The Construction of Women Position in Sport: A Textual Analysis of Articles and Images on Female Athletes in Malaysian Dailies Newspapers of 26th SEA Games 2011

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Abstract

Sport media is seldom covering women’s athletes by excluding them from sports news. Yet, female athletes often to be compared between male athlete’s ability and hegemonic powers during sport media coverage. This study identifies how national printed media in Malaysia (New Straits Times and Malay Daily News (Berita Harian) provide coverage to female athlete’s performance and also analyze construction of empowering positions and disempowering positions for women especially in newspapers. A content analysis is used to determine the descriptor in the newspaper’s content of both newspapers based on articles and images in sport sections during 26th Sea Games 2011 at Indonesia. Kian [2008] coding system was used to analyze the articles and Sport Illustrated Content [1997-2000] coding system for images. Both of newspapers shows the different angle of view for women athletes where the highest numbers of articles published by Berita Harian focusing on psychological strengths and emotional strengths while New Straits Times is focusing on the positive skills level and accomplishment. However, both newspapers give a lowest coverage of articles which was focusing on athletic weaknesses and limitations. For images, NST and Berita Harian focused on the same coded of portrayal for non-sport setting images rather than athletic action.

Keywords- Women position, sport, printed media, articles, images, Malay Daily News (Berita Harian)

Introduction

Media plays an important role in spreading out of information. The effect of media in our lives is highly influenced where people are easily trusted to the dissemination of news. Media can also be an effective perfect medium by applying the modes of communications to reach out information by using the channels (radio, television, films and printed words and image). Yet, media influence the process of socialization and forming ideology and thinking by shaping public opinion, personal beliefs and even people's self-perceptions. Eagleman & Pederson (2008) described the sport and the mass media have a strong and mutually beneficial in helping the
media to sell newspapers, magazines and build the perception of the public as well be used as a medium to create awareness and promote the sport through coverage of stories and pictures published. Neither printed media nor electronic media have their own works to describe and give publicity to athletes during tournaments and competitions by disseminating news through their masculinity, femininity, athlete’s achievement and failures as well. In a certain situation, female athletes often to compare between male athlete’s ability and hegemonic powers during sport media coverage. Sports reporter gives a sport coverage of athlete by trivialized, minimized their accomplishment and achievement as well as described them as a sex object.

**Problem Matter**

Most of the studies found gender bias and reinforced gender-specific stereotypes were happening in printed media since two decades of centuries. Usually, male athletes were often to get complimented for their power and athleticism. Instead, sport media keep on downgrading skill-level and the accomplishments of women athletes Kian (2008).

Yet, Fondazione et.al. (2013) explained gender stereotyping promotes an asymmetrical vision of women and men in society and the unequal distribution of power and resources among them in all spheres and at all stages of life. So far in Malaysia, there is a limited specific coverage for women's sports competitions provided by the media because the organizations of women’s sports are not fully developed. Compared to other countries which extremely organizes and develops their young and talented athletes based on implementation of speciality of competition for women. It supported by coverage during women’s college basketball in the U.S where gets highly implication during media gives full coverage to the tournament Kian (2008). Others, Lumpkin [2009] from the research which reviewed Sport Illustrated also agreed, mass media in women’s sport coverage do not reflect the development of women’s popularity and achievements. They tend to “symbolically annihilate” the female athletes.

Media in Malaysia basically work closely connected to government objectives and was binding with the policies as well. The roles of mass media are not only required to inform, educate, and motivate the masses toward development goals stipulated by the government, but are also expected to go along hand-in-hand with the government’s policies in order to remain viable and survive in the journalism business (Faridah et. Al, 2011).

Malaysia is a diversity of ethnics, multiracial and unique with a various of cultures. The mass media are an essential part of today’s social life because the media create and transmit important cultural information. It influences how mass media especially printed media communicated to the citizens and be equal in disseminating news when a women be a priority in their stories because the uniqueness of Malaysia also includes many traditional and norms where mass media have to considered. So, the news can reflect the society and government operations by touching the legislative, economic and socio-cultural methods in order to sake of national development, stability and identity.

Basically, in action of male athlete’s pictures are differently from women sport media articles and images. Most of female’s portrayal and the articles were described by readers as a private matter, focusing on physical appearance rather than spot their career development in sport position.

By identifying the newspaper coverage of the women's sport in Malaysia, researcher will be able to examine whether the sports media has accepted the popularity of women's sports by
empowering women athlete’s position or disempowering women’s athlete’s position with using femininity athletes as in place for their prior women stories. This study investigates and identifying problems that are facing by women athletes from their description of news which published by these national daily newspapers (New Straits Times and Berita Harian).

**Purpose of Study**

This qualitative study measured the construction of empowering position and disempowering position’s female athletes by textual analysis of articles and images from media coverage in Malaysia. The Researcher identify how far printed media in Malaysia play important roles in order to publish material which can influences the construction of women athlete’s career.

This study also investigate how much printed media in Malaysia provides a coverage towards women athlete’s private lives, female athlete’s sporting career and also female athlete’s physical appearance by analyze covering textual articles and images by newspapers.

Even some previous researcher done in comparing gender equity coverage to their countries but then researcher want to find out what exactly happening in printed media especially newspaper coverage in Malaysia which provide for female athletes sport news through analysing content analysis of the newspapers. From previous research that already done by Evans et al. (2008) identified sport coverage, text and pictures of men’s and women’s games inside the sport section is still not an equal coverage towards them.

**Objectives of Study**

a) To measure the textual and images from Berita Harian and New Straits Times through the sport coverage along six week period towards females athletes participation during 26th Sea Games 2011 at Indonesia.

b) To investigate the differences of textual and images from Berita Harian and New Straits Times through the sport coverage towards women athletes’ participation of 26th Sea Games 2011 at Indonesia.

c) To measure the construction of empowering positions and disempowering position for female athletes by textual analysis of articles and images along six week period during 26th Sea Games 2011 at Indonesia.

**Significant of Study**

In this study, particularly for those issues pertaining to sport which focusing on printed media in Malaysia, it’s allow researcher to explore from a multitude of perspectives, various issues which concerning the involvement of women in sport. The result of this research will reveal current view of the way women are portrayed in printed media by analyzing the role of media in contributing women athletes’ career to praise by celebrating their achievements and provide them positive role models from various backgrounds and personal life.
Thus, this significant can give a several implications on women empowering position and disempowering position towards athlete’s career in Malaysia through the media exposure by giving them the positive and negative side of news and images.

Finally, it’s necessarily to refine structured investigations into the impact of quantitative aspects of women media coverage in sport field by these newspapers. Through this result, people may know the total of women athlete news and images that were publish by Berita Harian and New Straits Times during 26th Sea Games 2011. Besides that, this research will also give information to other researcher that want to further this study.

Methodology

A qualitative with content analysis is used to determine the descriptor in newspaper’s content where analyzing based on textual analysis of articles and images in sport sections. Two most influential Malaysia’s newspapers under NSTP Group Press which is Berita Harian and News Strait Times were monitored for six (6) weeks period to investigate the coverage towards female athlete’s news during Sea Games 2011 at Indonesia. To identify the empowering position and disempowering position in sport by media coverage, Kian [2008] coding system was used to analyse the articles which includes nine categories of codes which are: i) Physical appearances, sexuality, attire ii) Athletic prowess, strengths iii) Athletic weaknesses, limitations iv) Positive skill level, accomplishments v) Negatives skill level, failures vi) Family roles, personal relationships vii) Psychological strengths, emotional strengths viii) Psychological weaknesses, emotional weaknesses ix) Humor. For images descriptions, data adapted from Sport Illustrated content from 1997 – 2000. The coding of photograph divided into four categories. The categories are i) Athletic action ii) Dressed but poised and pretty iii) Non-sport setting vi) Pornographic/sex-inappropriate. Analysis based on the total amount and percentage of articles and images published by newspapers.

Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspapers</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NST and Berita Harian</td>
<td>Articles</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>51.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Images</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>48.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first objective of this study was analyzed by measuring a textual and images from both newspapers on women athletes participation during 26th Sea Games 2011 at Indonesia. It indicates that total articles published by both newspapers is 51.1% (n=114) compared to images...
48.9% (n=109). During the competition, these newspapers more published stories rather than pictures.

Table 2: Focus for women’s articles and images

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Newspapers</th>
<th>Differences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New Straits Times</td>
<td>Berita Harian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articles</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>50.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Images</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>33.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The result above (Table 2) answered the second objectives by identifying the differences of total articles and images between New Straits Times (NST) and Berita Harian. NST was published 50.9% (n=58) articles are higher than Berita Harian which is 49.1% (n= 56) articles. It has a distinguish views when Berita Harian more portrayed images than a story which is 66.9% (n=73) compared to 33.1% (n=36). The analysis also shown only 2 articles that set a number of stories published by NST than Berita Harian about 1.8% compared to a large number of images occur by 33.8%. 
The result below (Table 3) answered the third objectives in this study by measuring the construction of empowering position and disempowering position for female athletes by textual analysis of articles. The coding was used to analyze the constructing women athletes in sport by printed media coverage. The highest numbers of articles published by Berita Harian focusing on psychological strengths and emotional strengths 57.7% (n=15) while New Straits Times is focusing on positive skills level and accomplishment 66.7% (24). However, both newspapers give a lowest coverage of articles which was focusing on athletic weaknesses and limitations which is NST is 66.7% (n=2) and Berita Harian 33.3% (n=1). Other, both of newspapers did not allocate any coverage for articles published about physical appearances, sexuality, attire and humor. The result also shown psychological weaknesses, emotional weaknesses and family roles, personal relationships get the balanced coverage by both newspapers.
Table 4: Total Coded for Images

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category/coded</th>
<th>Newspapers</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New Straits Times</td>
<td>Berita Harian</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n %</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletic action</td>
<td>17 39.5</td>
<td>26 60.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dressed but poised and pretty</td>
<td>0 0</td>
<td>0 0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-sport setting</td>
<td>19 28.8</td>
<td>47 71.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pornographic/sex-inappropriate</td>
<td>0 0</td>
<td>0 0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 shows the coded used for images. The result indicates that most of the images portrayed by photographer for NST and Berita Harian have a same coded of portrayal for non-setting images which is each of newspapers presented about 28.8% (n=19) for NST and 71.2% (n=47) for Berita Harian rather than athletic action where NST 39.5% (n=17) and Berita Harian 60.5% (n=26). Both of the result for dressed but poised and pretty and pornography /sex-inappropriate doesn’t portray any pictures by NST and Berita Harian.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was discussed the finding based on three objectives stated where it were used to seek and explore the coverage towards women athletes by printed media in Malaysia. Even though both of newspapers under the same roof and publication, but they had difference angel of views to focus on and the way they allocating some coverage. It happened because each newspaper has a difference of management, editor, editorial section and also manpower (journalists and photographers). It proved when both newspapers published a vary stories and images in a same date of competition. For example, by a date of 16 November 2011, NST was focused a story about fencing’s athlete who won bronze medal rather than Berita Harian focused on athletic athletes who received a new record for her pole vault. For images, by a date of 8 November 2011, NST was published a picture of female self-defense art’s contingent arrived at Jakarta Airport and welcomed by Indonesia ushered compared to Berita Harian which portrayed a picture of female athlete holding a rifle. It indicates each newspaper in Malaysia has their own priorities and view to publish a stories and pictures in order to grab reader’s interest and attention whereby to increase the sales itself. It was supported by Kian (2007) said the
structure and foundation of these attitudes must be altered among editors and writers before women’s sports start receiving substantially more coverage and better quality coverage in daily newspapers.

Most of the stories and pictures published at the sport section in both newspapers are helpful in constructing empowering woman position and career. Even though both newspapers had difference angle of views but it still give a positive storyline and captured the good images as well. It contradict to previous researcher studied by Shaller (2006) found print media has a lack portrayal of female athletes, and when a woman is depicted, she is more likely to be in a socially acceptable or non-active situation.

Yet, media in Malaysia give a motivation to athletes in developing their career by published and portrayed the positive images and stories where most of the articles publish regarding athlete’s psychological and emotional strength as well as positive skills level and accomplishment. It contradicts by Allison and Shirley (2007) from their studied revealed women is significantly underrepresented in athlete performance, coaching positions, management of sport teams and as referees and umpired. Moreover, women athletes are always under represented by sport media where they are often trivialized in received coverage and also by amount of coverage that they receive. Andrea N. Eagleman, P. M. (2008). Media often and more focused to describe women personal life rather than come out with their achievement and using a sense of humor to elaborate female athletes career Kian (2008) but in Malaysia humor and physical appearance, sexuality and attire don’t get any coverage towards printed media in Malaysia. It is because editor, writers and photographers in Malaysia still bind with journalistic ethics. It proved through this study when the news published by journalist mostly wrote stories positively.

In Malaysia situation, media members are looked to the prescribed norms and upheld as a Malaysian. It also must maintain the decency to respect people cultures and religions. It proved that when the photographers not even portrayed and published images related to pornographic/sex-inappropriate or personal life. The studied shown women athletes in Malaysia are assisting by media to develop their career by not trivialized in receiving coverage and also underrepresented them. Media in Malaysia didn’t act by impose in portraying images wrongly through media coverage as what happened at other Europe countries.

Hence, media have the ability and power to change the coverage provided for women’s sports. Whether as commentators or sports writers/editors, more women in the field could potentially decrease the inequitable coverage leading to more interest. It depends when the media have been an importance site for reinforcing dominant ideologies and power structured, Kane (1996). Despite, any news released in newspapers media have an importantly quality reflection for portrays ideas to the publics. It supported from Grappendorf et.al. (2009) found that media have an immediate and future impact on society’s view of female athletes, but also, it can alter viewers’ and readers’ perceptions of women’s coverage. To attract readers to know deeply about the athletes, achievements of the players and teams, they must get a huge coverage. This is for gives an opportunity to athlete expanding their career in sport at national and international level as well as created awareness among society about the existing of the athletes.
Conclusion

Media in Malaysia still gives a priority in women athletes’ stories especially about achieving their victory. It necessarily to help women athletes to be more well-known by empowering their position in sport by provides them with a positive value of stories and pictures.

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