

Sentiments of Malaysian Newspapers During The Movement Control Order (Mco) Phase 1: Economic and Consumer Content Analysis

Mohammad Noorizzuddin Nooh

Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, Malaysia

To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARAFMS/v14-i2/21192> DOI:10.6007/IJARAFMS/v14-i2/21192

Published Online: 21 April 2024

Abstract

The delivery of news plays a crucial role in society, especially during times of crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the world, leading to a shift in daily lives and the emergence of the "new normal." Newspapers have a vital role in delivering news to the public, setting the tone and message during times of crisis. This paper focuses on exploring the sentiments and themes related to economics and consumption reported in major Malaysian-language newspapers during Phase 1 of the Movement Control Order (MCO), which took place from March 18 to March 31, 2020. The study employs a content analysis approach to identify the main themes of news related to economics and consumption during this two-week period. The analysis focuses on two major Malaysian-language newspapers, namely Berita Harian and Harian Metro. The collected news articles were categorized based on titles, issues, and themes, specifically related to economics and consumption. The findings of the study reveal that the main themes in both newspapers revolve around the government's responsibility in ensuring an adequate supply of essential goods. Additionally, the newspapers extensively cover the government's role in stimulating the economy through general and special assistance programs, as well as providing information about economic sector procedures for operation. Overall, the tone conveyed by both newspapers is positive, highlighting the government's efforts in providing information about lifestyle changes and introducing assistance measures due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This study highlights the significance of newspapers in shaping public sentiment during a crisis and provides valuable insights into the economic and consumer-related content during Phase 1 of the MCO. The findings can contribute to a better understanding of public perceptions and government initiatives in managing the pandemic's economic impact. Further research can explore the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the economy and consumer behavior, as well as the evolving role of media in shaping public sentiment in crisis situations.

Keywords: COVID-19, Consumption, Economics, News, Newspapers, Content Analysis

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has had unprecedented effects on the entire world. This is a major event that requires swift assessment and response. Many countries have made difficult

decisions to 'close' their countries to contain the spread of this outbreak. Malaysia is among the first countries in Southeast Asia to implement the Movement Control Order (MCO) due to the escalating crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak is an infectious disease that can cause respiratory illness, such as a cold with symptoms of cough, fever, and difficulty breathing that can lead to death. As a measure to contain this outbreak, the Prime Minister of Malaysia declared Phase 1 of the Movement Control Order on March 18, 2020, until March 31, 2020. This order is based on the Prevention and Control of Infectious Diseases Act 1988 and the Police Act 1967 (National Security Council, 2020).

On March 25, 2020, the Prime Minister of Malaysia announced that the Movement Control Order (MCO) was extended until April 14, 2020 (Phase 2) and on April 10, 2020, once again the MCO was extended until April 28, 2020 (Phase 3). Furthermore, on April 23, 2020, the Prime Minister announced that the Conditional Movement Control Order (CMCO) Phase 4 would be extended until May 3, 2020.

The Conditional Movement Control Order was introduced on May 4, 2020, with the main objective of reopening the national economy in a structured manner and this allows for the resumption of operations in several economic sectors but must comply with the established standard operating procedures (SOP). On June 7, 2020, the Prime Minister declared that the Conditional Movement Control Order (CMCO) would end on June 9 and be replaced by the Recovery Movement Control Order (RMCO). which is effective from June 10 to August 31, 2020, and on August 28, 2020, the Recovery Movement Control Order (RMCO) was announced to be extended until December 31, 2020. Monitoring is conducted from time to time to ensure that the public complies with SOPs in the new norm to break the chain of transmission of the COVID-19 outbreak in this country.

Most studies on media conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic revolve around the issue of misinformation. Islam et al (2020) conducted a study on 2,311 news articles regarding rumors, stigma, and conspiracy theories in 87 countries and found that most of the fake news revolved around methods of disease transmission and death rates. Additionally, the existence of misleading news has also affected the mental health of travelers from China (Zheng et al., 2020). A study conducted by Brennen et al (2020) found that 59% of inaccurate information in the news was news that had been reprocessed from original news, while 38% of it was self-generated news.

Other mass media studies by Shelby et al (2020); Aslam et al (2020); Jurkowitz (2020) focus on the sentiments played by newspapers and television regarding the issue of COVID-19 in the first quarter of 2020. Criteria such as fear, trust, sadness, and anger greatly influence readers' sentiments towards the news broadcasted during the COVID-19 pandemic. A study on Letters to the Editor was conducted on The Star Online newspaper by Siti Aesiha and Syamimi, which found that letters referring to the COVID-19 pandemic had negative connotations and were filled with emotions (Joharry & Turiman, 2020). A study on consumer behavior was conducted by S.M. Arafat et al (2020) found that most panic buying reports discussing the causes and impacts occurred in developing countries.

Research Methodology

The news articles on economics and consumption studied were based on news published in major Malay-language print media, namely the newspapers Berita Harian and Harian Metro. According to NSTP, the readership of Harian Metro has increased to reach 3 million in 2019 compared to 106,000 people in 1993 (NSTP, 2020). This newspaper is the best-selling Malay-language tabloid in the market. The readership for Harian Metro is aged between 18 - 35 years

old, while for Berita Harian is for those aged 35 years and above (Prima, 2020). For this study, the authors feel that the criteria of the readership spectrum have been met because both of these Malay-language newspapers have readers ranging from 18 years and above, encompassing youth and adult groups.

The method used by the authors is content analysis. This method was chosen due to its suitability with the type of study conducted. The analyzed news are print news and not digital news. These print news articles were physically collected from March 18 to March 31, 2020. This is in line with the dates of Phase 1 of the Movement Control Order implemented across Malaysia for 2 weeks at that time. These news articles were taken only from local and national news sections, excluding business sections.

The analysis method will be divided into two parts. First, the news articles from Harian Metro and Berita Harian will be separated according to titles, issues, and themes under two issues, namely economics and consumption. Second, frequency calculations will be conducted for the resulting themes, and cumulative percentage calculations will be made for the resulting themes.

Findings and Discussion

Tables 1 and 2 show the headlines of news related to economic matters from the period of March 18 to March 31, 2020. Economic-related news from both newspapers were separated by issue and theme. During this period, there were a total of 18 economic news articles in Berita Harian and 13 economic news articles in Harian Metro.

Table 1

Daily Newspaper Berita Harian (Economy)

News Title	Issue	Theme
Restaurants Open But Only For Takeaway	Operation Permission	Use of Delivery Services
Major Supermarkets Operate As Usual	Operation Permission	Operating Hours of Major Supermarkets
RM600 Per Month For Unpaid Leave Workers	Financial Assistance	Aid Distribution to Workers
Financial Markets Operate As Usual	Online Services	Utilization of Online Services
Public Urged To Stay Home	Impact of Movement Control Order (MCO)	Decrease in Local Economic Activity
Night Markets, Farmers Markets Not Allowed To Operate	Operation Permission	Closure of Night Markets and Farmers Markets
Various Stimulus Measures	Financial Assistance	Economic Aid Initiatives
Food Sector, High Resilience Technology Sector	COVID-19 Impact	Resilience of Food and Technology Sectors

News Title	Issue	Theme
EPF Withdrawal To Combat Virus Spread	Financial Assistance	EPF Fund Withdrawal to Alleviate Economic Impact
Decrease In Visitors At Air Hitam Market	Impact of Movement Control Order (MCO)	Decrease in Local Economic Activity
EPF Withdrawal Eases Burden	Financial Assistance	EPF Withdrawal to Ease Financial Burden
Longer Movement Control Order Impacts Greatly	Impact of Movement Control Order (MCO)	Extended MCO's Impact on Cost of Living
Pm Announces Special Economic Stimulus Tomorrow	Financial Assistance	Announcement of Economic Stimulus Package
Moratorium Eases Burden On Citizens	Financial Assistance	Loan Repayment Moratorium Assistance
Deferral Aids Affected Parties	Financial Assistance	Bank Negara Malaysia's Control Measures
Ministers', Deputies' Salaries Cut For 2 Months For Covid-19 Fund	Awareness and Solidarity	Financial Measures in Dealing with COVID-19
RM250b Economic Stimulus Helps Citizens	Financial Assistance	Financial Aid Distribution
Stimulus Package Halts Economic Downturn	Awareness and Solidarity	Appreciation for Comprehensive Stimulus Package

Table 2

Daily Newspaper Harian Metro (Economy)

HEADINGS	Issue	Theme
Full Payment First	Change in Payment Procedure	Priority of Cash Sales over Credit Sales
Crowded Since 8 Am	Operation of Major Supermarkets	Need to Increase Stock Levels at Supermarkets
Vacations Interrupted	Impact of Travel Restrictions	Disruption in Tourism Sector
Stores Close At Midnight	Operating Hours Restriction	Compliance with Designated Operating Hours
Melaka Orders Closure At 7 Pm	City-Specific Operating Restrictions	Compliance with Designated Operating Hours in Melaka
Kota Bharu Establishments To Close At 7 Pm	City-Specific Operating Restrictions	Compliance with Designated Operating Hours in Kota Bharu
Capital City Deserted	Economic Impact of Movement Control Order (MCO)	Reduction in Economic Activity Due to MCO
Financial Relief With I-Lestari Account	Financial Assistance	Withdrawal of Savings from EPF I-Lestari Accounts to Ease Burden
Government Announces Three Deferral Steps	Financial Relief Measures	Government Offers Moratorium on Loan Repayments and Business Charges
40,000 Traders Exempted From Payment	Economic Stimulus Measures	Exemption of 40,000 Traders from Rent Payments as Part of Economic Package
Lost Income	Impact of Movement Control Order (MCO)	Loss of Income and Need for Assistance among Daily Wage Earners
RM100 Billion Economic Stimulus	Economic Stimulus Measures	Government Allocates RM100 Billion to Support Businesses Affected by MCO
No Ramadan Bazaar In Melaka This Year	Impact of Movement Control Order (MCO)	Suspension of Ramadan Bazaars and Night Markets Due to MCO

Table 3 and 4 show the headlines related to consumer issues from the period of March 18 to March 31, 2020. Consumer-related news from both newspapers has been categorized according to issue and theme. During this period, there were a total of 11 consumer-related news articles in Berita Harian and 6 in Harian Metro.

Table 3

Berita Harian Newspaper (Consumer Issues)

HEADINGS	ISSUES	THEMES
KPDNHEP Guarantees Sufficient Supply	KPDNHEP ensures an adequate supply of essential goods. Chicken/egg production increased. 800 million eggs sold per month, previously 620/630 million eggs.	Increase in demand for basic goods and necessities suddenly.
Critical Product Manufacturing Sector Allowed Operation	The government allows operations defined as critical: Such as food, beverages, agriculture, fisheries, and household goods.	Critical product flow such as food, agriculture, and fisheries.
No Need To Panic, Rice Supply Adequate	The Ministry notifies consistent and imported food supplies.	Government ensures sufficient supply of basic necessities.
KPDNHEP Authorizes Mask Imports	The government sets a ceiling price increase to RM2.	Government effectively controls prices of goods.
Hiding Masks Leads To Shortages In The Market	Some profit-seekers easily sell on the illegal market at high prices.	Increase in fraud cases during PKP, especially in face mask trading.
Meat, Egg Supplies Adequate	Meat and egg supplies are sufficient to meet domestic demand.	Government ensures sufficient supply of basic necessities.
Food Supply Ensured - Ismail Sabri	The Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry assures food supply for the needs of the people.	Government ensures sufficient supply of basic necessities.
Special Committee Ensures Uninterrupted Supply	This committee will ensure that food and supplies are not only produced but also delivered and packaged.	Government ensures sufficient supply of basic necessities.
PPR Tenants, DBKL Exempt From 3 Months' Rent	The Ministry agrees to waive business premise rental payments for 6000 tenants.	Government provides convenience to business premises.
Sufficient Supplies With No Price Increases	KPDNHEP mobilizes 2500 enforcers to ensure compliance with regulations.	Government ensures sufficient supply of basic necessities.
Free Internet Starting April 1	Free internet provision with 1GB quota per day starting April 1 until the end of PKP.	Internet is also a basic necessity during PKP.

Table 4

Harian Metro Newspaper (Consumer Issues)

HEADING	ISSUE	THEME
Surprised: 900 Egg Cartons Sold	Traders state that usually about 100 egg cartons are sold per day, but during MCO, 900 cartons were sold, and over 1000 are needed daily to meet the demand	Increased demand for basic necessities and sudden requirements
Pharmaniaga Ensures Sufficient Medicine	Pharmaniaga made early preparations and ensured the supply of medicine to all government hospitals and clinics remained uninterrupted	Preparation of stock made early
Still Buying In Large Quantities	The public is still rushing and buying daily necessities in large quantities	Concerns about inadequate supplies and panic
Delay In Stock Delivery	Buyers have to visit multiple stores to fulfill their needs	Concerns about inadequate supplies and panic
370 Cases Of Mask And Other Items Scammed	Many became victims of frauds involving the purchase of masks, nose covers, and other items during the spread of the infection	Increase in frauds noted during MCO, especially in mask buying and selling
Support For Free Internet	Welcoming the special free internet package from April 1st until the end of MCO	Internet is also a basic necessity during MCO

Table 5 shows the frequency and cumulative percentages for economic-related news published in the newspapers *Berita Harian* and *Harian Metro* during the period of March 18 to March 31, 2020. Overall, a total of 31 economic-related news articles were published in both newspapers during Phase 1 of the Movement Control Order (MCO). The most frequent themes of news articles revolved around government initiatives to support the continuity of Malaysia's economy and explanations regarding the operating hours of business premises during Phase 1 of the MCO. Both of these aspects could facilitate economic activity amid the uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. During Phase 1 of the MCO, both of these themes were published 6 times each. Additionally, themes that appeared 5 times in the first 2 weeks of the MCO period specifically focused on government allocations for the people. Furthermore, themes discussing the impacts of the MCO, which have affected several economic sectors due to limitations on physical movement, were published 3 times, similar to news articles highlighting the government's efforts and concerns in combating the outbreak. Additionally, news articles providing explanations about the types of businesses not allowed to operate during Phase 1 of the MCO were published twice. Themes such as the increase in the cost of living, the priority of cash sales over credit sales, the promotion of online services to facilitate transactions, the importance of the food industry compared to other industries during the MCO, the impact on the tourism sector, and cases of income loss due to the MCO were among the other themes arising from economic-related news articles, each with a frequency of 1 for each theme.

Table 5
Frequency and Percentage (Economy)

Theme	Frequency	Percentage
Government initiatives to assist the Malaysian economy	6	19.35%
Permission to operate but must comply with specified time and conditions	6	19.35%
Government allocation reduces the burden on the people	5	16.13%
Effects of Movement Control Order (PKP) causing economic sectors to be affected and not well-received	3	9.68%
Government's concern and earnestness in controlling the spread of the epidemic	3	9.68%
Night markets without permanent structures are not allowed to operate	2	6.45%
Rising cost of living	1	3.23%
Preference for cash sales over credit sales	1	3.23%
Encouraging online services to facilitate transactions	1	3.23%
The food sector is crucial compared to other sectors	1	3.23%
Tourism sector also affected	1	3.23%
Loss of income during PKP implementation	1	3.23%
Total	31	100%

Table 6 shows the frequency and cumulative percentage of news related to consumer issues published in the newspapers *Berita Harian* and *Harian Metro* for the period of March 18 - 31, 2020. Overall, a total of 17 consumer-related news articles were published in both newspapers during Phase 1 of the Movement Control Order. The most frequent theme of the news articles revolved around the government's assurance to the public as consumers that essential goods were sufficient, with this theme being reported 5 times throughout the two-week period. Themes that appeared twice each included sudden increases in demand for basic goods, increased incidents of fraud in purchasing goods, the recognition of the internet as an essential need during the Movement Control Order, and public concerns about potential shortages of essential goods. Additionally, themes such as focusing on critical product streams, early stock provisioning, government price controls, and government assistance to businesses were reported once during the two weeks of Phase 1 of the Movement Control Order between March 18 and 31, 2020.

Table 6

Frequency and Percentage (Consumer Issues)

THEME	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Government ensures sufficient supply of basic necessities	5	29.4%
Sudden increase in demand for basic goods and necessities	2	11.8%
Increase in fraud cases recorded during MCO, especially in face mask transactions	2	11.8%
Internet is considered a basic necessity during MCO	2	11.8%
Public concerned about possible shortage of essential goods and panic	2	11.8%
Focus on critical product streams like food, agriculture, and fisheries	1	5.85%
Early stock preparation is made	1	5.85%
Government provides facilities to business premises	1	5.85%
Government effectively controls prices of goods	1	5.85%
Total	17	100%

Conclusion

During the economic uncertainty that accompanied the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia, it is reasonable that issues related to health and the economy dominated the headlines of major newspapers. This study found that, for economic-themed news, only 31 articles were published in *Berita Harian* and *Harian Metro* newspapers, while 17 articles focused on consumer-related topics were published in the following newspapers. The main themes for both of these issues revolved around the government's responsibility to ensure an adequate supply of basic goods. Additionally, key themes concerning the government's role in stimulating the economy by introducing general and special assistance for the people, as well as providing explanations on the procedures for economic sectors to operate, were also priorities for publication in major Malay-language newspapers. In conclusion, the tone conveyed by both of these newspapers is positive, highlighting the government's efforts to provide information to the people about changes in lifestyle norms, while also introducing assistance measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

References

- Arafat, S. Y., Kar, S. K., Menon, V., Kaliamoorthy, C., Mukhrejee, S., Alradie-Mohamed, A., . . . Kabir, R. (2020). Panic Buying: An Insight from the Content Analysis of Media Reports During COVID_19 Pandemic. *Neurology, Psychiatry and Brain Research*, 37, 100-103.
- Aslam, F., Awan, T. M., Syed, J. H., Kashif, A., & Parveen, M. (2020). Sentiments and Emotions Evoked by News Headlines of Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Outbreak. *Humanities & Social Sciences Communications*, 7(23), 1-9.
- Brennen, J. S., Felix M. Simon, P. N., & Nielsen, R. K. (2020). *Types, Sources, and Claims of COVID_19 Misinformation*. Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.
- Buckman, S. R., Shapiro, A. H., Sudhof, M., & Wilson, D. J. (2020). News Sentiment in the Time of COVID-19. *Research from Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco*, pp. 1-5.
- Islam, M. S., Sarkar, T., Khan, S. H., Kamal, A.-H. M., Hasan, S. M., Kabir, A., . . . Seale, H. (2020). COVID-19-Related Infodemic and Its Impact on Public Health: A Global Social Media Analysis. *American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene*, 1621.
- Joharry, S. A., & Turiman, S. (2020). Examining Malaysian Public Letters to Editor on COVID-19 Pandemic: A Corpus-assisted Discourse Analysis. *Journal of Language Studies*, 20(3), 2420260.
- Jurkowitz, M. (2020). Cable TV and COVID-19: How Americans Perceive the Outbreak and View Media Coverage Differ by Main News Source. *Journalism & Media*, 1-8.
- Majlis Keselamatan Negara. (2020). Soalan Lazim (FAQ's) - Bil. 1 (Dikemaskini) 18-31 Mac 2020. Putrajaya, Putrajaya, Malaysia: Majlis Keselamatan Negara.
- NSTP. (2020). *NSTP*. Retrieved from Products: <https://www.nstp.com.my/harian-metro-2/>
- Prima, M. (2020). *NSTP*. Retrieved from Media Prima: https://www.mediaprima.com.my/?page_id=228
- Zheng, Y., Goh, E., & Wen, J. (2020). The Effects of Misleading Media Reports About COVID-19 on Chinese Tourists' Mental Health: A Perspective Article. *Anatolia*, 31(2), 337-340.