Framing of Covid-19 Pandemic News in Malaysian Local Newspapers

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ABSTRACT

As a reliable means for the public, mass media is a critical medium to be used to disseminate information predominantly in crisis. At the end of 2019, the world faced a new pandemic, later known as the COVID-19 pandemic, after scientists identified the virus that caused this infection. The media coverage of this cause accelerated and became more expansive after the spread of a group of shocking pictures of infected cases who died on the roads and streets due to this disease. People have turned to the mass media to find out what was happening, and at the same time, media outlets interacted differently with this pandemic. In particular, this study seeks to reveal the news framing used by the most popular local newspapers in Malaysia. This study, therefore, examines the five mainframes developed by Semetko & Valkenburg: conflict, attribution of responsibility, human interest, economics, and morality. This sampling involves the News Straits Times and The Star from April 1 to April 10, 2022. This study concludes that both newspapers NST and The Star reported the Covid-19 pandemic with all the five generic frames in this order (attribution of responsibility, human interest, economic frame, morality frame, and conflict frame), where the attribution of responsibility frame is the most used frame, and the conflict frame is the least used in both media outlets, the second significant result in this study concludes that NST used these generic frames more than The Star newspaper.

Keywords: *News framing, Covid-19, newspapers, News Straits Times, Utusan.*

INTRODUCTION

Communicating information about health hazards and pandemics represents a challenge to various media outlets. This is because media outlets must be particular about the news they broadcast to achieve precision and objectivity. Misinformation or exchanging the wrong information may have catastrophic implications. Despite the risk involved, information exchange about health issues is essential to society and decision-makers alike (Berry, 2007, p.67).

At the end of 2019, the world witnessed a new pandemic which later became known as the Corona Virus after scientists identified the virus that caused the pandemic. The media rushed to cover the event after some astonishing images of people dying on the roads due to infection went viral on the Internet. Such paranoia among people escalated further media coverage of the events. News framing is an essential factor for achieving this or the opposite. Some media framing cases contributed to directing the public's interpretations of the threats resulting from health disasters, which came contrary to the meaning the communicating party originally intended (Kott & Limaye, 2016; Starr & Oxlad, 2020).

According to the World Health Organization (World Health Organization, 2021), the virus transmits from one person to another through cough or sneeze droplets of COVID-19 sufferers. It is also transmitted when the drops land on any surfaces, turning them into fomites, and are touched by an uninfected person's mouth. An effective method to avoid the

pandemic is to practice social distancing by maintaining a one-meter (3 feet) distance from another person (assuming that they may be carriers of the same virus).

Not long after China, a number of countries experienced significant COVID-19 outbreaks to date. The United States of America is currently at the top of the list with 128,892 deaths out of 614,643 cases, followed by Spain (177,633 cases/18,579 deaths), Italy (162,488 cases/21,067 deaths) and France (143,303 cases/15,729 deaths) (Worldometer, 2020). Malaysia, as reported by Worldometer (2020), had 5,072 cases with 83 deaths and 2,647 recoveries as of 15 April 2020. The rapid growth of cases in Malaysia urged for a quick decision from the government. The Prime Minister, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, announced on March 16, 2020 a total lockdown of the country through the Movement Control Order (MCO) (Bernama, 2020).

Online news portals played an important role to cover the COVID-19 pandemic. The increase of deaths in some countries in Europe like Italy, and Spain, and in some other countries like the USA and Brazil, has led to an increased focus by the online newspapers portals to spread the news over the world. Each media outlet relied on a wide range of various sources to deliver the news (Onwe et al., 2020)

Online newspaper portals are becoming a unique means of information spreading. As such, the majority of Malaysians rely on online newspaper portals to find information about various topics including the COVID–19 news (Mohamad et al., 2020). To emphasize the importance of online information sources, Ryan et al. (2014) acknowledged the fact that the internet has become the most important force in the information world.

The critical evaluation of issues, in general, is considered one of the main purposes of media functions. This becomes even more important when it comes to crucial issues such as COVID-19 to help people to understand the situation to become more aware and able to limit the spread of the epidemic. When it comes to framing a news story in the online version of newspapers it's worth mentioning that this process is influenced by different factors such as human intervention by the reporter and Media competitiveness which can cause unfavorable results in some cases (Adekunle & Adnan, 2016).

Framing illustrates the power of the media in creating news stories of a specific nature to enhance the public's understanding to build an integrated picture of events (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2019). This directly means that the media can influence the news content to reduce the negative effects on the audience by choosing a specific frame. In contrast, the media can, by choosing some other specific frames, increase the negative effects of events on the public (Onwe et al., 2020).

The framing process shows that the media may address a single issue differently, providing various indications and meanings of the same issue. Media also promotes specific concepts and meanings that the communicating party intends to communicate to the public (Nelson & Kinder, 1996). The current study examines how the COVID-19 pandemic was framed in mass media news coverage (national newspapers). The study takes the broadest view of disaster news by focusing on the published news in the online version of two prominent national newspapers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Media Coverage of Crises
The media plays a vital role in warning people in times of crisis, especially health crises (Morissan et al., 2020). The coverage steadily increases based on specific events, such as

identifying new cases and the actions of the government and the health agencies (Vaughan & Tinker, 2009).

News media are essential during the pandemic because it seeks to achieve a primary goal: saving people's lives by raising awareness to eliminate the disease. Media frames are generally seen as 'coherent packages of information containing a central organising idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events' (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989).

News media employ such frames to organise and structure their presentation of issues to the public. Based on selection processes and working routines, journalists provide an overall context for an issue within public debate through classifying information, e.g. (Price, Tewksbury & Powers, 1997; Tewksbury, 2000). This is then characterised as the 'process by which a communication source constructs and defines a social or political issue for its audience (Nelson et al., 1997). Thus, a new frame is more than just an isolated argument or position on a topic – it represents a coherent construction of an issue (Pan & Kosicki, 1993; Nelson & Kinder, 1996).

Is media coverage considered a key factor to control the transmission process of infectious disease? Zhou et al. (2020), found that people know more about the crisis and work to enhance their safety through media reporting. In addition, people in most cases change their behaviors and take correct precautions such as hand-washing, wearing masks, keeping social distance, and in some cases quarantining themselves to avoid unnecessary contact with others. Furthermore, media coverage is considered an important medium to mitigate the spreading of the disease during the initial wave of an outbreak.

MEDIA FRAMING THEORY

News Framing

The variety of definitions of news frames in theoretical and empirical contributions is considerable. Gitlin (2003) defines frames as 'persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion by which symbol handlers routinely organise discourse'. Gamson and Modigliani (1989) refer to frames as 'interpretative packages' that give meaning to an issue. At the core of this package is a central organising idea, or frame, for making sense of relevant events, suggesting what is at issue. Under emphasising some elements of a topic above others, a frame provides a way to understand an event or issue. In this vein, Cappella and Jamieson (1997) suggested that frames activate knowledge, stimulate 'stocks of cultural morals and values, and create contexts. In doing so, frames 'define problems', 'diagnose causes,' 'make moral judgments, and 'suggest remedies' (Entman, 1993). The framing effect occurs when media "suggest a particular meaning or interpretation of an issue" (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2019). How an event is framed, therefore, affects how a population thinks of and sees the event as well as the people involved (Uribe, 2020).

Some scholars view news frame setting as, 1) influences to public knowledge, and 2) influences to beliefs, behavior, and cognitive levels when current issues are presented in the media. Some other scholars considered that news frames could influence the understanding of the value of the topic (An & Gower, 2009). The framing concept depends on the focus on communicative processes. Since communication is a dynamic proces, it contains frame building and frame setting. Entman (1993) acknowledged that frames have several sites, including (the text, the communicator, the culture, and the receiver). These elements are a

part of the framing process that consists of specific stages which are: frame building, frame setting, and much more (D'angelo, 2002).

The element of news framing was reviewed by Entman (1993), who pointed out that the frame will choose an issue considered accurate and featured in the form of communication text. Therefore, framing theory proposes that the mass media do more than make saliency. It chooses which part of the story to focus on and which other it has to remove (Zanuddin & Almahallawi, 2017; Almahallawi & Zanuddin, 2018). There are five generic frames as follows:

Conflict frame: This frame points to the conflict between different parties, whether individuals, groups, or institutions, to hold the audience's attention.

1. Human Interest: This frame focuses on the human or the emotional side of the event. So, the best description of this frame is the "human impact" frame. As a result of using this frame, the news becomes more personalised, emotionalised, or dramatised, to capture the audience's attention (Neuman et al., 1992). Media outlets work to offer some news stories to reflect human interests. These stories add more value to the news and elevate the credibility of the media outlets.
2. Morality Frame: The issue or event is specified as a moral imposition or religious precept in this frame. The editor indirectly refers to morality frames to comply with professional editing rules.
3. Economic frame: This frame focuses on the economic consequences of the event and determining the more affected category, whether it is "individual, group, or institution."
4. Attribution of responsibility frame: This frame was defined by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) as an issue that happened, and a specific party is responsible for its cause or solution. Those parties can be the government or individuals, or groups of people.

How do the selected newspapers frame the COVID-19 pandemic after the government's announcement to stop the MCO? Are there any significant differences in the main score of generic frames between The Star and the New Straits Times? This study, therefore, wishes to identify the main frames of news coverage of Covid-19 within the first ten days when the government stops the MCO. This study makes a comparison of the frames for the news coverage by The Star and New Straits Times.

Framing Analysis
Analysing frames is a method which aims to identify meaning based on the information given in the text, news or reports. It was first suggested by Goffman (1974) who classified framing as a process of organizing events and corresponding to them. To frame, according to Entman (1993), is to select certain aspects of statements and attempts to underpin salient information through repetitions and placements. Therefore, frames are defined by what is both included and excluded, in the texts. Furthermore, Entman (1993) stressed that framing analysis is a process of defining a problem, presenting causal factors, making judgments and suggesting solutions.

The differing philosophical perspectives on the frame and framing lead to variations in the framing analysis methodology that researchers have offered (Samsudin, 2019). Samsudin (2019) further explained that inductive techniques are framing analysis methods that may be used in qualitative news frame studies with an emphasis on the quality of news

text discourse. The quantitative technique of media framing research, on the other hand, places more emphasis on how frequently news frames appear in news texts that have been specified as variables in news content analysis.

Framing performs the role of simplification and attempts to manifest meaning of one event, which simultaneously maintains audience interests towards certain issues, also known as an audience frame, which refers to a schema of interpretations that helps audiences perceive, organise and correspond to incoming information (Valkennburg et al., 1999). However, Scheufele (1999) defined media frames as the story of everyday reality, providing features of news that can be easily picked up by the journalist and thus convey useful information to audiences. According to Scheufele, frames are emphasised in news reporting and then interpreted by public opinion as their own perception towards a particular event or issue (1999).

There are several ways of framing, since every research brings about different arguments towards a particular issue. The usage of framing analysis is usually employed when it comes to examining the roles and nature of news coverage of certain events or issues (Baysha, 2002; Kweon, 2000; Scheufele, 1999; Davis, 1995; Entman, 1993). However, the ways in which the frames were identified differed depending on the different kinds of issues covered.

Putnam (2002) has suggested that to examine the role of the media, one should examine the balance of coverage in the news articles and any specific views explaining the position of the press in the conflict. Media framing is important particularly when the various parties of the conflict are separated geographically and organizationally, in reporting the events and, highlighting environmental concerns to the public and structuring the nature of the conflict (Putnam, 2002). Content analysis, on the one hand, can identify the unit of meaning, frequency and the categorization of how the meanings are clustered. On the other hand, the use of framing may help identify different arguments devoted to a particular issue. For example, in her study of the Edwards Aquifer dispute, Putnam (2002) employs identity and characterization frames to understand the ways in which this dispute was perceived.

Framing analyses of public agenda, politics, and war, for instance, were generally distinguished by thematic (event related) and episodic frames (issues related) (De Vreese, Peter & Semetko, 2001; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000; Baysha & Hallahan, 2004; Kweon, 2000; Dimitrova, 2006; Dimitrova et al., 2005; Lee & Maslog, 2005). In favour of environmental conflicts, the frames were identified using the characterization or humanity influences, which emphasised gain or loss, positive or negative and pro or anti aspects (Putnam, 2002; Taylor & Nathan, 2002; Hanke, Gray & Putnam, 2002; Taylor et al., 2000; Ader, 1995; Davis, 1995).

Baysha and Hallahan (2004) attempted to identify different frames used in television, print newspapers and online newspapers concerning the role of framing in public opinion. They examined the way in which specific ideology was articulated by means of framing in order to shape public debate. Based on 829 articles, the frames distinguished between thematic and episodic themes to differentiate three frames: namely, neutral frames, pro-presidential frames and pro-oppositional frames (Baysha & Hallahan, 2004).

Based on the discussion of the content analysis on news frames, the subject of identifying frames that emerged in the newspaper articles is very subjective. However, there are two approaches that can be made in analyzing content of newspapers (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). First, it can be made through an inductive approach which begins with the

articles and the researcher has to identify possible frames that are frequently highlighted in the newspaper. Second, it is to predefine certain frames then verification is needed to what extent those frames appeared in the articles. This approach provides an idea of the likelihood of certain frames to be in the news.

It appears that the role of media may vary from one institution to another. The kind of interest leads them to determine the kind of frames that should be highlighted in the newspaper. Following the rules of news production, the frame of news may vary depending on certain environmental conflicts. However, it is crucial to look at how the news would frame out the stakeholders and the pressure groups in the articles. The space devoted to the debate will significantly shape the view of the actual event by the public. As a result, the examination of the role of the media in environmental conflict is possibly through the analysis of content and frames.

METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative approach using a content analysis of online news articles about COVID-19. Based on Hirschmann (2021) in Statista, online news has become the majority preference for news information. Two mainstream media were chosen including The Star and New Straits Times. According to similar web (2022), these outlets are among the top-ranking websites in Malaysia.

In this study, it examines the framing of the news coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia from April 1 to April 10, 2022, which was the first ten days after the government made the announcement to stop after more than two years of movement control order. The study focuses on the online version of two local newspapers (The Star and the New Straits Times). In addition, the researchers investigated five generic frames created by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), which are conflict attribution of responsibility, morality, economic consequences, and human interest.

Articles were identified after making a search based on two keywords namely COVID-19 and the Nation news category. As a result, 79 news articles were found for NST, and 39 were selected from The Star newspaper. A total of 118 news articles were coded. A two trained coders were used for the pre-test until a satisfactory coefficient inter-coder reliability was achieved. After that, the coders were allowed to code the news articles.

FINDINGS

Test of Differences in Generic Frames Among Different Media Outlets
Table 1 shows that NST and The Star have used the five generic frames in different proportions. First and foremost, NST used generic frames in its coverage more than The Star. With more focus on each media outlet alone, we can find that the most commonly used frame by NST is the attribution of responsibility, second in use was the human-interest frame, third is the economic frame, fourth is the morality frame, and the least used frame was the conflict frame. Furthermore, The Star used generic frames less than the NST. However, surprisingly, the results showed that The Star used the generic frames in the same order that was mentioned in the NST newspaper, but at a low rate as follows: the most commonly used frame by The Star was the attribution of responsibility, the second used frame was human interest, third economic frame, fourth morality frame and lastly was the conflict frame.

Table 1: Mean differences in generic frames between NST and The Star.

Newspaper Name	NST		Mean	The Star		Mean
Variables	Yes	No		Yes	No	
Does the article reflect disagreement between parties-individuals-groups-countries?	6 (11.1) %	48 (88.9) %	.11	4 (8.3) %	44 (91.7) %	.08
Does the article refer to two sides or more than two sides of the problem or issue?	30 (55.6) %	24 (44.4) %	.56	8 (16.7) %	40 (83.3) %	.17
Does one party-individual-group-country reproach another?	7 (13) %	47 (87) %	.13	3 (6.3) %	45 (93.8) %	.06
Does the article refer to winners and losers?	0 (0) %	54 (100) %	.00	1 (2.1) %	47 (97.9) %	.02
Does the article provide an example or "human face" on the issue?	52 (96.3)	2 (3.7) %	.96	16 (33.3) %	32 (66.7) %	.33
Does the article employ adjectives or personal vignettes that generate feelings of outrage, empathy-caring, sympathy, or compassion?	30 (55.6) %	24 (44.4) %	.56	3 (6.3) %	45 (93.8)	.06
Does the article emphasize on how individuals and groups are affected by the issue/problem?	45 (83.3) %	9 (16.7) %	.83	20 (41.7) %	27 (56.3) %	.43
Does the article go into the private or personal lives of the actors?	4 (7.4) %	50 (92.6) %	.07	10 (20.8) %	38 (79.2) %	.21
Does the article contain visual information that might generate feelings of outrage, empathy-caring, sympathy, or compassion?	23 (42.6) %	31 (57.4) %	.43	3 (6.3) %	44 (91.7) %	.06
Does the article suggest that some level of gov't can alleviate the problem?	40 (74.1) %	14 (25.9) %	.74	31 (64.6) %	17 (35.4) %	.65
Does the article suggest that some level of the government is responsible for the issue/problem?	40 (74.1) %	14 (25.9) %	.74	35 (64.6) %	13 (27.1) %	.73
Does the article suggest a solution(s) to the problem/issue?	37 (68.5) %	17 (31.5) %	.69	27 (56.3) %	21 (43.8) %	.56
Does the article suggest that an individual (or group of people in society) is responsible for the issue/ problem?	23 (42.6) %	31 (57.4) %	.43	20 (41.7) %	27 (56.3) %	.43
Does the article suggest the problem requires urgent action?	28 (51.9)%	26 (48.1) %	.52	12 (25) %	35 (72.9) %	.26
Is there a mention of financial losses or gains now or in the future?	15 (27.8) %	39 (72.2) %	.28	7 (14.6) %	41 (85.4) %	.15

Is there a mention of the costs/degree of the expense involved?	8 (14.8) %	46 (85.2) %	.15	3 (6.3) %	45 (93.8) %	.06
Is there a reference to the economic consequences of pursuing or not pursuing a course of action?	23 (42.6) %	31 (57.4) %	.43	7 (14.6) %	41 (85.4) %	.15
Does the news article reflect economic issues about individuals' daily survival – income generation?	23 (42.6) %	31 (57.4) %	.43	5 (10.4) %	43 (89.6) %	.10
Does the news article include information about the working facilities – government offices – factories – shops/retailers?	31 (57.4) %	23 (42.6) %	.57	10 (20.8) %	38 (79.2) %	.21
Does the article contain any moral message?	32 (59.3)	22 (40.7) %	.59	8 (16.7) %	40 (83.3) %	.17
Does the article refer to morality, God, and other religious tenets?	29 (53.7) %	25 (46.3) %	.54	5 (10.4) %	43 (89.6) %	.10
Does the article offer specific social prescriptions about how to behave?	17 (31.5) %	37 (68.5) %	.31	5 (10.4) %	43 (89.6) %	.10

To test the differences in the main score groups of conflict, human interest, attribution of responsibility, economic consequences, and morality between NST and The Star, the research uses the T-Test (Corrado, 1989; De Winter, 2013; Kim, 2015). Therefore, the t-test aims to compare the mean scores of both media outlets, NST and The Star.

Table 2 shows the group statistics results for the generic frames between NST and The Star. It shows the mean score of each media outlet based on the five generic frames. The first assumption that should be checked here is to ensure that the N value or frequency in the table above corresponds with the frequency in the demographic information. It is found that these numbers are the same for NST and The Star.

Table 3 above shows the result of the independent sample t-test for the generic frames NST and The Star media outlet coverage. The researcher checked for the significance value under Levene's test equality of variances. Pallant (2013) argued that if the significance value of Levene's test is above .05, we should consider equal variance assumed, but if it is below .05, we should consider equal variances not assumed. From the table presented above, only the conflict frame is above the significance value of Levine's test, while the attribution of responsibility, human interest, economic, and morality frames are below the significance value of Levene's test. It, therefore, implies that we will consider equal variance assumed for the conflict frame only and equal variances are not assumed for other frames.

To check for the difference, the researcher considered the significance section under the t-test for equality of means. On the one hand, it was found that there is a significant difference between NST and The Star in conflict frame, human interest frame, economic frame, and morality frame with p = .000. On the other hand, it was found that there is no significant difference between NST and The Star on the attribution of responsibility.

Table 2: The group statistics result for the generic frames between NST and The Star

Group Statistics

	Newspaper	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Score Conflicts	NST	54	.7963	.87695	.11934
	The Star	48	.3333	.80776	.11659
Score Human Interest	NST	54	2.8519	.85578	.11646
	The Star	46	1.0435	1.05318	.15528
Score AOR	NST	54	3.1111	1.59795	.21745
	The Star	47	2.5957	1.92985	.28150
Score EF	NST	54	1.8519	1.65298	.22494
	The Star	48	.6667	1.35793	.19600
Score MF	NST	54	1.4444	1.25392	.17064
	The Star	48	.3750	.93683	.13522

Table 3: The independent samples test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		**t-test for Equality of Means**						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Score Conflicts	Equal variances assumed	2.316	.131	2.761	100	.007	.46296	.16765	.13034	.79558
	Equal variances not assumed			2.775	99.865	.007	.46296	.16684	.13196	.79397
Score Human Interest	Equal variances assumed	9.189	.003	9.472	98	.000	1.80837	.19092	1.42951	2.18724
	Equal variances not assumed			9.317	86.597	.000	1.80837	.19410	1.42255	2.19419
Score AOR	Equal variances assumed	5.618	.020	1.468	99	.145	.51537	.35109	-.18128	1.21201
	Equal variances not assumed			1.449	89.591	.151	.51537	.35571	-.19135	1.22208
Score EF	Equal variances assumed	8.359	.005	3.927	100	.000	1.18519	.30181	.58639	1.78398
	Equal variances not assumed			3.972	99.411	.000	1.18519	.29835	.59322	1.77715
Score MF	Equal variances assumed	20.073	.000	4.830	100	.000	1.06944	.22142	.63016	1.50873
	Equal variances not assumed			4.912	97.229	.000	1.06944	.21772	.63734	1.50154

As a result of the T-Test which was conducted to compare the generic frames for NST and The Star, there is a significant difference in the scores of the conflict frame with NST (Mean = .796, SD = .876) and The Star (Mean = .333, SD = .807; t (99.8) =2.77, p = .000. Similarly, a significant difference exists in the scores of NST and The Star on human interest with NST (Mean = 2.85, SD = .855) and The Star (Mean = 1.04, SD = 1.05; t (86.59) =9.31, p = .000. It was also found that a significant difference exists in scores of NST and The Star on economic frame with NST (Mean = 1.85, SD =1.65) and The Star (Mean = .666, SD = 1.357; t (99.4) = 3.97, p = .000. In addition, a significant difference exists in the scores of NST and The Star on morality frame with NST (Mean = 1.44, SD = 1.25) and The Star (Mean = .375, SD = .936; t (97.2) = 4.91, p = .000. Finally, there is no significant difference in the scores of NST and The Star on attribution of responsibility frame with NST (Mean = 3.11, SD = 1.59) and The Star (Mean = 2.59, SD = 1.92; t (99) = 1.46, p = .151).

Findings: Based on the information provided in the tables above, the research concludes that there is a significant difference in the mean score on generic frames between NST and The Star in their coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic after the government's announcement of opening the country.

DISCUSSION

The news coverage on the issue of the COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia after the government's announcement to open the country, after two years of the MCO (movement control order) in several phases, has witnessed some logical changes, most notably the increase in the density of published news. It is found that NST has more news articles compared to The Star, but the difference in the number of published articles by both media outlets was not remarkable. The published news focused on several topics like humans, attribution of responsibility, and economic and moral issues. Conflict issues were detected in the coverage, but it had the lowest rate among the published topics. This indicates the media's devotion to publishing important topics that deal with people's daily issues rather than delving into the issues of conflicts and disputes between the actors.

In measuring the attribution of responsibility frame during the coverage of the first ten days of the government's announcement to reopen the country after a long period of closure by NST and The Star, the results came to clarify that attribution of responsibility frame was the most commonly used frame among the other frames in both media outlets while taking into account that NST was more used to this frame than The Star. As a result, the high use rate of this frame can reflect the argument between the parties about the responsibility of the issue. The second most commonly used frame in this coverage period was human interest. This explains the magnitude of the humanitarian needs caused by the pandemic. Third in the line was the economic frame, and the results showed that the economic frame was among the most used frame during this coverage, and that can reflect the extent of the economic difficulties lifted by the pandemic. It is worth mentioning that NST has used the economic frame more than The Star. The morality frame came fourth in the used frames of this coverage, noting that NST used the morality frame more than The Star. These results reflected the need to use such a frame to urge people to abide by the public safety measures announced by the government to overcome the crisis.

These findings came in contrast to Uribe (2020) study, which concluded that the US media outlets' coverage focused on reporting the number of cases and deaths, the economic impact, and the actions governments took to prevent its spread. In contrast, the individual and personal stories of people dealing with the pandemic did not get enough attention in the

US media outlets' coverage. In contrast, this study revealed that the attribution of responsibility and human-interest frames were among the most highly used frames during the Malaysian media outlets' coverage. This reflects the difference in coverage trends among the media outlets.

CONCLUSION

Overall, this research finds answers to the research questions. Furthermore, the data collected from the field meet the ambitious goals of understanding the relationship of news frames measured in this study concerning the pandemic news coverage in Malaysia. This research has also reaffirmed the theory of media framing setting (Entman, 1993).

The use of the frames during the news coverage can clearly detect the general policies pursued by the media outlets in their coverage of an event. For more explanation, this study found that both NST and The Star used the five generic frames that were tested in this study, but with different degrees of focus and intensity of coverage, and this reflects the directions of every media outlet in its coverage of COVID-19 news.

Finally, this research can claim that each newspaper has its approach to the coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, the differences between their coverage exist according to the news framing used. In other words, each newspaper tries to express this issue according to its opinions and the government policies regarding the pandemic.

BIODATA

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