

IMAGES OF MUSLIMS IN BROADSHEETS: A CONTENT ANALYSIS

Kristine Grace G. Evaristo¹, Jessa C. Hermosa¹, and
Norberto D. Bana, III²

¹Communication Arts, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

²Institute of Communication, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

ABSTRACT

Despite numerous studies on how Muslims are stereotyped by the media, little is known on how evident and how powerful media could be in influencing and shaping the views of the readers. The overall image of Muslims that remains is that they are highly associated with terrorism and this lingers on, thus creating a notion that this race is a threat to other people, creating further prejudices and misconceptions towards most Muslims. In order to prove whether or not there such stereotyping, this study dealt with the issue through a content analysis of news reports in broadsheets for a period of two months. From three national newspapers all news articles related to Muslims were collected and subjected to categorizations according to their thematic descriptions, news worthiness and positivity or negativity according to the portrayal of Muslims. An analysis of the results showed that the theme of news articles affects the stereotyping of the Muslims and that news worthiness affects stereotyping of the Muslims. Results showed the prevailing topics of the articles, Politics and Terrorism. Broadsheets positioned them in sections according to their value as Banner stories, in Front Pages and in Other Inner News. Negative issues were highlighted more than the positive. Therefore, the researchers concluded that it was palpable even in print media that Muslims were stereotyped. Moreover, the researchers found that this stereotyping would continue as long as the line of thinking of media is mainly to catch the reader's attention.

Keywords: Muslim, Stereotyping, Media, News

INTRODUCTION

The issue of Muslim stereotyping is a global one that occurs not only in the Philippines but in many countries, especially those facing terrorism. The issues confronting religious differences and the media dealing with Filipino – Muslims in the southernmost part of the Philippines are a relevant aspect in the society.

How the prejudices and discrimination are dyed fast in the national fabric is evident in the way the words Muslim and Islam have been used, as there were events and issues that directly bear upon the Muslims, individually or collectively. The caution that was raised in the indiscriminate use of the word Muslim or Islam in media reports and other write-ups is now being abandoned. The stereotype concepts on Muslim and Islam are once again reinforced as the media tell tales of the encounters with the MILF and the Abu Sayyaf. Extremist, fundamentalist, secessionist, rebel, lost command, gangster, terrorist, smuggler, hold-upper, kidnapper, are prefixed with the word Muslim or Islam, projecting the Muslims all the more as unreasonable, barbaric and violent. Whether this is a deliberate and conscious act or not, it was clear to have a presumption that there is a hint at

sloganeering or labeling to rally once again the Christians against the Muslims with regard to the outbreak of hostilities in Muslim Mindanao between the Armed Forces and the Muslim groups.

There are no government policies that clearly discriminate Muslims, but policies are mainly formulated according to popular demands pertaining to the majority. Given that majority of the population of the country are Christians, policies tend to become biased in favor of the preponderance (Lingga, 2004).

Newspapers are apparently among the most influential tools for disseminating news and information to the public. It is undeniable that the print media, especially publications with the most reliable reputations, are powerful to take control in what to publish and for what purpose.

Newspapers have considerable power to influence public opinion (Van Dijk, 1991). The Philippine press is known as the freest and liveliest in Asia. Because of the libertarian and free enterprise principles institutionalized by the American colonizers, it essentially played a "watchdog" function. The freedom enjoyed by Philippine press, however, has become a double-edged sword. The press (media) began to be criticized for being sensational (Tuazon, 2008). Moreover, the press has an alleged tendency to sensationalize and to focus on or foment conflict situations. Sensationalism as defined refers to exaggerating a non-issue/event or a "minor" one so as to create a startling or scandalous effect.

Dealing with news related to or involving Muslim issues has always been considered a challenge in the media, with all those lingering issues about biases and negativities between the media and the offended parties. The shaping of the images of Muslims is usually based on how they were portrayed in the media, in this case, in the newspapers.

Theoretical Framework

This study is best explained through the concept of the Social Construction of Reality theory configured by Schneider and Ingram. The theory focuses on how powerful the role that the media has in creating a lead that would help in shaping the perception of the public, explaining how and why the public view a certain issue in a certain manner and what the media has to do with it.

Social Construction of Reality suggests that whatever information the people get as fact (reality) and how do they know about it has something to do with how the media has shown or told them. The media serve as the socializing agent in forming the kind of reality in their news to be disseminated to the public. In the case of this study, the effectiveness of the theory is based on how the public accept and react towards the facts fed to them by the media. In most instances, this was how stereotyping of Muslims in the news came to be an issue.

Various researches suggested that stereotyping of Muslims is common in news and entertainment media and that political context was not given as much importance over conflict involving Muslims and that Islam was highlighted while other religions were not.

Andersen (2011), said that formation of stereotypes, specifically on Muslims, rooted from the media being considered as the main source of facts and information regarding public affairs. The way that the media presented the reality of a story that it intended to show has something to do with how its audience will view a certain issue. As explained by the Social Construction of Reality theory, the media affect the public's judgment of an issue according to the "pictures in our head" that they create.

In 2012, Baker cited that Muslim portrayal in the British newspaper was a lingering issue of sensationalism. This is especially true in the tabloids wherein Muslims are written about in a highly emotional style in most tabloids Muslims are being subjects of terrorism and religious extremism, emphasizing the minority Muslims as the 'villains'. The broadsheets, according to the study, somehow show a more "restrained reporting stance," with less dramatic effects with the style and a broader range of context in their coverage. But the problem was still there, broadsheet journalists still pick covered issues of Muslims engaged in war and terrorism.

It was already given that there was an existing circular relationship between the newspapers and their readers. Newspapers with all the content they had published could inevitably affect and influence the reader's outlook towards an issue (Baker, 2012).

The role of newspapers is apparently to report news and to keep the public updated on information. Baker (2012) said that news in the papers are usually intended to appeal to its audience which is the public. News more often than not tends to give emphasis to the most dramatic and devastating angle of a story, making it perhaps not surprising that news stories involving Muslims tend to deal mostly with the negative context of terrorism, murder, killing, wars, etc.

These studies served as the foundation of this research, as these captured the ideas that the researchers wanted to dwell on in the course of this study; also these gave additional support to the information thus laid down.

Sensationalism and stereotyping are continuing complaints about the media (Uy, 2009). Both are generally subjective and interpretative, which is quite contrary to how news is supposed to be written. When talking about Muslims, this is ordinarily related to terrorism, conflicts, etc. Therefore, in a news coverage, it is important that journalists should provide a comprehensive background based on a thorough investigation on events, ideas, or opinions.

Thus:

Assumption 1. *The higher the negative thematic description of the Muslim-related news articles, the higher the level of stereotyping of Muslims.*

Since the readers and audience are less inclined to perceive entertainment messages with suspicion, Shaheen (1985) argued it was possible that the entertainment stereotypical images have greater impact on the audience than the other forms of media, such as news.

In entertainment media, the stereotypical images are inserted as background to action, whereas the news prominently display negative minority stereotypes in the foreground or as the main frame of a news story. This may lead audience members to process more carefully news information, and thus be more likely to base subsequent evaluations on these portrayals.

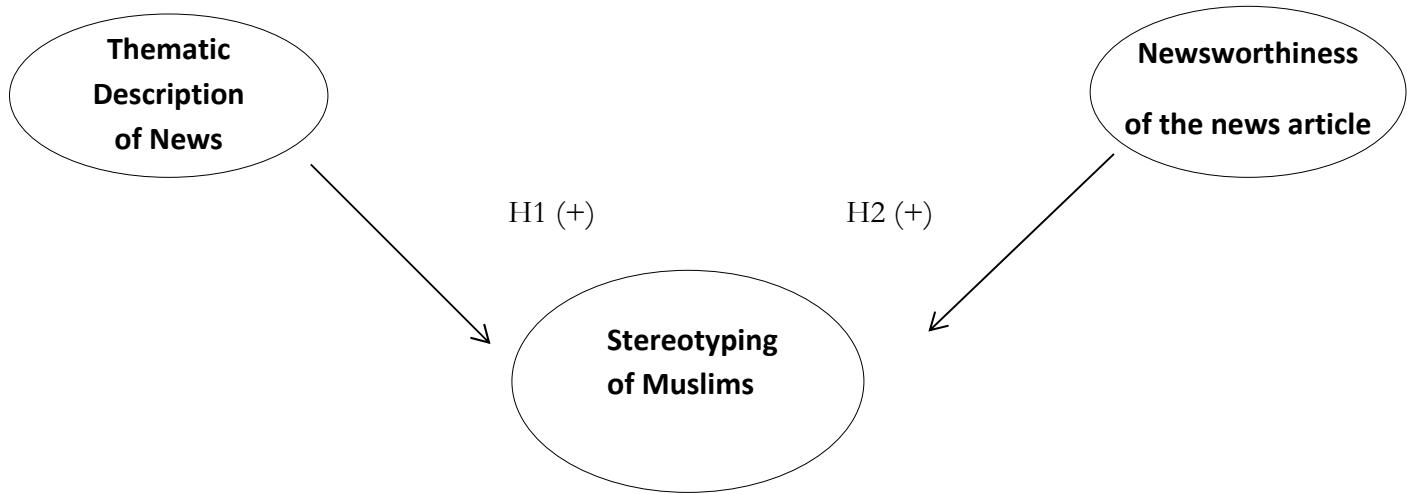
Aside from the basic characteristic that is “newsworthiness,” news must possess prominence, proximity, timelessness, novelty, human interest and oddity; overall, the greater the impact a story has, the more newsworthy it is. Events that have impact on the readers, that have real consequences on their lives, are also bound to be newsworthy. The greater the impact, the bigger the story is.

One of the many factors that could also affect how worthy a news can be was that of conflict because as human beings they are bound to be naturally interested in conflict. If taken into account, most of the stories printed in newspapers or broadcasted in television have an element of conflict; it somehow made the news more interesting to the readers and viewers - may it be from the simplest misunderstanding during a peaceful meeting and exchanging of ideas for the greater good to one of the most well-known conflict around the world, war.

This leads to the second assumption:

Assumption 2. *The higher the level of news worthiness, the higher the level of stereotyping.*

SIMULACRUM:



Objectives:

The purpose of this research is to identify the current image of Muslims through a content analysis of news published in the three newspapers in the country namely, The Philippine Daily Inquirer, The Philippines Star and Manila Bulletin. By identifying what the nature of the article is and how relative is the positioning of the articles in the newspaper to its importance, this study aimed to also show how it would affect the image of the Muslims.

1. To know how the theme of news articles in broadsheets affect the stereotyping of the Muslims.
2. To determine the relation of the newsworthiness in the broadsheet towards stereotyping of the Muslims.

Central Question: What are the images of Muslims as presented in broadsheets?

METHODS

Subjects

This research employed an analysis of Muslim-related news articles published in the Philippines. The article came from the Philippine Daily Inquirer, Manila Bulletin, and The Philippine Star.

The news articles selected were dated from August 1 to September 30, 2011, consisting of 60 publication-dates or a total of 213 articles: 72 from Manila Bulletin, 72 from The Philippine Star, and 69 from Philippine Daily Inquirer.

Instruments

Code sheets and code books.

The 213 news articles from the three broadsheets were analyzed based on the thematic description of the news content as well as their positions in the paper. Thematic description referred to the overall idea of the article as read and interpreted by the researchers as well as the coders while newsworthiness refers to how important the story was.

Topics written about were:

1. Terrorism – systematic use of terror, moved by religious, political or ideologically related goal. Also defined as the intentional use of unlawful force or violence or threat which aims to intimidate not just the government but the society as well. The 1937 Convention for the

Prevention and Punishment of Terrorism defines the term as criminal acts directed against a state intending to create a state of terror in the minds of certain individuals or the general public.

2. Politics –activities of the government and its social relations involving power and authority.
3. Religion – literally deals with the people’s theological beliefs and their acts pertaining to it, in this case Muslim-Christian relationship.
4. Business – concerns the commercial segment of the society which usually involves big enterprises and firms and the state of the market sectors.
5. Health – level of the functional and metabolic efficiency of humans as well as their general condition may it be physical, psychological or body and spirit.
6. Education – general experience of the people in knowledge, skills, customs, and values of generations.

Positioning of news articles hints on the importance or value of the story.

1. Banner Story – considered as the most prominent part of the newspaper, containing the first headline of the paper which serves as the leading story of the day.
2. Front Page – the first page of the newspaper which is typically the space where the most important news stories are being positioned.
3. World Section – news stories about foreign affairs and issues.
4. Local or Provincial Section – news from the different parts of the nation (usually from the provinces) are placed.
5. Other Inner News pages – news section which contains other news continued from the front page and succeeding news throughout the day.

The data collected were analyzed my means of Content Analysis. Content Analysis, according to Dr. Klaus Krippendorff, is a systematic technique for researches and studies representing the text or word count into fewer content categories which is based on the explicit rules of coding. Content analysis is usually done with the use of word counting in order to determine patterns and trends in the data being analyzed. In the case of this study, content analysis was conducted according to the thematic content of the data collected. The nature of content analysis was not restricted with the textual domain. It extended way beyond the simple word count used by most researches, as long as the data at hand are reliant to categorization. Coding and tallying of the news articles were conducted in order to come up with the results.

Data collection procedure

In order to find out if the thematic description of the news article published as well as its newsworthiness based on its position on the broadsheet has something to do with Muslim stereotyping, a content analysis was conducted on news articles published on the three broadsheets in the Philippines (Philippine Daily Inquirer, Manila Bulletin, and Philippine Star).

The first step in coming up with this study was the decision of the researchers in choosing news articles consecutively published in the three broadsheets dated August 1 to September 30, 2012.

The news articles were read and analyzed, having the negative news separated from the positive ones in terms of the portrayal of Muslim images involved. The content analysis was conducted by classifying the news articles according to its type of thematic content, whether political, terrorism, religion, business, education; and the position in the newspaper, whether it was placed as banner story, in the front page, local, world or other inner news pages.

Data Analysis

The Muslim-related news articles collected were analyzed according to the thematic description of its content. Instead of using the usual word counting which has been used by several studies in the past, the researchers used content analysis on the theme used on the contents published.

The content analysis conducted by the researchers on the news articles chosen came up with the following data as basis for the study. The 213 news articles were classified according to their thematic description portraying images of Muslims involved (positive or negative), the type of article based on its content (1-Religion, 2-Business, 3-Health, 4-Education, 5-Politics, 6-Terrorism), while the newsworthiness of the article according to its position in the broadsheets (1-Banner Story, 2-Front Page, 3-Local or Provincial, 4-World, and 5-Other Inner News pages.) and were divided into August and September issues.

Three coders, including the researchers, tallied the articles collected during the Data Gathering stage.

The Formula for the Inter-coder Reliability is:

$$\text{Reliability} = \frac{3M}{N_1 + N_2 + N_3}$$

Where M = the number of coding decisions on which three coders agree

N₁, N₂ and N₃= the total number of coding decisions by the first, second and third coders, respectively

FINDINGS

During the study the researchers conducted the collection of data up to the analysis and interpretation. The subjects were chosen accurately and were analyzed. However, because of time constraints, the researchers were not able to capture a broader range of their subjects. Due to such circumstances, the number of articles and the dates of publication were limitations to only two months. Results may be different if the subjects covered six months because there are possibilities that more positive articles were published in other issues and that greater newsworthiness may have been determined.

RESULTS

Overall Positive articles: 98

Negative Articles: 115

Total of articles in Philippine Daily Inquirer: 69

Philippine Star: 72

Manila Bulletin: 72

Total: 213

(Result of coding and tallying are found in Appendix A)

The result of the Inter-coder Reliability determines if coders were able to view the articles given to them for tallying and coding according to the categories set by the researchers. The higher the percentage of results the higher the reliability.

Out of 213 Muslim-related news articles, only 98 of them had positive portrayal of Muslim images while a majority of 115 portrayed Muslims negatively, all of which (negative articles) involved topics about Religion, Terrorism and Politics such as the MILF vs. Government issues; thus giving a direct answer to the central question of this study. Because of the fact that news articles portraying Muslims negatively are way too high in number as compared to the positive ones, it means that the image of Muslims in the Broadsheets is mostly negative.

According to the results of the study conducted, Philippine Daily Inquirer, Manila Bulletin, and Philippine Star are more focused on covering issues of the two leading type of news content – Politics and Terrorism.

Stereotyping of Muslims in these collected news articles were evident, not just from those issues dealing with terrorism and conflicts but even those related to peace campaigns of the government. For example, most politically-related news were more about the lingering issues of the peace process between the government and the MILF. But despite the fact that the headlines used in these articles involve *Peace Talks and Peace Processes* which undeniably sound positive, the content of the news contradicted how aggressive the MILF was in pursuing its aim for a sub-state, which led to

a rebellious face for them especially when they showed reluctance towards the government by threats for instances.

It is given that the newsworthiness of a story is one of the most important bases of where an article should be positioned in the newspaper. News published on the front page, especially banner stories are usually characterized as “the most relevant” according to its value.

Philippine Daily Inquirer and Philippine Star have more news consisting issues about terrorism and politics published as either banner story or in the front page, while Manila Bulletin has more published on the world and local sections.

Because of the positioning of the articles, it can be inferred that the media want to give more emphasis to the news which presents a negative portrayal of Muslims, leading to stereotyping.

Throughout the course of this study, the researchers found out that Manila Bulletin has greater coverage of issues of news articles related to Muslims as compared to Philippine Daily Inquirer and The Philippine Star.

In terms of the categorization of the thematic descriptions for the August issue which are divided into Religion, Business, Health, Education, Politics and Terrorism, Philippine Daily Inquirer and Manila Bulletin provided more reports of news for Religion while Philippine Star has none. For the Business category, only Manila Bulletin has reports while both Philippine Daily Inquirer and Philippine Star have none. For both Health and Education all three broadsheets have no articles relating to Muslims while for both Politics and Terrorism categories, Philippine Daily Inquirer and Philippine Star provided greater coverage of news over Mania Bulletin.

In the September issue, the determinations of thematic description are as follows: Manila Bulletin has similar results as that of its August issue, solely having greater coverage of articles relating to Religion while Philippine Daily Inquirer and Philippine Star have none. For the Business category, Philippine Daily Inquirer and Manila Bulletin have accounts of news while Philippine Star has none. In the Health category, only Manila Bulletin has news while both other publications have none. All three publications have no accounts of news pertaining to Education; while for both Politics and Terrorism categories Philippine Daily Inquirer has the greatest number of coverage of Muslim related articles followed by Manila Bulletin and Philippine Star respectively.

In relation to the newsworthiness of Muslim related articles for August, all three broadsheets have given equal value to news articles in connection to where these should be placed in the newspaper choosing from the categories such as Banner, Front Page, Local, World and Other Inner News Pages. Philippine Daily Inquirer mostly placed their Muslim related articles in as banner story, in the Front Page, Local Page, World and other Inner News Pages. Philippine Star focused more in

placing news in the Front Page, Local, and Other Inner News pages while Manila Bulletin news articles relating to Muslims are found from time to time more in the World, Banner and Local pages.

After the content analysis that was conducted on the three broadsheets, it was found out that stereotyping of Muslims is already a given, having them portrayed negatively for most of the times. The stereotyped images of Muslims which were highlighted in these broadsheets are that Muslims are (1) Terrorists and (2) Aggressive. They were stereotyped as terrorists as they were highly associated in the acts of terrorism being committed by the Abu Sayaff, MILF, and other Islamist rebel groups around the world. Out of the 213 news articles that were subjected to content analysis, majority of them covers acts of terrorism perpetuated by these rebel groups.

Muslims were also stereotyped as aggressive in the news in the broadsheets. It was highlighted in those politically related news stories, which were among those on the top most themes of the news contents, where issues of the lingering peace process between the MILF groups and the government were talked about. Aggression of Muslims were portrayed in terms of showing how reluctant they could be when it comes to pursuing their aim for a sub-state in Mindanao, which leads them to resort to threats or even violence to get what they want.

More articles regarding the portrayal of the image of Muslims were negative and that the two top thematic descriptions were under Politics and Terrorism and lead in determining the newsworthiness of the story was found more on the Banner, Front Page and Other Inner News pages.

The first challenge of this study was that it was not every day that there was news related to Muslims, making it difficult for the researchers to gather past and present issues of newspapers that would show a day-to-day account of relative articles. Out of 12 months the researchers went for two succeeding months – August when issues about the Peace Process between the government and the MILF group and September, the 9-11 commemoration were relevant in the media coverage. The next was to lay down choices of thematic ideas that would suit the articles in general and limit the ideas to six; same as with the position of articles in the newspaper. Ideas chosen had to be subjected to further clarifications in order not to create confusion for the coders and researchers and in order for them to easily identify the nature of the articles and the position it was from. The researchers then had to read all articles and tally them according to their categorization and have them exchange with their respective coders. The overall tally had to undergo further computations for Inter-coder Reliability.

DISCUSSION

In reporting news, may it be in broadcast or in print, there should be greater caution in choosing the angle and approach to be used, so as the words/terms and visuals to be provided. Failure to do so is just the same as providing a coverage of limited view of the intricacies of issues

such as conflicts and terrorism, this was according to the findings of a study by Uy in 2009. Given that the way that news stories were depicted in the papers was inevitably a great factor influencing individuals' view and opinion towards related identity-based policies such as race and religion (Andersen, et. al., 2011).

CONCLUSION

The determination of the results in Data Analysis was done with the aid of three coders who had to determine what is the nature of the news articles and where they were placed in the newspaper. Social Construction of Reality explained how and why individuals viewed the world according to how reality was presented to them, by the media which could be determined through the subjective experience of reality or by the media's influence.

Manila Bulletin has a broader coverage of different issues concerning Muslims as compared to Philippine Daily Inquirer and Philippine Star dealing with not only stories that would double the number of readers such as Politics and Terrorism enabling them to have greater positive news in relation to Muslim with a combined total of 48/72 articles.

What the Philippine Star lacked in coverage of other issues relating to Muslim, they made up for in the number of big issues in terms of Politics and Terrorism which were the top two leading thematic description of choice. Similar with Philippine Daily Inquirer which was consistent with the placing of news related to Muslims according to their newsworthiness as compared to the other two broadsheets putting them as Banner stories or in the Front Page.

Overall, this study proved that majority of the Muslim related news articles published in broadsheets were negative, covering topics and issues concerning politics and terrorism and that most of these articles were usually placed as banner stories, front page and other inner news pages all of which are the most prominent sections of the paper for news articles.

The media evidently enough have the power to make or break an issue depending on how they see fit. Over the years Muslims have been acquainted with negativity through how the media portrays them in print or in television. There is an existing stereotype because of the long history Muslims have had over the years and how the media have chosen to cover these issues.

Newspapers especially broadsheets should be sensitive enough to know that whatever was published in their papers were and would forever be part of written history. Thus, they should be sensitive and not sensational in order to be fair and just. They should, more often than not, avoid focusing only on issues that would catch the pique interest of the readers but also what they should know and report positive news as much as they would want to cover negative ones.

Time and time again, the images of Muslims have been stained negatively because of how they were being portrayed in reports and with the power of media, this was hardly inevitable.

The researchers suggest that if further studies on images of Muslims in broadsheets are to be taken in consideration, longer duration of time for the collection of data might be helpful to further clarify or falsify misconceptions about Muslims. A different point of view, perhaps, is one of the attacks future researchers may take into account focusing on the writing style of journalists. This time, they may focus on blogs, columns, editorials, or other subjective points-of-view in order to determine perception of existing images of Muslims.

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