Women leaders in the 14ᵗʰ General Election: A comparative framing analysis of the Malaysian media

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ABSTRACT

Malaysia concluded its momentous 14th General Election in May 2018, which heralded a regime change after 60 years. In this election, an unprecedented number of women stood as candidates but only 11% succeeded in becoming elected representatives. Hence, this study analyses the media discourse in the Malaysian press on women representation in the election. The media portrayal of women leaders in general elections constitutes an important research area as it reflects the crossroads of gender, politics, media and identity. Literature further indicates that effects of media reporting on political participation and election results may be particularly noticeable in Malaysia because it may give a new social meaning to women in politics, women's political presence and gendered social constructions about women's political capacity. The research ascertains how the articles were framed to contribute to women empowerment or framed to highlight awareness of women's basic role in the Malaysian society. This study employed a content analysis on a corpus of mainstream Malay (*Utusan Melayu*), English (*The Star*) and Chinese (*Sin Chew Daily*) newspapers, and the online media (*Malaysiakini*). The findings reveal that the coverage of women is still under-represented since only superficial issues on women's roles were discussed instead of their professional and leadership qualities. In the new Malaysia, the media needs to veer away from the stereotypical representation of women and instead represent them in a more progressive role, reshaping their political identity to enhance women's suitability and capability as key political figures.

Keywords: ***Women politicians, media and elections, representation of women***

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INTRODUCTION

Malaysia held its 14th General Election (GE14) on 9 May 2018. The general elections reflected a historical event for Malaysians' political participation. Malaysia is a parliamentary democracy with a constitutional monarchy. It is a political structure that consists of a federation with 13 states and 3 federal territories (Official Portal of Parliament of Malaysia, 2019). The 2018 election, unlike previous elections, served as a momentous event that altered the entire political landscape of the country. Since independence in 1957, Malaysia's electoral democracy has undergone regular periodic elections and Malaysia has never witnessed a change in government. GE14 marked a significant political shift by ending an uninterrupted 60-year rule by the same political alliance, *Barisan Nasional*. In 2018, the government changed hands from *Barisan Nasional* (National Front) coalition to another coalition, *Pakatan Harapan* (Coalition of Hope), which was formed in 2015. Of the 222 parliamentary seats contested, the *Pakatan Harapan* coalition secured 121 seats with its coalition *Warisan*, (a regional-based party from the state of Sabah) compared to *Barisan Nasional's* seventy-nine seats (Lee, 2019). *Barisan Nasional* lost all the federal states in Peninsular Malaysia except for the two less developed states of Perlis and Pahang. The outcome of this election indicates a change in mindset as it can be considered the culminating point of a process of change that was initiated in 1999 through the establishment of *Parti Keadilan Rakyat*, and its eventual evolution through *Barisan Alternatif*, *Pakatan Rakyat* and, finally, *Pakatan Harapan* (Moniruzzaman & Farzana, 2018). Hence, the 2018 election became the mother of all elections, challenging every speculation about the election outcome. The political landscape and the different prominent actors too changed in the run-up to that election, along with the rise of prominent political and civil society women leaders.

In order to gain more in-depth insights into the representation of women leaders by the Malaysian media, this study examined the coverage of women in GE14 by mainstream Malay, English and Chinese newspapers and online English media, *Malaysiakini* to ascertain whether the way in which the articles were framed contributed to women empowerment. To achieve this objective, the study employed content analysis on a corpus of media articles under all categories of news, features, opinions, commentary and letters. These were derived from three print newspapers – *Utusan Melayu* (Malay), *The Star* (English) and *Sin Chew Daily* (Chinese) and an online news portal, *Malaysiakini*. These media were selected based on the criteria of having the highest circulation numbers in their respective languages in Malaysia (Audit Bureau of Circulations Malaysia, 2018). *Malaysiakini* was selected as it mentions and discusses independent political figures more frequently than Malaysia's news agency *Bernama* or any of the other mainstream print and broadcast media.

Annual reports compiled by the Audit Bureau of Circulations Malaysia (ABC) suggest that dependency on (mass) media for information is still considerable. In a World Values Survey report covering the period 2010-2014, it was stated that 51.2% of the Malaysian population expressed "quite a lot" of confidence in the press compared with 28.5% who answered "not much".

Given the critical role played by the media in shaping public perception, it is important to gain a deeper understanding of how women leaders in the GE14 were portrayed. This is more so as "the need for orientation" is especially high during election campaigns that are marked by uncertainties (Van Aelst, Thorbjornsrud, & Aalberg, 2012). In regard to media effects, when media dependency is especially high, as in Malaysia, media portrayals may influence people's cognitions, attitudes, and behaviour (McCombs, Holbert, Kiousis, & Wanta, 2011). In light of the role of media, the need to study the media coverage of

women political leaders has become imperative. More specifically, a systematic analysis of media coverage and discourse will help detect representation or misrepresentations and biases that may have a negative impact on the public opinion and perception of women.

Against this background, this study aims to compare and contrast the news coverage of women leaders in GE14 in two news media, print newspapers and online news portal, using multi-ethnic Malaysia as a case study. In the present study, our interest is not so much on the quantity of media coverage of women, nor their media visibility compared to that of men but the quality of their portrayal: How are women candidates represented? To guide the analysis further, we drew upon framing as the theoretical framework. The outcome of this study is to provide a systemic analysis, interpretation and understanding of the framing of women leaders by three mainstream newspapers and an online news portal media during GE14 in Malaysia. Lastly, this comparative analysis between newspapers of different languages and online portal will contribute to the framing analysis with regard to political communication.

Literature on politics and news media during Malaysia's general elections is limited, whereby the focus has been mainly on censorship as well as political bias in print and online media (Abbott & Givens, 2015; A. Manaf & Sedu, 2015; Kasim & Mohd Sani, 2016). A slightly similar approach was used in an earlier comparative media treatment study of women in the 12th General Election by Rajaratnam (2009, 2010); a comparison of the 12th and 13th General Elections (Rajaratnam, 2018) and an analysis of online news portals in the 2013 General Election (Kasim & Mohamad Sani, 2016). However, our study significantly encompasses three major mainstream newspapers (Malay, English and Chinese) and an online news portal, *Malaysiakini* which have never been included by previous research. This study therefore provides a systematic analysis and interpretation for a deeper understanding of the framing of women leaders in Malaysia. Hence, it provides a different emphasis compared to different mainstream and online media when addressing women frames. Further to that, this study may also contribute to the body of work on the portrayal of women in Malaysian politics.

Role of media

The media plays a critical role in any election as it disseminates information to the public and shapes political change. The representation and representativeness of political leaders in electoral politics has received much scholarly attention. One of the reasons is that voters see the political landscape largely through the lens of the mainstream news media (Kahn, 1994). As Usman (2013, p.149) pointed out, "[d]uring election campaigns, three of the most important political components in a country — the media, candidates and voters — all intersect." The news media portrayal of women leaders in general elections constitutes an especially important research area to help us understand more clearly the challenges that women face in electoral politics (Rajaratnam, 2018). Literature further indicates that effects of media reporting on political participation and election results may be particularly noticeable in Malaysia. Like in most elections, the media played a pivotal role to shape political change by conveying information and being a key instrument in the election campaigns for GE14.

In this context, the ownership of media plays a role in the Malaysian media landscape. To gain and maintain political power, politicians utilise the media to influence the masses to vote for them. Indeed, *Barisan Nasional* (BN) effectively garnered a huge following and support by controlling media for 60 years. In the 1999 General Election, prior to the introduction of the social media, *Barisan Nasional,* who has a major stake in

the main television channels and newspapers, used this opportunity to promote their party and heavily discredit opposition parties and their candidates (Nadzri, M. N., 2019).

In comparison to the 13th General Election (GE13), the growth of social media has been exponential. In GE13, Malaysian internet users formed 15% of the population compared to 60% in GE14 (Nadzri, M. N., 2019). According to Reuters Institute's Digital News Report 2017, 51% of Malaysians surveyed stated that they have used WhatsApp as a source of news in the past week. When it comes to social media, 67% of Malaysians responded that they considered social media a source of news whilst 29% considered it as their main source of news, superseding TV (23%), online news sites (28%), and print newspapers (14%)(Newman, Kalogeropoulos, Levy, & Nielsen, 2018).

Women leadership representation in Malaysian politics

The representation and representativeness of women in electoral politics has been the focus of much scholarship (Albertyn, 2003; Budlender, 1997; Chaney, 2012; MacKay, 2001; Mackay, Myers and Brown, 2003; Mansbridge, 1999; Phillips, 1995; Pitkin, 1967; Russell, 2003; Squires and Wickham-Jones, 2001; Wängnerud, 2000, as cited in Rumbul, 2016). In Malaysia, since its independence in 1957, women have been actively involved in politics and have held political office.

Initially, women started off as campaigners and voters and later, offered themselves as candidates for office. In 1989, the first National Policy on Women was formulated with one of its core mandates being to eliminate all forms of adverse discrimination on the basis of gender. Further, in 1995, Malaysia signed and ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women indicating its serious commitment to this cause. This was evident in the 1999 election where a new trend of gender politics was apparent with women wooed as both voters as well as candidates (Abdullah, 2004). The establishment of the Ministry of Women and Family Development in 2001 marked the culmination of efforts to assign women's development and issues to a specific ministry. In 2004, the Malaysian government, through this Ministry implemented a policy to ensure a minimum 30% participation of women in decision-making and management levels in the public sector. According to *The Global Gender Gap Report* published in 2017, Malaysia held a global ranking of 104, among 144 countries, in terms of gender equality for four categories: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival and political empowerment. However, in the category of political empowerment, Malaysia ranked 133, indicating that the Malaysian society is still very much male-dominated.

Nevertheless, it is evident that the number of women contestants continue to rise with every election. In the 2008 election, 120 women candidates contested with 48 (40%) being elected (Koh, 2013) while the 2013 election saw 168 women candidates contesting, with 80 (47.6%) being elected to either parliament or state level office (Lim, 2013). In 2018, women constituted around 51% of Malaysia's 14,968,304 registered voters ("Women play a crucial role", 2018). However, this was in stark contrast to the advocated minimum 30% women representation in federal and state governments as well as leadership of political parties. Hence, Malaysia, with its female parliamentary representation of 14.4%, was placed at 134 out of 193 countries. Since its independence in 1957, the percentage of women parliamentarians in Malaysia had never exceeded 15%. In fact, prior to GE14, the highest percentage of women representation in parliament stood at a mere 10.8%, achieved during GE13. At the state level, again prior to GE14, state assemblywomen accounted for less than 12% of all elected state assemblypersons. Terengganu stood out as the only state

that was male dominated, as no woman was ever elected as a parliamentarian or a state assemblyperson.

Nevertheless, women leadership in political party saw a positive development in 2013 with the appointment of Datuk Seri Wan Azizah as the party president of *Parti Keadilan Rakyat* (PKR). However, this was an exception as no other political party had women in top leadership positions. Women in most political parties generally hold symbolic positions, where most are mere members at the executive level, while those with the highest positions were leaders within their party's own women's wing.

Women representation in GE14

GE14 was a watershed event in Malaysia's election history, where the then opposition achieved what was deemed impossible by handing over a thumping defeat to BN and forming a new government. Additionally, there was a significant increase in women candidates in comparison to GE13. At the parliamentary level, the percentage of women candidates increased from 9.7% to 10.9% while the state level saw an increase from 8.5% to 10.8%.

Arguably, GE14 denotes an improved performance from GE13's 8.8% (168 women out of 1900 candidates) with 10.8% (252 out of 2333 candidates) of the total electoral candidates (Yeong, 2018). However, this can only be considered a symbolic increase in comparison to the male candidates, indicating that women representation is still critically lagging behind. Table 1 presents GE14's women representation as parliamentary candidates by coalition or party.

Table 1. Total number and percentage of parliamentary candidates by party and sex in GE14

Coalition/Party	Total Candidates	Male Candidates	Male Candidates (%)	Female Candidates	Female Candidates (%)
PKR	76	62	81.6	14	18.4
DAP	46	38	82.6	8	17.4
PPBM	52	49	94.2	3	5.8
AMANAH	30	29	96.7	1	3.3
WARISAN	17	15	88.2	2	11.8
UMNO	121	112	92.6	9	7.4
West Malaysia-based BN Parties	59	50	84.7	9	15.3
Sabah-based BN Parties	11	9	81.8	2	18.2
Sarawak-based BN Parties	31	25	80.6	6	19.4
PAS	158	148	93.7	10	6.3
Other Parties/Independents	86	75	87.2	11	12.8
Total	**687**	**612**	**89.1**	**75**	**10.9**

Note: WARISAN is considered as part of the PH coalition.
Source: The Election Commission of Malaysia, 2018

Table 2. Total number and percentage of state assembly candidates by party and sex in GE14

Coalition/Party	Total Candidates	Male Candidates	Male Candidates (%)	Female Candidates	Female Candidates (%)
PKR	151	127	84.1	24	15.9
DAP	100	83	83.0	17	17.0
PPBM	103	95	92.2	8	7.8
AMANAH	102	92	90.2	10	9.8
WARISAN	45	38	84.4	7	15.6
UMNO	343	300	87.5	43	12.5
West Malaysia-based BN Parties	138	123	89.1	15	10.9
Sabah-based BN Parties	24	22	91.7	2	8.3
Sarawak-based BN Parties	390	362	92.8	28	7.2
PAS	250	227	90.8	23	9.2
Other Parties/Independents	250	227	90.8	23	9.2
Total	**1,646**	**1,469**	**89.2**	**177**	**10.9**

Note: Sarawak BN-based parties has been excluded on the account that Sarawak had held its state elections in 2015
Source: The Election Commission of Malaysia, 2018

At the parliamentary level, PKR fielded the highest number of female candidates (18.4%). Meanwhile, at the state level, *Pakatan Harapan* fielded 13.2% women contenders with DAP offering the highest number of female candidates (17%) from its 100 candidates. Meanwhile, BN fielded 11.8% women candidates whereas PAS only managed to nominate 28 women, which made up 7.2% of the party's overall candidates (Yeong, 2018). With the number of women candidates not even reaching 15% of total candidates at both the parliament and state elections, it can be concluded that women are still very much marginalised in terms of political representation as men continue to overshadow women as worthy political candidates.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Of late, researchers interested in the media coverage of gender politics have increasingly adopted the framing theory because the theory provides a useful conceptual tool to examine how political women leaders were covered by the media (Fountaine & McGregor, 2015). Framing posits that the way an issue is characterised in news reports can influence how it is understood by the audience (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Entman (1993) defined framing as a process "to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (p. 52). In addition, Griffin (2003) regarded framing as "the process of calling attention to some aspects of reality while obscuring others, which might lead to different reactions" (p. 74).

Chong and Druckman (2007) found that communication scholars generally use the term "frame" in two ways. First, a media frame refers to the words, images, phrases and presentation styles that a media outlet uses when relaying information about an issue or

event to an audience. The chosen frame reveals what the media outlet sees as relevant to the topic at hand. Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007) regarded this way of framing as a macro-level construct. According to them, the term "framing" at a macro level refers to modes of presentation that journalists and other communicators use to present information in a way that resonates with existing underlying schemas among their audience. In fact, framing is a necessary tool for journalists to reduce the complexity of an issue, given the constraints of their respective media related to newshole and airtime. Zillman, Chen, Knobloch and Callison (2004) also recognised that framing is considered a pivotal practice in journalism. They noted that choosing a frame for a story would be the most consequential decision that journalists make.

Secondly, a frame of thought or an individual frame is another way communication scholars use the word "frame". It refers to an individual's cognitive understanding of a given situation (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Unlike the media frame that reflects a media outlet's emphasis, a frame in thought refers to what an audience member believes to be the most salient aspect of an issue. Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007) considered this way of framing as a micro-level construct, which describes how people use information and presentation features regarding issues as they form impressions. It is well documented that when a news frame is used appropriately, they affect readers' interest, attention, interpretation and comprehension of the news (De Vreese & Semetko, 2002; Iyengar & Simon, 1991; Tewksbury, Jones, Peske, Raymond, & Vig, 2000 as cited in Zillman et al., 2004).

Manheim (1994) explained that news-framing analyses usually cover three aspects: visibility, valence and frame genres. Visibility refers to both the amount of coverage and prominence an event/issue or a nation receives in the news coverage. Prominence is usually demonstrated by certain typical elements such as the article's placement in the newspaper or websites, the headline, the visual tools associated with the text, a mention on the evening television news etc. Valence or slant is the tone of a news story or comment regarding certain frames. It is believed to have the potential to generate behavioural effects. By indicating discourse valuations or presenting positive and/or negative elements, valence news frames present the extent to which the coverage reflects favourably or unfavourably on the event/issue.

Framing of female politicians

Fountaine and McGregor (2015) reported that the invisibility of women in New Zealand had been explored in frontpage news stories, newspaper sports pages and coverage of politics. Similarly, Funk and Coker (2016) further indicated that there were substantive differences in the coverage between male and female candidates in terms of amount, quality and negativity; all of which can erode a woman candidate's credibility. Significantly, referring to US politics, Ryan (2013) also pointed out that the visibility and viability of candidates played a significant role in future female candidates. His study highlighted that the more visible women candidates are in national news, the more likely other women are to run for office. In other words, the amount of coverage a female candidate receives is not only important to the success of her own campaign, but also attributes to the number of women running for office. Ryan (2013) added that media bias continues to portray female candidates as less viable than their competitors.

In addition to the invisibility of female politicians in the coverage of politics, scholars also examined the issue of gender stereotypes which was prevalent. For example, in analysing Mississippi politicians, Smith (2017) criticised that journalists often used gender stereotypes to evaluate the capacity of certain candidates to handle certain issues;

men are usually associated with economics, crime and defence issues, while women usually are linked to healthcare or education. In a similar vein, news coverage in Israel also tended to emphasise the feminine traits that mark a female candidate: personal lives, personalities, appearances, children and marital status (Liran-Alper &Tsarfaty, 2015).

According to Fountaine and McGregor (2015), when a female candidate runs for offices that women tend to have a lower success rate such as Senator, news coverage often focuses on the horse race reporting of the campaign. The authors argued that focusing on the polling numbers would reinforce voters' beliefs about a woman's ability to hold a particular office.

Furthermore, pre-existing attitudes towards US women leaders strongly dictate peoples' perception of a woman politician. The valence of media coverage strongly influences perceptions of women political leaders. Some studies also found that stereotypical or pre-existing attitudes toward female politicians do not interact with media coverage whether positive or negative (Bligh, Schlehofer, Casad, & Gaffney, 2012).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The leap for women's representation in Parliament
Past research established that certain important factors hinder women's political participation such as "ideological factors, political factors, socio-cultural factors, economic factors which are very important in this regard" (Latif, Usman, Kataria, & Abdullah, 2015, p. 202).

However, Alexander (2015) described the historical leap witnessed by many countries since the mid-90s as quota legislation fostered quotas for women in national parliaments. For instance, Iraq and Spain saw exceptional spikes in women's representation with an average increase of 16% of women's presence in parliaments (Alexander, 2015).

In less developed democracies, there has been growth in public support for women's political involvement and leadership. The belief in women's ability to govern, gender equality in employment and women's presence in national parliaments are some views and practices that have garnered support and acceptance (Inglehard & Norris, 2003 as cited in Alexander, 2015). The rise of the development status of a country is believed to bring positive changes in attitudes towards gender equality. There is convincing evidence from research in US and a handful of comparative studies that increased women's presence in office strengthens their involvement in politics (Alexander, 2015).

Gender stereotype
The level of societal development of a country is strongly linked to gender equality values including support for women's political leadership (Alexander & Welzel, 2011 as cited in Alexander, 2015). Eagly, Makhi-jani & Klonsky (1992) found that women in leadership positions are devalued relative to men when leadership is carried out in stereotypically masculine styles, particularly when that style is autocratic or directive.

This is supported by Clover (2015) who stated that rationality, a characteristic attributed to men, is often overvalued compared to passion and emotion — "clearly irrational" — characteristics of women. There is a tendency to treat "masculine structures as the norm" (True, 2008, p. 92 as cited in Clover, 2015).

Further, in their study in Germany, Coka, Freir and Mollerstrom (2017), found that women tend to head ministries that are closely connected to stereotypical "women issues." Of the 19 ministers appointed to head the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs in Germany

(currently Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth) since 1949, 16 of them had been women.

Equal representation has always been an obstacle faced by women in the male-centric organisational culture which defines the qualities required according to the male model of leadership (Davidson & Burke, 2011; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Kark & Eagly, 2010, as cited in Moor, Cohen & Beeri, 2015). Culturally defined traits such as ambition, competitiveness, aggression, and control are confined to men as compared to feminine traits such as empathy, kindness, or concern for the needs of others (Moor, Cohen & Beeri, 2015). As such, a success indicator for women to excel in leadership positions requires women to embody "masculine" qualities such as competitiveness, aggression, rationalism and independence.

Representation of women in the media

It is important to note, however, that the increasing impact of the Internet and social networking sites may augment a wider dissemination of campaign information. In turn, this shift may allow female candidates to present a more nuanced view that potentially mitigates voters' reliance on gender-role attitudes. As campaigns incorporate more technology and more diverse communication outlets to reach voters, it becomes increasingly important to assess how different types of messages help shape attitudes towards women politicians.

When candidates do not get adequate access to the media, gender representation on women therefore relies on the initial evaluation from the media (Bligh et al., 2012). Results suggest that media has influence, in the case of US, on the judgement of women politicians' likeability.

The significance of news coverage in political campaigns has been well established in past research (Rajaratnam, 2018). Bligh et al. (2012) suggested that news media influence voters' perceptions of political leaders as either positive or negative, as well as their overall evaluation of leaders.

In an analysis conducted by Kittilson & Fridkin (2008) on the 2006 election in US, Canada, and Australia, it was revealed that male candidates receive more press coverage with regard to stereotypical "male" issues like economy and foreign policy compared to female candidates. Likewise, female candidates receive more press coverage concerning stereotypical "female" issues like education and welfare. The study also highlighted that women candidates' traits are more often described in female gender-stereotyped language such as gentle, warm, weak leader whereas the male candidates' traits are more often described in male gender-stereotyped language such as effective, aggressive and strong leader.

Guha (2018) highlighted in the *1997 Inter-Parliamentary Union (Roundtable on the Image of women politicians in the Media)* that the media is less open to the concerns and achievements of women politicians compared to their male counterparts. Sadly, 17 years later, the media seems to have paid little heed to the roundtable's recommendations. This further trivialises the issue of under-representation of women political leaders as "one of the global gender concerns." News reporting often emphasises women's roles as mothers and wives, and uses that framing to question women's experience, whether they were fit for office, and whether they could juggle domestic and political responsibilities (Braden, 1996, as cited in Meeks, 2016).

Despite the advances of women in social and political arenas, media coverage of women political candidates has not improved. While a man is defined by his ideology or the lack of it and the work carried out during his tenure, a woman is oftentimes defined by the way she dresses and looks and the company she keeps (Golder, 2012). Similarly,

Norris (1997) confirmed that women leaders are less evident in the news whereby they are covered in fewer stories, in the context of the number of daily stories per leader.

Gender communication styles

The historic exclusion of women from public politics in the US has created a cultural arena in which masculinised values and political values are often the same (Meeks, 2016). Nevertheless, Meeks (2016) pointed out that voters like candidates who are honest, collaborative, and empathetic; all of which are perceived as "feminine character traits". Evidently, femininity is a positive force in politics. Further, feminine communication style is advantageous as it is more personal, conversational, and interactive (Campbell, 1989; Jamieson, 1988, as cited in Meeks, 2016). In other studies by Campbell (1989) and Davisson (2009), it can be concluded that feminist rhetoric includes personal tones, use of personal experiences, anecdotes and examples as evidence, emphasis on audience participation and identification between speaker and audience. Unfortunately, the media seems to ignore or disregard these traits in women leaders and this is particularly problematic for women because it tends to skew negatively, questions women's viability, obsesses on their physical appearance and attractiveness, and can be overtly sexist (Bystrom, 2006; Dolan, 2006; Wasburn & Wasburn, 2011, as cited in Meeks, 2016).

METHODOLOGY

The overall objective of this study is to examine the media coverage of women by the Malaysian mainstream media. The selected media are *Utusan Melayu* (Malay), *The Star* (English) and *Sin Chew Daily* (Chinese) newspapers and online news portal, *Malaysiakini*. This study asks the following questions: What was the extent of coverage and prominence on women candidates published by the newspapers and online media during GE14? What were the news frames and valence used by the selected newspapers and online media in their coverage of women candidates during GE14?

This study employed content analysis as the research method. The choice of studying texts has a theoretical justification. The gender system is constantly shaped through cultural representation. Simultaneously, cultural products such as newspaper and website texts can be used to understand women. According to Weitz "the cultural products of any given society at any given time reverberate with the themes of that society and that era" (Weitz, quoted in Reinharz & Davidman, 1992, p. 145). The aim is to discover patterns and trends in the newspaper coverage of women candidates during GE14. The sample was drawn from 28 April 2018 to 8 May 2018, covering the time frame from nomination day to GE14. This period was chosen as in the final weeks leading up to Election Day, the various candidates, their personal viewpoints, policy statements, and party manifestos received much press coverage. The articles were collected via a database search of the respective media by using "women in general election" as the search term.

The news media with the highest circulations were selected since these would have the greatest reach and could impact a larger number of people. *The Star* and *Utusan Melayu* are non-tabloid dailies in Malaysia with the highest circulations for English and Malay, respectively, while *Malaysiakini*, an online news portal has the highest trending news headlines. According to ABC Malaysia (2018), the average daily circulation of *Utusan Melayu*, *The Star*, and *Sin Chew Daily* in Jan–June 2018 were 107,609, 175,288, 920 and 293,804 copies, respectively (www.abcm.org.my). These newspapers are circulated nationwide but predominantly within Peninsular Malaysia. Equally important is the fact

that, these media are available easily and offer coverage of both Peninsular Malaysia and East Malaysia. *Sin Chew Daily* also enjoys one of the highest readership among all the newspapers published in the four main languages in the country (www.abcm.org.my). It is noteworthy that *Sin Chew Daily* offers extensive coverage on politics, economy, culture and education, and is considered as the most outspoken mainstream newspapers in Malaysia (Yang & Md. Sidin, 2015).

The framing of women candidates in GE14 by the Malaysian media were examined from four different dimensions: the extent of coverage, level of prominence, news frames and valences of the articles. In addition, the extent of coverage was studied from two angles: number of news items and type of news items.

The study used Wimmer and Dominick's (2006) emergent coding approach, where the researcher establishes categories after a preliminary examination of the collected data. The content of these news items was analysed inductively, by progressively coding the portrayal of women candidates, in order to identify recurrent themes. The strength of content analysis lies in its focus on the overall interpretation of a phenomenon, that is, on identifying its so-called "patterned" meaning as opposed to "anecdotal" meaning (e.g; Krippendorff, 2012, p.24). Hence, themes are derived "bottom up" from reading and re-reading the news stories themselves rather than "top down," setting out from a particular theoretical framework (e.g., Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.12; Braun & Clarke, 2012).This study employed the inductive or the emergent coding approach for both news sources and news frames.

Table 3. Operational definitions for news frames

	No, Yes
Personal Information	Marital Status Age Profession Family Background
Physical appearance	Physical appearance, clothes, shoes, hair
Family orientated	Caring, nurturing and family orientated
Experience	Indicating experience at party level, state or national, party affiliation that reinforces their active participation and credibility; political role
Leadership qualities	Competent, confident, dynamic, determined and duty-bound
Candidate agenda	1. Political – accountability, integrity, transparent 2. Economical – disparity between rich and poor, poverty, bread and butter issues 3. Social – gender, citizen/resident issues, health, poverty 4. Others
Valence	1. Candidate 2. Political Party
Affiliation	1. BN 2. PH 3. PAS 4. Independent

FINDINGS

Table 4. Number of articles retrieved from selected newspapers

Item	Sin Chew (Chinese)	% Sin Chew (Chinese)	Utusan (BM)	% Utusan (BM)	The Star (English)	% The Star (English)	Malaysiakini (English)	% Malaysiakini (English)	Total	% Total
1 = Straight news	78	93.98%	32	94.12%	63	100.0%	9	52.94%	182	92.39%
2 = Editorial	0	0.00%	1	2.94%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	1	0.51%
3 = Column	5	6.02%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	3	17.65%	8	4.06%
4 = Opinion	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	5	29.41%	5	2.54%
5 = Letters	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
5 = Picture	0	0.00%	1	2..94%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	1	0.51%
Total	**83**	**42.13%**	**34**	**17.26%**	**63**	**31.98%**	**17**	**8.36%**	**197**	

A total of 197 articles on women candidates in Malaysia were collected from *Utusan Melayu* (Malay), *The Star* (English), *Sin Chew Daily* (Chinese) and *Malaysiakini* (English online) (Table 4) of which 182 were straight news. A majority of the coverage was in the form of straight news (N=182 or 92.85%) while the least were editorials (N=1, 0.51%), picture (N=1, 0.51%) and opinions (N=5, 2.55%).

Table 5. Personal information

Item	Sin Chew (Chinese)	% Sin Chew (Chinese)	Utusan (BM)	% Utusan (BM)	The Star (English)	% The Star (English)	Malaysiakini (English)	% Malaysiakini (English)	Total	% Total
Personal Information										
No	50	60.24%	3	8.82%	1	1.59%	2	11.76%	56	28.43%
Yes	33	39.76%	31	91.18%	62	98.41%	15	88.24%	141	71.57%
Marital Status	18	54.55%	3	9.68%	9	14.525%	1	6.67%	31	21.99%
Age	14	42.42%	7	22.58%	19	30.65%	4	26.67%	44	31.21%
Profession	14	42.42%	24	77.42%	24	38.71%	5	33.33%	67	47.52%
Total	**14**	**42.42%**	**9**	**29.03%**	**11**	**17.74%**	**6**	**40.00%**	**40**	**28.37%**

Table 5 presents the personal information found in the articles studied (N=197, 100%) of which 98.41% (N= 62) of *The Star* articles presented personal information of the leaders. This is followed by *Utusan* with 91.18% (N=31), *Malaysiakini* with 88.24% (N=15) and finally *Sin Chew* with 30.76% (N=33). However, 60.24% of *Sin Chew Daily* did not disclose personal information of the women leaders. This is followed by *Malaysiakini* (11.76%), *Utusan* (8.82%), and *The Star* (1.59%).

The most prominent frame analysed by *Sin Chew Daily* was marital status which is 54.55% (N=18), *Utusan* and *The Star's* prominent frame was profession (N=24, 77.42% and N= 24, 38.71%) and *Malaysiakini's* prominent frame was family background (N =6, 40%), respectively. From the four sub frames of the personal information, it can be concluded that the profession frame is the most salient in regard to women political leaders in Malaysia. This is followed by age, family background and marital status.

Table 6. Physical appearance

Item	Sin Chew (Chinese)	% Sin Chew (Chinese)	Utusan (BM)	% Utusan (BM)	The Star (English)	% The Star (English)	Malaysiakini (English)	% Malaysiakini (English)	Total	% Total
Physical appearance										
No	83	100.0%	3	8.82%	62	98.41%	17	100.0%	165	83.76%
Yes	0	0.00%	31	91.18%	1	1.59%	0	0.00%	32	16.24%

Table 6 presents the total number of news frames for physical appearance. The news frame "physical appearance" was mostly presented in *Utusan Melayu* (N=31, 91.18%) followed by *The Star* with 1.59% (N= 1). Alternative media sources, *Malaysiakini* and *Sin Chew Daily* did not use physical appearance as a frame for their articles.

Table 7. Family orientated

Item	Sin Chew (Chinese)	% Sin Chew (Chinese)	Utusan (BM)	% Utusan (BM)	The Star (English)	% The Star (English)	Malaysiakini (English)	% Malaysiakini (English)	Total	% Total
Family Orientated										
No	61	73.49%	18	52.94%	51	80.95%	16	94.12%	146	74.11%
Yes	22	26.51%	16	47.06%	12	19.05%	1	5.88%	51	25.89%
Caring	19	86.36%	5	31.25%	8	66.67%	1	100.0%	33	70.59%
Nurturing	7	31.82%	5	31.25%	4	33.33%	0	0.00%	16	60.78%
Warmth	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	8	66.67%	0	0.00%	8	58.82%
Understanding	0	0.00%	8	50.00%	4	33.33%	0	0.00%	12	66.67%

Women leaders' family-orientated qualities (caring, nurturing, warmth and understanding) were not highlighted significantly in the media (N =146, 74.11%) with *Malaysiakini* dominating in its non-reflection at 94.12% (N =16), followed by *The Star* (N =51. 80.95%), *Sin Chew Daily* (N=61, 73.49%) and lastly *Utusan* (N =18, 52.94%). In their usage, caring (N =33, 70.59%) was the dominant sub frame, followed by understanding (N = 12, 66.6%), nurturing (N = 16, 60.78%) and finally warmth (N = 8, 58.82%).

Table 8. Experience

Item	Sin Chew (Chinese)	% Sin Chew (Chinese)	Utusan (BM)	% Utusan (BM)	The Star (English)	% The Star (English)	Malaysiakini (English)	% Malaysiakini (English)	Total	% Total
Experience										
No	57	68.67%	7	20.59%	9	14.29%	3	17.65%	76	38.58%
Yes	26	31.33%	27	79.41%	54	85.71%	14	82.35%	121	61.42%

Experience is seen as a key factor as reflected in Table 8 (N = 121, 61.42%). This was predominantly featured in *The Star* (N=54, 85.71%), followed by *Malaysiakini* (N=14, 82.35%), *Utusan* (N=27, 79.41%) and *Sin Chew Daily* (N=26, 31.3%).

Table 9. Leadership qualities

Item	Sin Chew (Chinese)	% Sin Chew (Chinese)	Utusan (BM)	% Utusan (BM)	The Star (English)	% The Star (English)	Malaysiakini (English)	% Malaysiakini (English)	Total	% Total
Leadership Qualities										
No	17	20.48%	4	11.76%	7	11.11%	1	5.88%	28	17.09%
Yes	66	79.52%	30	88.24%	56	88.89%	16	94.12%	169	82.91%
Competent	38	57.58%	15	50.00%	43	76.79%	13	81.25%	138	84.54%
Confident	40	60.61%	14	46.67%	12	21.43%	3	18.75%	96	83.51%
Dynamic	33	50.00%	12	40.00%	18	32.14%	8	50.00%	105	81.44%
Determined	26	39.39%	15	50.00%	33	58.93%	11	68.75%	126	84.54%
Duty-bound	26	39.39%	23	76.67%	36	64.29%	8	50.00%	134	92.78%
Others	20	30.30%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	19	19.59%

Table 9 indicates an overwhelming emphasis on the leadership quality frames of women leaders (N=169, 82.91%). In the six sub frames tested, the confident frame was dominantly reflected in *Sin Chew Daily* (N= 40, 60.61%), competent sub frame in *The Star* (N= 43, 76.79%) and *Malaysiakini* (N=13, 81.25) while the duty-bound sub frame was strongly noted in *Utusan* (N= 23, 76.67%).

From all the four media studied, the duty-bound sub frame was the most highlighted with 92.78% (N=134), followed by competent (N=138, 84.54%), determined (N=126, 84.54%), confident (N = 96, 83.51%), dynamic (N=105, 81.44%) and other frames (N=19, 19.59%).

Table 10. Candidate's agenda

Item	Sin Chew (Chinese)	% Sin Chew (Chinese)	Utusan (BM)	% Utusan (BM)	The Star (English)	% The Star (English)	Malaysiakini (English)	% Malaysiakini (English)	Total	% Total
Candidate's Agenda										
No	39	46.99%	0	0.00%	8	12.70%	2	11.76%	49	24.87%
Yes	44	53.01%	34	100.00%	55	87.30%	156	88.24%	148	75.13%
Political	15	34.09%	26	76.47%	36	65.45%	10	66.67%	87	58.78%
Economical	7	15.91%	5	14.71%	15	27.27%	1	6.67%	28	18.92%
Social	28	63.64%	15	44.12%	24	43.64%	3	13.33%	69	46.62%
Others	14	31.82%	3	8.82%	11	20.00%	3	20.00%	31	20.95%

All the four media highlighted candidate's agenda as a factor for women leadership (N=148, 75.13%), led by *Utusan* (N= 34, 100%), followed by *Malaysiakini* (N=15, 88.24%), *The Star* (N=55, 87.30%) and *Sin Chew Daily* (N=44, 53.01%).

In Table 10, the highest use of sub frame within *Sin Chew* was social (N=28, 63.64%), while *Utusan*, *The Star* and *Malaysiakini* highlighted the political sub frame as the most important with 76.47% (N=26), 65.45% (N=36) and 66.67% (N=10), respectively.

Table 11. Valence

Item	Sin Chew (Chinese)	% Sin Chew (Chinese)	Utusan (BM)	% Utusan (BM)	The Star (English)	% The Star (English)	Malaysiakini (English)	% Malaysiakini (English)	Total	% Total
Candidate										
Positive	15	18.07%	33	97.06%	43	68.25%	9	52.94%	48	41.03%
Negative	2	2.41%	0	0.00%	5	7.94%	2	11.76%	2	1.71%
Mix	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	7	11.11%	3	17.65%	0	0.00%
Neutral	66	79.52%	1	2.94%	8	12.70%	3	17.65%	67	57.26%
Party										
Positive	0	0.00%	33	97.06%	40	63.49%	9	52.94%	33	28.21%
Negative	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	9	14.29%	2	11.76%	0	0.00%
Mix	1	1.20%	0	0.00%	5	7.94%	3	17.65%	1	0.85%
Neutral	82	98.80%	1	2.94%	9	14.29%	3	17.65%	83	70.94%

The candidate valence frame was skewed towards neutral reporting with 57.26% (N=67), followed by positive reporting (N=48, 41.03%), negative (N=2, 1.71%) and mixed (N=0, 0.00%). The candidate coverage of *Sin Chew Daily* reflected the neutral sub frame with 79.52% (N = 66), positive, 18.07% (N=15) and negative, 2.47% (N=2). There was zero valence for the mixed reporting of candidates.

For *Utusan*, the valence frame was more positive (N=33, 97.06%), followed by neutral (N=1, 2.94%). There was zero valence for negative and mixed reporting of candidates. Meanwhile, *The Star* reflected a positive valence frame (N=43, 68.25%), followed by neutral (N=8, 12.70%), mixed (N=7, 11.11%) and negative (N=5, 7.94%).

Malaysiakini's reporting of positive valence of candidate was at 52.94% (N=9) followed by mixed and neutral reporting 17.65% (N=3) for both, whereas negative valence for candidates was 11.76% (N=2). Table 11 also shows that in reporting of party valence, 70.94% (N=83) were neutral. Whereas positive reporting of party valence was 28.21% (N=33) followed by mixed reporting with N=1 (0.85%). There was no negative reporting of party valence.

Sin Chew Daily's neutral reporting of party was at 98.80% (N=82) leaving only 1.20% (N=1) for mixed valence for party reporting. There was no positive and negative reporting of party valence by *Sin Chew Daily* in this study. *Utusan*, on the contrary showed 97.06% (N=33) for positive reporting of party valence whereas neutral reporting was at an unimpressive amount of 2.94% (N=1).

The Star reported positive party valence with 63.49% (N=40), followed by neutral and negative valence of 14.29% (N=9), respectively and mixed valence was 7.94% (N=5). *Malaysiakini's* positive party valence was highlighted by 52.94% (N=9) followed by mixed and neutral valence of 17.65% (N=3) and negative valence of 11.76% (N=2).

Table 12. Affiliation

Item	Sin Chew (Chinese)	% Sin Chew (Chinese)	Utusan (BM)	% Utusan (BM)	The Star (English)	% The Star (English)	Malaysiakini (English)	% Malaysiakini (English)	Total	% Total
BN	19	22.89%	26	76.47%	31	49.21%	6	35.29%	82	41.62%
PH	46	55.42%	7	20.59%	32	50.79%	3	17.65%	88	44.67%
PAS	1	1.20%	1	2.94%	2	3.17%	0	0.00%	4	2.03%
INDE	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	6	9.52%	0	0.00%	6	3.05%
NON-POL	1	1.20%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	1	0.51%
OTHERS	1	1.20%	0	0.00%	1	1.59%	0	0.00%	2	1.02%
NO MENTION	15	18.07%	1	2.94%	0	0.00%	9	52.94%	25	12.69%

Sin Chew Daily used the affiliation frame most for *Pakatan Harapan* (N= 46, 55.42%), followed by BN (N=19. 22.89%), while *Utusan* highlighted BN (N=26, 76.47) followed by PH (N=7, 20.59%). Meanwhile, *The Star's* highest affiliation frame was used for PH (N=32, 50.79%), followed very closely by BN (N=31, 49.21%). *Malaysiakini* did not highlight any one party with no mention (N=9, 52.94%), followed by BN (N =6, 35.29%) and PH (N=3, 17.65%). In total, the most affiliation frame was used by all media towards PH (N= 88, 44.67%), followed closely by BN (N=82, 41.62%), Independent (N=6, 3.05%), PAS (N=4, 2.03%) and others (N=3, 1.53%) and finally, no mention of any affiliation was N=25 (12.69%).

DISCUSSION

This research paper aimed to analyse patterns and trends in the newspaper coverage of female candidates, female politicians and female leaders during the 2018 general election in Malaysia. From the total number of articles examined in this study, 92% were straight news. It should be noted that the search included all types of article in the news media such as editorial, letters, columns and commentaries. This suggests that editors and journalists seldom give their personal views on women leaders in Malaysia, and add little context, background, comment or opinion to give an in-depth coverage of these women leaders. Interestingly, only *Malaysiakini* provided 5 opinion pieces and 3 column articles out of the total 17 articles collected in this period suggesting that the news portal deemed it important to give greater depth and breadth to their coverage of women leaders.

One of the aspects this study sought to identify was the extent of "personal information" of women leaders that was included in articles. The results show that the media deemed it important to include personal information in their coverage, with 71.57% of the examined articles providing some details about the women leaders such as marital status, age, profession and family background. There was a marked difference though, in terms of which personal information was highlighted in the vernacular media. In this regard, *Sin Chew Daily* had the least number of articles that disclosed personal information, suggesting that the Chinese media, and possibly their readers, are not too interested in personal information. Of the personal information disclosed, it is noteworthy pointing out that "profession" was the most mentioned indicating that the media are concerned with highlighting that particular aspect of the women leader. This was also reflected in in *The Star* and *Utusan Melayu* articles, suggesting that English- and Malay-language media place

importance on women leaders' professions. These media chose to highlight the profession of the women leaders in Malaysia, thus lending professional credibility to them. On the other extreme, "marital status" was the least prominent frame used in reporting, suggesting that the media do not consider this aspect an important factor to represent women. This was similar to "physical appearance"; it was not considered an important factor in news reporting. Golder (2012), in her study of portrayal of women candidates in the Indian elections, stated that with women politicians, objectification is almost always the rule while little or no such observations of appearances, family or personal information are made about men candidates. She contends that the media should focus on more important issues instead of irrelevant information, specifically referring to details of personal information and appearances. The Malaysian media that were examined did not focus on personal details, with the exception of *Utusan Melayu*, whose articles overwhelmingly (91.18%) mentioned physical appearance. It would be interesting to find out if this is something regarded as important in the Malay culture, though there is no current literature on this specific point.

The media did not place importance on "family orientated" frames unlike its "profession" and "experience" frames (see Tables 7 and 8). Both the English and Malay media, in highlighting "experience" as a key frame for women leaders, set this up for readers as an important attribute to notice. While "leadership qualities" is a key frame as reflected in the data (Table 9), the "duty-bound" frame was seen highlighted substantially by all the four media studied. This aspect is more nuanced as there is a marked difference in the inclusion of the notion of duty, with the Chinese newspaper being the lowest to highlight it compared to the other media. This is confounding since there is a perception that the more traditional Chinese, as is reflective of the *Sin Chew Daily* readership, is believed to have great filial piety and duty-bound too. The findings suggest some socio-cultural differences between the vernacular media frames and representation of women leaders. Nevertheless, research on culture do not strongly support that there are differences. Fontaine and Richardson (2005) in their study of cultural values of Malays, Chinese and Indians in Malaysia concluded that overall, the three main ethnic groups shared 82% of 57 cultural values. The key difference between the three main ethnic groups is the rating of the value "devout". Fontaine and Richardson's findings broadly confirm the findings of Asma and Lim (2001) who found that the only significant difference between the three ethnic groups was in the dimension of "religiosity", which was never mentioned in the articles reviewed. The references to Indians in the quoted study is incidental as this research has not included any Tamil language media, the next largest ethnicity after Malays and Chinese, to provide further comparisons to identify ethnically influenced media coverage.

Additionally, English and Malay media placed prominence on the "political agenda" of women leaders (Table 10). This indicates that the media consider "political agenda" a pertinent issue for their readers. The Chinese media, however, highlighted the "social agenda" of women leaders, consistent with their interest for social benefits such as education and language.

Overall, the reporting of women candidates was positive. The valence of the articles relating to both candidate and party received the same proportion of positive frames. On one hand, there was a high level of positive reporting of women political leaders by both English and Malay dailies, which are known to be directly or indirectly owned by political parties. *Barisan Nasional* (the ruling coalition until GE14) has a large ownership stake in *Utusan Melayu* and *The Star* (Abbott, 2011). This suggests efforts to boost women's representation by their respective parties, although the coding in this study did not differentiate those from, or partial to, the ruling coalition or opposition in the run-up to

the elections. The only closest indication is found in Abbott's work (2011), which found that there is an overwhelming pro-government bias in the Malaysian media.

Malaysiakini also used positive frames in about half of their articles on women leaders. The Chinese daily, on the other hand, was more neutral in their coverage, which is consistent with Ng and Lee's (2018) findings that *Sin Chew Daily* provided space for the political discourses of both BN and PR in GE14. The question that arises next is whether there are any alignments along racial lines that could have influenced the valence. This current research did not take note of the race of the women subjects in the articles, and therefore, it is not possible to make any inference about whether the positive reporting was racially motivated. Bligh et al. (2012) stressed the importance of valence in their study on media representation of women in politics, where their findings suggest that the tone and the focus of a media message may contribute to an overall evaluation of a woman politician. They noted "…valence does shape differential perceptions of women politicians, which may, in turn, impact voting behaviours, leadership ratings, confidence votes, decisions to donate campaign dollars, and other important political behaviours."

To gain a deeper understanding of the finding here, it would be necessary to investigate what informs and influences the choice of frames, or what is commonly understood in journalism as the angle of the articles. From the articles alone, it is not clear if journalists in Malaysia write to pander to their readership. The question this does raise though, is whether media practitioners are influencing or perpetuating cultural views of women; based on what they perceive as values, characteristics and traits of women leaders in Malaysia, that are important to them according to their respective political leanings as well as personal beliefs about the role of women in society or ethnicities. It may be the case that they perceive these are the same beliefs that their readers hold based on vague notions of their readers. The editorial policy or political affiliation of each media should be examined too. In-depth interviews with editors and sub-editors who instruct or influence the specific angles and contents of articles would be necessary to get a more definitive understanding of the differences highlighted in this research. Another aspect, which came as a surprise to the researchers, was the gross lack of visual presentation of the women candidates in the media. In contrast, male leaders/politicians were prominently featured especially in the run-up to the elections. This would be an interesting future research topic to compare the coverage of women and men in leadership.

CONCLUSION

The present study is a contribution to the growing literature on media representation of women leaders in general elections in Malaysia. GE14 presented the highest number of women representatives in state assemblies and parliament. This election also saw the historical appointment of the first female Deputy Prime Minister in 2018. However, in totality, women are still lagging behind in political leadership positions. This is apparent when the proportion of men to women in politics and decision-making position is compared. There must be a progressive and affirmative representation of women in line with the government's aspiration of women in 30% of key decision-making positions.

By undertaking the emerging coding approach, the current study contributes to the body of work on framing theory by introducing eight frame categories for representation of women leaders in the media. In terms of media representation, it is without a doubt that women remain marginalised. The analyses reveal that the Malaysian media only sparsely engage in discussions to provide a fair and objective coverage on women political candidates and leaders. The reason a frame is selected over another is to convey a powerful

meaning or to support journalists in framing a story by basing on theoretical explanations (Coleman, 2010, as cited in Guha, 2018). To better understand the findings, it would be necessary to investigate the frame building process, specifically what informs or influences the choice of frames, or what is commonly understood in journalism as the angles of the articles. The appreciation of this point is crucial since news has moved beyond merely giving information, and journalist not just stating the facts but, more so, helping readers make sense of the vast amount of data and information already circulating as well as to analyse, interpret and comment on the data. In this regard, this study focuses on journalists' task which would be to represent women leaders' views and capabilities on important issues, rather than on personal attributes, and interpret what that means for the local political situation. Therefore, it is good to see that women's political agenda is covered in the news.

The other question this study raises is whether media practitioners are influencing or perpetuating cultural views of women, more specifically what they perceive as values, characteristics and traits of women leaders in Malaysia, that are important to them according to their respective political leanings, personal beliefs about the role of women in society or ethnicities.

In addition, future studies could also look into another aspect of frame building, whereby the editorial policy or political affiliations of each of the media outlets would be examined. In-depth interviews with editors and sub-editors who instruct or influence the specific angles and contents of articles would be necessary to get a more definitive understanding of how the news coverage of women are showing the differences highlighted in this research. Hence, it can be concluded that media representation of women leaders in Malaysia is still low. At the most obvious or anecdotal level, male leaders/politicians are prominently featured especially in the run up to the elections. A possibility for future research in this field is to compare media representation of women and men in electoral political participation and political leadership positions.

Finally, it would be interesting to juxtapose the findings of this study with public opinion data to measure public perception towards women leaders. This would further explicate the impact of news frames on people's perception of an issue. The scope could also be expanded to examine representation of women leaders in general, apart from the political realm, for instance in civil service, the private sector, and civil society.

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