



A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE KEY STEREOTYPING ELEMENTS THE MALAYSIAN JOURNALISTS WRITE AGAINST A FEMALE POLITICIAN

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Abstract

The representation of female politicians in media is an ongoing issue that reflects the larger problem of gender imbalance in politics and the media. The representation of women in political leadership roles and in media coverage of politics is improving along with recent awareness on this issue. Thus, this study aims to investigate the key stereotyping elements on Malaysian journalists who write against a female politician. This study employed a qualitative method with semi-structured interviews to extract information by interviewing 11 Malaysian journalists. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the findings. Based on the findings, Malaysian journalists develop the key stereotyping elements in writing against female political leaders based on their respective reporting styles. Besides, most informants in this study realise and acknowledge that female politicians are being underrepresented. This has become one of the key stereotyping elements that Malaysian journalists practice when writing about female politicians. It is not surprising that the informants acknowledge that men always have the upper hand, especially in politics. Hence, one of the key stereotyping elements that Malaysian journalists write against female politicians is revolved on the male dominance and male confidence in politics. Lastly, nature of politics is identified as one of the key stereotyping elements that Malaysian journalists write against female political leaders. This stems from the mixed reactions from the politicians regardless of gender and the fact that politicians are politicians.

Keywords: *Media; Stereotyping Elements; Malaysian Journalists, Female Politician; Qualitative Study*

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INTRODUCTION

In an ideal democratic society, the media fulfills a number of crucial functions. Their main objective is to educate the populace and provide people with the knowledge they need to make informed choices regarding governance and public policy. The media monitors government acts as watchdogs. They give a platform for political expression and set the agenda for public discourse on problems. By assisting people in locating shared interests, locating civic organisations, and working to discover answers to social problems, they also promote community formation (Owen, 2017).

Since stereotypes are based on heuristics, they can happen unintentionally and influence behaviour in a variety of ways. According to Spencer (2019), people may intentionally stereotype in order to uphold their own self-esteem and feeling of worth, or they may stereotype in order to swiftly define a person or a group of people. Stereotypes may be detrimental to many aspects of our attitudes and actions, including our political judgement. People frequently seek facts to support their beliefs rather than actively questioning stereotypes since they are so ubiquitous and learned early in life, making them particularly tough to modify or remove. However, it is feasible to reduce stereotypes and can be done actively or subconsciously. In this case, political stereotypes refer to the well-informed nature of politics that has set the precedent of what to write among Malaysian journalists.

According to Van Der Pas and Aaldering (2020), journalists will activate their gender stereotypes when they write about politics. Male politicians will be associated with leadership styles that are vigorous and highly skilled, while female politicians are equated with opposing characteristics that are not desired by the voters in their leaders. Meanwhile, Konnelly (2020) showed that, as opposed to everyday gender stereotypes, journalists use gender-stereotypic leadership roles in their reporting. Media coverage on politicians always triggers the stereotype of gender leadership style that can be persuasive to the audience. It can be deduced that male politicians will be represented more frequently with the leadership characteristics of political craftsmanship. Supposedly, gender bias must not be expected in the media reporting that should rely on the individual's credibility (Kumari and Joshi, 2015; Konnelly, 2020).

Women underrepresentation in the political arena is a worldwide phenomenon. There are continual studies, global forums and endless lists of action groups around the world advocating gender equality particularly in political leadership (Stoet and Geary, 2020). Gender struggle in Malaysia is far from over and never a thing of the past, though the world in general, and Malaysia in particular, have seen shifts in the women's roles and status. Women excel in many ways, and they contribute to the sharing of capital in the social, economic, and political environments. In general, women in Malaysia face a number of shortcomings in their lives; be it social or professional. Therefore, there is an urgency to resolve the systemic forms of gender disparity in Malaysia as they affect women's lives and experiences (Azmawati et al., 2017).

Furthermore, the trend of women in Malaysian politics, whether they are voters, candidates, parliamentarians, or ministers, has been volatile and unremarkable. In Malaysia, political campaigns seldom concentrate on realistic empowerment of women as much as youth mobilisation or the religion and race rhetoric of the 'turn-to-when-all-else-fails' (Louis et al., 2020). Datuk Seri Dr. Mohd Uzir Mahidin, Chief Statistician in the Department of Statistics of Malaysia, stated that women's achievement had exceeded men in the educational attainment sub-index with a score of 1.059, while the health and survival sub-index reported a score of 0.956, followed by economic participation and opportunity at 0.738. Political empowerment was documented at the least

percentage, standing at 10.0% (with a score of 0.100). This indicates that women were still not catching up to men in terms of representation in Ministerial roles and the Parliament (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2021).

Apart from statistics, scholars also perceive that journalists play a big impact in shaping the journey of female politicians (Goyanes, López-López & Demeter, 2021). A journalist's attitude might influence the ways information is being presented to the readers and viewers via various conventional media channels with their own interests, perceptions, and ideologies in delivering information. According to Vu et al. (2018), female leaders are considered to be under and misrepresented. They rarely appear as news sources in mainstream and online medium news. Instead, they are often approached to discuss topics related to stereotypical female issues. Previous findings have shown that gender stereotypes are predominant among journalists that influence their perceptions. They believe that robust and work-oriented news sources can only come from the male counterparts, while the females offer communal and social-oriented sources. The application of role congruity theory to study media environments has been confirmed based on studies conducted in non-Western countries. According to journalists, male leaders are perceived to be appropriate for masculine issues, while female leaders are only useful for feminine topics (Vu et al., 2018).

Thus, female politicians are prone to gain less attention, particularly when it comes to their leadership characteristics (Van der Pas & Aaldering, 2020). They are most frequently debating on trivial matters such as community, family, and physical looks instead of focusing on their personality. While the findings are not distinctive, the general image is that female politicians get more personal attention than men. This could be detrimental to their political career because personal attention emphasises non-political facets, which could influence how people judge female political players (Van Der Pas & Aaldering, 2020).

Despite that, the underrepresentation of female in politics is observed globally. According to the Interparliamentary Union (2017), the world's parliamentarians consist of 77% male representatives. Only in Rwanda and Bolivia (two out of 193 parliaments in the world) have at least 50% women representative. For decades, the gender equality norm has been actively fought in Western societies, yet, it has not been translated into gender equality in politics (Van Der Pas and Aaldering, 2020). Women find themselves underrepresented in political institutions in Malaysia. There are many obstacles faced by women joining politics, namely lack of support from party and family, public perception and masculinity of the political world. In Malaysia, men are dominating the culture as they feel threatened by the possibility of women taking superior positions. This is reflected in the local political sphere that some men are not willing to share authority with women from the same political ecosystem (Abdul Manan, 2019; Azizah, 2002; Gelashvili, 2019).

Most journalists do not have trust in the ability of women to prosper in politics. Scholars outlined five features of commercial news media to report on women's campaigns for high-level public office. First, female candidates seem to gain fewer coverage than male candidates (Thomsen & King, 2020). Second, when there are more frequent articles about male candidates, political women's debates tend to concentrate on relatively superficial subjects such as their physical image, lifestyle, and families, rather than their positions on influential campaign issues (Caldeira, De Ridder & Van Bauwel, 2020). Third, women will receive more negative attention on the grounds due to lack of charisma, expertise and knowledge required for successful leadership in high public office (Rohrbach et al., 2020). Fourth, to the degree that their views on topics are debated, they will concern issues described in political culture as 'woman's issues', such as abortion, childcare, education, and the climate, rather than 'men's issues', such as the economy, national security, and foreign relations. Fifth, concerns would be posed

as to the impact on the female candidate, had she been elected, or similar trends manifested in the press coverage of political women (Wasburn & Wasburn, 2011).

As some scholars argue that journalists do trust female politicians and write positively about women in politics without any bias, by which terms such as media bias, gendered media, and underrepresentation of women as a 'media problem' are often used. Other than the concept of media sexism, it is challenging to find a universally used description in literature. The (re)production of social sexism through under- and misinterpretation of women in the media is known as media sexism. This leads to a fabricated depiction of the public through a gendered lens (Haraldsson & Wängnerud, 2018).

A case study conducted by Rabo (2018) revealed one example of gender stereotype that being a woman is portrayed as being equated with emotion and frailty by the frequent mentions of the female politician, Kestia Sobchak about her gender and tears. Such references highlight stereotypically feminine traits and are an example of de-masculinisation; a media style strategy intended to undermine a political candidate. Further, when using critical discourse analysis, it is important to consider both the words that were used and the ones that were not. Whether deliberate or unintentional, media chose to highlight the words of gender and emotion while portraying Sobchak rather than emphasising how she defended herself or the unacceptable behaviour of her male opponent.

Barnes and Beaulieu (2019) suggested that people stereotype politicians according to their gender, with male politicians being perceived as less honest than female politicians. Interestingly, de Geus et al. (2021) mentioned that evaluations of political candidates are influenced by gender stereotypes of men and women. Assertiveness, confidence, and independence are "agentic" character qualities that men tend to have. Women, on the other hand, are frequently viewed in "community" terms and linked to virtues like gentleness, empathy, kindness, and a desire to help others. These gender-related stereotypes are important because they defy mainstream perceptions of women while correlating with the traditional traits of politicians, particularly political executives. Women's development in politics and the workplace more broadly has been proven to be hampered by the contradiction between gender stereotypes and traditional leadership attributes (Abdul Manan, 2019; Azizah, 2002; Azmawati et al., 2017; Gelashvili, 2019; Louis, 2020; Yeong, 2018).

Previous research focuses on comparing how politicians are being presented in the media. However, female politicians themselves still face the challenges of being unfavourable in the coverage of both online and offline media. This research will add to this vast amount of research by disclosing what are the key stereotyping elements the Malaysian journalists write against a female politician.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed face-to-face in-depth interviews in order to obtain data from eleven local journalists. The main rationale for employing face-to-face in-depth interviews in this study was to obtain in-depth information from the informants about the key stereotyping elements the Malaysian journalists write against a female politician. There are many journalists in Malaysia who write about politics and current issues, but only eleven journalists from *Bernama*, *Portal Berita Getaran*, *Selangor TV*, *Portal Gayah*, *RTM*, *UMNO Online* and *Media Prima* were included as samples in this study. Creswell, Hanson, Clark-Plano and Morales (2007) suggested that minimum of five informants is sufficient to conduct a qualitative interview. The informants in this study were selected based on

purposive sampling. Purposive sampling refers to the sample that involves participants who have specific characteristics of features (Coyne, 1997). The selection of the eleven journalists in this study was based on the following characteristics: (1) has been working as a journalist for ten (10) years and above; (2) writes for mainstream online media, and (3) has experience in writing about political scenarios and female politicians.

The findings were analysed using a thematic analysis method. Thematic analysis is a method used for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns which refers to the ‘themes’ within data. It also minimally organizes and describes data set in (rich) details (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In order to analyse data using thematic analysis, this study followed six processes in thematic analysis as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), i.e. (1) familiarising data; (2) generating initial codes; (3) searching for themes; (4) reviewing themes; (5) defining and naming themes and (6) producing the report.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The demographic background for each informant is tabulated in Table 1. Each informant is unique in terms of their background. They comprised of Malaysian journalist who are highly experienced in journalism with minimum 10 years of working experience. Most of them are working for mainstream media while utilising the digital aspect of presenting news. They have shared their experiences and expressed their views which obviously could hold significant weight as valuable inputs for political parties and politicians as decision makers. Their perspectives and opinions play a crucial role in reflecting the research findings, where the researcher managed to identify the data patterns discerned from the transcription.

Table 1: Demographic Background of the Informants

Informant	Gender	Years of working as journalist	Organisation
Informant 1	Female	33	Bernamea
Informant 2	Female	24	Portal Berita Getaran
Informant 3	Male	20	Selangor TV
Informant 4	Female	18	Bernamea
Informant 5	Male	18	Portal Gayah
Informant 6	Male	10	RTM
Informant 7	Male	26	UMNO Online
Informant 8	Female	19	Bernamea
Informant 9	Female	11	Media Prima
Informant 10	Male	15	Media Prima
Informant 11	Female	14	Bernamea

Reporting Styles

Apparently, Malaysian journalists develop the key stereotyping elements in writing against female political leaders based on their respective reporting styles. However, there is no obvious reason to underrepresent female politicians in their write up as they ask only relevant questions, be careful in their reporting, give equal treatment when scooping for news, follow general guidelines when publishing stories and acknowledging the media biasness. This is the shared factors that are applied by the Malaysian journalists. The informants in this study believe that they only ask relevant questions according to the topic and task assignment. This is to ensure that the politicians are not

offended by the questions and disrupt the journalism process. The questions are relevant to the news situation and not misleading as journalists try to be cooperative and supportive with their informants. Particularly, aiming for the current news is the best approach when inquiring politicians. Subsequently, this process ends with writing and publishing the story that reflects on the real interview situation. This aids in spreading the correct facts and information to the public, especially when it comes to sensitive issues.

“Normally...our interviews...would have press conference...and then we have the chance to ask question. So...we must ask...what is relevant to the PC” (Informant 2)

“Questions would revolve...on what did...they do...what have...they done...what are their plans...for floods...questions like that...would not be considered as sensitive that we ask to help save their butts. So...we don't always ask hard questions...that will put them in a tight spot, but we would help them...to save their butts...” (Informant 3)

“I will always go for...current issue. It is related...to the ministry...and the situation at the parliament...what is happening...to the party. So...I will go for the assignment that I am asked for...I will interview all...but...at the end...it will be filtered...” (Informant 8)

Malaysian journalists in this study practice are attentive in reporting when they want to publish any news or stories. Their experience in interviewing politicians has somehow molded their way of reporting to be very careful. It has become some sort of guidelines to follow, especially when they are tasked with assignment to interview certain politicians. By attentive reporting, this also means avoiding sensitive topics to inquire. The process of careful reporting begins from the preparation, during the interview and eventually writing and publishing the story.

“For especially...the prominent leaders...that we should not make them happy...as our entity is...pro-government...I need to be careful...I will not follow this kind of guideline...if it involves personal thingy...It is just about...personal preference” (Informant 3)

“I...ermmm..... But first...I will try to avoid sensitive topics...then...I will try to avoid...too personal questions” (Informant 11)

Furthermore, all informants in this study apply equal approach to be given to politicians regardless gender, in covering political news. According to the informants, all news sources are treated the same with no discrimination. Specifically, they will choose certain politicians that matter to the relevant current issue that is occurring. This really will make their job as journalists easier and hassle free. Moreover, their goal is to obtain the news material, as long as it contributes to the newsworthiness, it is irrelevant to pick news sources based on gender.

“.....I treat all of my news source...the same.....No...no...discrimination” (Informant 1)

“Actually...when we choose a minister or a politician...regarding the issue...we would see...how they would be related...to the topic matter. If they are not related...they will not be interviewed. Regardless of their gender....” (Informant 3)

Besides, most informants follow certain, general guidelines when pursuing stories. Similarly, all of them aim for current issues and the opinions from the politicians as news materials. Mostly, they set guidelines based on their experience so that they can conduct smooth interview process with the politicians. Some guidelines are specific

while some are too general that they just directly ask for any questions, while maintaining to the relevancy of the news topic.

“Yes...we do have guidelines...irrelevant to their gender. First rule is...never ask about their family. And number two...is never ask about their past programme. We must ask about...their current programme...to get exclusive interview...” (Informant 2)

“As for me, yes...I have guidelines especially when we are interviewing prominent politicians. We have to be as cordial...as we can. In a humanistic way...we would like to avoid things...that can make them feel upset...or unhappy...” (Informant 3)

“It actually depends on the issue...I will give them the questions first...so they study it...ummm...so that they not...misspoke or give inappropriate answers” (Informant 5)

Media bias and politics may interact; the media may be able to sway politicians, and politicians may be able to influence the media. The distribution of power in society may alter as a result. Though they are not directly biased towards the politicians, the informants in this study acknowledge the media bias that occurs. They realise that the media needs to seek controversies in order to attract an audience. This leads to the underrepresentation of female politicians when male politicians are giving more sensational news. Moreover, Informant 3 added that media has good repertoire with male politicians making them more accessible than female politicians. As a result, for convenience, male politicians are often to contact when they want to pursue a story.

“Unless we can tweak...into the questions that we want...any controversial questions. That time...they cannot run...they would probably reply, no comment...” (Informant 2)

“Yes, I agree. Maybe also because, the media, they are so exposed to more male politicians so it’s easier to keep their numbers. They are always.....seeing to give PC. They already kept their numbers.....” (Informant 3)

Journalism is created in a variety of forms and styles and aids in explaining the events that have an impact on our lives. Each genre and style of journalism employs a distinct method and writes for a different audience and purpose (Lupei et al., 2020). Interestingly, Latar (2014) mentions that direct reporting and asking relevant questions will be the future of journalism. This is from artificial intelligence point of view where this style of reporting is one form of telling stories that is practical to both respondents and readers.

With the availability of internet news sources, news dissemination is expected to happen instantly, and journalists and news organisations are under pressure to publish articles quickly in order to stay up with rival media sources. Standards of truth and impartiality are harder to sustain under this increased strain. The Committee of Concerned Journalists cites “to provide individuals with accurate and trustworthy information they need to function in a free society” as the primary goal of journalism in the preamble to its statement of mission (Plasser, 2005). The critical information premise is another name for this view of the press’s societal responsibility. It is widely acknowledged in the journalistic field as the cornerstone of any media ethics guidelines, albeit occasionally being phrased differently by various organisations.

Furthermore, the capacity to fulfil our public media purpose depends on the ability to maintain editorial and journalistic integrity. The capacity to engage with local and national audiences in a credible manner is supported by adherence to these guiding principles throughout the work done by journalists. Besides, the press significantly influences how people think about gender issues in general. The presentation of gender issues by

media also affects how society views them (Åkerlund, 2019). Because they provide people with the chance to have a voice, journalists are important in the sources they choose. An institution has a position of power, credibility, influence, leadership, and authority that makes it a source of journalistic interest. Gender equality is crucial in this situation because individuals with a voice will be connected to all these ideas (Mensa et al., 2021).

Acknowledging the Female Underrepresentation

Obviously, most informants in this study realise and acknowledge that female politicians are being underrepresented. This has become one of the key stereotyping elements that Malaysian journalists practice when writing about female politicians. This phenomenon can actually be seen from participation in politics, as well as news coverage by the media. Nevertheless, the informants aspire this situation to change by proposing the country to give chance to women, acknowledging the situation, building up good apprentice and seeking for extra supports.

“At one point...yes we can say that. It is an observation...But it mostly due to...what we already realise that...the number of male politicians...they are more than female politicians...ermmm...that is why...” (Informant 1)

“Can...can. If media highlight the same people every day...frequently. they will become famous...iconic. For example, KJ...before this before he becomes the minister for health ministry...every day we can see...media covers...so he becomes popular” (Informant 5)

The informants suggested that female politicians be positioned at main leadership roles of the country. From here, the credibility of the female politician can be figured out. The obstacles come from the general perceptions against women. As women are seen as committed, we should treat them to be as capable as males. The fact that the politician is a woman cannot be attributed to a weak politician.

“I think...this is not supposed to happen...it is about quota...nope.... ermm...I think there is no reason for men or women. If the women...ermm...can do work...credible enough...so they cannot be stopped to become politicians” (Informant 9)

“One thing is...we cannot it is male dominated...because they make better decision. When we interview them...they still cannot give us...the best of answer...” (Informant 3)

The informants in this study express their opinions about female politicians need good apprentice. The informants also stated that new batch of female politicians that have less charisma than previous generation. They recall on the excellence of previous female politicians such as Rafidah Aziz, Aishah Ghani, Napsiah Omar and Zaharah Osman. Young politicians especially need to know that Malaysian journalists are trying their best to represent and channel the voice of these politicians. In a way, this will help to spread the information or news to the public as the media acts as the primary anchor or reference. Female politicians, especially, need to bring something valuable as news materials to the journalists in order to be seen more in the media. Underperformed young generation of politicians will cost them further and future coverage, hence, continuing the vicious cycle of female underrepresentation.

“My experience...with the new people I’m interviewing...they would always react with ‘no comment.’ We don’t want to put pressure on you or give you a task...we just want to know...what are you going to do for the people...” (Informant 3)

“In my opinion...we have lack of credible female sources...you tell me who is the credible news... You won’t get another Rafidah Aziz. We want someone...that gives news value...Don’t say journalists don’t give you coverage if they don’t give us something as value as news” (Informant 4)

“But I do miss the era of Tan Sri Rafidah Aziz...I think...we don’t have more politicians like her...anymore nowadays. She is someone who are brave...she is fierce enough...that she put herself...in the same position with other male politicians” (Informant 6)

“It depends on the issue...but...I think it is hard to interview female politicians...I don’t know why...for new generations...previously...Rafidah Aziz I can easily text her...maybe female politicians...they are careful...so we just go to the ministry if we want information...KSU...KP...” (Informant 10)

Female politicians are in dire need of excellent supports from their surroundings to keep up with the political pace. The informants mention that extra support is helpful to maintain the image of the politicians, resolve any issues and repair the optics. Currently, male politicians are seen to be utilising these privileges of media cover up. Female politicians must learn a thing or two from the approach of these male politicians’ modus operandi so that they can be competitive in the politics.

“I think some are doing it...and some are not. For those not doing it, it is because her staffs are not cooperative enough.... all of the officers...” (Informant 5)

“Erm...so...that’s it...important for you to have good back up system...the support system...especially for the women...” (Informant 9)

Rattan et al. (2019) argued that women are much less likely than males to be featured in the media globally. Women are only the subjects of tales in 25% of television, radio, and print news. A 2015 study found that just 19% of specialists cited in news articles and 37% of reporters worldwide were women. As behavioural scientists researching the underrepresentation of women in the workforce, we are aware of the potential for detrimental gender stereotypes to be reinforced and perpetuated by this gender-imbalanced view of society.

Meanwhile, van der Pas (2021) confirms the notion that female parliamentarians in Europe receive less coverage in the media than their male counterparts, even after taking extensive account of individual differences. Hence, they concluded that the attention from media is a priceless electoral commodity, and fundamentally giving female candidates and politicians less media exposure might be harmful for their representation.

A former prime minister of Iceland Johanna Sigurdardottir implies that women are often more effective than males in ensuring social justice. This is based on her reflections after a 35-year career in Icelandic politics. If there were just as many women and men in leadership positions, she believes that the world would be a much better place. She had the opportunity to put this notion to the test in 2009 when she was appointed Iceland’s prime minister at a moment of severe economic unrest (Sigurdardottir, 2018). As reported by Porter (2003), more opportunities are needed for women politicians to contribute. When only women themselves are making the effort, it is insufficient to encourage women’s empowerment. In order to achieve gender equality in all areas and guarantee that women are not left behind, it also needs the assistance of men.

Acknowledge that Men always have the Upper Hand

The informants acknowledge that men always have the upper hand, especially in politics. Statistically speaking, the number of male politicians is higher than female politicians, as discussed before. Hence, one of the key stereotyping elements that Malaysian journalists write against female politicians is revolved on the male dominance and male confidence in politics. This factor might lead to the underrepresentation of female politicians in the media. The informants highlight that men have the upper hand when compared with women in politics as it is well-known worldwide that there is a male dominance. During elections, male politicians will always have male supporters who are more aggressive and radicals to align with the male candidacy. This is not the same when it comes to female politicians. Male dominance can also be seen in the domestic business where women are expected to solely take care for the family when it should be a shared responsibility between husband and wife. This male dominancy shows that women should not be running for politics as opposed to men be in the household. Consequently, this gives rise to low participation and representation of females in politics, that affects the media coverage by Malaysian journalists.

“It is...not uncommon...to say that...that...male dominance is...real...it is what blocking...the whatever potential...it is not up to us...it is...the normalcy...we are living in...” (Informant 1)

“I think...it is more on male dominance...not because the news reporting. Because of this world...which is dominantly controlled by more male than female...does the male choose female as their downlines, if I can use that word...it’s bigger than a...getting female on board with the politicians...or...the candidature of politics...” (Informant 3)

The informants expressed the view that male politicians appear more confident in answering questions posed by journalists. In contrast, female politicians may require more time or assistance to respond. Journalists experience frustration when they cannot obtain definitive answers from politicians. Consequently, the confidence displayed in answering questions plays a pivotal role in defining the stereotyping elements when Malaysian journalists write about female politicians, as the latter are perceived to be less assertive in their demeanor.

“Sure...from the male dominancy...yes...they have the confidence...the...what...you know...this and that...how they can show off...their power...” (Informant 1)

“In general, men politicians are...more confident to give out statements. So when they are confident, we will become confident to write the news. They also...are more relaxed...if we counter ask...they always have the answers...” (Informant 6)

According to Dahlerup and Leyenaar (2013), political parties can be considered male-dominated in and of themselves based on six aspects of male dominance, including: “the numerical political representation of women, politics as a workplace, vertical and horizontal sex segregation, discourses on women’s presence in politics, and gender equality policies”. They have historically been dominated by males, like many other political organisations, and because of this, they continue to function as “institutionally sexist” organisations that give men more power and privilege through institutional rules, norms, procedures, and narratives. Mebane, Aiello and Francescato (2020) propose that political gender inequalities can be explained by social dominance orientation (SDO). They postulate that if all else is equal, men have greater average SDO levels than women.

Mebane, Aiello and Francescato (2020) also recall on the social dominance theory (SDT) to explain observation on male dominance in politics. In the hierarchy of our civilisations, men and women often play various roles. Men tend to be more prevalent in occupations involving law, the military, attorneys, judges, and corporate leaders, whereas women are more prevalent in occupations including teaching, social work, and volunteer work for charities. In general, men tend to engage in or occupy positions in institutions that promote hierarchy, whereas women tend to do the opposite in institutions that undermine hierarchy. The SDT contends that out-groups are less likely to be social dominance-oriented than those who hold positions in society that uphold the status quo of group inequality or inequity (Mebane, Aiello and Francescato, 2020).

According to a recent poll in Canada, males feel more confident in their capacity to serve as politicians and are more likely to have received personal encouragement to do so. These findings highlight the reasons why women are underrepresented in public positions at all levels (Campion-Smith, 2019). Meanwhile, Wolak (2020) argues that having a sense of self-confidence is a resource that promotes psychological involvement in politics. The fact that males are more likely than women to own this resource, however, adds to gender inequalities in political interest, attention to politics, and internal effectiveness. She shows that gender's impacts on psychological involvement with politics are somewhat mediated by emotions of self-confidence by looking at surveys of both young people and adults. Prior studies have emphasised the value of resources like education for fostering political involvement, but she also demonstrates the significance of self-confidence as a psychological factor that fosters political interest, attentiveness, and a sense of personal ability.

Nature of Politics

Nature of politics is identified as one of the key stereotyping elements that Malaysian journalists write against female political leaders. This stems from the mixed reactions from the politicians regardless of gender and the fact that politicians are politicians.

The informants conclude that politicians will always be politicians regardless of their gender. Taking some points from previous finding that politicians are human, Malaysian journalists consider that politicians are all equal. The distinct factor would be their personality and how they carry themselves in the political arena.

“Politicians are politicians...they are the same...regardless their gender. I would say...no different. There are no...obvious differences” (Informant 1)

“Ermmm...I have seen this...a bit of defensive and emotionals...They are normal human. We can see...from when Rafidah lost to Zaharah... But I like how Zeti Aziz she is so calm...you have to be relaxed...calm. That you are human...” (Informant 4)

“Politicians....ermm...they are...they don't think...they just answer...it is dangerous for now...today we have live streaming so it can backfire” (Informant 9)

When interviewing politicians, the informants agree that they might get mixed responses and diverse answers. They emphasise that it really depends on the individual, rather than the gender of the politicians. Politicians will give diverse reactions according to their benefits in exploiting the issue or lessening their association with bad publicity. Malaysian journalists recognise that politicians, like all humans, have vulnerabilities based on the situation. In addition, the background of the politicians will also decide the resulting response from them. Some would give

good materials for the journalists to write, while some would be untrustworthy. It is noted that among female politicians themselves that they differ in terms of caliber or trustworthiness.

“Depends on the MP...some get serious...sometimes they will get mad at us. Well...they are human too...imagine if we are like them...it’s...it’s the same...how you control the emotion then...that is your take...to be politicians” (Informant 2)

“It depends on...whom do I interview. If it is Azalina...it is based on credible sources. If Rina Harun...I don’t trust her much...I can go to Nurul Izzah...Theresa Kok...They can be trusted...they would suggest ideas...and improvements” (Informant 5)

“Depends...some answer...with so much passions. Some...will be tricky as they twist their words...and maybe...they don’t answer at all” (Informant 7)

Seong-Kun (2022) wrote that Nikita Khrushchev, the leader of Russia, remarked that, *“Politicians are the same everywhere. Even in the absence of rivers, they make the pledge to build bridges. We laughed along with John F. Kennedy when he quipped that mothers don’t want their boys to end up in politics while growing up to be president. It is ironic that a president of a nation is also a politician”*.

As pointed out by Vercesi (2022), all politicians are the same. This is due to the political career paths that are often predictable and tend to repeat themselves over time, which contributes to the continuation of fundamental characteristics within the political landscape. The democratic theory’s concept that democratic competition is open, inclusive, and expanding seems to contrast with the absence of politicians’ change of behaviour.

CONCLUSION

This study has managed to mitigate the gap of research findings that related to the existing research wherein the online mainstream mass media in Malaysia is one of the official platforms available to represent female politicians – focusing on the key stereotyping elements the Malaysian journalists write against a female politician. Journalists are supposed to write news that is supported by verified facts. Therefore, journalists should look for sources from which “the claims can be taken as fact”. By interpreting events, news outlets play a critical role in influencing the news and public agenda. They are also essential to the professional practice of journalism. This does not imply that journalists have no control over how the news is filtered and who is allowed to engage in the conversation. This kind of interaction is an essential part of the source-journalist-audience equation, which determines how the news is distributed among various powers.

For the key stereotyping elements that Malaysian journalist wrote against female political leaders, the findings revealed that Malaysian journalist really focused on their journalistic styles whilst acknowledging the underrepresentation of women in politics from the obstacles and difficulties that women have, while participating in and holding leadership positions in politics, such as gender-based prejudice, bias, and institutional inequities. Recognising the value of women’s ideas and voices in political governance and decision-making is another aspect of it. Because of the underrepresentation of women in politics, journalists have fewer female politicians to write about.

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