

*Contemporary Issues in*

# ISLAMIC COMMUNICATION

Editor

**Mohd Yusof Hussain**



**IIUM Press**

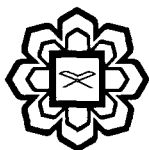
**International Islamic University Malaysia**

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# Television as an Instrument of Cultural Imperialism in Malaysia

SHAFIZAN MUHAMED

## Introduction

The nature of the Malaysian television is complex. This is mostly attributed to the social-cultural dimension of the country that is equally complex. In a country where racial and religious harmony has always been stressed, sensitivity to those particular issues is often central in the numerous systems and structures that exist in the country. Although, Malaysia often claims itself as one of the most modern Islamic country, its continuous quest for development have somehow disoriented its Islamic identity. At times, the issue of religious diversity is overplayed by different parties in defending the building of a more liberal and modern Malaysia. This paradoxical state of liberalism and Islamism can also be analysed through its media systems, most notably the television.

Malaysians now have options to more than 169 channels inclusive of the satellite TV ASTRO compared to the 3 channels they were confined to not less than 15 years ago. Airtime has been prolonged on all stations to allow Malaysians to watch TV 24 hours a day. However, these developments are more physical and superficial measurements. Has the Malaysian TV really matured and developed? As the “definers of reality” (Gurevitch, Benett, Curran and Woolacott, 1990), and “mirror of the society” (Curran, 1989) (Benett, 1990), is the Malaysian TV strong enough to play those roles to the Malaysian people?

One only needs to sit for 5 minutes in front of the TV and find that what is mostly shown are not representations of an Islamic and culturally-sensitive society. The overflow of Western, especially American TV programs are hogging most of the channels that it raises questions on the cultural orientation and dimension of the Malaysian TV. By highlighting