

Dissecting Crime News: Capturing the Value of Stories

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ABSTRACT

The study explored factors which make up news values in reference to various literature and scholars specifically in crime news reporting by Jewkes (2004) the researcher discovered various expected similarities and examined the criteria for crime news story selection in the Malaysian scenario. Using qualitative research methods applied to two prominent case studies and deriving crucial information from crime reporters through in-depth interviews, the study discovers that all crime stories are considered of importance but the severity of a crime defines news values and this is what ensures a story is selected. In terms of factors which affects news values, it can be said that the reporters assumption of what entails impact and of interest to the readers are what generally influences news values as well and to the fact that only if a story lacks major information and confirmation from reliable source that the story will not be done as the story does not have value. This social significance is important and is used to perceive connection to society where importance and impact play a vital role in deciding stories of value. Crime news has the opportunity to not only function as a communicative tool for society but communicates to society about everything representative of a criminal, the portrayal of threats, supporting responses, building norms and values whilst warning the public about the consequences of deviance and this can be clearly seen as an important reason to the affect it has on news values.

Introduction

What makes crime news? In a clichéd statement, when a dog bites a man it's not news but when a man bites a dog it's news. What does it mean? Specifically how does a reporter differentiate one case or event with another as seemingly of interest to the reader especially so if the event or case is in relation to crimes? News values, newsworthiness or news elements is defined as the amount of time and space a reporter and his paper dedicates to a story. It is a set of criteria's which determine the selection of a news story. In crime, the fact of the matter is that there are numerous cases that happen every day in reality from snatch thefts and vandalism to rapes and murders that there is a need to understand the reason a crime reporter selects one rape case over another to be highlighted in the newspaper.

The supply of crime news is virtually unlimited; choices must be made as to which crimes to report (Sheley, 1991). In this case, newsworthiness can be translated as 'the more serious the crime, the greater chance it will appear as a crime story'. This contradicts with Erickson and Gibb (1979), who states the sociological reality of it which is that crimes occur in inverse proportions, to their seriousness, the more serious the crime, the less frequently it occurs. Stacco (1995: 144) mentions that crime is a valuable element in news because of its currency according to an incident and when it is in an early processing stage where the justice system and the presence of police is of great impact. News about individual crimes with an explanation of the suspects and victims also have dramatic value. This dramatic potential (Websdale and Alvarez, 1998) climaxes when a victim or suspect is a celebrity or when the incident was extremely critical or when the incident was reported as extraordinary. Erickson (1998: 88) stresses that normal crimes are not news; news occurs when there is an extraordinary crime. In fact, if an incident does not have a deviant element therefore there is no news either.

In relation to journalism Tuchman (1978) and Ericson (1987) mentions that it is somewhat difficult for journalists to explain clearly and accurately how they value news whilst using the newsworthy elements. When pressed they (the journalists) gave examples relating to individual incidences or a vague idea with the expression "they would have a "nose for news". Generally, celebrated crimes are reported in great detail and followed closely over time (Chermak, 1995: 22-41). High profile cases

generate a great deal of interest and concern, providing reporters and sources (e.g. law enforcement officials etc) with an opportunity to make claims about new or recurring crime problems. At the same time according to McGregor (2002: 2), “journalists do not adhere to formal codes of newsworthiness than can be identified and promulgated”. Affirmation of good stories is confirmed in the newsroom by the acknowledgement of superiors. Meadow and Ewart (2001) note that journalists take their own cues for reporting the news from the editorial hierarchy rather than the community. Question here arises if these elements also affect the crime desk in the Malaysian scenario.

Nevertheless, the lines are blurred as to what exactly constitutes the selection of news and what values are given to each story. Does this mean that stories are manufactured to the whims and fancies of the journalist or the presses needs at the moment? It cannot be denied that crime is extensively reported by the newsman with details and a close following (Chermak, 1995: 28-41). In fact, high profile cases creates detailed information and is followed by the masses. These types of cases creates interest and concern in the reader and gives the journalist and the source (authorities) a chance to claim the crime that has just occurred or have reoccurred. Crime reporting is both human interest (the sensationalism as well as the disruption of public life) caused by the “tragic incidents” and is often done with a human touch. In addition to these elements it is able to sell newspapers and is a large part of the context of popular press where this is characterized by its success in reaching a large number of people.

How news is portrayed and perceived is a two way process. Little has been done to define equivalent factors that determine audience perception of news. This is largely because it would appear impossible to define a common factor, or factors, that generate interest in a mass audience. Hetherington (1985) states that: “...anything which threatens people’s peace, prosperity and well-being is news and likely to make headlines”. The news value of a story, if defined in terms of the interest it carries for an audience is determined by the degree of change it contains and the relevance that change has for the individual or group. Analysis shows that journalists and publicists manipulate both the element of change and relevance (‘security concern’) to maximize, or some cases play down, the strength of a story. Nevertheless, most times journalists adhere to their own selection process with an assumption of what the audience wants and needs.

Itule and Anderson (2003) mentions that reporters and editors, consciously or unconsciously often rely on time honoured news elements to help them make decisions about news. Galtung and Ruge (1965) formed “the foundation study of news values”. Their paper which has long been regarded as the study of news values promised to become a classic social science answer to the question “what is news?” and “how do events become news”. Their concern was with news reporting and not specifically to crime reporting. But their view that incidents and events were more likely to be reported if they were unexpected, close to home, of significant threshold in terms of dramatic impact and negative in essence, clearly made them relevant to crime reporting (Jewkes, 2004: 38). They were specifically concerned with how overseas events did or did not become foreign news in the Norwegian press. It can be said that the many academic research on news values since Galtung and Ruge (1965) identified broad criteria for news selection. Galtung and Ruge’s study was preoccupied with the analysis of foreign news in Norwegian newspapers and was written against the frantic pressures to print and physically transport newspapers from Oslo to Bergen. Their study of why some stories became news and others did not was the heart of their study. Many scholars have sought to update their relevance of these news values across media in contemporary news cultures (Brighton and Foy, 2007; Harcup and O’Neil, 2001).

Lewis and Cushion (2009: 316) in their study explored the growth and character of breaking news on two 24 hour news channels in the United Kingdom, Sky news and BBC News. They examined the nature of the role of breaking news and its impact on the quality of television news journalism. Their findings indicated that “breaking news” has become an increasingly important part of the 24 hour news culture. They also argued that the decision to cover more breaking news stories impoverishes the quality of journalism. Meanwhile, Harcup and O’Neil (2006) revisited Galtung and Ruge’s study by exploring all news items in three UK newspapers and found that among others, Galtung and Ruge’s taxonomy of news factors appeared “to ignore the majority of news stories” (2001: 276). They also found that UK’s national newspapers value stories that include a focus on power elites, celebrities, entertainment, surprise stories, both good and bad news, magnitude, relevance, follow-ups and whether news fits into editorial agenda’s. Brighton and Foy (2007) meanwhile conducted a systematic study of news values across a range of news media also suggesting news selections across the medias. Based on an analysis of national newspapers, regional and national

television news coverage, new media and conventional radio bulletins, they argue that the relevance of particular news values differs from one type of medium to another. The issue of news selection is then based on importance of the function of the medium as well as the message (Lewis and Cushion, 2009).

In terms of news values and crime, according to Surette (1998) and Ericson et al. (1987) cited in Grunewald et al. (2006: 263) when crime is abundant, news personnel decide what crimes to cover and what not to according to newsworthiness. This is shaped by several factors such as audience preferences and newsroom culture. According to Gans (1979), the news media emphasize stories that are graphic and violent because such stories are preferred by audiences. Other factors in news values which influence crime stories to be selected include stories of unusual nature, crimes with multiple victims, vulnerable victims, wealthy neighbourhood, status of the participants and some amount of cultural deviance (Buckler and Travis, 2005; Peelo et al., 2004).

Research Question and Objective

This paper discusses the intricacies of producing crime news and how much prominence a crime news story is given by a media outlet. News values are not universal and can vary between different cultures or possibly even different presses. Therefore the paper questions: what are the criteria of crime news selection? and what affects news values?

Method

It should be highlighted here that in the Malaysian context – crime news reporting is generally the period when a crime takes place and a reporter is notified of this to the point of when the suspect is charged or the police conclude investigations and files are handed to the attorney general before the case goes to court. Therefore when the case goes to court, it is no longer under the jurisdiction of a crime reporter. In this paper, the researcher does a comparative analysis of various news value criteria's prescribed by various scholars and choosing two cases, Noritta Samsuddin (NS) and Altantuya Shaaribu (AS) taken from three mainstream newspapers, *The Star (S)*, *Utusan Malaysia (UM)* and *Sin Chew Daily (SCD)* the researcher textual analyses and is further elaborated by in-

depth interviews of crime reporters who wrote the stories in the three dailies. Therefore, firstly it is only appropriate for one to be introduced to the two cases.

On December 3, 2007, Noritta Samsuddin, a part-time fashion model, was found dead in her apartment, naked, strangled with a pillow case, legs and hands bound with wires from an iron and mouth gagged. The case became the talk of the town as investigations revealed that she had had multiple sexual partner before she died. News reports mentioned that to her family she was a filial daughter and used to send money home but the family and friends were unaware of her activities and her relationships except that she was on the verge of getting married. The investigations also revealed that she had had multiple relationships with men of different races and there was no forced entry into her apartment and neither was there any items missing from her home. An individual, Hanif Basree who was allegedly connected to her murder was arrested and tried in court, was acquitted of all charges.

Meanwhile, Altantuya Shaaribu was a Mongolian national and was a murder victim who was either murdered by C-4 explosives or was somehow killed first and her remains destroyed with C-4 in October 2006 in a deserted area in a forested land near the Subang Dam in Puncak Alam, Shah Alam. The Malaysian police found fragments of bone, later verified as hers there. Her story created pandemonium in the Malaysian press as she was alleged to be in a relationship with Razak Baginda, a defense analyst from the Malaysian Strategic Research Centre think-tank. Razak Baginda and three members of the police force were arrested during the murder investigation. As of the writing of this research, Razak Baginda has been acquitted. Both cases were selected for its uniqueness and the fact that they were filled with drama and suspense which created a pandemonium amongst readers and the Malaysian society. People not only wanted to know what had happened but it made society speculates on the victims and suspects. These are celebrated crimes which were reported in great detail and followed closely over time (Chermak, 1995: 22-41). These high profile cases also generated a great deal of interest and concern, providing reporters and sources (e.g. law enforcement officials ect) with an opportunity to make claims about new or recurring crime problems. This is concurrent with Schelesinger and Tumber's (1994) statement that there are two types of crime news; sensational stories that receive "extended treatment", often on the front pages and with accompanying pictures and mundane stories that are short items tucked away on the inside pages.

Analysis of Literature

In Western practice, decisions on the selection and prioritization of news are made by editors on the basis of their experience and intuition, although analysis by J. Galtung and M. Ruge showed that several factors are consistently applied across a range of news organizations. Galtung and Ruge, in their seminal study in the area put forward a system of twelve factors describing events that together are used as a definition of 'newsworthiness'. Focusing on newspapers and broadcast news, Galtung and Ruge devised a list describing what they believed were significant contributing factors as to how the news is constructed. Their theory argues that the more an event accessed these criteria the more likely it was to be reported on in a newspaper. Furthermore, three basic hypotheses are presented by Galtung and Ruge: the additively hypothesis that the more factors an event satisfies, the higher the probability that it becomes news; the complementarily hypothesis that the factors will tend to exclude each other; and the exclusion hypothesis that events that satisfy none or very few factors will not become news. Galtung and Ruge's (cited in Harcup and O'Neill, 2001: 262) identify twelve news factors which include:

1. Frequency – An event that unfolds at the same time and is most likely to be selected as news than is social trend that takes place over long period of time.
2. Threshold – Events which have to pass a threshold before being recorded at all. This looks at intensity and the greater the impact of the perception.
3. Unambiguity – The less ambiguity the more likely the event becomes news.
4. Meaningfulness – The cultural similarities as it fits into the news selectors frame of reference.
5. Consonance – The news selection may predict or want something to happen thus forming a mental "pre-image" of an event.
6. Unexpectedness – The most unexpected of rare events – among those that are culturally familiar or consonant.
7. Continuity – News that has become headline news and it remains in the media spotlight for some time.
8. Composition – An event which may be included as news less because of its intrinsic news value than because it fits onto the overall composition or balance of a newspaper.

9. Reference to elite nations – refers to actions of elite nations seen as more consequential than actions of other nations.
10. Reference to elite people – where usually famous may be seen as having more consequence than others.
11. Reference to persons – News has tendency to present events as the actions of named people rather than a result of social forces.
12. Reference to something negative – which refers to unexpected, unambiguous and occurs over a shorter period of time compared to positive news.

Harcup and O’Neil’s (2001) revision of Galtung and Ruge’s (1965) taxonomy of news values excluded the virtue of immediacy – perhaps understandably, in the sense that the notion of immediacy is almost indiscriminate yet immediacy with or without live pictures or well-known sources is becoming an increasingly important criterion in deciding newsworthiness (Lewis and Cushion, 2009: 309-310). According to McGregor (2002), Galtung and Ruge’s theory though not modern has never been critically challenged although it has been typologically simplified (Tiffen, 1989) and given ideological trappings (Hall et al., 1978), and therefore adds four new news values for the 21st century which includes, visualness which is the ability for journalists to get pictures as well as the presence and absence of pictures ensures whether an event is selected as news, emotion which could be related to the above where emotions are aroused by something that is seen rather than heard. Events with emotional appeal evoke emotional response, conflict which is the criterion of negativity where there are more than one party concerned and celebrification of the journalist – journalists asks questions on behalf of the public. The journalist becomes a conduit for news sources. Journalists here are not just to bring in the news but to be a part of the news, to be the source of the news.

Other prominent researchers who have defined news values include Rich (2005) who mentions that newsworthiness relates to the elements that make an event or topic news in the eyes of the journalist. Rich (2005: 25-29) news elements includes, timeliness – Freshness that strengthens a story, proximity – Events closer to home that naturally bring interest to the news media, conflict – stories involving conflicts people have with each other, organizations or countries, prominence – well known people are involved, impact – News that ‘hits’ a community hard or reaction stories to news events or news angles that affect the readers, currency or trends – Recent developments, progression, patterns

or shifts in issues that influence readers' lives, human interest – stories about people who have special problems, achievements or experiences. People who have overcome some difficulties or seek to improve society and unusual nature – out of the ordinary events, a bizarre or rare occurrence or people engaged in unusual activity.

There are some similarities of Rich's explanation of news values or news worthiness to Galtung and Ruge's explanation. This similarities can be seen in Galtung and Ruge's frequency, threshold, meaningfulness, unexpectedness, reference to elite people and reference to something negative to Rich's currency, impact, proximity, unusual nature, prominence and conflict (in the similar order). Jewkes (2004) adds the concept of 'predictability' as a news values in some cases and the other values which she stresses on include threshold, simplification, individualism, risk, sex, celebrity or higher status persons, proximity, violence, spectacle or graphic imagery, children, conservative ideology and political diversion (Jewkes, 2004: 35), but in crime news reporting the researcher feels that it is close to impossible to use 'predictability' as a news value as crime is unpredictable unless, there has been a pre-planned event which is not directly relating to crime but that of, for instance, the police and crime prevention. Meanwhile according to Chibnall (1977:) in a study specifically on crime reporting, mentions that the operations of the framework of concepts and values is ordered and controlled by at least eight professional imperatives which guides the construction of news stories. This most influential study of news values relating to crime reporting includes immediacy, dramatization, personalization, titillation. Conventionalism, structured access, novelty and simplification

What is close to this study apart from Chibnall's 1977 study of crime reporting is Jewkes (2001: 41-59) news value for crime reporting which relates closely to the current study. Here she shares what is deemed to be the most suitable list of news values relating to crime reporting for the new millennium:

1. **Threshold**
Perceived importance or drama in order to be considered newsworthy. This might involve an escalation of the level of drama attached to the story. It may include others news structures which may create new elements to mentioned value.
2. **Predictability**
An event which is rare, extraordinary or unexpected at the same time events which are organized or planned in advance can get the

media's attention as the news organisation is able to make arrangements or prepare its journalists and pages. As crimes are unpredictable, there are times where a reporter can prepare for a press conference given by the police in advance. At the same time there is also a set of principals which a reporter works with such as news angles which do not change.

3. Simplification

Here it refers to a news story which lasts for a short time with a minimum number of parts or themes. It is unambiguous in its presentation. This inherent quality prevents complex interpretations. Stories are also personalized which means stories of people are favoured and the cases are seen as singular events. At the same time simplification of news stories are inclined to deal in binary oppositions; where crime stories are presented in a context that emphasises good over evil or hero over villain. Such frameworks create exclusive categories.

4. Individualism

This element connects with simplification and risk. It highlights individual responses to crime. Offenders and those who are potentially offended against are constructed within an individualistic framework. Victims are frequently constructed within familial and social contexts and enhancing even more strongly the impression of offending suspect acting alone.

5. Risk

According to Jewkes (2004), the media devotes little attention to crime avoidance, crime prevention or personal safety. Crimes such as rape and murders for instance are committed by people known to the victim yet the media presents a picture of the serious crimes as random, meaningless or unpredictable.

6. Sex

One of the most distinguishable elements. This could include sex which is in most times related with violence and women. The suspect is normally male and sex becomes a news element as sex crimes or sexually motivated crimes are highly represented in the media by adding sexual histories and sexualities.

7. Celebrity or high status person

The obsession with celebrities is evident in the media. A 'personality' will frequently be the recipient of media attention. High status

individuals in ordinary life are also deemed newsworthy as the media makes them a 'personality' overnight.

8. Proximity
This element includes both spatial and cultural dynamics. Spatial here refers to the geographical nearness of the event and cultural refers to the relevance of the event to the audience which changes according to the political climate and cultural mood of the times.
9. Violence
This element fulfils the media's desire to present dramatic events in the most graphic manner. For Presdee (2000), crime and violence have become objectified and commodified and thus desired to the extent where they are widely distributed through all forms of media to be pleurably consumed.
10. Spectacle or graphic imagery
Crimes have a strong visual impact and can be graphically presented. Pictures which accompany stories are visually attractive and attract the reader's attention first. It is also held to demonstrate the 'truth' of a story or to verify a particular angle.
11. Children
If children are the centre of the story as victims or offenders then the focus of children means that deviant behaviour automatically crosses a higher threshold of victimization than would have been possible if adults alone had been involved. Children and adolescents represent the future and if engaged in deviant behaviour is considered as a declining moral generation. Whereas children as victims are seen as innocent sacrifices to an adults personal agenda.
12. Conservative ideology and political diversion
The symbiotic relationship between media and politicians is illustrated by the support given by the former to the latter in matters of law and order. The news element arises when it is an issue concerning the above or pertaining to a 'victimless crime' which includes embezzlement or protests and demonstrations.

These facts causes the researcher to be worried as like the 1880's in America, crime news will still be used as a means of sensationalising a newspaper without considering the consequences towards society and the implications towards the victim and family as well as court proceedings. This segment addresses the question of how to describe the selection

process on the Malaysian crime reporting and if the classic values mentioned above influences their (crime reporters) selection patterns. A summary of the various scholars mentioned above can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of News Values

Galtung and Ruge (1965/1973)	McGregor (2002)	Rich (2005)	Jewkes (2004)
Frequency		Timeliness	Threshold
Threshold		Proximity	Predictability
Unambiguity		Conflict	Simplification
Meaningfulness		Prominence	Individualism
Consonance		Impact	Risk
Unexpectedness		Currency	Sex
Continuity		Human Interest	Celebrity or high status persons
Composition		Unusual Nature	Proximity
Reference to elite nations		Humour	Violence
Reference to elite people			Spectacle or graphic imagery
Reference to persons			Children
Reference to something negative			Conservative ideology and political diversion
	Visualness		
	Emotion		
	Conflict		
	Celebrification of journalists		

Findings: In-depth Interview

According to informant G from *The Star*, every story has its own value and that it forms the bigger part of the newspaper. This is not surprising as the news values preference of all crime reporters were almost the same although in terms of priority it differed. Even among news organisations which appear to be very similar there may be differences in news reporting which are largely accounted for by the house style. For instance some stress the “human interest” news angle of a crime

story while others may focus on sensationalising the case emphasising on sex. It was found that most of the informants selected news with readers in mind. Stories that were chosen were based on the fact that it would attract readers' attention or news which the readers were interested in reading. In fact informant C from *Utusan Malaysia* mentioned that he would put himself in the place of the reader to see if the story would be interesting for him to read. Informant F from *Sin Chew Daily* adds that news that would quench readers need to know especially speaking for the Chinese audience, would be selected.

I think news value is simple. For Chinese it's the news that people interested in. If the news...this is what the readers need and this news got value. But this news even if the news is quite explosive but nobody care about this one so there no news there should be no news.

Human interest stories were also criteria for news selection. These were stories about people who have special problems, achievements or experiences. People who have overcome some difficulties or seek to improve society. This element could also mean the story touches on human emotion and carries weight in terms of advocating the realities of life. The element of prominence was also mentioned where the informants felt that when a story had the involvement of famous or infamous people (politicians or celebrities) or someone familiar to the reader – this news story would be selected as it would be of interested to the reader. Informant B from *Utusan Malaysia* mentioned:

Faktor ahh... V.I.P. la contohnya, kalau kata seorang kena langgar, kita story tu masih tak menarik lagi tapi kalau Perdana Menteri kena langgar ataupun kemalangan saya rasa story tu memanglah, walaupun melibatkan seorang saje kan. Saya rasa V.I.P. ah...dari segi individu itu sendiri.

Translation: Factors ahh. V.I.P la for example if say a person is hit our story is still not interesting as say the Prime Minister is hit is meets with an accident, I think that's a story eventhough its one person so I feel V.I.P as per the individual themselves.

Other elements which influence the selection of news by the reporter include if the story has the element of sex. This is the most popular kinds of stories and this is mentioned in the literature. Throughout the history of newspapers, sex tend to garner the most public scrutiny and interest.

Blatantly put, sex sells. As was strongly expressed by informant G from *The Star* who stated:

If you look at the most read stories it's always about sex... People love sex... That tells you a lot about people and crime reporting. That gives you an idea on what angles to choose. If the man had the woman; Got the woman pregnant before killing her, it makes a better story... that's what people want and people want to be engaged...

In fact in terms of Noritta Samsuddin's case the story received a lot of coverage as the angle of the story revolved around her sex life and the many partners she had intimate affairs with. This was one of the reasons the story was picked up compared to other stories of the similar nature of rape and murder. The other news value is if there is a massive amount of individuals involved in violence which rarely happens as mentioned by informant F from *Sin Chew Daily*:

normal violence is quite simple..i mean the violence should be very rarely happen like..you see the last time the snatch thief is not even hurting the people but right now things happen so if the snatch thief also using the violence then this news also got value.

What he possibly means here that the violence is out of normalcy where it has changed in how people are used to seeing it happen or there is a change in trend which is unfamiliar to most. This is agreed by informant A from *Utusan Malaysia* who clearly states that this is what readers want to read about. In reference to Noritta Samsuddin's case she mentions:

nilai berita dia pasal okay... dia rogol, ada sebut seks..masyarakat memang biasa akan berminat dengan benda-benda macam tu ...kes bunuh orang nak tahu macam mana dia dibunuh lagipun dia still macam personality dia seorang model, dia cantik apa semua kan itulah nilai-nilai yang kita tengok dan boleh jual dalam berita kita.

Translation: ...news values about her okay.. she was raped, there was mention of sex... society usually are interested to read this sort of things... people want to read about murder cases and they want to know how she was murdered moreover she was like a personality, she was a model, she was beautiful so that has value and with that our news can sell.

In this case the crime has become more violent in the way it is carried out and this inadvertently has more value. These are also stories which are uncommon, different or weird. According to informant F from *Sin Chew Daily*:

I think weird is the most important in crime la..because even if people got three hands or they eat something they are not supposed to eat that is news also.

Crimes such as rapes or murders are not everyday events in most communities' also garnered interest of the crime reporters in selection of the story. Based on Jewkes (2004) list of news values in relation to crime reporting, the researcher cross checked with the two cases and Table 2 shows that both the Noritta Samsuddin and Altantuya Shaaribu cases attributed to high values and determined the news was highlighted to the public. This puts to rest the question which was asked to the informant on what made them select the two cases in comparison with other rape-murder cases.

Table 2: Summary of News Values in Comparison with Literature and Findings

Jewkes (2004)	Noritta Samsuddin	Altantuya Shaaribu	Informants
1 Threshold	✓	✓	
2 Predictability			
3 Simplification	✓	✓	Human Interest
4 Individualism	✓	✓	
5 Risk	✓	✓	
6 Sex	✓		Sex
7 Celebrity or high status persons	✓*	✓	Prominence
8 Proximity	✓	✓	Proximity
9 Violence	✓	✓	Violence
10 Spectacle or graphic imagery			
11 Children			
12 Conservative ideology and political diversion			

* Noritta was neither a celebrity nor a high status person but the media's selection of her case was also based on the nature of her job which then made her a 'celebrity'

Based on the table above it can be seen that in comparison with Jewkes (2004) listing of news values for crime reporting, both cases reflected highly for the amount of values it has. Both cases had a very high threshold in terms of drama in order to be considered newsworthy. The escalation of the level of drama attached to the story and the offences of a greater multitude makes both stories good selection criteria. Both cases had the element of simplification where it was unambiguous in its presentation. Both were stories of individual against individual although the press focused on the victims private lives and the people relating to them nevertheless in Altantuya's case the emphasis was on how the political analyst of the national think tank was tied to the murder of the Mongolian model and this creates an exclusive category of binary oppositions.

In terms of Jewkes (2004) element of individualism, both cases were constructed within familial and social construct. The victims in both cases were given an individualistic outlook. Being filial children to parents or the portrayal of having good relationships with their respective families. The crimes also gave an impression that the offending suspects were acting alone although in Altantuya's case, it was much more complicated as there was the main suspect (who at the time of writing this thesis has been acquitted) and other suspects who were believed to have been given orders of 'execution'. In terms of the element of risk the crime reporters claim that the media indeed create awareness through its portrayal of crime stories. Nevertheless, the crime reporter expects the reader to read between the lines as the stories do not have a clear message about prevention in an on-going narrative. Because most crimes are portrayed as single, individual cases therefore it generally states that the suspects are strangers and thus promoting a stereotype which in turn the reader feels that 'it could not happen to me'. The element of sex was existent in both stories although more so in the case of Noritta Samsuddin as it was part of the motive of the case. She was seen as a woman who had sexual relations with more than one male. In fact she was found to have sex with multiple partners before she was murdered and that became the motive of the crime. In Altantuya's case the element of sex was buried deep in the story as one of the sub categories as part of an extended explanation to the background of the story.

In terms of the element of news having celebrity or high status persons involved, it was clear that in Noritta's case although she was neither a celebrity or of high status but the media portrayed her otherwise. The informants were clear to say that she was a beautiful Malay woman and

the fact that she was a part-time model and held a full time high paying job in company were factors which contributed to the selection of this case. Therefore in Noritta's case it can be said that the media had made her a 'celebrity'. In the case of Altantuya, it's clear to say that she was connected to a person of high status and a celebrity in his own right. Razak Baginda was a well-known political analyst for the country and was involved in a major political think tank while Altantuya was a Mongolian model who had been in Malaysia and they were both believed to have had an affair. This information made both cases a criterion for selection as they were different compared to many cases similar in nature.

The element of proximity also existed in both cases as they were both spatial in terms of geographically near to the event and had relevance to the audience. The events occurred close to home and this is more likely to get news coverage compared to something that occurred elsewhere. Readers are most interested in things that happen in and around them and these cases were precisely that. In terms of the element of violence, it was found that both cases were dramatic events in the most graphic manner. Noritta Samsuddin was found dead in her apartment, naked, strangled with a pillow case, legs and hands bound with wires from an iron and mouth gagged while Altantuya was a murder victim who was either murdered by C-4 explosives or was somehow killed first and her remains destroyed with C-4 in a deserted area in a forested land near the Subang Dam the Malaysian police found fragments of bone, later verified as hers there.

In terms of having the element of spectacle and graphic imagery, it is clear that although in this research visuals were not taken into consideration, nevertheless in both cases visuals of the victim and families were flashed in the newspaper. It is clear that some of Jewkes (2004) news elements are similar to those mentioned by the informants although they may have used a different name nevertheless, these are elements which are widely used no matter in the crime beat of the United Kingdom or amongst crime reporters in Malaysia. Therefore in relation to the research question it can be said clearly here that the news values are an important part of crime reporters decision making and it is crucial in selecting a crime story.

In terms of the extent news values are compromised, it is safe to say that the general perception of crime reporters is that news values cannot be compromised. According to informant B from *Utusan Malaysia*;

“...semua berita kita tak de pilihan tau. Kita ada berita kita produce saje...”

Translation: “...we do not have a choice on all the news. If we have news we just produce it...”

Although very rarely but sometimes ethics and the lack of confirmation and information could affect a story not being selected. As added by informant B:

“...kalau story tu hebat pun kalau kita... tak dapat confirmation daripada polis kita tak boleh running story tu. Tak boleh running. Macam mana pun polis tu mungkin kadang-kadang ada yang setengah-setengah OCPD dia macam lembab sikit la...lembab sikit. Dia tak tau apa yang berlaku pada balai dia sendiri. Dia tak tahu. Pagi berlaku, kita talipon petang pun, oi saya tak dapat report la..so kita tak boleh running story tu. Sebab kita tak de confirmation daripada dia macam tu lah...”

Translation: “...If the story is fantastic...if we don't have confirmation from the police we cannot run the story. We cannot run the story. Whatever it is maybe sometimes there are OCPD who are quite slow...quite slow. They do not know what is going on in their own police precinct. They don't know. It happens in the morning when we call them in the evening, oi I didn't receive the report la..we cannot run the story because we do not have a confirmation from him. Its like that...”

According to informant F from *Sin Chew Daily* on a personal level he would consider to not write a story at all and would not even consider news value of a story if he has a personal interest in the story.

When I think I already know the like.. i'm very much close to the victims..then I will choose not to report such a so called news value. Not to consider about so called news value thing because I know the feeling.

Most reporters also felt that audience perception of the news affect them in their selection of a story. Informant A from *Utusan Malaysia* mentions that:

“Sebab ialah macam saya cakap nak menulis berita mestilah sesuatu yang boleh menarik perhatian pembaca untuk membacanya kalau berita tu tak menarik tak de orang nak baca kan...”

This is concurred with informant F from *Sin Chew Daily*:

News value? I think news value is simple..for Chinese it's the news that people interested in..if the news..this is what the readers need and this news got value. But this news even if the news is quiet explosive but nobody care about this one so there no news there should be no news.

Similarly informant G from *The Star* mentions that:

You report what people want to read. Which is why these values have evolved in the way that they have...the over arching principal is that you want to engage the reader. In that sense more than any other crime reporting touches the people's pulse more than any other kind of reporting and...so

Informant H from *The Star* also agrees by saying that the crime stories must be of interest to people and that this affect the selection of news.

To me it must be something which is what you want to know as a person... im sure you want to read something which is of interest to you. Something which can be of education to you. And something which can make you progress. Knowledgable. News can be anything... But what you want to put in your paper must be what people want to read, People pay to read your news. So you got to be... you got to give them value for money.

Informant G also added that he would not hesitate to compromise news values if he did not have enough information to go by.

If the story that I have has very sketchy information then its not much of a story. I have never been the kind who likes to publish based on innuendo or speculation. So id rather not publish if I don't have enough information so that's something that's very important to me. Having enough volume ...Because crime stories form the bigger part of the newspaper and how can you have a crime story which is a news story without news value? So it goes without saying la.

Informant H from *The Star* also mentions that he would forgo news values for a story if it compromised ethics.

We have done it before. We have done it before sometimes we say its not worth it.

Although informant C from *Utusan Malaysia* disagrees as he insists that all stories should be done and it is not the privilege of the reporters to decide what stories should and should not be covered as he feels that these stories are determined by the editors, although his perception of news values is the fact that all stories should be covered by a reporter and the amount of playing up a story is given will then be decided by the news values and not before a story is selected.

Conclusion

Therefore going back to the research questions as to the criteria of crime news selection, it can be said that in reference to crime reporters in three local dailies it was found that threshold, simplification, individualism, risk, sex, proximity and violence are some major factors which help reporters in the crime beat select news stories. All crime stories are considered of importance but the severity of a crime defines news values and this is what ensures a story is selected. In terms of factors which affect news values, it can be said that the reporters' assumption of what entails impact and of interest to the readers are what generally influences news values as well and to the fact that only if a story lacks major information and confirmation from a reliable source that the story will be done. This social significance is important and is used to perceive to be important to society where importance and impact play a vital role in deciding stories of value. Based on the literature, indeed celebrated crimes are reported in detail but news value of an incident decides if a crime is to be reported in detail.

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