Spotlight on Athletes With a Disability: Malaysian Newspaper Coverage of the 2012 London Paralympic Games

Jadeera Phaik Geok Cheong, Selina Khoo, and Rizal Razman
University of Malaya

This study analyzed newspaper coverage of the 2012 London Paralympic Games by 8 Malaysian newspapers. Articles and photographs from 4 English-language and 4 Malay-language newspapers were examined from August 28 (1 day before the Games) to September 10, 2012 (1 day after the Games closing). Tables, graphs, letters, fact boxes, and lists of events were excluded from analysis. A total of 132 articles and 131 photographs were analyzed. Content analysis of the newspaper articles revealed that most (62.8%) of the articles contained positive reference to the athletes with a disability. There were equal numbers (39.1%) of action and static shots of athletes. More articles and photographs of Malaysian (58%) than non-Malaysian (42%) athletes with a disability were identified. Only 14.9% of the articles and photographs were related to female athletes with a disability.

Keywords: sports, media, Asia

It has been said that media form a window to the world. In addition to providing opportunities to communicate, inform, and teach (Fortunati, 2014), the media can also influence the perceptions of social value and affect our attitudes about various issues (Ciot & Van Hove, 2010). Therefore, the media play an important role as they can be used to empower (Fortunati, 2014).

One area that the media can play this role is in educating and informing the public about disability. This is because, as previous studies have suggested, there is little coverage of persons with disabilities in the media (Green & Tanner, 2009), and, to compound matters, where coverage is given, it has often been negative (Chen, Hsu, Shu, & Fetzer, 2012; Green & Tanner, 2009). Jones (2014) concluded that on the whole, representations of persons with disabilities in the media have been stereotypical. The way disability is portrayed in the media is frequently “patronizing, trivializing and marginalizing” (Riley, 2005, p. ix), with the words suffers, victims, afflicted, confined, and wheelchair-bound the most common negative words used in American newspapers to describe persons with disabilities (Keller, Hallahan, McShane, Crowley, & Blandford, 1990). Both persons with disabilities

The authors are with the Sports Centre, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Address author correspondence to Selina Khoo at selina@um.edu.my
and journalists have expressed concern over how disability is portrayed. A survey among persons with disabilities found that the media only covered a small number of disability issues, and they were mostly negatively framed (Haller & Zhang, 2010). Journalists interviewed in a similar study conducted by Jones also expressed concern about how disability is covered in the media. Brittain (2004) has suggested that the limited and often negative coverage about disability in the media might be attributed more broadly to a lack of understanding of disability issues in the media. Misener (2013) concurs with this and stated that there is a lack of awareness on how to address disability issues including disability sports.

Representation of Disability Sports in the Media

The media can promote disability sports and the abilities of athletes with a disability (Brittain, 2004). Newspapers are an important medium for this because nearly all newspapers have a sports section (Woods, 2011). In some, the sports section is bigger than other sections such as business or politics. However, newspapers seem to place a low value on disability sports, and the subject is marginalized and trivialized in most newspapers (Schantz & Gilbert, 2001) and framed as “different, secondary and lesser” (Bruce, 2014, p. 1446).

Even the Paralympic Games, one of the biggest sporting events in the world, received limited coverage in the media compared with other sporting events (Buysse & Borcherding, 2010). For instance, several studies comparing media coverage of the Paralympic and Olympic Games found a disparity in the media coverage, with very much less Paralympic news (Chang & Crossman, 2009; Golden, 2003). This disparity was found in both articles and photographs from newspapers around the world. For example, coverage of the 2004 Paralympic Games (16 articles and 17 photographs) was less than 10% of the 2004 Olympics (261 articles and 220 photographs) in the South Korean national newspaper Chosun Ilbo (Chang & Crossman, 2009). Similarly, the coverage of the 2002 Winter Olympics in high-circulation American newspapers showed that only 13 Paralympic articles were published compared with 2,561 articles on the Olympics (Golden, 2003). In addition, The New York Times published 50 times more articles on the Olympic Games than on the Paralympic Games from 1955 to 2012 (Tynedal & Wolbring, 2013). Buysse and Borcherding, in their study of the photographic coverage of the 2008 Paralympic Games in 12 newspapers from China, Italy, New Zealand, South Africa, and the United States, revealed that only 152 photographs were published during the Paralympics.

Buysse and Borcherding (2010) concluded that the media did not perceive the Paralympic Games as a legitimate sport and Paralympians were not represented as elite athletes. This view was shared by Schantz and Gilbert (2001), who found that the Paralympic Games were not taken seriously in newspapers. Reporters who covered the 2002 Olympic Games did not consider the Paralympic Games a real competition and felt that there was lack of audience appeal and interest in the Paralympics (Golden, 2003). Media coverage surrounding the Paralympic Games is often charitable and patronizing in its discourse, helping to perpetuate the mythology that Paralympic sport is somehow of greater purity than that practiced in the mainstream (Howe, 2008).

There are common presentations of the Paralympic Games in newspapers. One is the stereotypical way in which athletes are portrayed, with the “supercrip” model...
most often used (Hardin & Hardin, 2003). Supercrips are defined as “individuals whose inspirational stories of courage, dedication, and hard work prove that it can be done, that one can defy the odds and accomplish the impossible” (Berger, 2008, p. 648). The supercrip frame have been used in newspaper reports around the world including Canada, France, Germany, and the United States (Misener, 2013; Schantz & Gilbert, 2001; Tynedal & Wolbring, 2013). Athletes with a disability are also commonly described in medicalized terms. For example, Thomas and Smith (2003) reported that the British newspapers used medical terms such as spina bifida, cerebral palsy, and autism. Brittain (2010) noted that athletes with a disability are portrayed in the media with “great emphasis on the disability, usually with the intention of evoking the pervasive medicalized perception of disability as personal tragedy” (p. 79). Other portrayals are “as ‘victims’ or ‘courageous’ people who ‘overcome’ the ‘painful’ experience of disability in order to participate in sport” (Smith & Thomas, 2005, p. 52). Athletes with a disability were highlighted in media coverage as heroes for overcoming life difficulties, as well as viewed as national sporting heroes (Thomas & Smith, 2003).

There are also common ways in which athletes with a disability are depicted in newspaper photographs. Most of the photographs tended to hide the disability of the athletes. Thomas and Smith (2003) found that nearly 60% of photographs hid the athlete’s impairment. Schantz and Gilbert (2001) reported that nearly half of the photographs in the newspapers they studied showed the face or upper body of Paralympians in a static position. There was an increase in photographs that hid the disability of Paralympians, from 18% in 2000 to 58% in 2008 (Pappous, Marcellini, & de Léséleuc, 2011). That study also found an increase in passive shots from 40% in 2000 to 62% in 2008.

Research on the newspaper coverage of the Paralympic Games has also focused on nationalism and gender. Nationalism was widely used in press coverage of international sporting events (Bishop & Jaworski, 2003). An analysis of 104 articles on the 1996 Paralympic Games from eight French and German national newspapers revealed a focus on national success, where 93% of articles on competitions were ethnocentric and nationalistic in nature (Schantz & Gilbert, 2001). Another study on the coverage of the 2000 Paralympics by four British newspapers also found that British athletes were described in highly nationalistic ways (Thomas & Smith, 2003). The South Korean national newspaper Chosun Ilbo also had more coverage of Korean athletes than international athletes who took part in the 2004 Paralympic Games (Chang & Crossman, 2009).

There have been mixed findings in terms of gender differences in Paralympic newspaper coverage. Chang and Crossman (2009), Schantz and Gilbert (2001), and Thomas and Smith (2003) found more coverage of male Paralympians. However, Pappous et al. (2011) did not find significant differences in the coverage of male and female Paralympians. de Léséleuc, Pappous, and Marcellini (2010) also found that female Paralympians were not underrepresented in articles and photographs related to the 2000 Sydney Paralympic Games from eight national newspapers from England, France, Germany, and Spain. However, even though the coverage was similar, there was a gender difference in the way Paralympians are portrayed. de Léséleuc et al. did find that female Paralympians were not represented in the same way as female athletes without disability, and male Paralympians were “trivialized” and “infantilized” in many newspapers.
On a more positive note, there was a positive trend in the amount and type of newspaper coverage of the Paralympic Games (Chang, Crossman, Taylor, & Walker, 2011). There has been an increase in the media coverage of the Paralympic Games through the years. A content analysis of 10 national newspapers from France, Germany, Greece, Spain, and the United Kingdom found an increase from 56 photographs during the 2000 Paralympic Games to 95 in the 2008 Games (Pappous et al., 2011). More recent research has found that Paralympians were portrayed as athletes and reported in ways similar to that of Olympians (Chang et al., 2011). Stories on the Paralympic Games are now found in the sports section of the newspapers, and not in the lifestyle section as in the past (Misener, 2013).

In general, there is limited coverage of disability sport by the Malaysian media, and media attention to Malaysian athletes with a disability remains low compared with athletes without disabilities (Khoo, 2011). Concerning the Paralympic Games in particular, there is limited research within Asia and none from Malaysia. Most previous studies on media coverage of the Paralympic Games were carried out in Western countries with a relatively long history of Paralympic participation. As such, research about Malaysian media coverage on the Paralympic Games is timely, as Malaysian athletes with a disability have only been taking part in international competitions since the 1970s and the Paralympic Games since 1988 (Khoo, 2008). In addition, given, as Schantz & Gilbert (2001) suggest, that culture influences attitudes toward persons with disabilities, it is imperative that the research literature critiquing media coverage of athletes with disability be as culturally diverse as possible.

In one of the few articles published on disability in Malaysia, Jayasooria (1999) highlighted the negative attitudes of society toward persons with disabilities and their treatment as “second-class citizens” and “lesser people” (p. 345). Malaysia has attempted to address the discrimination through the Persons with Disabilities Act of 2008. With this as a backdrop, this study analyzed newspaper coverage of the 2012 Paralympic Games in Malaysian newspapers with the aim of highlighting the volume of media coverage and the way the athletes were portrayed in Malaysia.

Method

This study used content analysis, which is a common technique in the social sciences to examine text of print or broadcast media, other writing or recording, and live scripts and observations, among others. More specifically, the study used summative content analysis to count and compare the frequency and size of newspaper coverage, as well as the content of the newspaper text according to predetermined categories of themes for headlines, articles, and photographs. Subsequently, the content of these headlines, articles, and photographs was interpreted and discussed.

Sample

All newspapers published in English and Malay (the national language) in Malaysia were examined, with a total of four newspapers from each language. The English-language newspapers were Malay Mail, New Straits Times, The Star, and The Sun; the Malay newspapers were Berita Harian, Harian Metro, Kosmo, and Utusan Malaysia. All were daily and paid newspapers except for Malay Mail and The Sun, which were both free newspapers and not published on weekends.
The Malay-language newspapers have a higher circulation (Audit Bureau of Circulations Malaysia, 2013) and readership (AdQrate, n.d.) than the English-language newspapers. The newspaper with the highest circulation (342,689) and readership (3.35 million) from July to December 2013 was the first Malay-language daily afternoon tabloid, Harian Metro. The tabloid focuses on entertainment, shopping news, lifestyle features, and current news. This is followed by Kosmo, with an average circulation of 204,422 and readership of 1.17 million. Utusan Malaysia, which was first published in Arabic in 1939, had a circulation of 179,098, the lowest readership (699,000), and Berita Harian, which was first published in 1957, had the lowest average circulation (119,163). The English-language newspaper with the highest circulation for the same period was The Star (305,000). The Star had the highest national readership (1.87 million) but had a slightly lower national circulation (298,611) than The Sun. The oldest newspaper in Malaysia, New Straits Times, which published its first edition in 1845, had a circulation of 77,685 and readership of 236,000, whereas Malay Mail had the lowest circulation (35,000) compared with all other newspapers.

Procedure

The selected newspapers were analyzed for 14 days starting from August 28 (1 day before the London Paralympic Games) to September 10, 2012 (1 day after the London Paralympic Games). These start and end dates were selected to ensure that the data collected were as current as possible in relation to the official dates of the Paralympic Games. Other studies on the Paralympic Games have analyzed coverage a day before to a day after the Games (Pappous et al., 2011; Thomas & Smith, 2003).

Two individuals examined the newspapers for news items on the Paralympic Games. Identified headlines, articles, and photographs were tabulated and measured. For headlines and photographs, the total area size was calculated by multiplying the length of the coverage from top to bottom with the width of the coverage from end to end. For articles, the number of columns of each article was first identified. Next, the area of each column of text was calculated by multiplying the length, starting at the top of the first word to the bottom of the last word, with the width for each column. Finally, the total area size for each article was calculated by adding the area size for each column of text.

Headlines and articles were also coded according to the following six themes: contains reference to sport, contains reference to the individual/team in a positive manner, contains reference to the individual/team in a negative manner, contains no reference to sport/individual/team, contains no reference to sport/individual/team but described in a positive manner, and contains no reference to sport/individual/team but described in a negative manner. These themes were predetermined based on review of previous research papers, and the purposes were twofold: first, to identify the main subject/object of the headlines/articles (i.e., whether about sport, individuals/teams or about neither sport nor individuals/teams), and second, to determine the language used on the subject/object (i.e., whether positive or negative). The interpretation of positive and negative references for this study was purely focused on the language used for reporting. Positive and negative references were not decided based on the end result of an
event (i.e., whether an individual/team won or lost an event). A winning team could have been reported negatively, whereas a losing team could have been reported positively.

Articles were categorized as positive if they were predominantly (more than 50%) positive and contained sentences or phrases that had a positive meaning (e.g., take center stage, made a comeback, “It was very, very special to me”), positive nouns (e.g., glitter, shine, star, fantastic), adjectives that amplified a quality or quantity in a positive way (e.g., massive, incredible, good, better, best), and were written in a way that highlighted notable achievements, lifted spirits, showed support, emphasized superiority, and reported virtues. Articles were categorized as negative if they were predominantly negative and included sentences or phrases that had a negative meaning (e.g., passing the blame, allegations of some sort, patronizing/condescending, humiliating), negative nouns (e.g., misfortune, disappointment), repetitions on negative qualities (e.g., unfair), and negative verbs (e.g., disrupted, missed out) or were written with too much emphasis on poor performances or behaviors. In instances where the predominant theme was ambiguous or unclear to the coder, the authors deliberated and decided by consensus.

Photographs were coded according to the following categories: action shot (e.g., swimming, throwing, running), static shot of athlete/team (e.g., posing for medal ceremonies, posing on the track/field), or not related to sport (eating, doing leisure activities, scenes of the opening and closing ceremonies). The nationality (Malaysian or non-Malaysian) and gender (male, female, or mixed) of the athlete or team in the headlines, articles, and photographs were also noted. In addition, emphasis (ability or disability and comparisons with athletes without disabilities) of the headlines and articles was also recorded.

A worksheet was developed to systematically record details of headlines, articles, and photographs, including the newspaper language, date, size, theme, gender, and nationality.

Reliability Measures

To establish intracoder reliability, the data were recoded by the two individuals who had previously coded the size of coverage and headlines, articles, and photographs according to the predetermined categories. A newspaper was randomly selected from each day, 6 months after the first coding exercise was conducted. For size of coverage, the intraclass correlation was .98 for articles, .89 for headlines, and .99 for photographs. For agreement of categories, kappa was .91 for articles, .80 for headlines, and .80 for photographs. By convention, values between .60 and .79 are considered substantial, and values above .80 are outstanding (Landis & Koch, 1977).

Analyses

To determine the frequency, mean, and percentage counts of the newspaper coverage, descriptive statistical analysis was carried out (SPSS version 18). Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to compare differences between gender and nationality groups, with the alpha level set at .05. Where group differences were detected, the post hoc Bonferroni test was used.
Results

Frequency and Size of Articles and Photographs

There were 132 articles and 131 photographs related to the 2012 Paralympic Games in the newspapers. The frequency and size of the articles and photographs are shown in Tables 1 and 2, respectively.

Only the New Straits Times had published at least one article and one photograph on all days that were analyzed. Harian Metro published the most articles (22.0% of the total articles) and the most photographs (30.5% of the total photographs). However, the average size of the articles was smaller than all but one newspaper (Malay Mail), and the average size of the photographs was the smallest among all the newspapers. Malay Mail and The Sun, which are free newspapers, had the least number of articles.

Table 1 Frequency and Size of Articles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Articles (%)</th>
<th>Average articles per day</th>
<th>Total size (cm²/in.²)</th>
<th>Average size (cm²/in.²)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malay Mail</td>
<td>5 (3.8)</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>392/60.73</td>
<td>78/12.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Straits Times</td>
<td>24 (18.2)</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>3,745/580.49</td>
<td>156/24.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Star</td>
<td>24 (18.2)</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>3,241/502.91</td>
<td>135/20.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sun</td>
<td>1 (0.8)</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>184/28.57</td>
<td>184/28.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berita Harian</td>
<td>13 (9.8)</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>1,210/187.51</td>
<td>93/14.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harian Metro</td>
<td>29 (22)</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>2,650/410.78</td>
<td>91/14.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kosmo</td>
<td>24 (18.2)</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>2,881/446.59</td>
<td>120/18.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utusan Malaysia</td>
<td>12 (9)</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>1,212/187.90</td>
<td>101/15.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>132 (100)</td>
<td>9.43</td>
<td>15,519/2,405.47</td>
<td>118/18.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 Frequency and Size of Photographs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Photographs (%)</th>
<th>Average photographs per day</th>
<th>Total size (cm²/in.²)</th>
<th>Average size (cm²/in.²)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malay Mail</td>
<td>3 (2.3)</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>440/68.14</td>
<td>147/22.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Straits Times</td>
<td>18 (13.8)</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>2,139/331.58</td>
<td>119/18.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Star</td>
<td>16 (12.2)</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>1,668/258.58</td>
<td>104/16.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sun</td>
<td>2 (1.5)</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>344/53.31</td>
<td>170/26.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berita Harian</td>
<td>10 (7.6)</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>1,768/274.04</td>
<td>177/27.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harian Metro</td>
<td>40 (30.5)</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>3,079/477.31</td>
<td>77/11.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kosmo</td>
<td>34 (26)</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>2,887/447.44</td>
<td>85/13.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utusan Malaysia</td>
<td>8 (6.1)</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>1,116/173.04</td>
<td>140/21.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>131 (100)</td>
<td>9.35</td>
<td>13,440/2,083.44</td>
<td>103/15.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
New Straits Times had the highest total size coverage for articles among all the newspapers, whereas Kosmo had the highest total size coverage among the Malay-language newspapers. Harian Metro and Kosmo had the two highest total size coverages for photographs, having nearly double the number of photographs than the other newspapers. In terms of average size of article, three out of the four English-language newspapers (New Straits Times, The Star, and The Sun) had a larger average size per article than the Malay-language newspapers. As for average size of photographs, Berita Harian had the biggest average size per photograph and Harian Metro had the smallest.

Content Analysis of the Headlines, Articles, and Photographs

Headlines. The categories that best described the theme used in the headlines were matched with each individual headline. There were six possible categories of themes (see Table 3).

The most frequent theme used in the headlines was related to the individual/team (78.6% out of total headlines), with 78.9% of these individuals/teams portrayed in a positive manner. The rest of the headlines were related to sport (2.8%), in reference to either sport (11.7%) or an individual or team (6.9%).

A secondary content analysis was conducted on all headlines to determine if the content emphasized sport or athletic ability as opposed to disability or disability sport. The analysis revealed that 74.5% of the headlines referred to Paralympic athletes/sports as athletes/sports in general, and 25.5% emphasized athletes’ disability/disability sports.

Articles. The articles were categorized according to the same themes as the headlines. Similar to the findings of the headlines, most of the articles contained positive references to the individual/team (62.8%). There were few articles (10.6%) that were negative in nature.

Articles that were related to individuals/teams were subjected to a secondary content analysis to determine if emphasis was on the ability or disability of the athletes and if comparisons were made with athletes without disabilities. We found that 75.5% of articles emphasized the ability of athletes, compared with 18.1% that focused on the disability. Only 6.4% of the articles made comparisons between the Paralympic athletes and athletes without disabilities, with equal numbers of articles highlighting ability and disability in the comparisons.

Table 3 Frequency of the Themes Used

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories of themes</th>
<th>Headlines</th>
<th>Articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reference to sport</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference to individual/team in a positive manner</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference to individual/team in a negative manner</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No reference to sport</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No reference to individual/team but in a positive manner</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No reference to individual/team but in a negative manner</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Photographs. There were equal numbers of photographs featuring individuals or teams in action (39.1%) and static shots of individuals or teams in a sport-related context (39.1%). The rest of the images were not related to sport (21.8%) and included photographs of the Opening and Closing Ceremonies, athletes at functions or in their younger days, and head shots.

Athlete/Team Nationality

All articles and photographs were examined to determine the nationality of the featured athletes/teams (see Table 4). There were more articles and photographs of Malaysians (58%) than non-Malaysians (42%). However, the difference was not significant, \( t(14) = 0.70, p = .50 \).

Athlete/Team Gender

Articles and photographs were also examined to determine the gender of the featured athletes/teams (see Table 4). Only 14.9% of the articles and photographs featured female athletes/teams. Collectively, there was a significant difference between the number of articles and photographs related to each gender for all newspapers, \( F(2, 230) = 6.70, p = .006 \). The post hoc analysis revealed that there were significantly more males than females \( (p = .008) \) and more males than mixed gender \( (p = .028) \) depicted in the articles and photographs.

Discussion

The purpose of the study was to analyze the newspaper coverage of the 2012 Paralympic Games in Malaysian newspapers. A total of 4,237 athletes \( (M = 2,736, F = 1,501) \) from 164 countries participated in 20 sports during the Games (International Paralympic Committee, 2012). The Malaysian contingent comprised 23 athletes (17 male, 6 female) who competed in eight sports (archery, athletics, cycling, powerlifting, sailing, swimming, table tennis, and wheelchair fencing).

Table 4 Nationality and Gender of Athletes and Teams Across Newspapers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th></th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Malaysian</td>
<td>Non-Malaysian</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malay Mail</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Straits Times</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Star</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sun</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berita Harian</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harian Metro</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kosmo</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utusan Malaysia</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>56</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Newspaper Coverage

There were findings that indicated that there is little coverage of persons with disabilities in the media (e.g., Green & Tanner, 2009). Furthermore, from a sporting perspective, newspapers seemed to place a low value on disability sports (Schantz & Gilbert, 2001), whereas from the Paralympic Games point of view, reporters have not considered the Paralympic Games to resemble a real competition (Golden, 2003). It appeared that all these suggestions regarding news coverage were also reflected in the coverage of the Paralympic Games by the Malaysian media.

Specifically, the Paralympic Games in London received limited attention in the Malaysian newspapers, with only one newspaper (New Straits Times) having coverage on all the 14 days that we analyzed. The least coverage was by The Sun, with only 2 days of Paralympic news, and Malay Mail with 3 days. Both these newspapers had the least number of articles and photographs. Being free newspapers, the limited coverage was understandable, as fewer pages were dedicated to sports than in the paid newspapers, perhaps due to the cost of paper, printing, and delivery. The Sun and Malay Mail had dedicated only 2.3% and 4.4% of their total pages to sports, respectively, whereas paid newspapers provided much higher coverage. For example, New Straits Times provided an average of 24% to sports, and The Star and Harian Metro each provided approximately 15%. Even when taking into account the percentage of pages for sports, the Paralympic Games did not feature much in the The Sun and Malay Mail, with 0.2% and 0.6% of total sports news dedicated to the Games, respectively. Comparatively, the Malay-language newspapers reported about the Paralympic Games in more than 5% of the total sports news, and the other two English-language papers (New Straits Times and The Star) reported more than 3.5%. This difference between the paid Malay- and English-language papers in terms of percentage of Paralympic coverage was not expected, and further investigation revealed that the discrepancy was explained by larger number of pages dedicated to photographic images.

In terms of the average number of articles and photographs per day, the two paid English-language newspapers (New Straits Times and The Star) featured nearly equal numbers of articles and photographs of the Paralympic Games, and both Harian Metro and Kosmo had double the average number of articles and more than triple the average number of photographs compared with the other two Malay-language newspapers (Berita Harian and Utusan Malaysia). Kosmo and Harian Metro are the two newest paid newspapers, established only in 1991 and 2004, respectively, and published in tabloid size from the beginning. In addition, both these newspapers cater to the younger age groups, as it has been reported that approximately 50% of readers were under 29 years old (AdQrate, n.d). These younger readers, coupled with the young newspaper team, are the newer generation of Malaysians who were exposed to disability sports since Malaysia first participated in Paralympics in 1988 and had grown up since the introduction of the Persons with Disability Act 2008. In addition, the ability to view nonconventional sports only emerged with the availability of alternative media—the Internet—which only started in Malaysia in 1988 (Mahmud, 2008), and satellite television in 1996 (Abdul Latif, Wan Mahmud, & Salman, 2013). Therefore, they viewed athletes with a disability as on par with athletes without disabilities compared with the older generation.
The paid Malaysian newspapers had an average of 0.86–2.07 Paralympic Games articles per day. This is comparable to Paralympic Games articles in other newspapers. For instance, Thomas and Smith (2003) found an average of 0.93–1.36 articles per day in four British newspapers they analyzed for the 2000 Sydney Paralympic Games. Chang and Crossman (2009) reported that there were 1.23 articles published each day on the 2004 Athens Paralympic Games in Chosun Ilbo, the South Korean newspaper with the largest readership and circulation.

Although Harian Metro published the most articles and photographs, the average size of the articles (91 cm²/14.16 in²) was the second-smallest and the average size of the photographs (77 cm²/11.93 in²) was the smallest among all the other newspapers. Although the newspaper highlighted more stories, each story was very brief and featured only one athlete or team. For example, just before the opening day of the Paralympic Games, Harian Metro had only reported about the prospects of the Malaysian contingent in one article, and New Straits Times had highlighted the prospects of South Africans Natalie Du Toit and Oscar Pistorius, Briton Jonnie Peacock, American Jerome Singleton, and the Chinese contingent in a single article. It appeared that newspapers with the highest average size of articles, such as The Star (135 cm²/20.95 in²) and New Straits Times (156 cm²/24.19 in²), tended to include a group of athletes/teams within one article. Although the calculated average size of Malaysian articles was larger than in the Korean paper Chosun Ilbo (100 cm²/15.6 in²; Chang & Crossman, 2009) and quite similar to French newspapers Le Monde (161 cm²/24.96 in²) and L’Equipe (151 cm²/23.41 in²; Schantz & Gilbert, 2001), they were much smaller than the British newspapers The Times (473 cm²/73.35 in²) and The Daily Mail (339 cm²/52.51 in²; Thomas & Smith, 2003) and the German newspapers Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (335 cm²/51.93 in²) and Frankfurter Rundschau (255 cm²/39.53 in²; Schantz & Gilbert, 2001). The results indicated that most foreign newspapers had more comprehensive and extensive coverage of the Paralympic Games than Malaysian newspapers. A large number of the Malaysian articles were sourced from news agencies, so the editors could delete certain sections as they were not obliged to use the whole story.

In terms of coverage of photographs, Pappous et al. (2011) found an increase in numbers whereby 10 newspapers from five European countries published 56 photographs during the 2000 Paralympic Games and 95 in the 2008 Paralympic Games. In addition, Buysse and Borcherding (2010) found that 152 photographs were printed by 12 newspapers from five countries (one from each continent) during the 2008 Paralympic Games. The Malaysian newspapers appeared to continue this upward trend for the 2012 Paralympic Games, with an increase in average numbers of photographs per newspaper.

In detail, Harian Metro and Kosmo had more than twice the number of photographs as the other Malaysian newspapers. A closer examination of the photographs indicated that these newspapers frequently featured a full page containing a montage of photographs that were not accompanied by related articles. These pages of montages were equally distributed across all coverage days and not related to whether there were fewer stories to write on days when there was no local representation. The other Malaysian newspapers had also favored providing a visual aspect to the reader, as 57 photographs were published within a 2-week period, compared with four French newspapers that published just two photographs and four German newspapers that published 23 photographs in a period of one and a
half months (Schantz & Gilbert, 2001). The Korean paper *Chosun Ilbo* published 17 photographs in a 2-week period, but the average size of the photographs (75 cm²/11.6 in²) (Chang & Crossman, 2009) was smaller than in Malaysian newspapers (from 77 cm²/11.93 in² to 177 cm²/27.4 in²).

The purpose of the content analysis of the newspaper coverage was primarily to identify the contextual coverage in each newspaper article. For example, Thomas and Smith (2003) examined descriptions of disability by way of medical terminology and studied comparisons of athletes with and without disabilities. Another article explored details of the text and found that articles were centered about four themes, namely, reporting game results, athleticism, ethical issues, and equality (Chang et al., 2011). This study was concerned with identifying the subject/object of the coverage and the language used to describe the subject/object. As such, the headlines and articles were coded according to the following six themes: contains reference to sport, contains reference to the individual/team in a positive manner, contains reference to the individual/team in a negative manner, contains no reference to sport/individual/team, contains no reference to sport/individual/team but described in a positive manner, and contains no reference to sport/individual/team but described in a negative manner.

From these themes, there were very few headlines and articles that did not contain any reference to sport or individual/teams. Most of the headlines and articles that did not contain any reference to sport or individual/teams were centered on pension schemes (monetary reward on retirement from sport) for medal winners, the Opening and Closing Ceremonies, or general issues surrounding the Games, such as ticket sales and doping control. Examples of some headlines in this category include “Organizers Increase Sale of Paralympic Games Tickets ("Penganjur Tambah," 2012), “No Recommendations Yet on Paralympic Pension Issue: Zolkples” (“Isu Pencen,” 2012), “The City of London Resounds Again” (“Kota London,” 2012), and “Looking to the Skies” (2012). These headlines and accompanying articles were mostly either neutral or positive.

We note that there were also very few headlines and articles that contained reference to sport. Only three sports were highlighted throughout the Paralympic Games—track and field, swimming, and blind sports. The articles on athletics focused predominantly on the equipment used by athletes, which may, in part, be attributable to interest stimulated by the complaints of Oscar Pistorius concerning differential advantage associated with varying prosthetic lengths. In one article in *The Star*, U.S. sprinter Jerome Singleton supported Pistorius’s call for blade review and said, “Right now it is like comparing apples to oranges and not apples to apples” (“US Sprinter Backs Pistorius Blade Rule Review,” 2012). The article about sports for persons who were visually impaired highlighted that goalball, five-a-side football, and blind jumping required complete silence by spectators (“Shhhh! Blind Sports Silence Crowd at London Paralympics,” 2012). It was perceived that there would have been more articles related to sports considering that many events in the Paralympic Games were either modified/adapted and/or had completely different rules and regulations from nondisability sports or were exclusive to athletes with disability. From the limited coverage, it appeared that the media expected that readers were familiar with Paralympic sports. However, if the expectations were wrong and readers were unfamiliar with Paralympic sports, it would be interesting to see if there is a possibility that the media could be forced...
into increasing coverage in newspapers in the attempt to educate readers about the nature of Paralympic sport.

The majority of headlines and articles contained references to an individual or team. From these, it was heartening to note that the content of most of the headlines and articles was positive. The individuals who were featured the most were Malaysian medal winners—archer Hasihin Sanawi, who won the silver medal in the individual recurve W1/W2, and shot putter Muhammad Ziyad Zolkefli, who won the bronze in the cognitive-disability category. Sanawi was reported to have “produced an excellent performance to advance to the quarterfinals” (“Hasihin Cereikan,” 2012), “facing a tough route, but displayed a performance full of confidence” (“Hasihin Sumbang,” 2012), and “creating history when winning the Malaysian contingent’s first medal in the 2012 Paralympic Games” (“Hasihin Raih,” 2012). Meanwhile, Muhammad Ziyad described himself as “very happy to have won a medal at this Paralympics” (“Ziyad Wins Bronze for Malaysia,” 2012) and “that he gave it all he had” (“Ziyad Lands Bronze,” 2012), while a Malaysian national sports council officer characterized Ziyad as “extraordinary in his determination to win a medal. I take my hat off to his unwavering focus in winning the bronze” (Paul, 2012).

Other articles had focused on an individual’s wonderful performance, including that of swimmer Natalie Du Toit, track athletes Jonnie Peacock and Oscar Pistorius, and hand cyclist Alessandro Zanardi. There were several instances where a group of athletes was commended on their sporting performance within a single article. For example, in the article headlined “Champions Dominate as Games Reach Climax” (2012), the successful feats of Dutch wheelchair tennis ace Esther Vergeer, Irish sprinter Jason Smyth, South African sprinter Oscar Pistorius, Italian hand cyclist Alessandro Zanardi, and Australian, South African, and American swimmers Jacqueline Freney, Natalie Du Toit, and Brad Snyder, respectively, were all described in that one article. These positively themed articles focused on the athletes’ performances and did not make any reference to their disabilities. Reporting in this way suggested that the Paralympic athletes were seen as athletes first.

Positive comparisons were made between disability sports and nondisability sports, with emphasis on the achievements of athletes with a disability matching their able-bodied counterparts. For example, an article in New Straits Times reported on the similar medal tally of the Malaysian contingent at both the Paralympic and Olympics Games, wherein the reporter reminded readers that badminton player Lee Chong Wei and diver Pandelela Rinong had contributed a silver and a bronze medal at the 2012 Olympic Games (Paul, 2012).

From a cultural point of view, these findings are contrary to the often negative coverage of persons with disabilities in the media in Taiwan (Chen et al., 2012) and the United States (Haller & Zhang, 2010). It appeared that the Malaysian coverage was similar to that of the British media in terms of positive reporting. In an article on factors that influence how an article was written, Howe (2008) concluded that unlike reporting in able-bodied sports, reports on Paralympics were usually positive and that “Paralympic sports are not yet ready to embrace the old adage that any publicity is good publicity.” In general, the practice among the Malaysian multicultural population is not to offend and to maintain a diplomatic and tactful stance. This, coupled with the Malaysian National Sports Policy that stated that sports can be a galvanizing tool to unite a multicultural society (Ministry of Youth and
Sports, 1988), has led to the media trend of lauding heroic feats at major sporting events. Hence, a possible reason for the lack of negative references in a majority of headlines and articles.

**Content of Photographs**

In terms of photographs, there were equal numbers of action (39.1%) and static shots (39.1%). Further analysis of the images in Malaysian newspapers revealed that the static shots were focused on winners, and there were many shots of Malaysian athletes posing for a winner’s photograph, either at the end of competition or on the winners’ podium. It was anticipated that active shots would be given priority in the news, since sport is all about action and movement, but the Malaysian newspapers had featured similar numbers of static shots, as well. It appeared that it was equally important to highlight photographs portraying Malaysian athletes as winners, as well as action shots.

It appeared that Malaysian newspapers were comparable with their foreign counterparts in terms of photographic coverage in recent times. Buysse and Borcherding (2010) reported that active poses accounted for 46% of photographs when newspapers from China, South Africa, Italy, New Zealand, and the United States were investigated. In another study, Pappous et al. (2011) examined photographic content of newspapers from five European countries (Spain, United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Greece) and discovered that although action shots outnumbered passive poses at the 2000 Sydney Paralympic Games, the percentages had dropped from 60% to 38% by the 2008 Beijing Games. From a cultural perspective, media representation from a number of different countries seemed to view Paralympic sports as less competitive. Action shots had made up less than half of the total amount of photographs featured. Images of physical strength, skills and technique, athletes’ competitiveness, and facial expressions (e.g., effort, determination) were harder to find.

Having said this, it should be noted that in both studies featuring foreign newspapers, the invisibility of athletes’ disability in the printed photographs were found to be a main concern. It is possible that in the attempt to show progress by focusing on Paralympic athletes as athletes first and disability second, action shots were removed as it would be difficult to hide the disability in them. Thomas and Smith (2003) had evidenced that more than half of the 47 photographs analyzed for content appeared to hide the impairment of the athletes. It would be interesting to see how the Malaysian and foreign media strive to keep disabilities invisible but at the same time show competitiveness in the photographic images.

**Nationality**

There were more articles and photographs of Malaysian athletes than other nationalities even though Malaysians \( (n = 23) \) only made up 0.005% of the total number of Paralympic athletes. Many articles and photographs either highlighted the success of the two Malaysian medalists or were related to their achievements (e.g., rewards and pension schemes for Paralympic medalists). This trend of coverage is noted among countries with a low medal tally, where winning medals is a huge achievement and source of national pride. As such, news of the triumphs
of Malaysian athletes received more coverage than the heroic feats of other winners or unexpected losses of favorites. This was especially evident when all four Malay-language newspapers did not report on Oscar Pistorius’s being dethroned by Brazilian Alan Oliveira in the T44 200-m event, but instead focused on the efforts of Malaysian Hasihin Sanawi in archery. Only the English-language newspapers reported on Pistorius’s loss.

Other studies have found a similar trend where coverage was focused exclusively on national athletes and their performances, for example, in French and German newspapers (Schantz & Gilbert, 2001), British newspapers (Thomas & Smith, 2003), and a Korean newspaper (Chang & Crossman, 2009). These countries do well in the Paralympic Games and are usually in the top 20 of the medal tally. It appears the press has a tendency to highlight athletes who represent their country regardless of the country’s Paralympic history and past records.

Gender

When athletes with disabilities appeared in the media, Pappous et al. (2011) did not find significant differences in the coverage of male and female Paralympians after examining 10 national newspapers from France, Germany, Greece, Spain, and the United Kingdom. However, there were significantly more articles and photographs that featured males than females in the media coverage of Malaysian newspapers. Although there were 35.4% female athletes at the 2012 Paralympic Games, the current study found that females accounted for only 14.9% of coverage, whereas 63.9% of coverage was attributed to males; that is, males had approximately 4 times the coverage of females. This finding is consistent, though, with previous literature in a variety of sports and competitions such as Winter Olympics ice hockey (Vincent & Crossman, 2012), Summer Olympics (Chang & Crossman, 2009; Vincent, Imwold, Masemann, & Johnson, 2002), Paralympics (Buysse & Borcherding, 2010), Wimbledon tennis (Vincent, 2004), and U.S. interscholastic athletics (Pedersen, 2002). It may be argued that the differences in coverage were due to higher participation numbers from males than females. Hence, the proportion of athletes was taken into consideration. Some studies found that the coverage of males and females was equitable (Buysse & Borcherding, 2010; Pappous et al., 2011; Vincent, 2004; Vincent et al., 2002), whereas one study found that there were more photographs of females even though there were fewer female participants than males in a Paralympic Games (Chang & Crossman, 2009).

Conclusion

The publishing of 0.86–2.07 articles per day in Malaysian newspapers related to the 2012 Paralympic Games is comparable to that found in other countries. Content analysis revealed that although the coverage was nationalistically inclined, the headlines and reporting were mostly positive in nature. Surprisingly, there was also vast photographic content, with a number of full-page montages appearing throughout the duration. Of concern, however, was the underrepresentation of women in the coverage of the Paralympic Games. Nonetheless, the overall tone of newspaper
coverage during the 2012 Paralympic games was positive, which is encouraging in light of the relatively short history of Paralympic sports in Malaysia.

References


Looking to the skies. (2012, August 31). *New Straits Times*, p. 56.


