test. For the United States, five coders were trained over a span of two months. After three training sessions, the third set of intercoder reliability testing yielded acceptable reliability scores (Krippendorff's α) ranging from 0.71 to 0.85 for six of the journalism models. For Malaysia, two coders were hired and trained for 15 days. Intercoder reliability was calculated using Krippendorff's α . The reliability scores ranged from 0.60 to 0.83 for all six of the journalism models.

RESULTS

Watchdog role performance

H1 predicted that the watchdog role performance is significantly more pronounced in news reports from the United States compared to those from Malaysia. Results from an ANOVA showed that the presence of this journalism model was significantly more pronounced in the United States ($M = .91$, $SD = .11$) compared to Malaysia ($M = .05$, $SD = .01$) $F(1, 2226) = 90.21$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .04$. We next conducted a stepwise regression to test if there were other variables that would function as a predictor for the role performance of the watchdog model. Results showed that the newspapers' country of origin was the strongest predictor $B = .10$ ($SE = .01$), $p < .001$ followed by the number of years a newspaper has been in existence $B = -.007$ ($SE = .001$), $p < .01$, and the newspapers' number of circulation $B = -.003$ ($SE = .000$), $p < .001$, $R^2 = .08$. These results support *H1*.

Loyal facilitator role performance

H2 predicted that the loyal facilitator role performance is significantly more pronounced in news reports from Malaysia compared to those from the United States. Results from an ANOVA indeed showed that the presence of this journalism model was more pronounced in Malaysian news reports ($M = .11$, $SD = .13$) compared to those from the United States ($M = .01$, $SD = .04$), $F(1, 2226) = 747.95$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .25$. The following stepwise regression showed that the newspapers' country of origin was the strongest predictor $B = -.10$ ($SE = .01$), $p < .001$ followed by the newspapers' number of circulation $B = .001$ ($SE = .00$), $p < .05$, $R^2 = -.25$. These results support *H2*.

Journalistic voice domain

RQ1 inquired on the differences between the U.S. and Malaysian newspapers for the presence of journalistic voice. The journalistic voice role performance consists of the interventionist role performance model. Results from an ANOVA showed that the presence of this journalism model was more pronounced in the U.S. news reports ($M = .32$, $SD = .19$) compared to those from Malaysia ($M = .15$, $SD = .19$), $F(1, 2226) = 404.58$, $p < .00$, partial $\eta^2 = .15$. To test for other predictors for this model, a stepwise regression was conducted. It was found that the newspapers' country of origin was the strongest predictor $B = .22$ ($SE = .01$), $p < .001$ followed by the newspapers' orientation (popular or elite) $B = .04$ ($SE = .01$), $p < .001$ and the number of years that a newspaper has been in existence $B = -.02$ ($SE = .00$), $p < .001$, $R^2 = .20$.

Audience approach domain

RQ2 inquired on the differences between the U.S. and Malaysian newspapers for the audience approach domain. This domain consists of the service, infotainment, and civic models. For the service model, results from an ANOVA shows that its presence was significantly higher in the Malaysian news reports ($M = .04$, $SD = .11$) compared to those from the United States ($M = .02$, $SD = .07$), $F(1, 2226) = 30.77$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .04$. Results from a stepwise regression for this model showed that the number of years the newspapers' have been in existence and their circulation numbers were both stronger predictors $B = .00$ ($SE = .00$), $p < .001$ compared to the newspapers' country of origin $B = -.04$ ($SE = .01$), $p < .001$, $R^2 = .02$.

For the infotainment model, results from an ANOVA showed that there was no significant difference between the United States and Malaysia. A follow-up stepwise regression also showed that there were no significant predictors for this journalism model.

Finally, for the civic model, results from an ANOVA showed that its presence was significantly higher in the U.S. news reports ($M = .12$, $SD = .15$) compared to those from Malaysia ($M = .08$, $SD = .15$), $F(1, 2226) = 29.09$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$. Results from a stepwise regression showed that for this model, the newspapers' country of origin was the strongest predictor $B = .10$ ($SE = .11$), $p < .001$, followed by the number of years a newspaper has been in existence, and the number of circulation $B = .00$ ($SE = .00$), $p < .001$, $R^2 = .05$.

The ANOVA results that found the differences between the United States and Malaysia for all the six journalism models are as shown in Table 3 and the stepwise regression that shows the variables tested as predictors for each journalism model is shown in Tables 4–6.

Table 3. Differences between the United States and Malaysia for the six journalism performance models

Dimensions	USA <i>M(SD)</i>	Malaysia <i>M(SD)</i>	<i>F</i>	Partial η^2
Presence of Journalistic Voice				
Interventionist	.32(.19)	.15(.19)	404.58***	.15
Power Relations				
Watchdog	.91(.11)	.05(.01)	90.21***	.04
Loyal facilitator	.01(.04)	.11(.13)	747.95***	.25
Audience Approach				
Service	.02(.07)	.04(.11)	30.77***	.04
Infotainment	.72(.13)	.08(.14)	1.26	.00
Civic	.12(.15)	.08(.15)	29.09***	.01

Table 4. Stepwise regression for journalism models in the power relations domain and their predictors

Role Conception	Watchdog <i>B(SE)</i>	Loyal <i>B(SE)</i>
Constant	.07***(.01)	.11***(.00)
Country	.10***(.01)	-.11***(.01)
Newspaper Orientation		
Years in Existence	-.01***(.00)	
Circulation	-.00***(.00)	.00*(.00)
<i>R</i> ²	0.08	0.25

Table 5. Stepwise regression for the journalism model in the journalistic voice domain and its predictors

Role Conception	Interventionist <i>B(SE)</i>
Constant	.17***(.01)
Country	.22***(.01)
Years in Existence	-.02***(.00)
Circulation	
<i>R</i> ²	0.2

Table 6. Stepwise regression for journalism models in the audience approach domain and their predictors

Role Conception	Service <i>B(SE)</i>	Infotainment <i>B(SE)</i>	Civic <i>B(SE)</i>
Constant	.03***(.00)	.08***(.00)	.11***(.01)
Country	-.04***(.01)		.10***(.01)
Newspaper Orientation			
Years in Existence	.00**(.00)		-.01***(.00)
Circulation	.00**(.00)	0	-.01***(.00)
<i>R</i> ²	0.02	0	0.05

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study set out to test the extent to which the normative models of journalism materialised in news reports from the United States and Malaysia. In light of this aim, we discovered that the watchdog role performance was significantly more pronounced among journalists in the United States compared to Malaysia. This supports the work of previous scholars, which noted that the watchdog model is practiced by “Western” or developed countries (Willnat & Weaver, 2014; Hanitzsch et al, 2011). Correspondingly, we also found that the loyal facilitator model, which is akin to development journalism was more pronounced in the role performance of Malaysian journalists. This supports previous findings from the research of Wong (2004).

While the findings in this study generally agrees that Malaysia embraces the loyal facilitator model (and thus practises development journalism), nevertheless, it is also observable that the current government is becoming more accepting towards media

freedom, albeit at a slow pace. The comparison by applying a normative theory against an established democracy such as the United States could have possibly further amplified Malaysia's development journalism practice.

While we were able to predict the presence of the journalistic role performances from the power relations domain in Malaysia and the United States based on previous research, we were unable to do so for the journalistic voice and audience approach domains due to the lack of previous research particularly on journalism in Malaysia. Therefore, exploratory research questions were posed. It was found that the interventionist model (which is from the journalistic voice domain) was more present in the U.S. news reports compared to those from Malaysia. This can be explained by the fact that in the United States, journalists are allowed to question and criticise those in power. Hence, the chances of journalists to include their own opinion (voice) is higher compared to Malaysia that still generally practises restraint in news reporting. Despite its growing democracy, the fact remains that Malaysia is an ethnically and religiously diverse society where sensitivities of different groups are taken seriously. Hence, practising development journalism to a certain extent is still needed to strengthen the relationships between the ethnicities as well as to maintain peace and harmony (Anuar, 2005). Due to this, the voicing of journalists' opinion is not particularly championed in Malaysia.

For the audience approach domain, it was found that the service model was more present in Malaysian news reports compared to those from the United States. This means that Malaysian journalists are inclined to treat the public as clients and report on news that are interesting for the public such as consumer advice (Mellado, 2015). This was evident in the media handling of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, where the Malaysian media broadcasted press conferences live. According to Soon (2020), the Malaysian media wanted to transmit all relevant information about the pandemic directly to the public in real time. On that note, it can also be argued that media management during a pandemic is a separate phenomenon altogether and an exception to the practice of development journalism.

The civic model of journalism on the other hand, was found to be more present in the U.S. news reports compared to those from Malaysia. This means that the journalist in the United States focuses on educating the public on complex and controversial topics. In Malaysia, there are many issues that may be potentially viewed as controversial especially in relation to politics, ethnicity, and religion. Hence, educating the public through the discussion of controversial issues does not seem to be in line with efforts focused on maintaining peace and harmony through journalism.

In essence, this study supports the proposed hypotheses which shows that these normative journalistic roles are still in place despite the contestation of some scholars (Hellmueller et al., 2016). A probable explanation to this could be that while there are changes in journalistic role performances in certain countries, these changes are not occurring at a rapid state. This is especially evident in the case of Malaysia where there are signs to openness in news reporting. It should be noted however, that openness is perhaps reserved for specific instances that are not related to sensitive issues on politics, ethnicity, and religion.

Besides testing and affirming the presence of the normative journalistic models in the United States and Malaysia, this study reaffirms that the newspapers' country of origin was a prevalent predictor for five of the six journalistic models (excluding the infotainment model). This supports the argument of Tameling and Broersma (2013) who stated that journalists adopt meaning systems from their cultural environment. It is also in line with notion proposed by Hanitzsch et al. (2011) that the social-system level contextualises the meaning journalists give to certain roles and practices.

Another predictor that was found to be important was the number of years that a newspaper has been in existence. It is presumable that the organisational values or culture seeps into the news reporting styles of journalists over time. However, the results from this study differ from this assumption for three out of the six journalistic role performance models tested. There were significant negative relationships between the number of years a newspaper has been in existence with the watchdog, interventionist, and civic models. In other words, the longer a newspaper has been in existence, the less likely they are to embrace these models. Interestingly, these three models belong to different domains of the journalistic role performance domain, making it difficult to identify a clear pattern. On the other hand, the number of years a newspaper has been in existence showed a significant positive relationship with the service model. From and Kristensen (2018) posit that service journalism is a type of journalism that is positive and adopts a solution-oriented approach. In other words, the longer a newspaper has been in existence, the more likely it is to treat readers as clients and focuses on news that are interesting for the public such as consumer advice.

A third relevant predictor of normative roles discovered was the newspapers' number of circulations. Although this predictor was not as strong as the newspapers' country of origin and the number of years that a newspaper has been in existence, nevertheless it does play a significant role in the presence of the normative journalistic role performance. This study found that there was a significant negative relationship between the number of circulations with the watchdog, infotainment, and civic journalistic models. Instead, the wider circulated newspapers showed a significant positive relationship with the loyal facilitator and service model. As the journalistic models are from different domains of the of the journalistic role performance domain, once again it is difficult to identify a clear pattern for the number of circulations as a predictor. It does however warrant an interesting notion for future research.

Like any empirical studies, this too faced several challenges. First, unlike the United States, the news archives of Malaysian newspapers are not always accessible. It was imperative for the researchers to communicate directly with the newspapers in order to gain access. Second, there is always a level of subjectivity when it comes to coding in general and specifically, in identifying journalistic models. Third, some news reports coded in Malaysia were in the Malay language. Although a thorough translation and back translation of the codebook as well as coder training and retraining were conducted, we cannot ignore the possibility of the normative roles identification to have been affected by linguistic, cultural, or contextual factors. Fourth, there are other newspapers with higher number of circulations that were not selected in this study. In the case of Malaysia, The Star would have been a good newspaper to be included considering its circulation numbers. Finally, the analyses of the newspapers covered a wide range of topics including government/legislatures, politics, economy, education, etc. It is plausible that the manner of coverage for these topics differ from one another — in which case the journalistic models employed for writing these different topics may also differ. This could especially be the case for the Malaysian newspapers as discussed earlier.

Notwithstanding these challenges, our study shows that in general, the normative journalistic models are practiced in the United States and Malaysia. However, the extent of the practice differs from one country to the other. In the future, perhaps the effect of these models can be investigated, in terms of public opinion among the citizens of these respective countries. This will further validate the equivalence of the journalistic models in mature and budding democracies. It would also be interesting to conduct interviews with journalists to inquire their perception towards their job. Additionally, future studies

should test additional predictors such as societal and/or cultural factors when testing the journalistic role performance models. This will provide a better explanation and justification to the practices in Malaysia and the United States.

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