



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

**USE OF PHOTOGRAPHS IN THREE MALAYSIAN ENGLISH DAILIES**

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**USE OF PHOTOGRAPHS IN THREE MALAYSIAN ENGLISH DAILIES**

**By**

**NAFISE ESMAEL MOTLAGH**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra  
Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of  
Science**

**November 2007**



## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents who have supported me all the way since the beginning of my studies. Also, this thesis is dedicated to my most beloved husband, Alireza, who is the great source of motivation and inspiration in my life.



Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in  
fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science

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**Chairperson: Professor Musa bin Abu Hassan, PhD**

**Faculty: Modern Languages and Communication**

This research was conducted to examine the use of photograph in Malaysian English dailies. Three newspapers with the largest circulations were chosen from English dailies: The Star, The Sun and The New Straits Times and content analysis was adopted as research method. The total number of sample was 138 issues which were selected every other day in a period between August 1 and October 30 of 2005. For pre-testing, 46 issues of The Star daily were examined in a three-month period (May, June, and July 2005) in order to improve and refine the codes. The results showed that the findings of the pre-test answer the research questions. The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). Frequencies and percentages were used to summarize the data.



Framing theory supported the results of this study. Framing theory reveals how the media portray the issues they cover. According to this theory, it was found that Malaysian editors in English dailies highlight the negative photographs which are mostly published in big size. This study found that, in Malaysian English dailies, nearly half of the front page photographs are not accordant to the headlines, meaning that front page photographs and the headlines do not cover the same pieces of news; the numbers are so remarkable in political headlines. It was found that Malaysian English dailies use international sources to cover Asia-Pacific news while this region has the highest number of front page photographs among Asian Regions.



Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sains

**Penggunaan Foto dalam Tiga Akhbar Harian Bahasa Inggeris di Malaysia**

Oleh

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**November 2007**

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Kajian ini dijalankan untuk mengkaji penggunaan gambar di dalam berita yang disiarkan dalam akhbar-akhbar di Malaysia. Tiga akhbar harian berbahasa Inggeris dengan jumlah edaran yang terbesar; The Star, The Sun, dan The New Straits Times, telah dipilih. Analisis kandungan telah digunakan untuk penyelidikan ini. Jumlah sampel yang digunakan adalah sebanyak 138 isu akhbar, yang telah dipilih setiap hari dari jangka masa 1 Ogos sehingga 31 Oktober 2005. Sebanyak 46 isu dari akhbar The Star telah digunakan di peringkat pra-uji dalam jangka masa tiga bulan (Mei, Jun dan Julai 2005) untuk mengenal pasti dan memperbaiki kod-kodnya. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa keputusan pra-uji menjawab persoalan kajian. SPSS telah digunakan untuk menganalisis data. Kesimpulan data telah diperolehi dengan menggunakan frekuensi dan peratusan.



'Framing theory' menyokong keputusan yang diperolehi. Teori framing mendedahkan bagaimana media menyampaikan isu yang diliputinya. Didapati bahawa penyunting Malaysia bagi akhbar bahasa Inggeris menggunakan lebih banyak fotograf yang menekankan aspek negatif dan diterbitkan dalam saiz yang besar. Kajian ini juga dapati bahawa gambar muka depan di akhbar bahasa Inggeris membawa makna yang lain berbanding dengan tajuk utama. Ini bermaksud bahawa tajuk utama di muka depan akhbar tersebut tidak menjelaskan gambar yang disertakan terutamanya bagi tajuk utama yang berkaitan dengan politik. Akhbar bahasa Inggeris turut menggunakan maklumat yang diperolehi daripada sumber-sumber antarabangsa untuk berita di rantau Asia-Pasifik. Tambahan pula, gambar muka depan bagi akhbar Asia memaparkan paling banyak gambar daripada rantau Asia-Pasifik.

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*I certify that an Examination Committee has met on 6 November 2007 to conduct the final examination of Nafise Esmael Motlagh on her Master of Science thesis entitled "Use of Photographs in Three Malaysian English Dailies" in accordance with Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Act 1980 and Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Regulations 1981. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Master of Journalism*

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## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that the thesis is based on my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously, and is not concurrently, submitted for any other degree at Universiti Putra Malaysia or other institutions.

Nafise Esmael Motlagh

Date: 07.01.2008



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
<b>DEDICATION</b>	ii
<b>ABSTRACT</b>	iii
<b>ABSTRAK</b>	v
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	vii
<b>APPROVAL</b>	viii
<b>DECLARATION</b>	x
<b>LIST OF TABLES</b>	xiii
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b>	xv
 <b>CHAPTER</b>	
<b>1 INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
Background of the Study	1
Statement of the Research Problem	3
Objective of the Study	8
Significance of Study	8
Scope of Study	9
 <b>2 LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	 <b>11</b>
Newspapers in Malaysia	12
English Language Newspapers	15
The Star	16
The Sun	17
The New Straits Times	18
Press Ownership and Law in Malaysia	22
Photojournalism	26
Importance of Photograph in Newspapers	30
Front Page Photograph in Newspaper	35
Ethics in Photojournalism	40
Ethics Codes of National Press Photographer's Association	41
Framing Theory	44
Chapter Summary	50
 <b>3 METHODOLOGY</b>	 <b>52</b>
Sampling	53
Measurement	54
Coding Instruction	54
Inter-Coder Reliability	58
Data Analysis	60



<b>4</b>	<b>FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION</b>	<b>61</b>
	<b>Table</b>	<b>Page</b>
	Overview of photographs	61
	Inclination of Photographs	62
	Theme of Photographs	64
	Size of Photographs	66
	Impression of Size on Inclination of Photographs	67
	Accordance of Photographs and Headlines	68
	Theme of Headlines without Accordance to Photographs	69
	Coverage and Source of Asian Region Photographs	71
	Chapter Summery	75
<b>5</b>	<b>SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>76</b>
	Summary	76
	Objective of the Study	77
	Methodology	78
	Summary of Findings	79
	Conclusions	82
	Recommendations and Suggestions for Further Research	83
	<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>86</b>
	<b>APPENDICES</b>	<b>95</b>
	<b>BIODATA OF STUDENT</b>	<b>100</b>



## LIST OF TABLES

<b>Table</b>	<b>Page</b>
1 Newspaper Cost-Efficiency; The Star	17
2 Newspaper Cost-Efficiency; The Sun	18
3 Newspaper Cost-Efficiency; New Straits Times	20
4 Circulation of English Dailies in Peninsular Malaysia	21
5 Circulation of English Dailies in Sabah	21
6 Circulation of English Dailies in Sarawak	21
7 Overview of Front Page Photograph	61
8 Overview of Front Page Photograph in Three Dailies	62
9 Inclination of Front Page Photograph	63
10 Inclination of Front Page Photograph in Three Dailies	64
11 Theme of Front Page Photograph	65
12 Theme of Front Page Photograph in Three Dailies	66
13 Size of Front Page Photograph	66
14 Size of Front Page Photograph in Three Dailies	67
15 Impression of Size and Inclination of Front Page Photograph	68
16 Accordance of Headlines and Front Page Photographs	68
17 Accordance of Headlines and Front Page Photographs in Three Dailies	69
18 Theme of Headline without Accordance to Front Page Photograph	70
19 Theme of Headline without Accordance to Front Page Photograph in Three Dailies	71



20	Coverage of Asian Region Front Page Photograph	72
21	Source of Asian Regions Photographs	72
22	Coverage of Asian Region Front Page Photograph in Three Dailies	73



## LIST OF FIGURES

<b>Figure</b>		<b>Page</b>
1	Readership of all Newspapers in Malaysia	14
2	Readership of Newspapers- by Market share in 2005	14
3	Readership of English Newspapers	15
4	Readership of The Star, The Sun, and The NST	20



# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the subject of this study. It provides information on the background of the study, research problem, research questions, research objectives, research scope, and significance of study.

### **Background of the Study**

Newspapers are a form of news communication that present a display of codes that should provide the reader with information about the world. News is expressed in a newspaper through linguistic, typographic, graphic, and codes which are defined by the medium itself. This can be seen in the physical confines of a newspaper affecting the contents and therefore the codes and signifiers used to communicate the stories (Carter, 2000). Indeed, the newspapers that we read would be rather bland without a photographic image.

Lester (2006) believes that we live in a visually intensive society. Bombarded daily with a steady, unrelenting stream of visual stimulation from all manner of media, we seek understanding from pictures when we are only taught to understand words. We see mediated images more than we read words.

Photojournalism is also ubiquitous in our everyday lives and nowadays, it's known as one of the most important communication tools used by the media.



Journalists knowing well the potential power of this tool, apply photographs to transfer the news to audiences, in shortest time and most efficient way.

Meanwhile according to Wells (2002), “photography is rarely admitted to settings in which journalism is discussed, investigated and taught”. She believes that “whenever the distinction is drawn between information and entertainment or the serious substance of journalism appealing to an intellectual reading public is defended against the light, trivial appeal of the popular, photography falls within the popular, excluded from the realm of the serious press” (p. 218).

On the other hand, Wanta (1988) believes that dominant photographs help set agendas and heighten awareness of issues. Blackwood (1987) wrote that sometimes photographs are the only representations of world events to which some people are exposed. These factors make the photographs in newspapers potentially important conveyors of information and shapers of attitudes. Furthermore, photographs have been found to heighten readers’ emotional response to the news (Garcia and Stark, 1991).

Just as important as photojournalism, the front page is another element of newspapers which is focused on in this study. The front page is the most important page of a newspaper. It is a basic cue to readers, visually suggesting what the newspaper considers the day’s most important story. In fact readers



are more likely to read front page articles than articles on any other page (Reisner, 1992).

Most newspapers strive for an attractive, persuading and well-balanced front page. Every element on a front page performs an essential function. Most newspaper designers strive to make their pages clean and uncluttered (Julian, Leiter and Johnson, 1985).

The front page is the face of the newspaper and must display not only the day's news but promote the best content inside. More is definitely better than less, and index items, promo boxes, and even standalone photographs are a part of what makes the eye move (Garcia, 1996).

Newspapers rely on front page headlines and photographs to provide readers with quick and easy access to different news stories. They do this by communicating the essence of the message. It can shock, seduce or offer a suggestion of mystery as newspapers have to 'sell' the story (The Age Education, 2006).

### **Statement of the Research Problem**

The front page is often seen as the major selling factor of the news paper; it is what attracts the potential readers to buy the paper and/or read further (Carter,



2000). Usually, readers do not spend more than 10 seconds to react to newspaper front page. Unfortunately, the reaction time has become shorter and shorter in the past few years. A newspaper's front page must have a strong visual impact which nearly always depends on the use of a good photograph (Garcia, 2002).

Photographs attract the eye more rapidly than text. A story with a photograph has higher readership than the same story without a photograph. Photographs represent an important element not only in conveying news but in contributing to the overall appearance of the page as well. Photographs deserve the same kind of attention a comparable story would get. Photographs are not just something to fill space or to make pages attractive. They function the same way as stories do. If the overall news package is to succeed, editors must give the same attention to photographs as they give to words. A photograph with a story ensures a higher readership than the story that runs alone. The reader sees the photograph first and is attracted by it to the story. Often a good photograph can lift a story from the routine or save a writer who is weak in description (Barthes, 1977).

Focusing on Malaysian media, it seems that while serious readers seek for more thought-provoking articles, they do not necessarily represent the majority of the reading public. The best-selling newspapers in Malaysia are those that carry news and photographs about celebrity scandals, sex websites, crime,

Nowadays, different and numerous sources supply journals with the photographs: employed photographers, internet sources, photo agencies, public relations and archives. The photographs are edited by the photographer or photo editor and then designed by a graphic designer. In terms of front page photographs, chief editors choose and apply the most appropriate photograph considering the policies of the newspaper, readers' taste, and most importantly, the top news of the day.

Most journalists believe that the successful selling of a newspaper is directly in line with front page news and photographs but this is not the only role of photographs in newspapers. Front page photographs are selected by journalists and not by photographers, and consequently, the themes of the photographs are more emphasized with respect to aesthetic factors. This means that journalists usually lean on the content of photographs and not to their quality to persuade and attract potential customers and make them select their newspapers.



In this competitive world, everybody in his work field is obligated to consider the sale as an important objective and maybe as the most important one. When the successful sale and consequent benefits are considered as the main objective in a cultural issue such as journalism, the coverage of reality in the news may be damaged. For example, it seems that it becomes a rule to apply sexy pictures of semi-nude women on the cover of magazines. Surprisingly, even many of the political and economic magazines are following this rule.

Journalists, as messengers of the elite community, have a massive responsibility to direct public views and create a healthy taste and it is the same with newspapers. The news and the relative pictures are generally misled towards violence, sex and negative news. Such news has always been appealing for the audience and journalists confess that such news is effective for increasing the readership of a newspaper. On the other hand, if only negative news is applied as the main news covered by a newspaper, the consequences on society would be negative. The policies of newspapers can be investigated with analysis of the inclination of newspapers in covering domestic and international news in front page photographs which are the most important photographs of the newspapers.

This research also aims to study the application of exclusive photographers in newspapers. Easy access to photographic sources on the Internet is one of the factors that decrease newspapers' efforts to utilize exclusive photographers.



Behind any photograph published on a newspaper is hidden the newspaper's point of view. Furthermore, photographers are the eyes of a newspaper, who see the world's facts and transfer them to the readers. Consequently, it is important to have exclusive photographers who cover the news all around this eventful world. It is more logical to cover domestic and neighboring countries' events with exclusive or local photographers who work for a native photography agency. This study aims to investigate the research problem via analysis of some selected front page photographs.

Considering the importance of front page photographs in newspapers, the following research questions are raised:

1. What is the inclination of front page photographs in Malaysian English dailies?
2. What is the theme of front page photographs in Malaysian English dailies?
3. What is the impression of photograph size on its inclination in Malaysian English dailies?
4. What are the themes of headlines in Malaysian English dailies which are not related to the front page photographs?
5. What are the sources of photograph in Malaysian English dailies which cover Asia-Pacific countries?

## **Objective of the Study**

The general objective of this study is to identify the use of photograph in three Malaysian English dailies.

The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To identify the inclination of the front page photographs in Malaysian English dailies.
2. To identify the theme of front page photographs in Malaysian English dailies.
3. To determine the impression of photograph size on its inclination in Malaysian dailies.
4. To identify the themes of headlines in Malaysian English dailies which are not related to the front page photographs.
5. To determine the sources of photographs of Malaysian English dailies which cover Asia-Pacific countries.

## **Significance of Study**

The results of this study are expected to highlight the present scenario of using photograph in three Malaysian English dailies as an important tool in the selling of newspapers.

The results are expected to give insight into how newspapers in Malaysia cover and mirror the events on the front page with employment of photograph, what the top events are and which domestic issues are more emphasized. The findings will show the tastes of Malaysian newspaper readers. Results of this study could provide a proper reference to journalists for employment of photograph in dailies.

This study is hoped to strengthen the role of framing theory in printed media and contribute to and highlight the general knowledge in mass communication, particularly the importance of photojournalism in newspapers.

### **Scope of Study**

The purpose of this study is to content analyze the front page photographs of three Malaysian English dailies; The Star, The Sun and The New Straits Times. All front page photographs of these newspapers from 1<sup>st</sup> August 2005 to 30<sup>th</sup> October 2005 were selected as the subjects of the study.

As mentioned in the background of the study, the front page is the most important page of a newspaper and most experts believe that appropriate front page photograph can increase sales of the newspaper and persuade potential readers to buy the paper. As a result, front page photographs were selected