



Framing and othering the T20 group in Malaysia: An analysis of news articles from selected mainstream and independent news portals

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ABSTRACT

Malaysian news portals often feature news related to the B40 group as they are considered the socially disadvantaged group. Conversely, the T20 group in Malaysia refers to 20% of the population earning the highest income which serves as the complete opposite of the B40 group. Primarily deemed as a privileged group, this study examines how the T20 group is unfairly framed and othered in the media by drawing upon Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concepts of media framing and othering. The study examines the linguistic elements in selected articles that depict the T20 as "unaffected", "undeserving", and "unrealistic." This negative portrayal is used to justify the implementation of broad economic policies, that exclude the T20 from government subsidy programmes and impose higher taxes on them. This demonstrates the power of language to evoke negative feelings and perceptions about a specific group, including those perceived as privileged in a society. It highlights the importance of critically analysing news as the media can portray a particular issue or group of individuals through framing and othering, thereby influencing our views and perceptions of them. This research is significant as it widens the scholarly discourse related to media representation through both positive and negative light. Additionally, the findings are useful in helping educators, policymakers, and other scholars develop a more critical and nuanced understanding of media framing and othering, ultimately raising awareness about its potential impacts on readers and audiences.

Keywords: **T20, othering, media framing, media representation, Malaysian media.**

INTRODUCTION

It is worth noting that the portion of the wealthy demographic is considerably smaller than those categorised as middle or low-income groups. Despite this, the wealthy continue to dominate in various aspects of life, and this is considered a universal trait. In fact, the top 1% of the world's richest individuals are projected to control approximately 66% of the world's wealth in less than a decade (Fottrell, 2018). This pattern is likewise discernible in Malaysia, where the wealthy or high-income group actually possess the most assets and liquidity. Notably, they also contribute the most to the nation's tax revenues.

Nestled between two better-known countries in the region, Singapore and Thailand, Malaysia is a multiracial nation largely considered a developing country with a moderately sized economy. As noted by Jomo (1990), Malaysia's modern structural transformations, be they in the aspects of politics, cultures and economy, are heavily impacted by the British colonial period. From the standpoint of economy specifically, Malaysia's growth has always been fuelled by export-led activities. Despite being recognised as a developing country in the Southeast Asian region today, Malaysia was once well-known for its ascent as one of the "Asian Tigers" with an impressive average economic growth of 9% per year between 1990–1997. The introduction of a minimum wage in Malaysia by the fifth Prime Minister of Malaysia was considered necessary for Malaysia to escape its middle-income trap (Abidin, 2020). As of 2019, Malaysia's population was estimated at 32 million, with 80% of Malaysians living in Peninsular Malaysia. This means that many areas of Borneo remain sparsely populated. The drastic economic growth in the past three decades has led to an increasing demand for manpower imported from neighbouring countries, mainly from Indonesia, Myanmar, Cambodia and the Philippines (Smart & King, 2021). Although Malaysians are still paid more competitive salaries compared to most foreign workers, many Malaysians are still unable to free themselves from the middle-income trap.

As noted by Ragayah (2008), there is a significant concern about income inequality in Malaysia, and it is imperative to dedicate more resources to addressing disparities in income among various groups. This includes narrowing income growth disparities between urban and rural areas and addressing the effects of globalisation. Similar to individuals from other nations, Malaysians are consistently exploring avenues to enhance their income prospects. Remarkably, local employers are grappling with challenges in meeting the salary expectations of recent university graduates, which often exceed market norms and surpass what employers are capable and willing to offer (Pfordten, 2023). It is not hard to understand why employees, including those in Malaysia, are constantly working to increase their income levels, as income can impact us in various aspects.

As highlighted by Keeley (2015), in developed and developing nations, income represents just one aspect of broader economic and social inequalities, frequently intertwined with unequal opportunities in education, healthcare and employment. These inequalities can reinforce privilege and hinder upward mobility for those of less affluent backgrounds. Although the salary range in Malaysia is not exactly one of the most competitive in the region, there was an increase of 2.5% in 2022 to RM6,338 with the T20 group taking home the largest percentage (46.3%) of total distribution of income household in 2022 (Harun, 2023). It is crucial to mention here that currently, Malaysians' income levels are influenced by the categorisations they belong to, such as T20, M40, and B40. However, the specific income categories they fit into can differ dependent on the cities they reside in (Morden & A.R., 2023).

High-income group in Malaysia: T20

The T20 group comprises Malaysian households whose monthly income exceeds RM10,960, and is widely considered as those who are able to afford a more affluent lifestyle. As emphasised by Cencini (2013), money and income are intricately intertwined, to the extent that one cannot exist independently of the other. The movement of income inevitably involves the movement of money, and vice versa. The emergence of the new affluent class has long been acknowledged as a noteworthy social phenomenon, sparking lively public discussions. It is only in recent times that academia has initiated its distinct and concentrated exploration of this group, whereas in the past, it was discussed within the context of more comprehensive sociological topics (Pinches, 2005).

In the Malaysian context, the 10th Malaysia Plan is a pivotal step in Malaysia's journey towards achieving the high-income status and becoming a developed nation by 2020, emphasising inclusivity and sustainability (Sergi & Jaaffar, 2021). Although Vision 2020 did not quite materialise and most Malaysians are still notably unable to free themselves from the middle-income trap, there are evidently more Malaysians who have been able to grow their net worth for the past one decade. As reported by Lim (2023), being part of Malaysia's top 1% in terms of wealth only requires owning RM2.2 million in assets. Also, between 2022 and 2027, Malaysia is expected to witness a rise of around 320 additional ultra-wealthy individuals, and Knight Frank's data suggests that Malaysia will be one of the top 10 nations with the fastest growth in this category during that period. Beyond the top 1%, the number of high-income earners in Malaysia is also on the rise. The T20 group comprises 1.46 million households with a monthly income of RM10,960 or more (Business Today Editorial, 2022).

As Ab Hamid et al. noted (2019), due to the continuous growth in skills and productivity, the income disparities between the T20, M40, and B40 groups have doubled in the past two decades. This indicates that the T20 segment is set to become increasingly distant in terms of opportunities and purchasing power from the remaining 80% of income earners in Malaysia. Therefore, even though it only makes up 20% of the workforce, the T20 group significantly affects the country's economy and growth due to its increased spending power.

The intersection between framing and othering

As explained by Spivak (1985), race, power, and class serve as the determiners that allow people who possess power in a society to treat those whom they consider inferior in a discriminatory manner. By employing race, power and class, they are able to distance themselves from those who they see as beneath them by "othering" these individuals. The origins of othering can be traced all the way back to the colonial era, where colonisers felt that there was a need to set themselves apart from the colonised with them being regarded as the centre while the latter as the marginalised. Also, as observed by Mushtaq (2010), by othering the colonised, the colonisers were then able to employ that as a means of asserting their power, value, and dominance. Meanwhile, it is equally noteworthy that the term "other" can be rather ambiguous due to the fact that it is constantly changing depending on the sentiment of the society. However, it will always find itself closely intertwined with the notion of excluding certain individuals through the economic, social and legal strategies of those in power (Greenberg, 1994).

As noted by Bellinger (2020), the word "othering" can best be understood as the current equivalent of words such as bias, prejudice, discrimination, and scapegoating. By dividing into distinct categories of the in-group and out-group, the former then identify themselves as the 'I' who are spared from the marginalisation, disempowerment, and social

exclusion imposed on the out-group. Finally, the discourse of “othering” is constructed socially and hinges closely on the construction of “us” vs “them” where “them” is always rendered social inferiors known as deviants, monsters or even “aliens” (Baybars et al., 2023). Being labelled as the “other” is socially demeaning and highly discriminatory, so much so, it is inherently viewed as a form of social injustice that deserves the due attention of society as a whole.

Meanwhile, framing is a process that has been extensively examined in the fields of behavioural and social sciences. Heavily influenced by the ideas of Erving Goffman, framing was initially employed as a means of assisting individuals in comprehending global events in a more organised and structured manner. As emphasised by Lecheler and De Vreese (2018), there is no unanimous definition of what framing entails. However, all of the various interpretations and definitions ultimately converge on one overarching conclusion: establishing a connection to an evolving series of events through a central organising idea or storyline. The media is able to capture the public attention by highlighting specific ideological viewpoints through the framing process. Also, framing allows the media to exclude other relevant ideas by focusing solely on a few selected ones. Hence, every storyline and narrative surrounding a particular issue can be distorted and disrupted through framing. In line with this, people’s perception of class and inequality can be greatly impacted by the viewpoints through which the media chooses to portray a particular class group (Kendall, 2011).

In relation to framing, as Coombs (2013) rightly observed, framing involves weaving together a few fragments of perceived reality and then present a narrative that is convincing enough to persuade a particular audience. The audience perception can then be shaped and influenced by how a specific issue is framed by the presentation of a particular source. The truth is that the media not only presents issues to us from one specific angle, but employ the framing technique that enables the audience to comprehend and interpret what has been presented. Therefore, framing does not affect all audiences in the same manner. This is because information, images, and headlines generated through framing, which involve the selection and omission of elements, can significantly influence our perspectives. As Rane et al. (2014) explained, our understanding and stance on particular issues are notably shaped by our experiences, interests, prior knowledge, and level of education. The media, which possesses the special capability to reach diverse audiences, can then attempt to influence our perception of an issue we may not have experienced and then attempt to persuade us to see it from the perspective framed by them.

Upon close examination, several points of convergence between framing and othering become evident. Firstly, both practices involve selectively presenting information to the audience regarding a specific issue, often achieved through techniques like downplaying or omitting relevant details. Second, both framing and othering share the objective of shaping people’s perceptions of a given issue. The audience’s interpretation can be significantly influenced or distorted depending on the sources that selectively frame and filter the information. Moreover, both framing and othering have the potential to exert a profound influence on attitudes, ranging from fostering prejudice to promoting favouritism and from inspiring optimism to instilling indifference.

Consequently, a study on how the T20 group in Malaysia has been impacted by both othering and framing carries profound academic merit. Such research is relatively scarce, particularly in its emphasis on linguistic aspects. Furthermore, studies related to high-income groups remain limited, despite their significant contribution to the nation’s growth. Finally, given the paradoxical position of the T20 group in contributing significantly to income tax while being marginalised by the government, this study can deepen scholars’

understanding of the challenges faced by Malaysia's high-income T20 group. It highlights that financially privileged individuals can also be socially disadvantaged by exclusion from government policies.

METHODS

This study endeavoured to undertake a textual analysis of selected news articles sourced from two mainstream and one independent news portals. The two mainstream publications, namely *The Star and Malay Mail*, are paired with *Free Malaysia Today*, selected as the representative of independent journalism. The rationale for selecting these three news portals is based on their readership and online presence. According to Mediapod's website traffic ranking for 2022, *The Star* boasts an impressive 14 million monthly visits, while *Malay Mail* receives approximately 9.2 million monthly visits. *Free Malaysia Today*, being an independent newspaper, was not included in the survey, but is also identified as one of the most accessed news sites, with roughly 11.8 million visits per month. Considering that textual analysis focusses solely on the linguistic aspects that contribute to how the narratives of the target group, T20, are formed, three perspectives will be used as the parameters through which the T20 group will be analysed. These three perspectives are referred to as the "unaffected", "undeserving", and "unrealistic".

Being unaffected means that the T20 group is portrayed as not being negatively impacted by the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent soaring inflation rates. Being undeserving can be understood as not worthy of being included in government subsidy programmes and aid initiatives. Finally, being unrealistic means having the means to spend extravagantly while others are struggling financially. In line with the three perspectives established, the selected news articles will focus on four main issues concerning the T20 group, including exclusion from government subsidies, contributions to the Employee Provident Fund (EPF), income tax rates, and extravagant lifestyles.

Only selected news articles reporting on T20, published in 2021 and 2023, with a large proportion of them taken from 2023, were analysed. The aim is to provide a current perspective on how the T20 group is portrayed in the media, particularly in the years where they were frequently featured due to economic climates and post-COVID inflation. The news articles will be categorised into four groups: taxes, subsidies, EFP contributions, and lifestyles. This categorisation will help clarify how the T20 group can be portrayed as "unaffected", "undeserving", and "unrealistic" more effectively.

This study aims to demonstrate that the T20 group has been unfairly framed in the Malaysian media through a negative representation. To achieve this, the analysis will prove that the tool used portrays the T20 group as "unaffected", "undeserving", and "unrealistic". By depicting T20 individuals as a privileged out-group, policies favouring lower-income groups that exclude the T20 may seem more justified. However, this study focuses only on how the T20 group is portrayed in three selected Malaysian English news portals. The portrayal of the T20 group in other Malaysian news portals or different mediums has not been considered and could differ.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies dealing with the notion of media framing are abundant in the communications field. To cite some more recent ones, Ting et al. (2024) examined how the 1MDB scandal was framed in Malaysian English and Chinese newspapers. Their study revealed that the

responsibility frame was the most widely used by newspapers in both mediums. However, the study also indicated that Chinese newspapers had a propensity to emphasise the importance of investigating the issue while English newspapers focused on highlighting the economic consequences brought about by the scandal. Furthermore, Ting et al. (2020) also explored how conventional and independent online news media primarily relied on the conflict frame to cover the Sungai Kim Kim chemical spill, influenced by the political climate and public opinion on leaders' actions. Their study revealed that political climate and public opinion influenced how stories were framed, especially on social media platforms like Facebook, leading to strong emotional reactions. Meanwhile, Wang et al. (2023) examined how visual framing impacted the creative processes, experiences, and visual frameworks of independent filmmakers, and shed light on how filmmakers navigated the COVID-19 crisis which influenced their story-telling direction.

Concerning the concept of othering, Lumayag and Bala (2021) mentioned how certain newspapers in Malaysia have othered refugees, particularly Rohingyas, during the COVID-19 pandemic. In their study, they explained how by constantly portraying them as dirty due to their limited access to healthcare and sanitation systems, the Rohingyas have been othered as the group that could pose a health threat to Malaysians as they are more likely to get infected by the virus due to their poor living conditions. Meanwhile, Saeed (2019) explained how the Western media is actively painting Muslims in a negative light by othering them as anti-democratic and anti-peace. This, as he asserts, contributes to the widespread and perpetuation of Islamophobia in the Western regions. Reverting back to the Malaysian context, Zamri et al. (2023) maintained that social media platforms in Malaysia play a major role in promoting the use of hate speech among their users. Consequently, Malaysians may feel more disunited because hate speeches are able to otherize certain races in Malaysia, which eventually dehumanise them.

The literature reveals that both framing and othering do share some commonalities; first, they provide a direction or perspective of how certain issues or individuals are to be perceived, and they are highly effective methods that can be employed by the media or other relevant parties to influence the narratives surrounding an issue. It can also be observed that while framing and othering often deal with marginalised groups, in actuality, anyone can be framed or othered when a need or purpose arises. Hence, this study which examines how the T20 group has been framed and othered in Malaysia is not only academically viable, it also sheds new light into how a privileged group, seemingly unbothered by conflicts, policies and money, can be perceived.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Exclusion from Subsidies and Aids

Govt to cut subsidies for T20

23 May, 2023 THE STAR

“We will not increase the electricity tariff except for those in the T20 group,” said Anwar during Question Time.

He also said the haj subsidy for the B40 income group would remain while those in the T20 would have to bear the total cost of the pilgrimage.

“We will no longer give subsidies to them. They have to pay the full cost because they can afford it,” said Anwar.

**PM Anwar: T20 households with their ‘big houses’ won’t get electricity subsidy,
Haj financial aid**

22 May, 2023 MALAY MAIL

The high-income group (T20) in the country will not benefit from electricity subsidies and haj financial assistance, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

He said the Main Database (PADU) would be used to manage and coordinate the distribution of subsidies to eligible groups.

“We are not raising electricity rates except for the T20. Only the T20, those with big houses, will not be given electricity subsidies.

No more haj, electricity subsidies for T20, says Anwar

22 May, 2023 FREE MALAYSIA TODAY

Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim says the subsidies will be reserved for those in the M40 and B40 groups.

“Targeted subsidies are being made an issue. We will not increase the electricity tariff except for the T20 group. I want to make things clear, the T20 will no longer receive the subsidy.

“This is the same with haj financial assistance. We have increased (the subsidy) to the B40 group but not for the T20 group. They will have to bear the full cost because they can afford it,” he said.

Muslims who fall under the T20 group will have to bear the full cost.

As previously delineated, the term “undeserving” can be understood within the context as not being worthy of inclusion in government subsidy programmes and aid initiatives. As defined in the Cambridge dictionary, “undeserving” means “*not having earned the right to receive something; not deserving something*” (Press 2005). When applied to the examination of the portrayal of the T20 group within the Malaysian environment, the selected newspaper excerpts exemplify how the government portrays T20 as devoid of the right to participate in subsidies, as opposed to the broader population. The use of pronouns such as “we” and “they” is notably present in the excerpts and creates a clear separation between T20 and those outside that category. This effectively others the T20 group, thereby projecting a narrative that suggests a lack of justification for them to receive aid subsidies.

Clearly, the quotes from *The Star*, such as “*We will no longer provide subsidies to them; they will have to cover the full cost because they can afford it*” and *Malay Mail’s* “*We are not raising electricity rates, except for the T20 group. Only the T20, specifically those with large houses, will no longer receive electricity subsidies,*” separate the T20 group from the big umbrella of government support. Meanwhile, the quote in the independent newspaper, *Free Malaysia Today*, “*Targeted subsidies have become a matter of concern. We will not increase the electricity tariff, except for the T20 group. To clarify, the T20 group will no longer receive subsidies*”, further solidifies the government’s intention to isolate the T20 group. The use of specific phrases like “*large houses*”, “*can afford*”, and “*except for*

the T20” reinforces the government’s intention to other the T20 group. Although these are direct quotes from ministers on upcoming aid subsidy adjustments, the newspapers’ inclusion of them can significantly shape the T20 group’s image among readers.

Income Tax Matters

Budget 2023: Income tax raised for T20 group

24 Feb, 2023 THE STAR

Income tax will be raised by 0.5 to two percentage points for the T20 group or those earning between RM100,000 and RM1mil, says Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim in tabling Budget 2023.

“However, less than 150,000 tax payers will be charged with higher taxes,” said Anwar.

“This amount is small; those considered rich, we will raise it a little bit so it won’t be too much of a burden. They must take up some of the responsibilities.

Why no income tax rate rise for those earning above RM1m?

27 Feb, 2023 MALAY MAIL

Meanwhile, annual income between RM100,001 and RM1 million will be taxed at a higher rate between 0.5 and two percentage points.

“The prime minister feels strongly that it’s not just about the government helping the poor, but those who are more fortunate should contribute a little bit.

“This is where he felt that a group such as 150,000 people who are the top one per cent of the labour force... it is not asking too much for the top one per cent of the labour force to contribute a little bit towards the well-being of the country,” he said.

T20 contributed 85% of personal income tax in 2022

30 May, 2023 FREE MALAYSIA TODAY

Personal income tax rate for individuals is progressive, starting at 1% and gradually increasing to 28% as income increases.

That’s why we end up with a lot more taxes being paid by the T20 because they are earning higher (salaries), which could be RM10,000 or RM100,000 a month. So, obviously they will pay a higher tax rate,” Veerinderjeet, who is Tricor Malaysia non-executive chairman, said.

The Inland Revenue Board said the T20 group contributed RM33.68 billion, or 85% of the total income tax collection of RM39.26 billion last year.

As far as taxes are concerned, the T20 group once again finds itself in a disadvantaged position in the narrative, subject to negative framing. In the current economic climate, marked by ongoing wars and post-COVID market that have led to high inflation worldwide,

including in Malaysia, paying taxes is considered a financial burden for most Malaysians. Instead of introducing a tax system that could alleviate the financial strain experienced by all Malaysians, the T20 group is once again singled out as not needing support. This can be viewed from the perspective of them being “unaffected”, as they are expected to contribute more due to their perceived abilities.

A quote from *The Star*, “*They must take on some of the responsibilities*”, highlights how the T20 group is portrayed as not fulfilling their role in supporting the country’s economy when, in reality, they have consistently been the largest contributors to Malaysia’s income tax revenues. The intention to portray T20 as “other” is further strengthened by a quote from *Malay Mail*: “*The Prime Minister strongly believes that it is not just about the government helping the poor; those who are more fortunate should also make a contribution*”. Here again, T20 is presented as a “bulletproof” group that is unaffected, with their “more fortunate” status cited as the justification for their higher tax burden. A similar sentiment can be seen in *Free Malaysia Today’s* quote: “*They are earning more, so obviously they will pay a higher tax rate*”. Once again, besides being treated as an out-group seemingly unaffected by the economic climate, T20’s higher earning capacity is used as a justification for their higher tax contribution. Evidently, the T20 group has been negatively framed, and being othered in the context of income tax contribution makes the situation appear logically forced.

Employee Provident Fund

EPF members running out of funds

17 Feb, 2023 THE STAR

B40 and M40 members are the most affected, causing a widening gap with the T20 group,” said Ahmad.

RM145.5bil in EPF withdrawals made since 2020 (05 Mar 2023)

As for income groups, the Top 20 (T20) group, which has 2.6 million members, saw a 9% increase in median savings – from RM140,440 as of April 2020 to RM152,964 as of December 2022.

Finance Ministry: T20 group ‘monopolising’ EPF with their savings, went up by 11pc during pandemic

22 Feb, 2023 MALAY MAIL

Deputy Finance Minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Maslan today said that the top 20 per cent of income earners (T20) in Malaysia are “monopolising” the Employees’ Provident Fund (EPF) with their savings making up the bulk of the total amount.

In contrast with other groups, the T20 also saw the savings in their EPF accounts increase by 11 per cent during the COVID-19 pandemic, he noted during the winding-up speech for the Finance Ministry in the Dewan Rakyat.

“The EPF is monopolised by the T20,” he said.

In April 2020 the total number of funds in the EPF accounts belonging to T20 account holders was RM538 billion, which then increased to RM597 billion by December 2022, he said.

High-income earners use EPF i-Sinar to buy gold, stocks

05 Feb, 2021 FREE MALAYSIA TODAY

Almost half of the people in the top 20 (T20) income group who were polled by the UCSI Poll Research Centre said they used – or would use – their i-Sinar withdrawal from the Employees Provident Fund (EPF) to invest in gold and stocks.

According to the survey, most of them were aged between 40 and 55.

It added that for those aged 26 to 55 in the B40 and M40 income groups, loan repayment was the main justification for their EPF withdrawal.

Since the BN-PH (Barisan National-Pakatan Harapan) coalition came into power, issues regarding EPF withdrawals have become highly politicised. The current BN-PH government firmly opposes further EPF withdrawals, citing declining retirement funds for EPF members, which once again portrays the T20 group in a negative light. In this scenario, they are once again depicted as “unaffected”. While many EPF members face dwindling funds, *The Star* reported that the Top 20 (T20) group, with 2.6 million members, experienced a 9% increase in median savings.

In comparison, *Malay Mail's* quote suggests that the T20 group in Malaysia are “monopolising” the Employees’ Provident Fund (EPF), as their savings make up a significant portion of the total amount. This further emphasises the notion that the T20 group remains largely unaffected by the sentiment of EPF withdrawal, which has stirred controversy in the country. On the other hand, *Free Malaysia Today's* report on T20’s EPF behaviour is somewhat different. Instead of highlighting the increase in their EPF savings, it focused on the fact that some T20 individuals chose to withdraw funds for investment in gold and stocks. In contrast to the B40 and M40 groups, whose withdrawals were mostly intended for loan repayments, the contrasting usage of EPF funds underscores the belief that the T20 group remains relatively “unaffected”. While others struggle to stay financially afloat, T20’s financial situation appears very much unaffected.

Extravagant Lifestyles

Proposed luxury tax is to broaden govt’s revenue base

28 Apr, 2023 THE STAR

It will not be imposed on essential items but only on those buying items considered luxurious. In short, it will not impact the society at large,” he said.

Mohamad, who is also Defence Minister, said as long as it did not have a negative impact on the food, education, services and health sectors, the luxury tax would not be a burden to Malaysians.

“If someone wants to buy a Ferrari or a luxury watch for example, he or she certainly has strong purchasing power.

“In short, it is only for those who can afford it,” he said.

Five-year-old Malaysian girl gets luxury SUV birthday gift as motivation to attend school

11 Apr, 2023 MALAY MAIL

If your child refuses to attend school, consider gifting them a luxury ride as a birthday present as done by entrepreneur Farhana Zahra.

Taking to TikTok, Farhana shared that her five-year-old daughter Fatima stopped attending school in January after a day due to sickness.

When she recovered, Fatima avoided school claiming she was too young. Farhana then decided to motivate Fatima to go to school by asking Fatima what she wanted for her coming birthday.

The girl responded she wanted either a BMW or a Mercedes G Wagon. Farhana then made Fatima promise she would attend school if she received a Mercedes G Wagon, worth a whopping RM1.79 million. The car was delivered on Monday, during a party and witnessed by friends and family members.

Over RM20mil gained from sale of ‘M_M’ number plates, says JPJ

08 Sep, 2023 FREE MALAYSIA TODAY

The road transport department (JPJ) collected over RM20 million from the sale of the special “M_M” series vehicle registration number plates which were offered in conjunction with this year’s Merdeka Day celebration.

JPJ said that the registration plate M1M fetched the highest bid at RM622,000, followed by M5M at RM500,000, Bernama reported.

It added that 25,033 individuals participated in the bidding for this series, with 6,872 individuals successfully winning bids for their respective registration numbers.

Finally, it is also crucial to examine how the T20 group has been framed as “unrealistic” by othering them, suggesting that they can afford to lead affluent lives. Although these excerpts do not specifically mention T20, the individuals featured in them all possess high spending power. When reporting the proposed increase in taxes on luxury goods, a minister’s quote is included: “*if someone wants to buy a Ferrari or a luxury watch, for example, he or she certainly has strong purchasing power.*” This quote highlights the unrealistic lifestyles of these high-net-worth individuals who can be safely categorised as T20. The mention of the luxury brand name Ferrari in the article draws attention to the unrealistic lifestyles enjoyed by the T20. When a car, typically regarded as super luxurious and impossible to own, is portrayed as well within the reach of the T20 group, it paints the picture of them as being unrealistically rich and excludes them from the general narratives of the struggles faced by the grassroots.

Moreover, the *Malay Mail’s* report on a five-year-old Malaysian girl’s luxury birthday gift provides a tangible example of how the earlier quote in *The Star* resonates. “*Fatima then made a promise to attend school if she received a Mercedes G Wagon, worth a whopping RM1.79 million. The car was delivered on Monday during a party and was witnessed by friends and family members.*” This epitomises the unrealistic lifestyle of a T20 family that chose to showcase their extravagant existence through social media.

The *Free Malaysia Today* report presents yet another perspective on the unrealistic lifestyle of T20. As seen in their report on September 8, 2023, some high-net-worth individuals spent unrealistically large sums of money on bidding for car registration plate numbers. “*JPJ said that the registration plate M1M fetched the highest bid at RM622,000, followed by M5M at RM500,000.*” These amounts exceed what most Malaysians earn in five years, yet T20 individuals can afford to spend such sums on car plate numbers. This portrays them as an out-group. While their affluent lifestyles may attract attention, it can also alienate them from the public, as their experiences are disconnected from those facing financial constraints.

CONCLUSION

Techniques of media framing and othering have been quite extensively examined in academia spanning across various fields, but are more commonly applied when examining groups that are regarded as marginalised, such as war refugees, sexual minorities, or social outcasts. For high-income individuals, the concepts of media framing and othering are scarcely used to examine this socially privileged group. In Malaysia, the literature that focuses on the T20 group remains relatively limited, particularly in the domains of social science and language studies. The scarcity is particularly pronounced when the T20 group is studied from the perspective of framing and othering, which seems contradictory to their social status.

This study emphasises that media framing and othering can be used as tools to examine all different groups, including those who are socially advantaged, such as T20. As government policies may change from time to time depending on a multitude of factors, this study serves as a valuable reference for understanding how the T20 group has been portrayed through negative framing in selected newspapers by being othered. It also highlights the paradoxical status of the T20 group. On the one hand, the government aims to turn Malaysia into a high-income nation, but simultaneously, high-income individuals are placed in a “socially disadvantaged position” in terms of government policies.

This study aims to enrich the discourse on media framing and othering, not to critique current policies. Finally, although there are plans to phase out the T20, M40, and B40 income categorisations, the established argument will maintain its relevance. This is because it highlights a temporal period during which the T20 group has been negatively framed. By othering them, it might then potentially allow the M40 and B40 groups to feel an enhanced sense of security with the realisation that they are always included under the broader umbrella of government support.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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