PORTRAYALS OF RURAL WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN ONLINE NEWS REPORTING

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Abstract:

The growth of the Internet has provided a new way to support rural women's empowerment in online news reporting. However, rural women are often seen as falling behind in terms of benefiting from development. Therefore, this study aims to examine the roles of the media, to analyse issues concerning rural women, and to identify themes of rural women's empowerment in online news reporting. In-depth interviews were conducted with five experts in the women- and media-related field. The study used a content analysis method to examine the themes and paragraphs of articles from two online mainstream newspapers: Berita Harian (BH) and the New Straits Times (NST). The results showed that spreading awareness and motivation, education, decision-making, balanced and fairness, online participation, local organisation, freedom of expression, and newsworthiness are important factors for empowering rural women in online news reporting. Furthermore, the study found that changes in the ruling government have impacted how news portrays the empowerment of rural women, particularly in relation to their representation in politics. As a result, the media tends to emphasize the benefits that rural women receive in social theme news. This study contributes to the understanding of Media Framing Theory and the Women and Development (WAD) approach. It sheds light on how rural women are depicted and issues that hinder the empowerment objectives.

Keywords:

News Portrayal, Online News Reporting, Rural Women's Empowerment, Media Framing Theory.

Introduction

The study concerning women empowerment was inspired by the proliferation of feminist movements in the late 1960s, which encompassed a wide range of approaches, concepts, and practices through different disciplines (Han, 2018). Furthermore, the Internet has experienced technological growth until the late 1980s. In this regard, the growth of online news in the traditional mainstream media has advanced all media outlets. This encompassed Malaysian online newspapers, Berita Harian (BH) and the New Straits Times (NST), both of which cover regional and local news including the emancipation of rural women in society. These platforms facilitate the dissemination of news related to the progress of rural women by providing a platform for their voices, showcasing their accomplishments, and serving as an inspiration for other women.

However, women residing in rural and remote areas are often disadvantaged in accessing the benefits of development, especially in terms of economic opportunities and education, as compared to their urban counterparts. This observation is reinforced by Ofong (2020), which highlights the financial constraints that many rural women face in acquiring and maintaining digital technologies, including essentials like mobile data and Internet connectivity, even if they manage to acquire affordable mobile phones. In this context, online news assumes a pivotal role, offering a platform for rural women to not only identify potential opportunities but also devise practical solutions tailored to their circumstances. Through online news reporting, rural women can access relevant information that enables them to navigate challenges and progress personally (Ishfaq, Abedullah & Kouser, 2023). Thus, technology emerges as a potent tool that empowers women to contribute to societal advancement and inspire other women, facilitated by the accessibility of online news platforms.

Active participation on the Internet, such as writing, clicking, and commenting, does not necessarily translate into empowerment, as indicated by Stavrositu and Sundar (2012). Online platforms like blogs and web pages place a strong emphasis on users expressing themselves, effectively making them the creators of their content, as noted by Herring et al. (2004). This ongoing self-expression serves to amplify the voices of women, making them visible to others and potentially empowering Internet users. As from a media perspective, women's perspectives on how news is presented exert significant influence. The aim is to convey messages directly to the intended audience and allow individuals to voice their opinions and assert their rights publicly, as suggested by Saunders and Goddard (2002). Therefore, the portrayal of news concerning rural women plays a crucial role in providing the public with insights into their perspectives within the community. This is because the media determines the type of stories they choose to convey to their audience.

Hence, it is important to show how rural women are presented in the news so that the public can understand their viewpoints in a community. This is because the media chooses types of story that they want people to know. According to Ross and Carter (2011), the media frequently does a poor job of reporting stories about women's life and what they know from their perspective. However, a study mentioned that when women are involved in making news, they portray women and girls in a better and more balanced way (Sineau, 2013). This implies that by having women contribute to the creation of news content, media outlets may be more likely to avoid biased or stereotypical portrayals of women and girls, leading to a more accurate and inclusive representation in the news. Therefore, this study aims to examine the roles of the

media, to analyse issues concerning rural women, and to identify themes of rural women's empowerment in online news reporting.

Literature Review

In the context of our study, we examine the portrayals of rural women's empowerment in online news reporting and delve into the application of two essential theories: the Media Framing Theory and Women and Development (WAD) Approach.

Women Portrayals on News

The portrayal of news serves as a conveyer of information, concepts, viewpoints, and opinions regarding subjects that require dissemination to the general public. It is a powerful force in influencing people's perspectives on a variety of issues. News portrayal can be both positive and negative in terms of the position and views about rural women. The selection of rural women's portrayals in online news has been caused either by a shifting agenda within a media organisation in covering some issues over others (Arguedas et al., 2023). Therefore, journalists are relying on news routines and official outlets to determine the value of the news.

As in Malaysia, under and misrepresentation of women in a political context has well documented in news reporting. Much or less known on how news providers portraying women in politics, which is different from time to time, at the same time, the media need to keep up with political development and media landscape. As an example, in the presence, visibility, and roles of women in politics, reflecting the changes in internal newsroom policies. Hence, the small representation of women in the political system reflected the democracy in a country (Sity, 2019). The lack of women in critical sectors such as decision-making aspects, suggests that key issues regarding women's participation in politics cannot be solved effectively. As indicated by the UN Women's global statistics report (2019), only 39% of girls in rural areas are enrolled in secondary school. This figure is significantly lower compared to rural boys (45%), urban girls (59%), and urban boys (60%). The educational challenges experienced by rural women have enduring impacts on decision-making at various levels. Thus, Socio-economic and cultural barriers towards women's political participation must be taken seriously to ensure an effective action to be tackled immediately.

In a broader context, previous research has indicated that how women are shown in the media is connected to society's overall cultural, economic, and political environment. The portrayal of women in media is often influenced by how society sees reality, rather than just being a result of media itself (Tiggemann & Anderberg, 2020). When we look at how the media depicts women, it is important to consider the specific goals, economic conditions, political factors, and culture of a country during a certain time (UN Women, 2020). Thus, it is crucial to focus on how rural women are shown in online news reports and figure out which kinds of news stories could empower them. The media's role is to strengthen the coverage of rural women, not diminish it. Some portrayals of rural women in online news rightfully show them as equal contributors in society. This is important for raising public awareness about the lives of rural women.

Online News Reporting

Umair (2016) opined that online journalism offers a fresh approach to reporting live events. These events quickly spread through the Internet and social media platforms. Several platforms have emerged to help share the latest news with the community. However, the rise of new

technologies has made information more accessible, which raises important questions about the reliability and correctness of online news reporting (Dwivedi et al., 2021). As this study delves into online news reporting, it becomes evident that the Internet has transformed the way newsrooms operate, introducing new ways of connecting society and the media.

Due to this fact, innovation and communication have changed their way of producing and consumed the news interactively. There are various platforms from news websites and social media such as blog, which enables the readers to decide how much the news affects them, sharing with others, and commenting. This was supported by Lee and Tandoc Jr. (2017) that online users click to the recorded computer system which is publicly visible according to the users' pattern and reading trend such as "Most Read Articles." It shows that the online audience not only drives news organisations in making an editorial decision. Instead, it tells the readers what to read and how to respond to it.

Siti Suriani et al. (2019) further emphasized that the quality content of online news, along with the appeal of the news portal, has become crucial in winning the audience's preference when selecting news. Thus, there are two key questions to examine, which are the action taken by Malaysian local newspapers to enhance newspaper circulation and how to gain popularity in online newspapers. It is, however, showed that the significant effort needs to be taken to strengthen news circulation which includes improving the quality of content and newspaper layout as well as promotion. Therefore, the online newspaper is seen as a survival tool for journalism because it is functioning to attract more audience (d'Haenens et al., 2022).

As traditional media becomes less popular, many Malaysians now depend on social media for their daily updates on local and global events to stay informed. In fact, approximately 42.6% of Malaysians use social media as their source of the latest news (Howe, 2023). This indicates that online news has become an essential daily resource for people to stay informed about the latest information. Traditional newspapers are also transitioning to the online platform to attract more readers by offering diverse content. This strategy aims to cater to various audience segments, including rural women. Domingo, Masip, and Meijer (2015) underscore the role of established news organizations in producing a majority of the news content consumed today, which includes dissemination through social media and aggregators, reaching both urban and rural populations.

Media Framing Theory

Through framing, media can determine their role in designing news (Hamid & Ibrahim, 2013). Framing is a process to determine news, which is considered vital in the news and influences the readers. Framing theory was designed to identify from different perspectives and interpreted various implications (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Goffman (1974) is the first scholar observing framing theory as one of the communication forms that enable an individual to seek, identify, and determine the issues in life. Takeshita (1997) has defined generally the meaning of framing, which is media can choose and focus on several issues within the country for the good cause of society. In the journalism context, Tuchman (1978) has observed that framing theory in journalism practice is to determine the factors that influence news writing. In Malaysia, news framing supposedly shows the event or issue in media, which might trigger balance reporting, enhance better political news writing and thus improve the quality of democracy (Baharin, Waheed, Ghazali & Ahmad, 2020).

Shoemaker and Reese (1996) have given a meaningful idea of framing aspects. They proposed that the interpretation of media content mostly reflected in cultural processes. However, frames in the context of cultural perspectives are considered as a vital element to structure in various ways (Goffman, 1981). Journalists have promoted cultural phenomenon through media representation in the news to the readers (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). VanGorp (2007) defined frames as a persuasive provocation in guiding readers to assess issues that eventually comes with the understanding of the topic.

The relationship between the frame and cultural phenomenon influences the mind of society and media practitioners. Nonetheless, some researchers discussed framing in the spectrum of social constructionism, which related to the construction of reality in socialisation (Berger & Luckmann, 1996). Through this approach, media studies facing bottlenecks of active and participative receivers (Wicks, 2001). Thus, journalists play an essential role in creating social reality by providing different types of media frames and restricted alternative sources (McCullagh, 2002; Reese, 2001). Furthermore, framing can be defined as theoretical devices by utilising media to express and evaluate messages (Neumann, Just & Crigler, 1992). Likewise, this study explores the theme of news regarding issues about rural women as portrayed by Berita Harian (BH) and the New Straits Times (NST). It would also evaluate the perspectives of the journalist, women's organisation, and rural women towards the news that were portrayed in the respective online newspapers.

Women and Development (WAD) Approach
Women and Development (WAD) Approach is not frequently discussed in previous studies. However, this approach is vital in pointing out issues regarding women. WAD is a 'neo-Marxist feminist approach' that has emerged in the 1970s as the follows up Women in Development (WID) approach (Rathgeber, 1990, p.492). Thus, WAD emphasised that women always been part of the development growth. It implied that women have always been important in economic sectors. This approach indicated that women's roles inside and outside the household are essential to the development of society. As the main focus of WAD is to determine the interactions between women and development growth than strategies to integrate women in development.

In this study, rural women's positions are considered within the structure of class inequalities to benefit facilities from the development. It, therefore, underplays that rural women's roles have undermines the development and does not address the interaction between them and the impact of the development. This context can be taken from the lack of media portrayals of rural women due to their limitations in utilising technology. Nevertheless, it shows that WAD sees women not benefit due to the class disadvantages and the way the wealth is distributed (Muyoyeta, 2007). In a varied context, WAD is very persuasive in raising debate about women's roles not only in reproduction but in production as well. For the meaningful development of rural women, their roles need to be acknowledged.

Methodology
This study adopted a qualitative research approach, which involves various methods like interpretative and naturalistic techniques to delve into a phenomenon (Denzin, 1994). The primary goal of qualitative research is to comprehend the thoughts and viewpoints of those being interviewed, as noted by Kvale (1996). This approach aids researchers in gaining a deeper understanding of the topic of study. Patton (1987) delineated three methods for

conducting qualitative interviews: the informal conversational interview, the general interview approach, and the standardized open-ended interview. The data for this study was gathered through in-depth interviews by adopting Patton's qualitative interview methods. Five experts from different media organisations, women's organizations, and rural women were interviewed for this study. These interviews were carried out to gather the perspectives of the experts on the first objective of the study which is to identify the roles of media, and for the second objective is to analyse issues concerning rural women. Additionally, this approach allowed the researcher to delve into various issues related to the research topic.

In addition, a content analysis method was applied, following an objective, systematic, and quantitative approach (Berelson, 1952). This technique helped examine external communication. A total of 72 news articles were collected and analysed using this method to identify themes related to news portrayals of rural women's empowerment in online newspapers, specifically Berita Harian (BH) and the New Straits Times (NST) from 10 November 2016 to 9 November 2019. The duration was chosen based on the one and half years (18 months) before and after the transition of the government. Analysis was done according to the frequency and percentage news portrayals of rural women, articles by themes and paragraph focus on articles. The significance of this study lies in its role in educating and raising awareness among the public regarding the empowerment of rural women through online news reporting. As the media plays a crucial role in delivering information to the public, it holds the responsibility of shedding light on the challenges faced by rural women and amplifying their voices.

Findings and Discussion
In this study, the first objective involved interviewing the experts about the media's roles in empowering rural women. Data analysis revealed four key roles of media: spreading awareness and motivation, education, decision-making, and presenting a balanced and fairness portrayal of rural women in online news reporting. For the second objective, the findings indicated four key aspects related to issues concerning rural women in online news reporting: online participation, collaboration with local organizations, freedom of expression, and newsworthiness. The third objective aimed to identify the prevailing themes of rural women's empowerment in online news reporting, encompassing the Economy, Social and Politics themes.

Background of Experts
Five experts were selected based on the recommendation of Romney, Welley, and Batchelder (1986), who propose that four or five informants with sufficient knowledge and expertise on the research topics are suitable for interviews. The experts chosen for this study possess a minimum of 5 to 20 years of experience in their respective fields. It is crucial in this study to carefully choose experts who are specialized in their areas of work, enabling them to provide insights on the roles of media and issues concerning rural women.

The background of the experts is shown in Table 1. Out of five experts interviewed, two were males and three were female. The two male experts have more than fifteen years of experience in media and journalism industry and hold higher positions as Chief Bureau (Expert 1) and Senior Journalist (Expert 2). While the three female experts came from different background. Expert 3 is a Director in a company and have 14 years of working experience, Expert 4 is a Head of Research Unit cum Women Activist cum Academician and have more than 20 years

of working experience, while Expert 5 is a Rural woman cum Entrepreneur, and have more than 15 years of working experience.

Table 1: Background of Experts

Expert	Gender	Position	Work Experience
Expert 1 (EXP1)	Male	Chief Bureau / Journalist	17 years
Expert 2 (EXP2)	Male	Senior Journalist	16 years
Expert 3 (EXP3)	Female	Director	15 years
Expert 4 (EXP4)	Female	Head of Research Unit / Women Activist / Academician	20 years
Expert 5 (EXP5)	Female	Rural woman/Entrepreneur	15 years

Roles of Media

The media serves as a mirror reflecting society's functioning and dynamics. Utilizing the online platform, individuals gain access to information concerning current news that directly pertains to their surroundings (Elsayed, 2021). This shows that media becoming voices of society. Thus, media platform has stimulated the youth generation and society thoughts to be more expressive (Singh & Pandey, 2017). In this case, some aspects were indicated about the roles of media, as it follows in the first objective.

The roles of media in spreading awareness and motivation through online news reporting can achieve the empowerment goal among rural women. It is because the news regarding rural women in the media is important as it provides opportunities to rural women by showing their potential publicly. Online news reporting enables them to portray their news and serves as a source of motivation for individuals to persevere through challenges (Robertson et al., 2023). This was supported by Nelson (2016) that media channels have the power to reach and inform the audiences to be influenced in motivating attitudinal change. These factors can be achieved if the media were defining the true meaning of empowerment on rural women's news portrayals. The following is the perspective shared by an Expert 1 (EXP1). They emphasized the significance of the media's role in spreading awareness and motivation. This aids rural individuals in showcasing their endeavours through online news reporting.

> *"It holds importance since the media raises awareness regarding their struggles in sustaining their families. This information reaches the public and typically garners higher viewership".* (EXP1)

In addition, the media play a vital role in enlightening society about the roles of rural women in fostering developmental progress. The media possesses the ability to educate individuals about both positive and negative aspects. Similarly, the pervasive influence of the media in disseminating information to the public remains unparalleled (Latha et al., 2020). Media allows society to make a noble mission in enlightening people about rural women's roles, as well as the process of empowerment, which can be achieved. From the findings, experts agreed that the media role is vital to educate the readers regarding their roles and acknowledging them for their contributions to a country's development. Thus, many informational regarding rural women should be conveyed by the media in achieving empowerment goals. Based on the study, Expert 3 (EXP3) concurred that the media is evolving into a tool for empowering rural women by educating society about their challenges.

"Media ought to offer solutions for various concerns, rather than focusing solely on one viewpoint. This is essential as the current generation tends to emulate, and the responsibility of educating them falls on the media". (EXP3)

Decision making within media organizations plays a significant role in how news about rural women is presented to the public. This was confirmed by the findings, which showed that decisions influenced by gender had an effect on the way news about rural women was shown. As highlighted by Narayana and Ahamad (2016), it's important for women to participate in decision-making roles to fully engage with and experience the positive effects of empowerment. Therefore, regulations within media organizations need to be established and strengthened to remove any biases related to gender in decision making. In this context, having more women in leadership positions within media organizations, particularly in the decision-making process, can contribute to the success of empowerment efforts. This increased representation can lead to more news stories focusing on rural women, highlighting their important roles within society. As per the expert (EXP2), there was a consensus that having a woman manager in a top position within a media organization has an impact on how news about women is presented.

> *"A woman manager shapes the way women are portrayed in the news. My previous supervisor was a woman. She supported us in covering news related to women's events, such as gatherings for single mothers and rural women entrepreneurs, among others. She determined the perspective of the story that empowers women. From my experience, I can deduce that a woman manager often has a clearer understanding of the story compared to a male manager".* (EXP2)

Balanced and fairness in journalism is crucial for delivering accurate news reports. The precision of news content holds a significant role in ensuring a clear distinction between balanced and fair representation. Media reflects the societal reality, which has a broad impact on various practices, especially in the lives of rural women. The findings underscore that imbalanced portrayals of rural women often stem from a lack of comprehensive information about their lives and challenges, particularly in remote areas. The media bears the responsibility of not only conveying direct messages but also indirect ones that promote gender equality across all aspects of life. This involves portraying their stories, experiences, and all matters related to them while sharing information with the public (Galdi & Guizzo, 2021). According to Expert 2 (EXP2), online news reporting of rural women receives limited attention in the media, often focusing on their challenges without providing viable solutions.

> *"The information about their accomplishments, as presented by the media, doesn't reach them. Consequently, news regarding women's empowerment receives less coverage because we lack sufficient material to create stories about their achievements. I approached the Village Development and Security Committees to share a success story about one of their accomplished villagers, but I am still awaiting a response. This indicates a lack of proactive efforts from the villagers to empower rural women".* (EXP2)

Issues Concerning Rural Women

Unequal access to employment, social prestige, and decision-making power lead to the vulnerabilities of social isolation in rural areas. Feminist researchers and advocates for women

emphasised that the preservation of agriculture, family farming, and various rural culture primarily rely on empowerment and women's participation (Hoff, 1992). For the second objective, the findings indicated that online participation, local organizational collaboration, freedom of expression, and newsworthiness as the four key aspects of the issues concerning rural women's portrayals in online news reporting.

The expansion of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to rural areas in developing countries marks a significant step towards empowerment. By leveraging the capabilities of digital technology, rural women can access new opportunities that contribute to their overall progress (Sun, Yu & Ma, 2023). However, it presents a challenge to rural women, especially the elderly. Based on the findings, online participation by rural women is very low. However, some tech-savvy benefits the use of ICT in seeking opportunities to establish their business and generating income. They tend to use ICT in both productive and reproductive activities central to their livelihood (Cepal, 2013). However, the elderly faced difficulties in using technology as they are seeking help from the community to use the services. It shows that technology is becoming an essential tool for rural women to expand their potential for the betterment of their lives. Expert 4 (EXP4) highlighted that technology can be beneficial for rural women who have access to it, enabling them to establish their own businesses, unlike those who are less fortunate within the community.

> "*Rural women's use of technology is limited due to factors like poor internet connectivity, economic constraints, and limited knowledge about ICT. Many of those who are adept with technology opt to pursue opportunities in urban areas to fulfil their aspirations. They recognize that urban areas offer better access to transportation, postal services, and various other facilities that are not as widely available in rural regions. This lack of accessibility is the primary reason why media communication is a challenge in reaching these rural women*". (EXP4)

Moreover, it is essential to improve local collaboration among organizations to effectively achieve the empowerment goals for rural women (World Health Organization, 2023). Based on the research findings, there are differing viewpoints between the media and women's organizations when it comes to discussing matters related to rural women. This discrepancy arises from the media personnel's limited understanding of the goals of women's organizations, which affects the empowerment process. Additionally, the shortage of staff in media organizations leads to fewer news stories about rural women in specific regions. Consequently, the objective of empowering rural women through online news reporting remains unfulfilled.

However, Narayana and Ahamad (2016) highlight that both groups can establish networks to create informative programs that acknowledge the unique needs of women in the media and encourage women's active involvement in news reporting. This emphasizes the potential for greater collaboration between the media and women's organizations, which can further strengthen the endeavour to empower rural women through online news reporting, thereby enhancing their visibility to the public. Expert 3 (EXP3) who is the representative of women's organization indicated that they are welcoming any collaboration to be held with the media organisation in order to empower rural women, as well as the function of the media, which is convenient to achieve the empowerment goal.

"We have open doors for the media to empower these rural women. Between the media and women's organisations, we have the same goals to empower the rural with difference tasks. However, media personnel should know the agencies that promote rural women. I also have sent letters to the media but mostly are left unanswered". (EXP3)

By enabling rural women's freedom of expression in the media provides them with opportunities to raise awareness about the challenges they encounter within their communities. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) allows rural women to expand their engagement online, sharing their thoughts and ideas. However, persistent obstacles often impede their ability to speak up, consequently slowing down their journey towards empowerment (Braverman-Bronstein et al., 2023). The media often portrays the difficulties and hardships that rural women face in their challenging lives. Yet, the findings revealed that the media does not restrain rural women from expressing their concerns, even if the news might seem insignificant; this determination depends on the news's value. Lanza (2018) has pointed out that women's involvement plays a role in strengthening the development of freedom of expression. Therefore, the results suggest that empowering rural women can be further enhanced by practicing freedom of expression within media organizations. Expert 5 (EXP5) held a similar perspective on how rural women express themselves in news portrayals.

"Media is an effective platform for rural women to voice out their opinion if they know how to use technology. It is fair. Maybe if there is something interesting, then it becomes a news". (EXP5)

Newsworthiness is essential when crafting any news story, including portrayals of rural women in online news reporting. The findings highlight the importance of adding news value to create meaningful news, particularly when reporting about rural women. Despite this, media often accentuates the challenges and difficulties faced by rural women, giving them a platform to voice their concerns through online news reporting. However, women's organizations perceive this approach as unjust towards rural women, as it can lead to negative perceptions among the general public. Jia and Landsdall-Welfare (2016) suggest that topics related to women are crucially relevant and significant, yet they often receive less attention in the news due to recurring issues. In this context, the concept of empowerment and its newsworthiness can vary, as the purpose of news reporting is to address pertinent issues concerning rural women, whether from positive or negative perspectives, as long as the news holds value. Expert 1 (EXP1) highlighted the importance of newsworthiness as a crucial factor when composing news articles.

"The significance of rural women's newsworthiness is substantial, particularly when it comes to stories about their achievements. It's essential to recognize that in any form of media, prioritizing newsworthiness is fundamental in crafting a story". (EXP1)

Online News Portrayals Themes
The third objective of this study focused on identifying the theme of rural woman's empowerment in both Berita Harian (BH) and the New Straits Times (NST). The timeframe for determining the frequency of news articles was aligned with the prevailing governments during the period from November 10, 2016, to November 9, 2019. The frequency and

percentage of online news portrayals related to rural women in BH and NST are presented in Table 2 below.

Berita Harian (BH) and New Straits Times (NST) were both mainstream online newspapers portrayed 72 articles since the government was ruled by the Barisan Nasional (BN), respectively 1.5 years before and after the transitioned of the government to Pakatan Harapan (PH). BH has presented 34 articles from November 2016 to November 2019, which comprises 47.22% while NST leads with 38 articles which presented 52.77%.

Table 2: Frequency and Percentage in Online Newspapers

No.	Online Newspapers	Frequency	Percentage
1	Berita Harian	34	47.22
2	New Straits Times	38	52.77

Meanwhile, Table 3 outlines the frequency and percentage of rural women's news articles in BH and NST, categorized according to the ruling government. Table 2 shows that there is the least number of news articles that portrayed rural women during the reigning of Barisan Nasional (BN) with 25 articles (34.72%) both from BH and NST. After the transitioned of the government to Pakatan Harapan (PH), there was improvement regarding the portrayals of rural women in BH and NST with 47 articles, which comprises 65.27%.

Table 3: Frequency and Percentage According to The Ruling Government

Duration (Month)	Ruling Government	BH	NST	f	%
2016 (Nov, 10) - 2018 (May, 9)	Barisan Nasional	14	11	25	34.72
2018 (May, 10) - 2019 (Nov, 9)	Pakatan Harapan	20	47	47	65.27

Note: BH=Berita Harian, NST=New Straits Times, f=frequency, %=percentage

In writing an article, the authors of Berita Harian (BH) and the New Straits Times (NST) make a deliberate selection of themes for portraying rural women. The chosen themes, as depicted in the Table 4, serve as a representation of the authors' preferences. Among these themes, the most notable emphasis lies on the 'Social' aspect, which is evident in 35 articles, accounting for 48.61% of the total. This highlights the authors' focus on depicting rural women's roles and empowerment within various societal spheres such as households, communities, health, and education. The 'Politics' theme ranks as the second most prevalent topic covered by both BH and NST authors, with a total of 24 articles, making up 33.33% of the selection. Within this theme, a substantial portion of articles underscore past and ongoing government initiatives aimed at empowering women through events, speeches, political perspectives, and official visits to rural regions. Conversely, the 'Economy' theme receives the least attention, with a mere 13 articles (18.05%) dedicated to it. The news articles within this category predominantly revolve around aspects such as business, self-entrepreneurship, and the utilization of agricultural resources to contribute to local economic growth.

Table 4: Articles by Themes

Themes	Frequency	Percentage
Economy	13	18.05
Social	35	48.61
Politics	24	33.33

The findings reveal that the Social theme is notably emphasized in both BH and NST newspapers, in contrast to the Economy and Politics themes. Media coverage tends to highlight the involvement of rural women in community activities and their contributions to various fields within society. Additionally, articles related to rural women's empowerment often focus on the first paragraph in both online newspapers. According to Lagarde and Ostry (2018), the contribution of women to the industrial labour force in developing nations positively impacts the progress of development. Hence, online newspapers recognized rural women to a greater extent for their role in boosting economic growth through government-supported initiatives and sustaining household income through social activities.

Following the government's shift from Barisan Nasional (BN) to Pakatan Harapan (PH), there has been an increased focus on online news reporting about rural women, particularly during the initial year and a half of PH's governance. This emphasis is attributed to the rise in women's political representation under the PH administration, with the proportion of nominated women reaching 14.4 percent in the 2018 general election (Sukhani, 2020). Consequently, this shift has led to beneficial incentives for rural women as well. The findings highlight that news portrayals of rural women during BN's reign were relatively limited in both online newspapers. This suggests that the transition of government had an influence on how rural women were portrayed in the news.

Conclusion

The fundamental framework of this study lies on the Media Framing Theory and the Women and Development (WAD) Approach in which improved the comprehension on how news portrays rural women's empowerment. This study presents a new perspective by providing valuable insights into the roles of media, issues concerning rural women, and theme of the news is presented. Rural women are often marginalized in news portrayals. Therefore, this study underscores the necessity for media to create opportunities that help rural women tap into their potential through online news reporting. To achieve this objective, there should be a stronger emphasis on highlighting the concerns and experiences of rural women. This would enable relevant authorities and responsible agencies to take effective measures in addressing their issues, ultimately leading to the empowerment of rural women. To ensure the continuity of this study, future studies could delve into the role of editorial decisions and their impact on the empowerment of rural women. Additionally, such studies may uncover issues that are prevalent in other mediums, further contributing to our understanding of the topic.

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