

News Values, Older People and Journalistic Practices in Australia and Malaysia

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Abstract

This article builds on a research project examining news values, journalistic practices, and media power in Australia and Malaysia. These two countries differ from each other in socio-cultural, religious, regional, political perspectives, and journalistic practices but share the presence of indigenous people, appreciation for multiculturalism, and increasing numbers of older people. The comparison of journalistic practices – Asian-based development journalism and Western journalism practices – along with other differences, especially socio-cultural values, provides the rationale for the selection of these two countries. The study draws on Fairclough's three-dimensional critical discourse analysis and Caple and Bednarek's discursive news values analysis to explore the discursive practices of journalists in providing voices and prioritising different actors in news stories. 99 news articles from 8 mainstream Australian newspapers – *The Age*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Australian*, *The Advertiser*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Courier-Mail*, *The Herald Sun*, and *The Canberra Times* – and 5 English-language Malaysian newspapers – *New Straits Times*, *The Malay Mail*, *The Star*, *The Borneo Post*, and *The Sun* – published between January 2011 and December 2013 are selected as the dataset in this study. The study finds that reference to elite persons remains a uniform news value in both Australian and Malaysian newspapers, indicating the role of journalists in reflecting and reinforcing the status quo, and the imbalance of power in society. This dominant news value amongst journalists tends to silence those who are not conceived as newsworthy or seen as less newsworthy, such as older people. While the dominance of elites can be linked to social norms in Malaysia that prevent challenges to the social hierarchy and the maintenance of a high regard for people in authority such as political leaders, the discursive practices of Australian journalists do not align with their role to provide a uniform forum for the exchange of ideas, as elderly Australians are given limited opportunities to be active participants.

Keywords

News Values, Older People, Malaysian Newspapers, Australian Newspapers, Journalistic Practices, Discourse Analysis.

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Introduction

This article builds on a research project examining news values, journalistic practices, and media power in Australia and Malaysia. These two countries differ from each other in socio-cultural, religious, regional, political perspectives, and journalistic practices, but share the presence of indigenous people, appreciation for multiculturalism, and increasing numbers of older people. The ageing population is on the rise at the

global level and in the countries that are the focus of this study. According to the latest World Population Ageing report, there were 703 million people aged 65 years or older worldwide in 2019, projected to be 1.5 billion – one in five people worldwide – in this age group by 2050 (United Nations, 2020). Increased lifespan has contributed significantly to the number of older persons globally as, in 2020, life expectancy at birth reached 72.3 years (United Nations, 2020). This also applies to Australia and Malaysia. Australia has an average life expectancy of 81.2 years for men and 85.3 years for women (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021). For Malaysians, the average life expectancy is 78.3 years for women and 73.2 years for men (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2021).

This study aims to explore the news values in action in Australia and Malaysia to explore the role of journalistic practices, institutional routines, and socio-cultural values in providing voices and prioritising different actors in news stories, particularly marginalised people such as older people. The comparison of journalistic practices – Asian-based development journalism and Western journalism practices – along with other differences, especially socio-cultural values, and the presence of an increasingly ageing population provide the rationale for the selection of these two countries.

News values are “qualities of the news” (Hough, 1988, p. 3), the ideological factors (Cotter, 2010, p. 67) that help to determine which events are worthy of becoming news and which are not (Westerstahl and Johansson, 1994, p. 72), and are applied by news workers to choose the structure and order of reporting (Bednarek and Caple, 2014, p. 136). News values today are based on the work of Norwegian sociologists Johan Galtung and Mari Ruge, who presented a “taxonomy of news values” in 1965 (Harcup and O’Neill, 2001, p. 262). The document listed a set of news factors (values) that made international events news in Norwegian newspapers. The twelve news values proposed by Galtung and Ruge (1965, p. 70) were “frequency, threshold, unambiguity, meaningfulness, consonance, unexpectedness, continuity, composition, reference to elite nations, reference to elite people, reference to persons, and reference to something negative”.

While there have been variations in the news values, signalling changes in understandings of newsworthiness over time, the significance of Galtung and Ruge's work remains momentous as their taxonomy continues to be reviewed, cited, scrutinised, and criticised even fifty-seven years after its publication. Other prominent contributors to the conceptualisation of news values include Bell (1991), Itule Anderson and Simon (2006), Cotter (2010), Caple and Bednarek (2015, 2016), Harcup and O’Neill (2017), and Bednarek (2016, 2017, 2019). The contribution of many media researchers to the conceptualisation of news values signifies the importance of news values in the field of journalism.

As there is no single set of values that make “news (worthy)” (Bednarek and Caple, 2014, p. 136), the selection of certain news values over others depends on numerous factors, including the impact of journalists’ schedules, such as deadlines (Schultz, 2007), the effect of owners and commercial pressures (Caple and Bednarek, 2015), the influence of “habitus” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 133), and the economic, political and social context in which media institutions operate (Fowler, 1991). It can be said that news is both an “individual product and an organisational product” (Becker and Vlad, 2009, p. 59), implying that news reports may partially reflect organisational, economic, and socio-cultural values (Weaver et al., 2009), rather than what the public needs.

The study utilises critical discourse analysis (CDA) combined with discursive news values analysis (DNVA) – developed by Monika Bednarek and Helen Caple (2017) – to analyse news articles from Australia and Malaysia retrieved through an online search using Factiva, a useful research tool and home to a global news database. According to DNVA, news values can be seen as discursively constructed, and newsworthiness becomes a quality of texts. Moreover, this approach identifies words and expressions in a text or dataset that may potentially establish newsworthiness (Bednarek and Caple, 2014, p. 145).

News Values and Marginalised People

The existing literature demonstrates researchers' interest in analysing different dimensions of news values, such as cognitive (Van Dijk, 1988), social (Fowler, 1991), and discursive (Bednarek, 2016, 2017, 2018; Bednarek and Caple, 2012, 2014, 2017). Previous studies reported that newsworthiness is constructed linguistically. However, the potential news value of events depends on multiple factors, including economic, social, and ideological values of society (Van Dijk, 1988, pp. 120–121), the socio-political environment in which journalists operate (Lange, 1984), and the given sociocultural system that assigns them value (Bednarek and Caple, 2017, p. 51). Makki (2019), accordingly, reported that the construction of news values in Iranian newspapers aligns with and reflects the sociocultural values prevalent in society. Carvalho (2008, p. 17) argues that “journalists hold a significant power of discursive construction of social issues as they are in the position to grant or deny other social actors framing power of these issues”.

The history of exploring social issues associated with marginalised people in news media can be traced back to the 1970s (Carvalho, 2008, p. 161) when the Glasgow University Media Group and the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies reported less neutrality, partial, and restricted reality (Philo, 1999) in news reports. Syvertsen (2010) argued that media is considered a space that generally does not provide adequate room for older people. Other researchers around the world have reported similar findings. For example, Weicht (2013) analysed the Australian press and reported a lack of voice and negative images of older people in Australian newspapers. Chen (2015) argued that negative stereotypes of older people were dominant in Taiwanese newspapers. Bai (2014) stated negative images of older people in both Western and Asian countries, and Raman et al. (2008) maintained that the stereotypical association of old age with health is prevalent in both Indian and American advertisements. Similarly, most recent studies reported the under-representation of older people in Australian news media (Thomson et al., 2022; Imran, 2021); they are portrayed as passive and voiceless in Australian and New Zealand news media (Imran and Bowd, 2022; Morgan et al., 2021), dependent on families in Malaysian news media (Imran, 2022), and in stereotypical languages in both mainstream media (Fealy et al., 2012) and social media (Meisner, 2021). Van Dijk (2007) linked such practices with journalists' routines, such as “biased newsgathering, biased language, and biased topic choices” (pp. 2-3). Bednarek (2019) stated that news values play a role in the distribution and prioritisation of views, which according to Bell (1991) makes up a professional value system reflecting and reinforcing dominant societal ideologies. The same newsworthiness models can be applied to news reports from different countries (Shoemaker and Cohen, 2012). However, there may be differences in the way that journalists report (Weaver and Willnat, 2012) and prioritise news values depending on how they view journalism.

Journalists and Journalism Practices

Journalists can position themselves only within the confines of the social space or workspace that surrounds them (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). This means that they follow internalised and institutional journalistic practices as well as understandings and conventions of professional practice more broadly – as part of the terms of their employment – which may vary amongst media institutions (Dent, 2008). Other factors that influence media include state censorship, high entry cost, media concentration, corporate ownership, mass-market pressures, consumer inequalities, advertising influence, a rise in public relations, news routines and values, unequal resources, and dominant discourses (Curran, 2002, pp. 148-151).

Previous studies (see, for example, Shoemaker and Cohen, 2012; Weaver and Willnat, 2012) reported significant differences in the way that journalism is perceived and practised in different parts of the world, particularly coloured by the national media system. For instance, on the one hand, Australian journalists following the Western conception of journalism see themselves as a watchdog on government (Joseph and Richards, 2012, p. 124), defending “the public interest” (Breit, 2008, p. 509), and providing a forum for the exchange of ideas and opinions (Wilding et al., 2018, p. 20). On the other hand, the Western

conception of journalism is discouraged in Malaysia as it is deemed to be contrary to Malaysian values (Ismail and Ismail, 2014). Instead, development journalism is promoted in an effort to de-Westernize journalism in Asia (Xiaoge, 2009). In development journalism, journalists see themselves in a constructive partnership with the government (Xiaoge, 2009), nation-builders (Romano, 2005), and are expected to report on events that have positive values for society and humanity (Mughtar et al., 2017) rather than criticism, which is “deemed dangerous in the context of politically frail and culturally divided countries” (Waisbord, 2009, p. 149), such as Malaysia.

It is worth clarifying that while the Western concept of journalism is discouraged in Malaysia, and Bednarek and Caple’s (2017) discursive news values analysis (DNVA) approach has mostly been applied to Western media, Makki (2019) used DNVA to analyse news values in Iranian newspapers. Similarly, Lim and Loh (2022) used O’Neill and Harcup’s (2009) set of news values to analyse Malaysian media. Othman and Tiung (2009) also applied O’Neill and Harcup’s (2001) approach to explore and compare newsworthiness in Malaysian and British newspapers. Therefore, by focusing on Australia and Malaysia, this study does not only provide a cross-cultural comparison of news values and the way that journalism is practised – Western journalism versus development journalism – adding an extra layer of novelty; it also attempts to explore whether journalistic practices reflected in the form of news values are the reflection of journalism education and the broader view of journalism in each country.

Methodology

To explore journalistic conventions and the role of journalists, media institutions, and social factors in providing voices and prioritising different actors in news stories, this study brings together two approaches to analyse newspaper articles, including critical discourse analysis (CDA) and discursive news values analysis (DNVA). The main components of Fairclough’s (1995) approach to CDA are (a) a description of the linguistic properties of texts, (b) an interpretation of discursive practice which consists of the relationship between the text and its production process, and (c) an explanation of discursive practices and social practice. The discursive news values analysis (DNVA) approach by Bednarek and Caple (2017) focuses on a close analysis of linguistic elements in the construction of news values in a news report. According to Caple and Bednarek (2016), “news values are constructed discursively in the course of news production, a perspective that focuses on how news production texts (press releases, interviews, published stories, ...) construct the newsworthiness of an event, issue or news actor through language, photography, layout, and so on” (pp. 437-438). The set of news values proposed by Caple and Bednarek (2016, p. 439) incorporate “negativity, timeliness, proximity, superlativeness, eliteness, impact, novelty, personalisation, consonance, and aesthetic appeal”.

The discursive nature of Caple and Bednarek’s (2016) approach aligns with Fairclough’s approach to critical discourse analysis as it provides backing to the analysis of discursive practices. As discursive practices vary from institution to institution and country to country, exploration of news values in operation provides insight into journalistic practices because news values indicate the perceived newsworthiness of an event and the people reported in news articles. In addition, the analysis of news values aligns and reinforces the interpretation of discursive practices and social practices of critical discourse analysis. Discursive practice – influenced by societal forces, for example, political systems and media institutions – is seen as a significant form of social practice that focuses on how the author of a text draws on existing discourses to produce texts (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002, p. 62). By using both approaches together, it becomes possible to identify phrases, expressions, and words in news reports that may potentially establish newsworthiness. Such forms are labelled “pointers” to newsworthiness (Bednarek and Caple, 2014, p. 145).

Although the DVNA approach mainly focuses on “how” rather than “why” news values are constructed or construed in news texts. Fairclough’s CDA provides the answer to “why”, as it helps the

author understand the effect of social and institutional practices on the language used by journalists to construct newsworthiness, within the broader contexts of socio-cultural differences and the way journalism is practised in each country. The analysis is largely concerned with the discursive practices of news writing, including the structure of news stories, as news text is arranged in “perceived decreasing importance” (Bell, 1991, p. 154), who is quoted, who is only referred to, the presence/absence of competing views (Breen et al., 2017), the positioning of quotes in the news story – i.e., a headline that is designed to attract readers’ attention and addresses both the reader and the content of the news story (Richardson, 2007), the lead paragraph with the facts sequenced descending in importance thereafter (Burns, 2013) or towards the end of a news story, and linguistic cues constructing different news values (Bednarek and Caple, 2017).

Sampling and Time Frame

The corpus built for this study consists of 99 news articles from eight mainstream Australian newspapers – *The Age*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Australian*, *The Advertiser*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Courier-Mail*, *The Herald Sun*, and *The Canberra Times* – and 5 English-language Malaysian newspapers – *The New Straits Times*, *The Malay Mail*, *The Star*, *The Borneo Post*, and *The Sun* – published between January 2011 and December 2013, a period of significant amendments to aged-care policies in Australia and Malaysia.

In Australia, an aged care reform package was introduced in April 2012 in a Federal Government report entitled “Living Longer Living Better - Aged Care Reform package” (Department of Health Australian Government, 2012). The report was followed by an Act of Parliament in 2013 - the “Aged Care (Living Longer Living Better) Act 2013” (The Federal Register of Legislation Australian Government, 2013). In Malaysia, the study sample reflects intensive coverage of amendments to the national policy for older persons in Malaysia introduced on 5 January 2011 (Department of Social Welfare, 2011) and ageing-related conferences held in Malaysia or actively participated in by the Malaysian government. For example, Malaysia hosted the 1st World Congress on Healthy Ageing, in cooperation with the World Health Organisation (WHO) and The Malaysian Healthy Ageing Society (MHAS), in Kuala Lumpur from 19-22 March 2012 (World Health Organisation, 2012).

The reason for the selection of the time frame is based on Fairclough’s (1992) data selection strategy of focusing on “moments of crisis” because of their potential to highlight aspects of routine practices that might otherwise go unnoticed (p. 230). The keywords “older person”, “ageing”, “elderly”, and “aged-care reforms” are used to identify reports. The initial search returned over two hundred articles in the selected newspapers. All the reports were read and reviewed to determine if they dealt with ageing and the elderly in the context of aged-care reforms. The review resulted in the elimination of 85 articles that did not deal with these topics. In the next step, the remaining articles were categorised according to mastheads and were reviewed again to eliminate any duplication. At this stage, 17 items were found to be identical; the same story by the same reporter was printed in multiple newspapers. Only the first version of the story in the search results was added, and the rest were removed from the dataset.

After the removal of irrelevant articles and duplications, the final dataset consists of 99 news articles published from 2011 to 2013 in 8 Australian and 5 English-language Malaysian newspapers. There are 61 news articles from the Australian press, and 38 from the Malaysian papers. There are multiple reasons for the discrepancies in the sample size, including the limited accessibility of Malaysian newspaper archives in online databases such as Factiva, availability of Malaysian newspapers’ archives in Australian libraries and also in the National Library of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur – the researcher travelled to Malaysia to gain full access to the newspaper’s archives. Moreover, there is a difference in the number of English-language newspapers in the two countries. While most newspapers in Australia are published in English, newspapers in Malaysia are available in three main languages of Bahasa, English, and Chinese. English-language newspapers make up a significant proportion of media enterprises as they beat other newspapers

in circulation in some urban areas, even though Bahasa and Chinese newspapers lead in terms of overall circulation in Malaysia (Audit Bureau of Circulations Malaysia, 2018). For instance, the readership of English language newspapers exceeds their counterparts in federal territories and metropolitans such as Kuala Lumpur – the national capital and the largest city in Malaysia – and Putrajaya – the federal administrative centre (Audit Bureau of Circulations Malaysia, 2018). The sample consists of a diverse range of articles ranging from front-page stories to analysis, commentaries, editorials, and feature articles with varying word counts: Australian articles ranged from 538 to 1079 words, with an average of 538 words, and articles from Malaysian newspapers ranged from 175 words to 1016 words, with an average of 428 words.

Findings

Analysis of articles from selected Australian and Malaysian newspapers reveals discursive techniques used by journalists in reporting issues associated with aged care, older people, and the ageing population, including the prioritisation of news actors' voices, positioning of quotes in the news story, lexical choices, and other linguistic resources – labelled as pointers by Bednarek and Caple, (2014, p.145) – used in establishing newsworthiness. While the news articles selected for this study relate directly to older people, their voices are largely excluded in both Australian and Malaysian papers – only 13.3 percent of news reports in the Australian newspapers and 13.1 percent in Malaysian press included the voices of older individuals. 86 percent of the articles in the dataset revolve around the statements and actions of elites. What has been included and excluded, what is foregrounded and what is left in the background shows the discursive practices of media professionals (Fairclough, 1995, p. 47). The next section discusses typical examples of pointers from the dataset that are used to establish newsworthiness: Eliteness, Impact, Negativity, Personalisation, Proximity, Timeliness, Superlativeness, Consonance, and Unexpectedness (Bednarek and Caple, 2017).

News Values in Australian Newspapers

Eliteness

Eliteness as a news value refers to the high status of individuals, organisations, or nations involved in an event or issue (Caple and Bednarek, 2016, p. 439). This is one of the most frequently constructed news values in the corpus as a reference to elites and linguistic instances exceed other news values and their pointers in news articles. Eliteness in Australian newspapers is signalled by references to powerful and prominent figures such as then-Prime Minister Julia Gillard, then-Minister for Ageing Mark Butler, then-Opposition Leader Tony Abbott, government officials, leaders of different organisations (such as Aged and Community Services Australia and the Business Council of Australia), providers of health care, and business experts. In particular, Julia Gillard was given the loudest voice as she was cited more than twenty times, including front-page coverage, multiple headlines, and six times in lead paragraphs of news articles. Some of the headlines citing the then-Prime Minister include:

- 1) PM's bid to avert crisis in aged care (Lunn, 2012) – *The Australian*
- 2) No place like home: PM's aged care plan (Grattan, 2012) – *The Age*
- 3) PM to unveil user-pays changes to aged care (Probyn, 2012) – *The Age*
- 4) PM pushes home care for dementia victims (Grattan, 2012b) – *The Age*
- 5) Funding changes a safe bet for Gillard (Scott, 2012a) – *The Courier-Mail*

Other examples from the dataset showing references to elites include:

JULIA Gillard's aged-care overhaul will ignore expert economic advice (Maher & Lunn, 2012) – *The Australian*

The government avoided the policy the Productivity Commission laid out because it is political poison (Van Onselen, 2012) – *Sunday Telegraph*

Opposition Leader Tony Abbott said “the Coalition supports a reform process in aged care (Kenny, 2012) – *The Advertiser*

An Aged Care Financing Authority will approve the level of lump sum payment or equivalent regular payment to ensure it reflects value for money (Grattan, 2012a) – *The Age*

Association chief executive Paul Carberry said the providers were being victimised by the Government (McGregor, 2012) – *The Advertiser*

From the above excerpts, it can be maintained that the Australian journalists incorporated and prioritised the views of politicians and aged care providers over elderly people, and those elites discussed the impact of aged care reforms. These results endorse the findings of Weicht (2013), who contends that “others define needs of care for the older people” (p. 195). The unequal distribution of voices represents and reproduces social dominance and hegemony (Van Dijk, 2007).

Impact

Caple and Bednarek defined Impact as the high significance of an event or issue in terms of its effects/consequences (2016, p. 439). The news value Impact in the sampled news reports is generally constructed in relation to the economic impact of an increasingly ageing population on the Australian economy. The analysis of the dataset shows that the pointers used by journalists in most reports indicate a negative impact on the increasingly ageing population, as exemplified by the following excerpts.

Same old story: grey growth will push the nation's economy into the red (Irvine, 2012) – *The Sydney Morning Herald*

The shift towards greater user-pays in the overburdened sector is designed to reduce the growing long-term costs of aged care as Australia's population faces a demographic time bomb (Maher and Lunn, 2012) – *The Australian*

Better-off people will face ... higher charges, in a sweeping reform of aged care that will boost federal funding by \$577 million over five years (Grattan, 2012a) – *The Age*

It can be argued that the ageing population in Australia is not only portrayed negatively but that the discussion of consequences of this increase also shows widespread social attitudes towards the elderly as newspapers can reflect the social mainstream (Mautner, 2008) – “what is both acceptable and socially thinkable” (Aldridge, 1994, p. 35). It can also be noted in the above excerpts that in some instances,

journalists combined more than one news value to enhance the newsworthiness of the event and to convey the message about the magnitude of the negative impact of an increasingly ageing population on the Australian economy. For instance, Impact, Negativity, and Superlativeness are combined in the above excerpts to report on the effect of the increasing ageing population on the Australian economy.

Negativity

The negative aspects of an event or issue are referred to as Negativity by Caple and Bednarek (2016, p. 439). Negativity as a news value is constructed by using negative lexis to report about older people, the ageing population, aged care reforms, the negative impact of an increasingly ageing population, and the suffering of older people due to lack of quality and staff shortage in the aged care sector.

Aged care reform ‘fails to fix staffing shortfall’ (Peatling and Tomazin, 2012)
– *Sunday Age*

When it comes to fiscal challenges facing the nation... the problem of ageing is something we all aspire to ... there is a substantial fiscal cost that goes with it (Van Onselen, 2012) – *Sunday Telegraph*

We’re blithely accepting of the “burden of an ageing population” (Lang 2013) –
The Courier-Mail

Quality of care ‘missing’ from reforms (Wells, 2012a) – *The Age*

As more baby boomers retire, these problems will only increase (Scott, 2012b)
– *The Courier-Mail*

Australia’s population faces a demographic time bomb (Maher and Lunn, 2012)
– *The Australian*

Shifting more of the financing burden on to care recipients can make sense, but exposes older Australians to significant financial risk (Ergas, 2012) – *The Australian*

It can be argued from the above-mentioned examples that government spending on the health and welfare of elderly people contributes to widely held negative perceptions about elderly Australians. Kendig (2017) argued that older Australians are widely portrayed as a drain on public expenditure and, due to demographic shifts, they are at “risk of being scapegoated” (p. 265). The negative tone for the increasingly ageing population is also noted in Canadian newspapers by Rozanova (2006), and the phenomenon is referred to as “apocalyptic demography” (Adams and Dominick, 1995; Gee and Gutman, 2000), which is defined as “the gloomy forecasts of the collapse of the social security system as the result of the growing proportion of seniors in society” (Lascelles, 2004; Rozanova, 2006, p. 127).

Superlativeness

Superlativeness as a news value is defined as the large scope or scale of an event or issue (Caple and Bednarek, 2016, p. 439). Superlativeness in the selected news article is discursively constructed by the use

of language that portrays the scale of reforms, the enormous amount of money spent on aged care, and the economics of aged care in Australia.

Already governments spend about \$10 billion a year on aged care but this is forecast to grow by 150 percent by 2050 as the number of Australians aged 85 and over reaches 1.8 million (Lewis, 2012) – *The Advertiser*

Thousands of wealthier older people will be asked to contribute to the cost of nursing home accommodation (Lewis, 2012) – *The Advertiser*

Millions of extra dollars will be pumped into community stay-at-home care as part of a pitch by the Gillard Government for the “grey” vote (Lewis, 2012) – *The Advertiser*

In the biggest reforms to aged care for years, the Government is preparing to announce a new era of user-pays, including for residents classified as “high care” (Lewis, 2012) – *The Advertiser*

In most reports, the news value of Superlativeness is combined with Impact and Negativity to highlight the magnitude of spending involved in the care of older people. While reporting facts is a part of journalists’ role, reiteration and stress on aged care expenses indicate the role of the press in reproducing and proliferating stereotypes of the financial dependency of older people. Financial dependency of older people on others carries a negative connotation that has the potential to worsen existing discrimination – 71 percent of 55 years plus Australians reported age discrimination and over 64 percent of those aged 65 plus reported disrespect and jokes about ageing in a research report “Stereotypes of older Australians” (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2013).

Consonance

The stereotypical aspects of an event or issue and adherence to expectations are categorised as Consonance by Caple and Bednarek (2016, p. 439). This news value was constructed mainly through references to stereotypes held by society about older people. Consonance is embedded in and coupled with other news values such as Impact, Negativity, and Superlativeness. The following excerpts illustrate typical pointers from the dataset:

Older Australians who are anything but lazy, useless and dead-weights in their communities (Lang, 2013) – *The Courier-Mail*

Five people in the paid workforce for every person aged over 65, but that ratio is set to fall to 2.5 workers by 2042... Increasing pressure on the community (*The Australian*, 2012)

AUSTRALIA is facing a time bomb (Scott, 2012b) – *The Courier-Mail*

The challenges of an ageing society, the Gillard government had no choice but to means-test home-based care subsidy packages (*The Australian*, 2012)

The above excerpts not only indicate the pointers used in the construction of Consonance but also echo Dahmen and Cozma's (2009) findings that the mass media spreads age-related stereotypes and Wilińska and Cedersund's (2010)'s argument that "older people and old age entail pejorative meaning" (p. 342). Moreover, similar use of news value Consonance for older people and the increasingly ageing population is found in the Canadian press (Rozanova, 2006).

Personalisation

Personalisation as a news value is defined as the personal or "human" face of an event or issue, including eyewitness reports (Caple and Bednarek, 2016, p. 439). Personalisation as a news value in the dataset is discursively constructed by using pointers that provide human factors in the news stories. Personalisation in this article applies to ordinary people and excludes elites. While Personalisation is not one of the most used news values in the dataset, the below excerpts provide examples of the language used in providing human factors in news articles.

Mr Rosario, 81, and his wife Prisca, 80, applauded the Gillard Government's initiatives to keep people in their own homes (Ife, 2012) – *Herald-Sun*

"Family home safe in aged care overhaul" (Maher and Lunn, 2012) – *The Australian*

Our children and grandchildren know this place. We would prefer to stay here and have services brought in (Maher and Lunn, 2012) – *The Australian*

It is worth noting here that, despite the presence of news articles in the dataset related to older people and aged care, the human factor is missing in most articles, indicating discursive controls of journalists in steering debates about aged care. The above examples also indicate an overlap between Personalisation, Eliteness, and Proximity.

Proximity

The geographical or cultural nearness of an event or issue is called Proximity (Caple and Bednarek, 2016, p. 439). The news value Proximity connects older people with readers geographically and culturally. The pointers from the sampled articles depict the geographical closeness of news actors to the news audiences, connecting older people to local communities, cities, and countries.

New Farm resident Maida Lilley, 78, has been living independently for more than 25 years (Scott, 2012b) – *The Courier-Mail*

Brisbane retiree Reg Hotchman, 78, has been married to wife Del for 54 years and knows that while they are both fit and well now.... We've got good neighbours on both sides. We know the local area well (Maher and Lunn, 2012) – *The Australian*

Marjory Chamberlain has lived in her Brighton East home for 64 years and doesn't plan on going anywhere any time soon (Wells, 2012b) – *The Age*

Older Aussies to get care at home Revamp junky bond system (Johnston,

2012) – *Herald-Sun*

Timeliness and Novelty

According to Caple and Bednarek, the relevance of an event or issue in terms of time: recent, ongoing, about to happen, or seasonal is called Timeliness, while the new and/or unexpected aspects of an event or issue are referred to as Novelty (2016, p. 439). Timeliness and Novelty in the dataset are used for the proposed aged-care reforms, and ongoing and most current debates about the reforms, which remained one of the key focus of most articles. While Timeliness and Novelty are constructed in most of the examples cited above, below are a few examples from different newspapers:

The Gillard government's much-anticipated response yesterday to the commission's Caring for Older Australians report (Lunn, 2012) – *The Australian*

\$3.7 billion overhaul of aged care announced by the Gillard Government yesterday (Scott and Brennan, 2012) – *The Courier-Mail*

The near-universal approval from the myriad stakeholders in the aged-care sector yesterday indicated this was an important policy reform (Coorey, 2012) – *The Sydney Morning Herald*

In sum, the reference to elite people, in the context of this topic, remains the most significant news value in the Australian press – the loudest voices in the Australian press are those of the elites – followed by Impact, Negativity, and Consonance, which display negative connotations. Personalisation and Proximity are used recessively and are found in only a few examples.

News Values in Malaysian Newspapers

Eliteness

Similar to their Australian counterparts, Malaysian journalists discursively constructed Eliteness as the most prominent news value in the sampled articles. Eliteness is signalled by references to powerful and prominent figures: Prime Minister Najib Razak, Ministers, Deputy Ministers, representatives of the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, mayors of different cities, and even members of the Malaysian royal family were prominent and vocal actors in Malaysian newspapers. In particular, the then-Prime Minister Najib Razak was framed as the most important actor in the news articles – he was mentioned 22 times in seven articles, including three headlines:

- 1) RM1.4b allocated for elderly, disabled and single mothers – Najib (BERNAMA, 2012).
- 2) PM: Centres for the elderly soon (*New Straits Times*, 2012a).
- 3) Najib shares Winter Solstice joy with elderly (BERNAMA, 2011).

Below are examples from the dataset signalling the construction of Eliteness in news articles:

Rosmah, who is Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak's wife, said that ageing

shouldn't be seen negatively. We need to move away from the notion of ill health, wrinkles and loneliness when we talk about ageing” (*New Straits Times*, 2012c)

Karpal Singh, the national chairman of opposition party DAP, yesterday called for the government to make it a crime for children to abandon their elderly parents (*The Borneo Post*, 2011b)

There is a need for better care facilities for the elderly as Malaysia slowly evolves into an ageing nation, said Raja Zarith Sofiah Sultan Idris Shah (*New Straits Times*, 2012a)

Take care of your ageing parents, says Heng (Ismail, 2012) – *Malay Mail*

The prominence of Eliteness and the prioritisation of elites over older people not only shows the discursive practices of Malaysian journalists in distributing voices, but also aligns with the journalistic practices and social norms – journalists see themselves as government partners (Romano, 2005) and social norms prevent journalists from challenging the social hierarchy, maintaining a high regard for “people in authority, such as community leaders” (Puteh-Behak et al., 2015, p. 187).

Negativity

Negativity is the second most used news value in the Malaysian dataset that is signalled through pointers discussing the ill-treatment of older Malaysians. Unlike their Australian counterparts, Malaysian journalists did not use Negativity to discuss the negative impact of the ageing population on the economy; rather, news stories reported the neglect and abandonment of elderly people.

Old and forsaken (Wen and Meikeng, 2012b) – *The Star*

The elderly being left to fend for themselves, most times under very difficult circumstances... being unwanted and uncared for while on borrowed time (*The Borneo Post*, 2012a)

The fate of elderly orphans in nursing homes (Hasan, 2013) – *The Borneo Post*

The infirm and frail elderly are usually tolerated as a liability or nuisance, and with self-esteem ripped away from them, they suffer in silence as they go through what is left of their twilight years (*The Borneo Post*, 2012a)

“But it is only normal to feel lonely at my age,” said the childless widow (Wen and Meikeng, 2012a) – *The Star*

Through the use of lexis constructing Negativity, journalists have painted a pessimistic imagery of older Malaysians who have been abandoned by their families. Traditionally in Malaysia, the care of older people has been the obligation of family members inside the extended family home (Leng et al., 2016). Over 73 percent of elderly Malaysians – 79.5 percent of females and 67 percent of males – received money from their families, as reported by Tey et al. (2016, p. 606). However, a shift in care practices is resulting in the

abandonment of older people (Imran, 2022). Due to the reliance of older people on family members, Negativity overlapped with Personalisation, Impact, and Consonance.

Personalisation

This news value was constructed mainly through pointers that provide human factors in the news stories, particularly family relations as noted in the below excerpts:

“**Educate children to care for parents, say, groups** (*The Star*, 2012).

“I have a daughter who has not seen me for five years and it appears that she does not want to know about me anymore,” says Ibu Mariana (Hasan, 2013) – *The Borneo Post*

“Uncle Lim”, asked where his family members were, he said cynically: “They are all rich and highly educated.” (Wen and Meikeng, 2012a) – *The Star*

“The elderly parents should be looked after just as their parents had looked after them when they were young,” (Ismail, 2012) – *Malay Mail*

“Children should be committed to ensure their parents enjoy a dignified, independent lifestyle and, at the same time, be an integral part of the family unit,” (Ismail, 2012) – *Malay Mail*

Frequent use of Personalisation and linking care of older people with families can be linked to the government strategy of keeping the financial cost of care within the families, which is promoted by the press, acting as government partners.

Impact

The news value Impact in Malaysian news reports is generally constructed in relation to the impact of the change in societal values – a shift away from the traditional care system – and the abandonment of older people. The pointers used by journalists in most reports indicate a negative impact of the shift away from familism, as exemplified by the following excerpts.

What is obviously a disturbing trend though is that a lot of sons and daughters are leaving their ageing parents to die at old folks’ homes (*The Borneo Post*, 2012a)

They are broken hearted, they cry alone and have lost all hope. No one visits most of them, many have been abandoned for good (Hasan, 2013) – *The Borneo Post*

The number of old folk deserted by their families had steadily increased by 1% each year between 2008 and 2011 (Wen and Meikeng, 2012b) – *The Star*

It can be argued from the above examples that news values Negativity, Personalisation, and Impact are

frequently combined in news reports to enhance their persuasiveness in encouraging familial piety, discouraging the shift away from familism and sending older people to nursing homes. While the negative impact of the shifts away from the traditional care system may have an economic impact, unlike Australian journalists, Malaysian journalists did not construct the news values in economic terms.

Consonance

The news value Consonance is defined as the stereotypical aspects of an event or issue and adherence to expectations (Caple and Bednarek, 2016, p. 439). Consonance is discursively constructed through references to stereotypes held by society not only for older people but also for nursing homes. The pointers from the dataset show that journalists construct a sense of guilt for those who do not financially support their parents and who send them to nursing homes; see, for example:

“No one in the right frame of mind would choose to send their parents to an old folks’ home... It is morally wrong to send your sick parents to a home simply because you don’t want the burden of looking after them (Mail, 2011) – *The Star*

It was not good for people to leave their sick parents at old folks’ homes and expect the staff members to take care of everything (*The Star*, 2011)

Dr Romzi Otiong noted that moving into a nursing home adds to the depression suffered by many elderly people, apart from the loss of memory and physical ability, chronic pain or illness, death of loved ones and financial insecurity (Hassan, 2013) – *The Borneo Post*

Not right to abandon ailing and elderly parents — Rohani (Irene, 2013) – *The Borneo Post*

Many people think dementia is a normal part of ageing (*New Straits Times*, 2012b)

“We need to move away from the notion of ill health, wrinkles and loneliness when we talk about ageing” (*New Straits Times*, 2012c)

While stereotypes such as illness, physical and social decline, and dependence have been associated in multiple studies (Cole, 1992, p. 230), the stigmatised nature of nursing homes and the taboo attached to nursing home residents are not a common thread, which is discursively constructed as a news value.

Proximity, Timeliness and Novelty

Timeliness and Novelty news values were used in most examples in conjunction with other news values, especially Eliteness. However, Proximity as a news value is constructed through pointers depicting geographical and cultural closeness of older people with local communities, as can be noted in the below examples:

Choy Pak, 84, a former sawmill labourer in Setapak, ended up at the home when he retired 10 years ago (*New Straits Times*, 2011)

Speaking at a “Meet-the-People” session and launching of the Caring for Old Folks Awareness Campaign in Taman Desa Rhu, Sikamat here today (BERNAMA, 2012a)

Filial piety is inherent in our culture and only needs to be encouraged by means other than fines (*The Borneo Post*, 2011b)

Generally, among Chinese families in Sarawak, filial piety is a culture that has been cherished for generations (*The Borneo Post*, 2011a)

Although Malaysian journalists have used a variety of news values to report on issues linked with older people and the ageing population, it can be argued that most news values are anchored in a discourse that represents the care of elderly Malaysians as a filial and moral responsibility and overlooks the role of government in providing care to older Malaysians.

Discussion and Conclusion

The analysis of sampled news articles shows that despite differences in journalistic practices in both Malaysia and Australia – for instance, in Malaysia, Asian-based development journalism is practised, and in Australia, journalists consider themselves as watchdogs on government policies – media discourses on ageing in both countries revolve around powerful elites as Eliteness remains a uniform news value in both Australian and Malaysian newspapers. While the dominance of elites can be linked to social norms in Malaysia that prevent challenges to the social hierarchy and maintenance of a high regard for people in authority such as political leaders, the discursive practices of Australian journalists do not align with their role to provide a uniform forum for the exchange of ideas, as elderly Australians are given limited opportunities to be active participants. The findings affirm Hall’s (1974) claim that news values favour powerful elites. O’Neill (2012) reported similar findings: celebrities dominate other news values in both popular and quality press in the United Kingdom. Hence, the study asserts that journalists in both countries exercise their power in controlling and prioritising the voices of various actors in news articles, for instance, by preferring elites over the elderly. The dominance of elites and the silencing of older people shows that journalists tend to silence those who are not conceived as newsworthy or seen as less newsworthy.

While the dominance of Eliteness in both countries indicates that media, regardless of geographical location, foregrounds the interests of elites, the study also found a significant difference in the way that news values have been operationalised by Australian and Malaysian journalists. For instance, on one hand, the most frequently used news values in Australian news articles, such as Impact, Negativity, Superlativeness, and Consonance, pointed toward the economic consequences of an increasingly ageing population on the Australian economy. On the other hand, Malaysian journalists used Negativity, Personalisation, Impact, and Consonance in a discussion about the ill-treatment of older Malaysians by their families. Correspondingly, Personalisation, which is frequently used by Malaysian newspapers, is recessively used by their Australian counterparts. In the same way, Consonance is constructed through references to stereotypes held by society for older people in the Australian press; however, in Malaysian newspapers, Consonance is exemplified through stereotypes held by society not only for older people, but also for nursing homes.

Differences in the ways news values have been used by journalists can be linked to socio-cultural differences and how journalism is practised in the two countries. Fairclough’s three-dimensional approach provided a useful lens through which to view and explore links between the pointers used to construct news values (at a micro-level), institutional practices and types of journalism practised in each country (at

a meso level), and political, ideological and cultural practices (at the macro level). The differing emphasis can be seen as reflecting broader societal practices in the respective countries. In Australia, aged-care policies are built on the premises of “individualisation and independence”, which are fulfilled by an age pension, community care, and aged-care homes for frail elderly (Gray and Heinsch, 2009), funded primarily by the Commonwealth Government and delivered by local and state governments. Moreover, economic rationalist approaches, including means-testing, are also encouraged to restrain public spending on aged care (Kendig, 2017, p. 23), which resulted in the dominance of the marketisation of aged care in Australia (Imran, 2021; Imran and Bowd, 2022). Due to the financial dependence of older people on the government, most Australian newspapers included and prioritised voices that discuss aged care in economic terms and encourage the marketisation of aged care. In Malaysia, the care of older people falls on the extended family; the majority of Malaysian newspapers reported older people as elderly parents, presenting them as part of a family. The language used by Malaysian journalists constructs a sense of guilt for people who do not financially support their parents and send them to nursing homes.

In conclusion, the dependence of older people on the government, societal perception of the ageing population, nursing homes, and the form of journalism practised in both countries play a critical role in the way that elderly people are reported in news articles. Conboy (2004) argues that “journalism can be viewed as an intersection of many conflicting interests” (p. 4), meaning that many angles to a story, and at times many different incompatible interpretations of the facts, are some of the components of such conflicting interests. The notion of “conflicting interest” is used in this paper to compare differences and similarities in reporting on the same topic, such as aged care in Australia and Malaysia, and the many perspectives that can be incorporated into the consideration of this topic. However, analysis of news values against a societal backdrop shows that journalists in both countries not only prioritised elites but also used pointers reflecting negative connotations towards the ageing population. Such practices represent and reproduce social dominance and hegemony (Van Dijk, 2007), and demonstrate that discursive practices play a significant role in maintaining “unequal power relations” (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002, p. 63). To avoid being a vehicle to propagate negativity about the increasingly ageing population, this study recommends journalists from both countries avoid reproducing discourses that carry negative connotations about the ageing population and provide them with a fairer platform to have pluralistic voices.

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