

SIMILAR BUT NOT ALIKE: THE FRAMING OF COVID-19 IN INDONESIAN AND MALAYSIAN NEWSPAPERS

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has certainly caused havoc all over the world. Governments, healthcare personnel, and the general public are all struggling to survive the health crisis. In such calamity, the media plays an important role as it is able to impact public attitude and response towards the pandemic. Malaysia and Indonesia are two neighbouring countries that are equally affected by the pandemic. These countries share the same language and geographic location, but they have distinct populations, government systems, and ethnic identities. This study compares the news framing of Covid-19 in Malaysian and Indonesian newspapers to understand how socio-political and cultural similarities and differences affect how the health crisis is framed and presented. The Star (Malaysia) and Detik (Indonesia) were chosen to be studied in this paper, with a total of 369 news pieces obtained between 60 days after the first local COVID-19 case was discovered in the respective country. The findings suggest that the framing of Malaysian online newspapers was action-oriented, whereas the framing of Indonesian online newspapers was uncertainty-oriented. In addition, Malaysian and Indonesian internet newspapers were quick to report on the Covid-19 news. Both cited the government as their primary source and addressed risk bearers as their primary focus. This shows that despite their geographical proximities, the two countries had distinct ways of covering the pandemic.

Keywords: COVID-19, Indonesia, Malaysia, pandemic, framing, media coverage.

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INTRODUCTION

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has certainly caused havoc all over the world. The social, economic and political implications of this health crisis appears to be gloomy. Governments and the people alike are trying different ways to survive. In times such as this, information plays an important role to maintain order and stability. The media plays a pivotal role in delegating the right information that are factual yet comforting so

that the public can stay focused and not be driven by panic and anxiety.

The media can help the public deal with health crisis by framing and carefully shaping reality through its news stories (Tham & Zanuddin, 2015; Adekunle & Adnan, 2016; Sell et al., 2018; Mutua & Ong'ong'a, 2020). People's knowledge and response to the situation will be influenced by the news they believe accurately reflects reality (Adekunle & Adnan, 2016). Some research attempted to investigate the extent to which the media frames health crises such as Ebola, HIV/AIDS

(human immunodeficiency virus and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome), Zika, and the most recent COVID-19 using different framing to their specific audience and gathered from their specific sources, which at the end of the day will shape public discourse indirectly (Adekunle & Adnan, 2016; Sell et al., 2018; Mutua & Ong'ong'a, 2020). As such, the media bears a significant deal of responsibility in reporting on health-related news items (Thomas et al., 2020).

Malaysia and Indonesia are two neighbouring countries that are equally affected by the pandemic. In the attempt to contain the crisis, the media in both countries have in their own terms, tried to provide the public with news and information that can help the public manoeuvre through the uncertainties that comes with the crisis.

Because Malaysia and Indonesia are culturally and geographically close, they have many similarities in language, culture, and values. These similarities are evident in their media where the national language is dominantly used and media control is rather autocratic (Moi, 2011; Ambardi, 2014). Media ownership in Malaysia could be defined as an oligopoly that few companies offer standardized products to support the government in maintaining the status quo. Most media in Malaysia are ruled or owned by the ruling government directly or indirectly. Only a few are free from the government, such as mandarin newspaper Kwong Huang daily and Oriental daily (Moi, 2011). Meanwhile, most of the media companies in Indonesia are

private, but have strong association with political parties. For example, the owner of tvOne, and ANTV is the chairman of the Golkar Party. The owner of RCTI, MNC TV and Global TV sit on the Expert Board in the Hanura Party, both parties have a significant number of parliamentary seats. It makes the difficulties to differentiate whether the news coverage comes from the government or the editorial (Ambardi et al., 2014).

At the same time, the neighbouring countries are very much unique from one another and this too influences how the media in the two countries may have distinct ways of covering the COVID-19 crisis. This study highlights four main differences between Malaysia and Indonesia. First, in terms of total population, Malaysia has 32 million people, while Indonesia has 267 million people (www.cia.com, n.d.). Second, there is the language preferences. Malaysia is made up of many ethnic groups, such as the Malay, Chinese, and Indians. Each group tends to prefer material in their own language (Ghani & Haidzir, 2014). Despite the fact that Indonesia is a multi-ethnic country, language does not have a significant role in shaping media preferences. The third factor is ethnic consciousness. Malaysian identity was substantially influenced by ethnic identities (Wok & Mohamed, 2017), whereas Indonesian identity cards do not specify ethnic affiliation, indicating that Indonesia has less ethnic consciousness (Chong, 2012). The fourth factor is people's perceptions of democracy. Although both countries believe in democracy, people in Malaysia and Indonesia

experience it differently because Malaysia is a constitutional monarchy and Indonesia is a republic (Sani & Hara, 2014). Therefore, this study looks into how these elements contribute to how the two neighbouring countries cover and frame COVID-19 news reports, and what this may mean on how the pandemic is understood in the two countries. To do this, the study asks:

RQ1: What was the dominating frames utilized by Malaysian and Indonesian newspapers in covering COVID-19?

RQ2: What is the primary source of news for Malaysian and Indonesian newspapers coverage of COVID-19?

RQ3: Who was the primary audience for Malaysian and Indonesian online newspapers' coverage of COVID-19?

LITERATURE REVIEW

During a health crisis, framing is responsible for developing a precise mechanism for the public in coping with reality. However, when intended or not, framing can have negative implications such as stereotyping and discrediting certain groups, disparaging specific populations (Garfin et al., 2020). For example, Cable News Network (CNN), British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), and Al Jazeera news coverage characterized COVID-19 as a Chinese virus, resulting in stigma and xenophobia against Chinese people globally (Mutua & Ong'ong'a, 2020). Similar studies were undertaken during the spread of H1N1 flu in 2009-2010, when

news media coverage represented Latinos and Mexicans as being responsible for spreading this virus (McCauley et al., 2013), and again during the Ebola outbreak, when media framed the virus as an African issue (Govender, 2017). As a result, those findings emphasized the importance of preventing the recurrence of narratives that may stigmatize and discriminate against specific populations affected by the outbreak (Mutua & Ong'ong'a, 2020).

Because news framing can have a substantial impact on public image, it is critical that it be constantly examined (Yakim, Mohamed, Manan, 2019). According to the framing analysis tradition, news on health crises are often measured through three major areas of news coverage: 1) the frames used to define the news context; 2) the news sources that inform the news coverage; and 3) the target audiences of the news (Adekunle & Adnan, 2016). During a health crisis, these three areas can influence how newspapers generate a specific effect and public perception.

Media Frames in Reporting Health Crisis

In assessing public health crisis coverage, some researchers used various design or framing elements. Chyi and McCombs (2004) used four framing elements: news topic, presentation, cognitive and emotional attribution, and cognitive and emotional attribution. The most recent one could also be considered as tone, which was further elaborated as pessimistic, neutral, and optimistic (Mutua & Ong'ong'a, 2020), while

Berry and colleagues (2007) differentiated further such as context, which includes risk, prevention, and treatment, and grammar, which includes warrant, rhetorical, connective, qualifier, and question (Berry et al., 2007). Because of the unpredictable nature of public health crises and their enormous influence on many people, some characteristics such as uncertainty, consequences, action, conflict, reassurance, and fresh evidence were investigated in reporting public health crises (Shih et al., 2008). Simultaneously, another study employed the dread and death frame, transmission and cause, government influence, social distance, lockdown, and disinformation and rumour frame, which are more detailed than simply the concept or abstraction of the occurrence (Onwe et al., 2020). Furthermore, Mutua and Ong'ong'a (2020) assessed media framing of COVID-19 news, categorizing it as repercussions and human interest, responsibility attribution, and health concern. In short, the media used multiple framing components to establish the reality of the health crisis issues. The following question was inspired by the literature:

RQ1: What was the dominating frames utilized by Malaysian and Indonesian newspapers in covering COVID-19?

Source of News

To increase the credibility of the news, the news source must be relevant to the news itself. Journalist would need to contact information reputable sources that are the authority when it comes to covering facts a health crisis situation (Ghazali, Mohamed,

Nasir, & Yusoh, 2020). News sources could be categorised according to how society actors provide societal efficacy by responding to the challenge through policy, warning, action, and study (Jerit et al., 2019). Similarly, Ghazali and colleagues (2020) argued that sources could be individuals or institutions who provide information to shape news articles. Sources for further elaboration could include the government, lawmakers, journalists' initiatives, scientists, ordinary citizens, international authorities, health officials, and non-governmental organizations (Smith & Tietaah, 2017). Berry and colleagues (2007) classified sources as "human interest", "public", "medical health officer", "researcher", "opinion article", or "health professional". In brief, the source of news could be taken from a number of experts who are qualified to speak on a specific problem. This backs the second research question that asks:

RQ2: What is the primary source of news for Malaysian and Indonesian newspapers coverage of COVID-19?

Target of News

Although the general public has easy access to health-related news, this does not imply that all news is directed towards the general public. There are several segments in targeting the news, particularly those relating to the particular situation. Different elements affected news media coverage, distribution, and influence, including: the geographical reach of a newspaper, whether national or regional, that targets a certain audience, and

the political ideology of the media source (Elejalde et al., 2019). Additionally, socioeconomic factors, as well as audience segmentation based on regional and political perspectives, should be considered (Elejalde et al., 2019). Pew Research Center classified the targeted audience into four categories based on their interest in news, primary news source, and frequency of use of the internet to obtain news: disengaged, who have no interest in using the internet, traditionalists, who use traditional media exclusively rather than digital media, integrators, who recognize traditional media as the primary source and use digital media, and integrators, who recognize traditional media as the primary source and use digital media. The targeted audience could also be categorised depending on their age (Larkin & Grotta, 1979), or the amount of their media usage, such as active consumers, early adopters, media user involvement, or none of the above (Eriksson et al., 2007). However, in terms of risk communication management, the messages were evaluated by focusing on certain social risk evaluations such as risk informer, risk researcher, risk advocate, risk bearer, risk creator, and risk arbiter. The risk bearer is defined as the person who wishes the good and is affected by the hazards, whereas the risk generator is the person who creates the problems or risks. The job of the risk arbiter is to maintain and balance the risk generator and risk bearer in order to solve the problems, which should be supported by the risk informer and risk researcher in reinforcing the action to solve the dispute (Heath & O'Hair,

2010). In summary, the target audience can be defined in a variety of ways based on the types of news that can make those audiences more relevant.

RQ3: Who was the primary audience for Malaysian and Indonesian online newspapers' coverage of COVID-19

RESEARCH METHODS

This study used deductive content analysis, which means that the operational analysis was based on pre-existing information and the output was analyzed using known theory (Graneheim et al., 2017). The study was developed using framing theory and applied codes of categories from earlier research. In addition, the quantitative results were compared and interpreted. In sum, the design of this study was built around quantitative content analysis with an interpretative approach to the quantitative results.

The news stories were sampled from the Malaysian newspaper, The Star, and Indonesian newspaper, Detik. The two newspapers were selected because of their widespread distribution of news, popularity, and diverse audiences within each country. Table 1 below describes the newspapers' characteristics. The study then used the terms 'COVID' and 'coronavirus' in the search box of each online newspaper, modified the news published date based on the date in the sample

technique, and only picked news from the 'news' section. The news were gathered over a 60-day period, with an average of three stories analyzed each day.

Table 1. Details of the Sampled Newspapers

Profile / Publisher	The Star	Detik
Total Visit	18.91 Million	168.65 Million
Established	1971	1998
Owner	The Star Publication Bhd.	CT Corp.
Amount news sampled	183	186

Source: www.similarweb.com.

The study created specific coding categories that focused on the three research questions: RQ1: framing, RQ2: source, and RQ3: target, in order to address the research questions. To ensure validity in the coding process, each question is rigorously operationalized. The definitions are based on a review of the literature. The operational definitions used to measure the content are as follows:

RQ1: Framing

This study adopted several frames that included consequence, uncertainty or warning, action, reassurance or support, conflict, and new evidence (Shih et al., 2008). The frames rumours and misinformation were adapted from Mutua and Ong'ong'a (2020).

Table 2. Operational Definitions of Frame

News Frame	Definition
1. Consequence	It depicts the effects of the virus such as the social and economic consequences, as well as the damages or challenges that arose as a result of the epidemic. COVID-19, for example,

	has an impact on national economic stability.
2. Uncertainty	The story focused on the unknown, such as the likely spread, the origin, the cure or remedy, and the outbreak's presentation as something that had not before been uncovered, demonstrating the need for further study and examination by the government or professionals.
3. Action	The story depicted any efforts undertaken in response to the pandemic, such as tactics, solutions, prevention, and so on. Malaysia, for example, used a Movement Restriction Order to flatten the curve.
4. Reassurance	The narrative emphasized the readiness or authority's success in coping with the pandemic. As a result, the outbreak's impact should not cause concern. One example of reassurance is the discovery of a reliable vaccination.
5. Conflict	The conflict frame was centered on the disagreements or diverse statements and arguments related to COVID-19, such as differing opinions about the most effective COVID-19 medication or disagreements concerning COVID-19 policies.
6. New Evidence	The narrative emphasized fresh discoveries or research findings that could help people comprehend the outbreak, such as discovering a new media that can assist the virus spread or discovering a new vaccine, cure, or preventive.
7. Misinformation or Rumour	This frame emphasized the need for caution, prevention, or judgment in the face of misinformation, rumor, fake news, or conspiracy. For example, the media reported that the greater the spread of

	COVID-19, the greater the propagation of fake news.
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Source: Researcher's operational definitions.

RQ2: Sources

The source refers to where the information came from or who informed about the news content. Adapted from Smith and Tietz (2017), this study categorized the news sources as follows:

Table 3. Operational Definitions of Source

News Source	Operational Definition
1. Government representative	The representative of government such as president, ministries, including the Minister of Health or the spokespersons as their primary sources.
2. Health official	Official health service provider or individual assigned as the representative of local health department such as doctors and public health officials.
3. International authority	International bodies such as the World Health Organization or any bodies from the United Nations and other international organizations.
4. Scientist	Researcher or someone who implements a research to develop and advance the knowledge related to COVID-19.
5. Ordinary citizen	Common people which the media did not specify or emphasize their significant to the pandemic.
6. Non-governmental organizations	Independent organizations established by citizen groups such as association, civil society or clubs.
7. Politician	A person who is involved in politics such as an active political party member, or who have the power in legislation and represent the people.
8. Journalists initiated	When the source of news is anonymous and cannot be recognized, it is considered that journalist as the source.

Source: Researcher's operational definitions.

RQ3: Target

The target news is the person to whom the news will be addressed. The intended targets are classified as risk informer, risk researcher, risk advocate, risk bearer, risk generator, and risk arbiter (Heath & O'Hair, 2010).

Table 4. Operational Definitions of Target

News Target	Operational Definition
1. Risk bearers	When information in the news is directed at communities or individuals who are affected by and bear the risk of the crisis, such as persons with terminal illnesses, the elderly, or the general public.
2. Risk advocates	When a news piece is addressed to persons who will speak out on behalf of the risk bearer, such as group leaders, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), ministers, and medical associations. It could be a call to action or a report on a specific situation.
3. Risk generators	The information in the story is aimed at people who created the risk or issue, such as travelers and social distance violators. The data could provide them with advice, a warning, or a danger.
4. Risk researchers and informer	When news content is directed at those who conduct study and analyze hazards, particularly those that are disputed as being caused by the risk in any way. Information could be advice to undertake further investigation or the discovery of specific critical variables relating to the outbreak itself or an occurrence induced by the danger.
5. Risk arbiters	The content is aimed at people who make major decisions on risk bearers in order to gradually reduce their burden, or who attempt to build a proper policy to cope with COVID-19, such as the government or employers. It could be a suggestion from professionals or the general population to the government.

Source: Researcher's operational definitions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The data demonstrate the disparities in the reporting of pandemic news by Malaysian and Indonesian newspapers. The frames utilized by both publications for covering COVID-19 are described in Table 5 below.

Table 5. News Frames Used in the Coverage of COVID-19 in Malaysian and Indonesian Newspapers

Category	The Star		Detik	
	(f)	%	(f)	%
Action	77	42%	68	37%
Uncertainty	46	25%	56	30%
Consequences	29	16%	22	12%
Reassurance	21	11%	21	11%
Conflict	5	3%	15	8%
Rumor	3	2%	4	2%
New Evidence	2	1%	0	0%
Total	183	100%	186	100%

Source: Researcher's data collection.

The research revealed that Malaysian and Indonesian newspapers have diverse perspectives on publishing pandemic news. Malaysian online daily was action oriented, with 42 % of its framing devoted to pandemic response, which included both local and international news. The title 'Movements to be Restricted' published by The Star on February 13th, 2020 is an example of action-framed news ("Movements to be restricted", 2020).

Action-oriented is significant in the Malaysian context since multiple races coexist, and a minor ethnic issue may create enmity among others, particularly during a very critical situation like a global pandemic. Thus, focusing on action regardless of ethnicity may unite people's thoughts to emphasize their efforts to combat the pandemic rather than criticizing one another.

On the other hand, the Indonesian online daily concentrated on uncertainty in its framing, which accounted for 37% of the total. Uncertainties were dominant in its coverage with issues such as the increase infections and fatalities, the harmful effects if COVID-19 and the authority's inability to respond to the crisis. The headline example of doubt is 'Kuala Lumpur passenger with corona symptom died in Padang,' reported by Detik on March 16, 2020. (Kampai, 2020). It represents the fear and uncertainty of the virus development and spread.

Uncertainty orientation implies questions about future sustainability (Zelizer, 2015), which will cause people to focus on the problem, anxiety, and risk of the epidemic rather than possible actions to deal with the pandemic. People that focus on difficulties tends to fabricate or misinterpret information, so they will continue to query and speculate about the situation.

The consequences (The Star 16%, Detik 11%) and Reassurance (The Star 16%, Detik 12%) frames were also widely used by both newspapers. This indicated that the papers were also providing a long-term outlook to the pandemic by discussing the possible outcomes of the crisis as well suggesting positive implications that can help reassure the public that things will get better. On a positive side, both newspapers were careful to not publish news that are overtly negative and can create further distress such as conflict (The Star 3%, Detik 8%) and rumors (The Star 2%, Detik 2%).

Table 6. News Sources Used in the Coverage of COVID-19 in Malaysian and Indonesian Newspapers

Category	The Star		Detik	
	(f)	%	(f)	%
Government	91	50%	125	67%
Ordinary Citizen	22	12%	14	8%
Health Official	19	10%	12	6%
NGOs	17	9%	10	5%
International Authority	13	7%	8	4%
Scientist	13	7%	7	4%
Journalist Initiated	5	3%	7	4%
Politician	3	2%	3	2%
Total	183	100%	186	100%

Source: Researcher's data collection

The Malaysian and Indonesian newspapers used the same sources for news. Both mostly sourced information from the government and the authorities. The Star referred to the government as the dominant source in publishing COVID-19 news, accounting for 50%, followed by Ordinary Citizen at 12%, indicating a 38% gap between the two. Similarly, Detik chose government as the key source, accounting for 67 %, a bigger number than the Star. The government is characterized as government representatives such as ministries, particularly the health ministry, the president, bureaucrats, or spokespersons. One of the headlines in The Star alluded to the government, specifically Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr. Dzulkefly Ahmad, as the source: 'First Malaysian patient recovers,' published on February 18th, 2020.

Health Official had the second-highest percentage at 8%, indicating a 59 % difference between the highest and second-highest percentages. This indicated that when it comes

to a serious situation like a health crisis, the newspapers understand the need to get information from the authorities so that the information shared are credible and consistent Ordinary citizens (The Star 12%, Detik 8%) are often the source of news that focused on the impact of COVID-19 on the lives of the everyday people. While not a lot, both newspapers did significantly take the views of the public so that the narrative about the pandemic becomes more balanced between the authorities which are the decision makers with the experiences of the public who will implicated by those decisions.

Politicians are individuals that make comments on behalf of his or her personal political inclinations. They do not represent the government or institutions when they provide information that relates more to their political stance and sentiments. They are the least referred to by the newspapers (The Star 2%, Detik 2%) and this is purposeful as politicians offer discuss issues for their political benefits and this may not be ideal in a time where the public needs news that unifies and not sensationalized news that only plays with the public's emotions.

Table 7. News Targets in the Coverage of COVID-19 in Malaysian and Indonesian Newspapers

Category	The Star		Detik	
	(f)	%	(f)	%
Risk Bearers	67	37%	83	45%
Risk Arbiters	62	34%	57	31%
Risk Advocates	38	21%	39	21%
Risk Researchers and Informers	8	4%	5	3%
Risk Generators	8	4%	2	1%
Total	183	100%	186	100%

Source: Researcher's data collection

The main target readership of both Malaysian and Indonesian online newspapers was risk takers. Its goal is to shape public opinion on the epidemic, which includes getting the message from the main source to the major target. Interestingly, risk arbiters, or those in charge of making pandemic policy, were the second most important target of Malaysian online newspapers (34 percent), with the majority of its message aimed at assisting and encouraging them to take a better policy by informing them of what other countries had done to combat the outbreak. That information can assist the risk arbiter create and contextualize better regulations, as well as assess whether their established policies have a loophole. As a result, while encouraging the public to trust and rely on reliable sources when taking action, it also helps the 'reliable source' to be more thorough in making decisions and developing successful policies. The Indonesian online daily also intends to transmit its message to risk bearers with a different orientation than Malaysia, which was uncertainty, and has identified risk advocates as the second key objective (31 percent). As a result of the government's ambiguous information, which caused confusion and frustration (Batoebara, 2020), Indonesian online newspapers targeted the risk advocates for two expected outcomes: demanding the government to convey clear and effective statements and policies, and contextualizing messages from reliable sources to maintain public order in dealing with the outbreak. Risk Generators had the lowest percentage as The Star's news target,

accounting for only 4 percent with eight frequencies, while Detik targeted Risk Researchers and Informers the least, accounting for only 1 percent with two appearances.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the initial phase of COVID-19 in Malaysia and Indonesia was a challenging situation. Both online newspapers in Malaysia and Indonesia referred most of their news from the government and set the public as the main target of information. However, each country has its own approach to conveying the message to its main target as Malaysian online newspapers focused on action framing while Indonesian emphasized uncertainty. Each framing has its consequences on the public's perception, feeling, and attitude towards the pandemic. In response, this study suggests that newspapers should focus more on action and consequences rather than action and ambiguity, because being overly optimistic can lead to irresponsibility, while being overly gloomy can lead to misunderstanding and dissatisfaction among the public. By helping the public recognizing the implications can help them grasp the crisis in a broader context, while taking action will motivate them to battle the pandemic.

It is also urged to identify scientific developments related to the outbreak with complete news in order to increase audiences' understanding of the infection. Furthermore, it is proposed that as the main source of information, governments must be precise,

brief, and impartial in order to streamline the crucial information regarding COVID-19. This imperative as the media has the ability to frame news and influence public opinion.

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