

Comparison of Indonesian and Malaysian Media in Reporting the QZ8501 Plane Crash Crisis

Siti Zaiton Mohd Ajis
p125621@siswa.ukm.edu.my
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

Emma Mohamad
emmamohamad@ukm.edu.my
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

ABSTRACT

The tragic loss of Flight QZ8501 captured widespread attention in 2014. The incident resulted in numerous fatalities with various forms of reporting and affecting AirAsia's negative image, such as pilot and staff incompetence, aircraft system weaknesses, management shortcomings, and safety issues are often associated when such unfortunate events befall an airline. This study attempts to examine the types of news reporting by local Indonesian media (Kompas.com and Detik.com) and Malaysian media (Berita Harian and Astro Awani) related to the QZ8501 incident, which ultimately shapes the image of AirAsia. The study found similarities between both Indonesian and Malaysian local media in reporting news related to the QZ8501 crash, emphasizing important information, using a positive tone to respect the families of the victims, and avoiding sensationalism in accordance with journalistic ethics and the theory of social responsibility. This study highlights the promptness of AirAsia Malaysia and AirAsia Indonesia's management in handling the crisis by providing information and interacting with the media and victims' families from day one, as reflected in the media coverage. Indirectly, such reporting can positively influence the airline's image in crisis management as recognized through the Priority Integration Award at the 2015 ASEAN Business Awards. and may serve as a valuable guideline for future crisis handling.

Keywords: Media Coverage; AirAsia Flight QZ8501; Crisis Reporting; Airline Image; Indonesia and Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

The QZ8501 plane crash at the end of 2014, experienced by AirAsia, became a major global issue. The QZ8501 aircraft, which crashed in the Java Sea, specifically in the Karimata Strait, to the east of Belitung Island and to the west of the Kalimantan region, on December 28, 2014, was in route from Surabaya, Indonesia to Singapore, carrying 155 passengers and 7 crew members. The QZ8501 aircraft was an Airbus A320-216 owned by Indonesia AirAsia, with serial number 3648, and registered as PK-AXC. The aircraft was first flown on September 25, 2008, and delivered as a new aircraft to AirAsia on October 15, 2008. It had accumulated approximately 23,000 flight hours over about 13,600 flights. Its most recent scheduled maintenance was completed on November 16, 2014. The aircraft was equipped with two CFM International CFM56-5B6 engines and was designed to accommodate 180 passengers.

Indonesia AirAsia is a subsidiary of the Malaysian low-cost airline AirAsia, based at Soekarno-Hatta International Airport, and is a private domestic airline in Indonesia. AirAsia acquired the struggling airline Awar in 2004, with a 49% stake in the company. Awar began

operations on behalf of AirAsia in December 2004, and the full rebranding to Indonesia AirAsia was completed on December 1, 2005. The tragedy involving flight QZ8501 was the first and worst tragedy experienced by AirAsia Malaysia after 13 years of its service. Additionally, the QZ8501 tragedy was the second worst aviation disaster in Indonesia's history, after the Garuda Indonesia Flight 152 crash in Medan in 1997, which claimed 234 lives. The QZ8501 tragedy was also the third worst plane crash in the world in 2014, after Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 and Malaysia Airlines Flight 370.

The final report from the National Transportation Safety Committee (NTSC), issued on Tuesday, December 1, 2015, concluded that a failure in the control system, which caused the system to fail in detecting the aircraft's malfunction, was the main cause of the QZ8501 plane crash that claimed 162 lives. The report also stated that the pilot's decision to reset the system by turning off the autopilot and then manually controlling the flight without sufficient experience led to the aircraft ultimately spinning and diving to the location where it crashed.

This incident undoubtedly affected the brand image of AirAsia as a low-cost airline. Before this tragedy, the AirAsia brand had a good reputation, but after the QZ8501 crash, it became difficult for the airline to maintain its image consistently, which indirectly affected consumer purchasing decisions and, in turn, harmed the airline's image. In this case, the media plays a significant role in shaping a particular image of AirAsia. When an incident involving loss of life occurs, the public naturally looks to the media for the latest updates, whether through print media, electronic media, or new media via internet access. According to McQuail (1983), mass communication is a process in which media organizations produce and transmit information or messages to the public, and these messages are seen, used, and understood by the audience, thereby influencing them. Therefore, the media is said to have a strong influence on society in reporting news.

IMAGE

Image generally refers to a symbol, value judgment, and action. Ideas are also formed based on the perceptions and thoughts of an individual or society regarding a product, employees, conditions, or the entire organization. Various definitions have been provided by scholars regarding the concept of image. Image is the knowledge, evaluation, and actions perceived from an object, whether it is "animate" or "inanimate." This cognitive knowledge consists of ideas, concepts, perceptions, attitudes, opinions, values, and beliefs, which are often classified as knowledge (Syed Arabi Idid, 1993). Corporate image and reputation are considered critical factors in the assessment of an organization because they represent strong perceptions in an individual's mind when hearing the name of the organization.

Corporate image is formed through the communication process created by an organization with specific information that is disseminated, containing strategies, missions, visions, goals, and identity to reflect the values within that organization. Each stakeholder has different viewpoints, creating different perceptions of the organization (James et al., 2000). In other words, an organization is viewed from the perspective of others. Most images that exist vary depending on the elements present in the organization. Image is not only measured by products but also by services, management style, communication activities, and overall actions. Additionally, corporate image can be created by communicators to be presented to the public, such as through the actions of journalists in news reporting (Grunig, 1993).

NEWS REPORTING BY THE MEDIA

News is a report of an event or occurrence, a fact, or an opinion that captures the interest of readers. It is also a brief and accurate account of a particular matter. Additionally, news can be defined as new information that was previously unknown and has an impact on the audience

(Schaffer, et al., 1993). According to Chamil (2008), news is a report based on facts (consisting of factual information; not fabricated or fictional), is new, and engages the interest of the audience to read, listen, or watch it. However, in the world of news writing, only journalists serve as the conveyors of information to the audience. According to Tuchman and Gaye (1978), only professional individuals working in the media determine the selection, gathering, and dissemination of news.

Communication scholars such as Patterson (2000a, 2000b, 2000c), Salgado, and Stromback (2011) have discussed the perspectives that need to be emphasized in news reporting in line with the evolving media landscape. Good news writing should not merely recount a series of events; instead, it should outline different perspectives by providing background information, interpreting significance, and assessing the potential consequences of what might happen in the future (Erik, 2011). Initially, the reporting style focused on descriptive writing, where journalists placed themselves in the role of observers (Patterson, 2000b). The role of journalists in descriptive writing is to report and describe events, which benefits journalists by enabling them to provide information to the audience (Erik, 2011).

However, in the 1980s, journalists gradually adopted an interpretive writing style due to changes that allowed a more flexible approach in their news writing. This style involves explaining what has happened and analyzing why it occurred (Erik, 2011). In interpretive writing, journalists take on the role of analysts (Patterson, 2000b). This shows that in interpretive writing, journalists include elements of analysis, explanation, and evaluation for every piece of information they aim to convey to the audience, going beyond the basic concepts of who, when, what, where, and how. Additionally, news writing and reporting play a role in raising audience awareness by presenting news that can evoke emotions in readers and viewers. The different writing styles practiced by journalists in reporting can create varied message delivery to the audience and leave a specific impression on the reported news.

Therefore, the news reporting highlighted by the media can influence the public in forming their own perceptions of AirAsia's image. Based on this issue, the study examines the extent to which local media in Indonesia and Malaysia play a role in shaping the image of AirAsia through their reporting, whether the written statements are positive, negative, neutral, or balanced. Based on these four criteria, a comparison is made between Indonesian media (Kompas.com and Detik.com) and Malaysian media (Berita Harian and Astro Awani) to illustrate their respective orientations in reporting on the QZ8501 plane crash. Thus, this study is conducted to compare how local media from Indonesia and Malaysia report on the tragedy of the QZ8501 plane crash.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

This study aims to examine the direction of news reporting on the QZ8501 plane crash tragedy as broadcasted by local media in Indonesia (Kompas.com and Detik.com) and Malaysia (Berita Harian and Astro Awani) in relation to the image of AirAsia, whether the reports are positive, negative, neutral, or balanced.

METHOD

RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

This research focuses on online news portals. The selection of online news portals is based on the convenience of obtaining information from these media sources online, as the plane crash occurred ten years ago, and the limited study period restricts the ability to collect all news related to the QZ8501 crash in print format.

The news reports analyzed are based on reports related to the QZ8501 crash issue from the following local media sources:

1. Indonesian Media: KOMPAS.COM and DETIK.COM
2. Malaysian Media: BERITA HARIAN and ASTRO AWANI.

DATA COLLECTION

This research employs textual content analysis as the primary method for data collection. The content analysis focuses on news content from the first day of the incident (December 28, 2014). This method was chosen as it aligns with the scope of the study, given the limited research timeframe. It involves planned data collection aimed at predicting and analysing the relationship between news content and the formation of AirAsia's image.

The study focuses on the portrayal of AirAsia's image based on news reports by the media. Since the QZ8501 crash involved significant loss of life, and news reports were updated as frequently as possible by the media starting from the first day of the incident, the selection of news reports from the first day was chosen to examine how the media reported the event in its initial stages.

QUALITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS

Qualitative content analysis is widely used in the field of media and communication. It emphasizes the deep and subjective interpretation of text meaning. Several qualitative research scholars, such as Berg (2001) and Mayring & Hsieh and Shannon (2005), highlight the advantages of content analysis in media based on context and process. The contextual aspect is observed through the main latent content, while the process aspect involves meticulous and repetitive interpretation of the text. This study analyzes media materials from online news portals concerning the QZ8501 issue using a qualitative approach, focusing on the content within a single news report.

Content analysis of news reports is based on four main directions: positive, negative, neutral, and balanced. Positive news refers to reports that highlight aspects of the incident or company that can enhance AirAsia's image, such as demonstrating the airline's commitment to safety or its efficient crisis response. Negative news, on the other hand, focuses on elements that could harm AirAsia's image, such as reporting on alleged faults, failures, or negligence that may have contributed to the crash. Neutral news consists of reports that provide factual information without offering any judgments or implications on the airline's image, focusing purely on the details of the incident. Finally, balanced news includes both positive and negative aspects, providing a more nuanced view of the situation that can both enhance and harm AirAsia's reputation, often by acknowledging the complexities of the incident and the airline's actions.

The content analysis method was carried out through the following steps: First, all news related to the QZ8501 crash issue was recorded from both Indonesian and Malaysian local media, focusing on statements directed at AirAsia. Second, the total number of news directions in both Indonesian and Malaysian local media were recorded from 9:00 AM to 12:00 midnight on December 28, 2014. This approach allowed for a detailed examination of how different media outlets portrayed the incident and the statements made regarding AirAsia during the specified time frame.

The categories of news direction are based on the following definitions: Positive news direction refers to reports that contain a general statement followed by at least one positive statement within a single report. Negative news direction refers to reports that contain a general statement followed by at least one negative statement within a single report. Neutral news direction refers to reports that do not contain any positive or negative statements and only provide general information within a single report. Finally, balanced news direction refers to reports that contain a general statement followed by both positive and negative statements

within a single report. These categories help classify the tone and impact of the news coverage regarding AirAsia, focusing on how the company is portrayed in relation to the QZ8501 incident as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Examples of positive, negative, neutral, and balanced statements.

News Direction	Example of Statement
Positive	AirAsia has a good safety reputation, including flight punctuality.
Negative	Flightradar24 claims that they did not receive an emergency signal from the A320-200 QZ8501. Usually, in an emergency situation, the aircraft would set the Squawk 7700 code on their transponder to receive priority handling from air traffic controllers.
Neutral	Here are the details of the aircraft as quoted by KompasTekno from Airfleets.net: Registration: PK-AXC Serial number: 3648 Type: Airbus A320-216 Engines: 2 CFMI CFM56-5B6/3 First flight: 25/09/2008 Registration during testing: F-WWBZ Aircraft age: 6.3 years Configuration: Economy class, 180 passengers.
Balanced	Positive statement: The Acting Director-General of Air Transportation, Joko Murdijatmojo, stated that the aircraft made its last contact with ATC at Soekarno-Hatta Airport at 06:12 WIB. At that time, the aircraft reported that it would avoid clouds by turning left. Negative statement: Meanwhile, quoting from Twitter @flightradar24, no emergency signal was transmitted by QZ8501, and what occurred was a signal loss at 23:12 UTC or 06:12 WIB.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 2 shows the frequency distribution of news reporting between Indonesian media (Kompas.Com and Detik.Com) and Malaysian media (Berita Minggu and Astro Awani) on December 28, 2014, from 9 AM to midnight. Based on the total news collected, Detik.Com reported the highest number of articles, with 55 reports or 54.46 percent, significantly more than the other three selected media within a single day. This was followed by Kompas.Com, which published 25 articles, accounting for 24.75 percent of its daily reporting. Next was Berita Harian with 15 articles, representing 14.8 percent of its daily output. Lastly, Astro Awani reported only 6 articles, which is 5.94 percent of its daily coverage. The higher frequency of reporting by Indonesian media compared to Malaysian media can be attributed to the QZ8501 plane crash occurring in Indonesia, as the aircraft was owned by AirAsia Indonesia. Consequently, all recent reporting was dominated by local Indonesian media. In contrast, Malaysian local media based their reports on information received from Indonesian sources since it was classified as international news.

Table 2. Comparison of News Reporting Frequency Between Indonesian Media (Kompas.Com and Detik.Com) and Malaysian Media (Berita Harian and Astro Awani)

MEDIA SOURCES	News Reporting	
	<i>f</i>	%
Kompas.Com	25	24.75
Detik.Com	55	54.46
Berita Harian	15	14.85
Astro Awani	6	5.94
Total news	101	100

Referring to Table 3, based on the analyzed news direction, Detik.Com has a higher percentage than Kompas.Com, Berita Harian, and Astro Awani in reporting positive news, with 26.73 percent (27 articles) and a high frequency of reports within a single day. Furthermore, Detik.Com also reported neutral news at 15.84 percent (16 articles), providing general information related to the QZ8501 incident in its coverage, followed by balanced news reporting at 7.92 percent (8 articles) and negative news at 3.96 percent (4 articles) out of the total 55 articles (54.56%) published in one day. Meanwhile, Kompas.Com reported more neutral news, with 10 articles (9.90 percent), followed by balanced news at 5.94 percent (6 articles), positive news at 4.95 percent (5 articles), and negative news at 3.96 percent (4 articles) from the 25 articles it reported in one day. On the other hand, Berita Harian and Astro Awani were observed to report only positive or neutral news, with much of their reporting sourced from Detik.Com or Kompas.Com. However, Berita Harian reported on the QZ8501 incident more frequently, with a total of 15 articles in one day, emphasizing important information regarding the incident to the public. In contrast, Astro Awani reported only 6 articles within the same timeframe. Nevertheless, each article reported by Astro Awani was noted to be more comprehensive in content and included as much gathered data as possible before publication.

Table 3. Comparison of News Direction Distribution between Indonesian Media (Kompas.Com and Detik.Com) and Malaysian Media (Berita Minggu and Astro Awani)

News Direction	Positive		Negative		Neutral		Balanced		N	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Kompas.Com	5	4.95	4	3.96	10	9.90	6	5.94	25	24.75
Detik.Com	27	26.73	4	3.96	16	15.84	8	7.92	55	54.46
Berita Harian	7	6.93	0	0.00	8	7.92	0	0.00	15	14.85
Astro Awani	3	2.97	0	0.00	3	2.97	0	0.00	6	5.94
Total	42	41.58	8	7.92	37	36.63	14	13.86	101	100.00

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings of the study indicate that there are similarities between the local media in Indonesia and Malaysia in reporting news related to the QZ8501 plane crash, where both media emphasized important information concerning the incident and maintained a positive tone to respect the feelings of the victims' families and show sympathy for the unfortunate event involving the Airbus 320 on the first day of the incident. The study's findings demonstrate that journalists in Indonesia and Malaysia continue to act as observers of the tragic QZ8501 incident, as stated by Patterson (2000b). The combination of descriptive and interpretive writing styles used in news reporting places greater emphasis on the aspect of "explaining," which ultimately creates a positive and neutral image in their news coverage.

Consequently, the role played by journalists is still seen as adhering to journalistic ethics and social responsibility theory, avoiding sensationalism in their reports while fostering a positive image for Indonesia AirAsia. However, the research focused solely on the news coverage from the first day of the incident is insufficient to assess the overall news reporting and its impact on AirAsia's image. Nonetheless, this study highlights the promptness of AirAsia Malaysia and AirAsia Indonesia management in handling the crisis by providing information and interacting with the media and victims' families from the first day of the incident through media reports. This is evidenced by AirAsia, which is also an ASEAN airline, being awarded the Priority Integration Award for the Aviation Sector at the 8th ASEAN Business Awards 2015 for its contributions to economic growth and within the ASEAN aviation industry. This award demonstrates that AirAsia has managed to maintain a good image despite facing the tragedy of the QZ8501 plane crash in 2014. Indirectly, it can be observed that fair reporting can provide a positive image for AirAsia in managing its crisis.

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About the authors

Siti Zaiton Mohd Ajis (M.SSc) is a doctorate student majoring in media and communication at the National University of Malaysia (UKM). Her area of interest is health communication. He is currently serving as a graduate research assistant at UKM x UNICEF Communication for Development Centre, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities UKM. Email: p125621@siswa.ukm.edu.my

Emma Mohamad (PhD) is the deputy dean of research and innovation at the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, National University of Malaysia. She is also the director of UKM x UNICEF Communication for Development Centre. Her area of expertise is in Health and Crisis Communication. Email: emmamohamad@ukm.edu.my