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## **Research Report**

# **Identification of 'Solutions Information' Elements in Road Crash Reports among the Malay Newspapers in Malaysia**



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MALAYSIAN INSTITUTE OF ROAD SAFETY RESEARCH

ASEAN ROAD SAFETY CENTRE

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## Abstract

As 7,000 road crash fatalities are recorded in Malaysia annually, the story of horrific accidents appears on Malaysian newspapers almost every day without fail. The rule of thumb is the more people killed, the bigger the news coverage. While the news about the road crash is common, little is known about the contribution of news in generating awareness for behaviour change among road users. Therefore, this study investigates the constructive journalism approach to news reporting through one of its constructs, which is the presence of 'solutions information'. The solutions information comes in the form of 'the 6th W' which actually questions 'what's next?', besides the already well-known news elements of '5Ws and 1H'. The study was carried out using a content analysis approach on 100 pieces of road crash news articles from the selected Malay language newspapers over three-month period. This qualitative analysis identifies the demographic distribution of crash victims; such as age, sex, race, time of crash, and the reasons of crash. The analysis primarily seeks the presence or absence of solutions information, which normally in the form of advice from subject matter experts or authorities. Then, a comparison is made among newspapers with regards to the presence of solutions information in their respective news reports. The results indicate that solutions information is non-existence among the Malay newspapers when reporting road crash. The study is hoped to improve the way news on road crash are reported; adding prescription to road safety issues rather than simply describing the events that lead to crash.



## 1. Introduction

A life lost on the road does not simply mean that there is one less person in the world. It is an indicator of the poor state of public health, specifically on traffic safety, that leads to bigger consequences on the country's economic and social issues. Worldwide, according to the World Health Organization's (WHO) in its report on Global Burden of Disease Project for 2004, about 1.27 million people, mostly from low and middle-income countries lost their lives in road crash a year. In addition, another 20 to 30 million became permanently disabled or suffered from some degree of non-fatal injuries due to road crash. The report also suggested that if no action was taken, it is estimated that 2.4 million lives would be lost in road crash by 2030.

The implication of the road crash is big. Many of those disabled can no longer contribute to their respective family or country's economy, and some even become dependent on other family members; and thus, leading to various social and economic issues. The WHO (2013) also pointed out that the global losses due to road traffic injuries are estimated at around USD 518 billion (MYR2.1 trillion). This costs the government in the low and medium-income countries between 1% to 3% of their gross national product (GNP), which is more than the total amount that these countries receive in development assistance.

In Malaysia, road crash leads to about 7,000 deaths a year out of more than 450,000 reported incidents. According to a statistic published in the Malaysian Institute of Road Safety Research (MIROS) website, which data was obtained from the Royal Malaysia Police, the number of deaths has been exceeding 6,000 in the past 15 years and 2016, more than 7,000 deaths were recorded. This has resulted in massive financial loss to the country, either in terms of the 'value of statistical life' or in property damages and insurance claims. In 2010, every death from a road crash is estimated to cost MYR1.3

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million (Yusoff, Mohamad, Abidin, Nor, & Salleh, 2103). The value is even higher now after taking into account inflation.

A projection on Malaysian road traffic fatalities indicated that if nothing was done to curb the current trend from escalating, by 2020, there will be 10,716 fatalities involving road accidents in Malaysia (Rohayu, Allyana, Jamilah, & Wong, 2012).

The state of poor road safety in Malaysia is alarming with the ratio of about 22 deaths for every 100,000 populations, far too high compared to developed nations such as Sweden or the Netherlands which the ratio is only 3:100,000 people. In developed countries, particularly in Western Europe, the death figure is kept low and continue to decline (OECD, 2015).

Various efforts are being carried out by the Malaysian government, especially through the agencies under the Ministry of Transport. One of the efforts is to educate road users either through formal or informal education, as well as through mass media campaigns. This study focuses on a possible media campaign, which is through newspaper reports. The newspapers reports, if executed in the right manner, could serve as an effective campaign daily. This would be possible if the solutions to traffic safety issue are embedded in every road crash news.

### 1.1 Scope and Objectives of the Study

#### General Objective

Generally, this study is meant to evaluate the usefulness of the road crash articles among the Malay dailies in Malaysia in promoting safer roads. The research aimed to determine whether the Malay newspapers, in particular, could serve as an educational or a social marketing tool on road safety through a news report. This is important because the Malay newspapers have large reach (either through print copies or online versions) and read by people across the gender, age or ethnicity. However, it is only fair to say that in Malaysia, most of the readers for Malay dailies are mainly read by the Malays.

## Specific Objectives

- i. To determine the adequacy of news elements (the 5Ws + 1H) in road crash articles among the Malay dailies;
- ii. To compare the adequateness of road crash information among the Malay dailies with regards to road crash articles; and,
- iii. To determine the presence of 'solutions information' in road crash articles among the Malay dailies.

The outcomes of this study will serve as a guide to come out with strategies and efforts to reduce the number of road traffic fatalities in Malaysia through news reporting.

## 1.2 Methodology of the Study

A total of 100 Malay newspaper reports on road crash were randomly collected between January and March 2016. The media was obtained from the Malaysian Institute of Road Safety Research's daily media subscription (provided by i-Sentia), comprises of all newspaper cuttings for the day. However, for this study, only the Malay-language newspapers are evaluated. The Malay dailies available are Utusan Malaysia, Berita Harian, Sinar Harian, Kosmo and Harian Metro. Note that some of this news published in these newspapers were supplied by the National News Agency, better known as Bernama.

Each of the news report was carefully read, and searched for the keywords that consist of the '5Ws and 1H' (What, Where, Who, When, Why, How) elements in the story. Another element, called 'What now' (as shown in Figure 1), is one of the core functions in constructive journalism's solutions information reporting, was also searched in every article evaluated. The 'what now' is the suggestions or solutions provided to the issue brought up in the article. The elements are compared among those newspapers in order to determine the style of reporting, and most importantly the presence of solutions information.

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The 5Ws 1H and 'What Now':

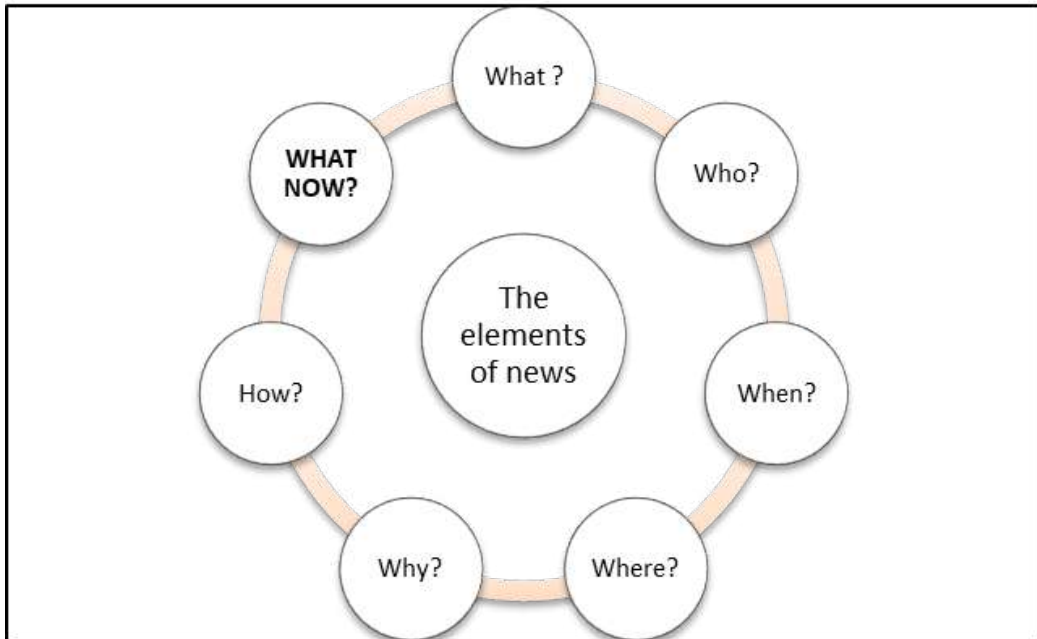


Figure 1 The elements of news

- i. The 'what' in the story answers what was happening during the crash. The analysis looks into kind of vehicle involved in the crash, and this also involved the pedestrians or even other objects such as trees or animals.
- ii. The 'where' refers to the place where the crash took place. The study needs to locate whether it happened at the highway, state road, in the city or rural area. The various traffic zones, such as the low-speed zone, the school zone or residential area are also taken into account in determining the locations.
- iii. The 'who' refers to the person involved in the crash, particularly the driver of the vehicle. This also includes motorcycle driver, the pillion, the bicyclist and the pedestrian. Their sex and age are among the vital information needed.
- iv. The 'when' refers to the time of the crash event; simply day or night.
- v. The 'why' refers to the reason for the crash.

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- vi. The 'how' refers to the event that leads to the crash and normally comes from the police statement.
- vii. The 'What now' is the most sought after element in solution information news, usually come from the traffic authority or an expert who explains the best solution to avoid the similar recurrence of the crash.

The 'what now' (or 'what's next?') is the integral part of the 'solutions information' that, together with positive emotions as shown in Figure 2, forms the constructive journalism. However, the scope of this study does not include the positive emotion aspect; and hence, simply concentrates on the solution's information.

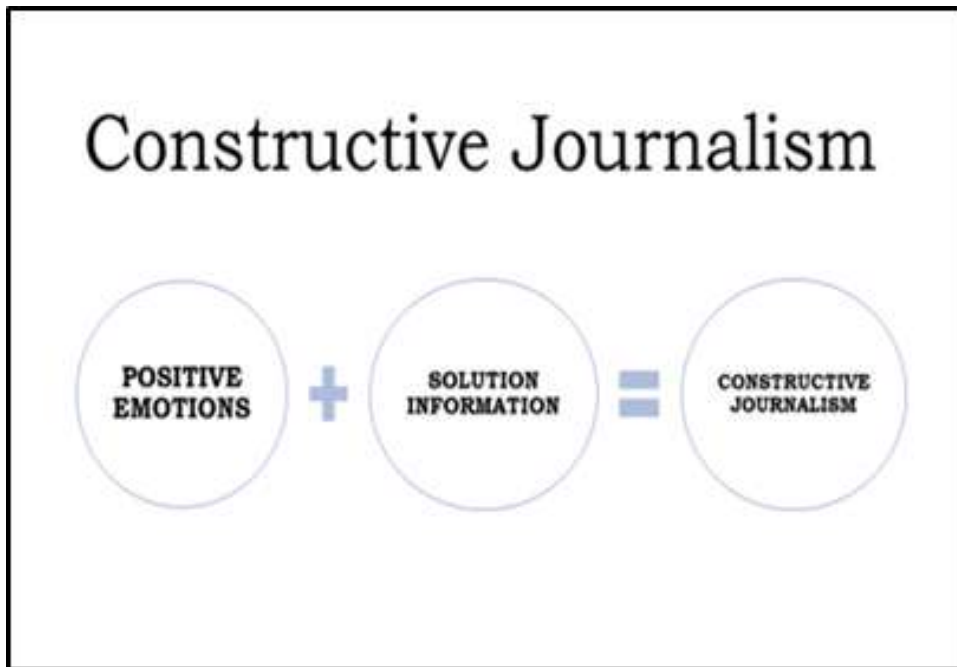


Figure 2 The constructs of constructive journalism



## 2. Data Analysis and Findings

A total of 100 articles of various Malay language newspapers were selected and analysed for their content. The newspapers consist of Utusan Malaysia, Berita Harian, Sinar Harian, Kosmo and Harian Metro. The information pertaining to the 5Ws and 1H and the 'What Now' is manually screen-based from each of the articles. The data were classified according to the 5Ws and 1H (as well as the 6th W) to explain the crashes that were reported. The analysis also looked into the ethnicity, sex, age of the victims, as well as the time of road crash as reported in every article.

As for the ethnics, as shown in Figure 3, the Malays appeared to be the majority with 73%, followed by the Chinese (17%) and Indian (8%). Other ethnics made up 2% of the reported road crash victims. The percentage is quite proportionate and reflective of Malaysian ethnic distribution in general; at least, in the order of population size.

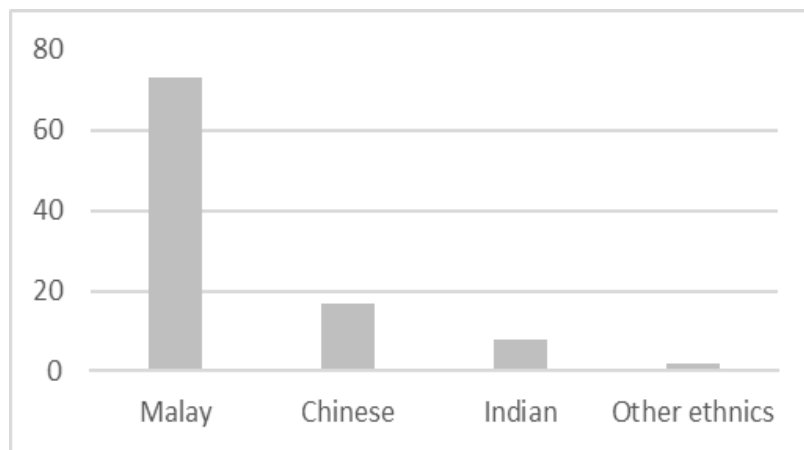


Figure 3 The casualties based on ethnicity

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As for the sex of the victims, 67% are males and 33% females. When it comes to road safety, the males are known to be associated with higher risk on the road; and therefore, the percentage seems to be representative of the actual figure as shown in Figure 4.

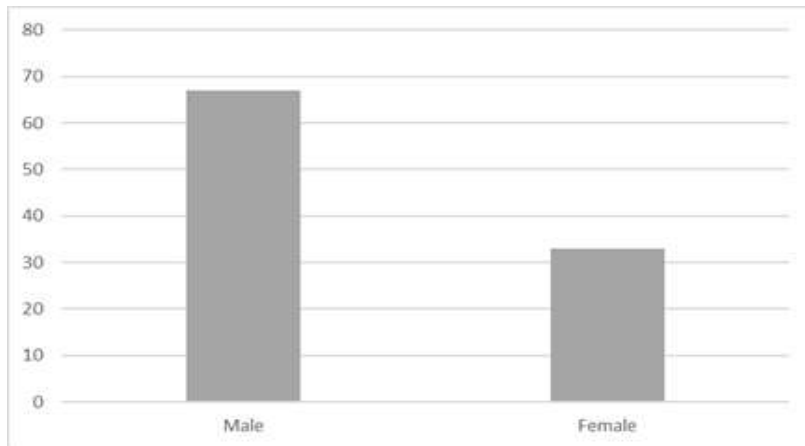


Figure 4 The road crash victims based on sex

The percentage of road victims based on age shows those between 16 – 45 made up the majority, as shown in Figure 5.

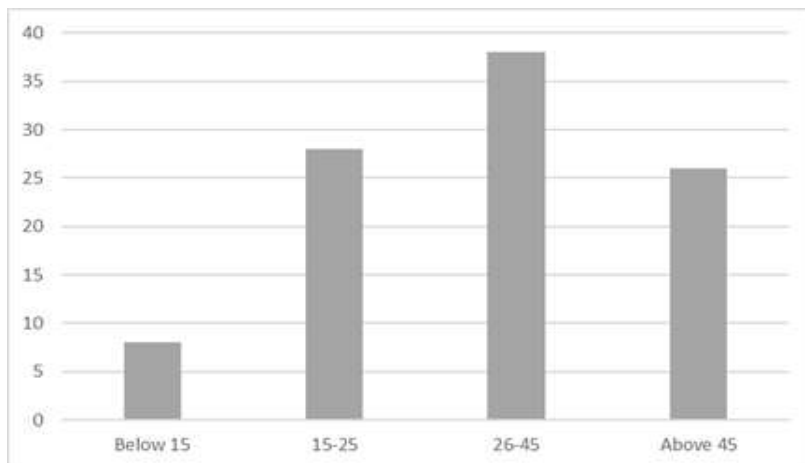
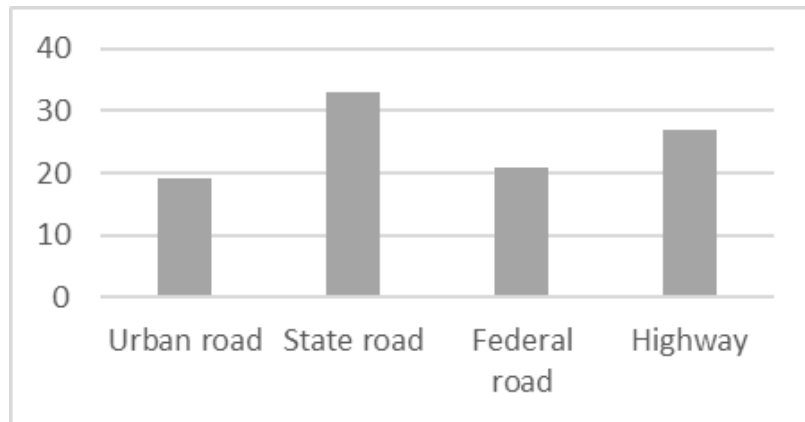


Figure 5 The road crash victim based on age

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As for the location of the crash, most of the cases took place on the state roads (33%), followed by the highways (27%), the federal roads (21%) and the urban roads (19%) as indicated in Figure 6.



**Figure 6** The locations of crash

The news reports have been useful to gauge the type of crash on Malaysian roads. Figure 7 shows crash involving cars (47%) led the newspaper coverage, followed by motorcycles (42%), lorries (6%), bicycle (2%) and pedestrian (3%). However, this coverage does not represent the actual cases in Malaysia, whereby 60% of the death from motorcycle crash (Abdul Manan, 2014).

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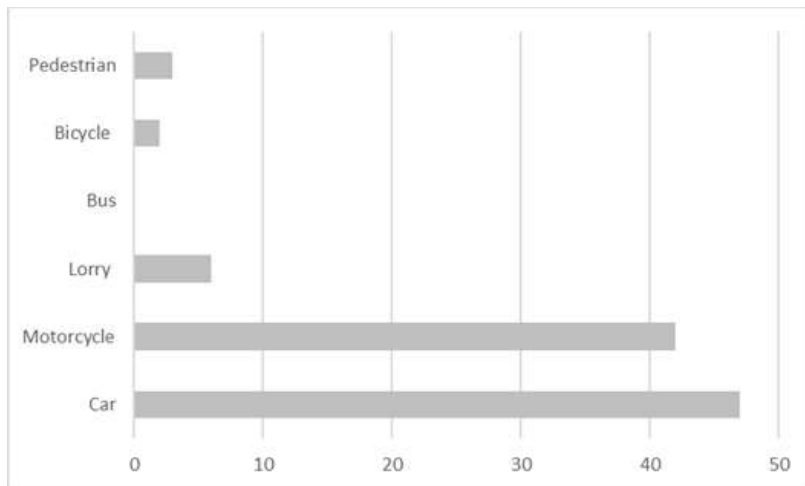


Figure 7 The types of vehicle involved

The study also investigated the time of crash as reported in the Malaysian media. Figure 8 shows that more than half of the cases took place at night with 53%, and the rest happened at night.

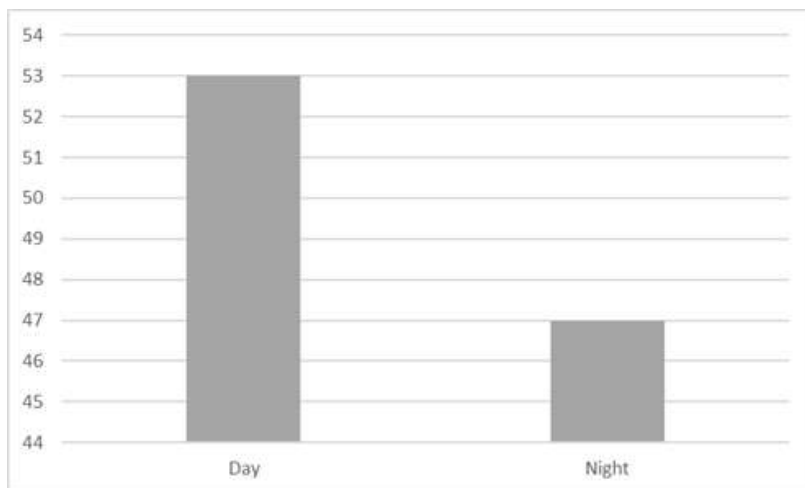


Figure 8 The time of the crash

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In every article, the police determined the reasons for crash. Sometimes, the newspaper would often report a single reason, but multiple reasons were also stated in newspaper reports.

For example, the news story could probably mention that the vehicle was 'speeding' and later went 'out of control' and 'hit a tree'. Sometimes, the article also mentioned more than one reasons for crash, such as 'the car went out of control' and 'hit the oncoming vehicle'.

Of the 100 news on road crashes analysed, 82% reported that the car 'went out of control' as the main reason for the crash. The 'out of control', also known as 'lane departure' usually happened when the driver is drowsy or fatigue (May & Baldwin, 2009). This could happen when the driver is the influence of drug or alcohol; using of mobile phone; drowsiness; heart attack; overtaking; speeding; mechanical failure; or even because the person behind the wheel is simply untrained or unlicensed. Therefore, the 'out of control' is rather a loose term used to describe the crash occurrence.

Overtaking (47%) is the second highest-reason for crash, which usually happened in the state or federal road. Often, while 'overtaking' is mentioned, the newspaper failed to report supporting information, such as whether the driver was speeding or driving under influence.

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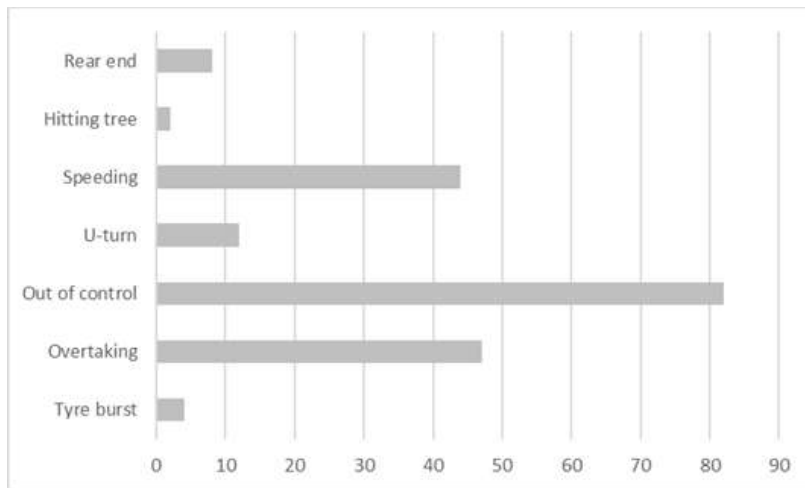


Figure 9 The occasion that led to crash

Regarding the source of information for the news, the analysis shows that the Malay dailies tend to interview the police (79%) and family members (16%), followed by witnesses (5%). However, not a single road safety expert (rather than the police) such as researchers or road engineers were asked for opinion or solution to the issue. Please refer to Figure 10.

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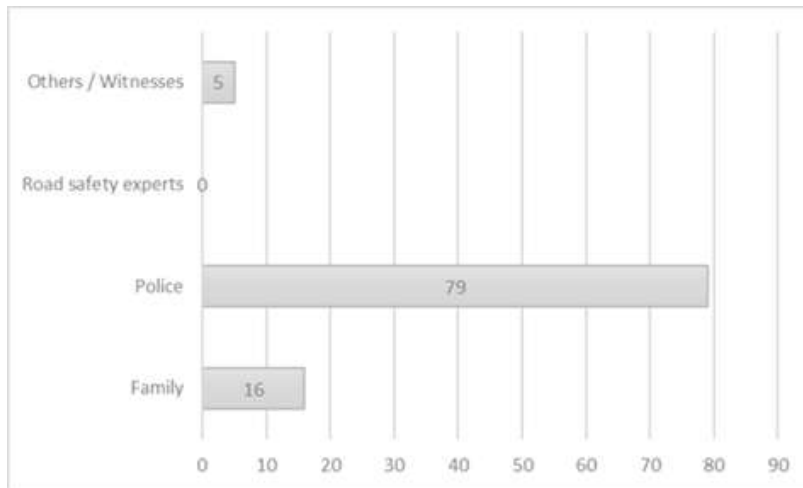


Figure 10 The persons interviewed by the media

The number of fatalities is analysed based on newspaper reports. Of the 100 crash event reported, the highest number was two (2) fatalities (46%), followed by one (1) fatality (45%), three (3) fatalities (8%) and four (4) fatalities with 1%. Figure 11 explains the number of fatalities.

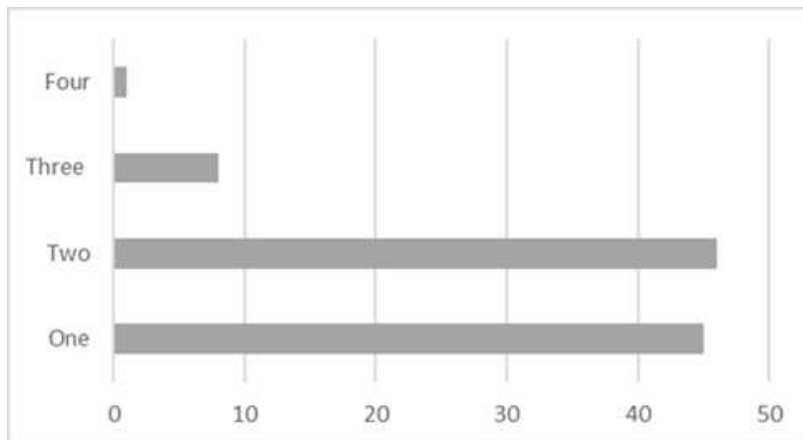
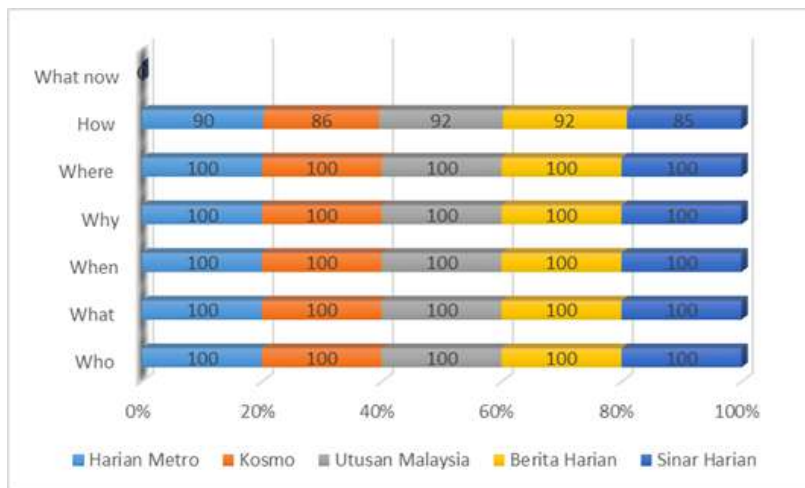


Figure 11 The number of fatalities

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The 'what now' element was investigated alongside the other news elements in all Malay dailies and apparently, none was found. In contrast, most of the other news elements were fulfilled, even though the 'how' element (how the crash happened) was not completely reported. Figure 12 below explains the comparison among the type of newspapers and the news elements in details:



**Figure 12** The 'what now' versus other news elements

Finally, with regards to the solution's information, not a single newspaper article met the criteria for 'solutions information' approach reporting. The absence of suggestions for improvement or advice from the authorities or road safety experts as lessons to be learnt by readers indicated that the criteria of 'solutions information' is not met. Figure 13 shows that articles 'with solution' scored 0% in contrast with 'no solution'.



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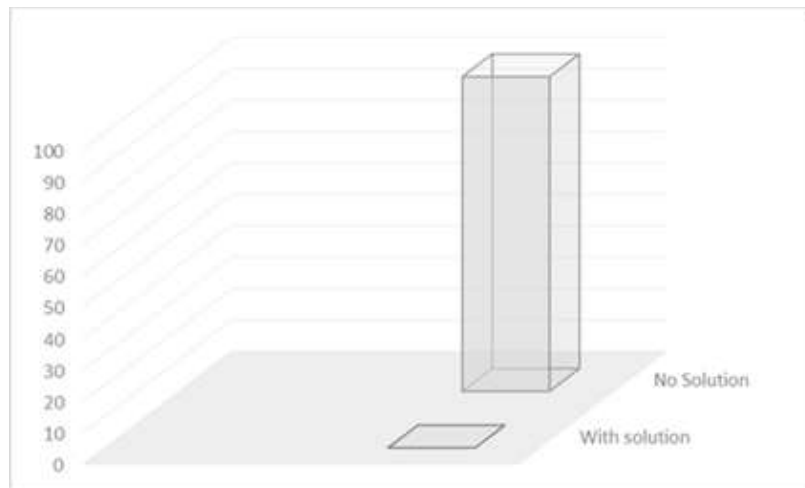


Figure 13 The articles with solution versus no solution

### 3. Conclusion

New reports on road crash in the Malay dailies is one (1) of the best ways to inform and educate readers on road safety, in this case, the readers of Malay newspapers. As road crash is frequently reported in all Malay newspapers, especially when there is a loss of life, it would be useful if the newspaper report could also embed some traffic safety knowledge or advice, such as the reasons for the crash and how it could be avoided. This study reveals that there is inconsistency in reporting the reasons of the crash among the newspapers, although every other news element is filled in the stories. None of the newspapers applies the solutions journalism approach which embeds the solutions to the issue. In other words, after the problem has been highlighted through all (or parts of) the 5Ws and 1H, there is a clear absence of 'what now' or 'what's next' that could be the solution to the road crash. Perhaps this could be due to lack of exposure among journalists on how to apply the solutions journalism approach or could be misconstrued for putting opinions in the article.

However, this could be avoided if the journalists are exposed to the solutions journalism approach which is part of constructive journalism, through training by qualified media professionals who are knowledgeable in the field. The trained journalists could apply the knowledge in solutions journalism by asking the right questions to the police officer who investigates the case, or any road safety experts, on solution to the issue. Unfortunately, as shown by this study, not a single road safety expert was consulted by the journalist as an additional source to the news. This additional element, which makes reporting constructive, would use to create awareness among readers. In the long run, this would contribute to reducing the number of crash as such newspaper articles serve as an effective social marketing tool that promotes safe driving.

Therefore, it is time for media practitioners to be given training on road safety reporting which incorporate solutions journalism approach in road crash reporting as solutions

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journalism involves “rigorous reporting about how people are responding to problems” (Solutions Journalism Network, 2016). This could improve the quality and usefulness of the reporting, which benefits the audience.

The solutions journalism approach workshops are currently being promoted in many developed countries, particularly in the United Kingdom, the USA and also Denmark. Perhaps, a similar study could also be carried out for other media in Malaysia, particularly the English language newspapers.

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## Research Report

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