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Analysing Islamic Elements in Environmental News Reporting in Malaysia

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This study sought to explore an area that is rarely investigated which is the influence of Islam on environmental news reporting in Malaysia. In this case, two methods were employed which include the quantitative content analysis on the *Utusan Malaysia* and *Berita Harian* newspapers as well as an in-depth interview with a total of 11 journalists from both newspapers. The results from the content analysis performed on the Islamic environmental articles published in *Utusan Malaysia* and *Berita Harian* newspapers revealed that the number of articles on Islamic environmental issues is low in both newspapers (N=112). The findings from the interviews conducted with the journalists managed to publish several factors that led to the low number of Islamic environmental articles including the lack of environmental knowledge among the Malay Muslim journalists as well as the fact that the environmental issues are commonly associated with politics instead of religion (Islam).

Keywords: Malaysia, Islam, environmental journalism, content analysis, interview

Malaysia is one of the developing countries located in the Southeast Asia region, and widely known for its multi-ethnic and plural nation (Olmedo, Smith, & Mansor, 2015). It is important to acknowledge that Malaysia as a multi-ethnic society provides freedom to its citizens in practising different faith and beliefs which include Islam, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, and other religions (Banerjee, 2011). Moreover, it is clearly stated in Article 3(1) of the Malaysian Constitution that Islam is the religion of the federation and other religions are free to be practiced in peace and harmony (Mohd Azizuddin & Dian Diana, 2011; Mohamed Azam & Nisar, 2014). Hence, it is not surprising to discover that Malaysia has also been characterised as a Muslim-majority nation (Mohamed Azam & Nisar, 2014) considering that Muslim constitutes majority of the population (60%) (Banerjee, 2011; Fauziah & Siti Zobidah, 2017). In relation to this, it is crucial to note that Malay is often synonymous with being Muslims due to the fact that majority of the Muslim in Malaysia comes from the Malay community (Mohamad et al., 2014). However, Farid (2012) mentioned that the implementation of Shariah law (the basis of Islamic law) is applicable only to a certain aspects of Muslim life such as marriage, while most other areas such as criminal law tend to fall under the federal laws which are also applicable to the non-Muslims.

As pointed out by Ramizah (2011), Islam came to Malaysia (formerly known as *Tanah Melayu* (the Malay Land)) between the 7th and 12th centuries through Arab and Indian traders and merchants. The long history of Islam in Malaysia has significantly influenced every aspect of Malaysian's social life, especially the Muslim and Malay

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community. For instance, a few of the aspects refer to the the need for Muslim to consume halal food for daily consumption, pray five times a day as well as the most common requirement for the Muslim women which is to wear hijab as their Islamic attire. Moreover, the Malaysian government through its policies have emphasised Islamic preaching via the television (Haidir, Mustari, & Fauziah, 2016). Therefore, it comes to no surprise that Islam has been proven as the religion that poses a significant influence on the Malaysian media's communication and content provided to the audiences.

Exploration on Islamic Environmental Journalism

The main motivation to embark on the current research originated from the working experience of the researchers as academics in environmental journalism and communication at a local university in Malaysia. In addition, this issue managed to attract the attention of the researchers considering that a few of the local newspapers, especially the Malay language newspapers have been publishing quite a number of environmental articles related to the Islamic perspectives. In fact, students at Universiti Sains Malaysia had often linked environmental discourses with Islamic values which include the roles of a *khalifa* (steward of Islam) to conserve the environment. In regard to this matter, it is important to note that a considerable amount of research has explored the link between Islam and various parts of journalism in the past few decades (Muchtar et al., 2017). However, none of them have investigated to what extent the representation of environmental issues in Malaysian newspapers is influenced by Islamic elements, including why the Muslim Malaysian journalists choose to link their writing about the environment with Islamic elements.

In examining Malaysian newspapers, it is worth to acknowledge that the mainstream newspapers such as the *Utusan Malaysia* have published a large number of environmental news that was linked to Islam. One feature article entitled "when the rain of blessing (*hujan rahmat*) turned to disaster" was written from the Islamic perspective using the citations from the Islamic holy book, the Quran. In that article, the selected Quranic verses were selected with the aim of highlighting the significant roles of water for human as well as the explanation about flash floods. Meanwhile, other newspaper such as the *Daily Express* also published an article about Islamic eco-school which promotes the lessons about the environment from the point of view of Islam such as touching the soil and remembering the greatness of Allah.

In regard to this matter, it cannot be denied that this particular type of news reporting is hardly found in the Western secular countries. According to Steele (2014a), news reporting that are related to Islamic values only seem to appear in Muslim-majority countries such as Malaysia due to the influence of Islam on journalistic values, particularly considering the fact that Muslim journalists possess a completely different perspective compared to the West journalists who tend to be influenced by enlightenment and natural right. Moreover, this statement was further supported by Steele's (2011b) findings on a study conducted among Malaysian and Indonesian's journalists. The study discovered that Islamic values such as being truthful in reporting is strongly embedded as one of the journalistic values that is highly regarded by Malaysian and Indonesian journalists.

On a more important note, Islam is an *ad-din* religion that upholds the concept of the way of life by giving a lot of emphasis on environmental protection and communication. In Islamic teaching, it is crucial to understand that the whole universe including the environment is emphatically viewed as God's creation (Dien, 1997; Naseef, 1998) and a gift

from God (Ashtankar, 2016). Hence, human as a *khalifa* (steward of Islam) holds the *amana* (responsibility) to protect the earth from degradation (Rizk, 2014) because their accountability will be questioned (Gada, 2014) on *akhira* (the day of judgement). Conversely, Husein (2018) stated that Allah created human beings with the great ability to communicate, thus it is not surprising to find that the need to communicate about the environment is very important to the Muslim society.

Methodology

The aims of the present study were to examine the characteristics of Islamic environmental issues portrayed in Malaysian newspapers as well as to investigate the reasons behind the journalists portrayal of Islamic environmental news with bear distinctive characteristics. Hence, a mixed method approach that involved both quantitative and qualitative approaches were carried out respectively in the form of content analysis and in-depth interview (Caffery, Martin-Khan & Wade, 2017; Schrauf, 2017). The purpose of employing the mixed methods approach was to allow the researchers to triangulate and verify the quantitative and qualitative results (Doyle, Brady & Byrne, 2016).

First, the quantitative content analysis was conducted on two mainstream Malay newspapers that have the highest circulation and readership in the country. Content analysis is a method that analyses the content of written documents such as newspapers (Oladele & Boago, 2011), which in this case, it clearly explains why it is more appropriate to be carried out on the oldest and highest selling newspapers (Woo, 2005). According to the latest statistics issued by the Audit Bureau of Circulation Malaysia (ABCM) from January to June 2018, *Utusan Malaysia* recorded the highest circulation of 107,609 copies per day, while *Berita Harian* recorded the second highest circulation with an average total of 82,252 copies per day. In fact, both newspapers are among the oldest Malay newspapers in the nation. Therefore, the present study chose to only focus on *Utusan Malaysia* and *Berita Harian* newspapers considering that they have more credibility in regard to Islamic environmental communication.

All the Islamic environmental articles published by *Utusan Malaysia* and *Berita Harian* online during the six-year period from 2012 to 2017 were collected. In this study, only the samples from 2012 onwards were collected because there were no environmental articles published in 2011 by both media that are related to Islam. The articles were discovered and selected using the keywords search which include "Islam and environment", "environment and Allah", including other similar terms in the archives of both online newspapers. All the articles were deductively coded using the coding categories developed based on the reference used by past researchers such as Mohamad Saifudin (2016) and Nik Norma (2007).

An in-depth interview was conducted with the journalists from *Utusan Malaysia* and *Berita Harian* newspapers following the completion of the content analysis in order to cross-check and strengthen the results of the analysis. In regard to this, it should be clear that the results obtain from an in-depth interview are crucial because it serves as a reference and clarification for the unexpected result of the quantitative content analysis (Doyle, Brady & Byrne, 2016). Apart from that, in-depth interview was chosen for this study because it enables to explore other perspectives of the interviewees, particularly in regard to certain research topics (Milena, Dainora & Alin, 2009) which in this case, the Islamic environmental communication. Purposive sampling was employed in order to select only the journalists who have the experience of covering environmental or Islamic news for the interview

session. Nevertheless, it is crucial to note that the respondents' involvement in the current research is a voluntary basis; hence, this provides them with the freedom to not answer any question or to withdraw at any time (Meseret, 2018).

The format of the questions was open-ended to ensure that the interviewees were provided with the opportunity to respond on their own terms, use their own language, and incorporate unexpected arguments and descriptions (Bewley, 2002). Moreover, majority of the interview questions were developed based on the result of the quantitative content analysis. In this case, all of the interviewees were labelled with the identification code such as EJ1, EJ2, and so on in order to assure confidentiality. All of the interviews were audio recorded with permission (Donne et al., 2018). As suggested by Njølstad, Mengshoel, and Sveen (2018), each interview was conducted in a quiet room at the respondents' office and lasted approximately 30 to 40 minutes. In the case of the present study, the interview stopped at journalist number 11 because there was no longer any new information that emerged from the interview based on the data saturation technique (Tam-Tham et al., 2016).

Out of the 11 respondents, six of them were from *Utusan Malaysia*, while the remaining five were from *Berita Harian*. The interview session is conducted in the Malay language because all of the interviewees come from Malay newspapers organisations that use Malay as the main language of communication and work. Apart from that, it was believed that they would feel more comfortable speaking in Malay instead of another language such as English.

In terms of the gender of the interviewees, most of the journalists from *Utusan Malaysia* are male (N=5), and similarly, the number of male journalist (N=3) is more than female journalists (N=2) from *Berita Harian*. Meanwhile, majority of interviewees from *Utusan Malaysia* (N=3) are seniors who have the working experiences of more than 15 years, while the majority of interviewees from *Berita Harian* (N=4) are young journalists who have been working for less than six years. Interestingly, all the interviewees from both organisations have acquired a bachelor's degree, which further indicates that they are a group of elite professionals in Malaysia.

However, the journalists from *Utusan Malaysia* were from a diverse background of studies, while the journalist from *Berita Harian* came from the field of communication. Nevertheless, it is crucial to note that the profile of the interviewees has no relation to the interview results because it only serves as an overview to obtain information on the background of respondents involved in this study.

In terms of data analysis, all the interview data were transcribed in verbatim by a professional (Donne et al., 2018; Njølstad, Mengshoel, & Sveen, 2018). Meanwhile, the MAXQDA software was utilised to manage the transcription, while the interview data was coded using qualitative content analysis.

Results

The results of the quantitative content analysis revealed that the number of Islamic environmental articles represented in both newspapers are relatively limited in numbers (*Utusan Malaysia*, N=64, and *Berita Harian*, N=48), and it can also be observed that the number fluctuates over the six-year period. According to this finding, it is interesting to highlight that *Utusan Malaysia* has a slightly higher number of Islamic environmental articles compared to *Berita Harian*. However, as presented in Table 1, the number of Islamic environmental news in both newspapers has increased dramatically in 2017 compared to the last five years.

Meanwhile, the findings obtained from the interview analysis showed that majority of the respondents realised and agreed that Islamic environmental articles are rarely written and published in their newspapers compared to the general environmental articles. An explanation to this as mentioned by the respondents refers to the struggle of the journalist who lack Islamic knowledge as well as their incapability to link the Islamic values with the environment. In fact, some of them mentioned about the competition with other articles considering the fact that the environment is more often linked to politics instead of Islam (religion), which further hinders the publication of Islamic environmental articles. On another note, the main reason for the limited number of Islamic articles as indicated by some of the respondents is the fact that environmental issue is not a priority for both newspapers. In most cases, environmental issue is likely considered as a seasonal publication as suggested by one of the responses below:

“From my experience working at *Berita Harian*, for the past 2017 for example, there is lack of something like this [Islamic environmental article] as it depends on the season. Like right now, it is a disaster season, then we write about it” (ID EJ9).

Table 1. Distribution of Islamic environmental news based on year

| Years | <i>Utusan Malaysia</i> (N) | <i>Berita Harian</i> (N) |
|-----------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 2012 | 6 | 2 |
| 2013 | 7 | 2 |
| 2014 | 2 | 4 |
| 2015 | 2 | 14 |
| 2016 | 8 | 4 |
| 2017 | 39 | 22 |
| Total (N) | 64 | 48 |

The result of the content analysis revealed that there are obvious differences between the genres of Islamic environmental articles portrayed in both newspapers. As shown in Table 2, majority of the articles published by *Utusan Malaysia* are written in a feature style (N=32), while most of the articles in *Berita Harian* newspaper are written in the news format (N=28). However, only *Utusan Malaysia* has several articles on Islamic environmental news that are in the opinion format (N=2).

According to the interview findings, the respondents from *Utusan Malaysia* explained that the feature type is more suitable and appropriate for Islamic environmental articles because it provides the journalist with more freedom to write a longer and in-depth articles. In addition, it also allows them to incorporate related Hadith (narrations of the Prophet’s companions) or verses from the Quran in order to support their statement. In fact, feature articles have their own special column and spaces in newspapers; hence, it is considered as a more suitable format in educating the readers about Islamic values. On the other hand, some of the journalist from *Berita Harian* agreed that the news type is more suitable to be used in Islamic environmental articles due to the fact that it is shorter and easier to attract the readers as suggested by the following response:

“Islamic environmental articles that are written in the news format would able to attract the readers especially when the news has included the comment from an Islamic expert and academic. In fact, news is more easy to be accepted and understood by the reader” (ID EJ7).

Table 2. Genre of articles

| Genres | Utusan Malaysia (N) | Berita Harian (N) |
|-----------|---------------------|-------------------|
| News | 30 | 28 |
| Feature | 32 | 20 |
| Opinion | 2 | 0 |
| Total (N) | 64 | 48 |

The result of the content analysis also established that most Islamic environmental articles are written in the medium size (6 to 15 paragraphs) in both newspapers, whereby most of them are comprised of feature articles (*Utusan Malaysia*, N=43, and *Berita Harian*, N=44). In other words, there is a very limited number of Islamic environmental articles written in more than 15 paragraphs.

On another note, majority of the respondents from both media organisations clarified that most of the Islamic environmental articles are published in medium size in both newspapers because it is the ideal size that can fit the column provided in the newspapers for one article. Apart from that, they also pointed out that the size of articles has a very negligible impact on the articles, thus more focus is put on the preferences of the journalists and editors.

Table 3. Length of articles

| Lengths | Utusan Malaysia (N) | Berita Harian (N) |
|----------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| Less than five paras | 15 | 3 |
| 6-15 paras | 43 | 44 |
| 16 and above | 6 | 1 |
| Total (N) | 64 | 48 |

The results of the content analysis showed that most Islamic environmental articles in both newspapers are written based on the Malaysian context (*Utusan Malaysia*, N=32, and *Berita Harian*, N=29). In other words, there is a very limited number of Islamic environmental articles that focuses on other countries' stories except for Indonesia, Mecca, Russia, and United States of America with one to two articles presented over the course of six years.

Meanwhile, in the aspect of geographical location of the article, majority of the respondents in the interview collectively agreed that most of the articles revolve around Malaysian issues due to the proximity factors considering that most of the readers are locals. Therefore, it suits their needs and interests to have more of the local news based on the following explanation provided by one of the respondents from *Berita Harian*:

"We live in Malaysia, and our readers are also Malaysian. In fact, our geography is different those abroad and therefore it is not suitable to compare it. We rather focus our write up on Malaysian [context] only" (ID EJ11).

Table 4. Geographical context of the articles

| Locations | Utusan Malaysia (N) | Berita Harian (N) |
|--------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| Malaysia | 32 | 29 |
| Indonesia | 2 | 1 |
| Russia | 1 | 0 |
| Mecca | 1 | 0 |
| United States of America | 1 | 0 |
| No location | 27 | 18 |
| Total (N) | 64 | 48 |

The content analysis also discovered that the journalists from both newspapers are the main contributor to the Islamic environmental articles (*Utusan Malaysia*, N=31, and *Berita Harian*, N=33). However, it is equally important to acknowledge that quite a number of Islamic environmental articles in both newspapers is written by academics from Malaysian local universities (*Utusan Malaysia*, N=7, and *Berita Harian*, N=4) as well as fellow of Islamic and environmental centre such as the Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia (IKIM) (*Utusan Malaysia*, N=8, and *Berita Harian*, N=1). In regard to this, it should be noted that other stakeholders such as motivational speakers, Islamic experts referring to *ustadz* or *ulama*, general people, and leaders of an organisation are less likely to appear as authors of Islamic environmental articles (one author for over six-year period).

In response to this issue, majority of the respondents from the interview mentioned that it is their job and responsibility as a journalist to write the articles. More importantly, it is hard for them to get people outside the organisations to write Islamic environmental article considering that they are not familiar with environmental issue despite the fact that some of them are equipped with Islamic knowledge. In other words, writing topics such as Islam and the environment is not a simple task that can be assigned to other authors considering that they need to be expert in both areas.

Table 5. Author of articles

| Authors | Utusan Malaysia (N) | Berita Harian (N) |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| Journalist | 31 | 33 |
| Academics | 7 | 4 |
| Leader of organisation | 1 | 0 |
| Fellow of centre | 8 | 1 |
| Motivational speaker | 1 | 0 |
| Islamic expert (ustadz or ulama) | 0 | 1 |
| General people | 1 | 1 |
| No name | 15 | 8 |
| Total (N) | 64 | 48 |

In regard to content analysis, a total of 13 themes that are linked to Islamic messages from environmental articles managed to be discovered in both newspapers. For *Utusan Malaysia*, majority of their Islamic environmental articles are about pollution (N=24), while natural disaster especially flood is the main theme used in *Berita Harian* newspaper to convey Islamic messages in environmental articles (N=28). Moreover, it should be noted that natural disaster's coverage is the second highest (N=22) and almost equal to the publication about pollution in *Utusan Malaysia's* Islamic environmental articles. Hence, this indicates that both newspapers have given considerable attention in communicating the information on natural disaster by linking it with Islamic messages. Interestingly, the result of the present study also discovered that only certain issues are communicated by *Utusan Malaysia* including fishery and water crisis, whereas other issues such as agriculture, tourism, forest burning, and unexpected events are covered by *Berita Harian*.

On another note, the respondents from *Utusan Malaysia* explained that pollution and natural disaster issues tend to receive a lot of coverage in the Islamic environmental articles because the pollution is an issue that occurs every day; hence, it is very important to be addressed for public awareness. In addition, some of the respondents from *Utusan Malaysia* agreed with the respondents from *Berita Harian* who stated that natural disaster such as flood and landslide are often written in regard to Islamic value because they are big scale environmental events which affect a wide number of population. In fact, some of

the respondents emphasised that natural disaster can easily be linked to Islam considering that many people especially Muslim readers tend to acknowledge natural disaster as a destiny from God:

“Because we go back to faith as natural disaster happens due to the sign and warning from God and it is our *da’wah* (inviting people to have interests in the teaching of Islam) to do [Islamic environmental writing]” (ID EJ10).

Table 6. Theme of articles

| Themes | Utusan Malaysia (N) | Berita Harian (N) |
|---|---------------------|-------------------|
| Pollution | 24 | 8 |
| Solid waste management | 3 | 2 |
| Fishery | 3 | 0 |
| Water crisis | 2 | 0 |
| Forest conservation | 3 | 1 |
| Forest burning | 0 | 2 |
| Environmental protection and conservation | 3 | 1 |
| Wildlife conservation | 1 | 1 |
| Natural disaster | 22 | 28 |
| Clean water | 2 | 0 |
| Rainfall | 1 | 1 |
| Agriculture | 0 | 1 |
| Tourism | 0 | 1 |
| Unexpected environmental event | 0 | 2 |
| Total (N) | 64 | 48 |

In regard to analysing the Islamic environmental articles, it is also deemed pivotal to investigate whether the headlines of the articles have been adopting Islamic terms such as *ibadah* (religious act), *ukhwah* (brotherhood), *hikmah* (wisdom), *umrah* (Islamic small pilgrimage to Mecca), and others which are typically used in Islamic articles. In this case, the result of the content analysis discovered a surprising finding as majority of the headlines on Islamic environmental articles are written without Islamic terms (N=48), especially those published by *Utusan Malaysia*. However, the usage of Islamic terms in the headlines written in *Berita Harian* newspaper are almost equal (N=23) to the general headlines that are usually published without Islamic terms (N=25).

Furthermore, majority of the respondents of the present study clarified that the usage of Islamic terms on the headlines is rare due to the lack of knowledge and skill of the journalist to incorporate the Islamic terms in the headlines. Most importantly, it should be understood that a headline is written depending on the suitability of the article. Overall, majority of the respondents agreed that it is not necessary for them to incorporate Islamic terms on the headlines because they only represent the Arabic terms. Therefore, it was further emphasised that the content is far more pivotal in the Islamic environmental articles as stated below:

“Although the headline is written in general form, the content of the article is actually more holistic with the incorporation of related [Islamic] terms” (ID EJ9).

Furthermore, it is also interesting to note that a few of the respondents mentioned about the importance of using Islamic terms on the headline because they believe that it will help to attract the readers to read the whole article.

“If you want to write the environmental article that is related to Islam, you can write the [Islamic] terms to attract a certain group of readers like Islamic preacher” (ID EJ3).

Table 7. Headline of articles

| Headlines | Utusan Malaysia (N) | | Berita Harian (N) | |
|---|---------------------|----------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| | With Islamic term | Without Islamic term | With Islamic term | Without Islamic term |
| Sustainability | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 |
| Environmental protection | 1 | 17 | 3 | 8 |
| Natural disaster | 5 | 16 | 14 | 9 |
| Faith to Islam | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| Water management | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Fishery | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Environmental protection and conservation | 1 | 4 | 0 | 1 |
| Solid waste management | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Total (N) | 16 | 48 | 23 | 25 |
| | 64 | | 48 | |

In the interview, the journalists were also asked the reason and motivation behind the publication of Islamic environmental articles in both newspapers considering that the Islamic environmental articles are a new topic in Malaysia. The results of the interview revealed that most of the respondents agreed that writing and publishing Islamic environmental articles are beneficial to the readers as it serves as a tool for *da’wah* (inviting people to have interests in the teaching of Islam) in the effort of reminding them that everything in this world including the environment is associated with God. For example, several respondents pointed out that flood is considered as a natural disaster sent by God.

Furthermore, there are several reasons mentioned by the respondents regarding their reasons to write about the Islamic environmental news. It is crucial to note that both newspapers have a specific column on Islam which provides sufficient opportunities to write more about Islamic issues, particularly the one that is associated with the environment. More importantly, both organisations have a majority of Malay and Muslim journalists who can easily write about the topic. Moreover, it is also interesting to highlight that majority of the respondents in this study emphasised the importance of catering to their target readers who are Malay and Muslim. Therefore, it is deemed necessary for the journalists to write more than a general environmental article in order to suit the readers’ interest.

Discussions

In summary, the present study has provided a unique insight by stating that the portrayal of Islamic environmental issues in local mainstream newspapers is still low in numbers compared to the general environmental articles despite the fact that Malaysia is best known as a Muslim majority country. The finding of the study is not consistent with the

study of Mohamad Saifudin (2016) which managed to discover a total of 1143 environmental articles published by *Utusan Malaysia* and *The Star* from the year 2012 to 2014 (three-year period). Therefore, this indicates that it is 100 per cent higher than the number of Islamic environmental articles published by *Utusan Malaysia* and *Berita Harian* from 2012 to 2017 (six-year period).

In regard to this matter, it is crucial to note that Islamic values are not highly embedded in the environmental news reporting in Malaysia. In this case, the journalist albeit having the Islamic background would rather write the environmental news in general instead of linking them to Islamic values. In other words, these findings showed that the Islamic background of Malay journalists in Malaysia does not have any significant influence on their journalistic values and views. This finding is slightly different from journalists in other Muslim countries such as in Pakistan where their worldview is shaped by Islam, and they even consider themselves as Muslim first and Pakistani second (Pintak & Nazir, 2013). In other words, in line with the claim made by Pintak (2014), Muslim journalists in Malaysia are not considered as a religious crusade that prioritise their Islamic ideology to the public. However, as argued by Liana et al. (2016), the limited number of Islamic environmental articles presented in both newspapers still proves that Islam has an influence on news construction in Malaysia.

On the other hand, further clarification managed to be obtained from the journalists of both newspaper organisations, whereby most of them agreed that they did not really focus on Islamic environmental articles due to their lack of knowledge about Islam. As stated by Masterton (1992), it is important for a journalist to have great knowledge and understanding of the subject matter in order to produce a good article. In fact, writing an article related to Islam is not an easy task in Malaysia because religion is a sensitive issue; hence, it is necessary for the journalist to be well verse to ensure that bad consequences can be avoided (Halimahton, Ngu, & Raman, 2006).

Additionally, some of the respondents mentioned that it was hard for them to write about Islamic environmental issues because in most cases, environment is often linked to politics instead of religion. Apart from that, environmental issues are not the priority of the media and country as the reporting is seasonal in nature (Mohamad Saifudin, 2016). Consequently, it is also hard for a journalist to write considerably more on Islamic environmental issues. In fact, the media as market-driven organisations tends to focus more on commercial appeal issues that are highly demanded by the audiences (Niblock & Machin, 2007). In regard to this matter, it is worth to note that entertainment and crime are favoured by teenagers and young adult readers in Malaysia (Freeman, 2013; Akmar Hayati & Siti Zobida, 2014).

On the other hand, the study also discovered that both newspapers provide adequate Islamic information coverage in feature articles because they offer more spaces, which consequently enables the journalists to write more by also incorporating the citations of Hadith and Quranic verses. This is in line with the claim made by Zdovc (2009) which stated that a feature article is one of the most powerful assets in newspapers due to its ability to attract readers, thus preventing the readership of the newspapers from declining. Apart from the feature format, both newspapers especially *Berita Harian* were found to publish the highest number of Islamic articles written in the news format which is usually short because it acts as a report considering that information on daily events should be more attractable to the society (Shahrul Nazmi & Ong, 2016). Overall, this supplements the understanding that these issues have high news value to the media and audiences considering that Islamic environmental issues are often written as news articles.

In terms of the length of articles in both newspapers, majority of the Islamic environmental articles were written in medium length which comprises of 6 to 15 paragraphs due to the need of adhering to the preference or house-style of both newspapers. In fact, most of the Islamic environmental articles were authored by the journalists themselves due to the limited allocations provided for outside authors. In fact, the characteristic of Islamic environmental issues that are special and cross-field causes the outside authors to be less favourable because they are usually specialised in one specific field. For instance, an Islamic preacher who has a good knowledge about Islam is only familiar with Islamic values, but possesses no knowledge on environment issues. Therefore, this issue poses a challenge to the outside authors to write this kind of articles.

Interestingly, the results of both content analysis and interview revealed that both newspapers pay more attention on the writing of Islamic environmental issues that are related to the Malaysian context. As argued by Caple and Bednarek (2015) from the viewpoint of journalism, this is associated with the proximity news values where the issues are selected by the journalists due to its closeness of geographical and cultural locations. Indeed, it is undeniable that stories which are close to the readers will attract their interests to read more compared to the stories that are far from their life such as Islamic environmental issues of non-Muslim countries.

Additionally, the headline is a pivotal element to secure the interest of the readers to read the article (Kuiken et al., 2017), and most importantly, it helps the readers to gain an overview about the content of the news (Shahrul Nazmi, & Ong, 2016). In regard to this, one way of getting the attention of readers is using a clickbait strategy that makes the readers curious which motivates them to read the article (Kuiken et al., 2017). In the context of the present study, the limited incorporation of Islamic terms in the headline of Islamic environmental articles showed that it does not act as a clickbait to attract the readers. Moreover, the journalists believe that the content is way more pivotal than the headline that incorporates Arabic terms. More importantly, this is in line with one of the characteristics of Islamic journalism which states that headlines should be written in simple terms and must avoid technical jargons (Saragih, Ag, & Kom, 2011).

The coverage of natural disaster in *Utusan Malaysia* is as high as *Berita Harian* although *Utusan Malaysia* has written a considerable amount of Islamic environmental articles related to pollution. In other words, both newspapers had given a considerable amount of attention to inform and educate Malaysian readers that natural disasters are events that are sent by 'Allah' as a reminder. Majority of the journalists from the study pointed out that it acts as form of *da'wah* (inviting people to have interests in the teaching of Islam) for them, which also serves as the need to inform people without manipulating their minds (A. Rahman, 2016). In line with the idea of *maslahah* (work for public interest) in Islamic journalism philosophy, it is believed that the work of Muslim journalists will be able to contribute towards a better society (Muchtar et al., 2017).

Conclusion

In summary, the influence of Islam on environmental news reporting is still at a low level despite the fact that Malaysia is a Muslim majority country. This statement is proven by the low number of Islamic environmental articles published by both *Utusan Malaysia* and *Berita Harian* newspapers within a six-year period from 2012 until 2017. Furthermore, this is an interesting fact because it shows that Malay Muslim journalists rarely make any connection between the environment issue in Malaysia with the Islamic perspectives because they choose to put more focus on other perspectives such as politics and economy.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the Islamic environmental articles published by both newspapers proved the existence of Islamic environmental articles in Muslim majority countries such as Malaysia.

Additionally, several interesting characteristics of Islamic environmental information managed to be discovered in both newspapers which include the limited use of Islamic terms in the headlines as well as the fact that they are mostly authored by journalists due to the lack of knowledge and opportunities allocated to outside authors. In addition, this type of articles are mostly written in medium size due to the need to adhere to the house-style, and most of them are published in feature and news with the aim of focusing on Malaysian issues as a result of the proximity factor. Apart from that, the themes of Islamic environmental issues mostly revolves around pollution for *Utusan Malaysia*, whereas the main theme for environmental issue in *Berita Harian* newspaper is natural disaster considering that both issues frequently takes place in Malaysia. Therefore, these characteristics would serve as a vital information and guideline for future researchers who are interested to conduct further work on Islamic environmental journalism and communication.

Overall, it was anticipated that the current research will contribute towards the expansion of the body of knowledge in the field of environmental journalism and communication in Malaysia through the new perspective on Islamic environmental journalism. More importantly, future research in this field can further explore the Islamic environmental articles published in other Muslim neighbouring countries such as Indonesia (world largest Muslim population) and conduct a comparison analysis based on the result of the present study. In fact, future studies within the local context can investigate the influence of Islamic elements on other stakeholders such as the scientific environmental communication materials.

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