

Research on news coverage and image of homosexuals in Taiwan

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Abstract: *Taiwan has made tremendous efforts on the road of equal rights for the same sex through mass media, and the affirmative action since 1990s. Although the Taiwanese referendum on November 24th, 2018, failed to pass the proposal of same-sex marriage, Taiwan is expected to become the first Asian region to legalize same-sex marriage in 2019. This article conducted Framing theory and Discourse Historical Approach to research on how news coverage changed when framing homosexuality during year 2005 to 2018 on Taiwan China Times, specifically in diversity of topics, referring expression, basic personal image and role attributes. And found that media's description of homosexual groups has gradually changed from negative to positive, and the media has a great role in building the social image of homosexual groups.*

Keywords: *Homosexuality, News coverage, Image, Taiwan China Times*

1. Introduction

According to 2015 Taiwan Social Change Survey, there are 54.18% of Taiwanese voted for same-sex marriage comparing to only 11.37% in 1991. Besides, in a 2012 poll conducted by TVBS, more than 85% of respondents said they could be accepted as colleagues or friends with homosexuals. However, Taiwanese referendum on November 24th, 2018, failed to pass the proposal of same-sex marriage, meaning that there is remaining discrimination on homosexuality in Taiwan society. Meanwhile, a Pew Research Report (2013) shows that on a national level, attitudes toward same-sex marriage have changed significantly in the past decade, with only 32% of people favoring same-sex marriage in 2003, rising to 51% in 2013.

As news coverage of issues of national importance often lead to further discussion on television and the Internet, and affects people's judgment on the issues and decisions in elections (Barnhurst, 2003; Tewksbury, 2006), it is of great importance to examine how the media described homosexuality and the relationship between the social image and media coverage that helped shape the news content. Taiwan China Times, which is comprehensive newspaper, providing the public with diversified opinions, offers a great chance to research on how media covered a controversial topic. This article is attempting to examine two questions:

RQ1: How media frames homosexuality to the public during 14 years (2005-2018) ?

RQ2: How these news coverages build up the image of homosexuality and relate to the Taiwan society?

2. Method

2.1 Sampling Design

A content analysis was conducted in this study. Through Wiser, which is the world's largest Chinese data set, with over 470,000 sources ranging from print, to web, social media, and business databases and the archive of over 59 billion licensed and reliable items reaching back to 1979, select the population. By setting the keywords "homosexuality" and "China Times" to search for relevant reports from the year of 2005-2018 respectively [1-2].

The samples were selected by the constructed week sampling, through the random number generator, news coverage from Monday to Sunday are randomly drawn from different weeks in the population, and these samples constitute "one week" (constructed week), and two constructed weeks are drawn as

representatives of the one-year news. Based on Daniel Riffe, Charles F. Aust and Stephen R.Lacy's findings "two constructed weeks would allow reliable estimates of local stories in a year's worth of newspaper entire issues." The sampling results as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Statistical table of sampling survey data

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
2005	9.05	6.21	3.16	5.12	10.28	12.03	8.21
	3.14	3.29	5.20	3.17	11.25	11.05	11.27
2006	8.28	12.26	8.30	8.10	11.17	3.25	7.16
	6.12	5.3	12.13	12.21	9.15	9.16	1.1
2007	12.03	3.27	11.21	6.28	5.25	10.6	4.8
	9.1	12.11	11.28	11.29	7.13	6.02	10.14
2008	4.07	3.04	11.05	11.06	4.25	7.26	10.05
	5.12	3.03	4.16	6.26	5.02	5.17	6.29
2009	12.14	11.01	9.30	4.09	7.31	2.14	6.2
	9.14	7.21	6.17	2.12	2.27	1.17	6.07
2010	6.21	6.29	12.01	7.22	12.24	4.10	10.31
	3.29	7.06	2.03	2.04	10.08	12.25	9.26
2011	6.06	8.23	4.20	4.21	7.01	9.03	9.25
	6.06	1.25	12.21	5.05	12.23	4.02	4.17
2012	1.02	8.07	5.23	11.08	6.29	12.08	4.01
	5.21	11.27	4.18	7.26	4.06	6.23	10.28
2013	4.29	5.28	11.06	8.15	9.06	4.13	12.01
	11.04	11.29	9.04	11.07	7.26	10.05	11.24
2014	7.14	10.14	2.19	12.18	8.29	6.07	9.07
	8.11	6.1	6.11	12.25	2.28	11.01	12.21
2015	5.25	1.20	12.23	11.26	9.11	6.27	5.17
	8.03	11.10	6.17	6.25	12.11	4.11	4.12
2016	4.04	6.14	5.18	10.20	11.25	12.24	2.28
	10.10	12.13	12.14	9.22	11.18	10.29	5.22
2017	7.17	6.06	2.15	5.03	2.24	10.21	1.15
	7.03	10.31	11.15	5.18	4.21	5.27	6.18
2018	4.23	8.14	10.17	11.22	6.15	11.24	11.25
	6.18	6.19	2.28	11.08	4.27	10.27	10.28

2.2 Coding Category

The 196 samples constructed different homosexual images through different topics and descriptions. In order to be more objectively and comprehensively to investigate the construction of homosexual images in the news coverage, the main coding categories are listed in the following:

Topics: the purpose of coding topics is to investigate what issues the media intentionally linked homosexuality with. The topics that were coded included: homosexual participation in politics、fight for homosexual rights、crimes、AIDS epidemic、chinese tradition and family values、cases of celebrity news、opinions about same-sex marriage、individual cases、education、drugs and others.

Basic personal image: the purpose of coding basic personal image is to investigate how the image of homosexuals in the news coverage has changed over time. The basic personal image that were coded included: gender、age、occupation and region.

Role attributes: the purpose of coding role attributes is to investigate whether the media's description of homosexual images is positive, negative or neutral.

Referring expression: the purpose of coding referring expression is to investigate the evolution of the homosexuality language in the news coverage. Record the modifiers for homosexuality in each report, such like "LGBT", "LESBIAN", "0Hao", "1Hao", ect[3-4].

3. Results

The results are divided into two parts, including media frames and the image of homosexuals from 2005 to 2018 to have further discussion of homosexual image in China Times. And the following analysis is based on the statistical table of research results.

3.1 Media frames from 2005 to 2018

3.1.1 The changes of topics

In general, China Times paid more attention to crimes and equal rights from 2005 to 2018. Among them, the crime issue has gradually declined, and in 2011 it dropped dramatically from the previous 36% to 7%. However, the reports focusing on fighting for homosexual rights showed a growing trend, from

14% in 2011 to 43% in 2012, and reached its peak in 2013 (86%).

Hence, 2011 is a representative year that brings lots of changes in topics. In the amended provisions of the 2011 gender equality education act in Taiwan, "gender equality education" was implemented to ask for respect for diversity of gender. The aim of the act is to eliminate gender discrimination and promote substantive equality of gender status. At the same year, New York state passed the same-sex marriage equality act. In fact, these two events showed that not only in Taiwan, but the international world like America has also made great progress in fighting for homosexual rights. Under such circumstances, China Times covered more public issues instead of individual cases. Also, education and celebrity issues reached 29% and 14% respectively. The appearance of education and equal rights issues implied that social acceptance was increasing, which meant homosexual groups were getting more and more attention after 2011.

Besides, after the introduction of Diversified family structures draft legislation in 2013, which refers to the draft law on amending the civil law involving marriage and family system to promote gender equality in Taiwan, the public's attitudes towards homosexuality tends to be more open-minded. In this case, some issues about homosexual exhibitions appeared to think about how homosexual is constructed through mass media. What's more, although AIDS epidemic issues were reported from 2005 to 2012, there has been no AIDS-related topics since 2013.

3.1.2 The changes of figures

At the beginning, most of the reports' figures were students or people without identifiable information. Then, some celebrity news came out, but most of them were related to gossip. However, the media started to cover some issues about homosexual participation in politics from 2009, which meant homosexuals came into power and were accepted by more people. Actually in 2009, homosexual condition in Taiwan changed a lot. In order to protect homosexual rights, a Taiwan Alliance to Promote Civil Partnership Rights was established in 2009. In the same year, a homosexual parade was held in Taiwan, which broke the participant record in recent years. The key focus of this parade was LGBT rights, particularly anti-discrimination laws and the recognition of same-sex unions. Thus, because of the change, the media tried to focus on other figures[5-6].

3.1.3 The changes of regions

In the past 14 years, the media generally focused more on Taiwan, but since 2006, some foreign reports appeared. Moreover, the proportion of it has reached 50% in 2014 and 2015. During that time, the west spared no efforts to promote same-sex marriage, and finally the American achieved their goal to make same-sex marriage legalize. At that time, the media reported more actions from foreign countries. In addition, there were also some reports from Chinese mainland and Hong Kong, but not in large numbers.

3.2 Image of homosexuals from 2005 to 2018

China Times focused more on young people, especially male homosexuals in Taiwan. And most of their image has become more positive and objective.

3.2.1 The neutral referring expressions have dominated the same-sex coverage since 2013

During these 14 years, "Tong Xing Lian" and "Tong Zhi" were two referring expressions that appeared every year. But before 2013, most reports tended to use some negative expressions like "Niang Niang Qiang" or "Si Ren Yao", which showed disrespect for the homosexuals. Among them, there were still few expressions that were neutral, such as LGBT. Fortunately, after the adoption of diversified family structures draft legislation in 2013, the media used more and more positive expressions, such as "Tong Zhi" and "LGBT", which were more inclusive.

3.2.2 Since 2009, the depiction of homosexuals in news coverage has become more inclusive and objective.

Before 2009, most of reports were connected with theft, drugs, sexual promiscuity and sexual assault. However, heterosexuality is rarely reported. In fact, the media tried to exploit the homosexuals in an exaggerated way for sensational effect. For example, in a report of 2008, the media used "Fan Yun Fu Yu" which caught people's eyes to describe the homosexual love process. Also, in the same year, one report said that homosexuals were easier to be cheated, which showed the image of weakness.

After years of reporting, since 2009, the depiction of homosexuals in news coverage has become

more inclusive and objective. What's more, readers can find some politicians with higher social status in the reports. Moreover, after 2011, the media preferred to present a more objective image, revealing homosexuals' specific information rather than obscuring their personal information such as age and occupation, and using some detailed depictions in order to attract audience's attention.

3.2.3 *The image of homosexuals changes from the weak to the brave*

In the past reports, homosexuals were often portrayed the homosexuals as weak persons. It seemed that most of them were dangerous persons such as criminals and were even at the bottom of the society due to their unclear occupations or age. Luckily, some homosexual politicians appeared in the reports who had higher social status. Meanwhile, many entertainment stars became supporters of homosexuality and participated in the homosexual parade in 2013. Although there were some contradictions between church and homosexuality in 2014, things still got better. The appearance of entertainment stars, politicians and scientists showed that the image of homosexuals has changed from the weak to the brave. They had the courage to fight for their rights and have influence on the society.

4. Conclusion

This study analyzes the changes in the construction of homosexual image in China Times in the past 14 years. The modifier used in the discussion of homosexuality evolved from the slander and derogatory words such like "Niang Niang Qiang", "IHao", "0Hao" to a more multifaceted language, like "LGBT", "same-sex marriage" ect. Another notable change is the significant reduction in news issues linking homosexuality to AIDS, crime, and violence, and the growing popularity of equal rights and homosexual education. The China Times' description of the homosexual image has also changed from a career vagueness, a low-educated criminal to a high-profile, powerful politician and entertainment star. This change shows that the homosexuality is gradually moving from a bottom-level topic to a mainstream topic. Besides, the China Times no longer only reports local homosexual gossip and seek novelty news, but also reports more foreign discussions on homosexual topics, such as the fight for equal right and gender education. These topics also make the discussion of homosexual discourse more inclusive and diversify.

What's more, changes in the social environment are also important factors in causing this change. In 2011, Taiwan amended the Gender Education Equality Act and began to implement Gender Equality Education, which aims to educate students to be respect for multi-gender. As a result, public issues on homosexuality coverage began to increase gradually from 2011, especially those on education. In 2013, Taiwan promulgated the Diversified family structures draft legislation, which further promoted the media to report homosexuality positively and objectively. In the Taiwanese referendum of 2018, the number of celebrity and education topics increased dramatically, which shows that the homosexual group is gaining wider support from the population and gradually popularizing to the whole society.

All in all, across the 14-year time span, the image of homosexuality built by China Times has gradually turned from negative to positive, which is closely related to the change of social environment.

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