Bank Advertisement in Newspaper Websites and the Representative of Gender

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Abstract

Many individuals in the country are beset by financial woes and this has led most of them to search for information on the way to manage their finances. Many people read the newspapers especially online newspapers. Banks have often placed their advertisements using online news portals because it will easily reach various segments of the community. This paper is a study on bank advertisements in Bahasa Malaysia and English newspaper websites and the manner in which gender is represented in these advertisements. This study has found that there are stereotypical representation of women as being less successful than men whereas men are portrayed as more successful than the former. It is recommended that banks should change with the times and start acknowledging women as equally as successful in life and portray this image in their future advertisements as this will most probably attract more female clients to their financial institution.

Keywords: banks, online, gender, representation, advertisements, stereotype

1.   Introduction

The Internet has been the way to disseminate information at the press of a keyboard which is convenient, quick and hassle-free (Robinson, 2006). The information on these newspaper websites has the ability to influence the public through its persuasive language. Some information is based on facts while some are pure conjecture. The language used is persuasive, derogatory, patriotic and inspiring. The images use by these websites are thought-provoking, provocative and also at times awe-inspiring (Lazaroui, 2011). Beers (2006) claim that the public especially the youth of today are easily influenced because information found on newspaper websites easily seep into the minds of the society and are able to evoke many types of emotions (Viberg, 2008). Despite the rising popularity of online newspapers, limited research exists in examining the discourse on these websites.

Language is perpetually and purposefully at work. Part of the work language does is to represent specific attitudes, entities, individuals, ideals, and institutions albeit in its textual (i.e., written) or visual form (i.e., images). How language is transmitted and operationalized, and by whom are dependent upon representation. Even when nothing is uttered a certain message is still conveyed.

Based on the principles of critical discourse analysis this contrastive study strives to investigate the representation or more specifically the ways language (image and text) is used in Bahasa Malaysia and English online newspapers in Malaysia. This study also aims to determine the similarities or dissimilarities in the language used in both online newspapers and to also identify the way social goods are represented in these websites. 10 newspaper websites whereby 5 websites are in Bahasa Malaysia and the rest are in English will be evaluated. The analysis involves the main page or homepage of the respective websites.

2.   Background to Research

Website design cost around $100,000 and to $2 million to create while it takes between $50,000 and $1 million per year to simply maintain the sites (Schenider & Bruton, 2004). This is mainly due to the complexities and advance technology that are usually involved in the design and maintenance of websites

According to Fairclough (2001) discourse is the product of the interplay of language in the visual or textual representations. The words, ideas, images, elements, events, meanings, objects, and symbols that contribute to discourse are also known as representations. Moreover, Gee (2005) also states that discourse models are formed by combining representations that are fluid, situated in context, and under constant revision. Any type of communication revolves around the use of language which is an undeniable fact. Wetherell (2001) asserts that language plays a fundamental role in representing ideas, images, elements and so forth. Representation involves the way language is used and the individuals using the said language. Gee (2005) states that there are two main ways language are used to represent. Firstly, to support the performance of social activities and identities. Secondly, to support human affiliation with cultures, social groups, and institutions. The nature of language is subject to social behaviours and conditions because it is mainly shaped by several contexts such as cultural, economic, historical, political, and social. Kress (1989) asserts that the construction of meaning is never neutral because language is socially constructed, and it is defined relative to the social and cultural experiences of an individual and subject to relations of power.   This   research aimed to determine the differences in how gender is represented in Malaysian online bank advertisements.

3.   Problem Statement

Newspaper websites are increasingly important because it can be easily accessible by the masses through numerous gadgets such as mobile phones, laptops, tablets, iPad and so forth. This is evident through the increased sales of these gadgets. China, the United States and India are the quickest-expanding smartphone market in the world today (Malay Mail Online, 7th Sept 2014).

People are no longer relying on the conventional medium such as newspapers, television, radio, magazines and others to obtain information and knowledge. This is largely due to the hectic lifestyle and societal pressures to keep abreast of developments with the help of the Internet. The function of these newspaper websites has replaced the traditional medium for the past 10 to 20 years ago. Conventional media is rather slow in disseminating information as compared to the Internet. Online newspaper use language to persuade its online readers with its own perspectives and judgments on numerous issues though limited research exists examining the type of language used on institutional websites.

4.   Significance of Research

This study aims to investigate how online bank advertisements represent gender both in Bahasa Malaysia and English newspapers. It is an undeniable fact that online newspaper or online news play a fundamental role in disseminating information in the modern society. According to Daekyung & Johnson (2009) the total number of Internet users had reached an all-time high of about more than 1.2 billion in January 2007. The figures do not lie and shows that since the year 2000, there was a 250 per cent increase of Internet users from around the globe. In 2009, three countries that include China, the United States and Japan were considered the top 3 Internet users in the world (CIA, n.d). This shows that the Internet wields a tremendous power since it is considered to be more important than traditional mass media. Information that is obtained through the Internet is considered to be credible and accurate by the global online users as was discovered by the World Internet Project (Daekyung & Johnson, 2009).

Newspaper websites become the most popular means of getting information at the tap of a keyboard. Hence it is crucial that an examination on the language used by these websites be conducted. The way newspaper websites have an insidious effect on its online readers because what is read by an individual can actually affect the person's way of thinking.

5.   Literature Review

Online newspapers have a vast influence and can be used as a tool or as a means to an end. The language used by newspapers can be used for the greater good to convey information to the public or to be abused to the detriment of the society. Therefore, it is imperative to discover how language is used in newspapers.

Language is used by individuals to generate meaning of the world (McKenzie, n.d). Functions of an event will determine the different representations that will be created. Representation or the language used refers to discourse which has been defined by the Oxford dictionary to be written or spoken communication. According to Day (2001) the context in which the discourse is found determines the meaning. Discourse normally involves a cacophony of ideas, images and objects that are in a certain context (Gee, 2005). Discourse

analysis pertains to an investigation of a language within a particular context using a set of theories and methods (Fairclough, 2001). It has been discovered in a study of cognitive science that language has a tremendous impact on the way the world is viewed, thoughts are shaped, and knowledge is constructed (Boroditsky, 2010). The way language is used online is also reflective of the psyche and mindset of an individual based on a study by a Stanford Scholar (Parker, 2014). This is further asserted by Elder (2014) that the simpler a language is used by an individual, the more honest he is perceived by others and the more complicated a language being used, the more untrustworthy the former is perceived by the latter.

According to Daekyung & Thomas (2009) state that with the decline of traditional mass media since the mid-1980s which dropped from 80 per cent in 1985 to 59 per cent in 2003 online news have overtaken the world by storm. The Internet has witnessed an exponential growth as a new source of information during the 1990s. In order to adapt to emerging new technologies, journalists have to constantly adapt their style of working to the new medium (Powers, 2012). The expectations of online users are higher because the existing technology has made it much easier for users to access information through the Internet (Radev, 2005). However certain parties were unsure that the online information was credible because there were fewer professional standards and social pressures to provide unbiased and accurate information. However, research on the credibility of digital information indicated that the public displayed a positive attitude towards the Internet. In the year 2000, Korea created the first and most interactive online newspaper called OhmyNews which turned out to become a credible news source in no time at all. In the past, not much research was conducted on the potential of the newly emerging web-based online newspaper as an alternative to the traditional news media. According to Radev (2005) there are over 18 million users of the New York Times' online news source (nytimes.com) whereas the daily print edition circulation numbers are just 1 million. Online news sources have numerous benefits such as ease of accessibility, being free of charge and there are many sources that makes users spoilt for choice.

The spoken or written word make up a language. However, images are also an integral component of a language (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). Newspaper websites also utilize images to convey information to the masses. Images are often used to transmit various actions, ideas, emotions, information, expressions, events, regulations, rues, and symbols (Kress, 2000). Fairclough (2001) claims that images can better express what words are unable to convey in certain circumstances. Images also denote an event and connote a plethora of meanings in any given situation (Hall, 1997). Images or visuals are similar to text because they are subject to social conditions which can play a significant role in influencing the way a message is received by an individual (Hodge & Kress, 1988).

It was previously stated that the language used in newspapers can be used as a tool and it is also the same case with online newspapers. The previous studies indicated that online newspapers were used as a tool to achieve the ends of the respective newspapers and that irrespective of the type of language used, newspapers used similar strategies to convey their own ideas to the public (Homayounzadeh & Mehrpour, 2013). Another study also showed that major linguistic and stylistic features were utilised during World War Two to by a Japanese newspaper to show support for their own government and to their fellow countrymen (Iwamoto, 1998). The current literature shows a dearth of studies on contrastive analysis related to newspapers. It is crucial that a study on representation (text and image) used in online newspapers be investigated.

The present literature on contrastive analysis (CA) reveal that CA is "a hybrid linguistic enterprise aimed at producing inverted (i.e., contrastive, not comparative) two valued typologies (a CA is always concerned with pairs of languages) and is founded on the assumption that languages can be compared. The strong view of CA is that the first language (L1) is a source of interference in the language acquisition of the second language (L2) (Lado,

1957). However, CA has been further divided into 2 aspects that include microlinguistics and macrolinguistics (Johansson, 2008). Johansson states that micro linguistics concerns the study of phonology, grammar, and lexis while macrolinguistics focusses on discourse analysis and text linguistics. CA should expand its paradigm to encompass the examination of underlying structural tendencies and not simply focus on categorising structure statements (Ree, n.d). One of the researches on CA that have been undertaken pertaining to the microlinguistics analysis is the CA of theoretical research article introductions in English and Hungarian, metadiscourse in academic prose of English and Persian research articles (Homayunzadeh & Mehrpour, 2013) abstracts of Chinese and English academic papers, phonological systems, research articles of business and economics in English and Spanish, and also a CA study of online variation in German, Russian & English that examines online content in the analysis fields of content structure, syntax, lexicon & semantics, and so forth (Ketchem, 2003).

On the other hand, other studies on CA also revealed that it did not focus on lexis, phonology, and grammar alone. The CA studies were related to the macrolinguistics analysis of contrastive analysis such as the field of discourse analysis. One of these studies relate to university rankings in China "to analyze and contrast the standard systems in the four rankings, focusing on the frame construction of the standard-system and the proportion, talents training (the condition of students), the account of scientific research and classification rankings as well" (Liu & Shan, 2007). Another CA study is on modality and point of view in Japanese wartime and peacetime newspaper discourse that investigated the way the Japanese made use of the newspaper to convey moral support for their countrymen and to also report the news based on their own perspective (Iwamoto,1998). Another study that investigated the effect of culture on the journalistic style and the strategies used to report news in the Persian and American newspaper editorials (Homayounzadeh & Mehrpour,2013). This study found that culture has no bearing on the strategies used by the respective newspapers and that these newspapers utilised similar strategies to convey their own ideologies. While one other study was on attitudinal variations in the Chinese & English press on the 2013 air pollution issue that investigated the way the press had reported the air pollution issue in their own respective ways (Chen, 2014) and another study was on the representation of college & university websites that revealed each learning institution conveyed different messages through the text and images in their respective websites (Sachaie, 2011). Much research has been carried out in order to investigate the linguistic characteristics between 2 or more than 2 different languages but less on the macrolinguistic aspect of CA. Thus, this study aims to fill the gap in the literature about the representation of Bahasa Malaysia and English online newspapers in Malaysia.

In order to examine the language on newspaper websites that use Bahasa Malaysia and English as the medium this contrastive study utilizes Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). This study aims to examine the number of characteristics (e.g., control, type, geographic region, and so forth) used in online newspapers in Malaysia. In an attempt to examine everyday language in an effort to raise awareness about issues of importance, such as the rights of women theoretically, CDA provides the means to do so. Methodologically, the approach developed by Fairclough (2001) to CDA has three dimensions of analysis (Figure 1). Firstly, descriptive analysis where the intent is to describe the textual and visual elements and its properties. Secondly, interpretive analysis where the objective is to understand and interpret the connections between the role of language and the greater social structures it reflects and supports by examining the contents of language and its functional parts. The third dimension, societal analysis focuses on larger cultural, historical, and social discourses surrounding interpretations of the data and explaining them.
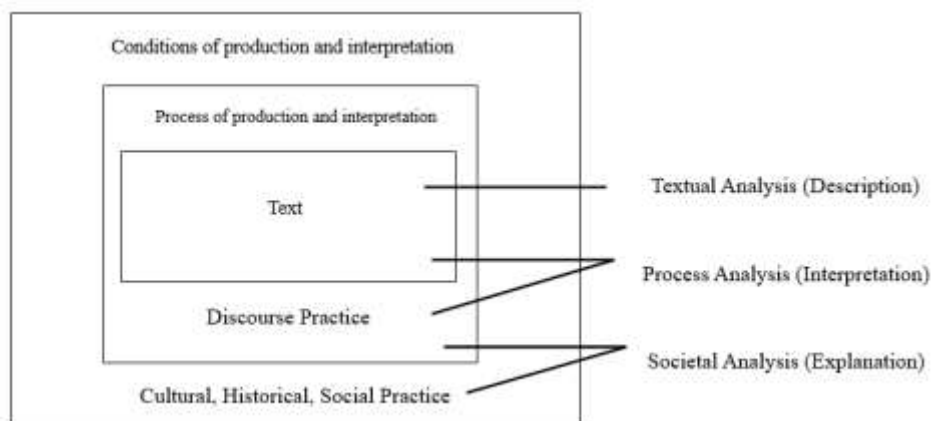
Figure 1: Fairclough's Dimensions of Discourse and Discourse Analysis (Source: Janks, 2005)

6.   Methodology

A purposeful sampling technique refers to a technique whereby a sample is intentionally selected to allow the researcher to focus in great detail on a certain issue, subject, or phenomenon (Flick, 2009). This sampling technique will be used because it will help narrow down the number of newspaper websites that will be analyzed since there are a large number of such websites online. Gee (2005) asserts that this sampling technique is most appropriate in the investigation of online material which include web pages and web sites. The main focus of this study will be a corpus of newspaper websites in English and Bahasa Malaysia that show bank advertisements. They are considered the popular online news portal as can be seen from the list that is mostly searched by users of Google. The websites are chosen based on the most read or experiencing heavy online traffic. According to Zhang et al (2014) the intensities to trace popular items are dependent upon the users own activity degrees. The users will search popular items dependent upon their own respective motivations. The newspaper websites chosen for this study include Berita Harian, Harian Metro, News Straits Times, and The Star.

Van Els et al (1984) defined CA as a "systematic comparison of specific linguistic characteristics of two or more languages". Based on the principles of critical discourse analysis (CDA) this contrastive study strives to investigate the representation or more specifically the ways language (image and text) is used bank advertisements found in English online newspapers in Malaysia and also abroad.

In addressing research gaps, a research method such as qualitative methodology plays a significant role in this process. CDA, one such qualitative method is likely to provide fuller understanding of the matter by complementing the present quantitative approaches. A variety of disciplines including education, media studies, history, and politics has utilized CDA (Agger, 1991). Gee (2005) states that with CDA multiple interpretive tools are provided to researchers. CDA is deemed valid due to the connection to grammatical devices in communicative functions of language. Janks' (2005) linguistic analysis rubric and a visual analysis rubric derived from the work of Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) will be used in the current study in an explicit attempt to systematically ensure rigor.

The researcher will conduct a paper-and-pencil analysis of the websites or more specifically the printed web pages which will be aggregated electronically (Hartley & Morphew, 2008). Screen captures of each of the Web pages will also be done. In an effort to preserve textual and visual representations on newspaper websites Web pages will also be saved in HTML (hypertext markup language). The researcher will be able to recursively conduct analysis numerous times to closely preserve the dynamic and static contents and

interconnectivity of the original, "online" website by creating an "offline" copy of a website (Bergman & Meier, 2004). The researcher will document the nature of the content in accordance with the rubrics previously mentioned when faced with interactive content (Bergman & Meier, 2004).

Previous research utilizing CDA to examine textual and visual artifacts revealed that the description and analysis of visual texts (e.g., images, graphics, and multimedia) often occurred in conjunction, often simultaneously, with written text (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). The process and societal levels of Fairclough's theoretical framework provides researchers the opportunity to make interpretations and draw conclusions based not only on the language, or image(s), but also on the combination of the two (Fairclough, 2001).

7.   Research Findings

Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 2 it is clearly shown that a female bank representative is being consulted by a male client. This portrays women as professionals and knowledgeable as well. This advertisement presents a positive representation of women as capable individuals and with high credibility. In Figure 3, a female client is portrayed as a successful business owner and is seen having a consultation session with a bank officer whose gender is unknown.

Figure 4

Figure 5

Figure 4 above, a stylishly dressed young attractive man is seen shopping at a high-end

boutique. This advertisement portrays men as successful and having the means to purchase anything he desires. In the above image, the fact that a young male model was shown also gives the impression that men can achieve success early on in their career. On the other hand, Figure 5 depicts an older less attractive female model in the advertisement. This is the only advertisement found which depicted women as bosses. However, the woman in this advert is not portrayed as being professionally dressed but instead was portrayed as a casually dressed individual with no makeup, disheveled hair and merely wearing a cardigan which spoke volumes about the type of business she owns. This image does not represent a successful business owner in this modern era. Instead, this particular advertisement shows that women are only capable of running a small business and that this type of women are usually oblivious about their appearance hence the drab image of the model in question. On the other hand, the model in the advertisement should have been depicted as an individual that has nicely coiffed hair, formally attired in a blazer with at least some makeup which will ultimately represent a far more professional image than the one presently portrayed in the above advertisement.
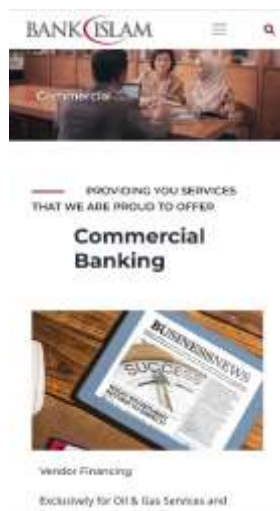

Figure 6

Figure 7

However, in Figures 6 and 7 above show two female clients seeking financial advice from a male bank employee. These advertisements provide a negative portrayal of women as the ones lacking in financial knowledge whereas the male model in this advertisement will be construed as having the upper hand as he is the one providing the information regarding banking. Thus, this advertisement reinforces the idea of women lacking in knowledge about financial matters and will need a man to provide her with the necessary information.

Figure 8

Figure 9

Figure 8 as shown above portrays men as business owners possibly in the F&B industry because of the apron the model is seen wearing in this advertisement. However, this advertisement contrasts with the image in Figure 9 as it depicts two individuals running a business. Figure 4.2 gives the impression that a woman is incapable of running her own business and that she must have a partner, a male business partner to be exact in order to make the business a success. Both are seen donning an apron which symbolizes the kind of business they are in which is most probably in the F & B industry.

Figure 10

Figure 11

Figures 10 and 11, both advertisements portray women as business owners but only relegated to the role of small enterprise such as a café or restaurant. Apparently, women are not deemed worthy or credible enough to be portrayed as being business owners of huge business enterprise. This does not put women in a positive light rather, it undermines the role that women play in the modern word today.

Figure 12

Meanwhile, in Figure 12 it shows a solitary figure of a man standing on top a mountain

overlooking the view from above. The man is seen standing with folded arms which appears to give an air of resoluteness and wisdom. The advertisement is about investment and when a man is being used in this type of advertisement, it portrays men as decision makers and great planners of the future whereas the advertisement could have used a woman instead.

Figure 13

Figure 14

In both Figure 13 and 14, these advertisements chose to be neutral and did not use any models. These banks clearly wanted to only provide the necessary information regarding finance that is normally sought after by potential bank customers. Hence, the absence of any model be it male or female models.

Figure 15

Figure 16

In Figure 15 and 16 depicts a stark contrast of the representation of both genders. In Figure 15, a laughing man is shown to portray that this individual is laughing all the way to the bank since he is presumed to have worked hard for his present success. Meanwhile the image of a woman is shown in the foreground but only the back of the head is shown which gives the impression she is probably the spouse or girlfriend adoringly looking at her successful spouse and partner. Her face is not considered important enough to be shown in the advertisement. Her role is

merely relegated to that of an unimportant bystander. Meanwhile in Figure 16, two women are seen shopping and doing this trivial task as opposed to the man in Figure 15.

Figure 17

In Figure 17, the face of the man is not shown but the forearms and rolled up sleeves are shown to depict men as being serious about business while symbolizing strength and power. This man was portrayed as the bank officer providing wise counsel while the other individual is a male client. This most probably will lead potential clients to believe that only men are capable of providing financial advice and that men are the only ones preparing for their financial future. Unfortunately, women are not depicted as such.

10.   Conclusion

After careful study of the respective advertisements, it can be concluded that women are being portrayed in an unflattering manner. Consequently, this will alienate potential female clients as the images being portrayed are negative and underestimating as well as trivializing the role of women in society. According to the Department of Statistics, at present women represent approximately 7 million of the modern workforces and have better purchasing power than ever before. It is counterproductive if banks keep on portraying this segment of potential clients in an unfavorable light. Advertisements are used as a business marketing strategy and should therefore be used effectively since the production cost of such advertisements generally is expensive. Thus banks should bear this in mind when producing an advertisement since it represents the image of the banks in question. It is imperative that banks get in touch with reality and start to change their advertisements if they hope to secure more clients of the fairer sex. They should stop undermining the position of women in the modern society and start acknowledging women for all their positive contribution to society. Failure to realize this fact will inadvertently result in a loss of potential business which will affect the bottom line.

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