

Backgrounding of LGBT in Newspaper Coverage in Malaysia

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Abstract: *In Malaysia, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual dan Transgender (LGBT) face moral sanctions and legal challenges because it is prohibited by Islam and not condoned by major religions. A search using Google Trends show that there was a spike of interest on “LGBT in Malaysia” in 2009 and 2019, but there has been sustained interest since 2014. The present study examined framing of LGBT in four online newspapers in Malaysia. The specific objectives of the study were to determine the percentage of episodic and thematic framing in the newspapers, and to compare the topics that are reported in LGBT news. LGBT seems to be backgrounded in newspaper coverage by Astro Awani, Free Malaysia Today, Malaysiakini and The Star Online because only 60 articles published in 2019 were related to LGBT. The analysis showed that 81.67% of the articles were episodic frames and 18.33% were thematic frames. Malaysiakini had relatively more thematic articles while Astro Awani had the lowest percentage of thematic articles on LGBT. Over half (61.67%) of the articles were on LGBT news stories in Malaysia while other articles reported LGBT-linked persons or events in other countries. The local topics reported on LGBT were specific events which generated views on LGBT from politicians, religious leaders, and activists. The coverage of LGBT topics in other countries included criminalisation and societal discrimination of LGBT, and support for LGBT. The findings suggest caution in news on LBGT, with newspapers treading a thin line between affirming human rights and taking the official position of the country on LGBT.*

Keywords: LGBT, news articles, episodic, thematic, Malaysia

1. Introduction

Of late, there has been openness towards LGBT, evident in 28 countries recognizing same-sex marriages in 2019 alone (Dorall, 2020), among which are Netherlands, Belgium, Canada and Spain. For instance, Australia legalised same-sex marriage on 9 December 2017. In the same year, Taiwan became the first country in Asia to legalise same-sex marriage (International lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, 2019). LGBT is an acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender. Lesbian refers to a woman who has a romantic and/or sexual orientation toward women (Vanderbilt University, 2021). Gay refers to men who are sexually attracted to other men (Evans, 2002). “The term ‘bisexual’ is used to describe a person who experiences emotional, romantic and/or sexual attractions to, or engages in romantic or sexual relationships with, more than one sex or gender” (American Psychological Association, 2021a). “Transgender is an umbrella term for persons whose gender identity, gender expression or behavior does not conform to that typically associated with the sex to which they were assigned at birth” (American Psychological Association, 2021b).

The official position of Malaysia on LGBT is clear. Same-sex marriage is not accepted in Malaysia (Reuters, 2018) and homosexuality is illegal (Dorall, 2020). The 126th Conference of Rulers on 13 December 1989 prohibited LGBT from being practised as a lifestyle (Haridi, 2016). LGBT is seen as violating religious principles, the lifestyle of the Eastern society, and human nature (Mohamad, 2015).

Movements towards equality for LGBT picked up in the last five years. LGBT (*pondan* and *mak nyah*) has existed in Malaysia ever since the liberalisation in the 1980s (Mohamad, 2015), but of late the LGBT community is gaining a voice in Malaysian society. In August 2018, Nisha Ayub, the transgender representative in Malaysia, met the Minister in the Prime Minister's Department to request non-discrimination of LGBT people in Malaysia 2018 (Kaos, 2018). According to Arif, Shafie, Hanapi, and Hassan (2018), there is a pro-LGBT organisation known as Seksualiti Merdeka which often organises annual programmes to promote LGBT so that their struggle is recognised in Malaysia. LGBT individuals also participated in a rally during the celebration of World Women's Day in Kuala Lumpur on 8 March 2019. This resulted in the rally becoming a hot issue covered extensively by Malaysian newspapers. For example, *Berita Harian* published nine articles on the rally from 9 to 14 March 2019. The emergence of LGBT in public space in the Malaysian society may have been an outcome of United Nations resolutions in 2011 and 2014 on LGBT rights as a part of fundamental human rights.

Most recently, the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC, 2014) adopted Resolution 27/32 on "Human Rights, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity" which expressed "grave concern at acts of violence and discrimination, in all regions of the world, committed against individuals because of their sexual orientation and gender identity."

(Lovell, 2015, para. 2)

However, a youth chief was quoted as saying that while they acknowledge the existence of the LGBT community, their lifestyle should be kept private (Mok, 2018).

Thus far, research on media coverage of LGBT has revealed that media cannot avoid portraying the pros and cons of the issue. Media, in fact, inadvertently discriminate against LGBT by using sensational headlines to attract readers (Utaminintyas, 2013). Canadian mainstream newspapers have attributed blame to LGBT individuals for the sexual victimisation (Morrison et al., 2020). The highlighting of sexuality elements in news on LGBT makes them into media commodities. The media repeatedly use certain terms or symbols to create a distinctive image of LGBT in the eyes of society (Zuhra, 2013). For example, *Republika Online* (an Indonesian news portal) portrayed homosexuals as sadistic, inclined to commit violence, and going against religion while *Tempo.co* emphasised that homosexuality is a choice, and not destined by God (Zuhra, 2013). In addition, Utaminintyas (2013) found that *Republika Online* framed LGBT as a social disease, and revealed that the forms of symbolic violence are found in all four framing structures as follows: (1) Syntactic Structure in terms of headline, lead, background, quotations, news source, and closing; (2) Script Structure by reporting the 5W+1H of the LGBT phenomenon; (3) Thematic Structure by presenting a selected perspective of the LGBT phenomenon in terms of detail, coherence, clause, and referents; and (4) Rhetoric Structure by emphasising the negative meaning of LGBT through choice of lexis (e.g., words, idioms), images and metaphors. The formation of images creates stereotypes which are later propagated in society (Gerbner, 2007). These mental representations in the media discourse influence the

attitudes and actions of readers (Van Dijk, 2011). The mental representations are created using language: words and grammatical structures.

News framing is often influenced by the ideological positions of the news media and the journalists' personal perspectives in writing articles. For instance, Wahid and Yakut's (2018) analysis of two online newspapers on an extensive campaign of LGBT community in Indonesia on online media on 16-18 February 2016. They found that Detik.com (the national media) had the humanism ideology and invited readers to sympathise with the party that is victimised or oppressed while Republika.co.id (an Islamic-based media) framed the LGBT community as contravening religious laws. Similarly, Indari and Novianti (2018) found that the LGBT discourse in the feminine online media is positive towards LGBT, mainly because of the journalists' liberal stance on LGBT. However, the framing of LGBT in the media may often reflect dominant societal views. Little is known about how LGBT is framed in newspapers in Malaysia, where same-sex marriage, homosexuality and sodomy is illegal and punishable by law. In view of the various influences on framing of news and the LGBT phenomenon, it is important to study framing of LGBT to find out the salient aspects that are used in arguments for or against LGBT in newspapers.

The present study examined framing of LGBT in four online newspapers in Malaysia. The specific objectives of the study were to determine the percentage of episodic and thematic framing in the newspapers, and to compare the topics that are reported in LGBT news.

2. Method of Study

The data for the descriptive study on framing of LGBT were taken from articles published on LGBT in 2019 because Google Trends shows although there has been sustained interest in the topic since 2014, there was a spike of interest on "LGBT in Malaysia" in 2009 and 2019. Online newspapers were chosen instead of printed newspapers because of easy access to readers. The four online newspapers were Free Malaysia Today, MalaysiaKini, The Star Online, and Astro Awani Online. These four newspapers were selected because the Top 30 online news site ranked MalaysiaKini as the top newspaper in readership, The Star Online second, and Free Malaysia Today seventh (All you can read, 2019). Astro Awani Online was selected because Astro Awani is a popular paid television channel in Malaysia that also produces news articles in Malay. It is considered the number one 24-hour news channel in Malaysia. The Star Online articles were all in English while Astro Awani Online articles were all in Malay. Free Malaysia Today and MalaysiaKini had both English and Malay articles. Table 1 shows the breakdown of the 60 news articles on LGBT that were found in the search of the websites of the four sources.

Table 1: Number of LGBT-related articles from the four newspapers

Newspaper	Number of English articles	Number of Malay articles	Total
MalaysiaKini	10	12	22
The Star Online	14	0	14
Free Malaysia Today	7	5	12
Astro Awani Online	0	12	12
Total	31	29	60

The framing of LGBT was analysed with reference to an analysis framework for episodic and thematic framing (Table 2). Episodic news articles are event-oriented (Iyengar, 1990). While they may include some background information such as the context and expert opinions, episodic articles are triggered by an event and the time of the event is usually mentioned giving

the event a time-stamp (e.g., “yesterday”, “A said on Sunday”). The sources include statements by authoritative individuals, citations from reports, and disclosures by unnamed individuals. A thematic article highlights the issues in a wider context, focusing on trends over time (Iyengar, 1991).

Table 2: Analysis framework for episodic and thematic framing

Type of framing	Definition	Example
Episodic	Episodic news articles are on specific individuals or events (Iyengar, 1990).	Russian police said Saturday they had opened an investigation into “sexual violence” after a video series published online showed children talking with members of the LGBT community and other minorities. (“Russia probes ‘destructive’ videos of kids talking to LGBT members”, Free Malaysia Today, 3 November 2019)
Thematic	Thematic news articles are on problems or issues positioned in a wider context such as showing trends over time (Iyengar, 1991).	Interestingly, we casually throw the word “human rights” in conversations that touch on political, socio-economic and cultural issues. But what exactly are human rights? (“Human Rights Day: Kudos to the Rakyat”, MalaysiaKini, 9 December 2019)

To collect the LGBT news articles, the second researcher searched the newspaper websites using the keyword “LGBT”. The search brought up news articles with LGBT content arranged according to date. She read through the articles to determine if they mention LGBT. One of the articles identified in the search did not mention LGBT, and was excluded from the analysis. The relevant articles were copied and pasted in a Word document, numbered and labelled according to the name of the newspaper. The document was printed for manual analysis.

The unit of analysis was the news article. The whole article was read to determine the dominant frame, that is, whether the focus was on specific individuals and events (episodic frame), or on issues set in a wider context (thematic frame). Both the first and second researchers analysed the articles with reference to the analysis framework shown in Table 2. Initially there were some differences in the analysis because some episodic articles contained some background on the event, and this gave rise to confusion as to whether it should be categorised as a thematic article. However, the differences were resolved by referring to the analysis framework which made it clear that an article is considered a thematic article if it is not a report of a specific event and does not have a time-stamp.

The other part of the data analysis was to compare the topics that are reported in LGBT news. For this, the main topic was identified for each article, and the topics were grouped by themes. An example is the expressions of support or condemnation of LGBT by ministers, politicians, and members of political parties. These were grouped as politicians as opposed to religious leaders. The results of the analysis of topics of LGBT news articles were presented as a concept map.

Chi-Square goodness of fit test was performed to examine the relationship between episodic/thematic framing and newspaper, and also the relationship between local/foreign-based LGBT news and newspaper.

2. Results

2.1 Episodic and thematic framing in Malaysian online newspapers

Altogether 60 articles on LGBT were published in the four Malaysian online newspapers in the year 2019, showing that LGBT is not represented as a salient issue to the Malaysian readership. Table 3 shows MalaysiaKini had more articles (22) compared to the other three newspapers which had 12 to 14 articles in that year, indicating the greater visibility given to LGBT issues in this alternative newspaper.

Table 3. Percentage of Episodic and Thematic Framing in the Four Online Newspapers Analysed

Newspaper	Episodic framing		Thematic framing	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
The Star Online (n=14)	12	85.71	2	14.29
MalaysiaKini (n=22)	16	72.73	6	27.27
Free Malaysia Today (n=12)	10	83.33	2	16.67
Astro Awani (n=12)	11	91.67	1	8.33
Total	49	81.67	11	18.33

The results showed the dominance of episodic framing, that is, 81.67% of the articles were episodic frames and 18.33% were thematic frames. The four newspapers differ in the proportion of episodic and thematic articles on LGBT. Astro Awani has the highest percentage of episodic framing (91.67%) whereas MalaysiaKini has the lowest percentage among the four newspaper analysed (72.73%) but it needs to be noted that 72.73% still shows the dominance of episodic reporting on LGBT in MalaysiaKini. Astro Awani having the highest percentage of episodic framing is expected. Television network news relies more heavily on episodic framing than thematic framing for war news (“Operation Iraqi freedom: How the media portrays the war in Iraq,” n.d.).

Chi-Square goodness of fit test was performed to examine the relationship between episodic/thematic framing and newspaper. The relationship between these variables was not significant, $X^2(3, N = 60) = 2.15, p = .75$. There were no significant differences in the percentage of episodic and thematic framing of LGBT in the four newspapers. Even though MalaysiaKini (72.73%) and Free Malaysia Today (83.33%) are alternative newspapers, the high percentage of episodic news on LGBT is similar to that of The Star Online (85.71%). The four newspapers were similar in the dominance of episodic framing of LGBT.

2.2 Topics reported on LGBT in Malaysian online newspapers

Further analysis showed that over half (61.67%) of the articles were on LGBT news stories in Malaysia while 38.33% of articles reported LGBT-linked persons or events in other countries (Table 4). Chi-Square goodness of fit test was performed to examine the relationship between local/foreign-based news and newspaper. The relationship between these variables was significant, $X^2(3, N = 60) = 33.90, p = .01$.

Table 4. Percentage of Local and Foreign-based LGBT News in the Four Online Newspapers Analysed

Newspaper	Local news		Foreign-based news	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
The Star Online (n=14)	3	5.00	11	18.33
MalaysiaKini (n=22)	20	33.33	2	3.33
Free Malaysia Today (n=12)	6	10.00	6	10.00
Astro Awani (n=12)	8	13.33	4	6.67
Total	37	61.67	23	38.33

There four newspapers were significantly different in the percentage of local and foreign-based LGBT news articles. The Star Online has more foreign-based LGBT news while MalaysiaKini and Astro Awani are focussed on Malaysian news. Free Malaysia Today has a balanced number of local and foreign-based news. In the rest of this section, details are provided on the topics of the local and foreign-based news in the four online newspapers

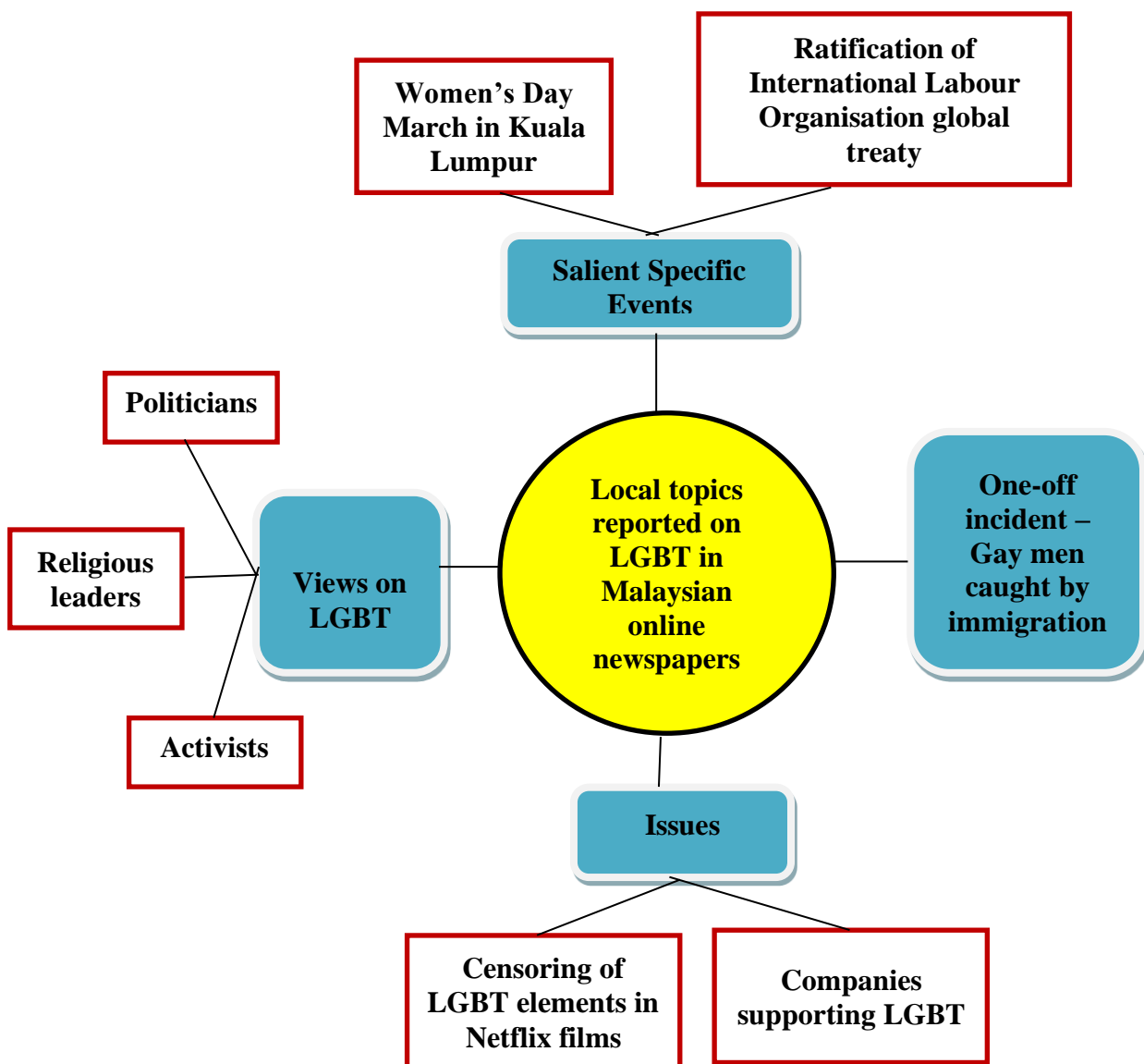


Figure 1: Topics reported in local LGBT news in four Malaysian online newspapers

Figure 1 shows the topics of the local LGBT news in the four online newspapers analysed in this study. The local LGBT news articles revolved around salient specific events, issue of support and censorship, and views on LGBT by various segments of the society. The main events related to LGBT were the Women's Day March in Kuala Lumpur on 9 March 2019 and the vote against the International Labour Organization global treaty. The detention of five gay men from another country suspected of entering Malaysia to offer sexual services was a one-off incident reported by Astro Awani in the article entitled "*Lelaki gay tawar aktiviti seks ditahan Jabatan Imigresen Pulau Pinang*" [Gay men offering sexual activity arrested by Penang Immigration Department] (Alias, 2019).

The most salient specific incident where LGBT presence became a big issue was the Women's Day March. Some LGBT individuals joined the Women's Day which led to claims by certain parties that the assembly was illegal, and police contacted the organisers to have their statement recorded. This incident was covered by all four newspapers.

In contrast, the International Labour Organization global treaty was given salience only by MalaysiaKini. The refraining of the Malaysian government from signing the treaty was only reported by MalaysiaKini a few times. An example is the 29 June 2019 article entitled "Yoursay: Unions are supposed to fight for the rights of all members, no?" The Human Resource Minister stated that Malaysia adopted a neutral stance so as not to contradict Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC) and Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF). MEF reportedly said that LGBT is the reason for their delegation to reject the International Labour Organization agreement which aims to provide better protection to workers who face violence and harassment at their workplace.

These three events and other minor events involving a company (H&M) supporting LGBT through its clothes line "Love for All" and the issue of censoring LGBT elements in Netflix firms triggered many expressions of support and condemnation of LGBT. Many news articles reported politicians, religious leaders, activists and companies expressing either support or condemnation of LGBT. Excerpts 1 and 2 show discrepant views expressed on Malaysia's refusal to ratify the International Labour Organization global treaty.

Excerpt 1

It just doesn't pass logical muster to cite LBGT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) issues as the reason the Malaysian delegates voted against the International Labour Organization's (ILO) global treaty (to end workplace discrimination) in one breath, and then assure us in another, that it "should not be interpreted to mean that MEF condones any discrimination against LGBT, especially violence and sexual harassment at the workplace" from which they are "entitled to be protected and be safeguarded ... just like any other employee". What pathetic gobbledygook is this? ("Yoursay: Unions are supposed to fight for the rights of all members, no?," MalaysiaKini, 29 June 2019)

Excerpt 2

Adakah H&M Malaysia turut terlibat dalam kempen LGBT seperti yang tertera di instagram H&M induk United Nation Free Equal iG? ... Iaitu hasil jualan 10 peratus akan diberikan kepada gerakan UN Free Equal untuk mendokong perjuangan LGBT? soal Fathul Bari. [Is H&M Malaysia also involved in the LGBT campaign as mentioned in H&M headquarters Instagram United Nation Free Equal iG? ... that is, 10 percent of sales will be given the UN Free Equal movement to support LGBT fight questions Fathul

Bari (“Busana pro LGBT: Fathul Bari personal gedung fesyen H&M,” MalaysiaKini, 1 June 2019)

MalaysiaKini also reported the then Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad being questioned about Malaysia’s stand in his speech delivered at Oxford Union during his three-day work visit to the United Kingdom. He was reported as saying that Western countries wanted to impose the LGBT lifestyle on other countries. He said that Malaysians have their own culture and cannot accept something that is against their customs and religion. This is the stance that is echoed by many politicians, but activists are likely to adopt a sympathetic stance on LGBT in the context of equal rights (along the lines of Excerpt 1).

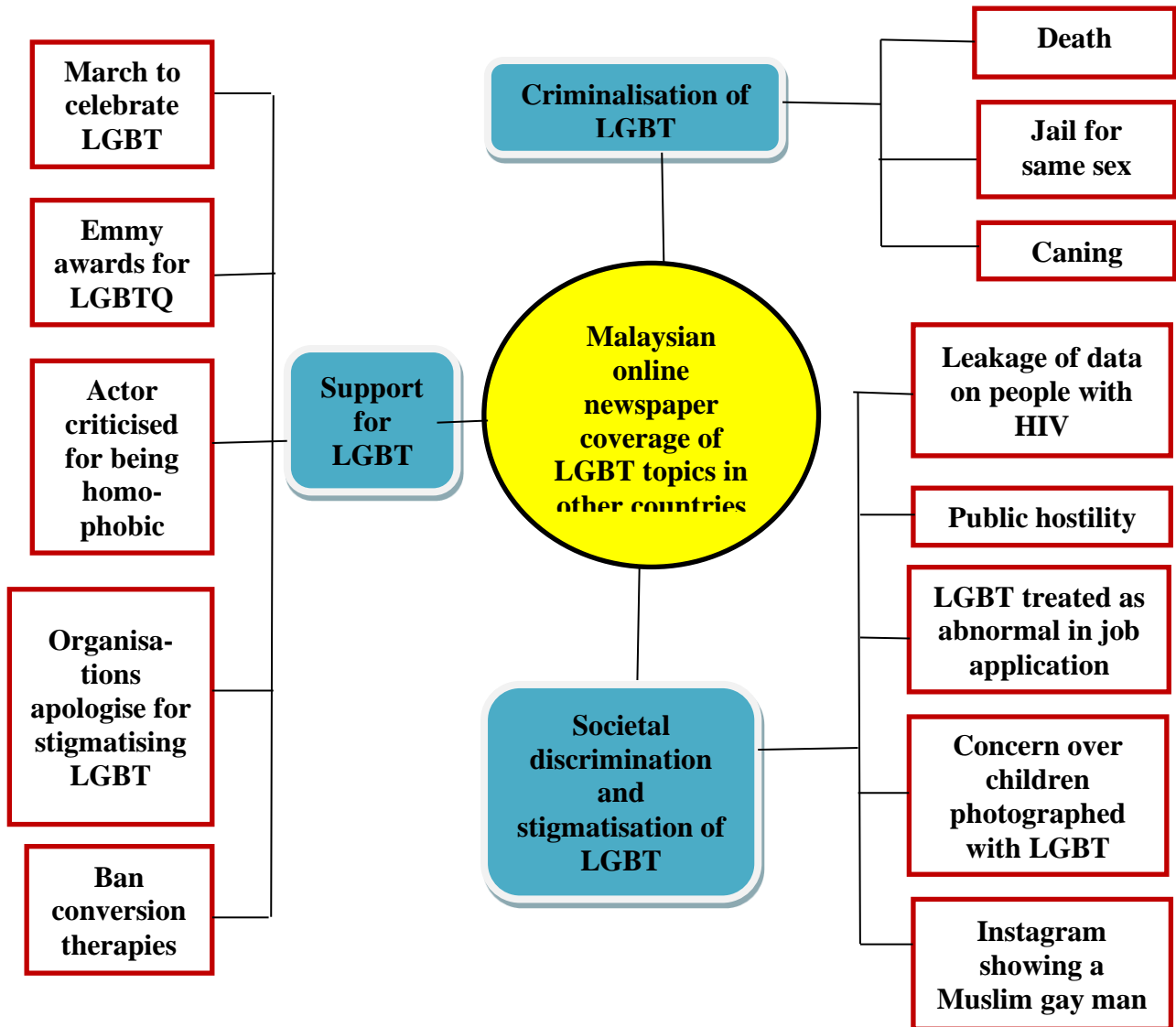


Figure 2: Newspaper coverage of the four Malaysian online newspapers on LGBT topics in other countries

Next, the results of the analysis of the remaining 38.33% of the articles covering LGBT issues and incidents in other countries are reported. There is a great deal of diversity in the topics covered and the countries involved: Singapore, Spain, Japan, Poland, Cuba, North Macedonia, Kenya, Brunei, Germany, Russian, Indonesia, and The United States. Figure 2 shows the newspaper coverage of the four Malaysian online newspapers on LGBT topics in other countries.

Figure 2 shows that the topics involving LGBT in other countries ranged from criminalisation of LGBT and discrimination against LGBT to support for LGBT. Some countries impose a death penalty, jail and caning of individuals identified to be LGBT or engaging in same sex acts. One scale down in negative representation of LGBT is the societal discrimination against LGBT in the news articles. The discrimination took the form of outcry by the LGBT community over leakage of data on people with HIV, public hostility towards LGBT, treatment of LGBT individuals as abnormal in job applications, concern over children being photographed with LGBT and Instagram showing a Muslim gay man.

Figure 2 also shows the support and acceptance of the LGBT community. In the United States, there are marches to celebrate LGBT and equality, recognition of LGBTQ in Emmy awards, and a report of an actor being shouted at for being “homophobic”. The CEO of two organisations in the United States apologised for their company’s response to the LGBTQ community. A Free Malaysia Today news article dated 21 September 2019 reported the growing presence of Lesbian Bay Bisexual Transgender Queer (LGBTQ) at Emmy Awards (Excerpt 3). The Emmy Awards featured several queer actors and filmmakers receiving some of the top television honours. Interestingly, the Emmy Awards news did not appear in the other three newspapers.

Excerpt 3

“The number of LGBTQ nominees at this year’s Emmy Awards is a sign that things are starting to change in Hollywood,” said Sarah Kate Ellis, president and CEO of GLAAD, an advocacy group that monitors diversity in the media, including on television. (Free Malaysia Today, 21 September 2019)

There was also a report of work in progress to ban conversion therapies in Germany because there are about 1,000 attempts per year. The Health Minister of Germany was quoted as saying, “Homosexuality is not an illness and therefore there is no need for therapy.” The Star Online article dated 11 June 2019 went on to explain conversion therapy (see Excerpt 4).

Excerpt 4

Conversion therapy, which can include hypnosis or electric shocks, is based on the belief that being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender is a curable mental illness. It is normally carried out by relatives, life coaches, therapists or religious counsellors. “We have to convince parents to accept their children the way they are and we must take away the worries from young people to feel ashamed,” Spahn said.

The news articles published in the four online Malaysian newspapers on LGBT-linked persons or events in other countries seemed to have a balance of support and condemnation of LGBT, in contrast to local Malaysian incidents which were reported either neutrally or negatively. The negative tone of the local topics on LGBT was mainly because of the official position of Malaysia against LGBT, founded on the prohibition of LGBT in Islam. The then Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia was quoted as saying that it is *haram* (forbidden) for Muslims to support

LGBT and what they are fighting for (Kamal, 2018). However, when newspapers like The Star Online carry more foreign-based news on LGBT, its readers are exposed to multi-faceted framing of LGBT compared to newspapers which carry predominantly local news on LGBT.

3. Discussion and Conclusion

The study examined framing of LGBT in four online newspapers in Malaysia, namely, The Star Online, MalaysiaKini, Free Malaysia Today and Astro Awani. The study produced three noteworthy findings.

Firstly, LGBT was backgrounded in the four online newspaper analysed. The salience seemed to be downplayed based on the number of LGBT-related articles in the year 2019. Among the four newspapers, the alternative newspaper MalaysiaKini gave LGBT slightly more visibility but having 22 articles on LGBT in a year is not high. A possible reason for the backgrounding of LGBT in newspaper coverage is that LGBT is still a controversial and sensitive issue in Malaysia and other countries. A Malay Mail article cited Malaysian laws such as Section 377A of the Penal Code which criminalise “carnal intercourse against the order of nature” (Kamal, 2018). “In at least 76 countries, discriminatory laws criminalize private, consensual same-sex relationships, exposing millions of individuals to the risk of arrest, prosecution and imprisonment – and even, in at least five countries, the death penalty” (United Nations Human Rights, n.d., para. 1). The Malaysian society may not be comfortable with LGBT being in public space in the news media. A related incident is the public’s unease with the inclusion of portraits of two LGBT activists at a photography exhibition celebrating the Merdeka month in Penang, which later led to the removal of the portraits.

Secondly, the study showed that 72% to 92% of LGBT articles in the four newspapers were episodic frames, and inclined towards negative representation of LGBT. Because of the dominance of episodic framing of LGBT, it is likely that readers may be unclear about the background, causes, motivations, and involvement of various parties in the unfolding of events linked to LGBT. The incident-focussed reporting leads readers to view the incidents as isolated incidents and they lose sight of the context and the connection between incidents. However, episodic frames evoke stronger emotional responses than thematic frames (Aarøe, 2011). “Episodic frames can actually increase persuasion if the individual’s story is compelling enough to generate intense emotional reactions from a significant portion of the audience”; otherwise thematic stories are more persuasive (Goss, 2008, p. 184). Therefore, episodic framing in news articles is powerful in influencing readers, and in the case of LGBT, it is mostly to portray LGBT negatively. Framing analysis of three Indonesian newspapers showed negative media representation of LGBT (Utaminingsyas, 2012; Wahid & Yakut, 2018; Zuhra, 2013). Sinkhorn’s (2011) analysis of the coverage of Turkish newspapers on LGBT showed that European influence has reduced the negative representation of LGBT issues in the 2005-2010 period in the conservative Turkish society. When news media are inclined towards dehumanising the experiences of LGBTQ victims or blaming them for their sexual victimisation instead of portraying the sexual violence as hate crimes against LGBT, they may influence readers to develop negative attitudes towards LGBT (Morrison et al., 2020). Morrison et al. (2020) asserted that LGBTQ experiences should be reported from an intersectional perspective (in the broader context) and thematically framed to give LGBTQ a fair representation. In this sense, it is understandable why the thematic coverage of the Gay Games in the US newspapers promoted acceptance towards LGBT (Lee, Kim, & Love, 2014). During the analysis of the data for the present study, we did not see clear evidence of compelling stories to evoke intense emotional reactions from the readers. Hence, it can be

surmised that the newspapers avoided taking a position on the LGBT phenomenon by staying away from thematic framing of LGBT. Their stance on LGBT, if any, are indirectly shown through the selection of voices to cite in their articles because quotations from religious leaders are usually negative towards LGBT while quotations from activists are usually supportive of LGBT.

Thirdly, the newspapers differed in the coverage of local and foreign news on LGBT, which suggests that the newspapers may shape their readers' attitudes towards LGBT differently. The Star Online was oriented towards reporting foreign news on LGBT while MalaysiaKini and Astro Awani emphasised local news. MalaysiaKini and Astro Awani's reporting of LGBT revolved around two salient specific events (Women's Day March, International Labour Organization global treaty) which showed rebuff of LGBT individuals, predominantly reflected in the voices of political and religious leaders. There was little expression of support for LGBT apart from the voice of activists. Free Malaysia Today had a balanced reporting of local and foreign news on LGBT. The Star Online, on the other hand, carried more foreign news on LGBT, and seemed to be more open about publishing articles that affirmed human rights of LGBT. Articles with a slant towards criminalisation and discrimination of LGBT were balanced with articles on societal acceptance of LGBT. As a result, the readership of The Star Online may develop a broader multi-dimensional perspective of LGBT, compared to the readership of newspapers that report mostly local news on LGBT.

Our study has produced some interesting observations on the framing of a morally and religiously sensitive issue. We had attempted to cover both mainstream and alternative newspapers, but it is limited by the small spectrum of newspapers chosen for analysis. Future research should examine a bigger selection of newspapers, including Chinese and Tamil newspapers to find out if selection of topics varies with the targeted readership which may be associated with the language of the newspapers. In addition, the valence or tone of the news articles on LGBT should be examined in relation to voices which are quoted to understand the support and rejection of LGBT across different segments of the society.

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