

**Corporate Environmentalism in Malaysia:
Exploring the Media's Pressure on Businesses**

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Abstrak

Perniagaan berkaitan dengan alam sekitar mempunyai tiga isu asas. Yang pertama, untuk menghasilkan produk, bahan mentah diambil terlalu banyak daripada alam sekitar dan dibuat dengan cara yang berbahaya. Kedua, produk yang dihasilkan menggunakan tenaga, toksin dan bahan cemar berlebihan. Akhir sekali, kaedah pengilangan dan produk itu sendiri menghasilkan sisa yang berlebihan dan menyebabkan kemudaratan kepada generasi masa kini dan masa depan semua spesis termasuk manusia. Satu-satunya cara untuk keluar daripada amalan perniagaan yang tidak mapan ialah melalui kejuruteraan semula aktiviti-aktiviti perniagaan selaras dengan prinsip ekologi. Oleh itu, pengendali perniagaan wajib mengkaji semula apa yang mereka telah lakukan terhadap alam semula jadi dan kesan mendalamnya terhadap kelangsungan hidup manusia. Perniagaan tidak akan berbuat perkara demikian sendiri melainkan terdapat tekanan yang semakin meningkat daripada pihak-pihak berkepentingan termasuk orang awam dan kerajaan untuk meningkatkan tanggungjawab alam sekitar korporat mereka. Dalam usaha untuk mengenakan pengaruh ke atas industri, media perlu lebih proaktif dalam melapor dan menyiasat isu-isu alam sekitar yang berkaitan dengan aktiviti perniagaan. Kertas kerja ini cuba untuk merungkai keberkesanan dan peranan media di Malaysia sebagai kumpulan pendesak kearah pengurusan alam sekitar korporat dalam perniagaan di negara ini. Kertas kerja ini melibatkan kajian kualitatif ke atas empat agensi akhbar utama di negara—dua akhbar harian berbahasa Melayu, satu akhbar harian berbahasa Inggeris dan satu akhbar dwi bulanan. Empat pemberita kanan terlibat dalam temu bual secara bersemuka. Perbualan dirakam dan kemudian dianalisis menggunakan perisian komputer NVivo versi ke-7. Laporan ini antara lain membincangkan cabaran yang berkaitan dengan isu-isu alam sekitar, dan pendekatan media untuk mengenakan tekanan ke atas perniagaan. Ia turut menyiasat keberkesanan media menggunakan pengaruhnya ke atas perniagaan di Malaysia supaya lebih bertanggungjawab terhadap alam sekitar dan langkah-langkah untuk meningkatkan tekanan media terhadap aktiviti perniagaan yang tidak mesra alam.

Kata kunci: Alam sekitar, kejuruteraan semula aktiviti perniagaan, alam sekitar korporat.

Abstract

A business pertaining to the environment has three basic issues. First, in order to produce products it takes too much from the environment and does so in a harmful way; second, the product it makes require excessive amounts of energy, toxins, and pollutants; and finally, the method of manufacture and the products themselves produce extraordinary waste and cause harm to present and future generations of all species including humans. The only way out of the unsustainability of business practices is through re-engineering business activities inline with the principle of ecology. Hence, it is crucial for businesses to take a fresh look at the damages that they have done to the natural environment and their far-reaching impacts to human survival. Businesses will not do so, unless there is an increasing pressure from the stakeholders including the public and the government alike to improve their corporate environmentalism. In order to exert an influence on the industry, the media needs to be more proactive in reporting and investigating environmental issues pertaining to business activities. This paper tries to unfold the efficacy and the role of the media in Malaysia as a pressure group towards corporate environmentalism in the Malaysian businesses. This report involves a qualitative study of four major newspaper agencies in the country – two vernacular daily newspapers, one daily English newspaper and a bi-monthly newspaper. Four senior reporters involved in the face-to-face interviews. The conversations were audio-taped and then were analysed using the NVivo Version 7 software programme. This report highlights amongst other things the media challenges pertaining to environmental issues, and the media approaches to exert pressure on businesses. It also investigates the efficacy of the media to exert influence on the Malaysian industries to be more environmentally responsible and forward ways to improve media pressure against unscrupulous business activities.

Keywords: *Environment, re-engineering business activities, corporate environmentalism.*

Introduction

According to Paul Hawken (1993, p. 12) in his book entitled *The Ecology of Commerce: A Declaration of Sustainability*, a business has three basic issues to face pertaining to the environment: first, in order to produce products it takes too much from the environment and does so in a harmful way; second, the products it makes require excessive amounts of energy, toxins, and pollutants; and finally, the method of manufacture and the products themselves produce extraordinary waste and cause harm to present and future generations of all species including humans. In his book he argues that the only way out of the unsustainability of business practices is through re-engineering business

activities inline with the principle of ecology. Hence, it is crucial for businesses to take a fresh look at the damages that they have done to the natural environment and their far-reaching impacts to human survival. They could not help but run their businesses sustainably for long-term benefits and at the same time do good for the environment and human beings. Nevertheless, businesses will not do so, unless there is increasing pressure from the stakeholders including the public and the government alike to improve their corporate environmentalism. As for the public, who, by and large, depend on the media as a main source of environmental information, will only know about environmental damages exacerbated by businesses when the media plays its role to unfold environmentally unfriendly businesses. In order to exert an influence on the industry, the media needs to be more proactive in reporting and investigating environmental issues pertaining to industries. This paper tries to unfold the efficacy and the role of the media in Malaysia as a pressure group towards corporate environmentalism in the Malaysian industries.

Literature Review

Stakeholder Theory

The Stakeholder Theory of strategic management emerged in the mid-1980s. One focal point in the movement was the publication of Edward Freeman's book, *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach*, in 1984 (Freeman & McVea, 2001, p. 189). The central task in a strategic management process is to manage and integrate the relationships and interests of shareholders, employees, customers, communities and other groups in a way that ensures the long-term success of the firm (Freeman & McVea, 2001, p. 192). Another researcher, Carroll (1996, p. 60) defines a stakeholder as "any individual or group who can affect or is affected by the actions, decisions, policies, practices, or goals of the organization". Meanwhile, Buchholz (1993, p. 347) defines stakeholder as "[A]n individual or group that has some kind of stake in what business does and may also affect the organisation in some fashion". According to Clarkson (1995) stakeholders are persons or groups that have or claim ownership, rights, or interests in a corporation and its activities, past, present, or future. Among the various definitions, Freeman's definition is the one most widely quoted and used in corporate environmental management literature (Moir 2001; Banerjee, Iyer et al., 2003; Brammer & Millington, 2004).

A manager needs to understand the concerns of its stakeholders in order to develop objectives, that stakeholders would support, for his or her organisation's long-term success. Therefore, the manager should actively explore their relationships with all stakeholders in developing effective business strategies (Freeman & McVea, 2001, p. 190). The number of

stakeholders and the variety of their interests can be quite large; thus, a company's decisions can become very complex (Henriques & Sadorsky, 1996, p. 383). But in practice, it is difficult and costly to identify and meet all the stakeholders' demands. Consequently, it is crucial for the manager to identify and analyse the meaning and significance of each individual group and to determine their respective power, in order to be prepared for the conflict that may follow from the prioritizing of competing groups of stakeholders (Madsen & Ulhøi, 2001). Stakeholders can be divided into two categories, external and internal. External pressures include regulators, the public, community, media and suppliers. Internal stakeholders include shareholders, management, and employees (Henriques & Sadorsky, 1996, p. 384). In another categorisation, stakeholders are divided into primary and secondary. Primary stakeholders refer to those who are critical to the company's existence and activities, in which are included stockholders, creditors, suppliers, customers, competitors, retailers and employees. Secondary stakeholders are those people and groups in society who are affected, directly or indirectly, by the company's primary activities. Local communities, federal, state, and local governments, social activist groups, media and business support groups, are included in this category (Post, Lawrence et al., 1999).

Businesses and Environmental Pressure

Industry's attitude towards the environment has come a long way over the past three decades. During the 1970s and the early 1980s businesses at large responded defensively against environmental pressures. They asked questions like 'Why are outsiders telling us what to do?' (Greeno & Robinson, 1992, p. 223). According to Newman and Breeden (Newman & Breeden, 1992, p. 211) businesses viewed environmental concerns at that time as less urgent because they lacked information on the cause and effect of pollution, as well as its life cycle cost, and had misconceptions about an endless supply of raw material and disposal options.

The introduction of the concept of sustainable development or sustainability has stimulated various reactions from businesses in general and the manufacturing industry in particular in response to the new environmental challenges. In the 1980s, businesses began to accommodate the media to avoid negative publicity against their organisations. Bad reporting not only exposes their unfriendly business activities but at the same time exposes themselves to regulators who can impose significant legal liabilities (Greeno & Robinson, 1993, p. 223). During this particular decade businesses developed their own interpretations of environmental management and adapted a series of management practices that were an extension of pre-existing management skills, frequently using accounting, quality management systems and health and safety systems as models.

Nonetheless, the early 1990s witnessed a significant transformation; the relationship had begun to shift away from being adversarial to a position of greater collaboration and cooperation between businesses and their stakeholders (Utting, 2006, p. 2). Best practices of environmental management like ISO 14000 (issued by the International Organization for Standardization), and life cycle assessment (LCA) tools began to be adopted by businesses. Increasing environmental awareness, increasing the quality of environmental information available to businesses and introducing eco-management tools and techniques enabled businesses to take advantage of the opportunity to improve their environmental performance.

The Media

A combination of increased public awareness of environmental issues and freedom of access to information magnify media interest in business' environmental performance. A reactive environmental strategy may be confronted with negative publicity campaigns from unfavourable coverage by the media (Welford & Gouldson, 1993, p. 11). In order to manage media attention, businesses should show that they make significant efforts to reduce their environmental impact. While it may be appealing to allow public relations or marketing departments to lead the way any false claims can soon be uncovered by the media which would be very detrimental to the companies' public images. Those who seek to communicate responsible environmental performance should base any claims that they make to this effect on hard facts which they are willing to communicate to the stakeholders (Welford & Gouldson, 1993, p. 10).

Over the decades since the publication of Carson's *Silent Spring* (Carson, 1962), the mass media have shifted focus from the isolated symptoms of environmental degradation towards appreciation of the underlying interconnections between environmental problems and their causes (Hutchinson & Hutchinson, 1997, p. 243). Though media reporting on the issues increased at the end of 1980s and reached a peak in the early 1990s in many countries, it has declined steadily after that. In the US, despite the actual high level of environmental concern, the media's environmental coverage in the early 1990s was less than two per cent (Letto, 1995, p. 22). There are some reasons why environmental issues receive less attention by the media in comparison to other issues. First, businesses put profits before anything else. Over the last three decades, newspapers' income has depended less on sales to readers and more on advertising; this meant that newspapers have become less responsive to their readers, but have become more accessible to their advertisers (Beder, 2000, pp.181–182). A 1992 US study of 150 newspaper editors found that 90 per cent of the respondents said that advertisers tried to interfere with newspaper content, 70 per cent said that advertisers tried to stop news stories altogether and 40 per cent admitted that advertisers had influenced a story (Beder, 2000,

p.181). Not surprisingly, environmental stories in the 1990s tended to have an economic framing, focusing on the costs of environmental regulations in terms of jobs and money, instead of highlighting environmental crises resulting from business activities (Spencer, 1992, p. 15).

Secondly, many media organisations are owned by MNCs who are involved in other businesses (Kellner, 1990, p. 82). The owners influence the selection, shaping and framing of the news. The common mechanism of control exercised by media owners is through the appointment of editors who become the owner's voice, ensuring that journalists comply with the editorial line (McNair, 1994, p. 42). In the US, General Electric (GE) ownership of NBC is a case in point. In 1987, the news station aired a special documentary promoting nuclear power in which GE had a vested interest. Using France as a model in its programme, it portrayed the French people welcoming each new reactor with open arms. But shortly after that, when accidents occurred at French power stations and there was opposition to nuclear power among its population, NBC did not report the stories of these events (Lee & Solomon, 1990, p. 78).

Thirdly, big corporations have learned that environmentalists have used the media to increase environmental awareness among the public and to put significant pressure on the government to legislate environmental regulations. Against such a strategy, they also use the media - to counter negative accusations. In the US, the major mainstream newspapers significantly downplayed scientific understanding on the impact of human activities on global warming. They portrayed global warming as a result of a natural cycle of the earth's temperature (Boykoff & Boykoff, 2004). Similarly, in Australia, the Australian Institute of Public Affairs (IPA), whose budget comes in part from mining companies, has also produced articles and media statements challenging the greenhouse consensus. In the IPA Review, Aaron Oakley (Beder, 2000, p. 242) accused the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) of bias 'because ABC reporters made the assumption that global warming is real, some even making assertions to that end.' As for the public, who depend on media, notably television, as a source of information, they are likely to receive distorted messages. For example, due to high positive media coverage, in 1991 GE managed to receive high ratings from viewers according to a Roper poll, but lost its position in 1993, when it was identified in several magazines as one of the most environmentally unfriendly companies (Beder, 2000).

Research Methodology

According to Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe (2002) social research has philosophically two approaches: either positivism or social constructionism.

A positivism approach reflects that the social world exists externally and its properties should be measured through objective methods. The quantitative paradigm is based on positivism. A social constructionism approach views the world as socially constructed and subjective. The social constructionism is one of a group of approaches that Habermas (1970 in Easterby-Smith et al., 2002) has referred to as interpretive methods. As far as ontology of the approach is concerned, there are multiple realities based on one's construction of reality which is constantly changing over time. Unlike the quantitative approach, in the qualitative approach the investigator and the object of study are interactively linked so that findings are mutually created within the context of the situation which shapes the inquiry (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This suggests that reality has no existence prior to the activity of investigation, and reality ceases to exist when the investigator no longer focuses on it. Qualitative research stresses the process and the meanings of topics of interest. Techniques used in qualitative studies include in-depth and focus-group interviews and participant observation. Samples are not meant to represent large populations; rather small purposeful samples are used to provide valuable information. Unlike a survey in a quantitative study, interviewing is one of the most important sources of case study information (Yin, 2003 p. 89).

In this study, all together four full-time reporters - two daily vernacular newspapers, a daily English newspaper and a bi-monthly Malay and English newspapers were involved in the interviews. The two daily vernacular newspapers were respectively labelled as Newspaper A and B. The English newspaper was labelled as Newspaper C whereas the bi-monthly Malay and English newspaper were labelled as Newspaper D. The selection of individuals was based on their wide experience in reporting as well as their interactions with and the knowledge about environmental issues in Malaysia. Individuals who were interviewed from each media organisation were also well-known figures or those at senior positions in their organisations. The interview protocol contained, open-ended questions. Amongst the questions asked by the researcher were: interviewees position in the organisation, how long they had been working for their organisations, what the nature of their job was and, how they perceived the effect of the industry and the environment. The crux of the interview was related to questions pertaining to media power against businesses, how their media exerted pressure on the industry to be more environmentally responsible in their activities, and how businesses reacted to their pressure. In addition, their opinions concerning ways to increase the strength regulatory pressure in the future were also discussed.

In order to improve the accuracy of the data collected in the semi-structured interview, each interview was tape recorded. This was subject to gaining the permission of the interviewees. All respondents allowed

their conversations to be audio-taped. The interviews took approximately between one to two hours. Overall, the respondents were very cooperative. All interviews were conducted at interviewees' premises at their convenience. Once an interview was completed the taped interview was transcribed on a word processor; by doing so the researcher gained more insights into the topic of the study, which provide new ideas for subsequent interviews. Once transcribed and checked for any errors, the transcripts of the interviews were sent to the respective interviewees either through ordinary mail or e-mail; this depended on which means the interviewees preferred. By doing so the interviewees could then make alterations to the data and send them back to the researcher. Out of four transcripts only one interviewee sent back the transcript with minor alterations. The researcher then amended the transcription of the interview accordingly. Another respondent contacted the researcher over the phone and told the researcher to proceed without any alternation. For those who did not return the transcripts, no alterations were expected from them.

At this point the data were ready for subsequent process - coding. The data were reduced by breaking them down into manageable units of codes and labels. In this research coding and labelling data were based on content analysis methods of data interpretation. A content analysis is the systematic analysis of written and oral information to build generalisations. The content analysis was used for identifying, coding and categorising the primary patterns in the data (Patton, 1980, p. 381). All coding was undertaken while simultaneously listening to the taped interviews and reading from the transcripts. Free codes were used in the initial stages and these were further processed into coding trees when patterns emerged (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The nodes for coding the data were structured around a set of themes pertaining to regulatory pressure on the MPOI.

In this study QSR Nvivo 7, was employed for this qualitative analysis. The software facilitated the research qualitative analysis in a number of ways. First, the software made importing interview transcripts a relatively easy exercise, as the researcher could import Word files saved in Rich Text Format (RTF). Second, by using NVivo software, tedious and time-consuming manual methods of data preparation, management and retrieval-integral parts of data analysis-were avoided. Third, the software helped in the coding exercise. The codes were saved within NVivo database as 'nodes' that could then be reordered, duplicated, merged or removed, to help visualise and locate analytical items or categories. Although this software facilitated data analysis, it is crucial to remember that NVivo did not eliminate the need for the researcher to think. Developing valid and reliable coding categories relies on the familiarity of the researcher with the research data. The researcher became familiar with the data as he went through the process of reviewing tapes, reading transcripts, coding

development and subsequent trials. It has been argued that this process may be the most important initial requirement to develop an objective, valid and reliable coding system (Holsti, 1969).

Qualitative Analysis and Findings

Results of this qualitative analysis are by no means exhaustive, however due to the sheer volume of quotes making up the study, a representative sampling of only one or two relevant quotes will punctuate the results in the findings.

Environmental Issues in Malaysia

When the study participants were questioned about environmental issues related to businesses in Malaysia, their answers revolved around deforestation, loss of natural ecosystems, run-off, soil erosion, toxic waste, heavy sedimentation, flooding, air pollution due to open burning, and water pollution. Inefficiency in the waste disposal system as well inadequate solid waste landfills across the country were also highlighted.

Media Challenges Pertaining to Environmental Issues in Malaysia

From the analysis of the interviews from various newspaper companies it was found that for newspaper D - an organ for the opposition party's media, the government's restriction on its newspaper circulation and mode of publication, from twice a week to twice a month, was considered the main contributing factor to its financial problems.

The media also faces legal challenges in relation to environmental issues. The respondents said they could be subjected to legal actions in relation to the news that they published. That is why in Malaysia, reporters as well newspaper agencies usually take extra precautions and they need reliable facts or accurate information to write their news content. Both the senior reporters of newspaper A and B indicated that they could be sued for incorrect information, and that sometimes even based on correct information they were not immune from legal action. Additionally, for newspaper D which is owned by the opposition party, apart from the above-mentioned legal challenge which was encountered by all newspapers agencies, it has a further challenge to actually sell its newspapers. According to the head reporter of the organisation, selling newspapers has become a problem since its circulation had been restricted by the government a couple of years ago, to only party members and not to the public. He added that even for the party's members, the newspapers must be sold at the party premises. Government authorities always monitor its circulation and on a

number of occasions the police have confiscated the newspapers. To add insult to injury the government has also reduced its circulation from twice a week to only twice a month.

Access to information was a further challenge faced by the media. As far as the media respondents were concerned, this happened due to two circumstances: first, when sources did not want to cooperate; and second, the distance between the reporters and the location of the news event. Access of information was worse for the opposition party's newspaper. The head reporter of newspaper D argued that although his organisation had the required permit of publication from the government (Home Ministry), his reporters were unfairly treated. Unlike the pro-government newspaper reporters (A, B and C), they did not get access passes from BERNAMA (Government Official News Agency). As a result, his reporters were not welcomed by the government departments and government-linked companies (GLCs). These organisations usually were not cooperative because they did not want to put themselves in a difficult situation, whereby their cooperation with the opposition party's newspaper could be misinterpreted and they could be accused by the government of leaning towards the opposition parties. A further challenge was all the media were controlled by political parties – both the ruling parties and the opposition. According to the respondents their top management leaders could decide what news they were supposed to highlight. It would be better if they could write news and or stories according to their interests, argued the respondents.

The Proactiveness of Malaysian Businesses on Environmental Issues

As far as environmental strategies of Malaysian businesses were concerned, participants of all newspaper companies seemed to agree that most Malaysian companies adopted a reactive environmental strategy. When the researcher raised the question of why businesses adopted such a strategy, their answers were obvious – to be proactive in terms of environment costs money.

They don't give priority on that thing (the environment). It involves high cost. For our factories they go for the highest profit they can get. If they can, they will avoid and try to blind (the) government, environmental strategies that they applied only make up, and they will only pay attention on (the) environment if court action taken to them, if not, business as usual for them, back to square one.

(The senior reporter of newspaper B)

However, some of them argue that international companies from Japan, United Kingdom and the US for example are more environmentally proactive. This is dictated by their headquarters.

The Media Approaches to Exert Pressure on Businesses

Generally speaking the main approach of the newspaper companies is to exert pressure on businesses through reporting on environmental issues in their newspapers, albeit that these issues are not as frequently reported as other issues (political, economic, and social). This is understandable, since all of the newspaper companies involved in the study are owned by political parties and/or large companies, which are politically connected with the ruling parties, and whose agenda is more along the party line. It should be highlighted here that the Malaysian media is tightly controlled by the ruling party where most media organisations are government adjuncts. The media's main role is to propagate the government agenda rather than to act as an effective check and balance mechanism. Media in Malaysia traditionally toes the government line, and any negative news about the government and Malaysian companies will not be permitted to be published. Instead, local newspapers have been used by reporters and those connected with the industry to counter negative allegations against the government and Malaysian companies. One case in point was the oil palm plantation that threatened the lives of the Orang Utan in Sarawak.

Despite restricted publication on environmental issues, where by and large environmental issues are not on the front page, the newspapers do take precautions in their reports. If newspapers report any environmental problems such as air and water pollution caused by a palm oil mill for example, it is not the policy of these media companies to expose the name of company responsible. This is to avoid legal action against themselves. The respondents from the media said the information they obtained from public complaints, as well as their own observations in the field, was not necessarily accurate as those sources of information were not reliable enough. After all, they did not have the authority to report situations. As the senior reporter of newspaper A, said:

The fact is, not only true for environmental issues, all like that. First, let say mill A, local community claimed, they said the mill polluted the environment, that is the issue, we go there to report, we interviewed local community, however, opinion from local communities alone is not enough to say mill A pollutes the environment. They have no authority to say that. They not even have any authority to say mill A so and so because this is the system in Malaysia, only Department of the Environment has the authority to say so.

He added:

We only mentioned a mill. Because only a mill has its operation there pollutes the environment. If we say mill A pollutes the environment, who say so? local

community. Tomorrow Department of the Environment investigates and found out no pollution, effluent level that discharges according to the regulation, we will be sued. The risk is there.

The Extent of the Media Pressure

In terms of the extent of media pressure, all participants admitted that their organisations did not have any direct power against businesses. However, in terms of indirect media pressure on businesses, two opposite views were given by their participants. On the one hand, a state bureau chief from newspaper A and his counterpart from newspaper C believed that though they did not have specific influence, they could exert pressure on industries and relevant authorities through their news. On the contrary, interviewees from newspapers B and D were rather pessimistic about that.

According to both reporters who believed in the significant influence of businesses, argued strongly that when they highlighted or reported environmental issues in their newspapers, they made people aware of the issues, and hoped the relevant environmental authorities would take action especially when they had pressure from people at the top (eg. politicians and those who hold higher office in the government service) and/ or from the general public.

The fact is we don't have (direct) power to force people to do their job. But sometimes we made aware, give awareness.... when media discloses any (environmental) issues, okay relevant authorities will start to take action because they got pressure from above. For example here, first it happens in one place, A, this is under whom? Okay local authority, okay it will take action. After that, okay DOE will take action. Okay local authority under state government, so state government will take action. Definitely a state's exco (senior state assemblyman) will question the local authority, 'what the problems? This is your area.' And at the same time DOE, ministry secretary, will also take action. Because ministry will ask, director at federal level will ask state director, and in turn state director will ask his subordinate at district level.all will question because at the end of the day, minister will ask about that. Because reporter will ask that Minister on that issue. 'What your action?', so in reality, the public prefer to report to us, because they see media can get the job done faster. Our job is to exert pressure, so we help these authorities do their jobs

(The senior reporter of newspaper A)

He elaborated his point further:

Of course we put pressure, because sometimes we mentioned their names. We mentioned their names when the authority went to their premises. Let say after we made a report, let say a mill in this village, so the next day what happened? Department of the Environment went there to investigate; okay DOE would go there, so we went together to the place. Normally we would do follow-up so we go together with the Department. We reported when Department of the Environment visited that area, and we also interviewed management of the mill.

Although the interviewee from newspaper A argued that the media had influence, at the same time he admitted media pressure was quite low and not much has changed in terms of the practices of the authorities and the companies on the ground. From this perspective environmental reporting in newspapers seems to be successful in increasing awareness amongst readers and provides information about the environment, but not to the extent that it can exert pressure on Malaysian businesses and the government to be environmentally responsible.

[T]he fact is like this, whether industry or authority, actually like 'a hammer and a nail' (Malay proverb), every time you knock the hammer, every time the nail goes inside the wood. That what is happening now. For example, no matter what happens, where and whatever issues, only when it is disclosed on news, either in newspaper or television, people will react and take action. If not, no action taken because they (the authorities) say no complaint. No complaint, (as for those who wanted to complaint) no use to complaint to the government offices (authorities), because the public don't know. That is the situation.

(The senior reporter of newspaper A)

On the other hand, the senior reporter of newspaper B believed his newspaper exerted little or no influence since the public do not care much about the environment. He argued: '[W]e expose (environmental issues) but the public awareness of (the) environment is the same, they don't care...In environmental case, let say a mill (pollution), who care? local community?, dust particles flying around their village, we as outsiders feel sorry for them, they don't care. Level of awareness is still low.' Despite limited pressure from the media against the Malaysian industries, he agreed newspapers should continuously highlight environment issues, albeit he admitted his newspaper gave less priority to the environment than to other issues such as politics, social, economy, and sport.

As for the opposition party's newspaper (newspaper D), its respondent believed his organisation did not exert any pressure. In his opinion, the owners or the management of the companies responsible for the environmental problems would become concerned about the environment only when mainstream newspapers reported negatively on their companies.

The Relationship between the Media and Businesses

The relationship between the media and businesses was described as a situational-based one. If the news reports favoured companies, businesses were willing to provide information, but when there were environmental problems related to them, and the media would report against them, the media was not welcomed.

Ways to Increase Corporate Environmentalism

When the respondents were asked about ways to increase corporate environmentalism in Malaysian businesses, almost all respondents wanted a very strong government commitment on the environment. In terms of environmental laws, they suggested proper implementation, stringent legislation and better enforcement of environmental regulations. Moreover, the interviewee from the newspaper D considered that government action to increase corporate environmentalism should be through the amendment of repressive media acts, such as the Official Secret Act (OSA), the Printing Presses and Publication Act, as well as official intimidation through the Internal Security Act (ISA). By so doing it would give more freedom to the media to play its due role professionally and in turn would improve corporate environmentalism in the country, he summed up. Together with enforcement, the other ways the government could increase corporate environmentalism were through awareness, education and negotiation.

Conclusion

Interviews with senior reporters of newspaper companies provided an insight into regulatory stakeholders' pressure against the businesses. The analysis showed that the media exerted indirect pressure on Malaysian businesses. Media reporting on environmental issues highlights the importance of the environment. However, their pressure against businesses seems limited as they preferred not to unfold the names of companies responsible to avoid any legal action. In order to increase corporate environmentalism, strong commitment from the government in terms of strong environmental laws, rewards to environmentally-friendly companies, environmental education coupled with support from customers through their buying practices as well as more freedom in environmental reporting were proposed by the media.

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