

Negativity as Criteria for Newsworthiness in Malaysian Newspaper Sports Corpus

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ABSTRACT

This study is an attempt to identify criteria for newsworthiness in Malaysian sports newspapers. It also seeks to find out how the media shapes the perception of Malaysians through sports news stories. Employing a corpus-based approach, with *The Reuters Corpus Volume 1* and *Malaysian English Sports News Corpus*, the researchers of the study conducted a thematic analysis to look for recurring patterns that would detect the criteria for newsworthiness in the headlines and content of the corpus. It was found that football dominates the pages of the newspaper, and negativity, reference to elite people and nations are the most prominent news values. The patterns of language reveal a very negative sports world in which achievement and winning are stressed at all cost. Players and coaches are pressured to do well or they risk losing their jobs. Scandals are running rampant in the sports world as cases of corruption, drug abuse and bad behaviors among athletes and coaches are consistently reported in the news. Following McKane's (2014) categorization of newsworthiness criteria, and using snowballing sampling method, 85 UKM students were asked to show their criteria for newsworthiness on a questionnaire, which resulted in a mismatch between the news stories and the readers' expectations.

Keywords: *Corpus, English, football, negativity, sports newspaper*

INTRODUCTION

The media is known as a powerful tool that carries transnational interests and importance (Rahim & Pawanteh 2010). It plays a major role in shaping the identity of a society through its content. The final product that is shown to its audience would matter as it would inadvertently shape its audiences' perceptions and way of thinking irrespective of the issue in question (Fairclough, 2002 cited in Zubir & Kadir, 2012). News as part of the media reviews the norms in society; hence, making journalism simply a conservative practice that supports the status quo, confirming and conforming to the way people make sense of the world news reports. The choice of one word over the other to influence and convince readers is important as it may project a certain potential meaning (Hall at el., 1978 in Matheson, 2005).

Every day many important events occur around the world but only some of them are reported in the news media. People are interested in news because they want to be in the know and each individual may have a different interest in the news type. Everyone and especially journalists, seems to recognise an event newsworthy. However, when they are asked what specifically made an event newsworthy, they may not give a definite answer. Thus, the news selection process is not transparent to the public and so readers may wonder whether the criteria for newsworthiness are the only decisive factors that make a news item published. Perhaps, it is the agenda of the newspaper company that interferes in the process.

There are often new stories of success or failure decorating the front pages of newspapers or magazines, homepages of news portals etc. Second to the political news is the sports news (Shoemaker & Cohen 2012). It is one of the best examples that could show a balance despite there being a winner and a loser in each game. This is one implication of the current paper.

Even though certain games in sports may allow a tie as its result, both sides of the party would make an effort in the process to win the game. Without an official winner, the process may help the audience recognise one party to be victorious over the other. There is more to it than just the end result: winning or losing.

Journalists and editors come across a huge number of events with news potentiality. Thus, it is not easy to select which news to be revealed to the public and it may result in debates on the criteria for newsworthiness. Yet, there is a definite list of criteria for newsworthiness. There have been many attempts (e.g. Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Harcup & O'Neill, 2001; Shoemaker & Cohen, 2012) to identify the criteria for newsworthiness, and so earlier studies are a guiding framework for this research to investigate the criteria for newsworthiness found in Malaysian newspapers.

For the purpose of this study, one of the top five English news portals in Malaysia, *The Malay Mail online*, was chosen as the source of data for the sports news corpus. Reportedly, there are 550, 000 unique visitors to their website and this figure excludes mobile users and overseas visitors making this figure even significantly higher (Malay Mail Online, 30th September 2015). With such a high amount of readership, the paper must have their set of newsworthiness criteria as they manage to attract and pique the readers' interest into reading their newspaper. Scanning through the headlines in the corpus displays a theme of negativity. Negative headlines seemed to be dominating the pages of sports news as it is now filled with controversy, scandal, corrupted organizations as well as drug abusing athletes. Shoemaker and Cohen (2012) found that readers demand negative news although they expect more positive news at the same time. Therefore, this study intends to identify the criteria for newsworthiness in Malaysian sports news and how the *Malay Mail Online* shapes the perception of Malaysians through sports news reporting. To this end, this paper aims to answer these questions:

1. What do Malaysian readers look for when choosing what to read in sports news?
 - a) What are the criteria that make news newsworthy?
 - b) Are the readers' criteria for newsworthiness aligned with those of the journalists?
2. How does sports news shape the perception of Malaysians through sports news reporting?

LITERATURE REVIEW

News Values

As the first researchers who focused on codifying news values, Galtung and Ruge (1965) formulated a taxonomy having investigated the news values of foreign news in Norway. Their research was revolved around one main question and that was how events become news? Their study particularly targeted overseas events and how they turned into news in Norwegian press. To select news for the newspaper, Galtung and Ruge (1965: 66) listed 12 important factors which are frequency, threshold, unambiguity, meaningfulness, consonance, unexpectedness, continuity, composition, reference to elite nations, reference to elite people, personalization, and negativity. Galtung and Ruge (1965) came out with the suggestion that the more criteria an event fulfills, the more chance there will be for that news to be selected for publication.

News values supposedly determine whether a story is worth getting published in newspapers or online news portals. Harcup and O'Neill (2001) devised a content analysis of newspapers in the UK to investigate whether Galtung and Ruge's 12 factors appear in the articles that passed the news selection process. They found that news stories must generally satisfy one or more requirements to be selected and it is necessary to be aware of the fact that identifying news values may reveal how news is covered rather than why it is covered and chosen for publication. Therefore, having analyzed the content of three leading UK newspapers, they put forward their own list of news values: power elite, celebrity, entertainment, surprise stories, bad news, good news, magnitude, relevance, follow-ups, and newspaper agenda (Boyce, 2007).

McKane (2014) categorized Galtung and Ruge's list of newsworthiness criteria into three groups: a) about the event, b) nature of the event, and c) treatment of the event. In the first category are timescale and threshold which are just facts about the event; in the second group stand the next eight criteria which are unexpectedness, elite people, elite nations, negativity, continuity, unambiguity, meaningfulness, and consonance; and finally, the third category encompasses composition and personalization grouped together as to how news is written to be presented to the public.

Harcup and O'Neill (2016) stressed that identifying and recording news values found in published news reports do not make the journalistic process transparent but it helps the audience understand the mediated world, how journalists are forced to produce items to meet deadlines and how news values actually work. As a result, these criteria are not only used by journalists but also by public relation practitioners and others who aim to gain maximum news coverage of events for their own agenda and benefits.

Shoemaker and Cohen (2012) conducted a large-scale study on newsworthiness around the world. It was a joint venture collaborated by researchers from 10 countries. The study was mainly based on two notions: deviance and social significance. They concluded that people want to know bad news and/or news that are socially significant. Although their focus groups wanted more positive news, they know that equal attention should be paid to the bad news as humans are intrinsically attracted to things that are out of the norm. They also found that people disagree with what their newspaper covers most prominently as newspapers do not give prominent coverage to deviance and social significance. Shoemaker and Cohen are in the opinion that newsworthiness is a cognitive concept made by individuals. Therefore, a definite list of newsworthiness is not something that is in order

although people from similar cultural backgrounds may have the same idea on what they deem as newsworthy.

News values are hard to apply for a variety of reasons. The gatekeepers, mainly newspaper editors, may have different reasons in choosing what too be published. Even though news values may give researchers an insight into the newsworthiness factors, the newspaper company's agenda may interfere. And as Harcup and O'Neill (2016) mentioned, journalists meeting deadlines and filling in empty columns for the sake of publishing may have caused news values to be overlooked.

Galtung and Ruge's original study stemmed from a psychological research on human perception and behaviour and this validates Shoemaker and Cohen's study (2012) in which different individuals perceive things differently. This means there are too many variables that can get a news story to be published. If a journalist thinks an event is newsworthy, the criteria for news values would not matter but he may write the article in such a way that the criteria for news values are taken into consideration. And finally, Norizah Aripin, Awan Ismail, Norhafezah Yusof and Rizalawati Ismail (2015:326) quoted Loo (2013) as saying that in Asia journalists report news in order to facilitate state based agenda whereas in the West, they practice 'transparent reporting' which champions freedom and they are not forced to align to any state based views.

Negativity Bias

Rozin and Royzman (2001: 297) said, "In most situations, negative events are more salient, potent, dominant in combinations, and generally efficacious than positive events". They also proposed four elements of negativity bias: 1) negative potency (a negative event is more potent and salient than its positive counterpart); 2) steeper negative gradient (a negative event grows more rapidly in negativity as it travels faster in space or time than positive events do); 3) negativity dominance (negativity dominates when good and bad things occur alongside each other and are inseparable), and 4) negative differentiation (people's cognition is more elaborate, complex and fine-tuned to negativity than when stimulated with a positive stimulus).

The primary principle in Rozin and Royzman's study (2001) is based on negativity dominance. They hypothesized that humans and animals are innately biased to negativity and negativity is more contagious than positivity. They illustrated negativity dominance with a delicious meal that is inedible as it has had a brief contact with cockroach. There is no anti-cockroach; nothing to make you eat the food that you dislike. Language is no exception to negativity biasness. Accordingly, there is more vocabulary used to describe physical pain than for physical pleasure. This suggests that people are more fine-tuned to negativity. In addition to that, there is a negativity bias in the lexicalisation or negative events and this is demonstrated in a number of commonly used one-term words with negative connotations that are regularly used in areas such as law or medicine in which a negative outcome is possible.

The Gatekeeping Theory

The influence of people in power can manipulate the information based on their interests before it is published to the public. In this way, people are fed with information that has been engineered which, eventually, will affect the public's perceptions towards various concepts (Jalli 2016). Accordingly, there exists the gatekeeping theory which is one of the

oldest social science theories that was adapted and developed to study news (Shoemaker, Vos and Reese 2009). Lewin (1951, cited in Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzsch, 2009: 80) said that forces at the gate determine which item can become news and which cannot. Herman and Chomsky (2002) argued that gatekeeping is controlled by ideological factors.

In gatekeeping studies, the focus is on items or information that are either rejected, selected, shaped and scheduled for release. Figure (1) demonstrates how items may enter the gatekeeping process. Not every item that comes in is necessarily selected. Although some items make their way into the channels, they will still have to go through gates to enter. There are forces that will facilitate or constrain the flow of the items through each gate; each varies in magnitude and valence and works on both sides of the gate.

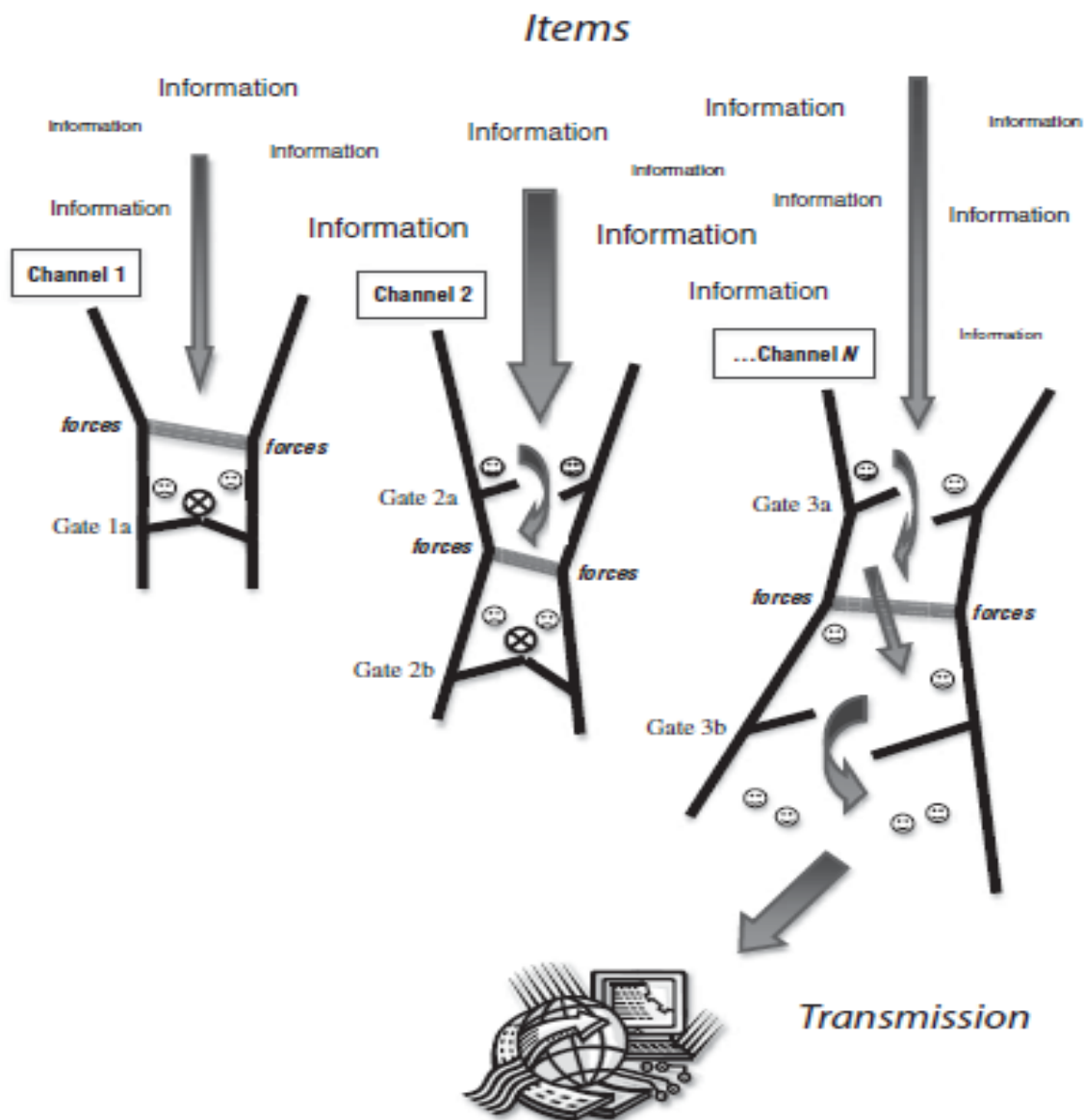


Figure 1: Basic Elements of Gatekeeping Studies (Wahl-Jorgensen, & Hanitzsch 2009)

The figure above shows the three channels and the overflow of information. However, only one item was made in it and transmitted to the audiences. There are negative and weak forces that keep the information from progressing further into the channels and it is important to note that the forces are present before and after the gates.

Arrows varying in size indicate how items change as they pass through the gates. The transmitted item is the selected item that goes through the gatekeeping process, but as news undergoes many impacts while passing through the gates, it may not even resemble the original item that first entered the channels.

Sports journalism

Taking a feminist perspective, Theberge (1989, cited in Messner 2010) analyzed media coverage of violence that took place in a game between Canada and the Soviet Union. Members of both sides were involved in the incident and analysis showed that the incident was framed as technical failure that could have been prevented if certain individuals acted responsibly. Interpretations that located the incident in culture and organization of sports were found to be secondary accounts. The social basis of violence in sports never received light and Theberge (1989, cited in Messner 2010) claimed that this caused a lost opportunity at a fundamental change in hegemonic masculinity. The event was deemed as newsworthy as both teams were eventually dropped out of the tournament causing Canada to lose its medal. This was something out of normalcy and the incident continued to decorate pages of the newspapers for two weeks.

Hoppe (2011) explored the concept of media representations and the relation between sports and news media. Through a quantitative content analysis by measuring frequency of key topics and an interpretative discourse analysis of World Cup newscasts aired in June and July of 2010, three transnational broadcasters, BBC World News, CNN International and Al Jazeera English were studied. Hoppe looked at how media frame and portray the host country during the World Cup, trying to represent South Africa from a different perspective. The broadcasters were reporting a variety of topics beyond the World Cup itself. They were also clearly differentiating the country from the African continent and as expected, the broadcasters presented certain news slightly different.

Hong and Oh (2017) examined US media coverage of foreign nations and their athletes during the 2012 London Olympic Games. They found that foreign nations and their athletes were not significantly affected by any given nation's performance during the Olympics. However, besides its dominance in the Olympics, a country could be represented in US media in terms of such factors as military expenditures, linguistic proximity to the United States, and the number of sports celebrities.

Using a newsworthiness model (i.e. more significant versus more deviant events), Lee and Choi (2009) examined whether news value indicators influenced sports coverage of the 2002 World Cup soccer games. Their findings showed that the newsworthiness model was partially effective in predicting media coverage of sports events. In addition, they revealed that traditional media coverage was better explained by the newsworthiness model than online media coverage.

In Malaysia, investigative journalists are bound by ethics, rules, laws and regulations protecting the national security and nations' peace state. In other words, any controversial news that is likely to threaten the national security will bring negative effects to the limitations of news by the investigative journalism's practitioners (Norsiah Abdul Hamid, Mohd Sobhi Ishak, Nazialita Geynna Maharani & Astro Awani, 2015).

Sports journalism in Malaysia

Sports journalism is a least-studied research area in Malaysia, and only two studies were found. Hajisama (2012) looked at how genders were represented in the online articles of *The Star* through analysing visual images. It was found that female athletes are underrepresented and the terms used for females are related to their attractiveness and not for their athletic abilities. Ismail and Adnan (2014), for their part, profiled the sports sections of *Berita Harian* and *Utusan Malaysia*, two printed Malay newspapers. The sports sections are “value-added strategies” and improve readership and circulation; there were no significant differences in the contents of these newspapers.

METHODOLOGY

This research sought to answer the following questions:

1. What do Malaysian readers look for when choosing what to read in sports news?
2. What are the criteria that make news newsworthy?
3. Are the readers’ criteria for newsworthiness aligned with those of journalists?
4. How does sports news shape the perception of Malaysians through sports news reporting?

Research Design and Instrumentation

The mixed methods research design was employed in this paper. The research began by using a corpus-based approach (n=4,211 sports articles, covering 10 million words) to analyze the collected data. This was followed by a survey (N=85) of students from a comprehensive university in Malaysia.

The research made use of a corpus: *Malaysian English Sports News Corpus* which was developed in March 2015. The articles used in this research dated from December 2014 to March 2016 and they were directly taken from the *Malay Mail Online* website. It contained three categories; Court, Field, and Track.

Meanwhile, a questionnaire was designed to indicate whether the journalists’ criteria for newsworthiness aligned with what the readers expected to read in the newspapers. The participants were asked to rank eight criteria for newsworthiness based on McKane’s (2014) categorisation of newsworthiness criteria: threshold, unexpectedness, elite people, elite nations, negativity, continuity, and unambiguity from one to eight. The respondents showed their preferences for reading newspapers reports by writing a number (from 1 to 8) in front of each criterion.

Another material used for this study was the reference corpus. *The Reuters Corpus Volume 1* (RCV1) containing about 200 million words. RCV1 is an archive of 806,791 English language news stories (Rose et al. 2002), containing news produced by Reuters’ journalists between 20th August 1996 and 19th August 1997. This served as a reference for comparing the frequency of the use of certain key words done by means of WordSmith concordancing tool.

Research Sample

From different faculties at UKM (National University of Malaysia) and through snowballing sampling method, 7 students were recruited to participate in the newsworthiness ranking questionnaire, making a total of 85 students for the study. They were of both genders aged 18-25.

Research Procedure

After the creation of the corpus, a newsworthiness ranking questionnaire was designed to confirm whether the journalists' criteria for newsworthiness aligned with those of the readers'. The questionnaire was then distributed in several faculties at UKM.

The study corpus was first created in 2015 with the collaboration of 4 other researchers. A few criteria were set before data were collected based on Sinclair's (2005) principle. The criteria to determine the structure of a corpus should not be a long list of overlapping specifications and that they should be efficient in describing the corpus. It was agreed that the samples would be divided into three categories; court, track, and field. About 20 articles with an average length of 300 words were then collected for each category. The data were saved into plain text files with Unicode encoding to ensure it can be read by WordSmith Tools.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was done to confirm the emerging theme of negativity and whether there were other themes arising from the concordance lines. WordSmith Tools version 6.0.0.251 was the word processing tools used in this research. The software generated a keyword list by comparing two wordlists, one from the study corpus and the other from the reference corpus to calculate the keyness value of a word. Keywords were chosen and the concordance lines were examined for recurring patterns. Thematic analysis was done to confirm the emerging theme of negativity and whether there were other themes arising from the concordance lines.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The keywords chosen to study the patterns of language were his, coach, minutes, scored, and defeat. The keywords were chosen after scanning the concordance lines to determine if they could provide significant patterns based on the context in which they recur. The keywords were chosen from the top 50 keywords generated using WordSmith Tools. These words showed the highest frequency in both corpora consulted.

Newsworthiness Ranking Questionnaire Analysis

Based on the responses collected from the questionnaire, the findings show 37% of the respondents answered that they would first look for the news value of unexpectedness. Continuity and threshold each took second stance with 20%. About 32% of the respondents surprisingly chose negativity as the last criteria that they would look for when choosing what to read in sports news. This contradicts the emerging pattern of negativity that was first observed through scanning of the headlines. Shoemaker and Cohen's (2012) study on newsworthiness across 10 countries, however, found that readers in general do want more positive news although they want to know the bad news as well. When reading, readers are most likely to read negative news as they are subconsciously attracted to it. But when asked if they would read negative news first, the answer would be no.

In addition to that, the criterion unexpectedness could actually go both ways. Something positive could unexpectedly turn negative and vice versa. In this line, the criteria continuity and threshold are related and this could be expected as huge events or issues that were widely covered by press again and again till they come to an end. People would be curious as to how everything would end especially when it is somehow related to them.

The MH370 incident (i.e. Malaysian flight crash in 2014), for example, still pops up in the news every now and then as it is relevant to Malaysians and when the public were first made aware of the incident, broadcasts were put on hold and everything that could be seen on national television were all about MH370. It is still covered in the news.

Thematic Analysis

Findings from the thematic analysis showed that sports news reports do lean towards negativity to attract readership. This contradicts what the respondents have said in which negativity is the last criterion they would look for when choosing what to read in the news. Having a high frequency in the corpora, all the five key words, his, coach, minutes, scored, and defeat, chosen for the study showed elements of negativity in the concordance lines and they may be categorized as follows: Legal cases, performances, trashing and insults, good and bad news.

Legal Cases

The first category for the use of the five key words is legal cases where the athletes and coaches are presented in legally negatives circumstances. The following are some sample statements from the corpus:

1. ... Blatter is disappointed by today's decision, his US lawyer Richard Cullen of McGuire...
2. ...be under house arrest. "He pleads not guilty", his attorney John Pappalardo told the court.
3. ...he will be grilled again about his role. The BBC said yesterday...
4. ...with US authorities, and admitted his crimes and pleaded guilty...
5. ...2016 received a huge boost after his bail conditions were eased...

There are athletes that are involved with tax evasion, drug abuse, bribery, fraud, and these are reflected in the concordance lines of the keywords. The above examples and many others show how bribery is becoming rampant in sports. To sell the news, journalists use the element of negativity and as Rozin and Royzman (2001) has established, negative events are more contagious than positive ones. Despite people trying to steer off negativity, it is attractive and would leave people to wonder.

Performance

The second category focuses on instances which show ill-performed activities. Here are some statements:

1. ... seeing his ranking slump to 10, his lowest in a decade.
2. ... had to fight off questions about his role in England's downfall...
3. ... players lined up to blame the Dutch coach with Paul Scholes calling United
4. ... he was replaced by Luiz Adriano 15 minutes from the whistle it took the...
5. ... Saint-Etienne. Sofiane Boufal scored the only goal of the game...

Players are mentioned in such a way that even when they contribute to the winning of the game, their past mistakes are still remembered. Articles are written find faults with the coaches and players for poor performance. They are even threatened with being sacked if they do not perform well.

Trashing and Insults

Negativity in sports news is definitely expressed by swear words hurled directly or indirectly. Here are some instances seen in the corpus:

1. ... comments to Wawrinka during a match about his girlfriend having possibly been unfaithful...
2. ... Bertolacci was scathing about his fellow teammates. Genoa...
3. ... hit back at Bernard Tomic after his compatriot accused him of...
4. ... in which he aimed a homophobic slur at coach Laurent Blanc and insulted several...
5. ... report of a spat between attack coach Mike Catt and flyhalf Danny...

Athletes and coaches alike trashed each other and as their statements are recorded by journalists, this goes out to public although most of the time there is malice. There were so many incidents where players and coaches alike were involved in a heated argument started by trash talk and insults. This does not happen only on the field but it goes on off the field as well. Sports are filled with scandals and instead of reporting on the game, journalists take advantage of the situation and put out articles on the bad behaviors of athletes and coaches.

Good and bad news

As seen in the corpus, the dominance of bad and negative news is so strong that even though a report piece is giving positive ideas, it may reflect negativity within the context. In the statements below, examples 1-2 are apparently positive but negativity can also be inferred. The other statements are indicative of bad news only:

1. ... We didn't defend very well the first 15 minutes and then we defended for...
2. ... Milan broke the deadlock on 16 minutes with Alessio Cerci, whose...
3. ... of injuries that has deprived Argentina coach Gerardo Tata Martino of a slew...
4. ... put him away after three hours, 18 minutes to reach the last eight...
5. ... both of whom limped off inside 18 minutes, he added: "It's a big blow..."
6. ... were reduced to 10 men with 20 minutes remaining after Rafael Tolo...

Good news reported in the newspaper would also somehow be weaved in with the negative news. Achievement and performance are a recurring theme which illustrates just to what extent team coaches are pressured to win. Despite winning and even when the article is generally a positive write up, journalists would weave elements of negativity into the article (e.g., bad past record or history of drug abuse etc.).

Sports news is not only filled with news on achievements of athletes and winning scores but it is also filled with bad news involving current and former athletes. News on injury and death are also a common report that can be found in the sports section of a newspaper. This gives an illusion of negativity in all aspects of sports.

One statement was a report on Manchester United's manager admitting to the press that his position was under scrutiny after his team was defeated at home ground in a game with Norwich City. In another place, there was a report on how pressure on the Wizard's coach, Wittman, eased when his team started leading the game when he was the coach compared to his shaky status when his team started the season in a very humble tone. The

threatening pressure put on the coaches causes a chain reaction as the players are then pressured by these coaches.

The corpus shows an illustration of a coach not satisfied with his players' performance despite their scoring a goal and this was all said publicly to the press. The coaches' concern is of course not ill founded as cases of sacking of coaches when they did not perform very well are very real and this can be illustrated by the news that Aston Villa manager Tim Sherwood was sacked following his team's defeat to Swansea City.

The chain reaction of stress and pressure that is put on achievement and performance is problematic as athletes seemed to be putting everything at stake for the sake of winning even if it means hurting themselves and using banned substances that would eventually affect them adversely. Winning and achievement is of utmost importance and it must be achieved at all cost. The values of sports are diminishing as athletes lose their self-respect, spirit of sportsmanship and coaches that overvalue winning are probably a factor in creating an unhealthy environment and promoting undesirable behavior.

Research Questions

Although the process of news selection is not made public, content analysis on sports news reports can be done to uncover the embedded news values in published news reports. The sports news section not only reports on match results or game schedules but it also presents athletes considered as celebrities and everything revolving about them including their personal life which may or may not have relevance to their performance in sports.

The first research question sought to find out what Malaysian readers looked for in sports newspapers, what their criteria for newsworthiness and whether they were aligned with those of journalists'.

Data obtained from the questionnaire shows that readers would first look for unexpectedness, continuity, and threshold. Negativity is the last criterion that they would look for when choosing what to read. The news selection process is not transparent to the public so it is not known what criteria decide on a certain event to be covered and published in the newspaper. However, it is found that there is a mismatch between what the readers look for and what has been reported in the newspaper (e.g. the element of negativity is definitely prominent in the corpus). The journalists use negativity to attract readers into reading news they publish. Therefore, it can be concluded that news values are not necessarily used to decide which news item gets published rather how they are used to sell news and increase the number of readership.

Other news values that are prominent in the sports news reports are reference to elite people and reference to elite nations. Athletes' names and their nationalities or the countries that are involved in the games are mentioned as a factor that would increase the worthiness of the article. For example, household names in football such as Arsenal, Zidane or Coach Pep would often surface in the concordance lines and this shows that people might read the article because it is on these household names. Journalists know that people will find it more meaningful and relevant if they write on famous figures in sports.

Sports news often presents an event with reference to an elite person, athlete, coach, a football team or nation. These criteria for news values are very prominent and McKane's theory (2014) of what makes news can be verified through this study corpus as the two main elements of news are present: people and conflict. The theme of negativity

prevailing in sports articles in the corpus shows how conflict is used as a selling point, highlighting issues to attract a high number of news readership.

Apart from journalists using negative words such as reeling, embarrassing, humiliating, and disappointing to describe the degree of unpleasantness of a defeat, players are seen to be looking for revenge to avenge their losses when they are scheduled to play against each other again. Sports or competitions are commonly supposed to teach discipline and true sportsmanship, but by associating failure with unpleasantness, degrading words and portraying the players as seeking for revenge when they lose a game shows that one should win no matter what.

Based on the analysis of concordance lines on all five keywords studied, the elements of negativity can be categorized into five: legal cases, performance, trashing and insults, good news and bad news. Sports figures, president of associations, athletes and coaches are reported to be embroiled in scandals and legal cases for cases like tax evasion, bribery, match fixing, drug abuse, speeding tickets etc.

Players are always questioned even when they contribute a goal or a point in games and injuries are rampantly reported. Bad behaviors which involve trash talk and insults coming from players and coaches alike are becoming common on and off the field although sporting associations do have penalties for bad behaviors displayed on court or in the field.

The second research question attempted to reveal how sports news would shape the perception of Malaysians through sports news reporting. The data collected through the key words his, coach, minutes, scored, and defeat sound that everything is related to performance. In sports, performance is important as it is a factor that will determine fail or win in a game. However, what is highlighted is the success of players or coaches and not the process towards achieving it. It is assumed that winning is the only thing that is important. The process of achieving success, the training, teamwork, the strategy etc. are not as important. The end result is the only thing that matters. If that is what is conveyed to the readers all the time, the society would end up having that kind of perception towards sports. Worse, they may apply it to everything. Winning at all cost is not healthy as it is the probable cause of other issues like drug abuse, match fixing etc.

The reporting of a loss is always associated with negative words; embarrassing, humiliating, suffered, disappoint etc. In addition, news on bribery, drug abuse, tax evasion, match fixing etc. are being reported in the sports section as well. People from various backgrounds and age group read the sports news section daily. Teenagers and adults alike idolize these athletes. But when fed with all this negativity, people are put under the impression that athletes and sports in general are no longer clean. The win of a game may have been tainted with drug abuse or match fixing. Sports, an activity that is supposed to promote hard work, team work and sportsmanship is now just something that one can be successful in if 'right' substance or money is available.

CONCLUSION

The corpus linguistic approach is used as a methodology for this study and thematic analysis was done to look for recurring patterns that would refer to the criteria for newsworthiness in the headlines and content of the corpus itself. Undoubtedly, football dominates the pages of the newspaper and this is confirmed by findings from the 2011 International Sports Press Survey that football is the only global media sport. Negativity, reference to elite people and

reference to elite nations are the most prominent news values found in the corpus although there is a mismatch between what the readers expects.

The patterns of language reveal a very negative sports world in which success at all cost is stressed. Players and coaches are pressured to do well or they risk losing their jobs. This created a chain reaction that might have created an environment in which winning is over-valued. Scandals are running rampant in the sports world as cases of corruption, drug abuse and bad behaviors among athletes and coaches are consistently reported in the news.

Based on the study, it is found that the element of negativity floods the pages of sports news. Readers should be made aware that news is mostly written in such a way that can sell well and so readers should not just take in everything that is presented. Journalists too should be made aware that the articles they write reaches a huge number of audience and the way sports news is written subconsciously shapes the perception of its audience. The sports news articles portray the image of sports and are filled with negative elements, reports on corruptions, and drug abuse. When it is tainted with these negative issues, it will teach the readers that winning is a must at all cost. Defeat should not be taken lightly as it would bring embarrassment and humiliation.

The researchers of this study made use of only one source for data collection. Had the data come from a broader range of sources and other sections from the newspaper, the study would be more holistic. If there had been more than five keywords for the theme analysis, the findings could be more generalizable.

As the present study corpus is only made up of sports news, future research may expand the corpus to include news from other sections of the paper such as politics, business, and lifestyle. The corpus can also be expanded to include sources from other newspapers as MESNEC's data only comes from *The Malay Mail online*. However, extensive collaboration with the newspaper companies will be required as their archive is not readily available for data collection. Only then can we confirm whether negativity is what drives Malaysian news.

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